

NORTH GREAT PLAIN REGION - HUNGARY

Basic regional socio economic data

The region covers an area of 17.729 square kilometres, 19.1% of Hungary's total area. The region has a population of 1,554,000 people, which is showing a moderate decline. This is 15.1% of Hungary's total population, a slightly smaller ratio than terms of its area.

Population	1 547 003 inhabitants (15,3%)
Area	17 729 km² (19,1%)
Population density	87 person per sq. km

NUTS 2 level Regional Development Council

North Great Plain Region, the **Eastern Gate** of the European Union is situated in the North Eastern part of Hungary, and has borders with Slovakia, Ukraine and Romania. The advantageous geographical location gives the region an **exceptional transit and logistics role**. The two most significant treasures of nature of our region are the **arable lands of excellent quality** and the **thermal water**. The region's world famous **health spas**, national parks with unique treasures of nature, welcome its visitors with the traditional Hungarian hospitality.

The region gives 9,9% of the Hungarian GDP (1 653 billion HUF – appr. 6,612 million EUR). The GDP per capita is 64,4 percent of the Hungarian average, and 37,5 percent of the EU25 average. The unemployment rate is 6,8 percent. Although there is a well-qualified manpower in the higher educational centres, the employment structure of the region is still unfavourable, the employment rate is low.

The regional strengths on which we build our strategic concept of the North Great Plain Region are the following:

1. **The spread of innovation-oriented technologies (bio-, nano-, gene- and agro-technology, pharmacy-innovation, information and communication technology)**. The region has the opportunity and advantages of intensive development of innovation-oriented technologies.
2. **Logistic**. Significant transit transport can be observed in the East-West and the North-South direction in the North Great Plain Region, as it is situated alongside international main roads and railways. The advantageous position from logistic aspect is further strengthened by its location near borders.
3. **Modern manufacturing industry**. The region has significant traditions in the field of manufacturing industry in several sectors. In spite of the decline in the '90s, the role of manufacturing industry increased again through settling down of several important investments in the recent past.

4. **Tourism built on the natural and cultural resources of the region.** The region is rich in curative thermal water that enables products of (thermal) tourism of international importance to be created with developing the existent thermal water bodies and expanding the services built upon it.
5. **Environmental and cultural values.** One of the important strengths of the region is the abundance of treasures of nature and the preserved environmental and cultural values.
6. **Rural areas.** In the region there is a prominent ratio of rural areas having significant intellectual, cultural, built and natural heritage but suffering from significant disadvantages.

Framework of Structural Funds and programmes operating in the region

The Operational Programme for Regional Development (OPRD), as a part of the Community Support Framework for Hungary is for the period 2004-2006. On the basis of the negotiations on the programming documents submitted by Hungary, which were concluded by the end of 2003, the CSF for Hungary 2004-2006 will be implemented by five Operational Programmes.

The global objective set in the CSF for the period 2004-2006 is Convergence with the level of socio-economic development of the EU, which is to be achieved through the following four specific objectives:

- a more competitive economy,
- improving the use of human resources,
- better environment and basic infrastructure,
- More balanced territorial development.

These four specific objectives correspond to four CSF priorities, which are implemented by five Operational Programmes summarised below:

1. *Economic Competitiveness OP*
2. *Environmental Protection and Infrastructure Development OP*
3. The primary objective of the *Agricultural and Rural Development OP*
4. *Human Resource Development OP*
5. Regional Development OP

The **global objective** of the Operational Programme for Regional Development corresponds to the CSF's fourth specific objective. In order to implement this global objective, activities supported by the Programme must be geared towards the regions' different geographical, economic, natural and cultural potentials and address their weaknesses. The Programme's strategy defines the following three **specific objectives**, all contributing to the global objective of a more balanced territorial development:

1. developing the endogenous potential of regions lagging behind with significant natural and cultural values,
2. creating basic conditions for regional competitiveness and an attractive communal environment
3. strengthening the adaptability and cooperation of local players

In order to achieve the above objectives, **4 priorities** (intervention areas) and 11 measures have been evaluated in the Programme. Priorities of the OPRD are the following:

1. Developing the tourism potential of the regions
2. Developing regional infrastructure and the communal environment
3. Strengthening the regional dimension of human resource development
4. Technical assistance

A specific group within the North-Great Plain Regional Development Agency, called the **Intermediate Body (IB) of the Operational Programme for Regional Development** is responsible for the SF management duties. The IB's roles are the followings:

- Review the documents of the OPRD calls for proposals;
- Organize communication campaigns to inform the public about the proposals;
- Provide continuous info-center services for the public through any kind of communication tunnels (by phone, e-mail, fax, or in person);
- Evaluate the proposals of the OPRD;
- Set up an order among the proposals according to the points reached along the evaluation.

The process of preparing the organizational, financial, and professional background of the new programming period began last year both on national and regional level. As a governmental decision set down the significant role of the regions in the programming process, they are – as a new element in Hungary – equal partners to the Ministries.

The systematic work has begun in the North Great Plain as well. On regional level, **working groups** including experts in the region, assist the planning works by their experiences and competences. A comprehensive regional professional and social involvement is ensured by the established **regional working group**, whose members represent social economic partners, sectors and knowledge centres.