

Interreg



**Co-funded by
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Latvia – Lithuania



Consultation of Stakeholders and Citizens

Interreg VI–A Latvia – Lithuania Programme 2021 – 2027

Acknowledged by the Monitoring Committee on 11 – 12 December 2024

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Section 1 Consultation of stakeholders

1.1. Main stakeholders consulted

In total 93 responses from stakeholders were received - 58 from Latvia and 35 from Lithuania.

Respondents represented national authorities, regional authorities, local authorities, public economic bodies, non-governmental organisations, community groups and small or medium enterprise mainly in the programme territory. Some respondents were from Riga, Vidzeme and Vilnius.

1.2. Methods of consultation

The following methods of consultation were used:

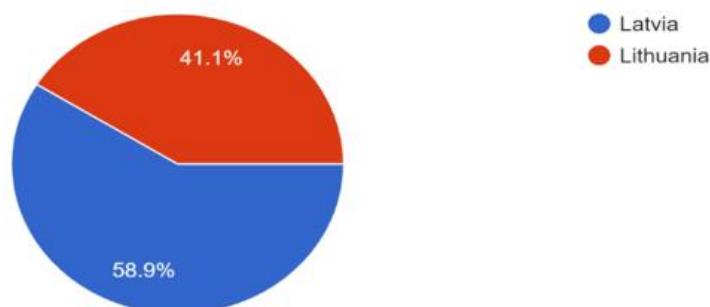
- 1) an online survey was launched from the end of May till the end of June 2024. During survey 73 responses from stakeholders were received.
- 2) an online survey was launched during ICDay event, which was organised on 19 September 2024 in Riga, Latvia. In order to attract more participants and use financing efficiently, several programmes organised the event jointly – Interreg VI-A Latvia – Lithuania Programme 2021 – 2027, Cross – Border (external) Cooperation Programme 2014-2020, Contact point of Central Baltic Programme 2021-2027 in Latvia, Interreg VI-A Estonia-Latvia Programme 2021 - 2027. Those participants, who did not want to fill in survey online, were invited to fill in the survey in paper. In the result additional 20 responses concerning Latvia – Lithuania programme were received.
- 3) during ICD event participants had an opportunity to participate in game «Shape the Future of Interreg» and invest «Interreg» money, which they received at the registration, in up to 3 from 6 pre-selected priorities: “People to people cooperation”, “Green and resilient development”, “Social services and welfare”, “Cultural heritage and tourism growth”, “Safety and security” and “Economic Growth and innovation”.

1.3. Summary of the input on the key questions

Online survey was launched from the end of May till the end of June 2024. In total 73 respondents took part in the survey. Slightly more answers were received from respondents in Latvia (58,9%) then respondents in Lithuania (41,1%).

Where are you from?

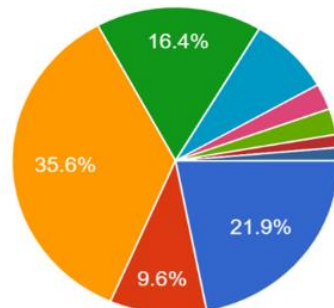
73 responses



Majority of respondents represent local authorities (35,6%), national authorities (21,9%) and public equivalent bodies (16,4%).

Which type of organization do you represent?

73 responses

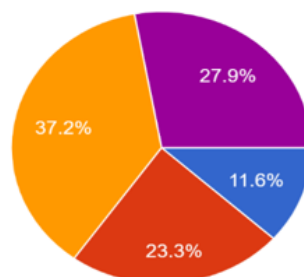


- National authority
- Regional authority
- Local authority
- Public equivalent body
- Small or medium enterprise
- Non-governmental organisation
- Community group
- Individual citizen/resident
- NGO established by municipalities
- Municipal budget institution

Latvia

Select your planning region

43 responses

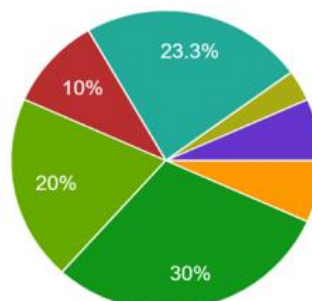


- Rīga planning region
- Kurzeme planning region
- Latgale planning region
- Vidzeme planning region
- Zemgale planning region

Lithuania

Select you county or municipality

30 responses



- Alytus County
- Birštonas Municipality
- Kaunas County
- Klaipėda County
- Marijampole County
- Neringa Municipality
- Palanga Municipality
- Panevėžys County
- Siauliai County
- Tauragė County
- Telsiai County
- Utena County
- Visaginas Municipality
- Vilnius County

During the survey following questions were asked and the following answers were received:

No	Questions for stakeholders
1	<p>Is living next to a border an opportunity or a disadvantage? Please explain, why you think so.</p> <p><i>90% of respondents believe that living next to a border is an opportunity, 10% - that it is disadvantage.</i></p> <p><i>Respondents mostly indicated that living in the border area is an opportunity because it is possible to get to know a new culture, which may be similar but different, it is possible to learn new approaches and methods, exchange experience, find optimal solutions to similar problems, choose and use the most territorially available services in both countries. Low population density and rich natural resources also were mentioned as advantage.</i></p> <p><i>Several respondents mentioned that living near the border is disadvantage because key decisions are made centrally in the largest cities and the border area is left behind, there is no possibility to receive the same benefits as living in the centre. Russia and Belarus as both are unfriendly countries.</i></p>
2	<p>Where is the biggest potential for Interreg CBC cooperation in your area?</p> <p><i>The areas most frequently indicated as having the greatest potential for Interreg cross – border – cooperation are: tourism, social services, culture, public services, environment, education, safety and security, business development and employment.</i></p> <p><i>It was mentioned that cooperation would be beneficial between the regions of Latvia, Lithuania and Estonia. Good cooperation could be also with Poland.</i></p> <p><i>The current Programme has potential, as it is sufficiently broad and important.</i></p>
3	<p>What currently works well in this cooperation and should be either preserved or reinforced?</p> <p><i>Most of respondents answered that the established partnerships work well – the vision and goals are the same, cooperation is based on equal values and needs and thus the cooperation is not artificial. It is possible to rely on the other party's involvement and performance, co-responsibility, honesty and punctuality, as well as share experience, skills and knowledge. As the biggest strength is mentioned open and active communication between and among municipalities and other stakeholders on both sides of the border. Projects are attracting visitors to the border region in both countries.</i></p> <p><i>There are good examples where local communities are actively participating in projects, contributing to and benefiting from the projects. Such involvement should be further encouraged and supported. Knowledge exchange and capacity building activities that improve the skills and knowledge of participants should be maintained and expanded.</i></p> <p><i>The process of developing a project application, and subsequently implementing the project, provides a wealth of experience in communication and collaborative problem-solving. Joint capacity-building activities and experience exchange trips, especially those to countries that are not partners in the project, foster a strong team, enhance trust, and serve to validate the partnership.</i></p> <p><i>Some respondents appreciated the JEMS, Programme`s website, less bureaucracy in comparison to previous programming periods and more simple reporting procedure, solving issues by involving Joint Secretariat. One respondent indicated that the Programme is flexible in terms of the activities to be implemented and allows project partners to come up with their own initiatives, which is a huge plus.</i></p>
4	<p>What currently does not work well in this cooperation and should be improved? How?</p>

	<p><i>Several respondents responded that everything is working well, however, most respondents responded that improvements are needed. Most often it was indicated that there is too much bureaucracy, it is difficult to attract newcomers, NGOs and associations lack pre-financing, language barrier exists, there is a lack of in-depth knowledge of how to handle social media tools, joint events should be organised more often and wider cooperation possibilities should be provided.</i></p> <p><i>It was mentioned that environmental solutions should be more focused on municipalities and their needs. Cooperation between institutions should be improved. More technical support and courses for project staff on project development and management are needed.</i></p> <p><i>Greater understanding among local politicians of the value and benefits of cooperation and the implementation of joint cross-border projects would be appreciated.</i></p>
5	<p>What are the main obstacles for good cross-border cooperation in your region? How can we get rid of these problems?</p> <p><i>As the main obstacles most often were mentioned differences in national legislation and work methods (sometimes – complex processes of information exchange, which is regulated by relevant regulatory acts), insufficient amount of funding for projects and programme, lack of capacity and human resources who can dedicate their time and effort for qualitative cooperation work and language barrier.</i></p> <p><i>It was pointed out that municipalities are busy with national EU support schemes and prioritize investment projects. Not all municipal leaders understand why soft projects are needed.</i></p> <p><i>In case of more specific problem/challenge, sometimes it is not easy to find partners, especially for newcomers who have no experience. More support from the Programme`s authorities and partner recommendations based on experience would help.</i></p> <p><i>National - scale authorities cannot build/reconstruct elements that they do not own (although this would greatly improve environmental status). The solution would be to maintain the possibility for national/regional authorities, as well as public institutions, to participate in the cross-border cooperation projects in order to implement assessments, surveys and practical activities.</i></p> <p><i>Individual respondents indicated that outdated systems and Vilius county as not eligible Programme territory are obstacles.</i></p>
6	<p>What could help you to work with your colleagues in another country faster and easier? Please explain.</p> <p><i>Majority of respondents indicated that more in person meetings, Programme`s support in partner search (contact fairs and data base for the partner search, regular information exchange on partner contacts) and revision of Programme`s requirements in order to decrease the bureaucracy would help. Other proposals were regarding:</i></p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> <i>1) joint face-to-face events with local opinion leaders, NGOs, policy makers, entrepreneurs, work in focus groups in order to develop solutions for new challenges.</i> <i>2) common and equal interest in the project results and equal responsibilities, greater responsibility for project implementation and payment deadlines.</i> <i>3) joint trainings for different levels of employees;</i> <i>4) better knowledge of English (language training - English, Lithuanian... and vice versa), more digital skills;</i> <i>5) more simple project application form with less justifications.</i> <i>6) well developed public transport;</i>

	<p>7) <i>higher % of the 1st payment.</i></p>
7	<p>Are there things you would like to do under Interreg but cannot? Why?</p> <p><i>Around half of respondents indicated that there are things which they would like to do but cannot. There is an interest to launch and implement long-term projects that include complex solutions and larger-scale infrastructure development. Due to the limited funding of the Programme, it is not possible to purchase necessary equipment or have investments in the infrastructure in the scale required. Experience gaining abroad and studying with colleagues are desired but quite often excluded activities, because these are costs which increase the total project budget and force project partners to evaluate financial priorities.</i></p> <p><i>It was mentioned that it is necessary to focus more on researching local needs and adapting projects to the specific requirements of local communities. Greater flexibility in projects would allow project partners to be able to respond more quickly to unexpected changes and adjust project activities.</i></p> <p><i>Still many basic needs exist in the Programme territory and project partners are concerned that such activities may not be supported because they are not new. There is a lack of up to date information about what is happening in the neighbourhood, a lack of ideas for areas of cross-border cooperation, and the creation of appropriate long-term platforms. Some ideas can hardly be implemented, because joint activities are not regulated on the level of national legislation between two countries.</i></p> <p><i>Associations that do not earn enough themselves cannot get involved in the implementation of projects due to the lack of pre-financing. Although the potential of associations is very high and they could implement various small community/interest group projects. There are problems with communication with municipalities. If the municipality does not support the association, it is very difficult to participate in the Interreg project.</i></p> <p><i>There is a severe lack of national monitoring data in each country and thus more fieldwork, monitoring and other data collection should be allowed in the project area.</i></p> <p><i>In the aging society there is an increasing need to develop long run services, but only temporary social services can be developed and supported by the Programme.</i></p> <p><i>There are project partners who struggle with the development of technical documentation and its implementation during the project duration. In order to receive financing under Interreg, the idea must be unusual, efficient. It means that development of technical documentation costs more, consequently, losses are higher, if the project is not supported.</i></p>
8	<p>What is the most important novelty that you would like to see in cross-border cooperation in future Interreg?</p> <p><i>Majority of respondents offered novelties. Most often it was proposed to:</i></p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> <i>1) have less bureaucratic procedures;</i> <i>2) more funding available;</i> <i>3) the possibility to implement infrastructure projects and activities;</i> <i>4) pre-financing (at least partial) for NGOs and associations;</i> <i>5) the use of artificial intelligence in cooperation activities;</i> <i>6) trust and confidence that project applicants know what they need in the relevant area.</i> <p><i>Individual responses suggested to think more about safety and security issues, organise joint annual events, set longer period for project implementation, foresee flexibility in personnel recruiting, provide practical examples of how to develop cooperation opportunities in a modern format (infrastructure cooperation, digital transformation). It</i></p>

	<p><i>was also proposed to develop new solution in JEMS platform – ability to communicate with colleagues via video call.</i></p> <p><i>There were also respondents who are satisfied with the existing cross-border cooperation and would not change anything. Approximately the same number of respondents had no comments nor suggestions.</i></p>
9	<p>Is there a need for infrastructure projects implemented in cooperation?</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Yes (Please indicate relevant maximum amount of CBC infrastructure project and maximum 5 areas where infrastructure needed the most.) • No <p><i>69% of respondents would like to have infrastructure projects, but 31% do not see a need for them. The most common budget indicated for infrastructure project is 500 000 EUR – 1 500 000 EUR. Several respondents indicated that 2 000 000 EUR – 3 000 000 EUR would be sufficient project budget, but one respondent – 5 000 000 EUR.</i></p> <p><i>One respondent mentioned that at least 70% of the total project budget should be allocated for infrastructure. The other respondent indicated that infrastructure threshold for capacity building projects should be at least 60%. One respondent suggested to allocate a budget of EUR 300,000 to each project partner committed to implement the innovation(s).</i></p> <p><i>Most often the following areas where infrastructure is needed the most were mentioned:</i></p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1) <i>tourism;</i> 2) <i>mobility;</i> 3) <i>social services and inclusion;</i> 4) <i>environment/entrepreneurship (both mentioned equally often);</i> 5) <i>safety and security/education (both mentioned equally often).</i> <p><i>Some respondents mentioned that it is necessary to improve the accessibility of public buildings, improve the public sports` infrastructure, improve infrastructure in costal areas, infrastructure for agriculture and local product development and housing stock (deterioration, energy efficiency).</i></p> <p><i>One respondent indicated that infrastructure is necessary for: “The opportunity to create anchor projects that will serve the sector's territorial growth in the future.”</i></p> <p><i>The other respondent answered that: “(..) what seems to be manageable at the moment is the environmental issue. Namely, to support the management of wastewater (construction of a new or expanded wastewater infrastructure, creation of new connections also in smaller villages), so that this completely unsettled issue does not pollute the surrounding environment, which later ends up on the table of the residents and when they relax by the waters of the dirtiest sea - the Baltic Sea. Another thing to support would be the creation of bicycle paths between settlements, which would make it easier for residents to get to schools, workplaces, as well as increase the safety aspect, protect the environment and improve physical and mental health, because residents would move more.”</i></p>
10	<p>What would be the cross-border cooperation project of your dreams?</p> <p><i>If to summarize all “dream project” ideas into one project description, it would be project which implementation lasts around 3 years, all participants are active, inhabitants receive such project outcomes which serve their actual needs, infrastructure component is always allowed, there is a large scope of target groups, there are no strict deadlines and one level reporting (currently there are partner reposts and consolidated report).</i></p>

11	<p>Latvia – Lithuania cross – border cooperation programme covers Klaipėda, Telšiai, Šiauliai, Panevėžys and Utena counties in Lithuania and Kurzeme, Zemgale, Latgale regions in Latvia. Would you change anything in Programme`s territory?</p> <p><i>Majority of respondents support keeping the existing territory of the Programme, however, there are several proposals to return Kaunas county. One respondent explained that there were good cooperation partners in Kaunas County.</i></p> <p><i>Several respondents propose to enlarge Programme`s territory by including Estonia and Poland, or only Estonia. One respondent would like to include Vidzeme region.</i></p> <p><i>Opinions about inclusion of Rīga region differ – several respondents would like to include Rīga region as well, but one respondent indicated that the existing territory: “Is Ok. The main thing is that Rīga region from Latvia is not included”. One respondent indicated that more simple inclusion of partners from Vilnius county is needed.</i></p>
12	<p>In what topics, areas, or fields do Latvia and Lithuania need to cooperate the most? Please name maximum 5 topics.</p> <p><i>The biggest potential for cooperation is in such topics as:</i></p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> <i>1) tourism;</i> <i>2) environment;</i> <i>3) culture/social services (both fields were mentioned equally often);</i> <i>4) safety and security;</i> <i>5) education.</i> <p><i>Other quite often mentioned topics are entrepreneurship, sport, healthcare and healthy lifestyle, mobility, renewable energy, mitigation of climate changes and public services.</i></p> <p><i>One respondent answered: “In all! We are neighbours!”. The other respondent indicated that: “Any cooperation is good if it is productive.” Several respondents pointed out that it is important to engage community in various activities and to support the revival of remote areas. One respondent answered that: “Promoting trust in public administration is also of great importance.”</i></p>

During survey launched during the ICDay event on 19 September 2024 the following questions were asked:

No	Questions for stakeholders
1	<p>Where are you from?</p> <p><i>15 respondents were from Latvia and 5 respondents were from Lithuania.</i></p>
2	<p>Please specify the region or administrative area where you reside.</p> <p><i>The following administrative areas were represented: Latgale, Kurzeme, Zemgale, Rīga planning region, Pierīga, Panevėžys region.</i></p>
3	<p>Please select all Interreg programmes with which you have previous experience.</p> <p><i>All respondents had experience with Latvia – Lithuania programme. Some respondents indicated that they have experience also with Estonian EU External Border Programme 2014-2020, Central Baltic Programme and Baltic Sea region programme.</i></p>
4	<p>Is living next to a border an opportunity or a disadvantage?</p>

	<i>All respondents indicated that living next to a border is opportunity.</i>
5	<p>Please explain, why you think so.</p> <p><i>The main benefits from living next to a border are opportunities for cooperation between neighbours, adoption of good practices, common EU space. As it is easy to meet each other, it is possible to learn from each other and see how the same thing can be done differently.</i></p>
6	<p>Where is the biggest potential for Interreg CBC cooperation in your area?</p> <p><i>Most often were mentioned such areas as tourism, social sphere, education, culture related activities, social security and safety, entrepreneurship.</i></p>
7	<p>What currently works well in this cooperation and should be either preserved or reinforced?</p> <p><i>Some respondents answered that due to the previous experience, good communication and good partnership it is easy to implement the project. Some appreciated possibility to use simplified cost categories.</i></p>
8	<p>What currently does not work well in this cooperation and should be improved? How?</p> <p><i>The different legislation was several times indicated as the main obstacle. Due to differences it is difficult to implement joint solutions. As one drawback is indicated a separate cooperation programmes between Baltic states and that there should be a programme where all Baltic states are included. It was mentioned that one Partner responsibility makes difficulty to other project partners, sometimes there is a lack of information about similar projects. It was offered to involve SMEs, private entrepreneurs - self-employed (as beneficiaries with financing) into project implementation by adjusting Programme documents and guidelines respectively.</i></p>
9	<p>What are the main obstacles for good cross-border cooperation in your region? How can we get rid of these problems?</p> <p><i>Most often were mentioned need for less bureaucracy, more partner search opportunities and more interactive partner search section in programme`s website, advance payments, more involvement of youth and citizens, activities which are strictly binded to specific priority and indicators. One respondent answered that there is a lack of enthusiastic people and more cooperation events are needed.</i></p> <p><i>One respondent answered that there is a fear to become a Lead partner. The other one answered that "It is hard to develop innovative solutions. Sometimes to adopt best practises is better, than create new."</i></p> <p><i>As the good example for partner search was indicated ICDay event.</i></p>
10	<p>What could help you to work with your colleagues in another country faster and easier? Please explain.</p> <p><i>It was mentioned that more in person meeting and communication would help. Also the platform where project partners can find colleague`s contacts easy would help. It was mentioned that the bureaucratic burden and redundant requirements should be reduced, the administrative system should not be changed or should be improved optimally and quickly, simplify reporting processes. The other respondent indicated that it should be more easy to manage project coordination - less paperwork.</i></p>

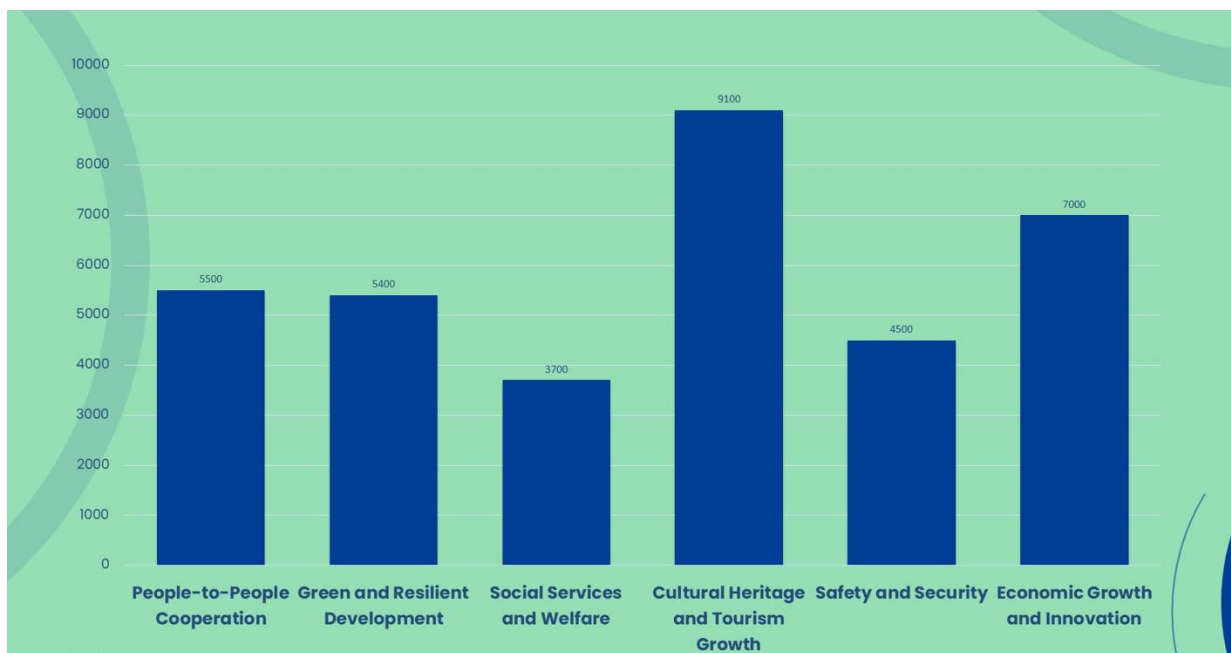
11	<p>Are there things you would like to do under Interreg but cannot? Why?</p> <p><i>Some respondents indicated that they would like to implement infrastructure projects and that there is a need for more money. There was also expressed the wish to involve SMEs as beneficiaries with financing, specially in business development priority.</i></p>
12	<p>What is the most important novelty that you would like to see in cross-border cooperation in future Interreg?</p> <p><i>There were mentioned such proposals as open cooperation within regions, involvement of SMEs as beneficiaries.</i></p>
13	<p>Is there a need for infrastructure projects implemented in cooperation?</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Yes • No <p><i>80% of respondents answered that there is a need for infrastructure projects.</i></p>
14	<p>If you answered 'Yes' to the previous question, please indicate relevant maximum amount of CBC infrastructure project and maximum 5 areas where infrastructure needed the most.</p> <p><i>Most often 500 000 EUR – 600 000 EUR were indicated as the maximum amount of cross border cooperation infrastructure project. One respondent indicated that 300 000 EUR would be enough, but the other respondent answered that 2 000 000 EUR would be appropriate amount. One respondent answered that “Amount depends on type of activity and infrastructure object.”</i></p> <p><i>Most often the following areas where infrastructure is needed the most were mentioned:</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • <i>tourism;</i> • <i>environment;</i> • <i>culture;</i> • <i>social inclusion;</i> • <i>mobility.</i>
15	<p>What would be the cross-border cooperation project of your dreams?</p> <p><i>Several respondents mentioned projects related with improvement of education through nature strengthening societies and joint sport activities.</i></p> <p><i>Several other dream projects were:</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • <i>Balanced partnership with in person meetings and interactions of organisations and target group.</i> • <i>Cross- border cooperation and small infrastructure development in one project, limited involvement of SMEs as beneficiaries allowed, cooperation allowing combine activities of several Programme priorities.</i> • <i>Common cross border long term cooperation which results in motivated youth to stay in country and build it as a better place.</i>
16	<p>Would you make any changes to the Programme's territory where you had a cooperation experience?</p> <p><i>Majority of respondents answered that there is no need to change programme `s territory, however some of respondents offered to make it wider, not so limited in order to reach new partners. One respondent proposed to include Estonia as well.</i></p>

17

What areas or fields should Latvia, Lithuania, and Estonia prioritize for cooperation?

Most often were mentioned such fields as people-to-people activities, tourism, cultural heritage and services, safety of the regions, nature, economic growth. Some respondents indicated sport, medicine, innovation, youth, digital challenges and mobility.

Results of the game «Shape the Future of Interreg», played during ICDay event on 19 September 2024 in Riga (Latvia) showed that the most demanded priorities are “Cultural heritage and tourism growth” and “Economic growth and innovation”. The 3rd and 4th place shared “People to people cooperation” and “Green and resilient development”. “Safety and security” was in the 5th place and least demanded was “Social services and welfare”. The results of the game are not considered as representative opinion but rather as the initial hint potential of which priorities could be assessed during programming Latvia – Lithuania programme post 2027.



After the event the Managing Authority received the feedback from one participant stating that “Having examined the list of participants and their fields of activity, the voting result was in line with the interests of the participants and the institutions and sectors of activity they represent.

I represent the area of security and civil protection, which was not well represented, and this was clearly reflected in the voting. If the voters did not have economical interest, and they had been neutral, I assume that the results would differ. In addition, there are topics that cannot bring immediate economic benefits to society. Therefore, I do not believe that this vote can be regarded as absolute and impartial.”

1.4. Interesting quotes

- In all countries LV, LT, EST 1 for all and all for 1. (answer to question “What areas or fields should Latvia, Lithuania, and Estonia prioritize for cooperation?”)
- The result which is expected from the project implementers, is not clear. In the region with the lowest GDP and standard of living in the EU, the basic needs of the population must be ensured at first, and only then should innovative solutions be

sought. Currently, projects expect innovations, but residents want to implement basic services.

- Quotes from answers received to question “Is living next to a border an opportunity or a disadvantage?”:
 - Like most situations, living near a national border has its advantages and disadvantages. Typically, such locations are a melting pot of nationalities, cultures, and perspectives, which can foster a wealth of ideas. The proximity to another country also allows for quick visits. However, living near the border with Russia, for instance, currently presents only disadvantages. What were once considered strengths have now become weaknesses.
 - It is both! In the disadvantages you can find the opportunities.
 - Because we have the opportunity to be the first to meet foreigners and sell them the services they need.
 - We don't live on the edge of the world. Any place has a neighbour. That's why Latgale is colourful, creative and viable, because the changing circumstances of history made it possible to adapt and fight to exist from the times of the Curses, serfdom, governorates and world wars.
 - It is possible to improve life and make friends with citizens of a neighbouring country through projects.
 - Every place of residence is an opportunity, you just need to know how to take advantage of it.
- Novelties should not be demanded all the time. It is impossible to create something unprecedented all the time. It is often not rational either, because unfortunately many basic things are still not in order. And society does not understand why mystical novelties need to be created in today's difficult financial conditions, when it is more important to direct finances to real and necessary things.
- We don't have many minerals, but we have very beautiful nature, which everyone can enjoy in a gentle way. (justification provided by the respondent regarding infrastructure projects)
- A wider territorial coverage would increase the number of participants involved and promote interregional cooperation. With a larger number of regions, a more diverse range of projects could be developed that address specific local problems and promote innovation.

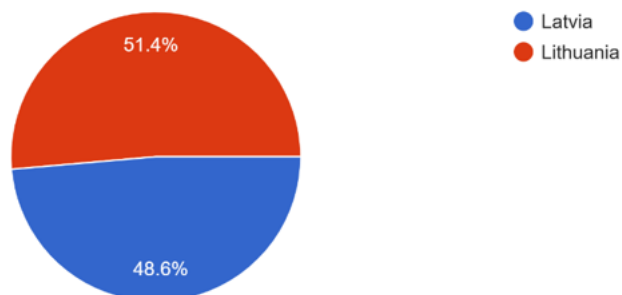
Section 2 Consultation of citizens

2.1. Main citizens consulted

In total 72 responses from citizens were received - from 35 from Latvia (48,6%) and 37 from Lithuania (51,4%).

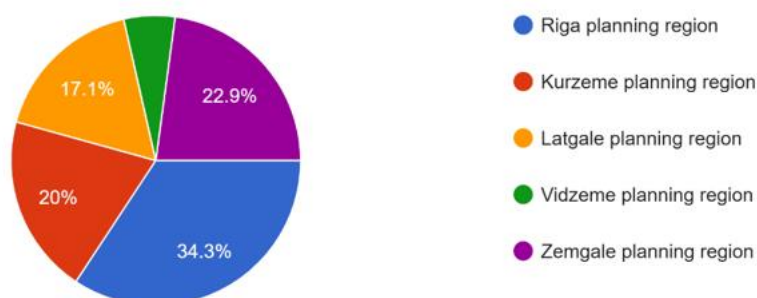
Where are you from?

72 responses



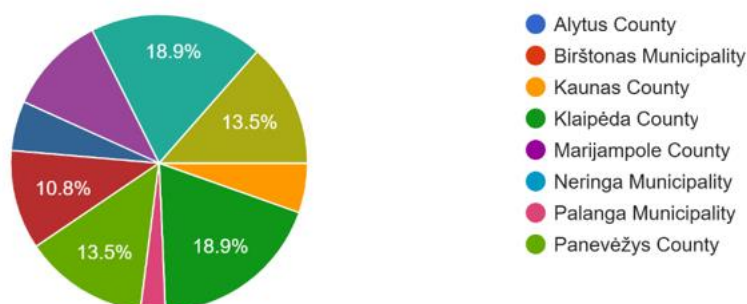
Select your planning region

35 responses



Select you county or municipality

37 responses



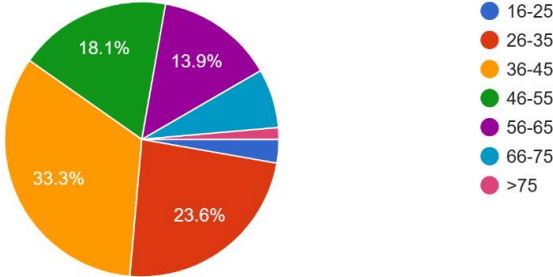
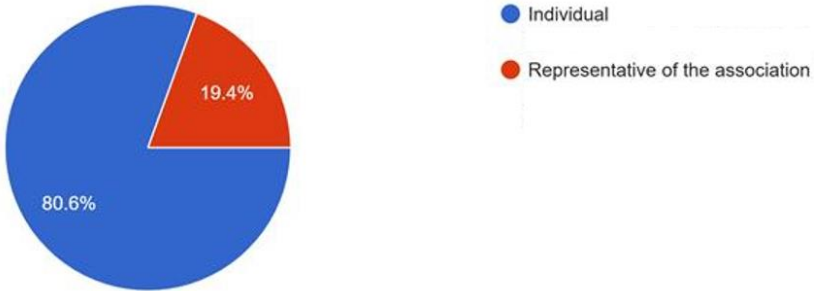
2.2. Methods of consultation

The following methods of consultation were used:

- 1) an online survey was launched from the end of May till the end of June 2024. During survey 6 responses from citizens were received.
- 2) repeated survey focusing on citizens was launched from October till the end of November 2024. During survey 66 responses from citizens were received.

2.3. Summary of the input on the key questions

During online survey the following questions were asked and the following received:

No	Questions for citizens																
1.	<p>Please select which age group do you represent:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <input type="radio"/> 16-25 <input type="radio"/> 26-35 <input type="radio"/> 36-45 <input type="radio"/> 46-55 <input type="radio"/> 56-65 <input type="radio"/> 66-75 <input type="radio"/> >75 <p><i>Respondents from all age groups participated in the survey. Majority of respondents were from age groups 26-35 (23,6%) and 36-45 (33,3%).</i></p> <p>Please select which age group do you represent: 72 responses</p>  <table border="1"> <caption>Age Group Distribution</caption> <thead> <tr> <th>Age Group</th> <th>Percentage</th> </tr> </thead> <tbody> <tr> <td>16-25</td> <td>1.4%</td> </tr> <tr> <td>26-35</td> <td>23.6%</td> </tr> <tr> <td>36-45</td> <td>33.3%</td> </tr> <tr> <td>46-55</td> <td>18.1%</td> </tr> <tr> <td>56-65</td> <td>13.9%</td> </tr> <tr> <td>66-75</td> <td>1.4%</td> </tr> <tr> <td>>75</td> <td>1.4%</td> </tr> </tbody> </table>	Age Group	Percentage	16-25	1.4%	26-35	23.6%	36-45	33.3%	46-55	18.1%	56-65	13.9%	66-75	1.4%	>75	1.4%
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2.	<p>Please indicate whether you are filling in the survey as:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <input type="radio"/> individual <input type="radio"/> representative of the association <p><i>Majority of respondents filled in survey as individuals (80,6%). Answers from respondents representing associations were received as well (19,4%).</i></p> <p>Please indicate whether you are filling in the survey as: 72 responses</p>  <table border="1"> <caption>Survey Response Type Distribution</caption> <thead> <tr> <th>Response Type</th> <th>Percentage</th> </tr> </thead> <tbody> <tr> <td>Individual</td> <td>80.6%</td> </tr> <tr> <td>Representative of the association</td> <td>19.4%</td> </tr> </tbody> </table>	Response Type	Percentage	Individual	80.6%	Representative of the association	19.4%										
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3.	<p>Is living next to a border an opportunity or a disadvantage? Please explain, why you think so.</p>																

	<p><i>88% of respondents indicated that living next to a border is an opportunity because it is possible to access and purchase services on both sides of the border; it is possible to travel and get acquainted with culture of other country. Living next to a border provides more work and collaboration opportunities, allows economic growth through cross-border trade and business, enhances travel and tourism, increases collaboration in education and research, as well as provides possibility to visit events in another country and enjoy the culture and traditions of neighbours or participate in jointly organised events, use attractive infrastructure of the neighbour's country, travel for shopping. It is possible to exchange good practices, find optimal solutions to similar problems. One respondent indicated that in one case there is a disadvantage, in the other - an opportunity. It depends on the neighbouring country.</i></p> <p><i>12 % of respondents indicated that living next to a border is rather disadvantage because there are limited work possibilities, no large cities nearby. There is no possibility to receive the same benefits as living in the centre, no sufficient choice of services, there is a lack of public transport, poor road quality, state/municipal funds are insufficient to meet local needs and ensure social support, nature conservation, innovation, entrepreneurship development, small and medium-sized business development, and community initiatives. Due to unstable safety situation living next to the border of unfriendly countries is a danger and challenge.</i></p>
4.	<p>In the place where you live, what are the main topics where cooperation between Lithuania and Latvia border regions is needed?</p> <p><i>Respondents mentioned such topics as tourism, trade, safety, language learning, environment protection (conservation of natural resources, pollution control and sustainable approaches to services), culture, school cooperation, involvement of youth and local communities, infrastructure objects, improvement of cross-border transportation networks and communication systems, entrepreneurship, entertainment (joint festivals, sport events, etc.), educational exchange programs, research projects, and trainings, management of coastal area and shared waterbodies, public services (coordinating healthcare services, emergency response and public safety measures), etc. One respondent mentioned that there is no need for any additional cooperation, because there are no actual borders inside EU. Few respondents could not propose any topic for cooperation.</i></p>
5.	<p>Can you name an Interreg project that you find useful in the place where you live?</p> <p><i>Almost half of respondents could name project useful in the place they live (hiking trails, park in the dark, green tourism between national parks, Nemunėlis waterway, joint singing celebrations, summer camps, tourist route between horse farms, FloodAdapt, PeatFire, Aging in Comfort, Only Safe, ghetto games festival for school children during which Latvian children made friendship with Lithuanian children, installation (placement) of shared exercise equipment, Network - Digihubs implemented in 2018, Promoting Gastro Tourism in Latvia and Lithuania, Combining Traditions and Technologies), etc.</i></p>
6.	<p>In your daily life, what are the biggest difficulties when it comes to cooperating across border?</p> <p><i>Part of respondents indicated that they do not encounter any difficulties or could not think about any.</i></p> <p><i>Many respondents indicated language barrier as the main difficulty. Some mentioned financing, cultural differences and differences in legislation. Individual answers</i></p>

	<i>pointed out distance, accessibility to healthcare services, no good invitations, lack of information about possibilities.</i>
7.	<p>What would be the cross-border cooperation project of your dreams between Latvia and Lithuania?</p> <p><i>Most often were mentioned projects in the field of tourism and entrepreneurship, culture, activities which increase mobility and safety.</i></p> <p><i>One respondent indicated that all Latvian children could learn Lithuanian, all Lithuanian children could learn Latvian and they all would have access to good jobs.</i></p> <p><i>The other respondent dreams about project that aims to strengthen Latvia and Lithuania border security and emergency preparedness in response to potential threats from Russia.</i></p> <p><i>There was mentioned creation of Baltic Culture Science and Entertainment Center by the Baltic Sea, aquaparks, projects containing joint sport activities, language learning, project which would ensure environment accessible to society throughout the Latvian-Lithuanian border region (including housing, public institutions, natural and cultural objects), etc.</i></p>
8.	<p>Latvia – Lithuania cross – border cooperation programme covers Klaipėda, Telšiai, Šiauliai, Panevėžys and Utena counties in Lithuania and Kurzeme, Zemgale, Latgale regions in Latvia. Would you change anything in programme`s territory?</p> <p><i>Almost all respondents would like to keep the current programme territory. Some of the respondents do not know what is programme territory, some offer to include Vidzeme planning region and Riga planning region, as well as to return Kaunas county. There were proposals to include Estonia in the Programme territory.</i></p>
9.	<p>In what topics, areas, or fields do Latvia and Lithuania need to cooperate the most? Please name maximum 5 topics.</p> <p><i>Most often the following topics were mentioned: tourism, safety and security, economic development and entrepreneurship, healthcare and social services, education and cultural exchange.</i></p> <p><i>Respondents indicated that cooperation is necessary also in such topics as sport, entertainment, trade, local arts, cooperation among citizens, energy sector, agriculture, nature protection, language learning, improvement of roads and ensuring public transport.</i></p>

2.4. Interesting quotes

- I think we don't need any additional cooperation, because we don't have any actual borders inside EU.
- I grew with a saying that Riga is closer than Vilnius. It really opened up perspectives later on even though I chose Vilnius, but Lithuanians, who are Latvian minded (either because they grew in border regions or had connections with Latvians in younger years) often continue to show their interest in Latvia – that's helpful for networking or just comparing how Lithuania or Latvia develops. Also, it's a really powerful argument in policy making that Latvia or Lithuania has something and other side doesn't.
- I think all you need is the desire and there will be no obstacles.

Section 3 Recommendations for post-2027

- 1) There is a need for Latvia – Lithuania Programme also post 2027.
- 2) Existing territory of the Programme is appropriate, however it is proposed to extend the territory by including more regions (Riga planning region and Vidzeme planning region in Latvia and Vilnius county in Lithuania) and returning Kaunas County. Kaunas region that used to be the Programme region in previous programming period, was excluded because the budget of the Programme shrunk quite substantially in comparison to 2014 – 2020 programming period due to reduced ERDF Interreg allocation for Latvia and a failure applied in calculation method. Decision to concentrate more on the border area was taken. Nevertheless, partners outside from the Programme territory are also welcome in the current Programme if the activities bring also added value to the border regions. Several respondents propose to include Estonia and Poland in the Programme territory.
- 3) Current priorities of the Programme are still relevant for post 2027 programme, however, there is a demand to consider inclusion of safety and security, and support to entrepreneurship.
- 4) There is a need for projects with investments in infrastructure and purchase of equipment.
- 5) There is demand to increase Programme budget and maximum project budget to 1 500 000 EUR.
- 6) More emphasis should be put on simplification measures and further reduction of administrative burden.
- 7) The duration of project implementation should be reassessed – in case of infrastructure projects it might be beneficial to extend the project duration up to 3 years.