



STUDY ON DIRECTIONS AND PROSPECTS OF THE TOURISM SECTOR DEVELOPMENT IN THE LITHUANIAN-POLISH BORDERLAND

Final report
(selected chapters)

KREATUS

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May 2025



EUROPEAN COMMISSION

Directorate-General for Regional and Urban Policy

Directorate D-European Territorial Cooperation, Macro-regions, Interreg and Programmes Implementation I

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Manuscript completed in May 2025

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1. EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Background and purpose

The Lithuanian-Polish borderland, adjacent to Kaliningrad and Belarus, faces significant socio-economic and security challenges due to its peripheral location and the impact of Russian aggression against Ukraine. Despite these difficulties, the region offers unique natural and cultural assets that could boost tourism and drive sustainable development.

To enhance Lithuanian-Polish tourism cooperation, coordinated actions are needed to leverage complementary tourism offers and maximise cross-border impact, especially by building on Interreg programme outcomes and mitigating such unfavourable issues as weak inter-sectoral collaboration, limited local engagement, lack of cross-border tourism information and promotion.

Considering this, the study aims to identify the directions and prospects for tourism sector development in the Lithuanian-Polish borderland, identify key cross-border tourism offers, recognise related strategic orientations for hard and soft investments, and define some other assumptions related to their successful implementation as recognisable cross-border tourism offers.

A mixed-methods approach was used to achieve these goals, including qualitative and quantitative research, surveys with tourists and project partners, and active engagement with local stakeholders. The study was conducted from April 2024 to May 2025 by KREATUS Ltd. experts, in collaboration with Lithuanian and Polish ministries and the Interreg Joint Technical Secretariat.

Tourism values and offers

The area is known for its unique nature, post-glacial landscapes, and slow tourism appeal. Forests, lakes, and rivers drive sustainable tourism, though protected areas limit some development. Land and water tourism-cycling, hiking, sailing, kayaking-thrives, but is fragmented, with poor cross-border connectivity and promotion. Some routes are thematic or educational, especially in rural areas, but need better public-business cooperation. The region's rich cultural heritage: castles, manors, folklore, and cuisine, offers diverse attractions, but exploitation is uneven and often locally managed. SPA and wellness tourism are growing, especially in health resorts, yet remain niche and require more investment. Overall, the area's natural and cultural assets hold great potential for sustainable and healthy tourism, but need better integration and support.

Tourism infrastructure, movement and preferences

The pandemic, military tensions, and migration issues have struck tourist stakeholders. Since 2019, tourist accommodation in most border regions has declined and has not fully recovered. While tourism-related companies rose in 2022, cross-border public transport remains poor, limiting accessibility. Tourist numbers in the Lithuanian-Polish borderland are still below 2019 levels, especially on the Polish side. In 2023, Lithuania had nearly twice as many foreign tourists as Poland. Stays are shorter, mainly among foreign tourists. Most visitors treat the area as transit, staying only one day, with family. Active tourism (cycling, hiking, kayaking) and cultural tourism (sightseeing) dominate. Services are rated highly except for public transport. Over half of tourists do not cross the border, and military tensions, high prices, and poor accessibility remain key deterrents.

Touristic strategies

There is no unified vision for cross-border tourism in the Lithuanian-Polish borderland. Its development should align with the EU Strategy for the Baltic Sea Region, which promotes sustainable tourism. The first joint vision attempt was the TCBFA study, highlighting cross-border natural and cultural resources and slow tourism potential. Lithuania has a national Tourism Roadmap for sustainable tourism; Poland lacks a unified strategy. Regional strategies address tourism in both countries in a mostly coherent way.

Cross-border partnerships and tourism projects

Most cross-border tourism initiatives in the Lithuanian-Polish borderland are driven by Interreg-funded projects, with only a few institutional agreements outside this framework. These projects often focus on the sustainable use and promotion of natural and cultural heritage, such as thematic trails and infrastructure for active and cultural tourism, as well as heritage protection and

preservation. Still, cooperation rarely extends beyond the project lifespan, limiting long-term cross-border impact and networking. Promotion is often minimal, and cross-border activities typically diminish with project completion, making it hard to capitalise on results. Partners cite limited resources for ongoing promotion and brand-building, despite a desire for a cross-border tourism brand. Good interpersonal relations among project staff help sustain partnerships, but language barriers, lack of tourism expertise, and asymmetry in partner numbers (more Polish than Lithuanian) hinder balanced cooperation. EGTCs are still learning to leverage their potential for deeper collaboration.

Recent efforts, like the TCBFA tourist concepts, guide future cross-border tourism development. They also recommend implementing cross-border information systems, improving tourist management and communication skills, and the sustainable use of heritage. Tourist project partners want to develop cycling, hiking, and water paths, which are mainly fragmentary and do not provide cross-border connections, and they want to develop integrated promotion systems and innovative tourism products. Lithuanian partners emphasise innovation and new trends, while Polish partners focus more on active tourism infrastructure. Interest in tourism clusters exists, but knowledge is still basic.

Future cross-border tourism offers

Most promising future tourist offers should be based on natural than cultural assets: sustainable active tourism (hiking, cycling, water sports, leisure using local infrastructure and cross-border routes) and cultural tourism (historical/cultural heritage, regional cuisine, crafts, thematic routes). In the long term, health tourism could enrich these products, but major infrastructure, services, and marketing investments are required to become visible and competitive.

Future cross-border tourism should capitalise on already existing Interreg projects' outcomes, and it should be developed in further projects following leading directions and innovations for climate/lifestyle (like *cittaslow*, *colocation*, *silver tourism*, *nature-health tourism*).

Strategic orientations for hard and soft investments

Following the identification of future cross-border tourism offers based on the region's natural and cultural assets, strategic orientations for both hard (infrastructure) and soft (services, events) investments were defined, engaging public, business, and social actors.

Active tourism orientations include, among other things, developing hiking, cycling, and water routes (kayaking, sailing) with supporting infrastructure and creating and marking thematic and nature trails, arranging green zones and spaces, offering educational programs on sustainable use of natural resources, expanding sports and recreational infrastructure, including equipment rentals and organising events (sports, recreation, hobby, integration), nature tourism (hikes, birdwatching), cruises, and camps.

Cultural tourism orientations include, among other things, thematic trail creation and marking, archaeological research and heritage protection, enhancing museum and exhibition offerings, educational activities on cultural sustainability, developing cultural infrastructure, promoting crafts, and organizing cultural events, promoting local cuisine, folklore, dialects, and cross-border guided tours and establishing virtual museums.

The Interreg Programme should prioritise investments that enhance cross-border tourism with tangible impacts. Focus should be on projects that leverage existing initiatives, create cross-border linkages, and develop multi-activity routes and thematic trails. Successful completed projects may be strategically updated and better promoted at the borderland level.

Key horizontal interventions needed include expanding cross-border route networks (bypassing Kaliningrad and Belarus), marking and promoting distinguished thematic trails, capitalizing on successful project outcomes, developing a cross-border tourist information system, enhancing project partners' qualifications, implementing innovative tourism technologies and advancing cross-border spatial planning. Moreover, the EGTC "Lithuanian-Polish Cross-Border Functional Area" should promote tourism development under established tourist concepts.

Critical success factors include political stability in the region, investment levels in tourism infrastructure, addressing security concerns, and ensuring cybersecurity to maintain the region's positive image as a tourism destination.

Assumptions for the future communication strategy

The communication strategy for the Lithuanian-Polish borderland should focus primarily on creating a unified cross-border tourism brand, building on the region's natural (forests, parks, lakes, unique flora/fauna) and cultural (Yotvingian heritage, castles, multiculturalism, wooden architecture, cuisine, crafts, folklore) assets. Currently, separate brands exist, but cross-border partners support integration. Establishing a cross-border brand requires consensus on its design, management, and funding, with a long-term goal of launching and promoting it in the tourism market. Success depends on medium- and long-term actions (3–10 years) and a supportive cross-border environment. A robust communication strategy can be the subsequent stage. It is vital for brand introduction and management, helping attract visitors and foster stakeholder collaboration. If implemented, the cross-border brand boosted by the introduced cross-border communication strategy could serve as a strong borderland label, uniting and promoting diverse tourism offers, and providing a competitive edge over other destinations.

Defined/revised criteria for assessing tourism cross-border project applications to be submitted to the INTERREG LT-PL Programme

In the 2021-2027 period, project applications under Specific Objective 4.6 of the INTERREG Programme are assessed using the same criteria as other applications. However, considering the unique needs of tourism and culture projects, some refinements in quality assessment criteria are recommended for both current and post-2027 programming.

The evaluation process includes an eligibility check and a quality assessment, focusing on strategic and operational criteria. Considering study results, the key recommended changes focus on the individual requirements of the quality criteria and application form as follows:

- **Project relevance:** Applications should explicitly address novelty, complementarity with existing projects, and plans for capitalising on programme results. This helps avoid duplication and ensures added value.
- **Cross-border impact:** The application should clearly state the project's cross-border impact. To streamline, it is proposed to merge existing questions about common challenges and opportunities into a single, focused inquiry.
- **Project intervention logic:** More emphasis should be placed on the sustainability and promotion of project results beyond the funding period. Applicants should provide a detailed plan for maintaining and promoting outputs for at least the durability period.
- **Partnership relevance:** Beyond formal partnerships, projects should engage a broader range of stakeholders (businesses, NGOs, local tourism organisations). Partners should demonstrate genuine added value, relevant experience, and professional capacity in tourism.
- **Work plan and communication:** A new assessment field should verify if communication activities effectively promote project results and target audiences throughout and after the project.
- **Budget:** the project budget should adequately fund these promotional efforts, ensuring broad impact.

These changes enhance tourism projects' quality, sustainability, and cross-border relevance within the INTERREG framework.

Roadmap for expanding the representation of tourist stakeholders in the decision-making process within the Programme

The current decision-making process follows the Programme Document 2022, with a Monitoring Committee that includes up to 10 voting members per national delegation (Poland and Lithuania). These members represent national/regional levels, socio-economic partners, NGOs, and environmental bodies. Some members are very active, others less so. Local stakeholders express interest in forming cross-border working groups, platforms, or councils to boost engagement, improve information flow, and ensure tourism interests are better represented at the Programme level by implementing the partnership principle more extensively.

Adding a delegation of observers from the Lithuanian and Polish tourism sectors could benefit from increased credibility and trust in Programme decisions and a bottom-up, place-based approach to tourism development.

Currently, a core group of tourist stakeholders, including both EGTCs, has been established ready to push for greater representation on the programme level. Local tourism stakeholders have shown

strong interest in contributing to programming, consultations, funding allocation, proposal selection, and ensuring long-term project outputs in tourism.

The roadmap for establishing a cross-border tourism representation at the Programme level includes the following stages:

- I. Invite tourism partners: Reach out to Lithuanian and Polish cross-border project partners interested in joining.
- II. Expand representation: Identify and invite additional stakeholders from outside the Programme relevant to cross-border tourism.
- III. Initial meeting: Convene interested entities to discuss expectations and capacities and establish a list of regular members.
- IV. Programme engagement: Collaborate with Programme authorities to integrate the working group into decision-making, possibly as additional observers in the Monitoring Committee.

The cross-border working group on tourism should foster inter-sectoral dialogue, promote collaboration among public, social, and business actors, and define long-term topics and forms of existence. It should also collaborate with the Monitoring Committee and regional authorities. Good practices, such as CLLD-centred cross-border cooperation in the Austrian-Italian border, can serve as a model, especially for the EGTC Polish-Lithuanian Cross-Border Functional Area.

To address gaps in the competences of cross-border tourist stakeholders, some activities are recommended: mentoring and participation in international networks, training on tourism-oriented competencies and project management, social media channels for communication, study visits to successful cross-border tourism destinations and toolkit development for participatory methods in cross-border dialogue, including training in negotiation, conflict management, digital literacy, business and leadership skills, and the use of digital tools and online surveys.

This comprehensive approach will enhance the capacity and engagement of local stakeholders, ensuring more effective and sustainable cross-border tourism development in the Lithuanian-Polish borderland.

Developing touristic inter-sectoral cross-border cooperation in the Lithuanian-Polish borderland

Inter-sectoral cross-border cooperation in the Lithuanian-Polish borderlands is weak. Business stakeholders are unaware of public tourism investments, rarely participate in projects, and see little value in cross-border partnerships. There is minimal interaction between businesses and only trace links among NGOs. Many entrepreneurs view counterparts across the border as competitors, not partners. Businesses and NGOs are not involved in EGTCs, and no platform exists for inter-sectoral cross-border cooperation.

Some local authorities are open to forming cross-border tourist clusters, but developing such clusters is a challenging task. A classic approach is needed: establish partnerships and governance, integrate assets, develop a strategy, design and promote joint offers, engage communities, and monitor progress.

Currently, tourism stakeholder networking is in its early stages, but some partners are willing to join a cross-border working group or cluster. In the short term, forming a cross-border working group could boost progress toward an integrated tourism cluster. However, coordinating such clusters is complex, and no entity has yet volunteered to lead. Still, a strong cross-border working group can lay the foundation for future inter-sectoral clusters

Recommendations

- I. The Interreg programme should financially support the most outstanding cross-border tourist projects already completed. To capitalise on the programme outcomes, these projects should be relaunched after the duration period, updated, clustered, and promoted better at the borderland level.
- II. Inclusion in Lithuanian and Polish national, regional and local strategies and policies issues related to the key cross-border tourism offers designed for the borderland, including tourism concepts developed under the TCBFA (2021), and providing compliance with the Strategy for the Baltic Sea Region.
- III. Increasing project partnerships' awareness of the future leading scopes of cross-border tourist offers and strategic orientations on investments that the Interreg programme can support, as well as the scopes of projects that individual partnerships will submit to the

- Interreg programme to avoid overlapping and multiplying projects and provide more networking at the starting stage of the project lifespan.
- IV. Significant distinguishing and promotion of the results of the already implemented cross-border tourism projects to ensure better long-term capitalisation of the programme results, boost cross-sectoral cooperation with entrepreneurs and social organisations, and provide better capitalisation of project results.
 - V. Boosting the competences of project partners implementing cross-border tourism projects in terms of communication, networking, project management, tourism management, etc., as well as knowledge on the possibility of using innovative technologies in tourism and implementing innovative tourism trends;
 - VI. Crucial Interreg-funded investments should connect fragmented cycling, hiking, sailing, and kayaking routes by building missing parts and providing supportive infrastructure. When conducting this, the focus should also be on bypassing Kaliningrad Oblast and the Belarusian border area.
 - VII. Cross-border educational and thematic trails, including those focusing on nature and various cultural heritage, should be developed to distinguish the area's natural and cultural values and provide a synergy effect.
 - VIII. Development of the cross-border tourist information system;
 - IX. Considering the atmosphere of threat created by the geopolitical situation in the region, targeted promotional, informational, and PR activities should mitigate the negative image of the borderland.
 - X. Creating a cross-border tourism brand is the first stage in designing a communication strategy for the Lithuanian-Polish borderland.
 - XI. The process of assessing submissions to the Interreg calls on tourism should be improved to counteract cross-border fund-driven partnerships in tourism and provide a higher cross-border impact on tourism development.
 - XII. Increase the participation of Lithuanian and Polish tourist stakeholders in the decision-making process within the Programme and, in parallel, boost inter-sectoral collaboration in tourism on the local level.

2. SUMMARY AND RECOMMENDATIONS

2.1. Conclusions on the study

2.1.1. Tourism values and offers identified in the border area

The area is distinguished by its high-quality natural environment, unique fauna and flora, fascinating post-glacial landscape, and provincial character, mainly attracting visitors who prefer slow tourism. Similar natural values on both sides of the border, particularly in forested areas, green zones, lakes, and rivers, can be considered drivers of sustainable tourism development across the Lithuanian-Polish borderland, providing a complementary and distinctive offer. It is not an area that provides conditions for the development of mass tourism, since a considerable part of the area is under various forms of environmental protection.

The borderland offers numerous land and water tourism opportunities, closely tied to its natural values. These include cycling, hiking, sailing, and kayaking routes, as well as main cycling trails (such as GreenVelo and EuroVelo) and numerous other interesting shorter trails. Unfortunately, many are fragmentary routes, poorly cross-border networked and marked, and promoted individually at a minimal level. Some land or water trails are also located in protected areas, which limits tourism development. Selected routes operate as thematic, educational, or nature trails, providing access to local attractions, particularly in less accessible rural areas. Further development of land and water tourism requires significant involvement from the public and business sectors; however, current inter-sectoral cooperation is not effective.

The borderland is also rich in tangible and intangible cultural heritage, including historical heritage, which provides a critical mass for developing cultural offers. Although the area's cultural landscape is very diverse, similarities and complementarities related to historical heritage, such as Yotvingian artefacts, medieval architecture, castles, manors, monuments, and museum collections, as well as those related to multiculturalism, folklore, dialect, crafts, and regional cuisine, can be identified.

The tourist exposition and exploitation of cultural assets range from professional and innovative offerings to local and traditional ones of a limited nature. Many tangible and intangible heritage elements lack comprehensive protection and funds for sustainable exploitation. A significant part of the cultural offer functions as thematic routes, generally dispersed throughout the support area, owned by different operators and promoted individually. Very few of them are cross-border.

Many tourist entities offer commercial basic SPA and wellness services. A few well-known health resorts provide public and commercial health tourism services, including recovery, medical SPA, and wellness services. These entities continuously develop their offers. Some other municipalities demonstrate ambitions to develop health tourism offers. Still, they are at an initial stage and require further substantial public and commercial investments in infrastructure, services, and promotion.

Considering the area's environmental values, changing lifestyles, the popularisation of well-being, an ageing society, and the concept of 'coolcation' (relaxation in the cold), health tourism is an auspicious direction in the long term. Still, currently, it is only a niche offer.

2.1.2. Lithuanian and Polish tourism infrastructure in the borderland

Following the pandemic, and considering the war in Ukraine and the migration crisis, the tourist supply and demand have likely not yet been fully rebuilt. The increase in tourism-related companies in 2022 is a positive trend compared to the pre-pandemic period (2019). Compared to the pre-pandemic period (2019), tourist accommodation establishments in most border regions have decreased, but are still more accessible in bigger towns. Despite significant investments from the Interreg programme and other funding sources, access to tourist infrastructure is not as good as in different regions of both countries. Tourist information centres are readily available, but they work under diverse standards. The quality of cross-border public transportation is low, making the area a bit inaccessible.

2.1.3. Tourism movement and preferences

Tourist stakeholders have suffered dramatically not only from the pandemic but also from military tensions on the Lithuanian-Polish-Belarusian-Russian border (the Suwałki Gap) and migrant crises, resulting in a decrease in the number of visitors and investments in the tourism sector. The national statistics indicate that tourist numbers in the Lithuanian-Polish borderland remain below 2019 levels, particularly on the Polish side. Stays are shorter, mainly among foreign tourists. Most visitors come with their families but treat the area as a transit point, staying only one day. In 2023, on the Lithuanian side, there were almost twice as many foreign tourists as on the Polish side. Compared to the pre-pandemic period, the total stay of tourists has also been shortened. This applies mainly to foreign tourists.

Based on the survey of tourists, a relatively large group of tourists visited this area in 2024 for the first time, despite constraints related to the military situation around the borderland. Family tourism dominates. The borderland is still treated as a transit area, where most visitors spend only one day and do not stay overnight. Visitors come to the borderland to learn about its cultural heritage, enjoy local attractions, and engage in water or land-based tourism activities (e.g., kayaking, cycling, hiking). Tourists prefer resting in rural or peripheral areas (calmcation, cittaslow), highly rate active tourism on land and water and cultural tourism. The health tourism offer is evaluated far lower. Tourist services in the area are highly rated, except for those related to public transport. Less than 50% of tourists travel to the other side of the border. Tourists visiting the borderland do not pay significant attention to the military situation around the border. However, this issue, with high prices and poor accessibility, remains the primary factor discouraging tourists from visiting this area.

2.1.4. Lithuanian and Polish policies addressing tourism development in the borderland

Currently, no joint policy exists on cross-border tourism development in the Lithuanian-Polish borderland. The only joint tourist vision was created for the TCBFA. It revealed significant shared tourism resources of the areas neighbouring the border (nature, culture) and potential for "slow tourism." Cross-border tourism concepts designed for the TCBFA should be considered when planning future directions for cross-border tourism offers. It is suitable with the EU Strategy for the Baltic Sea Region, which promotes, among other things, sustainable and regenerative tourism development.

At the national level, Lithuania has a national Tourism Roadmap that aims for a sustainable, inclusive, innovative, green, and competitive tourism sector. Poland lacks a unified national tourism strategy. Regional strategies address tourism in both countries in a mostly coherent way.

2.1.5. Lithuanian-Polish cross-border partnerships and tourism projects

Most cross-border tourism initiatives in the Lithuanian-Polish borderland are Interreg-funded projects. Only a few institutional agreements go beyond the scope of this programme, and some crucial tourist projects, including those developing tourist routes and connecting local attractions, were funded by other programmes.

Many Interreg partnerships and projects are partially fund-driven, rarely exceed cooperation beyond the programme's scope, and poorly demonstrate a willingness to develop long-term relations. This decreases cross-border networking and building synergies and complementarities. It also hinders a tangible cross-border impact on tourism in the area. On the other hand, partners are aware that good interpersonal relations among cross-border project staff support the long-term maintenance and development of cross-border tourism partnerships. They can also result in new relationships and provide partnership resilience, e.g. against changes of local authorities.

The highest density of cross-border relations has been demonstrated in the areas neighbouring the border e.g. within the EGTCs area. Considering the EGTCs membership, there is an asymmetry between the number of Polish and Lithuanian partners, resulting in difficulties in building balanced partnerships. Moreover, EGTCs partners do not have sufficient knowledge to develop further border cooperation using such a vehicle. They are just starting to learn.

Although limited motivations to develop cross-border cooperation among local authorities, businesses, and other partners, the tourist project partners are interested in developing cross-border tourism clusters. However, they only demonstrate basic knowledge of this.

Project partners demonstrate relatively good skills in managing cross-border projects but suffer from language barriers and a lack of specialised tourism expertise. Moreover, Polish partners specifically identify weaknesses in managing cross-border project teams, while Lithuanian partners struggle more with marketing, promotion, and advertising tourism project results.

Some cross-border projects lack extended promotional activities beyond the minimal requirements of the Interreg programme. In many partnerships, further promotional activities aren't continued after the project lifespan, making capitalising on these projects' results challenging. Partners are aware of challenges related to developing cross-border tourism offers, mainly when they have limited funds and capacities to promote and capitalise their project outcomes, after the project lifespan.

Insufficient promotion of cross-border tourist projects and offers does not correspond with partners' willingness to create a cross-border tourist brand.

Recent efforts, like the creation of the TCBFA tourist concepts (2021) or the OSI on Yotvingian heritage appreciation (2023), can partially provide a framework for developing cross-border tourism offers and creating a cross-border tourist brand. Additionally, the joint actions intended to support tourism development in the TCBFA, e.g., a cross-border tourist information system, and improving qualifications to manage the tourist offers are essential to be implemented. However, the future directions of cross-border tourism offer development are strongly related to the plans of cross-border tourist projects' partners and other tourist stakeholders in the borderland.

Cross-border projects 2004 - 2024 mainly focus on protecting and promoting cultural and natural heritage and their limited exploitation. Many of them include thematic and educational trails. As for the future, some project partners want to focus on developing infrastructure that supports active tourism, including sports events. Others refer to exploiting cultural values, including infrastructural and soft investments.

The Harvesting Report 2024 shows the significant potential to develop cycling, hiking, and water paths and partners' expectations on developing an integrated cross-border tourism promotion system, adapting cultural heritage for tourism, developing cultural activities using modern technologies, sustainable tourism offers, and new thematic paths.

Most Lithuanian and Polish partners surveyed in 2025 want to apply sustainable use of historical and cultural tangible and intangible heritage, including educational and thematic trails. Polish partners are more focused on active land and water tourism infrastructure, and Lithuanian ones - a more innovative approach to tourism (e.g. using innovative technologies in tourism) and exploring new tourism trends.

Tourist projects' partners still want to develop infrastructure for active land and water tourism, including cycling, hiking, and water paths, which are mainly fragmentary and do not provide cross-border connections. They are also interested in further protecting and promoting the cultural heritage of the borderland. Tourist stakeholders highlight the need to implement cross-border integrated tourist information and promotion systems, improve tourist management and communication skills, and the sustainable use of the area's heritage.

2.1.6. Future cross-border tourism offers

Future cross-border tourism offers should primarily capitalise on the outcomes of existing projects and investments, and be developed in further undertakings that build on leading active and cultural tourism offers and innovations in the tourism sector. They should comprise:

- Tourist products currently available in the borderland, which are mainly based on the results of the already-completed cross-border projects funded by the Interreg programme and other projects, including business investments.
- Tourist projects which are planned to be designed and implemented by cross-border partnerships in a short-term perspective.
- Tourist innovations addressing, among others, climate and lifestyle changes, e.g. cittaslow and calmcation; coolcation; silver tourism for seniors; nature tourism connected with health tourism aimed at treating specific.

Cross-border offers based primarily on natural values and, secondarily, cultural values can be recognised as the most promising direction for developing cross-border tourist offers in the short term. They are two bundles of tourism offers, including:

- sustainable active tourism, both land and water tourism, comprising sports, recreational and hobby activities, such as hiking, cycling, sailing and kayaking, as well as other types of leisure by exploring all natural assets of the area and its tourism infrastructure, including using various hiking, cycling, sailing and kayaking or nature routes connecting local attractions on the both sides of the border;
- cultural tourism exploring all tangible and intangible various historical and cultural heritage of the entire region or for some areas (e.g. Yotvingian heritage, Gothic and Teutonic castles, wooden architecture, palace and court architecture, borderland cuisine, dialect and craft) and other cultural offers, available individually or as thematic routes that also distinguish local attractions on the both sides of the border.

In the long term, cross-border health tourism offers might significantly enrich these products. However, to create sufficient health tourism products and their visibility in the tourist market, many public and commercial investments in infrastructure, public and commercial health and rehabilitation services, and marketing are still required.

Critical success factors impacting future cross-border tourism offer development include political stability, investment levels in tourism infrastructure, addressing security concerns, and ensuring cybersecurity to maintain the region's positive image as a tourism destination.

2.1.7. Strategic orientations for hard and soft investments

Following the future key cross-border tourism offers based on the region's natural and cultural assets, related hard (infrastructure) and soft (services, events) investments should be developed to enhance these attractions of the borderland and make them more competitive. They should be public, business, and social investments.

There are the following types of strategic orientations for active tourism:

- Building hiking and cycling routes and supportive infrastructure,
- Preparing water routes: kayaking, sailing, and supportive infrastructure
- Designing & marking thematic trails, e.g., nature trails
- Green zones & spaces arrangement
- Educational offer on the sustainable use of the natural values of the area
- Development of sports & recreational infrastructure – land & water tourism
- Sport & recreation equipment rentals
- Events (sports, recreation, hobby & integration)
- Nature tourism offers, e.g. nature hikes, bird watching, etc.
- Lake and river cruises
- Sports and thematic camps

Active tourism hard orientations include, among other things, connecting existing and future infrastructure to develop hiking, cycling, and water routes (such as kayaking and sailing), expanding sports and recreational infrastructure, including equipment rentals, creating and marking thematic and nature trails, and arranging green zones and spaces. Active tourism soft orientations encompass educational programs on the sustainable use of natural resources, recreational offers and events (sports, recreation, hobbies, integration), nature tourism (hikes, birdwatching), cruises, and camps.

Regarding cultural tourism, the following types of strategic orientations were identified:

- Designing and marking thematic trails
- Conducting archaeological research
- Protecting historical & cultural tangible & intangible heritage
- Developing museums and exhibitions offer
- Educational offer on the sustainable use of the cultural values of the area
- Development of cultural infrastructure
- Promotion of craft, handicrafts
- Cultural events, festivals, concerts and performances
- Promoting borderland cuisine, folklore, dialect, music, dance, etc.
- Organising guided cross-border tours
- Development of virtual museums

Cultural tourism hard orientations include, among other things, the protection, restoration, and appreciation of tangible heritage, enhancing museum and exhibition offerings, and developing infrastructure for the creation and marking of thematic trails, as well as other cultural infrastructure development. Cultural tourism soft orientations encompass the preservation and digitalisation of cultural heritage, educational activities on cultural sustainability, promoting crafts, organising cultural events, promoting local cuisine, folklore, and dialects, as well as cross-border guided tours and establishing virtual museums.

Regarding the financial support for the hard and soft investments provided by the Interreg Programme Lithuania-Poland, all the operations concerning active and cultural tourism that can enrich cross-border tourism offers and give a tangible cross-border impact should be supported, particularly those providing capitalisation of the already completed tourist projects as well as those creating cross-border linkages among individual complementary or similar tourist offers, as well as those which allow to develop cross-border cycling, hiking, kayaking and sailing routes and thematic trails.

The Interreg programme should provide an additional opportunity for the most outstanding tourist projects that have already been completed and require strategic intervention at the Programme level to be re-launched after the duration period, updated, clustered, and promoted more effectively at the borderland level. Therefore, urgent informational, promotional and cross-border networking activities are required and should be supported by the Interreg Programme Lithuania-Poland.

Following the conclusions of the 2021 and 2023 studies, as well as further research, some horizontal cross-border interventions are required to facilitate the development of cross-border tourist offers. They should comprise the following:

- extending a cross-border network of various routes in the Lithuanian-Polish borderland, bypassing the Kaliningrad region and Belarus;
- marking, extending and promoting the most distinguished cross-border thematic trails;
- capitalisation of the outcomes of the most distinguished already completed projects;
- development of the cross-border tourist information system;
- improving the qualifications of project partners to manage the cross-border tourist offer;
- implementing innovative tourism trends;
- cross-border spatial planning, as well as the design of cross-border policies and strategies;
- using innovative technologies in tourism.

Moreover, the EGTC “Lithuanian-Polish Cross-Border Functional Area” members and stakeholders should be encouraged to develop cross-border tourism offers under the four concepts designed in 2021. This can boost the recognition of coherent cross-border tourism offers in areas closest to the border.

Considering military threats from the Russian and Belarusian sides, which have impacted the geopolitical situation in the Baltic Sea region, including the Lithuanian-Polish borderland, as well as some other circumstances related to economy, society, technology, and environment (PESTEL) that impact the security in this borderland, some critical factors were identified that are going to affect the tourism market in the border area. They are as follows:

- political stability in Central and Eastern Europe and Northern Europe impacts the level of tourist traffic, especially from abroad, the level of domestic and foreign investments and the image of the borderland as a tourist destination;
- the level of public and commercial investment in tourism development impacts the development of cross-border tourist offers and associated services;
- fear of destabilisation of the border area due to illegal influx of migrants from the East and smuggling crimes increases uncertainty, limits tourist traffic, discourages investors and creates the image of the borderland as less safe and less attractive to tourists;
- protecting residents and tourists from cyber threats influences the region's positive image as a modern and responsible tourist destination.

2.1.8. Assumptions for the future communication strategy

Developing a communication strategy for the Lithuanian-Polish borderland primarily requires creating a unified cross-border tourism brand, building on the region's assets: natural (forests, parks, lakes, unique flora/fauna) and cultural (Yotvingian heritage, castles, multiculturalism, wooden architecture, cuisine, crafts, folklore). Such a brand can be created for the leading cross-border tourist offer available in the Lithuanian and Polish border regions. Currently, several tourist brands operate separately in the Polish or Lithuanian parts of the borderland, following individual marketing

strategies. They aren't ready to integrate. However, the cross-border project partners support the creation of a cross-border tourism brand.

Creating a new cross-border tourist brand would require reaching a broad consensus between the Lithuanian and Polish partners. Those who would jointly design and develop a cross-border tourist brand would also determine who would manage it and from what funds it would be financed. A long-term goal may be to launch a cross-border tourism brand into the market and develop a corresponding communication strategy.

Foundations for building a cross-border tourism brand might be as follows.

- The group of key values and natural attractions includes: forests, national and landscape parks, rivers and lakes of great value, and unique flora and fauna.
- The leading cultural values and attractions include: historical heritage (e.g. Yotvingians, medieval castles, etc.), multiculturalism, religious and wooden architecture, cuisine, crafts, folklore, dialect, museums and other cultural heritage.

Barriers to creating and promoting a brand are, among others:

- Lack of security for the population, entrepreneurs and local government officials due to the unstable geopolitical situation,
- Lack of a common identity being the basis for building a cross-border tourist brand - building many local and sub-regional brands,
- Lack of permanent cross-border cooperation in animating current collaboration and planning together further activities in the field of tourism development,
- Lack of internal and external financing of the cross-border tourist products, brand, and activities for the external building promotion.

Creating a cross-border tourism brand requires consensus on design, management, and funding. It is a long-term process (3–10 years) that culminates in the launch and promotion of the product in the cross-border tourism market. A communication strategy can be the subsequent stage. If implemented, the cross-border brand boosted by the introduced cross-border communication strategy could serve as a strong borderland label, uniting and promoting diverse tourism offers, and providing a competitive edge over other destinations. A robust communication strategy can attract visitors and foster collaboration among stakeholders in the tourism industry in the programme area, including Lithuanian and Polish partners. When a comprehensive, tailor-made, and engaging communication strategy underpins the cross-border brand, it can become a significant label for the border area and an umbrella for complementary and synergistic tourism cross-border offers, providing a distinct competitive advantage in the tourism market compared to other Polish and Lithuanian destinations.

2.1.9. Criteria for assessing tourism cross-border project applications to be submitted to the INTERREG LT-PL Programme

Between 2021 and 2027, the criteria for assessing project applications submitted to Specific Objective 4.6 within the INTERREG Programme are equal to those for all other applications. Their potential change for project applications submitted to Specific Objective 4.6 should also entail a change in the quality assessment criteria for other specific objectives. Considering this, depending on the capacity, adjustments can be made to evaluate cross-border tourist and cultural projects in the 2021-2027 period or the post-2027 period.

The evaluation process includes an eligibility check and a quality assessment, focusing on strategic and operational criteria. The eligibility check does not refer to the scope of this study. Regarding the quality assessment, both strategic and operational criteria are relevant. Below, some recommended changes in this scope are summarised.

Regarding the criterion "Project relevance," it is suggested that the application form include a specific position/question: What is project novelty, complementarities with other projects, and input for further capitalising the programme results?

This should clarify how the application references the indicated results and practices of the already completed projects to which the project aligns, and justify how applicants will avoid overlaps and replications. In this position, the project's potential novelty and added value compared to previous

projects should be described, as well as how the project capitalises on the results of previously completed projects and which projects they refer to.

For the criterion "Cross-border impact," the application is suggested to include a specific position/question: What is the project's cross-border impact?

This is crucial when assessing the cross-border project application, and it is also present in many application forms for the Interreg programmes on other borders.

Regarding this, to shorten the application length, it is proposed to combine the two existing positions: C.2.1 and C.2.2 into one position: C.2.1. What common territorial challenge(s) and/or opportunities will the project tackle, and how will it be achieved, considering the partners' novelty in approach to the issue?

Regarding the criterion "Project intervention logic", more attention should be paid to how project partners can maintain the durability of the specific objectives and outputs of the projects, e.g., whether they can provide both comprehensive maintenance and promotion of project results after the project lifespan. Currently, it is assessed according to the application positions: C.8, C.8.1, C.8.2 and C.8.3 which comprehensively address this issue but considering the specificity of tourism projects, this criteria should also refer to more detailed information on the project results promotion plan, which should be monitored carefully after the project lifespan. Such a plan should refer to the application position: C.5 Project Results and include promotional activities assigned for specific partners in the following 5 years.

Regarding the criterion "Partnership relevance," the application positions C.3 Project partnership and C.7.5 Cooperation criteria focus on formal project partnerships. Considering the need to develop sectoral cross-border cooperation and high-quality projects, project partners should address the issues:

- invite other stakeholders connected with the tourism industry (beyond the project's formal partnership) to address more comprehensive cross-border tourism challenges and utilise project outcomes, including businesses, NGOs, local tourist organizations, tourist information centres, etc.
- prove that even long-term partnerships produce the expected added value and do not apply for just incremental chances and almost replications of previous projects;
- Prove experience and competence in the thematic field (tourism), including professional staff for tourism project designing and implementation.

Regarding the criterion "Work plan and Communication," it is recommended to add another assessment field besides the current ones to check whether the communication activities during and after the project lifespan provide relevant information about the project results and its target-centred promotion across the borderland.

Regarding the criterion "Budget," considering the above recommendation on the criterion "Work plan and Communication," it should also be evaluated whether the communication objectives and activities are adequately addressed in the project budget, given their expected broad impact on the relevant tourist target groups and stakeholders. Therefore, it is recommended that another assessment dimension be added, i.e., that the project budget include relevant funds for properly promoting and appreciating the project outputs and addressing the project target groups.

2.1.10. Roadmap for expanding the representation of tourist stakeholders in the decision-making process within the Programme

Currently, the Programme's decision-making process is outlined under the Programme document 2022 regulations. It engages, among others, the Monitoring Committee, which comprises Lithuanian and Polish national delegations representing national/regional levels, socio-economic partners, NGOs, and environmental bodies, demonstrating a varied activity level. Each national delegation consists of up to 10 members with voting rights. The members of the Monitoring Committee are equally involved in all activities, and there is no specific distribution of tasks based on their fields of expertise. They demonstrate a varied level of activity. According to the Programme, additional delegation observers could be appointed as needed.

Local stakeholders expect to establish cross-border working groups, platforms, and councils to strengthen cross-border relations, be more informed about the programme agenda, and demonstrate interest in increasing participation in the programme's decision-making process, as well as creating a cross-border working group on tourism.

Establishing an additional delegation of observers representing Lithuanian and Polish tourism stakeholders on the programme level may result in multiple benefits for the Programme Management and its outcomes, as well as for the cross-border project partners, e.g., increasing credibility and trust, developing a bottom-up and place-based approach, and deepening the implementation of the participation principle.

The Stakeholders Engagement Matrix, designed for the borderland, indicates a pool of stakeholders who should be primarily engaged in the decision-making process and help strengthen cross-border relations on the ground. Following this, a core group of stakeholders was established to create a cross-border working group on tourism development, including two EGTCs: Nemunas and the EGTC Polish-Lithuanian Cross-Border Functional Area. In the next stage, the Lithuanian and Polish entities that wished to join this working group to expand stakeholder representation in the decision-making process were identified.

The primary interest of local stakeholders in the decision-making process within the Programme comprises, among others, programming & public consultations, the assignment of funds for axes and operations, the selection of proposals, maintaining long-term project outputs, and their capitalisation in the tourism industry of the borderland.

The road-map for expanding tourist stakeholders' representation in the Programme decision-making process should be as follows.

- I. Invite tourism partners: Reach out to Lithuanian and Polish cross-border project partners interested in joining.
- II. Expand representation: Identify and invite additional stakeholders from outside the Programme relevant to cross-border tourism.
- III. Initial meeting: Convene interested entities to discuss expectations and capacities and establish a list of regular members.
- IV. Programme engagement: Collaborate with Programme authorities to integrate the working group into decision-making, possibly as additional observers in the Monitoring Committee.

The cross-border working group on tourism development should develop further inter-sectoral dialogue at the local level by providing frequent communication among its participants, promoting undertakings among public, social and business actors on both sides of the border (e.g. Local Action Groups, Local Tourist Organisations, etc.) and establishing the topics and forms of long-term existence of this group and its tangible impact on the tourism development in the borderland (e.g. collaboration with the Programme Monitoring Committee, and collaboration with the regional authorities on both sides of the border). A very supportive practice in this regard is the experience from CLLD-centred cross-border cooperation on the Austrian-Italian border, which serves as a role model for the EGTC Polish-Lithuanian Cross-Border Functional Area. This group is currently working on a capacity-building project through participation in the EU's Resilient Borders programme.

Some gaps exist in the capacities and competencies of stakeholders engaged in cross-border dialogue on tourism development, which should be addressed to foster local cross-border cooperation in tourism. There are related, among others:

- networking and the development of cross-border network cooperation,
- motivating local partners to engage in cross-border cooperation,
- interpersonal communication and knowledge of the neighbour's language,
- management of a cross-border project team,
- design and development of cross-border tourism products,
- marketing, promotion and advertising of tourism project results,
- tourism management.

To mitigate these gaps, activities supporting the development of tourist stakeholders in various participatory and tourism-related competencies should be implemented. They may include mentoring, participating in international networks for cross-border cooperation development, training in developing tourism-oriented competences, a social media channel, and study visits to well-developed cross-border tourism destinations. Additionally, a toolkit on implementing participatory methods in the cross-border dialogue among tourist stakeholders can be prepared. It may include support for participatory training, capacity building & skills training, negotiation & conflict management training, project management training, digital literacy training, business skills training, leadership training, networking & collaboration structures, digital tools, and online survey & polling tools.

2.1.11. Developing touristic inter-sectoral cross-border cooperation in the Lithuanian-Polish borderland

Inter-sectoral cross-border cooperation in the Lithuanian-Polish borderlands almost doesn't exist. Most business stakeholders are unaware of public tourism investments, rarely participate in projects, and see little value in cross-border partnerships. There is minimal cross-border interaction between businesses and a little better among NGOs. Many entrepreneurs view counterparts across the border as competitors rather than partners. Businesses and NGOs are not involved in EGTCs, and no other platform exists for inter-sectoral cross-border cooperation.

Tourism stakeholder networking is in its early stages, but some partners are willing to join a cross-border working group or cluster. Developing the tourist cross-border working group in the short term may serve as a booster for the development of one integrated intersectoral cross-border tourism cluster or two such clusters, depending on the project partners' interests. Currently, no entity has declared a willingness to coordinate such a cluster in the borderland. Developing any cross-border intersectoral tourist cluster is challenging, and a classic approach to such a process is needed: establish partnerships and governance, integrate assets, develop a strategy, design and promote joint offers, engage communities, and monitor progress.

2.2. Recommendations

Based on the study's conclusions, 12 recommendations have been prepared addressing suggested solutions and improvements that can be undertaken in the 2021-2027 period or the post-2027 period.

The present recommendations (as included in Table 1) are addressed to the partners collaborating under the auspices of this study, comprising the Managing Authority and National Authority of the Interreg Programme Lithuania-Poland, as well as the Joint Technical Secretariat.

These entities are responsible for ensuring the implementation of the proposed recommendations. Nevertheless, the potential implementers of these recommendations are envisioned to be diverse entities operating on both sides of the border, possessing adequate capacity and competencies to undertake interventions aligned with the recommendations.

Such entities may include, but are not limited to, European Groupings of Territorial Cooperation active in the region, self-governments, cross-border project partners, and other stakeholders from the tourism sector in the border area.

It should also be noted that the majority of the recommendations are slated for implementation in the post-2027 period and are of a strategic nature. Specifically, seven recommendations pertain to key cross-border tourism offers, while two additional strategic orientations focus on tourism investments in general.

The individual recommendations are dedicated to the following areas:

- Development of a cross-border communication strategy;
- Establishment of criteria for evaluating tourism cross-border project applications to be submitted to the INTERREG programme;
- Fostering representation of stakeholders representing the tourism sector in the decision-making process within the Programme, as well as the development of inter-sectoral cross-border touristic cooperation in a cluster-based framework.

Table 1. Recommendations of the study

No.	Report reference	Recommendation	Way of implementation	Potential implementers	Status	Completion period
1.	Key cross-border tourism offers	The Interreg programme should financially support the most outstanding cross-border tourist projects that have already been completed, which can be relaunched after the duration period, updated, clustered, and promoted more effectively at the borderland level to capitalise on the programme outcomes.	1. Boosting cross-border networking to cluster complementary cross-border tourist projects and partnerships, and develop comprehensive cross-border tourism offers within the Programme. 2. Opening the additional Interreg call on informational and promotional activities addressing cross-border tourist projects already completed to better capitalise on the programme outcomes.	1.& 2. Managing Authority National Authority Joint Technical Secretariat	1&2. Operational	1. Post 2027 2.2021-2027
2.	Key cross-border tourism offers	Inclusion in Lithuanian and Polish national, regional, and local strategies and policies related to key cross-border tourism offers designed for the borderland, including tourism concepts developed under the TCBFA (2021), and compliance with the Strategy for the Baltic Sea Region.	1. Mail the Lithuanian and Polish tourist project partners information about the completed study and draw their attention to the necessity of considering the study results when designing or updating strategies and policies on tourism development. 2. Implement cross-border spatial planning practices for neighbouring Lithuanian and Polish municipalities cooperating under the EGTC « Polish-Lithuanian Cross-Border Functional Area » and the EGTC « Nemunas»	1. Joint Technical Secretariat 2. The EGTCs: « Polish-Lithuanian Cross-Border Functional Area» and « Nemunas»	1&2. Strategic	1.&2. 2021-2027
3.	Key cross-border tourism offers	Increasing project partnerships' awareness of the future leading scopes of cross-border tourist offers and strategic orientations on investments that the Interreg programme can support, as well as scopes of projects that individual partnerships will submit to the Interreg programme to avoid overlapping and multiplying projects and provide more networking at the starting stage of the project lifespan.	1. Including in the agenda of meetings for cross-border project applicants the following issues: -presenting the scope of cross-border tourist offers and strategic orientations on investments, which the Interreg programme will primarily support; - sharing information about the scopes of projects that individual partnerships will submit to the Interreg programme to avoid overlapping and multiplying projects, and provide more networking at the starting stage of the project lifespan.	1. Joint Technical Secretariat	1. Strategic	1. Post 2027

4	Key cross-border tourism offers	Significant distinguishing and promotion of the results of the already implemented cross-border tourism projects to ensure better long-term capitalisation of the programme results, boost cross-sectoral cooperation with entrepreneurs and social organisations, and provide better capitalisation of project results.	1. Including in the agenda of meetings with stakeholders on promoting successful projects and their results, starting events of the calls and other events organised by JTS - incentives for project partners to develop cross-sectoral collaboration with entrepreneurs and social organisations to ensure better capitalisation of projects' results. 2. Within the durability period, monitor more closely whether the products of cross-border tourism projects under the Interreg Programme are still being offered to tourists, such as functioning and updated websites, web applications, online games, and availability of information and promotional materials about the projects.	1&2. Joint Technical Secretariat	1&2. Strategic	1&2. 2021-2027 Post 2027
5	Key cross-border tourism offers	Boosting the competences of project partners implementing cross-border tourism projects in terms of communication, networking, project management, tourism management, etc., as well as knowledge on the possibility of using innovative technologies in tourism and implementing innovative tourism trends;	1. Considering ongoing programme capacities, trainings and workshops should be organised within the framework of Interreg Technical Assistance funds under the programme to : - improve the competencies of project partners in developing cross-border tourism offers, including tourism management and cross-sectoral cross-border cooperation in tourism; - promote using innovative technologies in tourism and implementing innovative tourism trends. 2. Applicants for future calls on cross-border tourist projects submitting applications to the Interreg programme should ensure that the project staff is experienced in tourism management, communication, networking, and project management. This criterion should be assessed in more detail by experts (see recommendation 11).	1.Managing Authority National Authority Joint Technical Secretariat 2. Applicants for future calls on cross-border tourist projects	1&2. Operational	1&2. Post 2027
6	Strategic orientations on tourism investments	Considering the area's availability, improving the quality of active tourism infrastructure, and access to the local attractions, one should connect fragmented cycling, hiking, sailing, and kayaking routes by building missing parts and providing supportive infrastructure. When conducting this, the focus should also be on bypassing Kaliningrad Oblast and the Belarusian border area.	1. Connecting fragmented cycling, hiking, sailing, and kayaking routes by building missing parts and providing supportive infrastructure should be primarily addressed in the following calls on cross-border tourist projects within the Interreg programme. 2. Applicants for future calls on cross-border tourist projects, should focus more on connecting fragmented cycling, hiking, sailing, and kayaking routes by building missing parts and providing supportive infrastructure.	1.Managing Authority National Authority Joint Technical Secretariat 2. Applicants for future calls on cross-border tourist projects	1&2. Strategic	1&2. Post 2027

7.	Strategic orientations on tourism investments	As crucial Interreg-funded investments, cross-border educational and thematic trails, including those focusing on nature and various cultural heritage, should be developed to distinguish the area's natural and cultural values and provide a synergy effect.	1. The development of cross-border educational and thematic trails, including those focusing on nature and various cultural heritage, should be primarily addressed in the following calls on cross-border tourist projects within the Interreg programme by awarding network partnerships to develop such projects in cross-sectoral collaboration. 2. Applicants for future calls on cross-border tourist projects should focus more on connecting complementary local attractions by designing educational and thematic trails, including those focusing on nature and various cultural heritage and providing a synergy effect. 3. The most distinguished cross-border thematic trails and other routes (cycling, hiking, kayaking, etc.) should be comprehensively marked and promoted.	1. Managing Authority National Authority Joint Technical Secretariat 2. Applicants for future calls on cross-border tourist projects 3. EGTCs, tourism information centres, municipalities along the cross-border trails and routes	1,2&3. Strategic	1,2&3. Post 2027
8.	Key cross-border tourism offers	Development of the cross-border tourist information system;	1. Neighbouring Lithuanian and Polish municipalities cooperating under the EGTC « Polish-Lithuanian Cross-Border Functional Area », as well as other tourist stakeholders representing leading border tourist destinations, should establish a cross-border tourist information system, including, among other things, an app presenting the area's tourist attractions comprehensively.	1. The EGTC « Polish-Lithuanian Cross-Border Functional Area » Lithuania Travel	1. Operational	1. Post 2027
9	Key cross-border tourism offers	Considering the atmosphere of threat created by the geopolitical situation in the region, targeted promotional, informational, and PR activities should mitigate the negative image of the borderland.	1. Inter-sectoral collaboration coordinated by both EGTCs should engage tourist information centres, companies operating in the tourism industry, regional authorities in the area, media, and other leading tourist actors to boost promotional, informational, and PR activities to mitigate the negative image of the borderland caused by the geopolitical situation in the region.	1. The EGTC « Polish-Lithuanian Cross-Border Functional Area » The EGTC Nemunas, Lithuanian and Polish authorities in the border regions, Lithuania Travel tourist information centres	1. Operational	1. 2021-2027

10	Cross-border communication strategy	Creating a cross-border tourism brand is the first stage in designing a communication strategy for the Lithuanian-Polish borderland.	1. Collecting cross-border tourism products and offers might provide a critical mass for further development of a cross-border tourist brand, and follow the instructions included in the study. This can be conducted only when creating key future cross-border tourism offers is more advanced.	1. Polish and Lithuanian ministries responsible for tourism development, Lithuanian and Polish border regions, EGTCs, tourist organisations, local action groups, project partners, and other tourist stakeholders participating in the process of national/regional or local strategies and policies on tourism development	1. Strategic	1. Post 2027
11	Criteria for assessing tourism cross-border project applications to be submitted to the INTERREG programme	The process of assessing submissions to the Interreg calls on tourism should be improved to counteract cross-border fund-driven partnerships in tourism and provide a higher cross-border impact on tourism development.	1. According to the instructions included in the sub-section 6.1. the quality criteria for assessing proposals within the Interreg programme and some positions in the application form template should be improved.	1. Managing Authority National Authority Joint Technical Secretariat	1. Strategic	1. Post 2027

12	Representation of tourist stakeholders in the decision-making process within the Programme Developing touristic inter-sectoral cross-border cooperation	Increase the participation of Lithuanian and Polish tourist stakeholders in the decision-making process within the Programme and, in parallel, boost inter-sectoral collaboration in tourism on the local level.	1. Establishing a cross-border working group on tourism development according to the road map presented in the study and, later, using a cross-border working group as a vehicle and critical mass to set a core for further clustering and boosting inter-sectoral cooperation in tourism. 2. Starting a dialogue on establishing an additional delegation of observers assigned to the Monitoring Committee to expand the representation of tourist stakeholders in the decision-making process within the Programme, based on a cross-border working group on tourism development.	1&2. The EGTC « Polish-Lithuanian Cross-Border Functional Area » The EGTC Nemunas	1&2. Strategic	1&2. 2021-2027 Post 2027
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Source: Study results

