



Strategic Environmental Assessment of the ETC Austria – Czech Republic 2021-2027

Draft Scoping Report

March 2021

Commissioned by:
Office of the Government of Lower Austria

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Vienna, March 2021 | ANr. 801458

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1. Introduction

To accompany the preparation of the ETC Austria – Czech Republic 2021-2027 programming period, a Strategic Environmental Assessment (SEA) is being conducted. The SEA aims to contribute to the integration of environmental considerations and ensure a high level of environmental protection in the preparation and adoption of the programme.

In the scoping-phase, the content and methodological approach of the assessment is defined in close cooperation with the authorities involved in their environment-related fields of activity. At the current stage, a first draft of the programme, its strategic orientation and a draft selection of measures has been made available to the project team. Consequently the first assessment of potentially relevant environmental goals in this scoping report builds on this draft programme. Apart from the analysis of relevant environmental goals, a description of the methodological approach has been prepared. As the programming progresses, new information can also be continuously included in the SEA.

The coping report contains the following information:

- ▶ Overview of the content of the draft programme
- ▶ Scope of the assessment
- ▶ Environmental goals
- ▶ Considered legal- and strategic documents as well as used information
- ▶ Approach to alternatives in the SEA
- ▶ Methodology of the assessment

2. Scope of the assessment

2.1 Time limitations

The time frame of the SEA is determined by the period of validity of the programme under evaluation. This is primarily the duration of the programming period from 2021-2027 but includes the subsequent period until 2029 as well. Based on the Commission's proposed regulations on the rules for the ESI funds, the ERDF and INTERREG, programme-based payments are still possible for this time. Thus, at the current point in time, 31.12.2029 or, if different, the formal programme closure is to be regarded as the end date of possible financing. To assess the status quo and possible future developments, the latest available data is used as the basis for this SEA.

2.2 Spatial limitations

In spatial terms, the area of expected environmental impacts of the assessed IP is determined by the area of its validity. Therefore, the primary investigation area is the territory of the cross-border area of Austria and the Czech Republic. Most of the expected environmental impacts are nevertheless likely to be limited to this primary study area, as the majority of the measures have a strong regional focus. However, some individual measures, especially climate- or air/water-related (which cannot always be strictly spatially delineated), are assessed beyond the primary study area. Of particular relevance here are significant transboundary environmental impacts (affecting other countries than Austria or the Czech Republic), the occurrence of which, according to Article 7 of the SEA Directive, requires the possibility for the affected state to be involved in a consultation process.

2.3 Content limitations and depth of the assessment

The subject of this SEA is the cooperation programme Austria-Czech Republic 2021-27, for which the expected environmental effects of particular measures of the programme are assessed. The target framework is set at an international, EU, national and regional level. The delimitation of the included objectives or the corresponding protective goods (see Chapter 4) is determined by the SEA directive. These conditions determine the depth of the assessment, which is directly linked to the measures of the programme. However, due to the nature of the CP, these measures do not relate to concrete projects but define solely the framework of possible projects. Thus, the way certain projects are delimited depends on the particular level of detail of the measures presented in the CP. This rather abstract nature of the programme influences the assessment of potential environmental impacts and results in a primarily qualitative evaluation.

3. Overview of draft Programme

At the current moment, a first draft of the structure of the cooperation programme Austria-Czech Republic 2021-2027 has been made available to the SEA team. It contains the foreseen priorities and specific objectives and outlines both an outline of indicative actions as well as a description of expected contribution of the actions to the specific objectives. In total there are 8 Specific objectives selected which are structured along 4 priorities corresponding to the POs 1, 2 and 4 as well as the ISO 1:

- ▶▶ **Priority 1 “Research and innovation” (corespondent PO1)**
 - ▶ SO i) “Research and innovation”
- ▶▶ **Priority 2 “Climate & Environment (correspondent PO2)**
 - ▶ SO iv) “Climate change adaption”
 - ▶ SO vii) “Nature protection and biodiversity”
- ▶▶ **Priority 3 “Education, culture & tourism” (correspondent PO4)**
 - ▶ SO ii) “Education and training”
 - ▶ SO v) “Culture and tourism”
- ▶▶ **Priority 4 “Cross-border Governance (correspondent ISO1)**
 - ▶ ISO ii) “Legal and institutional cooperation”
 - ▶ ISO iii) “People-to-people action for increased trust”

A first overview of the content of each PA is given below.

Priority 1 “Research and innovation”

While the border region is considered to be in a good state regarding the availability of research and development facilities, the programme is seen as a means of fostering their full potential by enhancing cooperation and mobility across borders between those facilities. Complementary to increasing the R&D output actions that enable the access of SMEs to innovations are supported as well. A particular focus is laid on parts of the territory which are not urban centers, aiming at the diffusion of innovation to those more peripheral regions. Foreseen actions focus on fields of common interest for the cross-border area and in particular eco-innovation. Apart from general support of research activities, the modernisation and extension of facilities in particular those for joint use is foreseen as well.

Priority 2 “Climate & Environment”

Both for climate and environmental issues regions on both sides of the border are facing similar challenges. Climate actions focus in particular on climate change adaption and risk management through common training, integrated risk management systems and awareness raising.

Furthermore, actions to reduce negative impacts on the climate such as fostering circular economy, reduction of waste, reduction of land consumption and agriculture- and forestry related measures are foreseen as well.

Nature protection actions address two main points, namely joint ecological water management and joint biodiversity management. For water management, joint and integrated management approaches will be supported covering fields like irrigation, water retention, re-naturalisation and ecologisation of rivers or floodplain restoration. Actions for biodiversity management include joint management plans for protected areas, joint management of landscape, wildlife migration corridors and biotope networks, joint monitoring approaches and data collection, actions for the control of neophytes and awareness raising activities.

Priority 3 “Education, culture & tourism”

The Czech side of the border is facing stronger challenges in relation to education, such as a lack of adult participation in further education and a mismatch between skills available and labour market requirements, in particular in rural areas. Education and overcoming the language barrier is thus a main goal of the programme. Actions supported thus include joint education schemes in topics relevant for the cross border area, harmonisation of vocational education in line with the labour market requirements, development of bilingual school concepts and general harmonisation in education systems.

Tourism is one of the main economic factors for the cross-border area which shares a common cultural heritage and contains a high amount of important cultural sites and objects. Actions supported consequently focus on exploring the added value of cross-border cooperation in exploiting the touristic potential of the area. This includes joint promotion activities and destination management, joint strategies, investment in tourism sites and tourism infrastructure (in particular cycling paths) and joint monitoring of tourism streams. Complementing those touristic activities some actions focus in the cultural sector in particular, ranging from cooperation between large and small museums, development of bilingual museum concepts to common cultural, religious, artistic and architectural heritage and folklore.

Priority 4 “Cross-border governance”

While cooperation between actors in the cross-border area is already taking place, a potential for further development and deepening of institutional cooperation has been identified. The main challenge are the different administrative structures and legal competences on both sides of the border. Actions foreseen include joint strategy developments, cooperation to reduce legal and administrative obstacles, cooperation between supporting organisations and networks (such as chambers of commerce), as well as cooperation in fields of particular importance for the cross-border area (e.g. health, disaster control, wastemanagement, transport etc.)

4. Environmental objectives and available data

The following tables set out the main environmental objectives in relation to the relevant protective goods for the possible programme contents. Based on the analysis of relevant legal matters and strategy documents at international, European, national and regional levels similar environmental goals have been and aggregated to the main environmental objectives of the SEA. For each environmental goal, main relevant issues which are likely affected have been identified as well. They will serve as a basis for presenting the current state of the environment, assessing any environmental impacts possibly caused by the CP, evaluating possible alternatives, and, if necessary, proposing monitoring actions. The selection was determined by the potential actions supported by the 2021-2027 programme, the SEA of the 2014-2020 programme was considered as input as well as some goals and actions are similar between periods.

The main environmental objectives can be adapted and updated if the programme evolves and requires the SEA to cover different thematic fields. In this case a revised version of the following tables is included in the environmental report.

According to the SEA directive, the SEA will analyse the effects of the program on the following environmental goods:

- ▶ Human health and well-being
- ▶ Flora, fauna including biodiversity, conservation of habitats
- ▶ Soil, land use
- ▶ Cultural heritage, landscape
- ▶ Water
- ▶ Air
- ▶ Climate and energy
- ▶ Material assets, raw materials, and resources

The strict assignment or separation of objectives to groups of protective goods is not always possible. For example, protection objectives for groundwater and surface water are primarily formulated in relation to “water” as a protective good, but they are equally relevant to human health or to species with water as their natural habitat. An analysis of these concrete interactions regarding the impacts of the CP is carried out in the environmental report.

The following table links the main environmental objectives with the issues guiding the assessment of effects. As a program sets the frame for potential projects to be supported, and as the number, size and location of the project is not known at the stage of the program development, the main issues listed set the frame for a qualitative ex-ante assessment focusing on the direction of the development in relation to one particular main objective. Some specific quantitative monitoring measures (e.g. amount of CO₂ emissions reduced by measures within the projects) can be prescribed in the course of the SEA at a later stage.

Table 1: Human health and well-being

| Main environmental objectives | Sources for objectives | Issues |
|--|--|---|
| Reduce the population share exposed to excessive noise levels | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> – EU-Directive 2002/49/EC (Environmental Noise Directive) – WHO, 2018, Environmental Noise Guidelines for the European Region – Federal Environmental Noise Protection Act Austria – Austrian Strategy for Sustainable Development of the Federal Government and Federal Provinces (ÖSTRAT) – National environmental policy of the Czech Republic until 2030 – Strategic framework the Czech Republic 2030 – Health 2020: National strategy for health protection and support and prevention of diseases 2014 – 2020 | Population share exposed to excessive noise levels |
| Reduce the population share exposed to excessive air pollution | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> – EU-Directive 2008/50/EC on ambient air quality and clearer air for Europe – Agenda 2030 – Austrian Air Pollution Control Act – Austrian Emission Law – National environmental policy of the Czech Republic until 2030 – National programme on reducing the air emissions – Mid-term strategy on improving the air quality in the Czech Republic – Programmes on reducing air emissions for zones South-East, Brno, and Middle Moravia | Population share exposed to air pollution |
| Improved flood risk management | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> – EU-Directive 2007/60/EC (Floods Directive) – Austrian Water Act (BGBl. Nr. 215/1959) – National Flood Risk Management Plan of the Federal Ministry of Agriculture, Forestry, Environment and Water Management – National environmental policy of the Czech Republic until 2030 – Act No. 254/2001 Coll., on water resources – National river basin management plans for Elbe and Dunaj river basins – Flood risk management plans for Elbe and Dunaj river basins | Number of people / areas affected by flood risk (HQ100) |

| Main environmental objectives | Sources for objectives | Issues |
|-------------------------------|---|--------|
| | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> – National strategy on flood protection – National strategy on protection against adverse impacts of floods and erosion thorough nature-based measures – National concept on flood protection using technical and nature-based measures | |

Table 2: Flora, fauna including biodiversity, conservation of habitats

| Main environmental objectives | Sources for objectives | Issues |
|---|--|--|
| Safeguarding the biodiversity of the flora and fauna and maintaining the quality of protected areas | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> – EU-Directive 92/43/ECC (Habitats Directive) – EU-Directive 2009/147/EC (Birds Directive) – Agenda 2030 – EU Biodiversity Strategy for 2030 – 8th Environment Action Programme – Biodiversity Strategy Austria 2020+ – Upper Austria Nature and Landscape Conservation Act (LGBl. 129/2001) – Lower Austria Nature Conservation Act 2000 (LGBl. 5500-11) – Vienna Nature Conservation Act (LGBl. 45/1998) – Act No. 114/1992 Coll., on nature and landscape protection – National environmental policy of the Czech Republic until 2030 – National programme on nature and landscape protection for the period 2020 – 2025 – Strategy on biodiversity protection of the Czech Republic 2016–2025 – Management plan of Sumava National Park – Management plan of Podyji National Park | Development of nature protection areas (by categories) |
| | | Occurrence of the species listed in appendix II of the FFH directive and appendix I of the bird protection directive |
| | | Development of favourable condition of Natura 2000 network (incl. status of bio-corridors) |

| Main environmental objectives | Sources for objectives | Issues |
|--|---|---|
| Protection of the ecosystems from invasive species and neophytes | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> – EU Biodiversity Strategy for 2030 – 8th Environment Action Programme – Biodiversity Strategy Austria 2020+ – Lower Austria Nature Conservation Act 2000 (LGBl. 5500-11) – National environmental policy of the Czech Republic until 2030 – National programme on nature and landscape protection for the period 2020 – 2025 – Strategy on biodiversity protection of the Czech Republic 2016–2025 | Occurrence of black- and grey list species |
| Protection of wildlife migration corridors and biotope networks | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> – EU Biodiversity Strategy for 2030 – 8th Environment Action Programme – Upper Austria Nature and Landscape Conservation Act (LGBl. 129/2001) – Lower Austria Nature Conservation Act 2000 (LGBl. 5500-11) – Vienna Nature Conservation Act (LGBl. 45/1998) – National environmental policy of the Czech Republic until 2030 – National programme on nature and landscape protection for the period 2020 – 2025 – Strategy on biodiversity protection of the Czech Republic 2016–2025 | Status of habitat fragmentation, status of regional and trans-regional wildlife migration corridors |

Table 3: Soil, land use

| Main environmental objectives | Sources for objectives | Issues |
|--|--|---|
| Economical land use, reduction of land consumption | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> – 8th Environment Action Programme – Alpine Convention – Austrian Spatial Development Concept (ÖREK 2011) – Upper Austria Spatial Planning Act 1994 (LGBl. 114/1993) – Lower Austria Spatial Planning Act 2014 (LGBl. 3/2015) – Vienna Building Code (LGBl. 61/2020) – Act No. 334/1992 Coll., on agriculture land protection – Act No. 183/2006 Coll., on spatial planning and building code – Strategic framework Czech Republic 2030 and its implementation plan – National environmental policy of the Czech Republic until 2030 – Regional development strategy of the Czech Republic 2021+ – National territorial development policy | <p>Land take (km²/year)</p> <p>Percentage of soil sealing</p> <p>Risk of agricultural land abandonment</p> |
| Protection of soil functions | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> – EU Soil Thematic Strategy – Agenda for Sustainable Development – Alpine Convention – Austrian Spatial Development Concept (ÖREK 2011) – Upper Austria Soil Protection Act 1991 (LGBl. 63/1997) – Lower Austria Soil Protection Act (LGBl. 6160-0) – Act No. 334/1992 Coll., on agriculture land protection – Act No. 183/2006 Coll., on spatial planning and building code – National environmental policy of the Czech Republic until 2030 – National programme on nature and landscape protection for the period 2020 – 2025 | soil pollution: Estimated number of contaminated sites |

Table 4: Cultural heritage, landscape

| Main environmental objectives | Sources for objectives | Issues |
|---|--|---|
| Favourable conditions cultural heritage (both objects and areas) through protection, preservation and awareness-raising | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> – UNESCO World Heritage Convention – European Cultural Heritage Strategy for the 21st Century – European Framework for Action on Cultural Heritage – Austrian Heritage Protection Law (BGBl. Nr. 533/1923) – Act No. 20/1987 Coll., on the state cultural heritage management – Act No. 114/1992 Coll., on nature and landscape protection – Concept of cultural heritage management in the Czech Republic for the period 2017-2020 | <p>Number of properties inscribed on List of World Heritage in Danger</p> <p>Change in the number of units of cultural heritage</p> <p>Occurrence of intangible cultural heritage</p> |
| Favourable condition of protected natural and cultural areas (natural parks, cultural landscape) through management | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> – European Landscape Convention – Austrian Federal Act for the Protection of Nature (LGBl. Nr. 22/1997) – Upper Austria Spatial Planning Act 1994 (LGBl. 114/1993) – Lower Austria Spatial Planning Act 2014 (LGBl. 3/2015) – Act No. 114/1992 Coll., on nature and landscape protection – Act No. 183/2006 Coll., on spatial planning and building code – National environmental policy of the Czech Republic until 2030 – National programme on nature and landscape protection for the period 2020 – 2025 – Strategy on biodiversity protection of the Czech Republic 2016–2025 | <p>Extent (number and size of areas/sites) of protected landscapes (cultural or natural)</p> <p>Landscape fragmentation change</p> |

Table 5: Water

| Main environmental objectives | Sources for objectives | Issues |
|---|--|---|
| Production of groundwater against pollution and harmful substances, safeguarding of a high chemical and quantitative status | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> – EU-Directive 200/60/EC (Water Framework Directive) | <p>Chemical and quantitative status of groundwater bodies</p> |

| Main environmental objectives | Sources for objectives | Issues |
|--|---|--|
| Protection of surface water against pollution and harmful substances, safeguarding a good ecological and chemical status | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> – UNECE Convention on the Protection and Use of Transboundary Watercourses – Alpine Convention – Agenda 2030 – Austrian Water Act (BGBl. Nr. 215/1959) – Austrian Water Management Plan – Act No. 254/2001 Coll., on water resources – Plan for development of water pipelines and sewage of the Czech Republic – National river basin management plans for Elbe and Dunaj river basins – National environmental policy of the Czech Republic until 2030 – National programme on nature and landscape protection for the period 2020 – 2025 – Strategy on biodiversity protection of the Czech Republic 2016–2025 | Ecological and chemical status of surface bodies |

Table 6: Air

| Main environmental objectives | Sources for objectives | Issues |
|---|--|---|
| Reduction of emission levels in consideration of respective emission limits | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> – EU 2030 Climate- and Energy Framework – EU Directive 2008/50/EC (Air Quality Directive) – EU Directive 2008/1/EC (Environmental Directive) – EU Directive 2001/81/EC (Directive on national emission ceiling for certain atmospheric pollutants) – Air Pollution Control Act Austria (BGBl. I Nr. 115/1997) – Mission 2030 – Austrian climate- and energy strategy – National Climate- and Energy Action Plan Austria – Act No. 201/2012 Coll., on air protection | Average emission levels of the main air pollutants (NO _x , PM ₁₀ + PM _{2,5} , Ozone, SO ₂) |

| Main environmental objectives | Sources for objectives | Issues |
|-------------------------------|---|--------|
| | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> – National environmental policy of the Czech Republic until 2030 – National programme on reducing the air emissions – Mid-term strategy on improving the air quality in the Czech Republic – Programmes on reducing air emissions for zones South-East, Brno, and Middle Moravia | |

Table 7: Climate and energy

| Main environmental objectives | Sources for objectives | Issues |
|--|---|--|
| Reduction of GHG emissions by <ul style="list-style-type: none"> – 36% in 2030 compared to 2005 for Austria – 30% in 2030 compared to 2005 in Czech Republic | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> – Paris agreement – EU 2030 Climate- and Energy Framework – Integrated National Energy and Climate Plan for Austria Agenda 2030 – Development Strategy 2030 – Act No. 383/2012 Coll., on the conditions for GHG emission trading – Act No. 201/2012 Coll., on air protection – Policy of the climate protection in the Czech Republic – Mid-term strategy on improving the air quality in the Czech Republic – Strategic framework Czech Republic 2030 and its implementation plan – National environmental policy of the Czech Republic until 2030 – National clean mobility action plan | Annual GHG emission levels (CO ₂ eq.) |
| Prevention and reduction of heat islands | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> – Agenda 2030 – Urban Heat Island Strategy – City of Vienna – Mission 2030 – Austrian climate- and energy strategy – Longterm Strategy 2050 – Austria – Climate change adaptation strategy of the Czech Republic – National action plan on the climate change adaptation | Days over 30°C |
| | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> – EU Renewable Energy Directive II | Share of renewable energy in energy production |

| Main environmental objectives | Sources for objectives | Issues |
|---|---|--------------------------|
| Fostering of renewable energy sources and increase of energy efficiency | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> – National Climate- and Energy Action Plan Austria – Mission 2030 – Austrian Climate- and Energy Strategy – EU-Directive Energy 2012/27/EU (Energy Efficiency Directive) – National Climate- and Energy Action Plan Austria – Mission 2030 – Austrian climate- and energy strategy – Act No. 458/2000 Coll., on the conditions for entrepreneurship and performance of the public services in energy sectors – Act No. 165/2012 Coll., on Supported Energy resources – State programme on support to energy savings 2017 – 2021 – National energy concept – Policy of the climate protection in the Czech Republic – Climate change adaptation strategy of the Czech Republic – Strategic framework Czech Republic 2030 and its implementation plan – National environmental policy of the Czech Republic until 2030 – National clean mobility action plan | Final energy consumption |

Table 8: Material assets, raw materials, and resources

| Main environmental objectives | Sources for objectives | Issues |
|---|---|--|
| Reduction and efficient recycling of waste | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> – EU Directive 2008/98/EC (Waste Framework Directive) | Resource consumption per capita |
| Promotion of recycling and the circular economy | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> – Federal Waste Management Act Austria – Federal Waste Management Plan Austria – Austrian Action Plan on Resource Efficiency – Act No. 541/2020 Coll., on waste – Waste management plan of the Czech Republic – National environmental policy of the Czech Republic until 2030 | Generated and deposited waste per capita |

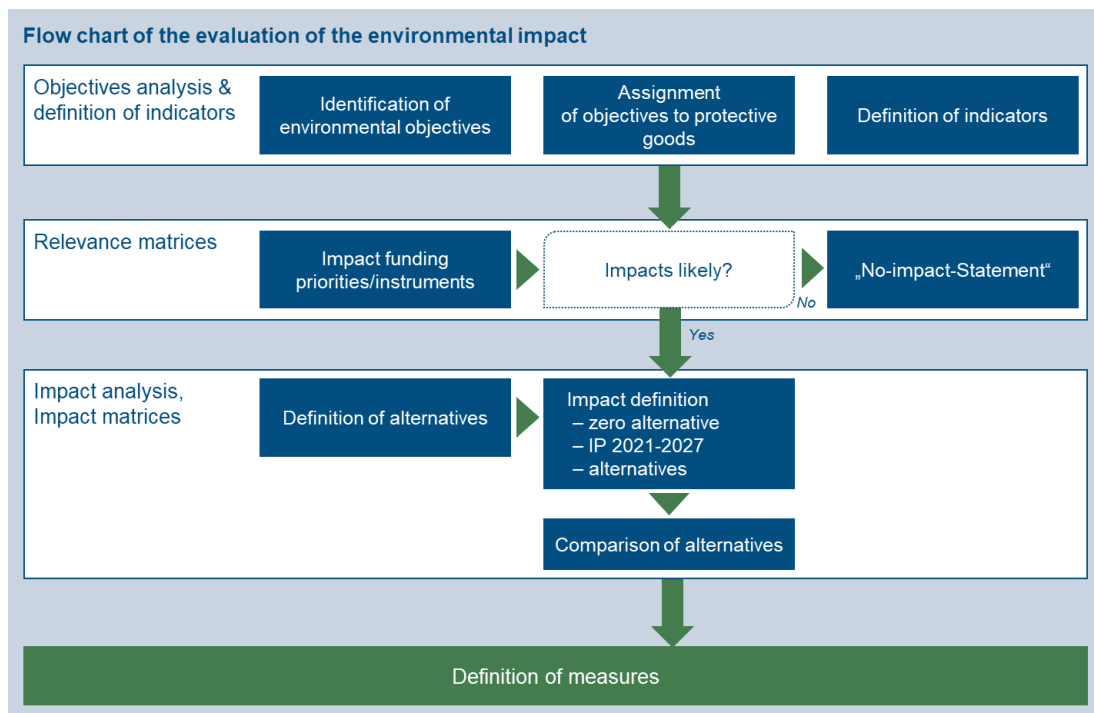
5. Methodology

5.1 Assessment steps

As part of the accompanying SEA for the programming of the CP Austria – Czech Republic 2021-2027, a comprehensible and well-tested set of methods will be applied. Based on an analysis of the relevant objectives in terms of potential environmental impacts, impact matrices are drawn up for the individual funding priorities by examining their relevance. These show the expected effects of the funding programme on individual protective goods. Figure 1 shows the basic process of environmental impact assessment, including the following steps:

- ▶ Goal analysis: presentation of the relevant environmental goals
- ▶ Relevance matrices: first assessment of potential environmental impacts for stakeholder consultation
- ▶ Impact analyses of the IP based on
 - Evaluation of the current state of the environment,
 - Definition of a zero alternative
 - Evaluation of the effects of the IP using impact matrices

Figure 1: Flow chart of the evaluation of the environmental impact of the new support programme



Source: ÖIR

The current state of the environment (SEA-Directive, Annex I, b-d)

The SEA Directive (Annex I, b) requires a description of the current state of the environment, including its likely development in the event of non-implementation of the IP (= zero alternative). To define the zero alternative, a qualitative trend estimation is being performed, based on concrete data and empirical values.

Table 9: Qualitative trend assessment (zero alternative)

| Symbol | Trend |
|--------|--|
| ↗ | Improvement: general improvement of the current state of the environment |
| ↖↗ | Partial improvement: improvement of the current state of the environment in parts only |
| ↔ | No change: no significant change in the current state of the environment |
| ↘↖ | Partial deterioration: deterioration of the current state of the environment in parts only |
| ↘ | Deterioration: general deterioration of the current state of the environment |

Source: ÖIR

This description of the current environmental situation in the potentially impacted cross-border regions of Austria and the Czech Republic is based on a review of already existing data sources. Primary data collection is not foreseen within the framework of the SEA but is also not necessary, due to the relatively abstract strategic nature of the programme. However, such data collection could be necessary for the implementation of concrete projects (e.g. in the context of approval procedures).

Assessment of the expected significant environmental impacts of the IP (SEA Directive, Annex I, f)

For the programme priorities and the measures and instruments of the IP assigned to them, assessments of possible effects on the environment are made, based on the environmental indicators examined. Both direct and indirect effects are examined:

- ▶ Direct effects are those which are directly linked to the implementation of a measure. This includes e.g. noise pollution during a construction project.
- ▶ Indirect effects refer to those which are a direct or indirect consequence of subsidized measures. This includes e.g. emissions from the operation of production facilities whose construction was supported by the programme.

Considering the already abstract nature of the funding programme itself, indirect effects, in particular, are often difficult to assess. This can mean a reduction in the concreteness of assessments, however, it must be weighed against the loss of information if the corresponding effects are not included. In most cases, the qualitative methodology applied allows for an assessment of the direction of impact and relevance of indirect effects.

The assessment of the significance of the impacts (relevance matrix, impact matrix) is qualitative. In those areas where concrete quantitative information is available, numerical information is also provided. The assessment scale covers both positive and negative impacts on the environment.

The environmental impact of the programme is assessed by comparing the potential environmental impact of the CP with the zero alternative. This allows statements to be made on

the extent to which the environmental situation changes as a result of the implementation of the planned measures in the CP (= “variant CP”) compared with a situation without the measures planned therein (= “zero alternative”).

To ensure the focus on significant environmental impacts, the proposed analysis and evaluation method is designed in such a way that areas, in which no significant environmental impacts are expected in relation to the environmental objectives, can be eliminated with a no-impact statement. The method of environmental impact assessment has to comply with the abstractness of the programme content.

Relevance matrices are used for the presentation of the assessment since they can be used to illustrate impacts in a way that is easy to understand on a qualitative level. In this way, important systemic relationships between the IP and the environmental aspects are presented without creating a false sense of precision that cannot be achieved with a qualitative methodology.

To ensure the comparability of the qualitative and quantitative assessments of potential changes in the selected indicators, a judgement on a five-grade ordinal scale is provided for all environmental indicators. Impact matrices are used for the presentation of foreseeable effects. The zero alternative serves as a basis for comparison to assess the environmental impacts of the IP and the alternatives. The following evaluation scale is proposed:

Table 10: Qualitative assessment system

| Symbol | Trend |
|--------|--|
| ++ | Substantial improvement of the environmental situation in comparison to the zero alternative |
| + | Slight improvement of the environmental situation in comparison to the zero alternative |
| 0 | No meaningful change of the environmental situation in comparison to the zero alternative |
| - | Slight deterioration of the environmental situation in comparison to the zero alternative |
| -- | Substantial deterioration of the environmental situation in comparison to the zero alternative |
| x | Assessment not possible |

In cases where environmental impacts of individual activities cannot be assessed due to e.g., vague formulations or the broadness of the descriptions in the IP, no judgement on potential impacts is made which is indicated in the impact matrices by an “X”.

Interactions of both a positive or a negative nature that may occur between different environmental objectives (e.g. impacts on air quality can also impact human health) are examined separately. This qualitative assessment is carried out in the environmental report and presented in tabular form.

Compared to other programmes with a lower degree of abstraction, the definition of “reasonable alternatives” in an SEA to an Interreg programme faces several difficulties. Thereby, it is not possible to draw up and evaluate a completely different supporting programme as an alternative, which is why two approaches are pursued in the context of a SEA:

- ▶ Comparison of the CP with the zero alternative, whereby the non-implementation of the programme is seen as an alternative to the implementation of the programme.

- ▶ Close interlocking and multiple feedback loops of the SEA with the programming process. Due to this iterative process, preliminary results of the SEA are directly incorporated into the programming of the CP, which means that the programme version assessed in the Environmental Report can be regarded as an improved version in which microalternatives or reduction measures for environmental impacts are already included at the measure level. This process is documented in the protocols of the programming groups and the final version of the Environmental Report.

5.2 Structure of the Environmental Report

The environmental report serves both to assess the environmental impacts of the programme and to document the SEA processes. It follows the scoping phase and is based on the first draft of the programme. The Environmental Report is divided into several sections:

- ▶ Non-technical summary
 - for a generally understandable explanation of the process and the results of the SEA
- ▶ Brief description of the content and main objectives of the programme and its relationship with other relevant plans and programmes
 - Overview of the structure of the programme including the planned measures as a basis for assessing possible environmental impacts
- ▶ Presentation of the environmental protection objectives relevant to the programme
 - Based on the results of the scoping phase and including the feedback from environmental authorities
- ▶ Description of the main characteristics of the environment, its current state, likely trends, and an indication of current significant environmental problems
 - For each protective good included in the SEA
 - Assessment of the expected development of the environmental status (zero alternative)
- ▶ Description of the potential (significant) effects of the programme on the environment and a description of the measures planned to reduce these effects
 - Establishment of the impact matrices for each protective good
 - Assessment of the interactions between the protective goods
 - Assessment of the programme impacts on individual environmental objective
 - Description of measures to reduce negative environmental impacts
- ▶ Indications of difficulties encountered in the assessment
- ▶ Description of the planned monitoring measures
- ▶ Annex
 - Documentation of the consultation phase of environmental authorities and the general public
 - Summary of the comments received during the consultation process

Public disclosure

The draft environmental report will be publicly disclosed following the programming progress. Then, written comments can be submitted by any interested party (i.e. including environmental authorities already formally involved in the process), which will subsequently be taken into account in the revision of the report. For each comment, the SEA team will explain how and why it was taken into account in the environmental report or not.

Interlinkages with the programming process

The SEA process in general (and the environmental report in particular) serve to ensure that environmental considerations are taken into account in the preparation process of programmes. The aim is not to propose completely new objectives and measures, but rather to examine, based on the measures chosen, what environmental effects may result, how potential positive effects can be enhanced and how potential negative effects can be mitigated. The SEA procedure thus has an advisory character.