



Interreg
Estonia-Latvia
European Regional Development Fund



EUROPEAN UNION

**Interreg VA – EE-LV - Estonia-Latvia
Cooperation programme under
European territorial cooperation goal**

CITIZEN'S SUMMARY

**Annex to the
Annual Implementation
Report 2017**

OVERVIEW OF THE PROGRAMME MANAGEMENT AND FINANCED PROJECTS

The Cooperation Programme Interreg VA – EE-LV – Estonia – Latvia



(hereinafter also the “programme”)

is the continuation of the Estonia – Latvia Programme 2007-2013. The programme area covers South and West Estonia and Kurzeme, Vidzeme and Riga Planning regions as well as Pierīga in Latvia. It supports activities within five priorities, which were agreed by the participating countries taking into account the needs of the programme area and approved by the European Commission:



Each priority has 1-3 specific objectives (SO), which are more elaborated below in the text. The content and objectives of the priority axes are in more detail described in the Cooperation Programme, which was adopted by the European Commission on 4 December 2015 and in the Programme Manual. For the beneficiaries and applicants, the Programme Manual together with its annexes is the main tool explaining all the programme’s rules and requirements. All programme-related information is available on the web page www.estlat.eu. It also includes a list of supported projects with a short summary about the main objectives and activities as well as the involved partners and project budget.

Priority axis 1
Active and attractive business environment

Priority axis 2
Clean and valued living environment

Priority axis 3
Better network of harbours

Priority axis 4
Integrated labour market

Priority axis 5
Technical assistance



The total budget of the programme
is 45 654 342.00 EUR
of which the EU contribution
is 38 020 684.00 EUR.



The main decision-making body of the programme is **Monitoring Committee (MC)**, which consists of the representatives of different institutions on national and regional level in Estonia and Latvia. In Estonia, the Ministry responsible for the programme is the Ministry of Finance of the Republic of Estonia and in Latvia the Ministry of Environmental Protection and Regional Development of the Republic of Latvia. In addition the MC includes the regional representatives from both countries as well as representatives of umbrella organisations of the areas the programme supports. Each MC member brings along expertise relevant for the areas the programme finances.

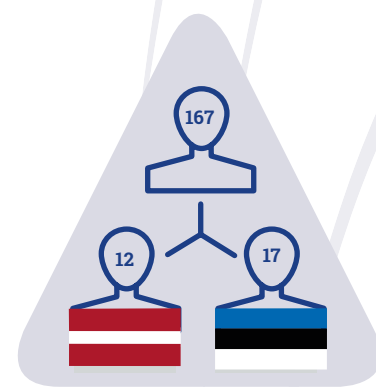
The EU part of the programme financing comes from the European Regional Development Fund. Based on the administration requirements of the EU funds, different bodies have been set up for the programme management. The Managing Authority (MA) is responsible for the overall implementation and eligibility of expenditure of the programme and is located in the Ministry of Finance of Estonia. The MA works closely together with the Joint Secretariat (JS), which is the main contact point for the applicants and beneficiaries and is responsible for advising them in application and implementation of the project as well as for carrying out various communication activities to inform the public about the programme. As the programme is implemented in Estonia and Latvia, also the employees of JS come from Estonia and Latvia so that communication is possible also in the project partner's mother tongue. The JS is located in the programme area, in Tartu, Estonia with an information point in Riga.

The body auditing the programme, Audit Authority, is formed within the Financial Control Department of the Ministry of Finance of Estonia and is supported by Group of Auditors from the Latvian Ministry of Environment Protection and Regional Development.

The year 2017 marked the real and fast start of the programme regarding implementation of the projects. The financing decisions were made for the project applications of the first call for proposals, 29 applications were approved and all project partners could start the implementation of their brilliant activities in many different areas.



Altogether, the programme committed 24 351 756.17 EUR of ERDF funds to these 29 projects. All in all, 167 partners are involved, among them 12 lead partners from Latvia and 17 from Estonia.



Partners

Below, an overview is provided about some of the financed projects within different priority axes and SOs as well as about main activities and goals the project partners would like to achieve.

Priority Axis 1,

Active and Attractive Business Environment, includes two SOs.

SO 1.1, Increased entrepreneurial cross-border cooperation in the programme area, aims at supporting business environment and starting new businesses to develop ideas that support cooperation across the border and bring Estonian and Latvian businesses together. From the 1st call for proposals, nine projects were financed in the framework of this SO. The ERDF allocation to SO 1.1 projects is 2 652 469.79 EUR.

The programme can be proud of the creativity of the project partners as many different and innovative themes are explored by the projects. Entrepreneurial spirit is developed in a variety of areas: in life sciences and biotechnology, training the next generation entrepreneurs with hands-on methods in space STEM, providing pre-accelerator programme for start-ups etc. In line with the contemporary business-starting concept the project “EstLat accelerate” brought together cross-border teams who developed joint ideas and practice pitching them in different start-up events. Cross-border and cross-sectoral teams play a role also in the project “**Wood and furniture**”. The project used very popular Garage48 Hackathon to let the teams develop innovative and design-oriented new products or solve industries’ problems in 48 hours.

The project “**COOP local**” is promoting business development in the remoter parts of the programme area in the field of non-traditional farming, food-production and handicraft. Along with other activities also stress is laid on increasing the competence and skills of the participating entrepreneurs and related organisations to enliven the domestic market as well as to grow and extend to new markets.



SO 1.2 More jointly developed products and services in the programme area is primarily targeted at supporting existing businesses in joint product and service development as well as joint marketing activities. 8 projects were approved within this SO in 2017 and the total ERDF allocation is 2 789 187.13 EUR.

The partners of seven projects have actively started to develop new products along with the marketing activities. To mention some of them, in the project “**Baltic Geodata Marketplace**” unified geospatial products and services will be developed; cloud resources and IT experts management service will be worked out in the project “**Waldur**”, Positron Emission Tomography (PET) precursor will be the product of the project “**PET diagnostics**”. Organic jelly candy with freeze dried berries (“**Organic candy**”) and printed audio learning materials for early childhood education (“**How the shammies learned**”) should first and foremost please the children. In the latter project, one product has been already developed: „Guidelines by the Universities about the educational methodology to be used in story line and content building/designing by authors.“

One project, “**Marketing intelligence and early stage promotion activities for the High Added value products Export**” („**HIADEx**“), is devoted to marketing activities only and the aim is to increase export capability of Estonian and Latvian producers of high added value products for prevention and treatment of digestive system diseases (DSDs) The goal is to help Estonian and Latvian companies to East Asian markets. Contacts have been established with Singaporean stakeholders and relevant companies for preparing trade mission endeavour in South-East Asia.

Priority Axis 2,

Clean and valued living environment has three SOs.

SO 2.1 More diversified and sustainable use of natural and cultural heritage aims at promoting values and supporting wise use of natural resources and tangible and intangible cultural heritage by developing their potential for tourism and recreational activities. 4 752 475.17 EUR of ERDF funds was allocated to the projects of this SO.

During the period of 2007-2013 tourism in all its variations was one of the most popular areas in the Estonia – Latvia programme. The programme area benefitted from many nice tourist objects, which attracted visitors from both countries and outside. This trend is continuing also in this period and it is only surprising to learn about the great tourism potential of limited part of the small countries like Estonia and Latvia.

Five projects, which were approved for this SO, are all aiming at developing thematically different tourism products: The project **“Livonian culinary route”**, as can be deduced from the title, will create a tourism product based on a culinary heritage of the Livonian area and involves food providers and producers from the whole programme area. It is not targeted only to local market but the big aim is also to make the product known abroad. The logo has been developed and the name of the new product has been agreed, which is Livonian flavours/Liivimaa maitseed /Livonias Garša.

The project **“Coastal hiking”** will develop a hiking tourism route along the Baltic Sea coastline in Latvia and Estonia. The approximate total length of the route will be 1100 km. It will not only be a mere route but includes sites and objects of interest and so the hikers/visitors can learn about the history and nature of Estonia and Latvia.

This project received much media attention when one of the project coordinators walked thousand kilometres to mark and develop the 1000 km long hiking trail. About 520 people, and surprisingly not only Latvians and Estonians accompanied him from June to October 2017 in all sections of the route. An official approval for the route has been obtained from nature protection and environmental agencies and state forest management authorities from both countries.



Picture author: Ilmārs Znotiņš

Coastal hiking

Another attractive tourism product will be created by the project **“Industrial heritage”**. Along with the aim to raise awareness about industrial heritage in the region and contribute to the diversification of the tourism offer, the partners will establish a joint route with thematic sub-routes like mills and hydro-electric power stations, old manufacturing sites, railway heritage, lighthouses and water stations

In Estonia and Latvia, there are four unique regions - Setomaa, Kihnu, Suiti and Liv coast – where old traditions like singing and dancing traditions, national costumes, celebrating religious and traditional holidays, food and handicraft traditions, are kept alive as part of everyday life of local people. The project **“UNESCO-tourism”** aims to more exploit those values and to develop 4 regional tourism routes by combining tourism attractions and products offered by local tourism businesses, museums and other players in the field. Specific tour packages will be created for individuals and small groups highlighting the various aspects of cultural heritage. Small-scale investments will help to improve eight cultural heritage sites in order to increase the quality and range of tourism services.

The projects in this SO involve the largest partnerships and widest, also geographically, networks, bringing together both private and public sector for improving services and active marketing. These projects have also used most the advantages of the social media, very often we can find posts of different events of the projects in Facebook.

SO 2.2 “Increased awareness of energy saving, sorting waste and re-use, and the more efficient management of common water resources.” The aim of this SO, like the title says, is to promote activities and raise people’s knowledge in efficient energy use, waste recycling, sustainable daily behaviour as well as improve cooperation in joint water resource management. Four projects were financed under this SO with the overall allocation of ERDF funds of 1 464 361.41 EUR.

The health of the water bodies and environmental security have always been a concern for Estonia and Latvia. This concern will be addressed by two projects that were approved in water management area. Within the project “Gurinimas”, an integrated nitrogen management system will be developed for the Gulf of Riga. This project is also contributing to the EU Strategy for Baltic Sea Region, having a direct linkage with the policy area *Nutri*.

The other project, “**SAFE SEA**” aims at improving the environmental security of the Gulf of Riga and Irbe Strait by strengthening coordination between Estonian and Latvian rescue services and infrastructure managers.

Two projects are implemented in the area of environmental awareness. The projects “**Smart Energy Community**” and “**Green Public Events**” are both focussing on increasing the awareness of the daily use of energy and improving energy saving in Estonian and Latvian household and communities as well as raising awareness on more environmentally friendlier behaviour in general, including waste reduction. Along with other activities, the partners of the project “**Green Public Events**” will organise campaigns in well-known public events to promote greener and environmentally responsible behaviour in big events.



Valga-Valka twin-town centre development

SO 2.3 “More integrated Valga-Valka central urban area” includes only project: “**Valga-Valka twin-town centre development**” with the ERDF share of 2 999 999.98 EUR. This project is part of a longer term vision to bring people, jobs and development back to the border town that has to struggle with decreasing population and jobs. The project is aiming at improving physical connectivity, unite both towns’ citizens, promote tourism and activate entrepreneurship by creating a multifunctional cross-border central area of the twin town on the border of Estonia and Latvia including an area for open-air markets, festive events, playgrounds, innovative street lighting systems, original urban space furniture, etc.

The international architectural design competition for the “Concept for Central Area and Pedestrian Street in Valga – Valka Twin Town Centre” was carried out in 2017. Out of 7 offers the winner was the team of Spanish architects’ “Safont-Tria arquitectes”. Contract on elaboration of Central Area and Pedestrian Street in Valga-Valka Twin Town Centre Building Design has also been signed.



Smart Energy Community

Priority Axis 3, “Better network of harbours”

one project **“Improvement of sailing infrastructure and yacht harbours network building in Estonia and Latvia” (“ESTLAT harbours”)** is financed The ERDF share to this project is 9 333 981.31 EUR.

The project partnership involves 21 harbours in Estonia and Latvia, who are determined to create a network of harbours on the western coast of Latvia and in the Gulf of Riga with similar service standards and improved sailing infrastructure to attract and be acknowledged as a quality service provider among foreign and domestic recreational sailors and to become a part of Baltic Sea sailing route. Three partners of the project are focussing on coordination and extensive marketing activities to help to realise the potential the project is creating. This project is also labelled as linked to the EU Strategy to Baltic Sea Region, namely contributing to the tourism development in the region under PA *Tourism*.

Development of cross-border employment opportunities has appeared to be quite a tough topic where the cooperation is not easy. That is much because of different legislation and administrative requirements in the neighbouring countries. The project **“Promotion of Cross-Border Labour Market Integration and Employment” under priority axis 4 “Integrated labour market”** is trying to address this problem with the ERDF allocation of 359 281.38 EUR.

According to statistics, more than 1000 people cross Estonian-Latvian border for work every day. However, the information on the vacancies and working conditions is still not easily accessible.

The project should help job seekers find information about cross-border job and training opportunities and receive guidance on working across border on one hand, and help employers find suitable employees and receive guidance on employing and upskilling them on the other hand. The activities of the project should also contribute to removing obstacles in cross-border commuting.



COMMUNICATION AND VISIBILITY

As regards the visibility and promotion of the programme there was much progress, especially in **social media**, where the number of followers is growing steadily. In the beginning of the year the programme launched the newly designed **webpage** where the news feed comes directly from programme's Facebook page. We see that less people visit the webpage and more the social media, but it was expected as the programme news are first published in **Facebook**.

Promotion of availability of programme funds can be named as the main communication activity in 2017. Two open call project competitions were announced and programme organized three thematic public events in Estonia and Latvia to inform about available funds. Events were attended by 136 interested participants. Thematically, the focus was on public resource saving campaigns, joint water management initiatives, labour commuting and joint product or service development between SMEs. **As the programme's website and Facebook account are closely linked, all funding opportunities were well visible and noticeable during the time of promotion.** Also stakeholders and media helped to spread the word.

As 167 partner organizations, including companies and NGOs, are busy with implementation of Estonian-Latvian cooperation projects, the programme provided needed support to them in the form of events and consultations. **In total, eight partner, and procurement seminars were organized in Estonia and Latvia and 404 participants found them useful.**

To support the visions of the programme with regard to resource saving, the European Cooperation Day event **"EC DAY Ape - Vastse-Roosa 2017"** was organized on 19 September following the guidelines of the green events. Incentive included production of sleeveless shirts using organic cotton from industrial waste, the use of local food, shared carpooling as transportation, reusable tableware instead of disposable, sorting the waste at the event, providing drinking water from the tap instead of plastic bottles and not pro-



viding unusable promotional items. The result of the revitalisation works, where by Estonians and Latvians worked hand in hand together, is much better access to the Ape manor park in Latvia. The entertainment included a **cross-border ride** on kick-bikes on the Ape – Mõniste road, **various workshops** and a **closing concert** at the Forest Brethren Farm in Vastse-Roosa on the Estonian side. **Altogether 200 fans of the Estonia-Latvia programme participated.** Since the launch of the European Cooperation Day the number of participants has been around 200, which on one hand shows that the programme is known and on the other hand that people are interested in these events as this is one way to relax, to do something useful and also to meet new people who one day may become project partners.

EVALUATION ACTIVITIES



The evaluation of the programme is necessary in order to learn whether the results delivered were of value for money and what could be the lessons learnt for the future. In 2017, based on the MC decision, the evaluation of the programme's Communication Strategy of the period 2014-2020 was carried out.

The main task of the evaluators was to assess, whether the Communication Strategy of the programme had been implemented effectively and highlight any areas for improvement. Evaluation was carried out by SAFEGE Baltija, Ltd & Comperio, Ltd.

The methods used in the evaluation: web-based survey, focus group discussions, expert interviews direct or phone, expert evaluation.

The key audience for the communication activities are the potential applicants and beneficiaries: national, regional and local authorities, public equivalent bodies, private companies, education and research institutions, business support institutions and non-governmental organisations within the eligible area of the programme.

Since 2015 the programme has reached over 39 thousand persons in Latvia and Estonia through the web page. 5.2% of the reached persons have participated in various events organised by the programme and 4.3% follow the Programme on Facebook. 1,3% of those reached have submitted project ideas and 0.58% have become beneficiaries. The programme has reached proportionally similar number of persons in Estonia and Latvia, however, persons and organisations from Latvia have participated more actively in communication activities.

The main conclusions were the following:

The programme and work of the JS is perceived positively among the potential and current beneficiaries. All methods of communication (events, social media, website, publications, direct communication) have received high average scores (above 4 or close to it on a scale of 5) regarding their usability, accuracy, relevance and timing. In particular:

- The **website www.estlat.eu** is seen as the main source of useful and accurate information. It has acquired **292 912 views made by 37 878 users**. The beneficiaries are satisfied with the access to documents, but some of the first-time site visitors struggle to find necessary information;
- Regarding **participation in the project events**, there seem to be different expectations from the perspective of more vs. less experienced organisations. While more experienced seek information on rules and requirements, and ask detailed questions, those with less experience look for inspiration, partners and overall understanding of the programme;
- **Facebook page** of the programme has one of the highest number of followers (1664) if compared to similar programmes. However, the reach of the programme seems to be lower than average. Also the interviewed persons and almost 40% of the respondents acknowledged that they did not follow the Facebook page, which might indicate, that the page mainly serves as a source of inspiration;
- The most successful **publications and promotional materials** are considered the short infographic style extracts about the rules of the programme and project stories. The overall rating of the programme documents is "4", which confirms, that these documents are considered as clear and user friendly;
- There is an overall consent among the interviewed persons that **direct communication via emails** is very useful, non-disturbing and sufficient, particularly, due to their busy schedules.

In general it may be concluded that communication activities implemented under the programme have reached the target groups in an effective way, as demonstrated by statistics and the number of applications submitted, and comments expressed during the interviews and survey.

For the **overall conclusion** it can be said that the programme proceeded fast and well in 2017. In addition to the financing decisions made in the beginning of the year, two more calls for proposals were announced the results of which became available in the first half of 2018. The partners are dedicated to implement their projects, and the programme staff is committed to provide any advice or support whenever needed.

