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Ethno-Confessional Realities and Societal Security in Bihor County

1. Overview

Bihor County is a historically multi-ethnic and multi-confessional border area in which Romanian, Hungarian, Roma and other communities coexist within a diverse religious landscape. The guide treats this diversity not only as an identity reality, but as a key dimension of societal security, regional resilience and cross-border cooperation.

The local balance is supported by administrative bilingualism, minority-language and confessional education, cooperation among religious denominations, social-assistance networks and the wider Romanian–Hungarian cross-border framework. European integration and Interreg Romania–Hungary programmes have further reduced the traditional “barrier effect” of the border and created opportunities for direct institutional and community cooperation.

At the same time, societal security remains dynamic. Demographic decline, marginalisation of vulnerable Roma communities, language asymmetries, political volatility, online radicalisation, migration and nearby geopolitical crises can weaken existing balances. The central challenge is therefore to move from passive coexistence toward active, participatory interculturality.

2. Main Issues and Challenges

➤ Demographic decline and unequal inclusion.

Historical minorities face ageing and numerical decline, while some Roma communities remain exposed to socio-economic isolation, school dropout and limited access to services.

➤ **Identity boundaries and limited mutual knowledge.** The overlap between ethnicity and confession can reinforce community boundaries, while asymmetric Romanian–Hungarian language knowledge and the absence of specific intercultural school curricula can limit deeper interaction.

➤ **Institutional discontinuity and border effects.** Differences between Romanian and Hungarian legal-administrative systems and changes in local political priorities can interrupt otherwise successful cooperation and make good practices difficult to replicate.

➤ **Emerging societal-security risks.** Online radicalisation, identity-based stereotypes, migration pressures, secularisation and geopolitical crises can create new tensions even where local inter-community relations are traditionally stable.

3. Key Background & Guidance

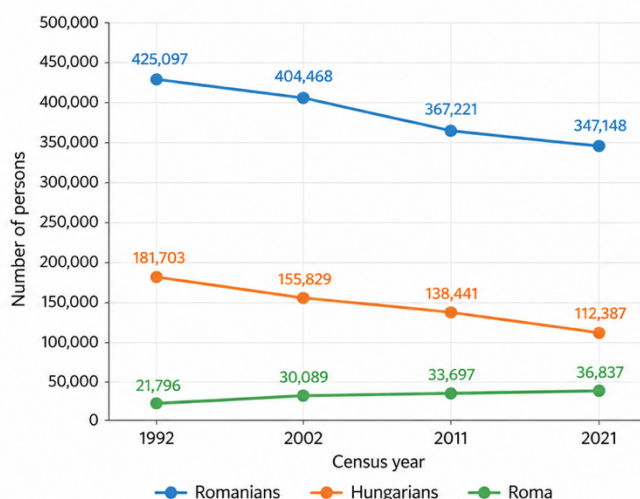
Ethno-confessional diversity as a resource for societal resilience

The guide argues that societal security is strengthened when minority protection, intercultural dialogue and institutional cooperation operate together. In Bihor, public authorities, schools, universities, churches and civil-society organisations form a multilayered local framework capable of preventing tensions and supporting inclusion.

Validated good practices

a. Ecumenical and inter-confessional cooperation provides an informal early-warning and social-stability mechanism. Dialogue among the historical dioceses in Oradea, together with Pentecostal and Baptist community leaderships, helps address community tensions and supports charitable and social-assistance activities.

Figure 1. Evolution of the Main Ethnic Groups in Bihor County, 1992–2021



Source: Romanian Population and Housing Censuses, 1992, 2002, 2011, 2021; National Institute of Statistics (INS).

Note: The values refer to persons who declared the respective ethnicity.

Table 1. Key Mechanisms Supporting Societal Security in Bihor County

Cooperation mechanism	Main contribution
 Administrative bilingualism & minority education	Identity protection and equal access
 Ecumenical dialogue & charitable networks	Early warning, social support and community trust
 Cross-border projects & people-to-people actions	Reduced border barriers and stronger regional ties
 Shared sacred heritage	Intercultural dialogue and common regional identity
 Intercultural education & diversity training	Mutual understanding and prevention of discrimination

Source: Author's own elaboration based on the analysis and good practices presented in the guide.

b. Cross-border sacred-heritage initiatives show how identity resources can become shared regional assets. HeritageTour expands the Route of Medieval Churches by integrating restored heritage sites into cultural and sustainable tourism, while Bridging Cultures uses a Romanian–Hungarian cross-border choir festival to turn public space and religious-cultural heritage into instruments of dialogue and mutual respect.

Together, the chapter highlights several complementary mechanisms:

Cooperation mechanism	Main contribution
Administrative bilingualism & minority education	Identity protection and equal access
Ecumenical dialogue & charitable networks	Early warning, social support and community trust
Cross-border projects & people-to-people actions	Reduced border barriers and stronger regional ties
Shared sacred heritage	Intercultural dialogue and common regional identity
Intercultural education & diversity training	Mutual understanding and prevention of discrimination

From coexistence to active interculturality

The chapter's strategic logic is to transform established coexistence into permanent mechanisms of co-governance, prevention and participation. This means combining institutional protection of minority rights with direct interaction among communities, shared educational tools, joint cultural and religious heritage initiatives, and regular monitoring of societal resilience. The SWOT analysis identifies a strong institutional and educational base, long-standing inter-community cooperation and EU cross-border opportunities, but also demographic vulnerability, segregation risks, political discontinuity and emerging digital and geopolitical threats. These findings are used as the basis for an operational set of recommendations.

4. Recommendations:

Strengthen strategic coordination and early warning.

- Create a permanent Ethno-Confessional Regional Advisory Council bringing together minority representatives, religious leaders and public authorities.
- Develop a societal-security crisis protocol linking county authorities, emergency services, NGOs and confessional charitable networks.
- Protect long-term inclusion and intercultural projects from discontinuity caused by electoral or administrative change.

Expand inclusion, co-governance and public-sector capacity.

- Use intercultural participatory budgeting to involve mixed groups of citizens directly in local development decisions.
- Develop urban and rural inclusion incubators for Roma communities, integrating social, educational, health, digital-literacy and vocational services.
- Introduce diversity management, intercultural skills and unconscious-bias training in the continuous professional development of public employees.

Develop shared heritage and intercultural education.

- Create a multilingual digital inventory and unified tourism routes for Bihor's sacred heritage.
- Develop an optional school curriculum on the history, culture and ethnicity/confession of neighbouring communities in mixed areas.
- Use universities, confessional schools and religious organisations as stable partners for intercultural learning and community dialogue.

Improve monitoring and digital resilience.

- Introduce an annual audit of societal resilience using intercultural indicators such as access to services, effective bilingualism and completed joint initiatives.
- Create a Regional Digital Observatory for Societal Security to identify hate speech, stereotypes and attempts at identity-based radicalisation.
- Use monitoring results to correct administrative weaknesses early and to transfer validated Bihor practices to other mixed border regions.



Historical and Cultural Heritage in Bihor County

1. Overview

Historical and cultural heritage is a strategic asset for social cohesion, territorial resilience and cross-border cooperation in Bihor County. Its multicultural profile and close relationship with Hajdú-Bihar create favourable conditions for using tangible and intangible heritage to strengthen trust, intercultural dialogue and the integration of minorities, refugees and immigrants.

Local cultural and social-inclusion institutions already combine heritage valorisation, community engagement, intercultural education and accessible cultural services. As migration diversifies and more non-EU workers settle in the county, heritage-based inclusion is becoming increasingly important for territorial cohesion and social stability.

A people-centred approach, based on cultural participation, accessible infrastructure and cultural mobility, can reinforce identity, social trust and inclusive growth while helping Bihor respond to demographic change and emerging integration needs.

At European level, culture is recognised as a driver of sustainable development and social cohesion. Instruments such as Interreg and regional development programmes support cultural infrastructure, heritage routes and intercultural initiatives, strengthening Bihor's capacity to use heritage for integration and shared cross-border development.

Heritage as a Bridge for Cross-Border Inclusion in Bihor–Hajdú-Bihar



2. Main Issues and Challenges

• **Territorial disparities in cultural access.** Urban-rural gaps remain significant. Cultural infrastructure, events, and educational programmes are concentrated in Oradea, while many rural communes face library closures, limited cultural services and declining participation. These disparities affect youth development, community cohesion and equal access to opportunities.

• **Fragmented institutional coordination.** Cultural institutions, local authorities and cross-border partners operate with parallel mandates but limited structured cooperation. Coordination mechanisms, shared

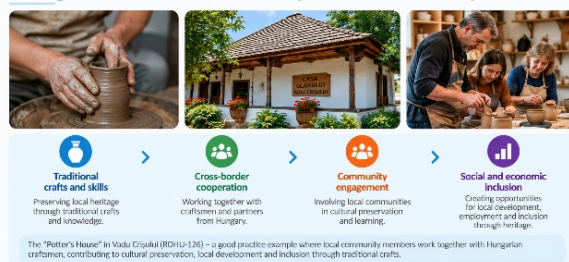
planning tools and professionalised cultural management are still insufficient, reducing the impact of cultural policies and programmes.

• **Limited cultural-integration programmes for newcomers.** Although Bihor has strong traditions of multicultural coexistence, sustained cultural programmes dedicated to new immigrant communities (non-EU workers, refugees) are underdeveloped. Integration efforts focus mainly on emergency assistance rather than cultural adaptation, intercultural mediation, or heritage-based inclusion.

• **Declining cultural participation and infrastructure.** Negative trends in cultural consumption (fewer library users, reduced participation in cultural events, limited cultural-education programmes) are particularly visible in rural areas. Accessibility barriers, insufficient promotion and lack of multilingual materials further restrict engagement.

• **Demographic pressures and emerging integration needs.** Industrial-park expansion and labour recruitment from third countries increase the number of newcomers settling in the county. Local authorities must shift from passive cultural provision to proactive cultural-integration strategies that use heritage to support language learning, civic orientation and community interaction.

Heritage in Practice: Crafts, Community and Cross-Border Cooperation



3. Key background and guidance

• European and national frameworks

A multi-level policy architecture supports heritage-based inclusion:

– **Schengen accession** transforms border points into spaces of mobility, cooperation, and cultural circulation.

– **Interreg RO-HU programme** finances cross-border cultural infrastructure, heritage routes, and intercultural programmes.

– **Migration and integration funds** support cultural-accommodation activities and inclusion of vulnerable groups.

– **Regional development programmes** invest in heritage conservation, rural cultural infrastructure, and urban regeneration.

• Local Strategic Directions

County-level strategies place strong emphasis on **expanding access to cultural services** across the territory, with particular attention to rural and underserved areas. They also prioritise the

professionalisation of cultural management and the consolidation of institutional cooperation, recognising that coordinated governance is essential for an effective cultural system. A further strategic direction concerns the **development of cultural-education programmes for youth**, aimed at strengthening participation and fostering long-term cultural engagement. **Heritage** is also positioned as a **tool for reducing prejudice, supporting intercultural dialogue and promoting inclusion**, especially in communities experiencing demographic change. At the same time, **the digitisation of heritage** and the **improvement of accessibility** through modern technologies and multilingual content are seen as necessary steps for widening participation and ensuring that cultural resources are available to all residents, regardless of background or location.

• Validated Good Practices

Recent initiatives in Bihor County demonstrate how cultural heritage can be transformed into an accessible and inclusive resource.

Heritage-Based Good Practices for Social Inclusion



Museums have evolved into learning centres that welcome diverse audiences, offering educational formats adapted to different age groups and cultural backgrounds. This shift has strengthened their role as community anchors and broadened participation beyond traditional museum-goers.

Cross-border cooperation in crafts and heritage has further reinforced community ties. Joint workshops, shared exhibitions and collaborative heritage projects create spaces where residents from both sides of the border interact, exchange knowledge and develop a sense of common cultural belonging. These initiatives contribute to building trust and sustaining long-term cross-border relationships.

Efforts to valorise minority heritage have also proved effective. Heritage routes dedicated to historical minorities help reduce prejudice, promote recognition of shared cultural legacies and encourage inclusive narratives about the region's past. By making minority heritage visible and accessible, these projects foster a more cohesive and tolerant social environment.

Cultural-accommodation activities for migrants and refugees represent another important direction. Guided visits, introductory cultural sessions and heritage-based orientation programmes help newcomers understand local traditions and integrate more easily into community life.

Complementary initiatives such as theatre outreach, non-formal education programmes and rural cultural hubs bring cultural resources closer to residents in remote areas. They diversify cultural participation, stimulate creativity and ensure that rural communities benefit from the same opportunities as urban centres.

Together, these practices show that heritage can function as a shared space for interaction, learning and trust-building across the border region.

From Cultural Heritage to Social and Territorial Resilience



4. Recommendations

Improve coordination mechanisms

- Create a county-wide framework dedicated to cultural inclusion and heritage collaboration.
- Align data-sharing practices across cultural and social inclusion actors.
- Develop joint cultural agendas with Hungarian partners, integrating heritage routes and intercultural programmes.

Expand cultural access in rural and border communities

- Reopen or modernise libraries and cultural centres in underserved communes.
- Deploy mobile cultural services (travelling exhibitions, theatre outreach, heritage workshops).
- Provide multilingual and accessible cultural materials, including digital formats and disability-friendly tools.

Use heritage as an Inclusion Instrument

- Introduce cultural accommodation programmes for newcomers using museums, heritage sites and craft workshops as integration spaces.
- Develop heritage-based language-learning modules that integrate local history and artefacts.
- Organise intercultural community events involving newcomers and historical minorities.

Professionalise cultural management

- Offer training in cultural management, marketing and intercultural mediation for staff of cultural institutions.
- Strengthen partnerships with universities, research centres and private stakeholders.
- Support digitisation of heritage through AR/VR tools, multilingual audio guides and accessible digital archives.

These actions work together to strengthen Bihor County's cultural system, making heritage more accessible, inclusive and professionally managed. By improving coordination, expanding access and modernising practices, the county can build a more vibrant and resilient cultural environment.

Intercultural Education and Communication

1. Overview

Bihor County provides a relevant example of how education can support integration, societal security and social inclusion in a multi-ethnic, multilingual and multi-confessional border region.

Long-standing coexistence among Romanian, Hungarian, Roma, Slovak and other communities has generated established mechanisms of minority-language, bilingual and confessional education. These structures provide Bihor with institutional experience that can also inform responses to newer forms of diversity generated by refugee and economic migration. However, recent experience with Ukrainian refugee children and emerging migrant communities shows an important gap: the education system has well-established mechanisms for “old diversity”, while responses to “new diversity” remain more fragmented and reactive.

2. Main Issues and Challenges

➤ **Uneven capacity to integrate newcomers.** Existing educational mechanisms function effectively for historical minorities, but refugee and migrant children face greater linguistic, administrative and institutional barriers.

➤ **Low educational retention.** Of 60 Ukrainian children initially placed in Bihor schools and kindergartens, only around 10 continued the following school year - approximately 17% retention. This indicates that formal access alone does not guarantee sustainable educational integration.

➤ **Limited institutional resources and coordination.** The dedicated ISJ Bihor commission operated with only **five members**, while monitoring, teacher training and financing remain distributed among different institutions without a unified county-level coordination mechanism.

➤ **Language and transition gaps.** Unlike historical minorities, newly arrived communities generally lack mother-tongue provision and structured linguistic transition mechanisms. The educational presence of

newer South and East Asian migrant communities also remains insufficiently documented.

➤ **Limited dedicated cross-border projects.** ROHU projects explicitly focused on intercultural education or minority/refugee integration remain relatively few; interculturality is more often addressed indirectly through mobility, governance or cultural initiatives.

3. Key Background & Guidance

From historical diversity to new diversity

Bihor does not start from zero. Its minority-language schools, confessional educational institutions, universities and public authorities constitute an existing infrastructure for managing diversity.

The guide particularly highlights the role of confessional institutions as active agents of integration. During the Ukrainian refugee response, Romanian-language courses and non-formal educational activities involved institutions including the Betel Pentecostal Theological High School, Caritas Eparhial and the Iuliu Maniu Greek Catholic High School. Ghid Complet_Ethno-confessional...

A central policy question is therefore:

How can Bihor transfer mechanisms developed through decades of historical diversity to the educational needs of refugees, migrants and newly emerging communities?

POLICY TAKEAWAY

Move from access to sustained inclusion.

Educational integration should not be measured only by whether a child enters school, but by whether that child can **participate, remain and progress** within the education system.

Validated good practices

➤ **The educational “bridge” model.** Non-formal education organised by confessional and civic organisations provides an intermediate stage before full integration into Romanian schools, helping reduce initial linguistic and cultural barriers.

➤ **The institutional-administrative model.** The dedicated ISJ Bihor commission provides a replicable governance mechanism for responding to new migratory flows, although the guide identifies insufficient human resources as a significant constraint.

A VISIBLE INTEGRATION GAP

UKRAINIAN CHILDREN IN BIHOR



60

initially placed
in schools and
kindergartens



≈10

continued
the following
school year



The gap between initial placement and continued participation highlights the need to **monitor educational retention, not only enrolment.**

INTERREG VI-A ROMANIA-HUNGARY 2021-2027

Opportunities for intercultural education and inclusion



€175.94 million

Total programme budget



€140.75 million

ERDF contribution



OPPORTUNITY

More people-to-people projects explicitly focused on intercultural education and inclusion.

➤ **The educational-diplomacy model.** Cooperation between Bihor County Council, Oradea City Hall and ISJ Bihor in organising activities for pupils from the Odesa region demonstrates how education, inclusion and cultural diplomacy can intersect.

➤ **The academic model.** The EuroINCLUS Research Centre and the journal *Inclusivity* provide a permanent framework for research, training and dissemination, moving beyond crisis-driven responses. The established University of Oradea–University of Debrecen relationship offers an additional platform for cross-border cooperation.

➤ **Cross-border opportunity.** Interreg VI-A Romania–Hungary 2021–2027 has a total programme budget of approximately €175.94 million, including approximately €140.75 million from the ERDF. **Importantly for this topic, the programme includes cooperation governance and mutual trust through people-to-people actions.**

- Provide intensive Romanian-language support for newly arrived children.
- Build on cooperation with confessional and community organisations.

Invest in intercultural competencies.

- Expand continuing teacher training for multicultural and multilingual classrooms.
- Use the expertise of the University of Oradea, CCD Bihor and specialised intercultural-education organisations.
- Strengthen cross-border academic mobility and professional exchange.

Develop stronger cross-border partnerships.

- Prioritise people-to-people initiatives in future ROHU projects.
- Connect schools, universities, public authorities, confessional institutions and civil society through multi-institutional partnerships.
- Use Oradea–Debrecen cooperation as a platform for training and knowledge exchange.

Improve data, monitoring and evaluation.

- Monitor enrolment, retention and educational progression, rather than enrolment alone.
- Collect systematic data on children from newer migrant communities.
- Track teacher participation in intercultural training, active institutional partnerships and the use of study-recognition mechanisms.

4. Recommendations

Strengthen rapid-response institutional capacity.

- Reinforce coordination for the enrolment of refugee, migrant and newly arrived minority children.
- Provide clear, multilingual procedural guidance for families and institutions.
- Strengthen dedicated human resources at county level.

Create an educational “bridge” mechanism.

- Develop structured transition programmes between non-formal support and formal schooling.



FINAL POLICY MESSAGE

Bihor's next challenge is not to build an inclusion model from scratch, but to adapt its accumulated experience with historical diversity to new forms of migration and mobility.



1 HISTORICAL EXPERIENCE

Established minority-language, bilingual and confessional education systems.



2 RAPID RESPONSE

Institutional coordination and targeted support for newly arrived children and families.



3 EDUCATIONAL BRIDGE

Language support, non-formal education and transition to formal schooling.



4 SCHOOL RETENTION

Continued participation and progress in the education system.



5 SUSTAINED INCLUSION

Stronger participation, integration and social cohesion in Bihor County.

Socio-Economic Inclusion in Bihor County

1. Overview

Socio-economic inclusion in Bihor County is shaped by the interaction between economic development, territorial and labour-market dynamics, demographic pressures and cross-border mobility with Hungary. The county's position along the Romanian-Hungarian border, characterised by daily commuting, employment-driven mobility, multicultural communities and shared labour markets, generates both opportunities and structural pressures. Economic development remains the central factor influencing inclusion across the border area, supported by a strong regional economy, active cooperation frameworks and dense community networks. At European level, inclusion is anchored in the *European Pillar of Social Rights*, which sets clear targets for employment, skills development and poverty reduction. This commitment to ensuring that prosperity is broadly shared and no group is left behind is implemented through *Cohesion Policy*, the *Recovery and Resilience Facility*, and targeted initiatives such as the *Social Economy Action Plan* and *Inclusive Entrepreneurship programmes*. Together, these instruments offer Bihor County substantial opportunities to strengthen institutional capacity, widen access to services, and better support vulnerable groups.

Locally, Bihor benefits from a dynamic economic environment, strong administrative capacity and active cross-border cooperation through Interreg Romania-Hungary projects. These advantages create favourable conditions for institutional coordination and labour-market integration across the border area. However, disparities persist between urban and rural areas and between communities with strong institutional support and those with limited access to essential services. Vulnerable groups (low-skilled workers, Roma communities, migrants and residents of remote rural areas) continue to face barriers to labour-market participation, education, housing and social protection. These challenges are reinforced by uneven service provision, limited outreach capacity and demographic pressures, highlighting the need for coordinated, place-sensitive inclusion measures.

2. Main Issues and Challenges

- **Territorial and structural disparities.** Bihor County faces significant urban-rural gaps in access to services, employment and infrastructure. Oradea functions as the county's main growth pole, with diversified economic sectors and stronger institutional capacity, while rural areas experience limited service provision, lower educational attainment and reduced labour-market absorption. Demographic trends further intensify these disparities. Ageing populations, youth outmigration and declining birth rates place additional pressure on local labour markets and social systems. At the same time, growing reliance on migrant labour introduces new integration needs, including language training, housing support and access to social services.

- **Labour market fragmentation and skills gaps.** Demand for technical, digital and vocational skills is rising, driven by industrial expansion, digitalisation and the green transition. However, access to training remains uneven, especially in rural areas. Vulnerable groups face structural barriers such as low qualifications, limited mobility, and insufficient information about employment opportunities. Cross-border labour mobility adds complexity, with differences in wages, administrative procedures and qualification recognition between Romania and Hungary, creating obstacles for workers and employers.

- **Social vulnerabilities and service gaps.** Vulnerable groups, including Roma communities, migrants, long-term unemployed persons and low-income households, continue to face significant barriers to socio-economic inclusion. Housing shortages, limited access to counselling and social assistance and insufficient community-based services constrain their ability to integrate and participate in local development. These gaps underscore the need for integrated, life-stage-sensitive interventions.

- **Institutional coordination challenges.** Despite strong administrative capacity, coordination across institutions and governance levels remains uneven. Employment services, social assistance, immigration authorities and local administrations often operate in parallel rather than through shared mechanisms. Weak data exchange and limited joint planning reduce the system's ability to address complex needs, particularly in areas affected by demographic decline, labour shortages, or increased demand for migrant integration. Strengthened coordination frameworks are essential for coherent, county-wide inclusion strategies.

Key Challenges to Socio-Economic Inclusion in Bihor County



Territorial disparities

Urban-rural gaps in access to services, employment and infrastructure.



Skills gaps

Rising demand for technical, digital and vocational skills.



Social vulnerabilities

Barriers for Roma communities, migrants, long-term unemployed and low-income households.



Coordination challenges

Uneven coordination across institutions and governance levels.

3. Key Background and Guidance

• European policy frameworks supporting socio-economic inclusion

Social Economy Action Plan promotes inclusive employment by strengthening community-based economic models. It supports over 2.8 million EU social economy entities that advance labour market inclusion, territorial resilience and locally rooted value creation. Social enterprises, cooperatives and WISEs mobilise local resources, retain economic activity and address structural challenges in rural, peripheral and cross-border regions. The Plan aligns with major EU frameworks by translating strategic priorities into concrete territorial outcomes.

Inclusive entrepreneurship expands economic participation by supporting women, migrants, youth, seniors and other groups facing structural barriers to business creation. Core measures focus on skills development, microfinance access and targeted support for non-bankable entrepreneurs. Ecosystem-building initiatives strengthen mentoring, incubation and cross-border collaboration, widening access to networks and markets.

Social Inclusion Strategy reduces poverty and expands equal access to essential services in line with the European Pillar of Social Rights. It prioritises affordable housing, healthcare, childcare, digital connectivity and community-based social services, while strengthening inclusive labour-market pathways through skills, personalised support and targeted activation. ESF+, Cohesion Policy and the Recovery and Resilience Facility finance measures across education, early childhood development, digital inclusion and employment assistance.

• Regional and local dynamics

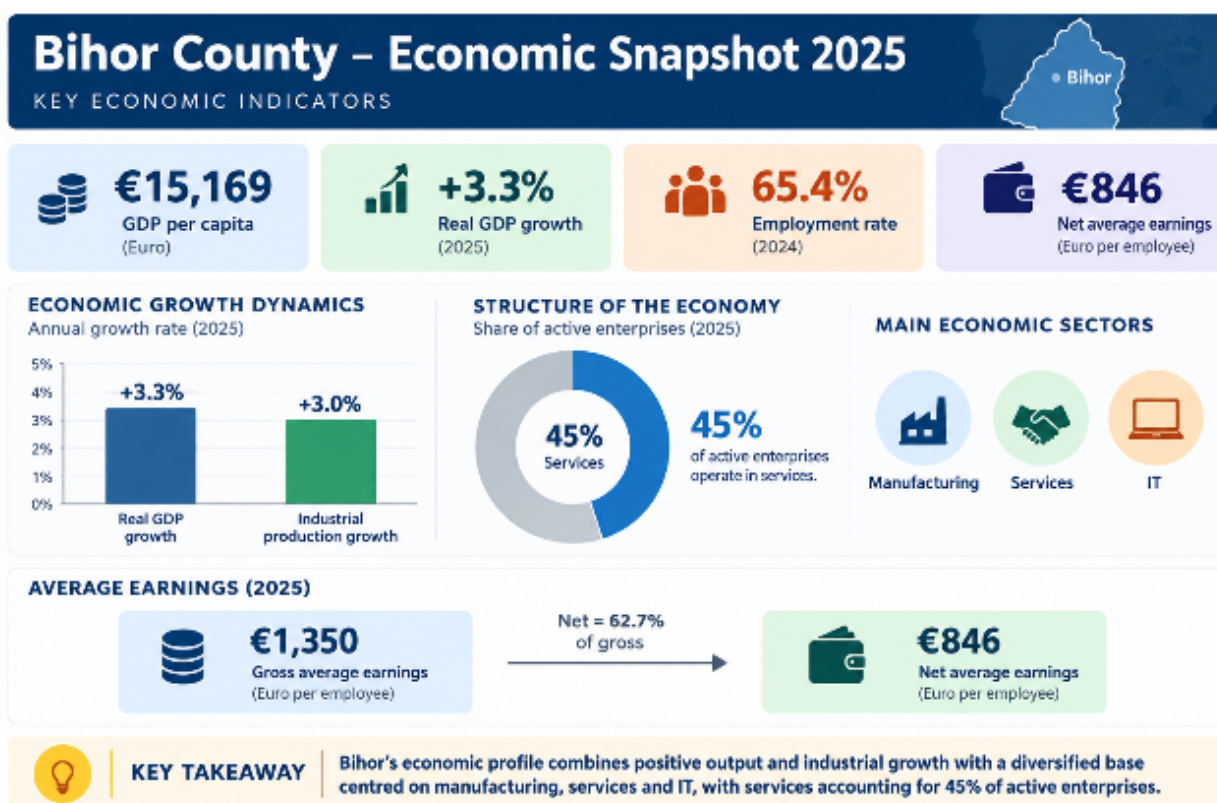
Bihor County is anchored in a dynamic economic environment centred on Oradea, which functions as a regional growth pole with diversified industries, expanding employment opportunities and strong administrative capacity. Cross-border cooperation with Hajdú-Bihar further supports labour mobility, service development and institutional collaboration.

Community actors complement public institutions by supporting vulnerable groups and addressing gaps in services, participation and community engagement, reinforcing local resilience where institutional capacity is limited.

Despite these advantages, uneven territorial development continues to shape inclusion outcomes. Rural areas have fewer services and training opportunities, demographic pressures constrain adaptation to economic change, and growing reliance on migrant labour introduces new integration needs. These conditions underscore the importance of coherent governance, targeted interventions and sustained cross-border cooperation to ensure balanced and inclusive growth.

• Validated good practices

Cross-border cooperation between Romania and Hungary has generated a set of good practices that demonstrate how coordinated action can strengthen socio-economic inclusion across the Bihor-Hajdú-Bihar region. These initiatives were validated for their effectiveness, sustainability, replicability and cross-border relevance, showing how shared approaches can translate into tangible improvements for communities on both sides of the border.



A first direction concerns **labour mobility and skills development**, where cross-border initiatives have expanded access to training, improved employability and created interoperable labour-market infrastructures. Joint training systems, shared standards and coordinated service provision have strengthened human capital and supported more inclusive labour-market participation.

A second direction focuses on **local economic development and entrepreneurship**, with cross-border interventions supporting small-business creation, strengthening producer networks and diversifying rural economies. These initiatives combine training, business support and digital tools to enhance entrepreneurial capacities and unlock local economic potential, particularly in rural and microregional contexts.

A third direction highlights **creative industries, cultural cooperation and sustainable tourism** as drivers of inclusion. Cross-border actions have improved access to creative infrastructure, strengthened cultural participation and developed integrated tourism routes that connect natural and cultural assets. These efforts foster social cohesion, stimulate innovation, and generate new economic opportunities for local communities.

Across these thematic areas, the validated practices demonstrate that sustained cross-border cooperation can produce integrated service systems, harmonised training approaches, expanded access to opportunities and durable institutional networks. They confirm that coordinated Romanian-Hungarian action is both feasible and transformative, contributing to more resilient communities, diversified economies and inclusive growth across the border region.

4. Recommendations

Advancing socio-economic inclusion in Bihor County requires coordinated, territorially sensitive action across institutions, labour-market systems and community services.

Strengthen coordination mechanisms.

- 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.
- Develop joint territorial planning with Hungarian partners to align services and reduce duplication.

Expand skills development and labour-market access.

- Create local skills hubs offering vocational, digital and language training, with a focus on rural and vulnerable groups.
- Promote employer partnerships offering internships, apprenticeships and on-the-job training for vulnerable groups.
- Extend cross-border training modules in sectors with shared labour demand.

Enhance social and community services.

- Expand community-based support systems (intercultural mediation, counselling, mobile services) to improve access in underserved areas.
- Strengthen housing support and social-housing mechanisms in urban centres to address demographic pressures.
- Improve access to early-childhood education and after-school programmes to support long-term inclusion and labour-market participation.

Promote intercultural dialogue and social cohesion.

- Support intercultural events, school programmes and community initiatives that foster shared values and community resilience.
- Develop volunteer networks assisting newcomers and vulnerable groups.
- Implement communication campaigns promoting inclusion and diversity.

Improve monitoring and evaluation.

- Develop a County Inclusion Dashboard tracking key indicators (employment, education, housing, service access).
- Require annual inclusion reports from ATUs and integrate administrative data into a shared digital platform.
- Apply participatory evaluation methods (community feedback, stakeholder workshops) to ensure interventions reflect real needs.

Main Areas of Cross-Border Good Practice for Socio-Economic Inclusion



Cultural Diplomacy in the Bihor–Hajdú-Bihar Border Region

1. Overview

Cultural diplomacy in the Bihor–Hajdú-Bihar border region is shaped by geographical proximity, shared historical and cultural heritage, multi-ethnic communities and a long experience of Romanian–Hungarian cooperation. Within this context, culture provides more than a means of promoting regional identity: it can support intercultural dialogue, institutional cooperation, community participation and mutual trust.

The region benefits from established cooperation between local and county authorities, cultural institutions, universities and civil-society organisations, reinforced by European Territorial Cooperation and the Interreg Romania–Hungary framework. These conditions provide a strong basis for using cultural cooperation to advance integration, societal security and social inclusion.

However, the long-term impact of cultural diplomacy depends on moving beyond individual projects and temporary funding cycles. The key challenge is to transform accumulated experience into a stable cross-border cultural ecosystem, linking culture with education, tourism, digitalisation, innovation and social inclusion.

2. Main Issues and Challenges

➤ Project-based cooperation and limited continuity.

Many cultural initiatives depend on European funding and fixed project cycles. While these projects generate valuable infrastructure, partnerships and activities, maintaining cooperation after funding ends remains a challenge.

➤ **Fragmented institutional and community participation.** The region has considerable institutional experience, but participation is uneven across authorities, cultural organisations and local communities. Stronger involvement of citizens and civil society is needed to turn cultural cooperation into a genuinely shared regional process.

➤ **Administrative and cross-border coordination barriers.** Differences between Romanian and Hungarian

administrative systems can complicate planning, implementation and long-term institutional cooperation. Permanent coordination mechanisms are therefore important for moving from bilateral projects towards sustainable regional governance.

➤ Limited common monitoring of regional impact.

Projects are generally assessed according to indicators established by individual funding programmes. There is no common regional framework for measuring their cumulative contribution to mutual trust, intercultural competencies, social inclusion, community participation and territorial development.

3. Key Background & Guidance

Cultural diplomacy as a regional development instrument

In border regions, cultural diplomacy extends beyond traditional foreign-policy functions. Local authorities, universities, cultural institutions and civil society become actors of diplomacy through cultural exchange, education, heritage initiatives, mobility and direct community interaction.

For Bihor–Hajdú-Bihar, this creates a practical connection between cultural cooperation and regional resilience:

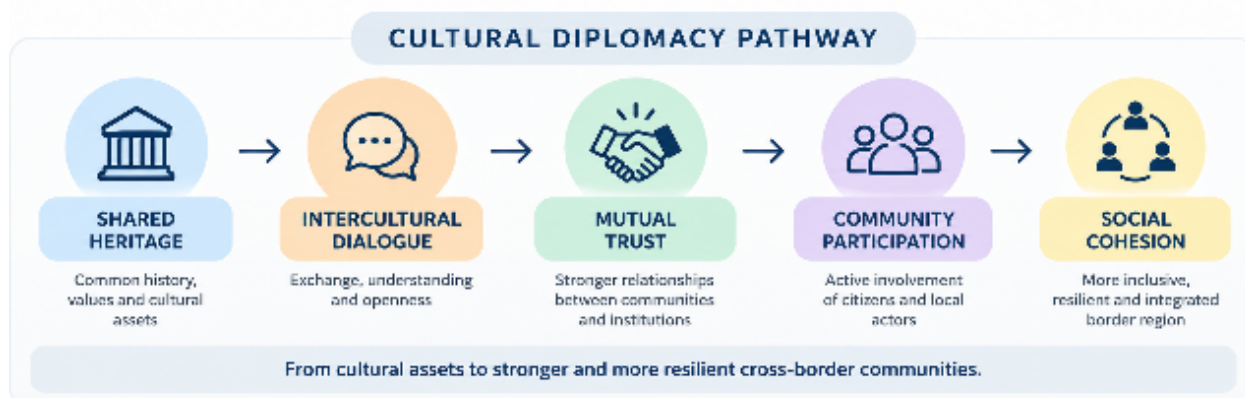
Culture can therefore function simultaneously as a resource for regional identity, social inclusion and sustainable territorial development.

Validated good practices

The guide identifies concrete initiatives showing how cultural diplomacy can move from cultural exchange towards more permanent forms of cross-border cooperation.

a. CULTURAL LIVING LAB (ROHU00618) represents a particularly relevant model. Implemented jointly by Bihor County Council and Hajdú-Bihar County Council under Interreg VI-A Romania–Hungary 2021–2027, the project combines cultural infrastructure, digitalisation, institutional cooperation and community participation. It includes the development of cultural infrastructure, a digital platform and joint festivals, exhibitions, workshops and artistic activities.

Rather than treating culture as a succession of events, the project develops infrastructure and cooperation



mechanisms capable of supporting cultural interaction over the longer term.

b. University of Oradea–University of Debrecen cooperation provides another model. Bilateral agreements, Erasmus+ and CEEPUS mobility, research and European projects create direct interaction among students, researchers and academic staff. Academic cooperation therefore contributes not only to education and research, but also to **intercultural learning, professional networks, knowledge transfer and mutual understanding**.

Together, these examples demonstrate two complementary models:

Cooperation model	Main contribution
Cultural infrastructure & joint activities	<i>Participation and access to culture</i>
Digital cultural cooperation	<i>Accessibility and wider regional reach</i>
Academic mobility & exchange	<i>Intercultural competencies and networks</i>
Institutional partnerships	<i>Continuity and cross-border governance</i>
Shared heritage initiatives	<i>Regional identity and dialogue</i>

From outputs to impact

The guide stresses that successful cultural diplomacy cannot be assessed only through the number of events, participants or partnerships. These indicators should be complemented by evidence concerning satisfaction, trust between communities, intercultural competencies, social inclusion and regional development.

This implies a transition:

A shared monitoring framework would make it possible to compare initiatives, identify successful practices and transform project experience into institutional knowledge.

4. Recommendations:

Strengthen institutional cooperation.

- Develop permanent cross-border networks between public authorities, cultural institutions, universities and civil society.
- Integrate cultural cooperation into wider strategies for education, tourism, innovation and social inclusion.
- Ensure continuity of partnerships beyond individual funding cycles.

Increase community participation and intercultural exchange.

- Involve local communities in the design and implementation of cultural initiatives.
- Expand mobility opportunities for pupils, students, teachers, researchers and cultural professionals.
- Promote Romanian, Hungarian and English language skills and intercultural competencies.

Develop shared heritage and digital cooperation.

- Promote cultural heritage through joint cultural, educational and tourism initiatives.
- Develop shared digital platforms, archives and multilingual cultural resources.
- Strengthen the digital competencies of cultural institutions and professionals.

Improve monitoring and evaluation.

- Establish common quantitative and qualitative indicators for cross-border cultural cooperation.
- Measure not only activities but also trust, participation, intercultural competencies and social inclusion.
- Develop joint data collection, regular regional reporting and participatory evaluation involving institutions and communities.



Migrant Integration and Societal Security in Bihor County

1. Overview

The significant variation and diversity in migration and displacement in South East Europe make grasping 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.

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.

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.

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.

2. Main Issues and Challenges

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.

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.

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 multiculturalism 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), <i>Good Practices in Migrant Integration: Trainee's Manual</i>	

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), <i>Integration of migrants and refugees: benefits for all parties involved</i> , Committee on Migration, Refugees and Displaced Persons. Doc. 15785, 05 June 2023.	

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. Key Background and Guidance

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

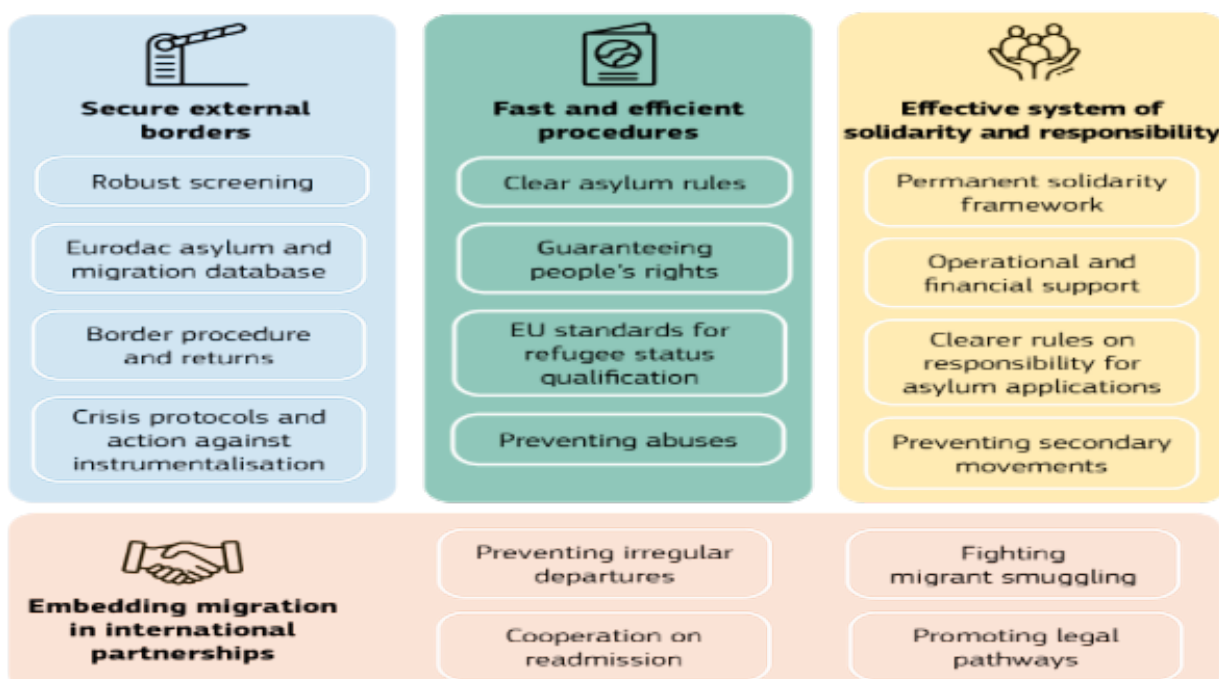
Source: International Organization for Migration (2024), *World Migration Report*, Geneva, p. 15

European Normative Framework

The main strategic framework in EU inclusion policies is the



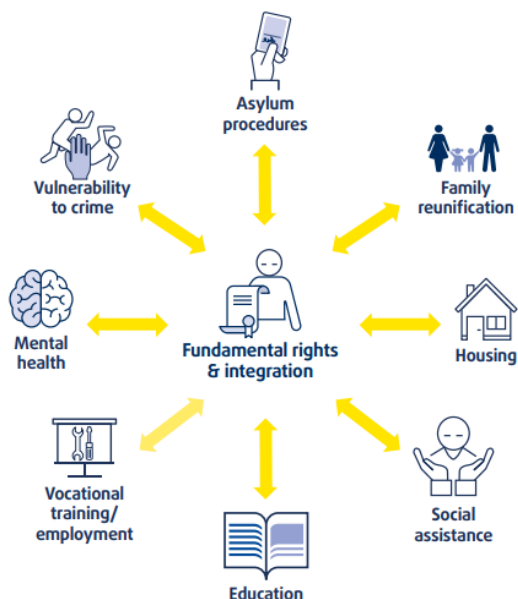
A common EU system to manage migration



Source: European Commission, Migration and Home Affairs (2026), *Pact on Migration and Asylum*

4. Recommendations

Effective integration policies are essential for building inclusive, cohesive and prosperous societies. They play

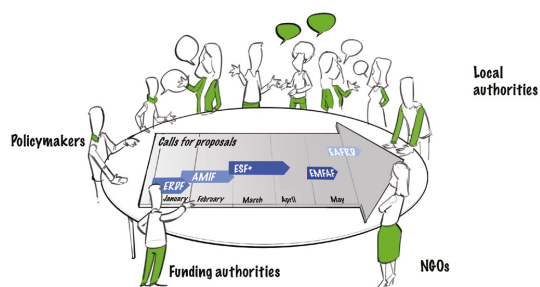


Source: Vidal Lopez, Joana, (2024), *Integration and Inclusion of Refugees and Migrants: Challenges and New Directions in Democracies*

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.

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.

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.



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>

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 participants.

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.