

**Interreg**



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**NEXT** Poland – Ukraine



# Consultation on Interreg post-2027

Report on future cross-border cooperation  
on the PL-UA and PL-BY borderlands

Warsaw, December 2024

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# 1. Summary

Within the consultation process initiated by the European Commission on the preparation to the post-2027 period, the Interreg NEXT Poland – Ukraine Programme hereby reports on the actions taken to harvest views of the citizens and stakeholders of the entire Programme area on the future of the Interreg cross-border cooperation and on results of these actions.

The consultation was carried out in the framework of the current Poland – Ukraine Programme and related primarily to that cooperation – between Polish and Ukrainian parties. Nevertheless, due to long-standing cooperation with bordering regions in Belarus, consultations related partly also to that aspect. Opinions received from both citizens and stakeholders showed that the Interreg Programme is very important and relevant for the development of the borderland.

As the **main conclusions from the consultations** the following directions were outlined for the future Interreg programme on the territory:

- Maintaining the current geographical scope of the Programme, i.e. Polish-Ukrainian borderland;
- Readiness of part of Polish stakeholders to get back to some sort of cooperation with Belarusian entities (local level, medical entities, NOG) once possible (moral and practical reasons)
- Decisive negative position on cooperation with Belarus expressed by Ukrainian citizens and stakeholders;
- Increase of the Programme budget to better respond to the potential of the Programme area and huge demand from the applicants for cross-border cooperation;
- Keeping the current broad thematic scope of the Programme with topics as roads infrastructure, cultural heritage and tourism, health, environment, border security indicated as the most important by both stakeholders and citizens;
- Extension of funding and thematic scope of the health priority, reasoned by the necessity to improve medical infrastructure and increase resilience of the healthcare systems;
- Keeping support of development of tourism and culture to continue integration of cross-border communities;
- Providing more financing and extend thematic scope for micro projects to engage more organizations and raise the level of existing cooperation;
- Adding more focus to the field of education;
- Continuing implementation of infrastructure projects, including those dedicated to road infrastructure;
- Ensure that resources dedicated to large infrastructure are adequate to expected strategic effects and the scale of the Programme (little Programme relevance in improving the transport on the territory, railway infrastructure, but also border crossing points infrastructure);
- Continuation of the joint work on harmonization of the Ukrainian legislation system with the EU and Programme framework to improve further implementation processes.

**“Every voice counts!”** – was the motto used by the Programme for the campaign launched in 2 main formats: on-line survey and 10 consultation meetings with the stakeholders. Total quantity of responses received within **on-line survey is 701** which may be treated as high level of participation given the complexity of the questionnaire (12 questions for citizens and 18 questions for stakeholders).

The population of the Programme area in Poland and Ukraine differs as 42/58% in favour of Ukraine. The same proportion was reached by the actual quantity of responses. The results of the **consultation meetings** are also impressive with **335 stakeholders** (counted as individual stakeholders’ institutions) represented (222 PL, 113 UA) and 459 participants in total.

## 2. Actions taken

Consultation campaign was organized in 2 main formats: on-line survey and 10 consultation meetings with the stakeholders.

### 2.1. On-line survey

Considerably high quantity of received responses is largely stipulated by the below set of measures taken to gather information and track progress.

#### a) 2 separate on-line questionnaires for collection of opinions:

- questionnaire for stakeholders (EN, PL, UA)
- questionnaire for citizens (PL, UA)

The option of reference in the survey either to PL-BY or to PL-UA cross-border cooperation was foreseen for more detailed categorization in the cases where separate assessment of those geographical contexts was actual for the Polish respondents.

#### b) Communication channels, recipients and activities on promotion of the consultation surveys:

##### Programme media

- wide, repeated promotion on the Programme 2014-2020 and 2021-2027 websites (articles and banners on [pbu2020.eu](http://pbu2020.eu) and [pl-ua.eu](http://pl-ua.eu));
- pinned post on the Programme Fan Page on Facebook;
- QR codes for the online surveys disseminated at the meetings.

##### Monitoring Committee (MC)

- MC was invited to complete the surveys and to actively participate in consultations promotion (repeated mailing to MC members).

##### Polish Regional Contact Points (RCPs)

- All four RCPs (located in 4 marshal offices of the Programme area) were involved in the consultation promotion (communication channels of marshals offices – websites, social media, mailings and other platforms);

- Rzeszów RCP – e-mails informing about consultations sent to **3 185 recipients** – potential applicants in the Programme.

#### Branch Office of the Joint Secretariat in Lviv (LBO), Ukraine (involving regional administrations)

- Promotion of the consultations through websites of regional administrations of six UA oblasts in the Programme, social media, and other platforms;
- E-mails informing about consultations sent to **371 recipients** – potential applicants in the Programme.

#### Programme beneficiaries/applicants

- Mailing encouraging to complete the survey (stakeholders) and distribute it among family members/friends (citizens);
- Beneficiaries of previous Programme perspective PBU 2014-2020 – **237 recipients**, applicants PL-UA 2021-2027 – **634 recipients**.

#### Potential beneficiaries

- Mailing encouraging people to complete the survey (stakeholders) and distribute through family members/ friends (citizens);
- E-mails informing about consultations sent to over **3 500 recipients**.

#### Programme events / events with the Programme participation

- The information on the post 27 survey was disseminated at all events such as trainings, meetings organized by Joint Secretariat (JS), LBO, and RCPs since June 2024.

#### c) Survey analysis

- JS continuously analysed the process of completion of the online survey (identifying the regions of Poland/Ukraine least involved in the consultations);
- The results of the analysis served as one of the reference points for the consultation meetings;
- The consultation meetings served as a backup for regions less actively engaged in the on-line part of the campaign.

### 2.2. Consultation meetings

10 consultation meetings for stakeholders were organized in all 10 regions of the Programme in cooperation with 4 RCPs in Poland and LBO in Ukraine. The base for the discussion were the questions/issues covered in the stakeholders survey, grouped into particular main topics and supported by presentation on the Programme and selected projects from particular regions in order to provide participants with clearer picture of the context.

The results of the meetings are:

- 10 regional consultation reports (4 by RCPs for Poland and 6 by LBO for Ukraine);
- JS individual reports and notes from consultation meetings in Poland;

- Enhanced promotion and information on the Programme among stakeholders – potential beneficiaries that so far were unfamiliar with that aspect.

### 3. Challenges

- There is no surprise that **geopolitical context** had the greatest influence on the opinions collected in the course of the consultation.

The main background that influenced the consistency of the consultation on Ukrainian side is the ongoing war in Ukraine, which naturally created lots of difficulties for a precise analysis of the current state of play, i.e. which one to refer – the cross-border cooperation before or after 2022, and also for delivering proposition for future of the Programme due to shortened planning horizon.

War in Ukraine and situation on the border with Belarus had made an impact on the general angle of view of the respondents on Polish side as well and on the concrete statistical expressions such as the level of satisfaction in location/living next to a state border either with Ukraine or Belarus (as area of significant political tension constraints).

It also led to partial narrowing of the discussion with the stakeholders from the scope of strategic vision of the next perspective to the operational topics of project implementation. In terms of consultation meetings the proposal to review the set of proposed questions generated in some cases similar feedback containing either positive or negative reaction on the current situation rather than 'out of the box' view to the future.

- The **generality of the recommended key questions** being versatile for the wide range of recipients at the same time caused a room for interpretation among the respondents that made the responses wider and less defined, consequently, more difficult to sum up and create consistent recommendations. This challenge may be further tackled by more thorough grouping of questions by specific areas of cooperation for stakeholders and split/dependant on age groups and/or function/activity for citizens.

### 4. Consultation of stakeholders

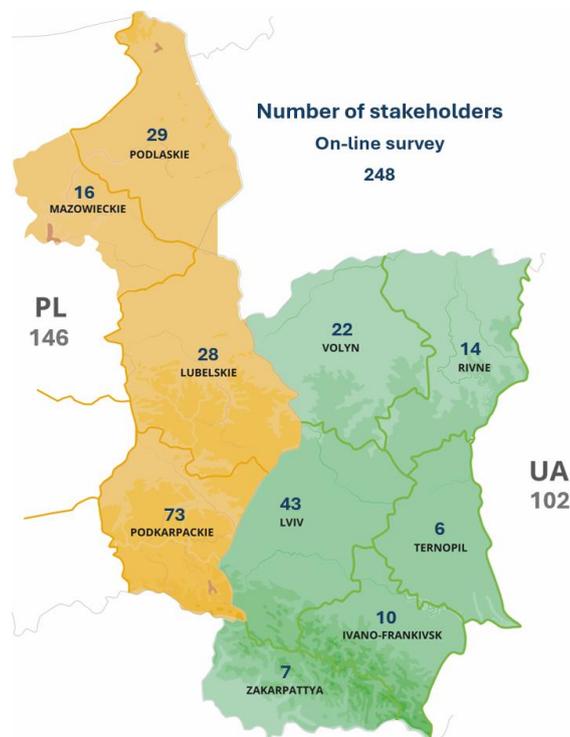
#### 4.1. Main stakeholders consulted

The total quantity of the stakeholders took part in the on-line survey is **248**. 146 of them (59%) were Polish stakeholders and 102 (41%) Ukrainian ones.

The majority of stakeholders was represented by the **regional/urban/local public authorities** - **61,29%**.

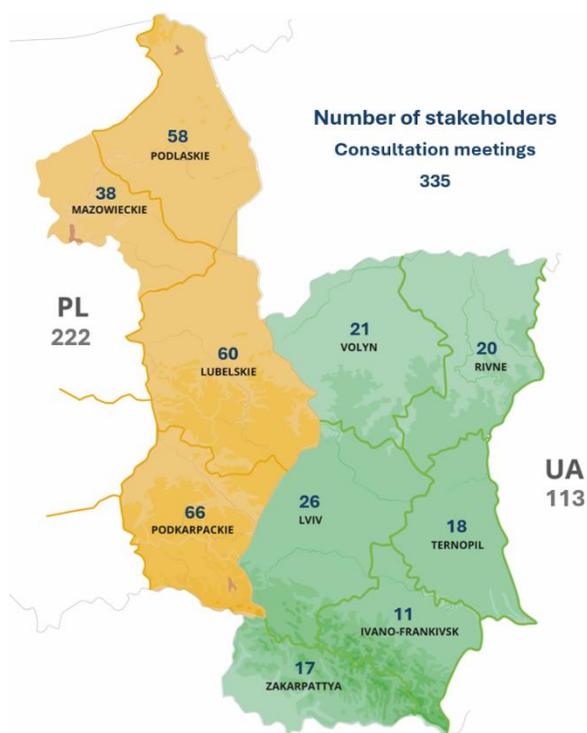
**10,89% of the stakeholders were Non-governmental organizations.** Healthcare and educational institutions have almost reached 10%. The actual quantity of the stakeholders as well as the geographical distribution of answers per Programme sub-region you may see in the charts below:

### Types of entities



With regards to the types of stakeholders' entities in both countries, most of the types are represented symmetrically with the exception to a larger number of the healthcare institutions (16 vs. 7) and cultural institutions (7 vs. 2) from the Polish side and larger number of Ukrainian educational institutions (12 vs 8).

Consultation meetings attracted more stakeholders than the on-line survey (335 vs 248). The distribution of participating entities by type was similar to the one within the on-line survey with the following share and geography:



Less active participation of several Ukrainian regions (Zakarpattia, Ternopil, Ivano-Frankivsk) had been compensated with more active involvement in the off-line consultations (Zakarpattia 17 entities, Ternopil 18 entities, Ivano-Frankivsk 11 entities).

The general audience of consultation meetings showed the following level of awareness on the EU funded programmes/projects in general or Poland-Ukraine (Poland-Belarus-Ukraine) projects:

Low – 26,41%

Medium – 48,09%

High – 25,51 %

Categorization was applied in the following levels of participants:

**Low** – heard of EU-funded projects without knowing details on the financing conditions, priorities, objectives etc.;

**Medium** – aware of the EU-funded projects with basic knowledge on conditions, examples of projects in the region or indirectly involved in the implementation;

**High** – directly involved in the Programme/projects implementation as a Monitoring Committee member or beneficiary of current or previous Poland-(Belarus)-Ukraine programme edition.

## 4.2. Methods of consultation

The consultations with stakeholders was organized in 2 formats: on-line survey with the questionnaire (in English, Polish and Ukrainian) containing the set of key and additional questions and off-line consultation meetings in each of 10 Programme regions (4 from Polish and 6 from Ukrainian side).

Timeline of the survey: 13/06/2024 – 31/10/2024

Timeline of the consultation meetings: 18/09/2024 – 30/10/2024

Additional off-line meetings were organized in order to add more objectivity to the feedback by discussing each of the key questions in the open dialogue both with the Programme and between the stakeholders. By means of discussion and sharing opinions the stakeholders formed consolidated messages from each region supporting and shaping the future Interreg initiatives.

As a result of consultation meetings with the stakeholders representatives of the Joint Secretariat, regional contact points from the Polish side and JS Lviv Branch Office on the Ukrainian side had prepared the reports on each region consultation meeting with summaries of discussion on the key questions and sets of quotes and opinions. The reports as well as agendas and lists of participants are collected and stored for further publication.

Data from regional reports was analysed by the Joint Secretariat and partially included in the proposed structure of the report with additional reference to the feedback from the consultations meetings.

## 4.3. Summary of the input on the key questions

Overall quantity of questions in the on-line questionnaire for stakeholders was 18, including 10 key required questions – analysed in details below and following 8 additional questions for better identification of the audience and drawing logical line from the previous and current perspectives:

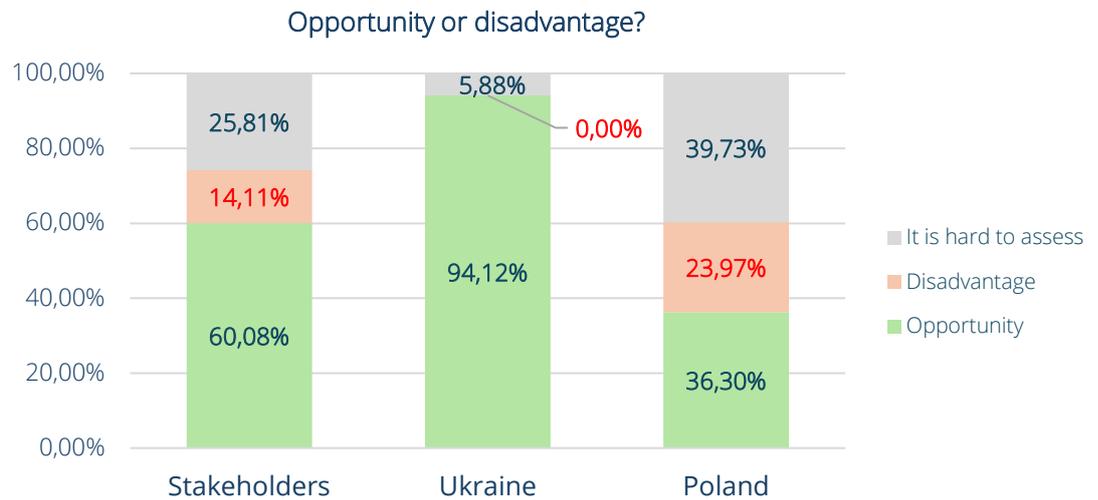
- Please indicate to which EU external border you will refer to in this questionnaire
- Please indicate where (in which voivodeship or oblast) is registered organisation that you represent (or where do you live)
- Please provide your postcode
- Which type of body do you represent?
- Please list maximum three most important specificities of the current programme that shall be sustained in its forthcoming edition
- Should the future programme geographic area change?
- Have you implemented or are you implementing an Interreg/EU funded cross-border cooperation project?
- If you are interested in further discussion concerning the future programme, please give us your e-mail address.

Analysis of the responses on each question was based on the results of both key and additional questions of the on-line survey and supplemented by the inputs from the consultation meetings as set methodologically.

## Question 1: Is living next to a border an opportunity or a disadvantage?

### Surveys

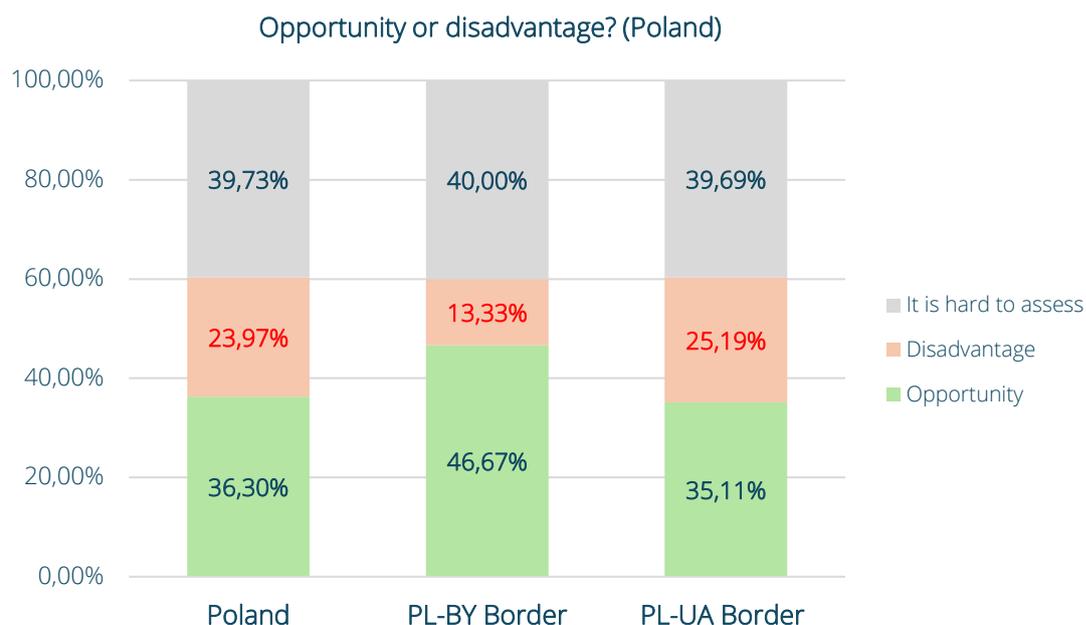
Among the whole audience of surveyed stakeholders, the **majority treats location near the border as an opportunity** (60,08% vs 14,11%). Division of the respondents made on the below chart additionally shows feedback on this question from each separate country of the Programme. More critical assessment of the near border location was provided by the Polish stakeholders.



**Most of Ukrainian stakeholders (94%) see only opportunities** in the location next to a border that show more positive assessment comparing to **Polish stakeholders (36,3 %)** and **Ukrainian citizens (78%)**.

In case of Polish stakeholders it is a combined data assessing both PL-BY and PL-UA borders. The majority of Polish stakeholders, that filled in surveys, were hesitating with the answer or had a negative assessment. **Insecurity related to the state border** was the key disadvantage expressed by the Polish stakeholders along with **the ageing society** and the **population outflow**.

Below chart illustrates the feedback of the whole Polish audience and separately respondents that referred to PL-BY border and PL-UA border.



Other **major disadvantages** were indicated by the stakeholders of both countries in frames of the on-line survey (ranked by priority):

- Crossing the border is difficult and takes time;
- Common local communities initiatives are limited because of the EU external border;
- Low ecological awareness of residents;
- Peripheral location that limits local development.

**Major opportunities** were also indicated symmetrically by both UA and PL stakeholders in frames of the on-line survey:

- Access to rich cultural heritage;
- Area attractive to tourists;
- More diverse partnership opportunities for local development projects;
- Closer to nature and easier to go on holiday;
- Many active organizations eager to cooperate across the border.

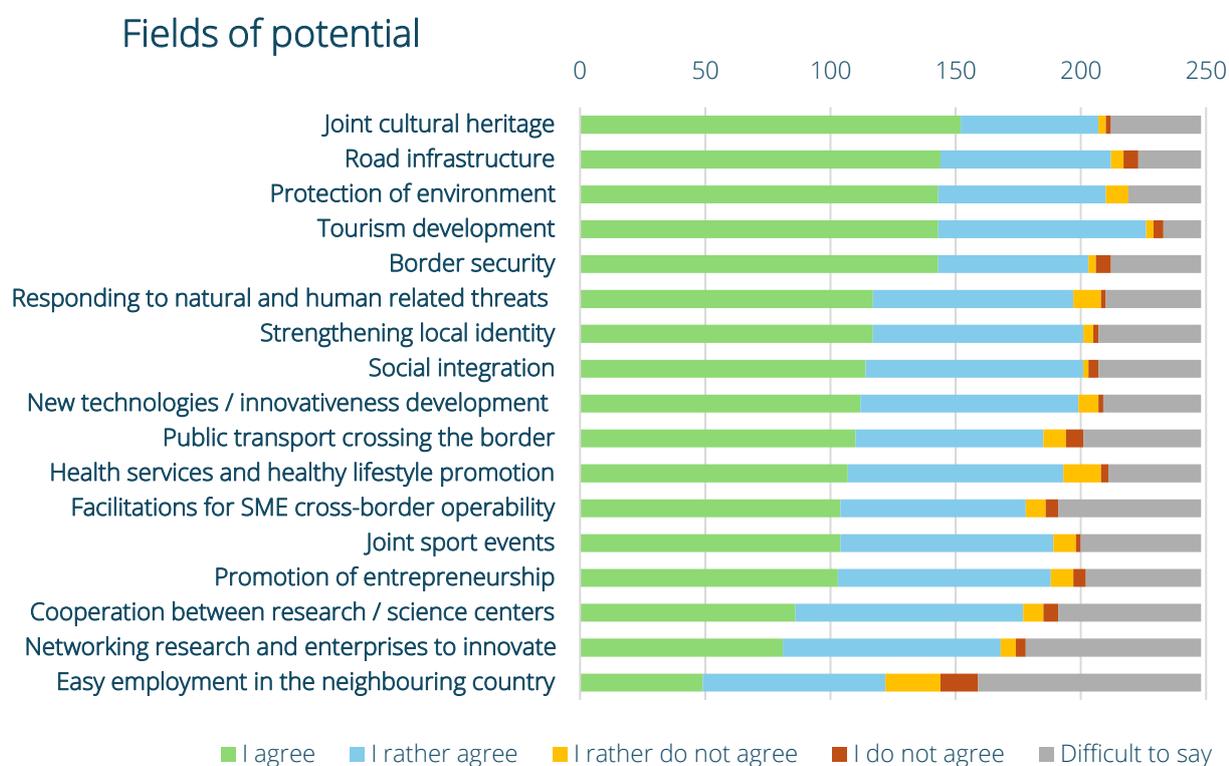
#### *Consultation meetings*

With regards to the consultation meetings, the Polish stakeholders provided more positive assessment of the near border location than the survey participants. **Half of the Polish audience reacted positively** and gave similar priority to the opportunities. Second half stated that the future perspective would depend directly on the **geopolitical situation**, that was assessed as unstable both **on PL-UA border** (confirmed by two Polish regions bordering with Ukraine – Lubelskie and Podkarpackie) **and PL-BY border** (as confirmed by the participants from Podlaskie, Lubelskie and Mazowieckie voivodships). One of the participants from Podlaskie (PL) told that the location near border is a challenge in which all surrounding conditions were treated as disadvantages and programmes of cross-border cooperation were among opportunities.

Ukrainian audience demonstrated similar positive feedback as within the on-line survey. They were close to the opinions of Polish participants in terms of opportunities and added that the possibility of exchange of experience, sharing the natural heritage, joint work on cultural links and civilizational heritage with rational approach to contradictions, business and social integration (healthcare accessibility), developing tourist attractions and active partnership dialogue with the EU remain very actual for the developing Ukrainian regions of the Programme area especially under current circumstances of severe damage continuously made to the country by war.

Question 2: Where is the biggest potential for territorial cooperation in your area? (cooperation with partners from the other side of the external EU border – Polish-Belarusian or Polish-Ukrainian) *Survey*

The overall picture on the actual fields of interest for the stakeholders based on the on-line survey looks as follows (sorted by priority):



The list of selected fields of potential does not differ significantly while grouping responses by country and had not changed significantly along the process of the data collection.

#### *Consultation meetings*

With regards to the consultation meetings there are several additional topics that were discussed and addressed as areas of biggest potential or areas that would need to be more visible in future Interreg on the territory:

- **Education/Science** – either in the form of separate priority containing support of **joint scientific researches, educational infrastructure** or in the form of specific objectives in

combination with other priorities (Health, Accessibility, Cooperation) containing **Research and Development** projects (including those on start up phase) with possibility of further scaling or commercialization;

- Widening of the **Health** priority – from the Ukrainian perspective in terms of particular accessibility of the health and social infrastructure for victims of war and general necessity of improving medical infrastructure (confirmed by enlarging interest of all regions for medical projects from PBU 2014-2020 to the current PL-UA Programme), from the Polish side in terms of gaining new top knowledge/competence abroad and sharing experience within trainings of the medical and scientific staff. Additional support to the development of the Health priority is observed in answers to next **questions 3 and 4 (What works well and not well)**. Feedback received contains well assessed joint work and progress in partnership and common professional developments in healthcare sector as a positive aspect and lack of up-to-date medical infrastructure (UA) and lack of cooperation between healthcare systems on the level of state and actuality of health aspect in migration/integration processes (PL).
- Considering **Environment** priority in more integrated combination with e.g. **Tourism, Culture, Energy Transformation, Economics**;
- Possibility of **combination of priorities** within the programme should be considered.

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

#### *Survey*

As mentioned earlier, the most part of the respondents was aware or had experience of the EU projects, and in combination with the fact that majority of stakeholders represented local/regional executive bodies, the assessment of positive aspects of cooperation was similar to the feedback on the fields of the biggest potential and showed general formal (“traditional”) progress within the so far Programme editions. Additionally the regional public authorities from both sides of the border were naturally interested in and positively referred to the wide scope of actions in which they are currently involved, which in most cases resulted in answers quite similar to the specific objectives and intervention categories of the current Programme perspective.

Answers were not grouped by country in this question due to balanced/symmetrical feedback received from both sides of the border.

Summarizing the most popular answers, the following fields of cooperation were indicated as ‘well working’:

- **Joint natural parks, recreational zones, tourist infrastructure, routes;**
- **Cooperation in preservation/renovation and joint scientific work on the historic and cultural heritage objects;**
- **Joint cultural, sport, integration events;**
- **Well expanded shared medical services and perspective work between healthcare institutions and medical universities;**

- Modernization and procurement of new specialized medical equipment;
- Experience exchange in health, environment, security, culture, business, emergency (fire-fighting);
- Joint cross-border actions between firefighters, border guards;
- Joint scientific and educational initiatives.

#### *Consultation meetings*

With regards to the consultation meetings apart from the above mentioned project actions the following positive points should be added as appreciated in current cooperation:

- Considerably high level of communication between local/regional authorities and Programme authorities, primarily the Joint Secretariat;
- Public and working integration events, partnership forums, networking initiatives;
- Different types (scales) of projects implemented, allowing all levels of stakeholders to participate;
- Micro-projects were additionally appreciated as particularly important both in terms of more possibilities for less experienced beneficiaries and as a source of dedicated support for cross-border cooperation/communication capacity for more experienced beneficiaries;
- Joint actions (both between beneficiaries and with the Programme authorities) on the development of different types of cross-border infrastructure (please see question 8 for more details).

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

##### *Survey*

Among the negative points of cooperation there were both – external and internal factors of project cooperation mentioned in the online survey.

Among the negative external factors from both sides of the border:

- Off-line meetings/cooperation across the border does not work properly due to difficult situation on PL-UA border crossing points;
- Cooperation on the level of state administrative system of Ukraine is difficult since is not sufficiently developed/digitalized/integrated compared to the EU member states;
- Resignation from the Tourism priority in the current Programme perspective (due to position of the Ukrainian National Authority on redirection of the funds from Tourism to Health and Environment priorities);
- Different level of financing and access to resources for UA and PL authorities;
- Low level of ecological awareness of both PL and UA population of the border regions

Internal negative factors were the following:

- Interface of the Programme information system is complicated and not user friendly;
- Application form is not consistent and inconvenient for operation;
- Complicated package of application documents and too large set of supporting documents;

- Long time needed from preparation of the project to realization;
- Complicated registration process of the projects in Ukraine;
- Complicated processes within newly established administrative/management control system combined with large volume of reporting and financing divided in several tranches create significant administrative loads;
- Strict requirements on the building permission documentation;
- Insufficient level of exchange of information (implementation experience, partnership search, lessons learnt) between sub-regions/stakeholders (particularly in Ukraine) in complex conditions of realization process.

Part of the stakeholders referring in the on-line survey to the **Poland-Belarus border** answered to this question that **nothing currently works well** since the cooperation with Belarus is suspended. Lack of pre-2022 cooperation has a negative impact on the development of the region (feedback from respondents of Podlaskie voivodship). Cooperation with Belarus was absolutely declined from the Ukrainian side.

#### *Consultation meetings*

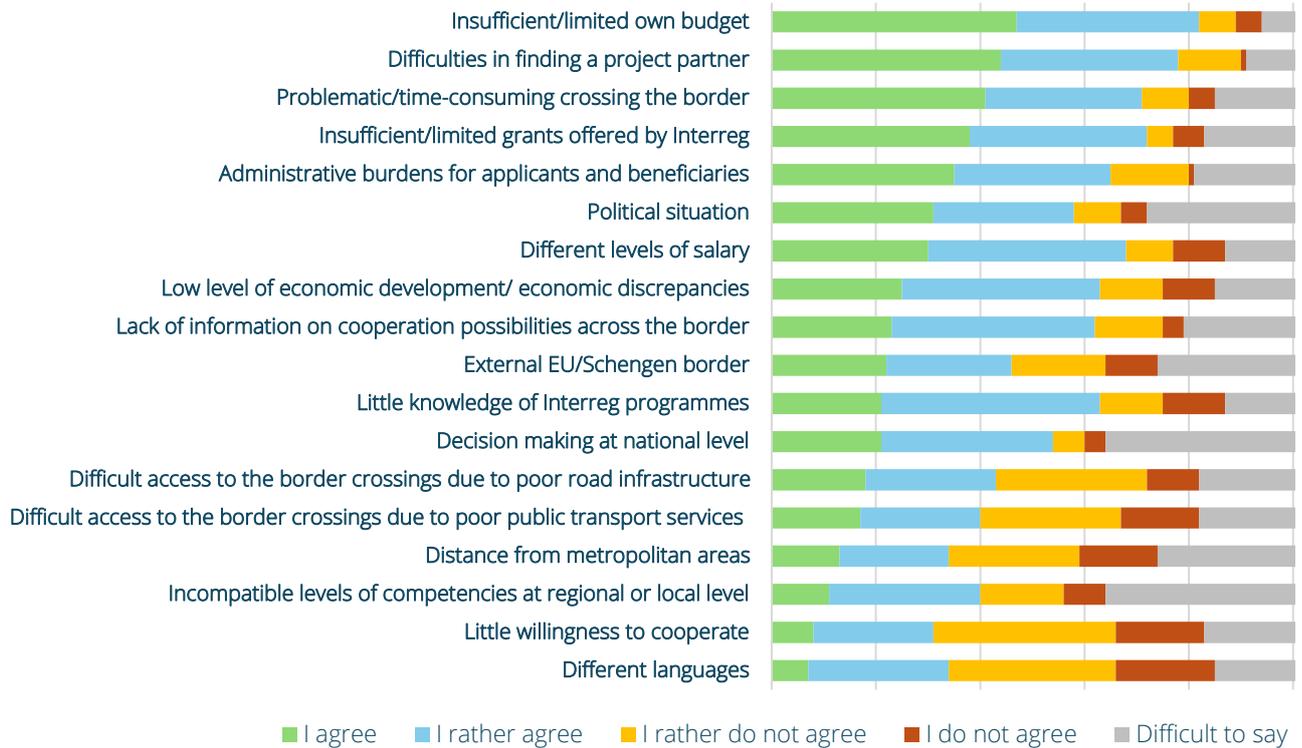
Most of these factors were also pointed out at the **consultation meetings** with additional remarks on such technical aspects as **currency exchange rate** for project reporting. Unlike the previous Programme edition, the current rules for reporting require calculation of expenditures in Euro basing on the exchange rate at the date of submission of the report to the controller (later than the date of actual expenditure). This method is considered as more risky due to possible losses that may occur if the exchange rate changes dynamically.

#### Question 5: What are the major obstacles for a good cross-border cooperation in your area?

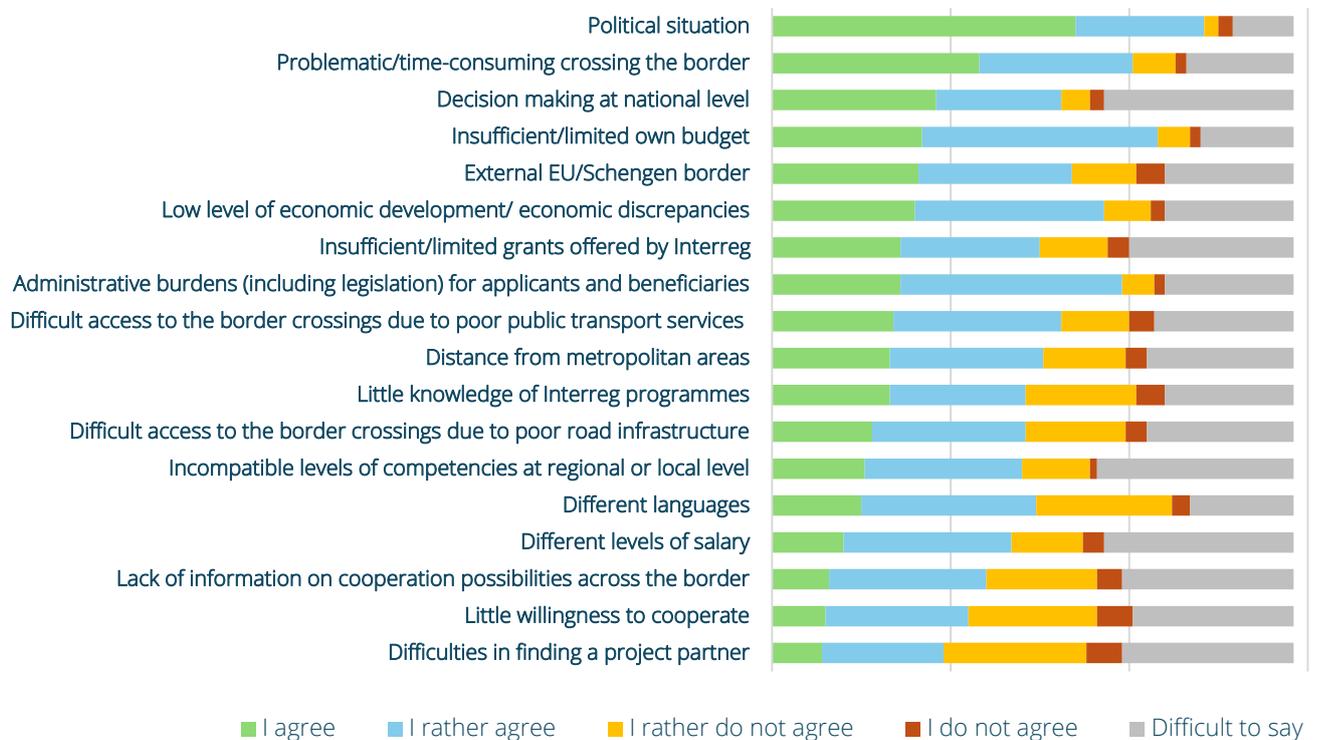
##### *Survey*

Below you may see the chart of the major obstacles sorted by priority as outlined by the representatives from each side of the PL-UA border:

## Obstacles from UA viewpoint



## Obstacles from PL viewpoint



Analysing the charts on differences in priorities it may be noted that the **political situation received more votes from Polish side** due to consideration (by the respondents from Podlaskie voivodship) of, not only Ukraine, but also Belarus as a bordering country, cooperation with which is directly dependant on the security/political/geopolitical situation (that is hardly predictable).

More prioritization to the complexity for finding a partner was given by Ukrainian stakeholders.

### *Consultation meetings*

The obstacles or reasons for the negative assessment of cooperation most actively discussed during the consultation meetings were:

- The overall geopolitical situation, especially the ongoing war in Ukraine that impacted nearly all aspects of cross-border cooperation shortening the planning horizon and the reshaping priorities for the future in various areas of life;
- Incompatibility of the UA and PL (EU) legislation systems and modes of operations of the bodies of executive power;
- UA legal frame not integrated enough with Programme/project implementation framework;
- Indicated particularly by the UA participants: **complicated crossing the border due to density of traffic, too complex set of related procedures (UA citizens) and insufficient quantity of the border crossing points.**

### Question 6: Are there things you would like to do under Interreg but cannot? Why?

#### *Survey*

Despite the difficulties and obstacles, for **66,53%** of stakeholders of the on-line survey, **there are no things that could not be done** from options available under Interreg.

Among the rest of the respondents, more than half indicated either things they would like to be done or problems/obstacles for the operation that they were facing in the past. The most popular answers, without justification, are similar to the ones provided to the question 2 on the fields of biggest potential for cross-border cooperation i.e.:

- Joint projects on development and restoration of the cultural heritage;
- Development of local infrastructure and transport for communities;
- Resolution of common environmental problems, energy efficiency;
- Reconstruction of communal network of canalization, water management facilities.

Most of problems indicated (with the symmetrical geographical distribution) are the same that were described in the sections with top obstacles for the cross-border cooperation (Question 5) that were: **geopolitical situation, lack of own budget resources, limited Programme budget, problems at the state border.**

### *Consultation meetings*

Among the stakeholders that indicated both, things preferred to be done and why it could not be done, there are the following answers with relevant correlation to responses on other questions of the consultation:

- The projects of significant potential (correlating to opinions in the question 2) oriented on **scientific/educational cooperation, research and development, technical studies, innovations** in different fields, or synergies of fields, would be easier generated/implemented within a separate priority or dedicated objective. The specificity of these fields requires significant funds for the expert services that are executed by the project staff. This option is not sufficiently accessible due to the strict proportions of the staff costs set for projects under the current Programme;
- One of the basic issues brought up during all meetings was **insufficient Programme budget** to allow the implementation of numerous highly important cross-border initiatives, practically in all the thematic fields covered by the Programme, except to those identified as irrelevant from the cross-border cooperation perspective – infrastructure projects devoted to railways and border crossing points.

### Question 7: What is the most important novelty that you would like to see in the future Interreg?

#### *Survey*

Majority of answers (around 90%) indicated general propositions included in earlier described feedback on the questions, primarily:

- **simplification** of administrative procedures, reporting and control requirements;
- effective, easy to use **on-line system of exchange of information** on project implementation;
- **increasing limits for staff and administrative costs.**

### *Consultation meetings*

Among the novelties/changes for the future programming proposed by the meetings' audience were the following:

- **Limitation of one grant per institution** under every Programme priority;
- Additional **experience based case studies and learning opportunities for potential beneficiaries** with no or less experience;
- Extensive experience of Ukrainian partners in responding to emergencies and solving security problems during the war can be further shared with partners across the border;
- Creating opportunities for **cooperation between SME's** (for profit enterprises), including this category of beneficiaries to the Programme scope either in full or upon certain limits/conditions;
- More **frequent calls for proposals** and availability of **micro-grants**;
- **Use of national languages** in the project application and implementation procedure.

## Question 8: Is there a need for some infrastructure projects?

### *Survey*

**94,75% of the respondents were** in favour of the need of the infrastructure projects. All profiles/types of infrastructure proposed for selection (i.e. health, tourism, environment, cultural heritage, roads) obtained similar **high level of support** with no difference by categories or geography of respondents.

### *Consultation meetings*

The discussion at the consultation meetings confirmed that stance (great majority in favour of infrastructure projects) and gave more clarity on this point with the following consolidated feedback: stakeholders pointed out that substantial budget as required by the strategic infrastructure (railways or border crossing points, but also roads were mentioned in few cases) is not available under the Interreg programme. Such railways/roads projects are absorbing significant part of the Programme budget while delivering comparatively small effects from the strategic standpoint. Particularly railways' related projects were pointed out as those completely inconsistent with the very nature of cross-border cooperation.

The issue of available financing (sizes of grants) was also brought up in this context by the representatives of the road management institutions. The maximum level of grants for regular projects (2.5 M EUR) was criticized as not correlated with current prices and not allowing for the real roads investments. That additionally proves the incompatibility between investments requiring significant financing (such as roads and railways) and their available financing under the Programme.

In this context, also the borders crossing points' related infrastructure was discussed with the same negative assessment by the audience – as not relevant to the very essence of the cross-border cooperation and to be tackled more within interstate contacts.

## Question 9: What should be done to facilitate the work with your counterparts in another country (governance)?

### *Survey / Consultation meetings*

The voices from Poland and Ukraine are similar with regards to the improvements needed in terms of the governance. The following crucial propositions are extracted from both on-line and off-line consultations and grouped into more general ideas:

- General increase of the Programme financing to cover more project proposals and better answering the huge demand for cross-border cooperation under various topics;
- Further harmonization of Ukrainian state legal requirements to that of EU in the fields relevant to cross-border cooperation in general and projects' implementation in particular;
- Greater autonomy from the Ukrainian central government to Ukrainian regional/local governments for intensifying direct contacts and partnership with Polish counterparts and

consequently increasing the influence of UA regions authorities on the Programme implementation;

- Facilitation of the border crossing procedures for the people working on the project/programme implementation which will allow more events directed on partnership search and boosting the communication during implementation;
- Offering of small grants that may support a wider range of beneficiaries, enhance people-to-people connections and raise the level of cooperation between organizations.

#### Question 10: What would be the cooperation project of your dreams?

##### *Survey*

The feedback of the stakeholders (institutions) on the dream projects was naturally correlated with the structure of that group, represented mainly by the local authorities, which, together with the other legal entities, have rather more formal orientation to the requirements and needs of the local communities. Answers contain probable project proposals on traditional topics of healthcare accessibility and inclusion, communal infrastructure, water and waste management, tourism promotion, preservation of common cultural and natural heritage, environment, common educational programmes.

From NGOs' perspective the main directions of the desired projects are:

- Preservation of common cultural traditions and local identity;
- Development of tourism potential and infrastructure;
- Ecological and environmental cooperation, common green corridors and nature adaptive solutions in urban areas;
- Support of entrepreneurship/SMEs and innovations.

From the less represented types of stakeholders the following opinions were outlined:

- "My dream project would be to establish a Polish-Ukrainian business incubator to support pro-entrepreneurial activities in both countries. To exchange ideas and concepts for business projects implemented by Poles in Ukraine and Ukrainians in Poland. R&D work contributing to cooperation between scientists and specialists from both countries. Nothing unites like well-organized innovative projects." (Educational institution);
- "Medical training centre with virtual reality simulations" (Healthcare institution).

In other cases the project directions are similar to the ones that were already presented in the description of the rest of key questions.

#### 4.4. Interesting quotes

**Taras, Lviv Oblast State Administration (UA)** "Tourism is mistakenly treated as entertainment, but it is so much more - development of communities, sustainability of historical sites, rehabilitation and recovery after trauma, formation of self-identity... It was a big mistake to cancel this priority."

**Olha, NGO "Inclusive Center for Children's Development UNIKO" (UA)** "We can see how Russia's informational campaigns work – recently, everything which seems to separate us from the Poles became noticeable... On the contrary, the Programme is doing a great job focusing on the things which unite us, helping to find something we have in common, like, for instance, cultural heritage, and something we can learn from each other."

**Wojciech, Drohiczyn community (PL)**, "Even though there is a border here, that there is a state of war on the other side of the border, there are such ordinary interpersonal contacts and they can be, and I hope that grassroots contacts will influence the political upper echelons."

**Renata, Augustów Town Hall (PL)**: "I think that this type of meeting would be worth repeating when we are at least halfway through the implementation of this financial perspective."

**Olga, Lviv Oblast State Administration (UA)**: "This is the Programme that has a soul, it's about the interaction among the people, among the communities."

**Markiyan, Caritas (NGO) (UA)**: "In the 2014-2020 Programme, some heritage buildings have been saved from ruination, it's extremely valuable help from the EU, and it would be good to continue it."

**Mykola, State Emergency Service in Volyn Oblast (UA)**: "Soft activities make a great impact. This, in particular, concerns joint exercises, improving the skills of rescuers. Remember what the situation was recently in the south of Poland, where our rescuers provided assistance. Such emergency situations can arise in future. In my opinion, the adoption of experience, constant improvement, training are crucial as it helps to quickly react to these situations in the future. It can save someone's life."

**Ievhen, NGO Project Managers Association YADRO (UA)** "The border always means problems. Problems require the projects to solve them, the projects mean we are needed."

**Mariusz, Commune of Łosice (PL)** "Location near the state border is an opportunity thanks to multiculturalism and willingness to cooperate on both sides of the border"

**Ruslan, Ternopil Oblast Council (UA)** "Ternopil Oblast has good historical moments with the Poles. When we now talk to our Polish colleagues about projects and cooperation, they remember history. And this is something, that every community should take as a basis for cooperation - to look at these historical aspects that exist. Because every city and village have something related to a potential partner in Poland."

**Olga, School No 3, Ternopil (UA)** "Organization of school competitions for children is a great tool. Representatives of the two countries of Poland and Ukraine have the opportunity to meet and get to know each other. It's an opportunity to start contacts, both for teachers and schoolchildren. The program is not only projects, but there are also other activities."

**Victoria Homonets, the coordinator of TwoTowers project in PBU 2014-2020 (UA)** "Experience exchange is a crucial element of each project. Some people might be sceptical about it, but in fact it is a great advantage when people have the opportunity to meet, to discuss common problems, identify them, and then find resources to solve them together and have a common result. And

when Polish partners show a "Ukrainian" result as a joint one, they are proud of it, and Ukrainians also show a "Polish" result as a joint one".

**Anonymous person (PL)** "It is necessary to consider a temporary increase in the budget, especially in the context of infrastructure projects, also by preparing Ukraine on the path to joining the European Union, while giving it the opportunity to learn and gain experience."

**Anonymous person (PL)** "Despite the war and other difficulties, cooperation between partners from Poland and Ukraine continues. The inhabitants of border areas should continually integrate with each other and small grants could serve this purpose."

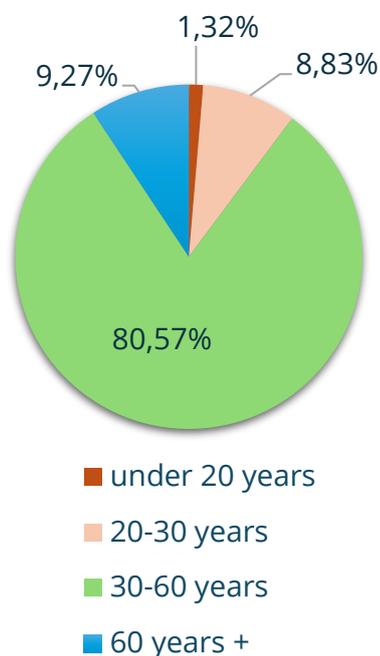
## 5. Consultation of citizens

### 5.1. Main citizens consulted

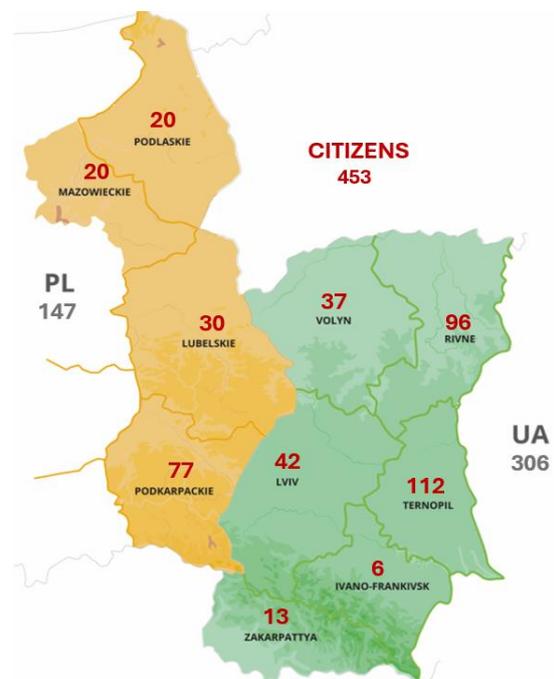
The total quantity of citizens that had responded to the on-line questionnaire is **453**.

**Young people** (< 30 years old) had represented **more than 10%** (46 persons) of citizens-respondents of the Programme area. Almost the same representation had **senior citizens** (> 60 years old). Detailed age grouping and distribution of responses by the Programme's regions is presented in below graphs:

Age groups of respondents



Geography of responses

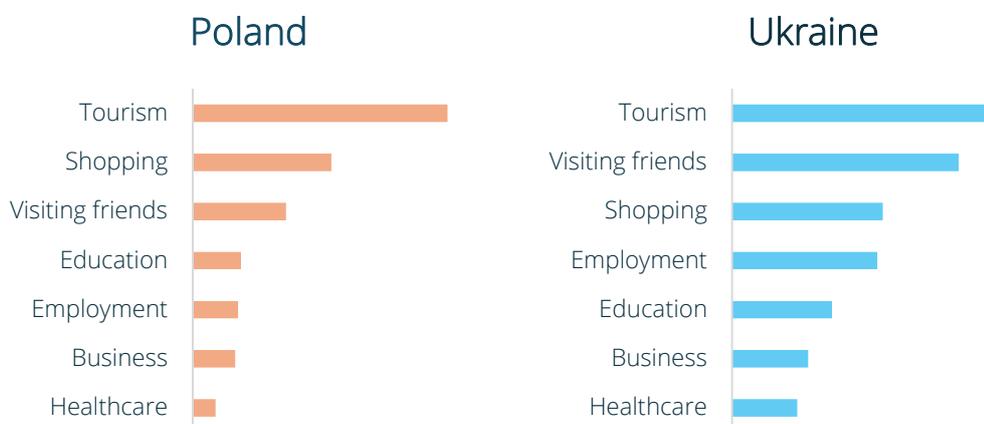


It is worth noting that **23,62%** of citizens participated in the survey had **never crossed any state border** (13,25% from Ukrainian side and 10,37% from Polish side).

**44,81%** of citizens **travel abroad rarely**, once in 2-3 years (28,68% from Ukrainian side and 16,13% from Ukrainian side).

30,02% of citizens travel **several times a year** (24,28% from Ukrainian side and 5,74% from Polish side).

1,54% of citizens **travel frequently** 1-3 times a month (6 persons from Ukraine and 1 from Poland). The following purposes by priority are mentioned by the **traveling citizens** (246 from Ukraine and 100 from Poland):



## 5.2. Methods of consultation

Consultation for citizens was carried out in the form of the Online survey with the questionnaires set in national languages (Polish and Ukrainian). The same approach was applied as for the stakeholders, i.e. the Polish respondents referred to either PL-BY cross-border relations or PL-UA ones.

Timeline of the survey: 13/06/2024 – 31/10/2024

Regular (monthly) update on the progress of participation with the visualized map on the distribution of responses by each region of the Programme (similar to the one presented in the report) and key topics for cross-border cooperation were published on the Programme website/social media accounts.

## 5.3. Summary of the input on the key questions

Overall quantity of questions in the questionnaire for citizens was 12, including 5 key required questions – each analysed in details below and the following 7 additional questions for better identification of the audience:

- What is your age? (<20, 20-30, 30-60, 60>);
- Please fill your post code;
- How often do you cross the border (EU external border closest to where you live)?
- For what purpose do you normally cross the border?
- When crossing the border, what is your most usual mode of transport?
- If you answered private transport, which of the following options prevents you from using other modes of transport?
- If you answered public transport, do you detect limitations in the provision of those services?

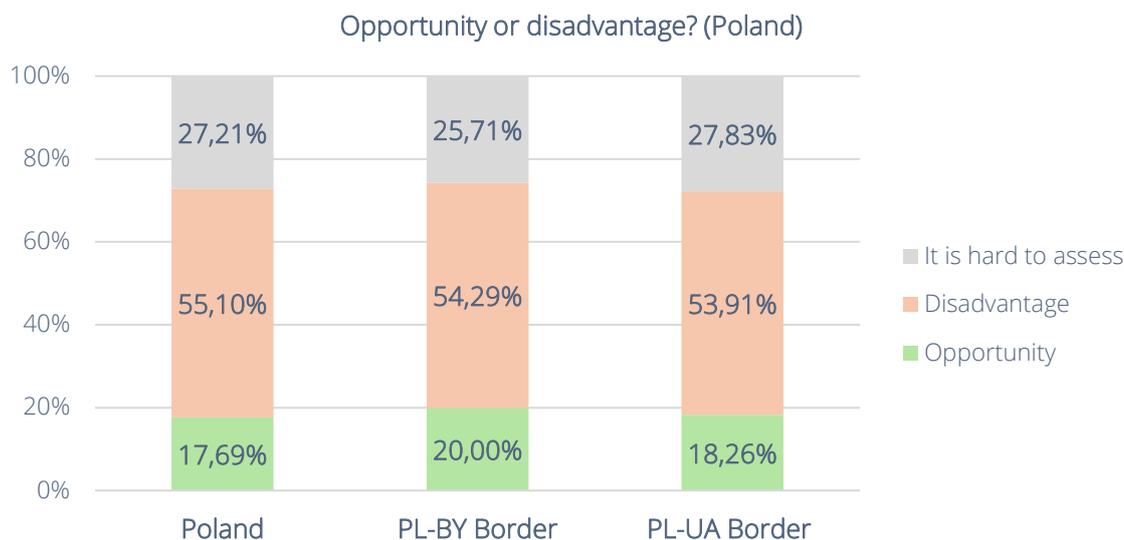
Analysis of the responses on each key question was supplemented where necessary with the feedback on additional questions of the on-line survey as set methodologically.

**Question 1: Is living next to a border an opportunity or a disadvantage?**

Among all the respondents -the citizens of the Programme territory, the majority treats location near the border as an opportunity (58,28% versus 19,21%). However division of the respondents by country showed negative assessment of the near border location by the Polish citizens, as you may see below.



The division of PL respondents into those referring to PL-BY and PL-UA border show little difference in that assessment:



The aspect of security at the state border which organically appear as a major concern for the Polish respondents is caused probably by the ongoing war in Ukraine. This aspect is assessed as a concern by the almost 2 times higher proportion of the citizens from Poland than those from Ukraine (64,62 % vs. 35,64 %).

Several other aspects that contributed to the **negative** statistics from the **Polish citizens** are:

- Difficulty for opening/expanding of business activity;
- Peripheral location limiting local development.

Other key **disadvantages** shown below are similar for **both countries**:

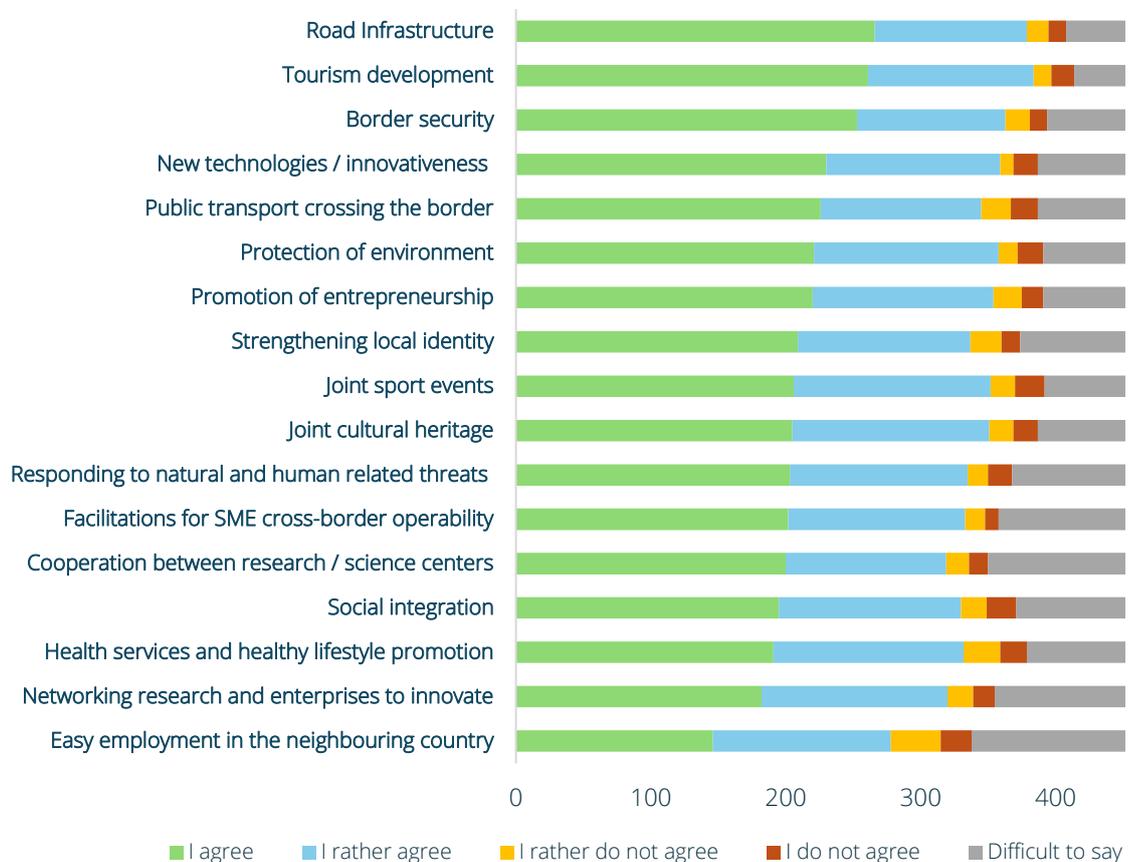
- Population outflow;
- Difficult border crossing;
- Ageing society;
- Lack of local/regional public transport.

The **main opportunities** outlined by the respondents from **both countries** are the following:

- Area attractive to tourists;
- Access to rich cultural heritage;
- More diverse partnership opportunities for local development projects;
- Closer to nature and easier to go on holiday.

Question 2: In the place where you live, what are the main topics where cross-border cooperation is needed?

The most actual topics for cross-border cooperation for all respondents-citizens are shown by priority in the chart below:



The answers received on this question do not differ substantially between two countries representations. In addition to the abovementioned top priority fields of potential (Road Infrastructure, Tourism development, Border security) the following opinions were provided that differ across the border:

From Polish side higher (above average) priority was given to following topics:

- Strengthening of local identity;
- Cooperation between research/science centres;
- Responding to natural and human related threats.

From Ukrainian side higher (above average) priority was given to following topics:

- Protection of environment;
- Promotion of entrepreneurship;
- Joint sport events.

### Question 3: Can you name an Interreg project that you find useful in the place where you live?

It is worth noting that almost **42%** (189 persons out of 453) **of the citizens** declared to **know at least one useful Interreg project**. Within this group 38% (71 persons) have managed to outline topics, titles or even acronyms of Interreg projects. The list of projects that could be identified with concrete Programme perspective is presented in the Annex 1.

Less accurate and more general information on the Interreg projects was presented in the form of below listed approximated topics of the actions that took place on the Programme territory:

- Better access to medical services in the cross-border region;
- Extension of road 812 on the Korolówka-Włodawa section;
- Expansion of Kuźnica border crossings;
- Creation of a park near the city hospital in Uzhhorod;
- Creating municipal system for handling waste household electronic equipment in Lviv;
- Creation of cross-border centres of preventive examinations in Lublin and Volyn regions;
- Ensuring the availability of medical services for patients with cardiovascular diseases.

### Question 4: In your daily life, what are the biggest difficulties for cross-border cooperation?

The biggest difficulties for cross-border cooperation are declared in the following order by priority:

- Difference in language;
- Non-Schengen borders;
- Difficult access to health, educational or culture services due to legislation or other barriers;
- Insufficient numbers of roads leading to a border crossing points;
- No cross-border transport connection;
- Little potential for cooperation of local business counterparties.

The distribution of answers by country or region was relatively flat, with only one difficulty that was assessed with notable difference.

The point concerning the **negative stereotypes** had more affirmative answers (40% vs 26% of agree/rather agree answers in the total quantity for this category) from the Polish side (without dependence from either PL-BY or PL-UA part) but this answer was not set in the list as one of a high priority.

#### Question 5: What would be the cross-border cooperation project of your dreams?

Generally the tone of answers received in this regard correlates with the selection of the most actual topics for cross-border cooperation that were provided under the **question 2**. Additional topics that should be shown with the scope of propositions for the projects are **education and health** that are widely presented in the received pool of answers **from Ukraine** either autonomously or combined with such spheres as **tourism** and **environment**.

The general audience of citizens had indicated either preferred priorities or general character of actions with a little lack of specific projects generated. At the same time, considering the volume and extended content of the questionnaire, the rate of both responsiveness and complexity of formulations may be considered as acceptable.

The share of respondents that answered this question is **33,11%** (150 persons out of 453). 74 persons from Ukraine and (60 referring to PL-UA border and 16 referring to PL-BY border).

#### **Polish respondents**

Polish respondents, with no visible division by the criteria of border (PL-BY or PL-UA), presented more answers oriented on the sphere of **tourism, cultural/natural heritage promotion and relevant infrastructure** that show closer correlation with the answers on the biggest potential for cross-border cooperation (question 2).

The selection of most concrete propositions:

- A joint tourist offer combined with local education, teaching respect and intercultural education;
- A network of cities jointly developing their tourist offer;
- Rapid border crossing system, development of public transport;
- Revitalization of degraded areas by implementing activities related to making modernized public spaces or buildings available to residents and their activation;
- Safety, preventing climate change, removing the effects of these changes, providing financial assistance to the Volunteer Fire Department;
- Cooperation in the field of culinary and cultural tourism, cross-border tourist routes;
- Cross-border railway route with frequent connections;
- Museum of common history;
- Agreement / partner cities / communes jointly developing the tourist offer, construction of a series of bicycle paths making it easier to cross the border as part of tourist exchange;
- Protection of cultural heritage - Polish monuments and memorial sites on the UA side.

## Ukrainian respondents

Ukrainian respondents paid more attention to the development of **joint healthcare and educational facilities** with several points of interest in the **environmental protection measures and improvement of local infrastructure** (the majority of formulations are also: “joint hospital”, “joint school”, “joint rehabilitation centre” university or educational centre, “nature/environment protection”). The same tendency was observed in regions with both direct and indirect border connection.

The most concrete propositions listed from more to less prioritized topics:

- Joint educational and medical complex university-hospital in Ukraine and Poland;
- Joint education and high-quality medical services;
- Exchange of experience and improvement of the material base of medical institutions;
- A joint inclusive educational project for educators who work with children with disabilities;
- Development of medical education, simulation training;
- Joint school, innovation centre, business incubator;
- Network of partners dealing with youth and youth policy;
- Network of partners whose activities are aimed at the protection of human rights, active legal education;
- Joint sports and entertainment centre for children and youth (swimming pool, gym, cinema, bowling, game centre...);
- Eco park in the city, cleaning of the Ustya River and Lake Basiv Kut;
- Autonomous tourist and ethnographic clusters with energy-saving support;
- Protection of nature, environment, cultural heritage, development of tourism, new business opportunities, development of social programs and projects.

### 5.4. Interesting quotes

Quotes were collected from the written responses of citizens in frames of the on-line consultation survey. The most meaningful of them are presented below:

“Positive cooperation, implementation of joint projects, trainings... and those advantages are numerous”

(Anonymous, Ukraine, age category – 30-60);

“Away from the capital, and along the eastern border - more openness, cordiality, family spirit”

(Anonymous, Poland, age category – 30-60);

“My dream project would be a bicycle highway that would allow you to cross the border and explore Ukraine by bike.”

(Maciej, Poland, age category – 30-60);

“The border greatly expands the horizons. As a rule, there is an intersection of different nationalities and ethnic groups at the border. We are always different than people in the center... Also, the border gives us a certain security at the moment. It is also important for residents. On the other

hand, the border gives an opportunity to study and implement projects. After all, projects are not only activities and infrastructure. They are about building relationships between people” (Ksenia, Ukraine, age category – 30-60).

## 6. Recommendations for post-2027

### 6.1. Topics to be covered by future Programme

In the current situation the border between Poland and Ukraine requires particular attention in terms of adaptability of both countries and specifically bordering regions to the reality stipulated by the ongoing war in Ukraine and suspension of cooperation with Belarus. Migration flows, damage to social and economic development, loss of working contacts and other issues outlined in the report have increased the demand for further funding of local community capacities that not only in such crucial sectors as health, emergency services and security, but culture, environment and tourism that remain important as an integral part of social structure.

What stakeholders and citizens expect from the future Programme, is the concentration on the topics that would further improve the borderland’s attractiveness for both citizens and visitors.

In this regard, there are two opposite aspects to be tackled. On the one hand, serious and costly investments in road infrastructure (particularly on the Ukrainian side) and border crossing are extremely required. On the other, the Programme should concentrate on the topics where it may have visible impact. It thus should not be focused on development of railways and border crossing points infrastructure, as its significance in these aspects will be minimal and these issues, though requiring fast and enormous improvements, are not the topics that might be adequately approached within cross-border cooperation.

### 6.2. Geography

Regarding the current and future Programme geography, absolute majority of the respondents (up to 90% including ones proposed adding already present territories) supported maintaining the current territorial frames.

Regarding the suspended cooperation with Belarus, Polish regions consistently oppose contacts with current Belarusian state authorities – such cooperation is not perceived as possible due to many factors, with security and moral issues being among the most important. Nevertheless, there is a hope (expressed mainly by the bordering regions of Podlaskie and Lubelskie voivodships) on the establishment of the democratic political conditions that may cause positive movements to revitalization of at least limited connections in the future. However, this perspective remains too challenging and highly unpredictable within the discussed planning horizon.

Among stakeholders of three Polish voivodeships bordering with Belarus, cooperation with local level Belarusian institutions or in the health sector is perceived as beneficial to both sides and awaited if only possible having in mind what is already stated above. Within the Programme framework, the Podlaskie voivodship, in pre-2022 period primarily cooperated with Belarusian side,

within the last 2 years well managed to establish new partnerships with Ukrainian institutions, almost fully substituting those with Belarusian ones.

Voices from all Ukrainian regions were entirely consistent in being decisively negative to any further continuation of cooperation with Belarus. Having that in mind, once again possible, cross-border relations involving Belarus or Belarusian organizations, should rather be approached within a separate bilateral Polish-Belarusian programme, not trilateral, as it was in years 2003-2022.

### **6.3. Implementation of the Programme / projects**

State administrative and legislation system of Ukraine should be more harmonized with the legal frame of Interreg programmes. Further integration of Ukrainian legislation requirements to the Programme would help to optimize such processes as project registration, reporting, control (administrative and management verifications) that currently require additional supportive efforts.

Regular, dedicated coordinative communication involving UA National Authority, regional, local authorities, audit authorities and Programme bodies should be encouraged to ensure a balanced and unified approach to cross-border cooperation in general and to project implementation in particular.

In terms of types of the future projects large infrastructure projects, regular and micro/small-projects are requested to remain available with even more attention to micro-project scale as justified in the report. Infrastructure component shall be better adapted to relatively low Programme budget considering its geography and expectations of the local communities. Adjustments are needed to balance either strategic effect or the level of financing of strategic infrastructure, ensuring they do not absorb a disproportionate share of the Programme financing from priorities/projects selected on competitive basis.

The budget available for one Programme perspective does not allow to reach significant impact on railways, roads and border crossing points infrastructure.

When it comes to the Programme budget, there is a clear message that having in mind:

- the needs of vast Programme territory,
- the inhabitants' expectations,
- the enormous potential for cross-border cooperation benefitting local communities on both sides of the border (reflected in number of applications submitted to subsequent calls for proposals under the Programme),

there is a strong demand for more financing of the truly cross-border and successful initiatives within various thematic fields.

Overall financing structure for the projects (90/10) as well as basic rules of their implementation, including lead partner principle and prefinancing option are appreciated by the respondents and advised to remain unchanged. Such technical options as fixed share of administrative and staff costs in projects are not well supported due to lack of flexibility for dedicated professional staff.

## Annexes

1. Annex 1. Projects known by citizens