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Guide of Best Practices Regarding Integration, Societal Security and Inclusion in the Border Area

Mircea Brie
Sorin Şipoş
Karla Barth
Luminiţa Şoproni
Alina Stoica
Polgár István



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TABLE OF CONTENTS

GUIDE OF BEST PRACTICES REGARDING INTEGRATION, SOCIETAL SECURITY AND INCLUSION IN THE BORDER AREA

Foreword.....	7
----------------------	----------

KEY AREAS

Mircea Brie

Ethno-Confessional Realities and Societal Security in Bihor County	9
Introduction	11
Methodology and documentary sources	13
I. Context. Concepts. Legislative and Institutional Framework	17
II. Ethno-confessional realities and societal security. Analysis and evolution of the integration stadium, societal security, inclusion in the Bihor border area	42
III. Best Practices at the Regional and Local Level: Ethno-Confessional Realities and Societal Security	56
IV. SWOT Analysis on Ethno-Confessional Realities and Societal Security in Bihor County	74
V. Developing and Grounding Practical Recommendations	79
Conclusions	83
Bibliography	85

Sorin Șipoș (coord.), Laura Ardelean, Cosmin Patca

Historical and Cultural Heritage in Bihor County	97
Introduction	99
Methodology and Documentary Sources	100
I. Context. Concepts. Legislative and Institutional Framework	103
II. Analysis and Evolution of Integration, Societal Security, and the Inclusion of Minorities, Refugees, and Immigrants in the Border Area, in the Field of Historical and Cultural Heritage	109

III. Identification, Detailed Presentation, and Substantiation of Examples of Good Practice at Regional and Local Level in the Border Area, in the Field of Historical and Cultural Heritage.....	118
IV. SWOT Analysis of the Dynamics of Integration, Societal Security, and the Inclusion of Minorities, Refugees, and Immigrants in the Border Area, in the Field of Historical and Cultural Heritage.....	127
V. Drafting and Substantiating Practical Recommendations.....	131
Conclusions	135
Bibliography:.....	136

Karla Barth

Intercultural Education and Communication.....	141
Introduction	143
Methodology and Documentary Sources	144
I. Context. Concepts. Legislative and Institutional Framework	145
II. Analysis and Evolution of the State of Integration, Societal Security, and Inclusion of Minorities, Refugees and Immigrants in the Border Area, in the Field of Intercultural Education and Communication.....	163
III. Identification, Detailing and Substantiation of Examples of Best Practice at Regional and Local Level in the Border Area, in the Field of Intercultural Education and Communication.....	173
IV. SWOT Analysis Regarding the Dynamics of the Integration, Security and Inclusion Process for Minorities, Refugees and Immigrants in the Border Area, in the Field of Intercultural Education and Communication.....	177
V. Drafting and Substantiation of Practical Recommendations.....	184
Conclusions	188
Bibliography.....	190

Luminița Șoproni

Socio-Economic Inclusion in Bihor County.....	195
Introduction	197
Methodology and Documentary Sources	197
I. Context. European Policies	198
II. Status and Emerging Trends in Integration, Societal Security, and Inclusion in Border Regions within the Field of Socio-Economic Inclusion.....	219
III. Identifying and Validating Good Practices for Socio-Economic Inclusion in Border Regions	229
IV. SWOT Matrix – Socio-Economic Inclusion in the Border Area	248
V. Practical Directions for Advancing Socio-Economic Inclusion.....	251
Conclusions	254
Bibliography.....	256

Alina Stoica

Cultural Diplomacy in the Bihor-Hajdú-Bihar Border Region... 267

Introduction	269
Methodology and Documentary Sources	271
I. Context, Concepts, and the Legislative and Institutional Framework ..	273
II. Socio-Demographic, Cultural, and Institutional Context of the Bihor-Hajdú-Bihar Cross-Border Region	281
III. Best Practices in the Use of Cultural Diplomacy to Promote Integration, Societal Security, and Inclusion in the Bihor-Hajdú-Bihar Cross-Border Region	295
IV. SWOT Analysis of the Use of Cultural Diplomacy to Promote Integration, Societal Security, and Inclusion in the Bihor-Hajdú-Bihar Cross-Border Region	323
V. Recommendations for Strengthening the Role of Cultural Diplomacy in Promoting Integration, Societal Security, and Inclusion in the Bihor-Hajdú-Bihar Cross-Border Region	332
Conclusions	350
Bibliography:.....	352

István Polgár

Migrant Integration and Societal Security in Bihor County 361

Introduction	363
Methodology and documentary sources	365
I. Context. Concepts. Legislative and Institutional Framework.	367
II. Emerging Trends in the Border Regions within the Field of Migrant Integration. Analysis and evolution of the integration stadium, societal security and inclusion in the Bihor border area	386
III. Identifying and Validating Good Practices at regional and local level in Migrant Integration in Bihor Border Regions.....	401
IV. SWOT Matrix – Migrant integration and Societal Security in the Border Area in Bihor County	408
V. Practical Directions/Recommendations for Advancing Migrant Integration	411
Conclusions	417
Bibliography.....	419

Foreword

This thematic guide, titled *Guide of Best Practices Regarding Integration, Societal Security and Inclusion in the Border Area*, is part of an academic and applied effort, finalized as a guide of best practices regarding the integration status, societal security, and inclusion of minorities, immigrants, and refugees in the border area, with a case study on the Bihor County region. This guide is structured into six key areas of analysis: ethno-confessional realities and societal security; historical and cultural heritage; intercultural education and communication; socio-economic inclusion; cultural diplomacy; migration and integration.

Each key area of analysis is structured and methodologically designed so that it can be used as a distinct and comprehensive guide of best practices for the specific thematic area it addresses. Based on this reality, we methodologically assume a few limited overlaps regarding the conceptual, regulatory, or institutional parts, as well as the examples used to argue and capitalize as much as possible on each key area of analysis. The approach is, of course, different, and the focus is oriented toward the specificity of each field.

The six thematic guides have an identical structure at the level of the main chapters.

The guides begin with the introductory part, presenting the specific methodology and the documentation sources. Within each guide, the context, concepts, legislative regulations, and institutional framework were then pursued.

This was followed by the analysis and evolution of the status of integration, societal security, and inclusion in the border area of Bihor County, with a focus on the situation of minorities, refugees, and immigrants.

Particular importance was given to identifying, detailing, and substantiating examples of best practices at the regional and local levels in the border area, and to conducting a SWOT analysis regarding the dynamics of the process of integration, societal security, and inclusion of minorities, refugees, and immigrants in the border area for each key area of analysis.

Within each thematic guide, the experts drafted and substantiated practical recommendations that can serve both to improve integration, societal security, and inclusion in the border area of Bihor, and to use them in other border areas with a mixed identity-based population.

This volume integrates the six thematic guides, specific to the key areas of analysis, succeeding in constituting a *Guide of Best Practices Regarding Integration, Societal Security and Inclusion in the Border Area* that can be used in other border regions to multiply best practices and to implement the recommendations resulting from this analysis.

The volume brings together research and analysis as part of the activities carried out within the EuroINCLUS Jean Monnet Center of Excellence project titled "Identity, Security and Inclusivity in border areas of South East Europe," implemented by the University of Oradea.

Mircea Brie, *project coordinator*
EuroINCLUS Research Center
Jean Monnet Center of Excellence

GUIDE OF BEST PRACTICES REGARDING
INTEGRATION, SOCIETAL SECURITY AND
INCLUSION IN THE BORDER AREA

Key area

**Ethno-Confessional Realities and
Societal Security in Bihor County**

by Mircea Brie

Introduction

The development of intercultural border regions can serve as a true example of best practices and models of integration and cooperation between communities, where global challenges intersect directly with the dynamics of local and community realities. This thematic guide is part of an academic and applied initiative, materialized as a *Guide of best practices regarding integration, societal security and inclusion in the border area*, structured around six key areas of analysis. This chapter has been developed and designed both as an integral part alongside the other key areas and as a standalone Guide that can be used separately. It is dedicated to the pillar represented by the key area of analysis: *Ethno-confessional realities and societal security*.

The approach focuses on the analysis of an area with a deep historical and geopolitical significance: the Romanian-Hungarian border space, with an applied focus on the case study of Bihor County. Throughout history, this space, like many others in border regions, has experienced numerous examples of dysfunctions that formed the basis of inter-community and inter-state conflicts and tensions, including those of a geopolitical nature. The two World Wars of the first half of the 20th century, and the broader context in which they occurred, are examples of extreme tensions and conflicts. These have most often constituted sources of societal insecurity, even in post-war periods.

Societal security is fluid. Recent phenomena such as forced migration and refugees, the demographic aging of certain historical communities, the radicalization of online discourse, and economic border asymmetries can destabilize long-standing balances. The guide justifies the need for a structured SWOT analysis to identify vulnerabilities and sources of societal insecurity before they turn into cleavages and identity borders.

The experience gained in the Romanian-Hungarian space regarding minority protection and cross-border cooperation constitutes a model of best practices that, in our view, can be replicated. A transfer of know-how can be achieved toward other regions with mixed populations along the southeastern borders of the EU, as well as toward countries aspiring to join the European Union

(for instance, the Western Balkan states or the Eastern Partnership), where unresolved ethnic tensions stall integration processes¹.

The examples of best practices in cross-border cooperation manifest multidimensionally across the entire regional ecosystem. Beyond the strategic partnerships between national, county, and local authorities — with the main pillar represented by the establishment of the Bihor-Hajdú-Bihar Euroregion and the close agreements between the Oradea City Hall and Debrecen City Hall — successful initiatives have gradually encompassed all actors within the societal sphere.

Other relevant examples in the field of inter-ethnic and inter-confessional relationship management include the following: a. The close partnership between the University of Oradea and the University

¹ See the cases of some examples that we analyzed on the occasion of other research regarding these EU proximity spaces: Mircea Brie, Ana-Maria Costea, Nicolae Toderaș, *The European Orientation of the Republic of Moldova. Romania's Support for this Process / Orientarea Europeană a Republicii Moldova. Demersuri de sprijinire din partea României*, Debrecen University Press / Editura Universității din Oradea, Oradea, 2025; Iordan Gheorghe Bărbulescu (coord.), Mircea Brie, Nicolae Toderaș, *Cooperarea transfrontalieră între România și Ucraina, respectiv între România și Republica Moldova. Oportunități și provocări între 2014-2020 [The cross-border cooperation between Romania and Ukraine, and between Romania and the Republic of Moldova. Opportunities and challenges over the 2014-2020 period]*, Tritonic, București, 2016; István-József Polgár, Mircea Brie (coord.), *The Enlargement of the EU Towards the Western Balkans*, Oradea, supliment *Analele Universității din Oradea, Seria Relații Internaționale și Studii Europene*, Debrecen University Press/ Oradea University Press, 2025; István-József Polgár, Mircea Brie (coord.), *The legitimacy of new regionalism in the European integration process*, supliment *Analele Universității din Oradea, Seria Relații Internaționale și Studii Europene*, Debrecen / Oradea, 2023; Mircea Brie, Ioan Horga, Sorin Șipoș (coord.), *Ethnicity and Intercultural Dialogue at the European Union's East Border*, Cambridge Scholars Publishing, 2013; Mircea Brie, Angela Solcan, *The Identity Challenges of the European Integration Process of North Macedonia*, in Polgár István, Mircea Brie (coord.), *The Enlargement of the EU Towards the Western Balkans*, Oradea, supliment *Analele Universității din Oradea, Seria Relații Internaționale și Studii Europene*, Debrecen University Press/ Oradea University Press, 2025, p. 7-28; Mircea Brie, Alexandru Solcan, *Identity and societal security in the Republic of Moldova. Civil society perceptions and engagement*, in *Civil Szemle*, vol. XXII, Budapest, 2025/1, p. 157-175; Ramona Goga, Mircea Brie, *Identity Challenges of the Integration Process of Bosnia and Herzegovina. The Case of the Republika Srpska*, in *EUROPOLITY. Continuity and Change in European Governance*, Vol. 20, no. 1, 2026, p. 27-65, <http://doi.org/10.25019/europolity.2026.20.1.2>; etc.

of Debrecen has generated innovative, large-scale projects; b. Joint projects between local museums (such as the *Muzeul Țării Crișurilor* in Oradea and the *Déri Museum* in Debrecen) facilitate heritage digitization, travelling exhibition organization, and the integrated promotion of thematic rural tourism; c. The long-standing institutional partnership between the Bihor County Police Inspectorate and the Hajdú-Bihar County Police Headquarters ensures the harmonization of operational techniques and the fight against cross-border crime; d. The active cooperation of local non-governmental organizations toward developing human capital and human resources/employment strategies; e. in a complementary manner, cross-border dioceses and confessional structures implement ecumenical programs, actions, and social assistance networks that convert religious diversity into a vector of stability and societal resilience.

In practice, the communities in Bihor and the neighboring region in Hungary (Hajdú-Bihar) are the natural beneficiaries of the Interreg Romania-Hungary (ROHU) cross-border cooperation programs. Evidence shows that financial support allocated to joint cultural projects, academic exchanges, cross-border ecumenism, and civil society networks effectively leverages ethno-confessional differences as social capital, significantly reducing the "barrier effect" of the border².

Methodology and Documentary Sources

In accordance with the common methodological plan of the six key areas of the *Guide of best practices regarding integration, societal security and inclusion in the border area* and with the priorities established for the pillar *Ethno-confessional realities and societal security*, the methodological approach is designed as a complex, integrated, and multilevel strategy. It combines qualitative and

² See for more details BRECO, *Interreg VI-A Romania–Hungary Programme (2021–2027)*, https://interreg-rohu.eu/en/the-interreg-vi-a-romania-hungary-programme-for-2021-2027-period-was-adopted/?utm_source=chatgpt.com, accessed on May 16th, 2026.

quantitative analysis to transform local empirical data into a strategic policy paper tool³.

The **purpose** of this study is the multidimensional analysis of ethno-confessional realities and the dynamics of societal security in the Romanian-Hungarian border space (with an emphasis on Bihor County). More specifically, the purpose includes identifying, substantiating, and systematizing best practice models capable of supporting social integration and inclusion. This approach offers a replicable framework for the transfer of know-how to other multiethnic regions or countries aspiring to join the European Union.

The assumed **objectives** are:

O1. *Analysis of the legislative and institutional framework.* This includes an in-depth analysis of local, national, and European policies, programs, and legal instruments regarding diversity management and societal security.

O2. *Analysis of ethno-religious inclusion and diagnostic assessment through a SWOT analysis.* An analysis of the current situation and emerging risks regarding ethno-religious minorities and societal security in the Bihor County region, substantiated by identifying 5 strengths, weaknesses, opportunities, and threats respectively.

O3. *Documentation of best practices and development of a set of recommendations.* Identifying successful models in the border area and translating them into an applied action plan with clear monitoring tools.

In our analysis, we start from two **research hypotheses**:

- H1. Structured and direct funding of cross-border cooperation (such as Interreg ROHU programs) in the administrative, academic, cultural, and religious spheres significantly reduces the "barrier effect" of the border, transforming ethno-confessional differences from sources of insecurity into positive social capital.

- H2. The existence of a consolidated local institutional framework directly enhances societal resilience, preventing emerging risks (migration, inter-ethnic or religious tensions, radicalized discourse) from turning into open identity cleavages.

³ Neuman, William Lawrence, *Social Research Methods, Qualitative and Quantitative Approaches* (7. ed.), Pearson Education Limited, Harlow Essex, UK, 2014, p. 204.

Our **research question** is: How can the best practices in the field of ethno-confessional realities from Bihor County be effectively utilized to ensure regional stability and societal security in the face of emerging risks, and to serve as a model for cross-border cooperation applicable at the European level?

The **levels of analysis**. The investigative process moves from a macro *level of analysis* (European/national) toward a regional/euroregional (cross-border) level and ultimately reaches a micro level (local and community).

The **research methods** used are directly correlated with the design of the guide to ensure a smooth transition from theoretical analysis to practical administrative recommendations⁴.

Thus, in the implementation process, we employ the following set of **research methods and tools**:

- Documentary and legal analysis, as an example of a mainly qualitative methodology⁵ („the traditional type of qualitative inquiry”⁶), used for inventorying and interpreting national legislation, bilateral treaties, and European directives.
- Demographic and statistical analysis, consisting of extracting and interpreting demographic and confessional data from the databases of institutions and territorial-administrative units (UATs) in Bihor.
- Regional and cross-border case study, which involves identifying and substantiating examples of best practices in the field of ethno-religious realities within Bihor County and projects completed through the Interreg ROHU program at the cross-border level.

⁴ See for more information regarding the relation between theory and data in Wagenknecht, Susann; Nancy J. Neressian and Hanne Andersen, *Introducing Qualitative Methods into Philosophy of Science*, Springer Publishing, Cham, Switzerland, 2015, p. 37; Sarah J. Tracy, *Qualitative Research Methods Collecting Evidence, Crafting Analysis, Communicating Impact* (2. ed.), Wiley Blackwell, Hoboken, NJ, USA, 2020, p. 80.

⁵ Given, Lisa M. (ed.), *The SAGE Encyclopedia of Qualitative Research and Methods*, Volumes 1 & 2, SAGE Pub., Thousand Oaks, CA, USA, 2008, p. 865.

⁶ Matthew B. Miles; A. Michael Huberman and Johnny Saldana, *Qualitative Data Analysis A Methods Sourcebook* (3. ed.), SAGE Pub., Los Angeles, CA, USA, 2014, p. 114.

- Strategic diagnosis method (SWOT), by classifying the collected data into a minimum of 5 strengths, weaknesses, opportunities, and threats specific to local resilience.

Documentary sources. The research utilizes a mixed documentary base, classified as follows:

- *Primary sources* (official statistical and administrative databases of public institutions and territorial-administrative units [UATs] in Bihor County; official records; contracts and implementation reports of active cross-border projects).

- *Secondary sources* (national and international literature focused on theories of societal security, minority management, and the sociology of religions; previous academic studies conducted by profile research centers within the Romanian-Hungarian space).

- *Legal and programmatic documents* (normative acts regulating inclusion policies, official guidelines of Interreg programs, and regional development strategies).

The **justification and utility** of this practical guide derive from fundamental academic, strategic, and administrative considerations. The study addresses a gap in integrated analysis from a multidimensional (qualitative and quantitative) perspective. It correlates classical theories of societal security with the concrete administrative realities of minority management at a critical EU border, providing clear indicators to scientifically understand why this successful model works. The guide goes beyond the boundaries of fundamental research, being conceived as a solid starting point for a policy paper. It offers policymakers and local, national, and European authorities a coherent set of tools, as well as a series of practical recommendations for substantiating strategic decisions.

Integrating policy analysis, SWOT diagnostics, and a strategic action plan, this chapter provides the methodological guidance needed to transform historical vulnerabilities into competitive advantages and societal resilience.

I. Context. Concepts. Legislative and Institutional Framework⁷

1. The context of this thematic guide relates to the historical, geopolitical, and demographic realities of Bihor County, as well as its geographic location near the border⁸.

Bihor County, through its geographical positioning and historical evolution, encompasses a demographic and confessional structure of distinct complexity. The coexistence between the Romanian majority and the Hungarian community, alongside the demographically dynamic Roma population and historical minorities such as Slovaks, Germans, or Jews, has generated a model of cultural interaction based on intercultural dialogue and a remarkable ethnic balance⁹.

This ethnic reality overlaps with a heavily polarized and diversified religious landscape, divided between Eastern Christianity (Orthodoxy and Greek Catholicism), historical Western confessions

⁷ Parts of this section can be found in our other previously published research: Mircea Brie, Mirela Mărcuț, István Polgár, *Guide for the Development of International Cooperation. The Case of Bihor County*, Bilingual edition (Eng / Ro), Debrecen University Press / Editura Universității din Oradea, Oradea, 2023; Mircea Brie, *Perspective de analiză interdisciplinară privind învățarea despre minoritățile etno-naționale*, in Mircea Brie, Karla Barth, Dragoș Dărbăneanu, István Polgár (coord.), *Integrarea europeană și reformarea educației românești. Comunicarea interculturală și dialogul multiethnic*, Debrecen University Press, 2021, p. 97-160; Mircea Brie, *The impact of political factors on ethno-national realities in northwestern Transylvania. One hundred years after the First World War*, in István Polgár, Ioan Horga, Mircea Brie (eds), *Ethnic Minorities and Majorities – Migration and Integration*, Debrecen University Press, 2016; Mircea Brie, *Ethnicity and politics in the Romanian space. The case of northwestern Transylvania*, in Sorin Șipoș, Gabriel Moisa, Dan Octavian Cepraga, Mircea Brie, Teodor Mateoc (coord.), *From Periphery to Centre. The Image of Europe at the Eastern Border of Europe*, Editura Academia Română. Centrul de Studii Transilvane, Cluj-Napoca, 2014, p. 158-170.

⁸ Mircea Brie, *The European Neighborhood Policy, Mass-media and Cross-border Cooperation*, in *Analele Universității din Oradea, Seria Relații Internaționale și Studii Europene*, 2009, p. 83.

⁹ Mircea Brie, *Ethnicity, Religion and Intercultural Dialogue in the European Border Space*, in Mircea Brie, Ioan Horga, Sorin Șipoș (coord.), *Ethnicity, Confession and Intercultural Dialogue at the European Union's East Border*, Editura Universității din Oradea/Editura Universității din Debrecen, supliment Eurolimes, Oradea/Debrecen, 2011, p. 11-18.

(Roman Catholicism and Protestantism/Calvinism, reflected predominantly among the Hungarian population), and an extremely dynamic neo-Protestant sector (Pentecostals, Baptists, Adventists).

The societal balance and resilience of the community in Bihor County are the direct result of a solid local institutional framework. In accordance with Romanian legislation, administrative bilingualism is implemented in localities with significant minority proportions. This framework also supports the proportional funding of religious denominations and the maintenance of pre-university education (for both ethno-linguistic and confessional-religious minorities), as well as higher education for minorities (as demonstrated by higher education institutions such as Partium Christian University and Emanuel University of Oradea).

Churches and religious denominations in Bihor function as genuine social actors and providers of societal security, managing extensive networks of social assistance, hospitals, day centers, and schools. The regular ecumenical dialogue among the denominations present in Bihor—and their regional leaderships based in Oradea—serves as an informal yet highly effective mechanism for defusing any potential inter-community and societal tensions.

1.1. The Historical Context of Ethno-Confessional Evolution in Bihor County

The evolution of the ethnic and confessional structure in the Bihor region has been shaped over the past two centuries by a succession of major geopolitical transformations, often radical political decisions, and differing political regimes. This Transylvanian borderland serves as a mirror reflecting how historical, legislative, and administrative factors can reconfigure collective identities, alternating between periods of extreme tension and stages of democratic stabilization.

The second half of the 19th century opened under the auspices of hope, with the Imperial Constitution of 1849 granting freedoms to all inhabitants of the Habsburg Monarchy, followed in the 1860s by the recognition of political and religious rights for Romanians and other ethnic groups. However, the year 1865 and the establishment of the Austro-Hungarian Dualism in 1867 abolished the autonomy of Transylvania, politically incorporating it into Hungary. Until World War I, the non-Hungarian population was subjected to an intense

process of Magyarization, legislatively supported by Budapest through the repeal of measures favorable to minorities¹⁰.

The historic act of December 1, 1918, and the Romanian Constitution of 1923 reversed the administrative dynamic, guaranteeing individual and collective freedoms to all citizens, regardless of nationality or religion. This stage brought expanded religious freedom through the Law of Cults of 1928, while also marking the beginning of an urban Romanianization process, driven by the new administration's need to consolidate a loyal, Romanian-speaking local elite.

The 1940–1944 period brought back a critical situation for the Romanians of Bihor in the context of territorial dictates, but the most dramatic impact of World War II was the irreversible alteration of ethnic pluralism through the deportation and extermination of the Jewish community. This group had previously represented a fundamental demographic, economic, and religious pillar of the region.

The establishment of the communist regime introduced severe disruptions through forced population homogenization policies. Confessional pluralism was targeted by banning the Greek Catholic Church and certain neo-Protestant communities. In parallel, during the post-war period, structural assimilation was coupled with the mass emigration—partially orchestrated by the state—of ethnic Jews, Germans, and Hungarians, considerably reducing their share in the territory.

The cumulative consequences of the 20th-century totalitarian regimes (both Horthyist and communist) left a visible mark on the ethno-linguistic configuration of Bihor, reflected by several structural realities¹¹:

¹⁰ Mircea Brie, *Familie și societate în nord-vestul Transilvaniei (a doua jumătate a secolului XIX – începutul secolului XX)* [Family and society in the North-West of Transylvania (second half of the 19th century – beginning of the 20th century)], Editura Universității din Oradea, Oradea, 2008. Mircea Brie, *Căsătoria în nord-vestul Transilvaniei (a doua jumătate a secolului XIX – începutul secolului XX). Condiționări exterioare și strategii maritale* [The marriage in North West of Transylvania (second half of the 19th century – beginning of the 20th century). External conditioning and marital strategies], Editura Universității din Oradea, Oradea, 2009.

¹¹ Mircea Brie, *op. cit.*, 2016.

- *The disappearance of historical communities.* There is an almost absolute disappearance of Jewish and German minorities from the demographic landscape.

- *The reversal of the linguistic dynamic.* While in 1918 the Hungarian language was known by the majority of Romanians and very little vice versa, today the Romanian language is acquired by the vast majority of ethnic Hungarians, while knowledge of the Hungarian language has become rare among Romanians.

- *Religion as an identity vector.* The Reformed (Calvinist) Church and the Roman Catholic Church have consolidated themselves as exponents of preserving the Hungarian ethno-cultural identity, embracing a strong identity message in the Oradea region.

- *The dynamics of the Roma community.* A history marked by stigmatization led to long-term underrepresentation in official data, with many Roma self-identifying as Hungarian during the communist period. In the last two decades, this phenomenon has reversed due to the consolidation of their own self-awareness, the emergence of a Roma elite, and an increased birth rate, generating numerical growth and an enhanced expression of identity in the public sphere.

The collapse of the communist regime in 1989 brought the restoration of democratic values and the recognition of the right to free religious practice for 23 cults, marked by the re-establishment of the Greek Catholic Church and the revitalization of neo-Protestant denominations. This religious reopening, correlated with the opening of borders and subsequent European integration, has propelled Bihor County from a space of historical vulnerabilities into a regional model where historical multiculturalism functionally blends into an active interculturality.

1.2. Bihor County within the Dynamics of European Integration

Romania's accession to the European Union on January 1, 2007, marked the conclusion of a difficult transition period and the beginning of a structural itinerary aimed at bringing the country closer to Western European standards. This historic moment signified Romania's adoption of the fundamental principles of community development, with economic and social cohesion as a major operational priority, achieved by reducing regional disparities, stimulating employment, and promoting sustainable growth. For Bihor County, as a border territory, this unique construct brought about a profound reconfiguration of its economic, social, and identity

realities, transforming the old "hard border" into an open space of cooperation and multilevel integration.

Over the past two decades, the European integration process has brought a radical shift in perception regarding national state borders. The eastern enlargement of the European Union diluted the barrier function of the Romanian-Hungarian border, shifting the pressure of the EU's external border and its strict security to other geopolitical alignments. For Bihor County, this opening meant the full implementation of the four fundamental freedoms: the free movement of goods, persons, services, and capital. The effects were felt directly at the local level through the massive attraction of foreign investments, the intensification of commercial exchanges with Hungary, and the creation of new jobs. However, the dynamics also included specific vulnerabilities, such as the brain drain of qualified labor, migration, and the need to adapt swiftly to economic border asymmetries¹².

In this changing reality, the county's societal security is directly influenced by macroeconomic factors, as the local ethno-confessional balance critically depends on social stability and the capacity of institutions to manage the inclusion of new groups of migrants or refugees.

Within this framework, the added value of European territorial cooperation becomes indispensable for the management of inter-ethnic and inter-confessional relations in the county. Funding instruments, such as the Interreg Romania-Hungary (ROHU) cross-border cooperation programs, have demonstrated that financial support allocated to joint projects prevents borders from turning into psychological or cultural barriers. Cooperation within the Bihor-Hajdú-Bihar Euroregion, alongside partnerships between universities, hospitals, and NGOs from Oradea and Debrecen represent essential bridges that convert ethno-religious differences into positive social capital. In conclusion, European integration has not only modernized the infrastructure of Bihor County but has also provided the necessary institutional framework to transform the

¹² Lucian-Liviu Albu (coordonator), Radu Lupu, Adrian-Cantemir Călin, Oana-Cristina Popovici, *Impactul aderării României la Uniunea Europeană asupra economiei românești. Analiză sectorială (industrie, agricultură, servicii etc.)*, Institutul European din România, București, 2018.

specific historical vulnerabilities of a contact zone into competitive advantages and long-term societal resilience.

2. Ethno-confessional Realities. Conceptual Analysis

The focus of our analysis is on the concepts associated with the keywords of the central pillar of this thematic guide *ethno-confessional realities* and *societal security*. These are associated with the concepts of *identity* at the 3 levels: national (main), supranational (European) and subnational (regional/local).

This analysis centers on ethno-national communities and cultural communication. Multicultural and intercultural models involve varying degrees of interconnection. Unlike mere coexistence, interculturality requires people to live closely connected, implying both acceptance and the mutual borrowing of specific elements. Thus, an intercultural society becomes a shared, participatory construction, moving beyond the simple juxtaposition of distinct groups. This model represents an alternative to multiculturalism, having been visibly implemented in Europe since 2007 and in Canada since 2008¹³.

Patrice Pavis defines interculturalism as a model with “hybrid forms that are based on a more or less conscious and voluntary mixing of performance traditions that can be identified in distinct cultural areas”¹⁴. T. Cante suggests that the application of the concept of interculturalism must also take into account the phenomenon of globalization, and that the ethnic majority's fear of losing power and identity must be replaced¹⁵. In his view, interculturalism must be the policy of the future, and societies must leave behind the baggage of the past. Only in this way can an intercultural society prosper in social relations, both internally and externally¹⁶.

¹³ Ch. McIvor, *Migration and performance in contemporary Ireland. Towards a New Interculturalism*, Palgrave Macmillan, Londra, 2016, p. 1.

¹⁴ Pavis, P., *Introduction: Towards a theory of interculturalism in theatre?*, in Patrice Pavis (ed.), *The intercultural performance reader*, Routledge, 1996. Apud Ch. McIvor, op. cit., p. 1.

¹⁵ T. Cante, *Interculturalism. The New Era of Cohesion and Diversity*, Palgrave Macmillan, Houndmills, 2012, p. 168.

¹⁶ *Ibidem.*, p. 173.

2.1. Principles and Models of Ethno-National and Religious Diversity Management

The preservation of specific identity lies at the foundation of developing an intercultural society. Until this stage of societal development is achieved, it is necessary to ensure the protection of national, ethnic, and religious minorities.

The literature and models resulting from international practice identify several general *principles* that underpin the protection of ethno-national minorities¹⁷:

a) *the principle of respect for diversity* – by promoting coexistence within the same shared habitat and equality, this principle is "to a large extent different from the principle of tolerance, which implied the arrogance of a hierarchical relationship between the tolerant and the tolerated" and ensures the mechanism for protecting the rights of all ethno-national and linguistic communities;

b) *the principle of collaborative coexistence* (partnership between cultural-identity communities) – based on this principle, ethno-national minorities are involved in the process of local, regional, and national governance (general leadership);

c) *the principle of positive discrimination* – ethno-national and cultural minorities are granted privileged rights in relation to the majority. These benefits are granted to compensate for inequalities and differences in socio-economic and cultural status and to stimulate integration;

d) *the principle of cultural identity preservation* – entails the creation of an institutional and legislative framework that contributes to preserving the specific elements of ethno-national and cultural-identity communities;

e) *the principle of multicultural integration* (multiculturalism) – which "goes beyond mere coexistence and, equally rejecting both the assimilation of minorities and their isolation (insularization, ghettoization), aims for the members of each entity, whether majority or minority, to internalize, understand, respect, and express themselves according to the specific cultural values of the other coexisting cultural communities."

¹⁷ Adrian Severin, *Stabilitatea și sfidările multiculturalismului civic în Europa*, in Rudolf Poledna, François Ruegg, Călin Rus (coord.), *Interculturalitate. Cercetări și perspective românești*, Presa Universitară Clujeană, Cluj-Napoca, 2002, p. 21.

These principles can form the basis for consolidating a society that ensures the peaceful coexistence of cultural and ethno-national communities that are distinct from an identity perspective.

f) In our view, however, there is a need to deepen the stage of identity "preservation" provided by multiculturalism. A closer "cooperation" is required among coexisting communities, rather than just a collaboration or simply living next to each other. Cooperation implies a much deeper cultural exchange. This is where intercultural dialogue and intercultural education come into play, facilitating the creation of an *intercultural society*. Such a stage of societal development implies moving beyond the phase of multiculturalism toward something higher and integrative in nature. At the foundation of this desirable transformation lies the *principle of interculturality*.

The principles of preserving and protecting minority identity support, argue for, and facilitate the realization of the objectives of intercultural education to create a society for everyone¹⁸.

Given the main theories and principles applied in inter-ethnic relations, the specialized literature has identified several *models* for the handling and management of relations between the minority and the majority. It is unlikely that these models are implemented in a pure form. Most often, they take abstract and idealized shapes which, in few situations, can be directly transposed to the reality on the ground. As a rule, states and societies adapt themselves and adjust these types of models to achieve the "compromises" necessary to ensure a balance. If it is not possible to achieve a state of general satisfaction and peace in inter-ethnic relations, then at least direct conflict should be avoided.

Christine Inglis highlights the existence of three main models through which states manage their policies in responding to ethnic diversity: the assimilation model, the differentiation model, and the multiculturalism model¹⁹. These models are "abstract" and "ideal,"

¹⁸ Cristina Straistari-Lungu, *Rolul educatorului în promovarea unei educații interculturale*, https://ibn.idsi.md/sites/default/files/imag_file/500-504.pdf, accessed on May 26th, 2026.

¹⁹ Christine Inglis, *Multiculturalism: New Policy Responses to Diversity*, in *Management of Social Transformations (MOST) – UNESCO, Policy Paper - No. 4*, <http://digital-library.unesco.org/shs/most/gsd/cgi-bin/library?e=d-000-00---0most--00-0-0--0prompt-10---4-----0-11--1-en-50---20-about---00031-001-1-OutfZz-8-00&a=d&c=most&cl=CL4.1&d=HASH01642e20b5302ceb94565abc>, accessed on May 26th, 2026.

based on “specific ideological-normative statements relating to the relationship between ethnic groups in a society”²⁰. Synthetically, according to the theses supported by Inglis, the three models presuppose:

- The assimilation model (this is the case in contexts found in states such as the United States of America or France). The model envisions the full incorporation of ethnic minorities into the majority society. Individuals belonging to national minorities abandon their distinct linguistic, cultural, and social characteristics and adopt the characteristic elements of the majority group. The emphasis falls on the individual. In the case of this model, minorities are reduced to a level below that of a group of individuals. The individual „opts” for change. „In this model, there is no place provided for the maintenance of distinct cultural, linguistic, or social practices. By being completely absorbed by the majority society, it is argued that the bases for ethnic conflict cease to exist”²¹.

- The differentiation model (see the past cases of the Aborigines in Australia, for example, who were excluded from being „received” into the ranks of the majority through integration or even assimilation). This model involves avoiding conflict through a process that eliminates or minimizes contact with minorities. It is situated at the opposite extreme in relation to the assimilation model. It does not aim for assimilation or the inclusion of individuals from minority groups into the majority, but rather for the total separation of the groups. An extreme vision of the differentiation model includes the expulsion of ethnic minorities or prevents minorities from participating in the social life of the country in which they live. Beyond this extreme vision, the differentiation model can imply „institutional separation”, the development of parallel institutions to minimally serve the educational, health, or cultural needs of ethnic minorities, which excludes them from satisfying these needs within the specific institutions of the majority²².

- The multiculturalism model (adopted by countries such as Australia, Canada, Sweden, or Romania) recognizes the legitimacy and the need for the preservation of one's own identity and for equality between ethnic groups regarding the expression of cultural

²⁰ *Ibidem*.

²¹ *Ibidem*.

²² *Ibidem*.

diversity. Multiculturalism includes minorities as part of the whole society and accepts their distinct cultural characteristics without denying them participation in public life. In this case, the state reforms itself at an institutional level. The multicultural model presupposes an integrative effort by the state to support the „parallel institutions” of the minority (the existence of these is also assumed by the differentiation model – but in that case, they are marginalized). Multiculturalism is the only one that recognizes „the legitimacy and necessity of the equality of ethnic groups in the expression of their diverse cultures”²³.

Another model found in the specialized literature is that of *consociationalism*. This was proposed by Arend Lijphart²⁴ and represents a political management formula dedicated to pluri-identity states affected by ethno-national, linguistic, or religious cleavages. This system is based on a communitarian "contract" where the supreme interest is maintaining state stability and promoting shared citizenship, placing the emphasis on the collective rights of the communities and less on the individual. The fundamental pillars of consociationalism involve ensuring proportional access for all groups to political power and the decision-making process, especially when vital rights are concerned²⁵. Governance is achieved through broad coalitions and proportional representation, guaranteeing equitable access to the symbolic and material goods of the state.

By offering real opportunities for internal development and self-determination, the system discourages extremism and stimulates political moderation. Among the states that have implemented consociational mechanisms to varying degrees are Belgium, Switzerland, Cyprus, South Africa, Bosnia and Herzegovina, North Macedonia, Finland, and Northern Ireland²⁶.

The *interculturalism model* represents the most complex framework for ensuring peaceful coexistence. While multiculturalism

²³ *Ibidem*.

²⁴ Will Kymlicka, *Teorie politică occidentală și relații etnice în Europa de Est*, in *Polis*, 2/2000, p. 203-204.

²⁵ Christopher McCrudden, *Consociationalism, equality and minorities in the Northern Ireland Bill of Rights debate: the inglorious role of the OSCE high commissioner for national minorities*, in John Morison, Kieran McEvoy, Gordon Anthony (ed), *Judges, transition and human rights cultures*, Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2006, p. 1 – 4.

²⁶ *Ibidem*, p. 2.

merely guarantees pluralism and the free expression of identities within the same space, interculturality implies a profound process of cultural interaction and exchange. Promoted through tailored education and public policies, interculturalism is often viewed as an abstract, elusive ideology. Nevertheless, it provides the strategic direction through which ethno-national communities, in close cooperation with the state, can maintain the fragile balance of societal security and the satisfaction of all identity groups.

We note that these are extreme models that are not found in an exact, idealistic form within any specific state; furthermore, states' public policies may combine these approaches. The models are, fundamentally, abstract and idealistic. In reality, states adapt these models to the realities and specific characteristics of their population and ethno-national groups. In this process, historical heritage and the 'dialogue' between groups can play an important role in harmonizing the public policy models, programs, and instruments used to manage inter-ethnic relations within a society.

In decisions regarding minority integration policies, it is necessary to resort to the principle of ethno-cultural equity. However, its institutionalization is far from being achieved as long as a committed decision emanates from a practice of the majority. This execution principle, typical of representative democracies, often induces a „feeling of subservience”²⁷ among ethno-cultural minorities²⁸.

2.2. European, National, and Regional Identity

Identity, regardless of the level of reference (European, national, or regional/local), is found as a form of expression in the public space despite universalist trends, globalization, or the homogenization of community values, characteristics, or expressions. Elements of ethno-religious identity are found in the global public space, including in forms multiplied through the propagation channels of the global. Therefore, it is not only the global that multiplies, but also the particular, the specific. The latter, often taking forms of extremism, nationalism, or ethno-religious violence, are seen multiplied by

²⁷ Levente Salat, *Multiculturalismul liberal. Bazele normative ale existenței minoritare autentice*, Editura Polirom, Iași, 2001, p. 81.

²⁸ Mircea Brie, Cosmin Adrian Pop, István Polgár, *Interculturality and Ethnodiversity in Post-Comunist Romania*, in *Analele Universității din Oradea, Seria Relații Internaționale și Studii Europene*, 2012, p. 111-112.

gaining followers thousands of kilometers away. Furthermore, the national and ethnic state, associated with the national territory, has not only managed to survive the pressures of the „global society” but has demonstrated an even greater capacity for affiliation. *Identity globalization* has proven to be stronger in urban and industrialized societies, and where substantial rural areas, a rich heritage, and cultural tradition exist, a resistance to globalization has developed²⁹. Thus, the local, national-cultural identity is preserved more strongly in the rural-agrarian environment and in the reference proximity area of cultural sites.

Beyond economic realities, we propose three levels of analysis regarding the concept of identity: the European level, the national level, and the regional level. A European can be Italian, German, or Romanian. At the same time, an Italian can be Sicilian, Neapolitan, Venetian, Piedmontese, Tuscan, etc.; a German can be Bavarian, Saxon, Prussian, or even Austrian. At the same time, Transylvanians, Oltenians, Banatians, or Moldavians can together express the feeling of Romanian Romanity.

Theoretical analyses, on the other hand, capture a debate around the subjective and objective dimensions of identity. Unlike the concept of national origin, which refers to something given, inherited through birth, national identity is, above all, the expression of the consciousness of belonging to a cultural community that defines itself as a political community. It is to this reality that Ernest Renan refers when he suggestively characterizes the nation as a „daily plebiscite”³⁰. In this case, national identity is linked to the concept of the nation. The analysis encompasses at least two fundamental, interconnected dimensions: The existence of a segment of the population living in a specific territory in sufficient numbers to allow for the perpetuation and development of a sense of identity (belonging to a community) among its members is indicative of the demographic dimension. A certain type of relationship that expresses a sense of identity and belonging, a "community spirit," is also indicative of the demographic

²⁹ Florin Poenaru, *Republica Moldova: complexul de superioritate al României*, <http://www.criticatac.ro/18342/republica-moldova-ca-sindrom/>, accessed on May 26th, 2026.

³⁰ Apud Gábor Flóra, *Identitate și ideologie națională: o perspectivă socio-istorică*, in Balogh Brigitta, Bernáth Krisztina, Bujalos István, Adrian Hatos, Murányi István (coord.), *Identitate europeană, națională și regional. Teorie și practică*, Editura Partium, Oradea, 2011, p. 114.

dimension³¹. Such a perspective on the nation is in line with the philosophy of the Westphalian state, which places the idea of the nation-state at its center.

Conceptually, the entire identity edifice entails at least two specific elements from the very moment of its construction:

- national identity born from ethnic belonging
- national identity born from civic/citizen belonging

In the first case, national identity serves a specific ethnic group often in competition with other ethnic groups (most frequently present within the same space of reference). This perspective gives rise to nationalist-tribal expressions that may involve the exclusion of representatives from other ethnic groups. In the second scenario, the civic dimension serves the state, most often leading to patriotism (the perspective is rather positive compared to the first situation, where we deal with a perspective carrying negative connotations!). The analysis of these two dimensions has led some analysts to identify the main differences in the conceptual debate regarding identity in Central and Eastern Europe versus the United States of America. The essential difference is that European national identity answers the question of who is Romanian, Hungarian, Slovak, etc. (thus, what makes us different from one another), whereas the American identity seeks to identify those elements that citizens have in common (what makes citizens, who are different in many situations from an ethno-cultural standpoint, American?)³².

This conceptual dispute between national identity/the European nation and the American one can also be extrapolated to the level of the European space. The idea of nationality is perceived differently in Western Europe and Central-Eastern Europe. In most Western countries, national identity was constructed primarily around the identity of the citizen, and consequently, the territory of the state became the fundamental term of reference for the „national territory” – *the civic dimension of national identity*. Eastern Europe followed a different path of development, in which ethnicity, ethnic belonging, played a fundamental role in building national identity –

³¹ *Ibidem*, p. 115.

³² István Bujalos, *Identitatea personală și națională în filosofia americană*, in Balogh Brigitta, Bernáth Krisztina, Bujalos István, Adrian Hatos, Murányi István (coord.), *Identitate europeană, națională și regional. Teorie și practică*, Editura Partium, Oradea, 2011, p. 79-91.

*the ethnic dimension of national identity*³³. Thus, the Western model of the nation emphasizes the central position of the national territory or the homeland of the nation, while the Eastern model is preoccupied with ethnic origin and cultural ties. A fundamental characteristic of nation-state structures in Eastern Europe is their permanent *lack of legitimacy* or, rather, their incomplete legitimacy. By identifying the state with a single national identity, the other national communities inevitably found themselves outside this process of legitimization, which constituted *a fundamental source of inter-ethnic tension*. This reality led to the sacralization of the state territory considered *national territory*³⁴ (the rightful property of a single nation/nationality!), and the cultural-historical philosophy is to delegitimize as much as possible the contribution of the other national communities.

When referring to the European level of analysis regarding the concept of identity, the legitimate question is to what extent we can speak of a common European identity or, in antithesis, about the presence of identity borders within the European space. A certain identity cleavage can be observed between Western and Eastern Europe.

Without claiming to exhaust all conceptual disputes regarding European, regional-European, or national identity, we conclude by referencing the diversity recorded within the European space, but also the distinct, sometimes antagonistic, manner in which European identity has evolved as an East-West or North-South dichotomy, with particular emphasis on Central Europe. From an identity perspective, this space acquires specific nuances given also by its positioning between Catholic, Protestant, and Orthodox Europe; between Germanic, Latin, and Slavic Europe.

2.3. Ethno-National and Religious Minorities

For the purpose of describing the epistemological majority-minority relationship, it is necessary to distinguish between the demographic and *sociological dimensions* of the meaning in which these concepts are analyzed. From a *demographic perspective*, the majority-minority relationship describes a situation of volume difference between two ethnically differentiated segments that co-exist within an administrative-territorial framework, usually on the

³³ Gábor Flóra, *op. cit.*, p. 116.

³⁴ *Ibidem*, p. 118-128.

territory of a state. In a sociological sense, minority-majority relations describe a situation of asymmetry between groups in terms of power or authority, essentially a relationship of subordination of the minority community (or communities) by a dominant majority³⁵. The distinction between the two perspectives – demographic and sociological – is necessary for a very simple reason: the institutionalized ways of managing power and authority relations do not necessarily overlap with demographic relations. Or, formulated more simply: power does not always belong to the many, but to the groups that control the resources of power and authority in a society, which can be minoritarian in a demographic sense³⁶.

From a conceptual standpoint, another important issue is that of establishing the ethnic and national identity of a person or community. On one hand, as noted in the previous subchapter, the objective and subjective elements of identification come into play; on the other hand, the analysis involves a reference to two perspectives of identification: *self-identification* and *hetero-identification*. Last but not least, the specialized literature makes a distinction between the concept of an ethnic minority and that of a national minority (the latter could create confusion where national identity is born from ethnic identity, as is the case in Central and Eastern Europe). The distinction is also relevant when referring to the degree of political and administrative organization. Thus, a national minority is linked to the existence of a state where that identity community forms the majority and is politically organized into a nation-state. In contrast, an ethnic minority lacks this organization (see the example of the Roma, who do not have a state of their own).

Ethnicity and confession are concepts around which discussions and polemics are born, generating emotions and feelings of an extreme intensity. Each of us belongs to such a community. Implicitly, there is a strong pressure of subjectivism upon us. Intercultural dialogue can be successfully ensured where a community, aware of the other's existence and knowing them, comes to communicate, cooperate, and construct the framework of a multicultural society. Specialized studies have shown that where ethno-confessional diversity is missing, openness toward other communities is deficient. On the other hand, the presence of diversity,

³⁵ Traian Rotariu, Petru Iluț (coord.), *Introducere în sociologie*, Cluj-Napoca, 1996.

³⁶ *Ibidem*.

as is the case throughout Central and Southeastern Europe, also highlights less desirable realities. Today, we discuss equally about discrimination, marginalization, low-status minorities, peripheral societies, and the inequitable distribution of resources, among others. We thus observe that the management of majority-minority relations highlights both the demographic (quantitative) aspect and the sociological aspect of the distribution of authority and power³⁷.

The current context of overlapping crises, which is no longer just a financial-economic crisis, but also a political, social, mental, pandemic, post-pandemic, and even ideological one, highlights a return to the forefront of discussions, on one hand, of the need to strengthen dialogue, and on the other hand, of the tendencies to return to certain forms of nationalism and cultural cleavage. Without campaigning for one or another of these trends, we find that Europe is at a crossroads. The old forms of social-political and economic existence are being redefined. Even relations between people and between communities are reshaping into new forms of organization and relationships. The crisis in Ukraine highlights the current relevance and complexity of inter-ethnic relations. In a Europe without borders, more and more forms of borders appear, which we have referred to on another occasion as „*symbolic and ideological borders*”³⁸.

Many of the European societies are developing a strong sense of „self-protection”, which does not only take a form of an economic nature, but also one of preserving their own identity, including cultural identity. Moments of crisis or exaltation can easily lead to the emergence of nationalist sentiments that dilute the 'Europeanist' perception of the border. Such a dilution takes place in parallel with the strengthening of identity-community cohesion, of the spirit of ethno-cultural belonging to a nation. It is a period when many

³⁷ Mircea Brie, *Ethnicity, Religion and Intercultural Dialogue in the European Border Space...*, p. 11.

³⁸ Mircea Brie, *European Culture between Diversity and Unity*, in *Analele Universității din Oradea, Seria Relații Internaționale și Studii Europene*, 2010, p. 79-92; Mircea Brie, Ioan Horga, *The European Union External Border. An Epistemological Approach*, in *Revista Română de Geografie Politică*, 2009, p. 15-31; Ioan Horga, Mircea Brie, *Europe: A Cultural Border, or a Geo-cultural Archipelago*, in *The Cultural frontiers of Europe*, Eurolimes, vol. 5, volume edited by Alina Stoica, Didier Francfort, Judit Csoba Simonne, Oradea, 2010, p. 155-169.

European peoples are reaffirming themselves, 'reclaiming their identity' through a return to the national, this despite the 'unity' and solidarity affirmed at the level of European institutions by the officials of the member states. Currently, strong currents are channeled in the direction of cross-border cooperation, eroding the idea of a compact and relatively isolated national bloc³⁹.

Cultural diversity records the plurality of ideas, images, values, and expressions. All of these are made possible through a wide variety of expression and through the presence of a large number of parallel, national, ethnic, regional, and local cultures, etc. Moreover, in this context, some authors speak of an „**identity revenge**” and the „sentiment of returning to historical, national, and cultural identity”, particularly within a space such as Central and Eastern Europe, and a historical time in which specific uniqueness and national identity are forced to redefine themselves through their openness toward new geopolitical, historical, and cultural configurations⁴⁰. In this approach, an important element is undoubtedly given by the level of reference: sub- or multinational, native or diasporic, and last but not least, by the European and international context⁴¹.

An example, which falls somewhat into the same category of discussions regarding the 'non-classical minority', is the subject related to granting **dual citizenship** to members of certain ethnic groups in Central and Eastern Europe. The granting of dual citizenship to Romanians in the Republic of Moldova and the granting of dual citizenship to ethnic Hungarians in the countries surrounding Hungary have been more heavily publicized (with particular emphasis placed in the public debate on the pro and con arguments in Slovakia and Romania, where the Hungarian communities are more numerous). The subject gained particular importance because this dual citizenship, even though granted individually, conveyed the

³⁹ Muller, Uwe; Schultz, Helge, *National Borders and Economic Desintegration in Modern East Central Europe*, Franfurter Studien zum Grenzen, vol. 8, Berliner Wissenschaft Verlag, Berlin, 2002, p. 205.

⁴⁰ David, Doina; Florea, Călin, *Arhetipul cultural și conceptul de tradiție*, in *The Proceedings of the European Integration – Between Tradition and Modernity Congress 2nd Edition*, Editura Universității „Petru Maior”, Târgu Mureș, 2007, p. 645-646.

⁴¹ Bennett, Tony, *Differing diversities. Transversal study on the Theme of Cultural policy and cultural diversity*, Council of Europe Publishing, Strasbourg, 2001, p. 29-32.

message through its sheer scale that it was being granted en masse to a group, a community. Hence the hope of some or the fear of others regarding the creation, for example, of 'Little Hungaries' in southern Slovakia or in central Romania.

Education centered on knowing minorities and understanding the mechanisms for managing inter-ethnic relations requires an educational level focused on a **linguistic perspective**. The promotion and preservation of the mother tongue, communication in the mother tongue in public spaces, or the promotion of multilingualism can be defining elements in such an educational system. Two aspects emerge in the discussion: on one hand, European education must offer the opportunity for national minorities to have education in their mother tongue; on the other hand, it is necessary to introduce and develop themes within the school curricula that belong to the sphere of knowing and promoting minority languages, and to the necessity of developing multilingual societies. Learning and using minority languages in the public space, through the sensitivity it offers, lends itself to being debated and analyzed at the level of the educational system.

The perspective of the association: ethnicity – confession is capable of leading to a clearer understanding of the specificity of ethnic groups. The ethno-confessional identity association, as well as the relationship of these communities with the majority, is both possible and necessary. Elements of analysis such as the violence of inter-religious conflicts versus contemporary ecumenism fall into the same note of knowing and understanding minorities.

In an analysis of inter-ethnic and inter-religious relations in border areas, security is no longer strictly defined through the lens of the military or state dimension, but through the concept of **societal security**. Developed by the Copenhagen School, this concept places **collective identity** at the center of analysis, focusing on the capacity of an ethnic or religious community to maintain its essential character, language, traditions, and institutions under conditions of global change. As a minority community perceives that its identity is threatened by assimilation or marginalization, various processes and mechanisms of self-defense and preservation of collective identity are triggered. Symmetrically, and often as an effect and reaction to the behavior of minorities, the majority perceives the dynamics of a minority as a vector of fragmentation, and within this context, a

phenomenon of securitizing the issue of inter-ethnic and inter-religious relations emerges.

We thus identify genuine tense spirals, cyclical developments, and reactive behavioral manifestations. In this context, modern diversity management in the European Union proposes a transition from mere passive tolerance to **deep integration** and **active inclusion of minorities**. Multiculturalism is no longer sufficient. At the inter-community level of mixed spaces, living alongside one another is replaced by living with one another and developing an intercultural society. Conceptually, this entails creating a shared public space in which minorities possess their own institutions that guarantee their identity reproduction, participate equitably in economic and decision-making life without abandoning their cultural uniqueness, and are recognized as a resource for societal resilience rather than risks to national security. The way identities are articulated in zones of inter-ethnic contact demonstrates the importance of institutional adaptation to local specificities⁴².

3. Legislative and Institutional Framework

The protection of national and religious minorities is regulated by a layered legal system, consisting of legally binding instruments and "soft-law" programmatic documents. The implementation of international and national regulations and the assurance of minority protection is carried out by an international, national, regional and local, governmental and non-governmental institutional framework.

3.1. Legislative Framework on Minority Protection

In the case of Romania, this legislative framework features several levels according to which we categorize these documents: the international, European, and EU levels, the level of bilateral agreements, and the national level (where applicable, a subnational level of regional or local regulation may also exist).

On this occasion, we aim to identify and synthesize the main directions and documents that underpin the protection of minority individuals and communities, which apply and can be invoked within mixed spaces in border areas.

⁴² Jakab Albert Zsolt, Peti Lehel (eds.), *Minorități în zonele de contact interetnic. Cehii și slovacii în România și Ungaria*, Institutul pentru Studierea Problemelor Minorităților Naționale, Kriterion, Cluj-Napoca, 2010.

At the **international/global level**, minorities are mainly protected through programmatic and legally documents adopted by the United Nations. The protection of national, ethnic, and religious minorities constitutes a fundamental pillar of international law and the European societal security architecture. Developed primarily in the post-war period, this legal framework has evolved from an approach based exclusively on individual human rights toward the recognition of collective needs for preserving cultural, linguistic, and spiritual identity. The United Nations established the foundational standard through Article 27 of the *International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights* (1966)⁴³, which prohibits states from denying minorities the right to enjoy their own culture, profess their religion, or use their language. This vision was politically consolidated through the United Nations *Declaration on the Rights of Persons Belonging to National or Ethnic, Religious and Linguistic Minorities* (1992)⁴⁴, setting forth the obligation of states to protect the existence and identity of these groups.

At the **European level**, legislative dynamics have reached the highest level of specificity and binding legal force. The Council of Europe governs this domain through two landmark instruments:

- *The Framework Convention for the Protection of National Minorities* (1995), adopted by the Council of Europe in 1995, stands as the first legally binding multilateral instrument explicitly designed to safeguard national minorities. Rather than creating collective rights, it establishes comprehensive principles that signatory states must implement within their domestic legislation, covering areas such as linguistic freedoms, minority-language education, and non-discrimination. Its operational strength lies in a rigorous monitoring mechanism led by an Advisory Committee of independent experts, which evaluates state performance through periodic reports and country visits. This ongoing dialogue ensures that the convention acts as a living instrument for legislative reform, maintaining stability and

⁴³ United Nations, *International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights*, <https://www.ohchr.org/en/instruments-mechanisms/instruments/international-covenant-civil-and-political-rights>, accessed on May 13th, 2026.

⁴⁴ United Nations, *Declaration on the Rights of Persons Belonging to National or Ethnic, Religious and Linguistic Minorities*, <https://www.ohchr.org/en/instruments-mechanisms/instruments/declaration-rights-persons-belonging-national-or-ethnic>, accessed on May 13th, 2026.

securing the cultural survival of distinct identity groups across European borderlands⁴⁵.

- *The European Charter for Regional or Minority Languages* (1992). It is a legally binding treaty designed to protect and promote historical regional and minority languages as an essential facet of European cultural heritage. Rather than focusing on minority rights per se, it targets the active use of these languages across key societal domains, including education, justice, administration, and media. By establishing tailored frameworks for legislative support, it ensures the preservation of linguistic diversity and reduces cultural marginalization within multiethnic territories⁴⁶.

- In a complementary manner, the European Court of Human Rights ensures the protection of religious freedom and the prohibition of discrimination through the coercive mechanisms of Articles 9 and 14 of the *European Convention on Human Rights* (1950)⁴⁷.

Within **the European Union**, although the direct management of minorities as a group remains under the sovereign competence of the member states, the principles of equality and diversity are structurally integrated into community law. Article 21 of the *Charter of Fundamental Rights of the EU* (2000)⁴⁸ explicitly prohibits any form of discrimination based on membership in a national minority, race, ethnic origin, or religion. This constitutional guarantee is operationalized through anti-discrimination directives, such as

⁴⁵ Council of Europe, *Framework Convention for the Protection of National Minorities*, <https://www.coe.int/en/web/minorities>, accessed on May 14th, 2026.

⁴⁶ Council of Europe, *European Charter for Regional or Minority Languages*, <https://www.coe.int/en/web/european-charter-regional-or-minority-languages>, accessed on May 14th, 2026.

⁴⁷ European Court of Human Rights, *European Convention on Human Rights*, <https://www.echr.coe.int/european-convention-on-human-rights>, accessed on May 14th, 2026.

⁴⁸ EUR-Lex, Access to European Union law, *Charter of Fundamental Rights of the European Union*, <https://eur-lex.europa.eu/legal-content/EN/TXT/?uri=CELEX%3A12012P%2FTXT>, accessed on May 14th, 2026.

*Directive 2000/43/EC (Race and Ethnic Origin Equality)*⁴⁹ and *Directive 2000/78/EC (Employment Equality)*⁵⁰.

Together, these international and European instruments function not only as legal shields but also as safety nets that prevent identity cleavages from turning into sources of conflict, providing the foundation upon which multiethnic border communities can build their resilience.

The **legal framework in Romania** provides a robust system for guaranteeing and protecting the rights of national and religious minorities, integrated across three distinct administrative levels: national, regional, and local. This legislative structure places ethno-cultural identity and religious confessions at the center of cohesion and societal security policies⁵¹.

At the highest normative level, the *Constitution of Romania* recognizes and guarantees, through Article 6, the right of persons belonging to national minorities to preserve, develop, and express their ethnic, cultural, linguistic, and religious identity, in full accordance with the principles of equality and non-discrimination. Furthermore, the Constitution ensures automatic parliamentary representation for minority organizations that do not meet the standard electoral threshold⁵².

The sphere of religious freedom and the functioning of religious cults are organically regulated by *Law no. 489/2006 on religious freedom and the general regime of cults*, a normative act through

⁴⁹ EUR-Lex, Access to European Union law, *Council Directive 2000/43/EC of 29 June 2000 implementing the principle of equal treatment between persons irrespective of racial or ethnic origin*, <https://eur-lex.europa.eu/legal-content/EN/TXT/?uri=celex%3A32000L0043>, accessed on May 14th, 2026.

⁵⁰ EUR-Lex, Access to European Union law, *Council Directive 2000/78/EC of 27 November 2000 establishing a general framework for equal treatment in employment and occupation*, <https://eur-lex.europa.eu/legal-content/EN/TXT/?uri=celex%3A32000L0078>, accessed on May 14th, 2026.

⁵¹ Council of Europe, *Protection of national minorities in Romania: solid legal framework and funding but insecurity about language rights in the future*, <https://www.coe.int/en/web/portal/-/protection-of-national-minorities-in-romania-solid-legal-framework-and-funding-but-insecurity-about-language-rights-in-the-future>, accessed on May 13th, 2026.

⁵² See Portalul Legislativ Just.ro, *Constituția României [Forma actualizată și republicată, conținând toate modificările aduse prin Legea de revizuire nr. 429/2003]*, <https://legislatie.just.ro/Public/DetaliiDocument/78355>, accessed on May 13th, 2026.

which the Romanian state guarantees the autonomy of recognized cults and proportional financial support⁵³.

To the **regional and local level** (Bihor County case), the administrative transposition of these guarantees takes an applied form through the *Administrative Code (Emergency Government Ordinance no. 57/2019)*⁵⁴. This stipulates the obligation of authorities to use the language of national minorities in local public administration (bilingual official records, toponymy, public relations) in Territorial-Administrative Units (UATs) where a minority accounts for more than 20% of the population or where a significant historical presence exists. This normative act requires city halls to ensure the bilingual signage of street names and public institutions, as well as the publication of official documents and local council resolutions in the mother tongue of the respective minority. At the same time, the law provides citizens with the right to submit applications and receive replies in their mother tongue, mandating the hiring of bilingual public officials or the use of certified interpreters within the local administrative apparatus.

3.2. Institutional Framework

There is a multi-level institutional framework for the protection of national, ethnic, and religious minorities. This framework functions in an integrated manner from the global to the local level. It combines political, legal, and monitoring bodies with actors from the non-governmental sphere.

Synthetically, we present the institutional architecture involved in the complex processes of protecting and guaranteeing the rights of persons and communities belonging to national, ethnic, and religious minorities.

The international/global level. The United Nations ensures and supervises the entire process. The United Nations utilizes specialized agencies and expert committees to monitor human rights:

- Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights (OHCHR). Serves as the central coordinating body. It manages the

⁵³ *Ibidem*, LEGE nr. 489 din 28 decembrie 2006 (*republicată*) privind libertatea religioasă și regimul general al cultelor, <https://legislatie.just.ro/Public/DetaliiDocument/78355>, accessed on May 13th, 2026.

⁵⁴ Portalul Legislativ Just.ro, *Ordonanță de Urgență nr. 57 din 3 iulie 2019 privind Codul administrativ*, <https://legislatie.just.ro/Public/DetaliiDocument/215925>, accessed on May 17th, 2026.

implementation of international treaties and provides technical assistance to governments for minority protection.

- Human Rights Committee. Monitors the implementation of the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights. It reviews state reports and individual complaints regarding violations of Article 27.
- Forum on Minority Issues. An annual platform for dialogue. It brings together member states, NGOs, and experts to formulate thematic recommendations for the Human Rights Council⁵⁵.

The European level is ensured by the *Council of Europe* and *Organization for Security and Co-operation in Europe* (OSCE). Europe possesses the most specific structures for monitoring minority rights:

- *Advisory Committee on the Framework Convention* (FCNM) is a body composed of independent experts within the Council of Europe. It evaluates national reports, conducts country visits, and issues legal opinions regarding compliance with ethnic rights⁵⁶.
- *OSCE High Commissioner on National Minorities* (HCNM) is an instrument of preventive diplomacy. It intervenes at early stages of inter-ethnic tensions to mitigate societal security risks in contact zones⁵⁷.
- *European Court of Human Rights* (ECHR) is the supreme judicial body. It sanctions member states for violations of religious freedom (Article 9) or the application of discriminatory treatment (Article 14)⁵⁸.

The European Union Level. Although the EU does not have a dedicated ministry for minorities as a group, individual rights are protected through key institutions:

- *EU Agency for Fundamental Rights* (FRA) collects statistical data, conducts field research on ethnic or religious discrimination, and provides expertise to European institutions⁵⁹.

⁵⁵ United Nations, Official website, <https://www.ohchr.org/en>, accessed on May 17th, 2026.

⁵⁶ Council of Europe, *Advisory Committee on the Framework Convention for the Protection of National Minorities*, <https://www.coe.int/en/web/minorities/advisory-committee>, accessed on May 19th, 2026.

⁵⁷ Organization for Security and Co-operation in Europe (OSCE), Official website, <https://hcnm.osce.org/>, accessed on May 17th, 2026.

⁵⁸ European Court of Human Rights, Official website, <https://www.echr.coe.int/>, accessed on May 17th, 2026.

⁵⁹ EU Agency for Fundamental Rights, Official website, <https://fra.europa.eu/en>, accessed on May 17th, 2026.

- *Traditional Minorities, National Communities and Languages Intergroup* (EP) is a political structure within the European Parliament. It brings together MEPs dedicated to promoting regional languages and protecting historical ethnic communities⁶⁰.

- *European Commission, through The Directorate-General for Justice and Consumers*, monitors how member states transpose directives regarding racial equality and equal treatment in employment⁶¹.

At the **national level** Romania has developed a recognized institutional model based on representation and control:

- *Department for Interethnic Relations* (DRI). This is a government structure under the authority of the Prime Minister. It develops public policies and coordinates programs to promote ethno-cultural diversity.⁶²

- *Council of National Minorities* (CMN) as an advisory body to the Government. It is composed of representatives from the 19 national minority organizations with parliamentary representation and distributes budget funds allocated to communities⁶³.

- *State Secretariat for Cults* (SSC) manages the relationship between the state and the 18 recognized religious denominations, ensuring financial support for clerical staff and the maintenance of places of worship⁶⁴.

- *National Council for Combating Discrimination* (CNCD), which is an autonomous administrative authority. It analyzes citizen petitions and sanctions acts of ethnic, linguistic, or religious discrimination⁶⁵.

⁶⁰ European Parliament, Intergroup on Traditional Minorities, National Communities and Languages, <https://www.europarl.europa.eu/meps/en/intergroup/details/7895/Intergroup%20on%20Traditional%20Minorities.%20National%20Communities%20and%20Languages>, accessed on May 17th, 2026.

⁶¹ European Commission, Justice and Consumers, https://commission.europa.eu/about/departments-and-executive-agencies/justice-and-consumers_en, accessed on May 17th, 2026.

⁶² Department for Interethnic Relations, Official website, <https://dri.gov.ro>, accessed on May 18th, 2026.

⁶³ *Ibidem*.

⁶⁴ State Secretariat for Cults, Official website, <https://culte.gov.ro/>, accessed on May 17th, 2026.

⁶⁵ National Council for Combating Discrimination, Official website, <https://www.cncd.ro/>, accessed on May 17th, 2026.

The Regional and Local Level (Bihor County and local Territorial Administrative Units). At the territorial level, protection of the rights of ethno-national and religious minorities becomes a direct administrative responsibility⁶⁶:

- Institution of the *Prefect of Bihor County* monitors the legality of administrative acts, ensures the application of the provisions of the Administrative Code regarding official bilingualism, and coordinates the County Bureau for Roma.
- *Bihor County Council* co-finances cultural projects of minorities, allocates local budgets for religious cults in the county, and develops integration strategies through social services.
- *Oradea City Hall* (or other *Territorial Administrative Unit*) implements the use of the Hungarian language in public and institutional spaces, and logistically supports the minority-language school network and confessional high schools.

II. Ethno-Confessional Realities and Societal Security. Analysis and Evolution of the Integration Stadium, Societal Security, Inclusion in the Bihor Border Area

In this section, we aim to develop an analysis of the ethnic and religious/confessional realities in Bihor County, starting from a demographic analysis of the population structure as derived from official census data. For a better understanding and to provide a more comprehensive picture, the analysis also includes references to the evolution of these indicators by correlating data from previous censuses conducted by the Romanian state.

1. Evolution of the Population's Ethnic Structure. Levels of Integration and Societal Transformations

The analysis of the evolution of the population's ethnic structure is relevant for understanding the mechanisms that underpin inter-ethnic relations and the management of sources of societal security and insecurity within a society. Based on these mechanisms, appropriate public policies can be developed to ensure an integrative

⁶⁶ See for more their official websites!

inter-ethnic climate, with the aim of fostering an intercultural society where each community can thrive through inclusion at all levels.

Without elaborating on this occasion, we note that over the course of the last two centuries, politically and geopolitically driven actions have taken place, which have had an impact on the realities and the ethnic structure of the population in the border area of present-day Bihor County⁶⁷.

Table 1. Population in Bihor County by Ethnicity at the Censuses between 1930 and 2021 (Absolute Number of Persons)

Year	Total Population	Romanians	Hungarians	Roma	Jews	Slovaks	Other*	Information unavailable**
1930	527.216	308.478	171.907	6.211	23.709	12.365	4.349	197
1956	574.488	362.345	194.883	3.333	4.878	6.726	2.214	109
1966	586.460	377.837	192.948	3.678	1.798	7.813	2.323	62
1977	633.094	409.770	199.615	12.014	910	8.079	2.700	6
1992	638.863	425.097	181.703	21.796	354	7.793	2.117	3
2002	600.246	404.468	155.829	30.089	224	7.370	2.146	120
2011	575.398	366.245	138.213	34.640	176	6.091	1.638	28.395
2021	551.297	347.148	112.387	36.837	135	4.860	1.502	48.428

* The "Other" column aggregates the remaining minorities mentioned individually in the document (Ukrainians, Germans, Turks, Russians-Lipovans, Tatars, Serbs/Croats/Slovenes, Bulgarians, Greeks, Czechs, Poles, Armenians, and the "Other ethnicity" entry from the source text).

** It includes the population with undeclared or unknown ethnicity, a phenomenon that manifested with a critical share in the 2011 and 2021 censuses.

Source: author's elaboration based on census data provided by the National Statistics Institute⁶⁸

⁶⁷ For this, see Mircea Brie, *The impact of political factors on ethno-national realities in northwestern Transylvania...*, 2016.

⁶⁸ The National Statistics Institute, *Recensământul Populației și Locuințelor 2021. Rezultate definitive: Caracteristici etno-culturale demografice*, <https://www.recensamantromania.ro/rezultate-rpl-2021/rezultate-definitive-caracteristici-etno-culturale-demografice/>, accessed on May 23th, 2026.

The evolution of the population was marked by major changes at the political and geopolitical level. During the period 1930-2021, policies with a major impact on the demographic level were implemented. Many of these mutations were possible under the political realities of totalitarian regimes, the change of the border between 1940-1944 (Vienna Dictate).

The year 1930 presents the consolidated interwar structure of the Kingdom of Romania. The establishment of the new state administration favored the immigration of Romanian administrative elites to the urban environment, triggering a broad process of Romanianization of cities (especially Oradea). The critical period 1940-1944 meant the deportation and extermination of the Jews from this region orchestrated by the Horst regime in 1944. The Jewish community of Bihor, which in 1930 constituted a major economic and cultural force with 23.709 members (4,49% of the county), was shattered. In 1956, their number had dropped drastically to 4.878 (0,84%).

Table 2. Percentage Structure of Ethnic Groups (% of the Population with Declared Ethnicity)

Year	Declared Population	Romanians	Hungarians	Roma	Jews	Slovaks	Other*
1930	100,00%	58,53%	32,62%	1,18%	4,50%	2,35%	0,83%
1956	100,00%	63,08%	33,93%	0,58%	0,85%	1,17%	0,39%
1966	100,00%	64,43%	32,90%	0,63%	0,31%	1,33%	0,40%
1977	100,00%	64,73%	31,53%	1,90%	0,14%	1,28%	0,43%
1992	100,00%	66,54%	28,44%	3,41%	0,06%	1,22%	0,33%
2002	100,00%	67,40%	25,97%	5,01%	0,04%	1,23%	0,36%
2011	100,00%	66,95%	25,27%	6,33%	0,03%	1,11%	0,30%
2021	100,00%	69,03%	22,35%	7,33%	0,03%	0,97%	0,30%

* The "Other" column aggregates the remaining minorities mentioned individually in the document (Ukrainians, Germans, Turks, Russians-Lipovans, Tatars, Serbs/Croats/Slovenes, Bulgarians, Greeks, Czechs, Poles, Armenians, and the "Other ethnicity" entry from the source text).

Source: author's elaboration based on census data provided by the National Statistics Institute⁶⁹

⁶⁹ *Ibidem.*

During the communist regime, strict policies of forced industrialization and urbanization were implemented, moving large masses of the Romanian population from traditional rural areas (e.g. the Beiuș Basin) to the urban centers of Bihor (Oradea, Salonta, Marghita). This meant an increase in the share of the Romanian population in the cities. In parallel, the phenomenon manifested itself in the form of a uniformization marked by secret bilateral agreements through which the communist state allowed the massive emigration (for a fee) of Jews and Germans.

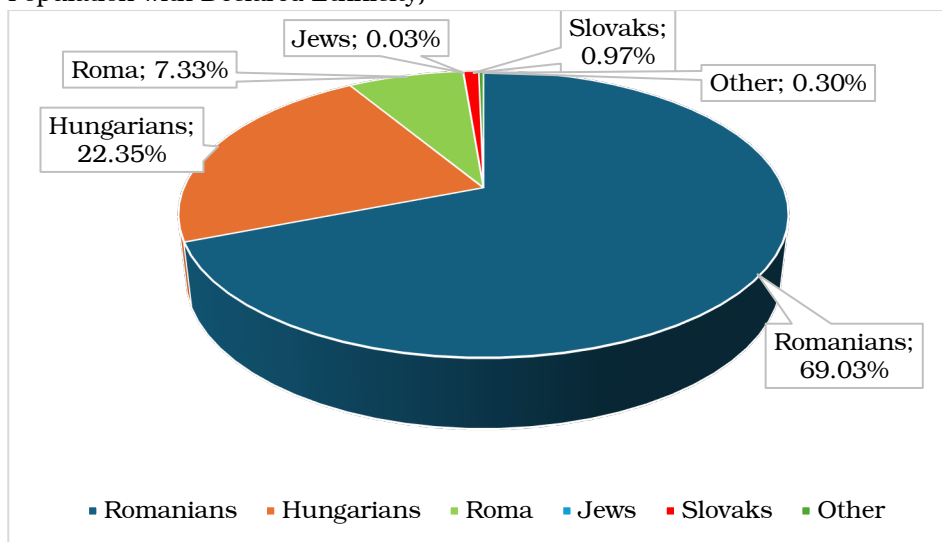
By 1977, the total population of the county had grown to a historic peak of 633.094 inhabitants, with Romanians consolidating their share in the total population. The Hungarian community grew steadily in absolute numbers (from 194.883 in 1956 to 199.615 in 1977), but registered a percentage decrease (from 33,92% to 31,53%). The Jewish community almost completely disappeared from the registers, dropping to only 910 people in 1977.

The fall of communism in 1989 eliminated movement restrictions, triggering successive waves of external economic migration. Bihor County, being a direct border area, experienced a special dynamic: cross-border emigration of ethnic Hungarians to Hungary or Western European states (a phenomenon later facilitated by Budapest's policies of granting dual citizenship) and the massive migration of Romanians to Western states (especially Italy and Spain). In parallel, forced assimilation stopped, allowing the Roma minority to freely reaffirm their identity, emerging from under the historical stigma. Between 1992 and 2011, the county entered a sharp demographic decline (over 63.000 inhabitants lost). The Hungarian minority suffered setbacks, falling spectacularly from 181.703 (28,44%) in 1992 to 138.213 (25,27%) in 2011. In contrast, the Roma population increased in number and share through positive natural increase and assumed self-identification (from 21.796 in 1992 to 34.640 in 2011).

The post-accession period to the European Union (2011-2021) has strengthened the freedom of movement of the workforce. For Bihor, the close connection with the Hungarian economic space (Oradea-Debrecen) has stabilized some of the border commuting, but structural demographic aging and long-term migration have continued to reduce the resident population. The online self-census in 2021 generated a high percentage of missing data for minorities, with many citizens refusing or omitting to declare their ethnicity.

The total population decreased to 551.297. The number of ethnic Hungarians continued to decrease in absolute numbers (112.387), representing in real terms approximately one fifth of the county's inhabitants (20,38% compared to the total population – 22,35% compared to the population that declared their ethnicity). The Roma population maintained its upward trend, reaching 36.837 people (6,68% compared to the total population – 7,33% compared to the population that declared their ethnicity), becoming an increasingly consistent local demographic community, which requires active public policies for social and educational inclusion.

Figure 1. Ethnic Structure of the Population. The 2021 Census (% of the Population with Declared Ethnicity)



* The "Other" column aggregates the remaining minorities mentioned individually in the document (Ukrainians, Germans, Turks, Russians-Lipovans, Tatars, Serbs/Croats/Slovenes, Bulgarians, Greeks, Czechs, Poles, Armenians, and the "Other ethnicity" entry from the source text).

Source: author's elaboration based on census data provided by the National Statistics Institute⁷⁰

According to the definitive results of the 2021 Census, the total resident population of Bihor County stands at 551.297 persons. As observed at the national level, the determination of the ethnic and confessional structure is influenced by a critical mass of the

⁷⁰ *Ibidem.*

population for whom information was unavailable (either due to non-participation in the self-enumeration/interview process or through the indirect collection of data from administrative sources). In Bihor County, the number of persons with undeclared or unknown ethnicity amounts to 48.428 individuals (representing 8,78%% of the total resident population). Therefore, to ensure scientific rigor, the percentage analyses below are calculated strictly in relation to the population that declared its ethnic affiliation (502.869 persons).

The border space of Bihor County maintains its profile as a multi-ethnic contact area, heavily influenced in the contemporary period by cross-border economic asymmetries and the mechanisms of European integration. Relative to the population with declared ethnicity, the structure highlights:

- *The Romanian Majority* (69,03%), which represents the main demographic pillar (347.148 persons). Its historical consolidation in urban centers (especially Oradea) ensures national administrative stability, acting as a balancing factor in the management of public policies.

- *The Hungarian Minority* (22,35%), with 112.387 residents, represents one of the most compact Hungarian communities in the border area. Although experiencing a gradual numerical decline caused by structural demographic aging and secondary cross-border migration toward Hungary, the group maintains a strong political and institutional representation, holding compact majorities in the northern and western parts of the county.

- *The Roma Minority* (7,33%): It records a steady rise (36.837 persons). This dynamic reflects a positive natural growth rate, but also an emancipation of identity assumption in the contemporary period, driven by the gradual reduction of stigmatization and the emergence of its own public elite.

- *Small Historical Minorities* (Slovaks – 0,97%, Jews – 0,03%): The Slovak community (4.860 persons) manifests vulnerabilities due to rural geographic isolation and aging. Jews (135 persons) represent a symbolic presence, a tragic reminder of the 20th-century geopolitical traumas (the 1944 deportations).

2. Evolution of the Population's Religious Structure. Levels of Integration and Societal Transformations

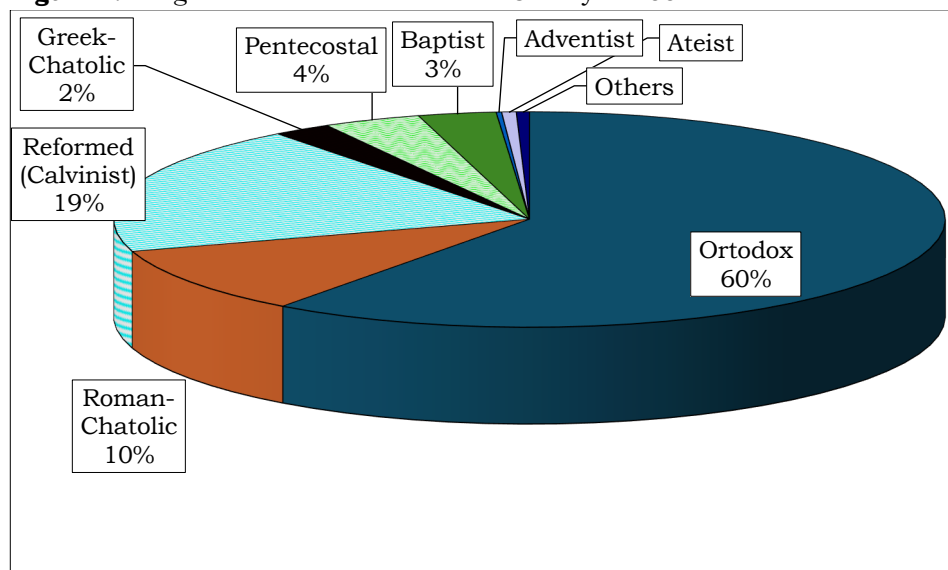
The post-1918 interwar period marked the beginning of profound mutations in the regional confessional configuration. The

integration of this space into the Romanian administration generated gradual religious transformations, which were closely correlated with ethnic dynamics and, in particular, with local political developments. Subsequently, the tragedy of the Holocaust during World War II, coupled with massive emigration during the communist period, caused the near-complete dissolution of the Jewish community and the Mosaic religion in Bihor.

However, the most radical structural transformations occurred under the communist regime, which promoted an aggressive policy of societal and spiritual homogenization. Within this context, the most drastic measure was the abusive dissolution and banning of the Greek Catholic Church in 1948.

With the purpose of analyzing this process of transformations within the confessional structure of Bihor County's population comparatively and over time, we intend to examine the data provided by the first post-communist census (1992) and the most recent one from 2021.

Figure 2. Religious structure in the Bihor County in 1992



Source: author's elaboration based on census data provided by the National Statistics Institute⁷¹

⁷¹ The National Statistics Institute, *Rezultate Recensământ 1992*, <https://www.recensamantromania.ro/rezultate-recensamant-1992/>, accessed on May 26th, 2026.

The collapse of totalitarianism in 1989 put an end to decades of oppression and ideological restrictions. The establishment of freedom of conscience decisively reconfigured the regional religious landscape: the Greek Catholic Church resumed its legal activity, a considerable expansion of neo-Protestant denominations was recorded.

Confessional pluralism represents a structural characteristic of societal security in Bihor, configuring a fluid space of historical contact between Eastern Christianity, Western Christian traditions and neo-Protestant movements.

Table 3. Religious Structure of Bihor County (Census 1992 Data)

Religion / Denomination	Resident Population (Absolute Number)	Share of Total Resident Population (%)
Orthodox	384.931	60,25
Reformed (Calvinist)	124.580	19,50
Pentecostal	24.400	3,82
Roman Catholic	64.616	10,11
Baptist	19.407	3,04
Greek Catholic	14.485	2,27
Other (under 1% share)	6.283	0,98
Information unavailable*	161	0,03
TOTAL RESIDENT POPULATION	638.863	100,00

*** It includes the population with undeclared or unknown religion*

Source: author's elaboration based on census data provided by the National Statistics Institute⁷²

The comparative analysis of census data between 1992 and 2021 highlights major demographic and sociological changes, determined by post-communist secularization, the dynamics of border migration, and community identity restructuring.

The analysis of the evolutionary dynamics of the main religious denominations between 1992 and 2021 reveals several conclusions:

- In 1992, the Romanian Orthodox Church recorded an absolute number of 384.931 parishioners, representing 60,25% of the total resident population. By 2021, the total number had decreased to 295.340 persons, constituting a share of 53,57% of the total population (or 59,29% if calculated strictly in relation to the

⁷² *Ibidem.*

population with a declared religion). This substantial numerical contraction mirrors the general demographic decline of the ethnic majority and the intensification of the secularization process in urban areas.

- The Reformed (Calvinist) Church also experienced a severe regression. From a peak of 124.580 believers (19,50%) in 1992, the community decreased to 79.723 persons (14,46%) in 2021. This decline is directly proportional to the numerical contraction of the Hungarian minority, further accentuated by structural demographic aging and cross-border emigration to Hungary. However, among those who actively embrace a religious choice, the Reformed still hold a critical mass of 16,01%.

Table 3. Religious Structure of Bihor County (Census 2021 Data)

Religion / Denomination	Resident Population (Absolute Number)	Share of Total Resident Population (%)
Orthodox	295.340	53,57
Reformed (Calvinist)	79.723	14,46
Pentecostal	40.643	7,37
Roman Catholic	39.893	7,24
Baptist	21.336	3,87
Greek Catholic	9.890	1,79
Other (under 1% share)*	11.278	2,05
Information unavailable**	53.194	9,65
TOTAL RESIDENT POPULATION	551.297	100,00

* The "Other (under 1% share)" section includes the following categories from the original document:

Small religious communities: Adventist (1,910), Muslim (308), Unitarian (224), Jehovah's Witnesses (1,193), Evangelical Gospel Christians (697), Old Rite Christians (175), Evangelical Lutheran (321), Serbian Orthodox (239), Evangelical (70), Augustan Confession Evangelical (54), Jewish/Mosaic (171), Armenian (4), other religions not distinctly declared (1,390). Secular categories: No Religion (2,770), Atheist (1,241), Agnostic (511).

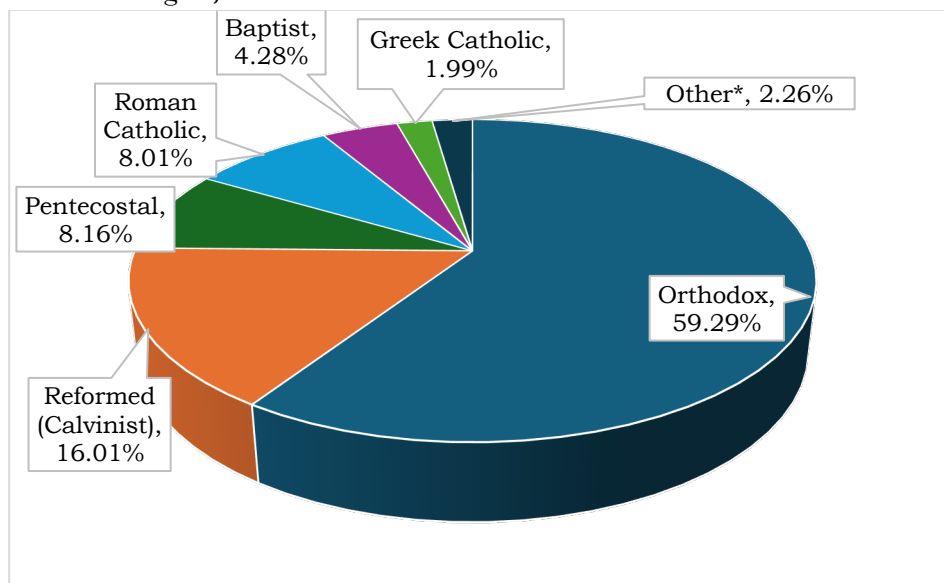
** It includes the population with undeclared or unknown religion

Source: author's elaboration based on census data provided by the National Statistics Institute⁷³

⁷³ Institutul Național de Statistică, *Recensământul Populației și Locuințelor 2021...*

• Both Catholic denominations experienced consistent declines. The Roman Catholic Church dropped from 64.616 parishioners (10,11%) in 1992 to 39.893 (7,24%) in 2021. The Romanian Church United with Rome (Greek Catholic), although legally revitalized after the collapse of communism, has steadily decreased in numbers over the last three decades, sliding from 14.485 believers (2,27%) in 1992 to 9.890 (1,79%) at the latest census.

Figure 3. Religious Structure of Bihor County. The 2021 Census (% of those with Declared Religion)



* The "Other (under 1% share)" section includes the following categories from the original document:

Small religious communities: Adventist, Muslim, Unitarian, Jehovah's Witnesses, Evangelical Gospel Christians, Old Rite Christians, Evangelical Lutheran, Serbian Orthodox, Evangelical, Augustan Confession Evangelical, Jewish/Mosaic, Armenian, other religions not distinctly declared. Secular categories: No Religion, Atheist, Agnostic.

Source: author's elaboration based on census data provided by the National Statistics Institute⁷⁴

Unlike the traditional historical denominations, which record systematic declines, the neo-Protestant segment exhibits a remarkable dynamic of growth and territorial consolidation.

⁷⁴ Institutul Național de Statistică, *Recensământului Populației și Locuințelor 2021...*

The Pentecostal Denomination has experienced a spectacular rise, nearly doubling its presence: it grew from 24.400 persons (3,82%) in 1992 to 40.643 believers (7,37%) in 2021, becoming the third-largest confessional force in Bihor County. Among the population with a declared religion, Pentecostals reach a stable share of 8,16%.

The Baptist Denomination demonstrates great institutional stability, growing in absolute numbers from 19.407 persons (3,04%) in 1992 to 21.336 (3,87%) in 2021, reaching a real share of 4,28% of the total declared religion.

The categories merged under the 'Other religions / under 1%' section grew from 0,98% (6.283 persons) in 1992 to 2,05% (11.278 persons) in 2021. This growth is explained by the emergence and diversification of new religious associations, as well as by the inclusion of emerging secular orientations (no religion, atheists, agnostics) within this category.

The data of our analysis were altered by a large share of people who did not declare their religion (in a methodological sense, it represents a limitation of this analysis). If in 1992 this phenomenon was completely insignificant, affecting only 161 people (0.03%), in 2021 the number of people with undeclared religion exploded to 53,194 individuals, representing a critical percentage of 9.65% of the entire resident population of the county. This refusal to declare represents a major challenge for societal security analyses, partially hiding the real dynamics of local inclusion.

3. Correlated Analysis between Ethnicity and Religion. Societal Significance⁷⁵

In Bihor County, the dynamics between ethnicity and religion function according to the principle of intersectionality, of overlapping identities: confession is not merely a spiritual choice, but an institutional shield and a guarantor for the preservation of ethno-linguistic identity in the face of assimilation risks.

- For ethnic *Romanians*, identity is predominantly linked to Orthodoxy and Greek Catholicism; however, a contemporary fragmentation toward the Baptist and Pentecostal denominations is observable. This mutation has not weakened ethnic cohesion, as

⁷⁵ *Ibidem*.

Romanian-language neo-Protestant movements have become stable factors of community organization.

- Over 88% of all ethnic *Hungarians* are affiliated with the Reformed Church and the Roman Catholic Church. This near-perfect overlap demonstrates that religion functions as a tool for cultural and linguistic resistance. The historical Hungarian churches in Oradea patronize education in the mother tongue, transforming the confessional element into a vector of ethnic reproduction.

- The *Roma community* has recorded the most dynamic contemporary mutation. A significant portion (especially in the north of the county) has adopted the language and Reformed/Catholic confession of the neighboring majority Hungarian communities. In parallel, over the last two decades, there has been a massive shift among the Roma from traditional Orthodoxy toward the Pentecostal Church. This conversion offers integration advantages: Pentecostal churches function as local networks for literacy, financial support, and social inclusion within segregated communities, thereby reducing the risks of social exclusion.

From a societal security perspective, this correlation demonstrates that the stability of Bihor County directly depends on the balance and ecumenical dialogue among religious denominations.

The data shows that in Bihor no public policy can be effective if it separates ethnicity from religion. Religious denominations become the main local institutional partners for inclusion projects, mother tongue education and cross-border cooperation.

According to the official cross-referenced data of the Population and Housing Census (2021)⁷⁶, we have established a correlation between ethnicity and religious denomination.

A. The religious structure of the ethnic communities⁷⁷

Ethnic Romanians (347.148 persons). The Romanian identity in Bihor presents a structure historically dominated by Eastern Christianity, but with a massive contemporary neo-Protestant diversification. The main religious groups of Romanians in Bihor are:

- Orthodox (80,05% - 277.895 persons). Remains the core and absolute majority denomination of the group;

⁷⁶ *Ibidem.*

⁷⁷ *Ibidem.*

- Pentecostal (8,81% - 30.601 persons). Represents the second largest religious community among Romanians.
- Baptist (3,55% - 12.315 persons).
- Greek Catholic (2,09% - 7.251 persons). Traditional Romanian-speaking Transylvanian confessional community.
- Roman Catholic & Reformed (Calvinist), under 1,5% each (5.124 and 4.323 persons, respectively).
- Secular Segment (No religion/Atheist/Agnostic) - 0,86%, 2.990 persons.
- Information unavailable: 1.12% (3,884 persons).

Ethnic Hungarians (112.387 persons). Among the Hungarian community, traditional Western denominations function as true identity shields, with over 88% of the group belonging to just the top two cults. The main religious groups of Hungarians in Bihor are:

- Reformed (Calvinist): 64,75% - 72.768 persons. The absolute majority confessional element defining the local Hungarian identity.
- Roman Catholic (23,68% - 26.609 persons).
- Baptist (3,23% - 3.635 persons).
- Orthodox (2,25% - 2.531 persons). A small percentage, often resulting from mixed marriages or secondary religious assimilation.
- Greek Catholic (1,89% - 2.119 persons).
- Pentecostal (0,66% - 745 persons).
- Secular Segment (No religion/Atheist/Agnostic): 0,83% - 938 persons.
- Information unavailable: 0,69% (774 persons).

Ethnic Roma (36.837 persons). The Roma community in Bihor exhibits the highest cultural fluidity, split between historical Eastern/Western assimilation and the neo-Protestant movement:

- Orthodox (39,44% - 14.528 persons). The largest segment, traditionally integrated into areas with a Romanian majority.
- Pentecostal (24,53% - 9.034 persons). Nearly a quarter of the community has joined the Pentecostal

community, which acts as a major driver for social assistance and literacy in segregated areas.

- Baptist (14,43% - 5.316 persons).
- Roman Catholic (8,82% - 3.250 persons). Concentrated in communities where the Roma speak Hungarian as their mother tongue.
- Reformed (Calvinist), 7,01% - 2.584 persons. Likewise linguistically assimilated within Hungarian basins.
- Secular Segment (No religion/Atheist/Agnostic): 2,17% - 801 persons. A rate twice as high as the Romanian and Hungarian averages.
- Information unavailable: 0,12% (43 persons).

Ethnic Slovaks (4.860 persons). They are:

- Roman Catholic, 87,94% (4.274 persons). The Slovak identity in the mountainous basin of Bihor (Șinteu, Popești) is nearly synonymous with Slovak-language Roman Catholicism.
- Orthodox (3,13% - 152 persons).
- Pentecostal (4,49% - 218 persons).

B. The ethnic structure of the religious communities in Bihor reflects the same identity overlap with minor exceptions⁷⁸.

The Orthodox Church (295.340 persons) has a pronounced Romanian ethnic profile, with minorities holding a symbolic share: Romanians (94,09% - 277.895 persons); Roma (4,92% - 14.528 persons); Hungarians (0,86% - 2.531 persons); Other ethnicities: 0.13% (377 persons).

The Reformed Church (79.723 persons) is almost entirely reflective of the Hungarian community: Hungarians (91,28% - 72.768 persons); Romanians (5,42% - 4.323 persons); Roma (3,24% - 2.584 persons); Other ethnicities: 0.05% (41 persons).

Pentecostal Church (40.643 persons): Romanians (75,29% - 30.601 persons); Roma (22,23% - 9.034 persons); Hungarians (1,83% - 745 persons); Slovaks (0,54% - 218 persons); Other ethnicities: 0.1% (39 persons).

⁷⁸ *Ibidem*.

The Roman Catholic Denomination (39.893 persons) is the most ethnically fragmented and diversified denomination in Bihor County, representing a genuine space of religious interculturality: Hungarians (66,70% - 26.609 persons); Romanians (12,84% - 5.124 persons); Slovaks (10,71% - 4.274 persons); Roma (8,15% - 3.250 persons); Germans (0,96% - 383 persons); Other ethnicities: 0.62% (246 persons).

Baptist Church (21,336 persons): Romanians (57,72% - 12,315 persons); Roma (24,92% - 5.316 persons); Hungarians (17.04% - 3,635 persons); Other ethnicities: 0.3% (64 persons).

Greek Catholic Church (9,890 persons): Romanians (73,32% - 7.251 persons); Hungarians (21,43% - 2.119 persons); Roma (3,41% - 337 persons); Other ethnicities: 1,81% (179 persons).

III. Best Practices at the Regional and Local Level: Ethno-Confessional Realities and Societal Security

Border spaces in the European Union are no longer rigid lines of demarcation, but active hubs of territorial cohesion and integration. In these areas, the **management of ethno-religious diversity** goes beyond mere legal compliance, becoming a central component of **societal security**. The latter guarantees the capacity of minority communities to preserve their collective identity and fundamental values in the face of current challenges, without causing fractures or dissension in relation to the majority population.

The cross-border area formed by Bihor County (Romania) and Hajdú-Bihar County (Hungary) constitutes a reference model at the European level regarding societal resilience. Having a history marked by profound geopolitical mutations, as well as various twentieth-century traumas and conflicts, this region has succeeded, in the post-communist and post-EU accession periods, in converting historical vulnerabilities into competitive advantages through bilingualism, active ecumenism, and European territorial cooperation programs.

The present overview explores the best practices developed within this space, being structured along two interdependent dimensions: the **ethnic dimension** and the **religious dimension**, each encompassing the imperatives of societal security and applied institutional management.

Within the limits of the available documentary sources and the identified practices in the analyzed frontier and cross-border area, we aim to identify examples of best practices across multiple correlated levels for each of the two dimensions—ethnic and religious. This approach examines legislative implementation, inter-community institutional cooperation, and minority representation at administrative and political levels, ranging from local governance to parliamentary involvement. It also addresses inter-ethnic and inter-religious relations, alongside joint inter-community projects developed within the public sphere. The analysis also covers education in the language of minorities and open confessional education, specific cross-border cooperation projects (from Interreg ROHU programs), joint cultural events, joint actions by public authorities for the preservation of sacred and historical heritage, alongside applied strategies for the social-educational integration of minorities, especially the Roma.

The fundamental financial instrument that allowed the operationalization of these ethno-confessional good practices and the consolidation of societal security is *The Interreg VI-A Romania-Hungary Programme*, financed by the European Regional Development Fund (ERDF) with a total allocation of 175,940,025.00 EUR (out of which 80% ERDF, in amount of 140,752,020.00 EUR)⁷⁹.

1. Ethnic Dimension and Societal Security

Societal security in its ethnic dimension aims to guarantee the right to cultural and linguistic self-reproduction for minorities, while simultaneously preventing any radical discourse or forms of structural marginalization. In Bihor County, the balance between the Romanian majority (69.03%) and the Hungarian (22.35%) and Roma (7.33%) minorities is ensured through a complex of public policies and successful community initiatives.

1.1. Legislative Implementation and Inter-ethnic Cooperation at the Institutional Level

The transposition of international standards into the Bihor region is achieved directly through strict compliance with the

⁷⁹ BRECO, *The Interreg VI-A Romania-Hungary Programme*. Discover the programme, <https://interreg-rohu.eu/en/discover-the-rohu-programme/>, accessed on May 18th, 2026.

Administrative Code of Romania (OUG no. 57/2019⁸⁰). This stipulates the right to use the language of national minorities in local public administration and in public relations in all Administrative-Territorial Units (ATU) where a minority exceeds the threshold of 20% of the population.

In Bihor County, institutional inter-ethnic cooperation takes concrete and effective forms:

- *Effective administrative bilingualism.* In the municipality of Oradea and in towns such as Salonta, Marghita, Săcueni, or Valea lui Mihai, as well as in dozens of communes with significant shares of the Hungarian population, all toponymy, street names, institutions, and public utility forms are displayed bilingually.

- *Bilingual administrative apparatus.* Deconcentrated institutions and local city halls apply the legal provisions by hiring public officials fluent in the Hungarian language or by using authorized interpreters, facilitating unhindered and non-discriminatory citizen access to state services.

- *Dedicated consultation structures.* Institutional cooperation is reinforced by the operation of specialized bodies at the county level, such as the Mixed Working Group for Roma Issues within the Prefect's Institution of Bihor County, which acts as a bridge between national inclusion strategies and field realities (the purpose of this working group is to implement the National Strategy for the Inclusion of Romanian Citizens Belonging to the Roma Minority for the 2022-2027 Period in Bihor County)⁸¹.

1.2. Interregional Coordination and Stimulation of Inter-Ethnic Relations and Cooperation

Inter-ethnic relations in Bihor County are characterized by a high degree of cultural accommodation and the absence of conflictual incidents. The central pillar of cross-border Romanian-Hungarian interregional cooperation—acting as a catalyst for inter-community cooperation in mixed-settlement areas—is the Bihor-Hajdú-Bihar

⁸⁰ Portalul Legislativ Just.ro, *Ordonanță de Urgență nr. 57 din 3 iulie 2019 privind Codul administrativ*, <https://legislatie.just.ro/Public/DetaliiDocument/215925>, accessed on May 17th, 2026.

⁸¹ See the composition and role of the Mixed Working Group for Roma Issues in Bihor County. Instituția Prefectului Județul Bihor, <https://bh.prefectura.mai.gov.ro/grupul-de-lucru-mixt-pentru-problemele-romilor/>, accessed on May 18th, 2026.

Euroregion. This structure is established upon a robust partnership framework between the Bihor County Council and the Hajdú-Bihar County Self-Government. This euroregional platform facilitates the harmonization of development policies, continuous information exchange, and the implementation of joint strategies that mitigate the border's "barrier effect."

A prominent, high-impact example illustrating how regional and local inter-institutional agreements diminish the "barrier effect" through cultural cooperation is the "*Romanian-Hungarian Cross-Border Cultural Laboratory*" project (*CULTURAL LIVING LAB – ROHU00618*)⁸². Implemented by Bihor County in partnership with Hajdú-Bihar County (Hungary) and funded via the Interreg VI-A Romania-Hungary 2021-2027 program, the initiative aims to leverage the role of culture in regional development. The core components of the project encompass:

- *The construction of cultural infrastructure*, namely the Oradea Multifunctional Cultural Center located within the vicinity of the Museum of the Crișana Region (*Muzeul Țării Crișurilor*). This complex is designed to operate symmetrically with a counterpart facility in Hajdú-Bihar.
- *The organization of 12 joint actions* executed as intercultural events.
- *The development of a digital cultural platform*, functioning as a trilingual tool (RO-HU-EN) dedicated to heritage promotion and the mapping of cultural institutions across the partner regions.

This initiative converts cultural diversity into a regional brand, thereby fostering cohesion and societal security within the ethno-linguistically, culturally, and religiously mixed borderland.

Another exemplary model of cooperation is the direct engagement between the Oradea Municipality and the Debrecen Municipality. This relationship is operationalized through active sister-city agreements that transcend formal diplomacy, generating

⁸² Consiliul Județean Bihor, „*Romanian-Hungarian Cross-Border Cultural Living Lab*, acronym *CULTURAL LIVING LAB*” – ROHU00618, <https://www.cjbihor.ro/programul-interreg-vi-a-romania-ungaria-2021-2027-ro-hu-2021-2027/laborator-cultural-transfrontalier-romano-maghiar-cu-titlu-in-limba-engleza-romanian-hungarian-cross-border-cultural-living-lab-acronym-cultural-living-lab/>, accessed on May 18th, 2026.

direct linkages among economic operators, cultural institutions, and local communities in both urban centers.

1.3. Joint Inter-Community Projects Developed in the Public Space

The public space of Bihor County reflects an integrative approach, wherein diversity is leveraged as a positive regional brand. Joint inter-community projects focus on the creation of areas for cultural and social interaction.

A prominent example is represented by urban revitalization initiatives in Oradea, where the restoration of historic monuments in the *Secession* style (an architectural heritage bequeathed by the Hungarian and Jewish elites) has been undertaken by the local administration as a general identity priority. Public spaces, such as Piața Unirii or the pedestrian corridor of Republicii Street, frequently host events where Romanian, Hungarian, Slovak, and Roma artists, artisans, and producers showcase their creations to a mixed audience, dissolving ethno-linguistic barriers through participatory urban culture. The most representative direct cross-border project, focusing exclusively on this issue, is the mirror strategic project carried out by the Oradea Municipality in partnership with the Debrecen Municipality: *Enhancing the role of culture and sustainable tourism in Oradea and Debrecen*. The project demonstrates how the historical assumption of the built heritage constructed by minorities (Hungarian and Jewish) is transformed by a majority-Romanian public administration into a general regional identity priority. Instead of becoming a historical fracture line, the *Secession* style has become a neutral and vibrant cultural platform, a unifying urban brand called "Art Nouveau, Life Nouveau," capable of dissolving linguistic barriers and cultivating mutual respect among all border communities⁸³.

Another recent and highly applied example in this direction is the project *Strengthening the preservation of cultural and natural heritage values along the Crișul Repede Valley in the cross-border area of Komádi and Lugașu de Jos (ROHU00328)*, implemented from May 2026 to May 2027 through a close partnership between the Komádi Local Self-Government (Hungary) and Lugașu de Jos Commune

⁸³ About keep.eu, *Enhancing the role of culture and sustainable tourism in Oradea and Debrecen*, Programme 2021 - 2027 Interreg VI-A Romania-Hungary, <https://keep.eu/projects/32704/Enhancing-the-role-of-cultur-EN/>, accessed on May 18th, 2026.

(Bihor County, Romania). This People-to-People initiative aims to bring together citizens from both sides of the border to foster awareness of shared cultural and natural values along the Crișul Repede Valley. By highlighting ethno-cultural diversity and volunteer-based ecological activities, the SPCN project demonstrates how rural border communities can directly cooperate to prevent cultural isolation, reinforcing societal resilience and long-term interpersonal linkages within the Bihor–Hajdú-Bihar Euroregion⁸⁴.

1.4. Education in the Language of National Minorities

Ethnic societal security critically depends on access to education in the mother tongue, a fundamental instrument for preventing forced linguistic assimilation and guaranteeing the preservation of cultural identity in border area. In Bihor County, through the strategic partnership between the Bihor County School Inspectorate⁸⁵ and local authorities, the educational infrastructure designated for national minorities is comprehensive, covering all instructional levels and organized into two major structural categories: units with exclusive instruction in the minority language and units with mixed instruction (inter-ethnic sections).

There are educational institutions with **full instruction in minority languages**. These institutions function as nuclei of absolute linguistic preservation, where the entire educational and administrative process is conducted in the mother tongue of the respective minority (with the exception of Romanian Language and Literature classes).

The **Hungarian minority** benefits from this educational system from pre-school to high school and university levels. The "*Ady Endre*" *Theoretical High School in Oradea* is one of the largest and most prestigious educational institutions with exclusive instruction in the Hungarian language in Romania. The institution offers elite theoretical profiles (real and human sciences) and attracts students

⁸⁴ BRECO, *The Interreg VI-A Romania-Hungary Programme, Strengthening the preservation of cultural and natural heritage values along the Crișul Repede Valley in the cross-border area of Komádi and Lugașu de Jos (ROHU00328)*, https://interreg-rohu.eu/en/project_library/spcn-strengthening-the-preservation-of-cultural-and-natural-heritage-values-along-the-crisul-repede-valley-in-the-cross-border-area-of-komadi-and-lugasu-de-jos-rohu00328/, accessed on May 18th, 2026.

⁸⁵ See official website, Bihor County School Inspectorate, <https://www.isjbihor.ro/>, accessed on May 18th, 2026.

from across the entire county, ensuring studies at all levels (Primary, Lower Secondary/Gymnasium, and High School)⁸⁶. Hungarian Theological and Confessional High Schools operate with full instruction in the Hungarian language and combine specialized secular training with spiritual education. Landmark examples include the "*Lorántffy Zsuzsanna*" Reformed High School in Oradea and the "*Szent László*" Roman Catholic Theological High School in Oradea. These schools prepare young people in the spirit of preserving the religious and ethno-cultural values of Transylvanian Hungarians. In border towns and communes with large Hungarian communities, educational institutions with full instruction in the Hungarian language are operational. Furthermore, at the university level, *Partium Christian University* in Oradea functions as an accredited, private higher education institution that offers bachelor's and master's degree programs with full instruction in the Hungarian language. The university covers specializations in economics, humanities, arts, and social sciences, serving as a central pillar of societal security in the cross-border region⁸⁷.

The **Slovak minority** has the "*Jozef Kozáček*" Theoretical High School in Budoï (Popești Commune), which provides education at all levels (Primary, Lower Secondary/Gymnasium, and High School). It represents a major best practice at the national level, being the only high school with Slovak as the language of instruction in Bihor County. The institution enrolls students of Slovak nationality coming from Bihor and Sălaj counties, ensuring the identity, linguistic, and confessional (Roman Catholic) survival of the Slovaks in the mountainous basins of northwestern Transylvania⁸⁸.

Mixed education (mixed **multilingual schools**) reflects the model of active interculturality, where students belonging to the majority and minorities share the same school space, facilitating mutual knowledge and societal integration. Such schools can be found in a very large number of localities with a mixed population, across all educational levels from kindergarten to university.

⁸⁶ See more details on the official website, "Ady Endre" Theoretical High School, <https://www.adyliceum.ro/>, accessed on May 18th, 2026.

⁸⁷ See more details on the official website, Partium Christian University, <https://partium.ro/>, accessed on May 18th, 2026.

⁸⁸ See more details on the official website, Bihor County School Inspectorate, https://www.isjbihor.ro/download/pdi/PDI_BUDOI.pdf, accessed on May 18th, 2026.

A recognized best practice is the **intercultural openness** of schools, namely school projects where students from Romanian-medium schools and those from Hungarian sections participate together in thematic summer camps, debate circles, and sports competitions, stimulating the mutual learning of languages and respect for alterity from an early age.

1.5. Joint Cultural Events and Heritage Preservation

The cultural synergy of ethnic groups is celebrated annually through large-scale regional events, such as the Hungarian Cultural Days in Oradea or the multi-ethnic festivals organized in border localities.

A case study of particular importance for the preservation of ethnic identity through the conservation of shared heritage involves the Slovaks of the Plopiș Mountains (Șes Mountains), who are predominantly located in the Șinteu commune. This community has successfully preserved a history spanning more than 200 years. The "Huta Slavia" Tourist and Cultural Complex, located in Șinteu, functions as a true center for promoting authentic Slovak gastronomy, crafts, and folk traditions in their pure form. In November 2025, the launch of a bilingual Romanian-Slovak documentary album titled *"The Story of the Slovaks from Huta / Príbeh Slovákov z Huty"* took place at this complex. Coordinated by Prof. Univ. Dr. Habil. Sorin Șipoș and developed in partnership with the University of Oradea and the Honorary Consulate of the Slovak Republic in Oradea, the volume brings together archival photographs, stories from local residents, and historical landmarks regarding the migration and settlement of Slovaks in the region. This initiative represents a major best practice through which the academic environment, diplomatic authorities, and the local community collaborate to safeguard cultural memory within the multicultural mosaic of Bihor⁸⁹.

Closely linked to this heritage and the preservation of Slovak identity is the funding secured through The Interreg VI-A Romania-Hungary Programme for the ROHU-271 project: *"The Minority Question in the ROHU cross-border area: Slovak Culture, Tradition and History without Borders"*. This project is specifically focused on the preservation of Slovak heritage. Its primary purpose is to promote the

⁸⁹ See Sorin Șipoș (coord.), Ioana Blajec, Cosmin Patca, Manuela Bârza, *Povestea slovacilor din Huta / Príbeh Slovákov z Huty*, Editura Primus, Oradea, 2022.

traditions, culture, and shared history of Slovak communities along the Romanian-Hungarian border, in close connection with the history of Romanians and Hungarians. The main implemented activities included: 1. organizing two cross-border workshops dedicated to "The Slovak Minority Issue", held in both Șinteu and Békéscsaba; 2. developing the itinerant event "Living Slovak Museum: A Museum of Slovak Culture and Traditions" in both partner locations. This initiative successfully collected and presented comprehensive data regarding cross-border Slovak organizations, historical backgrounds, traditional folk culture, daily lifestyles, and local cuisine⁹⁰.

1.6. The Social-Educational Integration of the Roma

The integration of the Roma minority represents one of the most complex challenges for contemporary societal security, given the high risks of segregation and economic exclusion. Unfortunately, the analysis of societal security in the case of Roma communities cannot be done without also considering the serious problems related to social and economic inclusion, the overlap between identity borders and social borders (this reality is not visible in the case of other ethnic communities in the region).

In Bihor County, best practices in this field place a strong emphasis on education and youth empowerment:

- "School after School" (After-school) programs implemented by local NGOs in partnership with school inspectorates in communities with large Roma populations (e.g., Tinca, Tileagd); these programs provide homework support, psychological counseling, and hot meals, substantially reducing school dropout rates.
- The employment of Roma individuals as school and health mediators within the county's schools and clinics has facilitated the building of a bridge of trust between traditional segregated families and official state institutions, thereby increasing children's vaccination and school enrollment rates.
- Guiding Roma youth toward accessing state-subsidized university slots at the University of Oradea has led to the formation of a new Roma intellectual elite (teachers, social workers, lawyers) who return to their communities to act as successful role models.

⁹⁰ BRECO, *The Interreg VI-A Romania-Hungary Programme, ROHU-271, The Minority Question in the ROHU cross-border area: Slovak Culture, Tradition and History without Borders*, <https://interreg-rohu.eu/en/pa6-cooperation-between-institutions-and-citizens>, accessed on May 18th, 2026.

A Landmark Model for the Social-Educational Integration of the Roma, the *Ruhamă Foundation*⁹¹, established in Oradea in 1996, serves as a premier institutional best practice at the regional and national level. It illustrates how civil society can effectively target and dismantle the cycle of Roma marginalization and poverty through a holistic approach. The foundation operationalizes the key pillars of contemporary social-educational integration. They actively deploy critical inclusion models, including "School after School" (After-School) frameworks, summer preschool programs, and parenting classes (*School of Parents*) to drastically reduce early school dropouts. A core success of the foundation has been its focus on training and promoting Roma school and health mediators. These mediators serve as a vital institutional bridge of trust between segregated communities and local public schools or medical dispensaries, successfully boosting enrollment and healthcare access. Through integrated structural initiatives—such as the recent 24-month project „*Active Students in the Community: From Student to Profession*” (Nov 2024 - Nov 2026) funded through the Education and Employment Program—Ruhamă actively facilitates the transition of hundreds of university students in Bihor into the labor market. The Ruhamă Foundation provides a proven, replicable methodology for local administrations seeking to secure societal resilience and active civic inclusion within multi-ethnic border zones.

1.7. The Involvement of Minorities in Political-Administrative Public Life

The Romanian model of political integration for national minorities is fully visible in Bihor County, ensuring democratic representation from the local to the parliamentary level. National minorities actively participate in the decision-making process through their legitimate organizations:

- The representation of the *Democratic Alliance of Hungarians in Romania* through its Bihor branch holds a significant share in the county's local councils and the Bihor County Council, frequently participating in local government coalitions alongside majority parties. This presence guarantees that the interests of the Hungarian community regarding culture, infrastructure, and education are directly integrated into public budgets. At the parliamentary level,

⁹¹ See more details on their website, Ruhamă Foundation, <https://www.ruhamă.ro/index.html>, accessed on May 18th, 2026.

Bihor consistently sends Hungarian deputies and senators to the Parliament of Romania, ensuring a strong voice for the region in the national legislative process.

- The *Democratic Union of Slovaks and Czechs in Romania*, with its headquarters firmly anchored in Bihor, manages the political representation of the Slovak community, holding the office of mayor in the Șinteu commune as well as local council mandates. Furthermore, through constitutional provisions that guarantee a seat in the Chamber of Deputies for national minorities that do not reach the standard electoral threshold, the Slovak community secures its permanent representation at the central legislative level.

2. The Religious Dimension and Societal Security

Societal security in its religious (confessional) dimension aims to maintain freedom of conscience, protect the autonomy of recognized denominations, and promote ecumenical dialogue as a tool to prevent religious radicalization or the exploitation of theological differences as geopolitical fault lines. Bihor County presents a unique pluralistic confessional structure (the main confessional groups are: Orthodox – 59.29%, Reformed (Calvinists) – 16.01%, Pentecostal – 8.16%, Roman Catholic – 8.01%, Baptist – 4.28%, Greek Catholic – 1.98% among the population with a declared religion⁹²).

2.1. Legislative Implementation and Institutional Cooperation

At the confessional level, cooperation is grounded in Law no. 489/2006 on religious freedom and the general regime of cults⁹³. The Romanian state recognizes the spiritual, cultural, and social assistance role of religious denominations, guaranteeing their status as factors of social peace.

In Bihor County, legislative implementation materializes through transparent mechanisms of institutional support:

- The *funding of cults* is also provided through regional and local authorities. Both the Bihor County Council and Oradea City Hall

⁹² Institutul Național de Statistică, *Recensământul Populației și Locuințelor 2021...*

⁹³ Portalul Legislativ Just.ro, *LEGE nr. 489 din 28 decembrie 2006 (*republicată*) privind libertatea religioasă și regimul general al cultelor*, <https://legislatie.just.ro/Public/DetaliiDocument/78355>, accessed on May 18th, 2026.

allocate funds annually from the local budget on a proportional and non-discriminatory basis to all dioceses and parishes present in the county, supporting the repair of places of worship and social projects⁹⁴.

- There is a *State-Church partnership* in the sphere of social-cultural assistance. Local authorities (Social Assistance Directorates) enter into collaboration protocols with the charitable foundations of dioceses/religious organizations, outsourcing home care services for the elderly or day centers for children to religious structures, recognizing their administrative efficiency in the field of community relations.

2.2. Inter-religious Relations and Cooperation

Oradea is renowned for its religious diversity and the institutional representation of its religious denominations. The simultaneous presence of four major historical dioceses—the Romanian Orthodox Diocese of Oradea⁹⁵, the Roman Catholic Diocese⁹⁶, the Reformed Diocese near Piatra Craiului⁹⁷, and the Greek Catholic Diocese of Oradea⁹⁸—has fostered a climate of deep inter-confessional cooperation. In the contemporary period, this traditional mosaic is organically completed by the presence of highly dynamic neo-Protestant movements, represented at the regional leadership level by institutions such as the Oradea Pentecostal Regional Community and the Community of Christian Baptist Churches of

⁹⁴ See, for example, the county administrative platform on the Bihor County Council website, where applicants' guidelines are published for the allocation of non-reimbursable funds intended for places of worship belonging to all recognized denominations, specifically under the section *Granting financial support for cult units belonging to recognized religious cults in Romania*, in accordance with OG nr. 82/2001 si HG nr. 1470/2002 (Government Ordinance no. 82/2001 and Government Decision no. 1470/2002), <https://www.cjbihor.ro/informatii-publice/acordare-sprijin-financiar-pentru-unitatile-de-cult-apartinand-cultelor-religioase-recunoscute-din-romania-cf-og-nr-82-2001-si-hg-nr-1470-2002/>, accessed on May 27th, 2026.

⁹⁵ See more details on official website, Episcopia Ortodoxă a Oradiei, www.eparhiaortodoxaoradea.ro, accessed on May 27th, 2026.

⁹⁶ See more details on official website, Episcopia Romano-Catolică de Oradea, www.varad.org, accessed on May 27th, 2026.

⁹⁷ See more details on official website, Episcopia Reformată de pe lângă Piatra Craiului, www.krek.ro, accessed on May 27th, 2026.

⁹⁸ See more details on official website, Episcopia Greco-Catolică de Oradea, www.egco.ro, accessed on May 27th, 2026.

Oradea. These administrative coordination structures closely collaborate with the historical dioceses, bringing an undeniable numerical, social, and institutional contribution to the city's cohesion equation. They oversee local megachurches recognized at the European level, such as the Emanuel Baptist Church⁹⁹—under whose auspices the foundations of the Emanuel University of Oradea and the Emanuel Baptist Theological High School were laid; the Speranța Baptist Church of Oradea (BBSO)¹⁰⁰; or the Betel Pentecostal Church¹⁰¹—under whose auspices the foundations of the Betel Pentecostal Theological High School were established.

The hierarchs and leaders of these churches participate together in public ceremonies on National Day, as well as in the city's official events, and jointly organize the annual Week of Prayer for Christian Unity. Within this long-standing ecumenical event, believers and religious leaders from Oradea gather itinerantly, evening after evening, in places of worship belonging to different denominations (Orthodox and Catholic cathedrals, Reformed churches, or Baptist and Pentecostal churches, among others) to preach harmony, dialogue, and fraternal witness¹⁰².

This periodic inter-religious dialogue functions as an excellent informal early warning and de-escalation mechanism: any potential administrative or political misunderstanding at the ethnic level is discussed and resolved at the level of religious leaders, thereby guaranteeing the societal stability of the entire region.

2.3. Integrated Social-Charitable Partnerships

The churches in Bihor have understood that their social relevance depends on direct involvement in the life of the local community. An excellent practice is represented by the coordination of social assistance networks in situations of humanitarian crisis or

⁹⁹ See more details on official website, Emanuel Baptist Church, <https://bbeo.ro/>, accessed on May 27th, 2026.

¹⁰⁰ See more details on official website, Speranța Baptist Church of Oradea, <https://www.bbso.ro/>, accessed on May 27th, 2026.

¹⁰¹ See more details on official website, Betel Pentecostal Church, <https://beteloradea.ro/>, accessed on May 27th, 2026.

¹⁰² See the program of this event from 2026, which took place between January 17th and 25th. Every day, the program was held in a different location belonging to a different religious denomination. Episcopia Greco-Catolică de Oradea, <https://www.egco.ro/2026/01/08/octava-de-rugaciune-pentru-unitatea-crestinilor-oradea-2026/>, accessed on May 27th, 2026.

for supporting vulnerable groups. Diocesan charitable organizations, such as the *Filantropia Oradea Association* (Orthodox), the *Caritas Catolica Association* (Roman Catholic), the assistance foundations of the Baptist and Pentecostal churches, and many others, collaborate directly to manage social soup kitchens, night shelters for the homeless, and home care services for the elderly. Logistical resources and volunteers from different denominations are often jointly directed to ensure optimal territorial coverage of social cases in Bihor County, with support being granted strictly on the basis of human vulnerability, without any confessional discrimination.

2.4. Open and Inclusive Confessional Education

Bihor County possesses a confessional educational network that is unique in its dynamism, complexity, and size, managed in close partnership between local dioceses or religious communities and the Ministry of Education. An absolute best practice of these institutions is the implementation of an institutional "open doors" policy in the sphere of education for all children, regardless of denomination.

At the ***pre-university level***, the confessional high schools in the Municipality of Oradea have transcended the traditional model of closed community schools. They function as inclusive, mainstream institutions where enrollment is not conditioned or limited by membership in the denomination that sponsors the school. These units welcome students from all ethnic and religious backgrounds, offering a curriculum focused on academic performance and universal moral values.

From the perspective of educational quality, confessional schools in Oradea have become elite units highly sought after by parents, regardless of the family's denomination. These high schools consistently record remarkable results in national exams (the National Evaluation and the Baccalaureate exam), with passing rates that are often well above the county and national averages, with some frequently reaching 100% passing rates in the Baccalaureate.

- "Episcop Roman Ciorogariu" Orthodox High School, Oradea¹⁰³. Sponsored by the Romanian Orthodox Diocese of Oradea, this high school offers a complete educational track (from pre-school

¹⁰³ See more details on the official website, "Episcop Roman Ciorogariu" Orthodox High School, Oradea, <https://www.licortoradea.ro>, accessed on May 27th, 2026.

to high school level, including a theological profile and theoretical profiles, such as philology). The institution has experienced spectacular growth, becoming one of the most requested schools in the municipality, where parents from Oradea compete fiercely to enroll their children in the primary and lower secondary cycles due to the quality teaching staff and the safe climate.

- "Betel" Pentecostal Theological High School, Oradea¹⁰⁴. Provides high-level theoretical and vocational training. Its inclusion policy attracts youth from various Christian denominations, and its academic rigor is reflected in annual Baccalaureate results well above the national average (frequently reaching a 100% passing rate).

- "Emanuel" Baptist Theological High School, Oradea¹⁰⁵. Established under the auspices of the Baptist community, this high school offers top theoretical profiles (real and human sciences) and is recognized at the county level for high admission averages and performances in national olympiads. The school integrates a significant number of Orthodox or Pentecostal students and traditionally ranks at the top of high schools in Bihor regarding its Baccalaureate passing rate.

- "Iuliu Maniu" Greek Catholic High School, Oradea¹⁰⁶. A continuator of the tradition of the Romanian United schools, this high school offers both elite theoretical tracks and a vocational theological profile. It educates a mixed student population.

- "Lorántffy Zsuzsanna" Reformed High School, Oradea¹⁰⁷ and "Szent László" Roman Catholic Theological High School, Oradea¹⁰⁸. These institutions offer instruction in the Hungarian language and are open to all students, regardless of their specific denomination. They stand out for the preservation of cultural heritage and high success rates in national exams, preparing youth for bilingual higher education.

¹⁰⁴ See more details on the official website, "Betel" Pentecostal Theological High School, Oradea, <https://www.ltpbetel.ro/>, accessed on May 27th, 2026.

¹⁰⁵ See more details on the official website, "Emanuel" Baptist Theological High School, Oradea, <https://ltbe.ro/>, accessed on May 27th, 2026.

¹⁰⁶ See more details on the official website, "Iuliu Maniu" Greek Catholic High School, Oradea, www.liceuliuliumaniu.ro, accessed on May 27th, 2026.

¹⁰⁷ See more details on the official website, "Lorántffy Zsuzsanna" Reformed High School, Oradea, <https://lorantffynagyvarad.ro/>, accessed on May 27th, 2026.

¹⁰⁸ See more details on the official website, "Szent László" Roman Catholic Theological High School, Oradea, www.licromcat.ro, accessed on May 27th, 2026.

- "Don Orione" High School, Oradea¹⁰⁹. Managed by the Don Orione Congregation, this high school represents a benchmark of best practices in diversity management and quality. Despite having a Catholic foundation, the overwhelming majority of its students are Orthodox. It is one of the most sought-after technical and theoretical schools in the county due to its modern logistical base, discipline, and very good exam results.

At the *university level*, Oradea has consolidated itself as a multiconfessional center of academic excellence, capable of covering the entire European theological spectrum. This unique concentration of universities and confessional faculties transforms the local university environment into a strategic platform for dialogue, interdisciplinary research, and regional cooperation.

- *Faculty of Orthodox Theology "Episcop Dr. Vasile Coman"* within the *University of Oradea*¹¹⁰. As a public state institution, it structurally collaborates with all confessional faculties in the region. It prepares future clerics and social workers in the spirit of ecumenical dialogue.

- *Emanuel University of Oradea*¹¹¹. Established under the patronage of the Baptist Community, the university offers bachelor's and master's programs in theology, music, management, social work, and computer science. Although it maintains a clear evangelical theological profile, the university is open to youth from other denominations, emphasizing academic excellence and leadership training for the community.

- *Partium Christian University* (Oradea)¹¹². An accredited private higher education institution tightly linked to the local reformed diocese. It offers study tracks with full instruction in the Hungarian language in economic, artistic, and humanistic fields. The university acts as a central pillar of cross-border societal security, cooperating directly with

¹⁰⁹ See more details on the official website, "Don Orione" High School, Oradea <https://www.ldo.ro/>, accessed on May 27th, 2026.

¹¹⁰ See more details on the official website, University of Oradea, Faculty of Orthodox Theology "Episcop Dr. Vasile Coman", <https://teologie.uoradea.ro/>, accessed on May 27th, 2026.

¹¹¹ See more details on the official website, Emanuel University of Oradea, <https://emanuel.ro/>, accessed on May 27th, 2026.

¹¹² See more details on the official website, Partium Christian University, <https://partium.ro/>, accessed on May 18th, 2026.

the University of Debrecen and welcoming students from various confessional backgrounds (Reformed, Catholic, Lutheran).

- *Faculty of Greek Catholic Theology, Babeş-Bolyai University – Oradea University Extension*¹¹³. The presence of the renowned Cluj university in Oradea through its department of Greek Catholic theology completes the Romanian-language Catholic academic dimension. The institution closely collaborates with the Greek Catholic Diocese of Oradea and other local theological faculties, supporting Transylvanian historical research and elite intellectual formation.

2.5. Joint Efforts and Involvement in the Preservation of Tangible and Intangible Spiritual Heritage

Bihor County shelters a sacred architectural treasure of priceless value (e.g., the wooden churches in the Beiuş area, Baroque cathedrals, medieval Reformed churches). Their conservation is approached through a common strategy that unites communities.

We present several of the numerous projects significant for our analysis:

- The Restoration Project of the Roman Catholic Baroque Complex represents a model for the restoration of a major historical monument in Oradea, achieved with the support of European and governmental funds, and returned to the entire cross-border community as an elite cultural center¹¹⁴.

- The Wooden Churches Circuit and Ecumenical Tourism. Local initiatives supported by the Bihor County Council (CJ Bihor) have led to the creation of ecumenical tourist routes that connect Orthodox wooden churches with Catholic and Protestant places of worship in the region, promoting an indivisible cultural heritage that belongs to the entire Bihor area, regardless of the original confessional source. A historic partnership agreement was officially approved on July 30, 2026, between the county administration and the Romanian Orthodox Diocese of Oradea to save these monuments¹¹⁵. The project bears the

¹¹³ See more details on the official website, Babeş-Bolyai University – Oradea University Extension, Faculty of Greek Catholic Theology, <https://gct.ubbcluj.ro/licenta-teologie-greco-catolica-pastorala-la-oradea/>, accessed on May 27th, 2026.

¹¹⁴ See more details on the official website, Episcopia Romano-Catolică de Oradea, <https://varad.org/ro/>, accessed on May 28th, 2026.

¹¹⁵ See the partnership agreement on the Bihor County Council website, <https://www.cjbihor.ro/wp-content/uploads/2026/07/20-proiect-de-hotarare-privind-aprobarea-cooperarii-dintre-Jud-BH-si-Episcopia-Orodoxa-a-Oradiei->

official name "Rehabilitation of Wooden Churches in Bihor County" and is carried out as a multi-annual program. In Bihor, 59 wooden churches are registered with historical monument status (representing approximately 5% of the national total). Through this program, they will be gradually conserved and included in the Cultural-Tourist Route of Wooden Churches in Bihor¹¹⁶.

- HeritageTour. The Enhancement of the Route of Medieval Churches (ROHU-00532) project is a major cross-border sustainable tourism and cultural preservation initiative funded under the Interreg VI-A Romania-Hungary Programme¹¹⁷. The strategic partnership brings together two historical religious institutions: the Reformed Church District from Debrecen (Hungary) and the Reformed Church District from Oradea (Romania). Direct funding is allocated for the structural renovation and rehabilitation of 6 historically significant medieval churches across the Hungarian and Romanian border region. The initiative expands the existing cross-border cultural network by integrating 27 new heritage sites into the established Route of Medieval Churches. By restoring lesser-known historical monuments and transforming them into active cultural and sustainable tourism hubs, HeritageTour successfully turns shared sacred architecture into a tool for regional growth. This project serves as an excellent best practice of how cross-border confessional networks can convert deep-rooted ethno-religious history into a shared economic and social asset, fostering long-term stability and intercultural cohesion.

- Another example of best practices in the development of a multicultural public space, funded through the current European program, is the project Bridging Cultures: A Multicultural Crossborder Choir Festival Celebrating Common Heritage (ROHU00356). The project was implemented by the Romanian Greek-Catholic Diocese of Oradea (RO) and the Hajdúdorog Metropolis Church (HU). This initiative shifts the focus from tangible to intangible heritage, utilizing

[si-a-acordului-de-parteneriat-pentru-reabilitare-biserici-de-lemn.pdf](#), accessed on May 29th, 2026.

¹¹⁶ Bihor County Council website, <https://www.cjbihor.ro/parteneriat-intre-consiliul-judetean-si-episcopia-ortodoxa-pentru-reabilitarea-biseriilor-de-lemn-din-bihor/>, accessed on May 27th, 2026.

¹¹⁷ BRECO, *The Interreg VI-A Romania-Hungary Programme, HeritageTour. The Enhancement of the Route of Medieval Churches* (ROHU-00532), https://interreg-rohu.eu/en/project_library/heritagetour-the-enhancement-of-the-route-of-medieval-churches-rohu-00532/, accessed on May 27th, 2026.

urban and rural public spaces in the region to hold a large-scale cross-border choir festival. The project brings together multi-ethnic choirs, performers, and vocal ensembles that perform sacred, secular music and traditional folklore outdoors, in parks, public squares, and places of worship open to the general public. By transforming the shared space into a living stage for musical dialogue, the project acts as a cultural bridge ("bridging cultures") that brings together citizens from both sides of the border, converting a mixed historical heritage into a social bond that directly strengthens mutual respect and regional societal security¹¹⁸.

IV. SWOT Analysis on Ethno-Confessional Realities and Societal Security in Bihor County

In accordance with the objectives and methodology of the best practices guide, the strategic diagnosis below evaluates the dynamics of the integration, security, and inclusion process in Bihor County. This analysis correlates long-term census demographic data (1930–2021) and confessional realities with contemporary mechanisms of institutional and cross-border cooperation.

The utility and importance of this SWOT analysis derive from the need to conduct a rigorous strategic diagnosis, capable of scanning the complex ethnic and confessional realities of Bihor County and evaluating the current stage of integration, intercultural dialogue, and intercommunity cooperation. By systematizing the strengths and opportunities generated by the identified best practices — mirrored against demographic vulnerabilities and emerging geopolitical threats — this methodological tool provides the indispensable scientific foundation for translating empirical data into practical recommendations and a sustainable administrative action plan.

¹¹⁸ BRECO, *The Interreg VI-A Romania-Hungary Programme, Bridging Cultures: A Multicultural Crossborder Choir Festival Celebrating Common Heritage* (ROHU00356), https://interreg-rohu.eu/en/project_library/cbc-fest-bridging-cultures-a-multicultural-crossborder-choir-festival-celebrating-common-heritage-rohu00356/, accessed on May 27th, 2026.

Table 4. SWOT Matrix

<p>1. Strengths</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Consolidated institutional framework and administrative bilingualism • Complete educational infrastructure in the mother tongue or at a confessional level • Long-standing coexistence and cooperation of ethnic and religious communities • Membership of Romania and Hungary in the EU and the Schengen Area • Excellence and attractiveness in open confessional education • Ecumenical early warning mechanism and social peace • Efficient public-private partnership in the charitable sphere 	<p>2. Weaknesses</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Structural demographic decline and the aging of historical minorities • Risk of segregation and exclusion in marginalized Roma communities • The near-complete disappearance of core multicultural communities • Interethnic language proficiency asymmetries • The association between religion/confession and ethnicity • Legislative-Administrative Barrier Effect Generated by the Border • Absence of Specific School Curricula for Mixed Border Areas • Vulnerability of Best Practices in the Face of Political/Electoral Volatility
<p>3. Opportunities</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Strategic European funding through the new Interreg VI-A ROHU program • Development of cultural hubs with a regional scope • Capitalizing on ecumenical tourism and shared sacred heritage • Neo-Protestant churches as vectors of inclusion for the Roma • International transfer of know-how to the EU neighborhood 	<p>4. Threats</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Radicalization of identity discourse in the digital environment • Brain drain and border migratory pressure • Political and geopolitical instrumentalization of dual citizenship • Accelerated secularization and fragmentation of community values • Regional instability through proximate geopolitical crises

Source: author's elaboration based on the analyzed data and documentation sources.

1. Strengths

- *Consolidated institutional framework and administrative bilingualism.* The rigorous implementation of the Administrative Code (GEO no. 57/2019) guarantees the use of minority languages in the local public administration (toponymy, bilingual official documents)

in Bihor administrative-territorial units with proportions exceeding 20% or with a significant historical presence.

- *Complete educational infrastructure in the mother tongue or at a confessional level.* The existence of a stratified school network from preschool to university level, which halts the academic migration of individuals from minority communities and retains intellectual capital within the region.

- *Long-standing coexistence and cooperation of ethnic and religious communities.* There have been no inter-community tensions or conflicts in the post-war period; there are numerous mixed localities where communities cooperate and develop genuine dialogue; there are numerous mixed families that facilitate good understanding; minorities know and use the Romanian language in the public space as a language of inter-community communication.

- *Membership of Romania and Hungary in the EU and the Schengen Area.* A common socio-economic and cultural space has been developed in the cross-border area; cross-border cooperation has been facilitated through EU programs and instruments; European values regarding intercultural cooperation are promoted; minority rights and fundamental human rights are promoted and protected by a supranational framework.

- *Excellence and attractiveness in open confessional education.* Confessional high schools in Oradea apply an inclusive "open doors" policy. These schools achieve top academic performance and record-breaking Baccalaureate passing rates, being highly demanded by parents regardless of their confession. Through the mixed background of the students and the secular curricula of certain programs, these schools do not act as centers for promoting inter-community divides, but rather as promoters of mutual understanding, coexistence, and peaceful harmony.

- *Ecumenical early warning mechanism and social peace.* The constant dialogue among the four historical dioceses in Oradea (Orthodox, Roman Catholic, Reformed, Greek Catholic), coupled with close cooperation with the regional Pentecostal and Baptist community leaderships, functions as an informal channel for the rapid defusing of any inter-community, social, or even political frictions.

- *Efficient public-private partnership in the charitable sphere.* Direct cooperation between local Social Assistance Directorates and diocesan foundations (Filantropia Oradea Association, Caritas

Catolica, Baptist and Pentecostal foundations) for managing soup kitchens and home care, providing aid strictly based on criteria of human vulnerability.

2. Weaknesses

- *Structural demographic decline and the aging of historical minorities.* The constant decrease in absolute numbers of the Hungarian community and the contraction of the Slovak minority, both facing a high aging index and declining birth rates.

- *Risk of segregation and exclusion in marginalized Roma communities.* Despite the constant demographic growth of the Roma minority, pockets of socio-economic isolation persist, particularly in certain rural areas, characterized by the risk of school dropout and deficient access to services.

- *The near-complete disappearance of core multicultural communities.* The symbolic reduction, to the point of demographic dissolution, of the German and Jewish minorities, resulting from the geopolitical traumas of the 20th century (the 1944 deportations) and the politico-economic emigrations during communism.

- *Interethnic language proficiency asymmetries.* Although the vast majority of contemporary ethnic Hungarians assimilate and use the Romanian language in public spaces, knowledge of the Hungarian language among the majority Romanian population has become extremely rare, occasionally limiting the depth of direct cultural exchanges in mixed communities.

- *The association between religion/confession and ethnicity.* This overlap (almost absolute in some cases) contributes to separating communities through identity boundaries capable of creating divides between citizens. This reality can be politically exploited by community leaders, leading to interethnic or interreligious enclaves and antagonism.

- *Legislative-Administrative Barrier Effect Generated by the Border.* Despite both states belonging to the Schengen area and sharing close geographical proximity, the border continues to create a structural discontinuity in the uniform application of best practices. Discrepancies between national legal systems in Romania and Hungary frequently hinder the direct synchronization of local development policies and spontaneous community contact.

- *Absence of Specific School Curricula for Mixed Border Areas.* There is a total lack of a national or regional didactic curriculum

tailored to areas with mixed ethnic and religious populations. Consequently, children do not benefit from a specially designed program to learn about the history, culture, and confession of "the other" in a structured manner, leaving intercultural education dependent on optional extracurricular projects.

- *Vulnerability of Best Practices in the Face of Political and Electoral Volatility.* The local replication of successful models in other mixed localities across the county is frequently blocked by political factors. Administrative turnovers from one electoral cycle to another generate major discontinuities in inter-community partnerships, often leading to the abandonment of integration projects due to shifting local political priorities.

3. Opportunities

- *Strategic European funding through the new Interreg VI-A ROHU program.* The existence of dedicated financial instruments that allow for the direct funding of cross-border cooperation projects to reduce the psychological and administrative "barrier effect" of the border.

- *Development of cultural hubs with a regional scope.* The implementation of major cultural infrastructure projects, such as the strategic Cultural Living Lab project (ROHU00618), which will ensure the construction of the new Oradea Multifunctional Cultural Center for bilateral interethnic events. The multi-annual organization of specific cultural events belonging to minorities, as well as events that promote the cultural coexistence of all citizens.

- *Capitalizing on ecumenical tourism and shared sacred heritage.* The extension of thematic cultural routes, such as the Heritage Tour project for the restoration of medieval churches or county programs for saving the wooden churches of Bihor, transforming historical monuments into engines for sustainable development.

- *Neo-Protestant churches as vectors of inclusion for the Roma.* Capitalizing on the intersectional transformation within Roma communities, where the massive shift toward Pentecostal churches provides efficient local networks for literacy, inter-community integration, and integrated social assistance.

- *International transfer of know-how to the EU neighborhood.* Exporting the Bihor model of intercultural balance and minority protection to mixed regions in the Western Balkans or the Eastern

Partnership (e.g., the Republic of Moldova), where unresolved identity tensions can block European Union expansion.

4. Threats

- *Radicalization of identity discourse in the digital environment.* The rapid propagation through global online channels of nationalist-extremist discourses, intolerance, and ethno-religious stereotypes, capable of remotely eroding the climate of local trust.

- *Brain drain and border migratory pressure.* The loss of highly qualified labor and young graduates from Bihor due to economic asymmetries in the Western European labor market, directly affecting demographic balance and reproductive capacity, especially within minority communities.

- *Political and geopolitical instrumentalization of dual citizenship.* The risk of suspicions or defensive self-protection reflexes arising among the majority population, generated by the massive granting of dual citizenship by neighboring states (Hungary), a phenomenon that can be used to create artificial political cleavages.

- *Accelerated secularization and fragmentation of community values.* The growth of contemporary urban secularization trends among young people in both communities (Romanian and Hungarian), a process that can weaken the historical role of churches as main pillars for identity preservation and societal stability.

- *Regional instability through proximate geopolitical crises.* The direct impact of conflicts at the borders of the European Union (e.g., the crisis in Ukraine), which generate humanitarian pressures (refugees), overlapping economic crises, and tendencies to retreat into compact, isolated national blocks, diluting the open European perception of the border.

V. Developing and Grounding Practical Recommendations

The set of practical recommendations below integrates innovative administrative mechanisms, participatory governance strategies, and innovative best practices at the European level for the inclusive management and societal securing of multi-ethnic and multi-religious spaces in border areas. The recommendations applied are structured across three pillars: the strategic-decisional level; the operational-administrative level; and the community level.

The purpose is to transform the ethno-confessional realities of Bihor County and the adjacent cross-border region from a source of historical vulnerability into a pillar of resilience and societal security.

1. Strategic-Decisional Level

- *Institutionalization of an Ethno-Confessional Regional Advisory Council for Societal Security*

- *Measure:* Establishing a permanent body at the Bihor County level that officially brings together the legitimate representatives of national minorities and the leaders of religious cults.

- *Purpose:* Formalizing an integrated early-warning mechanism, thereby ensuring an institutional platform where any social, cultural-educational, political, or digital tension with an ethno-religious undercurrent can be debated and neutralized before generating identity cleavages or developing into sources of societal insecurity.

- *Elaboration of a Societal Security Management Protocol in Crisis Situations*

- *Measure:* Signing a strategic cooperation agreement between the Prefect's Institution, the Inspectorate for Emergency Situations, and ethnic and religious organizations, including NGOs and the charitable networks of religious denominations (*Filantropia*, *Caritas*, evangelical foundations, etc.). This agreement can also include a societal stability protocol among all political parties represented in the Bihor County Council and local councils, through which major inter-community cooperation and ethno-religious inclusion projects are declared "objectives of regional strategic interest."

- *Purpose:* Coordinating logistical resources and volunteers in an integrated manner during societal crises within the border area, including refugee flows, thereby preventing the destabilization of the local societal balance through reactive and fragmented administrative measures. Furthermore, the signed protocol would immunize best practices against political turnover and electoral volatility, guaranteeing that no political shift will freeze the funding of intercultural dialogue axes.

- *Community Co-Governance through Specific Ethno-Confessional Participatory Budgeting*

➤ *Measure:* Allocating a fixed percentage of the annual development budget of Bihor County to an "intercultural participatory budgeting" line, where social or cultural infrastructure projects are jointly proposed, voted on, and implemented by mixed groups of citizens (Romanians, Hungarians, Roma, Slovaks) and with the participation of representatives of religious cults.

➤ *Purpose:* Moving from passive management by the majority to active co-governance, eliminating the feeling of inferiority among minorities regarding majority decisions and transforming citizens into direct budget decision-makers.

2. Operational-administrative level

- *Establishment of a County Network of Urban and Rural Active Inclusion Incubators for Roma*

➤ *Measure:* Establishing administratively integrated, multifunctional community centers by the municipalities of localities with large Roma populations, in direct partnership with school inspectorates, religious communities, and civil society representatives. These spaces will provide a "one-stop shop" service where mixed teams composed of social workers, and authorized school and health mediators operate permanently. The centers will host digital literacy courses, "Second Chance" educational support, and accredited professional training programs adapted to the contemporary labor market.

➤ *Purpose:* Eliminating prejudices and discrimination against Roma communities. This will contribute to reducing exclusion and will strengthen local societal resilience.

- *Protecting Sacred Heritage as a Unified Brand of Societal Security*

➤ *Measure:* Developing a multilingual digital inventory of the entire sacred heritage within the county (Orthodox wooden churches, Baroque cathedrals, medieval churches) by the Bihor County Council.

➤ *Purpose:* Including these sites in unified tourist and ecumenical routes, eliminating the risk of places of worship being perceived as the "exclusive property" of a single ethnic

group, and promoting them as an indivisible cultural heritage of the entire region.

- *Implementing Ethno-Religious Diversity Management in the Public Service*

- *Measure:* Mandatory introduction of Diversity Management courses, intercultural skills, and training to combat unconscious bias into the continuous professional development plans of all public officials and employees in deconcentrated institutions (healthcare, police, social assistance) within Bihor.

- *Purpose:* Modernizing the local administrative culture, ensuring that daily interaction between authorities and minorities (especially Roma communities, but also immigrants or refugees) is guided by structural empathy and administrative equity.

- *Annual Audit of Societal Resilience and Intercultural Innovation*

- *Measure:* Instituting an evaluation system based on "Intercultural Health Indicators" for each mixed territorial-administrative unit within the county, conducted by an independent academic body. This audit will measure actual access to services, the effective degree of bilingualism, and the number of completed joint initiatives.

- *Purpose:* Shifting from mere formal bureaucratic reporting to qualitative monitoring of inclusion, providing municipalities with precise data for the early correction of administrative dysfunctions.

3. Community level

- *Introduction of Intercultural Didactic Education in Mixed Communities*

- *Measure:* Development of an optional curriculum focused on "The History, Culture, and Ethnicity/Confession of the Other" by the Bihor County School Inspectorate, in collaboration with the University of Oradea, Partium Christian University, and Emanuel University.

- *Purpose:* Developing an appropriate didactic program in multi-ethnic areas, providing all students in mixed-housing zones with the cognitive tools to understand the identity sensitivities of their neighbors from an early age, preventing assimilation or intolerance, and contributing to the societal security of the region.
- *Monitoring and Combating the Radicalization of Ethno-Confessional Discourse Online*
 - *Measure:* Creating a Regional Digital Observatory for Societal Security and establishing a professional network made up of local journalists, bloggers, influencers, and opinion leaders from the region, with the role of researching and analyzing the regional digital space.
 - *Purpose:* Monitoring local social networks for the early identification of hate speech, stereotypes, and attempts to radicalize young people, intervening through counter-campaigns focused on promoting the ecumenical and coexistence best practices of Bihor.

Conclusions

A comprehensive analysis of the ethno-confessional realities in Bihor County and the adjacent cross-border region validates the fundamental premise that cross-border contact zones can transcend historical vulnerabilities to become active labs of European integration.

By systematically addressing the primary *research question*—how to leverage the ethno-confessional realities of Bihor County to ensure regional stability amid emerging risks—this study provides a scientifically grounded framework for local, national, and European policy development. The findings confirm that societal security is not a passive state of coexistence but a dynamic process requiring intentional institutional alignment, targeted funding, and structural intercultural communication.

The research successfully achieved its stated *objectives (O1–O3)*. By analyzing the multilayered legislative and institutional architecture, the study demonstrated that Romania's domestic enforcement of administrative bilingualism and the structural protection of historical minorities align seamlessly with high

European legal standards, such as the Council of Europe's Framework Convention.

The core research hypotheses have been fully validated by the empirical evidence. *Hypothesis H1* is confirmed. Structured and direct cross-border funding, specifically channeled through successive Interreg Romania-Hungary (ROHU) iterations, has historically diluted the "barrier effect" of the border. Financial mechanisms that legally mandate bilateral cooperation effectively convert deep-rooted ethno-confessional differences into positive, unyielding social capital, preventing local unique traits from being weaponized into lines of insecurity. *Hypothesis H2* is confirmed. The resilience of Bihor County depends directly on its consolidated local institutional framework. The presence of confessional and minority-language schools provides a vital societal buffer. These institutions absorb emerging systemic shocks—such as demographic aging, migration pressures, and secularization—by offering inclusive, value-driven spaces that prevent social frictions from escalating into toxic identity cleavages.

Ethnicity and religion cannot be managed separately in administrative strategies. In Bihor, the overlapping of ethnic identity borders with religious ones demonstrates that religious denominations represent the main local partners for any civic or educational inclusion program.

The contemporary fluid mutations within the Roma community—specifically their mass conversion toward Pentecostal and Baptist churches—reveal a highly effective grassroots vector for societal inclusion. These evangelical networks operate as functional webs for literacy, basic education, and social relief, they absorb peripheral socio-economic vulnerabilities more efficiently than standardized bureaucratic programs. No public integration policy in the region can achieve structural sustainability if it artificially separates ethnic indicators from confessional realities.

The comprehensive evaluation of the regional ethno-confessional ecosystem leads to the formulation of *several clear, action-oriented analytical and strategic conclusions*, intended to guide local, regional and cross-border governance.

Public policies and regional development plans must recognize that ethnic and religious boundaries in Bihor are structurally fused. Public policies and regional development plans must recognize that

ethnic and religious borders in Bihor often overlap. Diocesan and parochially backed networks are not merely symbolic entities; they are the most resilient local institutional partners available for civic, social, and educational inclusion programs.

The operational continuity of the Bihor-Hajdú-Bihar Euroregion and the deliberate deployment of Interreg ROHU grants prove that direct, micro-level financing of "people-to-people" initiatives effectively neutralizes macro-level geopolitical risks. These active ties deconstruct identity barriers before they can be exploited by radicalized populist rhetoric.

The international value of the Romanian-Hungarian model of diversity management in the border area is proven by the institutional and democratic balance achieved in the Bihor area and represents a complete and highly useful package of good practices. This local model holds a potential for know-how transfer to the EU's eastern and southeastern neighborhood, including the Western Balkans and the Eastern Partnership (e.g. the Republic of Moldova), where frozen and unresolved identity tensions directly block European enlargement and threaten macro-regional stability.

In the Bihor border area, the transition from coexistence to active interculturality could be observed at various levels. The long-term security of the region demands a shift from passive multiculturalism (merely living alongside one another) to active, participatory interculturality (living with one another). This transition must be structurally enforced by introducing targeted, cross-confessional school curricula focused on mutual understanding and by establishing permanent digital observatories to detect and combat the radicalization of identity discourse in the online sphere, thereby preserving the hard-won societal balance of the border area.

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GUIDE OF BEST PRACTICES REGARDING
INTEGRATION, SOCIETAL SECURITY AND
INCLUSION IN THE BORDER AREA

Key area

**Historical and Cultural Heritage
in Bihor County**

by Sorin Şipoş (coord.), Laura Ardelean, Cosmin Patca

Introduction

The cultural and creative sectors constitute an important dimension in defining and understanding regional and local economic development based on unique resources, creativity, and knowledge, particularly those available within local communities. They can provide an almost inexhaustible source of urban regeneration and economic development for the community, as well as an improved quality of life; however, they are often overlooked and not used to their full potential.

In an extensive study of ten major European urban areas, *The Impacts of Culture on the Economic Development of Cities*¹, the authors explain how urban “clusters” or “cultural concentrations” have become “catalysts for a healthy creative economy, more attractive to tourists, talented and skilled personnel and, ultimately, to businesses with substantial human-resource requirements that seek an innovative environment and higher levels of quality of life”. Furthermore, the study emphasises the impact of these areas on the decisions of highly skilled professionals as to whether or not to settle in a particular place: “contemporary skilled workers attach considerable value to a stimulating cultural climate and to communities that are open to what is new and symbolic” and, most importantly, “these factors ultimately influence their mobility choices and, consequently, a city’s competitiveness”. Indeed, many of these principles may also be extrapolated from cities to broader geographical regions, as in the present case of Bihor County, albeit with certain reservations. What is certain, however, is that the heritage and level of cultural performance of a geographical area constitute a fundamental factor that will determine and influence its social and economic potential, as well as its capacity to integrate and compete effectively in an increasingly globalised region and world.

This approach to local and regional development forms part of a broader strand of development studies in which, as described in the *Handbook of the Economics of Art and Culture*², “culture is increasingly perceived as central to the development process”, particularly where “a

¹ Jan van der Borg & Antonio Paolo Russo, *The Impacts of Culture on the Economic Development of Cities*, European, Institute for Comparative Urban Research (EURICUR), Erasmus University, Rotterdam, 2005, passim.

² Victor Ginsburgh & David Throsby, *Handbook of the Economics of Art and Culture*. Elsevier Science and Technology, 2013, passim.

people-centred rather than a goods-centred view of development is adopted", which is also the perspective taken in the present study. Culture is therefore essential to local and regional economic development (the two being, moreover, linked by a relationship of "*mutual causality*") and must be supported, promoted, and stimulated through close cooperation among all relevant institutions, from cultural and artistic bodies to political and economic authorities, which may benefit from the positive externalities generated by investment in culture. Such cooperation ensures both the effective development of the cultural sector and the optimal implementation of cultural strategies, as well as greater continuity and interconnectedness among the different spheres of society, in which each party benefits both from its own investments and from investments in adjacent fields, to whose success it has indirectly contributed through cooperation and resource-sharing.

A successful and properly implemented cultural strategy, supported by a favourable institutional and social framework, can, beyond the development and economic benefits it entails, produce broad and positive transformative effects on society at the macro level and, implicitly, on citizens' living standards and quality of life.

In Bihor County, historical and cultural heritage has particular value because it lies at the intersection of local identity, cross-border cooperation, and multicultural coexistence. The county's location on the border with Hungary should not be viewed solely through the lens of societal security, but also as an opportunity for dialogue, cultural mobility, tourism, education, and closer relations between communities. From this perspective, culture can become a discreet yet highly effective instrument of social integration and of strengthening trust among residents, institutions, and the new groups arriving in the area.

Methodology and Documentary Sources

A. Documentary sources to be used in this study are as follows:

1. *Bihor County Sustainable Development Strategy for 2021-2027*
2. The management plans of the Țării Crișurilor Museum, the "Gheorghe Șincai" County Library, the Bihor County Directorate for Culture, and the Bihor County Cultural Centre

3. Questionnaires addressed to public and private cultural stakeholders in the county
4. Data from institutional websites
5. Specialized literature on the trajectories of cultural development in different countries where culture plays a central role, as well as case studies
6. Specialized publications and studies on the role and place of culture today (cultural albums, monographs, and volumes covering various elements of heritage)
7. Statistics

B. Research Methodology

a. General Overview

We shall begin our analysis with the county development strategy. First, we shall examine statistical data, for example, how many people purchased books or attended concerts, the number of libraries closed in the county over the years, and how these data point to vulnerabilities in young people's personal development and fulfilment and in educational standards, while also comparing the current situation with that of Western countries. Second, we shall use the management plans of institutional leaders, which we shall corroborate with information and data from the European community and with our own analyses.

After identifying problems and areas of conflict through a broad, multidisciplinary, and multifaceted analysis, we shall provide a series of recommendations, ideas, and objectives to be achieved in order to ensure the harmonious and effective development of culture in the county, together with the factors that must be taken into account. We shall thus formulate an integrated vision that seeks to draw upon the positive elements of all documentary sources used in the research and adapt them to the case under consideration.

Once this has been accomplished, we shall outline an action plan containing recommendations, objectives, and examples of specific policies.

b. Key Considerations

As an essential component of the study's methodology, it is necessary to provide clear definitions of the terms used in the introduction and throughout the study. It should therefore be noted

that the term **culture** has three principal meanings, as presented in the *Handbook of the Economics of Art and Culture*.

The first meaning of culture, **“culture as an aspect”**, denotes *“the community of ideas, values, norms, and customs of a society”*. The second is **“culture as art”**, *“where art represents the implicit assessment of quality”*, namely the cultural value of an artistic work.

Finally, the third meaning of the term is **“culture as a sector”**, defined *“through a series of genres such as painting, sculpture, theatre, dance, music, literature, poetry, films, videos, organisations, and individuals working within these genres”* or industries. *“The cultural sector, thus defined, encompasses a broad spectrum, ranging from commercial enterprises, on the one hand, to cultural institutions and organisations, on the other”*³. This third meaning is also the one adopted in the present study, in which culture is analysed not as a given framework, but as a field requiring continuous attention, involvement, promotion, dissemination, and investment, with the potential subsequently to translate these into substantial economic development.

Economic development, according to the same work, includes economic growth as an essential component and principal catalyst, the latter representing *“an increase in the quantity of goods and services produced by a (regional) economy within a given period [...] in tandem with increased employment and improved living standards”*. What economic development adds to economic growth, however, relates primarily to the temporal dimension of the phenomenon, namely *“a longer-term increase in the economy’s capacity to improve the quality of life of its residents”*, which inevitably introduces the idea and necessity of economic sustainability.

According to United Nations General Assembly Resolution A/65/166, *“Culture and Development”*, the organisation explicitly and firmly *“recognises culture as an essential component of human development, representing a source of identity, innovation, and creativity for the individual and the community, and as an important factor in combating poverty, generating economic growth, and fostering ownership of development processes”*. Moreover, it also represents a *“source of prosperity and an important contributor to the sustainable*

³ Ginsburgh & Throsby, *Handbook of the Economics of Art and Culture*, p. 1054.

*development of local communities, peoples, and nations, enabling them to play an active and distinctive role in development initiatives*⁴.

Considering Bihor County as falling within the category of local communities, the projects and policies proposed in this study will follow precisely this line of analysis and reasoning, seeking to restore culture to its rightful place in society as one of the four essential pillars of sustainable development, alongside the economic, social, and environmental dimensions⁵.

I. Context. Concepts. Legislative and Institutional Framework

The border area of Bihor County constitutes a zone of geostrategic interaction of major importance to the European Union, serving as a gateway connecting national infrastructure to trans-European transport networks⁶. The management of this region requires a careful balance between the demands of national security and the need for socio-economic openness. A best-practice guide is therefore an indispensable working instrument for border communities, bringing together public-safety standards and mechanisms for the reception, support, and inclusion of vulnerable groups or migrant flows.

Fundamental concepts:

- **Integrated cross-border security:** A concept based on the interoperability of law-enforcement agencies, the digitalised monitoring of flows, and the prevention of organised crime, without disrupting legitimate freedom of movement.
- **Social inclusion in peripheral areas:** A set of administrative and community mechanisms designed to reduce economic disparities in border communes and to ensure equal access to employment, education, and public services.
- **Functional regional integration:** The harmonisation of public policies between Bihor County and neighbouring administrative regions (e.g. Hajdú-Bihar County in Hungary) in order to create a homogeneous economic and social area.

⁴ United Nations General Assembly, A/RES/65/166, 20 December 2010.

⁵ Astara, Olga Helen, *Culture as the Fourth Pillar of Sustainable Development*.

⁶ Ministry of Internal Affairs (2023), *National Strategy for Integrated State Border Management (2023-2027)*.

- **Historical and cultural heritage:** the totality of tangible and intangible assets that express a community's memory, identity, and continuity. In the border area, heritage also has a social function: it can build bridges between different communities, support intercultural education, and contribute to reducing prejudice against minorities, refugees, or immigrants.

1. In-Depth and Updated Presentation of the Legal and Institutional Framework

The management of Bihor's border area is governed by a three-tier legislative architecture: international (Schengen), national, and local.

Relevant legal framework:

- **The Schengen Agreement and the Schengen Borders Code (EU Regulation 2016/399):** Establishes the rules governing checks on persons crossing external borders and the temporary reintroduction of controls at internal borders⁷.

- **Government Emergency Ordinance No. 105/2001 on Romania's State Border:** The principal domestic legislative act defining the legal regime of the border, the protection strip, and the specific responsibilities applicable within the security zone⁸.

- **Government Emergency Ordinance No. 104/2001 on the Organisation and Operation of the Romanian Border Police:** Defines the powers of surveillance and control and the responsibilities for combating illegal migration and cross-border crime⁹.

- **Law No. 292/2011 on Social Assistance:** Guarantees the framework for implementing social-inclusion measures for

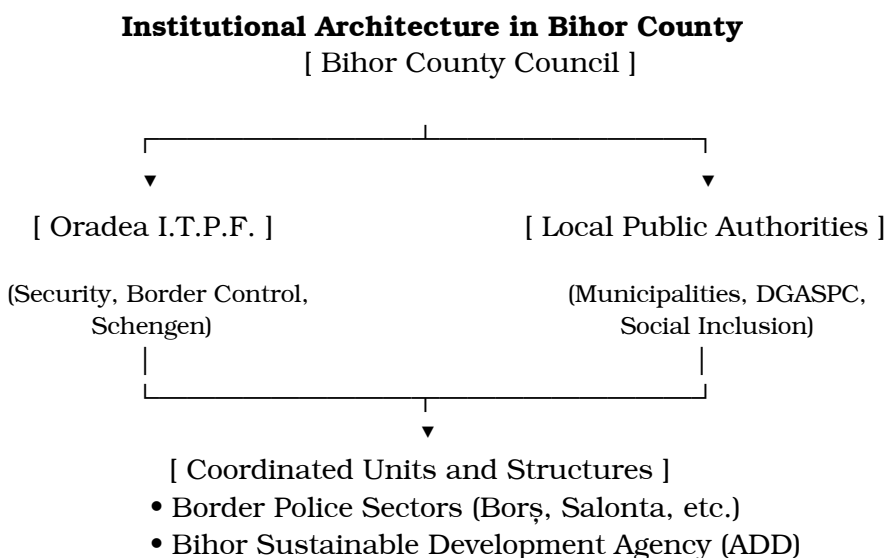
⁷ European Parliament and Council of the European Union (2016), *Regulation (EU) 2016/399 of 9 March 2016 on a Union Code on the rules governing the movement of persons across borders (Schengen Borders Code)*, Official Journal of the European Union.

⁸ Government of Romania (2001), *Emergency Ordinance No. 105 of 27 June 2001 on the State Border of Romania*, published in the Official Gazette No. 352 of 30 June 2001/

⁹ The Emergency Ordinance is available at <https://www.politiadefrontiera.ro/files/docu/1460962775239-oug104.pdf> (website accessed on 25 June 2026).

disadvantaged communities, including those in Bihor's rural border areas¹⁰.

- **National Strategy for the Integrated Management of the State Border (2023-2027):** A policy document aligning the actions of Ministry of Internal Affairs structures with European security standards¹¹.



- **Oradea Territorial Inspectorate of the Border Police (I.T.P.F.):** The principal territorial executive authority, responsible for document checks and for ensuring the smooth flow of traffic through road and railway crossing points (Borș I, Borș II, Salonta, Valea lui Mihai, and Episcopia Bihor)¹².

- **Bihor County Council:** Coordinates territorial-development policies through its own structures, such as the Bihor County Council and the Bihor Sustainable Development Agency (ADD)¹³.

¹⁰ Law available on the official website of the Ministry of Labour, Family, Youth and Social Solidarity, https://mmuncii.gov.ro/wp-content/uploads/2025/08/LEGE_Nr292.pdf (accessed on 15 June 2026).

¹¹ Ministry of Internal Affairs (2023), *National Strategy for the Integrated Management of Romania's State Border for the Period 2023-2027*, Bucharest.

¹² <https://www.politiadefrontiera.ro/ro/structura-teritoriala-oradea/>

¹³ <https://www.cjbihor.ro/>

- **Bihor General Directorate of Social Assistance and Child Protection (DGASPC):** Manages cases of social vulnerability, addresses the inclusion of minorities, and provides assistance to immigrants or refugees crossing the border¹⁴.

- **Office of the Prefect of Bihor County:** Chairs the County Committee for Emergency Situations (CJSU), managing humanitarian or security crises at the border¹⁵.

2. Regional, National, and European Policies, Programmes, Mechanisms, and Instruments

The implementation of inclusion and societal security measures is based on aligning European structural funds with county-level territorial-development strategies¹⁶.

European programmes and instruments:

- **Interreg VI-A Romania-Hungary Programme (2021-2027):** The principal source of cross-border funding for Bihor. It finances institutional cooperation in risk management, shared medical infrastructure, and employment in the border area¹⁷.

- **Asylum, Migration and Integration Fund (FAMI):** Provides financial support for national reception measures, asylum procedures, and the long-term integration of third-country nationals¹⁸.

- **Internal Security Fund (FSI):** Finances high-technology scanning and monitoring equipment used by the Romanian Border Police at customs crossing points in Bihor¹⁹.

¹⁴ <https://www.dgaspcbihor.ro/dgaspcbh.ro/index.html>

¹⁵ <https://bh.prefectura.mai.gov.ro/>

¹⁶ *Bihor County Spatial Plan, Stage III – Development of the Strategy and Action Plan for the Bihor County Spatial Plan (P.A.T.J. Bihor)*, prepared by Urban Team S.R.L. for the Bihor County Council.

¹⁷ Information available at <https://interreg-rohu.eu/ro/programul-interreg-vi-a-romania-ungaria-pentru-perioada-2021-2027-a-fost-adoptat/> (accessed on 31 July 2026).

¹⁸ Information available at <https://fed.mai.gov.ro/despre/fondul-azil-migratie-si-integrare-2021-2027/> (accessed on 10 May 2026).

¹⁹ Information available at <https://fed.mai.gov.ro/in/fed-2021-2027/fsi-2021-2027-fondul-securitate-interna/> (accessed on 10 May 2026).

National and regional policies and mechanisms:

- **North-West Regional Development Plan 2021-2027:** A strategic document managed by the North-West Regional Development Agency, which emphasises the secondary connectivity of border settlements and the reduction of isolation among marginalised communities²⁰.
- **Integrated Border Security System (SISF):** A national interinstitutional mechanism for sharing real-time operational data among the intelligence services, police, and customs authorities.

Documents and instruments specific to Bihor County:

- **Integrated Sustainable Development Strategy of Bihor County (2021-2027):** A document approved by the County Council that prioritises attracting investment to industrial parks in the border area (Marghita, Borş, and Salonta). Its aim is to integrate the marginalised rural population into the labour market.
- **Integrated Urban Development Strategy (SIDU) for Oradea and the Metropolitan Area:** Extends mobility corridors and social infrastructure towards settlements in the immediate vicinity of the border²¹.
- **Strategic Working Group (GSL):** A county-level mechanism that monitors indicators of social resilience and security within projects financed by European funds²².

3. Assessment and Forecast of Potential Transformations in the Coming Period

The evolution of the legal and institutional framework in Bihor County's border area will be strongly influenced by geopolitical dynamics and new European technologies.

²⁰ North-West Regional Development Agency (ADR Nord-Vest) (2021), *North-West Regional Development Plan 2021-2027*, Cluj-Napoca..

²¹ *Integrated Urban Development Strategy for the Municipality of Oradea and the Oradea Metropolitan Area 2021-2027*, available at <https://oradea.ro/wp-content/uploads/2023/12/Strategia-Integrata-de-Dezvoltare-Urbana-Oradea.pdf> (accessed on 9 July.2026).

²² https://www.cjbihor.ro/wp-content/uploads/2021/11/Strategie-Bihor-2021-2027_final_pentru_consultare_publica.pdf

Impact of full accession to the Schengen Area. Romania's full accession to the Schengen Area, including the abolition of systematic controls at internal land borders as of 1 January 2025, has significantly changed the way in which Bihor County relates to its border function. Border crossing points with Hungary should no longer be understood solely as spaces of control, but also as areas of mobility, economic cooperation, cultural circulation, and shared responsibility for security²³.

- **Abolition of systematic border controls:** Road border crossing points (e.g. Borș I and Borș II) have changed their operational function.

- **Changes in territorial responsibilities:** The activities of the Oradea I.T.P.F. have shifted from the demarcation line towards measures to combat crime within the national territory (inland mobile checks and direct police cooperation with the Hungarian authorities).

- **Legislative changes:** Strict national provisions governing controls along the border with Hungary have been repealed. They have been replaced by European compensatory-security protocols.

Digitalisation of security and interoperability of databases. From a security perspective, the digitalisation of border control is already a European reality. The Entry/Exit System (EES) digitally records the entries and exits of third-country nationals staying for short periods, gradually replacing the practice of stamping passports. In parallel, the European Travel Information and Authorisation System (ETIAS) will introduce an additional stage of electronic authorisation for visa-exempt third-country nationals. For Bihor County, these transformations require greater attention to institutional interoperability, data protection, and the provision of information to persons transiting or temporarily settling in the border area. In 2026, the EES is already operational: the system began its progressive rollout on 12 October 2025 and became fully operational on 10 April 2026. ETIAS is scheduled for the final quarter of 2026. The following developments are therefore envisaged:

²³ Adrian Lăzăroaia, *Managementul frontierelor externe ale Uniunii Europene și Spațiului Schengen*, Teză de doctorat susținută la Academia de Poliție „Alexandru Ioan Cuza”, Conducător de doctorat prof. univ. dr. Florian Coman, București, 2017 [Adrian Lăzăroaia, *Management of the External Borders of the European Union and the Schengen Area*, PhD thesis defended at the “Alexandru Ioan Cuza” Police Academy, PhD supervisor: Prof. Florian Coman, PhD, Bucharest, 2017.].

- **The Entry/Exit System (EES) and ETIAS:** Full automation of the registration of third-country nationals.

- **Interoperability Framework:** Direct connection of national databases with those of Frontex and Europol. This will change standard working procedures in Bihor, enabling security risks to be identified more rapidly.

Migration pressures and the reconfiguration of inclusion mechanisms. Bihor County will increasingly shift from being a transit area to becoming a destination for non-EU workers brought in by local companies. The local institutional framework (DGASPC and municipalities) will need to develop rigorous mechanisms for educational and linguistic integration. These will replace approaches focused exclusively on emergency social assistance. Future local-development strategies will necessarily include chapters dedicated to urban resilience and demographic security in relation to fluctuations in the cross-border labour force.

II. Analysis and Evolution of Integration, Societal Security, and the Inclusion of Minorities, Refugees, and Immigrants in the Border Area, in the Field of Historical and Cultural Heritage

Identification and Presentation of the Vision for Cultural and Historical Heritage

a. Analysis of the *Bihor County Sustainable Development Strategy for 2021-2027* and identification of the specific vision for the cultural field as reflected in this document;

The cultural strategy is based on the following vision: “*The development of a county rests on a multitude of elements that contribute to its productivity, vitality, and sustainability. Art and culture are transformative elements for communities, helping to position them as attractive places in which to live, work, and invest.*”

The Bihor County Cultural Strategy for 2021-2027 and the Integrated Sustainable Development Strategy of Bihor County 2021-2027 identify as a priority direction increasing access to cultural services for all residents of the county, both by organising cultural

events in settlements other than Oradea and by establishing or re-establishing libraries.

Other directions emphasised in the strategy include: *the professionalisation of cultural management and administration*, with a recommendation that the county administration establish a dedicated unit within the administrative apparatus of Bihor County Council; *raising awareness among local public authorities regarding the allocation of cultural funding*; *encouraging and developing cultural consumption*; and *developing and diversifying the cultural-tourism offer*²⁴.

The five principal objectives of the **strategy** in the field of culture are presented below, each detailed through a series of sub-objectives:

1. Increasing access to culture;

O1.1: Enhancing, improving, and properly managing cultural infrastructure;

O1.2: Ensuring the circulation of cultural products at county level (internal mobility);

O1.3: Developing means of cultural promotion, with an emphasis on public communication;

2. Raising awareness among Local Public Authorities regarding the allocation of cultural funding;

O2.1: Strengthening dialogue among Local Public Authorities, the County Council, and public cultural institutions regarding their activities and the impact of the results of their cultural work;

O2.2: Encouraging partnerships and cooperation between the private and public sectors in support of a structured vision capable of contributing to the diversification of the cultural offer;

²⁴ Bihor County Council, *Integrated Sustainable Development Strategy of Bihor County 2021-2027*, available at https://www.cjbihor.ro/wp-content/uploads/2021/11/Strategie_Bihor_2021-2027_final_pentru_consultare_publica.pdf accessed on 10 June 2026).

3. Professionalising cultural management and administration;

O3.1: Ensuring the effective management of public cultural institutions in Bihor County;

O3.2: Providing professional training in cultural management and marketing for employees of public cultural institutions;

O3.3: Planning and making effective use of specialised technical staff and operational personnel in public cultural institutions subordinated to the County Council;

O3.4: Promoting intra- and intersectoral cooperation;

4. Encouraging and developing cultural consumption;

O4.1: Improving the quality of the cultural offer and cultural products;

O4.2: Strengthening the cultural offer intended for young people aged 11-18;

O4.3: Prioritising and developing cultural-education projects and programmes;

5. Developing and diversifying the cultural-tourism offer;

O5.1: Enhancing cultural-tourism offers;

O5.2: Promoting cultural-tourism offers;

O5.3: Establishing the foundations for entrepreneurship and innovation in the cultural-tourism sector, combined with the involvement of cultural professionals capable of highlighting and capitalising on the advantages of the built and natural heritage.

b. Analysis, Updating, and Adaptation of the Vision for the Cultural Field in Accordance with Empirical Reality and Discussions with Key Stakeholders

The critical analysis of the Bihor County Cultural Strategy for 2021-2027 and the Integrated Sustainable Development Strategy of Bihor County 2021-2027 (including their strengths, weaknesses, opportunities for improvement, and potential obstacles or threats, as presented under point 3.a) will be supplemented by ideas arising from questionnaires administered to public and private cultural stakeholders in the county. This will make possible a novel

perspective grounded in both the public and private spheres of the county's cultural environment. We are convinced that these varied perspectives on the county's future and cultural development will substantially enrich our plan.

The vision we propose is to *increase access to cultural services for all residents of the county while, at the same time, providing residents of rural areas with opportunities comparable to those available to residents of the towns and municipalities of Bihor County.*

Bihor County's border area constitutes a complex zone of intercultural interaction, where territorial-security policies intersect directly with European imperatives of inclusion. Traditionally, historical and cultural heritage (both tangible, including buildings and sites, and intangible, including crafts and traditions) has functioned as an element of cohesion.

In the new regional geopolitical context, marked by the refugee crisis and the increasing recruitment of labour from third countries, the use of heritage as a vehicle for inclusion, combating xenophobia, and integration is becoming a strategic priority for communities in Bihor.

The terms "migrant", "asylum seeker", and "refugee" are often used interchangeably. Despite no generally accepted definition, migrants are people who left their countries "to work, study, join family" or felt they "must leave because of poverty, political unrest, gang violence, natural disasters or other serious circumstances"²⁵. An asylum seeker is someone who left their country and "is seeking protection from persecution and serious human rights violations in another country' but has not yet received the legal status of "refugee and is waiting to receive a decision on their asylum claim". A refugee has received refugee status and is granted international protection (Amnesty International, n.d.). Since asylum seekers do not become refugees but are only recognised as such, refugee status is intrinsic. Since not all migrants are eligible for refugee status despite suffering from situations similar to persecution, I mostly use the term "migrant" when referring to people fleeing to Europe, which includes refugees²⁶.

²⁵ Paul Sipos, *Layers of Violence and Irresponsibility in the Implementation of International Migration Law: The Case of the EU and UK*, Institut d'études politiques de Paris, SCIENCES PO UNDERGRADUATE COLLEGE, Politics and Government Major, Academic capstone project directed by Dr. Jen Schradie, April 19, 2024, p. 3.

²⁶ *Ibidem*, p. 4.

Analysis of the Current Situation Regarding Integration and Inclusion Capacities

Capacities for integration through the cultural and historical pillar display different dynamics depending on the administrative level under analysis:

National level. Romania has a solid theoretical framework centred on the protection of historical minorities and the recognition of multiculturalism; however, practical implementation mechanisms for new migration flows (refugees or non-EU workers) often remain rigid or focused strictly on primary social assistance. The Ministry of Culture supports ethnic festivals through programmes dedicated to diversity, but the integration of newcomers through local historical-heritage events is poorly coordinated at central level.

Regional level (North-West Development Region). Institutional capacity increases significantly through the development agencies. The region possesses notable expertise in drafting and implementing European cross-border projects that use the shared multiethnic past (Romanian, Hungarian, German, and Jewish) as a bridge for economic and tourism cooperation with Hungary. Nevertheless, regional cooperation lacks instruments specifically designed to facilitate the cultural adaptation of immigrant communities from Asia or the Middle East to local heritage values.

Local level (Bihor County and border settlements). Bihor County displays a high degree of resilience and interethnic tolerance. Institutions such as the Bihor County Council and Oradea City Hall have demonstrated advanced administrative capacity in rehabilitating the built heritage (such as Oradea Fortress, synagogues, and Art Nouveau palaces) and transforming it into inclusive public spaces. At rural level, however, municipalities in border communities face limited human resources and budgets dependent on central allocations, thereby reducing their capacity to develop sustainable cultural programmes for the integration of marginalised minorities, particularly the Roma population²⁷.

Integration does not occur solely through administrative documents or formal access to services. It also requires spaces in

²⁷ *Bihor County Cultural Strategy 2021-2027*, available at https://www.cjbihor.ro/wp-content/uploads/2021/02/h-338-din-17.12.2021_Redacted.pdf (accessed on 15 June 2026)

which people can meet naturally, learn one another's stories, and discover what they have in common. Museums, libraries, cultural centres, local festivals, heritage routes, and craft workshops can fulfil this role, particularly in border communities, where cultural diversity is already part of everyday life.

Activities Undertaken at Bihor County Level

Bihor County actively implements measures that combine integrated border management with cultural projects open to inclusion:

- **Inclusive cultural platforms and hubs:** Through European projects such as *EduCultCenter* (ROHU-446), museum spaces in Oradea have been redesigned not only as places of conservation, but also as community learning centres. All major rehabilitated museum facilities have been physically adapted through ramps and lifts to ensure full accessibility for vulnerable persons²⁸.

- **Integration through crafts in border areas:** Project ROHU-126 facilitated the establishment of the "Potter's House" in Vadu Crişului, creating a physical space in which the local community works alongside craftspeople from Hungary. It serves as a model of economic and social micro-integration for people from disadvantaged rural backgrounds²⁹.

- **Supporting historical minorities through thematic routes:** Projects have been implemented to map and promote the heritage of ethnic minorities, such as the tourist route dedicated to Swabian heritage developed in cooperation with Nyíregyháza - ROHU-00528. These measures strengthen social security by combating discrimination.

- **Cultural-accommodation programmes for refugees and migrants:** Under the coordination of active local NGOs, such as the Filantropia Oradea Association, and in cooperation with AIDRom, activities were carried out within the project "AIM 5 – Actions for the Integration of Migrants". Migrants and beneficiaries of temporary

²⁸ <https://www.cjbihor.ro/proiecte-culturale-transfrontaliere-romania-ungaria-cu-fonduri-europene/>

²⁹ *Cross-Border Cooperation for the Promotion of Tourism, Crafts and Culture*, available at <https://www.cjbihor.ro/colaborare-transfrontaliera-pentru-promovarea-turismului-a-mestesugurilor-si-a-culturii-in-bihor-si-hajdu-bihar/> (accessed on 12 June 2026).

protection, including Ukrainian refugees, took part in orientation and cultural-accommodation activities and visited the county's historical sites in order to become familiar with local identity and the host community.

- **Community inclusion through local projects:** Initiatives financed through local mechanisms such as the *Talent Grants* programme of the Oradea Community Foundation, exemplified by projects such as “The Theatre Comes to You”, broaden access to culture for older people and marginalised young people in rural border settlements, including Suplacu de Barcău, Tinca, and Vadu Crișului. At the same time, organisations such as Dorcas implement long-term educational programmes in rural settlements, such as Tărian, where Roma children are integrated through non-formal activities centred on identity and multicultural respect.

The value of these initiatives lies not only in the specific results achieved, but above all in the way they use heritage as a shared space, thereby transforming heritage into a concrete instrument of inclusion.

Assessment and Forecast of Potential Transformations in the Coming Period

The evolution of integration and social security in relation to heritage in Bihor County will undergo changes conditioned by the following factors:

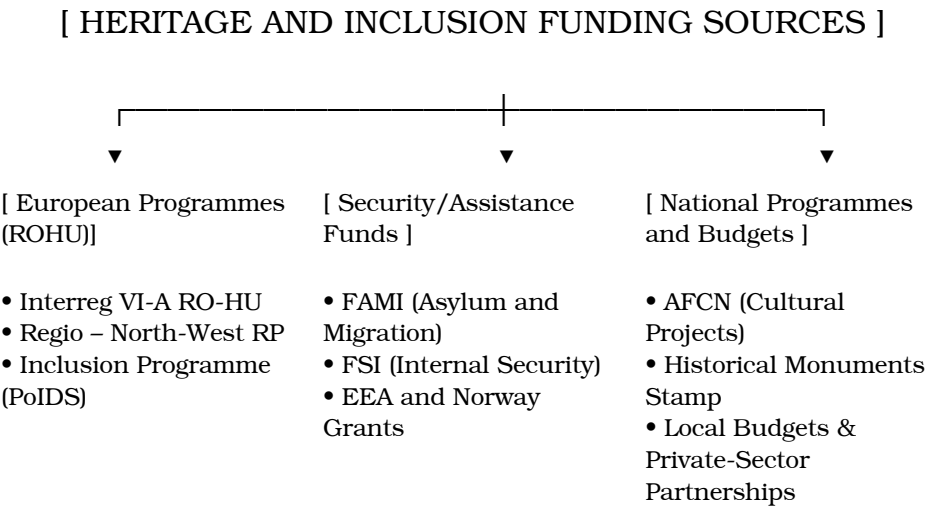
Changes in urban and demographic dynamics. As a result of the expansion of industrial parks in Bihor's border settlements (Borș, Salonta, and Tileagd) the number of immigrants settling for the medium term will increase exponentially. Local authorities will be required to transform their cultural strategies from a passive approach based on performances into an active one based on programmes of secondary cultural assimilation. Local heritage will become an instrument for teaching the Romanian language and civic values.

Digitalisation and democratisation of access to heritage. The coming years will see the widespread use of AR/VR technologies in Bihor's cultural institutions. This transformation will enable refugees or migrants facing language barriers to engage with the county's history through automated multilingual audio guides and interactive immersive platforms, thereby reducing disparities in access to information and integration.

Security pressures and compensatory funding. Full accession to the land component of the Schengen Area will remove controls at the border with Hungary, encouraging the free movement of tourists. Nevertheless, in order to offset the risks of secondary cross-border crime, the authorities will implement intelligent monitoring systems in the vicinity of isolated heritage sites. The legislative framework will evolve towards greater decentralisation, allowing county councils to co-finance directly community-security programmes linked to the protection of strategic cultural assets.

Identification of Funding Sources

To ensure the sustainability of projects concerned with inclusion, societal security, and the enhancement of heritage, local and regional entities in Bihor County may access a diverse range of funding sources:



1.1. European Structural and Investment Funds:

- **Interreg VI-A Romania–Hungary Programme:** The principal source of funding for shared cross-border cultural infrastructure, cultural “Living Labs”, and interethnic academic exchanges.
- **North-West Regional Programme (RP):** Manages substantial funding under priority axes dedicated to the conservation of historical monuments, urban regeneration, and the enhancement of heritage sites in rural Bihor.

- **Inclusion and Social Dignity Programme (PoIDS):**

Finances integrated measures of assistance, education, and poverty reduction among marginalised communities, including Roma communities in Bihor, while allowing components focused on preserving local cultural identity.

- **Specialised European Funds (Security and Migration):**

- **Asylum, Migration and Integration Fund (FAMI):** Directly finances social-integration and cultural-accommodation activities carried out by regional centres for refugees and third-country nationals.

- **Internal Security Fund (FSI):** May provide intelligent protection, surveillance, and security systems for critical and heritage infrastructure situated in the immediate vicinity of the border strip.

1.2. International Non-EU Grants:

- **EEA and Norway Grants (European Economic Area Financial Mechanism):** Through the *RO-CULTURA Programme*, substantial budgets are made available for projects combining cultural entrepreneurship with heritage protection and, specifically, for measures intended to enhance Roma culture and promote the inclusion of this minority through social museology. In 2026, new memoranda were signed for the 2021-2028 period, and an allocation of more than EUR 47 million was announced for culture.

National and Local Sources:

- **Administration of the National Cultural Fund (AFCN):** Finances calls for small- and medium-scale projects, which are well suited to NGOs in Bihor that develop multiethnic festivals, craft workshops, or heritage-digitisation initiatives.

- **National Heritage Institute (INP):** Through funds obtained from the *Historical Monuments Stamp*, it finances urgent restoration and safeguarding works for deteriorated heritage buildings throughout the county.

- **Own-source revenue and local budget allocations:** Bihor County Council and the municipalities provide annual funding, through revised budgets, for the cultural institutions subordinated to them, including the Țării Crișurilor Museum and the Bihor County Cultural Centre, and allocate funds for the mandatory co-financing (usually 2%) of major European projects under implementation.

For cultural projects in Bihor County, the funding source should be selected according to the nature of the intervention. Projects for the restoration and enhancement of monuments may be directed towards the North-West Regional Programme or the Historical Monuments Stamp; projects with a cross-border dimension may fall under Interreg Romania–Hungary; activities involving cultural education, inclusion, and work with vulnerable groups may be linked to PoIDS, AFCN, or international grants, and digitisation projects may be connected to programmes dedicated to digital transformation.

III. Identification, Detailed Presentation, and Substantiation of Examples of Good Practice at Regional and Local Level in the Border Area, in the Field of Historical and Cultural Heritage

a. Bihor County constitutes a reference area for Eastern European multiculturalism, historically characterised by a mosaic ethnic and confessional structure. In the current context of European security, this traditional legacy of intercultural dialogue is acquiring broader functional significance.

It no longer represents solely a means of preserving the identity of historical minorities, but is becoming a social and administrative infrastructure capable of absorbing and integrating new waves of non-EU migrants and refugees.

1. Historical Ethno-Religious Structure: The Foundation of Community Tolerance

According to the official statistical data reflected in the *Integrated Sustainable Development Strategy of Bihor County*¹, the county's population is defined by a stable multiethnic profile, in which the ethnic Romanian population coexists closely with a significant Hungarian community (representing more than 25% of the county's total population and constituting the majority in several border settlements) followed by substantial Roma, Slovak, German,

¹ *Integrated Sustainable Development Strategy of Bihor County, 2021-2027*, available at https://www.cjbihor.ro/wp-content/uploads/2021/02/SIDD_Bihor_sinteza_RO_PDF_interactiv.pdf

and Jewish communities, with the Slovaks concentrated in the mountainous area of Huta Slăvonești.

From a religious perspective, the landscape is equally diverse, comprising Orthodox, Roman Catholic, Reformed, Greek Catholic, Baptist, Pentecostal, and Jewish communities. Over time, this confessional plurality has generated a distinctive model of interinstitutional cooperation among religious denominations. Churches and religious communities in Bihor actively cooperate with public authorities in the provision of social assistance, transforming diversity into an instrument of local stability and societal security.

2. Intercultural Dialogue and Ethno-Religious Cooperation as Strategic Instruments

The county strategy emphasises the enhancement of this ethno-religious profile through cross-border cooperation programmes, particularly within the Bihor - Hajdú-Bihar Euroregion. Intercultural dialogue is not approached merely as a theoretical concept, but is translated into concrete administrative mechanisms:

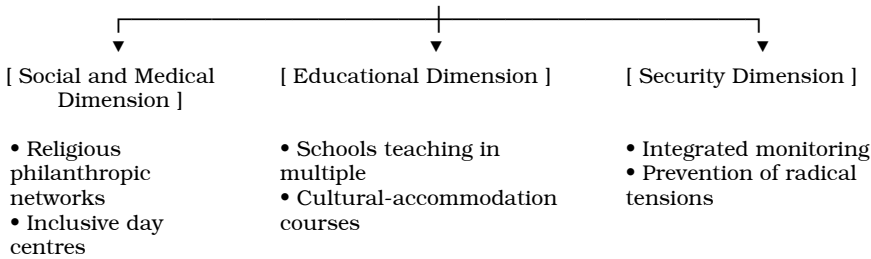
- **Cross-border parish and diocesan partnerships:** ROHU projects frequently finance the simultaneous restoration of places of worship on both sides of the border, such as wooden churches in Bihor and Reformed or Catholic churches in Hungary, thereby encouraging ecumenical tourism and reciprocal visits by communities of believers.
- **Integrated multiethnic events:** Cultural festivals organised in the county, including Hungarian Culture Days, festivals of the Slovak community, and events of the Roma minority, receive county co-financing because they contribute to social cohesion and to dismantling discriminatory barriers in marginalised rural areas.

3. Integration of New Immigrants and Refugees from an Ethno-Religious Perspective

The geopolitical transformations of recent years have added a new dimension to Bihor's border area: a transition from historical to global multiculturalism, reflected in the emergence of refugee communities, particularly from Ukraine, and non-EU immigrant workers from Asian countries such as Sri Lanka, Nepal, India, and Bangladesh.

Public institutions in Bihor and civil society have approached the integration of these new groups through the experience accumulated in traditional interethnic dialogue:

[INFRASTRUCTURE OF ETHNO-RELIGIOUS COOPERATION IN BIHOR]



A. Social, Humanitarian, and Medical Dimension

• **Role of church philanthropic networks:** During humanitarian crises, such as the outbreak of the conflict in Ukraine, the most effective initial response was coordinated through the charitable structures of religious denominations. Organisations such as the *Filantropia Oradea Association*, under the aegis of the Orthodox Diocese, as well as the charitable structures of the Roman Catholic Church and Neo-Protestant denominations, transformed parishes and social centres near the border crossing points at Borş and Valea lui Mihai into reception, accommodation, and primary medical-assistance facilities.

• **Good practice:** The use of existing religious infrastructure enabled the rapid distribution of resources and the provision of psychological and spiritual support to refugees, irrespective of their denomination, while respecting standards of human dignity.

B. Educational and Cultural Dimension

• **Minority language skills as a resource:** The presence of historical minorities in Bihor has facilitated communication and integration. For example, the existing multilingual school network (schools teaching in Hungarian, Slovak, or German) and bilingual human resources have provided a basis for translation, cultural orientation, and facilitating refugee children's access to the local education system.

• **Cultural accommodation through heritage:** Programmes implemented by NGOs and associations financed through European and national grants use guided visits to multiethnic historical monuments in Oradea and Bihor County as a means of familiarising

Asian immigrants with European values and norms, encouraging mutual respect and preventing their isolation in industrial enclaves.

C. Security, Public Order, and Governance Dimension

• Prevention of interethnic and interconfessional conflicts:

The Oradea Territorial Inspectorate of the Border Police (I.T.P.F.) and the Bihor County Police Inspectorate (I.P.J.) cooperate with the formal leaders of ethnic and religious communities to monitor the county's social climate. Continuous dialogue prevents the emergence of xenophobic tensions or radical manifestations in rural settlements where companies bring in large numbers of foreign workers.

• Participatory governance: Within the County Committee for Emergency Situations and the consultative structures attached to the Office of the Prefect, representatives of minorities and religious denominations are active partners in strategic decision-making concerning relocation, labour-market integration, and legal support for immigrants, ensuring a sound balance between rigorous border-security measures and respect for fundamental rights.

b. Identification of examples of good practice specific to the cultural field:

• Cultural activities carried out to date and those proposed for the future by the Țării Crișurilor Museum, the County Library, the Directorate for Culture and Heritage, the University of Oradea, the Bihor County Cultural Centre, and the Doctoral School of History/Centre for Interdisciplinary Studies.

These include:

- Activities organised to mark 100 years since the Union of Transylvania with Romania.
- The Bihor County Monograph
- The installation on county town halls of plaques bearing the names of the delegates who attended the Great National Assembly at Alba Iulia
- The production of the album *Patrimoniul Țării Bistrei* [*The Heritage of Țara Bistrei*], the preparation of *Cuzap - album istorico-geografic* [*Cuzap: A Historical and Geographical Album*], and the work *Povestea slovacilor din Huta* [*The Story of the Slovaks of Huta*] (2022, 2025), among others.

c. Detailed presentation and analysis of the identified examples of good practice;

➤ Activities organised to mark 100 years since the Union of Transylvania with Romania:

To mark the Centenary of the Great Union, the University of Oradea and the Țării Crișurilor Museum organised a series of major cultural and scholarly events:

- “The Centenary Conferences”: a large-scale scholarly project conducted throughout the year in cooperation with historians from the Republic of Moldova and the Romanian Academy¹.
- Solemn sessions in the Aula Magna: major gatherings that brought together hundreds of students and academic staff for historical lectures dedicated to the act of 1 December 1918.
- Thematic heritage exhibitions: the Țării Crișurilor Museum displayed original documents, maps, period photographs, and century-old items of traditional dress.
- Artistic events and concerts: commemorative performances such as “Romania, Corner of Heaven” and recitals by the Choir of the Faculty of Arts.
- Activities at memorial museums: special guided tours and wreath-laying ceremonies at the “Aurel Lazăr” Memorial Museum, the residence in which the Declaration of Independence of the Romanians of Transylvania was drafted².
- Book and journal launches: the publication of volumes of historical studies and special issues of the scholarly journal *Crisia*.

➤ The Bihor County Monograph:

During the Centenary Year, three institutions in Oradea (Oradea City Hall, the Centre for Interdisciplinary Studies at the University of Oradea, and the Țării Crișurilor Museum joined forces to prepare and publish this work. The members of the Centre for Interdisciplinary Studies and the Țării Crișurilor Museum provided the scholarly content, while Oradea City Hall supplied the financial support. The monograph *Istoria Bihorului: civilizație, societate, economie, mentalități* [*The History of Bihor: Civilization, Society, Economy, and*

¹ <https://media.uoradea.ro/article1129-Conferin%C5%A3ele-Centenar-100-de-ani-de-la-Unirea-Basarabiei-cu-Romania>

² <https://www.ovidan.ro/?p=articles.details.17037>

Mentalities] is structured in a traditional manner according to historical periods: Prehistory, Ancient History, Medieval History, Modern History, and Contemporary History, to which two further chapters are added: Art and Architecture, and Ethnic and Confessional Structure. For both specialists and the general public, retaining a classical structure for the presentation of information facilitates a clearer understanding of the historical events, phenomena, and processes that unfolded in this part of the country. From a methodological perspective, the authors sought to investigate the history of Bihor in relation to events in the histories of Transylvania, Hungary, and the Byzantine Empire, as well as in relation to the extra-Carpathian Romanian Principalities and the Central European area. Consequently, the editorial team attempted to combine the classical approach to investigating the past with new themes, such as the history of private life, the history of mentalities, and the history of everyday life, which are characteristic of the “new history”. The authors did not set out to produce a militant or triumphalist history, nor to judge past events through the lens of contemporary realities. The editorial team’s stated aim was to reconstruct the realities of this area in a critical and modern manner, irrespective of the political entity of which Bihor formed part over time. The result was a coherent and extensive work (the most substantial history of Țara Crișurilor produced to date) giving its coordinators and authors every reason to feel the satisfaction of having fulfilled their duty³.

➤ The installation on county town halls of plaques bearing the names of the delegates who attended the Great National Assembly at Alba Iulia:

The installation of commemorative plaques on town-hall buildings throughout Bihor County was one of the most enduring and symbolically charged initiatives of the Centenary Year. This large-scale project, directly coordinated by the Țării Crișurilor Museum in partnership with Bihor County Council, sought to identify and honour every local delegate who travelled to Alba Iulia to seal the

³ *Istoria Bihorului: civilizație, societate, economie, mentalități*, coordonatori Gabriel Moisa, Sorin Șipoș, Aurel Chiriac, Radu Românașu, Editura Muzeului Țării Crișurilor, Oradea, 2018, 1100p. [*The History of Bihor: Civilization, Society, Economy, and Mentalities*, edited by Gabriel Moisa, Sorin Șipoș, Aurel Chiriac, and Radu Românașu, Țării Crișurilor Museum Publishing House, Oradea, 2018, 1,100 pp.].

historic act of 1 December 1918. The initiative aimed to secure public recognition both for those entitled to vote and for ordinary participants by installing sixty marble plaques on the façades of administrative institutions across the county. The project began symbolically in January 2018 in the commune of Mădăras, where the first such plaque was unveiled in the presence of the local community and public officials. Each engraved plaque keeps alive the memory of earlier generations by presenting passers-by with the full names of the people of Bihor who contributed directly to the creation of Greater Romania⁴.

➤ The production of the album *Patrimoniul Țării Bistrei* [The Heritage of Țara Bistrei], the preparation of *Cuzap - album istorico-geografic* [Cuzap: A Historical-Geographical Album], and the work *Povestea slovacilor din Huta* [The Story of the Slovaks of Huta] (2022, 2025), among others.

1. All the works were produced by specialists recognised nationally and internationally, with the active involvement of the cultural institutions mentioned above.
2. The project teams were designed to cover a broad range of related fields so that the results would be as objective as possible and closely aligned with the interests of the community.
3. The projects mentioned above sought to enhance Bihor's tangible and intangible heritage, enabling it to be better understood and used by school pupils, university students, and leaders of local communities.
4. The research results were published in scholarly works, albums, and volumes that were presented and distributed free of charge to school pupils, university students, and local authorities. The scholarly publications were also distributed to the libraries of the Romanian Academy and to university libraries in Romania and across the European Union.
5. The volume "*Patrimoniul Țării Bistrei (Județul Bihor)*" [*The Heritage of Țara Bistrei (Bihor County)*], coordinated

⁴ 60 Commemorative Plaques Unveiled in Bihor during the Centenary Year, available at <https://www.digi24.ro/regional/digi24-oradea/60-de-placi-comemorative-dezvelite-in-bihor-in-anul-centenarului-867052> (accessed on 11 May 2026).

by historians including Sorin Șipoș and Gabriel Moisa, contributes to the promotion of local values through the rigorous documentation of a multiethnic and multicultural area. The work inventories and presents detailed images of ecclesiastical and secular monuments, providing visual and historical testimony to the heritage of north-eastern Bihor County. By being published bilingually in Romanian and English, the volume makes its information more accessible to international audiences and specialists. This research rescues regional identity from oblivion, supports community awareness, and provides a scholarly foundation for future conservation projects. Launched through local cultural events, the volume reconnects residents with the historical past of Țara Bistrei⁵

6. The work *Cuzap - album istorico-geografic* [*Cuzap: A Historical-Geographical Album*] contributes to the promotion of heritage by combining scholarly research with rich illustrative material and by rigorously documenting the historical and geographical evolution of the settlement in the Bistra Valley, Bihor. The volume preserves local memory by reconstructing social life, place names, and traditions, transforming elements of architecture and traditional dress into valued markers of identity⁶

7. The work *Povestea slovacilor din Huta* [*The Story of the Slovaks of Huta*] contributes to the promotion of heritage through the rigorous documentation of the history, traditional architecture, and customs specific to Romania's largest Slovak community. Published as a bilingual Romanian-Slovak historical and geographical album, the volume enhances, from cultural and tourism perspectives,

⁵ *Patrimoniul Țării Bistrei (Județul Bihor)/Bistra Land's Patrimony (Bihor County)*, Ediția a II-a/2nd edition. Coordonatori: Sorin Șipoș, Gabriel Moisa, Stelian Nistor, Ioan Giarca, Cosmin Patca, Gelu Serea, Editura Muzeului Țării Crișurilor, Oradea, 2018 [*The Heritage of Țara Bistrei (Bihor County)*, 2nd edition, edited by Sorin Șipoș, Gabriel Moisa, Stelian Nistor, Ioan Giarca, Cosmin Patca, and Gelu Serea, Țării Crișurilor Museum Publishing House, Oradea, 2018].

⁶ *Cuzap – album istorico-geografic*, ediția a II-a, coord. Sorin Șipoș, Cosmin Patca, Ioana Blajec, Editura Ratio et Revelatio și Editura Universității din Oradea, Oradea, 2025 [*Cuzap: A Historical-Geographical Album*, 2nd edition, edited by Sorin Șipoș, Cosmin Patca, and Ioana Blajec, Ratio et Revelatio Publishing House and University of Oradea Press, Oradea, 2025].

the ecotourism route within the Huta Slavia complex in Șinteu. By recovering historical landmarks from Bihor and Sălaj counties, this interdisciplinary research succeeds in rescuing ethnic identity from oblivion and conveying to young people and visitors a profound sense of belonging to a world characterised by distinctive rituals and occupations⁷

8. The projects were financed through contributions from cultural institutions, the involvement of economic stakeholders, and participation in projects supported by European funding.

9. Raising awareness among the managers of cultural institutions and economic investors that investment in culture can generate economic and educational benefits for the entire community.

d. Proposal of substantiated recommendations for improving activities on the basis of good-practice examples:

1. Continuation of the interdisciplinary projects carried out to date
2. Improved coordination among cultural institutions, county administrative institutions, municipalities, economic stakeholders, and leading figures in cultural life in order to promote cultural, educational, and tourism-promotion projects
3. Support by local authorities and small entrepreneurs for cultural, educational, and tourism-promotion projects in order to make better use of local potential
4. Involvement of research institutes within the University of Oradea in implementing projects (see the projects carried out by the Centre for Interdisciplinary Studies)
5. Identification of European funding priorities
6. Greater attention to training and making effective use of the human resources of local communities

⁷ Sorin Șipoș, Miroslav Iabloncsik, Ioana Blajec, Cosmin Patca, Manuela Bârza, *Povestea slovacilor din Huta/ Príbeh slovákov z Huty*, Coord. Sorin Șipoș, Editura Primus și Editura Universității din Oradea, Oradea, 2025 [Sorin Șipoș, Miroslav Iabloncsik, Ioana Blajec, Cosmin Patca, Manuela Bârza, *The Story of the Slovaks of Huta / Príbeh slovákov z Huty*, edited by Sorin Șipoș, Primus Publishing House and University of Oradea Press, Oradea, 2025].

7. Promotion of capacity-building, as appropriate, at all levels in order to develop a dynamic cultural and creative sector, particularly by encouraging creativity, innovation, and entrepreneurship; developing sustainable cultural institutions and cultural industries; providing equipment; offering professional training for cultural professionals; increasing employment; and creating opportunities in the cultural and creative sector.

IV. SWOT Analysis of the Dynamics of Integration, Societal Security, and the Inclusion of Minorities, Refugees, and Immigrants in the Border Area, in the Field of Historical and Cultural Heritage

– identification of the elements of the SWOT analysis corresponding to each field, including at least five strengths, five weaknesses, five threats, and five opportunities

a. Identification of the SWOT-analysis elements relating to the cultural field that were included in the ***Bihor County Sustainable Development Strategy for 2021-2027***

STRENGTHS (S)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Multicultural character; • Development of the CCI sector (cultural and creative industries) in terms of the number of companies, turnover, and number of employees; • Significant and diverse cultural heritage, both in general and in relation to the built heritage; • Positive developments in the museum sector and in the use of these resources; • Cultural and recreational activities provided by the private sector; • Natural heritage, including thermal waters, karst relief, and nature reserves; • An extensive network of tourist information centres.
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WEAKNESSES (W)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Negative developments affecting certain cultural resources (libraries, cinemas, and performing-arts institutions) and their use; ● Lack of centralised information on cultural leisure opportunities and poor coordination among the stakeholders involved; ● Lack of a single website or information point; where one exists, it has insufficient online visibility; ● Insufficient coverage of services; ● Lack of education for young people in the spirit of culture and the appreciation of cultural heritage; ● Lack of cultural-promotion materials in international languages and in formats accessible to persons with disabilities; ● Lack of sustained cultural programmes dedicated to new immigrant and refugee communities.
OPPORTUNITIES (O)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Potential for cooperation with stakeholders from abroad and for joint events, particularly given the county's border location; ● Strengthening cooperation with private-sector stakeholders in the field; ● Potential for growth in the CCI sector, particularly in activities that benefit from the county's multicultural character and proximity to the border; ● National and, above all, international promotion; ● Adoption of successful cultural strategies from different Western cities and regions; ● Policies to raise awareness of the importance of tangible and intangible heritage within local communities; ● The inventorying, by specialists, of all cultural and heritage assets and sites that can contribute to the promotion of local and regional tourism; ● Following the inventory, the production of information plaques and the development of potential cultural-tourism routes within local communities; ● Use of skilled human resources in establishing policies for the promotion of cultural tourism; ● Preparation of albums, monographs, and tourist maps for each commune, according to its existing heritage; ● Development of shared Bihor - Hajdú-Bihar cross-border cultural routes incorporating Romanian, Hungarian, Jewish, Slovak, Roma, and Swabian heritage; ● Creation of cultural-accommodation programmes for refugees, immigrants, and non-EU workers through guided visits, workshops, and community events.

THREATS (T)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The capacity of Bihor County, and especially the Municipality of Oradea, to consolidate, attract, and absorb resources and activities specific to the cultural and creative industries; • Competition from abroad; • Lack of interest and preparedness among decision-makers; • Mismatch between cultural objectives and the infrastructure available in certain areas of the county; • Lack of financial resources and the precarious circumstances of certain communities, making access to culture difficult.
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The SWOT analysis above seeks to capture not only the situation of the cultural sector itself, but also the ways in which historical and cultural heritage can contribute to integration, inclusion, and social security in the border area. In this respect, strengths and opportunities should be viewed as resources that can be activated, while weaknesses and threats should be regarded as areas requiring public intervention and local partnerships.

b. Identification of data/information not included in the *Bihor County Sustainable Development Strategy for 2021-2027* but required to complete the SWOT analysis for the cultural field;

- Appropriate alignment with development directions at European level;
- Culture is not sufficiently addressed or enhanced within the strategy;
- The strategy focuses more on identifying the existing situation than on concrete actions and measures to address it.

c. Collection of data using existing information sources and databases, or collection of new data through interviews with stakeholders

- Interviews or questionnaires administered to representatives of cultural institutions whose management plans were not used (the philharmonic, theatre, cultural centre, and heritage-promotion directorate) as well as to private-sector stakeholders;
- According to data provided by the National Institute of Statistics and reproduced in the *Bihor County Sustainable*

Development Strategy, the numbers of libraries, readers, and volumes declined sharply between 1990 and 2019, with the most substantial decreases occurring in rural areas.

d. Analysis of the existing and newly collected data in order to complete the SWOT analysis (identifying the strengths, weaknesses, opportunities, and threats) relating to the cultural field.

The studies conducted for the preparation of the SWOT analysis, together with the 2021 study on quality of life in Bihor County, help to identify strategic perspectives and trends concerning the development of Bihor County:

STRENGTHS (S)	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Increase in the number of museums and public collections, as well as in visitor numbers;• The inherited cultural heritage (industrial, pre-industrial, mining, agricultural, and craft heritage, together with local customs and traditions) provides Bihor County with a significant competitive advantage;• Bihor County is the second-largest actor in the creative and cultural industries in the North-West Region, after Cluj County, in terms of the number of companies operating in this field, their turnover, and the number of employees;• A border county with a strongly multicultural character.
WEAKNESSES (W)	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Decline in the number of libraries, volumes, and users/readers;• Decline in the number of cinemas, seats, screenings, and spectators;• Decline in the number of performances and concerts, the number of seats in performance and concert halls, and the number of spectators and audience members attending artistic events;• Lack of interest and preparedness among decision-makers;

	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Cultural activities are concentrated predominantly in urban areas, often creating a cultural void in rural areas; • Lack of a database covering all cultural activities carried out throughout the county and of an information point for residents.
OPPORTUNITIES (O)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Strengthening cooperation with private-sector stakeholders in the field; • Adoption of successful cultural strategies from different Western cities and regions; • Policies to raise awareness of the importance of tangible and intangible heritage within local communities; • The potential of Bihor County, and especially the Municipality of Oradea, to consolidate, attract, and absorb resources and activities specific to the cultural and creative industries; • National and, above all, international promotion.
THREATS (T)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Competition from abroad; • Mismatch between cultural objectives and the infrastructure available in certain areas of the county; • Because the County Council allocates a joint budget for cultural and religious activities, the proportion of this budget assigned to culture is not known precisely and may be significantly lower than the financial support provided for religious activities. A separate budget line allocated directly to culture is therefore necessary.

V. Drafting and Substantiating Practical Recommendations

– drafting and substantiating an action plan specific to each major field of activity

- practical recommendations concerning planning and analysis processes for partnerships aimed at developing skills within the field
- recommendations for monitoring and evaluation

1. Identification and substantiation of the general objective and the strategic directions for action in the cultural field, as an area of activity of the units subordinate to the county authority.

a. Analysis of the *Bihor County Sustainable Development Strategy for 2021-2027* and of the SWOT analysis in order to identify and substantiate the **general objective** for the cultural field as an area of activity of the units subordinate to the county authority;

General objective: increasing access to cultural services for all residents of the county and using culture as an economic catalyst

b. Analysis of the *Bihor County Sustainable Development Strategy for 2021-2027* and of the SWOT analysis in order to identify and substantiate the **strategic directions for action** in the cultural field, as an area of activity of the units subordinate to the county authority;

The cultural strategy resulting from the analysis of the *Bihor County Sustainable Development Strategy for 2021-2027* comprises five major directions, each with two to four corresponding strategic objectives, as follows:

1. Increasing access to culture:

O1.1: Enhancing, improving, and properly managing cultural infrastructure;

O1.2: Ensuring the circulation of cultural products throughout the county (internal mobility);

O1.3: Developing means of cultural promotion, with an emphasis on public communication;

2. Raising awareness among local public authorities regarding the allocation of funding for culture:

O2.1: Strengthening dialogue among local public authorities, the County Council, and public cultural institutions concerning their activities and the impact of the results of their cultural work;

O2.2: Encouraging partnerships and cooperation between the private and public sectors in support of a structured vision capable of serving the aim of diversifying the cultural offer;

3. Professionalising cultural management and administration:

O3.1: Efficient management of public cultural institutions in Bihor County;

O3.2: Professional training in cultural management and marketing for employees of public cultural institutions;

O3.3: Efficient scheduling and use of specialist technical staff and operational staff within public cultural institutions subordinate to the County Council;

O3.4: Promoting intra- and intersectoral cooperation;

4. Encouraging and developing cultural consumption:

O4.1: Improving the quality of the cultural offer and cultural products;

O4.2: Strengthening the cultural offer intended for young people aged 11-18;

O4.3: Prioritising and developing cultural-education projects and programmes;

5. Developing and diversifying the cultural-tourism offer:

O5.1: Strengthening cultural-tourism offers;

O5.2: Promoting cultural-tourism offers;

O5.3: Establishing the foundations for entrepreneurship and innovation in the cultural-tourism sector, in conjunction with the involvement of cultural professionals capable of highlighting and enhancing the advantages of the built and natural heritage.

5.2. Linking SMART objectives and the projects corresponding to each objective with funding sources specific to the cultural field:

a. Identification of all **potential funding sources**, both national and international, generally applicable to the **cultural** field (e.g. projects supported by European funding)

In order to achieve the specific objectives mentioned above, the following general national and international funding sources that may be accessed during the 2021-2027 period have been identified:

- National Recovery and Resilience Plan (PNRR)
- North-West Regional Operational Programme 2021-2027
- Health Operational Programme 2021-2027
- Education and Employment Operational Programme 2021-2027
- Social Inclusion and Dignity Operational Programme 2021-2027
- Smart Growth, Digitalisation and Financial Instruments Operational Programme 2021-2027
- Just Transition Operational Programme 2021-2027
- Sustainable Development Operational Programme 2021-2027
- Cross-Border Cooperation Programmes 2021-2027
- Local budget
- Private funders

b. Selection of the national and international funding sources for which the projects developed or proposed to achieve the SMART objectives relating to the cultural field are eligible

The potential funding sources for which the projects proposed or developed in the cultural field would be eligible are as follows:

- National Recovery and Resilience Plan (PNRR)
- North-West Regional Operational Programme 2021-2027
- Sustainable Development Operational Programme 2021-2027
- Cross-Border Cooperation Programmes 2021-2027
- Local budget
- Private funders.

5.3. Drafting and substantiating an action plan specific to the cultural field as an area of activity of the units subordinate to the county authority:

- a. Drafting and substantiating an **action plan** specific to the cultural field
- b. Identifying the project stage for each project included in the action plan/project portfolio
- c. Estimating the budget for each project included in the action plan/project portfolio
- d. Estimating the implementation period for each project included in the action plan/project portfolio
- e. Identifying the funding sources for each project included in the action plan/project portfolio
- f. Identifying the responsible parties for each project included in the action plan/project portfolio

Conclusions

1. The cultural and creative sectors are an important consideration in defining and understanding regional and local economic development based on unique resources, creativity, and knowledge, with particular emphasis on those available within local communities. They can constitute an almost inexhaustible source of urban regeneration and economic development for the community, as well as of improvements in quality of life, yet they are often overlooked and not used to their full potential.

2. Economic development includes economic growth as an essential component and its principal catalyst, the latter representing *“an increase in the quantity of goods and services produced by a (regional) economy over a given period [...] in tandem with increased employment and improved living standards”*. What economic development adds beyond economic growth, however, relates primarily to the temporal dimension of the phenomenon, namely *“a longer-term increase in the economy’s capacity to improve the quality of life of its residents”*, a fact that inevitably introduces the concept and necessity of economic sustainability.

3. The studies conducted for the preparation of the SWOT analysis, together with the 2021 study on quality of life in Bihor

County, help to identify strategic perspectives and trends concerning the development of Bihor County.

4. The cultural activities carried out to date and those proposed for the future by the Țării Crișurilor Museum, the County Library, the Directorate for Culture and Heritage, the University of Oradea, the Bihor County Cultural Centre, and the History Doctoral School/Centre for Interdisciplinary Studies may provide a model for future cultural projects.

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GUIDE OF BEST PRACTICES REGARDING
INTEGRATION, SOCIETAL SECURITY AND
INCLUSION IN THE BORDER AREA

Key area

**Intercultural Education and
Communication**

by Karla Barth

Introduction

This guide of best practices addresses the domain of Intercultural Education and Communication within the broader architecture of the EUROINCLUS project — "Identity, Security and Inclusivity in Border Areas of South-East Europe" (project code 101127601), Jean Monnet Centre of Excellence, University of Oradea, coordinated by Mircea Brie — and should be read as a complementary, not self-contained, contribution to that collective effort.

The guide's central premise is that Bihor County — through its long-standing experience of ethnic and confessional coexistence, its border position vis-à-vis Hungary, and its consolidated network for minority-language and inclusive education — constitutes a relevant case study for practices of integration, societal security and inclusion transferable beyond Romania's borders, to the EU's eastern-neighborhood states targeted by the project (Serbia, Ukraine, the Republic of Moldova). Accordingly, the guide combines a legislative and institutional overview (Chapter I), an analysis of the current state of integration capacities (Chapter II), an inventory of best practices at regional and cross-border level (Chapter III), a SWOT analysis (Chapter IV), and practical recommendations (Chapter V).

The guide starts from the premise that education is not merely a social good to be distributed equitably, but one of the principal instruments through which integration, societal security and inclusion are produced at local level. A school system capable of absorbing ethnic, confessional and linguistic diversity without friction functions, in practice, as an early-warning and prevention mechanism against social fragmentation; conversely, a school system that fails to integrate new categories of pupils — historical minorities, refugees or economic migrants alike — risks converting educational marginalisation into a longer-term source of Integrated Findings and Interpretation security vulnerability. This is the conceptual link that justifies treating intercultural education, within a project explicitly dedicated to societal security in the border area, as one of its structural components.

Bihor's relevance to this endeavour is not a recent construct: its multi-ethnic and multi-confessional character predates by generations the institutional frameworks described in the chapters

that follow. Hungarian, Slovak, German and, later, Roma communities have coexisted with the Romanian majority across successive political regimes, developing durable mechanisms of confessional and linguistic accommodation, documented in Chapters I and III. It is this historical depth — rather than a policy framework designed from scratch — that gives the practices analysed here their claim to replicability, making Bihor a genuine "laboratory" rather than merely a beneficiary county of EU-funded pilot projects.

Methodology and Documentary Sources

The guide was compiled through documentary research, institutional data collection and, where possible, direct verification against primary sources. At the legislative level, primary EU instruments and Romanian legislation were consulted directly, rather than relying on secondary summaries: Directive 2013/33/EU on reception conditions for asylum applicants, Directive 2011/95/EU on qualification for international protection, the Council of Europe's Framework Convention for the Protection of National Minorities (1995), the European Charter for Regional or Minority Languages (1992), and the Reference Framework of Competences for Democratic Culture (RFCDC, 2016); at national level, National Pre-University Education Law No. 198/2023 and National Higher Education Law No. 199/2023, Law No. 489/2006 on religious freedom, Law No. 122/2006 on asylum, Government Ordinance No. 137/2000 on preventing discrimination, and Government Decisions No. 1194/2001 (establishing the National Council for Combating Discrimination) and No. 560/2022 (the national Roma-inclusion strategy) — each consulted in its official-gazette form.

At institutional and statistical level, the guide draws on data obtained from, or verified against, the websites and public decisions of the Bihor County School Inspectorate (ISJ Bihor), the Bihor Teachers' House (CCD Bihor), Bihor County Council (CJ Bihor), the University of Oradea, and the institutions comprising Bihor's minority-language and inclusive-education networks, complemented by national statistical sources (the National Institute of Statistics) and by reports of international organisations active in the field (UNHCR, UNICEF). Where the guide of Karla Barth (2022) dedicated to special education provides directly relevant institutional and statistical

context, it is cited accordingly, with its findings updated wherever more recent data are available.

Two methodological limitations should be noted. First, as discussed in Section II.1, the North-West Development Region does not constitute a distinct statistical-reporting level for the phenomena analysed here; the guide therefore relies on data reported at county and national level, without an intermediate regional layer. Second, labour migration from South and East Asia (Section II.5) remains, at the time of writing, insufficiently documented from an educational standpoint, in the absence of centralised statistics — a gap flagged for a future, updated edition. Finally, given the accelerated pace of legislative change described in Chapter I, the guide reflects the framework as it stood at the time of drafting and should be periodically updated.

I. Context. Concepts. Legislative and Institutional Framework

1. In-depth and updated presentation of the legal and institutional framework

Intercultural education and intercultural communication, as instruments of integration, societal security and inclusion in the border area, rest on a layered normative framework operating simultaneously at European, national, regional and local-institutional level. Understanding this architecture is essential for any best-practice endeavour, since the margin of action available to a school, an inspectorate or a university in Bihor is always conditioned by higher-order norms, as well as by the specific manner in which these are transposed and applied locally.

1.1. The European level

At European Union level, the right to education without discrimination is enshrined in the Charter of Fundamental Rights of the European Union (Art. 14 — the right to education; Art. 21 — non-discrimination; Art. 22 — respect for cultural, religious and linguistic diversity). These provisions of constitutional value are complemented by a set of sectoral policies relevant to our field:

Directive 2013/33/EU¹ (reception conditions for applicants for international protection) and Directive 2011/95/EU² (qualification) require Member States to ensure that minor asylum seekers have access to the national education system, on conditions similar to those of nationals, within a maximum of three months from the lodging of the application.

Cohesion policy and its related financing instruments — the European Social Fund Plus, the Asylum, Migration and Integration Fund (AMIF) — financially support the educational inclusion of migrant children.

The Erasmus+ programme, through its dedicated European-studies component — the Jean Monnet Programme — funds the creation of chairs, modules and centres of excellence focused on European integration, precisely the institutional framework in which this project (EUROINCLUS) is situated.

Beyond the strict framework of the European Union, the protection of national minorities has its principal legal basis in an older and more specific Council of Europe instrument: the Framework Convention for the Protection of National Minorities, adopted in Strasbourg on 1 February 1995. Romania was the first state to ratify it, on 29 April 1995, through Law No. 33/1995³ — a gesture of considerable symbolic value, given that at the time our country had one of the most numerous and diverse minority populations in Central and Eastern Europe, including that of Bihor County. Among other things, the Framework Convention enshrines the right of persons belonging to national minorities to learn and be taught in their mother tongue, a principle directly applicable to the Hungarian, Slovak, German and Roma school networks described below, at level (c).

Complementing the Framework Convention, the European Charter for Regional or Minority Languages (adopted in Strasbourg in 1992, ratified by Romania through Law No. 282/2007) offers a differentiated protection regime, essential for understanding the

¹ Parlamentul European și Consiliul Uniunii Europene, Directiva 2013/33/UE de stabilire a standardelor pentru primirea solicitanților de protecție internațională (reformare), Jurnalul Oficial al Uniunii Europene, L 180/96, 2013.

² Parlamentul European și Consiliul Uniunii Europene, Directiva 2011/95/UE privind standardele referitoare la protecția internațională (reformare), Jurnalul Oficial al Uniunii Europene, L 337/9, 2011.

³ Ministerul Afacerilor Externe, 2015.

situation in Bihor: Part II of the Charter, containing general obligations, applies to all minority languages traditionally spoken on national territory, whereas Part III — which contains detailed, genuinely operational obligations, including in education — has been applied by the Romanian state explicitly only to the Hungarian and German languages⁴. This legislative choice has a direct and visible consequence on the ground: the Slovak community in Bihor, although benefiting from the general protection of Part II, does not enjoy the same level of detailed guarantees as the Hungarian or German minority — a legal factor that helps explain the decline of the Slovak-language school network noted at level (c) of this section, where we showed that five Slovak-language schools have closed over the last decade.

A central normative reference point for the current period is the European Commission's Action Plan on Integration and Inclusion 2021–2027, which addresses the barriers that may hinder the participation and inclusion of people with a migratory background⁵. Inclusive education and training, from early childhood to higher education, with an emphasis on the easy recognition of qualifications and continuous language learning, supported through European funds, represent one of the plan's four pillars of action. The document was built on the experience gathered during the COVID-19 crisis, on the previous 2016 action plan, and on the new Pact on Migration and Asylum, published in September 2020; unlike the 2016 plan, it covers both third-country nationals and EU citizens with a migratory background, being grounded in the principle of inclusion for all.

Among the objectives of the 2021–2027 action plan in education and training are increased participation of migrant children in quality, inclusive early education, better preparation of teaching staff for managing multicultural and multilingual classrooms, and the creation of learning communities involving schools, health and social services, and parents. The plan also proposes targeted, tailored support that takes into account individual characteristics that may generate specific challenges, such as gender or religious affiliation — an element of direct relevance to the ethno-religious dimension analysed in this guide.

⁴ Institutul pentru Studierea Problemelor Minorităților Naționale (ISPMN), f.d.

⁵ Comisia Europeană, Planul de acțiune privind integrarea și incluziunea 2021–2027, COM(2020) 758 final, 2020.

The national strategy dedicated to Roma inclusion, approved by Government Decision No. 560/2022, is not an isolated undertaking of the Romanian state but the direct transposition of a European framework: the EU Roma Strategic Framework for Equality, Inclusion and Participation 2020–2030⁶, which replaced the previous EU framework for national Roma-integration strategies (valid until 2020). The document sets seven EU-level objectives, three horizontal (non-discrimination, participation, awareness-raising) and four sectoral (education, employment, health, housing), with minimum targets for 2030 — among them, reducing to below one third the share of young Roma not in education, employment or training. The accompanying Council Recommendation, adopted on 12 March 2021, was unanimously approved by the Member States, which lends the national strategy a high degree of legitimacy and consistency with Romania's European commitments.

1.2. The national level

In Romania, the legal framework relevant to intercultural education is structured across several layers:

National Education Law No. 198⁷ and 199/2023⁸, as subsequently amended, guarantees the right of persons belonging to national minorities to instruction in their mother tongue, at all levels and forms of pre-university education, under the conditions of the law, and enshrines the principle of inclusive education as a purpose of the national education system.

Law No. 489/2006 on religious freedom and the general status of religious denominations⁹ regulates the status of recognised denominations and their right to organise their own confessional education — a matter of particular relevance to Bihor, where Orthodox, Roman Catholic, Greek Catholic, Reformed, Baptist and Pentecostal educational institutions coexist.

⁶ Comisia Europeană, EU Roma Strategic Framework for Equality, Inclusion and Participation 2020-2030, COM(2020) 620 final, 2020.

⁷ Parlamentul României, Legea învățământului preuniversitar nr. 198/2023, Monitorul Oficial al României, nr. 613/5.07.2023.

⁸ Parlamentul României, Legea învățământului superior nr. 199/2023, Monitorul Oficial al României, nr. 614/5.07.2023.

⁹ Legea nr. 489/2006 privind libertatea religioasă și regimul general al cultelor.

Law No. 122/2006 on asylum in Romania¹⁰, together with its implementing methodological norms, transposes at national level the obligations assumed through the European directives on access to education for minors seeking or benefiting from international protection.

Government Ordinance No. 137/2000 on preventing and sanctioning all forms of discrimination¹¹ constitutes the general anti-discrimination framework applicable also in education. The effective application of this framework is ensured by the National Council for Combating Discrimination (CNCD), an autonomous state authority with legal personality, under parliamentary control, established by Government Decision No. 1194/2001 and operational since August 2002¹². Under Art. 9 of GO No. 137/2000, the Council is empowered to mediate reported discrimination cases, by agreement of the parties, and to impose contraventional sanctions for established violations — including, under Art. 11 of the same ordinance, the refusal of access to the education system, at any level or form, on grounds of race, nationality, ethnicity or religion¹³. The CNCD's relevance to inclusive education is confirmed by its own decision-making practice: through Decision No. 374/2014, the CNCD's Steering Board found discrimination in the case of three schools in Bucharest that had refused to enrol children with autism¹⁴ — a case directly relevant to the situation of students with autism spectrum disorders in Bihor's inclusive-education network, described in Section II. Beyond its adjudicative function, the CNCD collaborates structurally with the Ministry of Education on the annual collection of equality and non-discrimination data in schools, and on instituting an annual week dedicated to promoting equal opportunity and diversity in pre-university schools¹⁵.

At institutional level, the Ministry of Education, through its specialised directorates (education for national minorities, special and integrated special education), together with the Department for

¹⁰ Legea nr. 122/2006 privind azilul în România.

¹¹ Ordonanța Guvernului nr. 137/2000 privind prevenirea și sancționarea tuturor formelor de discriminare.

¹² CNCD, 2026.

¹³ CNCD, 2009.

¹⁴ CNCD, Hotărârea nr. 374/2014.

¹⁵ CNCD, 2017.

Interethnic Relations within the Government's structure, coordinate the relevant national policies.

1.3. The regional and local-institutional level

At regional level, Bihor's educational institutional framework directly reflects its multiple ethnic structure, with historically consolidated mother-tongue teaching mechanisms for the main national minorities, though at very different stages of vitality.

Bihor County's relevance to a project centred on the "border area" is not metaphorical but strictly geographic and institutional. Bihor is a border county in the north-western extremity of Romania, bordering Hungary to the west — specifically the Hungarian counties of Hajdú-Bihar and Békés — along more than 150 km of shared border¹⁶, part of the 448 km total Romanian–Hungarian border, the second-longest of Romania's land borders. Several crossing points open to international traffic are located on this stretch, the main road gateway being Borş, joined — through the operationalization of the modern Borş II–Nagykerekí crossing — by a second direct link to the Hungarian motorway network¹⁷, alongside the crossings at Salonta, Săcueni and Valea lui Mihai. With an area of 7,544 km² (5th nationally) and a population of 551,297 according to the 2021 census¹⁸, Bihor is also the home county of the municipality of Oradea — a regional university, economic and administrative hub, seat of the University of Oradea and, consequently, of the EUROINCLUS Jean Monnet Centre of Excellence.

This border position has a direct institutional counterpart: at the end of 2002, on the initiative of Bihor County Council and the Hajdú-Bihar Local Self-Government, the Bihor–Hajdú-Bihar Euroregion¹⁹ was established, with the explicit purpose of stimulating cross-border cooperation and identifying common fields of action. Bihor is also part of the eligible area of the Interreg VI-A Romania–Hungary Programme (ROHU) 2021–2027²⁰, alongside the counties of Satu Mare, Arad and Timiş on the Romanian side, and Szabolcs-Szatmár-Bereg, Hajdú-Bihar, Békés and Csongrád on the Hungarian side — the exact financial framework within which the cross-border

¹⁶ Consiliul Judeţean Bihor, f.d.-a.

¹⁷ Poliţia de Frontieră Română, f.d.

¹⁸ Consiliul Judeţean Bihor, f.d.-b.

¹⁹ Fundaţia Euroregiunea Bihor-Hajdú-Bihar, f.d.

²⁰ Ministerul Investiţiilor şi Proiectelor Europene, f.d.

projects mentioned in Section III of this guide fall. This dual institutional architecture — euroregional and operational-programme-based — provides the concrete basis on which intercultural education in Bihor cannot be analysed in isolation, but must be constantly related to the dynamics of the relationship with the Hungarian neighborhood, whether through the lens of the Hungarian minority already resident in the county or through that of cross-border institutional cooperation.

The Hungarian community, the county's largest minority (22.3% of the population, according to the 2021 census), benefits from an extensive mother-tongue education network, supported by both the public and the confessional (Reformed, Roman Catholic) systems. Three dedicated Hungarian-medium high schools operate in Oradea — Theoretical High School "Ady Endre," Reformed High School "Lorántffy Zsuzsanna," and the Roman Catholic Theological High School "Szent László" — enrolling together approximately 2,200 students, with a combined teaching staff of around 255.

The Roma community, with 34,630 registered citizens in the county, has a dedicated institutional framework, coordinated by the school inspector for the Roma minority within the Bihor County School Inspectorate. School mediation activity is supported by 8 school mediators, alongside 11 health mediators and 24 health assistants, present in 27 Roma communities across the county²¹. Beyond its administrative component, the intercultural dimension is also cultivated through dedicated educational events, such as the "Roma Have Talent" competition in Tinca, which brought together over 300 Roma and non-Roma pupils from Bihor and Arad, in a setting explicitly oriented towards dialogue and mutual understanding.

The Slovak community, concentrated mainly in the commune of Șinteu — the most compact Slovak-population locality in Romania²² — maintains its own school network, although one in decline: one high school (Theoretical High School "Jozef Kozaček" in Budoii), two schools with grades 0–VIII (Șinteu, Șerani) and four schools with

²¹ Partida Romilor Pro-Europa, 2022.

²² Institutul Național de Statistică, Recensământul Populației și Locuințelor 2021, rezultate definitive — caracteristici etno-culturale demografice, Șinteu, <https://www.recensamantromania.ro/rezultate-rpl-2021/rezultate-definitive-caracteristici-etno-culturale-demografice/>.

grades 0–IV (Vărzari, Valea Cerului, Varăsău, Săcălăsău Nou), attended by approximately 340 pupils, plus around 50 who study Slovak as an elective, at parents' request. Over the past decade, five Slovak-language schools have closed, signalling a structural vulnerability of this segment of the education network.

The German community, unlike the other three, has a predominantly urban profile, anchored in Oradea through the German Theoretical High School "Friedrich Schiller" (attended by approximately 460 pupils, with over 40 teachers)²³, an institution active in international educational-mobility partnerships (for example, with the Evangelical High School in Tharandt, Germany) and connected to the historical German community in the Foieni area.

The coexistence of these four language-medium school networks, at differing degrees of institutionalisation and sustainability, constitutes both a resource and a challenge for intercultural education: a resource, through the accumulated experience in managing diversity; a challenge, through the visible fragility of some of these networks (the Slovak case) and the absence of common county-level monitoring mechanisms.

At the level of Bihor County, seven institutions are dedicated to special education and inclusive education, under the authority of Bihor County Council, six of them concentrated in the municipality of Oradea and one in the commune of Popești: Inclusive Education School Centre No. 1 Oradea, Inclusive Education School Centre "Orizont" Oradea, Inclusive Education School Centre "Cristal" Oradea, Inclusive Education School Centre "Bonitas" Oradea, Special Technological High School No. 1 Oradea, Inclusive Education School Centre No. 1 Popești, as well as the Bihor County Centre for Educational Resources and Assistance (CJRAE), which coordinates psycho-pedagogical assistance services at county level²⁴.

²³ Liceul Teoretic German „Friedrich Schiller” Oradea, f.d., liceulgermanoradea.ro.

²⁴ Barth, K. M., Ghid pentru dezvoltare și cooperare instituțională — Domeniul Învățământ special, Konic Napoca Management România SRL, în cadrul proiectului „Optimizarea procesului decizional și al planificării strategice și bugetare la nivelul Consiliului Județean Bihor” (cod SIPOCA 678), Consiliul Județean Bihor, 2022.

In the 2021–2022 school year, these centres enrolled 1,137 pupils with various categories of disability, unevenly distributed among institutions according to each one's profile and specialization. Inclusive Education School Centre "Orizont" Oradea hosted the largest number of pupils in the network, 281, followed by Special Technological High School No. 1 Oradea, with 361 pupils — the largest unit in the county, given also its upper-secondary/vocational component, oriented towards the socio-professional integration of graduates. Inclusive Education School Centre "Bonitas" Oradea enrolled 164 pupils, Inclusive Education School Centre No. 1 Oradea, 137, Inclusive Education School Centre "Cristal" Oradea, 94, and Inclusive Education School Centre No. 1 Popești — the only unit in the network located outside the municipality of Oradea — 97 pupils.

The distribution by disability category shows a predominance of mild and moderate intellectual disability, alongside a significant number of pupils with autism spectrum disorders (ASD) and ADHD, especially at "Orizont" Centre (119 reported ASD/ADHD cases) and at Special Technological High School No. 1 (131 cases). "Cristal" Centre Oradea stands out as the only institution in the county also specialized in sensory disabilities — hearing and visual impairments — with dedicated groups/classes for these categories, as well as the only early-intervention group for young children with special educational needs in Bihor.

Specialized teaching staff for special and integrated special education numbered, at the time this guide was prepared, 437, distributed by professional category as follows: 41 teachers for special pre-school education, 98 special psycho-pedagogy teachers, 74 psycho-pedagogue teachers, 84 educator-teachers, 66 itinerant and support teachers — those providing support for children integrated in mainstream schools — 1 psycho-diagnosis teacher, 15 kinesiotherapy teachers and 58 subject-specialist teachers. The largest teaching team operated at Special Technological High School No. 1 Oradea (129 special psycho-pedagogy teachers, plus other categories), reflecting the complexity of this institution's technological and vocational profile.

Beyond the network dedicated exclusively to special education, 803 pupils holding certificates for special educational needs (SEN) school orientation were, in the same period, integrated into mainstream schools across the county — from Oradea to rural areas and small towns (Beiuș, Ștei, Aleșd, Marghita, Tinca, Diosig, Tileagd,

Sânmartin, Valea lui Mihai, etc.). The number of integrated SEN pupils varies considerably from one unit to another: some schools report one or two pupils (for example, German Theoretical High School "Friedrich Schiller" Oradea or Baptist Theological High School "Emanuel" Oradea), while others concentrate a significant number — Theoretical High School "Constantin Șerban" Aleșd, with 70 SEN pupils, "Lucreția Suci" Secondary School Oradea, with 33, or Technological High School No. 1 Popești, with 34. It is significant for the intercultural dimension of inclusive education that the integration network includes both Romanian-medium schools and units with Hungarian-medium teaching or sections (for example, Reformed High School "Lorántffy Zsuzsanna," Roman Catholic Theological High School "Szent László," "Szacsavay Imre" Secondary School, or Theoretical High School "Horváth János" Marghita), showing that the education of SEN children in Bihor takes place transversally, regardless of the integrating unit's language of instruction.

Taken together, the 1,137 pupils schooled directly in inclusive-education centres and the 803 integrated into mainstream schools add up to 1,940 children and young people in Bihor County who benefit from, or require, additional specialized educational support — a figure that gives this field significant weight within the county's education system as a whole, and which justifies, in the guide prepared by Karla Barth, the explicit recommendation that the county authority maintain constant attention to the proper functioning of these centres, both from the standpoint of material resources (equipment, school transport, assistive technology) and of human resources (continuing training, support for writing European projects, a sufficient number of itinerant and support teachers)²⁵.

2. Regional, national and European policies, programmes, mechanisms and instruments

Beyond the strictly legislative framework, the effective functioning of intercultural education depends on a set of policies and financing/implementation instruments, situated at the intersection of several levels of governance.

At European level, the main mechanisms are: the Erasmus+ 2021–2027 Programme, with its mobility and strategic-partnership components and, specifically, the Jean Monnet Action, which funds

²⁵ Barth, op. cit., 2022.

modules, chairs and centres of excellence dedicated to teaching and research on European integration — the direct institutional framework of the EUROINCLUS project; the Asylum, Migration and Integration Fund (AMIF), the main financial instrument dedicated to the integration of third-country nationals, including through educational projects; the European Education Area, with a 2025 horizon, which includes inclusion and gender equality among the six structural dimensions of European education policy.

At Council of Europe level — an institution distinct from the European Union, but whose instruments directly complement the legal framework presented in section 1.a — the reference mechanism for intercultural education is the Reference Framework of Competences for Democratic Culture (RFCDC), unanimously approved by European education ministers in Brussels in April 2016, and published in full form in 2018. RFCDC offers educators a systematic model for teaching, learning and assessing twenty competences — values, attitudes, skills, knowledge and critical thinking — necessary for effective participation in a democratic culture and for peaceful coexistence in culturally diverse societies²⁶. A first implementation-assessment report, produced by the Council of Europe's Steering Committee for Education in 2023–2024, confirms a positive trend in integrating the framework into member states' national policies and curricula, while also signalling persistent difficulties in the actual assessment of democratic competences and in their integration into vocational and higher education²⁷.

RFCDC's relevance to the Romanian framework is not merely theoretical: since the 2019–2020 school year, the compulsory subject "Education for Democratic Citizenship," taught in grade 7, explicitly applies the principles and tools of this framework, through the "Project: Citizen" method, supported through a dedicated national platform for teachers (cetateanul.intercultural.ro). This means that every lower-secondary pupil in Bihor — regardless of ethnic or linguistic community of origin — already goes through, via the compulsory curriculum, a module built directly on the same European framework that underpins, at the level of principle, the entire intercultural-education endeavour analysed in this guide.

²⁶ Consiliul Europei, Cadrul de Referință al Competențelor pentru Cultură Democratică (RFCDC), 2016.

²⁷ Consiliul Europei, 2024.

Institutional cooperation networks built around Jean Monnet centres also facilitate the exchange of best practices between universities in Member States and states in the EU's eastern neighbourhood.

At national level, relevant instruments include: the National Strategy on Social Inclusion and Poverty Reduction²⁸, with its dedicated education components; the Government of Romania's Strategy for the Inclusion of Romanian Citizens Belonging to the Roma Minority²⁹, which, although explicitly targeting the Roma population, offers a methodological model replicable for other vulnerable categories; and programmes run through the County School Inspectorates to support the integration of pupils from refugee families (in particular Ukrainian, following the migratory flow generated by the conflict in Ukraine).

At the same national level, the "Educated Romania" Project must also be mentioned, an initiative of the President of Romania, Klaus Iohannis, whose conclusions were published on 14 July 2021, following the broadest public-consultation process ever conducted in Romania's post-1989 education sector³⁰. Although it lacks the legal force of a law or government decision, the report was assumed through a Government memorandum, which gave it the status of a reference programmatic document for the medium- and long-term reform of the education system, with an implementation horizon up to 2030. Its relevance to intercultural education and communication is direct: among the ten goals formulated for the education system are "quality education for all" and "individualised education," and the document includes a chapter explicitly dedicated to inclusive education — defined in line with the understanding proposed by the international organisation Save the Children — as well as a separate analysis of early school leaving (ESL), a phenomenon with disproportionate incidence precisely among children from vulnerable, minority or migratory-background communities.

²⁸ Guvernul României, Hotărârea nr. 440/2022 pentru aprobarea Strategiei naționale privind incluziunea socială și reducerea sărăciei pentru perioada 2022-2027, Monitorul Oficial al României, Partea I, nr. 359 bis/12.04.2022.

²⁹ Guvernul României, Hotărârea nr. 560/2022 pentru aprobarea Strategiei Guvernului României de incluziune a cetățenilor români aparținând minorității rome pentru perioada 2022-2027, Monitorul Oficial al României, Partea I, nr. 450/5.05.2022.

³⁰ Iohannis, K., România Educată. Raport al Președintelui României, Administrația Prezidențială, 2021.

An essential mechanism, though often invisible in discussions of the school integration of migrant and refugee children, is the official recognition of studies completed abroad. At national level, this function is performed by the National Centre for the Recognition and Equivalence of Diplomas (CNRED), under the Ministry of Education, which assesses and recognizes the qualifications of EU/EEA citizens, their family members, and beneficiaries of a form of international protection, for the purpose of continuing studies in Romania³¹. At pre-university level, the equivalence procedure is decentralized to the county school inspectorates, on the basis of the methodology approved by ministerial order, published in the Official Gazette on 15 July 2024, which explicitly provides that, for asylum seekers and beneficiaries of a form of international protection, recognition of studies is carried out "in accordance with national and international legal methodology and norms"³².

The most relevant recent instrument in this field is the European Qualifications Passport for Refugees (EQPR), developed by the Council of Europe and introduced into Romanian legislation at CNRED's initiative, through Ministerial Order No. 3,691 of 5 May 2022. EQPR allows the assessment of refugees' qualifications even in the absence of complete study documents — a frequent situation for families who left conflict zones in haste — providing a recommendation on the equivalent level of studies, for the purpose of access to education and the labour market in Romania. The existence of this instrument nuances the diagnosis formulated in Section II.1 of this guide: the main problem in the case of Ukrainian refugee children in Bihor was, therefore, not the absence of a legal mechanism for recognising studies, but families' low level of awareness of the existence and functioning of this mechanism, as well as the reluctance — documented directly in the field — generated by the Ukrainian state's non-recognition of studies completed outside the national system. Funding from the National Recovery and Resilience Plan (PNRR), with education components relevant to digitalisation and the reduction of disparities, is also relevant here.

At regional and local level, the mechanisms identifiable in Bihor include: the three institutions with a central role in intercultural education and communication — the Bihor County School

³¹ Ministerul Educației, f.d.

³² JURIDICE.ro, 2024.

Inspectorate (ISJ), the Bihor Teachers' House (CCD) and Bihor County Council (CJ) — which operate through complementary mechanisms, each covering a different stage of the intervention chain: institutional monitoring and coordination (ISJ), human-resource training (CCD), and financing/infrastructure (CJ).

ISJ Bihor has a monitoring mechanism explicitly dedicated to access to education for vulnerable groups, through two school inspectors with specific responsibilities for "monitoring programmes on access to education"³³, complemented by a distinct administrative section, actively maintained on the institution's website, for "foreign minors benefiting from the right to temporary protection (Ukraine)"³⁴ — an instrument that institutionalises, four years after the onset of the refugee crisis, a permanent line of administrative management for this category of pupils. The ethno-linguistic component is covered by a corps of inspectors dedicated to each minority — Hungarian, German, Slovak, Roma — who function as a direct interface between the school network and the respective communities.

CCD Bihor operates the continuing-training mechanism, through which the competences needed to manage diversity actually reach the classroom. Among the institution's accredited training programmes is explicitly "Interculturality and Multiculturality. Interferences in the Teaching-Learning Process"³⁵, alongside related programmes such as the use of art-mediation therapies for pupils with special educational needs, or the use of social stories in the context of autism spectrum disorders. To these are added, as shown in Section III, the Romani-language summer courses organized in cooperation with the Ministry of Education and the Roma Pro-Europe Party Association, also administratively coordinated by CCD Bihor.

CJ Bihor provides the financing and infrastructure mechanism that makes it possible to put the other two components into practice. The concrete instruments used in 2026 — the free transfer of use of digital equipment to inclusive-education centres (CJ Bihor Decision No. 15/2026) and the approval of the "Inclusive Education and Integrated Support for Pupils with SEN" project, with CJRAE Bihor as project leader (CJ Bihor Decision No. 57/2026)³⁶ — illustrate a

³³ ISJ Bihor, 2026b.

³⁴ ISJ Bihor, 2026c.

³⁵ CCD Bihor, 2026.

³⁶ Consiliul Județean Bihor, Hotărârea nr. 15/2026.

transition from one-off financing through individual competitive projects towards a more stable mechanism, coordinated directly by the county authority.

Taken together, the three institutional mechanisms converge, at regional level, on a functional but fragmented model: each institution covers its own component well — monitoring, training, and financing respectively — but, as already noted by Karla Barth's SWOT analysis for special education, a common inter-institutional coordination mechanism is missing, one that would explicitly connect the three layers into a unified county-level strategy for intercultural education³⁷.

3. Estimation/forecast of potential developments in the coming period

The legal and institutional framework presented above is not static, and any best-practice guide must anticipate probable directions of evolution in order to remain relevant in the medium term.

At European level, several clear trends are emerging. The effective implementation of the New Pact on Migration and Asylum³⁸, adopted by the European institutions and currently being transposed by Member States, will require adjustments to national reception mechanisms and, consequently, to the school-enrolment procedures for minor asylum seekers. The Action Plan on Integration and Inclusion 2021–2027 continues to be monitored through a progress-tracking mechanism covering four key areas — education and training, employment and skills, health and housing — the interim assessments of this mechanism are likely to generate updated recommendations for Member States in the second half of the programming period.

The most important unknown for the long-term sustainability of the mechanisms described in this guide — Erasmus+, the Jean Monnet Action, the Asylum, Migration and Integration Fund — concerns the ongoing negotiations for the Multiannual Financial Framework (MFF) 2028–2034, the EU's next long-term budget, which will replace the current 2021–2027 MFF under which all the funding

³⁷ Barth, op. cit., 2022.

³⁸ Comisia Europeană, Comunicare privind un nou pact privind migrația și azilul, COM(2020) 609 final, 2020.

cited earlier in this chapter falls. The European Commission presented its official proposal on 16 July 2025, a budget of nearly €2,000 billion³⁹. Subsequent negotiations, however, reveal divergent positions with direct implications for intercultural education: while the European Parliament, through the negotiating mandate adopted in April 2026, supports a 16% increase in the budget allocated to Erasmus+⁴⁰, the negotiating package put forward by the Cypriot Presidency of the Council of the EU in June 2026 proposes, on the contrary, funding for Erasmus+ below the level allocated under the current 2021–2027 programme — a proposal firmly rejected by European universities, which warn of investment needs far greater than what is on offer⁴¹. The final outcome of these negotiations, expected by the end of 2027, will directly determine the level of funding available for centres of excellence such as EUROINCLUS in the next budgetary cycle, which is why we recommend that the Oradea Jean Monnet Centre of Excellence's medium-term institutional planning incorporate, as a working assumption, a European-funding scenario at least as restrictive as the current one. The continuation of migratory pressure from Ukraine, as well as possible additional flows generated by instability in the EU's eastern or southern neighbourhood, will keep intercultural education as a political priority, with consequences for the funding of the Erasmus+ and Jean Monnet programmes.

At national level, the continuation of the decentralisation of educational decision-making is foreseeable, with effects on the role of school inspectorates and county authorities in managing diversity locally, as well as a possible revision of the National Education Law, in the context of recurring debates on reforming the education system. Also at national level, the most relevant reference point for estimating forthcoming developments is the drafting process of the National Strategy on Immigration for 2026–2030, currently undergoing public consultation at the Ministry of Internal Affairs. The document follows the National Strategy on Immigration 2021–2024, which recorded an objective-compliance rate of over 96%⁴², and is

³⁹ Comisia Europeană, 2025.

⁴⁰ Comisia pentru Buget a Parlamentului European, 2026.

⁴¹ EduPedu, 2026.

⁴² Ministerul Afacerilor Interne, Anexa nr. 1 — Strategia Națională privind Imigrația pentru perioada 2026-2030 (document în transparență decizională), 2026.

explicitly designed to align the national framework with Regulation (EU) 2024/1351 on asylum and migration management — one of the legislative pillars of the Pact on Migration and Asylum, which entered into application on 12 June 2026 in all Member States. According to its explanatory memorandum, the new strategy aims to "develop a robust and effective framework for managing migration and asylum in Romania, one that promotes social cohesion [and] contributes to the inclusive development of Romanian society." For intercultural education and communication, the direct implication is that, for the first time, national strategic planning on migration will be explicitly correlated with social-cohesion objectives — which opens up, for the 2026–2030 horizon, a real chance of dedicated funding lines for the educational integration of children from migrant and refugee families, complementary to those already available through the Asylum, Migration and Integration Fund (AMIF) 2021–2027, currently in the midst of its project calls⁴³.

Far from being a stable framework, National Pre-University Education Law No. 198/2023 is undergoing an active and accelerated process of amendment: in the December 2025 – April 2026 period alone, at least three amending normative acts were adopted — Emergency Ordinance No. 89 of 23 December 2025, Law No. 12/2026 (on reimbursing pupil transport) and Emergency Ordinance No. 28/2026⁴⁴ — which suggests that the relevant forecasting horizon for this guide is measured not in years but in months.

The most relevant of these amendments for intercultural education is Emergency Ordinance No. 89/2025, which starts explicitly from the finding that "school dropout and early school leaving are determined by problems at the level of the national education system" and that "reduced access to education accentuates inequality of opportunity among pupils"⁴⁵ — a formulation that confirms, at normative-act level, exactly the empirical diagnosis this guide has documented for Ukrainian, Roma and economic-migrant-family children in Bihor. The measure is operationalized through the National Programme for Reducing School Dropout (PNRAS), with a component explicitly dedicated to small and vulnerable schools (PNRAS-SSM), funded with €25 million through PNRR-linked funds,

⁴³ Inspectoratul General pentru Imigrări, 2026.

⁴⁴ Universul Juridic, 2026a, 2026b.

⁴⁵ Guvernul României, Ordonanța de urgență nr. 89/2025.

being implemented until 30 June 2026, with the possibility of extension until 31 August 2026⁴⁶. In the near future, the Ministry of Education is expected to launch a new funding stage through the Education and Employment Programme (PEO) 2021–2027, which takes over and extends the PNRAS logic through a standard-cost mechanism designed to simplify the drafting and implementation of dropout-reduction education projects.

For Bihor, the practical implication is twofold: on the one hand, inclusive-education centres and integrating schools that enroll a significant number of pupils from vulnerable families — including those with a high share of Roma pupils or pupils from migrant families — are natural candidates for future PNRAS/PEO funding rounds; on the other hand, the accelerated pace of legislative change requires the periodic updating of this guide, given that the legal basis cited in Section I.1.b may change from one semester to the next.

At regional level, a concrete direction of change for the coming period is marked by the approval, through Bihor County Council Decision No. 57 of 19 May 2026, of the project "Inclusive Education and Integrated Support for Pupils with SEN" (MySMIS code 338316), implemented by the Bihor County Centre for Educational Resources and Assistance (CJRAE), as project leader, over a two-school-year period (1 August 2026 – 31 July 2028), with a total budget of RON 2,777,620.01, of which RON 1,788,774.54 is non-reimbursable⁴⁷. At the same meeting, the participation of the Bihor General Directorate for Social Assistance and Child Protection in the project "Community Support through Mobile Teams for People with Disabilities in Bihor County" (SMIS code 365733) was also approved, a sign of an integrated approach explicitly linking the education component to the social and health components of the county's inclusion policy. These recent developments suggest that, unlike the previous period — in which, as Karla Barth's guide on special education shows, the funding of inclusive-education centres depended almost exclusively on competitive European funds (Erasmus+) or one-off sponsorships — the 2026–2028 horizon brings a more stable form of structural funding, coordinated directly by the county authority through CJRAE

⁴⁶ Ministerul Educației și Cercetării, 2025.

⁴⁷ Consiliul Județean Bihor, Hotărâri ale Consiliului Județean — Anul 2026, 2026.

Bihor, with the potential to strengthen the already existing network of inclusive-education school centres in Oradea and Popești.

II. Analysis and Evolution of the State of Integration, Societal Security, and Inclusion of Minorities, Refugees and Immigrants in the Border Area, in the Field of Intercultural Education and Communication

1. Analysis of the current state of integration and inclusion capacities at local, regional and national level

At local level (Bihor County), the starting situation is defined by a particularly diverse ethnic structure, the result of a long history of coexistence. According to the provisional data of the 2021 Population and Housing Census, Bihor County had a resident population of 551,297, of whom 347,148 (69.0%) declared themselves Romanian, 112,387 (22.3%) Hungarian, 36,837 (7.3%) Roma and 4,860 (1.0%) Slovak⁴⁸. The share of ethnic Hungarians in Bihor is the fourth-highest in the country, after Harghita, Covasna and Mureș⁴⁹, and this long coexistence with the Hungarian community has already generated, within the local education system, functional mechanisms of bilingual and confessional (Reformed, Roman Catholic) education that can serve as a model for managing other forms of diversity.

Regarding the capacity to integrate newcomers — refugees and immigrants — the situation is less consolidated. The recent experience of the Ukrainian refugee flow reveals both real institutional resources and significant limitations. At the onset of the crisis, the Bihor County School Inspectorate (ISJ) set up a dedicated commission, made up of the general school inspector, three school inspectors, and the director of the Bihor County Centre for Educational Resources and Assistance (CJRAE), tasked with monitoring enrolment requests and identifying the resources needed. However, the actual enrolment rate remained low: of the 60 Ukrainian children initially placed in Bihor schools and kindergartens, only about 10 continued their studies the following school year, most opting to continue their education online, within the Ukrainian system. Reasons cited by families included both the wish to

⁴⁸ Direcția Județeană de Statistică Bihor, 2023.

⁴⁹ Mediafax, 2023.

maintain a link with their system of origin and administrative difficulties — one mother reported giving up on the enrolment process after being repeatedly postponed by the school secretariat.

At regional level, Bihor County is part of the North-West Development Region, alongside the counties of Cluj, Maramureș, Satu Mare, Sălaj and Bistrița-Năsăud — a NUTS2 region with an area of 34,159 km² (14.32% of the country's territory) and a population of 2,730,132⁵⁰. This region does not constitute an administrative level in its own right, but rather one for planning and programming structural funds, which means that data on the educational integration of minorities, refugees and immigrants is not, as a rule, reported at this intermediate level, but directly at county or national level. This absence of an intermediate regional statistical layer is itself a relevant methodological observation for this guide: unlike the local level (Bihor County) and the national level (where aggregate reports exist, such as those of UNHCR or UNICEF), the North-West regional level remains an analytical "blind spot," without its own mechanisms for monitoring educational inclusion — an additional argument for the role that EUROINCLUS- or ROHU-type projects, anchored directly at county and cross-border level, can play in filling this gap.

At national level, the picture confirms this gap between the available legal framework and its actual rate of use. Nearly a year after the start of the war, almost 48,000 Ukrainian refugee children were in Romania, but fewer than 4,000 were enrolled or registered as auditing students in schools — a major obstacle being that the Ukrainian government did not recognise studies completed outside the national system, which discouraged families from enrolling their children in Romanian schools. The situation improved gradually: for the 2023–2024 school year, the UNHCR representative in Romania estimated 24,000 Ukrainian children enrolled in Romanian schools, five times more than the previous year, and by April 2025, over 15,000 Ukrainian children had cumulatively enrolled in the Romanian education system, from kindergarten to high school⁵¹.

This evolution shows that the integration capacities existing at local and national level are not absent, but insufficiently correlated: the legal framework (the "auditing pupil" status, the possibility of study equivalence, Romanian-language courses) exists, but its application

⁵⁰ ADR Nord-Vest, f.d.

⁵¹ UNICEF România, 2025.

depends heavily on the human resources available in each inspectorate, on families' level of awareness, and on the availability of bridging solutions, such as non-formal education centers.

2. Activities carried out at the level of Bihor County

Despite direct institutional integration difficulties, several types of response have developed at county level, complementary to the formal system: dedicated Romanian-language courses — ISJ Bihor organised Romanian-language courses for Ukrainian pupils at the Pentecostal Theological High School "Betel" in Oradea, delivered by Romanian-language and literature teachers, a relevant example of interconfessional cooperation, with a Protestant religious-education institution hosting a secular language-integration programme, open to all; non-formal educational structures, supported by civil society and religious denominations — the Caritas Eparhial Association opened a centre in Oradea where approximately 20 Ukrainian lower-secondary pupils continued their studies, supported by teachers also from Ukraine, as an intermediate stage before integration into Oradea schools; individual integration into confessional education units — at the Greek Catholic High School "Iuliu Maniu" in Oradea, five Ukrainian siblings were enrolled as auditing pupils, with the option of attending either Romanian-language classes or lessons assisted by Ukrainian-speaking staff, where available⁵²; institutional partnerships between the county authority, the city hall and the inspectorate — Bihor County Council, Oradea City Hall and ISJ Bihor approved, by decision, a partnership to organize a camp for 30 pupils from the Odesa region, hosted at inspectorate premises, in response to a request from the Ministry of Foreign Affairs and the Romanian Embassy in Kyiv, an initiative that goes beyond the strictly educational framework and approaches cultural diplomacy; and multi-confessional education as an existing institutional resource — the study visits organized at Emanuel University of Oradea, within the EUROINCLUS international internship of June 2025, explicitly highlighted the role of ecumenical openness and inter-confessional collaboration as a resource for university-level training in inclusion⁵³.

Beyond the institutional network itself, the activity carried out over the last decade by Bihor's inclusive-education centres shows a

⁵² Episcopia Greco-Catolică Oradea, 2022.

⁵³ Universitatea din Oradea, 2025a.

considerable diversification of intervention forms, supported both by competitive European funding and by institutions' own resources. The network's most active actor, Inclusive Education School Centre No. 1 Oradea, has run, since 2015, a series of Erasmus+ strategic-partnership (KA2) and staff-mobility (KA1) projects, including "Valuing Scenic Play" (2015–2017), aimed at developing young children's personality through play, "Our Story, a True Story" (2016–2018), centred on storytelling, and the "LIFE" project (2016–2019), dedicated to exchanging best practices on children with learning difficulties and behavioural disorders. The same institution implemented the "as CES — Specific Educational Requirements in Autism Spectrum Disorder" project (2019–2022), with a budget of over €32,000, aimed at training teaching staff in autism-specific intervention techniques — an aspect all the more relevant given that the data show a significant proportion of pupils with ASD and ADHD among the county's beneficiaries.

Another active line of intervention addressed mitigating the pandemic's effects on the educational-therapeutic process for children with special educational needs (SEN). The "Digital PER_SEN — Open Educational Resources for SEN Pupils" project (2021–2023, budget over €27,000) and the "Teach Me to Help!" project (2022–2023, over €32,000), the latter explicitly built on the pupil-professional-parent educational triangle, illustrate a reorientation of Bihor's network towards digitalization and the systematic involvement of families in the recovery process. At Inclusive Education School Centre "Cristal" Oradea — the only institution in the county also specialized in sensory disabilities, with the only early-intervention group for young children — two Erasmus+ strategic partnerships were carried out, "All Together" and "I Am Unique," the latter focused on exchanging best practices on adapted curricula and child-specific therapeutic techniques.

Integration activity was not limited to European projects. At local level, inclusive-education centres consistently ran educational projects approved by ISJ Bihor, without external funding, but with a direct impact on the community's climate of tolerance: "The World of Friendship" and "Sensi Teaches Us" at CSEI "Cristal," focused on building positive attitudes towards children with SEN and developing the socio-emotional dimension through inter-institutional collaboration; "Stop Violence!" and "Our Special World and the World of Phenomenal Fables" at CSEI "Bonitas"; "A School Without Violence" and "Life Lessons" at Special Technological High School No. 1 Oradea. A project notable for its explicitly intercultural dimension is "Inclusive

Education for the Prevention of Abuse and Discrimination — Equal Opportunities for Children from Disadvantaged Categories," carried out in partnership with "Traian Vuia" Technical College, which directly links the theme of disability to the broader one of discrimination against vulnerable groups — including ethnic minorities and children from families with a migratory background.

The broader social-inclusion component was also supported through partnerships with foundations and international organisations. The Mol Foundation for Children's Health funded, in 2020, the art-therapy project "Behind the Mask, It's Me" at CSEI No. 1 Oradea, while the Peter van Geel Foundation from Boxtel, Netherlands, financially supported two educational projects at CSEI "Bonitas" — "Greenhouse" and "Live Healthy!". The sporting component of inclusion was covered through consistent cooperation with the Special Olympics Romania Foundation, which supported the projects "Integration of People with Disabilities through Sport" and "Sport of the Unified Generation," while the eTwinning network enabled, through the "Bridge of Friendship" project, now in its 11th edition, the development of social relationships between pupils with SEN and their counterparts in other European countries, through art.

An essential aspect of activity carried out at county level concerns the actual integration of pupils with SEN into mainstream schools, a phenomenon that far exceeds the perimeter of the seven specialized institutions: at the time this guide was prepared, 803 pupils with school-orientation certificates were integrated into mainstream education units across the county, supported by a network of 66 itinerant and support teachers. It is worth noting that this integration network, in turn, crosses the ethnic and linguistic boundaries of Bihor's education system: pupils with SEN are integrated both in Romanian-medium schools and in units with Hungarian-medium teaching or sections — from Reformed High School "Lorántffy Zsuzsanna" to Theoretical High School "Horváth János" in Marghita — suggesting that, in practice, disability-support mechanisms and ethno-linguistic diversity mechanisms often operate within the same institutions, even if not institutionally conceived as such.

Finally, activity over the past year marks a significant shift in how these interventions are funded. Bihor County Council approved, through Decision No. 15 of 27 February 2026, the free transfer of use of goods — furniture, teaching materials and digital equipment — to all six inclusive-education centres in Oradea and Popești, as well as to

CJRAE Bihor and one integrating rural school (No. 1 Secondary School, Curățele), under the project "Equipping Education Units in Bihor County with Furniture, Teaching Materials and Digital Equipment". Furthermore, through Decision No. 57 of 19 May 2026, the project "Inclusive Education and Integrated Support for Pupils with SEN" (MySMIS code 338316) was approved, with CJRAE Bihor as project leader, running over two school years (1 August 2026 – 31 July 2028), with a total budget of RON 2,777,620.01⁵⁴. This development marks the shift from a funding model based predominantly on competing for European funds and one-off sponsorships — a model explicitly described as insufficient in Barth's (2022) SWOT analysis — towards a form of structural support, coordinated directly by the county authority.

3. Estimation/forecast of potential developments in the coming period

At local level, the number of children from refugee or immigrant families is expected to remain relatively low compared to other border counties, but with a slow upward trend, as study-equivalence mechanisms and language-support programmes become better known to families. The 2026 change to the conditions for granting financial support to Ukrainian refugees in Romania — the elimination, from 1 January 2026, of the monthly allowance for single persons or families⁵⁵ — is likely to trigger either an acceleration of the economic and educational integration of those who remain, or a new wave of departures to other states.

At regional level, the consolidation of the EUROINCLUS Jean Monnet Centre of Excellence at the University of Oradea, with its activities training specialists from Serbia, Ukraine and the Republic of Moldova, opens up the prospect of Bihor's transformation from a mere recipient of national integration policies into a regional provider of expertise and replicable best practices.

At national level, the demographic pressure generated by the decline of the school-age population (also confirmed in the guide dedicated to special education, which signaled the same trend) is likely to increase educational authorities' interest in the effective integration of children from migrant families, not only for reasons of equity but also for reasons of school-network sustainability. This demographic

⁵⁴ SCHOOL Bit, 2026.

⁵⁵ Euronews România, 2026.

pressure is not a vague hypothesis but one rigorously documented by the projections of the National Institute of Statistics (INS). Compared to the 2014–2015 school year, when Romania recorded around 3.7 million persons aged 0 to 23, INS estimates a decline to 3.1 million by 2030 and to just 2.1 million by 2060⁵⁶. The decline affects education cycles differently: the number of kindergarten children (ages 3–5) is projected to fall by 21.4% by 2030, that of primary-school pupils (ages 6–10) by 19.8%, and that of lower-secondary pupils (ages 11–14) by 15.3% — precisely the age segments most relevant to the early integration of children from migrant and minority families, where educational intervention has the greatest long-term impact.

Recent INS data, however, introduce an important nuance for short-term forecasting: unlike the steady downward trajectory of 2014–2024 (from 3,735.6 thousand to 3,466.5 thousand pupils and students), the 2025–2026 school/academic year marked an unexpected increase, to 3,518.7 thousand persons — an increase of 33.1 thousand over the previous year^{57,58}. The increase is driven exclusively by the crèche and pre-school levels, the only ones rising, which suggests either a transitory statistical effect or — a hypothesis this guide cannot confirm without further data, but which we flag as a research hypothesis for a future edition — a possible effect of recent flows of children from refugee and economic-migrant families, concentrated precisely at these early age levels.

This combination — structural long-term demographic decline, but with signs of short-term stabilisation at early age levels — reinforces this section's central argument: local and national education authorities will have an increasing interest, not only for reasons of equity but also of pure school-network sustainability, in attracting and effectively integrating every available child for enrolment, regardless of ethnic or linguistic origin or the family's migratory status.

4. Identification of potential funding sources (national and international) specific to the field

For intercultural education and communication, identifiable funding sources for the 2021–2027 period include the Asylum, Migration and Integration Fund (AMIF), known nationally as the

⁵⁶ HotNews, 2019.

⁵⁷ Institutul Național de Statistică, 2026a.

⁵⁸ DailyBusiness.ro, 2026.

National Asylum, Migration and Integration Programme (FAMI) 2021–2027, managed in Romania by the General Inspectorate for Immigration (IGI), under the Ministry of Internal Affairs. The programme is structured around competitive thematic calls, some launched during 2026 itself — for example the call "BV18A — Implementation of the Pact on Asylum and Migration," launched on 16 March 2026⁵⁹. Although most FAMI-funded projects target the administrative management of asylum (for example, a project run by IGI with a budget of RON 2,475,000, 100% EU-funded, for the equitable distribution of asylum seekers among IGI centres⁶⁰), the fund also includes a component explicitly dedicated to the integration — including educational — of third-country nationals, a component that the University of Oradea or Bihor County Council can access directly, as eligible beneficiaries, for projects integrating children from migrant and refugee families.

Other identifiable sources include: the Education and Employment Operational Programme 2021–2027, with axes dedicated to reducing early school leaving and to educational inclusion; the Inclusion and Social Dignity Operational Programme 2021–2027, relevant to the socio-educational integration of vulnerable groups; the National Recovery and Resilience Plan (PNRR), through its components for educational digitalization and reducing disparities; funds from the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, mobilizable for one-off initiatives such as the camp for pupils from the Odesa region; and private and non-governmental/confessional organization funding — Caritas Eparhial, diocesan structures, organizations such as UNICEF or Save the Children, which have already supported one-off projects integrating refugee children⁶¹.

The Erasmus+ 2021–2027 Programme, with a total budget of €26.2 billion across the European Union — almost double the previous 2014–2020 programming period⁶² — remains the main direct funding source for the activity of the EUROINCLUS Jean Monnet Centre of Excellence, through the specific call ERASMUS-JMO-2023-HEI-TCH-RSCH, under which project code 101127601 was selected⁶³. Beyond the direct funding of the EUROINCLUS project, the University of Oradea's institutional capacity to attract additional Erasmus+ funds is also

⁵⁹ FED.MAI.gov.ro, 2026.

⁶⁰ Inspectoratul General pentru Imigrări, 2026.

⁶¹ Salvați Copiii, f.d.

⁶² Ministerul Educației și Cercetării, 2026.

⁶³ Universitatea din Oradea, 2023.

confirmed by its membership of the EU GREEN European university alliance, which received, in 2026, new funding of up to €7.2 million to strengthen its activities over the next two years, under the "European Universities" call — an institutional precedent showing that the University of Oradea already has the administrative expertise needed to manage European projects of similar scale in intercultural education.

Bihor County Council's own budget deserves separate mention. Unlike competitive European funds, whose award depends on the quality of proposals and on often unpredictable funding calendars, Bihor County Council's own budget is the only funding source over which the county authority has direct control and which can cover urgent needs otherwise unfundable through competitive projects. Barth's (2022) analysis among the directors of inclusive-education centres under Bihor County Council identified, with a high degree of concreteness, the priorities for which this funding source is indispensable.

The first category of needs concerns the mobility of pupils with disabilities. Inclusive Education School Centre No. 1 Oradea reports that, of its two school minibuses, one dates from 2000 and is in an advanced state of wear, and that neither currently covers the full range of pupil-transport requests. This is a recurring need across the whole network, given that many of the 1,137 pupils schooled in inclusive-education centres come from localities at a distance from the institutions' premises.

The second category of needs concerns assistive technology and the digitalisation of the educational-therapeutic process. Inclusive Education School Centre No. 1 Oradea estimated, at the time of the report, an additional need for 107 tablets (approximately RON 107,000), 21 complete interactive-whiteboard systems — board, laptop, projector, webcam (approximately RON 189,000) — and 32 laptops for teaching staff working individually or in small groups, including the 16 specific-therapy teachers and 16 support teachers active in integrating schools, where they are not provided with the necessary equipment. Only 30 tablets had previously been acquired, in May 2020, also with CJ Bihor's support — a directly relevant precedent for arguing the continuity of this type of funding.

The third category concerns specialized therapeutic interventions, low-cost but with a direct impact on children's recovery. Inclusive Education School Centre "Cristal" Oradea proposed funding for two programmes: "Sensory Swimming," aimed at increasing muscle tone in

children with hypotonia and reducing spasticity in those with hypertonia, requiring pool rental and the purchase of materials (rings, floats, buoys, sensory balls) and consumables; and "Animals, My Friends," a programme stimulating communication and social interaction through contact with specially trained animals (dogs, horses), requiring funding for transporting children to a riding center and paying associated fees. Both programmes illustrate a type of intervention difficult to fit within European funds' eligibility criteria, but with a moderate total cost for the county budget.

The fourth category concerns basic infrastructure. Inclusive Education School Centre "Orizont" Oradea reported the need for roof, heating-system and sanitary-facility repairs at the boarding structure in Tileagd — a concrete example of how basic, non-digital needs of the inclusive-education network remain, in certain cases, unresolved, even alongside investment in technology.

The conclusions of Karla Barth's report converge on a clear recommendation: funding from CJ Bihor's own budget should be directed, as a priority, towards the continuing professional training of the 437 teaching staff in the inclusive-education network, towards a "shadow funding" mechanism for the individualized support of SEN children in pre-school and primary education, and towards funding integration activities between children in special education and those in mainstream education — including after Erasmus+ project implementation periods end, when European funding ceases but the need for activity continuity remains. Developments in 2026 show a partial uptake of these recommendations: through CJ Bihor Decision No. 15 of 27 February 2026, furniture, teaching materials and digital equipment were transferred, free of use, to all six inclusive-education centres in Oradea and Popești, to CJRAE Bihor, and to one integrating school — a direct continuation, four years later, of the type of investment explicitly requested in the 2022 report.

5. Labour migration from South and East Asia — an emerging dimension, distinct from the refugee phenomenon

Unlike the Ukrainian refugee flow, generated by a sudden crisis and treated, at least initially, as a transitory phenomenon, Bihor County is experiencing a steady and growing flow of economic migration from South and East Asia. Data from the Bihor Immigration Service show that most non-EU nationals settled in the county come from Nepal, India, Sri Lanka and Bangladesh, employed predominantly in

construction and HoReCa, and the number of employment requests has continued to grow year on year. Unlike refugee migration, this type of migration tends, over time, towards family stabilization — workers who initially arrive alone subsequently bring their families, and children are born or grow up in Romania.

This category remains, for now, poorly documented from an educational perspective: there is no aggregated public data on the number of pupils from these communities enrolled in schools in Oradea and across the county. Direct observations from school-inspection activity — such as those noted in the preparation of this guide — nonetheless suggest an already visible and growing presence of children from South and East Asian worker families in Bihor's education system, including from the Chinese community, for which we have not identified centralized public data. This finding recommends, as a next step, a direct request for statistical data to ISJ Bihor, to empirically ground a future section of this guide.

III. Identification, Detailing and Substantiation of Examples of Best Practice at Regional and Local Level in the Border Area, in the Field of Intercultural Education and Communication

1. The ethno-religious dimension of cooperation and intercultural dialogue. References to the situation of immigrant and refugee integration — Bihor County case study

Bihor's most relevant particularity, from the standpoint of intercultural education, is that the ethnic dimension cannot be separated from the confessional one. The county's Hungarian community (22.3% of the population, according to the 2021 census) is itself religiously heterogeneous — Reformed, Roman Catholic in particular — and the confessional education system already functions, *de facto*, as an instrument of intercultural education. The case of the commune of Roşiori, where a Reformed majority (51.23%) coexists with a Romanian Orthodox minority (28.68%) and other minority denominations — Pentecostal, Baptist, Roman Catholic,

Adventist⁶⁴ — is illustrative of how confessional structure reproduces, on a local scale, the ethnic diversity of the entire county.

This historical institutional cohabitation offers a favorable framework for extending the principles of tolerance and inter-confessional dialogue to the new forms of diversity generated by migration and displacement. The most relevant case study is the mobilization of Oradea's religious institutions in support of Ukrainian refugee children — a phenomenon that goes beyond the strict boundaries of a single denomination and involves an inter-confessional network: Romanian-language courses for Ukrainian pupils were hosted by the Pentecostal Theological High School "Betel"; the non-formal education centre for Ukrainian lower-secondary pupils was organized by the Caritas Eparhial Association (a structure of the Roman Catholic Church); the individual integration of refugee children also took place through the Greek Catholic High School "Iuliu Maniu" in Oradea⁶⁵; and, at academic level, the study visits of EUROINCLUS international interns were explicitly dedicated to multi-confessional education, with a stage at Emanuel Baptist University, where ecumenical openness and inter-confessional collaboration were discussed as part of university-level training⁶⁶.

What emerges from these examples is a pattern specific to Bihor: confessional institutions — regardless of which denomination they belong to — function as active agents of integration, not merely as passive recipients of public policy. This confirms, from an empirical standpoint, the broader thesis of the EUROINCLUS project, namely that the model of coexistence in the Romanian-Hungarian border area can be transferred to other states⁶⁷ — with the caveat that, in the specific case of intercultural education, the vehicle for this transfer is not so much the secular public institution as the network of confessional institutions and their associated educational structures.

⁶⁴ Institutul Național de Statistică, *Recensământul Populației și Locuințelor 2021, rezultate definitive — caracteristici etno-culturale demografice*, Roșiori, <https://www.recensamantromania.ro/rezultate-rpl-2021/rezultate-definitive-caracteristici-etno-culturale-demografice/>.

⁶⁵ Episcopia Greco-Catolică Oradea, op. cit., 2022.

⁶⁶ Universitatea din Oradea, op. cit., 2025a.

⁶⁷ Universitatea din Oradea, 2025b.

2. Activities carried out at the level of Bihor County

Synthesizing the activities already documented in the previous section, from a best-practice (rather than merely descriptive) perspective, several replicable models can be identified.

The "bridge" model — non-formal education preceding formal integration. The centers opened by confessional and civic organizations (Caritas Eparhial) demonstrate the usefulness of an intermediate stage, in which refugee children learn alongside teachers from their own linguistic community, before moving to full integration into the Romanian system. This model reduces the initial cultural and linguistic shock without compromising the ultimate goal of integration.

The institutional-administrative model — a dedicated commission at inspectorate level. The establishment, at ISJ Bihor, of a commission made up of the general school inspector, three school inspectors and the CJRAE Bihor director⁶⁸ represents a replicable governance model for any new migratory flow, provided sufficient human resources are allocated — a significant limitation already identified in Section II, where administrative delays were noted as a real barrier⁶⁹.

The local educational-diplomacy model. The partnership between Bihor County Council, Oradea City Hall and ISJ Bihor to organize the camp for pupils from the Odesa region illustrates a hybrid form of best practice, at the boundary between education, inclusion and cultural diplomacy — also relevant to cooperation with the EUROINCLUS project's "cultural diplomacy" domain (coordinated by Alina Stoica).

The academic model — a dedicated research center. The establishment of the EuroINCLUS Research Centre and the launch of the journal "Inclusivity"⁷⁰ institutionalizes the research and dissemination of best practices, providing a permanent — not merely reactive, crisis-driven — framework for the development of intercultural education at the University of Oradea.

⁶⁸ Barth, op. cit., 2022a.

⁶⁹ Barth, op. cit., 2022b.

⁷⁰ Universitatea din Oradea, 2026.

3. Examples of cross-border best practice — ROHU projects

Institutionalized cross-border cooperation in the Bihor-Hajdú-Bihar area has been carried out, since 2007, through successive Romania–Hungary Interreg programmes (ROHU), currently in their third programming generation, 2021–2027, with a total budget of €175,940,025, of which €140,752,020 from the European Regional Development Fund⁷¹. The eligible area covers four Romanian counties (Arad, Bihor, Satu Mare, Timiș) and four Hungarian counties (Békés, Csongrád-Csanád, Hajdú-Bihar, Szabolcs-Szatmár-Bereg)⁷².

Unlike previous programme generations, focused mainly on infrastructure and the environment, the current programming period explicitly includes a priority dedicated to cooperation governance and building mutual trust through interpersonal actions (Specific Objective 6.3)⁷³ — the most relevant framework for intercultural-education projects. A concrete example is the INNOCOOP project ("Innovative Cooperation for Better Cooperation Governance in Cross-Border Area"), implemented by the Transregio Intercommunity Development Association, which included educational activities for primary and lower-secondary pupils (grades III–VI), focused on financial education and on promoting public transport as a resource for sustainable development — an example of a ROHU project that integrates the educational component into a related theme (mobility, governance), a model also transferable to the intercultural theme.

At academic level, the most consolidated cross-border cooperation remains that between the University of Oradea and the University of Debrecen, documented also in the specialist literature — for example, the study by Toca, Teperics and Czimre (2015)⁷⁴ on the role of the two universities in attracting international students in medicine, which highlights higher education as the most active field of Oradea–Debrecen cross-border cooperation, within the Bihor–Hajdú-Bihar Euroregion. Although this study concerns medicine, the institutional model described — territorial proximity, increased international visibility, exchange of best practice — is directly applicable to intercultural education as well.

⁷¹ Interreg ROHU, op. cit., 2022.

⁷² BRECO, op. cit., f.d.

⁷³ Transregio, op. cit., f.d.

⁷⁴ Toca, A., Teperics, K., Czimre, K., op. cit., 2015.

It is also worth mentioning the activity of specialized national-level structures which, although not operating exclusively within ROHU, offer a methodological model for future cross-border projects — such as the Intercultural Institute Timișoara, an organization established in 1992 with the support of local authorities and the Council of Europe, which runs intercultural and civic education programmes for teachers and young people, intercultural-communication training for public authorities and migrants, as well as research on education policy and intercultural competence⁷⁵. Collaboration with such an already-specialized structure could provide, for a future ROHU or Jean Monnet project, a resource of validated methodological expertise.

An important limitation, which must be honestly noted in this guide, is that, unlike fields such as infrastructure or the environment, the public portfolio of completed ROHU projects with a theme explicitly dedicated to intercultural education or the integration of minorities/refugees is, at the time of writing, relatively small — most identifiable projects address interculturality tangentially, within projects whose main object is different (mobility, governance, cultural tourism). This is, moreover, an additional argument for the relevance of this guide and of the EUROINCLUS project: identifying a specific funding gap and substantiating the need for future ROHU calls explicitly dedicated to intercultural education and communication.

IV. SWOT Analysis Regarding the Dynamics of the Integration, Security and Inclusion Process for Minorities, Refugees and Immigrants in the Border Area, in the Field of Intercultural Education and Communication

Strengths

1. Real historical experience of inter-ethnic and inter-confessional coexistence. Bihor does not start from zero: long-standing coexistence with the Hungarian community (22.3% of the population) and other minorities, together with local confessional pluralism (Orthodox, Reformed, Roman Catholic, Greek Catholic, Baptist, Pentecostal), have already produced functional institutional

⁷⁵ Institutul Intercultural Timișoara, op. cit., 2026.

mechanisms — confessional schools, bilingual education — which can be extended to new categories of beneficiaries. The county's ethnic structure overlaps with confessional pluralism documented at local scale: the case of the commune of Roșiori, where a Reformed majority coexists with a Romanian Orthodox minority and other minority denominations, illustrates that diversity is not merely a county-level statistical indicator but a functional reality at the level of individual local communities.

2. A rapidly mobilizable confessional institutional network. As shown in Chapter III, Oradea's religious institutions have already demonstrated the capacity to respond promptly and effectively to the educational needs of refugee children, often faster than formal administrative structures. This network is not ad-hoc but rests on a pre-existing and diverse institutional infrastructure: Orthodox, Roman Catholic, Greek Catholic, Reformed, Baptist and Pentecostal education units operate simultaneously in the county, which means that, unlike a confessionally homogeneous county, Bihor has several parallel networks, each capable of mobilizing its own resources — premises, staff, community relationships — independently of one another, reducing the risk of a single point of failure in responding to educational crises.

3. A newly consolidated academic institutional framework, with regional vocation. The establishment of the EuroINCLUS Research Centre — Jean Monnet Centre of Excellence at the University of Oradea, together with the journal "Inclusivity," provides for the first time a permanent framework for research, training and dissemination dedicated precisely to this theme, not merely a reactive response to specific crises. To this newly consolidated academic framework is added a pre-existing institutional resource, often overlooked in discussions of intercultural education in Bihor: Partium Christian University, established in Oradea in 1995, teaching entirely in Hungarian, with ARACIS accreditation since 2008⁷⁶. The coexistence, in the same city, of a multilingual state university (the University of Oradea, with the EUROINCLUS Centre) and a Hungarian confessional university consolidated over three decades offers a rare institutional precedent at national level: two parallel academic pathways, both functional, demonstrating in practice — not merely at the level of discourse — that multilingual higher education can coexist

⁷⁶ Partium Christian University, f.d.

sustainably with monolingual-minority education, without destructive competition.

4. Consolidated cross-border university cooperation. The long-standing relationship between the University of Oradea and the University of Debrecen, already documented in other fields (medicine), offers a functional institutional precedent, transferable to intercultural-education projects. The scale of this partnership is also visible in the size asymmetry between the two institutions: the University of Debrecen, with approximately 30,000 students⁷⁷, is about three times larger than the University of Oradea, which gives the Oradea–Debrecen cross-border cooperation — beyond geographic proximity — an added dimension of access to significantly larger academic infrastructure, relevant to any future student mobility or training of specialists in intercultural education.

5. An existing legal framework, even if imperfectly applied. The "auditing pupil" status, the possibility of study equivalence, and enrolment procedures for refugee children are already regulated at national level, meaning the normative basis need not be built from scratch, only consolidated in its application. This normative basis is, moreover, layered across several levels of governance — European, national and, since 2022, the concrete mechanism of the European Qualifications Passport for Refugees (EQPR), applied by CNRED — which means that the weakness identified below (the gap between framework and application) is all the more striking: the problem is not the absence of legal instruments, but the administrative capacity to put them into practice locally.

Weaknesses

1. A large gap between the available legal framework and its actual rate of use. The case of Ukrainian refugee children is telling: of 60 children initially placed in Bihor schools and kindergartens, only about 10 continued the following school year — an extremely low retention rate, indicating a structural rather than merely conjunctural problem. The phenomenon is also confirmed at national scale: nearly a year after the start of the war in Ukraine, almost 48,000 refugee children were in Romania, but fewer than 4,000 were enrolled or registered as auditing students — a utilization rate of under 10% of the available legal framework, structurally comparable

⁷⁷ University of Debrecen, f.d.

to the 17% retention rate observed in Bihor. The convergence of these two figures, at different administrative levels, suggests a systemic problem, not one specific to a single county.

2. Insufficient human resources at school-inspectorate level. The dedicated commission set up at ISJ Bihor operated with limited resources, and the administrative delays reported by families (repeated postponements, lack of communication) directly discouraged the enrolment process. In absolute terms, the ISJ Bihor commission operated with only five people to manage the schooling requests of a flow that, at one point, involved dozens of children in the initial placement phase alone. This resource allocation contrasts visibly with the much denser structure, with permanently dedicated inspectors, that exists for the county's historical minorities (Hungarian, Slovak, Roma), showing that the institutional mechanism works well for "old" diversity but reacts ad hoc to "new" diversity.

3. Absence of mother-tongue courses for newly arrived minorities. As shown by accounts concerning Ukrainian pupils, state schools generally do not offer courses in newcomers' mother tongue, forcing an abrupt integration without an institutionally supported linguistic transition stage. The contrast is all the more visible given that Bihor already has functional minority-language education infrastructure for its historical communities — Hungarian, Slovak, German, Roma — built up over decades. The absence of even a minimal equivalent for Ukrainian, or for the languages of South and East Asian economic-migrant communities, is therefore not a gap in institutional know-how, but a matter of prioritization and time — the system knows how to build such networks, but has not yet had the time or institutional incentive to do so for these new categories of beneficiaries.

4. An insufficiently developed cross-border (ROHU) project portfolio on this specific theme. As honestly noted in Chapter III, ROHU projects with a theme explicitly dedicated to intercultural education or to the integration of minorities/refugees are few; most address interculturality only tangentially.

5. Dependence on one-off initiatives rather than a coherent, continuous strategy. Many of the documented activities (the camp for Odesa pupils, non-formal education centres) are responses to a specific crisis rather than long-term planned public policy, which makes them vulnerable to the exhaustion of funding or media

interest. This vulnerability is amplified by an external factor over which Bihor has no control: the EU's future 2028–2034 Multiannual Financial Framework, under active negotiation in 2026, could bring Erasmus+ funding below current levels, according to the proposal from the Cypriot Presidency of the Council of the EU — which would deepen, not resolve, dependence on unpredictable funding cycles.

Opportunities

1. The ongoing institutional consolidation of the EUROINCLUS project. With an international conference already held in June 2026, bringing together over 100 participants from 16 countries, the project is at a favorable moment to expand its partner network and generate satellite projects specifically dedicated to intercultural education. This consolidation also benefits from a broader European framework, itself in full development: the Council of Europe's Reference Framework of Competences for Democratic Culture (RFCDC), already implemented in the Romanian curriculum through the subject "Education for Democratic Citizenship," gives EUROINCLUS ready-prepared pedagogical ground, which the project can leverage directly, without needing to build an institutional culture of education for diversity from scratch.

2. The new 2021–2027 generation of European funds, through AMIF, Erasmus+/Jean Monnet, the Education and Employment Operational Programme and Interreg VI-A Romania–Hungary, offers a broader funding framework than in previous periods, with an explicit priority dedicated to building mutual trust through interpersonal actions (ROHU Specific Objective 6.3), suited to education projects. In absolute figures, this generation of funds is significant: the Erasmus+ 2021–2027 programme has a total EU-wide budget of €26.2 billion, while the Interreg VI-A Romania–Hungary (ROHU) 2021–2027 programme has a budget of €175,940,025 for the cross-border area that includes Bihor. Even a small fraction of these sums, explicitly directed towards intercultural education, would represent a substantial increase over current, predominantly one-off, funding.

3. The existence of established expertise structures, mobilizable through partnership. The Intercultural Institute Timișoara, with over thirty years of experience in intercultural and civic education and in building intercultural competences for public authorities, represents

a potential partner for transferring methodological know-how to Bihor.

4. The "regional laboratory" role Bihor can play for states in the EU's eastern neighbourhood. The already-functional Romanian-Hungarian coexistence model can be documented, formalized and transferred, through internships and training, to specialists from Serbia, Ukraine and the Republic of Moldova — precisely the direction already taken by the EUROINCLUS project.

5. The digitalization of education as a tool for reducing access barriers. The experience (even if partly problematic) of online education for Ukrainian children shows that digital infrastructure and institutional familiarity with hybrid solutions already exist and can be leveraged positively — for example, through Romanian-language courses delivered online, synchronized with the curriculum in the country of origin. Moreover, the University of Oradea's own Erasmus+ mobility network — with active agreements renewed annually, from the 2015–2016 to the 2025–2026 generation⁷⁸ — already constitutes digitalized administrative infrastructure for managing international mobility, whose procedures could be directly adapted for educational flows similar to those generated by forced migration, rather than being built from scratch.

Threats

1. The unpredictable evolution of migratory flows. The continuation or intensification of the conflict in Ukraine, as well as possible new crises in the EU's eastern or southern neighbourhood, may generate sudden fluctuations in demand for educational services, difficult to anticipate in inspectorates' budgetary planning. To this unpredictability of flows is added, since 2026, a parallel unpredictability in the European funding available to respond to these flows: the final outcome of the negotiations for the 2028–2034 Multiannual Financial Framework will directly determine the institutional capacity to financially support any response to a new migratory wave, regardless of its scale or origin.

2. The reduction of direct financial support for refugees. The elimination, from 1 January 2026, of the monthly allowance for Ukrainian refugees in Romania may accelerate either economic

⁷⁸ Universitatea din Oradea, f.d.

integration or departure to other states — both scenarios with effects difficult to anticipate on the stability of school enrolment numbers.

3. Limited or inconsistent recognition of studies between education systems. The fact that the Ukrainian government did not, at one point, recognize studies completed in Romania directly discouraged children's enrolment in local schools — a structural barrier that could recur with other migratory flows, absent clear bilateral equivalence agreements. This threat must nonetheless be qualified: since the 2022 introduction of the European Qualifications Passport for Refugees (EQPR) into CNRED procedures, Romania has had a functional mechanism for recognizing studies even in the absence of complete documents — which shifts the real source of the problem away from the absence of a legal framework and towards families' low level of awareness of this mechanism's existence, a barrier far easier to address through institutional communication than through legislative reform.

4. The risk of political instrumentalization of the migration and minorities theme. Intercultural education takes place in a public climate in which discourse on migration and minorities can become politically polarized, which may affect both funding and community receptiveness to inclusion projects.

5. The fragility of funding based predominantly on time-limited projects. As already seen in the guide dedicated to special education, the same structural vulnerability applies here: most activities depend on funding cycles (Erasmus+, ROHU, PNRR) with fixed deadlines, without a guarantee of budgetary continuity at local or national level after the programming period ends. Part of this fragility has already been partly addressed at the level of Bihor County Council, through the shift from exclusively competitive funding towards direct investment from its own budget — a precedent showing that the solution to this threat is not necessarily more European funding, but the diversification of sources, including through more active involvement of the county authority.

V. Drafting and Substantiation of Practical Recommendations

1. Action plan specific to intercultural education and communication

Building on the SWOT analysis in Chapter IV, we propose an action plan structured around four directions, each with objectives, responsible parties and an indicative time horizon — following the logic of the SMART objectives already applied in the guide dedicated to special education, but adapted to the specific academic character of the Jean Monnet EUROINCLUS project.

Direction 1 — Strengthening rapid-response institutional capacity

The establishment, at ISJ Bihor, of a commission dedicated to integrating pupils from refugee and migrant families was a necessary step, but under-resourced. We recommend: expanding the existing commission with a dedicated, part-time coordinator, responsible exclusively for monitoring and facilitating the enrolment of children from refugee families, economic migrants and newly formed minorities; drafting a simple internal procedural guide, translated into the main languages of the identified groups (Ukrainian, English, possibly Nepali/Sinhala for basic communication), to reduce the administrative barriers already reported by families. Indicative deadline: 12 months from the guide's approval, with responsibility assigned to ISJ Bihor, in partnership with CJRAE Bihor.

Direction 2 — Developing an institutionalised educational "bridge" stage

The non-formal education centre model (such as the one organized by Caritas Eparhial) has proven functional but has remained dependent on confessional organizations' own initiative, without a formal framework for continuity. We recommend: formalizing a framework partnership between ISJ Bihor and the network of confessional institutions already active in this field (Pentecostal, Roman Catholic, Greek Catholic, Baptist), to support a linguistic and cultural transition stage, with official recognition of hours completed; introducing short, intensive Romanian-language modules, with dedicated funding, for newly arrived children, regardless of origin. Indicative deadline: 18-24 months, with shared responsibility between ISJ Bihor and confessional partners.

Direction 3 — Training teaching staff to manage multicultural classrooms

Preparing teaching staff with the competences needed to manage multicultural and multilingual classrooms is one of the explicit objectives of the European Action Plan on Integration and Inclusion 2021–2027, and this objective remains insufficiently covered locally. We recommend: including a continuing-training module dedicated to intercultural competences in the offer of the Bihor Teachers' House and the University of Oradea, leveraging the expertise already accumulated at the EuroINCLUS Centre of Excellence; developing a partnership with the Intercultural Institute Timișoara, a structure with over thirty years of experience in building intercultural competences, for direct methodological transfer. Indicative deadline: first pilot training session in the academic/school year immediately following the guide's approval.

Direction 4 — Systematic documentation of the South and East Asian economic-migration phenomenon

As noted in Section II.5, economic migration from Nepal, India, Sri Lanka, Bangladesh and, possibly, China remains poorly documented from an educational standpoint. We recommend: a formal request for statistical data to ISJ Bihor on the number of pupils from these communities, broken down by education unit; integrating this data into a future updated edition of this guide, as a solid empirical basis for further recommendations. Indicative deadline: 6 months, responsibility of the EuroINCLUS Research Centre, in collaboration with ISJ Bihor.

Direction 5 — Preventing and sanctioning discrimination in access to education

As shown in Section I.1.b, the National Council for Combating Discrimination (CNCD) already has relevant decision-making practice for inclusive education — including a decision (No. 374/2014) concerning the refusal to enroll children with autism at three schools in Bucharest — but this mechanism remains, in Bihor, practically invisible to parents from refugee, migrant or minority families. We recommend: a formal partnership between ISJ Bihor and CNCD to inform school-unit principals of the obligations arising from Art. 11 of GO No. 137/2000; publishing, on the ISJ Bihor website, in the section already dedicated to Ukrainian minors, a simple, multi-language guide on the right to file a complaint with CNCD in the event of a refused enrolment. Indicative deadline: 6 months from the guide's

approval, shared responsibility between ISJ Bihor and CNCD, with no significant additional cost, given that both institutions already exist and hold the relevant legal mandate.

2. Practical recommendations on planning and partnerships for developing field-specific skills

The analysis of best practices (Chapter III) and the SWOT analysis yield several partnership principles that we recommend as a methodological foundation.

a. Multi-institutional, not bilateral, partnership. The documented success cases show that an effective response has always involved more than two actors — a public authority, a confessional institution, and sometimes civil society as well. We recommend that any future partnership be conceived from the outset as a network, not as a one-off institution–beneficiary relationship.

b. Actively leveraging the Jean Monnet academic framework as a partnership platform. The June 2026 EuroINCLUS International Conference, which brought together over 100 participants from 16 countries, already provides a network of institutional contacts from Serbia, Ukraine, the Republic of Moldova and other states, which can be mobilized for future joint projects, including through Erasmus+ or ROHU calls.

c. Correlation with EUROINCLUS's related project domains. We recommend explicit coordination with the project's other domains — ethno-confessional realities and societal security (Mircea Brie), historical-cultural heritage (Sorin Șipoș), socio-economic inclusion (Luminița Șoproni), cultural diplomacy (Alina Stoica), migration and integration (Polgár István) — to avoid overlaps and build a final guide that is coherent at the level of the whole project, not just of an individual domain.

d. Prioritizing "people-to-people" actions in future ROHU applications. As shown in Chapter III, the ROHU 2021–2027 priority dedicated to building mutual trust through interpersonal actions (SO 6.3) remains under-exploited for intercultural-education themes. We recommend developing a ROHU project proposal explicitly dedicated to this theme, with the University of Oradea and a partner from Debrecen or another eligible county.

e. Including Partium Christian University as a complementary academic partner. As shown in Section IV (Strengths, point 3), Oradea

already hosts two parallel, functional academic pathways — the multilingual University of Oradea, host of the EUROINCLUS Centre, and Partium Christian University, teaching entirely in Hungarian. To date, none of the partnerships documented in this guide formally involves Partium, although the institution has a direct, organic connection to the theme of intercultural education, through its very status as a functioning minority-language university. We recommend initiating a targeted partnership — for example, a joint round table or an optional course module, open to students from both universities, dedicated to the lived experience of minority-language education — as a first step towards a broader collaboration, which would bring the EUROINCLUS project an "insider" perspective, complementary to the academic-analytical one already in place.

f. Formalizing the Oradea–Debrecen asymmetry as a resource, not merely a neighbourly relationship. The difference in institutional scale between the two partner universities — approximately 30,000 students at Debrecen, versus a significantly smaller student body at Oradea — should not be seen as an imbalance but explicitly leveraged: we recommend that future EUROINCLUS international internships for specialists from Serbia, Ukraine and the Republic of Moldova include, where possible, a joint component with the University of Debrecen, which can provide access to research infrastructure and a larger pool of experts than what is available at Oradea alone, without diluting the University of Oradea's coordinating role within the project.

3. Monitoring and evaluation recommendations

For the proposed action plan not to remain merely declarative — a vulnerability already noted in the guide dedicated to special education, where most SMART objectives lacked defined measurable indicators — we recommend a minimum set of monitoring indicators: a basic quantitative indicator (the number of pupils from refugee families, economic migrants and newly formed minorities actually enrolled, not merely placed, in Bihor education units, reported annually by ISJ Bihor); a retention indicator (the rate of continued attendance after the first semester of enrolment — a directly relevant indicator, given that the Ukrainian experience showed a retention rate of only about 17%, 10 of 60 children, in the school year immediately following initial placement); a teacher-training indicator (the number of teaching staff participating annually in intercultural-competence

training modules, reported by the Bihor Teachers' House); a partnership indicator (the number of active formal cooperation agreements between ISJ Bihor and confessional institutions/civic organizations dedicated to educational integration); an academic dissemination indicator (the number of articles, case studies or reports published in the journal "Inclusivity" or in other EuroINCLUS Centre publications); and a study-recognition mechanism usage indicator (the number of files submitted to CNRED or to county equivalence committees through the EQPR procedure, reported annually by ISJ Bihor — an indicator directly relevant to testing the hypothesis formulated in Section IV, Threats, point 3, according to which the main problem is not the absence of a legal recognition framework, but families' low level of awareness of its existence; an increase in this indicator, correlated with an increase in the actual enrolment rate, would empirically confirm this hypothesis).

We recommend that this data be collected annually and integrated into an internal monitoring report of the EuroINCLUS Centre of Excellence, with an interim evaluation at the mid-point of the Jean Monnet project's implementation period and a final evaluation at its conclusion, following the best-practice model already applied at European level for the Action Plan on Integration and Inclusion 2021–2027, which has its own progress-tracking mechanism, structured around four key areas.

Conclusions

This guide has argued that Bihor County constitutes a genuine, rather than merely convenient, case study for the EUROINCLUS project's broader thesis: that models of integration, security and inclusion developed in a border region can be transferred beyond it. The argument rests on a simple but consistent finding, documented across all five chapters — Bihor already possesses most of the institutional building blocks such a model requires; what is missing is not capacity in principle, but the consistent, monitored work of connecting existing resources to newly emerging needs.

The legal and institutional framework mapped in Chapter I operates coherently at European, national and regional level, yet is applied unevenly across communities, as the divergent treatment of the Hungarian, German and Slovak minorities under the European Charter for Regional or Minority Languages illustrates. Chapter II

turned this observation into a measurable pattern: the retention rate for Ukrainian refugee children in Bihor schools (roughly ten of sixty) closely mirrors the sub-10% national enrollment rate against the total refugee-child population, indicating a systemic gap between entitlement and actual use — one rooted less in absent legal instruments than in families' limited awareness of them and in understaffed inspectorate structures.

Chapter III showed that where the formal administrative system has moved slowly, Bihor's confessionally diverse network of educational institutions — Orthodox, Roman Catholic, Greek Catholic, Reformed, Baptist and Pentecostal alike — has repeatedly acted as the more agile agent of integration, offering a distinctly Bihor-specific "bridge" model worth formalizing rather than treating as improvised crisis response. The SWOT analysis in Chapter IV confirmed that this institutional depth is a genuine strength, alongside a newly consolidated academic framework and consolidated cross-border university cooperation, but weighed it against concrete weaknesses — a five-person inspectorate commission, the absence of mother-tongue transition courses for newly arrived groups, and a cross-border project portfolio still thin on this specific theme — and against threats largely external to Bihor's own performance, chiefly the outcome of the 2028–2034 EU budget negotiations and the discontinuation, as of January 2026, of direct financial support for refugees.

The recommendations of Chapter V follow directly from this diagnosis rather than proposing mechanisms built from scratch: strengthening the existing inspectorate commission, formalizing the informal educational "bridge" already tested by confessional organizations, training teaching staff for multicultural classrooms, closing the documentation gap around the emerging South and East Asian migrant population, and making existing anti-discrimination channels visible to the families who need them. To avoid the fate of similar action plans that remain declarative, the guide proposes a concrete, annually reviewed set of monitoring indicators — enrollment and retention rates, teacher-training uptake, active partnerships, and use of the European Qualifications Passport for Refugees — anchored institutionally in the EuroINCLUS Research Centre.

Taken together, these findings support the guide's central premise: Bihor's relevance to the EUROINCLUS project is not a policy

construct designed for the occasion, but the product of a historical depth of coexistence that makes its practices genuinely transferable — provided the connective, monitoring work this guide recommends is carried out with the same consistency as the coexistence it documents.

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GUIDE OF BEST PRACTICES REGARDING
INTEGRATION, SOCIETAL SECURITY AND
INCLUSION IN THE BORDER AREA

Key area

**Socio-Economic Inclusion in
Bihor County**

by Luminița Șoproni

Introduction

The landscape of socio-economic inclusion across Europe has been significantly shaped by a wide array of policies and programs implemented at both national and regional levels. These initiatives are designed to combat marginalization and promote the integration of disadvantaged groups, including the unemployed, immigrants, rural communities, ethnic minorities, and individuals from lower socio-economic backgrounds. Central to these efforts is the dimension of economic development, which serves as a primary driver of inclusion by creating jobs, stimulating innovation, and fostering equitable access to resources. Inclusive economic growth not only enhances living standards but also empowers vulnerable populations to participate meaningfully in society. By aligning development strategies with social objectives, such as investing in education, supporting entrepreneurship, and strengthening local economies, European nations are working to ensure that prosperity is broadly shared and that no group is left behind.

Methodology and Documentary Sources

The methodology applied in this section of the Guide is tailored to the dynamics of socio-economic inclusion in border regions and combines qualitative and quantitative tools. It draws on a focused set of European, national, regional, and local documentary sources, with emphasis on EU programmes, regulations, and strategic frameworks relevant to labour mobility, migration, social protection, economic development, and cross-border cooperation.

At national, regional, and local levels, the analysis relies on government strategies, territorial development plans, labour market policies, and sectoral strategies addressing socio-economic conditions, mobility and urban development, alongside economic development instruments influencing regional growth. These are complemented by statistical and administrative datasets from Eurostat, National Commission for Strategy and Prognosis (CNSP), National Institute of Statistics - Bihor County Statistics Directorate, Bihor County Agency for Employment (AJOFM Bihor), General Directorate for Social Assistance and Child Protection (DGASPC Bihor), General Inspectorate for Immigration (IGI) and local authorities, which provide insights into demographic trends,

labour-market needs, regional disparities, and service provision. Data are interpreted to identify structural challenges and emerging patterns relevant to inclusion.

The methodology also includes the evaluation of regional and local development strategies and a set of case studies of Interreg Romania-Hungary projects, which offer concrete evidence on cooperation mechanisms, service models, and community-level interventions. Project records, partnership agreements, and operational documents provide additional insights into implementation practices and cross-border coordination.

An analytical synthesis integrates these findings into a structured interpretation, combining a SWOT analysis of socio-economic inclusion in the border area, forward-looking assessments of potential development pathways and a sector-specific action plan with practical recommendations for skills development, partnership planning and monitoring mechanisms.

Together, these components form a comprehensive, evidence-based foundation for assessing institutional capacities and identifying effective approaches to socio-economic inclusion in border areas. The selection and validation of good practices, based on relevance, impact, sustainability, and cross-border potential, ensure that the Guide's recommendations are both credible and transferable across different border contexts.

I. Context. European Policies

1. Strategic Frameworks and Guiding Principles

The European Union has consistently emphasized the imperative of fostering inclusion and socio-economic development, particularly in border regions that frequently exhibit pronounced disparities compared to more centralized areas. These peripheral territories, often overlooked and marginalized, play a crucial role in the EU's Cohesion Policy, which seeks to mitigate regional inequalities and promote integration through a suite of targeted instruments and initiatives.

To support its goals, the European Union has built a clear **strategy** for fair growth and stronger regional unity, centred around the **European Pillar of Social Rights**. This foundational document outlines *20 key principles* designed to ensure fair working conditions,

equal opportunities, and robust social protection across all member states. These principles serve as a compass for policy-making, particularly in regions where socio-economic vulnerabilities are most acute.

To translate these principles into concrete outcomes, the **Action Plan for the European Pillar of Social Rights** establishes a set of ambitious **targets to be achieved by 2030**, underscoring the European Union's commitment to measurable social progress. These **objectives** include raising the employment rate among people aged 20 to 64 to at least 78 percent, ensuring that a minimum of 60 percent of adults participate in training activities each year, and reducing the number of individuals at risk of poverty or social exclusion by at least 15 million¹.

- **More and better jobs:** The European Union has placed employment at the centre of its long-term socio-economic strategy. In line with the objectives of the European Pillar of Social Rights, the Union aims to raise the employment rate of people aged 20 to 64 to at least 78% by 2030. Achieving this target requires not only an expansion in the number of available jobs, but also a qualitative shift toward employment that supports the green and digital transitions². These sectors are expected to play a decisive role in sustainable development, regional revitalisation, and the competitiveness of the European economy.

- **Skills and equality:** At least 60% of adults should participate in annual training, ensuring that citizens, especially those in peripheral and border areas, are equipped with the competencies needed for evolving labour markets. This focus on lifelong learning is key to bridging gaps in opportunity and access³.

¹ European Commission, *The European Pillar of Action Rights Action Plan* (2021), Luxembourg: Publications Office of the European Union, <https://op.europa.eu/webpub/empl/european-pillar-of-social-rights/en/>, accessed on 20 January 2026

² European Commission. DG for Employment, Social Affairs and Inclusion, *More and better jobs*, https://employment-social-affairs.ec.europa.eu/policies-and-activities/european-pillar-social-rights-building-fairer-and-more-inclusive-european-union/european-pillar-social-rights-action-plan/more-and-better-jobs_en, accessed on 20 January 2026

³ European Commission. DG for Employment, Social Affairs and Inclusion, *Skills and equality*, <https://employment-social-affairs.ec.europa.eu/policies-and-activities/european-pillar-social-rights-building-fairer-and-more-inclusive->

- **Social protection and inclusion:** The EU seeks to lift at least 15 million people out of poverty or social exclusion by 2030. This goal underscores the importance of integrated, life-stage-sensitive approaches that address structural disadvantages and promote social resilience⁴.

Together, these initiatives form a focused strategy to support disadvantaged regions, reduce gaps, and strengthen unity across Europe. Clear targets ensure the EU's commitment is not just a goal, but a concrete effort backed by coordinated action and long-term investment.

2. Economic Development Policies

2.1. Cohesion Policy: reducing regional disparities through inclusive development

At the core of the EU's regional development framework stands **Cohesion Policy**, a strategic mechanism designed to incorporate disadvantaged regions into broader economic and social structures. This policy encompasses all EU regions and cities, aiming to stimulate job creation, enhance competitiveness, drive economic growth, improve living standards, and ensure sustainable development. Its overarching objective is to ensure that no individual or region is left behind in the Union's pursuit of balanced development.

To achieve these goals and respond to the diverse developmental needs across member states, the EU has allocated €392 billion, representing nearly one-third of its total budget, for the Cohesion Policy during the 2021–2027 programming period⁵.

Cohesion Policy is implemented through a set of dedicated funding instruments, each tailored to address specific developmental challenges across the European Union. The **European Regional**

[european-union/european-pillar-social-rights-action-plan/skills-and-equality_en](https://ec.europa.eu/european-pillar-social-rights-action-plan/skills-and-equality_en), accessed on 20 January 2026

⁴ European Commission. DG for Employment, Social Affairs and Inclusion, *Social protection and inclusion*, https://employment-social-affairs.ec.europa.eu/policies-and-activities/european-pillar-social-rights-building-fairer-and-more-inclusive-european-union/european-pillar-social-rights-action-plan/social-protection-and-inclusion_en, accessed on 20 January 2026

⁵ European Commission, *Cohesion Policy*, https://ec.europa.eu/regional_policy/policy/what/investment-policy_en, accessed on 20 January 2026

Development Fund (ERDF) strengthens the economic and social fabric of all EU regions and cities by investing in infrastructure, innovation, and regional competitiveness. The **Cohesion Fund (CF)** supports environmental and transport-related projects in less prosperous member states, promoting sustainable development in less prosperous countries. The **European Social Fund Plus (ESF+)** enhances employment opportunities, combats poverty, and fosters a fair and socially inclusive society throughout the Union. Complementing these efforts, the **Just Transition Fund (JTF)** provides targeted support to regions most affected by the transition toward climate neutrality, ensuring that the shift to a green economy is both equitable and inclusive. Together, these instruments form the financial backbone of the EU's strategy to reduce regional disparities and promote cohesive, sustainable growth across all member states.

EU funding is distributed according to each region's GDP per capita⁶:

- *Less-developed regions* (below 75% of the EU average)
- *Transition regions* (between 75% and 100%)
- *More-developed regions* (above 100%)

This approach allows the EU to provide tailored support, directing resources where they are most needed to reduce disparities and promote balanced growth.

The EU's cohesion policy operates through a structured **partnership with each Member State**, where priorities are jointly defined and funding is allocated accordingly. These resources are then channelled into **national and regional operational programs**, supporting a wide range of projects, from improving transport infrastructure to boosting youth employment.

The **impact** of this approach is visible across Europe: it revitalizes declining industrial zones, strengthens rural and remote communities, encourages innovation and digital transformation, and fosters inclusive labour markets with a strong focus on lifelong learning. For instance, a region facing high unemployment might benefit from ESF+ funding to provide vocational training, while ERDF

⁶ European Parliament, European Regional Development Fund, <https://www.europarl.europa.eu/factsheets/en/sheet/95/cohesion-policy>, accessed on 20 January 2026

investments could enhance local transport networks, making the area more attractive to businesses and improving access for residents.

2.2. Green and Digital Transitions: reshaping economic development through inclusive growth

At the heart of the European Union's contemporary development agenda lies the twin **green and digital transitions**, which are redefining the foundations of economic growth across regions⁷. Rather than representing isolated policy domains, these transitions form an integrated framework through which regions are expected to adapt to long-term systemic shocks, such as climate change, technological disruption, and global competition, while narrowing persistent development gaps.

The green transition strengthens regions' capacity to absorb and adapt to environmental and economic pressures by promoting resource efficiency, renewable energy, and circular production models. Regions historically dependent on carbon-intensive activities are encouraged to diversify their economic bases, reducing vulnerability to external shocks and regulatory change. At the same time, the digital transition enhances adaptive capacity by improving connectivity, productivity, and access to services, particularly in geographically remote or structurally disadvantaged areas⁸.

Crucially, EU policy frameworks emphasise that these transitions must be inclusive. Without targeted support, green and

⁷ Communication from the Commission to the European Parliament, the Council, the European Economic and Social Committee and the Committee of the Regions (2021). *2030 Digital Compass: the European way for the Digital Decade*. COM/2021/118 final, <https://eur-lex.europa.eu/legal-content/en/TXT/?uri=CELEX:52021DC0118>, accessed on 6 February 2026; Communication from the Commission to the European Parliament and the Council (2022). *2022 Strategic Foresight Report. Twinning the green and digital transitions in the new geopolitical context*. COM/2022/289 final, <https://eur-lex.europa.eu/legal-content/EN/TXT/?uri=CELEX:52022DC0289>, accessed on 6 February 2026

⁸ Antonio Aloisi (2025), *Integrating the EU Twin (Green and Digital) Transition Synergies, Tensions and Pathways for the Future of Work*, European Commission, Seville, 2025, JRC140964, <https://publications.jrc.ec.europa.eu/repository/handle/JRC140964>, accessed on 6 February 2026; Stefan Muench et al. (2022), *Towards a green & digital future - Key requirements for successful twin transitions in the European Union*, Publications Office of the European Union, <https://data.europa.eu/doi/10.2760/977331>

digital transformations risk exacerbating existing territorial and social disparities, particularly in rural, peripheral, and less developed regions. To address this challenge, **EU funding instruments** (most notably **ERDF** and **ESF+**) support investments in digital skills, green jobs, and innovation ecosystems tailored to regional capacities. This approach enables regions to align climate and digital objectives with local development strategies, reinforcing smart specialisation and place-based growth.

The **impact** of this integrated approach is increasingly visible across Europe. Regions are leveraging green investments to revitalise local economies, while digital innovation enhances access to services, education, and employment opportunities. By embedding inclusiveness at the core of the green and digital transitions, the EU ensures that economic modernisation contributes not only to competitiveness and sustainability, but also to social cohesion and territorial balance.

2.3. Recovery and Resilience Facility: investing in a sustainable and inclusive post-crisis recovery

The **Recovery and Resilience Facility (RRF)** is a temporary financial instrument and the central pillar of **NextGenerationEU**, the European Union's strategy to emerge stronger and more resilient from the COVID-19 crisis. While cohesion policy remains the EU's primary long-term mechanism for reducing territorial disparities, the RRF complements this framework by providing a rapid, large-scale response to the economic and social disruptions caused by the pandemic. In doing so, it reinforces the Union's broader objectives of convergence, resilience, and inclusive growth⁹.

The RRF provides a combination of grants and loans to support reforms and investments across EU Member States, with a strong emphasis on accelerating the green and digital transitions. Funding is allocated on the basis of **National Recovery and Resilience Plans**, which function as strategic roadmaps outlining reform agendas and investment priorities aligned with EU-wide objectives. These plans are explicitly designed to address structural weaknesses while advancing climate neutrality, digital transformation, and institutional resilience,

⁹ European Commission, The Recovery and Resilience Facility, https://reforms-investments.ec.europa.eu/recovery-and-resilience-facility-1_en, accessed on 6 February 2026

thereby operationalising the policy orientations examined in the chapter on Green and Digital Transitions.

By January 2026, the Recovery and Resilience Facility provides up to €360 billion in grants and €217 billion in loans to support reforms and investments across EU Member States. In parallel, *NextGenerationEU* reinforces existing EU programmes (including the Just Transition Fund, Horizon Europe, InvestEU, RescEU, and REACT-EU) with €83.1 billion, strengthening alignment between crisis recovery, cohesion objectives, and the green and digital transitions¹⁰.

Beyond macroeconomic stabilisation, the RRF places strong emphasis on social cohesion and institutional capacity. Investments target labour market reforms, education and training systems, healthcare, and social services, with the aim of strengthening social resilience and reducing vulnerabilities exposed by the crisis. Particular attention is given to supporting disadvantaged groups and regions, ensuring that recovery efforts contribute to reducing inequalities rather than deepening them.

Taken together, the RRF and cohesion policy form a multi-layered governance framework in which immediate stabilisation and long-term convergence are mutually reinforcing. While cohesion policy sustains place-based development and gradual territorial adjustment, the RRF accelerates structural transformation, enabling Member States and regions to emerge from the crisis on more sustainable, inclusive, and resilient development paths.

3. Socio-Economic Inclusion Initiatives

The European Union's socio-economic inclusion agenda reflects its long-standing commitment to combining economic competitiveness with social cohesion, equal opportunities, and territorial balance. Three major policy strands illustrate how the Union seeks to build a more inclusive and resilient socio-economic landscape: the **Social Economy Action Plan**, **Inclusive Entrepreneurship**, and the broader **Social Inclusion Strategy**. Together, these initiatives form a coherent approach to empowering

¹⁰ European Council, The Recovery and Resilience Facility, <https://www.consilium.europa.eu/en/policies/rrf/>, accessed on 6 February 2026

people, strengthening communities, and ensuring that economic progress translates into shared prosperity.

For border regions, where geographic peripherality, labour market fragmentation, and uneven access to services often reinforce vulnerability, these initiatives play a particularly strategic role. By supporting job retention during crises, enabling transitions to new forms of employment, strengthening social enterprises, and empowering underrepresented groups to participate in economic life, the EU's inclusion toolbox helps stabilize local economies and reduce long-standing disparities.

3.1. The Social Economy Action Plan: inclusive employment through social innovation

The EU Social Economy Action Plan positions the social economy as a key driver of quality employment, territorial resilience and democratic participation. Within the broader framework of EU cohesion policy and place-based regional development strategies, social economy models represent a complementary and territorially grounded approach to economic and social cohesion.

According to the European Commission, more than 2.8 million social economy entities operate across the EU, providing innovative solutions to social and economic challenges and contributing significantly to labour-market inclusion, especially for disadvantaged groups¹¹. Social enterprises, cooperatives, mutuals, associations, and non-profits place social and environmental objectives at the core of their business models, prioritizing community benefit over profit maximization¹². While traditional regional development instruments often prioritise infrastructure investment, competitiveness, and market-driven growth, social economy enterprises place greater

¹¹ *Building an economy that works for people: an action plan for the social economy* (2021). Communication from the Commission to the European Parliament, the Council, the European Economic and Social Committee and the Committee of the Regions, Luxembourg: Publications Office of the European Union, <https://www.socialeconomy.eu.org/wp-content/uploads/2021/12/Building-an-economy-that-works-for-people-an-action-plan-for-the-social-economy.pdf>, accessed on 10 February 2026

¹² European Commission, *EU Social Economy Gateway. Mapping of stakeholders and networks*, https://social-economy-gateway.ec.europa.eu/about-social-economy/mapping-stakeholders-and-networks_en, accessed on 10 February 2026

emphasis on social inclusion, community resilience, and locally embedded value creation.

Social economy organisations act as effective intermediaries between policy objectives and local needs. Their strong territorial anchoring enables them to mobilise local resources, retain economic activity within communities, and address structural challenges (depopulation, labour market exclusion, or limited access to services) that are particularly acute in rural, peripheral, and less developed regions.

Strategically, the Action Plan reflects the Commission's long-term vision of strengthening resilience, competitiveness, and social cohesion, as reaffirmed in the mid-term review process launched by DG Employment in 2025¹³. By empowering community-based economic models, the Plan supports democratic participation, gender equality, and the revitalization of rural and depopulated areas – an aspect particularly relevant for border regions where demographic decline and limited-service provision are persistent challenges.

Key Measures

The Action Plan introduces a comprehensive set of measures to **support the creation, scaling, and professionalization of social enterprises**. These include improving access to finance through EU instruments such as InvestEU, ESF+, and Cohesion Policy funds, which help unlock the significant untapped job-creation potential identified across Member States and regions¹⁴. Capacity-building initiatives are designed to strengthen managerial skills, digital competencies, and innovation capabilities within social economy organizations, enabling them to operate more sustainably and expand their impact.

Another core component is the development of **favourable policy and regulatory frameworks**, including guidance for Member

¹³ Communication from the Commission to the European Parliament, the Council, the European Economic and Social Committee and the Committee of the Regions on the Mid-term review of the Action Plan for the social economy: main achievements and way forward (2025), [https://eur-lex.europa.eu/legal-content/EN/TXT/?uri=PI_COM:Ares\(2025\)4142142](https://eur-lex.europa.eu/legal-content/EN/TXT/?uri=PI_COM:Ares(2025)4142142), accessed on 10 February 2026

¹⁴ *Building an economy that works for people: an action plan for the social economy* (2021)

States on creating supportive ecosystems and integrating social economy actors into industrial strategies. The Action Plan also promotes cross-border cooperation and knowledge exchange, an essential dimension for border regions where labour markets and service networks operate across national borders. Through the **Social Economy Gateway**¹⁵, the Commission facilitates access to information, funding opportunities, and best practices, helping local actors navigate EU support structures more effectively.

Expected Impact

The expected impact of the Social Economy Action Plan is multifaceted. At its core, it aims to create and retain quality jobs, particularly for vulnerable groups such as long-term unemployed persons, women, migrants, and people with disabilities. The Commission highlights the significant potential for job creation in regions where the social economy is still underdeveloped, provided that adequate support measures are implemented¹⁶. By strengthening local ecosystems, social economy models enhance the availability of community-based services, from care and education to circular-economy initiatives, thus improving quality of life and social cohesion.

For border regions, the impact is especially relevant: social economy actors can address service gaps, foster cross-border cooperation, and support inclusive labour-market participation in areas where economic peripherality and demographic pressures are more pronounced. Ultimately, the Action Plan contributes to a more resilient, innovative, and territorially balanced European economy, reinforcing the EU's commitment to ensuring that no region and no community is left behind.

3.2. Inclusive Entrepreneurship: empowering underrepresented groups

Inclusive entrepreneurship is a key dimension of the EU's strategy to broaden economic participation and reduce structural inequalities. Underrepresented groups (*women, migrants, youth, seniors, the unemployed, and persons facing poverty or exclusion*)

¹⁵ European Commission, *EU Social Economy Gateway*, https://social-economy-gateway.ec.europa.eu/about-eu-social-economy-gateway_en, accessed on 10 February 2026

¹⁶ *Building an economy that works for people: an action plan for the social economy* (2021)

encounter higher structural barriers to starting and growing a business, including limited access to finance, weaker networks and lower confidence or skills. The European Commission explicitly frames inclusive entrepreneurship as essential for mobilising Europe's full human capital, particularly in the context of the green and digital transitions, where new business models and local innovation ecosystems are rapidly evolving¹⁷.

The **EU's long-standing cooperation with the OECD** reinforces this strategic orientation. Joint initiatives such as the *Better Entrepreneurship Policy Tool*¹⁸, the *Missing Entrepreneurs* reports¹⁹ and the *Inclusive Entrepreneurship Country Assessment Notes*²⁰ provide evidence on gaps in national ecosystems and highlight the need for tailored support measures for women, migrants, youth, and other groups facing structural disadvantages. These assessments reveal persistent fragmentation, underfunding, and uneven policy coherence across Member States, underscoring the need for stronger EU-level coordination and targeted interventions²¹.

Policy Tools and Support Measures

EU support for inclusive entrepreneurship is structured around three main pillars: skills development, access to finance, and ecosystem strengthening.

Skills and capacity-building. The Commission and OECD jointly promote tools and programmes that help policymakers and support organisations design better interventions. The *Better Entrepreneurship Policy Tool* and related policy briefs offer guidance

¹⁷ European Commission, *Inclusive entrepreneurship and microfinance*, https://employment-social-affairs.ec.europa.eu/policies-and-activities/eu-employment-policies/social-economy-and-inclusive-entrepreneurship/inclusive-entrepreneurship-and-microfinance_en, accessed on 10 February 2026

¹⁸ European Commission. OECD, *The Better Entrepreneurship Policy Tool*, <https://betterentrepreneurship.eu/en/home>, accessed on 10 February 2026

¹⁹ OECD. European Commission (2023), *The Missing Entrepreneurs 2023: Policies for Inclusive Entrepreneurship and Self-Employment*, OECD Publishing, Paris, <https://doi.org/10.1787/230efc78-en>.

²⁰ OECD, *Inclusive entrepreneurship*, <https://www.oecd.org/en/topics/sub-issues/inclusive-entrepreneurship.html>, accessed on 10 February 2026

²¹ Entrepreneurship: Europe's Untapped Advantage - If We Choose to Act, *The New European*, 25 June 2025, <https://www.theneweuropean.eu/archives/inclusive-entrepreneurship-europes-untapped-advantage-if-we-choose-to-act>, accessed on 10 February 2026

on mentoring, incubators, senior entrepreneurship, and sustaining self-employment. These resources help Member States and regions tailor support to the specific needs of underrepresented groups²².

Access to finance and microfinance. Microfinance is a cornerstone of the EU's inclusive entrepreneurship strategy. Since 2007, EU microfinance instruments have provided small loans to entrepreneurs who are not considered bankable, including unemployed persons, migrants, and low-income individuals. Microfinance contributes to job creation, self-employment, and active inclusion, yet a significant financing gap (estimated at €12.9 billion annually) remains across Member States, highlighting the need for continued investment and targeted financial instruments²³.

Ecosystem development and cross-border support. The EU also supports ecosystem-building initiatives such as the *Better Incubation project*, which encourages mainstream business incubators to expand their outreach to inclusive and social entrepreneurship²⁴. Networks like the *Inclusive Entrepreneurship Alliance* further connect entrepreneurs, NGOs, policymakers, and business support organisations across Europe, promoting diversity, cross-border collaboration, and fair access to resources and markets²⁵. These networks emphasise that inclusive entrepreneurship is not peripheral but central to Europe's competitiveness and social cohesion agenda.

Expected Impact

The impact of EU inclusive entrepreneurship policies is twofold: they stimulate economic participation and reinforce social cohesion. By reducing barriers to business creation, the EU seeks to activate the entrepreneurial potential of groups still underrepresented in the innovation economy, including women, migrants, youth, and rural

²² *The Better Entrepreneurship Policy Tool*

²³ European Commission: DG for Employment, Social Affairs and Inclusion (2020), *Microfinance in the European Union – Market analysis and recommendations for delivery options in 2021-2027 – Final report*, Luxembourg: Publications Office, <https://data.europa.eu/doi/10.2767/005692>

²⁴ Better Incubation, <https://betterincubation.eu/>, accessed on 10 February 2026

²⁵ Inclusive Entrepreneurship Alliance, <https://inclusiveentrepreneurship.eu/about-us-2/>, accessed on 10 February 2026

populations, segments whose engagement is vital for Europe's long-term competitiveness and territorial balance.

These measures also strengthen local resilience, particularly in regions affected by demographic decline or fragmented labour markets, such as many EU border territories. By supporting micro-enterprises, community-based initiatives and diverse entrepreneurial pathways, inclusive entrepreneurship contributes to job creation, innovation and the revitalisation of local economies, positioning it as a structural lever for a more dynamic and equitable European development model.

3.3. Social Inclusion Strategy: expanding access to services, education and employment

The EU's Social Inclusion Strategy brings together measures to reduce poverty, prevent exclusion, and ensure equal access to essential services. It implements the principles of the **European Pillar of Social Rights**²⁶, particularly those concerning quality education, healthcare, housing, childcare, and active labour-market participation.

Its priorities include expanding access to affordable, high-quality services such as early childhood education and care, digital connectivity, and community-based social services. At the same time, it strengthens inclusive labour-market pathways through skills development, personalised assistance, and targeted activation measures to help marginalised groups enter or re-enter employment²⁷.

Priority Areas and Instruments

The strategy is implemented through EU instruments such as ESF+, Cohesion Policy, and the Recovery and Resilience Facility. Priority measures include:

- **Access to essential services:** expanding affordable housing, healthcare, childcare, and long-term care through community-based and integrated models.

²⁶ European Commission, *European Pillar of Social Rights*, https://employment-social-affairs.ec.europa.eu/policies-and-activities/european-pillar-social-rights-building-fairer-and-more-inclusive-european-union_en, accessed on 12 February 2026

²⁷ European Commission, *Social inclusion*, https://ec.europa.eu/regional_policy/policy/themes/social-inclusion_en, accessed on 12 February 2026

- **Education and skills:** improving early childhood education, reducing early school leaving, and promoting digital inclusion, in line with the *European Education Area*²⁸.

- **Active inclusion and employment support:** combining income support, personalised counselling, and targeted activation to help marginalised groups enter or re-enter employment²⁹.

- **Equal opportunities and anti-discrimination:** addressing structural barriers faced by Roma communities, migrants, persons with disabilities, and other groups at risk of exclusion, aligned with EU frameworks such as the *EU Roma Strategic Framework* or the *Strategy for the rights of persons with disabilities*³⁰.

These measures are reinforced by cross-cutting principles such as gender equality, non-discrimination, and territorial cohesion, ensuring that inclusion efforts are embedded across all major EU policies.

Expected Impact

The Social Inclusion Strategy improves access to essential services and opportunities, helping reduce inequalities and support more inclusive labour-market participation. By expanding childcare, healthcare, education, and digital infrastructure, it strengthens human capital and ensures that vulnerable groups can benefit from Europe's economic and social transitions.

In border regions, the strategy provides targeted tools to close territorial gaps. Investments through ESF+ and Cohesion Policy

²⁸ European Commission, *European Education Area*, <https://education.ec.europa.eu/>, accessed on 12 February 2026

²⁹ European Commission, *Active inclusion*, https://employment-social-affairs.ec.europa.eu/policies-and-activities/social-protection-social-inclusion/addressing-poverty-and-supporting-social-inclusion/active-inclusion_en, accessed on 12 February 2026; Official Journal of the European Union (2023), *Council Recommendation of 30 January 2023 on adequate minimum income ensuring active inclusion (2023/C 41/01)*, https://eur-lex.europa.eu/legal-content/EN/TXT/?uri=oj:JOC_2023_041_R_0001, accessed on 12 February 2026

³⁰ *The new EU Roma strategic framework for equality, inclusion and participation*, https://commission.europa.eu/publications/new-eu-roma-strategic-framework-equality-inclusion-and-participation-full-package_en, accessed on 12 February 2026; *Union of Equality: Strategy for the Rights of Persons with Disabilities 2021-2030*, <https://eur-lex.europa.eu/legal-content/EN/TXT/?uri=celex:52021DC0101>, accessed on 12 February 2026

expand community-based services, improve connectivity, and support integrated employment pathways. By enhancing access to education, healthcare and social support, the strategy reinforces resilience and promotes more balanced, inclusive development across Europe's border territories.

The EU's socio-economic inclusion agenda, through inclusive business models, smoother transitions into employment, and improved access to essential services, unlocks untapped human potential and supports more balanced territorial development. These initiatives build a workforce capable of adapting to green, digital, and demographic transformations, while ensuring that all communities, including those in border regions, can fully participate in and benefit from Europe's long-term growth.

4. Funding Instruments supporting Inclusive Growth and Territorial Cohesion

The EU's inclusion and employment agenda is underpinned by a robust set of funding instruments that enable Member States and regions to design, implement, and scale policies promoting social innovation, skills development, and balanced territorial development.

The **European Social Fund Plus (ESF+)**³¹ is the EU's main instrument for implementing the European Pillar of Social Rights, supporting employment, skills development, social inclusion, and poverty reduction, with a strong focus on vulnerable groups and disadvantaged regions. It finances personalised employment support, upskilling and reskilling programmes, youth initiatives, and community-based social services.

ESF+ strengthens labour-market participation and improves access to essential services, particularly in areas facing structural challenges. Its flexibility allows Member States to tailor interventions to local needs, including those of border regions where labour markets and service systems intersect.

The **European Regional Development Fund (ERDF)**³² promotes economic, social, and territorial cohesion by investing in

³¹ European Commission, *European Social Fund Plus*, <https://european-social-fund-plus.ec.europa.eu/en>, accessed on 12 February 2026

³² European Commission, *European Regional Development Fund (ERDF)*, <https://commission.europa.eu/funding-tenders/find-funding/eu-funding->

infrastructure, innovation, and regional competitiveness. It supports projects that expand access to healthcare, education, digital connectivity and social services, key drivers of inclusion and territorial balance.

In border regions, ERDF is particularly important for addressing service gaps, improving mobility, and supporting cross-border cooperation through **Interreg**³³, which funds joint solutions for shared challenges such as labour-market integration, service provision, and connectivity. These investments reduce disparities, reinforce local development ecosystems, and create the foundations for long-term sustainable growth.

InvestEU³⁴ provides EU-backed guarantees to mobilise public and private investment in areas such as social infrastructure, skills, microfinance, and social entrepreneurship. It supports projects that traditional financial markets may consider too risky, including social enterprises, inclusive business models, and community-based innovation.

Through its *Social Investment and Skills Window*, InvestEU expands access to finance for organisations active in social impact, labour-market integration, and skills development – core drivers of inclusive growth – supported by a dedicated budget of €2.8 billion.

Horizon Europe³⁵, the EU's flagship research and innovation programme, funds projects that advance scientific excellence and develop solutions to societal challenges, including social innovation, digital inclusion and community resilience.

Its missions and clusters support research on inclusive technologies, future skills, demographic change, and territorial cohesion. Horizon Europe also strengthens cooperation between universities, social enterprises, public authorities, and civil society, fostering innovation ecosystems that benefit all regions.

[programmes/european-regional-development-fund-erdf_en#funding-opportunities](#), accessed on 12 February 2026

³³ Interreg, <https://interreg.eu/>, accessed on 12 February 2026

³⁴ European Union, *About the InvestEU Fund*, https://investeu.europa.eu/investeu-programme/investeu-fund/about-investeu-fund_en, accessed on 12 February 2026

³⁵ European Commission, *Horizon Europe*, https://research-and-innovation.ec.europa.eu/funding/funding-opportunities/funding-programmes-and-open-calls/horizon-europe_en, accessed on 12 February 2026

5. Governance and Implementation

Effective governance and implementation are essential for ensuring that EU inclusion, employment, and territorial development policies translate into tangible results on the ground. These policies operate within a **multi-level governance system** that brings together EU institutions, national governments, regional and local authorities, and a wide range of social partners and civil-society organisations³⁶. Their coordinated action ensures that strategic objectives set at EU level are adapted to national contexts and implemented in ways that respond to local needs, including those of border regions.

5.1. Multi-level governance

EU Level. The European Commission sets the strategic direction, proposes legislation, negotiates Partnership Agreements with Member States, and oversees the implementation of EU funds. It ensures that national strategies align with EU priorities such as the European Pillar of Social Rights, the Green Deal, and the Digital Decade. The Commission also monitors compliance with regulatory requirements and evaluates progress through instruments such as the European Semester³⁷.

³⁶ Consolidated text: Regulation (EU) 2021/1060 of the European Parliament and of the Council of 24 June 2021 laying down common provisions on the European Regional Development Fund, the European Social Fund Plus, the Cohesion Fund, the Just Transition Fund and the European Maritime, Fisheries and Aquaculture Fund and financial rules for those and for the Asylum, Migration and Integration Fund, the Internal Security Fund and the Instrument for Financial Support for Border Management and Visa Policy. 2025, <https://eur-lex.europa.eu/eli/reg/2021/1060/2025-10-25>, accessed on 12 February 2026; *New Cohesion Policy 2021-2027*, <https://erdf.brussels/programmation-2021-2027-2/to-understand-everything-about-the-new-2021-2027-programming/>, accessed on 12 February 2026

³⁷ *The European Pillar of Action Rights Action Plan* (2021); *European Green Deal* (COM/2019/640): Communication from The Commission to the European Parliament, the European Council, the Council, the European Economic and Social Committee and the Committee of the Regions, 2019, Brussels: European Commission, <https://eur-lex.europa.eu/legal-content/EN/TXT/?uri=CELEX:52019DC0640>, accessed on 12 February 2026; Decision (EU) 2022/2481 of the European Parliament and of the Council of 14 December 2022 establishing the Digital Decade Policy Programme 2030, *Official Journal of the European Union*, 2022, <https://eur-lex.europa.eu/eli/dec/2022/2481/oj/eng>, accessed on 12 February 2026; European Commission, *The European Semester*,

National Level. National governments translate EU priorities into national strategies, operational programmes, and reform agendas. They manage EU funds, coordinate ministries and agencies, and ensure that investments support national labor-market, social-inclusion, and territorial-development objectives. National authorities are responsible for selecting projects, ensuring compliance with EU rules, and reporting progress through **Annual Performance Reports** and **National Reform Programmes (NRPs)**. These processes are guided by the **Country-Specific Recommendations** issued under the *European Semester*³⁸.

Regional and Local Level. Regional and local authorities are central to implementation, particularly in areas where service delivery, labour-market activation, and community-based initiatives take place. They design and manage local projects, engage with civil society and social partners, and adapt interventions to the specific needs of their territories³⁹. In border regions, cooperation is further supported through **Interreg**⁴⁰, which enables joint planning and

https://commission.europa.eu/topics/economy-and-euro/european-semester_en, accessed on 12 February 2026

³⁸ European Commission, *Partnership Agreements on EU funds 2021-2027*, https://commission.europa.eu/publications/partnership-agreements-eu-funds-2021-2027_en, accessed on 12 February 2026; European Commission, *2012-2017 Adopted National Partnership Agreements*, Cohesion Open Data Platform, <https://cohesiondata.ec.europa.eu/stories/s/2021-2027-Adopted-National-Partnership-Agreements/4jua-76d5/>, accessed on 12 February 2026; National reform programmes, https://ec.europa.eu/invest-in-research/national/national_reform_en.htm, accessed on 12 February 2026; *The implementation of country-specific recommendations under the European Semester cycles* (2025), European Parliament. Economic Governance and EMU Scrutiny Unit (EGOV), [https://www.europarl.europa.eu/RegData/etudes/BRIE/2024/760248/IPOL_BRI\(2024\)760248_EN.pdf](https://www.europarl.europa.eu/RegData/etudes/BRIE/2024/760248/IPOL_BRI(2024)760248_EN.pdf), accessed on 13 February 2026

³⁹ European Commission. DG for Employment, Social Affairs and Inclusion, *The European code of conduct on partnership in the framework of the European structural and investment funds* (2014), Publications Office, <https://data.europa.eu/doi/10.2767/49637>

⁴⁰ Regulation (EU) 2021/1059 of the European Parliament and of the Council of 24 June 2021 on specific provisions for the European territorial cooperation goal (Interreg) supported by the European Regional Development Fund and external financing instruments, <https://eur-lex.europa.eu/eli/reg/2021/1059/oj/eng>, accessed on 12 February 2026; Interreg

implementation of cross-border projects addressing mobility, service provision, and labour-market integration.

Social Partners and Civil Society. Trade unions, employer organisations, NGOs, social-economy actors, and community organisations contribute expertise, outreach, and implementation capacity. Their involvement ensures that policies remain grounded in real needs and that vulnerable groups are effectively reached. Their participation is embedded in EU regulations, which require partnership and stakeholder engagement throughout the policy cycle⁴¹.

5.2. Monitoring and evaluation

Monitoring and evaluation mechanisms ensure that EU inclusion and cohesion policies deliver measurable results and remain aligned with evolving socio-economic conditions. These mechanisms operate at multiple levels and combine quantitative indicators with qualitative assessments⁴².

The **European Semester** provides the overarching framework for monitoring economic, employment, and social policies across the EU. Through **Country Reports**⁴³, **Country-Specific Recommendations**⁴⁴ and **Social Scoreboard indicators**⁴⁵, it tracks progress on labour-market performance, social inclusion, skills development, and regional disparities. The Semester also assesses

⁴¹ *The European code of conduct* (2014); *The European Pillar of Action Rights Action Plan* (2021)

⁴² European Commission, *Performance, monitoring and evaluation of the European Regional Development Fund, the Cohesion Fund and the Just Transition Fund in 2021-2027* (2025), https://ec.europa.eu/regional_policy/en/information/publications/evaluations-guidance-documents/2021/performance-monitoring-and-evaluation-of-the-european-regional-development-fund-the-cohesion-fund-and-the-just-transition-fund-in-2021-2027, accessed on 13 February 2026

⁴³ European Commission. Directorate-General for Economic and Financial Affairs, *2025 European Semester: Country Reports*, https://economy-finance.ec.europa.eu/publications/2025-european-semester-country-reports_en, accessed on 13 February 2026

⁴⁴ *The implementation of country-specific recommendations under the European Semester cycles* (2025)

⁴⁵ *The European Pillar of Action Rights Action Plan* (2021); Social Scoreboard, <https://ec.europa.eu/eurostat/cache/dashboard/social-scoreboard/>, accessed on 13 February 2026

how national reforms and investments – many supported by ESF+, ERDF, InvestEU, and RRF – contribute to EU-wide objectives⁴⁶.

National Reform Programmes and Strategic Reporting. Member States report annually through **National Reform Programmes (NRPs)**, outlining progress on reforms, investments, and policy commitments. For cohesion policy, they also submit **strategic reports** detailing implementation progress, financial execution, and results achieved⁴⁷. These reports help identify bottlenecks, emerging needs, and areas where additional support or adjustments are required.

Programme-Level Monitoring. Each EU-funded programme includes a **performance framework** with indicators, milestones, and targets. Managing authorities track outputs and results, conduct evaluations, and ensure compliance with EU regulations. Evaluations assess effectiveness, efficiency, relevance, and impact, providing evidence for policy adjustments and future programming⁴⁸.

Cross-Border Monitoring. In border regions, **Interreg** programmes use joint monitoring committees and shared indicators to track progress on cross-border mobility, service accessibility, labour-market integration, and institutional cooperation⁴⁹. This ensures that interventions address shared challenges and generate added value beyond national boundaries.

Together, multi-level governance and robust monitoring systems ensure that EU inclusion and cohesion policies are both strategically coherent and responsive to local realities. This governance architecture is essential for achieving long-term objectives: reducing inequalities, strengthening territorial cohesion, and ensuring that all communities benefit from Europe's green, digital, and demographic transitions.

⁴⁶ *The European Semester, The European Pillar of Action Rights Action Plan* (2021); European Commission, *Recovery and Resilience Facility Annual Report 2025*, https://reforms-investments.ec.europa.eu/publications-0/recovery-and-resilience-facility-annual-report-2025_en, accessed on 13 February 2026

⁴⁷ European Commission, *Report on the outcome of 2021-2027 cohesion policy programming* (2023), https://ec.europa.eu/regional_policy/information-sources/publications/reports/2023/report-on-the-outcome-of-2021-2027-cohesion-policy-programming_en, accessed on 13 February 2026

⁴⁸ *Performance, monitoring and evaluation of the European Regional Development Fund, the Cohesion Fund and the Just Transition Fund in 2021-2027* (2025)

⁴⁹ Regulation (EU) 2021/1059 (Interreg)

6. Future Transformation Forecasts within the ongoing EU Policy Agenda

The evolution of the legal, institutional, and socio-economic landscape in the coming years will be strongly shaped by the European Union's strategic frameworks, economic development priorities, and inclusion-oriented policy instruments. Anticipated transformations at European, national, regional, and local levels converge toward a common direction: **more adaptive, skills-driven, and socially cohesive systems capable of managing demographic change, labour shortages and integration needs.**

6.1. European Level

- Expansion of **labour mobility** and **skills-based migration pathways**

- Stronger emphasis on **digital inclusion** and **green skills**
- Continued reform of **migration and asylum policies**

These trends reflect the EU's demographic challenges and economic modernization agenda.

6.2. National level

- Adjustments to **labour market legislation** to address workforce shortages

- Strengthening of **integration services** and **community-based support**

- Potential reforms in **social assistance** and **housing policies**
- National systems will increasingly align with EU targets and funding priorities.

6.3. Regional and local levels

- Greater **institutional coordination** between ATUs, NGOs, employers

- Expansion of **cross-border cooperation** in the Romanian-Hungarian area

- Rising demand for **local integration services** due to demographic and economic pressures

Local actors will become central to delivering flexible, adaptive solutions.

Across all levels, the anticipated developments point toward a shared imperative: **to design inclusion strategies that are flexible,**

future-oriented, and capable of responding to rapid economic, demographic, and technological change. This requires:

- integrated governance
- skills-driven labour market policies
- stronger social protection systems
- community-based and cross-border cooperation
- continuous adaptation to EU strategic frameworks

The convergence of EU-level ambitions with national and local realities will shape the next decade of institutional transformation.

II. Status and Emerging Trends in Integration, Societal Security, and Inclusion in Border Regions within the Field of Socio-Economic Inclusion

1. Existing conditions and institutional capacities for socio-economic inclusion

In EU cohesion policy, border regions are understood as territories located along internal or external EU borders, typically corresponding to adjacent NUTS 3 regions, whose development is influenced by cross-border interactions, and which are eligible for support under European Territorial Cooperation (Interreg) programmes⁵⁰. Border regions represent over 40% of the EU's territory, generate around 30% of its GDP, and are home to approximately 150 million people, about 30% of the Union's population⁵¹. Such territories are characterised by the simultaneous presence of development gaps, cross-border mobility, and cooperation dynamics, which require differentiated policy responses to foster inclusive and balanced territorial development. Within this context, socio-economic inclusion in border regions is shaped by demographic

⁵⁰ Regulation (EU) 2021/1060 (Common Provisions Regulation (CPR) 2021–2027), <https://eur-lex.europa.eu/eli/reg/2021/1060/oj/eng>, accessed on 16 February 2026; Regulation (EU) 2021/1059 (Interreg); Treaty on the Functioning of the European Union (TFEU), <https://eur-lex.europa.eu/EN/legal-content/summary/treaty-on-the-functioning-of-the-european-union.html>, accessed on 16 February 2026

⁵¹ European Commission, *Ninth report on economic, social and territorial cohesion* (2024), https://ec.europa.eu/regional_policy/sources/reports/cohesion9/9CR_Report_FINAL.pdf, accessed on 16 February 2026

trends, labour-market dynamics, institutional capacity, and the accessibility of social services.

In the Romanian–Hungarian border area, these dynamics are influenced by cross-border flows, economic interdependence, and the presence of diverse minority communities. Demographic change, marked by population ageing, out-migration, and the arrival of foreign workers, creates both pressures and opportunities for local labour markets, which increasingly rely on mobile and migrant labour to compensate for structural shortages. At the same time, the institutional capacity of local authorities and service providers determines the extent to which newcomers and vulnerable groups can access employment, education, housing, and social assistance⁵².

Cross-border mobility plays a central role in shaping socio-economic inclusion in the Romanian–Hungarian borderland. Daily and weekly commuting, circular migration, and transnational family arrangements create a fluid socio-economic space in which people and businesses operate across administrative boundaries⁵³. This mobility deepens economic interdependence between neighbouring regions, particularly in manufacturing, construction, logistics and services, sectors marked by high labour demand and persistent workforce shortages. Long-standing minorities (Hungarian, Roma) benefit from established intercultural arrangements, whereas newcomers (refugees and third-country nationals) depend more heavily on targeted integration measures and NGO support⁵⁴.

These combined factors make socio-economic inclusion in the border area a multi-layered process shaped by structural

⁵² *Ninth report on economic, social and territorial cohesion* (2024); European Commission, *Cross-border public services CPS inventory analysis and policy recommendations* (2022), https://ec.europa.eu/regional_policy/sources/studies/cross_border/KN-03-22-295-2A-N.pdf, accessed on 16 February 2026

⁵³ *Cross-border public services CPS inventory analysis and policy recommendations* (2022)

⁵⁴ European Union Agency for Fundamental Rights, *Fundamental Rights Report 2024*, <https://fra.europa.eu/en/publication/2024/fundamental-rights-report-2024>, accessed on 16 February 2026; UN High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR) (2026), *Romania - RRP 2025 End of Year Report*, <https://data.unhcr.org/en/documents/details/121629>, accessed on 16 February 2026

vulnerabilities, mobility patterns, and the adaptive capacity of local institutions.

Economic development plays a decisive role in shaping socio-economic inclusion across the Romanian–Hungarian border area. Growth dynamics, labour demand, and cross-border economic interdependence increasingly determine who participates in local economies, how vulnerable groups access opportunities, and which institutions can respond to demographic and social pressures. In this context, inclusion is not only a social policy objective, but also a functional requirement for sustaining regional competitiveness, especially in territories facing labour shortages, ageing populations, and high mobility.

At national scale, Romania's integration framework provides the **institutional foundation** that links economic participation with social inclusion. It offers:

- **Legal pathways for residence, employment, and social support**, enabling foreign workers and newcomers to fill labour gaps in expanding sectors⁵⁵.

- **Integration programmes for beneficiaries of international protection**, which facilitate their transition into the labour market through language training, counselling, and access to services.

- *Asylum, Migration and Integration Fund (AMIF)* – supports wide-ranging social integration campaigns of beneficiaries of international protection and third-country nationals, projects funded through the General Inspectorate for Immigration under the Ministry of Internal Affairs⁵⁶.

⁵⁵ European Commission: Migration and Home Affairs, *Employed Worker in Romania*, https://home-affairs.ec.europa.eu/policies/migration-and-asylum/eu-immigration-portal/employed-worker-romania_en, accessed on 16 February 2026; General Inspectorate for Immigration, *Employment and Posting*, <https://igi.mai.gov.ro/en/employment-and-posting/>, accessed on 16 February 2026

⁵⁶ European Commission, *Asylum, Migration and Integration Fund (2021-2027)*, https://home-affairs.ec.europa.eu/funding/asylum-migration-and-integration-funds/asylum-migration-and-integration-fund-2021-2027_en, accessed on 16 February 2026

◦ *InterACT Programme* – a comprehensive integration support scheme implemented by the International Organization for Migration (IOM) Romania⁵⁷

• **Anti-discrimination and social inclusion policies**, supporting equal participation of minorities and migrants in education, employment, and public life⁵⁸.

These national instruments create the enabling environment through which economic development can translate into inclusive growth, but their impact depends on regional labour market structures and local implementation capacity.

At the regional level, in the North-West Region, economic development is a primary driver of inclusion, as expanding industries and cross-border economic ties generate sustained demand for labour and skills⁵⁹.

• **Labour shortages in construction, manufacturing, logistics, and services** stimulate the recruitment of migrant workers and cross-border commuters, making mobility a structural component of regional growth⁶⁰.

⁵⁷ International Organization for Migration (IOM), *INTERACT*, <https://romania.iom.int/interact>, accessed on 16 February 2026

⁵⁸ National Council for Combating Discrimination (CNCD), <https://www.cncd.ro/>, accessed on 16 February 2026; Government Ordinance 137/2000 on preventing and sanctioning all forms of discrimination, <https://legislatie.just.ro/Public/DetaliiDocument/79377>, accessed on 16 February 2026; Strategy of the Romanian Government for the Inclusion of Romanian Citizens Belonging to the Roma Minority (2022–2027), https://commission.europa.eu/system/files/2022-10/1_1romania_national_roma_strategic_framework_2022_2027.pdf, accessed on 16 February 2026

⁵⁹ North-West Regional Development Agency. *Regional Development Plan 2021–2027*, <https://www.nord-vest.ro/planul-de-dezvoltare-regionala-2021-2027/>, accessed on 22 February 2026; OECD (2025), *OECD Reviews of Labour Market and Social Policies: Romania 2025*, <https://doi.org/10.1787/f0532908-en>

⁶⁰ European Commission: Joint Research Centre, *Labour migration: what's in it for countries of destination and origin?*, https://joint-research-centre.ec.europa.eu/jrc-news-and-updates/labour-migration-whats-it-countries-destination-and-origin-2024-06-12_en, accessed on 22 February 2026; Romania struggles to fill 100,000 quota of non-EU workers, *Romania-Insider.com*, 25 October 2024, <https://www.romania-insider.com/romania-struggles-fill-quota-foreign-workers-2024>, accessed on 22 February 2026; Romania Requires up to 300,000 Foreign Workers to Alleviate Workforce Shortages in 2025, *SchengenNews*, 3 October 2024,

- **Regional development strategies** emphasise skills upgrading, workforce adaptability, and cross-border cooperation, recognising that inclusive labour markets are essential for maintaining competitiveness⁶¹.

- **Minority communities** (Roma and Hungarian minority) remain integral to regional development agendas, with targeted measures to improve access to education, employment, and healthcare, thereby reducing barriers to participation in the regional economy⁶².

Economic expansion therefore functions both as a **pull factor for mobile labour** and as a **driver of social inclusion** when institutional support structures match labour market needs.

At the local scale, Bihor County illustrates how **territorial economic dynamics shape inclusion outcomes**.

- **Strong labour market absorption**, driven by Oradea's economic growth and investment climate, creates opportunities for local minorities, cross-border workers, and newly arrived migrants. Economic expansion increases the demand for skills and accelerates the integration of diverse labour groups⁶³.

<https://schengenvisainfo.com/news/romania-needs-up-to-300000-foreign-workers-to-address-workforce-shortages-in-2025/>, accessed on 22 February 2026

⁶¹ North-West Regional Development Agency. *Regional Development Plan 2021–2027; Regional Strategy for Sustainable Urban Mobility and Smart Cities of the North West Region 2021–2027*, <https://www.nord-vest.ro/strategia-regionala-de-mobilitate-urbana-durabila-si-orase-inteligente-a-regiunii-de-dezvoltare-nord-vest-2021-2027-3/>, accessed on 22 February 2026

⁶² North-West Regional Development Agency. *Regional Development Plan 2021–2027*; Simona Anton et al. (2014), *Elaboration of integration strategies for urban marginalized communities: the atlas of urban marginalized communities in Romania*, Washington: World Bank Group, <http://documents.worldbank.org/curated/en/857001468293738087>, accessed on 22 February 2026; Emil Teșliuc et al. (2016), *Atlas of marginalized rural areas and local human development in Romania*, Washington: World Bank Group, <http://documents.worldbank.org/curated/en/237481467118655863>, accessed on 22 February 2026

⁶³ National Institute of Statistics - Bihor County Statistics Directorate, *The Social and Economic Situation of Bihor County in the Year 2024*, https://bihor.insse.ro/wp-content/uploads/2025/04/Starea_socio-economica_BH_2024.pdf, accessed on 22 February 2026; National Institute of Statistics - Bihor County Statistics Directorate, *Monthly Statistical Bulletin of Bihor County (2026)*, <https://bihor.insse.ro/comunicate-de-presă/etiam-lacinia-rutrum-dolor-eu-rutrum-lacus-varius-sed/>, accessed on 22 February 2026;

- **Uneven distribution of social services across administrative-territorial units (ATU)** influences the extent to which vulnerable populations can benefit from economic opportunities⁶⁴. Urban centres with stronger administrative capacity provide more comprehensive housing, counselling, and social assistance, enabling better labour market participation⁶⁵.

- **Education and training structures**, from vocational schools to adult learning centres, support skills development aligned with local economic needs, though access remains limited for some groups, particularly in rural areas⁶⁶.

- **Community-level actors**, including NGOs, religious organisations, and intercultural mediators, complement public institutions by facilitating access to services, supporting labour market integration, and strengthening social cohesion⁶⁷.

Within the county, economic development acts as a **catalyst for inclusion**, but disparities in local capacity and service provision shape who benefits and at what pace.

More broadly, at national, regional, and local levels, economic development constitutes the **primary mechanism** shaping socio-economic inclusion in the Romanian–Hungarian border area. Labour demand, investment patterns, and cross-border economic flows create opportunities for participation, while institutional

Oradea Local Development Agency (ADLO), *Projects*, https://adlo.ro/?cms_block=proiecte-adlo, accessed on 22 February 2026; Oradea Local Development Agency (ADLO), *Investors in Oradea*, <https://adlo.ro/investitori-in-oradea/>, accessed on 22 February 2026

⁶⁴ Bihor County Council, *Bihor County Social Services Development Strategy 2023–2031*,

https://www.dgaspcebihor.ro/dgaspcebihor.ro/informatii_publice/Strategie_2023-2031.pdf, accessed on 22 February 2026

⁶⁵ Luminița Șoproni (2025), „Local Leadership and Collective Action for Inclusive Development: Enhancing Governance and Branding in Oradea”, *INCLUSIVITY*, No. 1/2025, 95–120, <https://doi.org/10.58603/PEFS2825>; Luminița Șoproni (2023), „The Cooperation of social actors in the cross-border area – its role in promoting European values”, *Civil Szemle*, XX (4), 55–78, [77-Civil-Szemle-20234.pdf \(civilszemle.hu\)](https://civil-szemle-20234.pdf(civilszemle.hu)), accessed on 22 February 2026

⁶⁶ Oradea Local Development Agency (ADLO), *Eurobusiness Vocational School*, <https://adlo.ro/en/appe-oradea/>, accessed on 22 February 2026; Oradea Local Development Agency (ADLO), *Educational Development Centre (The Spot)*, <https://adlo.ro/en/the-spot-oradea/>, accessed on 22 February 2026

⁶⁷ Oradea City Hall, *Development strategies*, <https://oradea.ro/en/for-companies/development-strategies/>, accessed on 22 February 2026

capacity determines whether these opportunities translate into **inclusive and sustainable development**. The interplay between economic growth and social support systems ultimately defines the resilience and cohesion of border communities.

2. Activities undertaken in Bihor County

- Bihor County has advanced a broad portfolio of initiatives that reinforce **socio-economic inclusion**, drawing on national institutions, regional actors, and cross-border cooperation frameworks. Taken together, these efforts signal a maturing, though still uneven, local institutional capacity, with urban ATUs generally better equipped than their rural counterparts to design, coordinate, and deliver inclusive services.

- **Local integration programmes** for refugees and beneficiaries of international protection, coordinated with General Inspectorate for Immigration (IGI) and NGOs⁶⁸. Activities include social and legal counselling, Romanian language courses, cultural orientation, support for vulnerable cases, and community-based integration actions.

- **Employment support measures** through Bihor County Agency for Employment (AJOFM Bihor), including counselling, job-matching services, and vocational training, with dedicated programmes for vulnerable groups such as young people, the long-term unemployed, Roma communities, and persons with disabilities. Recent reporting highlights AJOFM Bihor's expansion of digital services, improved labour-market profiling, and targeted assistance for low-skilled jobseekers in rural areas, developments that accompany the county's very low unemployment rate (2.14% in May 2025)⁶⁹. In addition, AJOFM Bihor organises job fairs and facilitates labour mobility, including through its participation in ROHU cross-border employment initiatives

⁶⁸ Bihor County Immigration Service, <https://igi.mai.gov.ro/bihor/>, accessed on 23 February 2026; Filantropia Oradea Association, <https://filantropiaoradea.ro/>, accessed on 23 February 2026

⁶⁹ Reducing unemployment and promoting innovative initiatives for all social categories in Bihor County, *Bihor.ro*, 26 June 2025, <https://www.bihor.ro/stirile-judetului-bihor/reducerea-somajului-si-proiecte-inovatoare-pentru-toate-categoriile-sociale-din-bihor-4967982/>, accessed on 23 February 2026

• **Community-based initiatives promoting intercultural dialogue, minority inclusion, and social cohesion.** Local NGOs and community actors across Oradea and Bihor implement intercultural, educational, and social cohesion activities, particularly through refugee support networks (International Organization for Migration – IOM), Caritas, Filantropia Oradea, Dorcas Aid)⁷⁰. These initiatives provide psychosocial support, community events, educational activities, and targeted inclusion measures for minority groups. Oradea's governance model further reinforces these efforts by integrating participatory and inclusive approaches into urban development and community identity-building⁷¹.

• **Cross-border cooperation projects (RO-HU)** focusing on labour mobility, social services, and community development. The initiatives launched during 2007-2013, 2014-2020, and 2021-2027 programming periods illustrate a progressive landscape for the county of Bihor, which actively shapes the regional economic environment through cooperative strategies⁷². These cross-border partnerships leverage shared resources, skills, and infrastructures, creating a favourable environment for sustainable economic growth.

• **Municipal strategies** addressing social inclusion, housing, and vulnerable groups. The Municipality of Oradea integrates social inclusion priorities into its strategic planning documents, including the *Integrated Urban Development Strategy* and sectoral strategies that emphasize equitable access to services, mobility, and urban development⁷³. Housing inclusion is supported through regulated

⁷⁰ Dopomoha.ro, <https://dopomoha.ro/en/dopomoha-oradea>, accessed on 23 February 2026; Dorcas Romania, <https://dorcas.org/countries/romania/>, accessed on 23 February 2026, Caritas Oradea, <https://www.caritaseparhial.ro/>, accessed on 23 February 2026

⁷¹ L. Şoproni (2025), *op.cit.*

⁷² Interreg Romania-Hungary Programme, <https://interreg-rohu.eu/en/home-en/>, accessed on 23 February 2026; Interreg VI-A Programme Romania-Hungary 2021-2027, <https://www.cjbihor.ro/programul-interreg-vi-a-romania-ungaria-2021-2027-ro-hu-2021-2027/>, accessed on 23 February 2026

⁷³ *Integrated Urban Development Strategy for the City of Oradea and Oradea Metropolitan Area 2021-2027*, <https://oradea.ro/wp-content/uploads/2023/12/Strategia-Integrata-de-Dezvoltare-Urbana-Oradea.pdf>, accessed on 23 February 2026; Oradea City Hall, *Development strategies*

procedures for allocating social housing, based on transparent priority lists approved annually by the Local Council⁷⁴.

Taken together, these initiatives indicate a strengthening of institutional capacity across Bihor County; however, persistent urban-rural disparities in administrative resources and service provision continue to limit the consistency of outcomes among ATUs.

3. Anticipated developments influencing Socio-Economic Inclusion

A series of emerging trends is expected to shape socio-economic inclusion in the period ahead.

Local Level

- Rising demand for migrant labour driven by sustained economic expansion in Oradea and the surrounding industrial zones.
- Growing pressure on housing, education, and social services as internal and cross-border mobility intensifies.
- Expansion of NGO-led and municipal inclusion programmes, particularly in urban centres with diversified labour markets.

Regional Level

- Strengthening of cross-border labour mobility mechanisms with Hungary, improving recruitment channels and administrative coordination.
- Regional development strategies prioritising skills upgrading, digital inclusion, and targeted support for vulnerable groups.
- Potential expansion of cross-border service networks (including healthcare, social services, and vocational training) to address shared demographic and labour-market needs.

National Level

- Adjustments to migration and labour-market policies to mitigate workforce shortages and support sectoral growth.
- Expansion of integration programmes and community-based support structures, with increased attention to early inclusion pathways.

⁷⁴ Oradea Social Assistance Directorate, 2025 Activity Report, <https://d32e5lpdsek2nl.cloudfront.net/DAS%20Oradea/19622/Raport-de-Activitate-2025--24.02.2026.pdf>, accessed on 23 February 2026

- Stronger alignment with EU priorities on social inclusion, anti-discrimination, and labour-market activation, reinforcing coherence across governance levels.

These dynamics suggest that socio-economic inclusion is becoming a strategic priority across governance levels, underscoring the need for more coherent institutional cooperation and forward-looking planning frameworks.

4. Identification of funding sources

A diverse set of national, European, and international funding mechanisms supports socio-economic inclusion efforts.

National sources

- **Government programmes** targeting employment, social inclusion, and support for vulnerable groups.

- **Funding channels managed by Bihor County Agency for Employment (AJOFM Bihor), General Directorate for Social Assistance and Child Protection (DGASPC Bihor) and local authorities**, enabling labour-market activation, social assistance, and community services.

- **National initiatives for minority inclusion and community development**, including programmes focused on education, participation, and local capacity building.

European and International sources

- **ESF+ (European Social Fund)** – supporting employment, skills development, and social inclusion initiatives.

- **ERDF (European Regional Development Fund)** – financing regional development, infrastructure, and service expansion.

- **AMIF (Asylum, Migration and Integration Fund)** – facilitating the integration of migrants, beneficiaries of international protection, and refugees.

- **Interreg ROHU** – promoting cross-border cooperation and joint service development.

- **Horizon Europe** – funding research and innovation related to social inclusion and community resilience.

- **UNHCR (United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees), IOM (International Organization for Migration), and UNICEF** – providing project-based support for protection, integration, and community-level interventions.

Together, these funding sources create significant opportunities to strengthen local institutional capacities, develop new and adaptive services, and advance cross-border initiatives that enhance socio-economic inclusion across the region.

III. Identifying and Validating Good Practices for Socio-Economic Inclusion in Border Regions

1. Profile of Bihor County

Bihor County holds a **strategic position** along the Romanian–Hungarian border, acting as a dynamic interface between Central and Eastern Europe. Its administrative centre, Oradea, has developed into a regional growth pole, driven by sustained investments in infrastructure, digitalisation, and cross-border cooperation. The county combines urban centres (Oradea, Salonta, Marghita) with extensive rural areas, reflecting significant disparities in development. Its location on major transport routes, including the TEN-T Rhine–Danube corridor, enhances mobility and facilitates economic exchange⁷⁵. Through its socio-economic profile, cultural diversity, and long-standing cross-border interactions, Bihor represents a valuable case for analysing how integration, societal security, and inclusion policies function in border regions.

Bihor's **demographic profile** reflects both stability and transformation. With a population of approximately 600.000 and a relatively even urban–rural distribution, the county maintains a diverse social fabric shaped by its significant Hungarian and Roma communities⁷⁶. This multicultural composition influences local identity, everyday interactions, and the character of cross-border cooperation with Hungary. Recent demographic trends, however, point to *structural pressures*: sustained youth out-migration toward Western Europe, accelerated ageing in rural localities, declining birth rates, and a growing labour demand concentrated in urban centres,

⁷⁵ European Commission, *Rhine-Danube corridor*, https://transport.ec.europa.eu/transport-themes/infrastructure-and-investment/trans-european-transport-network-ten-t/rhine-danube-corridor_en, accessed on 2 March 2026

⁷⁶ *Bihor County Statistical Yearbook 2025*

such as Oradea⁷⁷. Together, these dynamics generate a complex environment in which socio-economic inclusion must respond simultaneously to population decline, labour shortages, and the need to integrate both long-standing minorities and new arrivals.

Bihor County's **economic profile** reflects a diversified and increasingly competitive structure, supported by several high-performing sectors⁷⁸: manufacturing (automotive, electronics), services (IT, finance, tourism), logistics and transport, green and creative industries.

Table 3.1. Bihor County – Economic Indicators (2025)⁷⁹

Indicator	Value
GDP per capita	15.169 (Euro)
Real GDP growth	+3.3%
Employment rate (2024)	65.4%
Gross average earnings	1350 (Euro per employee)
Net average earnings	846 (Euro per employee)
Main sectors	Manufacturing, services, IT
Industrial production growth	+3.0%
Services sector share	45% of active enterprises

The 2025 economic projections underscore Bihor County's emergence as a particularly dynamic and competitive regional economy within Romania. Industrial production growth and the structural dominance of services point to a balanced economic profile, where traditional manufacturing strengths coexist with expanding IT, finance, and tourism activities. Overall, these forecasts reveal a

⁷⁷ *Bihor County Statistical Yearbook 2025*; Bihor County Agency for Employment (AJOFM Bihor), *Activity Report 2025*, <https://www.anofm.ro/bihor/raport-activitate-2025/>, accessed on 2 March 2026

⁷⁸ *Bihor County Statistical Yearbook 2025*; INNO, *Invest in Bihor*, <https://inno.ro/en/investete-in-bihor>, accessed on 2 March 2026

⁷⁹ National Commission for Strategy and Prognosis (CNSP), *Territorial Projection of Key Economic and Social Indicators 2025–2028*, <https://cnp.ro/wp-content/uploads/2025/08/Prognost-2025-2028-in-profil-teritorial-aferenta-Prognostei-macroeconomic.pdf>, accessed on 22 February 2026; *Bihor County Statistical Yearbook 2025*

resilient, diversified county economy with strong cross-border linkages and growing regional competitiveness.

These dynamics are mirrored in the **labour market**, where several trends are becoming increasingly pronounced:

- skills shortages in manufacturing, IT, and construction – reflecting both rapid economic expansion and demographic pressure;
- high demand for technical and digital skills – driven by industrial upgrading and the growth of knowledge-intensive services
- cross-border labour mobility compensating for local shortages – contributing to a more flexible regional labour pool
- vocational education reforms aligned with EU skills agendas.

Within this context, **several groups face increased vulnerability**. Rural poverty remains persistent, particularly in peripheral communes where access to healthcare, education, and social services is limited. Roma communities continue to encounter barriers in the labour market, including discrimination, low educational attainment, and limited access to stable employment. At the same time, skills mismatches affect both young people and low-qualified workers, constraining their ability to benefit from the county's economic expansion⁸⁰. These challenges align with broader EU evidence on regional disparities and social inclusion gaps⁸¹, underscoring the need for targeted, place-sensitive policies that strengthen institutional capacity and promote equitable access to opportunities across Bihor's diverse territory.

Cross-border cooperation provides an important mechanism for addressing these vulnerabilities by expanding access to services, improving institutional coordination, and supporting integrated territorial development. This collaborative system is anchored in a multilayered architecture that enables shared solutions to persistent socio-economic challenges:

- the Bihor-Hajdú-Bihar Euroregion,
- successive Interreg Romania-Hungary programmes,
- bilateral partnerships between local authorities,

⁸⁰ *Integrated Sustainable Development Strategy of Bihor County 2021–2027*, https://www.cjbihor.ro/wp-content/uploads/2021/11/Strategie_Bihor_2021-2027_final_pentru_consultare_publica.pdf, accessed on 23 February 2026

⁸¹ Eurostat (2025), *Regions in Europe*, <https://ec.europa.eu/eurostat/web/interactive-publications/regions-2025>, accessed on 2 March 2026

– joint working groups on mobility, environmental management, and emergency services.

These mechanisms operate within the broader framework of EU territorial cooperation principles⁸², which provide both the legal basis and the strategic orientation for coordinated action across the border.

This institutional foundation supports a region characterised by strong **economic and social interdependence**. Daily commuting flows illustrate the functional integration of labour markets, while residents on both sides of the border increasingly rely on healthcare, education, and specialised services across jurisdictions. Business networks and supply chains have expanded in parallel, reinforcing complementarities between local economies. Oradea and Debrecen, in particular, form an emerging cross-border urban system whose connectivity is deepened by shared investments, mobility corridors, and growing economic specialisation⁸³.

EU membership has been a decisive catalyst for these dynamics. The removal of administrative barriers, improved mobility regimes, and access to Cohesion Policy instruments have enabled sustained joint investments in infrastructure, public services, labour market integration, and environmental protection. **Interreg** programmes have played a central role in financing cross-border projects that enhance accessibility, strengthen institutional capacity, and promote social inclusion⁸⁴. Together, these developments illustrate how EU integration has transformed the Romanian–Hungarian border from a peripheral divide into a space of cooperation, connectivity, and shared development.

2. Activities undertaken at the level of Bihor County

Bihor County has implemented a range of initiatives that illustrate emerging good practices in **socio-economic inclusion**, combining institutional, community-based, and cross-border actions. These include locally coordinated **integration programmes for refugees and beneficiaries of international protection, employment activation and vocational training measures** delivered through AJOFM Bihor, **community-level initiatives**

⁸² Regulation (EU) 2021/1059 (Interreg)

⁸³ L. Şoproni (2023), *op.cit.*

⁸⁴ L. Şoproni (2023), *op.cit.*; EU project database KEEP (2026): *Projects and documents*. www.keep.eu, accessed on 2 March 2026

promoting intercultural dialogue and minority inclusion, and **Interreg RO-HU cross-border projects** that strengthen labour mobility, social services, and local development capacities. Together, these activities demonstrate a growing institutional capacity and a collaborative approach involving public authorities, NGOs, private actors, and EU cooperation frameworks.

2.1. Identification and validation of cross-border good practices

Cross-border cooperation between Romania and Hungary has generated a set of practices that function as effective models for socio-economic inclusion, offering value for both policy design and practical implementation. These good practices were identified based on their demonstrated relevance to socio-economic inclusion, measurable impact on beneficiaries, long-term sustainability, applicability in other border contexts, and their capacity to strengthen cross-border cooperation.

2.1.1. Cross-border labour mobility and skills development projects

Labour market integration in the Bihor-Hajdú-Bihar area has been significantly strengthened through a series of cross-border projects that promote mobility, skills development, and coordinated workforce planning. These initiatives support joint training programmes, improve skills recognition mechanisms, and foster networks between Romanian and Hungarian employers. Together, they illustrate how bilateral cooperation between Romania and Hungary can address shared labour-market challenges and create more inclusive opportunities for workers on both sides of the border.

CBC-EMPLOYMENT. Improve employment in Bihor County, Oradea, and Hajduboszormeny through the development of the local potential infrastructures (Programme Interreg V-A Romania-Hungary 2014-2020)⁸⁵

Overview

The project strengthens labour-market integration in the Bihor-Hajdú-Bihar area by developing complementary employment and entrepreneurial infrastructures and expanding access to training and

⁸⁵ EU project database Keep, <https://keep.eu/projects/24572/Improve-employment-in-Bihor-EN/>, accessed on 2 March 2026

support services. The initiative enhances local capacity to participate in a more dynamic, cross-border labour market.

Objectives

- Improve employment and entrepreneurship infrastructures across the border region.
- Expand access to skills development and labour-market services.
- Support local producers and small businesses through integrated service provision.
- Strengthen institutional cooperation between Romanian and Hungarian partners.

Key Actions

- Establishment of entrepreneurship and employment centres.
- Deployment of mobile support units for rural and underserved communities.
- Development of inclusive training programmes aligned with labour-market needs.
- Creation of a coordinated cross-border network linking municipalities, development agencies, and employment institutions.

Results and Achievements

- Increased employability among jobseekers and low-qualified workers through targeted training and counselling.
- Strengthened local value chains and entrepreneurial activity supported by new service infrastructures.
- Expanded access to employment services in rural and underserved areas via mobile support units.
- A more coordinated and functional cross-border labour-market environment, supported by sustained institutional cooperation.

Cross-Border Added Value

The project creates a coherent cross-border ecosystem by interlinking infrastructures, training systems, and producer networks. It enhances institutional coordination and supports long-term employment, entrepreneurship, and socio-economic inclusion across the Bihor-Hajdú-Bihar region.

ForTour BHHB - Creating and developing a cross border polycentric network for training and support to increase the quality of tourist and handcraft cross-border services in the counties of Bihor (RO) and Hajdú-Bihar (HU) (Programme Interreg V-A Romania-Hungary 2014-2020)⁸⁶.

Overview

The initiative enhances the quality and competitiveness of tourism and handcraft services in the Bihor–Hajdú-Bihar region by creating a cross-border polycentric network for training, professional development, and sectoral support. The project strengthens local capacities by offering coordinated training opportunities for tourism operators, artisans, and small producers, addressing persistent skills gaps, limited access to affordable training, and the growing demand for modern, competitive tourism services in the cross-border area.

Objectives

- Improve professional skills and service standards in tourism and hospitality.
- Strengthen cross-border cooperation among labour-market institutions and sectoral actors.
- Develop joint training programmes and shared learning resources across the border.
- Expand access to training and specialisation for jobseekers, employees, managers, and young people.

Key Actions

- Creation of a polycentric network of six training and support centres (urban and rural).
- Development of cross-border training curricula tailored to tourism and handcraft needs.
- Promotion of employment and local products through cross-border events.
- Establishment of a shared online platform providing information on labour-market needs and employment opportunities in the tourism and hospitality sectors.

Results and Achievements

⁸⁶ EU project database Keep, <https://keep.eu/projects/22673/CREATING-AND-DEVELOPING-A-C-EN/>, accessed on 2 March 2026

- Improved professional competencies among tourism operators, artisans, and small producers.
- Increased attractiveness of cross-border tourist destinations through higher service quality and coordinated workforce development.
- Strengthened visibility and valorisation of local cultural and craft traditions.
- A more integrated and resilient cross-border tourism and handcraft ecosystem supported by sustained institutional cooperation.

Cross-Border Added Value

The project builds a coordinated cross-border network that links training institutions, local authorities, and sectoral organisations. This cooperation fosters shared standards, promotes cultural heritage, and supports the emergence of a more integrated and competitive tourism and handcraft ecosystem across the Bihor-Hajdú-Bihar region. By integrating human-resource development with cultural and economic cooperation, the project contributes to a more competitive, sustainable, and culturally distinctive tourism economy across Bihor and Hajdú-Bihar.

HRArea. Joint Development of Human Resources in Cross-Border Area (Programme Interreg V-A Romania-Hungary 2014–2020)⁸⁷

Overview

The project addresses persistent labour shortages, skills gaps, and low employability in the Bihor-Hajdú-Bihar region by expanding access to training and strengthening local human capital. Through coordinated investments in training infrastructure and targeted capacity-building, the initiative improves the match between labour supply and demand and supports employment-friendly growth across the cross-border area.

Objectives

- Increase employment by improving access to training and professional qualifications.

⁸⁷ EU project database Keep, <https://keep.eu/projects/24571/Joint-Development-of-Human--EN/>, accessed on 2 March 2026

- Strengthen human-resource development in rural and urban communities.
- Address labour shortages in key sectors through targeted skills development.
- Enhance cross-border cooperation between labour-market institutions to support labour mobility and foster sustainable socio-economic development

Key Actions

- Development of training infrastructure in both Romania and Hungary to support skills acquisition and professional development.
- Delivery of coordinated training programmes and workshops tailored to regional labour-market needs.
- Strengthening of cross-border cooperation among training providers, local authorities, and employment institutions.
- Expansion of accessible learning opportunities to improve employability and support labour mobility in the region.

Results and Achievements

- People trained across the cross-border area, improving employability and qualifications.
- Improved employment prospects for young people, jobseekers, low-skilled workers, and employees seeking re-qualification.
- Strengthened cooperation between Romanian and Hungarian labour-market institutions.
- Enhanced capacity of local communities to meet labour-market demands in agriculture, services, hospitality, and emerging economic sectors.

Cross-Border Added Value

The project creates a shared framework for human-resource development by linking training institutions, local authorities, and employment agencies on both sides of the border. This cooperation supports harmonised training standards, improves access to qualifications, and enhances the region's capacity to respond to labour-market needs. The establishment of a permanent Rural Development Center near Oradea provides long-term value for both rural and urban communities and reinforces labour mobility across the Romanian-Hungarian border.

ALTERAGRI. Support to the Local Economy by Encouraging Alternative Use of Agricultural Products (Interreg V-A Romania-Hungary 2014-2020)⁸⁸

Overview

The project advances rural employment and cross-border labour mobility by revitalising traditional agricultural professions and integrating modern technologies into local production systems. By combining heritage-based skills with digital innovation, the initiative supports a more resilient, diversified, and competitive rural economy across the Bihor -Hajdú-Bihar region.

Objectives

- Revitalise traditional agricultural skills and professions with economic potential.
- Integrate digital tools and modern technologies into local production and farm management.
- Expand access to training and professional development for rural populations.
- Strengthen cross-border cooperation to support labour mobility and sustainable rural development.

Key Actions

- Development of training infrastructure and learning opportunities in both counties.
- Delivery of training programmes focused on traditional agricultural competences and modern production techniques.
- Promotion of digital literacy through dedicated software, IT equipment, and e-learning platforms among farmers and rural workers.
- Organisation of thematic conferences, study tours, and knowledge-exchange events on sustainable agriculture and eco-materials.
- Support for local value chains through awareness-raising, capacity-building, and cross-border collaboration.

Results and Achievements

- Increased awareness and revitalisation of traditional agricultural vocations.

⁸⁸ EU project database Keep, <https://keep.eu/projects/26325/Support-to-the-local-econom-EN/>, accessed on 2 March 2026

- Expanded access to training for rural residents, improving employability and professional skills.
- Enhanced productivity among farmers through IT-literacy training and access to e-learning tools supporting modern farm management.
- Strengthened local value chains through diversified production and improved resource use.
- Upgraded training infrastructure, including rehabilitated buildings, new equipment, and modern learning environments in both counties
- Contribution to higher employment rates and more sustainable rural development across the Romanian–Hungarian border region.

Cross-Border Added Value

The initiative reinforces cooperation between Romanian and Hungarian rural development actors by aligning training approaches, sharing expertise, and promoting joint solutions for agricultural diversification. This cross-border framework enhances the region's capacity to modernise rural production, preserve traditional skills, and respond to labour-market needs in a coordinated manner.

Table 3.2. Cross-border added value of Interreg projects (cross-border labour mobility)

Project	Cross-Border Added Value
CBC EMPLOYMENT	Establishes an integrated cross-border network that connects employment infrastructures, training systems, and producer support services.
ForTour BHHB	Builds a coordinated cross-border ecosystem for training and service quality in tourism and handcraft sectors.
HRArea	Creates a shared framework for human-resource development that improves employability and labour mobility across the border.
ALTERAGRI	Aligns Romanian–Hungarian efforts to revitalise traditional agricultural skills and modernise rural production systems.

2.1.2. Local economic development, social inclusion and entrepreneurship support initiatives

Local economic development in the Bihor-Hajdú Bihar region has been advanced through cross-border initiatives that stimulate small business creation, strengthen entrepreneurial capacities, and expand opportunities for underrepresented groups. These projects support business incubation, promote financial literacy, and provide tailored assistance for minorities, newcomers, and rural entrepreneurs. Together, they demonstrate how coordinated Romanian-Hungarian cooperation can unlock local economic potential, diversify income sources, and foster more inclusive and resilient cross-border communities.

CROSSLOCALDEV. Promoting an integrated approach regarding the improving of the employment rate and business environment at the level of Marghita and Berettyóújfalu microregions (Interreg V-A Romania-Hungary 2014-2020)⁸⁹

Overview

The project addresses persistent labour-market challenges and underused economic potential in the Marghita-Berettyóújfalu cross-border area by promoting an integrated approach to employment, entrepreneurship, and local economic development. The initiative strengthens institutional cooperation and develops complementary infrastructures that support long-term socio-economic inclusion, particularly in the agriculture and agri-food sectors, which remain central to local competitiveness.

Objectives

- Improve employment prospects through coordinated training and support services.
- Enhance the local business environment by developing tools for entrepreneurship and small-enterprise growth.
- Capitalise on agricultural and agri-food potential as key drivers of local economic development.
- Foster sustained cooperation between Romanian and Hungarian institutions.

⁸⁹ EU project database Keep, <https://keep.eu/projects/24564/PROMOTING-AN-INTEGRATED-APP-EN/>, accessed on 4 March 2026

Key Actions

- Development of training, employment, and business-support infrastructures in both microregions.
- Delivery of programmes that link skills development with local economic needs, especially in agriculture and agri-food production.
- Strengthening of producer networks and support services for small businesses and start-ups.
- Design of a coordinated strategy for employment growth and economic development in the microregion

Results and Achievements

- Improved employability among jobseekers and low-skilled workers through targeted training and counselling services.
- Strengthened entrepreneurial activity supported by new infrastructures and tailored business-development tools.
- Enhanced capacity of local producers and agri-food enterprises through coordinated support and network development.
- Expanded access to employment and business services in both microregions, including rural and underserved communities.
- A more integrated and functional cross-border economic environment, supported by long-term institutional cooperation and shared development strategies.

Cross-Border Added Value

The project creates a coherent cross-border ecosystem by interconnecting training systems, producer networks, and local development institutions. This integrated framework enhances employability, supports small-business development, and reinforces the resilience of the regional labour market. Through sustained cooperation between Romanian and Hungarian partners, the initiative contributes to a more dynamic, integrated, and opportunity-rich economic environment across the Marghita–Berettyóújfalu area.

**Create2Gather. Create To Gather (Programme 2014 - 2020
INTERREG V-A Romania – Hungary)⁹⁰**

Overview

The project advances the creative economy and supports employment-friendly growth in the Bihor–Hajdú-Bihar region. It addresses structural challenges in the creative industries, including limited entrepreneurial skills, fragmented marketing capacities, and insufficient access to professional infrastructure. Through a coordinated cross-border approach, the initiative strengthens the full cycle of creative entrepreneurship, from skills development and branding to infrastructure and networking.

Objectives

- Enhance entrepreneurial and managerial skills among creative professionals.
- Improve access to professional infrastructure and shared creative spaces.
- Foster cross-border cooperation and networking within the creative industries.
- Support employment-friendly growth and innovation in the cultural and creative sectors.

Key Actions

- Development of training programmes focused on creative entrepreneurship, branding, and digital marketing.
- Establishment or upgrading of creative hubs and shared workspaces to support production and collaboration.
- Organisation of cross-border networking events, workshops, and thematic exchanges.
- Support for joint branding initiatives and market-access strategies for creative products and services.
- Promotion of cross-border cooperation between institutions, creative professionals, and local authorities.

Results and Achievements

- Improved entrepreneurial, managerial, and marketing skills among creative professionals in both counties.

⁹⁰ EU project database Keep, <https://keep.eu/projects/24569/Create-To-Gather-EN/>, accessed on 4 March 2026

- Stronger cross-border networks connecting artists, designers, cultural operators, and support institutions.
- A more dynamic and resilient cross-border creative sector capable of generating sustainable jobs and fostering innovation.

Cross-Border Added Value

The project builds a coordinated cross-border ecosystem for creative entrepreneurship by linking training, infrastructure, branding, and professional networks. This integrated approach enhances competitiveness, stimulates new business creation, and strengthens long-term cooperation between Romanian and Hungarian creative sectors.

CDDL. CENTER FOR SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT LEŞ (Programme Interreg VI-A Romania–Hungary 2021–2027)⁹¹

Overview

The CDDL project promotes entrepreneurship, employability and skills development among rural populations in the Oradea Metropolitan Area and Békés County. Responding to persistent challenges such as low educational attainment, limited entrepreneurial culture, and reduced economic diversification, the initiative develops both physical and digital infrastructures that support long-term socio-economic inclusion. By strengthening entrepreneurial skills, IT competences, and access to training, the project contributes to a more dynamic and opportunity-rich rural economy on both sides of the border.

Objectives

- Enhance entrepreneurial and digital competences among rural residents.
- Improve employability through certified training and targeted workshops.
- Establish long-term learning infrastructures supporting rural development.
- Promote cross-border cooperation in education, training, and entrepreneurship.
- Support the diversification of the rural economy and the development of non-agricultural activities.

⁹¹ EU project database Keep, <https://keep.eu/projects/24567/CENTER-FOR-SUSTAINABLE-DEVE-EN/>, accessed on 4 March 2026

Key Actions

- Establishment and modernisation of the Center for Sustainable Development Leș, including training rooms, IT facilities, and outdoor learning spaces.
- Delivery of certified training courses in entrepreneurship and IT competences.
- Organisation of workshops, mentoring sessions, and bilateral events promoting entrepreneurial culture and employability.
- Development of a cross-border online platform offering information, tools, and services for professional development.

Results and Achievements

- Expanded access to entrepreneurship and IT training for rural residents, improving their employability and readiness for self-employment.
- Development of a cross-border digital platform offering continuous access to information, tools, and learning opportunities.
- Strengthened entrepreneurial culture and support networks through workshops, mentoring, and bilateral events.
- Enhanced cross-border cooperation in rural development, skills training, and strategic planning.

Cross-Border Added Value

The project creates a shared Romanian–Hungarian ecosystem for rural entrepreneurship and skills development by combining physical infrastructure, digital tools, and coordinated training programmes. This integrated approach strengthens human capital, supports economic diversification, and enhances long-term cooperation between institutions in the Oradea Metropolitan Area and Békés County.

REMBlerSZ. Ramblers' Cultural Bridge – Fostering Social Cohesion through Sustainable Tourism (Programme Interreg VI-A Romania–Hungary 2021–2027)⁹²

Overview

The project enhances the role of culture and sustainable tourism as drivers of economic development, social inclusion, and innovation in the Romanian–Hungarian border region. It modernises

⁹² EU project database Keep, <https://keep.eu/projects/31469/Ramblers-Cultural-Bridge-Fo-EN/>, accessed on 4 March 2026

cultural sites in Bihor and Hajdú-Bihar, improves their accessibility, and develops a cross-border hiking trail that connects natural landscapes with cultural heritage. By creating a new integrated tourism destination, the initiative aims to increase tourist stays, diversify tourism products, and generate new economic opportunities for local communities and stakeholders.

Objectives

- Promote social cohesion by engaging residents, cultural actors and micro-communities in tourism development.
- Strengthen sustainable tourism as a tool for regional development and inclusive growth.
- Increase the visibility and attractiveness of the Romanian-Hungarian border area as a unified tourism destination.

Key Actions

- Rehabilitation and modernisation of cultural sites in Bihor and Hajdú-Bihar.
- Creation of a cross-border hiking route integrating cultural, natural, and community-based attractions.
- Development of promotional materials and joint communication tools for the new cross-border destination.
- Strengthening cooperation between tourism institutions, cultural organisations, and local authorities.

Results and Achievements

- Modernised and more accessible cultural sites contributing to a higher-quality visitor experience.
- Establishment of a cross-border hiking trail linking heritage, landscapes, and local communities.
- Increased cultural participation and community involvement through workshops, events, and outreach activities.
- Diversified tourism products and improved regional visibility as a sustainable, culture-rich destination.
- Strengthened socio-economic resilience through new opportunities for local businesses, cultural actors, and rural communities.

Cross-Border Added Value

The project creates a unified tourism corridor that connects Romanian and Hungarian cultural and natural assets, enabling shared branding, coordinated visitor experiences, and joint community

engagement. By pooling resources and expertise, it enhances regional cohesion, supports sustainable tourism development, and reinforces long-term cooperation between Bihor and Hajdú-Bihar.

INSPIRE. Improving Networks and Services to Promote Innovative and Resilient Entrepreneurship (Programme Interreg VI-A Romania–Hungary 2021–2027)⁹³

Overview

The INSPIRE project builds up the regional entrepreneurial ecosystem by consolidating and improving the quality, coordination, and accessibility of business-support services across the Romanian–Hungarian border area. Young entrepreneurs in the region face low business survival rates, fragmented support structures, and limited cross-border opportunities, while service providers often operate in parallel with minimal cooperation. The project addresses these challenges by fostering collaboration, enhancing institutional capacity, and promoting a more resilient, innovation-oriented business environment.

Objectives

- Improve the coordination and quality of business-support services across the border.
- Strengthen institutional capacity to assist young entrepreneurs and start-ups.
- Promote innovation, resilience, and cross-border market access for emerging businesses.
- Build a more integrated entrepreneurial ecosystem through shared tools, data, and cooperation mechanisms.
- Support long-term business survival and competitiveness in the border region.

Key Actions

- Organisation of online and in-person networking events connecting entrepreneurs, mentors, and support institutions.
- Development of a cross-border business-support programme focused on skills development, knowledge exchange, and hands-on assistance.

⁹³ EU project database Keep, <https://keep.eu/projects/31456/Improving-Networks-and-Serv-EN/>, accessed on 4 March 2026

- Strengthening cooperation between business-support organisations, chambers, development agencies, and local authorities.
- Promotion of cross-border opportunities, resources, and market access for young entrepreneurs.

Results and Achievements

- Improved cooperation and communication between business-support organisations across the border.
- Enhanced access to training, mentoring, and practical assistance for young entrepreneurs.
- Stronger cross-border networks facilitating knowledge exchange and joint initiatives.
- A more coherent and data-informed support environment that addresses real entrepreneurial needs.
- Increased resilience and competitiveness of start-ups and small businesses in the Romanian–Hungarian border area.

Table 3.3. Cross-border added value of Interreg projects (socio-economic development)

Project	Cross-Border Added Value
CROSSLOCALDEV	Creates a coherent cross-border framework for employment services, skills development, and local economic growth.
Create2Gather	Builds a cross-border creative ecosystem through shared training, infrastructure, and digital-art collaboration.
CDDL	Establishes a shared Romanian–Hungarian learning and entrepreneurship environment supporting rural skills and employability.
REMBlerSZ	Develops a unified cross-border tourism corridor connecting cultural sites, natural landscapes, and local communities.
INSPIRE	Builds a coordinated entrepreneurial support ecosystem across Romanian and Hungarian border counties.

Cross-Border Added Value

The initiative creates a coordinated support ecosystem that links Romanian and Hungarian institutions, enabling shared learning, joint service provision, and broader access to markets and resources. By integrating support structures across four counties, the project

enhances entrepreneurial resilience, fosters innovation, and strengthens long-term cooperation in the border region.

The interventions carried out in Bihor County and across the Romanian–Hungarian border region demonstrate a coherent set of good practices in socio-economic inclusion. Across sectors, the projects translate cross-border cooperation into concrete results by creating interoperable infrastructures, harmonising training systems, expanding access to services, and building durable institutional networks.

Collectively, they meet the core criteria for good practice validation:

- *Effectiveness* – reflected in higher employability, stronger value chains, improved service quality, and broader access to training.
- *Sustainability* – supported by new or upgraded infrastructures, permanent centres, digital platforms, and long-term institutional cooperation.
- *Replicability* – enabled by integrated models that can be adapted to other border contexts.
- *Cross-border relevance* – demonstrated through harmonised approaches, shared standards, and joint responses to common socio-economic challenges.

Overall, these validated practices show that coordinated cross-border action can drive inclusive growth, modernise local economies, and strengthen social cohesion. They confirm that sustained cooperation between Romania and Hungary is both feasible and transformative, enhancing human capital, diversifying economic opportunities, and contributing to a more resilient and integrated border region.

IV. SWOT Matrix – Socio-Economic Inclusion in the Border Area

The following overview summarizes the key factors shaping socio-economic inclusion in the Romanian–Hungarian border area, reflecting institutional capacities, structural vulnerabilities, and emerging opportunities for coordinated territorial development.

Strengths	Weaknesses
Established cross-border cooperation frameworks enabling joint initiatives in employment, social services, and community development.	Uneven distribution of social services across ATUs, with rural areas lacking adequate support structures for vulnerable groups.
Growing labour market demand in Bihor and the wider region, creating integration opportunities for minorities, refugees, and immigrants.	Limited long-term integration planning for labour migrants and beneficiaries of international protection.
Multicultural environment with long-standing Romanian–Hungarian coexistence and well-established institutional bilingualism.	Insufficient coordination between national, regional, and local institutions, leading to fragmented service delivery.
Active NGO and community networks offering social assistance, counselling, and integration support.	Persistent socio-economic disparities affecting Roma communities and other vulnerable groups (particularly in education and employment).
Enhancing local governance capacity through broader adoption of social inclusion strategies and stronger partnerships with employers and educational institutions	Language barriers and limited access to training reducing the effectiveness of labour market integration and social participation measures for newcomers.

Opportunities	Threats
Expansion of EU funding instruments (ESF+, AMIF, Interreg) supporting skills development, social inclusion and cross-border cooperation.	Demographic decline and population ageing , increasing pressure on labour markets and social support systems.
Increasing employer interest in recruiting migrant workers due to labour shortages, creating favourable conditions for labour-market integration.	Rising risk of social tensions and reduced community cohesion if integration needs are not addressed through adequate territorial and community-based interventions.
Digitalisation and green-economy transitions creating new training and employment pathways.	Geopolitical instability generating economic uncertainty, supply-chain disruptions, and additional pressures on social and administrative systems.
Growing potential to consolidate community-based and intercultural services , enhancing early intervention, personalized support, and territorial approaches to inclusion	Policy instability or delays in national reforms related to migration, labour, and social inclusion, affecting long-term planning.
Development of functional cross-border service networks in healthcare, education, and social support, improving accessibility and fostering coordinated territorial development.	Cross-border disparities in wages, services and administrative procedures, creating additional complexity for mobility and integration processes.

The SWOT analysis shows that in the border area, socio-economic inclusion is shaped by a combination of strong institutional cooperation, an increasingly diverse labour market, and the gradual consolidation of community-based and intercultural services. The strengths, combined with the opportunities offered by EU funding instruments and the digital and green transitions, create favourable conditions for scaling effective practices in socio-economic inclusion. These elements demonstrate that the region already possesses the governance capacity, partnerships, and social capital required for effective cross-border interventions.

At the same time, the region continues to face structural vulnerabilities, including demographic decline, uneven service provision, and persistent cross-border disparities. Fragmented service delivery, limited coordination across administrative levels, and

barriers to labour-market participation continue to hinder the integration of minorities, migrants, and other vulnerable groups. Addressing these gaps is essential for ensuring that good practices become sustainable, transferable, and aligned with EU standards. The new threats, particularly geopolitical instability, supply-chain disruptions, and policy uncertainty, highlight the need for interventions that strengthen regional resilience, multi-level governance, and functional cross-border service networks.

Overall, the analysis confirms that the border area is well-positioned to consolidate and transfer good practices in socio-economic inclusion, provided that interventions remain coordinated, evidence-based, and territorially sensitive, and that local actors continue to invest in administrative capacity, inclusive services, and cross-border cooperation.

V. Practical Directions for Advancing Socio-Economic Inclusion

1. Action Plan for Socio-Economic Inclusion

A forward-looking action plan should reinforce local institutional capacities, enhance coordination across service providers, and expand inclusive opportunities for minorities, refugees, immigrants, and other vulnerable groups. The proposed measures are organised around four strategic pillars.

1.1. Strengthening institutional coordination

- Establish a **county coordination platform** bringing together ATUs, NGOs, employers, and educational institutions to support integrated planning.
- Develop **standardised protocols** for information exchange between social services, employment agencies, and integration stakeholders.
- Promote **joint territorial planning** between local authorities and cross-border partners to align services and prevent duplication.

1.2. Expanding access to employment and skills development

- Create **local skills hubs** providing vocational training, language courses, and digital skills programmes aligned with labour-market needs.

- Support **employer partnerships** for internships, apprenticeships, and on-the-job training targeting vulnerable groups.
- Facilitate **skills and qualification recognition** for migrants and returning workers to accelerate labour-market integration.

1.3. Enhancing social and community services

- Strengthen **community-based support systems**, including intercultural mediation, counselling, and mobile social services.
- Expand **housing support mechanisms**, particularly in urban areas facing demographic and affordability pressures.
- Improve access to **education and childcare**, including after-school programmes and early-childhood services.

1.4. Promoting intercultural dialogue and community cohesion

- Support **intercultural events**, school-based programmes, and community initiatives that foster trust and reduce discrimination.
- Encourage **local volunteer networks** to assist newcomers and vulnerable groups.
- Develop **communication campaigns** promoting inclusion, diversity, and shared community values.

2. Recommendations for skills-focused partnerships

Skills development is central to socio-economic inclusion. Partnerships should be structured around shared responsibilities, long-term collaboration, and alignment with regional development priorities.

2.1. Public-private partnerships

- Encourage employers to **co-design training curricula** with vocational schools and AJOFM.
- Promote **dual education models** linking theoretical learning with practical experience.
- Support companies in developing **inclusive recruitment practices** and workplace integration programmes.

2.2. Cross-border skills cooperation

- Develop **joint Romanian-Hungarian training modules** in sectors with shared labour needs (construction, manufacturing, tourism, logistics).
- Facilitate **cross-border mobility schemes** for apprentices and trainees.

- Align local training programmes with **regional economic strategies** on both sides of the border.

2.3. Community-level partnerships

- Engage NGOs and community groups in delivering **soft-skills training**, mentoring, and cultural orientation.
- Support **collaborative learning mechanisms** among ATUs to exchange good practices in inclusion and skills development.
- Encourage schools and universities to collaborate on **intercultural education** and research on inclusion.

3. Recommendations for monitoring and evaluation mechanisms

Effective monitoring ensures that inclusion policies remain relevant, efficient, and responsive to evolving needs.

3.1. Establishing a local monitoring framework

- Develop a **County Inclusion Dashboard** tracking key indicators: employment, education, housing, service access, and community participation.
- Require ATUs to submit **annual inclusion reports** summarising progress, challenges, and resource needs.
- Introduce **performance indicators** for integration services: time to employment, training completion rates.

3.2. Data collection

- Improve **ATU-level data collection** by including basic demographic details: age, gender, ethnicity, migration status.
- Integrate administrative data from AJOFM, DGASPC, IGI, and local authorities into a **shared platform**.
- Conduct **regular needs assessments** to identify emerging vulnerabilities and adjust programmes accordingly.

3.3. Participatory evaluation

- Involve beneficiaries (minorities, refugees, migrants) in **feedback sessions** and **community consultations**.
- Use **focus groups and stakeholder workshops** to validate findings and co-design improvements.
- Promote **external evaluations** for major projects, especially those funded through EU programmes.

The recommendations outlined above aim to create a coherent, adaptive, and inclusive system capable of responding to demographic

changes, labour market needs and cross-border dynamics. Strengthening institutional coordination, expanding skills development and implementing robust monitoring mechanisms will enable border regions to build a sustainable model of socio-economic inclusion.

Conclusions

The analysis of socio-economic inclusion in Bihor County and the wider Romanian-Hungarian border area demonstrates that inclusion acts as a structural driver of territorial resilience and long-term regional competitiveness, not simply a social policy priority. In this context, socio-economic inclusion refers to the capacity of a region to integrate diverse population groups into its labour markets, service systems and development processes, ensuring that economic growth translates into accessible opportunities, stable incomes and improved living conditions. For border territories, where demographic decline, labour shortages and cross-border mobility shape everyday realities, inclusive development becomes essential for maintaining functional labour markets, preventing territorial fragmentation and maintaining balanced regional growth.

The European policy frameworks reviewed in the Guide (Cohesion Policy, the Social Economy Action Plan, Inclusive Entrepreneurship, the Social Inclusion Strategy, and the twin green and digital transitions) provide a coherent architecture that directly supports this form of inclusion. Together, they link employment creation, skills development, social protection and territorial cohesion into a unified strategic agenda. Their combined influence is particularly visible in border territories, where socio-economic inclusion is shaped by cross-border commuting, shared labour markets, multicultural communities and uneven access to services.

Evidence from Bihor County confirms that economic development is the primary driver of inclusion. Oradea's growth pole dynamics, expanding industrial base and strong labour absorption capacity create favourable conditions for integrating minorities, newcomers and vulnerable groups. At the same time, persistent disparities between urban and rural ATUs, insufficient service coverage in peripheral territories and structural vulnerabilities affecting Roma communities and low-skilled workers illustrate the limits of growth-driven inclusion when institutional capacities remain

uneven. Cross-border mobility further shapes the regional landscape, reinforcing interdependence between Bihor and Hajdú-Bihar and highlighting the need for coordinated labour market and service systems.

The cross-border projects analysed in the Guide show that cooperation with Hungary has matured into a functional ecosystem capable of generating tangible socio-economic inclusion outcomes. Interreg initiatives in employment, skills development, tourism, agriculture, creative industries and entrepreneurship show that shared infrastructures, harmonised training systems and joint service provision can reduce territorial gaps and expand opportunities for diverse groups. These interventions meet the core criteria of good practice (effectiveness, sustainability, replicability and cross-border relevance) and illustrate how coordinated action can modernise local economies while strengthening social cohesion.

The SWOT analysis underscores that the region possesses significant strengths: established cooperation frameworks, active community networks, multicultural coexistence and growing employer demand. These assets create favourable conditions for scaling inclusive practices. Yet structural weaknesses (demographic decline, fragmented service delivery, limited coordination and persistent socio-economic disparities) continue to constrain the full institutionalisation of inclusion. Emerging threats linked to geopolitical instability, labour shortages and policy uncertainty reinforce the need for adaptive, evidence-based and territorially sensitive interventions.

The action-oriented recommendations proposed in the Guide outline a forward-looking agenda centred on institutional coordination, skills development, community-based services and intercultural cohesion. Strengthening partnerships between ATUs, NGOs, employers and educational institutions, expanding access to training and employment pathways, and improving monitoring systems are essential steps for consolidating a sustainable socio-economic inclusion model. Cross-border cooperation remains a strategic lever, enabling shared solutions to labour-market needs, service gaps and demographic pressures.

Overall, socio-economic inclusion in border regions is both achievable and strategically significant when supported by coherent governance, targeted investments and sustained cross-border collaboration. Bihor County already benefits from solid institutional

capacity, strong social capital and a dynamic local economy that can sustain further progress in socio-economic inclusion. Together with its partner county in Hungary, it has the foundations needed to advance coordinated, cross-border approaches to inclusive development. The challenge for the coming years lies in deepening cooperation, reducing territorial disparities and aligning regional strategies with the evolving European agenda. By doing so, border communities can strengthen their resilience, enhance cohesion and secure full integration into Europe's long-term development trajectory.

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GUIDE OF BEST PRACTICES REGARDING
INTEGRATION, SOCIETAL SECURITY AND
INCLUSION IN THE BORDER AREA

Key area

**Cultural Diplomacy
in the Bihor–Hajdú-Bihar Border
Region**

by Alina Stoica

Introduction

Border regions represent spaces in which processes of cooperation, development, and integration acquire a distinct dynamic, shaped by the interaction between communities belonging to different administrative, economic, and cultural systems. Within the European Union, internal borders have evolved from areas of separation into spaces of cooperation and shared development, where cohesion policy, European territorial cooperation, and the free movement of people have strengthened relationships among local and regional communities¹.

In this context, cross-border regions have become laboratories of European integration, where institutional cooperation, intercultural dialogue, and community participation contribute to reducing economic and social disparities while strengthening territorial cohesion. The European Union's Cohesion Policy promotes the development of regions that are more competitive, resilient, and inclusive by supporting cooperation among public authorities, educational institutions, cultural organizations, and civil society².

In recent years, geopolitical and social developments have significantly reshaped the role of border regions. Population mobility, demographic change, increasing migration flows, and the consequences of the war in Ukraine have highlighted the need for public policies capable of simultaneously promoting social integration, community security, and the inclusion of vulnerable

¹ Paasi, A. (1998). *Boundaries as Social Processes: Territoriality in the World of Flows*. *Geopolitics*, 3(1), 69–88. <https://doi.org/10.1080/14650049808407608>; Newman, D. (2006). *The Lines that Continue to Separate Us: Borders in Our "Borderless" World*. *Progress in Human Geography*, 30(2), 143–161. <https://doi.org/10.1191/0309132506ph599xx>; Scott, J. W. (2015). *Bordering, Border Politics and Cross-Border Cooperation in Europe*. In *The Routledge Handbook of Border Studies*. Routledge. <https://www.routledge.com/The-Routledge-Handbook-of-Border-Studies/Walter/p/book/9781138021881>. Accessed 20 May 2026.

² European Parliament and Council. (2021). *Regulation (EU) 2021/1058 of the European Parliament and of the Council of 24 June 2021 on the European Regional Development Fund and the Cohesion Fund*. <https://eur-lex.europa.eu/eli/reg/2021/1058/oj>. Accessed 10 May 2026; European Parliament and Council. (2021). *Regulation (EU) 2021/1059 on specific provisions for the European Territorial Cooperation goal (Interreg)*. <https://eur-lex.europa.eu/eli/reg/2021/1059/oj>. Accessed 20 May 2026.

groups. National minorities, refugees, and immigrants constitute social groups for whom institutional cooperation and intercultural dialogue can facilitate access to education, culture, public services, and civic participation, thereby contributing to social cohesion and preventing marginalization³.

Within this framework, cultural diplomacy extends beyond its traditional association with foreign policy and emerges as an instrument for regional development and cross-border cooperation. By promoting shared cultural heritage, encouraging intercultural dialogue, supporting academic and artistic mobility, and fostering joint cultural projects, cultural diplomacy strengthens trust between communities and institutions while facilitating integration and social inclusion within a region characterized by cultural and ethnic diversity⁴.

The Bihor-Hajdú-Bihar cross-border region represents one of the most established examples of cooperation between Romania and Hungary. Geographical proximity, a shared historical and cultural heritage, the presence of multi-ethnic communities, and extensive experience gained through the implementation of European Union-funded projects have created favorable conditions for sustainable partnerships among public authorities, cultural institutions, universities, and civil society organizations. European Territorial Cooperation programmes, particularly Interreg Romania-Hungary, have encouraged the development of joint initiatives aimed at promoting cultural heritage, tourism development, cultural infrastructure, and intercultural dialogue⁵.

³ European Commission. *Cohesion Policy 2021–2027*. https://cohesiondata.ec.europa.eu/cohesion_overview/21-27. Accessed 18 May 2026.; UNHCR. (2024). *Global Trends: Forced Displacement*. <https://www.unhcr.org/global-trends>. Accessed 18 May 2026.

⁴ International Organization for Migration (IOM). (2024). *World Migration Report 2024*. <https://worldmigrationreport.iom.int/world-migration-report-2024/>; Nye, Joseph S. (2004). *Soft Power: The Means to Success in World Politics*. PublicAffairs. <https://www.publicaffairsbooks.com/titles/joseph-s-nye-jr/soft-power/9781586482258/>. Accessed 14 June 2026; Melissen, Jan (Ed.). (2005). *The New Public Diplomacy: Soft Power in International Relations*. Palgrave Macmillan. <https://link.springer.com/book/10.1057/9780230554938>. Accessed 12 April 2026.

⁵ European Parliament and Council. (2021). *Regulation (EU) 2021/1059*; UNESCO. (2023). *Culture and Sustainable Development – Resolutions and*

At the same time, cultural diplomacy can contribute to broader regional development objectives, including strengthening societal security, enhancing the resilience of local communities, and promoting a culture of cooperation based on trust, mutual respect, and civic participation. In border regions, culture thus becomes a means of bringing communities closer together and building lasting relationships between institutions and citizens, while supporting the implementation of European policies on integration, inclusion, and sustainable development⁶.

This guide aims to examine the role of cultural diplomacy in promoting integration, societal security, and inclusion within the Bihor-Hajdú-Bihar border region by analysing the legislative and institutional framework, assessing the current situation, identifying examples of good practice, and formulating recommendations addressed to public authorities, cultural institutions, non-governmental organizations, and other stakeholders involved in cross-border cooperation. The guide seeks to provide a practical, scientifically grounded resource capable of supporting the development of policies and initiatives that strengthen social cohesion and sustainable cooperation within the region under study.

Methodology and Documentary Sources

This guide has been developed using a qualitative research methodology, focusing on the analysis and integration of information derived from academic literature, public policy documents, and institutional reports relevant to cross-border cooperation, cultural diplomacy, social integration, community security, and inclusion in the Bihor-Hajdú-Bihar border region. The methodological approach aims to provide an applied perspective on how cultural diplomacy can

Reference Documents. <https://www.unesco.org/en/sustainable-development/culture/resolutions>. Accessed 20 July 2026.

⁶ Interreg VI-A Romania-Hungary Programme (2021–2027). *Programme Document*. <https://interreg-rohu.eu/en/the-interreg-vi-a-romania-hungary-programme-for-2021-2027-period-was-adopted/>. Accessed 18 April 2026; European External Action Service (EEAS). (2023). *EU Strategy for International Cultural Relations*. https://www.eeas.europa.eu/eeas/culture-%E2%80%93-implementing-eu-international-cultural-relations_en. Accessed 18 April 2026.

support the development of more cohesive, secure, and inclusive communities⁷.

The documentary research was based on a review of the scholarly literature in the fields of international relations, border studies, cultural policy, and European territorial cooperation. Key academic works on cultural diplomacy and soft power, cross-border cooperation, societal security, and European integration were consulted, together with studies examining the role of culture in community development and the strengthening of intercultural dialogue⁸.

A central component of the research consisted of analysing the European and national legal and strategic framework. Documents issued by the European Commission, the European Parliament, the Council of Europe, UNESCO, the European External Action Service (EEAS), the International Organization for Migration (IOM), and the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR) were examined, alongside programme documents specifically related to cooperation between Romania and Hungary, particularly the Interreg VI-A Romania–Hungary Programme 2021–2027. These sources provide the institutional and strategic framework necessary for understanding the objectives and mechanisms of cross-border cooperation in the fields of integration, inclusion, and regional development⁹.

⁷ Creswell, J. W., & Poth, C. N. (2018). *Qualitative Inquiry and Research Design: Choosing Among Five Approaches* (4th ed.). Sage Publications. <https://us.sagepub.com/en-us/nam/qualitative-inquiry-and-research-design/book246896>. Accessed 18 April 2026.

⁸ Melissen, J. (Ed.). (2005). *The New Public Diplomacy: Soft Power in International Relations*. Palgrave Macmillan. <https://link.springer.com/book/10.1057/9780230554938>. Accessed 28 April 2026; Scott, J. W. (2015). *Bordering, Border Politics and Cross-Border Cooperation in Europe*. In *The Routledge Handbook of Border Studies*. <https://www.routledge.com/The-Routledge-Handbook-of-Border-Studies/Wastl-Walter/p/book/9781138021881>. Accessed 16 April 2026.

⁹ European Parliament & Council. (2021). *Regulation (EU) 2021/1059 on the European Territorial Cooperation Goal (Interreg)*. <https://eur-lex.europa.eu/eli/reg/2021/1059/oj>. Accessed 24 April 2026; European Commission. *Cohesion Policy 2021–2027*. https://cohesiondata.ec.europa.eu/cohesion_overview/21-27. Accessed 18 April 2026; Council of Europe. *Culture and Cultural Heritage*. <https://www.coe.int/en/web/culture-and-heritage>. Accessed 18 April 2026;

The analysis of the situation in the Bihor–Hajdú-Bihar region was based on statistical data and information obtained from official sources, including Eurostat, the Romanian National Institute of Statistics (INSSE), the Hungarian Central Statistical Office (KSH), local and county public authorities, and reports produced within the framework of cross-border cooperation projects. The use of these data makes it possible to relate the theoretical and institutional framework to the economic, social, and demographic realities of the region under study¹⁰.

To identify examples of good practice, projects and initiatives implemented in the Romanian–Hungarian border region, as well as relevant examples from other European border regions that use culture as a tool for cooperation, integration, and inclusion, were analysed. Their selection was based on their relevance to the objectives of this guide, their innovative character, and their potential for adaptation to the specific characteristics of the Bihor–Hajdú-Bihar region¹¹.

The findings of the analysis are synthesized into a set of recommendations addressed to public authorities, cultural institutions, non-governmental organizations, educational institutions, and other stakeholders involved in cross-border cooperation. Through this approach, the guide seeks to provide a practical, scientifically grounded resource aligned with the objectives of European policies on territorial development, social integration, and cross-border cooperation.

I. Context, Concepts, and the Legislative and Institutional Framework

This chapter presents the conceptual, legislative, and institutional foundations underpinning cross-border cooperation within the European Union and highlights how these are applied in

UNESCO. *Culture and Sustainable Development*. <https://www.unesco.org/en/culture>. Accessed 19 April 2026.

¹⁰ Eurostat. *Regional Statistics Database*. <https://ec.europa.eu/eurostat>; Romanian National Institute of Statistics (INSSE). <https://insse.ro/>; Hungarian Central Statistical Office (KSH). <https://www.ksh.hu/>. Accessed 22 April 2026.

¹¹ Interreg VI-A Romania–Hungary Programme (2021–2027). *Programme Document*. <https://interreg-rohu.eu/en/the-interreg-vi-a-romania-hungary-programme-for-2021-2027-period-was-adopted/>. Accessed 21 April 2026.

the Bihor–Hajdú-Bihar border region. Understanding these foundations is essential for analysing the role of cultural diplomacy as a tool for strengthening cooperation between institutions and communities, as well as for formulating recommendations tailored to the territorial characteristics and development needs of the border region¹².

1. The Context of Cross-Border Cooperation in the Bihor–Hajdú-Bihar Region

Cross-border cooperation represents one of the fundamental pillars of the European Union's Cohesion Policy, aiming to reduce disparities between regions located on either side of internal borders while promoting economic, social, and territorial development. Through European Territorial Cooperation programmes, the European Union promotes the establishment of sustainable partnerships among public authorities, educational institutions, cultural organizations, businesses, and civil society, thereby contributing to greater territorial cohesion and reinforcing a shared European identity¹³.

The Bihor–Hajdú-Bihar cross-border region constitutes one of the most well-established areas of cooperation between Romania and Hungary. Characterized by geographical proximity, longstanding historical and cultural ties, and the presence of diverse ethnic and religious communities, the region provides favourable conditions for the development of joint policies focused on integration, inclusion, and sustainable development. The membership of both countries in the European Union facilitates the implementation of common projects and access to financial instruments dedicated to cross-

¹² European Parliament and Council. (2021). *Regulation (EU) 2021/1059 on specific provisions for the European Territorial Cooperation goal (Interreg)*. <https://eur-lex.europa.eu/eli/reg/2021/1059/oj>. Accessed 09 April 2026.

¹³ European Parliament and Council. (2021). *Regulation (EU) 2021/1059 on specific provisions for the European Territorial Cooperation goal (Interreg)*. <https://eur-lex.europa.eu/eli/reg/2021/1059/oj>. Accessed 18 April 2026; European Parliament and Council. (2021). *Regulation (EU) 2021/1058 on the European Regional Development Fund and the Cohesion Fund*. <https://eur-lex.europa.eu/eli/reg/2021/1058/oj>. Accessed 23 April 2026.

border cooperation, particularly the Interreg VI-A Romania–Hungary Programme 2021–2027¹⁴.

In recent years, the regional context has been influenced by challenges arising from increasing population mobility, demographic changes, the effects of the COVID-19 pandemic, and the consequences of the war in Ukraine. These developments have highlighted the need to strengthen the resilience of border communities and to develop public policies capable of simultaneously addressing the objectives of security, integration, and social inclusion¹⁵. Within this context, cultural cooperation has acquired strategic importance. Beyond promoting cultural heritage and identity, it contributes to fostering intercultural dialogue, reducing stereotypes, and strengthening trust-based relationships among local communities. Joint cultural activities, educational exchanges, and cross-border artistic initiatives facilitate citizens' participation in community life and support the integration of vulnerable groups, including national minorities, refugees, and migrants¹⁶.

Consequently, cross-border cooperation in the Bihor–Hajdú-Bihar region should be analysed not only from the perspective of economic and institutional development but also as a framework that promotes social cohesion and community security. From this perspective, cultural diplomacy emerges as an important instrument for strengthening relations among local and regional stakeholders, facilitating the development of communities that are more inclusive, more resilient, and better prepared to respond to contemporary challenges¹⁷.

¹⁴ Interreg VI-A Romania–Hungary Programme (2021–2027). *Programme Document*. <https://interreg-rohu.eu/en/the-interreg-vi-a-romania-hungary-programme-for-2021-2027-period-was-adopted/>. Accessed 16 May 2026.

¹⁵ Ibidem; European Commission. (2024). *Communication on the Mid-term Review of Cohesion Policy 2021–2027*. https://ec.europa.eu/regional_policy/. Accessed 16 April 2026.

¹⁶ Council of Europe. (2023). *Culture and Cultural Heritage*. <https://www.coe.int/en/web/culture-and-heritage>. Accessed 10 April 2026; UNESCO. *Culture and Sustainable Development*. <https://www.unesco.org/en/culture>. Accessed 18 April 2026.

¹⁷ Nye, J. S. (2004); Melissen, J. (Ed.). (2005). *The New Public Diplomacy: Soft Power in International Relations*. Palgrave Macmillan, p.45–52. <https://link.springer.com/book/10.1057/9780230554938>. Accessed 21 April 2026.

2. Cultural Diplomacy – Conceptual Delimitations and Relevance for Border Regions

Cultural diplomacy constitutes an instrument of international relations and interinstitutional cooperation through which states, local authorities, cultural institutions, universities, and civil society organizations promote intercultural dialogue, cultural exchange, and shared values with the aim of strengthening cooperation and mutual trust. Over the past two decades, the concept has evolved beyond its traditional association with foreign policy and has become integrated into regional development strategies, territorial cooperation, and public diplomacy, with a growing emphasis on the involvement of local communities and non-state actors¹⁸.

Within the European Union, cultural diplomacy is understood as an integral component of international cultural relations and policies aimed at strengthening social cohesion, promoting cultural diversity, and fostering resilient communities. The EU Strategy for International Cultural Relations and the EU Work Plan for Culture 2023–2026 emphasize that intercultural dialogue, cultural heritage, and participation in cultural life contribute to the development of inclusive societies and to strengthening relationships among communities¹⁹.

The academic literature defines cultural diplomacy as a mechanism for exercising soft power, whereby culture, education, cultural heritage, the arts, and academic exchange contribute to building a positive international image, fostering trust, and facilitating international cooperation²⁰. In the context of border regions, the function of cultural diplomacy extends beyond external representation and becomes an instrument for strengthening social cohesion and bringing together communities that share a common

¹⁸ UNESCO. *Culture and Sustainable Development*. <https://www.unesco.org/en/culture>. Accessed 18 April 2026; Melissen, J. (Ed.). (2005).

¹⁹ European Commission & European External Action Service. (2016). *Towards an EU Strategy for International Cultural Relations*. <https://eur-lex.europa.eu/legal-content/EN/TXT/?uri=JOIN:2016:29:FIN>. Accessed 18 May 2026; Council of the European Union. (2022). *EU Work Plan for Culture 2023–2026*. [https://eur-lex.europa.eu/legal-content/EN/TXT/?uri=CELEX:42022Y1207\(01\)](https://eur-lex.europa.eu/legal-content/EN/TXT/?uri=CELEX:42022Y1207(01)). Accessed 18 May 2026.

²⁰ Nye, J. S. (2004).

geographical space while belonging to different administrative and cultural systems.

Border regions are characterized by mobility, ethnic and cultural diversity, economic interdependence, and continuous interaction between populations living on either side of the border. Under these conditions, culture facilitates dialogue, reduces symbolic barriers, and contributes to building a climate of trust between institutions and citizens. Joint cultural activities, festivals, educational projects, and cooperation among museums, libraries, universities, and cultural organizations create favourable conditions for mutual understanding and foster a shared sense of belonging to the European cultural space²¹.

From the perspective of this guide, cultural diplomacy should therefore be analysed in direct relation to the three fundamental objectives of cross-border cooperation: integration, societal security, and inclusion.

Integration is promoted through the development of relationships among communities, the encouragement of intercultural dialogue, and the facilitation of participation by all social groups in cultural and civic life. Cultural exchanges contribute to reducing social distance and strengthening mutual trust between the majority population and minority or newly arrived communities²².

Security is addressed from a societal security perspective and is associated with strengthening community resilience, preventing social polarization, combating discrimination, and increasing public trust in institutions. By promoting dialogue and democratic values, cultural diplomacy can reduce social tensions and contribute to the peaceful management of cultural diversity²³.

Inclusion implies ensuring equal participation in social and cultural life regardless of ethnic, national, linguistic, or religious background. In border regions, this dimension is particularly important for national minorities, refugees, and migrants, whose

²¹ UNESCO. *Culture and Sustainable Development*. <https://www.unesco.org/en/culture>. Accessed 18 April 2026.

²² Ibidem; Council of Europe. (2022). *Culture and Cultural Heritage*. <https://www.coe.int/en/web/culture-and-heritage>. Accessed 18 April 2026.

²³ Council of the European Union. (2021). *Council Conclusions on Strengthening Resilience and Countering Hybrid Threats*. <https://www.consilium.europa.eu/>. Accessed 18 April 2026.

access to cultural, educational, and community activities facilitates integration and strengthens their sense of belonging to the local community. Intercultural dialogue is widely recognized as an essential instrument for promoting inclusion and sustaining social cohesion²⁴.

In the Bihor-Hajdú-Bihar border region, cultural diplomacy benefits from a shared multicultural heritage, well-established historical relations, and extensive experience in implementing cross-border cooperation projects. These factors provide favourable conditions for developing cultural initiatives that support community integration, strengthen societal security, and promote the inclusion of vulnerable groups, thereby transforming culture into a driver of sustainable development and enhanced cooperation between Romania and Hungary²⁵.

3. The Legislative and Institutional Framework of Cultural Diplomacy and Cross-Border Cooperation

Cross-border cooperation between Romania and Hungary is carried out within a complex legal and institutional framework based on the principles of the European Union's Cohesion Policy and the norms of international and national law. The objective of this framework is to facilitate the balanced development of border regions, reduce economic and social disparities, and strengthen European integration through joint projects in fields such as culture, education, infrastructure, environmental protection, and social inclusion²⁶.

At the European level, the legal foundation of territorial cooperation is provided by the European Union's Cohesion Policy and the 2021–2027 Multiannual Financial Framework, implemented through the European Regional Development Fund (ERDF) and the European Territorial Cooperation (Interreg) objective. Regulation (EU) 2021/1059 establishes the objectives, governance principles, and implementation mechanisms of the Interreg programmes, encouraging the development of partnerships among public

²⁴ Council of Europe. (2022); UNESCO. Culture

²⁵ European Commission. *EU Cohesion Policy 2021–2027....*

²⁶ European Parliament and Council. (2021). *Regulation (EU) 2021/1059 on specific provisions for the European Territorial Cooperation goal (Interreg)*. <https://eur-lex.europa.eu/eli/reg/2021/1059/oj>. Accessed 12 June 2026.

authorities, cultural institutions, universities, and civil society organizations in border regions²⁷.

A central role is played by the Interreg VI-A Romania–Hungary Programme 2021–2027, which constitutes the principal financial instrument supporting cooperation between the border counties of the two countries. The programme finances projects aimed at promoting cultural heritage, developing sustainable tourism, improving public services, strengthening institutional capacity, and fostering collaboration among local communities. Furthermore, it supports social inclusion and the development of more resilient communities through initiatives involving public authorities, cultural institutions, universities, and non-governmental organizations²⁸.

From the perspective of cultural diplomacy, several additional European funding instruments are also relevant. These include Creative Europe, which supports cooperation among cultural operators and creative industries; Erasmus+, which promotes academic mobility and educational exchanges; and the Citizens, Equality, Rights and Values (CERV) Programme, which aims to strengthen civic participation, protect fundamental rights, and promote social inclusion and European values²⁹.

At the international level, cultural diplomacy is supported by UNESCO conventions and recommendations promoting the protection of cultural heritage and the diversity of cultural expressions, as well as by the recommendations of the Council of Europe concerning intercultural dialogue, democratic citizenship education, and participation in cultural life. These international instruments recognize culture as a key contributor to peacebuilding,

²⁷ European Commission. *EU Cohesion Policy 2021–2027...*

²⁸ Interreg VI-A Romania–Hungary Programme (2021–2027). *Programme Document*. <https://interreg-rohu.eu/en/the-interreg-vi-a-romania-hungary-programme-for-2021-2027-period-was-adopted/>; European Commission. *Interreg 2021–2027*. https://ec.europa.eu/regional_policy/policy/cooperation/interreg_en. Accessed 24 April 2026.

²⁹ European Commission. *Creative Europe Programme (2021–2027)*. <https://culture.ec.europa.eu/creative-europe>. Accessed 19 April 2026; European Commission. *Erasmus+ Programme (2021–2027)*. <https://erasmus-plus.ec.europa.eu/>; European Commission. *Citizens, Equality, Rights and Values (CERV) Programme*. https://commission.europa.eu/funding-tenders/find-funding/eu-funding-programmes/citizens-equality-rights-and-values-programme_en. Accessed 18 April 2026.

social cohesion, and the integration of vulnerable groups within local communities³⁰.

In Romania, the legislative framework governing cross-border cooperation and the activities of local public authorities is complemented by the Constitution of Romania, the Administrative Code (Government Emergency Ordinance No. 57/2019), and other legislative acts regulating the international activities of local authorities and the implementation of European programmes. These legal provisions enable local public authorities to establish international partnerships and participate in joint projects with authorities from other European Union Member States, within the limits of the competences established by law³¹.

In the Bihor-Hajdú-Bihar border region, the institutional framework consists of an extensive network of public and private stakeholders contributing to the development of cross-border cooperation. These include the Bihor County Council, the Municipality of Oradea, the local and county authorities of Hajdú-Bihar County and the City of Debrecen, the University of Oradea, the University of Debrecen, museums, libraries, theatres, philharmonic orchestras, non-governmental organizations, and Euroregional structures established to facilitate cooperation between Romania and Hungary. Collaboration among these institutions has enabled the implementation of a significant number of cultural, educational, and social projects financed through European funds, contributing to stronger relationships between local communities and to the development of a regional identity based on cultural diversity and shared European values³².

The analysis of the legislative and institutional framework demonstrates that the Bihor-Hajdú-Bihar region benefits from a favourable environment for the development of cultural diplomacy

³⁰ UNESCO. (2005). *Convention on the Protection and Promotion of the Diversity of Cultural Expressions*. <https://en.unesco.org/creativity/governance/2005-convention>. Accessed 18 April 2026.

³¹ Constitution of Romania (republished). Official text. <https://www.cdep.ro/pls/dic/site.page?id=339>. Accessed 20 April 2026; Government Emergency Ordinance No. 57/2019 regarding the Administrative Code. <https://legislatie.just.ro/Public/DetaliiDocument/215925>. Accessed 18 April 2026.

³² Bihor County Council. *European Projects and Cross-Border Cooperation*. <https://www.cjbihor.ro/>. Accessed 18 April 2026.

and cross-border cooperation. The principal challenge is no longer the availability of legal or financial instruments, but rather their effective use through integrated projects, sustainable partnerships, and public policies designed to promote integration, societal security, and the inclusion of communities living in the border area.

II. Socio-Demographic, Cultural, and Institutional Context of the Bihor-Hajdú-Bihar Cross-Border Region

1. Characteristics of the Bihor-Hajdú-Bihar Cross-Border Region

The Bihor-Hajdú-Bihar cross-border region is located along Romania's western border and Hungary's eastern border, representing one of the most dynamic areas of cooperation within the European Union. Its geographical position facilitates the development of economic, social, and cultural relations between the two counties, supported both by territorial proximity and their shared membership in the European framework for territorial cooperation. Following Romania's accession to the European Union in 2007 and its full integration into the Schengen Area in 2025, cross-border cooperation has benefited from favourable conditions for increasing the mobility of people, strengthening institutional partnerships, and implementing joint regional development projects³³.

Bihor County and Hajdú-Bihar County form a territory characterized by strong economic and social complementarity. The cities of Oradea and Debrecen function as regional growth poles, concentrating economic, educational, cultural, and healthcare activities with an impact extending across the entire border region. Relations between the two urban centres are reinforced by transport infrastructure, commercial exchanges, university cooperation, and numerous initiatives financed through European Territorial Cooperation programmes³⁴.

³³ European Commission. *EU Cohesion Policy 2021-2027*; Council of the European Union. (2024). *Council Decision on the Full Application of the Schengen Acquis in Romania and Bulgaria*. <https://www.consilium.europa.eu/>. Accessed 18 April 2026.

³⁴ Interreg VI-A Romania-Hungary Programme (2021-2027). *Programme Document*. <https://interreg-rohu.eu/en/the-interreg-vi-a-romania-hungary->

From a demographic perspective, the region is characterized by considerable ethnic and linguistic diversity. In Bihor County, Romanian, Hungarian, Roma, and other ethnic communities coexist, whereas Hajdú-Bihar County is predominantly inhabited by ethnic Hungarians while also hosting Romanian communities and other national minorities. This diversity represents an important resource for the development of intercultural dialogue and cultural cooperation, while also requiring public policies that promote social inclusion, equal opportunities, and the active participation of all communities in social and cultural life³⁵.

Recent demographic trends reveal common challenges for both counties, including population ageing, outward migration, and a declining working-age population. These developments affect labour markets, regional economic development, and the capacity of public institutions to provide services adapted to the needs of local communities. At the same time, cross-border mobility for employment, education, and healthcare services has intensified relations between the two territories and reinforced their economic and social interdependence³⁶.

The diversity of the region's cultural heritage constitutes one of the principal assets of the Bihor–Hajdú-Bihar area. Built heritage, local traditions, cultural events, gastronomy, religious heritage, and multiculturalism all contribute to shaping a regional identity characterized by coexistence and continuous cultural exchange. Cultural institutions, universities, museums, libraries, and non-governmental organizations organize numerous joint activities that strengthen relationships between communities and contribute to the development of a shared cross-border cultural space³⁷.

Cooperation between Bihor and Hajdú-Bihar counties is supported by a well-established institutional framework based on

[programme-for-2021-2027-period-was-adopted/](#). Accessed 18 April 2026; ESPON. (2022). *Territorial Cooperation and Functional Areas in Europe*. <https://www.espon.eu/>. Accessed 18 April 2026.

³⁵ Eurostat. *Regional Demographic Statistics*. <https://ec.europa.eu/eurostat>. Accessed 16 April 2026; Romanian National Institute of Statistics (INSSE). <https://insse.ro/>. Accessed 18 April 2026. Hungarian Central Statistical Office (KSH). <https://www.ksh.hu/>. Accessed 18 April 2026.

³⁶ EPSON. (2022); UNESCO. *Culture and Sustainable Development*.

³⁷ Council of Europe. (2022). *Culture and Cultural Heritage*. <https://www.coe.int/en/web/culture-and-heritage>. Accessed 18 April 2026.

European Territorial Cooperation programmes, bilateral agreements between public authorities, and partnerships among educational institutions, cultural organizations, and civil society. Projects implemented through Interreg programmes have contributed to the modernization of cultural infrastructure, the promotion of shared cultural heritage, the development of cultural tourism, and the organization of cross-border cultural events, thereby strengthening institutional cooperation and reinforcing relationships among local communities³⁸.

Overall, the Bihor–Hajdú-Bihar region possesses significant cultural, institutional, and human resources capable of supporting joint initiatives aimed at promoting integration, societal security, and social inclusion. The effective use of these resources through cultural diplomacy can contribute to strengthening trust between communities, reducing social and cultural barriers, and fostering sustainable cross-border cooperation in line with the objectives of the European Union's Cohesion Policy and the Interreg Romania–Hungary Programme³⁹.

³⁸ Council of the European Union. (2024). *Council Decision on the Full Application of the Schengen Acquis in Romania and Bulgaria*.

³⁹ European Commission. *EU Cohesion Policy 2021–2027*; Interreg VI-A Romania–Hungary Programme (2021–2027). *Programme Document*.

Figure 1. Comparative Characteristics of Bihor County and Hajdú-Bihar County

INDICATOR	BIHOR COUNTY (Romania)	HAJDÚ-BIHAR COUNTY (Hungary)	
 Geographical location	Located in north-western Romania, on the border with Hungary. Neighbouring counties: Satu Mare, Sălaj, Cluj, and Arad.	Located in eastern Hungary, on the border with Romania. Neighbouring counties: Szabolcs-Szatmár-Bereg, Jász-Nagykun-Szolnok, and Békés.	 
 Area	7,544 km ²	6,208 km ²	
 Population (2023)	563,486 inhabitants	531,138 inhabitants	
 Population density (2023)	74.7 inhabitants/km ²	85.6 inhabitants/km ²	
 Ethnic composition (majority population and significant minorities)	Majority: Romanians (approx. 72%). Significant minorities: Hungarians (approx. 24%), Roma (approx. 2%), Germans and other ethnic groups.	Majority: Hungarians (approx. 87%). Significant minorities: Roma (approx. 6%), Romanians (approx. 2%), Germans and other ethnic groups.	
 Regional GDP (2022) (EUR billion)	€5.48 billion (= €9,731 GDP per capita)	€7.30 billion (= €13,662 GDP per capita)	
 Main universities	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> University of Oradea Emanuel University of Oradea Partium Christian University 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> University of Debrecen Hajdúböszörmény University College University of Applied Sciences of Debrecen 	
 Representative cultural institutions	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Regina Maria Theatre of Oradea Târlău Crișurilor Museum – Museum Complex State Philharmonic of Oradea Oradea Fortress 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Csokonai National Theatre of Debrecen Déri Museum Kodály Philharmonic Orchestra of Debrecen MODEM Centre for Modern and Contemporary Arts 	
 Main road infrastructure	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> A3 Motorway (under completion) European roads: E60, E79, E671 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> M35 and M4 Motorways European roads: E573, E79, E671 	

Source: created by the author with the assistance of ChatGPT, based on data from Eurostat (2024), the Romanian National Institute of Statistics (INSSE, 2024), the Hungarian Central Statistical Office (KSH, 2024), and the Interreg VI-A Romania–Hungary Programme 2021–2027.

2. Cultural and Institutional Cooperation in the Bihor–Hajdú-Bihar Region

Cultural and institutional cooperation constitutes one of the fundamental pillars of development in the European Union's border regions, contributing to stronger relationships among communities, the promotion of intercultural dialogue, and the establishment of sustainable partnerships between public authorities, cultural institutions, universities, and civil society organizations. In the Bihor–Hajdú-Bihar region, these forms of cooperation have intensified over the past two decades, supported by European Territorial Cooperation programmes and by the shared commitment to promoting cultural heritage and regional development⁴⁰.

The cities of Oradea and Debrecen serve as the principal cooperation hubs within the region, bringing together cultural institutions, universities, professional organizations, and local authorities engaged in joint projects in the fields of culture, education, research, tourism, and community development. The

⁴⁰ Ibidem.

institutional relationships established between the two cities have facilitated the organization of joint cultural events, professional exchanges, educational programmes, and initiatives aimed at promoting their shared cultural heritage, thereby strengthening a regional identity founded on cooperation and mutual respect⁴¹.

Higher education institutions also play a significant role, particularly the University of Oradea and the University of Debrecen, which have developed partnerships in research, academic mobility, and the organization of international conferences and collaborative projects. University cooperation facilitates knowledge exchange, strengthens intercultural competencies, and contributes to educating a new generation of professionals familiar with the challenges and opportunities of cross-border cooperation. Participation in programmes such as Erasmus+⁴² and Interreg further reinforces these partnerships and supports the development of an integrated European academic area.

Cultural institutions in both counties also cooperate in promoting tangible and intangible cultural heritage through festivals, exhibitions, performances, and cross-border artistic projects. Museums, theatres, philharmonic orchestras, libraries, and cultural centres collaborate within institutional networks that facilitate the exchange of good practices and the development of cultural products aimed at diverse audiences. These initiatives not only enhance the cultural attractiveness of the region but also strengthen relationships among local communities⁴³.

The Interreg Romania–Hungary Programme represents one of the most important instruments supporting this cooperation. Through its funding, numerous projects have been implemented focusing on the restoration of built heritage, the development of cultural infrastructure, the promotion of cultural tourism, the digitization of cultural heritage, and the organization of joint cross-border events. These investments generate benefits that extend beyond the cultural sector by stimulating local economic

⁴¹ European Commission. *European Framework for Action on Cultural Heritage*. <https://culture.ec.europa.eu/>. Accessed 14 May 2026.

⁴² European Commission. *Erasmus+ Programme (2021–2027)*. <https://erasmus-plus.ec.europa.eu/>. Accessed 14 May 2026.

⁴³ UNESCO. *Culture and Sustainable Development*. <https://www.unesco.org/en/culture>. Accessed 14 May 2026.

development, increasing mobility, and strengthening the administrative capacity of institutions involved in cross-border cooperation.

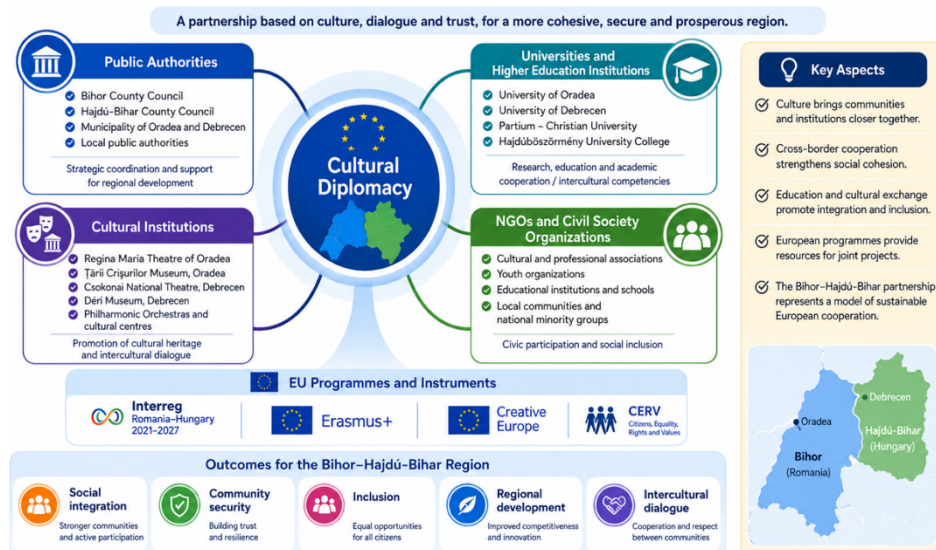
In addition to public authorities and cultural institutions, non-governmental organizations and professional associations contribute to the implementation of projects promoting social inclusion, intercultural dialogue, and civic participation. Activities carried out in cooperation with schools, universities, and local communities encourage the involvement of young people, national minorities, and other vulnerable groups in cultural and community life, thereby fostering a climate based on collaboration, mutual trust, and shared responsibility⁴⁴.

From the perspective of cultural diplomacy, institutional cooperation between Bihor and Hajdú-Bihar demonstrates that cultural relations can generate benefits extending well beyond the fields of heritage preservation and artistic exchange. Culture becomes an instrument for strengthening trust between institutions and citizens, encouraging community participation, and supporting public policies aimed at integration, social inclusion, and sustainable development. Through the establishment of stable partnerships and the effective use of shared cultural resources, the region enhances its capacity to respond to the social and economic challenges characteristic of a border area⁴⁵.

⁴⁴ European Economic and Social Committee (EESC). (2023). *Culture, Cities and Identity in Europe*. <https://www.eesc.europa.eu/>. Accessed 14 May 2026; International Organization for Migration (IOM). (2024). *World Migration Report 2024*. <https://worldmigrationreport.iom.int/world-migration-report-2024/>. Accessed 14 May 2026.

⁴⁵ Melissen, J. (Ed.). (2005).

Figure 2. Cross-Border Cultural Cooperation in the Bihor–Hajdú-Bihar Region. Institutions, Stakeholders, and Outcomes for Integration, Societal Security, and Inclusion



Source: Interreg VI-A Romania–Hungary Programme 2021–2027; European Commission (2024); Council of Europe (2022); UNESCO (2022). Prepared by the author with the assistance of Artificial Intelligence (ChatGPT).

3. Integrating National Minorities, Refugees, and Migrants through Cultural Diplomacy

The Bihor–Hajdú-Bihar cross-border region is characterized by significant ethnic, linguistic, and cultural diversity, which has shaped both the development of local communities and the relationships among them. The long-standing coexistence of Romanian, Hungarian, Roma, and other ethnic communities has contributed to the formation of a shared cultural heritage and to the development of cooperation mechanisms based on mutual respect and intercultural dialogue. Within this context, integration and inclusion policies must respond both to the needs of historical communities and to the challenges arising from increased population mobility and new migration flows.

Social integration involves creating conditions that enable all individuals to participate actively in the economic, social, and cultural life of the community, regardless of their ethnic origin, nationality,

religion, or legal status⁴⁶. In border regions, this process is facilitated through cooperation among public authorities, educational institutions, cultural organizations, and civil society, which jointly implement programmes promoting intercultural dialogue, combating discrimination, and strengthening social cohesion.

In recent years, the European context has been significantly influenced by increased international mobility and the growing number of people seeking international protection, particularly as a consequence of the war in Ukraine. Romania and Hungary have become countries of transit and, in certain cases, destination countries for refugees and other categories of migrants. This development has prompted local authorities and non-governmental organizations to establish support mechanisms facilitating access to education, social services, healthcare, and community integration. Within this process, cultural and educational activities have played a complementary role by facilitating communication, mutual understanding, and adaptation to new social environments⁴⁷.

Cultural diplomacy contributes to the integration of these groups through the organization of intercultural events, festivals, educational workshops, artistic programmes, and community-based activities that encourage interaction between local populations and newcomers. Such initiatives reduce cultural barriers, combat stereotypes, and foster relationships based on mutual trust and respect⁴⁸. At the same time, they promote cultural diversity as a resource for community development and for strengthening a European identity founded on pluralism, solidarity, and shared values.

⁴⁶ European Commission. (2020). *Action Plan on Integration and Inclusion 2021–2027*. https://home-affairs.ec.europa.eu/policies/migration-and-asylum/legal-migration-and-integration/integration-and-inclusion_en. Accessed 14 May 2026; UNESCO. *Culture and Sustainable Development*.

⁴⁷ United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR). (2024). *Global Trends: Forced Displacement in 2023*. <https://www.unhcr.org/global-trends>. Accessed 14 May 2026; International Organization for Migration (IOM). (2024). *World Migration Report 2024*. <https://worldmigrationreport.iom.int/world-migration-report-2024/>. Accessed 27 May 2026.

⁴⁸ European Commission. (2018). *A New European Agenda for Culture*. <https://eur-lex.europa.eu/legal-content/EN/TXT/?uri=CELEX:52018DC0267> . Accessed 16 April 2026.

The Bihor–Hajdú-Bihar region offers favourable conditions for developing joint programmes aimed at social inclusion, building upon the experience gained through cross-border cooperation projects and the presence of institutions with expertise in education, culture, and social assistance. Partnerships among local authorities, universities, schools, cultural institutions, and non-governmental organizations can facilitate initiatives promoting language learning, cultural exchange, volunteering, and civic participation, thereby contributing to the integration of vulnerable groups and strengthening social cohesion⁴⁹.

A particularly important dimension concerns the integration of national minorities, which has long represented a central component of cooperation between Romania and Hungary. Respect for minority rights, the promotion of education in minority languages, the preservation of cultural heritage, and support for intercultural dialogue all contribute to fostering a climate of trust and cooperation among communities. In this respect, cultural diplomacy complements existing public policies by using culture as an instrument for bringing people and institutions closer together, reducing the risk of social tensions, and supporting the development of an inclusive society⁵⁰.

Overall, the experience of the Bihor–Hajdú-Bihar region demonstrates that integration and inclusion depend not only on administrative or economic measures but also on the ability of communities to build relationships founded on dialogue, participation, and respect for cultural diversity. Cultural diplomacy provides an effective framework for fostering these relationships and contributes to strengthening cross-border cooperation that responds both to the objectives of European policies and to the needs of local communities.

⁴⁹ Interreg VI-A Romania–Hungary Programme (2021–2027). *Programme Document*. <https://interreg-rohu.eu/>. Accessed 15 May 2026; Interreg VI-A Romania–Hungary Programme (2021–2027). *Programme Document*. <https://interreg-rohu.eu/>. Accessed 15 May 2026.

⁵⁰ Council of Europe. (1995). *Framework Convention for the Protection of National Minorities* (ETS No. 157). <https://www.coe.int/en/web/minorities>. Accessed 14 May 2026; Council of Europe. (2022). *Culture and Cultural Heritage*. <https://www.coe.int/en/web/culture-and-heritage>. Accessed 14 May 2026.

Table 1. Examples of Good Practices for Integration and Inclusion through Cultural Diplomacy

Initiative	Description	Contribution to Integration and Inclusion
Cross-border cultural festivals and events	Organization of joint festivals, performances, exhibitions, and cultural events in Oradea and Debrecen, involving artists and communities from both countries.	Promotes intercultural dialogue, increases the visibility of the shared cultural heritage, and strengthens relationships among communities.
Academic mobility and Erasmus+ projects	Cooperation between the University of Oradea and the University of Debrecen through student and staff exchanges, summer schools, and joint educational projects.	Develops intercultural competences and strengthens academic and professional cooperation.
Educational programmes for border communities	Activities implemented in primary and secondary schools focusing on shared cultural heritage, cultural diversity, and European citizenship.	Encourages tolerance, civic participation, and mutual understanding among young people.
Cultural activities for refugees and migrants	Artistic workshops, language courses, community events, and integration programmes organized by public authorities and non-governmental organizations.	Facilitates social integration, reduces social isolation, and encourages participation in community life.
Interreg projects promoting shared cultural heritage	Restoration of built heritage, development of cultural routes, and promotion of cultural and tourism attractions across the Bihor–Hajdú-Bihar region.	Contributes to regional economic development, institutional cooperation, and the strengthening of a shared regional identity.

Source: created by the author, with the assistance of ChatGPT, based on the analysis of the Interreg VI-A Romania–Hungary Programme (2021–2027), the European Commission, the Council of Europe, UNESCO, and other documentary sources examined in this guide.

The examples presented demonstrate that cultural and educational projects can generate impacts that extend well beyond the promotion of cultural heritage or artistic exchange. They contribute to the development of intercultural competences, strengthen trust among communities, and foster cooperative networks that support integration, societal security, and social

inclusion. Building upon these experiences can provide a solid foundation for the development of new initiatives within future cooperation programmes between Bihor County and Hajdú-Bihar County, further reinforcing sustainable cross-border partnerships and contributing to the long-term objectives of European territorial cooperation.

4. Challenges to Security and Inclusion in the Bihor-Hajdú-Bihar Cross-Border Region

The development of the Bihor-Hajdú-Bihar cross-border region is influenced by a range of challenges affecting social cohesion, societal security, and the capacity of public institutions to respond effectively to economic and demographic change. Although cooperation between the two counties has strengthened considerably over recent decades through European funding programmes and institutional partnerships, several structural factors continue to influence the processes of integration and inclusion if not addressed through coordinated public policies and joint cross-border initiatives⁵¹.

One of the principal challenges concerns demographic developments. Both Bihor County and Hajdú-Bihar County face population ageing, declining birth rates, and labour migration towards other regions of the European Union. These trends reduce the availability of human resources, affect regional economic development, and place increasing pressure on education, healthcare, and social protection systems. At the same time, cross-border mobility creates new opportunities for cooperation but also requires policies adapted to an increasingly integrated labour market⁵².

Another significant challenge relates to the integration of vulnerable groups, including national minorities, refugees, and migrants. Although the region possesses substantial experience in managing cultural diversity, effective integration requires equitable access to education, public services, employment opportunities, and cultural life. Limited language skills, cultural differences, and

⁵¹ ESPON. (2022). *Territorial Cooperation and Functional Areas in Europe*. <https://www.espon.eu/>. Accessed 17 May 2026.

⁵² Eurostat. *Regional Demographic Statistics*. <https://ec.europa.eu/eurostat>. Accessed 17 May 2026; Romanian National Institute of Statistics (INSSE). <https://insse.ro/>. Accessed 17 May 2026.

unequal access to opportunities may increase the risk of social exclusion and marginalization, particularly among newly arrived members of the community⁵³.

Digital transformation represents another important dimension affecting both security and inclusion within border communities. The expansion of digital public services and online communication facilitates cross-border cooperation while simultaneously increasing the risks associated with disinformation, hate speech, and the spread of stereotypes. In this context, strengthening digital and media literacy, together with promoting responsible intercultural communication, has become an essential component of community resilience and democratic participation⁵⁴.

From the perspective of regional development, territorial disparities between urban and rural areas continue to influence access to cultural, educational, and social services. While Oradea and Debrecen concentrate a substantial share of the region's cultural and academic infrastructure, smaller settlements along the border possess more limited resources for organizing cultural activities and participating in European cooperation projects. Reducing these disparities requires continued investment in infrastructure, institutional capacity-building, and the expansion of local and cross-border partnerships⁵⁵.

Within this context, cultural diplomacy can make an important contribution to strengthening societal security by promoting intercultural dialogue, encouraging civic participation, and developing sustainable cooperation networks among institutions and

⁵³ European Commission. (2020). *Action Plan on Integration and Inclusion 2021–2027*. https://home-affairs.ec.europa.eu/policies/migration-and-asylum/legal-migration-and-integration/integration-and-inclusion_en. Accessed 16 May 2026; United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR). (2024). *Global Trends: Forced Displacement in 2023*. <https://www.unhcr.org/global-trends>. Accessed 16 May 2026; International Organization for Migration (IOM). (2024). *World Migration Report 2024*. <https://worldmigrationreport.iom.int/world-migration-report-2024/>. Accessed 16 May 2026.

⁵⁴ European Commission. (2022). *2030 Digital Compass: The European Way for the Digital Decade*. <https://digital-strategy.ec.europa.eu/en/policies/europes-digital-decade>. Accessed 13 May 2026; Council of Europe. (2023). *Digital Citizenship Education*. <https://www.coe.int/en/web/digital-citizenship-education>. Accessed 14 May 2026.

⁵⁵ Interreg VI-A Romania–Hungary Programme (2021–2027). *Programme Document*. <https://interreg-rohu.eu/>. Accessed 14 May 2026.

communities. Joint cultural activities, educational exchanges, and heritage-based projects enhance mutual trust and reduce negative perceptions arising from cultural differences or social change. Consequently, culture becomes a complementary instrument of public policy for promoting resilience, social cohesion, and the sustainable development of the cross-border region⁵⁶.

Addressing these challenges requires continuous cooperation among public authorities, cultural institutions, universities, civil society organizations, and local communities. Integrating the cultural dimension into regional development policies can facilitate the identification of sustainable solutions while strengthening the capacity of the Bihor-Hajdú-Bihar region to respond to social, economic, and demographic challenges in a coordinated, inclusive, and resilient manner.

Figure 3. Key Challenges and Strategic Response Directions in the Bihor-Hajdú-Bihar Cross-Border Region. Cultural Diplomacy as a Tool for Security, Integration, and Inclusion

 CHALLENGES	 RESPONSES THROUGH CULTURAL DIPLOMACY
 POPULATION AGEING Declining birth rates and increasing life expectancy place growing pressure on public services and reduce community dynamism.	 INTERGENERATIONAL CULTURAL PROGRAMMES <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Cultural workshops and projects bringing together young people and older adults. • Promoting the experience and knowledge of older generations within the community. • Strengthening social cohesion and intergenerational solidarity.
 MIGRATION AND MOBILITY Labour migration and the arrival of refugees and migrants may increase the risk of social exclusion and cultural tensions.	 INTEGRATION ACTIVITIES AND INTERCULTURAL DIALOGUE <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Intercultural events, festivals, and community gatherings. • Language courses and educational projects for newcomers. • Facilitating interaction and fostering a sense of belonging.
 DISINFORMATION AND HATE SPEECH The spread of false information and stereotypes may undermine trust and relationships between communities.	 MEDIA LITERACY AND CULTURAL PROJECTS <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Media literacy and critical thinking programmes. • Cultural initiatives promoting pluralism and shared values. • Counteracting stereotypes through knowledge, dialogue, and communication.
 URBAN-RURAL DISPARITIES Unequal access to cultural infrastructure and educational services between urban centres and rural border areas.	 CULTURAL NETWORKS AND TRAVELLING PROJECTS <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Mobile libraries, travelling exhibitions, and cultural caravans. • Strengthening local networks of cultural institutions and operators. • Reducing territorial disparities and improving access to culture.
 LIMITED CIVIC PARTICIPATION Low levels of citizen engagement in community life hinder development and social cohesion.	 VOLUNTEERING AND COMMUNITY ENGAGEMENT <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Cultural and civic volunteering programmes. • Supporting local initiatives and community leaders. • Strengthening trust, responsibility, and community ownership.

Source: created by the author with the assistance of ChatGPT, based on the Interreg VI-A Romania-Hungary Programme (2021–2027), the European Commission (2024), the Council of Europe (2022), and UNESCO (2022).

⁵⁶ European Commission. *Interreg VI-A Romania-Hungary Programme 2021–2027*. <https://interreg-rohu.eu/>. Accessed 09 May 2026.

5. Chapter Conclusions

The analysis of the Bihor-Hajdú-Bihar cross-border region highlights the existence of a favourable framework for the development of cultural and institutional cooperation, supported by geographical proximity, a shared cultural heritage, and the experience gained through the implementation of European-funded projects. Cooperation among public authorities, educational institutions, cultural organizations, and civil society has contributed to strengthening cross-border relations and to the development of initiatives promoting intercultural dialogue and regional development.

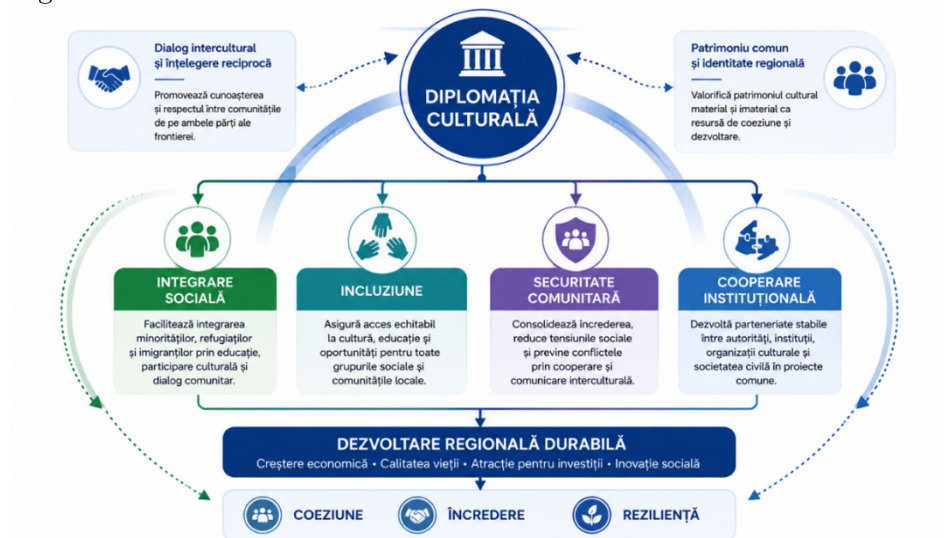
The region's ethnic and cultural diversity represents a valuable resource for promoting social inclusion and civic participation. At the same time, demographic change, population mobility, the integration of refugees, and the need to reduce disparities between urban and rural areas require public policies capable of using cultural cooperation as a complementary instrument for economic and social development.

The analysis demonstrates that cultural diplomacy can contribute to achieving the objectives of integration, societal security, and inclusion by fostering intercultural dialogue, strengthening trust among communities, and developing sustainable partnerships between institutions in the two counties. Cultural, educational, and community-based activities encourage citizens' participation in public life while creating favourable conditions for reducing stereotypes and strengthening social cohesion.

At the same time, the effectiveness of these initiatives depends on the continuity of institutional cooperation, sustained access to European funding, and the capacity of local stakeholders to develop joint projects that respond to the needs of communities on both sides of the border. Building upon the experience acquired through the Interreg programmes and other European initiatives can support the development of cooperation models capable of addressing the current and future challenges of the region.

The conclusions of this chapter provide the foundation for the analysis of good practices presented in the following chapter, which examines projects and initiatives demonstrating how cultural diplomacy can be effectively used as an instrument for promoting integration, societal security, and social inclusion in border regions.

Figure 4. The Role of Cultural Diplomacy in the Development of the Cross-Border Region



Source: created by the author based on the data and documents analyzed.

III. Best Practices in the Use of Cultural Diplomacy to Promote Integration, Societal Security, and Inclusion in the Bihor-Hajdú-Bihar Cross-Border Region

Following the analysis of the conceptual framework and the characteristics of the Bihor-Hajdú-Bihar cross-border region, the next step is to identify and evaluate concrete examples demonstrating how cultural diplomacy can generate measurable social, institutional, and economic outcomes. The analysis of best practices facilitates the transition from the theoretical to the practical dimension by presenting initiatives that have contributed to strengthening cooperation among local stakeholders, promoting the shared cultural heritage, and developing sustainable mechanisms of cross-border collaboration⁵⁷.

⁵⁷ European Commission. *Interreg VI-A Romania-Hungary Programme (2021–2027)*. <https://interreg-rohu.eu/>. Accessed 07 June 2026; European Commission. *EU Cohesion Policy 2021–2027*. https://cohesiondata.ec.europa.eu/cohesion_overview/21-27. Accessed 07 June 2026.

This chapter examines projects and initiatives implemented in the Bihor–Hajdú-Bihar region, selected on the basis of their relevance to the objectives of this guide and the availability of documented results. The analysis focuses on how these initiatives have supported institutional cooperation, increased community participation, promoted intercultural dialogue, and strengthened territorial cohesion, in line with the objectives of the European Territorial Cooperation policy⁵⁸.

The purpose of this analysis is not to provide an exhaustive overview of all projects implemented within the region, but rather to identify those experiences that can serve as reference models for the design and implementation of future initiatives. Particular attention is therefore given to the factors contributing to project success, the challenges encountered during implementation, and the elements that can be transferred and adapted to meet the needs of communities in the border area. Such an approach supports the formulation of practical recommendations and promotes an institutional culture based on cooperation, innovation, and sustainable development.

1. Criteria for the Selection of Best Practices

The identification and analysis of best practices constitute an essential stage in the preparation of a guide intended to support cross-border cooperation and the formulation of recommendations applicable at the regional level. According to the academic literature and the documents of European institutions, a best practice is defined as an initiative or intervention model that has demonstrated its effectiveness through concrete, sustainable, and transferable results, thereby serving as a reference for the development of similar projects in other contexts⁵⁹.

In this guide, the selection of best practices was guided by the principal objective of the research, namely to demonstrate the role of cultural diplomacy in promoting integration, societal security, and inclusion within the Bihor–Hajdú-Bihar cross-border region. Consequently, priority was given to projects and initiatives implemented within this region that have had a significant impact on institutional cooperation, community development, and the strengthening of

⁵⁸ European Commission. *Interreg 2021–2027*. https://ec.europa.eu/regional_policy/policy/cooperation/interreg_en. Accessed 07 June 2026.

⁵⁹ Scott, J. W. (2015). *Bordering, Border Politics and Cross-Border Cooperation in Europe*. Routledge.;

relationships among local stakeholders. The selection of local examples highlights experiences that are directly applicable and facilitates the formulation of recommendations adapted to the economic, social, and cultural realities of the border area⁶⁰.

The selection process was based on several complementary criteria. The first criterion concerned the relevance of each project to the objectives of this guide, particularly its contribution to the development of cultural cooperation, intercultural dialogue, and cross-border relations. Priority was given to initiatives demonstrating how culture can become an instrument for strengthening mutual trust, encouraging community participation, and developing sustainable partnerships. The second criterion concerned the impact of the initiatives on integration, societal security, and inclusion. Particular attention was paid to projects that produced visible results in terms of institutional cooperation, citizen participation, the promotion of shared cultural heritage, and the development of collaborative mechanisms capable of strengthening territorial cohesion and the resilience of border communities.

The innovative and sustainable character of the initiatives also represented an important selection criterion. Preference was given to projects introducing innovative approaches to the promotion of cultural heritage, the application of digital technologies, the development of cultural infrastructure, or the active involvement of local communities. Furthermore, consideration was given to the long-term sustainability of project outcomes beyond the completion of European funding, which represents a key condition for effective cross-border cooperation⁶¹.

Another important criterion concerned the availability of reliable information and the possibility of verifying project results. Consequently, the analysis includes only projects for which official documentation is available, such as project fiches, implementation reports, and information published by partner authorities or by the Interreg Romania-Hungary Programme. This approach ensures the objectivity of the analysis and allows conclusions to be based on verifiable evidence.

⁶⁰ European Commission. (2021). *Better Regulation Toolbox*. https://commission.europa.eu/law/law-making-process/planning-and-proposing-law/better-regulation_en. Accessed 07 June 2026.

⁶¹ European Commission. *Interreg 2021-2027*.

Finally, preference was given to examples with significant replication potential and the capacity to serve as models for future initiatives within the Bihor–Hajdú–Bihar region. The analysis therefore seeks not only to present project outcomes but also to identify the factors contributing to their success, the challenges encountered during implementation, and the lessons that may be applied in future cooperation programmes.

By applying these criteria, this chapter aims to highlight relevant examples of cultural diplomacy in practice within the Bihor–Hajdú–Bihar region and to provide an analytical framework supporting the recommendations presented in the following chapters. The selected best practices demonstrate that cultural cooperation, when supported by strong institutional partnerships and the effective use of European funding, can make a significant contribution to strengthening integration, societal security, and social inclusion in border regions⁶².

Figure 5. Criteria for the Selection of Case Studies



Source: created by the author based on the data and documents analyzed.

⁶² European Commission. *Interreg VI-A Romania–Hungary Programme (2021–2027)*. <https://interreg-rohu.eu/>. Accessed 08 June 2026.

2. The CULTURAL LIVING LAB Project (ROHU00618): A Model of Cultural Cooperation and Regional Development

The CULTURAL LIVING LAB (ROHU00618) project represents one of the most significant cultural cooperation initiatives implemented in the Bihor–Hajdú-Bihar cross-border region under the Interreg VI-A Romania–Hungary Programme 2021–2027. The project has been designated as an Operation of Strategic Importance (OSI), reflecting its contribution to achieving the objectives of the European Union's Cohesion Policy related to territorial development, cross-border cooperation, and the strengthening of social cohesion⁶³.

The initiative is jointly implemented by the Bihor County Council and the Hajdú-Bihar County Council and aims to develop a shared cultural ecosystem through investments in cultural infrastructure, digitalization, and the organization of cultural activities targeting communities on both sides of the border. Moving beyond the traditional approach to cultural cooperation based primarily on cultural events, the project focuses on establishing permanent infrastructure capable of supporting long-term institutional cooperation and sustained citizen participation.

One of the project's main components is the construction of the Multifunctional Cultural Centre in Oradea, designed as a venue for cultural, educational, and artistic activities. At the same time, complementary infrastructure is being developed in Hajdú-Bihar County to support the organization of joint events and improve logistical cooperation between the project partners. These investments are complemented by the creation of a digital platform designed to promote the region's cultural heritage and improve public access to information on cultural activities taking place throughout the cross-border area⁶⁴.

From the perspective of cultural diplomacy, the project establishes a favourable framework for strengthening relationships among public authorities, cultural institutions, and local communities. The organization of festivals, exhibitions, workshops,

⁶³ European Commission. (2024). *EU Cohesion Policy 2021–2027*. https://cohesiondata.ec.europa.eu/cohesion_overview/21-27. Accessed 09 June 2026. Interreg VI-A Romania–Hungary Programme. (2025). *CULTURAL LIVING LAB (ROHU00618) – Operation of Strategic Importance*. <https://interreg-rohu.eu/>. Accessed 09 June 2026.

⁶⁴ Interreg VI-A Romania–Hungary Programme. (2025). *CULTURAL*

artistic camps, and other joint cultural activities contributes to the enhancement of intercultural dialogue and the promotion of the region's shared cultural heritage. At the same time, these activities facilitate the exchange of professional experience among cultural practitioners and encourage citizens' active participation in regional cultural life, thereby reinforcing a shared sense of belonging within the cross-border area⁶⁵.

The project has a significant impact on the process of regional integration by strengthening cooperation between public administrations and creating the conditions for sustainable partnerships among cultural and educational institutions. Owing to its strategic nature, it contributes to the development of cross-border governance based on cooperation, mutual trust, and common objectives, all of which are widely recognized as essential factors for the success of European Territorial Cooperation⁶⁶.

The project also contributes to strengthening community security by fostering institutional cooperation and intercultural dialogue. The academic literature demonstrates that participation in joint cultural activities and the establishment of stable cooperation networks help reduce social and cultural barriers, strengthen mutual trust, and enhance the resilience of border communities⁶⁷. In this respect, the investments implemented through the project generate not only cultural and economic benefits but also positive effects on social cohesion and regional stability.

Another important dimension of the project is the promotion of social inclusion. The activities planned within the project are designed for diverse target groups and encourage the participation of young people, artists, non-governmental organizations, educational institutions, and local communities from both countries. Through the diversification of cultural activities and the use of digital technologies, the project expands access to culture and increases community participation in line with European objectives concerning social inclusion and active citizenship⁶⁸.

⁶⁵ Melissen, J. (Ed.). (2005). *op.cit.*

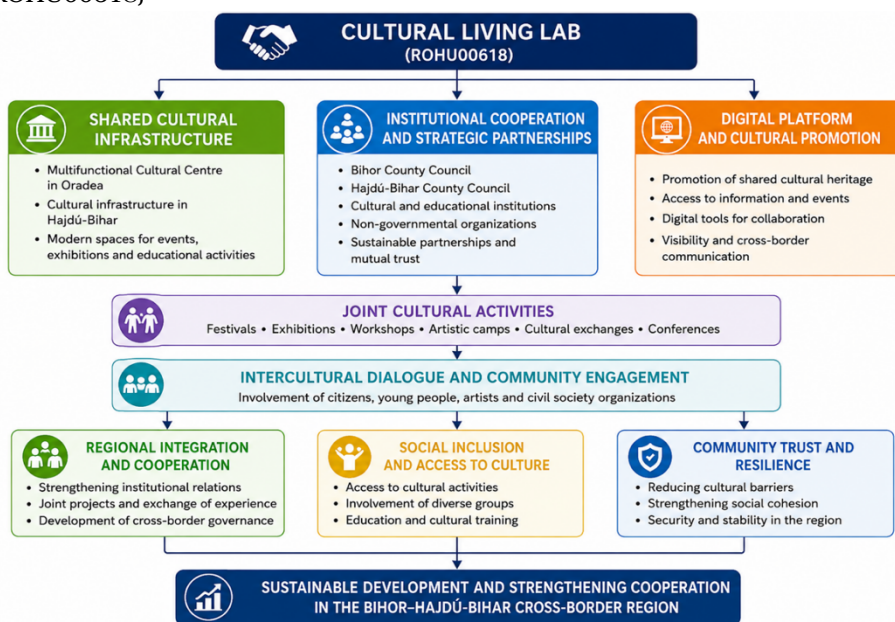
⁶⁶ Scott, J. W. (2015). *Bordering, Border Politics and Cross-Border Cooperation in Europe*. Routledge.

⁶⁷ Buzan, B., Wæver, O., & de Wilde, J. (1998). *op.cit.*

⁶⁸ UNESCO. (2019). *Culture | 2030 Indicators*. <https://www.unesco.org/en/culture/2030-indicators>. Accessed 07 June 2026.

The experience of the **CULTURAL LIVING LAB** project demonstrates that cultural diplomacy can serve as an effective instrument for strengthening cross-border cooperation and promoting regional development. The integration of infrastructure investments with cultural and educational activities, the use of digital technologies, and the involvement of a broad range of local stakeholders represent valuable practices that can be replicated in future cooperation initiatives. From this perspective, the project can be regarded as a model of good practice for the Bihor–Hajdú-Bihar region, illustrating how culture can contribute to promoting integration, societal security, and social inclusion in border regions⁶⁹.

Figure 6. Cooperation Model within the CULTURAL LIVING LAB Project (ROHU00618)



Source: created by the author, with the assistance of ChatGPT, based on the Interreg VI-A Romania–Hungary Programme 2021–2027 and the official project documentation of the CULTURAL LIVING LAB (ROHU00618) project.

The figure above illustrates the main components of the cooperation model developed within the CULTURAL LIVING LAB (ROHU00618) project and the relationships between them.

⁶⁹ Ibidem.

Investments in cultural infrastructure, the strengthening of institutional partnerships, and the use of digital tools create the conditions necessary for organizing joint cultural activities and fostering intercultural dialogue. Through the active involvement of public authorities, cultural institutions, and local communities, the project generates outcomes that extend beyond the cultural dimension, contributing to regional integration, social inclusion, and the strengthening of trust among the stakeholders involved. These results demonstrate that cultural diplomacy can serve as an effective instrument for promoting cross-border cooperation and enhancing the resilience of communities in the Bihor–Hajdú-Bihar region.

Based on the analysis of the project, a number of key elements can be identified that may be applied to other cross-border cooperation initiatives. These elements are summarized in figure 7 and represent practical directions for action that can contribute to strengthening cultural and institutional cooperation throughout the region.

Figure 7. Transferable Elements for the Bihor–Hajdú-Bihar Cross-Border Region



Source: created by the author based on the data and documentary sources analyzed.

3. Cross-Border Academic Cooperation: The Partnership between the University of Oradea and the University of Debrecen

Higher education institutions are key actors in cultural diplomacy, contributing to the development of relationships among communities through education, research, and academic exchange. In border regions, universities extend beyond their traditional role as providers of educational services, becoming platforms for intercultural dialogue, innovation, and institutional cooperation. Through the mobility of students and academic staff, the development of joint programmes, and participation in European projects, universities strengthen mutual trust and contribute to the creation of a cross-border area based on cooperation and knowledge exchange⁷⁰.

Within this context, the partnership between the University of Oradea and the University of Debrecen represents a relevant example of good practice in the Bihor-Hajdú-Bihar cross-border region. Cooperation between the two institutions has developed progressively through bilateral agreements, participation in European mobility programmes, and the implementation of joint projects in the fields of education, research, and innovation. These initiatives have strengthened academic exchanges while reinforcing links between the higher education sector and local communities on both sides of the border.

European mobility programmes such as Erasmus+ and CEEPUS play a particularly important role by facilitating exchanges of students, academic staff, and researchers. Participation in these programmes provides opportunities for professional and personal development, promotes intercultural learning, and contributes to the acquisition of competencies suited to a European Higher Education Area characterized by cultural diversity and cross-border cooperation. Academic mobility also encourages the establishment of long-term professional networks and strengthens institutional partnerships⁷¹.

⁷⁰ European Commission. *European Education Area*. <https://education.ec.europa.eu/>. Accessed 07 June 2026; Melissen, J. (Ed.). (2005).

⁷¹ European Commission. *Erasmus+ Programme*. <https://erasmus-plus.ec.europa.eu/>. Accessed 10 June 2026.

Cooperation between the two universities is further reflected in their participation in projects funded through the Interreg Romania–Hungary Programme, Horizon Europe, and other European research and innovation initiatives. These projects enable the partners to combine their complementary expertise and develop joint solutions to the economic, social, and environmental challenges facing the cross-border region⁷². At the same time, they facilitate the transfer of knowledge to public authorities, businesses, and civil society organizations, thereby supporting innovation-driven regional development.

From the perspective of cultural diplomacy, academic cooperation generates benefits that extend well beyond the educational sphere. Direct interaction among students, researchers, and academic staff promotes mutual understanding, reduces cultural and linguistic barriers, and contributes to the development of a shared regional identity based on mutual respect and collaboration. The academic literature emphasizes that such relationships strengthen social capital and enhance the capacity of communities to respond collectively to common challenges. University cooperation also promotes social inclusion by expanding access to educational opportunities for students from diverse social and cultural backgrounds. Participation in international programmes strengthens intercultural competencies, promotes equal opportunities, and supports the integration of young people into the European Higher Education and Research Area. Through active involvement in joint projects, volunteering initiatives, cultural events, and international conferences, the two universities contribute to strengthening dialogue among communities throughout the Bihor–Hajdú-Bihar region⁷³.

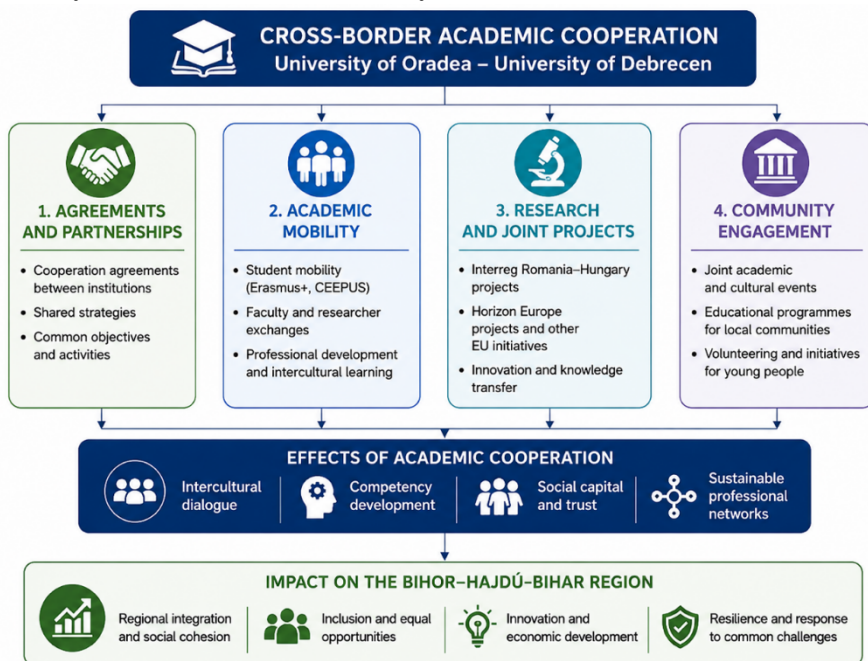
The experience of the partnership between the University of Oradea and the University of Debrecen demonstrates that higher education institutions can become genuine drivers of cultural diplomacy and cross-border cooperation. The continuity of institutional relations, sustained participation in European programmes, and a strong orientation towards projects with regional impact constitute good practices that can be replicated and further expanded in future

⁷² Interreg VI-A Romania–Hungary Programme (2021–2027); European Commission. *Horizon Europe*.

⁷³ Scott, J. W. (2015); European Higher Education Area (EHEA). <https://www.ehea.info/>. Accessed 07 April 2026.

initiatives. Such an approach contributes to the development of a border region that is more integrated, more inclusive, and more resilient⁷⁴.

Figure 8. The Model of Cross-Border Academic Cooperation between the University of Oradea and the University of Debrecen



Source: created by the author based on the data and documentary sources analyzed.

The figure highlights the principal components of the cross-border academic cooperation developed between the University of Oradea and the University of Debrecen. Institutional relationships strengthened through cooperation agreements, mobility programmes, joint research projects, and active engagement with local communities demonstrate that universities can become strategic actors of cultural diplomacy. By promoting knowledge exchange, intercultural dialogue, and scientific collaboration, these institutions contribute to the development of human capital and to strengthening trust among communities in the Bihor–Hajdú-Bihar cross-border region.

The benefits of this cooperation extend beyond the fields of education and research, generating positive outcomes for regional

⁷⁴ Ibidem.

development, innovation, and social inclusion. The establishment of professional networks, increased academic mobility, and participation in European-funded projects facilitate knowledge transfer and the development of joint solutions to the specific challenges faced by border regions. In this way, university cooperation enhances regional competitiveness and creates a favourable environment for long-term institutional collaboration.

Building on this experience, a number of strategic actions can be identified that may be further developed and expanded through future cross-border cooperation initiatives. These elements, summarized in figure 9, highlight the factors that have contributed to the success of the partnership and may serve as reference points for the development of new projects in the fields of education, research, and cultural diplomacy within the Bihor–Hajdú-Bihar cross-border region.

Figure 9. Transferable Elements



Source: created by the author based on the data and documentary sources analyzed.

4. Promoting Cultural Heritage and Developing Cross-Border Tourism: A Model of Cooperation between Local Authorities and Communities

Cultural heritage represents one of the most valuable assets of border regions, contributing not only to the preservation of local identity but also to the development of cooperation based on shared values and common interests. According to the UNESCO Framework for Culture | 2030 Indicators⁷⁵, cultural heritage plays an essential role in sustainable territorial development, while the **Council of Europe Framework Convention on the Value of Cultural Heritage for Society (Faro Convention)**⁷⁶ emphasizes its contribution to social cohesion, democratic participation, and intercultural dialogue. In the Bihor-Hajdú-Bihar cross-border region, built heritage, traditional crafts, local customs, and cultural events constitute important resources that foster closer relationships between communities while supporting joint initiatives in culture and tourism.

A relevant example is provided by projects implemented under the Interreg VI-A Romania-Hungary Programme 2021–2027, which supports cross-border initiatives aimed at promoting cultural heritage, sustainable tourism, and institutional cooperation⁷⁷. Through cooperation among the Bihor County Council, Visit Bihor – Destination Management Organization, and their partners in Hajdú-Bihar County, common promotional tools, integrated tourism routes, and joint cultural initiatives have been developed, strengthening the visibility and attractiveness of the border region⁷⁸.

Cooperation among the project partners extends beyond the promotion of tourist attractions to the creation of a shared regional identity and the strengthening of relationships among cultural institutions, local authorities, tourism operators, and civil society organizations. As highlighted by the Council of Europe, cultural

⁷⁵ UNESCO. Culture | 2030 Indicators. <https://www.unesco.org/en/culture/2030-indicators>. Accessed 02 June 2026.

⁷⁶ Council of Europe. *Framework Convention on the Value of Cultural Heritage for Society (Faro Convention)*. <https://www.coe.int/en/web/culture-and-heritage/faro-convention>. Accessed 03 June 2026.

⁷⁷ Interreg VI-A Romania-Hungary Programme (2021–2027). <https://interreg-rohu.eu/>. Accessed 07 June 2026.

⁷⁸ Bihor County Council. <https://www.cjbihor.ro/>. Accessed 07 June 2026; Visit Bihor – Destination Management Organization. <https://visitbihor.ro/>. Accessed 08 June 2026.

participation and heritage-based initiatives encourage intercultural dialogue and reinforce democratic engagement. Joint cultural festivals, traditional craft fairs, exhibitions, and heritage promotion activities have therefore contributed not only to increasing the visibility of the region but also to fostering stronger social ties between local communities.

From the perspective of cultural diplomacy, these initiatives demonstrate that shared cultural heritage can serve as an effective instrument for building trust and developing sustainable partnerships. According to Nye⁷⁹, culture represents one of the principal resources of soft power, while Scott⁸⁰ argues that cross-border cultural cooperation strengthens institutional relationships and territorial cohesion. The active involvement of local stakeholders encourages the exchange of experience and promotes a culture of cooperation, which constitutes an essential prerequisite for regional integration and long-term social cohesion.

Projects dedicated to cultural heritage have also generated important economic benefits by stimulating tourism and supporting local businesses operating in hospitality, traditional crafts, gastronomy, and the creative industries. The OECD⁸¹ and the European Commission recognize cultural tourism as a significant driver of regional competitiveness and sustainable local development. Likewise, the joint promotion of the Bihor-Hajdú-Bihar destination has diversified the tourism offer and increased the international visibility of the region.

The experience of these initiatives demonstrates that successful cross-border cooperation depends on a shared strategic vision, the active involvement of local authorities, and the participation of local communities in preserving and promoting cultural heritage. The Interreg Romania-Hungary Programme identifies these elements as fundamental conditions for achieving sustainable territorial cooperation. Consequently, the projects implemented within the Bihor-Hajdú-Bihar region may be regarded as examples of good practice, illustrating how culture and tourism can simultaneously

⁷⁹ Nye, J. S. (2004).

⁸⁰ Scott, J. W. (2015).

⁸¹ OECD. *Culture and Local Development*. <https://www.oecd.org/cfe/leed/culture.htm>. Accessed 09 June 2026.

contribute to economic development, social inclusion, and stronger cross-border relationships.

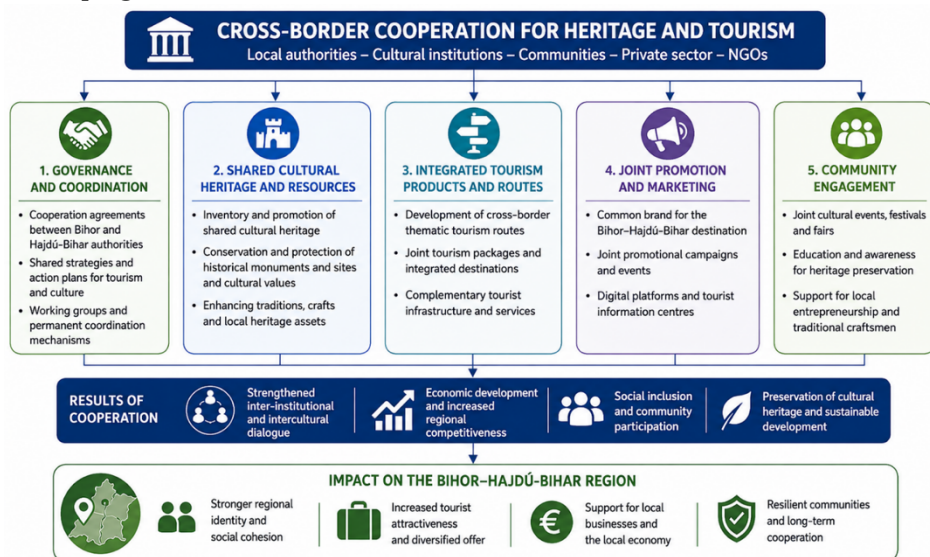
Figure 8 illustrates the principal components of the cooperation model applied to the promotion of cultural heritage and the development of cross-border tourism in the Bihor–Hajdú-Bihar region. Collaboration among public authorities, cultural institutions, tourism organizations, non-governmental organizations, and local communities enables the implementation of integrated initiatives that preserve shared heritage while increasing the region's tourism attractiveness. As emphasized in the European Framework for Action on Cultural Heritage⁸², coordinated cultural policies and integrated tourism products strengthen territorial cohesion and reinforce cooperation among border communities.

The results of these initiatives demonstrate that investments in cultural heritage and cultural tourism generate benefits extending well beyond economic development. Increased regional visibility, stronger intercultural dialogue, enhanced local entrepreneurship, and greater community participation contribute to building regional identity and fostering mutual trust. Furthermore, the responsible management of cultural heritage supports the principles of sustainable development promoted by UNESCO and the European Green Deal⁸³, ensuring that cultural resources continue to benefit future generations.

⁸² European Commission. *European Framework for Action on Cultural Heritage*. <https://culture.ec.europa.eu/cultural-heritage/european-framework-for-action-on-cultural-heritage>. Accessed 09 June 2026.

⁸³ European Commission. *The European Green Deal*. https://commission.europa.eu/strategy-and-policy/priorities-2019-2024/european-green-deal_en. Accessed 09 June 2026.

Figure 10. Cross-Border Cooperation Model for Promoting Cultural Heritage and Developing Tourism



Source: created by the author based on the data and documentary sources analyzed.

Building on the experience gained from initiatives implemented in the Bihor-Hajdú-Bihar cross-border region, a number of key factors can be identified that have contributed to the success of cooperation projects in the fields of cultural heritage and cultural tourism. These elements, summarized in the next image, highlight practical directions for action that can be replicated in future cross-border initiatives and support the strengthening of cultural diplomacy, sustainable economic development, and greater social cohesion throughout the border region.

This experience also demonstrates that the long-term success of heritage-based cooperation depends not only on financial resources but also on effective institutional partnerships, active community participation, coordinated promotional strategies, and the integration of cultural heritage into broader regional development policies. These transferable elements provide a valuable framework for designing future projects capable of generating lasting social, cultural, and economic benefits for communities on both sides of the Romania-Hungary border.

Figure 11. Transferable Elements for the Development of heritage and Vulture and Cultural Tourism Projects



Source: created by the author based on the data and documentary sources analyzed.

5. Lessons Learned and Success Factors of the Best Practices Analysed

The analysis of the best practices implemented in the Bihor-Hajdú-Bihar cross-border region demonstrates that cultural diplomacy can serve as an effective instrument for strengthening institutional cooperation, fostering relationships among communities, and promoting sustainable regional development. According to the OECD (2018)⁸⁴, cultural initiatives generate value not only through artistic activities but also by strengthening social capital, improving local governance, and enhancing regional competitiveness. Similarly, the European Committee of the Regions (2022)⁸⁵ recognizes culture as a strategic resource for territorial cohesion and inclusive regional development.

⁸⁴ OECD (2018). *Culture and Local Development: Maximising the Impact*. <https://www.oecd.org/cfe/leed/culture.htm>. Accessed 11 June 2026.

⁸⁵ European Committee of the Regions (2022). *Culture and Cultural Heritage as Strategic Resources for Regional Development*.

One of the principal success factors identified in the analysed projects is the establishment of stable institutional partnerships among public authorities, cultural institutions, universities, civil society organizations, and the private sector. The Territorial Agenda 2030⁸⁶ highlights that long-term cooperation networks and multilevel governance are essential for achieving balanced territorial development. In the Bihor-Hajdú-Bihar region, the continuity of partnerships has facilitated access to European funding while creating an institutional environment based on mutual trust and shared strategic objectives.

Another common characteristic is the integration of culture into broader regional development policies. Rather than treating culture as an isolated policy sector, the analysed initiatives combined cultural activities with education, tourism, innovation, entrepreneurship, and digital transformation. The New European Bauhaus initiative promotes this integrated approach by encouraging projects that combine sustainability, inclusion, aesthetics, and community participation. Likewise, UNESCO (2019)⁸⁷ emphasizes that culture should be considered a cross-cutting dimension of sustainable development rather than an independent policy area.

The analysed case studies also underline the importance of active community participation. The involvement of citizens, young people, cultural organizations, universities, entrepreneurs, and local associations increased public ownership of the projects and reinforced a shared sense of regional identity. According to the Council of Europe Framework Convention on the Value of Cultural Heritage for Society (Faro Convention, 2005)⁸⁸, cultural heritage generates social value when communities actively participate in its identification, preservation, and promotion. This participatory approach has strengthened social cohesion and contributed to the long-term sustainability of cross-border initiatives.

Another determining factor has been the strategic use of European funding instruments. Programmes such as Interreg,

⁸⁶ European Commission (2020). *Territorial Agenda 2030: A Future for All Places*. <https://territorialagenda.eu/>. Accessed 11 June 2026.

⁸⁷ UNESCO (2019). *Culture | 2030 Indicators*. <https://www.unesco.org/en/culture/2030-indicators>. Accessed 07 April 2026.

⁸⁸ Council of Europe (2005). *Framework Convention on the Value of Cultural Heritage for Society (Faro Convention)*. <https://www.coe.int/en/web/culture-and-heritage/faro-convention>. Accessed 12 May 2026.

Erasmus+, Creative Europe, and Horizon Europe have enabled investments in cultural infrastructure, academic cooperation, digital heritage, and sustainable tourism. The European Commission (2023)⁸⁹ notes that combining different European funding instruments significantly increases the long-term impact and resilience of regional development projects, particularly in border regions.

The analysis further demonstrates the importance of strategic planning, monitoring, and continuous evaluation. According to ESPON (2022)⁹⁰, effective territorial governance requires clear performance indicators, evidence-based policymaking, and adaptive management capable of responding to demographic, economic, and environmental changes. Integrating cross-border projects into regional development strategies therefore enhances both their sustainability and their long-term contribution to territorial cohesion.

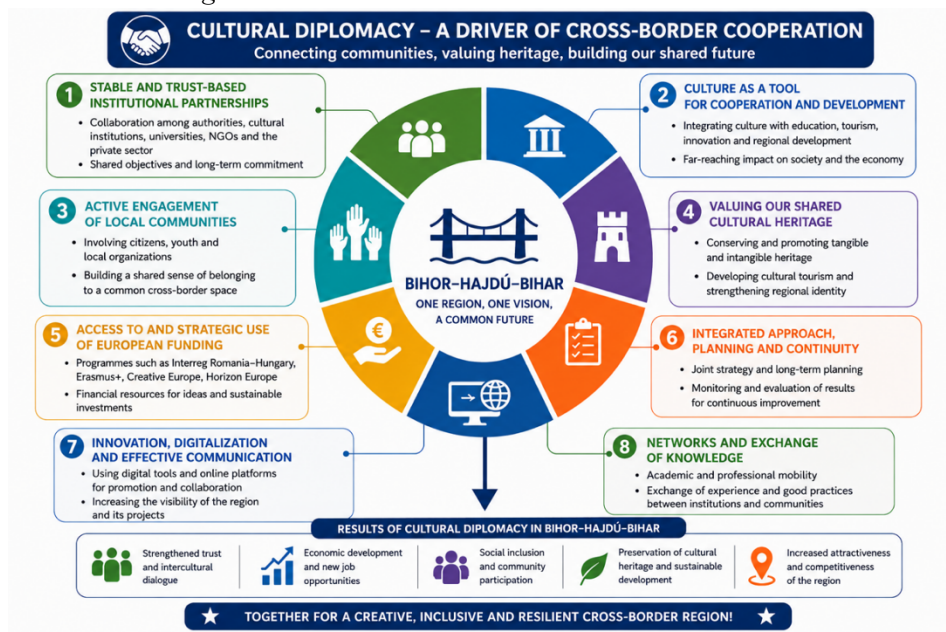
Overall, the analysed examples confirm that cultural diplomacy contributes directly to regional integration, social inclusion, institutional resilience, and sustainable development. As emphasized by UN-Habitat (2020)⁹¹, culture strengthens local resilience by encouraging participation, innovation, and social cohesion, while the OECD (2018) identifies cultural cooperation as an important driver of regional attractiveness and competitiveness. The lessons derived from these projects therefore provide a valuable foundation for designing future cross-border initiatives capable of generating lasting benefits for communities throughout the Bihor-Hajdú-Bihar region.

⁸⁹ European Commission (2023). *Funding Programmes 2021–2027*. https://commission.europa.eu/funding-tenders/find-funding_en. Accessed 07 May 2026.

⁹⁰ ESPON (2022). *Territorial Development and Cross-border Governance*. <https://www.espon.eu/>. Accessed 07 June 2026.

⁹¹ UN-Habitat (2020). *World Cities Report 2020: The Value of Sustainable Urbanization*. <https://unhabitat.org/wcr/>. Accessed 14 June 2026.

Figure 12. The Success Factors for Cultural Diplomacy in the Bihor–Hajdú-Bihar Cross-Border Region



Source: created by the author based on the data and documentary sources analyzed.

Figure 9 provides an integrated perspective on the key elements identified through the analysis of best practices in the Bihor–Hajdú-Bihar cross-border region. Unlike the individual case studies presented earlier, this framework highlights the interdependence of the components that support cross-border cooperation and demonstrates that the effectiveness of cultural diplomacy stems from the combination of complementary interventions rather than the implementation of isolated measures.

The model illustrates that the success of the analysed initiatives depends on the adoption of an integrated approach in which cultural objectives are closely linked with regional development, education, innovation, tourism, and community participation. Such an approach promotes the efficient use of available resources, strengthens institutional capacity, and facilitates the adaptation of projects to the specific needs of communities in the border area. As emphasized by the European Commission (2023), integrated territorial strategies are fundamental for enhancing the long-term impact and sustainability of cross-border cooperation initiatives.

Consequently, the factors summarized in Figure 9 may be regarded as strategic guidelines for the planning and implementation of future cross-border cooperation initiatives. Incorporating these elements into project design and implementation can enhance the sustainability of interventions, strengthen cooperation among regional stakeholders, and maximize the social, cultural, and economic impact of investments in the Bihor-Hajdú-Bihar region. Furthermore, this integrated framework aligns with the objectives of the European Union's Cohesion Policy and the Territorial Agenda 2030, which advocate collaborative governance, territorial resilience, and sustainable regional development.

6. Inventory of Cultural Projects Implemented or Under Implementation in the Bihor-Hajdú-Bihar Cross-Border Region

The analysis of the best practices presented in the previous sections highlights only a selection of the cultural cooperation initiatives developed in the Bihor-Hajdú-Bihar cross-border region. Throughout the programming periods 2007–2013, 2014–2020, and 2021–2027, public authorities, cultural institutions, non-governmental organizations, religious communities, and higher education institutions have implemented numerous projects focusing on tangible and intangible cultural heritage, performing arts, cultural tourism, education, community participation, and the strengthening of regional identity. These initiatives have been supported primarily through the European Territorial Cooperation programmes, particularly Interreg, as well as by other European funding instruments promoting cultural cooperation and regional development⁹².

The following table is intended as an extended selective inventory of these initiatives. It includes projects involving partners from both Bihor and Hajdú-Bihar counties, as well as initiatives implemented within the two counties that have generated significant effects on cross-border cultural cooperation. The inventory illustrates the diversity of thematic areas addressed, the variety of institutional actors involved, and the increasing role of culture as a driver of

⁹² European Commission, 2023; Interreg VI-A Romania-Hungary Programme 2021–2027.

territorial cohesion, sustainable development, and intercultural dialogue.

For projects financed under the current Interreg VI-A Romania–Hungary Programme (2021–2027), the inventory includes initiatives that have been approved, contracted, or officially launched up to 2027. Given the implementation schedules established under European funding rules, several of these projects may continue beyond 2027 while maintaining their expected contribution to cultural cooperation and regional development. The inventory therefore provides a representative overview of the evolution of cultural diplomacy and cross-border cooperation in the Bihor–Hajdú-Bihar region, highlighting both completed and ongoing initiatives that support integration, social inclusion, and sustainable regional development in line with the objectives of the European Union's Cohesion Policy⁹³.

Tabel 2. Major Cultural, Cultural Heritage, and Cultural Tourism Projects in the Bihor–Hajdú-Bihar Cross-Border Region (2007–2027)

No.	Project Details (code/acronym, title)	Programme/ Period	Main Field	Contribution to Cultural Diplomacy and Cross-Border Cooperation
Completed (KEEP, 2025)				
1	<i>Commheritage</i> Promoting Our Common Heritage – Revitalization of Cultural Tourism in Hajdú-Bihar–Bihor Euroregion	HU-RO 2007– 2013; implemented 2013–2015	Built cultural heritage and cultural tourism	Restoration of heritage monuments in Bihor and Hajdú-Bihar and their integration into joint thematic tourism products
2	<i>ZION</i> ; <i>HURO/1101/052/2.1.</i> 3 Promoting Religious Tourism by Best Using the Patrimony of Jewish Communities from Oradea and Debrecen	HU-RO 2007– 2013; 2012– 2015	Jewish heritage and religious tourism	Promotion of the synagogues of Oradea and Debrecen and the history of the Jewish communities
3	<i>Religious Bridges</i> Religious Bridges –	HU-RO 2007– 2013	Religious heritage	Restoration and promotion of

⁹³ European Commission, 2023; Territorial Agenda 2030

No.	Project Details (code/acronym, title)	Programme/ Period	Main Field	Contribution to Cultural Diplomacy and Cross-Border Cooperation
	Promoting Religious Tourism in Bihor and Hajdú-Bihar Counties			places of worship while highlighting the region's religious diversity
4	Innovative Implementation of Joint Tourism Programme Packages for Tourism Development in Hajdú-Bihar and Bihor Counties	HU-RO 2007–2013	Tourism marketing and joint tourism products	Development of joint tourism packages and integrated promotion of attractions in both counties
5	Promoting Heyducks' Tradition	HU-RO 2007–2013	Intangible cultural heritage and festivals	Promotion of Hajduk traditions through festivals, conferences, and youth activities
6	Self-government Cooperation in Bihor and Bihor Regions	HU-RO 2007–2013	Community cooperation and local traditions	Strengthening cooperation among local authorities, NGOs, and local communities
7	Development of Natural Habitats on Ciuperca Hill-Oradea and in Körösszegapáti	HU-RO 2007–2013	Natural heritage and tourism	Creation of recreational and educational areas integrated into regional tourism routes
8	<i>e-regionaldevelopment.com</i> Supporting the Sustainable Development of the Bihor-Hajdú-Bihar Euroregion through "e-regionaldevelopment.com"	HU-RO 2007–2013	Communication and regional development	Development of a joint information platform and promotion of regional cooperation
9	Common Cross-border Publications for the Business Area of Bihor-Hajdú-Bihar	HU-RO 2007–2013	Intercultural communication	Reducing linguistic and informational barriers among regional stakeholders

No.	Project Details (code/acronym, title)	Programme/ Period	Main Field	Contribution to Cultural Diplomacy and Cross-Border Cooperation
10	<i>EduCultCentre; ROHU 446</i> Romanian–Hungarian Cross-Border Education Centre of Cultural and Historical Heritage	Interreg V-A Romania– Hungary 2014– 2020	Cultural heritage, museums, and cultural education	Development of cultural infrastructure and organization of joint educational activities
11	<i>CBC Incubator; ROHU 445</i> Romanian–Hungarian Cross-Border Cultural Incubator for Performing Arts	Interreg V-A Romania– Hungary 2014– 2020	Performing arts	Development of theatre infrastructure and promotion of artists' mobility
12	Cluster for Geography, Heritage and Sustainable Development in the Bihor–Hajdú-Bihar Cross-border Area	Interreg V-A Romania– Hungary 2014– 2020	Heritage, education, and research	Development of educational materials, workshops, study visits, and digital tools
13	Cross-border Polycentric Network for Training and Support in Tourism and Handcraft Services in Bihor and Hajdú-Bihar	Interreg V-A Romania– Hungary 2014– 2020	Tourism, crafts, and training	Promotion of local traditions, gastronomy, and handicrafts
14	<i>EASDOR</i> Easing Access to Systemic Discovery of Our Origins and Resources	Interreg V-A Romania– Hungary 2014– 2020	Tourism and cultural heritage	Development of an integrated cross-border tourism destination
15	Conservation and Protection of the Cross-border Natural Heritage of Bihor– Hajdú-Bihar Counties	Interreg V-A Romania– Hungary 2014– 2020	Natural heritage and environmental education	Institutional cooperation for the conservation and promotion of regional heritage
Under implementation (Interreg Romania–Hungary, 2025)				
16	<i>CULTURAL LIVING LAB; ROHU00618</i> Romanian–Hungarian Cross-Border Cultural Living Lab	Interreg VI-A Romania– Hungary; 2024– 2027	Cultural infrastructure, digitalisation, and inclusion	Establishment of a cultural centre, digital platform, and artistic exchange network
17	<i>CBC OrDe HERITAGE; ROHU00581</i> Enhancing the Role of Culture and Sustainable Tourism	Interreg VI-A Romania– Hungary; 2025– 2028	Urban heritage, digital art, and sustainable tourism	Promotion of the shared heritage of Oradea and Debrecen and development of a

No.	Project Details (code/acronym, title)	Programme/ Period	Main Field	Contribution to Cultural Diplomacy and Cross-Border Cooperation
	in Oradea and Debrecen			joint tourism strategy
18	<i>HeritageTour</i> ; <i>ROHU00532</i> The Enhancement of the Route of Medieval Churches	Interreg VI-A Romania– Hungary 2021– 2027	Religious heritage and cultural routes	Restoration of medieval churches and extension of a cross-border cultural route
19	<i>TRANSMAT</i> ; <i>ROHU00265</i> Translocal Matters: Socially Engaged Arts and Design on the Borderlands	Interreg VI-A Romania– Hungary 2021– 2027	Contemporary art and community participation	Use of participatory art and design to connect border communities
20	<i>ROLE-ART</i> ; <i>ROHU00291</i> Promoting the Active Role and Involvement of Young People with Artistic Methods and Cultural Cooperation	Interreg VI-A Romania– Hungary 2021– 2027	Youth, arts, and inclusion	Engagement of young people through joint artistic activities and intercultural dialogue
21	<i>REMBlerSZ</i> ; <i>ROHU00604</i> Ramblers' Cultural Bridge – Fostering Social Cohesion through Sustainable Tourism	Interreg VI-A Romania– Hungary 2021– 2027	Cultural tourism and social cohesion	Strengthening social cohesion through shared cultural routes and experiences
22	<i>Swabian Heritage</i> ; <i>ROHU00528</i> Creation of a Swabian Cultural-Touristic Route and a Historical Memorial Site	Interreg VI-A Romania– Hungary; 2025– 2027	Swabian heritage and cultural tourism	Research and promotion of Swabian heritage through cultural routes, exhibitions, and events
23	<i>SPIRITRAILS</i> ; <i>ROHU00463</i> Borderless Faith: Cultural Route of Folk Religiosity in the Border Areas of Romania and Hungary	Interreg VI-A Romania– Hungary 2021– 2027	Folk religiosity and cultural routes	Promotion of shared folk religious traditions and spiritual heritage
24	<i>SPCN</i> ; <i>ROHU00328</i> Strengthening the Preservation of Cultural and Natural Heritage Values along	Interreg VI-A Romania– Hungary 2021– 2027	Cultural and natural heritage	Integrated promotion of the cultural and natural values of the Crișul Repede Valley

No.	Project Details (code/acronym, title)	Programme/ Period	Main Field	Contribution to Cultural Diplomacy and Cross-Border Cooperation
	the Crișul Repede Valley			
25	<i>CBC Fest; ROHU00356</i> Bridging Cultures: A Multicultural Cross-border Choir Festival Celebrating Common Heritage	Interreg VI-A Romania–Hungary 2021–2027	Choral music and intercultural dialogue	Organisation of a multicultural choir festival and promotion of artistic exchanges
26	<i>Seeds of Cooperation; ROHU00079</i> The Seeds of Cooperation between the Communities of Biharia and Mikepércs	Interreg VI-A Romania–Hungary 2021–2027	Community cooperation and local traditions	Strengthening community relations through cultural and social events
27	<i>Architect AI; ROHU00228</i> The AI Integration into Architectural Practice in the RO–HU Cross-border Area	Interreg VI-A Romania–Hungary; 2025–2026	Architecture, heritage, and digital innovation	Connecting architects and students while promoting heritage through digital technologies
28	<i>Together for Each Other; ROHU00241</i> Joint Actions of Romanian and Hungarian Young People in the Field of Peer Support	Interreg VI-A Romania–Hungary; 2025–2026	Youth, volunteering, and inclusion	Organisation of joint youth activities in Oradea and Debrecen

Source: created by the author based on information provided by the KEEP database and the official project library of the Interreg VI-A Romania–Hungary Programme (KEEP, 2025; Interreg Romania–Hungary Programme, 2025).

The inventory of cultural projects implemented and currently under implementation demonstrates the continuous evolution of cross-border cooperation between Bihor and Hajdú-Bihar counties throughout the 2007–2027 programming periods. The analysis shows that cultural diplomacy has gradually strengthened through the effective use of European Territorial Cooperation programmes, particularly the Interreg Romania–Hungary programmes, which have provided the institutional and financial framework necessary for developing sustainable partnerships among public authorities, cultural institutions, universities, non-governmental organizations, and local communities. As emphasized by the European Commission,

European Territorial Cooperation has become one of the principal instruments for promoting territorial cohesion and strengthening regional partnerships across internal EU borders⁹⁴.

The distribution of projects across the three programming periods reveals a significant evolution in cooperation priorities. During the 2007–2013 period, interventions focused primarily on the conservation of cultural heritage, the restoration of historical monuments, the promotion of religious tourism, and the preservation of local traditions. These projects aimed to strengthen a shared cultural identity while increasing the tourism attractiveness of the border region through the promotion of both tangible and intangible cultural heritage. According to the KEEP database⁹⁵, cultural heritage represented one of the dominant thematic priorities of the first generation of Romania–Hungary cross-border cooperation projects.

During the 2014–2020 programming period, the scope of cooperation expanded considerably, accompanied by a strengthening of institutional partnerships. Projects no longer focused exclusively on heritage conservation but also addressed the development of cultural infrastructure, heritage education, artists' mobility, vocational training, applied research, and the creation of integrated tourism products. At the same time, stable cooperation networks were established among cultural and educational institutions in Oradea and Debrecen, enhancing administrative capacity and contributing to the professionalization of cross-border cooperation. These objectives are illustrated by the EduCultCentre project, which combined the protection of shared cultural heritage with the establishment of permanent facilities for cultural exchange and professional training in the cultural sector.

Projects implemented during the 2021–2027 programming period reflect the growing maturity of cultural cooperation between the two counties and its increasing orientation towards more complex objectives, including the digitalisation of cultural heritage, the development of cultural and creative industries, community participation, social inclusion, innovation, and the application of digital technologies to cultural promotion. Initiatives such as CULTURAL LIVING LAB, CBC OrDe HERITAGE, TRANSMAT, and

⁹⁴ European Commission. *European Territorial Cooperation (Interreg)*.

⁹⁵ KEEP Database. *Knowledge and Expertise in European Programmes*. Interreg Project Database, 2025. <https://keep.eu/>. Accessed 07 June 2026.

HeritageTour illustrate a transition from infrastructure-oriented projects towards the development of integrated cultural ecosystems capable of generating long-term economic, social, educational, and cultural benefits. These priorities are fully aligned with the strategic objectives of the Interreg VI-A Romania–Hungary Programme (2021–2027)⁹⁶.

The inventory also demonstrates that cultural heritage and cultural tourism remain the dominant fields of cross-border cooperation, being represented in the majority of projects implemented over the past two decades. This finding confirms that shared cultural heritage continues to constitute one of the most effective instruments for strengthening intercultural dialogue, fostering regional identity, and bringing communities on both sides of the border closer together, while simultaneously supporting local economic development through tourism and the cultural and creative sectors. The European Framework for Action on Cultural Heritage⁹⁷ identifies cultural heritage as a key driver of sustainable regional development and territorial cohesion.

At the same time, the inventory highlights the gradual expansion of cooperation into complementary fields such as intercultural education, youth participation, professional skills development, volunteering, digital innovation, and the active involvement of civil society. This diversification reflects an increasingly integrated understanding of cultural diplomacy, in which culture is employed not only as a means of preserving heritage but also as a strategic instrument for regional development, social inclusion, institutional cooperation, and cross-border innovation. According to UNESCO, this integrated approach is essential for maximizing the contribution of culture to sustainable development⁹⁸.

Overall, the inventory demonstrates the existence of substantial experience in cultural cooperation within the Bihor–Hajdú-Bihar region and confirms that projects implemented over the last two decades have contributed to the establishment of a stable

⁹⁶ Interreg VI-A Romania–Hungary Programme 2021–2027. *Programme Documents and Approved Projects*.

⁹⁷ European Commission. *European Framework for Action on Cultural Heritage*. <https://culture.ec.europa.eu/cultural-heritage/european-framework-for-action-on-cultural-heritage>. Accessed 07 June 2026.

⁹⁸ UNESCO. *Culture | 2030 Indicators*. <https://www.unesco.org/en/culture/2030-indicators>. Accessed 07 June 2026.

institutional framework, increased mutual trust, and strengthened a shared regional identity. Furthermore, the diversity of projects illustrates the capacity of regional stakeholders to capitalize on the opportunities provided by the European Union's Cohesion Policy while creating favourable conditions for the development of new cultural diplomacy initiatives during future programming periods. The findings summarized in Table 2 provide an important foundation for the SWOT analysis presented in the following chapter and further support the need to continue investing in cultural diplomacy as an instrument for promoting integration, societal security, and social inclusion in the Bihor-Hajdú-Bihar cross-border region. As stated in the Territorial Agenda 2030, long-term territorial resilience depends on sustained cross-border cooperation, collaborative governance, and the effective mobilisation of cultural and social capital⁹⁹.

IV. SWOT Analysis of the Use of Cultural Diplomacy to Promote Integration, Societal Security, and Inclusion in the Bihor-Hajdú-Bihar Cross-Border Region

Following the analysis of the conceptual framework, the characteristics of the Bihor-Hajdú-Bihar cross-border region, and the best practices implemented in the two counties, it is appropriate to undertake a systematic assessment of the factors influencing the use of cultural diplomacy as an instrument of regional cooperation. SWOT analysis is one of the most widely used strategic assessment methods, enabling the identification of internal strengths and weaknesses, as well as external opportunities and threats that may shape the future development of cross-border cooperation. According to the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD), strategic assessment tools such as SWOT facilitate evidence-based policymaking by supporting informed decision-making and the prioritisation of strategic actions¹⁰⁰.

In this chapter, the SWOT analysis is based on the findings presented in the previous chapters and on the best practices examined throughout this guide. The assessment focuses on

⁹⁹ European Commission. *Territorial Agenda 2030: A Future for All Places*.

¹⁰⁰ OECD. (2020). *OECD Strategic Foresight Toolkit*. <https://www.oecd.org/strategic-foresight/>. Accessed 04 June 2026.

identifying the principal factors affecting the effectiveness of cultural diplomacy in the Bihor–Hajdú-Bihar region. It considers the institutional, cultural, social, and economic dimensions of cross-border cooperation while identifying strategic directions capable of strengthening regional integration, societal security, and social inclusion. As emphasized by the European Commission, integrated territorial development requires coordinated action across multiple policy areas, including culture, education, innovation, and regional governance¹⁰¹.

The following figure provides a synthetic overview of the internal and external factors influencing the use of cultural diplomacy in the Bihor–Hajdú-Bihar cross-border region. The strengths and weaknesses reflect the existing regional resources, institutional capacities, and structural limitations over which local and regional stakeholders can exercise direct influence. In contrast, opportunities and threats originate primarily from the broader European, economic, social, and geopolitical environment and therefore require adaptive strategies capable of responding to external changes. The Territorial Agenda 2030 underlines that resilient cross-border regions depend on the ability to adapt governance structures to evolving territorial challenges.

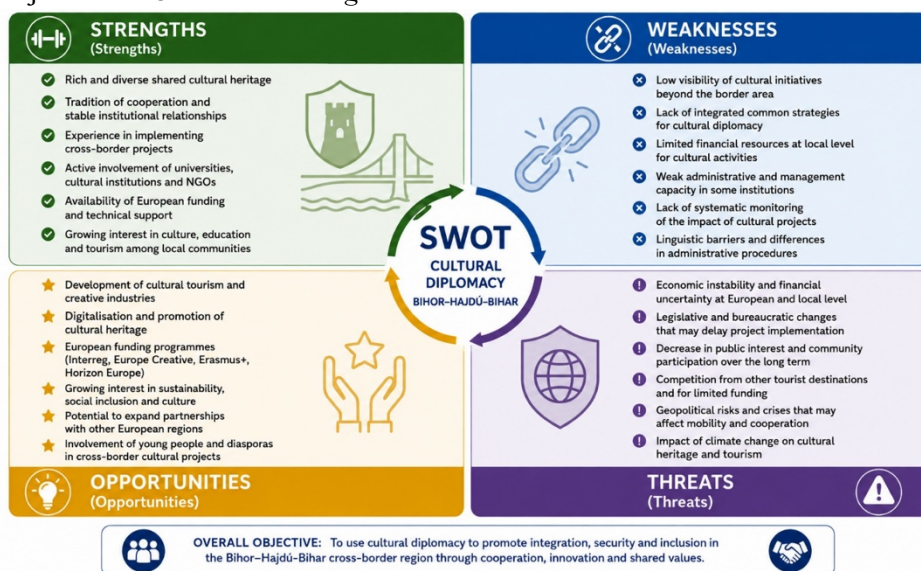
The SWOT matrix highlights the existence of significant regional potential, supported by the region's rich cultural heritage, extensive experience in implementing cross-border projects, and the presence of institutions capable of initiating and maintaining long-term partnerships. At the same time, the effective use of these assets continues to be constrained by fragmented interventions, administrative differences between the two countries, and the absence of common monitoring and evaluation mechanisms. Consequently, the principal strategic challenge is not merely the initiation of additional projects but rather the transformation of accumulated experience into a coherent and permanent framework for cultural cooperation. Similar conclusions are drawn by ESPON, which emphasizes that long-term territorial cooperation requires stable governance arrangements, institutional continuity, and integrated planning mechanisms¹⁰².

¹⁰¹ European Commission. (2023). *Cohesion Policy 2021–2027*. https://cohesiondata.ec.europa.eu/cohesion_overview/21-27. Accessed 04 June 2026.

¹⁰² ESPON. (2022). *Territorial Development and Cross-Border Governance*. <https://www.espon.eu/>. Accessed 07 June 2026.

The relationship among the four components of the SWOT analysis suggests the need for a selective and strategic approach. Existing strengths should be mobilised to maximise the opportunities created by European policies and funding instruments, while internal weaknesses should be addressed before external threats undermine the continuity and effectiveness of cross-border cooperation. In this sense, the SWOT analysis should not be understood merely as an inventory of influencing factors but rather as the analytical foundation for establishing strategic priorities and formulating the operational recommendations presented in the following chapter. This approach is consistent with the European Commission's Better Regulation Guidelines, which emphasize that strategic analysis should support evidence-based policy design and the development of sustainable interventions¹⁰³.

Figure 13. Structure of the SWOT Analysis of Cultural Diplomacy in the Bihor-Hajdú-Bihar Cross-Border Region



Source: created by the author based on the data and documentary sources analyzed.

¹⁰³Council of Europe. (2022). *Intercultural Integration Framework: Concepts, Challenges and Opportunities*. <https://www.coe.int/en/web/interculturalcities>. Accessed 07 June 2026.

1. Strengths

One of the main advantages of the Bihor-Hajdú-Bihar region is the diversity of its tangible and intangible cultural heritage. Historical monuments, urban and rural architecture, local traditions, handicrafts, gastronomy, and artistic events provide a solid foundation for the development of joint cultural and tourism programmes. The complementarity of the resources available in the two counties enables the creation of cross-border cultural products that go beyond separate promotional approaches and contribute to the development of a recognizable regional identity.

Another major strength is the institutional experience accumulated through cross-border cooperation. Public authorities, universities, cultural institutions, and non-governmental organizations have participated in numerous joint projects, developing working procedures, professional networks, and expertise in accessing European funding opportunities. This accumulated experience reduces the initial challenges associated with cooperation and facilitates the establishment of new partnerships, as many regional stakeholders are already familiar with the administrative requirements and implementation mechanisms of cross-border projects.

Geographical proximity also represents a significant advantage. The relatively short distances between the main urban centres and the communities located along the border facilitate participant mobility, the organization of joint events, and the maintenance of institutional contacts. Unlike international cooperation conducted over long distances, partnerships in the Bihor-Hajdú-Bihar region benefit from frequent interaction and a better understanding of local needs.

The region also benefits from educational and cultural institutions with a strong capacity for mobilization. Universities, museums, theatres, libraries, cultural centres, and community organizations provide expertise, infrastructure, and access to diverse audiences. Their presence makes it possible to combine cultural activities with education, research, innovation, and civic engagement, thereby extending the impact of projects beyond their formal implementation period.

An additional advantage is the multicultural and multilingual character of the region. The long-standing coexistence of communities

with different cultural identities creates favourable conditions for the development of intercultural competences and the implementation of programmes built around diversity. When approached through participation and mutual respect, this diversity becomes a valuable resource for cultural diplomacy and an important factor in enhancing the region's attractiveness.

The availability of European cooperation programmes constitutes another important strength, although funding itself formally represents an external opportunity. At the regional level, there is already a proven capacity to access and effectively utilize these financial instruments, as demonstrated by the successful implementation of numerous projects. The existence of established partnerships and experienced project management staff provides the region with a competitive advantage compared with territories where institutional cooperation remains at an early stage of development.

Overall, these strengths demonstrate the existence of significant cultural and institutional capital capable of supporting the long-term development of cultural diplomacy. However, the value of this capital ultimately depends on the ability of regional stakeholders to coordinate their efforts, transform isolated initiatives into recurring programmes, and extend the benefits of cooperation to local communities, including groups that participate less frequently in cultural and cross-border activities.

2. Weaknesses

Despite the significant progress achieved in recent years, the use of cultural diplomacy in the Bihor–Hajdú-Bihar cross-border region continues to be affected by several limitations that reduce the effectiveness and continuity of cooperation. These vulnerabilities are associated both with the organization and coordination of projects and with differences among the stakeholders involved and the resources available to them.

One of the principal weaknesses is the strong dependence on European funding. A large proportion of cross-border cultural initiatives are implemented exclusively through projects financed by Interreg or other European funding instruments. Once the funding period ends, many activities are reduced or discontinued because of the lack of permanent financial resources and institutional mechanisms capable of ensuring the continuity of project outcomes. This situation limits the possibility of transforming projects into long-

term partnerships and reduces the lasting impact of the investments made.

Another challenge is the uneven administrative capacity of partner institutions. Although considerable experience has been gained through project implementation, the level of human resources, technical expertise, and management capacity varies significantly among organizations. These differences may result in implementation delays, difficulties in coordinating activities, and an unequal distribution of responsibilities among project partners.

Cross-border cooperation is also influenced by legislative and administrative differences between Romania and Hungary. Procedures related to public procurement, financial reporting, investment authorization, and the management of European projects differ between the two countries, increasing administrative complexity and extending implementation timelines. In certain cases, these differences affect the pace of cooperation and require additional coordination efforts among partner institutions.

Another important limitation is the relatively low visibility of project results among the general public. Although many initiatives have produced valuable outcomes, these achievements are not always communicated through coherent and accessible promotion strategies. The absence of common communication platforms and integrated dissemination strategies reduces public awareness and limits the potential for extending project benefits to a broader range of beneficiaries.

At the same time, community participation often remains concentrated among the same categories of beneficiaries, such as cultural institutions, public authorities, and organizations directly involved in project implementation. The limited involvement of the private sector, young people, vulnerable groups, and other segments of society may reduce the inclusiveness of cooperation and limit the ability of projects to generate broader community-wide impacts.

Another significant weakness is the absence of a common regional system for monitoring and evaluating the impact of cultural diplomacy. Most projects are assessed individually according to the indicators established by their respective funding programmes, without a regional framework capable of evaluating their cumulative contribution to integration, social inclusion, and territorial

development. This situation makes it more difficult to identify high-impact best practices and to formulate evidence-based public policies.

Overall, the identified weaknesses do not diminish the importance of cultural cooperation within the Bihor–Hajdú-Bihar region; rather, they highlight the areas in which additional intervention is required. Reducing dependence on external funding, strengthening institutional capacity, increasing community participation, and developing common monitoring and evaluation mechanisms are essential conditions for enhancing the effectiveness of cultural diplomacy and ensuring the long-term sustainability of cross-border initiatives.

3. Opportunities

The evolution of European policies on territorial cooperation and regional development provides the Bihor–Hajdú-Bihar region with a favourable environment for expanding the use of cultural diplomacy as an instrument of integration and regional development. The European Union's increasing emphasis on territorial cohesion, the promotion of cultural heritage, and support for border communities creates new opportunities for launching innovative projects and developing partnerships with regional and European impact.

An important opportunity is the continuation of European funding programmes such as Interreg, Erasmus+, Creative Europe, Horizon Europe, and other instruments dedicated to territorial cooperation and innovation. These programmes make it possible not only to finance investments in cultural infrastructure and heritage conservation but also to develop projects focused on digitalisation, education, creative industries, and social innovation. Diversifying funding sources can reduce dependence on a single programme while strengthening institutional resilience.

Another significant opportunity is the rapid development of digital technologies, which provide new ways to promote cultural heritage and engage wider audiences. Digital platforms, virtual tours, mobile applications, and interactive tools expand access to cultural resources while enabling the participation of individuals who, for geographical or social reasons, cannot attend cultural activities in person. At the same time, digitalisation can increase the international visibility of the region and attract new categories of visitors.

The growing interest in cultural tourism and authentic visitor experiences represents another important opportunity for the Bihor–

Hajdú-Bihar region. Current tourism trends demonstrate increasing demand for destinations that showcase local heritage, traditions, and cultural identity. The development of joint thematic routes, integrated tourism products, and internationally oriented cultural events can contribute to regional economic diversification while enhancing the competitiveness of the cross-border destination.

Additional opportunities arise from expanding cooperation among universities, research institutes, and the business sector. Integrating research outcomes into cultural and tourism projects can stimulate innovation, strengthen the creative industries, and encourage the application of modern technologies in the preservation and promotion of cultural heritage. In this context, universities have the potential to become regional centres of expertise for cultural diplomacy and the training of professionals engaged in cross-border cooperation.

Another significant opportunity lies in the increased involvement of young people and civil society organizations. Younger generations show growing interest in international mobility, volunteering, and participation in cross-border projects, while digital communication tools facilitate cooperation across national borders. Harnessing this potential can contribute to the establishment of sustainable cross-border networks and foster a culture of cooperation from an early stage of education.

At the same time, the growing emphasis of European policies on sustainable development, social inclusion, and community resilience creates favourable conditions for integrating cultural diplomacy into broader regional development strategies. Aligning cultural initiatives with objectives related to environmental protection, the circular economy, social innovation, and territorial cohesion can generate long-term benefits while increasing the attractiveness of the region for new investments and international partnerships.

Overall, the identified opportunities demonstrate that the Bihor–Hajdú-Bihar region benefits from a favourable external environment for strengthening cultural diplomacy. Successfully capitalising on these opportunities will depend on the capacity of regional stakeholders to develop integrated projects, diversify partnerships, and adapt their initiatives to evolving European priorities and the changing needs of local communities.

4. Threats

Although the Bihor-Hajdú-Bihar cross-border region benefits from a favourable framework for cooperation, the development of cultural diplomacy may be affected by several external factors that reduce the predictability of projects and threaten the continuity of partnerships. Economic, political, and social developments at the European and international levels may alter funding priorities, restrict mobility, and influence the capacity of institutions to implement joint initiatives.

One of the principal threats is economic and financial instability. Periods of economic slowdown, inflation, or reductions in public investment may lead to decreased funding for culture and cross-border cooperation. Under such circumstances, cultural projects risk being considered less of a priority than other policy areas, affecting both the initiation of new partnerships and the continuation of existing ones.

Another potential threat arises from changes in European policy priorities and funding mechanisms. Although territorial cooperation remains an important component of the European Union's Cohesion Policy, shifts in programme priorities or reductions in available financial resources could limit funding opportunities for cultural projects. Consequently, regional institutions need to diversify their funding sources and strengthen their capacity to adapt to evolving European priorities.

The development of cultural diplomacy may also be influenced by geopolitical developments and regional security challenges. International crises, political tensions, or situations affecting the mobility of people can reduce the frequency of cultural exchanges and cross-border activities. Even though the Bihor-Hajdú-Bihar region enjoys stable relationships among its local partners, such developments may indirectly affect cooperation and the implementation of joint projects.

Demographic change represents another significant threat. Population ageing and the migration of young people towards larger university or economic centres reduce the active population and the number of individuals participating in cultural activities. Without measures aimed at encouraging youth participation and strengthening local competences, these demographic trends may weaken the long-term dynamics of cross-border cooperation.

At the same time, increasing competition among European regions for funding, investment, and tourism represents an important challenge. Regions with integrated promotion strategies, modern infrastructure, and strong administrative capacity are better positioned to attract financial resources and international projects. In this context, the Bihor-Hajdú-Bihar region must continue strengthening its regional identity while capitalising on the competitive advantages provided by its shared cultural heritage and accumulated experience in cross-border cooperation.

Finally, climate change and the degradation of cultural heritage may negatively affect both tourism development and the preservation of cultural resources. Extreme weather events, the deterioration of historical monuments, and pressures resulting from urban development require the adoption of effective protection measures and the integration of sustainable development principles into all cultural and tourism initiatives.

Overall, the identified threats highlight the need for a proactive and flexible approach to managing cross-border cooperation. Strengthening institutional resilience, diversifying partnerships, and integrating risk management into strategic planning are essential conditions for maintaining and further developing cultural diplomacy in the Bihor-Hajdú-Bihar region, regardless of changes in the external environment.

V. Recommendations for Strengthening the Role of Cultural Diplomacy in Promoting Integration, Societal Security, and Inclusion in the Bihor-Hajdú-Bihar Cross-Border Region

The analyses presented in the previous chapters demonstrate that cultural diplomacy constitutes an instrument with significant potential for strengthening cross-border cooperation between Bihor County and Hajdú-Bihar County. The best practices examined throughout this guide illustrate the existence of initiatives capable of generating social, economic, and cultural benefits, while the SWOT analysis confirms both the competitive advantages of the region and the challenges that must be addressed to ensure sustainable development.

Based on these findings, this chapter formulates a set of recommendations addressed to public authorities, cultural institutions, universities, non-governmental organizations, and other stakeholders involved in cross-border cooperation. The recommendations aim to strengthen the institutional framework of cultural diplomacy, increase the participation of local communities, promote the shared cultural heritage, and develop mechanisms capable of supporting long-term cooperation.

The proposed approach is grounded in the principles promoted by the European Union's Cohesion Policy, the New European Agenda for Culture, and the objectives of European Territorial Cooperation programmes, all of which encourage the development of resilient, inclusive communities capable of using cultural diversity as a resource for regional development¹⁰⁴.

The recommendations presented below should not be regarded as independent solutions but rather as complementary components of an integrated strategy. Their implementation can contribute to transforming cultural diplomacy from a collection of isolated projects into a permanent mechanism for cooperation capable of strengthening mutual trust, encouraging citizen participation, and supporting the balanced development of the Bihor-Hajdú-Bihar cross-border region.

1. Strengthening the Institutional Framework of Cultural Diplomacy

Strengthening the institutional framework is one of the essential prerequisites for transforming cultural diplomacy into a strategic instrument of cross-border cooperation between Bihor County and Hajdú-Bihar County. The analysis of best practices and the results of the SWOT assessment have demonstrated the existence of substantial experience in implementing joint projects. However, many initiatives continue to be developed on an ad hoc basis, depending on available funding opportunities. In the absence of permanent coordination and planning mechanisms, there is a risk that the results achieved will not be sustained over the long term and that

¹⁰⁴ European Commission (2018), *A New European Agenda for Culture*, Brussels. <https://culture.ec.europa.eu/policies/new-european-agenda-for-culture>. Accessed 07 June 2026; Council of Europe. (2022). *Intercultural Integration Framework: Concepts, Challenges and Opportunities*. <https://www.coe.int/en/web/interculturalcities>. Accessed 07 June 2026.

cooperation will remain dependent on successive European funding cycles¹⁰⁵.

A first strategic direction involves the institutionalisation of cross-border cultural cooperation through the establishment of permanent dialogue structures bringing together public authorities, cultural institutions, universities, non-governmental organisations, and representatives of the business sector. These structures could operate as thematic working groups, advisory councils, or regional cooperation platforms dedicated to cultural diplomacy. Their primary role would be to identify common priorities, facilitate information exchange, and coordinate regional initiatives. Such an approach would enhance policy coherence while reducing the duplication of projects implemented by different stakeholders¹⁰⁶.

At the same time, it is necessary to develop a common Cultural Diplomacy Strategy for the Bihor-Hajdú-Bihar cross-border region, integrated into the strategic planning documents of the local and regional administrations and aligned with the objectives of the European Union's Cohesion Policy. The strategy should establish clear objectives, priority areas for intervention, performance indicators, and monitoring mechanisms, thereby providing a shared framework for the development of future projects. The existence of such a strategy would facilitate the continuity of cooperation regardless of institutional changes or future European funding cycles¹⁰⁷.

Another recommendation concerns strengthening the administrative capacity of institutions involved in cross-border cooperation. Experience gained through previous projects demonstrates that successful implementation largely depends on the competencies of project management teams and on the ability of organisations to manage complex initiatives involving partners from different administrative systems. Organising joint professional training programmes in European project management, cultural diplomacy, intercultural communication, and impact evaluation

¹⁰⁵ Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD), *Regional Development Policy Reviews* (Paris: OECD Publishing, 2023), <https://www.oecd.org/regional/regional-development-policy-reviews/>.

¹⁰⁶ Council of Europe, *Intercultural Cities Programme*, <https://www.coe.int/en/web/interculturalcities>.

¹⁰⁷ European Commission, *EU Cohesion Policy 2021–2027*.

would contribute to increasing institutional effectiveness while reducing disparities among partner organisations¹⁰⁸.

Ensuring sustainable cooperation also requires the diversification of institutional partnerships. In addition to public authorities and cultural institutions, future projects should involve universities, schools, chambers of commerce, professional associations, cultural and creative industries, and civil society organisations to a greater extent. A multisectoral partnership approach can generate projects with broader impacts on economic development, innovation, and social inclusion, while responding more effectively to the needs of local communities.

Equally important is the establishment of permanent mechanisms for exchanging information and sharing best practices among partner institutions. The creation of a regional platform dedicated to cultural cooperation could facilitate the dissemination of funding opportunities, the promotion of completed projects, the exchange of resources, and the identification of new partners. Such an instrument would contribute to greater transparency, reinforce mutual trust, and maximise the value of the experience accumulated through previous cross-border initiatives¹⁰⁹.

Finally, strengthening the institutional framework also requires integrating cultural diplomacy into regional public policies so that it is no longer perceived solely as a cultural activity but as a policy instrument capable of contributing to economic development, education, tourism, social cohesion, and community security. An integrated and cross-sectoral approach would enable more effective coordination of investments and the development of projects capable of generating multiple benefits for communities throughout the border region¹¹⁰.

Overall, strengthening the institutional framework should be understood as a continuous process aimed at enhancing cooperation capacity and coordination among regional stakeholders. The establishment of stable governance mechanisms, the development of a shared strategic vision, and the expansion of institutional

¹⁰⁸ European Institute of Public Administration (EIPA), *European Project Management and Capacity Building*, <https://www.eipa.eu/>.

¹⁰⁹ Interreg Europe, *Policy Learning Platform*, <https://www.interregeurope.eu/policy-learning-platform>.

¹¹⁰ Territorial Agenda 2030, *A Future for All Places*, <https://territorialagenda.eu/>.

partnerships can transform cultural diplomacy into a permanent instrument of regional development, capable of promoting integration, inclusion, and community resilience throughout the Bihor–Hajdú-Bihar cross-border region¹¹¹.

2. Strengthening the Participation of Local Communities and Civil Society

The effectiveness of cultural diplomacy depends not only on the involvement of public institutions but also on their ability to mobilise local communities in cross-border cooperation processes. European experience demonstrates that cultural projects generate sustainable outcomes when citizens are not merely beneficiaries of organised activities but actively participate in their planning, implementation, and evaluation. In this respect, strengthening community participation should become a strategic priority for the Bihor–Hajdú-Bihar cross-border region, contributing to greater mutual trust and fostering a shared sense of belonging to a common space of cooperation¹¹².

A first strategic direction involves expanding the participation of civil society organisations in the initiation and implementation of cross-border cultural projects. Cultural associations, youth organisations, foundations, volunteer groups, and other community-based organisations possess considerable mobilisation capacity and can facilitate dialogue between public institutions and citizens. Their involvement contributes to identifying the real needs of local communities and to developing initiatives that are better adapted to the local context¹¹³.

Particular attention should be devoted to the participation of young people, who represent one of the most valuable resources for ensuring the continuity of cross-border cooperation. Mobility programmes, educational exchanges, summer schools, cultural

¹¹¹ Joseph S. Nye Jr., *op.cit.*; Jean Melissen, *op.cit.*; European Commission, *EU Cohesion Policy 2021–2027*, https://commission.europa.eu/funding-tenders/find-funding/eu-funding-programmes/cohesion-policy-2021-2027_en.

¹¹² Council of Europe, *Intercultural Integration Framework: Concepts, Challenges and Opportunities* (Strasbourg: Council of Europe, 2022), <https://www.coe.int/en/web/interculturalcities>. Accessed 10 May 2026.

¹¹³ European Economic and Social Committee. (2022). *The Role of Civil Society Organisations in European Cohesion Policy*. <https://www.eesc.europa.eu/en>. Accessed 11 May 2026.

competitions, artistic projects, and volunteering activities can foster intercultural competences while creating collaborative relationships that extend beyond the duration of individual funding programmes. Encouraging youth participation contributes to educating a generation familiar with European values of cooperation and capable of initiating new partnerships in the future. At the same time, cultural diplomacy should promote the inclusion of vulnerable groups and underrepresented communities¹¹⁴. Rural populations, ethnic minorities, persons with disabilities, older adults, and other groups that participate less frequently in cultural activities should be provided with genuine opportunities for engagement. Organising accessible cultural events, applying participatory methods, and removing economic, physical, and linguistic barriers can significantly improve social inclusion while strengthening community cohesion.

Another important recommendation concerns the establishment of permanent public consultation mechanisms during the planning of cultural projects. Community forums, participatory workshops, online consultations, and regular meetings with representatives of local communities can facilitate the identification of regional priorities while increasing the transparency of decision-making processes. Moreover, involving citizens from the earliest stages of project design strengthens their sense of ownership and shared responsibility for project outcomes¹¹⁵.

To further enhance community participation, the development of cross-border cultural volunteering should also be encouraged. Establishing joint volunteer networks involved in festivals, exhibitions, educational programmes, and cultural heritage projects can facilitate intercultural exchange while strengthening relationships between communities on both sides of the border. Volunteering also provides valuable opportunities for personal and professional development, particularly for young people, while contributing to the growth of the region's social capital¹¹⁶.

¹¹⁴ European Commission. (2024). *Erasmus+ Programme Guide 2024*. <https://erasmus-plus.ec.europa.eu/programme-guide>. Accessed 10 may 2026.

¹¹⁵ OECD. (2020). *Innovative Citizen Participation and New Democratic Institutions*. <https://www.oecd.org/gov/open-government/innovative-citizen-participation-and-new-democratic-institutions.htm>. Accessed 11 May 2026.

¹¹⁶ European Commission. (2024). *European Solidarity Corps Guide 2024*. <https://youth.europa.eu/solidarity>. Accessed 10 May 2026.

Another strategic priority is improving public communication regarding the benefits of cross-border cooperation. Disseminating project results through information campaigns, digital platforms, local media, and community events can increase public awareness of the value of cultural diplomacy and encourage the participation of a broader range of citizens. Communication strategies should highlight not only the tangible outcomes of cooperation but also its contribution to the economic, social, and cultural development of the region¹¹⁷.

Finally, strengthening local community participation also requires encouraging community-led cultural initiatives. Small-scale projects designed and implemented by local groups can complement institutional interventions while responding more effectively to the specific needs of individual communities. Supporting these initiatives through micro-grants, mentoring programmes, and technical assistance can stimulate social innovation and reinforce the sense of belonging to the shared cross-border area¹¹⁸.

Overall, the active participation of local communities and civil society represents a decisive factor in the success of cultural diplomacy. Cooperation built upon dialogue, participation, and shared responsibility can generate long-lasting relationships of trust, strengthen social inclusion, and transform cross-border cooperation into a process supported not only by institutions but also by citizens themselves. This approach is fully consistent with the principles of participatory governance and territorial development promoted by the European Union and the Council of Europe¹¹⁹.

¹¹⁷ European Commission. (2017). *Strengthening European Identity through Education and Culture*. <https://eur-lex.europa.eu/legal-content/EN/TXT/?uri=CELEX:52017DC0673>. Accessed 12 May 2026.

¹¹⁸ Interreg Europe. (2023). *Policy Learning Platform*. <https://www.interregeurope.eu/policy-learning-platform>. Accessed 12 May 2026.

¹¹⁹ European Commission. (2024). *EU Cohesion Policy 2021–2027*. https://commission.europa.eu/funding-tenders/find-funding/eu-funding-programmes/cohesion-policy-2021-2027_en. Accessed 12 May 2026.

3. Leveraging Cultural Heritage and Developing Cross-Border Tourism

Cultural heritage represents one of the most important strategic resources of the Bihor-Hajdú-Bihar cross-border region and provides a solid foundation for the development of cultural diplomacy. The diversity of historical monuments, local traditions, intangible cultural heritage, and contemporary artistic creation offers favourable conditions for the implementation of joint initiatives that simultaneously strengthen regional identity, increase tourism attractiveness, and stimulate local economic development¹²⁰. To fully capitalize on this potential, an integrated approach is required, whereby cultural heritage is viewed not only as an asset to be preserved but also as a resource for innovation, education, and cross-border cooperation.

A primary recommendation is the development of a common strategy for promoting cross-border cultural heritage. At present, many cultural and tourist attractions are promoted primarily at the local or national level, without being integrated into a coherent regional tourism offer. Establishing a shared visual identity and a common branding concept for the Bihor-Hajdú-Bihar region would enhance its international visibility and strengthen its image as a European cultural destination. Such a strategy should include joint promotional campaigns, bilingual or multilingual information materials, and coordinated participation in international tourism and cultural heritage fairs and events¹²¹.

Another strategic priority is the development of integrated cultural and tourism routes connecting representative sites on both sides of the border. These routes may include historical monuments, museums, archaeological sites, religious landmarks, protected natural areas, ethnographic villages, and recurring cultural events. Integrating these attractions into a common tourism offer would encourage longer visitor stays, diversify tourism experiences, and

¹²⁰ UNESCO. (2003). *Convention for the Safeguarding of the Intangible Cultural Heritage*. <https://ich.unesco.org/en/convention>. Accessed 12 May 2026.

¹²¹ European Commission. (2018). *A New European Agenda for Culture*. <https://culture.ec.europa.eu/policies/new-european-agenda-for-culture>. Accessed 12 May 2026; Council of Europe. (2023). *Cultural Routes of the Council of Europe*. <https://www.coe.int/en/web/cultural-routes>. Accessed 12 May 2026.

distribute economic benefits across a wider range of local communities¹²².

It is also recommended to support permanent cross-border cultural events, such as festivals, traditional fairs, travelling exhibitions, concerts, cultural heritage celebrations, and artists' residencies. The regular organisation of such events strengthens relationships between communities, facilitates intercultural exchange, and creates opportunities to promote the region's cultural heritage to diverse audiences. Furthermore, the continuity of these initiatives contributes to the establishment of long-term cooperation networks among cultural institutions and local stakeholders. Particular attention should be paid to the promotion of intangible cultural heritage, including traditions, customs, crafts, music, folk dances, and local gastronomy. These elements play a fundamental role in shaping the region's identity while offering authentic cultural experiences for visitors. Engaging local communities in documenting, safeguarding, and promoting intangible heritage can support its preservation while creating new opportunities for cultural entrepreneurship and the development of creative industries¹²³.

To enhance the competitiveness of the tourism destination, the integration of digital technologies into the promotion of cultural heritage is strongly recommended. The use of mobile applications, interactive platforms, virtual tours, augmented reality, and other digital tools can significantly improve visitor experiences while facilitating multilingual access to cultural information. Moreover, the digitalisation of cultural heritage contributes to its preservation and enables the international promotion of the region through digital communication channels, responding to emerging trends in cultural tourism¹²⁴.

Another recommendation concerns strengthening cooperation between the cultural and tourism sectors. Cultural institutions,

¹²² Council of Europe. (2023). *Cultural Routes of the Council of Europe*. <https://www.coe.int/en/web/cultural-routes>. Accessed 13 May 2026; UN Tourism. (2024). *Tourism and Culture*. <https://www.unwto.org/tourism-and-culture>. Accessed 13 May 2026.

¹²³ UNESCO. (2003).

¹²⁴ European Commission. (2021). *Commission Recommendation on a Common European Data Space for Cultural Heritage*. <https://digital-strategy.ec.europa.eu/en/policies/common-european-data-space-cultural-heritage>. Accessed 13 May 2026.

destination management organisations, tourism agencies, private tourism operators, and local authorities should work together to develop integrated products and services that combine cultural heritage with recreational, gastronomic, educational, and leisure activities. Such an integrated approach can generate added value for the regional economy while diversifying income sources for local communities.

Finally, the promotion of cultural heritage must fully respect the principles of sustainable development and heritage protection. Increasing the region's tourism attractiveness should not result in the overexploitation of cultural or natural resources but should instead be accompanied by appropriate conservation measures, monitoring systems, and visitor education initiatives. Integrating sustainability principles into the planning and implementation of cultural and tourism projects will help preserve the value of cultural heritage for future generations while enhancing the region's resilience to economic and environmental challenges.

Overall, the development of cultural heritage and cross-border tourism should be approached as a process of strategic cooperation in which culture becomes a driver of economic development, regional identity, and closer relationships between border communities. Through the coordinated use of existing resources and the development of integrated cultural and tourism products, the Bihor–Hajdú-Bihar region can strengthen its position as a European area of cooperation while promoting integration, social inclusion, and sustainable development.

4. Digitalization of Cultural Cooperation and the Promotion of Innovation

Digital transformation represents one of the main development priorities promoted by the European Union, while the integration of digital technologies into the cultural sector offers new opportunities for strengthening cross-border cooperation. In the Bihor–Hajdú-Bihar region, digitalization can contribute to increasing the accessibility of cultural heritage, diversifying citizens' participation, and improving collaboration among the institutions involved. At the same time, the use of digital solutions facilitates the development of innovative

cultural services and extends the impact of projects beyond the geographical boundaries of the region¹²⁵.

A first recommendation is the development of a common digital platform dedicated to cross-border cultural cooperation. Such a platform could integrate information on cultural institutions, regional heritage, event calendars, funding opportunities, and ongoing projects. It would facilitate information exchange among partners, improve communication with the public, and contribute to promoting a unified image of the Bihor-Hajdú-Bihar region¹²⁶. At the same time, it is recommended to continue the digitalization of cultural heritage through the creation of digital archives, virtual collections, and publicly accessible shared databases. The digitization of historical documents, museum collections, and intangible cultural heritage contributes both to their preservation and to their use in education, research, and tourism promotion. Moreover, online access to cultural resources facilitates the participation of people who cannot physically visit cultural sites and supports digital inclusion¹²⁷.

Another strategic direction concerns the use of emerging technologies for the interpretation and promotion of cultural heritage. Augmented reality, virtual reality, interactive mobile applications, and artificial intelligence can enhance visitors' experiences and transform cultural heritage into an attractive educational tool for different categories of audiences. These technologies enable information to be presented in an accessible and interactive manner, increasing public interest in the cultural values of the region. Digitalization should also support institutional cooperation. The use of digital platforms for project management, online meetings, document exchange, and activity monitoring can reduce administrative costs and facilitate cooperation between partners from the two countries. Furthermore, digital tools enable faster communication and more efficient coordination of activities implemented within cross-border projects¹²⁸.

¹²⁵ European Commission. (2021). *2030 Digital Compass: The European Way for the Digital Decade*.

¹²⁶ Europeana Foundation. (2023). *Europeana Strategy 2023–2025*. <https://pro.europeana.eu>. Accessed 15 May 2026.

¹²⁷ European Commission. (2021). *Common European Data Space for Cultural Heritage*.

¹²⁸ UNESCO. (2023). *Culture and Digital Technologies*. <https://www.unesco.org/en/culture/digital>. Accessed 12 May 2026; Interreg

It is also recommended to strengthen the digital skills of staff working in cultural institutions and partner organizations. Joint training programmes in digital resource management, online communication, cultural marketing, collaborative digital tools, and cybersecurity can improve the quality of cultural services while enabling institutions to adapt to the evolving digital environment¹²⁹.

Another important recommendation is to encourage innovation within the cultural and creative industries. Strengthening cooperation among cultural institutions, universities, research centres, and technology companies can lead to the development of innovative products and services with a positive impact on the regional economy. Business incubators, innovation laboratories, and pilot projects dedicated to creative industries can contribute to economic diversification and attract young professionals to the region.

During the digitalization process, particular attention should be paid to ensuring digital accessibility and inclusion. Platforms and applications developed within cultural projects should comply with universal accessibility principles, providing solutions adapted to persons with disabilities and users with different levels of digital competence. Furthermore, multilingual content should be promoted in order to facilitate the participation of diverse audiences and strengthen intercultural dialogue¹³⁰.

Overall, digitalization and innovation should not be regarded solely as technological instruments but as factors capable of transforming the way culture is created, managed, and promoted within cross-border cooperation. The integration of digital solutions into the activities of cultural institutions can expand access to cultural heritage, improve collaboration among partners, and support the development of modern cultural services capable of responding to

Europe. (2023). *Policy Learning Platform*. <https://www.interregeurope.eu/policy-learning-platform>. Accessed 22 May 2026.

¹²⁹ European Commission. (2023). *European Year of Skills*. <https://year-of-skills.europa.eu>. Accessed 22 May 2026.

¹³⁰ European Commission. (2019). *Directive (EU) 2019/882 on the Accessibility Requirements for Products and Services (European Accessibility Act)*. <https://eur-lex.europa.eu/eli/dir/2019/882/oj>. Accessed 17 May 2026.

community needs while contributing to the objectives of European policies¹³¹ on the digital transition and territorial cohesion.

5. Development of Competencies and Intercultural Education

The development of cultural diplomacy requires investments not only in infrastructure and projects but also in human capital development. Intercultural competencies, the ability to communicate in multicultural environments, and an understanding of European values are essential factors for strengthening cross-border cooperation. In the Bihor-Hajdú-Bihar region, where cultural diversity constitutes a defining characteristic, intercultural education can contribute to strengthening mutual trust, reducing stereotypes, and fostering a culture of dialogue and cooperation¹³².

A first recommendation concerns the integration of intercultural education into educational programmes and extracurricular activities implemented by schools and universities. Educational institutions from the two counties can develop joint projects, thematic modules, workshops, and practical activities dedicated to promoting knowledge of the region's cultural heritage, European diversity, and cross-border cooperation. Such initiatives contribute to the development of civic and intercultural competencies that encourage the active participation of young people in the development of their local communities¹³³.

At the same time, expanding educational and professional mobility programmes is recommended. The participation of pupils, students, teachers, researchers, and cultural professionals in exchange programmes, internships, summer schools, and joint projects facilitates the development of long-term professional networks and promotes the transfer of good practices. Direct cooperation experiences strengthen intercultural competencies and

¹³¹ UNESCO. (2021). *Recommendation on the Ethics of Artificial Intelligence*. <https://www.unesco.org/en/artificial-intelligence/recommendation-ethics>. Accessed 17 May 2026.

¹³² Council of Europe. *Reference Framework of Competences for Democratic Culture*. Strasbourg: Council of Europe Publishing, 2022. <https://www.coe.int/en/web/reference-framework-of-competences-for-democratic-culture>. Accessed 12 May 2026.

¹³³ European Commission. *European Education Area*. Brussels: European Commission, 2024. <https://education.ec.europa.eu/>. Accessed 12 May 2026.

increase the capacity of institutions to develop joint initiatives with regional impact¹³⁴.

Another important direction of action is the development of continuing professional training programmes for staff working in cultural institutions and public administrations. These programmes should address topics such as cultural diplomacy, cross-border cooperation management, intercultural communication, European project management, negotiation and intercultural mediation, as well as the evaluation of cultural policies. Strengthening professional competencies can improve project quality and contribute to the development of an organisational culture focused on cooperation and innovation¹³⁵.

It is also recommended to promote lifelong learning by organising educational activities for different age groups. Public lectures, open courses, thematic workshops, interactive exhibitions, and educational programmes organised by museums, libraries, and cultural centres can facilitate community access to shared cultural heritage and improve public understanding of the benefits of cross-border cooperation. Such an approach contributes to fostering a culture of participation and strengthening social cohesion¹³⁶.

In the context of digital transformation, it is equally important to develop digital competencies related to cultural and educational activities. Staff from cultural institutions, teachers, and project participants should acquire skills in the use of collaborative platforms, digital content creation, online communication, and the application of new technologies in the promotion of cultural heritage. These competencies enhance institutional capacity to respond to the

¹³⁴ European Commission. *Erasmus+ Programme Guide 2024*. Brussels: European Commission, 2024. <https://erasmus-plus.ec.europa.eu/programme-guide>. Accessed 12 May 2026.

¹³⁵ European Institute of Public Administration (EIPA). *Training and Capacity Building Programmes*. Maastricht: EIPA, 2023. <https://www.eipa.eu/>. Accessed 26 May 2026.

¹³⁶ UNESCO Institute for Lifelong Learning. *Making Lifelong Learning a Reality for All*. Hamburg: UNESCO UIL, 2022. <https://www.uil.unesco.org/>. Accessed 26 May 2026.

challenges of the digital environment while expanding access to cultural activities¹³⁷.

Special attention should also be paid to the development of language skills, considering the cross-border nature of cooperation. Encouraging the learning of Romanian, Hungarian, and English within joint projects can facilitate communication among partners, reduce cultural barriers, and support participants' integration into cross-border activities. Language competencies also contribute to increased educational and professional mobility and strengthen long-term institutional cooperation¹³⁸.

Finally, supporting research and knowledge exchange in the field of cultural diplomacy is recommended. Universities and research institutes in the region can develop joint research projects on the impact of cultural cooperation on regional development, social inclusion, and community security. The findings of such research can support evidence-based policymaking and contribute to designing interventions tailored to the specific characteristics of the Bihor-Hajdú-Bihar region¹³⁹.

Overall, the development of competencies and the promotion of intercultural education represent strategic investments in the region's human capital. By strengthening the knowledge, skills, and attitudes required for cooperation in multicultural environments, regional stakeholders can create the conditions for sustainable cultural diplomacy capable of supporting European integration, social inclusion, and the sustainable development of border communities¹⁴⁰.

¹³⁷ European Commission. *Digital Education Action Plan 2021–2027*. Brussels: European Commission, 2023. <https://education.ec.europa.eu/focus-topics/digital-education/action-plan>. Accessed 26 May 2026.

¹³⁸ Council of Europe. *Common European Framework of Reference for Languages: Companion Volume*. Strasbourg: Council of Europe Publishing, 2020. <https://www.coe.int/en/web/common-european-framework-reference-languages>. Accessed 26 May 2026.

¹³⁹ OECD. *Skills Outlook 2023: Skills for a Resilient Green and Digital Transition*. Paris: OECD Publishing, 2023. <https://www.oecd.org/skills/oecd-skills-outlook/>. Accessed 26 May 2026.

¹⁴⁰ UNESCO. *Re|Shaping Policies for Creativity: Addressing Culture as a Global Public Good*. Paris: UNESCO Publishing, 2022. <https://unesdoc.unesco.org/ark:/48223/pf0000380474>. Accessed 26 May 2026.

6. Establishing a Common Monitoring and Evaluation System

The effective implementation of cultural diplomacy requires not only the development and financing of projects but also the systematic evaluation of their outcomes and their impact on communities in the Bihor-Hajdú-Bihar cross-border region. The analysis of best practices and the results of the SWOT analysis have shown that most projects are monitored according to the indicators established by their respective funding programmes, without the existence of a common regional framework capable of assessing their cumulative contribution to integration, social inclusion, and territorial development. In this context, the establishment of a common monitoring and evaluation system represents an essential prerequisite for evidence-based decision-making and the continuous improvement of cultural cooperation policies.

A first recommendation is the development of a common framework of performance indicators that would enable the comparable evaluation of projects implemented by different partner institutions. This framework should include both quantitative indicators, such as the number of participants, events organised, or partnerships established, and qualitative indicators related to participants' satisfaction, the level of trust between communities, the development of intercultural competencies, and the contribution of projects to social inclusion and regional development.

It is also recommended to establish a joint mechanism for data collection and analysis, coordinated by partner institutions from the two counties. Such a mechanism would facilitate the centralisation of information on project implementation, the identification of trends, and the comparison of results achieved across different intervention areas. The use of common methodologies for data collection and reporting would improve the quality of evaluations and support evidence-based policymaking¹⁴¹.

Another strategic recommendation concerns the periodic implementation of impact assessments examining the contribution of cultural diplomacy to the development of the cross-border region. These evaluations should analyse the effects of projects on

¹⁴¹ European Court of Auditors. (2023). *Performance Measurement in EU Spending Programmes*. <https://www.eca.europa.eu>. Accessed 27 May 2026.

strengthening institutional cooperation, increasing community participation, promoting cultural tourism, fostering social inclusion, and reinforcing territorial cohesion. The results obtained could provide an important basis for reviewing regional strategies and adapting interventions to emerging challenges and opportunities¹⁴².

To enhance transparency and encourage the exchange of experience, it is recommended to publish regular regional reports on the state of cross-border cultural cooperation. These reports could include analyses of key indicators, presentations of best practices, the main implementation challenges, and recommendations for improving public policies. The publication of joint reports would contribute to the development of an organisational culture based on learning, accountability, and cooperation¹⁴³.

An equally important aspect is the involvement of stakeholders in the evaluation process. Public authorities, cultural institutions, universities, non-governmental organisations, and representatives of local communities should actively participate in analysing project outcomes and identifying areas for improvement. The use of participatory methods, such as public consultations, focus groups, and beneficiary surveys, can provide valuable information regarding the actual impact of projects and the level of community satisfaction.

At the same time, digital tools should be fully integrated into monitoring and evaluation activities. Online project management platforms, integrated databases, and digital dashboards can facilitate the real-time monitoring of indicators, the automatic generation of reports, and the rapid exchange of information among project partners. These instruments contribute to reducing administrative burdens while improving the efficiency of the monitoring process.

Finally, the common monitoring system should promote organisational learning and continuous improvement. Evaluation should not be perceived solely as an administrative control mechanism but rather as a process through which partner institutions identify solutions for improving project quality and adapting interventions to the evolving needs of local communities.

¹⁴² ESPON EGTC. (2022). *Territorial Impact Assessment*. <https://www.espon.eu>. Accessed 27 May 2026.

¹⁴³ Interreg Europe. (2023). *Policy Learning Platform*. <https://www.interregeurope.eu/policy-learning-platform>. Accessed 26 May 2026.

The systematic exchange of experience and the analysis of results can contribute to the development of more effective and sustainable models of cross-border cooperation.

Overall, the establishment of a common monitoring and evaluation system will enable accumulated experience to be transformed into institutional knowledge and will support the development of evidence-based cultural policies. Through the use of common indicators, regular impact assessments, and the active involvement of regional stakeholders in the evaluation process, the Bihor–Hajdú-Bihar region can strengthen its capacity to plan and implement cultural initiatives with lasting effects on integration, societal security, and social inclusion¹⁴⁴.

7. Final Strategic Recommendations

The recommendations presented in this chapter demonstrate that the development of cultural diplomacy in the Bihor–Hajdú-Bihar cross-border region requires a strategic, integrated, and results-oriented approach. Strengthening institutional cooperation, encouraging the active participation of local communities, promoting shared cultural heritage, accelerating digital transformation, developing intercultural competencies, and establishing a common monitoring and evaluation system represent complementary priorities that should be implemented in a coordinated manner.

To ensure the sustainability of these interventions, it is necessary to move from an approach primarily based on individual projects to one founded on permanent partnerships and stable governance mechanisms. Cultural cooperation should be integrated into regional development strategies and aligned with sectors such as education, tourism, innovation, economic development, and social inclusion. Such an approach would enable a more efficient use of available resources while increasing the resilience of communities located in the border area.

At the same time, the success of cultural diplomacy depends on the capacity of regional stakeholders to adapt their interventions to economic, social, and technological changes. Institutional flexibility, continuous learning, and the systematic use of evaluation results to

¹⁴⁴ OECD. (2020). *OECD Regulatory Policy Outlook 2021*. Paris: OECD Publishing. <https://www.oecd.org/gov/regulatory-policy/oecd-regulatory-policy-outlook-2021.htm>. Accessed 16 May 2026.

improve public policies should become permanent components of the cross-border cooperation process. In this regard, the recommendations presented in this guide should not be viewed as independent measures but rather as complementary elements of an integrated regional development model based on cooperation, innovation, and participation.

With regard to future European territorial cooperation programmes, the Bihor-Hajdú-Bihar region has the opportunity to build upon the experience gained over recent decades and become a model of good practice in the use of cultural diplomacy to promote integration, societal security, and social inclusion. Achieving this objective requires the adoption of a shared development vision, the strengthening of relationships between institutions and communities, and the prioritisation of investments in initiatives capable of generating long-term social, cultural, and economic benefits.

In conclusion, cultural diplomacy should not be regarded solely as a means of promoting cultural heritage or organising cultural events, but rather as a strategic component of regional development and European cooperation. By promoting intercultural dialogue, enhancing cultural diversity, and strengthening cross-border partnerships, cultural diplomacy can contribute to building a more inclusive, resilient, and competitive region in which culture becomes a driver of cohesion, mutual trust, and sustainable development.

Conclusions

This guide has examined the role of cultural diplomacy in promoting integration, societal security, and social inclusion in the Bihor-Hajdú-Bihar cross-border region, based on the premise that the development of cultural cooperation constitutes a fundamental element for strengthening territorial cohesion and bringing together communities located on both sides of the Romanian-Hungarian border. The analysis has demonstrated that cultural diplomacy extends far beyond artistic exchanges and the promotion of cultural heritage, functioning as a public policy instrument capable of fostering stable institutional relationships, increasing mutual trust, and strengthening regional resilience.

The theoretical framework presented in the first part of the guide highlighted the evolution of the concept of cultural diplomacy and its relationship with the notions of soft power, international cooperation,

and regional development. The academic literature emphasizes that cultural exchanges facilitate intercultural dialogue, reduce social barriers, and contribute to the establishment of relationships based on trust and mutual respect. In border regions, these functions acquire additional significance, as they transform borders from spaces of separation into spaces of cooperation and shared development.

The analysis of the regional context revealed that Bihor and Hajdú-Bihar counties possess numerous advantages for the development of cultural cooperation. Their geographical proximity, rich and diverse cultural heritage, the presence of institutions experienced in implementing European projects, and their long-standing participation in cross-border cooperation programmes have created favourable conditions for the establishment of sustainable partnerships. The projects analysed throughout this guide demonstrate that cultural diplomacy generates impacts extending beyond the cultural sector, contributing to tourism development, increased regional competitiveness, stronger institutional cooperation, and greater community engagement.

At the same time, the SWOT analysis showed that fully exploiting this potential depends on overcoming several persistent challenges. Dependence on European funding, administrative differences between Romania and Hungary, the uneven involvement of local stakeholders, and the absence of a common monitoring and evaluation framework continue to limit the continuity and long-term impact of cross-border projects. Furthermore, ongoing economic, demographic, and geopolitical changes require the development of more flexible and resilient cooperation mechanisms capable of responding effectively to an evolving external environment.

Based on these findings, the guide proposed a comprehensive set of recommendations aimed at strengthening the institutional framework of cultural diplomacy, expanding community participation, promoting shared cultural heritage, accelerating digital transformation, developing intercultural competencies, and establishing a common monitoring and evaluation system. These recommendations should not be interpreted as isolated measures but rather as complementary components of an integrated regional development strategy founded on cooperation, innovation, and participation.

An important conclusion emerging from this research is that the success of cultural diplomacy depends equally on the quality of institutional relationships and on the active involvement of citizens. Cross-border cooperation generates sustainable outcomes when local communities actively participate in defining priorities and implementing projects, while institutions establish stable mechanisms for dialogue, coordination, and cooperation. In this context, culture becomes both a catalyst for civic participation and an instrument for strengthening regional social capital.

Looking ahead to future European Territorial Cooperation programmes, the Bihor–Hajdú-Bihar region has a valuable opportunity to build upon its accumulated experience and further develop a regional model based on cultural heritage, innovation, and intercultural cooperation. Integrating cultural diplomacy into regional and local development strategies can contribute to the creation of more inclusive, resilient, and competitive communities capable of addressing contemporary challenges through collaboration, knowledge exchange, and innovation.

In conclusion, cultural diplomacy should be understood as a continuous process of building relationships among individuals, institutions, and communities. By promoting intercultural dialogue, enhancing shared cultural heritage, and developing sustainable partnerships, it contributes to strengthening European integration, enhancing security through cooperation, and fostering an inclusive society in which cultural diversity is recognised as a strategic resource for regional development and for reinforcing the European project.

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GUIDE OF BEST PRACTICES REGARDING
INTEGRATION, SOCIETAL SECURITY AND
INCLUSION IN THE BORDER AREA

Key area

**Migrant Integration and Societal
Security in Bihor County**

by István Polgár

Introduction

The significant variation and diversity in migration and displacement in South East Europe make grabbing the new trends difficult. Migration issues and demographic issues are two of the key elements of modern society, bringing benefits and conflicts both to the receiving places and to the place of origin and raising issues of security, social measurements and multiculturalism in our globalized world.

The overwhelming majority of people migrate internationally for reasons related to work, family and study, involving migration processes that largely occur without fundamentally challenging either migrants or the countries they enter. This migration is mostly safe, orderly and regular. In contrast, other people leave their homes and countries for a range of compelling and sometimes tragic reasons, such as conflict, persecution and disaster¹.

Regular migration pathways boost public confidence in migration systems, while also protecting migrants. International migration and mobility occurring within regional and global economic, social, political and security environments increasingly reflect migration policy settings. Where, how, when and with whom people migrate often depends on the options available to them, with many of these options being determined or shaped by national level policies as well as regional integration².

One of the great challenges of the South East European space is related to migration, border management and the need for integration of minority communities, including immigrants. Evaluations conducted have shown that there is a great need for expertise and policies regarding the integration of minorities in both their countries of origin and in the new host countries which are dealing with migration.

In recent years, the discourse on migration has become increasingly negative. It is more and more obvious that the complex, transnational migration challenge cannot be handled or managed anymore only by the state. Especially because the states are no longer the most important actors in the migration process. As a consequence,

¹ International Organization for Migration (2024), *World Migration Report*, Geneva, p. 19

² Ibidem, p. 23

there is an increasing tendency to advocate for closing the borders and trying to stop migration.

If we are trying to figure out how to manage migration, or how to elaborate comprehensive and sustainable migration policies, the issue of integration of migrants it must to be considered. Usually, the question of integration, or the method of integration is a very sensitive subject. When it is already difficult to discuss whether and how the migratory trajectory should happen, it is even harder to discuss how and whether immigrants should be helped to integrate.

Migrant integration is a dynamic, multi-faceted and long-term process aimed at mutual accommodation and acceptance among migrant and host society populations. Integration assumes equal opportunities for migrants in their economic mobility and social, civil, political and cultural inclusion; their active participation in the integration process; and their respect for fundamental norms and values, without having to relinquish their own identity.

Migrant integration policies and measures should not be limited to long-term migrants, but should also respond to the needs of those staying for short terms. The process of migrant integration involves and affects a number of parties: migrants themselves, host governments and their institutions, local governments and their institutions, and the local receiving community, as well as communities of origin, to name just the most significant.

While in many countries across the South East European region integration policies are formulated at the national level, they are mainly implemented through local administrative and public institutions. Local authorities, even when not directly tasked with migrant integration, can do a lot to assist this process, and cities increasingly have their own approaches to migrant integration.

Actively engaging in the migrant integration process does not mean that local authorities need to do everything on their own. There are a number of possible partners, including local migrant organizations, mainstream civil society organizations, local media, public institutions and private businesses that can contribute to the process.

The present Guide is for anybody who is developing, or thinking about developing, a strategy to integrate migrants in their city, town or region. It should be helpful for those just starting to think about developing an integration strategy as well as those well along the path.

It aims to offer an initial overview of key aspects of migrant integration relevant to regional, national and local authorities to help promote knowledge and encourage further learning and improved policies and practice.

By discussing common issues and various policy instruments in the most relevant policy areas for migrant integration at the regional, national and local level, and by presenting examples of good practices from various South East European states, we are hoping that this Guide will assist authorities across the South East European border regions in their work on migrant integration.

Methodology and Documentary Sources

The overall aim of the present Guide is to support as interactive as possible different actors from the South East European region in implementing policies and practices that meet relevant international legal standards in the field of migrant integration.

It does so by building the capacity and raising the awareness of those involved in migrant integration policies and processes, using already implemented best practices.

Based on this aim, the proposed research methodology is complex and designed on several levels, both in its qualitative and quantitative form. The analytical part is complemented by synthetic elements that provide an integrated picture.

The specific objectives of this section of the Guide are as follows:

- to increase awareness of existing international legal standards, EU commitments and good practices related to migrant integration and inclusion among national authorities and civil society actors working on migrant integration;
- to increase the capacity of regional, national and local authorities to develop and/or implement migrant integration and inclusion policies and practices that are in line with relevant international legal standards, EU commitments and national good practices;
- to increase awareness among relevant civil society actors of issues relating to migrant integration and inclusion, and inform them of the appropriate domestic policies and practices that are in line with

international legal standards, EU commitments and national good practices.

In order to reach the established goals, in this section of the Guide the used methodological structure is customized for the existing frame of migrant integration and inclusion from the border regions and combines qualitative and quantitative tools. It draws on a focused set of European, national, regional, and local documentary sources, with emphasis on EU programmes, regulations, and strategic frameworks relevant to migration management, integration, inclusion and trans-national and cross-border cooperation in the field.

The analysis will be structured and delivered through 5 main chapters alongside with several sub chapters.

At international and European level, the main analysed sources were the policies, the strategies and the legal framework developed by international institutions and organisations (UN, EU, IOM, OSCE).

At national, regional, and local levels, the analysis draws on government strategies, and sectorial strategies addressing socio-economic conditions, mobility and urban development. These are complemented by statistical and administrative data from different institutions, relevant in the field, like Eurostat, National Statistical Institute, Romanian Border Police, General Inspectorate for Immigration and local authorities, which provide insights into used tools and instruments, on the ground implemented action and their outcome, demographic trends, migration flow and management and service provision. Data are interpreted to identify structural challenges and emerging patterns relevant to inclusion.

The methodology also includes the evaluation of regional and local development strategies and the results of several implemented projects, which offer concrete evidence on cooperation mechanisms, service models, and community-level interventions. Project records, partnership agreements, and operational documents provide additional insights into implementation practices and cross-border coordination.

An analytical synthesis integrates these findings into a structured interpretation, combining a SWOT analysis of migrant management and inclusion in the border region, a sector-specific action plan with practical recommendations for the development of new instruments and methods, partnership planning and monitoring mechanisms.

The proposed methodological frame can assure the creation of an extensive and complete evidence-based material, which can serve as a basis for assessing institutional capacities and identifying effective approaches to migration management and inclusion in border areas.

I. Context. Concepts. Legislative and Institutional Framework.

1. Context

In the past few years, due to economic crises, pandemic situation, armed conflicts and political turbulences across the world, massive migration trends started towards the European Union. This phenomenon raised issues and concerns in the EU Member States and often provoked emotional reactions, negative stereotypes and myths which tend to mutilate the actual facts.

In this context, the present Guide is developed not only to serve as one of the main results of the Jean Monnet Centre of Excellence project, entitled „*Identity, Security and Inclusivity in border areas of South East Europe* ", but also as a need, in order to support representatives of national, regional and local authorities; social partners and civil society actors involved in developing, implementing and reviewing migrant integration and inclusion policies.

It is more and more visible that migration and the question of integration and inclusion as a topic has been a subject for political and public arguments which requires evidence-based information, crucial to respond to this complex problem. As a result to this massive flow of people in Europe, immediate actions and measures, policy priorities for the host countries were obviously demanded in order to help them cope with this crisis.

The European Union's South Eastern border region, and bordering countries are representing a so-called epicenter of the migration process. Basically, it is one of the main migration routes, also called the Western Balkan track, used by thousands of migrants and refugees on their way to the EU member states³.

³ Polgár István (2024), *Developments in Border and Migration Management in the South East European Region*, *Analele Universitatii din Oradea, Seria Relații Internaționale și Studii Europene*, TOM XVI, p. 219-231

Based on the statistical data, the Western Balkan route can be considered one of the main migratory ways towards the EU. After the record number of arrivals in the European Union in 2015, the number of irregular migrants choosing this route fell steadily for a few years. However, since 2019 it has started to pick up again⁴.

Many irregular migrants reaching the EU via the Western Balkans route, move from the EU member state in which they first arrived to another EU country. This results in high numbers of detections of irregular migrants and asylum applications in Europe.

There is a different perception between countries with regard to the definitions of the terms: migrant, national minority and ethnic minority. In some cases, states from the South East European region are treating migrants and minorities like own citizens, in other cases like non-citizens - their migration or minority background is viewed as irrelevant in statistical terms⁵.

Nevertheless, is already obvious that local events have an impact on the effective integration and inclusion process of the refugees in the host communities. The fact that cities are incubators of innovation and good practices that support refugee protection has been demonstrated by their commitments to implement the Global Compact for Refugees⁶.

Indeed, the destination of refugees and how they are included in host communities depends on the vision, collaboration and commitment of mayors, municipal authorities and local groups. Local authorities often show generous solidarity with refugees and migrants, offering them protection and recognizing their abundant and diverse contributions. Local communities can also show

⁴ European Council (2024), *Illegal border crossings on the Western Balkans route*, <https://www.consilium.europa.eu/en/infographics/western-balkans-migration-route/> accessed 10.06.26

⁵ Centre for Strategy & Evaluation Services (2011): *Evaluation of ESF Support for Enhancing Access to the Labour Market and the Social Inclusion of Migrants and Ethnic Minorities*, Belgium, p. 40

⁶ United Nations, *Global Compact for Refugees* (2018), New York, https://www.unhcr.org/about-unhcr/overview/global-compact-refugees?gad_source=1&gad_campaignid=23232545219&gbraid=0AAAAA-Pr7kkJ9P-I-jnFJ4uTAZKJYPZXF&gclid=Cj0KCQjwnbrUBhDOARIsAKKhPpebz0-zTfM_3Xun6-L9z2h6jdFT6gf-0K11EzpfvUrvLKEdmHAL_OgaAvLNEALw_wcB, accessed 10.06.26.

compassion in cases of persecution, loss or cultural alienation of people displaced by conflict and violence.

The EU along with the Member States have so many key priorities, measures, demands and needs on migration, integration and asylum. The European Commission, to this effort, has launched the “Action Plan on the integration of Third-Country Nationals”, in which they present structured actions and concrete initiatives to support Member States in the integration process of the 20 million documented non-EU nationals residing in the EU.

The action plan includes actions supporting pre-departure and pre-arrival measures, education, employment, vocational training, access to basic services, active participation and social inclusion⁷.

2. Concepts of migrant integration and inclusion

As a core concept specialist agree that migration is a complex process of spontaneous or forced interactions between individuals and groups. These contacts are often between people who identify themselves as different from each other and who really are culturally distinct.

Different states through their different institutions can apply a range of different policies to the societal diversity resulting from migration.

While in the past migrants were often expected to assimilate, with national institutions doing little to facilitate the relationships between migrants and receiving societies, the importance and benefits of policies that promote integration are now widely accepted.

More recently, studies have been done on multiculturalism and interculturalism that reflect on the multiple identities that people in diverse societies often have, and the policies and processes that can shape such societies⁸.

⁷ European Commission (2022), *Commission Action Plan for Migratory Routes in Western Balkans*", European Commission, https://home-affairs.ec.europa.eu/news/commission-action-plan-migratory-routes-western-balkans-2022-12-05_en, accessed in 23.06.26

⁸ OSCE (2018), *Good Practices in Migrant Integration: Trainee's Manual*, Warsaw, Poland, ISBN 978-83-66089-17-4, p. 24

Tabel 1. Types of institutional and policy methods to manage diversity resulting from migration

Types of institutional and policy methods to manage diversity resulting from migration	
Multiculturalism	A set of discourses, philosophies and policies which aim to recognize the unique contributions of multiple cultural traditions. In the same vein as pluralism, the goal of multi-culturalism is to instill a sense of belonging between people from different cultural backgrounds. Emphasizes equal rights and opportunities for all cultural groups, with almost no dominant culture.
Assimilation	The process by which an ethnic or racial minority gradually loses its distinctive identity and conforms to the cultural patterns of the dominant group. Sometimes refers to whether an immigrant achieves the same socioeconomic status or spatial distribution as the dominant society
Integration and interculturalism	A policy situated between multiculturalism and assimilation that entails a give and take between state institutions, receiving societies and migrants, and implies rights and duties on all sides (Integration can also include intercultural approaches that support cross-cultural dialogue based on a recognition of both the differences and similarities between cultures.)
Segregation	This involves the marginalization of migrants, their physical separation from the receiving society and the ignoring of their needs. This policy does not demand anything of migrants, but also does not provide them with any support.

Source: OSCE (2018), Good Practices in Migrant Integration: Trainee's Manual

The concept of integration is difficult to define as there is no legally binding and universal definition of the term. Integration policies can range from a “close-to-assimilation” model to a multiculturalism model, as countries differ in their migratory traditions and/or government approaches to integration. The practical interpretations and social connotations of integration may differ significantly across countries.

In the following we present the comprehensive definitions of integration, developed by IOM and UNHCR.

Definitions of integration

IOM: Integration is “the process by which immigrants **become accepted** into society, both **as individuals and as groups**. The particular requirements for acceptance by a receiving society vary greatly from country to country; and the responsibility for integration rests not with one particular group, but rather with many actors: immigrants themselves, the host government, institutions and communities”.

Source: Handbook on Migration Terminology, IOM (2011).

UNHCR: Integration is “understood as a dynamic and multifaceted two-way process with three interrelated dimensions: a legal, an economic and a social-cultural dimension.

Integration requires efforts by all parties concerned, including preparedness on the part of refugees to adapt to the host society without having to forego their own cultural identity, and a corresponding readiness on the part of host communities and public institutions to welcome refugees and to meet the needs of a diverse population.

At the core of UNHCR's definition is the concept of integration as a two-way process and this is premised on “adaptation” of one party and “welcome” by the other. It does not, however, require the refugee to relinquish their cultural identity and integration therefore differ from assimilation”.

Source: UNHCR's Executive Committee Conclusion on Local Integration (2005).

As the phenomena of migration increases, there is a need for more comprehensive, consistent and transparent migration policies that take account of migrants' diversity and adopt more structured integration approaches that involve all stakeholders. For this, it is crucial to understand what inclusion is.

In the following we present the comprehensive definitions of inclusion, developed by UNESCO.

Definitions of inclusion

UNESCO: Inclusion refers to the practice of ensuring that individuals from diverse backgrounds and abilities are actively integrated and valued within various social contexts. It is a fundamental concept in social and human sciences, emphasizing equitable access to opportunities and resources. Inclusion plays a vital role in shaping effective social policies that foster community cohesion and mutual respect.

Source: UNESCO (2026), <https://www.unesco.org/en/query-list/i/inclusion>

At the level of the European Union, the conceptual framework for integration looks a little bit different and is comprised of four key dimensions:

Tabel 2. EU's conceptual framework for integration

Foundational dimension	consists of the granting of refugee status, access to rights, and citizenship
Functional dimension	involves the access to housing, health, social security, decent work, financial services and education
Social dimension	includes social connections and bonds within the host community, social bridges, networks and social links
Facilitation dimension	comprises language, training, counselling, cultural knowledge, safety, and stability

Source: Council of Europe (2023), *Integration of migrants and refugees: benefits for all parties involved*, Committee on Migration, Refugees and Displaced Persons. Doc. 15785, 05 June 2023.

The issue of migrant inclusion is therefore critical for many societies all over the world and concerns both internal and

international migrants. Inclusion does not only mean meeting migrants' basic needs, such as housing, food, or health care, but also creating an urban environment in which civic, social and economic inclusion is understood as essential prerequisites for sustainable development⁹.

In the process of inclusion, migrants stimulate change and development in receiving societies, resulting in greater diversity. Acknowledging diversity becomes a crucial part of the inclusion process. It often requires changes to fundamental concepts about the state, reflected in how policies and programs are implemented; simultaneously, it also requires changes to migrants' mind-sets and identities.

Therefore, inclusion is best understood as a multi-layered and two-way process based on the migrants approaches and motivations, as well as the receiving society's attitudes and integration measures.

The two parties involved in the inclusion processes – migrants and the receiving society – determine its direction and final outcome. Inclusion depends on many different groups of people within society: migrants, politicians, members of parliament, civil servants, non-governmental activists, journalists and people representing various other professions and communities. All parties play an important role both as individuals – in terms of their personal interactions with migrants – and also as members of a group, as they contribute to a general climate of acceptance¹⁰.

In order to conclude the conceptual part of this section of the Guide, we can summarize the following:

- integration and inclusion are interlinked (however, they do not have the same meaning)
- integration consists of bringing someone into an existing social group or system

⁹ UN Habitat (2015), *Migrants inclusion in cities. Innovative Urban Policies and Practices*, p. 11-13

¹⁰ OSCE (2018), *Good Practices in Migrant Integration: Trainee's Manual*, Warsaw, Poland, ISBN 978-83-66089-17-4, p. 24

- inclusion means creating an environment that values and respects all individuals, regardless of their differences.
- countries with large inflows of refugees and migrants need to put in place effective integration and inclusion policies.
- successful integration and inclusion of refugees and migrants in a country relies heavily on ensuring broad public opinion support, and on recognizing the benefits of diversity in society by its citizens.

3. Legal and Normative Framework of migration and integration

States possess broad authority to regulate the movement of foreign nationals across their borders. Although these authorities are not absolute, states exercise their sovereign powers to determine who will be admitted and for what period.

In support of these powers, states enact law and regulations to govern issuance passports, admissions, exclusion and removal of aliens, integration processes and border security. States vary in the types of laws and regulations adopted, with some being more restrictive than others are, but all states adopt rules that govern entry into and exit from their territories.

3.1. International Normative Framework

The legal and normative framework on international migration includes binding international law as well as non-legally binding best practices and principles.

Existing international law provides useful contributions to a normative and legal framework regarding¹¹:

- the powers and responsibilities of individual states to manage movements of people across their borders
- the rights and responsibilities of international migrants
- state cooperation in managing international movements of people

¹¹ Global Commission on International Migration (GCIM) (2005), *The legal and normative framework of international migration*, p. 5

Nevertheless, the gaps in international law and norms remain, particularly related to migration for family and economic reasons.

Internationally recognized standards applicable to all migrants:

Non-nationals enjoy all of the unalienable rights applicable in international law. The International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights (ICCPR) defines such basic rights of all persons as:

- the right to life,
- liberty and security;
- the right not to be held in slavery or servitude;
- the right not to be subjected to torture or to cruel, inhuman or degrading treatment or punishment;
- the right not to be subjected to arbitrary arrest, detention or exile;
- the right to marry and to found a family.

Article 2 specifies that such rights are provided without distinction of any kind, such as race, colour, sex, language, religion, political or other opinion, national or social origin, property, birth or other status.

Source: General Assembly Resolution 2200A(XXI), (1966), The International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights (ICCPR), Art. 2

International migration laws and policies must address a wide range of issues, including but not limited to the following:

- Legal channels for migration of persons seeking work opportunities in other countries;
- Protection of the rights of migrants and their families, including persons who have been smuggled or trafficked;
- Protection of refugees and durable solutions to refugee problems;
- Prevention and prosecution of human smuggling and human trafficking operations;
- Return, readmission and reintegration of persons who do not have, or no longer have, authorization to remain in a destination country.

Source: Global Commission on International Migration (GCIM) (2005), *The legal and normative framework of international migration*, p. 6

Core Policy Areas in international migrant integration

In line with the UN's 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development, successful international integration can be managed as a dynamic and multidirectional process that covers inclusion in the:

- | | |
|---------------------|---------------------|
| • Employment | • Housing |
| • Education | • Healthcare |

Source: International Organization for Migration (2024), *World Migration Report, Geneva*, p. 14

Key Dimensions in international migrant inclusion

- **Economic:** Joining the labor market and achieving financial independence
- **Social and Cultural:** Building community ties and respecting local traditions alongside personal heritage.

- **Civic and Legal:** Understanding local laws, gaining voting rights, and navigating pathways to permanent residency or citizenship

Source: International Organization for Migration (2024), World Migration Report, Geneva, p. 15

After the significant migration wave from 2015 from the South East border of the EU, it became obvious that a well-regulated system must also provide avenues for international cooperation in managing the flows of people from source, through transit, to destination countries and, often, back to the source country or into another destination country.

Important, to be noticed! - weak institutional arrangements make international cooperation in managing international migration all the more difficult to achieve and retard the development of effective legal and normative frameworks to handle the full range of issues and recommendations presented in this section of the Guide.

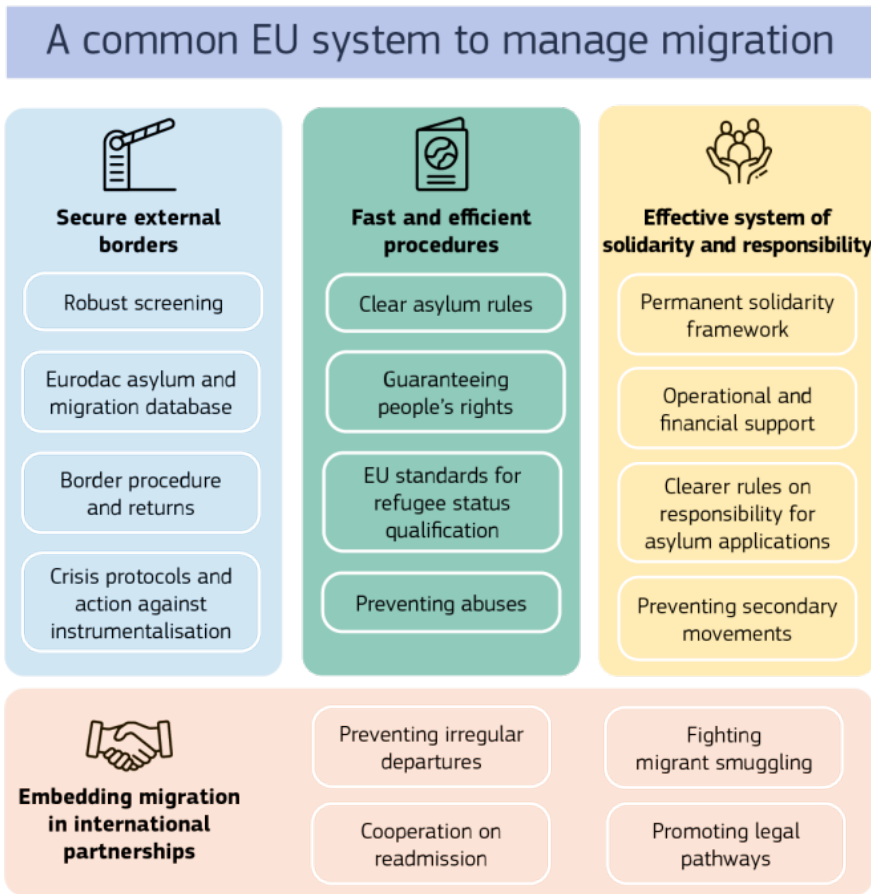
Probably the most important deficiency of the actual system is that institutional responsibilities are spread across many organizations, none having a clear mandate to work with states to manage flows of people across borders, enhance compliance with existing international law or to fill gaps where they exist.

Nevertheless, there are already some international organisations like IOM, ILO, UNHCHR, OECD, etc. which provides institutionalized technical assistance to states in migration management and in the development of policies and programs for integration and inclusion.

3.2. European Normative Framework

The Council of Europe defines integration as a dynamic and bidirectional process conducive to a “full and equal membership in society”, where “all members of society find common ground and make compromises, while inclusion implies that all members of the society have the opportunity to participate in social, cultural and political life and encourages a sense of togetherness”¹².

¹² Council of Europe (2023), *Integration of migrants and refugees: benefits for all parties involved*, Committee on Migration, Refugees and Displaced Persons. Doc. 15785, 05 June 2023, p.4

Figure 1 European Commissions Pact on Migration and Asylum

Source: European Commission, Migration and Home Affairs (2026), Pact on Migration and Asylum https://home-affairs.ec.europa.eu/policies/migration-and-asylum/pact-migration-and-asylum_en

In the following we propose to illustrate in a concise way the key steps and the core policy documents on EU policy on integration.

Tabel 3. Core policy documents for integration

Action Plan on Integration and Inclusion (2021-2027)	the main strategic framework guiding current EU inclusion policies and funding allocation
New Pact on Migration and Asylum	adopted in May 2024, this major reform package links screening, border management, and asylum procedures with inclusion and solidarity mechanisms.
Common Basic Principles for Immigrant Integration (CBPs)	the foundational reference framework adopted by the Council to ensure consistent integration standards across member states

Source: European Commission, Migration and Home Affairs (2026)
https://home-affairs.ec.europa.eu/policies/migration-and-asylum/migrant-integration/eu-integration-policy_en

The main strategic framework in EU inclusion policies is the:



The Action Plan promotes inclusion for all, recognising the important contribution of migrants to the EU and addressing the barriers that can hinder participation and inclusion of migrants and people with a migrant background in EU countries.

It addresses integration barriers in the main policy areas: housing, education, employment and healthcare¹³.

Effective integration policies are essential for building inclusive, cohesive and prosperous societies. They play a crucial role not only in enabling migrants to fully participate in their new communities but also in supporting social stability, economic growth and democratic resilience across Europe.

When integration is well-managed, it benefits both newcomers and the wider population by fostering equal opportunities, reducing inequalities and strengthening trust in public institutions.

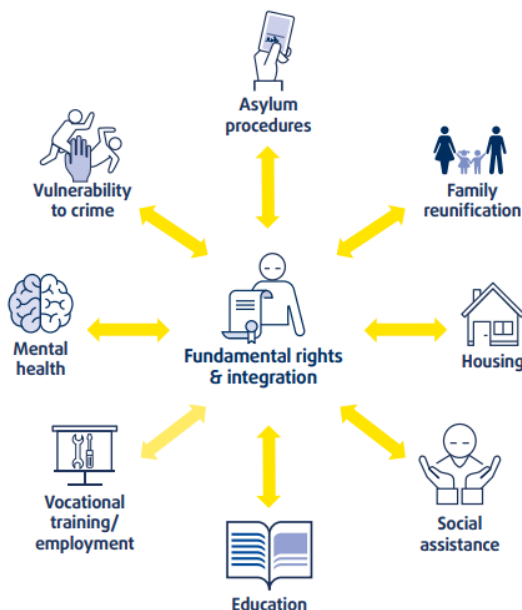
Failure to integrate the newly arrived migrants and refugees can lead to a significant waste of resources, not only for the individuals concerned, but also for the economy and society in general. The legal, economic and social inclusion of recently arrived refugees in the host society depends on how the different rights they are entitled to under EU and national law can be realised in practice¹⁴.

The challenges from the integration and inclusion of refugees and migrants at the local, national and European levels became particularly more prominent following the Mediterranean Crisis peak of 2015, whose effects continued to be felt in the subsequent years. The main challenges for successful refugee integration are interconnected and involve complex processes as it is illustrated on the figure below.

¹³ European Commission, Migration and Home Affairs (2026), *EU Action Plan on Integration and Inclusion (2021-2027)*, https://home-affairs.ec.europa.eu/policies/migration-and-asylum/migrant-integration/eu-integration-policy_en accessed in 23.05.26

¹⁴ Vidal Lopez, Joana, (2024), *Integration and Inclusion of Refugees and Migrants: Challenges and New Directions in Democracies*, p.9, https://www.researchgate.net/publication/384045487_Integration_and_Inclusion_of_Refugees_and_Migrants_Challenges_and_New_Directions_in_Democracies, accessed in 23.06.26

Figure 2. Interconnectedness of different factors for successful migrant integration



Source: Vidal Lopez, Joana, (2024), *Integration and Inclusion of Refugees and Migrants: Challenges and New Directions in Democracies*, p.9

3.3. National Normative Framework

Romania does not have a specific integration strategy, but integration is addressed through the immigration strategy. In the field of migration management and integration Romania aligns to the European Community Law and all European regulations. Also, Romania operates under updated frameworks aligned with the EU Pact on Migration and Asylum

Legislative background

Migrant integration in Romania is regulated by the Integration Act. It provisions the rights and measures the migrant residents are entitled to. The act also contains a description of the Governmental integration program designed for beneficiaries of international protection.

There is a comprehensive legislative background, which support and ensure proper migrant management and integration:

- **Law on foreigners** – implemented through Emergency Ordinance no 194/2022 on the regime of aliens in Romania is the regulatory framework for the entry, stay and exit of foreigners. It also defines their rights and obligations, as well as specific measures to control immigration.
- **Asylum Law** – Law no. 122/2006, establishes the legal status of aliens who are applying for protection in Romania and of persons granted subsidiary or international protection. It also regulates the granting, cessation and cancellation of protection
- **Integration law** - Government Ordinance no. 44/2004 on social integration ensures that beneficiaries of international and subsidiary protection have access to the following rights: employment, housing, medical and social assistance, social security, and education. It also established an integration program consisting of cultural adaptation activities, counselling and Romanian language classes
- **Emergency Ordinance no 15/2022 on provision of support and humanitarian assistance to displaced persons from Ukraine** - sets the grounds for provision of accommodation, food, clothes, hygienic items, transportation, and health services to the displaced people from Ukraine who are not asylum seekers. The disabled and elderly also have the right to receive social services adapted to their needs. In April 2023, the conditions for granting food and accommodation support to displaced people from Ukraine have become more restrictive, depending on the access to education for children and on the access to employment support services for adults.

Source: European Commission, Migration and Home Affairs (2026)

Key stakeholders in migration management and integration

- **The General Inspectorate for Immigration (GII)** - within the Ministry of Internal Affairs is the authority in charge of asylum and migration.

It coordinates and monitors the integration of TCNs and EU citizens, providing integration services through its regional structures.

These structures include six Regional Centres for Accommodation and Procedures for Asylum Seekers across Romania (located in Bucharest, Galati, Giurgiu, Şomcuta Mare, Rădăuţi and Timișoara).

The GII represents Romania at the level of the European Integration Network¹⁵.

- **Ministries of the Romanian Government** - as a coordinator of migrant integration in Romania GII's cooperates with the ministries carrying out specific tasks on different integration areas (e.g. education, labour, health etc.). These ministries cooperate through an inter-institutional mechanism – the Commission for Immigration Management – with the main role to oversee and evaluate the implementation of the Immigration Strategy.

- **Local authorities** - as a coordinator of migrant integration in Romania GII's cooperates with the local authorities from the administrative territorial units, carrying out specific tasks on different integration areas (e.g. education, labour, health etc.).

Integration policy relies on inter-institutional coordination involving public authorities, regional school inspectorates.

¹⁵

The General Inspectorate for Immigration,,
<https://igi.mai.gov.ro/en/strategies/>, accessed in 13.06.26

- **Civil society organizations** - according to Government decision no. 572/2008, non-governmental organizations and employers' associations may be invited for consultations at the meetings of the Commission for Immigration Management.

Civil society organizations are permanent members of the National Coalition for Refugee Integration.

As a stand-alone initiative, several Romanian NGOs active in the field of migration, human rights and public policies have launched in 2017 the Coalition for Migrants and Refugees Rights (CDMIR). To date, CDMIR has 23 members.

The Coalition publishes position papers on institutional practices, legislation and policies in the field of migration, and organizes training sessions, seminars, conferences, public debates and lobbying activities to push for changes in the fields of asylum, migration and integration.

Since February 2022, the Coalition members have been involved in various task forces alongside authorities, and were on the front line of providing humanitarian assistance to the people displaced by the war in Ukraine¹⁶.

The Romanian integration program targets the beneficiaries of international protection who possess either a refugee or a subsidiary protection status. The program consists of a series of services offered through cooperation between public institutions, local communities and non-governmental organisations, under the coordination of the General Inspectorate for Immigration.

Financial background and funding

In Romania the process of migrant integration is carried out mainly through non-reimbursable European funds, supplemented by co-financing from the state budget, the money being directed to public

¹⁶ Coalition for Migrants and Refugees Rights, <https://cdmir.ro/despre-noi/>, accessed in 13.06.26

institutions and non-governmental organizations (NGOs), not directly to individuals.

Below we list some of the most important financing sources used for migrant integration.

- Asylum, Migration and Integration Fund (AMIF) - the EU allocation for Romania is over €38 million.

- the strategic goals of the AMIF national programme for Romania include Legal migration and integration.
- the main priorities of this strand are: provision of integration services, development of the integration programmes, awareness raising in local communities and strengthening data collection on integration.

- European Social Fund (ESF) – funds are destined to:

- improve access to employment - especially youth employment;
- quality and inclusive education;
- new skills and training, to promote entrepreneurship;
- to combat poverty and improve children education and care;
- to increase access to healthcare.

Romania implements ESF through 4 national programmes.

- ERASMUS+ - supports the educational, personal and professional development of people involved in either of the following areas: education, vocational training, youth and sport. Erasmus+ provides funds for mobility projects that promote learning and cooperation.

The priorities for 2021 - 2027 include: diversity and inclusion, digital transformation, environment and climate change.

Source: European Commission, Migration and Home Affairs (2026)

The inclusion of newly arrived asylum seekers, refugees, migrants and stateless people has become a key priority for national, regional, local authorities, civil society organisations and service providers¹⁷. While national policies set the broad policy framework, it is local authorities who face the often-daunting task of implementing them and finding practical solutions.

Integration and inclusion is recognized as a shared responsibility. National and local authorities, the private sector and local organizations have emerged as crucial agents of innovation and key partners for the EU.

The success or failure of achieving effective inclusion and integration at the local level can influence subsequent decision-making in asylum, resettlement and complementary pathways procedures. It is therefore essential that this procedure is successfully concluded.

II. Emerging Trends in the Border Regions within the Field of Migrant Integration. Analysis and Evolution of the Integration Stadium, Societal security and Inclusion in the Bihor Border Area

Migrant integration and inclusion are dynamic and complex two-way processes which are specific to the needs and abilities of each individual and each local community. It requires efforts from both the host society, public and private institutions to welcome refugees and meet their needs, as well as from refugees themselves, who must adapt to their new environment without giving up their own cultural identity¹⁸.

When refugees feel safe, confident and welcome, they can invest in their new country of residence and make valuable contributions to society. Adequate support, motivation, familiarity with the local

¹⁷ Vidal Lopez, Joana, *Integration and Inclusion of Refugees and Migrants: Challenges and New Directions in Democracies*, https://www.researchgate.net/publication/384045487_Integration_and_Inclusion_of_Refugees_and_Migrants_Challenges_and_New_Directions_in_Democracies accessed in 23.06.26

¹⁸ United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR) *Executive Committee* (2005), *Conclusion on Local Integration* nr. 104, <https://www.unhcr.org/about-unhcr/governance-and-oversight/executive-committee> accessed in 18.06.26

culture and acceptance of the new social environment can bring considerable mutual benefits.

As the phenomena of migration increases, there is a need for more comprehensive, consistent and transparent migration policies that take account of migrants' diversity and adopt more structured integration approaches that involve all stakeholders at national, regional and local levels.

In the development process of new integration strategies border regions increasingly serve as unique laboratories. Migrant integration and social inclusion it is observed differently, shifting from traditional centralized national policies to localized, cross-border cooperation models.

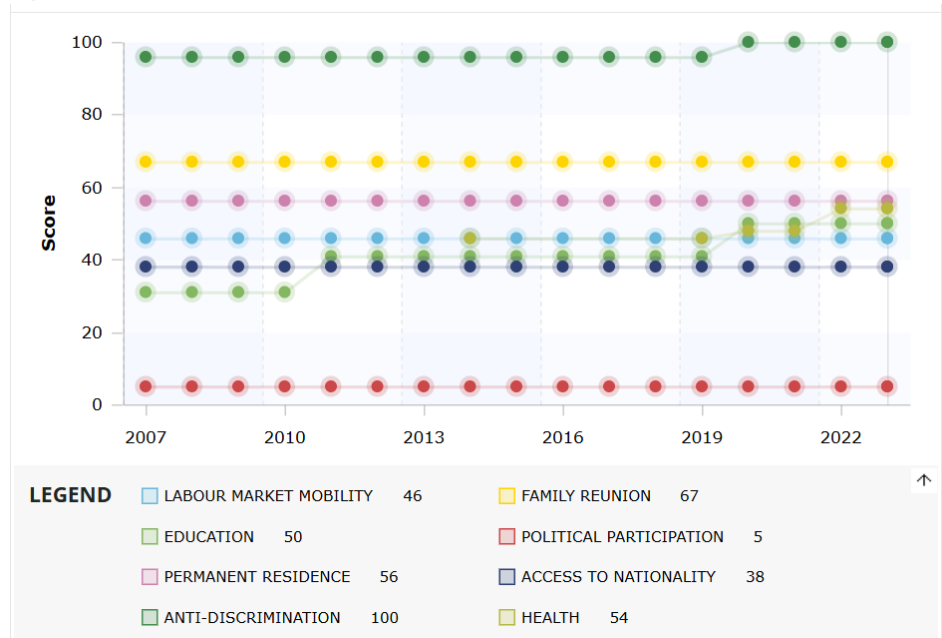
1. Emerging Trends at national level within the Field of Migrant Integration and Inclusion

According to the most recent, 2023 MIPEX assessment, Romania obtained an overall score of 52/100, a result that places it in the category of states with "half-favourable" policies¹⁹.

This level reflects the existence of a relatively stable legal framework, but an uneven application of integration policies, which restrict the access of migrants to services and rights in an equitable manner.

¹⁹ Migrant Integration Policy Index (MIPEX) (2025), <https://www.mipex.eu/romania>, accessed in 20.06.26

Figure 3. MIPEX Index Romania (2023)



Source: Migrant Integration Policy Index (MIPEX) (2025), <https://www.mipex.eu/romania>

The moderate progress recorded in recent years is mainly due to sectoral improvements:

- in particular, facilitating access to health services for persons with legal residence and for beneficiaries of temporary protection
- the introduction of elements of intercultural education and the strengthening of linguistic support in the education system.

Source: Migrant Integration Policy Index (MIPEX) (2025), <https://www.mipex.eu/romania>

Despite these developments, areas essential for sustainable integration remain underdeveloped and accentuate the perception of a system with different integration rates. In the following we summarize some of the main issues discovered by the MIPX Index:

- political participation is almost non-existent, in the absence of electoral rights at local level and consultation mechanisms that include migrants in the decision-making process.
- access to citizenship remains difficult, as procedures are incompletely clarified and children born in Romania to foreign parents do not automatically acquire citizenship.
- in education, undocumented migrants face barriers to accessing services and implicitly intergenerational marginalization.
- language requirements for obtaining permanent residence are partially defined
- differences in support granted to beneficiaries of temporary protection, compared to other non-EU migrants

Source: Migrant Integration Policy Index (MIPEX) (2025), <https://www.mipex.eu/romania>

The conclusions of European evaluations show that Romania offers a set of basic rights, but fails to ensure equal opportunities for participation, which is why policies are perceived as “more egalitarian on paper”.

In this context, civil society actors highlight the need to strengthen administrative capacity and transparent consultation mechanisms, as well as a stronger involvement of local organizations in the policy-making process²⁰.

²⁰ European Commission against Racism and Intolerance (ECRI) (2025), *ECRI REPORT on Romania*, p. 30, available at: <https://www.coe.int/en/web/european-commission-against-racism-and-intolerance/romania>, accessed in 20.06.26

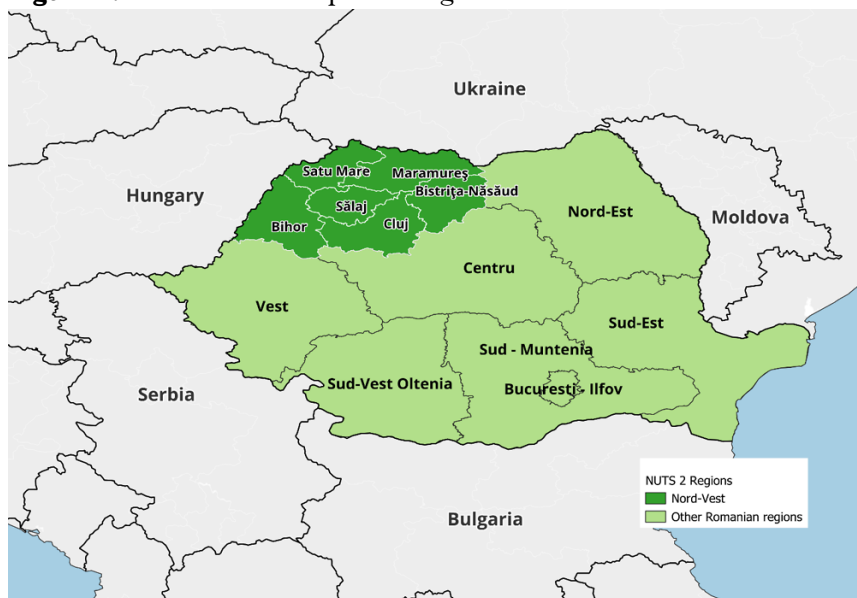
2. Emerging Trends at regional and local level within the Field of Migrant Integration and Inclusion.

Romania's accession to the European Union had several beneficial effects over the regions of the country. These positive effects are divers, representing the main way of progress on multiple levels (economic, social, political, etc.) and approaching the standards of the most developed countries in the EU.

Integration meant, on the one hand, the free movement of goods, people, services and capital, which led to increased exports, attracting investment, jobs abroad and, on the other hand, increasing imports, migration, voluntary renunciation to certain aspects of national sovereignty for the common good of the Union.

The Nord-Vest is one of Romania's eight development regions, strategically positioned in the northwest of the country. It shares international borders with Hungary to the west and Ukraine to the north, serving as a gateway for trade and migration routes across the region.

Figure 4. Nord Vest Development Region of Romania



Source: Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD) (2025), *Full report over Nord-Vest Romania*

https://www.oecd.org/en/publications/preparing-for-demographic-change-in-nord-vest-romania_21b50ace-en/full-report/setting-the-scene-portrait-of-nord-vest-in-its-national-and-european-context_17aa779a.html

The North-West region comprises six counties with a total population of 2.5 million inhabitants. The region has a low unemployment rate (2.1% in 2022, third place among regions) and a high degree of employment in high-tech fields²¹.

The region is also second, after the capital, in the number of research and innovation entities, most of which are concentrated in the municipality of Cluj-Napoca.

The region also has attractive tourist potential, due to its rich natural and cultural heritage and the four airports, which assure good connectivity at European and international level.

The most important cities in the region are Cluj-Napoca, Baia-Mare, Oradea, Zalău, Satu Mare and Bistrița. These are considered regional economic development poles and cities with a special cultural and historical heritage. There are three metropolitan areas in the region: Cluj-Napoca, Oradea and Baia Mare²².

In recent years, Nord-Vest has been converging towards the EU average in terms of GDP per capita, aided by significant investment supported by EU and national funds.

Key stakeholders in migration management and integration at regional and local level

To ensure the Nord-Vest region remains an attractive place for youth requires re-scaling and re-shaping governance structures, policies, services and investment priorities.

In order to fulfil this need, migrant inclusion in the Nord-Vest development region of Romania focuses on addressing demographic decline, integrating local ethnic communities, and supporting a rising number of non-EU workers and Ukrainian refugees.

²¹ National Statistical Institute of Romania, Population and Housing Census 2021, <https://insse.ro/cms/ro/content/recens%C4%83minte>, accessed in 11.06.26

²² Mircea Brie, Mirela Mărcuț, Polgár István (2023), *Guide for the development of international cooperation: the case of Bihor County-Ghid pentru dezvoltarea cooperării internaționale: cazul județului Bihor*, Debrecen University Press/Editura Universității din Oradea, ISBN 978-963-490-527-1, p. 12

● **The General Inspectorate for Immigration (GII)** - within the Ministry of Internal Affairs is the authority in charge of asylum and migration.

It coordinates and monitors the integration of migrants and EU citizens, providing integration services through its regional structures²³.

● **Ministries of the Romanian Government** - these ministries cooperate with local authorities, through an inter-institutional mechanism – the Commission for Immigration Management – with the main role to oversee and customized the implementation of the Immigration Strategy at local level.

● **Local authorities** - as a coordinator of migrant integration in Romania GII's cooperates with the local authorities from the administrative territorial units, carrying out specific tasks, projects on different integration areas (e.g. education, labour, health etc.).

- County Councils
- City Halls
- School Inspectorates
- Oradea Border Police, Territorial Inspectorate
- Office for Population Register
- National Employment Agency

Integration policy relies on inter-institutional coordination involving public authorities, regional school inspectorates.

²³

The General Inspectorate for Immigration,
<https://igi.mai.gov.ro/en/strategies/>, accessed in 13.06.26

● **Civil society organizations** - according to Government decision no. 572/2008, non-governmental organizations and employers' associations may be invited for consultations at the meetings of the Commission for Immigration Management²⁴.

Main NGO's dealing with migration and inclusion form the region²⁵:

- League for the Defence of Human Rights (LADO Cluj)
- Non-Governmental Professional Association of Social Assistance (ASSOC Baia Mare)
- Ecumenical Association of Churches from Romania (AIDRom)
- Filantropia Oradea
- HEKS/EPER Romania
- IOM Romania

Integration initiatives have shifted from centralized, national state mandates to localized, "whole-of-society" frameworks driven by subnational municipalities and NGOs.

²⁴ Coalition for Migrants and Refugees Rights, <https://cdmir.ro/despre-noi/> accessed in 13.06.26

²⁵ Consiliul Național Român pentru Refugiați, The Coalition for the Rights of Migrants and Refugees, <https://www.cnrr.ro/en/projects-implemented-in-partnership-with-unhcr-un-refugee-agency>, accessed in 08.06.26

Examples for Localization of Governance and Civic Inclusion at regional level

- **The Cluj Migrant Council:** A pioneering development in municipal inclusion is the establishment of the Cluj Migrant Council under the Migrant Voices Heard initiative, in the frame of the AMIF-funded Migration Voices Heard project, implemented by a consortium of NGO's. This body provides foreign residents an active platform to participate in local political and civic discourse

- **Civil Society Consortia:** Specialized integration initiatives like the PRISM 4 project (run by IOM Romania and the INTEGRIS project, led by AID Rom and Filantropia Oradea, manage dedicated Regional Centres for Integration across Cluj, Maramureș, and Bihor counties

2.1. Actions and activities within the Field of Migrant Integration and Inclusion in Bihor County

Based on its geographic and socio-economic character, Bihor Counties strategic asset is joining cross-border cooperation activities.

Cross-border cooperation can be defined in relation to direct collaboration between neighbouring regions, found along a border, regardless of the level at which this relationship is achieved. For the best possible implementation of the migrant management and integration process, a high penetrability of the borders is needed²⁶.

Also, in order to be successful in cooperation with cross-border partners must be equal in border areas and the interests of each party involved must be respected. The European Union encourages and stimulates the development of partnerships for migrant integration.

²⁶ Mircea Brie, Mirela Mărcuț, Polgár István (2023), *Guide for the development of international cooperation: the case of Bihor County-Ghid pentru dezvoltarea cooperării internaționale: cazul județului Bihor*, Debrecen University Press/Editura Universității din Oradea, ISBN 978-963-490-527-1, p. 35

The main actions regarding migrant integration and inclusion are focusing on the following:

Local integration programmes - for refugees and beneficiaries of international protection.

- the programs are coordinated by the General Inspectorate for Immigration in partnership with NGOs²⁷.
- activities include social and legal counselling, Romanian language courses, cultural orientation, support for vulnerable cases, and community-based integration actions.

Community-based initiatives promoting intercultural dialogue, minority inclusion, and social cohesion.

- Regional Centres for Integration realized through EU funding and partnerships (AID Rom and Filantropia Oradea)²⁸
- local NGOs and community actors across Oradea and Bihor implement intercultural, educational, and social cohesion activities, particularly through refugee support networks (International Organization for Migration – IOM), Caritas²⁹, Filantropia Oradea³⁰.
- these activities provide psychosocial support, community events, educational activities, and targeted inclusion measures for migrant and minority groups.
- Oradea's governance model further reinforces these efforts by integrating participatory and inclusive approaches into urban development and community identity-building.

²⁷ Bihor County Immigration Service, <https://igi.mai.gov.ro/bihor/>, accessed in 06.06.26

²⁸ Filantropia Oradea Association, <https://filantropiaoradea.ro/rapoartele-anuale/>, accessed in 06.06.26

²⁹ Caritas Oradea, <https://www.caritaseparhial.ro/proiecte>, accessed in 06.06.26

³⁰ Dopomoha.ro, Oradea for Ukrainians, <https://dopomoha.ro/en/dopomoha-oradea>, accessed in 06.06.26

Oradea Municipality strategies with a special regard on:

- social inclusion
- vulnerable groups.

The Municipality of Oradea integrates social inclusion priorities into its strategic planning documents, including the *Integrated Urban Development Strategy* and sectoral strategies that emphasize equitable access to services, mobility, and urban development³¹.

3. Anticipated developments influencing Migrant Inclusion

Rising international migration demands a clear understanding of migrant settlements, their local effect and the policies shaping these impacts.

At **national level** the perspective is connected to the National Implementation Plan for the EU Pact on Migration and Asylum. This can create the premises for a more coherent approach, oriented towards prevention and early integration³². However, its impact depends on the establishment of clear accountability mechanisms, effective inter-institutional coordination and monitoring systems that allow for the real assessment of progress.

In terms of future and needed developments, we consider the following priorities:

³¹ Oradea City Hall, *Development strategies, Integrated Urban Development Strategy for the City of Oradea and Oradea Metropolitan Area 2021-2027*, p. 23

³² Porumbescu, A., Coșciug, A., Mihaie, S. (2025). *Migrația cetățenilor din țări terțe în România: Integrarea pe piața muncii și riscurile exploatarei prin muncă*. Consiliul Economic și Social, București, p. 60

- elaboration of a harmonized national integration strategy, geared towards migrants
- strengthen cooperation between institutions
- develop tools for monitoring and evaluating implementation
- formalize partnerships with civil society, so that policies produce sustainable results in terms of the protection of migrants and the prevention of exploitation.

At **regional level** the perspective is connected to the ability of cooperation. Migration is an issue that transcends borders, making cooperation between regions and states essential³³. Harmonized policies and regional agreements can facilitate the mobility of people, ensure their protection, and improve migration governance, especially because of the raising pressure in terms of migration.

In terms of future and needed developments, we consider the following priorities:

- increasing decentralization concerning migrant integration
- strengthening of the cross-border and transnational partnerships with regional neighbours
- development of regional strategies through the regional development agencies in partnerships with CSO's.

At **local level** migrant integration faces structural, social, and administrative hurdles that vary significantly across different municipalities and counties. Over these issues, we can observe that local integration policy making and governance is getting increasingly

³³ European Commission. (2025). Romania: *Exploratory study on labour immigration*, https://homeaffairs.ec.europa.eu/whats-new/publications/romania-exploratory-study-labour-immigration_en, accessed in 10.06.26

politicized and influenced by political dynamics, including the presence of anti-migrant parties in local councils and dynamics of multi-level party politics³⁴.

- the development of local integration strategies
 - common CSO and municipal inclusion programmes
 - creation of distinct institutional bodies or officials at the level of local public authorities, dedicated to migrant integration

4. Financial and funding sources for migrant integration

Integration should be seen as a long-term investment in human capital. Policymakers can implement specific measures to improve the integration and inclusion of refugees and migrants, so that these dynamic processes can be beneficial to all parties involved: host countries and their local communities as well as the refugee and migrant population³⁵.

This section highlights the founding sources available for migrant integration at international and national level.

4.1. International and EU financial sources

IOM Development Fund	- it is a unique global resource aimed at supporting developing member states in their efforts to strengthen their migration management capacity.
Source: IOM, https://www.iom.int/iom-development-fund	

³⁴ European Commission against Racism and Intolerance (ECRI) (2025), *ECRI REPORT on Romania*, p. 30, available at: <https://www.coe.int/en/web/european-commission-against-racism-and-intolerance/romania>, accessed in 20.06.26

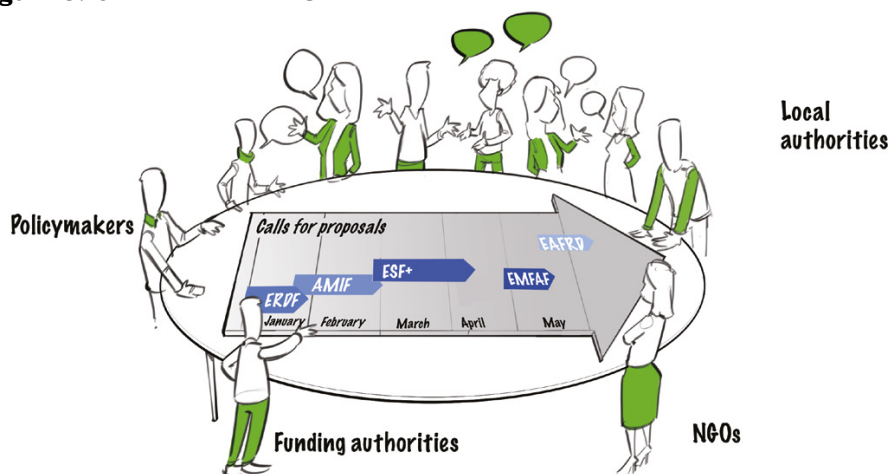
³⁵ Council of Europe (2023), *Integration of migrants and refugees: benefits for all parties involved*, Committee on Migration, Refugees and Displaced Persons. Doc. 15785, 05 June 2023, p.7

At EU level funding is one of the tools to support EU Member States' efforts regarding migrant integration policies and the Action Plan on integration and inclusion mobilises different types of EU funding.

Some of the funding tools, for the programming period of 2021-2027 offers a certain programme framework at national level. These programmes set their specific spending priorities and EU Member States have to involve regional and local authorities as well as civil society to develop and implement these programmes, based on the principle of partnership.

Financial support for migrant integration is also made available to transnational projects on integration, involving partners from different EU countries for instance via dedicated calls for projects.

Figure 5. Coordination of EU funds



Source: European Commission (2021), Toolkit on the use of EU funds for the integration of people with a migrant background 2021–2027 programming period

Table 4. Migrant integration funds at EU level

The Asylum, Migration and Integration Fund (AMIF)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - funds projects dedicated to asylum, migration and integration topics through specialised funds, which are set for a period of 7 years (2021-2027) - in Romania is available at https://oportunitati-ue.gov.ro/program/fondul-azil-migratie-si-integrare/?sf_paged=2
The European Social Fund Plus (ESF+)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - the EU's main instrument for investing in people. - the ESF+ will continue to provide an important contribution to the EU's employment, social, education and skills policies, including structural reforms in these areas.
The European Regional Development Fund (ERDF)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - is designed to strengthen economic, social and territorial cohesion in the European Union. - it aims to do this by correcting imbalances between regions enabling investments in a smarter, greener, more connected and more social Europe that is closer to its citizens
Erasmus+	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - is the EU's programme to support education, training, youth and sport in Europe
The EU Programme for Employment and Social Innovation (EsSI)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - maintains the focus on evidence-based policy-making and social experimentation, support to job mobility and the non-financial instrument activities related to the former Microfinance and Social Entrepreneurship axis.
The Citizens, Equality, Rights, and Values programme (CERV)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - aims to protect and promote rights and values as enshrined in the EU Treaties and the Charter of Fundamental Rights in particular by supporting civil society organisations active at local, regional, national and transnational level.
Technical Support Instrument (TSI)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - is the EU programme that provides tailor-made technical expertise to EU countries to design and implement economic and social reforms

Source: European Commission, Migration and Home Affairs (2026), *Founding opportunities on migrant integration*

4.2. Domestic financial sources

In Romania, each institutional actor is responsible for the integration of foreigners in its field, while the coordination and monitoring of the policy belongs to the Ministry of Interior Affairs, through the General Immigration Inspectorate.

This has the power to provide, through its regional structures, specific services to facilitate the integration in Romanian society of different categories of foreigners.

There is a diverse set of national funding mechanism for migrant integration and inclusion, coordinated by different institutions³⁶.

- **Government programmes** targeting migrant integration, social inclusion, and support for vulnerable groups.
- **Funding channels managed by Bihor County Agency for Employment (AJOFM Bihor)**
- **General Directorate for Social Assistance and Child Protection (DGASPC Bihor) and local authorities**, enabling labour-market activation, social assistance, and community services.
- **National initiatives for migrant and minority inclusion and community development**, including programmes focused on education, participation, and local capacity building.

III. Identifying and Validating Good Practices at Regional and Local Level in Migrant Integration in Bihor Border Regions

Migratory processes occupy a central place in contemporary social sciences, especially when examined in territories crossed by intense circulation of people, goods, norms and symbols.

³⁶ General Immigration Inspectorate, *Support and Integration*, <https://igi.mai.gov.ro/en/category/diverseen/support-and-integration/>, accessed in 20.06.26

But, before we start to present good practices in migrant integration, we propose a short explanation of the border, border region and the day-to-day life and behaviour of the human population in these territories.

In border territories, everyday life tends to produce specific forms of social pragmatism:

- families distribute their members among different cities;
- workers build commuting routines;
- merchants organize informal and formal supply circuits;
- students cross the international line to access services and opportunities;

The above presented actions do not delete the presence of a border or the authority of a state, but show that social life often operates through arrangements that combine legality, custom, and practical adaptation to the conditions of the territory.

From a cultural point of view, the border offers particularly favorable conditions for the observation of situational identities. Subjects can activate national, local, ethnic, linguistic or religious belongings according to the circumstance.

The ethno-religious dimension of migrant integration shapes how newcomers adapt to host societies, acting simultaneously as a social bridge and a cultural barrier.

In border regions, migration cannot be reduced to the simple displacement of individuals between different political units. It always involves:

- labour relations
- family networks
- disputes for recognition
- cultural negotiations
- state control mechanisms

All these, together, reconfigure the so-called social space³⁷.

The analytical relevance of borders stems from the fact that these territories condense different scales of interaction. In them, macroeconomic and national political decisions coexist with daily practices of mobility, commerce, kinship, and belonging³⁸.

From this perspective, migration is understood as a complex historical and social phenomenon. It is not just an individual response to economic incentives, but a process shaped by structural inequalities, collective trajectories, social networks, and institutions³⁹.

At the same time, the border is no longer seen only as a line of separation between states - is now understood as a relational space, in which territorialities, identities and development strategies are produced.

In the past years, the orientation of integration policy in EU member states has evolved to reflect the changes seen in many member countries from border regions – both in the economic and political climate.

While some governments have strengthened integration frameworks and taken steps toward inclusion recognising the long-term social and economic dividends of early integration, others have tightened access to services, introduced restrictive measures, or framed integration conditions as a migrant obligation⁴⁰.

³⁷ Nantes, Rosalina Alves, and Rosemeire Ferrarezi Valiante. (2026), *Migration and Territorial Dynamics in Border Regions: Culture, Regional Development and Public Policies*, Seven Editora, p. 3, <https://doi.org/10.56238/sevened2026.008-214>.

³⁸ Ibidem, p. 5

³⁹ Polgár István, Péntes János, Radics Zsolt (2025), *Assessing the role of Moldavan civil society organizations and international funds in migration management*, Civil Szemle XXII/1, p. 55-71

⁴⁰ Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD) (2025), *International Migration Outlook 2025*, OECD Publishing, Paris, p. 3, <https://doi.org/10.1787/ae26c893-en>, accessed in 13.06.26

These developments underscore a complex and evolving landscape where labour market demands, humanitarian obligations, and political considerations intersect⁴¹.

The literature review shows that migratory processes, when observed in border regions, require reading that goes beyond sectorial or monocausal approaches. Migration proved to be inseparable from:

- power relations;
- social networks;
- identity negotiations;
- production of territory and state action;

Thus, human mobility or migration cannot be treated only as physical displacement or the border as a simple line of separation between sovereignties.

1. Integration and protection in border regions

In a context of global instability, security for Europe does not only involve hard power defence. It also involves bringing countries together, fostering trust, cohesion and solidarity and breaking down barriers.

While border regions can be regarded as living labs of EU integration, cross-border regions and citizens are confronted by limitations and barriers created by the administrative borders.

An important step in fostering migrant integration and breaking down border barriers is cross-border cooperation and coordination⁴².

⁴¹ Polgár István, *Local development and social responsibility to boost integration at the Romanian-Hungarian border*, p. 141-153 in *From Exclusive Borders to Inclusive Frontiers in the Western Balkans*, Supliment no. 1, 2024, *Analele Universitatii din Oradea, Seria Relații Internaționale și Studii Europene*

⁴² INTERACT (2025), *Unblocking border regions: Tackling cross-border obstacles through cooperation and coordination*, available at: <https://www.interact.eu/about-interact/our-service/library/unblocking-border-regions-tackling-cross-border-obstacles-through-cooperation-and-coordination>, accessed in 13.06.26

Borders and migrant integration are deeply connected, as policies designed to control physical borders often extend inward to shape how newcomers access housing, work, and social life.

Integration and protection in border regions combine economic and social cooperation with security measures to balance open movement with regional safety.

Integration and protection programs for migrants in Romania, although structured and supported by both national strategies and funding from international bodies, reflect a complex reality in which policymaking faces significant practical challenges, as reflected in both official sources and the lived experiences of migrants.

Migrant integration in border regions involves:

- coordinating local governance;
- cross-border institutional cooperation;
- community support to address unique economic and social pressures

2. Activities undertaken at the level of Bihor County

The integration of migrants in border regions depends not only on the legislative framework and economic dynamics, but also on the way in which public institutions and external actors (consulates, recruitment agencies, international organizations, NGOs) cooperate with each other.

The administrative data analysed, complemented by recent studies, outline a model of inter-institutional collaboration that is in a process of consolidation, in which there are relevant initiatives, but also areas where limited coordination directly translates into vulnerabilities for migrants.

Bihor County institutions have implemented a range of initiatives that illustrate emerging good practices in **migrant integration**, combining institutional, community-based, and cross-border actions. These include:

- locally coordinated integration programmes for refugees and beneficiaries of international protection;
- employment activation and vocational training measures;
- community-level initiatives promoting intercultural dialogue and minority inclusion;

Together, these activities demonstrate a growing institutional capacity and a collaborative approach involving public authorities, NGOs, private actors, and EU cooperation frameworks.

Best practice project in migrant integration implemented in Bihor County

In Bihor County, integration projects mainly target three main pillars:

- the integration of young people and vulnerable people into the labour market;
- the social inclusion of disadvantaged communities;
- the integration of refugees or migrants.

Most active initiatives are financed by European funds and carried out by local public institutions or NGOs.

1.	<p>Project „INTEGRIS: Migrant Integration Initiatives in Romania - carried out in Region 5", project code AM221_01.</p> <p>The project is implemented by AIDRom - Ecumenical Association of Churches in Romania in partnership with Oradea Philanthropy Association, Timiș County Prefect's Institution, Caras-Severin County Prefect's Institution, Bihor County Prefect's Institution</p> <p>The project is co-financed by the European Union and the General Inspectorate for Immigration, through the National Program – Asylum, Migration and Integration Fund.</p> <p>General objective The project aims to support the socio-economic and cultural integration of beneficiaries of international protection, third-country nationals, and beneficiaries of temporary protection into Romanian society, in Region 5, through an integrated and complex approach – by providing the information and services they need in a single location and by strengthening the collaboration and active involvement of the authorities and the local community in supporting migrants in the integration process.</p> <p>Specific objectives 1. Increasing the level of social integration of beneficiaries of a form of international protection (BPI), beneficiaries of temporary protection (BPT) and third-country nationals (RTT), foreigners with the right to stay, from Region 5, through access to individualized and complex integration services.</p>
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	<p>2. Strengthening local inter-institutional support networks, community support, volunteer networks, and representative members of the foreigners' communities.</p> <p>3. Developing the professional capacities of actors involved in assisting the target group.</p> <p>Source: AIDROM, https://www.aidrom.ro/project/integris-initiative-de-integrare-a-migrantilor-in-romania-desfasurate-in-regiunea-5/</p>
2.	<p>Project "AIM 5 – Migrant Integration Actions in Region 5".</p> <p>The project is implemented by AIDRom - Ecumenical Association of Churches in Romania in partnership with Oradea Philanthropy Association, Timiș County Prefect's Institution, Caras-Severin County Prefect's Institution, Bihor County Prefect's Institution</p> <p>The project is co-financed by the European Union and the General Inspectorate for Immigration, through the National Program – Asylum, Migration and Integration Fund.</p> <p>Objective 1: Increasing the level of social integration of BP and RTT in Region 5, through access to individualized and complex integration services.</p> <p>Objective 2: Strengthening local inter-institutional support networks, community support, volunteer networks and representative members of foreign communities.</p> <p>Objective 3: Developing the professional capacities of the actors involved in assisting the target group.</p> <p>Through this project, the activity of the Oradea Regional Integration Centre will continue, offering, free of charge, specialized social and legal counselling services, material assistance for vulnerable categories, Romanian language courses and cultural accommodation, leisure activities for migrants, specific actions for minor beneficiaries of the target group and mediation of the relationship of migrants with the institutions involved in the project.</p> <p>County volunteer networks will also be strengthened, working groups, training sessions and information and awareness sessions on the phenomenon of migration in the local community will be created.</p> <p>Source: AIDROM, https://www.aidrom.ro/project/aim-5-actiuni-de-integrare-a-migrantilor-in-regiunea-5-27-12-2022-26-10-2023/</p>

The actions carried out in Bihor County and across the border region demonstrate a coherent set of good practices in migrant integration. Across sectors, the implemented activities and projects translate cross-border cooperation into concrete results by creating interoperable infrastructures, harmonising protection systems, expanding access to services, and building durable institutional networks.

IV. SWOT Matrix – Migrant integration and Societal Security in the Border Area in Bihor County

Nowadays border regions and border effects attract a lot of interest in political practice and in the research field of social sciences.

Substantial interest in border regions is predominantly inspired by the opinion that their specific geo-graphic position might cause peculiarities in socio-economic adjustments to integration.

These border regions located at the interface of a foreign and a domestic market are seen from a geographical perspective the focal point of integration. Hence, one could suppose that the most rapid and direct impact of the integration process should be felt there⁴³.

A strategic approach to integration requires political will and a secure commitment to migration as a permanent feature of the city and its development. The political leadership or governance structure should agree on addressing the issue for the long term with sufficient resources and in spite of potential challenges, including those related to national politics or policies. This may mean assessing when it is best to start this process within the usual electoral cycle: migration is a “hot” topic and may be best tackled soon after an election rather than just before one.

⁴³ Niebuhr, Annekatrin & Stiller, Silvia. (2002), *Integration effects in border regions - A survey of economic theory and empirical studies*. Jahrbuch fur Regionalwissenschaft. 24, [https://www.researchgate.net/publication/23730420_Integration_effects_in_border_regions - A survey of economic theory and empirical studies](https://www.researchgate.net/publication/23730420_Integration_effects_in_border_regions_-_A_survey_of_economic_theory_and_empirical_studies), accessed Aug 28 2026.

Strengths	Weaknesses
Favourable geographical location , close to Romania's western border, allowing easy access to Hungary and all the EU.	Territorially peripheral position . Major development gaps between Oradea municipality and the rest of the border region.
Functional interregional and cross-border cooperation frameworks enabling joint initiatives in integration and inclusion	Lack of support institutions , rural areas with weak social and public services
Multicultural environment with a traditionally mix society. Functional ethno-confessional coexistence and synergy.	Lack of integration strategies and mechanisms for migrants
Increasing need for human resource in Bihor and the wider region, creating integration opportunities for minorities, refugees, and immigrants.	Exploitation Risks : Exposes migrant workers to informal markets, low wages, and poor legal protection.
Cultural diversity : The exchange of ideas, values, and customs fosters social openness and interaction between ethnic groups.	Integration difficulties : Linguistic, cultural and bureaucratic barriers lead to the social marginalization of some migrants.
Functional CSO's offering social assistance, counselling, and integration support.	Insufficient coordination between national, regional, local institutions and civil sector leading to fragmented service delivery.
Opportunities	Threats
Funding opportunities in the actual and the next European programming cycle	Competition for financing and investments with other cities from the region and Romania
Availability of funding for cross-border cooperation and interregional projects	Unstable legal framework and its poor enforcement
Potential for the development of knowledge-intensive industry and services	Humanitarian and geopolitical crises : Conflicts or climate change can trigger uncontrolled migratory waves and pressure on borders.
Digitizing mobility : Simplifying work visas and digital permits for legal and controlled migration.	Economic stagnation , slow down of the European economies
Increasing economic flexibility : Adjusting demographic imbalances and population aging by attracting young workers.	Social tensions and xenophobia : The rise of extremism and anti-immigrant discourse in destination societies.
Better public policies : Developing clear bilateral agreements for social protection and migrants' rights.	Pressure on public services : Overcrowding of the medical, educational and housing systems in large cities or destination areas.

A SWOT analysis of human migration examines the internal strengths and weaknesses of migration systems, alongside external opportunities and threats. The following matrix summarizes the key factors shaping migrant integration in the border area, reflecting institutional capacities, structural vulnerabilities, and emerging opportunities for coordinated territorial development.

According to the results of the SWOT analysis we can observe that migrant integration in border regions is generated and managed by a mixture of institutional cooperation, the fulfilment of a growing need for human resource and the step by step strengthening of public services, especially towards the vulnerable social groups.

Analysing the main strengths, it is obvious that these can be capitalized only through opportunities given by the external financing sources, European funds and different policies and mechanisms.

Through these instruments a favourable environment can be created, where migrant integration and inclusion can run in an efficient way.

It is important to underline that in the analysed border region there already exist a certain level of **functional interregional and cross-border cooperation** framework, which enables joint initiatives in integration.

In terms of weaknesses, the region is still struggling with the territorially peripheral position, lack of support institutional network in rural areas and the lack of integration strategies and mechanisms for migrants.

Dealing with these weaknesses it is indispensable to implement good practices from the EU.

In terms of threats, competition for financing and investments, humanitarian, climate or geopolitical crises are the most important to manage. This will be possible only if the border region will be capable to strengthen regional resilience and its institutional system.

We can conclude chapter 4 from this section of the Guide with the perception that the analysed border region is ready and able to implement integration policies, but only if public authorities and the civil sector will continue to strengthen cooperation and raise administrative capacity focusing on the cross-border character of the region.

V. Practical Directions/Recommendations for Advancing Migrant Integration

1. EU level action plan and recommendations

The European Commission's Action plan on integration and inclusion for the 2021-2027 period is guided by the overarching principle of 'inclusion for all'. The plan envisioned concrete actions across a number of key areas of integration.

Romania has not yet developed a harmonized national integration strategy, geared towards migrants, and coordination between relevant institutions, local authorities and NGOs remains deficient, we recommend the use of the EU's Action Plan on Integration and Inclusion.

The current action plan is part of a comprehensive response to tackling the challenges linked to migration put forward in the New Pact on Migration and Asylum.

The plan includes actions dedicated to the different areas of integration, as well as actions supporting effective inclusion across all areas⁴⁴.

The Pact on Migration and Asylum is a set of rules managing migration and establishing a common asylum system at EU level, that deliver results while remaining grounded in European values.

They build on and amend previous reform proposals in the area of migration, offering a comprehensive approach that aims at strengthening and integrating key EU policies on migration, asylum, border management and integration. With firm but fair rules, they are designed to manage and normalize migration for the long term, providing EU countries with the flexibility to address the specific

⁴⁴ European Commission, Migration and Home Affairs (2026), *EU Action Plan on Integration and Inclusion (2021-2027)*, https://home-affairs.ec.europa.eu/policies/migration-and-asylum/migrant-integration/eu-integration-policy_en, accessed in 23.05.26

challenges they face, and necessary safeguards to protect people in need.

The Pact entered in force in June 2026, the new rules on migration and asylum ensure that the Union has strong and secure external borders through 4 policy areas.

1. Secure external borders: Robust screening, Eurodac asylum and migration database, Border procedure and returns, Crisis protocols and action against instrumentalization.

2. Fast and efficient procedures: Clear asylum rules, guaranteeing people's rights, EU standards for refugee status qualification, Preventing abuses.

3. Effective system of solidarity and responsibility: Permanent solidarity framework, Operational and financial support, Clearer rules on responsibility for asylum applications, Preventing secondary movements.

4. Embedding migration in international partnerships: Preventing irregular departures, fighting migrant smuggling, Cooperation on readmission, Promoting legal pathways.

1.1. Recommendations for EU Member States

National Governments have a key role to play in formulating policies for the integration of migrants, giving public funding for urban renewal and housing projects and tackling discrimination and segregation of migrants.

In this context, the recommendations are the following:

Formulate a national integration policy - a local policy for integrating immigrants into the society must be integrated into a general policy of migration and integration.

Strengthen the scope of action at municipal level - measures to encourage integration that are related to the housing market need cities and communities to be financially empowered, therefore cities and communities should be allocated sufficient resources.

Establish framework conditions for the provision of housing - it is recommended that EU Member States create the legal framework conditions that allow cities and communities to take on an active role in the housing market

Improve 'good practice' in local governance - local governance structures must be improved in terms of the participation of the groups of stakeholders and their efficiency. National policy should promote the intercultural opening and diversity policies of national and local institutions, as well as promoting better cooperation and partnerships with local NGOs.

Source: Council of Europe and European Foundation for the Improvement of Living and Working Conditions, Housing and integration of migrants in Europe: Good practice Guide, Dublin 2007, available online at <http://www.eurofound.europa.eu/publications/htmlfiles/ef0794.htm>

1.2. Recommendations for local policymakers

The following recommendations for local policymakers are generally applicable, to every European city.

Partnership and cross-departmental cooperation - given the complex interrelation of policies targeting the integration of migrants and other municipal areas, an integrated, cross-departmental approach is strongly recommended.

Reliable and up-to-date information - in order to plan and implement local integration policies and policies in relation to housing and segregation, local policymakers and administrators need reliable, comprehensive and up-to-date information.

Public-private partnerships - in order to improve access and affordability for migrants, city administrations could consider innovative public private partnerships (PPPs).

Anti-segregation policy - a high concentration of migrants and particularly of one ethnic group of migrants in areas should be avoided

Ethnic enclaves - generally, is recommended promoting neighbourhoods that are ethnically and socio-economically mixed.

Community relations and participation - good community relations – that is, relations between groups in a community – is an important factor

Source: Council of Europe and European Foundation for the Improvement of Living and Working Conditions, Housing and integration of migrants in Europe: Good practice Guide, Dublin 2007, available online at <http://www.eurofound.europa.eu/publications/htmlfiles/ef0794.htm>

2. International level action plan and recommendations

The promotion of social and cultural activities as a mechanism to encourage interaction between migrants and host communities with the aim of advancing in the construction of more just and peaceful societies, is currently a topic of special interest in studies, policies and programs on migrant inclusion and social cohesion⁴⁵.

⁴⁵ International Organization for Migration (IOM), 2021. *The Power of “Contact”. Designing, Facilitating and Evaluating Social Mixing Activities to Strengthen*

Based on the analysis and review of different integration strategies, we list below a series of recommendations for a better integration process.

The following recommendations are focusing on social and cultural activities with the participation of migrants and receiving communities.

1. Fun and goal-oriented

Designing and incorporating fun and exciting activities leads to a lighter and more welcoming environment for people to meet, interact and create social bonds. At the same time, setting common goals, which neither group can achieve without the participation of the other (cooperative interdependence), makes the activities more engaging and participatory.

2. Mutual appreciation

Participants should understand, recognize and appreciate culture, traditions and history as part of the process of bridging differences, maximizing each other's strengths and identifying commonalities. It is important that all individuals are able to identify how their contributions can have a positive impact on the achievement of common goals.

3. Shared ownership

Involving migrants and local communities in all phases of activities will increase their participation. This ownership empowers them, raises their self-esteem and opens up new opportunities for responsibility and commitment.

4. Guided Reflection

Dialogues and activities that allow for a certain degree of reflection help to create an atmosphere that is perceived as trusting, friendly and warm. Processing information and sharing personal and sensitive stories, which can evoke memories, are of utmost importance as long as they are carefully guided and accompanied by facilitators or project members.

5. Supervision and Trust Facilitation

Those responsible for group interactions, such as team leaders, facilitators, project staff or event planners, must play an active role in promoting equality within intergroup relations and creating an inclusive environment for all. This deliberate effort is crucial to overcome the natural tendency of participants to group themselves according to their most salient characteristics and status.

6. Sustained and regular intervention

It goes without saying that the more frequent, prolonged and intensive the participation, the better the attitude of each individual towards others. This means adopting an approach that rethinks the role of the people involved, who in turn will define the needs of their communities and ultimately take part in the design and organization of appropriate interventions.

7. Institutional support and partnership

The support of institutions such as local governments, media, government agencies and intermediary organizations is critical to promoting and facilitating constructive efforts to strengthen intergroup relations. The coordination of these institutions creates a system that can provide resources and incentives to promote and strengthen intergroup relations.

Source: International Organization for Migration (IOM), (2021), <https://lac.iom.int/en/blogs/>.

Social and cultural activities, understood as a programmatic intervention strategy to facilitate the inclusion of migrants in receiving communities, are important to the extent that they offer non-institutional spaces for interaction, where through spontaneous

human contact, social ties are built based on experiences, stories, emotions and life trajectories of the participants⁴⁶.

As a conclusion for chapter five of this section of the Guide we can state that the outlined recommendations are useful and achievable. Also, through these recommendations, a sustainable, coherent and inclusive system will be created, enough resilient to answer challenges in the field of migrant integration. Fortifying institutional capacity and cooperation, and implementing a rigorous monitoring mechanism will give the possibility to border regions to build a functional frame of migrant integration.

Conclusions

The European Union's South Eastern border region, and bordering countries are representing a so-called epicenter of the migration process. Basically, it is one of the main migration routes, used by thousands of migrants and refugees on their way to the EU member states.

As the phenomena of migration increases, there is a need for more comprehensive, consistent and transparent migration policies that take account of migrants' diversity and adopt more structured integration approaches that involve all stakeholders. For this, it is crucial to understand what inclusion is.

The issue of migrant inclusion is therefore critical for many societies all over the world and concerns both internal and international migrants. Inclusion does not only mean meeting migrants' basic needs, such as housing, food, or health care, but also creating an urban environment in which civic, social and economic inclusion is understood as essential prerequisites for sustainable development.

In the process of inclusion, migrants stimulate change and development in receiving societies, resulting in greater diversity. Acknowledging diversity becomes a crucial part of the inclusion process. It often requires changes to fundamental concepts about the state, reflected in how policies and programs are implemented;

⁴⁶ United Nations (2026), *Building Trust through Dialogue, Inclusion and Reconciliation*: <https://www.un.org/en/observances/living-in-peace-day> , accessed in 23.05.26

simultaneously, it also requires changes to migrants' mind-sets and identities.

Integration and inclusion are recognized as a shared responsibility. National and local authorities, the private sector and local organizations have emerged as crucial agents of innovation and key partners for the EU.

The success or failure of achieving effective inclusion and integration at the local level can influence subsequent decision-making in asylum, resettlement and complementary pathways procedures. It is therefore essential that this procedure is successfully concluded.

The actions carried out in Bihor County and across the border region demonstrate a coherent set of good practices in migrant integration. Across sectors, the implemented activities and projects translate cross border cooperation into concrete results by creating interoperable infrastructures, harmonising protection systems, expanding access to services, and building durable institutional networks.

Basically, we can ascertain that the analysed border region is ready and able to implement integration policies, but only if public authorities and the civil sector will continue to strengthen cooperation and raise administrative capacity focusing on the cross-border character of the region.

We can also state that the outlined recommendations are useful and achievable. Also, through these recommendations, a sustainable, coherent and inclusive system will be created, enough resilient to answer challenges in the field of migrant integration. Fortifying institutional capacity and cooperation, and implementing a rigorous monitoring mechanism will give the possibility to border regions to build a functional frame of migrant integration.

It is essential to acknowledge the key role of local authorities in informing and implementing migrant integration policies at a local and regional levels.

We believe that the present material can assure a more in-depth look to these issues concerning migrant integration and inclusion. Also, the material intends to provide practical guidance for designing and transposing integration measures that meet the EU commitments and international legal standards across multiple policy fields.

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