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Annexes

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Annex 1: Data collection tools used for the evaluation of each question

Evaluation questions (EQ)	Desk research	Interviews	Questionnaire survey	Case studies	Benchmark analysis
SU.01. Are the programme's outputs and results sustainable on long term?	•	•	•	•	
SU.02. How can future programming (2021-2027) be streamlined in order to achieve higher impact and ensure sustainability of the financial assistance provided?	•	•	•	•	
SU.03. What are the major factors which influenced the achievement or non-achievement of sustainability of the programme?	•	•	•	•	
I.TR.01. What is the progress in improving the secondary and tertiary nodes connections to TEN-T infrastructure in the cross-border area?	•	•	•	•	
I.TR.02. What is the current and expected contribution of the interventions under the programme to this progress?	•	•	•	•	
I.TR.03. What are the factors facilitating that contribution?	•	•	•	•	
I.TR.04. Are there any unintended effects of the programme in this field?	•	•	•	•	
I.TR.05. What is the progress in increasing Danube navigation safety for freight and passenger traffic in the cross-border area?	•	•	•	•	
I.TR.06. What is the current and expected contribution of the interventions under the programme to this progress?					
I.TR.07. What are the factors facilitating that contribution?	•	•	•	•	
I.TR.08. Are there any unintended effects of the programme in this field?	•	•	•	•	
I.HE.01. What is the progress in using sustainably the natural and cultural heritage and in improving the tourism in the cross-border area?	•	•	•	•	
I.HE.02. What is the current and expected contribution of the interventions under the programme to this progress?	•	•	•	•	
I.HE.03. What are the factors facilitating that contribution?	•	•	•	•	
I.HE.04. Are there any unintended effects of the programme in this field?	•	•	•	•	
I.EN.01. What is the progress in improving the management and protection of NATURA 2000 sites in the cross-border area?	•	•	•	•	
I.EN.02. What is the current and expected contribution of the interventions under the programme to this progress?	•	•	•	•	
I.EN.03. What are the factors facilitating that contribution?	•	•	•	•	
I.EN.04. Are there any unintended effects of the programme in this field?	•	•	•	•	



Evaluation questions (EQ)	Desk research	Interviews	Questionnaire survey	Case studies	Benchmark analysis
I.EN.05 Does the implementation of the programme have significant environmental effects, based on measuring the indicators for monitoring the environmental impacts proposed under SEA?	•	•	•		
I.RI.01 What is the progress in preventing and managing the capacity of mitigation and disaster resilience in the cross-border area?	•	•	•	•	
I.RI.02 What is the current and expected contribution of the interventions under the programme to this progress?	•	•	•	•	
I.RI.03 What are the factors facilitating that contribution?	•	•	•	•	
I.RI.04 Are there any unintended effects of the programme in this field?	•	•	•	•	
I.EM.01 What is the progress in integrating the cross-border area in terms of employment and labour mobility?	•	•	•	•	
I.EM.02 What is the current and expected contribution of the interventions under the programme to this progress?	•	•	•	•	
I.EM.03 What are the factors facilitating this contribution?	•	•	•	•	
I.EM.04 Are there any unintended effects of the programme in this field?	•	•	•	•	
I.IC.01 Have the interventions under this priority axis (5.1) led to the achievement of any effects, intended or unintended?	•	•	•	•	
I.IC.02 How much of the effects identified are directly attributable to interventions under the programme?	•	•	•	•	
I.IC.03 What are the factors facilitating this direct effect?	•	•	•	•	
I.RD.01 To what extent does the programme add benefits to the cross-border regional development and complement and enhance the effect of other related policies or strategies? How does this mechanism work and what can be improved?	•	•	•		•
I.RD.02 What is the current and estimated aggregated effect of the programme in the eligible area?	•	•	•		•
I.RD.03 How support from ERDF has contributed to the objectives of each priority, in line with the result-focus of cohesion policy?	•	•	•		
I.RD.04 What is the additional value resulting from the EU intervention (in this case, support from ERDF), compared to what could reasonably have been expected from the two Member States acting from own funds?	•	•	•		
I.RD.05 What would be the most likely consequences of stopping or withdrawing the EU intervention?	•	•	•		



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Annex 2. Theory based impact evaluation – Theory of Change for each specific objective

A rigorous programme impact evaluation usually looks to identify not only if a public intervention works, but also the reason why it does, in order to reduce uncertainty about the intervention's contribution to observed outcomes. This approach is known as theory-based impact evaluation and its role is to test the assumptions of policymakers and stakeholders against the observed results, following the different steps of the intervention logic and examining other influencing factors. There are several different approaches to theory-based evaluation including contribution analysis, realist evaluation and process tracing. Contribution analysis, which is the method chosen in the case of the present report, is an approach for assessing causal questions and inferring causality through an increased understanding of why the observed results have occurred (or not) and the roles played by the intervention and other internal and external factors¹.

Contribution analysis is based on five steps to produce a credible contribution story:

- Setting of the attribution problem to be addressed,
- Development of the theory of change,
- Gathering of existing evidence on the theory of change,
- Assembly and assessment of the contribution story and challenges to it,
- Evaluation of additional evidence,
- Revise/Strengthen of the contribution story.

As contribution analysis has as underlining premise the influence of multiple factors, the specific questions which will be addressed as a first step in the analysis will be the following:

- Has the SO influenced the observed result?
- Has the SO made an important contribution to the observed result?
- Is it reasonable to conclude that the SO has made a difference?
- What does the preponderance of evidence say about how well the SO is making a difference?

The following step is to reconstruct the theory of change afferent to the SO. Theory of change is a tool for the comprehensive description and illustration of how and why a desired change is expected to happen in a particular context. It facilitates the understanding of the manner in which the activities and interventions of a programme lead to the desired goals being achieved.

This is done by identifying the desired long-term goals and by working back from these to identify all the conditions (outcomes) that must be in place (and how these related to one another causally) for the goals to occur². The next step is to identify the type of activities/interventions that will produce the outcomes identified as preconditions for achieving the long-term goal – ensuring in this way a logical link between activities and the long-term goals.

¹ See further at: https://www.betterevaluation.org/en/plan/approach/contribution_analysis.

² See further at: <https://www.theoryofchange.org/what-is-theory-of-change/>.



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Annex 2.1. Theory-based impact evaluation – Specific objective 1.1. Improve the planning, development and coordination of cross-border transport systems for better connections to TEN-T transport networks

Below we illustrate the theory of change for Specific Objective 1.1.

Figure 1. Theory of change – SO1.1 - Improve the planning, development and coordination of cross-border transport systems for better connections to TEN-T transport networks





Theory of change – Assumptions in the result chain, inherent risks and external influence

In the case of SO 1.1. the following assumptions have been identified:

- The local and regional transport grid was built, before the nineties, on the premises that the Danube was a rigid border, a “dead-end” area. At that time, only nodes connectivity to the national capital or major urban areas mattered, generating thus large pockets of low connectivity between rural areas and secondary nodes and between secondary nodes and tertiary nodes at a national level and almost no connectivity at a cross border level.
- The Cross-Border area is currently suffering from the limited connection of the counties/district’s infrastructures to the TEN-T ones due to the uncompleted TEN-T corridor major infrastructure in its vicinity or to the deficiencies of existing connections to the TEN-T corridors.
- In terms of connectivity of the cross-border area, a sustainable improvement can be achieved more easily if the transport systems are part of a cross-border system and not mere “dead-end” areas, totally dependent on the national major transport grid. Re-connecting the region, as a cross-border integrated area, will represent a real incentive to local socio-economic development.

Inherent risks:

- No inherent risks were identified

External influence:

- Difficulties in public procurement
- Lack of expertise by project beneficiaries

Existing evidence on the theory of change

Based on the analysis done within the section covering the answers to the evaluation questions, the following aspects have been argued:

Statement	Source	Supporting information	Type of source	Confirming/ refuting the logic model	Type of causal mechanism ³	Strength of evidence
The programme had a positive impact on	Case Study Interviews	The assessed case studies highlighted	Primary	Confirming	Intended contribution	Rather strong

³ We have used the types of causal mechanisms applied by T. Delahais, J. Toulemonde (2012): „Applying contribution analysis: Lessons from five years practice”, in Evaluation, Vol. 18, No. 3, pp. 281–293. The authors apply the following types of causal mechanisms:

- Intended contribution, assumed to be sufficient for generating the intended change;
- Other contribution (influence of a contextual factor), also assumed to be sufficient for generating the intended change;
- Condition to intended contribution, i.e. influence of a contextual factor that is necessary for the intended contribution to work;
- Intended condition to other contribution, i.e. a particular case in which the evaluated intervention is designed to block or unblock the influence of a given contextual factor;



Statement	Source	Supporting information	Type of source	Confirming/ refuting the logic model	Type of causal mechanism ³	Strength of evidence
local transport infrastructures		that the region is in serious need of improvement in transport connection to TEN-T. Local roads are often out of maintenance and there is lack of coordinated cross border planning. The very fact that the Programme brings together local authorities from both sides of the border is itself a success. Interviewees consistently pointed out that a substantial improvement in the local transports has occurred in the recent years. Many of them believe that the Programme was an important factor.				
Developing co-ordinated concepts, standards and tools on the cross-border level for improved mobility services in the public interest	Desk research Programme's document	Both the programme and the selection criteria put a lot of emphasis on the cross-border dimension. The transport solutions to be implemented need to be beneficial to the whole region not only to one side of the Danube. Indeed, establishing long-lasting partnership is essential to achieve this scope. This further strengthen the development co-ordinated concepts, standards and tools	Primary	Confirming	Intended contribution	Rather strong

➔ Feedback, i.e. reverse contribution.

The authors also argue that a contribution is unnecessary but sufficient for the occurrence of the intended change. A condition is necessary for the working of a mechanism that is itself unnecessary but sufficient for the occurrence of the intended change.



Statement	Source	Supporting information	Type of source	Confirming/ refuting the logic model	Type of causal mechanism ³	Strength of evidence
Improving the cross-border secondary and tertiary nodes connections to TEN-T infrastructure: improve/build bicycles routes	Desk research	The specific project “E-Bike” is a clear step towards the objective of boosting modal shift – especially towards sustainable transport	Primary	Confirming	Intended contribution	Rather strong
Overcoming local connectivity issues and provide a better access to TEN-T secondary and tertiary node.	Desk research	The region has one of the worst records in terms of roads accidents. During the Programme period – we noticed a slow decrease in that. Perhaps this is due to the overall improvement brought about by the Programme.	Secondary	Confirming	Unintended	Quite Strong
The programme had positive unintended effects on employment and economic competitiveness	Interviewees	The majority of consulted stakeholders pointed out that the investment in transport infrastructure brought important job opportunities in an area which is severely hit by unemployment. Likewise, improving connectivity is an essential step to boost economic competitiveness by overcoming natural and infrastructural gaps in the region	Primary	Confirming	Unintended	Fair

Contribution story and challenges to it

Through the interventions supported under SO 1.1., the cross-border region has improved in the planning, development and coordination of cross-border transport systems for better connections to TEN-T transport networks through:

- Developing cross-border/joint action-based solutions related to works projects for public infrastructure in order to connect secondary and tertiary nodes to TEN-T infrastructure and to reduce transportation time and optimising logistics



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- Developing co-ordinated concepts, standards and tools on the cross-border level for improved mobility services in the public interest
- Exchanging experience and knowledge, including raising awareness (trainings, seminars, and workshops) in the field of traffic safety measures in the cross-border area
- Improving the cross-border secondary and tertiary nodes connections to TEN-T infrastructure
- Setting up of joint traffic management for smart mobility in the cross-border area

This change has occurred in conjunction with:

- An increased level of coordinated management of connectivity issues related to TEN-T secondary and tertiary nodes (Source: desk research, case studies and interviews).
- Improved the connectivity to the TEN-T secondary and tertiary roles boosting modal shifting (Source: interviews, case studies, desk research and survey).

Other mechanisms have also influenced this change among which we mention:

- Lack of functioning local transport infrastructures (Territorial analysis).

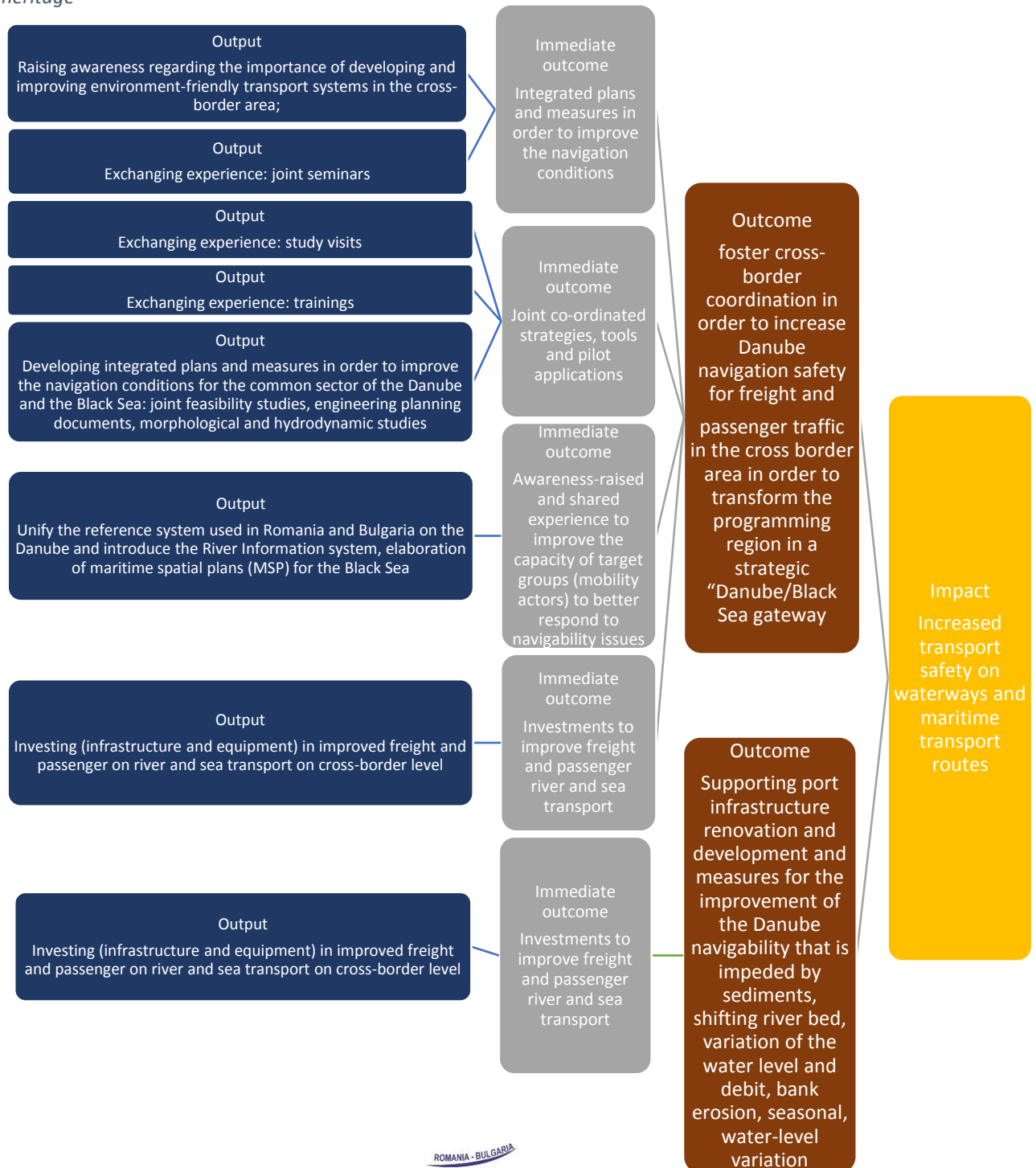
Strengthening of the contribution story

- The statement “The programme had a positive impact on local transport infrastructures” is supported by the Implementation Evaluation Report of the Interreg V-A Romania-Bulgaria 2014-2020. From a local stakeholder perspective, significant improvements were perceived in aspects related to accessibility, travel time, safety and connectivity.
- The statement “Improving the cross-border secondary and tertiary nodes connections to TEN-T infrastructure: improve/build bicycles routes” is supported by the Implementation Evaluation Report of the Interreg V-A Romania-Bulgaria 2014-2020. According to a local stakeholder, the Electric Bicycle Network project, implemented under the Programme code ROBG-01, accomplished its main goal, as it has improved the individual transport mobility for citizens and guests of all secondary and tertiary nodes to the TEN-T infrastructure in the cross-border region by creating a rental network of electric bicycles.

Annex 2.2. Theory-based impact evaluation – Specific objective 1.2. Increase transport safety on waterways and maritime transport routes

Below we illustrate the theory of change for Specific Objective 1.2.

Figure 2. Theory of change – SO 1.2. To improve the sustainable use of natural heritage and resources and cultural heritage





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Theory of change – Assumptions in the result chain, inherent risks and external influence

In the case of SO 1.2. the following assumptions have been identified:

- ➔ The RO-BG Cross border area must take advantage of the fact that large shipping lines can consider or already consider Black Sea ports as their natural ports for EU. There is, therefore, a real opportunity for the cross border area to take benefit from transfer of production and assembly activities from Western Europe and Asia in order to become the Asian gateway for Central and Eastern Europe via Black Sea ports and one of the EU distribution centre.
- ➔ There is a need to promote the development of Black Sea ports and to make the cross border region appear as the international EU entrance gate from the east: a trade hub for assembly and product customization activities, serving the Central and Eastern Europe (CEE) and Black Sea markets
- ➔ Moreover, sustainable mobility is a clear objective of Europe 2020, as well as the common European transport policy. Given that inland navigation has a relatively low environmental impact (it emits 3.5 times less CO2 per ton-kilometre than trucks) it is an important mode of transport.

Inherent risks:

- ➔ No inherent risks were identified

External influence:

- Based on the observations included in the Territorial Impact Assessment for Cross-border cooperation (2019), the cross-border programme is an important policy concerning the Danube navigation. However, other national and EU policies (EU Strategy for Danube river) are likely to have a higher impact.

Existing evidence on the theory of change

Based on the analysis done within the section covering the answers to the evaluation questions, evidence will be presented in order to support the contribution claims/statements for SO 1.2. In accordance with the specialised literature, the contribution story comprises a series of contribution claims that assert that:

- An intended change did or did not occur;
- Due or not due to the intended contribution;
- In conjunction with a few selected contextual factors;
- other mechanisms being considered by order of influence;
- and other non-selected mechanisms being acknowledged.

Statement	Source	Supporting information	Type of source	Confirming/ refuting the logic model	Type of causal mechanism ⁴	Strength of evidence
Integrated plans and measures in	Case Study	The project Danube Safety Net is indeed	Primary	Confirming	Intended contribution	Rather strong

⁴ We have used the types of causal mechanisms applied by T. Delahais, J. Toulemonde (2012): „Applying contribution analysis: Lessons from five years practice”, in Evaluation, Vol. 18, No. 3, pp. 281–293. The authors apply the following types of causal mechanisms:



Statement	Source	Supporting information	Type of source	Confirming/ refuting the logic model	Type of causal mechanism ⁴	Strength of evidence
order to improve the navigation conditions		a good example of integrated plans and measures to improve the navigation conditions. By centralising the collection of information on flood and river level, this project is likely to have a significant impact in the cross-border area.				
Joint co-ordinated strategies, tools and pilot applications	Desk research	The nature of the programme focus on cross-border solutions which are elaborated with a transnational perspective. By doing so, the programme supports the development of joint co-ordinated strategies.	Secondary	Confirming	Intended contribution	Quite strong
Awareness-raised and shared experience to improve the capacity of target groups (mobility actors) to better respond to navigability issues	Interviews	According to the majority of interviewees, the programme contributed to enhance the awareness on navigability issues by spreading information about it.	Primary	Confirming	Intended contribution	Quite strong

- ➔ Intended contribution, assumed to be sufficient for generating the intended change;
- ➔ Other contribution (influence of a contextual factor), also assumed to be sufficient for generating the intended change;
- ➔ Condition to intended contribution, i.e. influence of a contextual factor that is necessary for the intended contribution to work;
- ➔ Intended condition to other contribution, i.e. a particular case in which the evaluated intervention is designed to block or unblock the influence of a given contextual factor;
- ➔ Feedback, i.e. reverse contribution.

The authors also argue that a contribution is unnecessary but sufficient for the occurrence of the intended change. A condition is necessary for the working of a mechanism that is itself unnecessary but sufficient for the occurrence of the intended change.



Statement	Source	Supporting information	Type of source	Confirming/ refuting the logic model	Type of causal mechanism ⁴	Strength of evidence
Investments to improve freight and passenger river and sea transport	Interviews	The majority of interviewees highlighted an overall improvement in the Danube navigation even though there is room for improvement	Primary	Somehow confirming	Intended contribution	Strong
Investments to improve freight and passenger river and sea transport	Survey	Most of respondents highlighted that hard measures are more likely to deliver significant impacts on the relevant areas.	Primary	Confirming	Intended contribution	Rather Strong

Contribution story and challenges to it

Through the interventions supported under SO 1.2, the cross-border region is better-prepared and integrated in terms of prevention and management capacity of disaster risks through:

- Raising awareness regarding the importance of developing and improving environment-friendly transport systems in the cross-border area
- Unifying the reference system used in Romania and Bulgaria on the Danube and introducing the River Information system, elaboration of maritime spatial plans (MSP) for the Black Sea
- Investing (infrastructure and equipment) in improved freight and passenger on river and sea transport on cross-border level

This change has occurred in conjunction with:

- An increased level of local awareness towards Danube navigability issues, especially security concerns (Source: survey, desk research and interviews).
- Improved safety in Danube navigation and improved management responses of possible accidents.

Other mechanisms have also influenced this change among which we mention:

- Lack of investment in the area (Territorial analysis).

Strengthening of the contribution story

- The supporting evidence for the theory of change regarding the statement “Investments to improve freight and passenger river and sea transport” is endorsed by the Implementation Evaluation Report of the Interreg V-A Romania-Bulgaria 2014-2020. According to a local



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stakeholder, the overall improvement in the Danube navigation brought an increase in the number of passengers.

- The statement “Awareness-raised and shared experience to improve the capacity of target groups (mobility actors) to better respond to navigability issues” is supported by the Implementation Evaluation Report of the Interreg V-A Romania-Bulgaria 2014-2020. From a local stakeholder perspective, the safety of transportation on the shared portion on the Danube has been improved by the maritime executive agency from Bulgaria and the naval authority from Romania by developing a cross-border urgency system within the **Danube Safety Net** project



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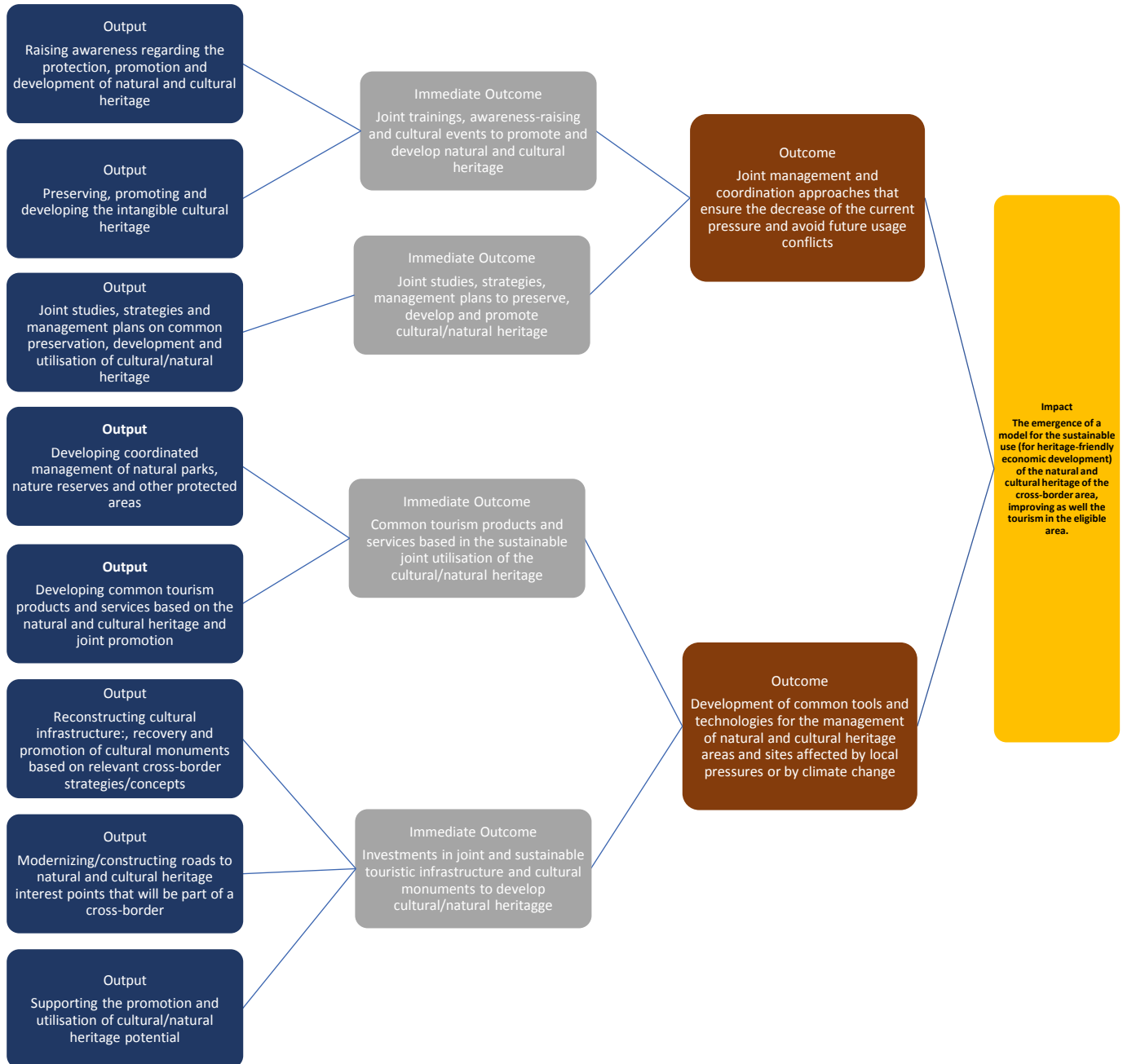


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Annex 2.3. Theory-based impact evaluation – Specific Objective 2.1. To improve the sustainable use of natural heritage and resources and cultural heritage

Below we illustrate the theory of change for Specific Objective 2.1.

Figure 3. Theory of change – SO 2.1. To improve the sustainable use of natural heritage and resources and cultural heritage





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Theory of change – Assumptions in the result chain, inherent risks and external influence

In the case of SO 2.1. the following assumptions have been identified:

- The cross-border area has a rich natural and cultural heritage that is subject to a variety of pressures and usage conflicts (e.g. from industry, intensive agriculture, climate change, transport as well as mismanaged tourism flows);
- The conservation of the Romanian-Bulgarian cross-border natural heritage is interlinked with the socio-economic difficulties of the area, the impossible arbitrage between protection and production that can be overcome through the identification, implementation and promotion of new ways of sustainable yet viable economic uses of this heritage;
- It is crucial to enhance the capacity to integrate natural and cultural heritage protection in cross-border socioeconomic development strategies and policies;
- Sustainable tourism seems to be the sector that best combines, given the local conditions, the economic rationale and the protection logic in order to yield sustainable benefits for the local communities;
- The development of integrated tourism products between the Danube and the Black Sea areas and the creation of new linkages with the Danube upper side tourism infrastructures can increase the tourism contribution to green and sustainable growth in the cross-border area;
- The natural and cultural heritage is a resource to be promoted and prevented from spoiling; it is important to take measures regarding the environmental protection (including raising public awareness on the concrete socio-economic benefits).

Inherent risks:

- The precision of the actual results of the indicators is uncertain considering that the beneficiaries under the programme are public institutions, universities, museums and NGOs, rather than accommodation establishments providing primary data (Territorial Impact Assessment for Cross-Border Cooperation, 2019).

External influence:

- Based on the observations included in the Territorial Impact Assessment for Cross-border cooperation (2019), the cross-border programme is not the main funding source for improving the sustainable use of natural heritage and resources and cultural heritage. Significant amounts of additional resources are channelled through the national budgets or under other operational programmes in the direction of natural or cultural heritage (e.g. Regional Operational Programme, Operational Programme for Large Infrastructure, Operational programme “Regions in Growth, Private investments/own contribution);
- A major obstacle for the integrated development of the RO-BG region is the River Danube, which divides both countries throughout almost the entire length of the border between the two countries (Territorial Impact Assessment for Cross-Border Cooperation, 2019).

Existing evidence on the theory of change



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Based on the analysis done within the section covering the answers to the evaluation questions, evidence will be presented in order to support the contribution claims/statements for SO 2.1. In accordance with the specialised literature, the contribution story comprises a series of contribution claims that assert that:

- An intended change did or did not occur;
- Due or not due to the intended contribution;
- In conjunction with a few selected contextual factors;
- other mechanisms being considered by order of influence;
- and other non-selected mechanisms being acknowledged.

Statement	Source	Supporting information	Type of source	Confirming / refuting the logic model	Type of causal mechanism	Strength of evidence
Joint management and coordination approaches to promote and develop natural and cultural heritage have been developed through joint trainings, awareness-raising and cultural events Joint management and coordination approaches have been developed by raising awareness regarding the protection, promotion and development of natural and cultural heritage as well as by preserving, promoting and developing the intangible cultural heritage	Survey	<p>Based on the beneficiary's answers, a new trend is formed because of the events organised in the natural wildlife of the region like: cycling trips, fishing, kayaking and water sports, open concerts, motorcycle trips, hiking, stand up paddle, jet sky and water sky etc.</p> <p>It was mentioned that people are starting to participate more and more to outdoor events that promote the environment and a healthy lifestyle. For example, in Calarasi a concert is held for 3 years, "3 Smoked Olives" that gather more than 10000 people. Moreover, many organised cycling tours like the Dunav Ultra or running events like the Sand Marathon in Constanta are more captivating. All these events didn't exist 5 years ago and now they are very popular and bring a lot of people together having a very good economic impact.</p>	Secondary / Primary	Confirming	Condition to intended contribution	Rather strong



Statement	Source	Supporting information	Type of source	Confirming / refuting the logic model	Type of causal mechanism	Strength of evidence
Joint management and coordination approaches have been developed by sustaining the creation of joint studies, strategies and management plans	Survey	<p>“The creation of two joint tourism routes; adoption of joint strategies for development and promotions of the routes; development of sets of promotional materials.”</p> <p>“Elaboration of joint strategical action plan. Joint Development Joint Implementation Joint Staffing Development of 2 touristic centres. “</p>	Primary	Confirming	Condition to intended contribution	Rather strong
Common tools and technologies for the management of natural and cultural heritage areas and sites affected by local pressures or by climate change have been developed through reconstructing cultural infrastructure, recovery and promotion of cultural monuments based on relevant cross-border strategies/ concepts, as well as through modernizing/ constructing roads to natural and cultural heritage interest points that will be part of a cross-border	Survey Interviews with JS	<p>Through the projects several tools like studies, strategies, applications and events were implemented. All of these tools improved the tourism and promoted the rroma culture.</p> <p>The effects are positive - new supplies, new visitors, plans, and know-how were gained. This gains new development potential for our tourism site and also, we will be able to offer common tourism product with the Romanian partner</p> <p>The project ensures wider accessibility of common historical and cultural heritage based on technology and innovative tools and services. With the interactive tourist environment built on both sides of the Danube, the Calarasi - Silistra region will be promoted as a tourist destination, which is a priority for both municipalities.</p> <p>An interactive tourist environment on both sides of the Danube River has been built to achieve sustainable results and ensures wider accessibility of common historical and cultural heritage based on technology and innovative tools and services</p>	Primary	Confirming	Intended contribution	Rather weak



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Statement	Source	Supporting information	Type of source	Confirming / refuting the logic model	Type of causal mechanism	Strength of evidence
Common tools and technologies for the management of natural and cultural heritage areas and sites affected by local pressures or by climate change have been developed through supporting the promotion and utilisation of cultural/natural heritage potential	Survey	Based on the beneficiaries answers through the projects common tourism products were developed	Primary	Confirming	Intended contribution	Rather weak

Contribution story and challenges to it

Through the interventions supported under SO 2.1., the cross-border region is better-prepared and integrated in terms of sustainable use of natural heritage and resources and cultural heritage through:

- the development of joint management and coordination approaches
- the development of common tools and technologies for the management of natural and cultural heritage areas and sites

This change has occurred in conjunction with:

- An increased level of local awareness towards cultural and natural heritage preservation and importance thanks also to the cross-border projects funded during the previous and current programming period (Source: interviews and survey).
- Increased development of common tourism products and services thanks also to the cross-border projects funded during the previous and current programming period (Source: survey).

Other mechanisms have also influenced this change among which we mention:

- This particular SO was also influenced by the funds received from other mechanisms such as Regional Operational Programme, Operational Programme for Large Infrastructure, (Romanian Operational Programmes) and Operational programme “Regions in Growth” (Bulgarian Operational Programme). Both countries received funds from Private investments/own contribution.

Strengthening of the contribution story



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- The statement “Common tools and technologies for the management of natural and cultural heritage areas and sites affected by local pressures or by climate change have been developed by common tourism products and services based in the sustainable joint utilisation of the cultural/natural heritage” is supported by the Implementation Evaluation Report of the Interreg V-A Romania-Bulgaria 2014-2020. Based on the report, at the level of 31st December 2018, 31 integrated tourism products/services were created, while at the level of 2019, 34 products/services were created.
- The statement “Common tools and technologies for the management of natural and cultural heritage areas and sites affected by local pressures or by climate change have been developed by investments in joint an sustainable touristic infrastructure and cultural monuments” is strengthened by the Implementation Evaluation Report of the Interreg V-A Romania-Bulgaria 2014-2020 that emphasized the affirmation of a local stakeholder. Based on the local stakeholder ‘affirmation, the heritage has achieved increased investments in joint and sustainable touristic infrastructure and cultural monuments, wider economic impacts such as creation of new business opportunities, improved mobility of factors etc.



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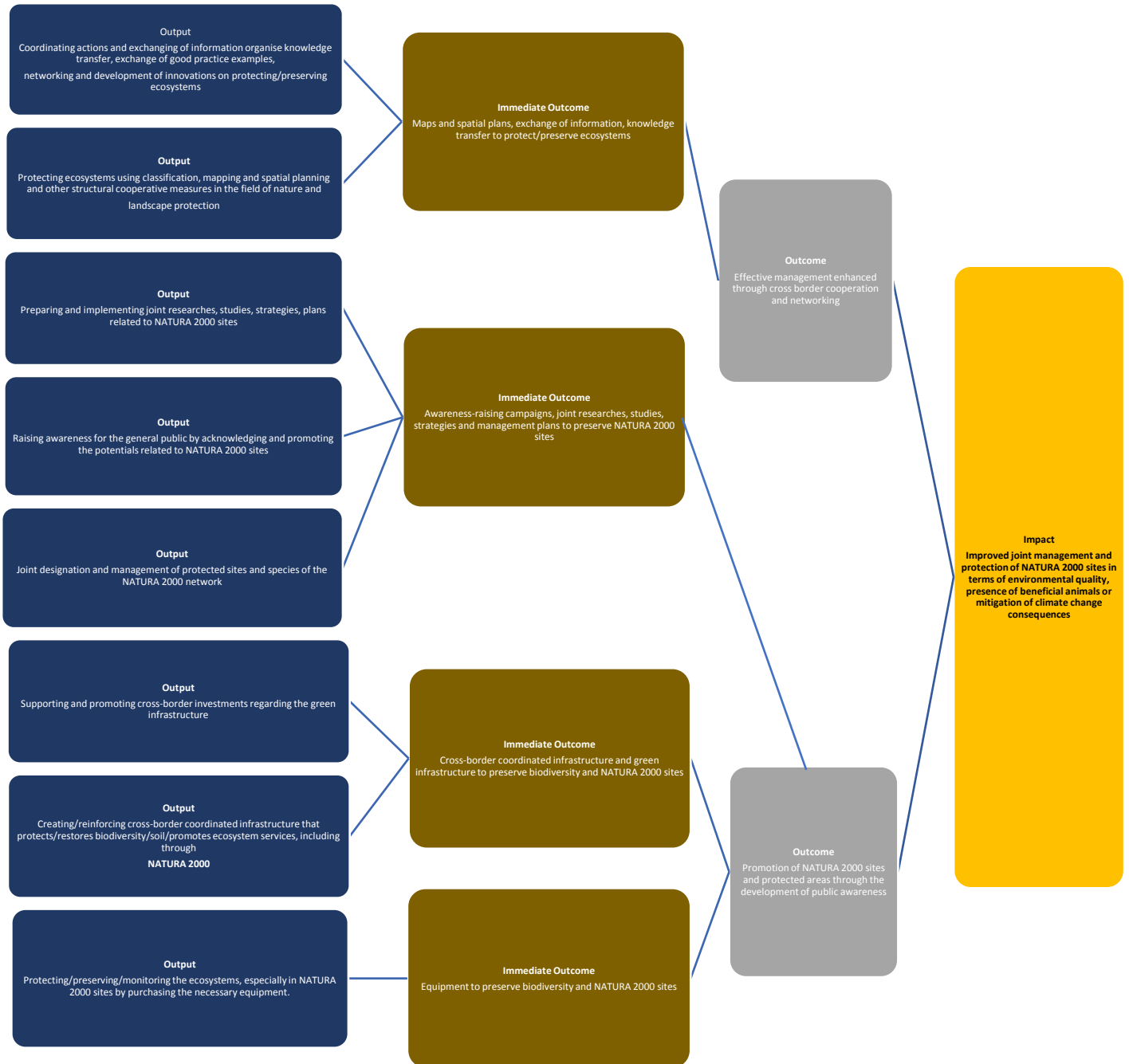


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Annex 2.4. Theory-based impact evaluation – Specific objective 2.2. To enhance the sustainable management of the ecosystems from the cross-border area

Below we illustrate the theory of change for Specific Objective 2.2.

Figure 2. Theory of change – SO 2.2. To enhance the sustainable management of the ecosystems from the cross-border area





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Theory of change – Assumptions in the result chain, inherent risks and external influence

In the case of SO 2.2 the following assumptions have been identified:

- One of the greatest assets of the eligible border region is the interaction and interdependency of the landscapes and the continuity of habitats and ecosystems across and along the Danube River. Moreover, this is also an important location factor for development.
- It is a priority to implement climate adaption and mitigation processes in order to facilitate the transfer of best-practice models and solutions and the pooling of competences in a region where the impacts of climate change are expected to be very important.
- The awareness of the importance for local communities of natural areas along and across the border can also be a factor in the emergence of a common cross-border identity.

Inherent risks:

- Due to the fact that the two completed projects have been targeting the whole eligible CBC area, the positive impact cannot be differentiated at NUTS 3 level.
- For the reported indicators at project level, there are not objectively verifiable external sources of information, which can be used to determine actual impact/effect.

External influence:

- The discrepancy between the information collected by Romanian and Bulgarian statistical authorities. For example, in some cases, there is sufficient and reliable information on one Romanian indicator, but not the same sufficient and reliable information for the Bulgarian side for the same indicator. This is also available in reverse way (reliable and sufficient information from the Bulgarian statistical authorities, but not from Romanian one). As example, the information regarding the 'surfaces of protected habitats' are insufficient for both countries because the national institutes of statistics do not have the data at the level of counties or districts, they have the data only at the level of the entire country.
- The cross-border programme is not the main funding source for enhancing the sustainable management of the ecosystems from the cross-border area in both countries where significant amounts of additional resources are channelled through Regional Operational Programme, Operational Programme for Large Infrastructure Operational programme "Regions in Growth" Both countries received funds from Private investments/own contribution.

Existing evidence on the theory of change

Based on the analysis done within the section covering the answers to the evaluation questions, evidence will be presented in order to support the contribution claims/statements for SO 2.2. In accordance with the specialised literature, the contribution story comprises a series of contribution claims that assert that:

- An intended change did or did not occur;
- Due or not due to the intended contribution;
- In conjunction with a few selected contextual factors;
- other mechanisms being considered by order of influence;
- and other non-selected mechanisms being acknowledged.



Statement	Source	Supporting information	Type of source	Confirming/ refuting the logic model	Type of causal mechanism	Strength of evidence
Effective management enhanced through coordinated actions and exchanging of information, knowledge transfer, exchange of good practice examples, networking and development of innovations on protecting/preserving ecosystems	Interview with Managing Authority Project progress report ROBG-11 Project progress report ROBG-10	The MA considered that the added value of cross-border projects in terms of environment is that the programme created the field of play for the stakeholders to interact with each other. The main objective of the project is to inform the population of the target area about wildlife in protected areas and engage the people in concrete actions for protection of the environment in towns and Natura 2000 protected areas. Promoted and Strengthened the partnership between the border environment communities to sustainably management of ecosystems in zones of European Natura 2000 network by establishing a joint model for better planning, protection and use of ecosystems in the transboundary region of Danube river as well as by the implementation of a common approach for green initiatives to protect the biodiversity.	Secondary	Confirming	Condition to intended contribution	Rather weak
Effective management enhanced through the protection of ecosystems using classification, mapping and spatial planning and other structural cooperative measures in the field of nature and landscape protection, as well as through the	Survey	The beneficiary mentioned that the project contributed to a great extent in improving the management and protection of NATURA 2000 sites in the cross-border area. The beneficiary mentioned that the joint solutions envisaged by the project had contributed to a great extent to the improvement of joint management and protection of NATURA 2000 sites.	Primary	Confirming	Condition to intended contribution	Rather strong



Statement	Source	Supporting information	Type of source	Confirming/ refuting the logic model	Type of causal mechanism	Strength of evidence
implementation of joint researches, studies, strategies, plans related to NATURA 2000 sites						
Effective management enhanced through cross border cooperation and networking, repairing and implementing joint researches, studies, strategies, plans related to NATURA 2000 sites, as well as by raising awareness for the general public by acknowledging and promoting the potentials related to NATURA 2000 sites	Interview with representatives from Vidin District Administration	Public awareness of Natura 2000 sites is increasing. Social responsibility is increasing. The main aspects that have undergone a change were the increased awareness and social responsibility. Increased awareness of protected areas and increased public involvement in environmental protection in cities and Natura 2000 sites. The changes resulting from the implementation of the Romania-Bulgaria Programs contribute to the implementation of public environmental policies	Primary	Confirming	Condition to intended contribution	Rather strong
The promotion of NATURA 2000 sites and protected areas through the support and promotion of cross-border investments regarding the green infrastructure, through the creation/reinforcement of cross-border coordinated infrastructure that protects/restores biodiversity/soil/promotes ecosystem services, including through NATURA 2000	Survey Interview with Joint Secretariat	Some measures must be taken together with Romania and Bulgaria. There are places where if not intervened on both sides the effect would not be as great and with as great impact, since the program addresses common problems RO-BG.	Primary	Confirming	Intended contribution	Rather weak
The promotion of NATURA 2000 sites and protected areas through the protection/preservation/monitoring of the ecosystems,	Survey Interview with Joint Secretariat	See above	Primary	Confirming	Intended contribution	Rather weak



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Statement	Source	Supporting information	Type of source	Confirming/ refuting the logic model	Type of causal mechanism	Strength of evidence
especially in NATURA 2000 sites by purchasing the necessary equipment						

Contribution story and challenges to it

Through the interventions supported under SO 2.2., the cross-border region is better-prepared and integrated in terms of sustainable management of the ecosystems from the cross-border area through:

- effective management enhanced through cross border cooperation and networking.
- the promotion of NATURA 2000 sites and protected areas through the development of public awareness.

This change has occurred in conjunction with:

- joint development, testing (pilot actions) and implementation of innovative tools and mechanisms for the protection of NATURA 2000 sites;
- Increased capacity for joint strategies and management plans thanks also to the cross-border projects funded during the previous and current programming period.

Other mechanisms have also influenced this change among which we mention:

- This particular SO was also influenced by the funds received from other mechanisms such as Regional Operational Programme, Operational Programme for Large Infrastructure (Romanian Operational Programmes) and Operational programme “Regions in Growth” (Bulgarian Operational Programme). Both countries received funds from Private investments/own contribution.

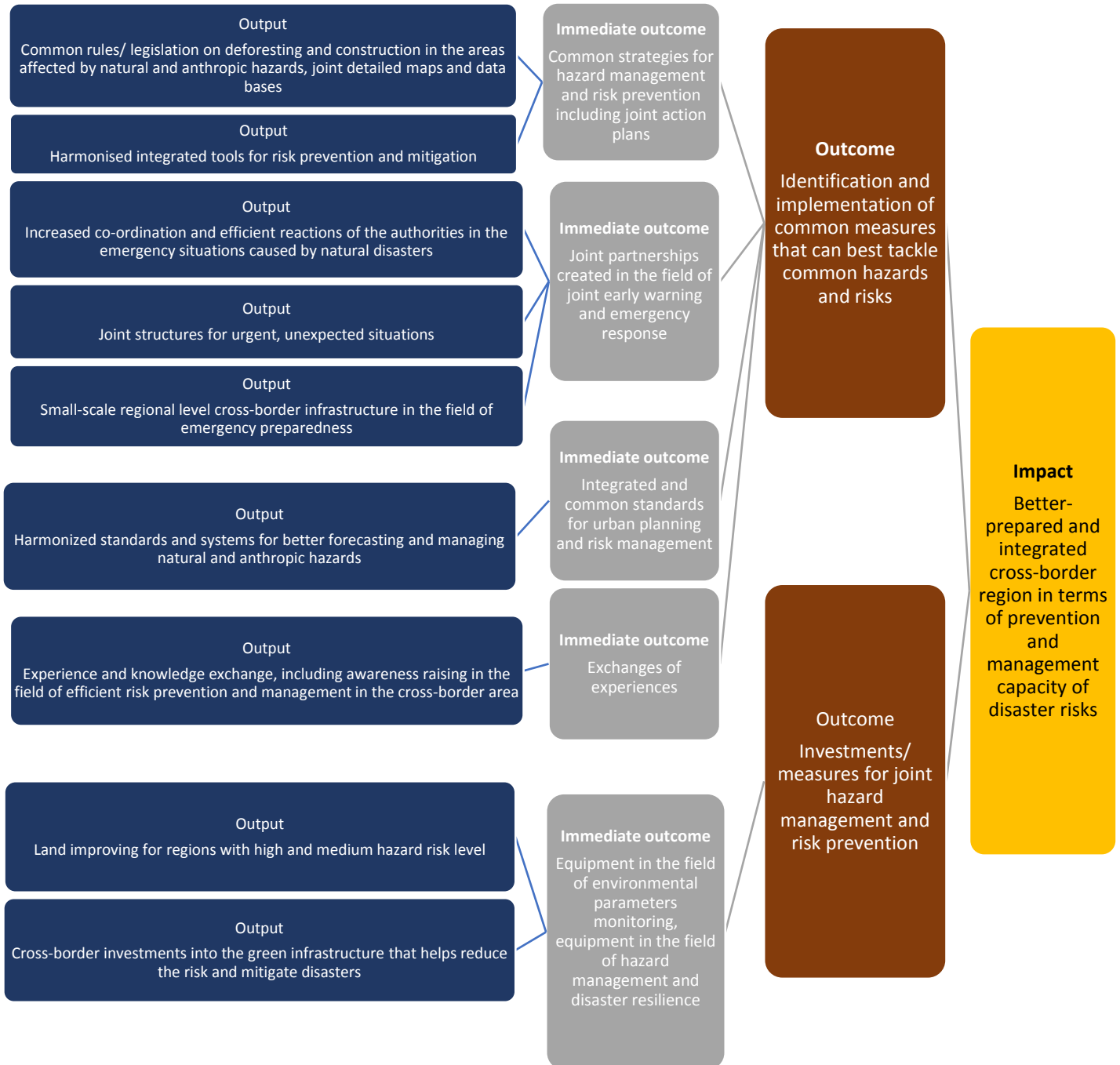
Strengthening of the contribution story

- The statement “The promotion of NATURA 2000 sites and protected areas through the support and promotion of cross-border investments regarding the green infrastructure, through the creation/reinforcement of cross-border coordinated infrastructure that protects/restores biodiversity/soil/promotes ecosystem services, including through NATURA 2000” is supported by the Annual Implementation Report from 2019 that states the fact that 11 NATURA 2000 sites in the cross border area with coordinated management tools were achieved, compared with 8 sites target value.” (11 achieved, compared with 8 sites target value).
- The statement “The promotion of NATURA 2000 sites and protected areas through the protection/preservation/monitoring of the ecosystems, especially in NATURA 2000 sites by purchasing the necessary equipment” is supported by the Annual Implementation Report from 2019 that states the fact that One project, RoBg 11, has reported more than its set target (12.5 ha of surface area of habitats supported to attain a better conservation status instead of 10 ha set in the approved application form).

Annex 2.5. Theory-based impact evaluation – Specific objective 3.1. To improve joint risk management in the cross-border area

Below we illustrate the theory of change for Specific Objective 3.1

Figure 3. Theory of change – SO 3.1. To improve joint risk management in the cross-border area





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Theory of change – Assumptions in the result chain, inherent risks and external influence

In the case of SO 3.1. the following assumptions have been identified:

- The Romanian-Bulgarian cross-border area is extremely susceptible to natural disasters generated by climate change, and the abandoned historically polluted sites and the multiplication of small polluting sources represent anthropic risk factors that are only marginally managed and become almost hazards given the climate change effects in the area.
- There is an overall low mitigation capacity.
- The continuation of the implementation of previous programming period projects (flood prevention measures, development of risk management system and cross border rescue services/system) is a great opportunity for a cost-effective and rapid improvement of some key aspects in the field of hazard management and emergency response.
- Public and private stakeholders as well as the civil society have already, through the results of the previous programming period, a direct view of the benefits of cross border collaboration in this field and promote the implementation of common measures and projects.
- A higher level of disaster risk prevention can come from cooperation and coordination of cross-sectorial responses, technological developments and norms agreed upon by both countries at local and national public level but also from increasing the preference given to green solutions.

Inherent risks:

- A potential inherent risk of the Programme concerns the Programme-specific result indicator R 3.1. Quality of the joint risk management in the CBC area (having as measurement unit the degree of satisfaction among stakeholders with regards to the quality of joint risk management in the CBC area). As there are other funding sources through which risk management capacity could be supported in the region (either national or European), this indicator could also reflect the influence of other external sources (in the case of Mehedinti county which is also part of the Interreg IPA CBC Romania-Serbia Programme this risk could be more prone to materialise). However, a thorough construction of the survey (needed to collect data for this indicator) and a clear selection of the survey population could eliminate this risk.

External influence:

- Based on the observations included in the Territorial Impact Assessment for Cross-border cooperation (2019), the cross-border programme is not the only funding source for enhancing risk management in both countries where significant amounts of additional resources are channelled through the national budgets or under other operational programmes in the direction of risk mitigation (mainly infrastructure activities). As such, the Coordination Table afferent to the Programme document mentions in the case of Romania that funding programmes such as the Operation Programme Large Infrastructure, the Regional Development Operational Programme, the Administrative Capacity Operational Programme and the National Rural Development Programme have specific objectives that are complementary to SO 3.1. In the case of Bulgaria, SO 3.1. has been evaluated as potentially overlapping with the Environment Operational Programme,



and the Regions in Growth Operational Programme and is complementary to the Rural Areas Development Programme.

Existing evidence on the theory of change

Based on the analysis done within the section covering the answers to the evaluation questions, evidence will be presented in order to support the contribution claims/statements for SO 3.1. In accordance with the specialised literature, the contribution story comprises a series of contribution claims that assert that:

- An intended change did or did not occur;
- Due or not due to the intended contribution;
- In conjunction with a few selected contextual factors;
- other mechanisms being considered by order of influence;
- and other non-selected mechanisms being acknowledged.

Statement ⁵	Source	Supporting information	Type of source	Confirming/ refuting the logic model	Type of causal mechanism ⁶	Strength of evidence
Common measures to best tackle common hazards and risks have been identified and implemented by supporting the development of small-scale regional level infrastructure in the field of emergency preparedness	Territorial Impact Assessment for Cross-border cooperation (2019) Survey	"The cross-border programme is not the main funding source for enhancing risk management in both countries where significant amounts of additional resources are channelled through the national budgets or under other operational programmes in the	Secondary/ Primary	Confirming	Condition to intended contribution	Rather weak

⁵ See T.Delahais & J. Toulemonde (2012). "Applying contribution analysis: Lessons from five years of practice", Evaluation Journal, Vol. 18, No. 3, pp. 281-293.

⁶ We have used the types of causal mechanisms applied by T. Delahais, J. Toulemonde (2012): „Applying contribution analysis: Lessons from five years practice”, in Evaluation, Vol. 18, No. 3, pp. 281–293. The authors apply the following types of causal mechanisms:

- ➔ Intended contribution, assumed to be sufficient for generating the intended change;
- ➔ Other contribution (influence of a contextual factor), also assumed to be sufficient for generating the intended change;
- ➔ Condition to intended contribution, i.e. influence of a contextual factor that is necessary for the intended contribution to work;
- ➔ Intended condition to other contribution, i.e. a particular case in which the evaluated intervention is designed to block or unblock the influence of a given contextual factor;
- ➔ Feedback, i.e. reverse contribution.

The authors also argue that a contribution is unnecessary but sufficient for the occurrence of the intended change. A condition is necessary for the working of a mechanism that is itself unnecessary but sufficient for the occurrence of the intended change.



Statement ⁵	Source	Supporting information	Type of source	Confirming/ refuting the logic model	Type of causal mechanism ⁶	Strength of evidence
	<p>Interview with JS</p> <p>Project progress reports</p>	<p>direction of risk managements (mainly infrastructure activities). However (...) the programme provides a targeted approach for specific cases and funds soft measures, such as promotion of volunteering, awareness raising for risk prevention, establishment of efficient reaction and interoperability for emergency response (creation of joint rapid intervention forces), etc.”</p> <p>” The founding is helpful for developing the capacity to react quickly to threats and the integrity of citizens and goods in order to ensure a safe area, a sustainable development and an increase in the standard of living of the population”. The projects funded under this SO have a big and positive impact, and their contribution to increase the feeling of safety is substantial.</p> <p>Certain projects, such as ROBG-244, successfully</p>				



Statement ⁵	Source	Supporting information	Type of source	Confirming/ refuting the logic model	Type of causal mechanism ⁶	Strength of evidence
		established partnerships between regional/ local institutions in order to increase the quality and effectiveness of common risk-related measures.				
Common measures to best tackle common hazards and risks have been identified and implemented by supporting the development of harmonised integrated tools for risk prevention and mitigation	Survey Project progress reports	Through commonly developed tools, joint strategies for risk management can be implemented by relevant actors in both countries. Projects such as ROBG-123 creating operational toolboxes, which include operational procedures and joint intervention plans for the cross-border area	Primary	Confirming	Condition to intended contribution	Rather strong
Common measures to best tackle common hazards and risks have been identified and implemented by supporting increased coordination between authorities	Survey European Territorial Cooperation. Work Package 11. Ex post evaluation of Cohesion Policy programmes 2007-2013, focusing on the European Regional Development	The most frequent cited factors identified as sustaining improvement in cross-border risk management and prevention are cross-border partnerships, improved communication, partnerships consolidated between emergency authorities in the two countries, and generally joint cooperation. " (...) for Objective 3 of Priority Axis 2	Primary/ Secondary	Confirming	Intended contribution	Rather strong



Statement ⁵	Source	Supporting information	Type of source	Confirming/ refuting the logic model	Type of causal mechanism ⁶	Strength of evidence
	<p>Fund and the Cohesion Fund (p. 13)</p> <p>Interview with representatives of the Vratsa District</p> <p>Project progress reports</p>	<p>(focusing on joint preventive actions and emergency response services throughout the border area) there is quantifiable evidence of enhanced co-operation. Specifically, through the fact that five of the six programme indicators relating to this objective focus on joint aspects of risk management relating to environmental hazards and record significant levels of activity in relation to each of these aspects. (...) In a number of instances, project participants in our case-study indicated that there was either very little or no history of co-operation between stakeholders in their regions and that the programme acted as a catalyst to facilitate co-operation through project activity. Therefore, the fact that many of the supported projects exist at all can be taken as a proxy measure for enhanced co-</p>				



Statement ⁵	Source	Supporting information	Type of source	Confirming/ refuting the logic model	Type of causal mechanism ⁶	Strength of evidence
		<p>operation within the context of the programme. One interviewee suggested that without the cross-border cooperation programme” the real cooperation will remain only at the ministries’ level and for some NGOs”.</p> <p>” Stakeholders, as well as civil society, through the results of the previous programming period, are aware of the benefits of cross-border cooperation in this area (i.e. of disaster prevention and shared risk management) and the implementation of measures and joint projects to ensure effective management of common problems. A higher level of disaster risk prevention can be achieved through cooperation and coordination, as well as through joint management of common risks at cross-border level”.</p> <p>Various implemented projects foreseen</p>				



Statement ⁵	Source	Supporting information	Type of source	Confirming/ refuting the logic model	Type of causal mechanism ⁶	Strength of evidence
		the enhancement of cooperation through the establishment of joint partnerships.				
Common measures to best tackle common hazards and risks have been identified and implemented by supporting the development of joint structures for urgent, unexpected situations	Survey European Territorial Cooperation. Work Package 11. Ex post evaluation of Cohesion Policy programmes 2007-2013, focusing on the European Regional Development Fund and the Cohesion Fund (p. 13) Project progress reports	See the row above.	Primary/ Secondary	Confirming	Intended contribution	Rather strong
Common measures to best tackle common hazards and risks have been identified and implemented by supporting the development of harmonized standards and systems for forecasting and managing natural and anthropic hazards	Interview with Vidin District Administration representatives	Among the key factors that have been identified to have facilitated the contribution of the Programme to the progress in preventing and managing risk and in improving the capacity of mitigation and disaster resilience in the cross-border area was a "common understanding of the need for uniform and coordinated action in risk prevention and management processes".	Primary	Confirming	Intended contribution	Rather strong
Common measures to best	European Territorial	"The CBC programme has	Secondary	Refuting	Intended condition to	Rather weak



Statement ⁵	Source	Supporting information	Type of source	Confirming/ refuting the logic model	Type of causal mechanism ⁶	Strength of evidence
tackle common hazards and risks have been identified and implemented by supporting the development of common rules/legislation on deforesting and construction on areas affected by natural and anthropic hazards	Cooperation. Work Package 11. Ex post evaluation of Cohesion Policy programmes 2007-2013, focusing on the European Regional Development Fund and the Cohesion Fund (p. 16)	helped alleviate various barriers to cooperation. (...) Other barriers to cooperation are more persistent. They include cultural and language differences and legislative and administrative differences resulting in problems of 'asymmetric project implementation' in some instances."			other contribution	
Common measures to best tackle common hazards and risks have been identified and implemented by supporting knowledge and experience exchanges	Case study, ROBG-20 "Safe Schools Network/SSN" Interview with representatives of the Vratsa District	The supported project strengthened the capacity for disaster prevention by building a culture of safety and supporting the formation of disaster resilient communities. The project highlighted the need for preventive action, and local authorities have expressed support for a greater culture of prevention to increase people' resilience and reduce risks related to different hazards. Among the most important changes generated by the Programme was the increase in	Primary	Confirming	Intended contribution	Rather strong



Statement ⁵	Source	Supporting information	Type of source	Confirming/ refuting the logic model	Type of causal mechanism ⁶	Strength of evidence
		exchanges of experience and knowledge on prevention and effective risk management in the cross-border area, including training programs, training initiatives.				
Investments/ measures for efficient joint hazard management and risk prevention have been implemented by supporting land improving in regions with high and medium hazard risk level	Territorial Analysis	Highly important weaknesses at the level of the cross-border area include deforestation and inappropriate land use which increase the threat of landslides.	Secondary	Confirming	Intended contribution	Rather strong
Investments/ measures for efficient joint hazard management and risk prevention have been implemented by supporting cross-border investments into the green infrastructure	Survey	50% of the respondents considered that the calls were fully effective (and 39% believe these were fairly effective) designed to select projects aimed at enhancing the capacity to prevent, manage and mitigate disaster and the resilience to disaster in the cross-border area. Moreover, among the most important factors that have contributed to improved risk management and prevention capacities in the cross-border region were: the	Primary	Confirming	Intended contribution	Rather strong



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Statement ⁵	Source	Supporting information	Type of source	Confirming/ refuting the logic model	Type of causal mechanism ⁶	Strength of evidence
		procurement of specialized equipment, the improvement of technical equipment and the better endowment of the emergency inspectorate for the both countries.				

Contribution story and challenges to it

Through the interventions supported under SO 3.1., there is evidence that the cross-border region will better-prepared and integrated in terms of prevention and management capacity of disaster risks through the support provided for:

- the identification and implementation of common measures to tackle common hazards and risks (these measures were based on joint partnerships, common strategies, integrated and common standards and exchanges of experiences) and through
- investments made and measures taken to consolidate joint hazard management and risk prevention (these measures being based on the procurement of necessary equipment).

This change has occurred in conjunction with the following contextual factors:

- An increased level of local awareness towards Disaster Risk Management actions and importance thanks also to the cross-border projects funded during the previous and current programming period (Source: survey).
- Increased operation capacities developed through additional resources, channelled through national budgets or under other operational programmes in the direction of risk mitigation (including SEE programmes – ex.: in the case of Romania: the Operational Programme Large Infrastructure, the Regional Development Operational Programme and I Bulgaria: the Environment Operational Programme, and the Regions in Growth Operational Programme).
- Increased capacity for joint interventions and emergency response thanks also to the cross-border projects funded during the previous and current programming period (Source: survey).

Other mechanisms have also influenced this change among which we mention:

- Increasing awareness about climate change effects and counter measures (Territorial analysis).
- Opportunity of implementing adaptation measures, risk prevention and management in the wake of EC 2020 strategy (Territorial analysis).

Other non-selected mechanisms being acknowledged:



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- Influence of relevant stakeholders and networks. To provide an example, the Disaster Risk Management Knowledge Centre (DRMKC)⁷ represents an initiative of the European Commission to better share and manage knowledge and competence for sounder EU policy making on the topic of disasters. It represents a network approach to the science-policy interface in Disaster Risk Management DRM across the Commission, EU Member States and the DRM community within and beyond the EU. The centre which reunites policymakers, academics and specialists in DRM organises periodical seminars for the purpose of advancing and sharing existing knowledge between policy makers, risk managers and scientists at all levels – local, national, European and global - along all stages of the DRM cycle (prevention, reduction, preparedness, response and recovery). In 2018, Bulgaria has co-organised the DRMKC's annual seminar on DRM, the results of the meeting including work on addressing challenges for policy and science in Disaster Risk Reduction⁸. In 2019, Romania has hosted the annual seminar⁹, among the most important results announced being that of the development of the new European Civil Protection Knowledge Network which will reinforce the EU's capacity for sharing knowledge, best practices and lessons learned by civil protection experts and emergency management personnel. This type of professional networks has the possibility to generate a higher level of awareness on the importance of capacity development in DRM, it can better connect the spheres of policy and research and it can even generate policy and normative change. As such we consider such networks as mechanisms which, albeit not selected to be included in the contribution story, they can have to a certain degree an influence upon the result of the public intervention.

The change attributed to the influence of funding channelled through SO 3.1. is challenged by the following aspects:

- Indicators specific to the SO 3.1. are highly focused on outcomes instead of impact, which can lead to an unclear image with regards to causation. For instance, it can be unclear whether the results in the quality of risk management can be attributed exclusively to the programme interventions and, in the absence of similar regional/national indicators, estimating the exact contribution of the programmes interventions is highly difficult. This is particularly the case of OS 3.1, as it funds interventions in key competence areas of regional/national emergency institutions. Additional and important funding through other sources (be it national funding or operational programmes) has also contributed to the development of Disaster Risk Management capacity and the cushioning of consequences of disastrous events such as landslides, floods and forest fires. Due to the existence of such investments, the contribution of the programme to the progress made by the regions is not easily quantifiable¹⁰

⁷ Please see further details at: <https://drmkc.jrc.ec.europa.eu/overview/About-the-DRMKC>.

⁸ Please see: <https://drmkc.jrc.ec.europa.eu/partnership/Annual-Seminar/Meeting-2018#documents/803/list>.

⁹ Please see: <https://drmkc.jrc.ec.europa.eu/Partnership/Annual-Seminar/Meeting-2019#documents/952/list>.

¹⁰ ESPON (2019). "Territorial Impact Assessment for Cross-Border Cooperation. Target Analysis. Scientific Annex.", p. 137. ISBN: 978-99959-55-96-0



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In the following section we will address both these aspects as well as the contribution statements which have been supported by rather weak evidence in order to test the validity of the contribution story.

Strengthening of the contribution story

Based on the table presented in the section dedicated to the identification of supporting evidence for the theory of change we have identified that the following two contribution claims have rather weak evidence to support the logical connection between outcomes and outputs:

- Common measures to best tackle common hazards and risks have been identified and implemented by supporting the development of small-scale regional level infrastructure in the field of emergency preparedness.
- Common measures to best tackle common hazards and risks have been identified and implemented by supporting the development of common rules/legislation on deforesting and construction on areas affected by natural and anthropic hazards.

In order to sustain them, we present the following evidence based on the consultation of relevant literature:

- ➔ Based on specific examples of cross-border cooperation cases, the specialised literature points to the fact that despite inconsistencies in the overall trend towards cross-border cooperation between local/regional governments for emergency planning (as well as the depth of collaborations taking place), there is important proof of the efficiency of resources' pooling in order to deliver coherent services through cross-border emergency management arrangements (to give an example: Ariem-112 project involving the areas of Galicia, Castilla y Leon and the North of Portugal, which has included not only joint training programmes and drills but also the development of a computer application for handling emergency information as a key component for coordinated emergency response)¹¹.

¹¹ For further details please see C. Murphy, C. Creamer, A. McClelland, M. Boyle (2016): "The value of cross-border emergency management in adapting to climate change" in *Borderlands: The Journal of Spatial Planning in Ireland*, 5. pp. 34-46.



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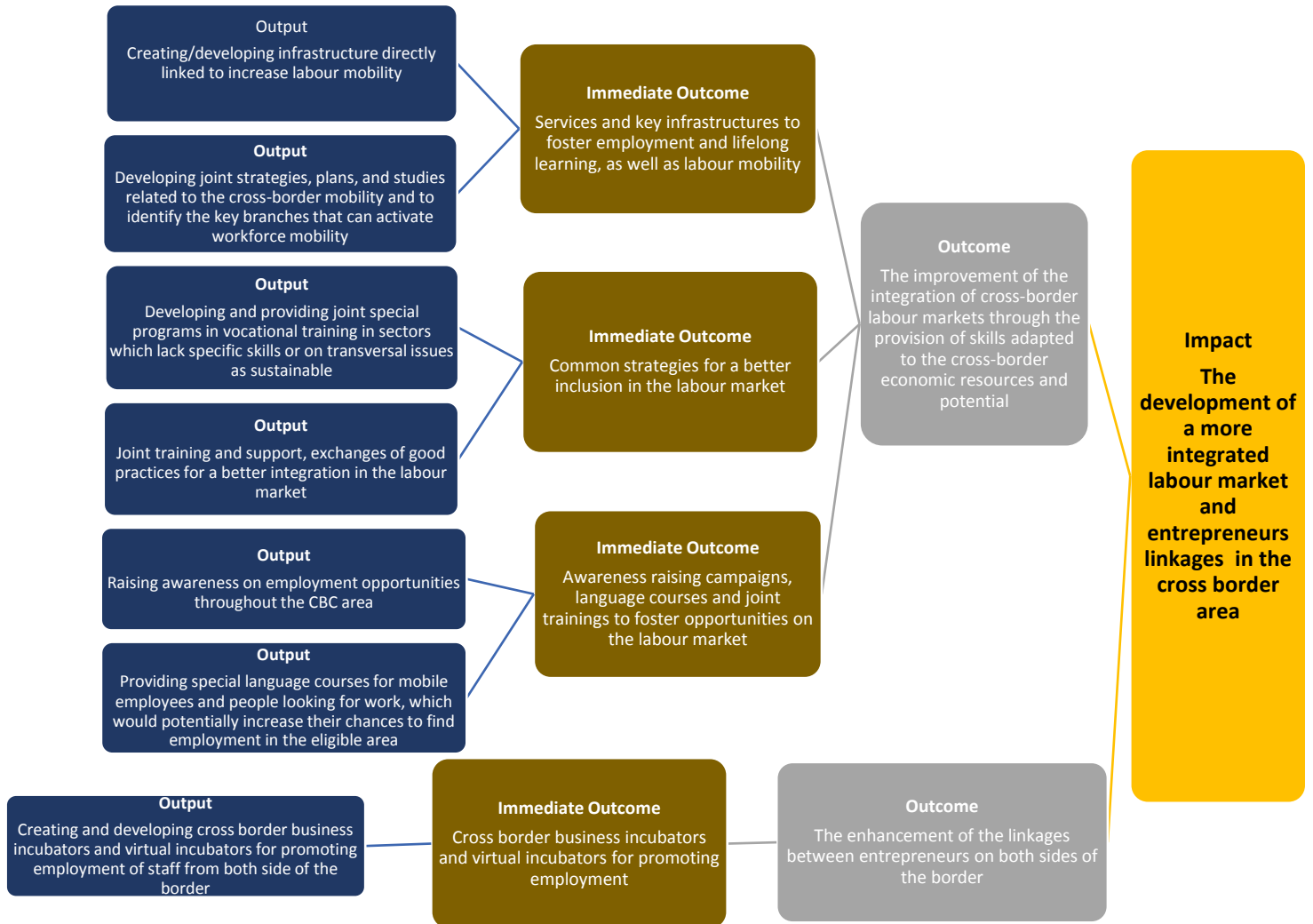


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Annex 2.6. Theory-based impact evaluation – Specific objective 4.1. To encourage the integration of the cross-border area in terms of employment and labour mobility

Below we illustrate the theory of change for Specific Objective 4.1

Figure 4. Theory of change – SO 4.1. To encourage the integration of the cross-border area in terms of employment and labour mobility





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Theory of change – Assumptions in the result chain, inherent risks and external influence

In the case of SO 4.1 the following assumptions have been identified:

- The eligible border region is characterised in terms of employment by high rates of unemployment, low wages and structural brain drain. Furthermore, the cross-border labour market is rather underdeveloped.
- In the context of depopulation, demographic ageing and external migration from the cross-border area, one of the most urgent issues is a current employment situation showing that the supply and the demand of work is unbalanced as a result of a general climate unfavourable to business-related initiatives.
- The growing mobility and inclusiveness of the labour market was fostered by initiatives directed at the same time towards workers and entrepreneurs. This objective created the need for building cross-border networks that share best practices and strategies in order to create valuable encounters and synergies between them.

Inherent risks:

- The difficult accessibility between both countries because of the limited connectivity
- The lack of sufficiently credible statistical information for a quantitative assessment made difficult the assessment of implemented and ongoing projects.

External influence:

- Based on the observations included in the Territorial Impact Assessment for Cross-border cooperation (2019), the cross-border programme is not the main funding source for encouraging the integration of the cross-border area in terms of employment and labour mobility. Significant amounts of additional resources are channelled through the national budgets or under other EU programmes (e.g. mainstream programmes, Erasmus+ Programme) in the direction of employment.

Existing evidence on the theory of change

Based on the analysis done within the section covering the answers to the evaluation questions, evidence will be presented in order to support the contribution claims/statements for SO 4.1. In accordance with the specialised literature, the contribution story comprises a series of contribution claims that assert that:

- An intended change did or did not occur;
- Due or not due to the intended contribution;
- In conjunction with a few selected contextual factors;
- other mechanisms being considered by order of influence;
- and other non-selected mechanisms being acknowledged.



Statement	Source	Supporting information	Type of source	Confirming/ refuting the logic model	Type of causal mechanism	Strength of evidence
The improvement of the integration of cross-border labour markets through the creation/development infrastructure directly linked to increase labour mobility as well as the development of joint strategies, plans, and studies related to the cross-border mobility	Interview with Managing Authority Survey Interview with City Council Călărași Interview with IPA SA	Beneficiaries mentioned that training services, exchange visits and published job advertisements strengthen cross border labour mobility and employment. Under this priority axis there were created not only job fairs, but also one stop shops where people can find out information about hiring process in the border area, job openings, selection criteria etc. From the previous programming period, the impact of one project implemented in the employment field can still be observed in the actual programming period: the common online platform created under this project still function and people from Bulgaria and Romania can use it in order to see the job opportunities in Silistra and Călărași. Setting up centers for information and counselling and on both sides of the border; inside the centers, beneficiaries are able to find information about job openings on each side of the border, work legislation etc	Primary	Confirming	Condition to intended contribution	Rather weak
The improvement of the integration of cross-border labour markets through the development and provision of joint special programs in vocational training in sectors which lack specific skills or on transversal issues, as well as	Survey Interview with representatives from Vidin District Administration	Improved quality of the VET in the CB area via new developed curriculum, courses and training materials tailored to the needs of the employers in the CB area in the tourism sector. Enriched training offer of the VET providers in the CB region, respectively increased possibilities for learning for the interested	Primary	Confirming	Condition to intended contribution	Rather strong



Statement	Source	Supporting information	Type of source	Confirming/ refuting the logic model	Type of causal mechanism	Strength of evidence
joint training and support, exchanges of good practices for a better integration in the labour market		persons and thus improvement of their employment chances. Raised capacity of the VET providers to provide quality training and CB mobility support.				
The improvement of the integration of cross-border labour markets by raising awareness on employment opportunities throughout the CBC area, by providing special language courses for mobile employees and people looking for work, which would potentially increase their chances to find employment in the eligible area	Survey Interview with Joint Secretariat Interview with Chamber of Commerce Constanta Interview IPA SA	Several beneficiaries mentioned that during the projects implementation all participants were informed on the opportunities for job conditions in both countries. There was an experience exchange and job fairs were organized. During the programme implementation several campaigns were organized aimed to inform the citizens about the job opportunities across borders, the eligibility criteria etc. Setting up training courses (including requalification authorized training courses) on both sides of the border;	Primary	Confirming	Intended contribution	Rather strong
The enhancement of the linkages between entrepreneurs on both sides of the border through the creation and development of cross-border business incubators and virtual incubators for promoting employment of staff from both side of the border	Survey Interview with Joint Secretariat Interview with City Council Călărași	Entrepreneurship non-formal activities to support linkage with the cross-border business community Some beneficiaries mentioned that the Programme encouraged the development of small fam village markets and union of small farmers as well as the support towards start-up business in the creative industries Some Romanian entrepreneurs opened several small business in Silistra in the field of services. As a result of the projects, business ideas have been	Primary	Confirming	Intended contribution	Rather strong



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Statement	Source	Supporting information	Type of source	Confirming/ refuting the logic model	Type of causal mechanism	Strength of evidence
		developed and implemented in agriculture, services and tourism.				

Contribution story and challenges to it

Through the interventions supported under SO 4.1., the cross-border region is better-prepared and integrated in terms of employment and labour mobility from the cross-border area through:

- the provision of skills adapted to the cross-border economic resources and potential
- the enhancement of the linkages between entrepreneurs on both sides of the border

This change has occurred in conjunction with:

- Increased capacity for common strategies and joint trainings to foster opportunities on the labour market thanks also to the cross-border projects funded during the previous and current programming period (Source: Territorial analysis).

Other mechanisms have also influenced this change among which we mention:

- This particular SO was also influenced by the funds received from other mechanisms such as Human Capital Operational Programme (Romanian Operational Programme) and Operational programme “Human Resources Development” (Bulgarian Operational Programme). Both countries received funds from Private investments/own contribution.

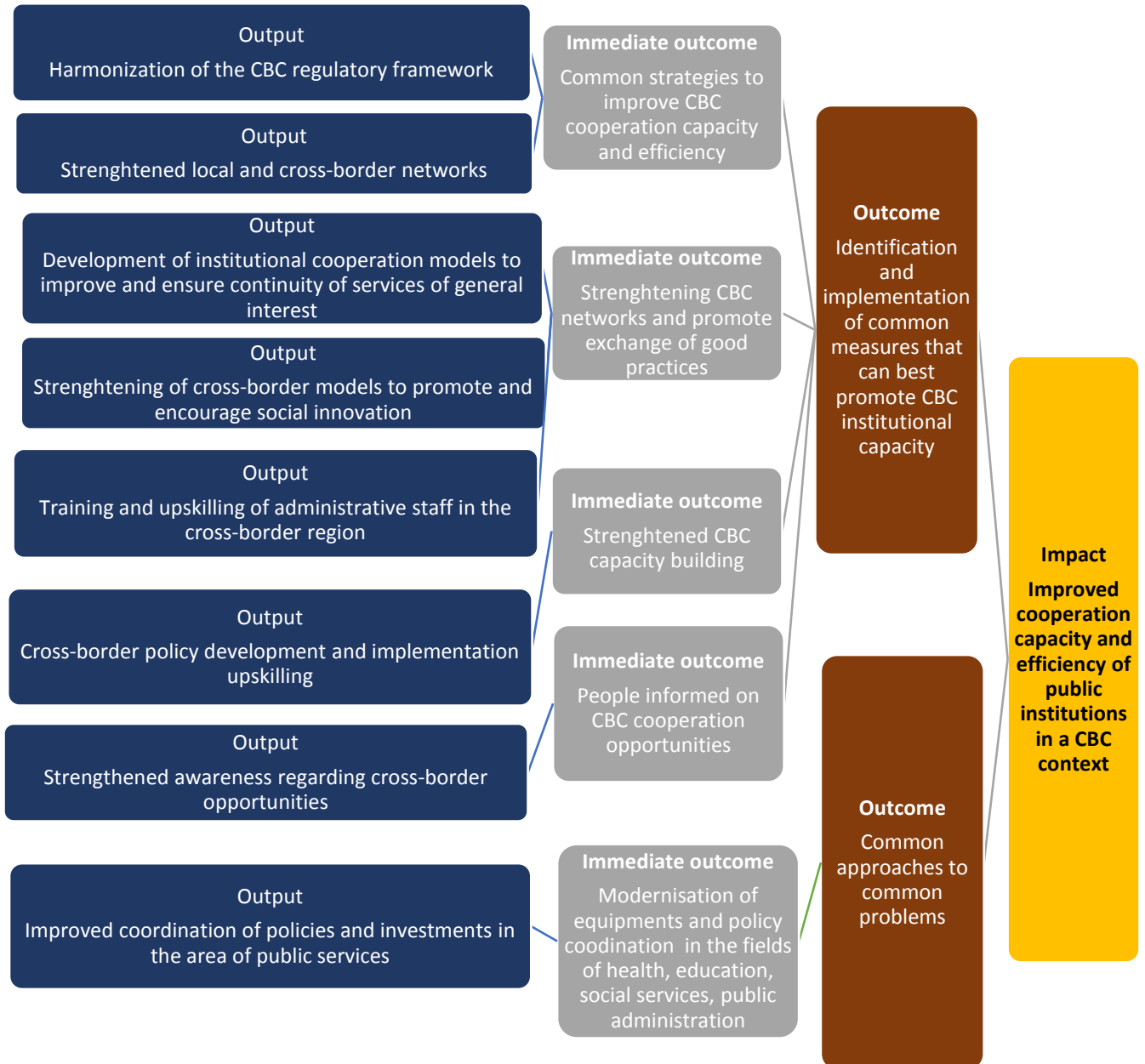
Strengthening of the contribution story

- The statement “The improvement of the integration of cross-border labour markets through services and key infrastructures that foster employment and lifelong learning, as well as labour mobility” is endorsed by the local stakeholders who stated in the Implementation Evaluation Report that in the employment field some improvements were achieved, such as:
 - The development of infrastructure directly linked to increase labour mobility and lifelong learning.
 - The creation of cross-border business incubators and virtual incubators for promoting employment.

Annex 2.7. Theory-based impact evaluation – Specific objective 5.1. To increase cooperation capacity and the efficiency of public institutions in a CBC context

Below we illustrate the theory of change for Specific Objective 5.1.

Figure 5. Theory of change – SO 5.1. To increase cooperation capacity and the efficiency of public institutions in a CBC context





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Theory of change – Assumptions in the result chain, inherent risks and external influence

In the case of SO 5.1. the following assumptions have been identified:

- The Romanian-Bulgarian cross-border has a weak administrative capacity, with a tendency towards over-regulation and centralization of public bodies, although progress has been made in strengthening the administrative capacity in the CBC context;
- The low administrative capacity leads to non-optimal absorption of EU funding opportunities and low levels when it comes to PPPs (Public-Private-Partnerships) and private participation in the decision-making;
- The development of new models of governance which encourages the participation of private stakeholders (local action groups, CLLD), could help to strengthen the public service throughout a collaborative decision-making process;
- Helping public bodies to be more aware of their cross-border dimension leads to enhance their capacity building, being able to develop concrete joint actions that aim to improve concretely citizens' life.

Inherent risks:

- In accordance with the observations from the Border Orientation Paper: Romania Bulgaria, the CBC Programme's geographical focus on NUTS 3 does not enable to thoroughly assess the impact under of the Programme, which can be pursued through a flexible geographical setting, depending on the topic concerned, then opening to the concept of functional areas.

External influence:

- According to the observations from the Territorial Analysis: the language barriers and cross-border communication problems are still a key aspect of the difficulties of cross-border actors to engage in cooperation, influencing the Programme's impacts.

Existing evidence on the theory of change

- An intended change did or did not occur;
- Due or not due to the intended contribution;
- In conjunction with a few selected contextual factors;
- other mechanisms being considered by order of influence;
- and other non-selected mechanisms being acknowledged.



Statement	Source	Supporting information	Type of source	Confirming/ refuting the logic model	Type of causal mechanism ¹²	Strength of evidence
The Programme had a positive impact on increasing cross-border citizens' in EU funds effectiveness	Case Study	The Programme had capacity to generate positive impacts in the eligible area. The implementation of the project, increased citizens' confidence in the health system and raised awareness on the European cohesion funds' effectiveness.	Primary	Confirming	Intended contribution	Rather strong
The Programme had a positive impact in enhancing the level of coordination of public institutions or the general level of cooperation capacity	Survey	A large number of beneficiaries mentioned increases in institutional cooperation in the cross-border area through the establishment and partnerships and common projects.	Primary	Confirming	Intended contribution	Rather strong

¹² We have used the types of causal mechanisms applied by T. Delahais, J. Toulemonde (2012): „Applying contribution analysis: Lessons from five years practice”, in Evaluation, Vol. 18, No. 3, pp. 281–293. The authors apply the following types of causal mechanisms:

- ➔ Intended contribution, assumed to be sufficient for generating the intended change;
- ➔ Other contribution (influence of a contextual factor), also assumed to be sufficient for generating the intended change;
- ➔ Condition to intended contribution, i.e. influence of a contextual factor that is necessary for the intended contribution to work;
- ➔ Intended condition to other contribution, i.e. a particular case in which the evaluated intervention is designed to block or unblock the influence of a given contextual factor;
- ➔ Feedback, i.e. reverse contribution.

The authors also argue that a contribution is unnecessary but sufficient for the occurrence of the intended change. A condition is necessary for the working of a mechanism that is itself unnecessary but sufficient for the occurrence of the intended change.



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Statement	Source	Supporting information	Type of source	Confirming/ refuting the logic model	Type of causal mechanism ¹²	Strength of evidence
The Programme had a positive impact in enhancing the level of coordination of public institutions or the general level of cooperation capacity	Territorial Analysis	Even though the cooperation in the health and social services has seen some improvements and projects being implemented, is still deficient, much is still needed to be achieved	Primary/Secondary	Confirming	Intended contribution	Rather strong
The Programme had a positive impact in enhancing the level of coordination of public institutions or the general level of cooperation capacity	Interview with the representatives of Vidin District	Organized specialized forums for the exchange of experience and expertise in the field of social services is positive effect. The experts and public servants thus get the opportunity to get acquainted with new methods of social work and new types of services, to meet with their colleagues from the neighbouring country, to discuss common problems and find common solutions, to discuss social services in a cross-border context	Primary	Confirming	Intended contribution	Rather strong



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Statement	Source	Supporting information	Type of source	Confirming/ refuting the logic model	Type of causal mechanism ¹²	Strength of evidence
The Programme had a positive impact in enhancing the level of coordination of public institutions or the general level of cooperation capacity	Border Orientation Paper: Romania Bulgaria	“ [...] there are many different types of obstacles to cross-border cooperation which have different effects on border regions. There is also scope for greater sharing of services and resources in cross-border regions. Among the obstacles, legal, administrative and institutional differences are a major source of bottlenecks. [...] When it comes to unused potential, the shared use of health care or educational facilities could contribute greatly to improving the quality of life in border regions. As the Interreg programmes are instrumental to effective cross-border cooperation, they should seek to address these particular obstacles and tap the common potential to facilitate cooperation in this wider context.”	Primary/Secondary	Confirming	Intended contribution	Rather strong
The Programme had positive effects on exchange of good	Case Study	The Exchanges of experience and good practices provided the	Primary/Secondary	Confirming	Intended contribution	Rather strong



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Statement	Source	Supporting information	Type of source	Confirming/ refuting the logic model	Type of causal mechanism ¹²	Strength of evidence
practices between public administrations		preconditions for further strengthening cross-border cooperation between the two beneficiaries				

Contribution story and challenges to it

Through the interventions supported under SO 5.1., the cross-border region has increased cooperation capacity and the efficiency of public institutions through:

- Improved harmonisation of the cross-border regulatory framework;
- Strengthened local and cross-border networks and creating new ones;
- Enhanced capacity building of cross-border public administrations;
- Created and strengthened new cross-border models to encourage social innovation and platforms of discussions and exchanging ideas.

This change has occurred in conjunction with:

- An increased level of local awareness on the cross-border opportunities (employment, health, education, social services) and European cohesion funds' effectiveness;
- Enhancement of level of cooperation through the development of concrete joint actions with the aim to improve the overall well-being of the citizens in the cross-border area;
- Development of new models of governance which encourages the participation of private stakeholders in the cross-border decision-making process.

Strengthening of the contribution story

- The statement "The Programme had positive effects on exchange of good practices between public administrations" is supported by the Implementation Evaluation Report of the Interreg V-A Romania-Bulgaria 2014-2020. From a local stakeholder perspective, the exchanging of good practices leads to an overall better administration in the concerned areas.
- The statement "The Programme had a positive impact in enhancing the level of coordination of public institutions or the general level of cooperation capacity" is supported by the Implementation Evaluation Report of the Interreg V-A Romania-Bulgaria 2014-2020. According to a local stakeholder, the Programme promotes progress in the field of capacity building for civil servants, upgrades the level of cross-border cooperation mechanisms and improves the public administration efficiency.



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Annex 3. Web-survey questions and charts

Section I – General information on the project

Table 1. Details on the beneficiaries that undertaken the survey

Country	N.	%
Romania	29	48%
Bulgaria	31	52%
Total	60	100%

Source: Data collected by the research team

Section II - Sustainability

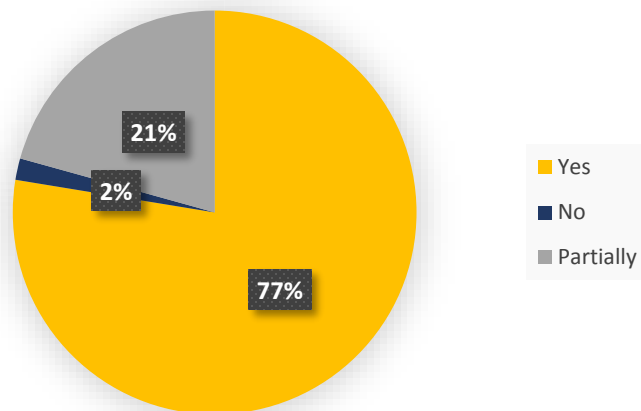
1. As far as your project is concerned, have results and outputs been achieved?

Table 2. Achievement level of results and outputs

	Count	Percent
Yes	45	78%
No	1	2%
Partially	12	21%

Source: Data collected by the research team

Figure 6. Achievement level of results and outputs



Source: Data collected by the research team

Out of 60 respondents that answered the general questions sections, 78% of them outlined that the results and outputs of the projects have been achieved, while another 21% mentioned that the results and outputs were partially achieved. Only 2% affirmed that the results and outputs were not fully achieved.

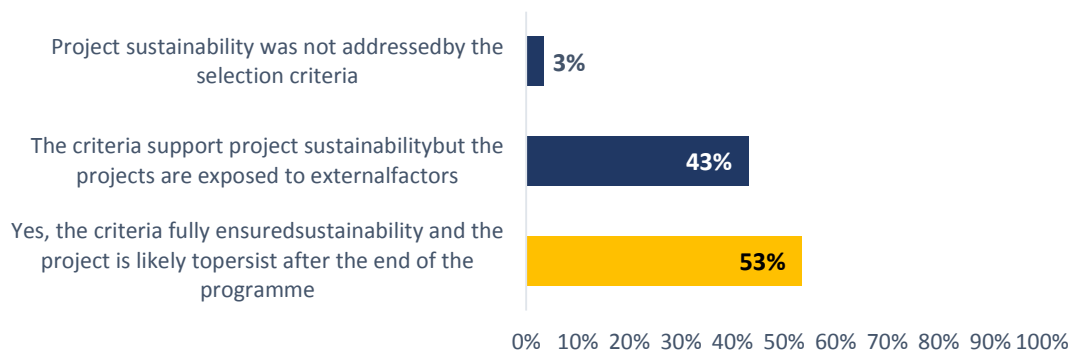
2. Do you consider that the selection criteria in projects application were effective to ensure the sustainability of the project (i.e. to prevent the project to fail once the Programme support is over)?

Table 3. Effectiveness of the selection criteria

Options	Count	Percent
Yes, the criteria fully ensured sustainability and the project is likely to persist after the end of the programme	31	53%
The criteria support project sustainability but the projects are exposed to external factors	25	43%
Project sustainability was not addressed by the selection criteria	2	3%

Source: Data collected by the research team

Figure 7. Effectiveness of the selection criteria



Source: Data collected by the research team

To this question, for 53% of the respondents the perspective was that the selection criteria in projects application fully ensured sustainability and that the projects are likely to persist even after the end of the programme. Only for 3% of the respondents the project sustainability was not addressed by the selection criteria. Furthermore, for 43% of the respondents the criteria supported projects sustainability but the projects were also exposed to external factors that may have been affected the sustainability of the projects.

3. Please elaborate your answer

Table 4.

Please elaborate your answer
Integrated risk management and efficient reactions of authorities for civil safety will continue the efforts made in developing the capacity to react quickly to threats to the health and integrity of citizens and goods, in order to ensure safety in the cross-border area
The achievement of better socio-economic figures and development of the target territory (generally, result indicators of the program) depends on various factors, apart from the project/ Interreg V-A program results and impact. Such factors are governmental/ national policies towards the border region, various actor's collaboration, and global processes.



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Please elaborate your answer
The projects are being written today, they are being implemented after 2 years and their sustainability is after another 3-5 years. In 5 years, a lot of things have changed that we can neither predict nor control.
The answers are related to the project "Safety for our children" code 461, which is now in implementation. That is why the results are achieved partially to that moment. The sustainability of the project will be achieved after the end of the programme through the training programme and materials, which will be accessible for all the teachers and schools in the immunity.
In general terms, the selection criteria in projects application provide the needed tools and preliminary conditions for ensuring overall sustainability of the projects results. Although there may be external factors not imputable to the responsible parties, which may lead to some deviations in the project sustainability plan, in general the applied selection criteria ensure sound sustainable project results.
The Training Centre it's working now, after the project is finished.
There are the external factors like pandemic and etc.
The equipment that is an object of purchase under the project will be used after the end of the programme
Because the selection criteria is chosen correctly
We experienced difficulties in finding and persuading to participate in activities the representatives of the tourism business in Bulgaria
the provisions of financial and human resources were taken into account
The provisions of the financing contract are appropriate to ensure sustainability of the project
Sometimes it is difficult to be ensured finances after the support of the Programme is finished.
The criteria are effective, but keep in mind that tourism projects are at risk- force majeure related to the pandemic and its subsequent results
The 3D model made are still on display and helps us promote our heritage. All the information uploaded on the project's website and web platform are available for those who are interested. The equipment purchased helps us to continue our work.
The projects have not been completed
the recent worldwide pandemic, which was impossible to predict, has seriously impacted the remaining project activities
There is no clear method from the programme and the JS of what the methods are to evaluate the projects in the sustainability period. The JS expects to present a lot of documents from NGOs especially that were not mentioned in the initial applicant guide.
It's not clear to us how a statistic from the National Institute of Statistic can show the impact of each project (for priority axis 2)
The partnerships created during the project continued after the end of the project. We carried out activities during the sustainability period.
The evaluation criteria must be more objective and easier to quantify. All project that promotes tourism are external factors like location, weather and now with the COVID 19 situation
sustainability and heavy revenue generation rules are incompatible in some case
The process of drafting the goals of the programme happened during the period of crisis. The selection criteria and the implementation happened in the time when the lowest levels of unemployment both RO and BG, existed. So, there was not any chance a priori, to have a sustainability. What left from the project is an on-line platform, which was insufficient even during the project?



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Please elaborate your answer

Referring to VISA, EMS-147: Since the completion of the project companies are still publishing job ads on the website and job seekers contacts us about information for the labour market in Bulgaria and Romania. Referring to MEMOFISH, EMS-420: Since the completion of the project we continue publishing articles on the social media pages. Recent monitoring showed that some of the locations part of the integrated tourist products are gaining popularity, seen from publications of followers of the social media pages. After the overcoming the Covid-19 crisis we believe that interest of large groups and families will increase.

The selection criteria in project application were completely effective - they ensure sustainability of the projects - however, projects are exposed to external factors which sometimes could not be predicted by the project partners, so there is a very small chance of such risk.

The achievement of the indicator "Increase in expected number of visits to supported sites of cultural and natural heritage and attraction" can be put at risk as a result of the pandemic situation related to Covid - 19.

They are a lot of external factors which can influenced the sustainability of project: the mobility of target groups, the social and economic situation of projects area, emergency situation (e.g. pandemic)

For our project can appear external factors - competition on the market, new law/rules, etc

The project is under development.

The projects are always exposed to external factors that cannot be predicted. For example: through our project, we have promoted the cultural and natural patrimony of the county aiming the increasing of the tourism in the area. Due to the covid19 pandemic, the HORECA industry has seen a dramatic decline. Only the chance to be a border county (and entry into the country for foreigners) helped us reach the proposed indicators because everyone was quarantined in the hotels in Giurgiu. Otherwise, as we know (the traffic was stopped for everyone eve for Romanian people), we would not have even one tourist in Giurgiu County.

It is not clear how for example will be monitored our results for our project on Priority Axis 2. For example, how the national statistical institute can see the exact impact of our project. In order to justify the indicators too many documents are requested from JS without being mentioned in the application form. Also, the crisis generated by Covid 19 affects us with future events.

It was not very clear how the project will be monitored in the sustainability area. We presented a description in the eMS platform for the "Exit continuation strategy" but the JS experts expect more activities and more documents from us. It's not clear also the tools that the programme will use to monitor all the projects.

Source: Data collected by the research team

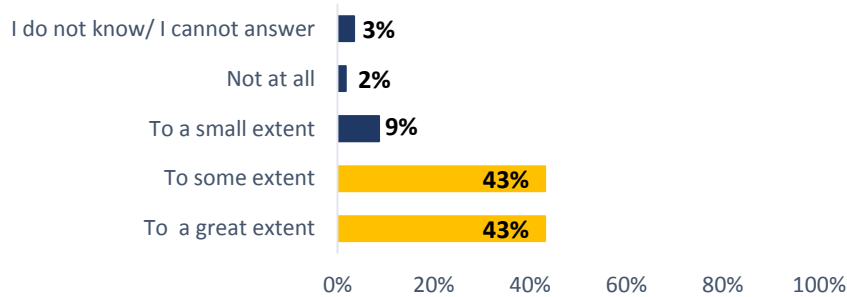
4. In your perception, did the calls and/or the selection criteria take into consideration long-term sustainability related issues?

Table 5. Did the calls and/or the selection criteria take into consideration long-term sustainability related issues?

Options	Count	Percent
To a great extent	25	43%
To some extent	25	43%
To a small extent	5	9%
Not at all	1	2%
I do not know/ I cannot answer	2	3%

Source: Data collected by the research team

Figure 8. Did the calls and/or the selection criteria take into consideration long-term sustainability related issues?



Source: Data collected by the research team

To this question, 43% of the respondents considered that the calls and/or the selection criteria took into consideration to a great extent the long-term sustainability, and other 43% agreed that the calls and/or selection criteria took into consideration to some extent the long-term sustainability. Only 9% of the respondents considered that the calls and/or selection criteria took into consideration to a small extent the long-term sustainability.

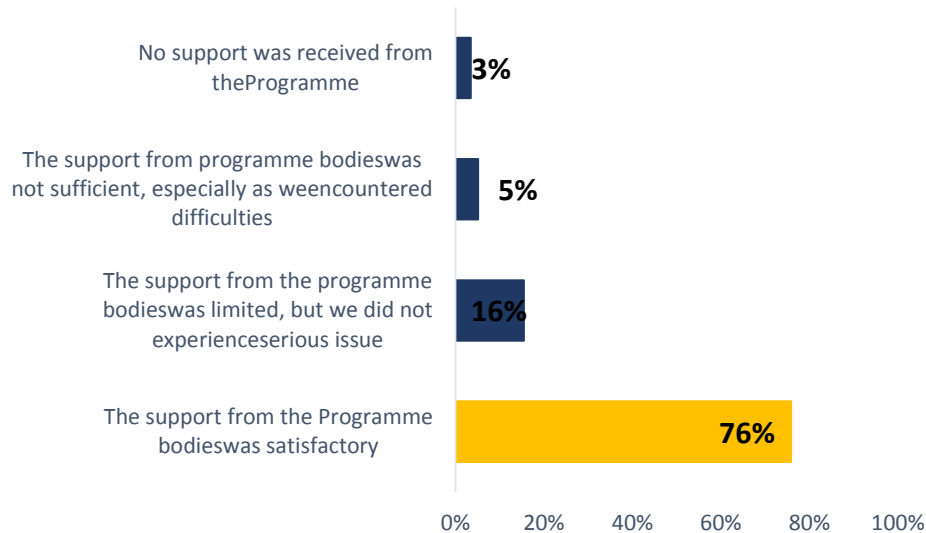
5. How do you assess the support from the Programme Bodies aimed to ensure sustainability (i.e. guidelines, instructions, Q&A, and other activities)?

Table 6. Support from the Programme Bodies

Options	Count	Percent
The support from the Programme bodies was satisfactory	44	76%
The support from the programme bodies was limited, but we did not experience serious issue	9	16%
The support from programme bodies was not sufficient, especially as we encountered difficulties	3	5%
No support was received from the Programme	2	3%

Source: Data collected by the research team

Figure 9. Support from the Programme Bodies



Source: Data collected by the research team

To this question, 76% of the respondents considered that the support received from the Programme bodies was satisfactory and 16% affirmed that the support received was limited, but no serious issues were encountered. Only 5% of the respondents mentioned that the support from the Programme bodies was not sufficient in comparison to the problems that they encountered.

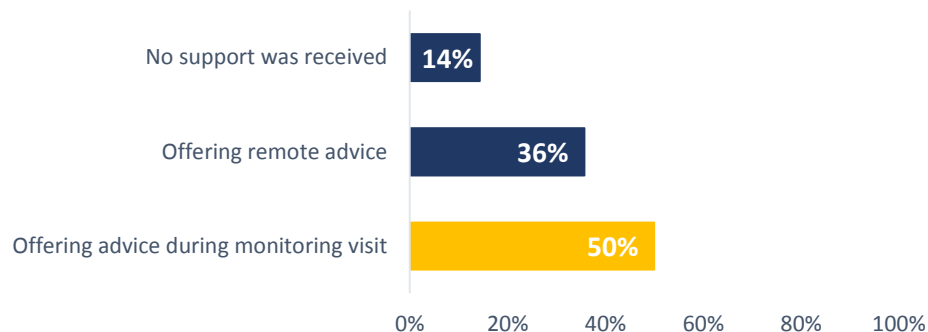
6. How did the Programme bodies support you during project sustainability

Table 7. Programme bodies support during project sustainability

Options	Count	Percent
Offering advice during monitoring visit	28	50%
Offering remote advice	20	36%
No support was received	8	14%

Source: Data collected by the research team

Figure 10. Programme bodies support during project sustainability



Source: Data collected by the research team

Even if for 14% of the respondents the opinion is that the Programme bodies were not offering support, 50% of the respondents affirmed that the Programme bodies were offering advice during the monitoring visits and that they supported the beneficiaries during project sustainability process. Moreover, another 36% of the respondents mentioned that the Programme bodies were offering remote advice.

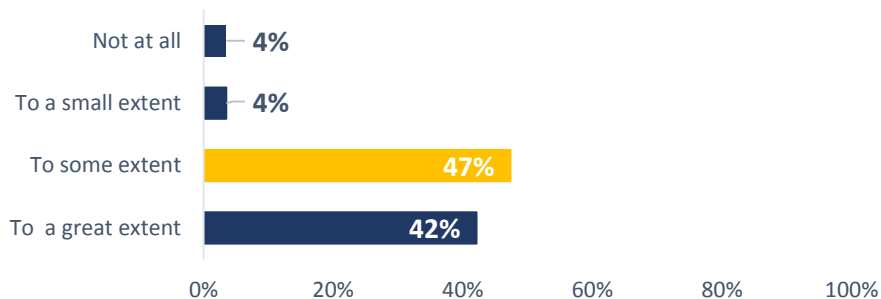
7. Do you consider that the criteria underlying the selection of eligible expenditures support project sustainability?

Table 8. The criteria underlying the selection of eligible expenditures support project sustainability

Options	Count	Percent
To a great extent	24	42%
To some extent	27	47%
To a small extent	2	4%
Not at all	2	4%
I do not know/ I cannot answer	3	5%

Source: Data collected by the research team

Figure 11. The criteria underlying the selection of eligible expenditures support project sustainability



Source: Data collected by the research team

Out of 57 respondents to this question, only 4% mentioned that the criteria underlying the selection of eligible expenditures supported to a small extent the project sustainability. The overall majority opinion is that the criteria underlying the selection of eligible expenditures supported to a great, respectively to some extent the project sustainability (47% respectively 42%).

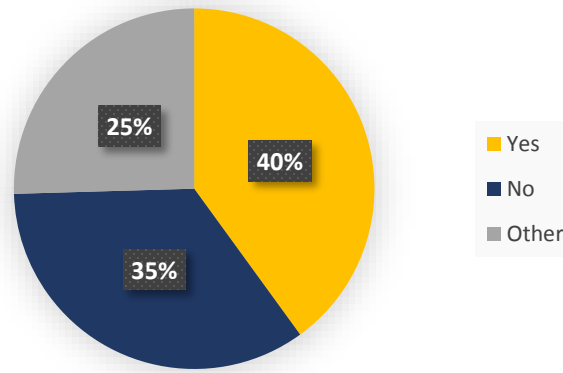
8. Do you consider that financial corrections pose a serious risk to project sustainability? If yes, why?

Table 9. Does financial corrections pose a serious risk to project sustainability?

Options	Count	Percent
Yes	22	40%
No	19	35%
Other	14	25%

Source: Data collected by the research team

Figure 12. Do financial corrections pose a serious risk to project sustainability?



Source: Data collected by the research team

Out of 55 respondents to this question, 40% affirmed that the financial corrections did pose a serious risk to project sustainability, while 35% of respondents affirmed that the financial corrections did not pose a serious risk to project sustainability.

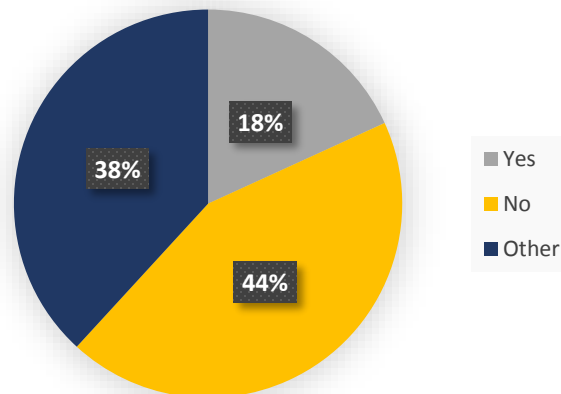
9. Is your project’s sustainability hindered by external factors? If yes, please provide at least one example?

Table 10. Is project’s sustainability hindered by external factors?

Options	Count	Percent
Yes	10	18%
No	24	44%
Other	21	38%

Source: Data collected by the research team

Figure 13. Is project’s sustainability hindered by external factors?



Source: Data collected by the research team

Out of 55 respondents to this question, 44% affirmed that the project’s sustainability was not hindered by external factors, while for 18% of the respondents the external factors hindered the project’s sustainability.

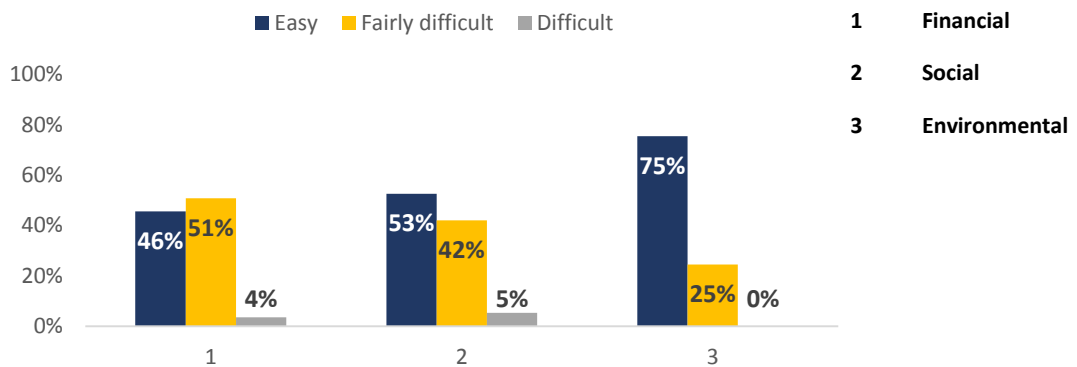
10. In your case, how difficult was it to reach the following elements of sustainability (financial, social, environmental)?

Table 11. Difficulty to reach the elements of sustainability

Options	Financial /count	Financial / percent	Social / count	Social / percent	Environmental/count	Environmental/ percent
Easy	26	46%	30	53%	43	75%
Fairly difficult	29	51%	24	42%	14	25%
Difficult	2	4%	3	5%	0	0%

Source: Data collected by the research team

Figure 14. Difficulty to reach the elements of sustainability



Source: Data collected by the research team

11. If you considered “difficult” meeting that criteria, please provide details explaining why?

Table 12

If you considered “difficult” meeting that criteria, please provide details explaining why?
Being an NGO, is hard to receive funding for implementation of project activities. It will be better the BG government to establish fund (like fund FLAG for the municipalities), which can provide credits for NGO.
N/A
not the case
WE ARE NGO, FINACIAL IS ALLWAYS A PROBLEM
it's not necessary
Sustainability of tourism projects depends on post pandemic situation
Refunds on payment requests are made late
social sustainability depends on the willingness of target groups to further take advantage of project results



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If you considered “difficult” meeting that criteria, please provide details explaining why?
The Programme expects from a Beneficiary to continue to develop at a certain level the project activities even if there is no funding for salaries or other expenditures. For example, if you effectively want to promote a tourism product (priority axis 2) you need to make activities during all 5 years of sustainability but without funding. It can be difficult for NGOs and public authorities. In our opinion, clear methods of monitoring methods should be made public in the Applicant guide in order for the Beneficiaries to know what to expect.
NA
The question is not correct. These elements are not in the agenda of the project, which was to boost employment. Socially was difficult as public do not speak the language (RO-BG) in order to be affected by the platform or any of the activities. How people may search work without communication? I even do not remember any other sustainable moment to judge and comment.
N.A.
No.
Due to reduced budget, the organization had to finance some of the activities with its own resources.

Source: Data collected by the research team

General Section II - Regional Development

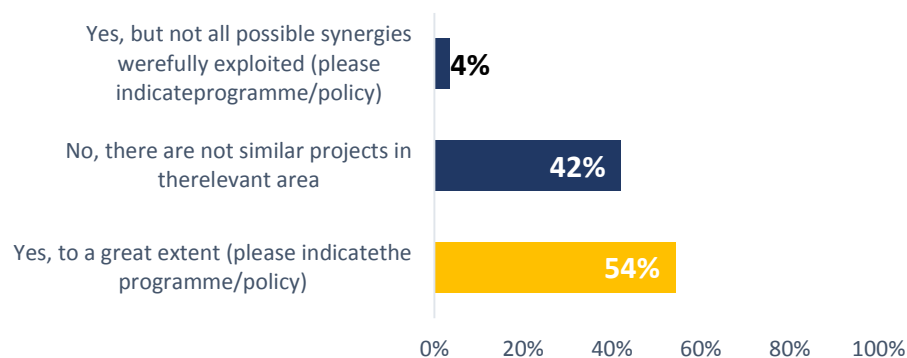
1. Have you experienced synergies and/or complementary coordination between your projects and other projects financed under other programmes/policies?

Table 13. Synergies and/or complementary coordination

Options	Count	Percent
Yes, to a great extent (please indicate the programme/policy)	31	54%
No, there are not similar projects in the relevant area	24	42%
Yes, but not all possible synergies were fully exploited (please indicate programme/policy)	2	4%
No, even thought there would have been some opportunities (please indicate programme/policy)	0	0%

Source: Data collected by the research team

Figure 15. Synergies and/or complementary coordination



Source: Data collected by the research team



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2. Please indicate the programme/policy

Table 14

Please indicate the programme/policy
The question is not clear enough
BG Operational Program "Good Governance", Danube Transnational Program; however, it is necessary, in our experience, the next cross-border program to consider more co-financing with other programs of identified strategic projects (e.g. new bridges on Danube, cross-border and inland waterway transport services, and etc.).
Programme Regional Development and Human Resource Development
Investing in eco-friendly public transportation in the CBC area, encouraging citizens in using bicycles as main transport mean- contribution to reduction of CO2 emissions and Developing, modernizing and extension of new public transport systems – by encouraging the Joint Strategy elaborated during the project.
OP "Regional Development"
SOCIAL PROGRAMME
Through the Project JOYRIDE ROBG-338 we created 3 tourist trails in Agigea and we established the TIN JOYRIDE NETWORK – Tourist Information Centers Network between all the partners who participated in the project from both Romania and Bulgaria, both activities being tied to the Local Tourist Information Center in Agigea, financed through PNDR - AFIR.
Project robg142 within Romania-Bulgaria cross-border cooperation Programme 2007-2013
INTERREG IPA CBC ROMANIA-SERBIA
Regional Operational Program; Administrative Capacity Program
INTERREG Romania-Serbia
Regional Operational Program, Large Infrastructure Operational Programme
Leader+
IPa CBC Romania Serbia Programme
Interreg Europe 2014-2020, Project RAMSAT and Project CD-ETA, from Interreg V-A - Project NATBIOT
COSME- Enterprise Europe Network
Cross-border programmes Romania-Bulgaria/Bulgaria-Serbia
Danube Transnational Programme, Black Sea Basin Programme, Interreg Europe and other Interreg Programmes. We promote green tourism and a healthy lifestyle and project that promotes kayaking, cycling, hiking and other green activities are very popular.
Danube Transnational Programme, Black Sea Basin, Danube Strategy, national programmes that promotes green tourism.
Vasiliada Association implements projects in the social field, with various funding, and has partnerships with institutions and organizations in the social field.
Danube Strategy, Danube Transnational Programme, Black Sea Basin, almost all cross-border programs, national programs that promote green tourism.
A lot of similar projects in the frame of the same program were realized and common points and goals were identified among them that were exploited further (wider dissemination of the results and deliverable was achieved through platforms created under another projects, cooperation in organizing further joint events and initiatives were established, etc.) for increasing the project impact.
Interreg IPA Bulgaria - Serbia
DTP 2014-2020; Interreg V-A 2014-2020; Interreg Balkan-Med 2014-2020.
Operative programme "Administrative capacity"
Regional Operational Program



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Please indicate the programme/policy
BULGARIA-SERBIA IPA CROSS-BORDER PROGRAM
Program INTERREG V-A Romania – Bulgaria
Danube Transnational Programme, Black Sea Basin, Danube Strategy, almost all the cross-border programmes and most of the national ones that promotes private industries.
Danube Transnational Programme, Black Sea Basin, Danube Strategy, Interreg Europe, almost all cross-border cooperation Programmes

Source: Data collected by the research team

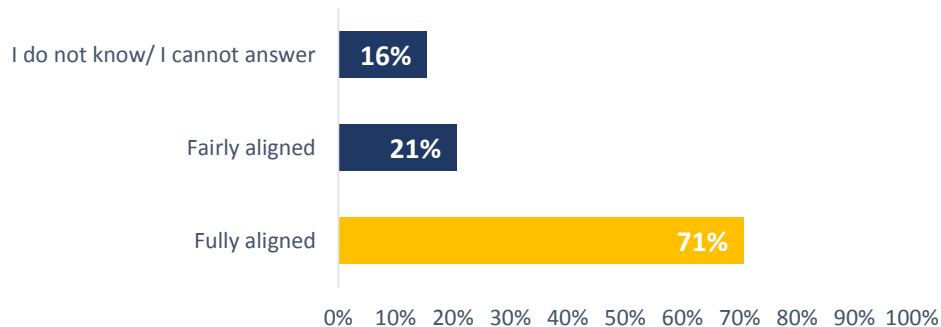
3. How would you evaluate the alignment between the ERDF contribution, in terms of financial availability, and your project goals?

Table 15. The alignment between the ERDF contribution and the goals

Options	Count	Percent
Fully aligned	41	71%
Fairly aligned	12	21%
I do not know/ I cannot answer	5	16%
Barely aligned	0	0%

Source: Data collected by the research team

Figure 16. The alignment between the ERDF contribution and the goals



Source: Data collected by the research team

A very large proportion of the respondents (71%) mentioned that the project goals were fully aligned with the ERDF financial availability, while 21% of the respondents mentioned that the project objectives were only fairly aligned. Even though 16% of the beneficiaries stated they do not know/they cannot answer, the overwhelming majority of the beneficiaries had they project objectives at the very least fairly aligned with the ERDF financial availability.



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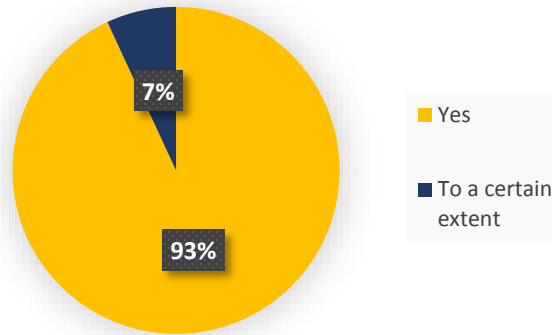
4. Do you think that the ERDF support has been a decisive factor for the successful implementation of your project?

Table 16. Do you think that the ERDF support has been a decisive factor for the successful implementation of your project?

	Count	Percent
Yes	54	93%
To a certain extent	4	7%
No	0	0%

Source: Data collected by the research team

Figure 17. Do you think that the ERDF support has been a decisive factor for the successful implementation of your project?



Source: Data collected by the research team

Regarding this question, the overwhelming majority of the respondents (93%) mentioned that the ERDF support was the deciding factor for the successful implementation of their project, while 7% mentioned that the ERDF support was the deciding factor only to a certain extent. No beneficiary disagreed with this statement.

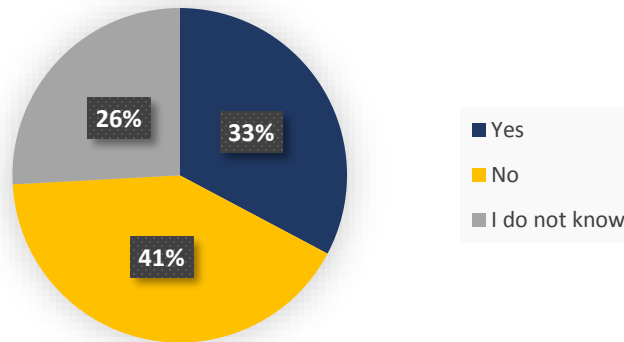
5. Would you have participated in the call if the project had not been funded through the ERDF but only from national funds?

Table 17. Would you have participated in the call if the project had not been funded through the ERDF but only from national funds?

	Count	Percent
Yes	19	33%
No	24	41%
I do not know	15	26%

Source: Data collected by the research team

Figure 18. Would you have participated in the call if the project had not been funded through the ERDF but only from national funds?



Source: Data collected by the research team

Considering the decision to participate in the calls if such funds were available at the national level, only 33% of the respondents mentioned that they would have participated in the call, while a large proportion of the respondents (41%) mentioned that they wouldn't have participated in the calls.

6. What is in your view the added value of the RO-BG Programme for the cross-border area, apart from the availability of the funds

Table 18

What is in your view the added value of the RO-BG Programme for the cross-border area, apart from the availability of the funds?
The programme definitely brings together partners across borders and let them work on common issues.
The focus on cross border problems that can only be successfully managed through a cross border initiative collaboration of various actors, which factors in every cross-border initiative and joined policy.
increased cooperation, new contacts, improved qualification, increased level of information
The greatest added value is the creation of good neighbourly and even friendly relations between nations.
This is the only programme in the cross-border area, which links the people and the community.
The joint initiatives will generate social and economic exchanges, contributing to a wider dissemination of results. Thus the project will also lead to improved economic relations, transport communication channels, growth of supplementary tourist services (accommodation, travel, translation, etc.). This would ensure value added and synergy effects not only for the participating parties and regions, but on a larger scale.
The RO-BG Programme provides unique possibilities for common actions and coordinated development of the cross-border area.
The opportunity for mutual cooperation on issues which appear in the both countries, the opportunity to learn and share good practices.
The cross-border area is greatly improved by addressing various problems through the projects funded and implemented under the Programme. In addition, the Programme promotes establishing long-lasting connections with partners from across the border and broadens the opportunities for future cooperation, exchange of ideas and know-how.
Simplification of documentation and management procedures.
Bringing closer and getting to know our neighbours better.



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What is in your view the added value of the RO-BG Programme for the cross-border area, apart from the availability of the funds?
The added value of the RO-BG Programme for the cross-border area are the opportunity to work together and to solve the common problem. Opportunity to discuss the important topics and exchange the experience.
It allows us to be in touch with the partners from Bulgaria and to improve the endowments of some institutions (such as Emergencies Inspectorates).
The opportunity for interaction and exchange of experience between two or more municipalities from the cross-border region, which have similar opportunities and problems.
I cannot answer
Big help
MULTIPLE POSSIBILITIES TO DEVELOP THE REGION
Exchange of experience between countries
Working in partnership with Bulgarian colleagues and increasing the level of coordination in the CBC area.
Common approach of the same problem from different countries.
good cooperation between authorities from Bulgaria and Romania
Cooperation between organizations, businesses and people who share common ideas, who work jointly for development of the region.
The Programme contributes for the cohesion of the population from the cross-border area, for the social inclusion. Thanks to the projects there were created a lot of partnerships between Bulgarian and Romanian companies in different economic sectors.
The opportunity for closer cross-border cooperation
The harmonious, coordinated, cooperative development of the border region, making it a more competitive and attractive area for everyday life, business and tourism
efficiency and effectiveness of programme management
supporting the development of underdeveloped regions both in Bulgaria and in Romania
The creation of friendships between Romanians and Bulgarians that extend over the project activities.
The relationship that created with our Bulgarian partners that have the same goal. These projects are essential to create a bridge between the two countries.
Exchange of experience with similar institutions from another state.
Very important. Without funding like this it's very difficult to create relationships with our Bulgarian partner's mostly because of the Danube and language. After implementing our project, we can see the impact on the RO-BG relationship and not only from a project point of view.
Bringing the cross-border regions closer in terms of joint initiatives, supporting the social development and inclusion of the populations from the both sides of the border.
Great
where the projects create sustainable, working models for development the added value is bigger
This is the decisive moment now, the programme to find out the right and proper priorities for the regions. They need to be realistic and field oriented, to have a full knowledge on the regions and to draft as priorities practical, priorities.
The added value of the RO-BG Programme for the cross-border area is very wide for our small Municipality. First of all we have great partners with which we collaborate a strong and long term partnership not only in the field of the RO-BG Programme but out of it. We share experience and involve our communities in different events.
Popularization of the other country among the citizens.
The realization of such projects really helps for bettering the life of people in the cross-border area, so the added value is very high.



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What is in your view the added value of the RO-BG Programme for the cross-border area, apart from the availability of the funds?
Great
Establishment of a portal (site) containing all information on the legislation underlying the provision of social services, accreditation and licensing, respectively access to an electronic register at national level with accredited/ licensed /accrediting/licensing social service providers (contact details, services provided eligibility conditions for accessing the social service)
Cross-border partnership and the type of projects are being financed
By creating integrated tourism products/services through the project ROBG - 471 "New destinations in cross-border tourism" the partners will manage to bring communities together and at the same time to make them aware of the common cultural, historical and ethnographic values.
I can't evaluate
Raising the trust between RO/BG organizations
Very good.
solving common issues with joint efforts
Cross-border cooperation, establishing development needs in the area
Very important especially in the Romania-Bulgaria border. The 2 communities are separated by the Danube and also by the language barrier. It's very difficult to create partnerships without special funding.
Very important because it really increases the cooperation between the two countries. Partnerships and friendships are formed and this will help to better integrate the 2 communities.

Source: Data collected by the research team

Regarding the main added value of the RO-BG programme for the cross-border area, apart from the availability of funds, the main answers of the beneficiaries are related towards an increase in cross-border cooperation between Romanian and Bulgarian actors, the collaboration of various actors that wouldn't have been otherwise possible without the RO-BG programme, the simplification of documentation and management procedures. In general, most of the beneficiaries mentioned that, in general, the only available funds for projects regarding cross-border cooperation are not at the national level, further enforcing the need for Interreg programs in general.

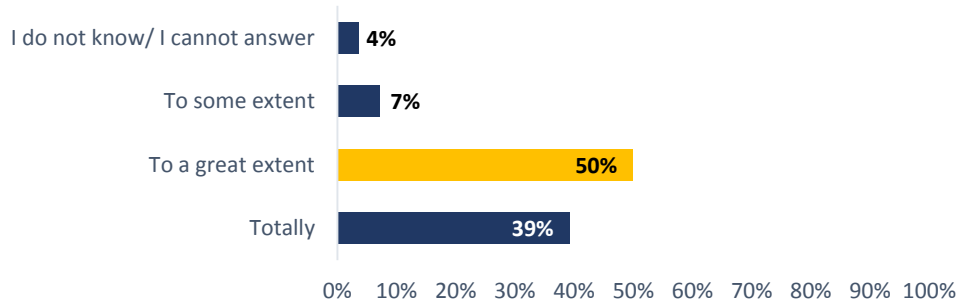
7. To what extent can the main achievements of the project be credited to the EU intervention?

Table 19. To what extent can the main achievements of the project be credited to the EU intervention?

Options	Count	Percent
Totally	22	39%
To a great extent	28	50%
To some extent	4	7%
I do not know/ I cannot answer	2	4%
To a small extent	0	0%
Not at all	0	0%

Source: Data collected by the research team

Figure 19. To what extent can the main achievements of the project be credited to the EU intervention?



Source: Data collected by the research team

Considering the attribution of achievements to EU intervention, most of the beneficiaries (89%) mentioned that such achievements can be attributed to the EU intervention totally or to a great extent. 7% of the respondents mentioned that such achievement can only be partly attributed to EU intervention, while 4% did not know or could not answer.

8. In your opinion, what would be the consequences on RO-BG cross-border area of an interruption of the EU CBC funding in the field covered by your project?

In your opinion, what would be the consequences on RO-BG cross-border area of an interruption of the EU CBC funding in the field covered by your project?
Disastrous consequences as no cooperation among different stakeholders could happen
The founding is extremely important for the creation of the partnerships and the safe area in the cross-border zone
This would be clearly an impediment to the target territory development.
The cross-border cooperation should be continued in one way or another.
Life will not end, but many EU-funded activities will not be carried out.
Absolutely negative.
With implementation of the project will increase the energy efficiency, introduce alternative energy sources and implement environment friendly technologies, will lead to reduction of CO2 emissions due to implementing an alternative, non-polluting mean of transport, and by encouraging individuals to be more responsible. The Joint Strategy will pave the way to the development of more eco-friendly solutions for mobility in the entire cross border area. The current project is in line with the European strategy for sustainable development and its implementation fully complies with the provision of the policy framework, i.e. to meet the needs of the present without compromising the ability of future generations to answer their own necessities. All project objectives expected results and envisaged activities comply with the Strategy measures for responding to the key challenges. In particular, the concept of sustainable development is addressed in the project by the inclusive and sustainable growth dimension.
It will have a negative long-term impact at local and regional level, causing social, economic and environmental issues.
The consequences will be negative
The consequences would be negative, because there are still issues that need to be resolved in the cross-border area, and the Programme greatly expands the ability of local communities to do so.
There will be no projects



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In your opinion, what would be the consequences on RO-BG cross-border area of an interruption of the EU CBC funding in the field covered by your project?

There are no more changes in experience and good practices.

Limiting the established good partnerships and joint projects. Slowdown in the region's economy.

The priority is important for the cross-border region, in this sense, funding should not be stopped.

Taking into consideration that our project refers to the sector of emergency situations, that are currently very solicited, we think that an interruption of the EU CBC funding will have a negative impact on this sector.

It will slow down the economic development of the region.

The project will not be implemented, and the necessary equipment will not be delivered that will impact on the effectiveness of the health care in the cross border region

Definitely negative

there will be more less investments

It would reduce the exchange of staff and experience between the two countries

slowing economic development

The border area will not be visible and the development of the cross-border area will be delayed

The results of the project will not be achieved in this respect all the benefits for CBC area will not be accomplished.

not positive

A lot part of the funding needed in that field will be considerably diminished.

I cannot answer.

slower development of cross-border activities

In such case, there will be significantly less promotion of the cultural heritage of the region, less investments in the area in order to attract more tourists.

Disastrous

no results at all in the targeted domain

most likely to have negative implications on tourism sector

In our opinion very bad. Because of the Danube and the language barrier before the CBC funding there was almost no cooperation between the 2 countries. In our opinion at least the soft part of the projects must be kept because it will help a lot the 2 communities to communicate and cooperate.

The relations between Romanian and Bulgarians will be almost eliminated in some areas.

There would be less exchange of good practices between the 2 countries.

An abrupt end to some of the RO-BG relationships.

Increased opportunities for labour and training mobility across borders.

Very bad

the field covered by our project is already covered by it, but the possibilities for further cooperation exist and they are all around us

Now the high level of unemployment is back but the emphasis has to be on regional in-country development and solving of the problem. I do understand that the program aims to have cross-border. Good example that I have seen is encouraging tourism and translation of the site materials in the two languages, joint shops and markets...

If there is an interruption of the EU CBC funding in the field covered by our project it won't be possible the actions to be carried out in this form, as well as the added value wouldn't be approached.



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In your opinion, what would be the consequences on RO-BG cross-border area of an interruption of the EU CBC funding in the field covered by your project?

The project MEMOFISH: On one hand the project has collected valuable information resources and documentation, including visual materials that could be used in the future by the citizens. On the other hand, interpretation and development of data could be performed via additional project. The project VISA: On one hand the project has created foundation and capacity of an independent structure - the cross-border labour mobility agency. On the other hand, substantial upgrade of the existing structure could be made via EU support.

Probably, not such many projects could be realized and thus the effect will not be so powerful.

Very bad

In this situation the objectives of the project would not have been achieved.

Negative

For the municipality of Varshets, financing under cross-border programs is the only opportunity to implement project ideas in the field of tourism.

The consequences on RO-BG cross-border area would be catastrophic, because the governmental funds for tourism in this area are not very generous

Will get to less opportunities for the area

Negative impact on a possibility of increasing the health of the population.

The possibility for implementing joint RO-BG projects would be very limited.

Probably 98% of the projects that could be done, would not even be initiated.

The ending of most of the partnership between public and private partners.

A big drop in the Romanian - Bulgarian relationships.

Considering the main consequences towards the RO-BG cross-border area of an interruption of the EU CBC funding in the field covered by their project, the main answers of the respondents are aimed towards a severe reduction in the possibility of implementation of cross-border projects, a big drop in the Romanian-Bulgarian relationship as well as a significant drop in the investments regarding cross-border cooperation. The beneficiaries consider that cross-border partnerships would have been severely limited, while some beneficiaries mentioned that, in absence of EU intervention, there would be no projects on the cross-border cooperation of RO-BG actors.

9. What would have changed for your project if the Programme was funded only from the national budgets of the two involved countries and not through EU funds?

What would have changed for your project if the Programme was funded only from the national budgets of the two involved countries and not through EU funds?

The EU funds bring added value, enlarge the scope and the goals of the projects

If the project was founded from national budget only the value of the financing would probably be a lot less and the procurement of special vehicles needed for the creation of a safe area would be impossible

The national funds are limited; cross-border interventions have, so far, not been priorities in national policies.

I don't know

Usually, the activities carried out under projects are those that the two countries would not finance independently.

Delay in the reimbursements and difficulties in achievement of the cross-border effect.

That would make implementation more difficult from a financial point of view

In my opinion, the Programme wouldn't have had such an impact on cross-border level and would have limited the results to local and national level.



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What would have changed for your project if the Programme was funded only from the national budgets of the two involved countries and not through EU funds?

There is no National financing for common action in the tourism area.
I am not sure.
Nothing
Smaller number of beneficiaries and activities.
I do not know.
In this case, the project budget would be much smaller. it would not be possible to carry out all the activities.
Definitely the amounts for each project would have been smaller and we couldn't accomplish so many with a smaller budget.
nothing
I guess the project budget would be much smaller
Many things
more bureaucracy, lack of funds, difficulties in financial implementation
There would be no change in goals and activities
fewer achievements and delays in financing activities/development
For an NGO the funds assured by only by the national budget are not enough. Also, the EU funds participation assure that the project implementation will be focused to the communities and region's needs.
The benefits would have been accomplished only on one border.
cannot give opinion
Probably not so many results could have been obtained as they were with the EU funds.
This way the funding and the implementation of the project activities would be much difficult.
We do not have a chance to apply in such a situation
We would not be able to purchase the equipment necessary to successfully develop the project (i.e. 3D printer, 3D scanners and others)
I do not know
no cross-border objective would have been reached
Nothing, but citizen who learn about the project trust more the EU institutions than the national ones.
The EU contribution is essential and not only for the money but for their procedure of spending the public funds. I think both Romania and Bulgaria besides using the EU funds they also learn how to effectively develop a project and how to spend the money with clear results after that. Without the EU contribution I don't think the 2 countries will be able to implement a programme like this.
Probably we wouldn't have made any projects if they were only to national financing. In the present there are similar programmes financed by local authorities and in our opinion they are total failures.
I wouldn't have applied to it. But for sure I would have tried to develop the same type of projects on similar national programs.
I cannot answer
No possibility to work
It doesn't matter which programme funds the projects, but how much and how hard
I really don't know. The project design had been made by the leading organization and our role in the process was min. At the national level in BG there are plenty of call under the structural funds. Their calls are much more flexible and much closer to the problems of the communities and citizens, may be that is the reason for their high impact



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What would have changed for your project if the Programme was funded only from the national budgets of the two involved countries and not through EU funds?
We couldn't afford such a budget if the Programme was funded only from the national budgets of the two involved countries and not through EU funds.
The scale of the projects would have been different depending on the level of funding.
Not sure, but if there was not support from the EU funds, it is very realistic not to be endorsed the project itself.
No possibility to work
It would probably have been smaller funds in a situation where so many funds in a situation where so many goals could not have been achieved
No cross-border cooperation, paperwork, less funds
It would not be realized.
The budget will be lower, or it won't be at all
Probably the level of quality of activities due to diminished fund available
I would have involved more regions/areas.
If all the funds needed for the project have been provided, perhaps nothing would have changed.
In such a situation, the implementation of the projects would probably have been easier. But the national co-financing would have been 98% of the project budget, as in the case of the support received from both Romania and the EU. If it were only the co-financing supported by the Romanian state (13%), then the projects would not have been possible.
We wouldn't have applied to national budgets.
We wouldn't have applied.

Source: Data collected by the research team

Considering the availability of national funds, most beneficiaries agree on the fact that, in absence of EU funds, there would be no projects in the cross-border cooperation between RO-BG. Furthermore, in cases where national budgets are made available, actors mentioned that such funds would not be sufficient to implement the projects or the scope of the projects would have been severely diminished. Some beneficiaries mentioned that, if such funds were made available at the national level, the level of the budgeting wouldn't have been sufficient and therefore they would not have applied.

Section III - Specific Objective 1.1

Country	No. of projects under OS 1.1
Romania	2
Bulgaria	8
Total	10

Source: Data collected by the research team

Figure 20



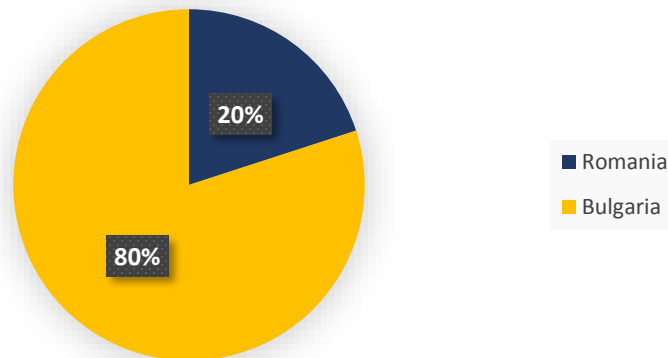
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Source: Data collected by the research team

The analysis of the survey's answers outlined that out of 60 respondents, 11 applied for finance under the Specific Objective (SO) 1.1. Only one respondent affirmed that the project was financed under the SO 1.1. Hence, from a total of 10 respondents that have project financed under SO 1.1, 2 of them are Romanian beneficiaries and 8 are from Bulgaria. Even if the number of respondents from each country is uneven and a cross-country analysis cannot be made for this SO, the total number of respondents is sufficient to analysis the overall impact of the SO 1.1. The number of respondents to this SO is representative, since the total number of beneficiaries that have projects financed under this SO is 21 (See the list of contracted projects, 02.04.2020).

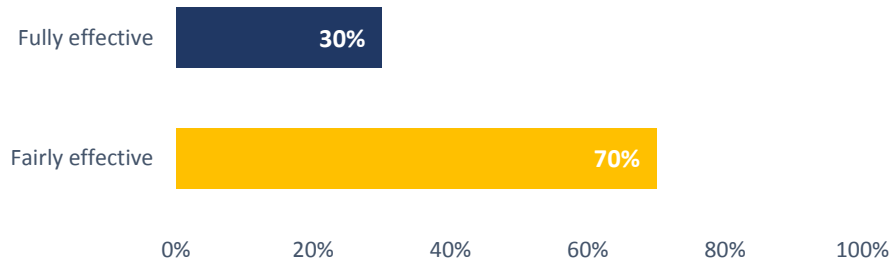
1. Do you consider that the calls were effectively designed to select projects aimed at improving the secondary and tertiary nodes connection to TEN-T infrastructure?

Table 20. The design of the calls

Range	Count	Percent
Fairly effective	7	70%
Fully effective	3	30%
Barely effective	0	0%
Fully ineffective	0	0%
I do not know/ I cannot answer	0	0%
Total	10	100%

Source: Data collected by the research team

Figure 21. The design of the calls



Source: Data collected by the research team

The effectiveness designs of the calls aimed to improve the secondary and tertiary nodes connections to TEN-T infrastructure were considered by 70% of the respondents to be fairly effective, while another 30% of the respondents mentioned that design of the calls was fully effective. These results are extremely positive, since no respondent considered that the calls' design was ineffective or barely effective.

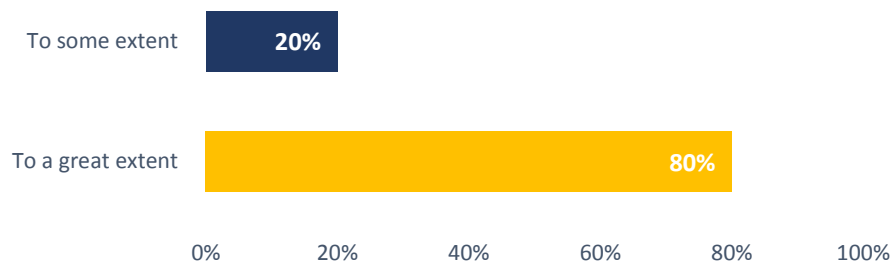
2. To what extent has your project contributed to the improvement of the connection of secondary and tertiary nodes? 4.82"

Table 21. Contribution of projects to the improvement of the connection of secondary and tertiary nodes

Range	Count.	Percent
To a great extent	8	80%
To some extent	2	20%
To a small extent	0	0%
Not at all	0	0%
I do not know/ I cannot answer	0	0%
Total	10	100%

Source: Data collected by the research team

Figure 22. Contribution of projects to the improvement of the connection of secondary and tertiary nodes



Source: Data collected by the research team

The contribution of projects to the improvement of the connection of secondary and tertiary nodes was appreciated by all the respondents to be high and significant. 80% of them affirmed that the project



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contributed to a great extent to the improvement of nodes, and 20% mentioned that their projects contribute to some extent to the improvement of nodes.

3. Please elaborate on your project’s contribution to the improvement of the connection of secondary and tertiary nodes?

Table 22

Please elaborate
Our project set up a mechanism for support of intermodal nodes in the CBC area - a cross-border committee that has a study of the transport system and a strategy to implement. The support for intermodal/ multimodal terminals on ensures links of secondary/ tertiary nodes with Danube (TEN-T corridor). Without broad collaboration of varies actors (public authorities at different levels, business, NGOs, universities and etc) cannot be implemented projects in the area of cross-border infrastructure and services.
Our project raises awareness of transport opportunities and provides an alternative way to move between nodes.
Project SEVEN-T focus to one of the Thematic objective which is 7: Promoting sustainable transport and removing bottlenecks in key network infrastructures and Investment Priorities 7b: Enhancing regional mobility by connecting secondary and tertiary nodes to TEN-T infrastructure and Investment Priorities 7c: Developing and improving environmentally-friendly (including low-noise) and low-carbon transport systems. Those are some of the tasks to solve which are also major constraints in the cross-border area Municipality of Silistra - Municipality of Navodari. The implementation of the project will create new, flexible system by connecting tertiary nodes to TNT-T infrastructure. The cross-border region Silistra - Navodari needs to renovate existing crossing infrastructure. The improvement of cross border transport, with a special emphasis on public transport at regional level, can be one of the solutions to the overall low cross-border accessibility. For solution of the problems Municipality Silistra needs to renovate the existing infrastructure in the town for better connection to TNT - T transport infrastructure. The project plans to implement measures for the development and rehabilitation of infrastructure in the town in order to increase mobility in the area with investments for modernization of road infrastructure. The project fits into the general goal of Interreg V-A Romania-Bulgaria Program by answering the need to bring together the people, communities and economies of the border region to participate in the joint development of cooperative area, using its human, natural and environmental resources and advantages in a sustainable way. The project includes reconstruction and rehabilitation of road with length - 475m. That includes repair of asphalt covering, replacement of curb stones and pavements. Also will be constructed 2 one-way bike lanes “ 950m. The street is very important for the infrastructure transport in the town and goes to national level road. Also, the street is entrance and exit of the town to the Border Check Point - Silistra. The Border Check Point is located near the Danube river which is most important part of the TEN-T transport network. During the project, 7.394 km of bike lane will be constructed. The bike lane will close the circle of bikes lines in the town. The design solution comprises 7.394km of biking network of Silistra. The length of the two lanes is 4782 m. and the length of one-way lanes is 5134m. The total length of the cycling network is 7349m.
Traffic flow.
Better connectivity of the region.
The project proposes as the main objective to improve access for the inhabitants of the 2 partners and for all those who are transiting the cities to TEN-T network and to create the premises of further economic development

<p>of the region, by proper connection of the modal points. The project aims to ensure access to tourist areas, customs point, objectives of interest and public institution of both cities and to create rapid connections between regional transport infrastructure on the one hand and national and European transport, on the other hand, creating thus a functional network that is indispensable condition for the development of regional economic potential, especially tourism on Black Sea and to better serve the inhabitants, tourists and people in transit.</p>
<p>The two tertiary nodes from Giurgiu county were connected to the TEN T network</p>
<p>The creation of e-bike network has increased individual mobility of citizens in and around the nodes of TEN-T infrastructure.</p>
<p>The project's contribution to the improvement of the connection of secondary and tertiary nodes is very important for us because the implementation of the project will improve the accessibility and mobility that are affected by the poor conditions of the street network /built before the nineties/ and which leads to longer journeys, which increases the cost of people due to waste of time. The project also contributes to the positive effect on the security of the movement of the residents and transit vehicles across the localities. And last but not least it will improve the connection to the both cross-border areas.</p>

Source: Data collected by the research team

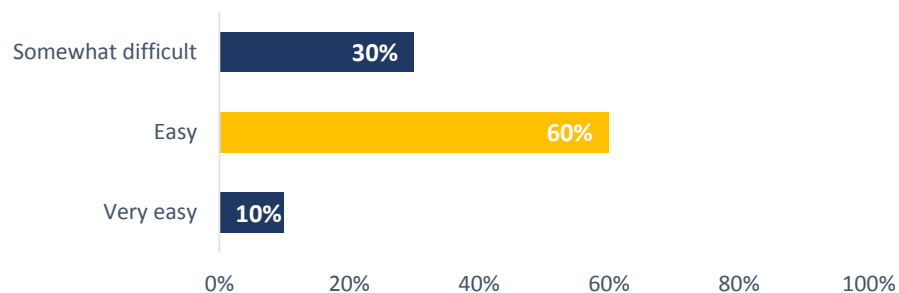
4. According to your first-hand experience, how easy was it to align the project's features to its contribution to the Programme's objectives?

Table 23. The level of difficulty to align the project's features to its contribution to the Programme's objectives

Range	Count	Percent
Very easy	1	10%
Easy	6	60%
Somewhat difficult	3	30%
Very difficult	0	0%
I do not know/ I cannot answer	0	0%
Total	10	100%

Source: Data collected by the research team

Figure 23. The level of difficulty to align the project's features to its contribution to the Programme's objectives



Source: Data collected by the research team

30% of the respondents to this question mentioned that it was somehow difficult to align the project's features to its contribution to the Programme's objective, but 70% of the respondents affirmed that it was easy and very easy to align the project's features to the Programme's objectives.

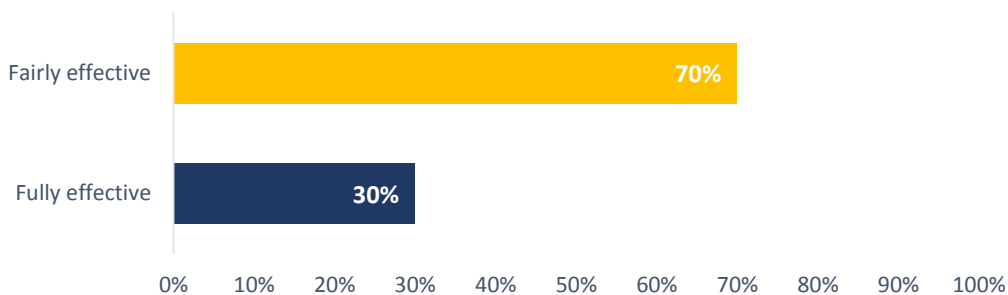
5. According to your first-hand experience, do you consider that the calls have effectively balanced local needs with the overall Programme's objectives?

Table 24. Did the calls effectively balanced local needs with the overall Programme's objectives?

Range	Count	Percent
Fully effective	3	30%
Fairly effective	7	70%
Barely effective	0	0%
Fully ineffective	0	0%
I do not know/ I cannot answer	0	0%
Total	10	100%

Source: Data collected by the research team

Figure 24. Did the calls effectively balanced local needs with the overall Programme's objectives?



Source: Data collected by the research team

30% of the respondents to this question mentioned that the call was fully effective in balancing the local needs with the overall Programme's objectives and 70% considered that the call were fairly effective in assuring the mentioned balancing between needs and objectives.

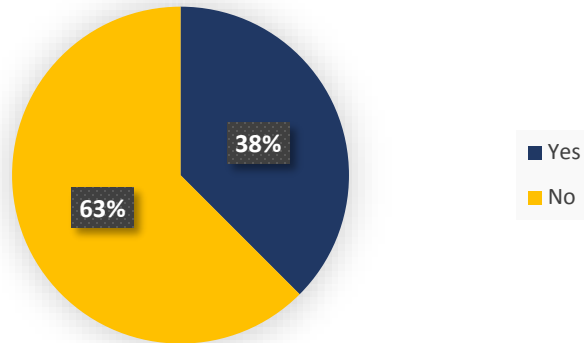
6. Is your project related in any way to another project funded in the previous RO-BG Programme? If so, could you please outline the connection between the 2 projects and the related advantages/added values, as compared to the ones declared in the financing request?

Table 25. Project funded in previous RO-BG Interreg Programme

Options	Count	Percent
Yes	3	27%
No	5	45%
No answer	3	27%
Total	11	100%

Source: Data collected by the research team

Figure 25. Project funded in previous RO-BG Interreg Programme



Source: Data collected by the research team

To this question, 38% affirmed that the projects funded in this programming period and the projects from the previous programming period are related to each other in any way, while 68% of the respondents outlined that their projects are not related.

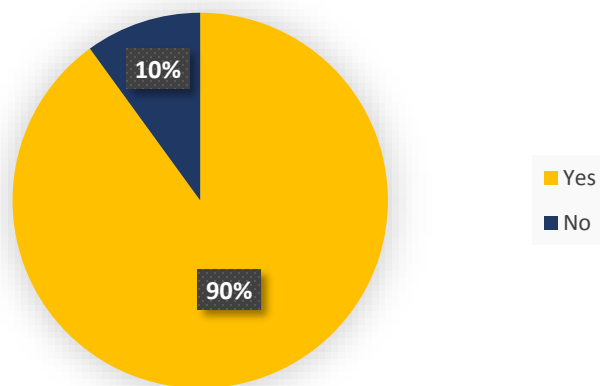
7. Did your project consider any of the indicators for monitoring the environmental impact proposed through the Strategic Environmental Assessment (SEA)?

Table 26. SEA Indicators

Options	Count	Percent
Yes	9	82%
No	1	9%
No answer	1	9%
Total	11	100%

Source: Data collected by the research team

Figure 26. SEA Indicators



Source: Data collected by the research team



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82% of the respondents affirmed that their projects considered several indicators for monitoring the environmental impact proposed through the Strategic Environmental Assessment, while 9% outlined the SEA indicators were not taken into consideration, and 9% did not offered any answer to this question.

8. If yes, which one (s)?

Table 27.

SEA Indicators
Number of projects creating a modal shift from road transport to waterways; Number of projects focusing on road transport infrastructure; Number of projects focusing on river transport infrastructure; Number of supported cross border mechanisms (agreement, networks, regulations, studies, policies, strategies, information exchange, tools) to enhance cooperation capacity
Number of projects improving of air quality; Number of projects affecting cultural heritage; No of projects having a positive impact on landscape; Number of supported cross border mechanisms (agreement, networks, regulations, studies, policies, strategies, information exchange, tools) to enhance cooperation capacity
Number of management plans implemented; Number of projects improving of air quality; Number of projects focusing on road transport infrastructure; Land take as a result of building road transport infrastructure (km2); Number of supported cross border mechanisms (agreement, networks, regulations, studies, policies, strategies, information exchange, tools) to enhance cooperation capacity
Number of projects focusing on road transport infrastructure
Number of management plans implemented; Number of projects improving of air quality; Number of projects affecting cultural heritage; Riverbanks rehabilitated (km)
Number of projects focusing on road transport infrastructure
Number of projects focusing on road transport infrastructure
Number of projects improving of air quality; Number of projects focusing on road transport infrastructure; Number of supported cross border mechanisms (agreement, networks, regulations, studies, policies, strategies, information exchange, tools) to enhance cooperation capacity
Number of management plans implemented
Number of projects focusing on road transport infrastructure

Source: Data collected by the research team

9. According to your first-hand experience, which one of the following factors had facilitated the implementation of the project?

Table 28. Factors that facilitated the implementation of the project

Options	Count	Percent	Total
Clear and effective call design	4	40%	100%
ERDF support/EU added value	6	60%	100%
Smooth and effective selection criteria	1	10%	100%



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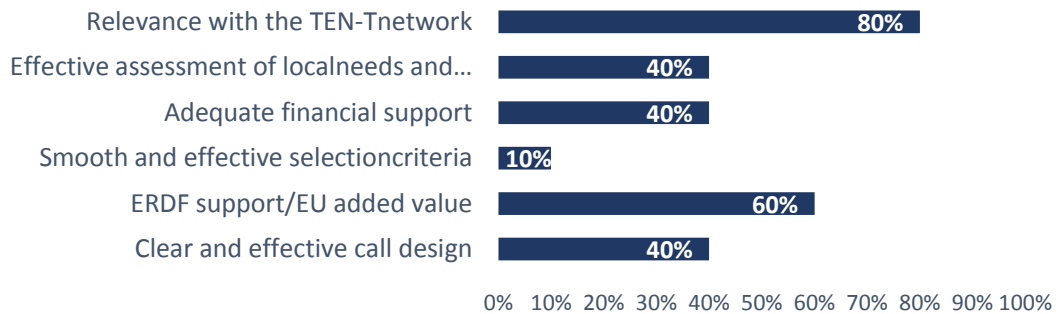


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Options	Count	Percent	Total
Adequate financial support	4	40%	100%
Effective assessment of local needs and...	4	40%	100%
Relevance with the TEN-T network	8	80%	100%

Source: Data collected by the research team

Figure 27. Factors that facilitated the implementation of the project



Source: Data collected by the research team

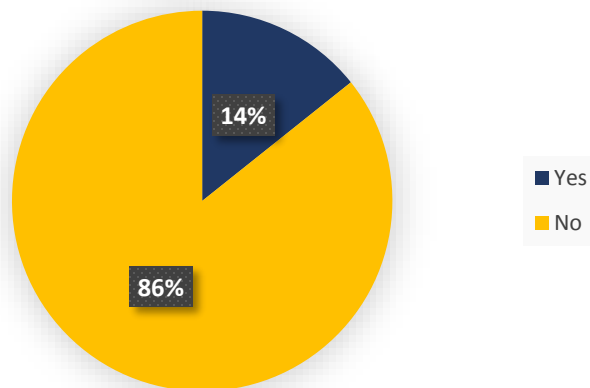
10. Are there any unintended effects of the programme in this field?

Table 29. Unintended effects of the programme

Options	Count	Percent
Yes	1	9%
No	6	55%
No answer	4	36%

Source: Data collected by the research team

Figure 28. Unintended effects of the programme



Source: Data collected by the research team



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Section III - Specific Objective 1.2

1. As a beneficiary, in which kind of measures are you involved?

- The respondents mentioned that as beneficiary he/she was involved in hard measures.

2. To what extent has your project contributed to the improvement of navigation safety on the Danube?

- The beneficiary mentioned that the project contributed to some extent to the improvement of navigation safety on the Danube.

3. Can you elaborate on your project's contribution to the improvement of the Danube?

- The Calarasi county and the city Silistra are connected by a relation of passenger's transportation which implies only road transportation (made by own cars) or navy transportation (made by ferryboat). The beneficiary intention was to eliminate the barriers to free movement of the citizens between the two communities, Calarasi (Romania) and Silistra (Bulgaria) by introducing a new and alternative means of transportation. These barriers were represented by the obligation of using personal transport means or by using a transportation mean such as ferryboat. The project had to take in consideration that a lot of people who does not have a license for a car and cannot use this mean of transportation for traveling from one side of the border to another

4. According to your first-hand experience, please evaluate the level of difficulty in aligning the project features to its contribution to the Programme's objectives?

- About the level of difficulty in aligning the project features to its contribution to the Programme's objective, the respondent did not offer any answer.

5. According to your first-hand experience, do you consider that the calls have effectively balanced local needs with the overall Programme's objectives?

- The beneficiary's perspective is that the call was fairly effective in balancing the local needs with the overall Programme's objectives.

6. According to your first-hand experience, which one of the following factors have facilitated the implementation of the project?

- The ERDF support/EU added value were one of the most important factors that have facilitated the implementation of the project.

6. Did your project consider any of the indicators for monitoring the environmental impact proposed through the Strategic Environmental Assessment (SEA)?

- The beneficiary mentioned that the project considered some of the indicators for monitoring the environmental impact proposed through the Strategic Environmental Assessment (SEA).

7. If yes, which one (s)?

- The SEA indicators that the project took into consideration were:
 - No of projects having a negative impact on landscape;
 - Number of projects creating a modal shift from road transport to waterways;
 - Number of projects focusing on river transport infrastructure

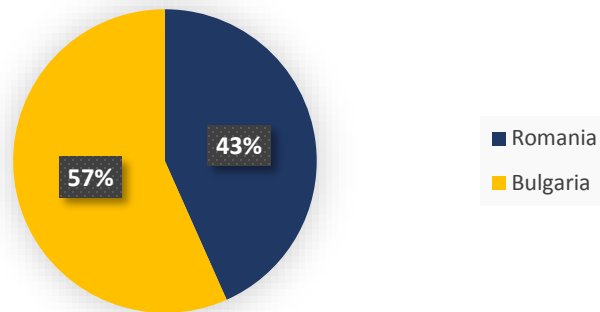
Section III - Specific Objective 2.1.

Table 30

Country	No. of projects under OS 2.1.	Percent
Romania	13	43%
Bulgaria	17	57%

Source: Data collected by the research team

Figure 29



Source: Data collected by the research team

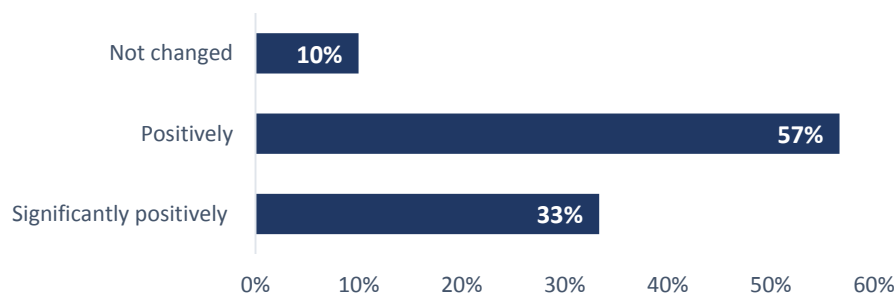
1. In your opinion, how have the use of natural and cultural heritage and tourism changed in your region in the last 5 years?

Table 31. Have the use of natural and cultural heritage and tourism changed in your region in the last 5 years?

Range	Count	Percent
Significantly positively	10	33%
Positively	17	57%
Not changed	3	10%
Negatively	0	0%
Highly negatively	0	0%

Source: Data collected by the research team

Figure 30. Have the use of natural and cultural heritage and tourism changed in your region in the last 5 years?



Source: Data collected by the research team



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2. What are the aspects that have changed in a significant manner?

Table 32

Aspects that have changed
More people are travelling across the borders to get to know the cross-border areas.
rehabilitation of the cultural and archaeological sites; of tourist and technical infrastructure; socialization of cultural sites; more marketing
Knowledge in the potential tourists for natural heritage and creation of possibilities to visit them.
the project provided the most distinctive result of the project - designing, developing and implementing an innovative integrated web portal and mobile application providing a unique user experience. A modern and convenient tool has been created to attract public attention and promote the region as a tourist destination. As part of the project was developed a mobile application, modern mobile travel guide, where the based data on GPS device and predefined hiking trails, dynamic trails are generated depending on the user's predefined criteria. Installation of digital displays (kiosks) - Interactive digital displays (kiosks) are installed at key locations, 15 pcs. in the area of Calarasi and 20 pcs. in the Silistra area, with multiple options for navigating through EasyGuide and using all its features. The digital displays allow access to local information and a digital database in three languages (English, Romanian and Bulgarian). They provide a physical dimension to the intangible virtual nature of digitalised heritage. The kiosks play an important social role. They offer free access to the database, which in turn provides equal opportunities for all social groups to benefit from the project without discrimination on the basis of gender, ethnic origin, social status or physical disability. By placing kiosks close to landmarks and central public places, the integrated product is advertised for citizens and tourists. They attract the attention of the public, thus becoming acquainted with the history of the region.
The opportunity for elaboration of common tourism products.
The project is currently being implemented. Positive results are forthcoming.
promotion, number of tourists visiting, a larger number of touristic objectives promoted
Creation of new touristic products related with nature and cultural heritage
Increased number of tourists exchange between both countries.
greater awareness of the various stakeholders
tourism development in the area
another project under this PA is under implementation; results have not been achieved so far
number of people visiting the area
A new trend is formed out of events organised in the natural wildlife of the region like cycling trips, fishing, kayaking and water sports, open concerts, motorcycle trips, hiking, stand up paddle, jet sky and water sky etc. The use of the Danube touristic potential has really developed in the region Calarasi/Silistra and not only.
The increase in popularity of green tourism and outdoor activities (cycling, kayaking, running events, hiking, etc)



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Aspects that have changed
People are starting to participate more and more in outdoor events that promote the environment and a healthy lifestyle. For example, in Calarasi a concert is held for 3 years, "3 Smoked Olives" that gather more than 10000 people on a beach for a week. Also, many organised cycling tours are taking place like the Dunav Ultra or running events like the Sand Marathon in Constanta. All these events didn't exist 5 years ago and now are very popular and bring a lot of people together and has a very good economic impact.
getting to know each other
Popularity of destinations; increase and return of cross-border tourists.
getting to know each other
Increasing interest in the destination.
The support of authorities in promoting of cultural heritage and tourism
Traditions and local gastronomy have been revived, steps have been taken to raise awareness of the importance of enhancing cultural and natural heritage.
A lot of outdoor activities are being developed in the region like: kayaking, cycle tours, outdoor concerts, stand up paddle, fishing, etc. people like to get out of the offices/crowded cities into the wild life and the Danube region is very close and easy to use by many types of enthusiasts.
A big increase in the outdoor activities like sports, motorcycle tours, camping, fishing, kayaking, etc. People are tired of the day to day work and want to escape in outdoors activities

Source: Data collected by the research team

3. What are in your opinion the factors leading to such a change?

Table 33

Factors that were leading to change
EU policy on regional cooperation and the funding
investments in tourist infrastructure, in socialization of tourist sites and in marketing
The upper aspects are achieved through possibilities to learn about the natural heritage, trainings and creation of mobile application.
The integrated tourist products developed by the project are several innovative tourist services: Mobile application (name: Easyguide) Web portal (www.easyguide-portal.com) The products are fundamental for the project as they provides the most distinctive deliverable of the project "the innovative integrated web portal and mobile application providing a unique user experience. The goal is to create a trendy and convenient tools which will grab the public attention and promote the region as a tourist destination. digital displays (kiosks) Interactive digital displays (kiosks)are installed at key locations in the Calarasi and Silistra region featuring several



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Factors that were leading to change
options to navigate through EasyGuide and take advantage of all its functionalities. 20 units kiosks located at the territory of SM and 15 units kiosks located at the territory of MDJ Trough communication to all interested stake holders was develop a Management plan for utilization of cultural and natural heritage in a sustainable way. The goal is the promotion of the cross-border heritage for long-term economic benefits. The management plan presents an analysis of the project implementation and results. It discusses best practices and weaknesses, achievements and obstacles. The plan provides suggestions for future joint activities and policy measures between the beneficiaries to ensure long-term cooperation
the projects implemented
Involvement of the NGO's that start to move the general perception of the area that was not considered a touristic one.
The good quality of the project's implementation.
improved evaluation, openness and acceptance of new good practices by the local tourism actors
Advertising
promotional activities, investments in buildings, roads etc.
People are starting to discover the beautifully Danube.
People are tired of the agitated day to day life in the crowded cities and they want to do more activities outdoor combining with a healthier lifestyle.
People are open to a new type of tourism that takes them out of the cities and their very busy life.
Availability of information materials elaborated within CBC projects; accessibility; promotion; tourist offers in RO and BG.
In addition to the implemented investment projects in the improvement of the infrastructure, including the tourist infrastructure, there is a change in the thinking and demand of the modern tourist.
The mentality, the level of knowledge and culture of the people which lead the public institutions
The reason is the people who have made efforts to keep alive the local traditions and customs.
The very agitated way of life in the cities, pollution, need of fresh air, etc.
The very busy way of life and the crowded cities.

Source: Data collected by the research team

4. In your opinion, did your project bring any improvement at local level?

Table 34. Did projects bring improvement at local level?

Options	Count	Percent
Yes, to a great extent	20	67%
Yes, but only to some extent	10	33%



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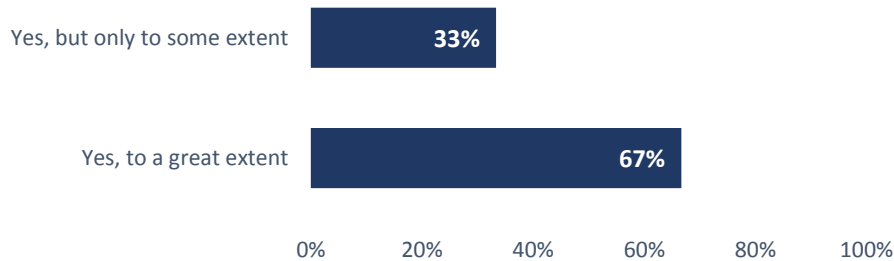


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Options	Count	Percent
No	0	0%
I do not know/I cannot answer	0	0%

Source: Data collected by the research team

Figure 31. Did projects bring improvement at local level?



Source: Data collected by the research team

5. What are the effects that your project has had upon the sustainable use of the natural and cultural heritage and upon the improvement of tourism in the cross-border area? Please elaborate your answer.

Table 35

Projects effects
Positive changes in people's attitude towards the preservation of the natural and cultural heritage
our two projects link well developed tourist sites with less developed or underdeveloped sites, gives them joint strategies for development and marketing and thus promotes them together to different audiences and at different markets. Give the sites and their managing bodies a common strategic perspective.
Until the end of the project 758 potential tourists learn about the sites of CBC natural heritage and visit them.
The project had entirely positive effect on the environment protection-effects on the environment and sustainable development The project includesd supply of digital displays (kiosks) and development of web portal and mobile application for promotion of the tourism in the Silistra Calarasi region. Based on the a.m., it provided and will continue to provide green solution for popularizing cultural and historic heritage without leaflets, maps, paper guides, brochures, etc. It contributes to the modern and unique integrated tourist product created. The project ensured also environmental and cultural sustainability and protection, as the implementation of the envisaged activities resulted in green measures for promotion of cross-border heritage. Thus, the execution lead to the joint management of the natural and cultural resources in an ecological and sustainable way. The implementation of the activities contributed to improved economic conditions and living standards of the cross-border population.
The effects are positive - new supplies, new visitors, plans, and know-how were gained. This gains new development potential for our tourism site and also, we will be able to offer common tourism product with the Romanian partner



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<p>The project is currently being implemented. The positive effects are yet to come.</p>
<p>The overall objective established is preservation and promotion of common natural and cultural heritage in order to create a sustainable cross border identity that generate added value across the sectors with potential in sustainable development of communities: tourism, fisheries and environmental protection. The specific objectives are:-to develop & promote 2 tourism products in order to use in a sustainable way the cultural & natural heritage of the target area;-to establish and assume a joint strategical action plan on a medium term (5 years from finalising the project) regarding measures and actions for the sustainable use of the project results and of the natural and cultural inheritance from the Mangalia Balchik area.</p>
<p>The tourist has now more information about regions and touristic attractions, they can find the almost the whole information in online, centralized - everyone has access</p>
<p>The projects implemented create the opportunity to promote the target area through instruments created through the project: new touristic products and instrument for their promotion.</p>
<p>Project ROBG-356 is related to the eco-tourism and thus it contributes to the sustainable use of natural and cultural heritage. Also due to the project we promoted objects of the NCH which were not very popular but have high potential for tourism.</p>
<p>attracting new potential tourism services users</p>
<p>The effects will be seen after the completion of the project</p>
<p>please see the answer above</p>
<p>An effective communication campaign was carried out about the religious heritage of the region. Many people from different continents learn about it and thanks to the online platform and mobile aps these people can easily travel to the promoted destinations, find places for accommodation, food, leisure activities in the nearby.</p>
<p>We bought kayaks and bicycles for different target groups and we aim to initiate new tourists in the green tourism field. The reaction of our participants at our project events was very positive and many ask us when we will do events again. For the moment we have a problem because of COVID 19 but after the crisis ends we will resume our activities.</p>
<p>We procured equipment and we will organise different types of outdoor activities like cycling, kayaking, running events and hiking. At our previously events the feedback was very positive and in the region, we are almost the only ones who promote these type of activities.</p>
<p>For example, for 2 events we had a target of 100 persons. For the first we had 240 and the second 180 without a very big campaign of promotional activities. A lot of people like to combine a healthy lifestyle with tourism and if for example you to a running event in a National park like Belogradchick the success is guaranteed. The type of projects that we developed (running events and hiking trips) are been developed for more than 10 year in the European Community and they have a clear success.</p>
<p>Visitors to the exhibition are given the opportunity to get acquainted with the cultural heritage of both countries for a long time.</p>



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The added value of our projects is elaboration of comprehensive field research audio-visual study, being foundation for other strategic documents.
Visitors to the exhibition are given the opportunity to get acquainted with the cultural heritage of both countries for a long time.
The project is in the process of implementation until 29.08.2021 but is expected to achieve the following goal: to promote cooperation among institutions and people by using the cultural and natural resources in a sustainable touristic way. The project will create a common cultural tourist product: Cross-border Museums Tour, and also will promote a cross-border tourist service: balneal-climatic facility in Varshets addressed to Dolj population. Moreover, the project is introducing a new type of modern tourism: scientific/academic tourism (conferences, exhibits, common research etc) in the field of palaeontology and other natural sciences.
Through the project was elaborated a lot of tools (studies, strategy, smart application, events) which would improve the tourism and promote the rroma culture
Through our project we studied the extent to which communities preserve ancient traditions and customs, we identified these unappreciated values, we promoted them through: the site, articles in the specialized (tourism)press and big events, everything we discovered on the spot: traditions, customs, historical monuments , places to visit, local gastronomy.
We promoted outdoor activities like kayaking, running events, hiking and cycling. Our participants were very pleased with these types of activities and want to come again to future events.
We organized tours with kayaks and bicycles. Because the tours were organized and had the appropriate equipment our participants were very pleased with this new type of activities.

Source: Data collected by the research team

6. To what extent and how do you feel that your project has contributed to the sustainable use of the natural and cultural heritage and to improving the tourism in the cross-border area?

Table 36. The project contribution to the sustainable use of the natural and cultural heritage and to improving the tourism in the cross-border area

Range	Count	Percent
To a great extent	19	66%
To some extent	9	31%
To no extent	1	3%

Source: Data collected by the research team

Figure 32. The project contribution to the sustainable use of the natural and cultural heritage and to improving the tourism in the cross-border area



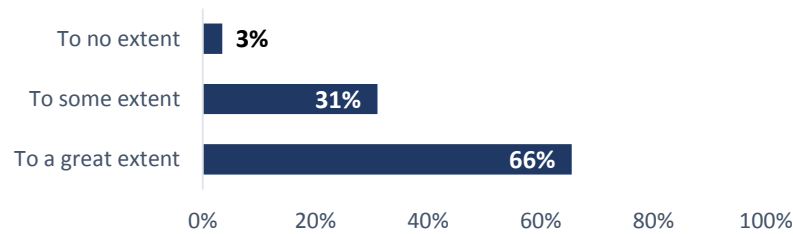
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Source: Data collected by the research team

7. Which are, in your opinion, the most useful joint measures your project/s took to ensure sustainable joint utilization of the cultural/natural heritage? Please nominate at least three joint measures, if appropriate.

Table 37

The most useful joint measures to ensure sustainable joint utilization of the cultural/natural heritage
Joint research and planning, joint tourist routes and promotional travelling
creation of two joint tourism routes; adoption of joint strategies for development and promotions of the routes; development of sets of promotional materials.
Mobile application, Info boards, common CBC routes.
The project made a study of the historical and cultural heritage in the two regions, to identify sites and events of interest to be included in the integrated environment. Based on the collected data, virtual applications have been developed that represent an interactive tourist environment on both sides of the Danube River has been built to achieve sustainable results. The project ensures wider accessibility of common historical and cultural heritage based on technology and innovative tools and services. With the interactive tourist environment built on both sides of the Danube, the Calarasi - Silistra region will be promoted as a tourist destination, which is a priority for both municipalities. An interactive tourist environment on both sides of the Danube River has been built to achieve sustainable results and ensures wider accessibility of common historical and cultural heritage based on technology and innovative tools and services - development of software for information displays began (kiosk devices), Web portal and mobile application and management plan
new supplies, new promotion materials, new tourism product
Elaboration of joint strategical action plan. Joint Development Joint Implementation Joint Staffing
common approach, common promotion of the touristic products, exchange of good practice
Two joint strategies, media campaign, joint testing of the touristic packages.



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joint videos, guides and photo albums, all promoting the region
research, strategies, implementation, media coverage
we will separately answer for ROBG-413
Performing joint study on the religious heritage in the both countries; elaboration of joint strategy for development of the religious tourism; created e-platform and mobile application, promoting the common religious heritage of the two countries.
To buy the same equipment on both countries. The have partners in Bulgaria with the same enthusiasm as us regarding green tourism and sports. The location of the events, the Danube, is the same for both beneficiaries.
Development of 2 touristic centres. Organizing events in the Danube region. Creating a good partnership with our Bulgarian partners.
Be more flexible with beneficiaries in the sustainable period because on their own expense they have to do a lot of activities. More help from the programme bodies. More clear rules on what you can do or not in the sustainable period.
Exhibition, Book, Website
The integrated tourist products include locations in Bulgaria and Romania stimulating cross-border tourism.
Exhibition, Book, Website
No
Cross-border routes, smart application, movies
Creating a guide with Romanian-Bulgarian routes to visit, taking a photo album of the places targeted by the project, creating a common strategy for tourism development in the area.
Joint events with mixed target group. The same equipment procured on both borders. Good communication with our partners.
Joint partnership, joint tourism centre, joint equipment

Source: Data collected by the research team

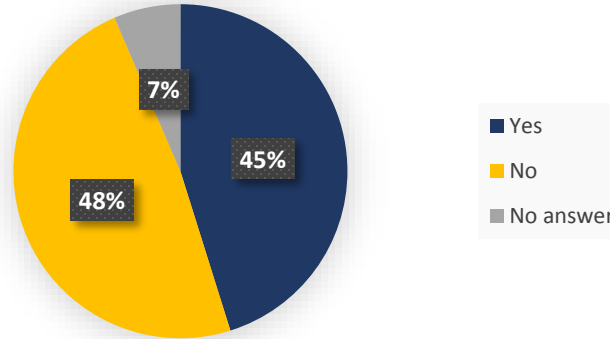
8. Did your project consider any of the indicators for monitoring the environmental impacts proposed under SEA?

Table 38. SEA Indicators

	Count	Percent
Yes	14	45%
No	15	48%
No answer	2	6%

Source: Data collected by the research team

Figure 33. SEA Indicators



Source: Data collected by the research team

9. If yes, which one (s)?

Table 39

SEA Indicators
Number of projects having a negative impact on landscape
Number of management plans implemented; Number of projects affecting cultural heritage; No of projects having a positive impact on landscape; Number of supported cross border mechanisms (agreement, networks, regulations, studies, policies, strategies, information exchange, tools) to enhance cooperation capacity
Number of management plans implemented; Number of projects affecting cultural heritage; No. of initiatives (trainings, education schemes, websites, agreements, networks, job-fairs etc.) that activate workforce mobility in the cross border area; Number of supported cross border mechanisms (agreement, networks, regulations, studies, policies, strategies, information exchange, tools) to enhance cooperation capacity
Number of projects affecting cultural heritage; Number of supported cross border mechanisms (agreement, networks, regulations, studies, policies, strategies, information exchange, tools) to enhance cooperation capacity
Number of management plans implemented; Number of projects affecting cultural heritage; No. of initiatives (trainings, education schemes, websites, agreements, networks, job-fairs etc.) that activate workforce mobility in the cross border area; Number of supported cross border mechanisms (agreement, networks, regulations, studies, policies, strategies, information exchange, tools) to enhance cooperation capacity
Number of projects affecting cultural heritage; No. of initiatives (trainings, education schemes, websites, agreements, networks, job-fairs etc.) that activate workforce mobility in the cross border area; Number of supported cross border mechanisms (agreement, networks, regulations, studies, policies, strategies, information exchange, tools) to enhance cooperation capacity
Number of management plans implemented; Number of projects affecting cultural heritage
Number of projects affecting cultural heritage



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SEA Indicators
Number of projects affecting cultural heritage; Number of supported cross border mechanisms (agreement, networks, regulations, studies, policies, strategies, information exchange, tools) to enhance cooperation capacity
Number of management plans implemented; Number of projects affecting cultural heritage; No of projects having a positive impact on landscape; No. of initiatives (trainings, education schemes, websites, agreements, networks, job-fairs etc.) that activate workforce mobility in the cross border area; Number of supported cross border mechanisms (agreement, networks, regulations, studies, policies, strategies, information exchange, tools) to enhance cooperation capacity
Number of projects affecting cultural heritage; No of projects having a positive impact on landscape; Number of supported cross border mechanisms (agreement, networks, regulations, studies, policies, strategies, information exchange, tools) to enhance cooperation capacity
Number of supported cross border mechanisms (agreement, networks, regulations, studies, policies, strategies, information exchange, tools) to enhance cooperation capacity
Number of management plans implemented; Number of projects affecting cultural heritage

Source: Data collected by the research team

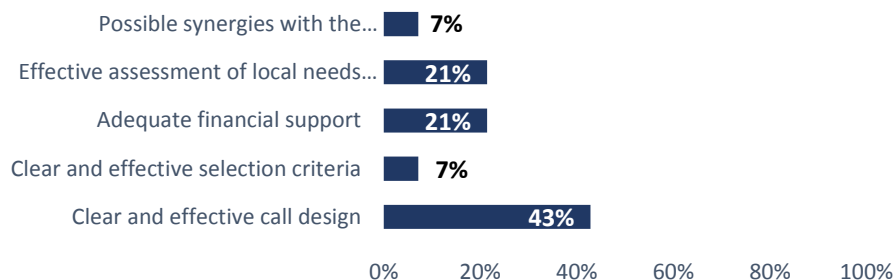
10. Amongst the possible factors, which one do you consider the most important for facilitating the smooth implementation of your project?

Table 40. Factors that facilitated the smooth implementation of projects

Options	Count	Percent
Clear and effective call design	12	43%
Clear and effective selection criteria	2	7%
Adequate financial support	6	21%
Effective assessment of local needs and alignment with the Programme's Priority Axis	6	21%
Possible synergies with the Danube Strategy	2	7%

Source: Data collected by the research team

Figure 34. Factors that facilitated the smooth implementation of projects



Source: Data collected by the research team



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Section III - Specific Objective 2.2

1. As a project beneficiary, in which/what kind of measures are you involved?

- The respondent mentioned that as beneficiary he/she was involved in hard measures.

According to your first-hand experience, how effective have calls been in balancing local needs with the overall Programme's objectives?

- The beneficiary's perspective is that the call was fairly effective in balancing the local needs with the overall Programme's objectives.

2. As far as the expected contributions are concerned, please provide an estimate timing for the effects to materialize

- The beneficiary considered that the projects effects will immediately materialize.

3. To what extent do you consider that your project has contributed to improving the management and protection of NATURA 2000 sites in the cross-border area?

- The beneficiary mentioned that the project contributed to a great extent in improving the management and protection of NATURA 2000 sites in the cross-border area.

4. In which manner do you consider that your project has contributed to improving the management and protection of NATURA 2000 sites in the cross-border area?

- No answer was provided

5. In your opinion, the joint solutions envisaged by your project contribute to the improved joint management and protection of NATURA 2000 sites

- The beneficiary mentioned that the joint solutions envisaged by the project had contributed to a great extent to the improvement of joint management and protection of NATURA 2000 sites.

6. If your answer is *to a great extent*, please underline the joint solutions foreseen.

- No answer was provided

7. Is your project related in any way to another project funded in the previous RO-BG Programme? If so, please outline the connection between the 2 projects and the related advantages/added values, as compared to the ones declared in the financing request.

- No answer was provided

8. In your opinion, have the possible synergies with the NATURA 2000 network at the EU level been a facilitating factor for project implementation?

- Yes

9. If yes, why?

- No answer was provided

10. Among the possible factors, which one/s do you consider the most important for facilitating the smooth implementation of your project?

- No answer was provided



11. Do you think your project has had other effects related to biodiversity and soil protection and restoration and to the promotion of ecosystem services, other than the contribution to enhance the sustainable management of the ecosystems from the cross-border area? If yes, which?

- No answer was provided

12. Did your project consider any of the indicators for monitoring the environmental impacts proposed under SEA

- Yes

13. If yes, which one (s)?

- No answer was provided

Section III - Specific Objective 4.1

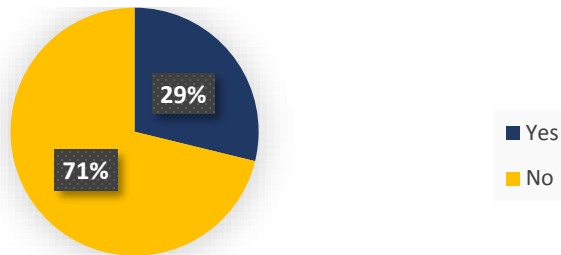
1. Did you receive financing under specific objective 4.1 (IP 8i)?

Table 41

Option	Count	Percent
Yes	17	29%
No	42	71%

Source: Data collected by the research team

Figure 35



Source: Data collected by the research team

17 (29%) of the surveyed beneficiaries received financing under SO 4.1, while 42 (71%) of the surveyed beneficiaries did not receive financing under this specific objective.

2. In your opinion, how has the situation about the integration of the cross-border area in terms of employment and labour changed in your area in the last 5 years?

Table 42. How the situation about the integration of the cross-border area in terms of employment and labour changed in the last 5 years

Option	Count	Percent
Very positively	3	19%



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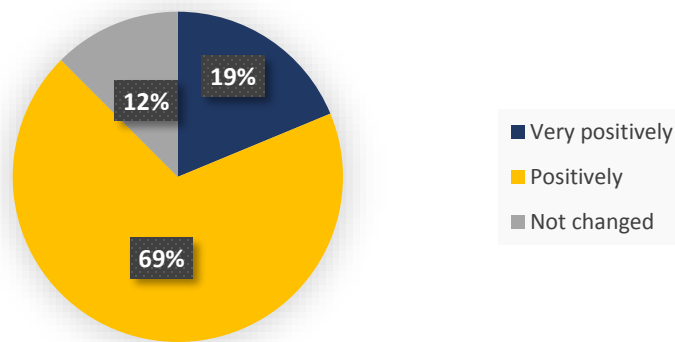


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Option	Count	Percent
Positively	11	69%
Not changed	2	13%
Negatively	0	0%
Very negatively	0	0%

Source: Data collected by the research team

Figure 36. How the situation about the integration of the cross-border area in terms of employment and labour changed in the last 5 years



Source: Data collected by the research team

Concerning the opinion of the beneficiaries regarding how the situation about the integration of the cross-border area in terms of employment and labour changed in the past 5 years, the majority of the beneficiaries regard the situation to have changed “positively”, namely 11 beneficiaries that account for 69% of the sample.

3. What are the aspects that changed more?

Table 43

What are the aspects that changed more?
Entrepreneurship non-formal activities to support linkage with the cross-border business community
Accessibility to a larger labour market.
Access to the labour market
Tourism
Improving the workforce mobility on the cross border area.
The increase of labour market as a result of migration of young people



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What are the aspects that changed more?
I cannot answer
Flexibility in considering other opportunities related to employment
It's hard to say
Increased possibilities and preparedness for CB mobility.
Investments to local actors were made, development of new industries in the region happened which led to new jobs and cut down sharply the rate of unemployment.
VISA contributed to employment of cross-border staff; provided information about the job options in the opposite country.
N/A
More flexibility for jobs.

Source: Data collected by the research team

Considering this question, the general consensus among the beneficiaries is that the following aspects changed most: access to the labour market and an increase in labour market access for youth, an increase in the cross-border mobility of individuals within Romania and Bulgaria, as well as investments in local businesses and the development of new industries. Moreover, at least one beneficiary mentioned that these investments have effectively created new jobs, in turn increasing the rate of employment in certain cross-border areas.

4. What are in your opinion the factors leading to such a change?

Table 44

What are in your opinion the factors leading to such a change?
Joint Entrepreneurship non-formal activities
Gaining more skills and knowledge.
Tourism
activities implemented through the projects
work migration
all project activities
It's hard to say
Flexibility in considering other opportunities related to employment
It's hard to say

New developed labour mobility supporting schemes and tools under the RO-BG INTEREG V-A program.
Investments directly to SME and support for new SME initiatives
Some of the factors are the establishment of the cross-border labour mobility agency; the comprehensive studies about the labour market in both countries; license of the VET centre.
N/A
Being part of the EU labour market

Source: Data collected by the research team

Considering the opinion of the beneficiaries regarding the main factors that have driven the change related to projects financed under SO 4.1, the respondents have repeatedly mentioned a number of main factors, such as flexibility of employment, work migration, project activities, cross-border labour mobility schemes and direct investments in small and medium enterprises. One beneficiary mentioned that an increase in tourism was a driving factor for the observable changes in labour and employment in the cross-border region.

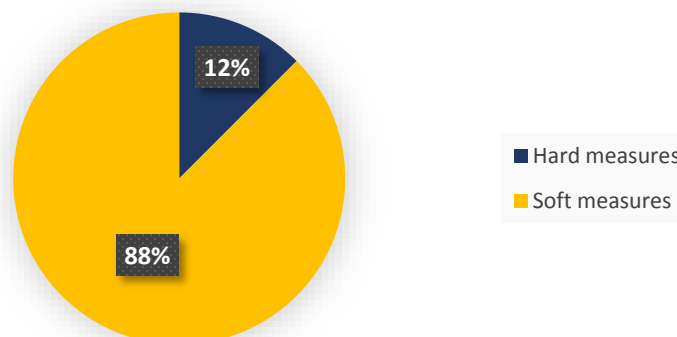
5. As a project beneficiary, in which kind of measures are you involved?

Table 45. Type of measures

Option	Count	Percent
Soft measures	14	88%
Hard measures	2	13%
Integrated measures	0	0%

Source: Data collected by the research team

Figure 37. Type of measures



Source: Data collected by the research team

An overwhelming majority of the beneficiaries (14, representing 88% of the respondents) were involved in soft measures, while 2 beneficiaries (12%) were involved in hard measures. No beneficiary was involved in integrated measures.

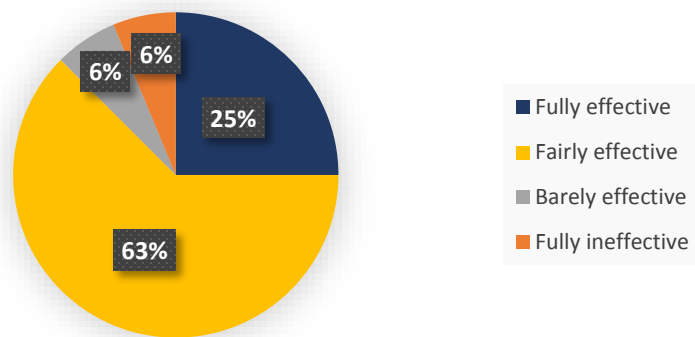
6. According to your first-hand experience, how effective have calls been in balancing local needs with the overall Programme’s objectives?

Table 46. The calls’ effectiveness

Option	Count	Percent
Fully effective	4	25%
Fairly effective	10	63%
Barely effective	1	6%
Fully ineffective	1	6%
I do not know/I cannot answer	0	0%

Source: Data collected by the research team

Figure 38. The calls’ effectiveness



Source: Data collected by the research team

Considering the effectiveness of the calls in balancing local needs with the overall objectives of the Programme, an overwhelming majority of the beneficiaries (10, representing 63% of the respondents) mentioned that the calls have been fairly effective, while 4 (25%) mentioned that calls were fully effective. One beneficiary stated that the calls were barely effective, and one beneficiary stated that the calls were fully ineffective.

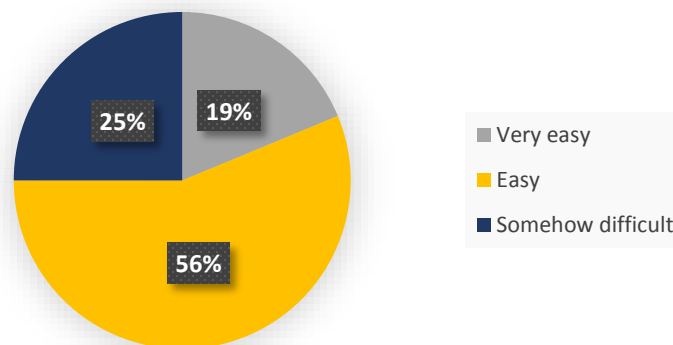
7. In your opinion, how easy was it to align project features to its contribution to the programme objectives?

Table 47. The level of difficulty to align project features to its contribution to the programme objectives

Option	Count	Percent
Very easy	3	19%
Easy	9	56%
Somehow difficult	5	25%
Very difficult	0	0%
I do not know/I cannot answer	0	0%

Source: Data collected by the research team

Figure 39. The level of difficulty to align project features to its contribution to the programme objectives



Source: Data collected by the research team

Most of the beneficiaries agree on the fact that the projects were easy or very easy to align their features with the contribution to the programme objectives. Indeed, 9 (56%) regard the process as being easy and 3 (19%) regard the process as being very easy. A quarter of the beneficiaries (4), however, mentioned that this alignment process was somehow difficult, yet no beneficiary experienced major difficulties in this process.

8. To what extent did your project manage to integrate and strengthen the cross-border area in terms of employment and labour mobility?

Table 48

To what extent did your project manage to integrate and strengthen the cross-border area in terms of employment and labour mobility?
Fairly effective
We experienced great difficulties in the implementation of the project due to the lack of interest from young people and employers in the tourism industry.



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To what extent did your project manage to integrate and strengthen the cross-border area in terms of employment and labour mobility?
The project achieve some objectives in the terms of employment and labour mobility in the field of creative industries
To some extent
During the project implementation all participants were informed on the opportunities for job conditions in both countries. There was an experience exchange and job fairs were organized.
to a fair extent
It was difficult but the project achieved the indicators.
To a sufficient extend.
Already answered but: low levels of unemployment of the two side of the Danube, lack of having any communication tool between the citizens
Due to training, exchange visits and published job ads favourable conditions have been created for strengthening of cross border labour mobility and employment.
We consider that our project strengthens the labour mobility and to some extent will increase also the employment rate
To a great extend because we focused our activities to young students from high schools and in our opinion, they are the future of the labour market.

Source: Data collected by the research team

Some beneficiaries mentioned that the project managed to integrate and strengthen the cross-border area in terms of employment and labour mobility at the very least to some extent. However, some beneficiaries have mentioned that they have experienced difficulties in the implementation of the projects under this specific objective. More specifically, they have quoted factors such as the lack of interest from young people and employers in the tourism industry and the inability to achieve all of the objectives.

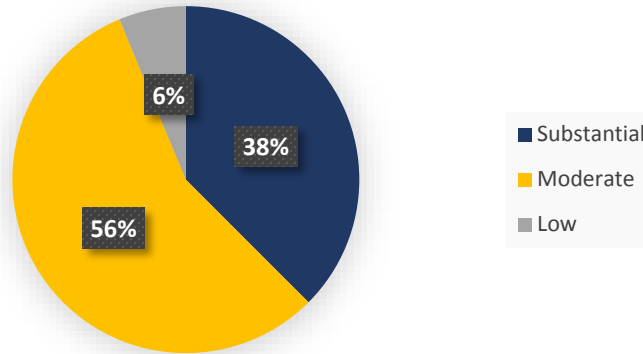
9. How would you rate your project's major achievements in terms of employment and labour mobility?

Table 49. Projects rate of achievements

Option	Count	Percent
Substantial	6	38%
Moderate	9	56%
Low	1	6%

Source: Data collected by the research team

Figure 40. Projects rate of achievements



Source: Data collected by the research team

For this question, the beneficiaries were asked to rate their own level of achievements project-wide in terms of employment and labour mobility. In conformity with the answers of the previous question and in line with the difficulties that the beneficiaries have experienced under this specific objective, a large number of the respondents (9, representing 56% of the sample) mentioned that the level of achievement was moderate, while 6 (38%) mentioned that the level of achievement was substantial. Only one beneficiary rated the project rate of achievement being low.

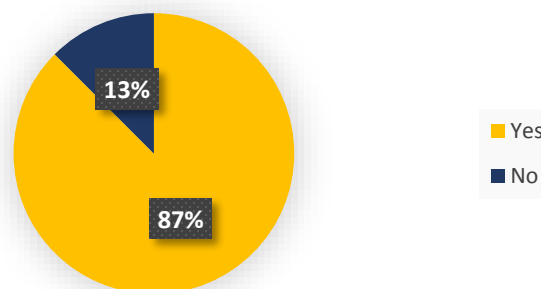
10. Are you aware of any type of social impact derived from your project?

Table 50. Social impact of the projects

Option	Count	Percent
Yes	14	87%
No	2	13%

Source: Data collected by the research team

Figure 41. Social impact of the projects



Source: Data collected by the research team



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Regarding the awareness of the beneficiaries in terms of the social impact derived from their projects, 14 (87%) answered positively while 2 (13%) answered negatively.

11. If yes, which?

Table 51

If yes, which?
young people get to know better the economies across the borders, get better prepared to work abroad and acquired language competences
Employment and labour mobility.
Improved qualification
Job fairs were organized for young people in the tourism industry
The support the start-up businesses in the creative industries
Encouraging development of small farm village markets and union of small farmers
Increase of the professional qualification, increase opportunity for job realization, increase awareness of the participants for labour mobility.
We involved only students from high schools that in our opinion are the next labour market and we tried through our activities to guide them to good choices.
Improved quality of the VET in the CB area via new developed curriculum, courses and training materials tailored to the needs of the employers in the CB area in the tourism sector. Enriched training offer of the VET providers in the CB region, respectively increased possibilities for learning for the interested persons and thus improvement of their employment chances. Raised capacity of the VET providers to provide quality training and CB mobility support.
The visual materials created on the project many good practices and first hand stories were shown to the general public.
development of visibility for small artisans in the area
Very close friendships developed by Bulgarian and Romanian students.

Source: Data collected by the research team

Albeit with a lower rate of response, this question asked beneficiaries to elaborate on the observable social impact of the projects that they have implemented under SO 4.1. The general social impacts that have been observed by the beneficiaries at the level of their individual projects are regarding the following: an increase in both awareness and language competences of youth, improved overall qualification of the labour force, and an increase in job opportunities through job fairs. Some projects had a particularly long-term vision and therefore targeted their approach towards high school students. An interesting “soft” impact in cross-border cooperation was stated by one individual beneficiary and entails



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very close friendships that have developed between Bulgarian and Romanian students during project activities.

12. Is your project related in any way to another project funded by the previous RO-BG Programme? If so, could you please outline the connection between the two projects and the related advantages/added values, as compared to the ones declared in the financing request?

Table 52

Is your project related in any way to another project funded in the previous RO-BG Programme? If so, could you please outline the connection between the 2 projects and the related advantages/added values, as compared to the ones declared in the financing request?
no
No
Do not know
Project from previous programming period AGRICONS was upgraded though project JOINTCONSTRUCT
For sure,
The project is related to a previously implemented project INNO-JOBS
N/A
N/A
Many projects organized trainings to different participants but I don't know to what extend the participants were young people from high schools.

Source: Data collected by the research team

While a large proportion of the beneficiaries could not answer this question, presumably due to the fact that there is no relation between this project and another project from the previous programming period, some beneficiaries reported relations with projects from the past. In particular, project JOINTCONSTRUCT was the continuation of project AGRICONS from the previous programming period, while one project was related to a previous project titled INNO-JOBS.

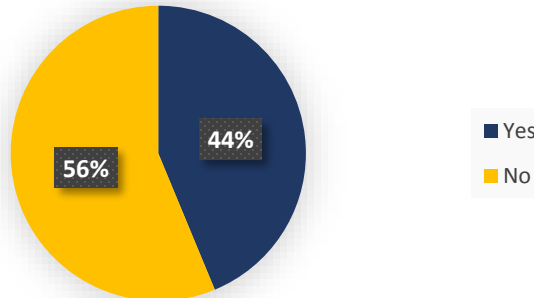
13. Did your project consider any indicators for monitoring the environmental impacts proposed under SEA?

Table 53. SEA Indicators

Option	Count	Percent
Yes	7	44%
No	9	56%

Source: Data collected by the research team

Figure 42. SEA Indicators



Source: Data collected by the research team

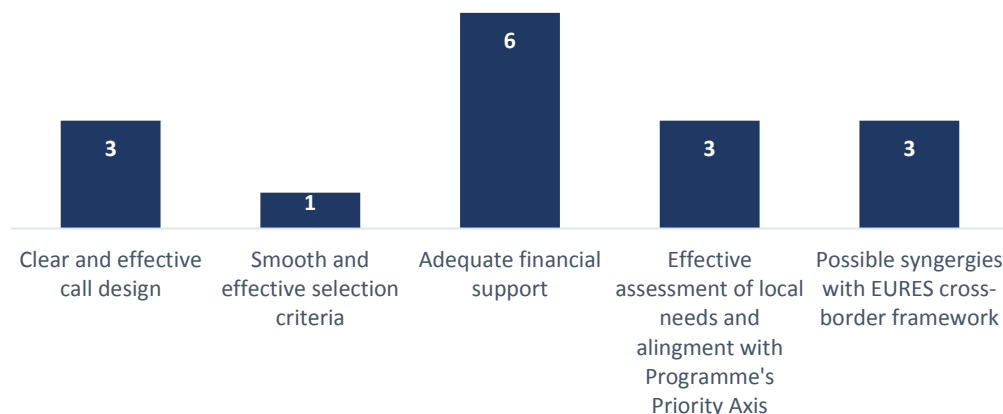
7 (44%) of the respondents did not consider using any of the SEA indicators for environmental impact monitoring, while 9 (56%) of the respondents considered doing so.

14. If yes, which ones?

Out of the considered SEA indicators for environmental impact monitoring, the main indicators considered were the following: a) No. of initiatives (trainings, education schemes, websites, agreements, networks, job-fairs etc.) that activate workforce mobility in the cross-border area; b) Number of supported cross border mechanisms (agreement, networks, regulations, studies, policies, strategies, information exchange, tools) to enhance cooperation capacity and c) Number of management plans implemented.

15. Amongst the possible factors, which one do you consider the most important for facilitating the smooth implementation of your project?

Figure 43. Factors that facilitated the smooth implementation of projects



Source: Data collected by the research team

Regarding factors that have driven the smooth implementation of the projects, the most consistent answer was the adequate financial support received through the programme. Beneficiaries also



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mentioned possible synergies with EURES cross-border framework, effective assessment of local needs and alignment with the Programme's Priority axis as well as clear and effective call design.

16. Do you think the project has had other effects in the field of integrating cross-border labour markets, including cross-border mobility joint local employment initiatives, information and advisory services and joint training, besides the contribution to encourage the integration of the cross-border area in terms of employment and labour mobility? If yes, which?

Table 54. Unintended effects

If yes, which?
no
No
Development of cross border cooperation and creations of the SME's with Ro-Bg participation
Developing of network of organic business
Information and advisory services and joint training
There were organized joint events, exchange visits, training. Culture and language exchange were performed.

Source: Data collected by the research team

Out of the beneficiaries that answered positively, the most prevalent answers were the development of cross-border cooperation, creation of SME's with cross-border participation, the development and business networks and joint cross-border activities.

Section III - Specific Objective 5.1

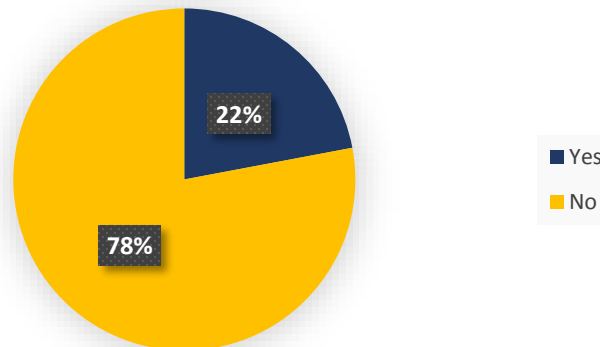
1. Did you receive financing under specific objective 5.1 (IP 11iv)?

Table 55

Option	Count	Percent
Yes	13	22%
No	46	78%

Source: Data collected by the research team

Figure 44

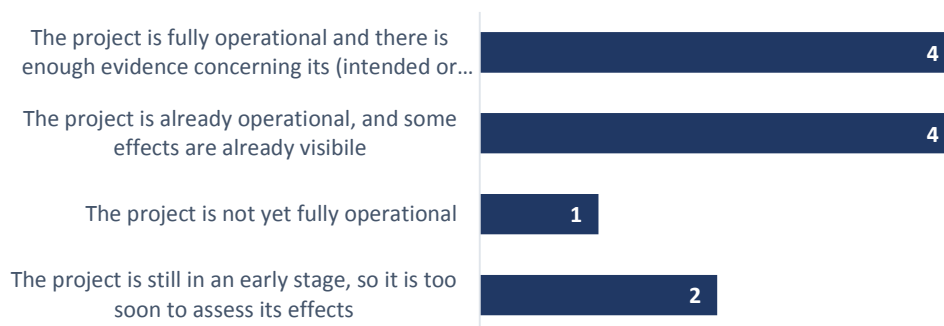


Source: Data collected by the research team

Out of the surveyed beneficiaries, 13 (22%) had received financing under specific objective 5.1.

2. To what extent it is possible to assess your project's effects on cooperation capacity?

Figure 45. To what extent it is possible to assess your project's effects on cooperation capacity?



Source: Data collected by the research team

Regarding the possibility of assessment of effects on cooperation capacity, 4 beneficiaries mentioned that the project is fully operational and that there is enough evidence concerning its effects, 4 beneficiaries mentioned that the project is already operational and some effects are visible, 1 beneficiary mentioned that the project is not yet fully operational and 2 beneficiaries mentioned that the project is at an early stage.

3. To which of the fields related to institutional capacity is your project most relevant?

Most beneficiaries mentioned that the main field of institutional capacity is the enhancement of cooperation capacity (7). The rest of the beneficiaries mentioned relevance in the following fields:



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improving health care services and the collaboration between health care providers, the project activities refer to the social needs of the elderly people living in the cross-border area Byala-Gradinari and doing business across borders.

4. Please elaborate on the effect that your project has upon the cross-border cooperation capacity

Table 56

Please elaborate on the effect that your project has upon the cross-border cooperation capacity
The project optimizes the existing and creates new mechanisms for joint cross-border solutions.
Increased capacity of public authorities.
The effect is positive. Integrated process management information systems have been introduced in the partner municipalities. A joint online platform for the exchange of experience between municipalities, NGOs and citizens has been set up. This has increased communication between stakeholders in the region.
common strategies and action plans have been developed
The project created a network of social service providers that is operational.
The effect that the project will have upon the cross-border cooperation capacity is to provide efficient services to the population.
It leads to a better institutional cooperation on regional level.
Laid the foundations for cooperation between the two hospitals direct beneficiaries of the project and strengthened the partnership between local public administrations from Zimnicea and Svishtov
Health capacity increase by sport.
Easier access to services of the public institutions
The project developed cooperation between institutions on the one hand, and on the other hand, the connection between citizens and institutions by facilitating access to information.

Source: Data collected by the research team

The beneficiaries were asked to elaborate on the effect of their project upon the cross-border cooperation capacity. To this extent, most of the answers were related to the increase in capacity of public authorities, particularly through the establishment of integrated management systems, the creation of joint online platforms, common strategies and increase in institutional cooperation as well as easing the access to public services. Other beneficiaries mentioned an increase in effectiveness of services as well as health capacity increase through sport.



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5. In which way(s) does your project contribute to enhancing the level of coordination of public institutions or the general level of cooperation capacity in the cross-border area?

Table 57

In which way(s) does your project contribute to enhancing the level of coordination of public institutions or the general level of cooperation capacity in the cross-border area?
The project further reinforces the efficiency of the performed by both institutions tasks, in the field of its implementation by creating new and optimizing existing common procedures and creating new mechanisms for joint cross-border solutions.
Introduced integrated electronic management system of the municipality.
A joint online platform for the exchange of experience between institutions, non-governmental organizations and citizens has been created
the foundations have been laid for the implementation of joint projects in future
The project created a network of social service providers, both public and private. During implementation period, took place a lot of exchanges of experience between public institutions from Romania and Bulgaria.
The project contributes to enhancing the level of coordination of public institutions or the general level of cooperation capacity in the cross-border area due its activities: elaborating of the Joint strategy for addressing social needs of the elderly people living in the cross-border area Byala-Gradinari. Creating active and direct assisted living system for elderly people, creating exchange information system between social departments from Gradinari and Byala, joint events for elderly people, establishment of center for elderly people in Municipality of Byala.
Green energy and better investment planning
The representatives of the authorities and institutions involved decided to extend the institutional cooperation by promoting partnerships between different types of entities that have common or complementary development intentions and sharing the results by obtaining common results, such as the elaboration of policies, laws, strategies or new knowledge / practices. Also, an environment has been created in which people from different entities work together for common purposes that generate mutual trust and understanding. Another effect is the improve of awareness of the quality of European citizens, namely the free movement of people, capital, goods and services between EU countries. As a result of the collaboration, a professional network and partnerships have been created that establish and can lead to further cooperation beyond the projects and programs funded from European funds, all for the development of communities and for the benefit of the citizens.
High manner.
Elaboration of a joint STRATEGY TO IMPROVE THE PUBLIC SERVICES ENVIRONMENT IN THE ROMANIA-BULGARIA CROSS-BORDER REGION and development of the platform E-GoverNet
A common online platform for obtaining information has been created. Thus, citizens of Bulgaria can easily obtain information from public institutions in Romania.

Source: Data collected by the research team



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For this question, the responses of the beneficiaries are varied. One beneficiary mentioned that their project reinforces the efficiency of institutions through the implementation of new common procedures as well as the optimization of existent ones. Another beneficiary mentioned the creation of a join online platform of the exchange of good practices between institutions, NGO’s and citizens, while another project described the creation of a network of social service providers (both public and private). A large number of beneficiaries mentioned increases in institutional cooperation in the cross-border area through the establishment and partnerships and common projects. Indeed, one beneficiary reported the elaboration of a joint strategy to improve the public services environment in the RO-BG cross-border region, as well as the development of a platform named E-GoverNet, while another beneficiary reported establishing a platform to exchange information about public institutions in the cross-border regions, which was aimed at the general public.

6. According to your first-hand experience, which one of the following factors facilitated the implementation of the project?

Regarding this question, most beneficiaries (4) believed that the effective assessment of local needs and alignment with the Programme’s priority axis were the main drivers of successful implementation, followed closely clear and effective call design (3). Only one beneficiary mentioned adequate financial support as the main driver, while 2 beneficiaries mentioned that ERDF support and the EU added value were the main driving factors.

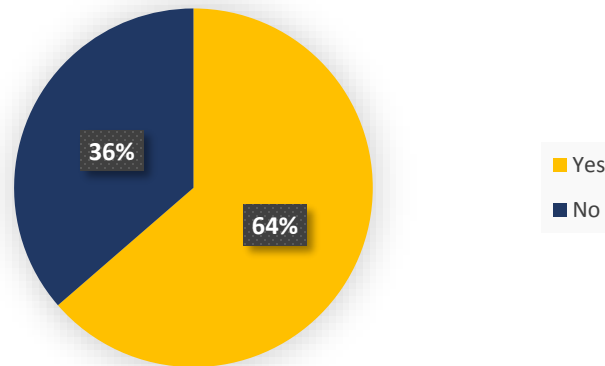
7. Did your project consider any of the indicators for monitoring the environmental impacts proposed under SEA?

Table 58. SEA Indicators

Option	Count	Percent
Yes	7	64%
No	4	36%

Source: Data collected by the research team

Figure 46. SEA Indicators



Source: Data collected by the research team

A majority of the beneficiaries (7, representing 64%) mentioned that they considered using SEA indicators for environmental impact monitoring, while 4 (36%) did not do so.

8. If yes, which ones?

Most of the respondents (7, representing 64%) mentioned that they considered using the indicator “Number of supported cross border mechanisms (agreement, networks, regulations, studies, policies, strategies, information exchange, tools) to enhance cooperation capacity”. The other considered indicators were the following: a) No. of initiatives (trainings, education schemes, websites, agreements, networks, job-fairs etc.) that activate workforce mobility in the cross-border area; b) Number of people benefiting from flood protection measures; c) Number of projects improving of air quality; d) Number of management plans implemented



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Annex 4: Interviews with Programme management authorities and stakeholders

Interviewees: Mrs. Ioana Manțog, Mrs. Marcela Glodeanu - Managing Authority for the Interreg V-A Romania-Bulgaria Programme 2014-2020

Date: 05.06.2020

Topics: Sustainability, Transport, Heritage, Regional Development, Institutional Capacity, Employment, Environment, Risk Management.

Main aspects highlighted during the interview:

- The MA was drawing attention on the sustainability element since the application form. In the application form, a section is dedicated to project sustainability in which each applicant must fill in order to explain how the sustainability will be ensured. There were also allocated extra points to the projects that proved an exit strategy for guaranteeing the sustainability. Also, the Joint Secretariat, during the trainings that they organized paid special attention on this issues. Further on, the MA performed verification on sustainability by monitoring all the projects with at least one visit per year. Most projects were aware of the sustainability obligations, it was not something unexpected, only in some cases the project had some issues with ensuring the sustainability. The JS tried to address these aspects together with the beneficiaries and in some cases they even involved the MA. They organized meetings with beneficiaries and discussed the things on which they need to focus in order to achieve the sustainability of their projects.
- The criteria can be accessed in the evaluation grid for all calls. The most important aspect that the exit strategy should focus on is to create a clear, concrete and reliable exist plan. These criteria were evaluated upon the overall experience of the projects and by comparing also the different exist strategies that the applicants were proposing. An ideal exist strategy will be to capitalize the results of the projects but this is more common in the transnational or interregional programme, while in the cross-border programmes the beneficiaries propose more real concrete actions. Nevertheless, there were some projects that were capitalizing their results and will continue to do it in the future.
- The financial issues were the key challenge in ensuring long-term sustainability. Even if in theory the beneficiaries said that they understand and they agreed with the financial aspects, they forgot that they have financial commitment outside the supports of the EU fund. While some expenditures are supported for some months after the project is completed, they still have 4 years and 9 months in which they need to carry out the sustainability activities on their own. This was the most difficult part. Even if the MA tried to support them, this is the beneficiary's responsibility to ensure the financial flow and the MA is limited in the actions that can be taken in this respect.



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The only thing that MA can do is to offer solutions, to be flexible in accepting different solutions for the same problems, but at the end of the day, what beneficiaries wrote in the exit strategy need to be observed.

- The MA is aware of the fact that the financial corrections are a major concern for the beneficiaries to ensure the sustainability of the projects. The MA would like to avoid completely the financial corrections, but sometimes they are necessary. Thus, the MA tried to take preventive actions and not punitive actions. Most of the financial corrections are related to public procurement. Even after the public procurement legislation suffered some changes, the problems still persisted. The problems are above legislation, the law is complex and sometimes people really do mistakes. People do not commit irregularities with the intentions to commit a fraud, most of the errors are simply mistakes. Hence, the MA tried to constantly draw attention to the possible mistakes that the beneficiaries could make. During the events that MA organized for the beneficiaries, the service controllers were also invited in order to explain the most common mistakes that they can find in verifying procurements and projects in general. But, to avoid these problems, each project must have an expert in public procurement in the team.
- This was taken into account even in this programming period but they did not receive legislation approval. The MA will consider this aspect also in the next programming period, although some different courses were put already in practice. They intend to use even more in the future the simplified cost options.
- The MA does not agree that bigger amounts should be paid at the beginning of the projects. All beneficiaries receive the same amounts which are standard at the programme level. If they will offer more money at the beginning, the MA's accounts will remain empty and delays will occur for the next payments.
- The external factor that the MA consider to be particularly challenging for the sustainability of the projects is the financial status. This aspect does not stay in the MA's duty and there is nothing they can do to improve it.
- The beneficiaries are composed of local bodies that are inclined to fund roads and infrastructures. Projects with great ideas were created in the soft part. One of the project was struggling at the beginning, but they managed to fix the issues until the end of the project implementation period (e.g. E-Network of Bikes). Now in the eligible area there are bikes everywhere, fact that encourage people to do sport and also contribute to the reduction of the negative effects of the pollution.
- The MA mentioned that all the Interreg programmes finance the interventions in terms of roads and that there is normal that other programmes intervene in the area of the modernization of roads.
- It was emphasized that the success of the projects is due to the quality of the partnerships. Also, the communication is very important and is considered a factor that contribute to the overall success of the projects. If the partnership is not solid, the project will not succeed.



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- The MA mentioned that horizontal factors impacting the transport domain are the financing status. For some projects, the finances were not approved even if the project was selected.
- The MA considered that all the projects related to infrastructure have an impact on environment. Some beneficiaries already said that their projects have a neutral impact on the environment. For the projects financed under PA 1 the impact on the environment will be observed when the works will be completed.
- The MA underlined that the need of finance on the Danube navigability is really high, but the allocated budget is not very big. Hence, there were not too many projects applications received on this SO. MA also emphasized that there will be one indicator related to the transport that will not be achieved. Moreover, MA mentioned that the navigability on the Danube was improved. The financed projects were more focused on the safety aspects related to the Danube navigability.
- The MA underlined that the navigability is a special issue that requires national commitment which is difficult to achieve.
- The MA mentioned that the language barrier is a real problem that hinders the cooperation. While other border areas like Romanian-Hungary, based on historical experiences, made people learn the language of each other, for Romania-Bulgaria is not the case. Probably because the Danube, which is in between, makes the cooperation difficult.
- The MA considered that the Danube remains an obstacle in achieving cooperation between the beneficiaries. Anyhow, the EU support helped definitely these countries to cooperate and without the EU support they could not continue the projects.
- The MA mentioned that priority axis 2 has better results than expected. The projects were delivering fast and good results, and also the projects' ideas were extremely innovative. The reason why the projects were innovative is that PA 2 was a new axis for the beneficiaries, and they had the possibility to not be biased with their previous experiences and think projects from scratch. Their results were really impressive.
- For this priority axis 2 there were more soft than hard projects financed. The projects under this axis needed lower amount of money than the projects financed under priority axis 1. Hence, the projects under PA 2 were able to do more activities with less money.
- In the previous programming period, the MA emphasized that the projects did not have a high focus on tourism, while in this programming period there is a higher focus for this field. Also, the projects had the most innovative ideas created and implemented by specialized experts such as professors, scientists, archaeologists etc.
- The MA emphasized that innovation of the projects was an unintended positive effect.
- The protection of habitat (biodiversity) was a top priority under this axis. NATURA 2000 was open to all of the projects and helped to reach the indicators.
- The MA considered that the added value of cross-border projects in terms of environment is that the programme created the field of play for the stakeholders to interact with each other.
- MA mentioned that the actual programming period is a continuity of the previous programme.



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- In what concerns the SEA indicators, no problems were identified and the indicators are monitored and reported to the Ministry of Environment according to the legal provisions in force.
- The MA mentioned that for the Priority Axis 3 the projects' results took a little bit longer to be observed. The MA is satisfied with the projects results and emphasised that the output indicators were not drafted by them and that the ones selected reveal the need of the border in terms of floods and fires.
- The MA is very satisfied with the results obtained under Priority Axis 4. In this programming period, it was the first time when the employment aspect was targeted in a cooperation programme. At the beginning, the MA was cautious and wanted to see how the market in the eligible area will react. Under PA 4 there were created not only job fairs, but also one stop shops where people can find out information about hiring process in the border area, job openings, selection criteria etc.
- The fact that the projects could not benefit from state aid affected the overall results of the projects. The reason why the projects did not receive state aid is because the interest in this area is low. The MA mentioned that they will take into consideration the state aid in the following programming period.
- The MA does not consider this aspect an unintended effect but emphasised that a lot of projects targeted disadvantaged people. Hence, the inclusive aspects were added to the effects that the PA 4 was created.



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Interviewees: Mr. Milen Obretov - National Authority for the Interreg V-A Romania-Bulgaria Programme

Date: 27.02.2020

Topics: Sustainability, Transport, Heritage, Regional Development, Institutional Capacity, Employment, Environment, Risk Management.

Main aspects highlighted during the interview:

- The Ministry of Regional Development and Public Works is the most responsible institution for the RO-BG Programme and other Interreg Programmes (such as BG – SER and BG – Turkey). The Interreg RO-BG is the biggest one in terms of regions covered (the Bulgarian-Romanian border is the second longest in Europe).
- It is the only National Authority from the Bulgarian side. Thus, the Ministry is involved in several activities:
 - It sits on Monitoring Committee and prepares/coordinates National Positions;
 - It is charge of National Control System and design controllers
 - It overviews the national co-financing and it has a key role in the programming phase.
- As compared with the initial needs' assessment, there were no major changes. Thus, the programme retains its relevance in the region.
- Being amongst the less developed regions in the EU, there is a wide range of needs to be assessed.
- The needs assessment had been carried out with a bottom-up approach. This proved to be successful, yet there is room for improvement as local stakeholders may been involved to a higher degree (especially on technical issues).
- On the other hand, we observed a clear continuity with the previous CBC Programme and the PHARE programme dating back to the pre-accession phase.
- The continuity created a local network where the actors have been the same in the last 15 years.
- Yet, the Programme could be more relevant to the region – especially in terms of connecting the both side of borders. The Danube – rather than being a connectivity factor – remains a significant physical barrier for the two sides of the border, which should be taken in consideration in the design of cooperation programmes.
- The cross-border dimension – while improved in the last programming period – remains not fully exploited. The issues of mirroring projects remain common.
- This is because it can be easy to create “artificial cooperation” for establishing partners in order to have access to funding.
- It should also be noted that – as long as physical barriers (i.e. lack of infrastructures) are significant, together with soft ones such as language – it is harder to create real “cross-border projects”.



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- The cross-border relevance is in fact more visible in projects where these physical barriers are less visible and offer larger scope for cooperation. This is the case of Tourism and Cultural heritage projects – where cross-border partnerships are very successful. This is also true for Environmental and Climate change adaptation related projects – especially in risk prevention – where municipalities cooperate in putting into place a common procurement system.
- The EU Danube Strategy is indeed very relevant for the Programme and there are substantial synergies in terms of objectives. For instance, Romania and Bulgaria manage jointly one of the Priority Areas of the EU Danube Strategy that is Tourism.
- The Interreg Programme is also aligned with the National Strategy in the area. Indeed, a reform of the national strategies concerning cross-border links is currently in the pipeline. This will further increase relevance with the Interreg Programme.
- The current reform aims at a more detailed assessment of specific needs at the regional level. It will combine a top down approach from the national perspective with a bottom up approach ensured by extensive consultation from local stakeholders. The experience of the Interreg Programme has had some influence on this strategic rethinking. For instance, both the national strategy and the following Interreg Programme will give more importance to the Maritime aspect.
- Given the extent of the challenges affecting the Region, it is hardly impossible to fully cover all the needs. However, the policy makers, in respect of the Draft Regulations, are considering the pre-selection of one or two projects of strategic importance for the cross-border Region for the next programming period. These will be integrated projects – i.e. encompassing different fields of intervention.
- These strategic projects will be designed with a clear cross-border feature, able to cover the whole territory. The Romanian authorities share this view. There are two strategic projects in the pipeline for the next programming period:
- Integrated transport infrastructure relevant for the EuroVelo 6 and the Danube River Navigation. This project will also include measures aimed at boosting the local economy, as there is a huge untapped potential along the Danube.
- Investment in new bridges, but also the reconstruction of the existing docks and ports on the Danube to improve its navigability from one to the other side of the border.
- For the next programming period, it is important to address also Maritime issues, which are not considered under the current Programme, as there are cross-border Regions that face the Black Sea.
- To conclude, it should be stated that the Programme is substantially relevant with needs and other policies and that the cross-border dimension has improved significantly. Yet, mirroring projects are still relatively common.
- Overall, the effectiveness of the project implementations is satisfactory.



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- However – many project beneficiaries – reported that the project implementation is over-controlled. This is because the programme has different layer of governance – each of those requiring a check.
- Thus, from a project beneficiary perspective, there is the perception of being constantly under auditing and controlling.
- This level of control is different from other Interreg programme in which the Ministry is involved. For instance, the GR-BG Interreg Programme is much more streamline and the control system are significantly less burdensome.
- The auditing system is perceived as “over-controlling”: project beneficiaries often pointed out that the auditors were looking for the minimum irregularity
- This approach led to frequent financial corrections, which – in several cases – led to the decommissioning of projects. Regrettably, this is a major waste of money and time.
- Concerning the implementation phase, it should be highlighted that it is quite easy to find partnership – this is due to the efficient local network that has been established throughout the previous programmes. This avoided many projects decommissioning.
- Another successful factor is the lack of political conflicts between the two Countries.
- Even though the National Authority is not in the programme implementation - thus it does not have any role in project selection – it considers that the cooperation with the Managing Authority is efficient. The coordination is very functional, and the partnership is working well.
- As far as project selection is concerned, the National Authority does not need to approve each project. However, certain projects implemented by the regional administrations which require letter of support from the Council of Ministers. This is because – despite being independent institutions – they do not have their own budget. As beneficiary need to provide their own resources, the approval of the Council of Ministers is needed. They mostly focus on the relevance and financial soundness of the projects.
- This applies only to regional administration – municipalities and ministries do not need to go through this process, as they possess their own budget.
- This procedure will change in the future. In the strategic document, the law for regional development will be changed. Regional councils will be involved in the implementation of EU funded projects. This will ensure better coordination between projects implemented guaranteeing consistency amongst the project goals and the regional priorities and needs. On the other hand, the regional councils will have a more important role in projects’ selection and relevance in the future. For now, the major check by the government concerns the financial soundness.
- Given the level of under-development and the challenges faced by the region, there is room for very big set of interventions. Yet, these interventions need to be consistent with the challenges that the region concretely faces, in the next programming period.
- Auditing is by far the most difficult issue.



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- The language barrier is also an issue. Bulgarian and Romanian are very different and local stakeholders are not fluent in English.
- The beneficiary receives almost 100% of the total costs of the project. This is a good incentive for projects take up.
- This approach should be applied also in the next programming period. Given the lack of local financial resources, this very high co-financing rate is probably the only way to guarantee project delivery.
- The auditing is exaggerated. It lacks proportionality. It should be adjusted to the size of the project.
- In addition, the overall approach of looking for the frauds is not appreciated.
- Sometimes the issue only concerns 5 euros of ineligible costs, but this is enough to stall a project. Not to mention the time wasted in investigating into it.
- The relation is good. However, the geographical location of the Joint Secretariat poses logistic challenges for project beneficiaries.
- It would be better to have more small info points in the programme area.
- The technical assistant budget is very big (about EUR 20M) but it can be designed more wisely. It can be improved, especially envisaging support for project beneficiaries in designing their project ideas
- In general, it is difficult to assess the impact at this stage. Thus, rather than actual findings, we will deal with perceptions
- Sustainability in the long term is difficult to assess. This is the goal for this programming period, knowing that it was an issue in the previous.
- There has been an improvement in the last programming period, as project beneficiary better understood the concept of sustainability.
- The criteria for ensuring sustainability are also stricter.
- If more SMEs will be involved as project beneficiary, this would help project's sustainability, as their goal is to keep their business going.
- Sustainability criteria: example – Ministry of Interior beneficiary. The key area is risk prevention. Within this project, many expensive equipment is bought, and they need maintenance. As they are visible expenditures, the project beneficiary invests in maintenance; otherwise, it would be clear they are wasting public money. Flagship projects are usually more sustainable, as project beneficiaries put more effort in that. While soft measures projects are usually less sustainable long term. (i.e. study or action plan are unlikely to be used in the long term). Once the sustainability period expires, these projects are usually forgotten.
- Then, there is the issue of project repetition and overlapping which is often not tackled enough.
- The sustainability assessment is developed enough. Project beneficiaries may simply sign a declaration without any strict check. The assessment should be carried out more at an early stage



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- considering also local needs. The more relevant is the project, the more likely it would be sustainable.
- In Bulgaria, regional councils will check the relevance at very early stage – which will help the selection of sustainable projects.
 - Diverging political objectives may also hinder sustainability.
 - Hard measures are usually more likely to deliver impact.
 - However, it is difficult to isolate the specific impacts of the programme, as there are a lot of complementary policies/investment in the area.
 - In order to ensure higher impact, a balance between hard and soft measures is advisable.
 - The cross-border region is still facing significant transportation challenges, especially on the Danube navigation. To some extent, the navigability was better 30 years ago when state-run boats ensured daily crossings.
 - So far, impacts on Danube navigability are hardly visible.
 - The new programme shall have more focus on supporting infrastructural investment. Given the limited financial resources, the INTERREG cannot directly finance major infrastructural investments but it may support their impacts.
 - Road Infrastructure Agency in Bulgaria should have some data, but they may be outdated.
 - Socio-economic analysis of Bulgaria is a relevant document for the impact analysis.
 - TEN-T can be a benefit for delivering higher impact – but there is a whole OP on that so overlapping is a key risk.
 - Municipal roads improvements will probably have a more significant impact on the local development.
 - This is particularly true also for the Danube Strategy. The EU strategy ensures traffic on the Danube but not from one side to the other.
 - The programme did not have a significant impact on that. The key limitation is capacity.
 - In addition, this type of projects should not have open call as only public entities can deliver these complex infrastructural projects.
 - Municipalities were invited to submit projects, but they lacked the basic skills (i.e. they are not fluent in English).
 - We can observe a good impact on heritage in the area thanks to the programme. It is arguably the sector where the impacts are strongest.
 - This is because the heritage sector offers many possible interventions: Romania and Bulgaria share a common cultural background.
 - In this sector, the cross-border dimension is particularly relevant.
 - Like the heritage, also the environment offers significant scope for cross-border cooperation. Indeed, both sides of the borders are facing the same challenges (especially flood management).
 - The cross-border dimension in this field is difficult to assess. Likewise, it is quite difficult to assess impacts at this stage.



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- So far, it is possible to highlight that the programme has improved the cross-border information sharing concerning environmental risks.
- Natura 2000 has been a facilitating factor in the delivery of impacts.
- Labour mobility is not well developed. A major obstacle is the lack of infrastructures connecting both sides of the border.
- For instance, Ruse and Giurgiu are connected by a bridge, which makes interregional projects and flows easier and more effective.
- Overall, it would be over optimistic to think that the Interreg Programme may significantly change the current situation in the labour market. The structural unemployment is a long-lasting challenge for the region and would require massive policy interventions.
- In the last years, we noticed a slight improvement, but this is hardly attributable to the programme.
- The programme had limited impact on specific type of employment – especially for minorities such as Roma population.
- Labour mobility is mainly obstructed by the lack of proper infrastructure allowing the circulation of people and goods
- Improving institutional capacity is a feasible target for the target.
- Most of the impacts are at the local level – meaning that it is possible to see an actual improvement in the cooperation on both sides of the borders.
- As previously said, one of the key impacts of the programme was to create a well-established cross-border network.
- Partnership agreements create positive spill overs: partners share their experience.
- This also happens between public authorities – for instance our cooperation with the Romanian MA.
- This institutional cooperation may have some impact on daily citizen's life. For instance, exchanging of best practices may lead to an overall better administration of the concerned areas.
- Networking is as import as infrastructural investments. However, the actual impacts will be observed in the next future. The impacts will be also facilitated by another national programme.
- Considering the budget of the programme, it is impossible that the situation changes in a couple of years.
- The EU contribution is essential, but most of the issues in the region should be national priority.
- Thematic concentration – in line with EU Cohesion policy – was an added value and supported a more efficient use of the funds
- However, probably, local beneficiary and stakeholder would say the opposite.
- The ERDF contribution was a benefit and far better than national programmes. There are stricter rules. ERDF helps local and national planners to concentrate on the real needs. Focus resources on certain topic, which are priority. National funds – on the other hand – are more influenced by political and personal views



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Interviewees: Mr. Bogdan Muşat - Joint Secretariat (JS)/CBC RO Calarasi for the Interreg V-A Romania-Bulgaria Programme)

Date: 05.03.2020

Topics: Sustainability, Transport, Heritage, Regional Development, Institutional Capacity, Employment, Environment, Risk Management.

Main aspects highlighted during the interview:

- The risks that lead to the threat of the sustainability of projects act in different proportions depending on the category of beneficiary. Thus, if for public administrations the financial part that could endanger sustainability is less valid, for NGOs the financial side represents the main risk. Another important factor is the continuity of the implementation team within the institution through which the sustainability of the project is ensured. The political environment is a factor behind the discontinuity of human resources. With the election, mayors change, and county councils' presidents come up with a wave of change.
- The Archive project implemented by the University of Ruse with the National Museum of History and Archaeology Constanta was not only a successful project during the implementation period, but also continued to be successful even after the finalisation of the programme.
- There were also situations in which the same partnership worked in the new programming period, the partnership being from the old programming period. It was observed in this way that projects with a logical continuity are better built and developed.
- Broadly speaking, beneficiaries have struggled to ensure sustainability, and sometimes have resorted to bank loans to ensure sustainability. On the part of the programme bodies there is the responsibility to check ex-post the projects and when appropriate they made recommendations, and proposed measures.
- There are no differences between countries' approach of the sustainability of the projects, but there are different risk factors that act more or less on the types of beneficiaries.
- According to the procedure, projects are checked during the sustainability period, but from a financial point of view, the programme can no longer provide support. It can only provide technical assistance. Some beneficiaries asked for advice, asked for the programme bodies' opinion, and the Joint Secretariat made proposals to the Management Authority for solving various problems raised by the beneficiaries.
- The way in which the beneficiaries planned to approach project sustainability was one criterion for the assessment of the funding application, and generally what was written at the time of the funding application is broadly respected.
- The biggest impact is given by hard projects, which results are the most successful. Moreover, their results are most used by people who live and work in the area because they benefit from shorter transport times and greater safety on the roads.



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- The obligation to have connection with TEN-t network is a positive aspect. If rehabilitation had been made to roads without regional importance, then the effect would have been felt only by small communities and we could not have talked about such a big impact.
- Continuity over periods: Some projects in the previous programming period that had studies on technical projects funded, then implemented the works in this programming period.
- Among the beneficiaries of Priority Axis 1 there were key national authorities that pooled their interests and contributed to the improvement of the inland waterways of the eligible area. They are a key factor of success for the domain. Some problems have been identified since the program was written. These beneficiaries participated in the meetings organised for the relevant actors in the field of navigability.
- There have been unexpected positive effects in the field of navigation. For example, one of the projects aimed to improve the navigability between Calarasi and Silistra but above this transport improvement, after the finalization of the project it was also observed an urban improvement (visual beauty). This can be considered an unexpected effect.
- Large projects interfere with many legislative provisions, but as such legislative obstacles meet, they try to find common solutions: obtaining opinions, etc.
- The projects under SO 2.1 are much more in terms of number and with greater impact, but in terms of value it is difficult to estimate that they have a greater contribution than the projects under SO 2.2. It is not possible to assess if the programme mainly supported tourism, culture or environment.
- The fact that several Romanian residents discovered the beauty of Belgrachich and several Bulgarian citizens chose to visit Craiova and Mehedinti (e.g. roman ruins) represents an extremely important gain. The results were not totally achieved because the results in tourism are like a snowball, grows as time goes on, as the information goes from person to person and more and more people discover the offered and tourist products.
- Despite the fact that there is a perception that in a plain area not much can be offered in terms of tourism, the program has shown that more and more people are also looking for activities far from the city and away from the crowds, especially in the context of the current pandemics.
- The ideas of the projects were generated equally by public authorities, NGOs and academia
- When a festival was organized in the framework of the projects, the festival attracted a lot of participants who in one way or another spent money in the area. It cannot be known if it's a long-term development, but about a short-term contribution that could have a long-term effect can definitely be discussed
- CBC added value: Some measures must be taken together with Romania and Bulgaria. There are places where if not intervened on both sides the effect would not be as great and with as great impact, since the program addresses common problems RO-BG.
- The partnership's criteria that could assure a better success of the project is that within the partnership one of the partners should have the necessary attributes to carry out that project.



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- An undesirable effect would be that a place hidden from the eyes of the people was discovered by many tourists and that place was somehow destroyed. There are currently no undesirable effects; they will be able to be observed after a longer period of time. The public has become aware of the existence of NATURA 2000 sites and protected areas, and this is extremely beneficial.
- The risk field is another successful area of the program. By the end of 2019, 26 projects had been contracted. Projects have a big and positive impact, and their contribution to increase the feeling of safety is great.
- Projects are also addressed to the risks of fires and floods, man-made disasters, etc. there is no specific focus on a specific risk
- Considering that between the beneficiaries in this field are the inspectorates for emergency situations the projects address approximately the same categories of risks taking into account that the beneficiaries have the same type of activity
- In some areas close to the border the projects have developed joint intervention plans, no matter of the country where the risk is located and where the intervention comes from
- The RO-BG border area is not the richest area, so many residents have chosen to go to other countries. The contribution of the programme projects was visible, because where there is nothing, anything realized is important. It cannot be said that they had a major impact, but the initiatives were felt, they were visible, some took advantage of them and used the existing opportunities. The effects exist, even if not of great impact.
- CBC added value: The cross-border aspect is not taken into account in other programmes. The Interreg programme covers precisely this need for cross-border of the issues identified by the national programmes
- The opportunity offered by the program, the correct identification of the problems that exist in the eligible area and the target groups, but also the structure of a partnership are positive factors of ensuring sustainability
- The projects implemented have been targeting mainly the category of young people. explanation would be that young people are more open to what the idea of involvement in the project means, their greater power to accept some changes, but also the desire to be involved in something.
- As a result of the projects, business ideas have been developed and implemented in agriculture, services and tourism
- The impact should be interpreted on the basis of the level of indicators, because any opinion related to this aspect would be subjective
- Fluctuation of the programme teams at the level of the programme institutions affects all aspects of the programme



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Interviewees: Mrs. Albena Georgieva – Vidin District Administration

Date: 03.03.2020

Topics: Sustainability, Transport, Heritage, Regional Development, Institutional Capacity, Employment, Environment, Risk Management.

Main aspects highlighted during the interview:

The Vidin Regional Administration did not implement a project under the said program. Further, please be aware that the beneficiaries have no obligation to inform the regional administration about the projects they are implementing.

For the purposes of the attached interview, information has been used, both from the database of the Vidin Regional Administration and from the official websites of institutions and organizations.

- The Vidin District Administration did not implement the Interreg V-A Romania - Bulgaria 2014-2020 project. A non-governmental organization from Vidin has implemented a project under Priority Axis 1 of the Program related to the Establishment of an Electric Bicycle Network in the Cross-Border Area between Bulgaria and Romania, with a view to better realizing individual mobility and sustainable transport.
- Key improvements related to transport could not be identified given the fact that institutions and organizations have not implemented infrastructure projects on the Territory of Vidin County along Interreg V-A Romania - Bulgaria 2014-2020.
- About the key gaps and needs that should be addressed in the near future, a local stakeholder's opinion was that it should be improved the rail connection between Vidin and Calafat, respectively between Vidin and Craiova. In this way, those wishing to visit the respective cities have the opportunity to leave in the morning from their country and go back home in the evening. Another inconvenience is that, at the moment, the train travelling between Vidin and Craiova passes by Calafat but does not enter the station and continues to Golentsi (a settlement well beyond the borders of Calafat) which makes it difficult for travellers.
- The perception of the local stakeholder about the progress in improving the secondary and tertiary nodes connections to TEN-T infrastructure in the cross-border area in the last 5 years was that there has been real progress within some of the administrative areas covered by the Romania-Bulgaria Programme. With regard to Vidin District, the construction and maintenance of the transport infrastructure is carried out with funds from the central budget and/or other operational programmes.
- The main aspects identified by the local stakeholder that have undergone a change were social contacts in the cross-border region that have been increased. Cultural exchange that has been improved. Inter-institutional communication that was enhanced.



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- The factors that have most influenced/determined such changes mentioned by the beneficiary were:
 - The conditions laid down in the Program, the projects to be implemented in Bulgaria and Romania by legal entities on both sides of the border;
 - The free movement of goods and persons.
- Changes to the transport infrastructure contribute to achieving some of the goals and measures of the Government Program's Priority "Effective Maintenance, Modernization and Development of Transport Infrastructure". The changes resulting from the implementation of the Romania-Bulgaria Programs contribute to the implementation of public policies.
- The program provides quite a wide range of options for solving specific problems. The key is now the evaluation and selection of projects.
- With regard to Vidin district - the construction and maintenance of the transport infrastructure is carried out with funds from the central budget and / or other operational programs and we could not answer whether there was a fair prevention of undesirable effects.
- Sustainable use of natural and cultural heritage is one of the main factors for improving tourism in the cross-border region and one of the areas with the largest intervention under the Romania-Bulgaria Program. The changes resulting from the implementation of the Romania-Bulgaria Programs contribute to the implementation of public policies
- As a key result of the implemented projects under the Romania-Bulgaria Program in the field of cultural heritage is its preservation and promotion. Through various project interventions, the population in the cross-border region is able to get to know the cultural heritage of the neighbouring country. This also helps in the development of new tourism products, respectively to maintain a sustainable tourism infrastructure.
- The local stakeholder mentioned three key factors that have facilitated the contribution of the OP to the progress in using sustainably the natural and cultural heritage and in improving the tourism in the cross-border area, such as:
 - Active non-governmental organizations;
 - Effective inter-institutional communication and good partnerships;
 - Established partnerships between Romanian and Bulgarian institutions, agencies, organizations.
- The opinion of the beneficiary was that the OP internal factors that are important was the simplification of the application procedures.
- The experience gained by the beneficiaries from previous periods and the overall institutional framework are a prerequisite for the effective implementation of the projects.
- Public awareness of Natura 2000 sites is increasing. Social responsibility is increasing. The main aspects that have undergone a change were the increased awareness and social responsibility. Increased awareness of protected areas and increased public involvement in environmental



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- protection in cities and Natura 2000 sites. The changes resulting from the implementation of the Romania-Bulgaria Programs contribute to the implementation of public environmental policies.
- The local stakeholder mentioned three key factors that have facilitated the contribution of the OP to the management and protection of NATURA 2000 sites in the cross-border area:
 - Active non-governmental organizations;
 - Effective inter-institutional communication and good partnerships;
 - Established partnerships between Romanian and Bulgarian institutions, agencies, organizations.
 - About the progress in preventing and managing the capacity of mitigation and disaster resilience in the cross-border area in the last 5 years the respondent mentioned that inter-institutional communication between Romanian and Bulgarian response forces has been improved. Partnerships have been established in the field of early warning and emergency response. The capacity of the specialized units has been increased. Different types of emergency, disaster and emergency management equipment are provided on site.
 - The main aspects that have undergone change are related to both the enhancement of the capacity of the specialized units for joint prevention activities and the provision and / or improvement of the available equipment.
 - The factors that have most influenced/determined such change were:
 - Effective inter-institutional communication and good partnerships;
 - Established partnerships between Romanian and Bulgarian institutions, agencies, organizations;
 - A common understanding of the need for uniform and coordinated action in risk prevention and management processes.
 - The changes resulting from the implementation of the Romania-Bulgaria Program projects contribute to the implementation of public policies in the field of disaster protection.
 - About risk, it was mentioned that an important contribution is the fact that two municipalities in the Vidin region have purchased some of the equipment they need to deal with disasters.
 - Risk management is a key issue in any state policy and ensuring continuity of support from the Romania-Bulgaria Program is important for both countries.
 - The key factors that facilitated the contribution of the OP to the progress in preventing and managing the capacity of mitigation and disaster resilience in the cross-border area were:
 - Effective inter-institutional communication and good partnerships;
 - Established partnerships between Romanian and Bulgarian institutions, agencies, organizations;
 - A common understanding of the need for uniform and coordinated action in risk prevention and management processes.
 - In terms of employment, progress has been made, notably in measures to increase information and promote labour mobility, as an opportunity to tackle unemployment.



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- The key factors that influenced such a change were to raise public awareness of labour mobility.
- Factors that reduce the effect of labour mobility in the cross-border region are:
 - Lack of accessible and understandable information on job vacancies;
 - Language barrier;
 - Different regulatory requirements / recognition or non-recognition of a particular education / qualification /;
 - Social issues (housing, transport, medical care, insurance);
 - Difficulties in the pay gap.
- In employment field, the key factors that facilitated the contribution of the OP were:
 - Active non-governmental organizations;
 - Effective inter-institutional communication and good partnerships;
 - Established partnerships between Romanian and Bulgarian institutions, agencies, organizations.
- About regional development, at the local level, improvements have been noted in the areas of tourism, environmental protection, and promotion of cultural and historical heritage, improvement of partnerships and enhancement of inter-institutional dialogue in the cross-border region.
- The program has a positive impact on regional development.
- The main aspects that have undergone such a change were:
 - Tourism;
 - Environmental protection;
 - Promotion of cultural and historical heritage;
 - Improving partnerships;
 - Enhancing inter-institutional dialogue in the cross-border region.
- The above-mentioned areas of intervention, especially in the soft measures part, are most accessible to the beneficiaries, both in terms of administrative capacity and in terms of co-financing.
- The changes resulting from the Romania-Bulgaria Program projects help to implement the various public policies.
- At this stage, the withdrawal of EU intervention will have a negative effect on local policies.
- In principle, stakeholders welcome EU intervention through relevant programs.



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Interviewees: Mr. Momchil Mladenov – Vratsa District Administration

Date: 04.03.2020

Topics: Sustainability, Transport, Heritage, Regional Development, Institutional Capacity, Employment, Environment, Risk Management.

Main aspects highlighted during the interview:

- From a local stakeholder perspective, significant improvements were perceived in some aspects related to impact in the transport domain, such as accessibility, travel time, safety and connectivity.
- As the main key improvements in the transport area, the beneficiary mentioned that the improvements are related to reconstruction and upgrading the roads, as well as to the fact that more people are using the upgraded infrastructure leading to TEN-T.
- The perception of the local stakeholder about the progress in improving the secondary and tertiary nodes connections to TEN-T infrastructure in the cross-border area in the last 5 years was that the Programme has a positive role to play in developing its transport infrastructure.
- The progress in using sustainably the natural and cultural heritage and in improving the tourism in the cross-border was emphasized as follows:
 - Implementation of activities to support the identity and traditions of local communities. Collaboration between local cultural and educational institutions (museums and theatres, libraries, community cultural centres) to promote cultural heritage, renew, and support local cultural traditions, preserve cultural, artistic and ethnic values.
 - Creation of common products in culture, arts (festivals, performances, exhibitions, art workshops) and traditional crafts.
 - Common cross-border initiatives in the fields of education, youth and sport.
- Largely, the positive effects of the implementation of the Program and the implementation of public policies can be taken into account. Participation in projects gives the opportunity to extend and improve the experience gained by designing it outside the national territory and comparing it with the experience of partners. Becoming partners in ongoing projects, participants create a wide network of connections and contacts that are particularly useful in future work.
- Among key contributions that were achieved the local stakeholder mentioned Organization of conferences, festivals, business meetings and exchange of experience in creating partnerships between Bulgarian and Romanian tourism businesses, as well as promoting cultural monuments and cultural and natural heritage. Among the economic impacts were mentioned:
 - Established regional partnerships for sustainable development.
 - Established cultural information centres on the territory of Vratsa and Craiova, in which citizens of the two border regions are free to use the means of



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- communication - IP telephones, Internet and videoconferencing. In this way, the two communities have the opportunity to be acquainted with the lifestyle and culture of the population of the neighbouring country, with the opportunities for tourism and business, and to discuss and solve common problems.
- A common web portal was created between the two largest public libraries in the two border regions - Vratsa and Dolj with free access to the valuable digital wealth from the collections of the two libraries. Hristo Botev Regional Library digitizes 5 collections from the fund of the Department of Local History.
 - Integrated tourism products / services, common strategies, policies or management plans for the valorisation (including awareness raising) of cultural and natural heritage through its restoration and promotion for sustainable economic use.
- The continuity of supported fields at project level from the previous Programme promote cross-border cooperation between people and communities by enhancing social and cultural exchange, leading to the sustainable development of cross-border areas.
 - The local stakeholder mentioned three key factors that have facilitated the contribution of the OP to the progress in using sustainably the natural and cultural heritage and in improving the tourism in the cross-border area, such as:
 - Joint actions aimed at tourism infrastructure, respectively the general design of key tourism products and services based on natural and cultural heritage; contribute greatly to the economic, social and cultural sustainable development of the area.
 - Raising the awareness of the communities concerned about the cultural and natural resources of the area in order to be valued and preserved in the future.
 - Creating a stable and lasting partnership between beneficiaries on both sides of the Danube as a tool for sustainable Romanian-Bulgarian cross-border cooperation in order to overcome the physical and socio-cultural barriers.
 - The opinion of the beneficiary was that the OP internal factors that are important was the use of grants.
 - Cross-border and cross-border problems are being addressed and opportunities are exploited to the best of their ability. Partnerships, improved coordination, and intensive cooperation between decision-makers at local, regional, national and European level are also needed to the mutual benefit of from the point of view of the common interest in a problem, the advantage of having the problem solved on both sides.
 - Disaster prevention and shared risk management are among the main cross-border priorities. Stakeholders, as well as civil society, through the results of the previous programming period, are aware of the benefits of cross-border cooperation in this area and the implementation of measures and joint projects to ensure effective management of common problems. A higher level



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of disaster risk prevention can be achieved through cooperation and coordination, as well as through joint management of common risks at cross-border level.

- The main aspects that have undergone this change were:
 - Ensuring better coordination and effective response of authorities in emergency situations caused by natural disasters
 - Exchange of experience and knowledge on prevention and effective risk management in the cross-border area, including training programs, training initiatives.
 - Provision of technical equipment and specialized equipment.
 - The implementation of the projects contributes to the progress in joint risk management in the Dolj-Vratsa area.
- Among the factors that have determined/influenced these changes were mentioned the following:
 - Identifying common measures that can best address disasters and shared risks.
 - Support for investment / joint risk management and risk prevention measures.
- The current and expected contribution of the interventions under the programme related to risks that were mentioned are the following:
 - Specialized equipment and equipment for emergencies purchased.
 - Conducted training on effective disaster, accident and catastrophe management. Experience exchange.
 - The implementation of projects under the Program has improved cooperation between authorities in the event of disasters, accidents and catastrophes in the cross-border area and increased early warning capacity. Training was provided for effective disaster, accident and disaster management and public awareness and emergency equipment was delivered. The specialized equipment purchased can be used in the event of emergencies and disasters - floods, earthquakes, landslides, technological incidents, industrial accidents, radiation accidents, as well as serious road traffic accidents with trucks.
 - The projects are of real benefit to the citizens of both countries, to local and regional authorities from the cross-border region and to the institutions directly responsible for disaster management and emergencies.
- The implementation of the projects under the Program enables the joint work of institutions and organizations from Bulgaria and Romania to achieve results that contribute to the achievement of the objectives of the Romania-Bulgaria Cross-border Cooperation Program in the 2007-2013 and 2014-2020 programming periods. .
- Good practices resulting from projects implemented in 2007-2013 can help to prevent and manage other risks as well. Collaborative research on flood forecasting and prevention and a common cross-border approach to the problem can be extremely useful.



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- Joint actions in the cross-border area, together with prevention and emergency response measures, are not only a success factor but also a path to building a more secure region.
- About the progress in integrating the cross-border area in terms of employment and labour mobility, the respondent affirmed:
 - Implement various activities to promote the development of a more integrated labour market in the cross-border area. Mechanisms for training, support and facilitation of the workforce in the cross-border region.
- The main aspect considered to have undergone this change was the increased labour mobility in the cross-border area
- Among the factors that have most influenced/determined such changes were mentioned the following:
 - Develop strategies, plans and joint studies on cross-border mobility and identify key sectors that can activate labour mobility.
 - Creation and development of cross-border business incubators and virtual incubators to encourage the recruitment of staff on both sides of the border
- Among the key factors that have facilitated the contribution of the OP to employment, the beneficiary mentioned:
 - Studies to improve employment;
 - Initiatives that activate labour mobility in the cross-border area;
 - Self-assessment tools to support job seekers;
 - Stakeholder affiliate network and information resources;
 - Various information campaigns, trainings and roundtables
- In the context of depopulation, population aging and migration from the cross-border area, one of the important issues is employment. The demand for and supply of jobs is not balanced. The implementation of various projects under the Program has an impact on increasing mobility and outreach in the labour market by promoting initiatives aimed at both workers and entrepreneurs. It helps to build cross-border networks that share best practices and strategies.
- Specialized equipment for emergencies purchased and delivered, which can be used in the event of accidents and disasters.
- About the benefits of the programme that were added to the cross-border regional development the respondent mentioned that, in the light of the experience of the past years and the implementation of projects under the Program, people living together in neighbouring border areas want to cooperate more. The institutional benefit of cooperation leads to the active involvement of citizens, authorities, political and social groups on both sides of the border and long-term cross-border cooperation in structures that are able to work effectively. In doing so, they are contributing to the promotion of economic and social cohesion and cooperation. Cross-border networks at regional and local level have been set up, which not only facilitates economic



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and infrastructural cooperation, but also promotes socio-cultural interaction by removing barriers.

- The main aspects that have undergone these changes were the risk prevention through the intermediation of cross-border cooperation, promotion of culture and tourism and direct contacts between people, as well as the improved institutional capacity and cooperation.
- Among the factors that have most influenced/determined such changes were mentioned the following:
 - Acquiring knowledge about the other;
 - Mutual understanding and confidence building;
 - The pursuit of subsidiarity and partnership.



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Interviewees: Mr. Evtim Stefanov – Association Regional Partnerships for Sustainable Development

Date: 26.02.2020

Topics: Sustainability, Transport, Heritage, Regional Development, Institutional Capacity, Employment, Environment, Risk Management.

Main aspects highlighted during the interview:

- From a local stakeholder perspective, significant improvements were perceived in some aspects related to accessibility, travel time, safety and connectivity. Hence, from the perspective of **accessibility**, local stakeholder interviewed emphasised that the Electric Bicycle Network project, implemented under the program code ROBG-01, accomplished its main goal. It improved the individual transport mobility for citizens and guests of all secondary and tertiary nodes to the TEN-T infrastructure in the cross-border region by creating a rental network of electric bicycles. About **travel time**, the interviewed local stakeholder mentioned that the individual mobility was enhanced through the electric bicycle network in 32 cities of TEN-T infrastructure. With regard to the network for electric bicycles the necessary **safety measures** have been taken which include: (1) cyclists' safety instruction provided to operators, (2) development of routes for cycling on roads with relatively low traffic, (3) marked black spots where wheeling is not recommended. As a result of the good work of the Electric Bicycle Network so far, there has been no serious incident by a cyclist who has used it.
- About the key gaps and needs that should be addressed in the near future, the local stakeholder mentioned that the roads on the Bulgarian side in the region of the village of Dobridol, Dolni Tsibar - Kozloduy, the town of Oryahovo - the island of Ostrov, the village of Krushevne, the town of Kardam - the village of Durankulak need to be improved. It is necessary to build a cycle lane along the whole Danube river or at least in the most conflict sections as a start, namely from Vidin to the village of Dobridol, from Svishtov to Rousse, from Ruse to Silistra.
- For the Danube navigation, the local stakeholder mentioned that the navigation on the Danube is mainly for passengers – cruise ships and that there are currently no transport schemes along the river. It was mentioned that only ferry connections work well.
- In terms of road infrastructure as a participant in the Danube Ultra cycle race over the last 3 years, the interviewed mentioned that there is progress, but there is more to be desired. Improving road infrastructure is key to increasing the number of cyclists in the cross-border region.
- Concerning the unintended effects of the programme in transport, the local stakeholder affirmed that from his point of view there are no side effects to the implementation of the programme.
- The local stakeholders considered that the projects implemented make a major contribution to the progress of the sustainable use of natural and cultural heritage, as well as in improving tourism in the cross-border region.



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- About the key contributions that the line of interventions in transport achieved, the interviewed emphasised that this line of intervention made the most sense for the development of the region and its transformation into a tourist region. Because of the projects' implementation, the interviewed considered a major impact for tourism.



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Interviewees: Mrs. Svetlana Doncheva, Mr. Stanislav Popdonchev – Bulgarian Industrial Association (Local Stakeholders)

Date: 27.02.2020

Topics: Sustainability, Transport, Heritage, Regional Development, Institutional Capacity, Employment, Environment, Risk Management.

Main aspects highlighted during the interview:

- The Bulgarian Industrial Association (BIA) is a project beneficiary and it is a local stakeholder operating in the area with regional offices. The BIA participated in the 2nd call for Specific Objective: Labour market and mobility with the aim of transferring experience to local actors
- As far as the relevance with local needs, the BIA considers that the programme is well designed to address local challenges, especially from the point of view of unemployment and the development of Human Capital.
- There is an interesting complementary between the Interreg and the national policies in the area.
- The key issue is labour mobility from both sides of the borders – which is well below the potentialities and remain a key issue.
- The cross-border added value of the programme is mostly resulted in the establishment of a cross-border network – which brings together the two communities and helps exchanging best practices.
- However, the issue of “mirroring projects” is still common and language barriers are significant.
- The establishment of partnership is relatively easy as it is built on previous experience. As project beneficiary, BIA found the relation with the Romanian counterpart excellent.
- On the other hand, the reporting procedure is perceived as burdensome and complex. Likewise, the monitoring phase is crippled by a heavy administrative burden. Most of the communication must be printed and sent as physical copies to MA. This is a bit inconsistent with the green horizontal principle.
- In addition, as project beneficiary, BIA considers there are too many levels of control and monitoring. These results in time wasted by notify the same things/documents to different authorities.
- An interesting remark provided by BIA concerns the structuring of project indicators. They are not fully efficient as they measure the number of outputs but not the impacts.
- For instance, the project managed BIA had indicators which assess the “number of training courses held” without assessing their efficiency.
- BIA also pointed out that the indicators do not take into considerations lesson learnt and they argue for a more “learning by doing” approach in the next programming period.
- Indicators should be more ambitious and should be able to capture the added value.
- The selection criteria – on the other hand – are reasonable and efficient.



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- A suggestion for the next programming period is to boost the involvement of SMEs as beneficiary. They should be eligible to directly receive grants as they are key local stakeholders and they know how to operate in the area.
- Applicants guide were efficiently designed
- More business-related projects should be taken into consideration, as they can tackle key issues in the area.
- In addition, some flexibility on administrative and legal issues should be adopted.
 - Small disparities in labour law can be major obstacles to the projects;
 - There is very little attention to the digitisation of administrative paperwork
 - More significantly, legal and technical requirements should be adapted to the area of intervention. Specific expertise is missing in the region and comply with extremely demanding and detailed procedure can simply be impossible for local stakeholders. For instance, BIA managed to fulfil all these obligations, but small municipalities may not be able to.
- Public authorities are somehow detached from the local realities and they should take a more bottom-up approach.
- There should be special and fast track procedures for beneficiary, which lacks technical expertise.
- BIA is not directly operating in the area; thus, it does not have a direct experience on the impacts on the territory. Being a project beneficiary under SO – Employment, it may have some inputs and opinions on this field.
- It is important to have realistic objectives, which consider external factors.
- A long lasting and structure unemployment affect the area, which is a major obstacle to the impact of the programme.
- In addition, there is a substantial lack of infrastructure to support labour mobility.
- EU Policy and EU Cohesion Funds can be helpful, but the challenge of underdevelopment and persisting unemployment shall be addressed mostly with national policy.
- The scope for cross-border interventions is not that visible, as the lack of physical infrastructure hinder any project related to labour mobility.
- To improve impacts, local stakeholders should have a more relevant and significant role in the designing of the programme and in the need's assessment.
- Even though the stakeholder's consultation were useful, these were too formal and not fully efficient in highlighting the issue and problems.
- Results from the desk research are still over considered – more bottom up approach would be needed.
- To some extent, a National Programme would be perhaps more efficient in tackling unemployment. The needs assessment from a cross-border point view is not able to identify the differences amongst the regions involved.



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Interviewees: Mr. Chavdar Hristov – Association Centre for Development (Local Stakeholder)

Date: 26.02.2020

Topics: Sustainability, Transport, Heritage, Regional Development, Institutional Capacity, Employment, Environment, Risk Management.

Main aspects highlighted during the interview:

- From a local stakeholder perspective, significant improvements were perceived in some aspects related to impact in the transport domain, such as accessibility, travel time, safety and connectivity.
- As the main key improvements in the transport area, the beneficiary mentioned the improvements of roads in some sections of the region and rehabilitation of roads that bypass or lead to the same places, thereby reducing traffic on major roads.
- About the key gaps and needs that should be addressed in the near future, a local stakeholder's opinion was that a need that should be addressed is safety of transport by the perspective of reducing road accidents.
- Regarding the Danube navigation, a local stakeholder mentioned that an overall improvement is an increase in the number of passengers.
- The perception of the local stakeholder about the progress in improving the secondary and tertiary nodes connections to TEN-T infrastructure in the cross-border area in the last 5 years was that there is no improvement, or that the improvement is so low that it is intangible. The local stakeholder mentioned that the main aspects that have undergone a change was the ring roads. Moreover, in local stakeholder's perspective, this change has numerous positive aspects such as traffic unloading in settlements, faster long-distance travel is faster, as well as avoiding urban traffic and traffic lights. This change can be attributed to the effect of public policies to a large extent, the local stakeholder affirmed.
- The beneficiary affirmed that at a local level there was a fair prevention of unintended effects of the investments and this led to a wider positive effect in the area.
- About the positive or negative unintended effect on local communities, the local stakeholder mentioned that there was a positive progress in all areas of socio-economic life in the region.
- The changes occurred in the heritage sector are, to a high degree, the effect of public policies due to the fact that they are funded by public funds
- From a point of view of a local stakeholder, the heritage has achieved increased investments in joint and sustainable touristic infrastructure and cultural monuments, wider economic impacts such as creation of new business opportunities, improved mobility of factors etc.
- The local stakeholder mentioned three key factors that have facilitated the contribution of the OP to the progress in using sustainably the natural and cultural heritage and in improving the tourism in the cross-border area, such as:



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- Creating an accessible transport network for cultural and natural attractions
 - The preservation and valorisation of the cultural and natural attractions through their rehabilitation
 - Comprehensively informing and engaging a wider and diverse range of CBC communities through various methods.
- The opinion of the beneficiary was that all the OP internal factors are important and must be synchronized and work together.
 - The local stakeholder considered that the cross-border dimension as well as previously existing common institutional framework had been a success factor because when something spreads and develops, it first starts closest to the border.
 - The beneficiary affirmed that there are no unintended effects of the programme in the heritage field from the perspective of environmental and social effects.
 - About the improvements in the management and protection of NATURA 2000 sites in the cross-border area, the local stakeholder affirmed that it has improved because of the fund available for the facilities.
 - The main aspects that have undergone a change are site rehabilitation and storage, as well as the conservation of such
 - The local stakeholder affirmed that there are no unintended social effects of the interventions aiming at improving the management and protection of NATURA 2000 sites in the cross-border area.
 - The perception about the progress in preventing and managing the capacity of mitigation and disaster resilience in the cross-border area in the last 5 years was that there was no noticeable progress.
 - The aspects considered to undergo a change were:
 - Many machines have been purchased in connection with disaster and emergency work
 - Many projects have been implemented to increase the capacity of the relevant institutions in the area
 - It was mentioned that his changes occurred to a high degree due to the effect of public policies
 - The local stakeholder mentioned that improvements could be observed at a local level achieved, such as an increase in investments in the development of joint risk management in the cross-border area, environmental impacts and wider economic impacts.
 - Three key factor that in the opinion of the local stakeholder facilitated the contribution of the OP to the progress in preventing and managing the capacity of mitigation and disaster resilience in the cross-border area were mentioned:
 - Purchased machinery and equipment
 - Increasing the capacity and expertise of institutions working in the field
 - In employment field, the local stakeholder mentioned that some improvements were achieved, such as development of infrastructure directly linked to increase labour mobility, social impacts



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and wider economic impacts such as lifelong learning, respectively the creation of cross-border business incubators and virtual incubators for promoting employment. It has been mentioned that the continuity of supported fields at project level from the previous Programme represent an added value for achieving Programme's objectives.

- For the institutional capacity the local stakeholder affirmed that there is possible progress in this field that is related to:
 - Capacity building for civil servants
 - Upgrading cross-border cooperation mechanism
 - Developing specific skills
 - Improving public administration efficiency
 - Improving digitalisation of public administration and establishing common cross-border technical standards
- Improvements have been observed by the local stakeholder in all the regional development themes
- The main aspects that undergone a change mentioned were infrastructure, cultural and natural resources and ecology. These changes were influenced by the work of trained people to translate ideas into projects and write them so that they are good enough for funding and implementation.
- Some ideas and projects that have received EU funding will probably not be materialise, whatever, many things have already been done and many economies areas in the CBC regions have developed.



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Interviewees: Mr. Daniel Popov – Centre for Environmental Information and Education - Local Stakeholder

Date: 28.02.2020

Topics: Sustainability, Transport, Heritage, Regional Development, Institutional Capacity, Employment, Environment, Risk Management.

Main aspects highlighted during the interview:

- From a local stakeholder perspective, significant improvements were perceived in some aspects related to impact in the transport domain, such as accessibility, travel time, safety and connectivity.
- As the main key improvements in the transport area, the beneficiary mentioned that the improvements are mainly in the quality of infrastructure and less in the organization of transport. There have been no interventions for modal switching from road to rail transport at border crossings-freight and passenger.
- About the key gaps and needs that should be addressed in the near future, a local stakeholder's opinion was that there is too much emphasis on infrastructure and care is not taken to provide adequate, quality and low-emission vehicles for local transport schemes. Another problem is that state authorities prefer to finance more infrastructure than common cross-border public services transport links.
- Regarding the Danube navigation, a local stakeholder mentioned that the improvement of the Silistra-Călărași ferry was funded.
- The perception of the local stakeholder about the progress in improving the secondary and tertiary nodes connections to TEN-T infrastructure in the cross-border area in the last 5 years was that there is no improvement, or that the improvement is so low that it is intangible. Overall, the passenger service of the Sofia-Bucharest railway has deteriorated.
- The local stakeholder mentioned that the calls were not so efficiently designed; they are usually subordinated to national transport priorities. The beneficiary considered that improvement is more about infrastructure than about citizen mobility.
- The respondent considered that his/her role in facilitating the results of the Programme in this field as being minimal in setting priorities and projects, even though he/she deals with the transport sector and national level.
- The changes occurred in the heritage sector are, to a high degree, the effect of public policies.
- From a point of view of a local stakeholder, the heritage has achieved increased investments in joint and sustainable touristic infrastructure and cultural monuments, wider economic impacts such as creation of new business opportunities, improved mobility of factors etc.
- The local stakeholder mentioned three key factors that have facilitated the contribution of the OP to the progress in using sustainably the natural and cultural heritage and in improving the tourism in the cross-border area, such as:



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- National priorities and policies in the field of tourism, availability of important tourist sites
- The opinion of the beneficiary was that the OP internal factors that are important were the use of grants, stakeholders' consultation and needs assessment.
- The local stakeholder considered that the cross-border dimension as well as previously existing common institutional framework had been a success factor only to some extent because there is more to be desired.
- The local stakeholder affirmed that there are no unintended social effects of the interventions aiming at improving the management and protection of NATURA 2000 sites in the cross-border area. Most conservation areas have not yet been identified with conservation goals and priorities, so there is an infringement procedure of the European Commission against Bulgaria.
- It was mentioned that the above problem occurred because of managerial passivity and lack of interest in the protection of the NATURA sites in Bulgaria.
- It was affirmed that the calls were not efficiently designed to select most suitable projects to achieve overarching objectives and that there is no satisfaction with the current contribution of the interventions.
- The progress in preventing and managing the capacity of mitigation and disaster resilience in the cross-border area in the last 5 years was considered positive due to the construction of modern systems and improved administration.
- The changes have been possible because of the existence of disasters and the existence of clear European policies in the area.
- The local stakeholder mentioned that improvements could be observed at a local level achieved, such as an increase in investments in the development of joint risk management in the cross-border area, environmental impacts and wider economic impacts.
- **In employment** field, the local stakeholder mentioned that some improvements were achieved, such as development of infrastructure directly linked to increase labour mobility, actions plans for disaster resilience and mitigation, social impacts and wider economic impacts such as lifelong learning, respectively the creation of cross-border business incubators and virtual incubators for promoting employment. It has been mentioned that the continuity of supported fields at project level from the previous Programme represent an added value for achieving Programme's objectives.
- For the institutional capacity the local stakeholder affirmed that there is possible progress in this field that is related to:
 - Capacity building for civil servants
 - Upgrading cross-border cooperation mechanism
 - Improving public administration efficiency
- The EU intervention was perceived as being relevant and necessary.



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Interviewees: City Council Călărași
Date: 18.06.2020

Topics: Sustainability, Transport, Heritage, Regional Development, Institutional Capacity, Employment, Environment, Risk Management.

Main aspects highlighted during the interview:

- CJ Călărași has in implementation four projects during the current programming period: one financed under Priority Axis 1 (SO 1.1), one under PA 2 (SO 2.1.), and the other two financed under PA 3 (SO 3.1).
- The **project under Priority Axis 1** is implemented in partnership with Silistra Municipality and with the Municipality of Călărași. The project should be implemented in three years, but they wanted to prolong its period of implementation because there were some problems regarding the public procurement process. Moreover, due to the Coronavirus emergency there were some delays both for the Bulgarian and Romanian sides. The collaboration with the Bulgarian institutions is not always beneficial, especially from the perspective of their administrative issues. The respondent emphasised that maybe one of the explanations of the unproductive collaboration could be that the SO 1.1 is very technical and not all the partners are used with this type of projects. Moreover, the Bulgarian partner does not assure always a normal cash flow because their administrative budgeted are more restrained than the Romanian ones. The respondent mentioned that the project on SO 1.1 is the first project of CJ Călărași financed under Priority Axis 1.
- Under **Priority Axis 2**, the City Council has a project that is still in implementation. The project is called 'Hercule' and it will be finalized at the end of 2020. The respondent mentioned that probably, due to the problems appeared in the public procurement process caused by the Covid-19 situation, they will ask for a prolongation of the project duration. The partner of the project is Silistra Municipality and they had organized several mirror activities, especially for children (Bulgarian side rehabilitated some of their art galleries and Romania side rehabilitated a heritage building where a library for kids will be put in place).
- The County Council Călărași has two projects in implementation that are financed under **Priority Axis 3**. One is implemented in partnership with Bolsovika Municipality and has been prolonged until 2021. It was supposed to be finalized in March 2020, but because some tenders were delayed, they decided to extend it. Under the project, an informatic system was procured and it was installed at ISU Călărași. In addition, the Bulgarian partner will also purchase an informatic system.
- For the second project financed under SO 3.1 the County Council Călărași is the leader and the partners are Pavilken Municipality and the county Gendarmerie Inspectorate. The activities of this project have also a soft part because it aims to establish several partnerships with the



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organizations involved in the area of risk management. The project has also a hard side because it intends to purchase trailers, boats for interventions, cars for interventions etc. In addition, the Bulgarian side intends to regulate the edge of the river in order to prevent the floods.

- The respondent mentioned that the problems they encountered are related to public procurement process.
- The respondent mentioned that is difficult to have an opinion about the impact in this domain because the project just started, and they have only one project on accessibility and navigability in this field. Hence, in the perspective when the project will be finalized, the navigability conditions on Danube will improve, but it is difficult to estimate or measure the impact at the moment.
- An issue of these kind of projects is that the dragging aspect was not considered in any of the funded interventions. The impact of the projects can be observed only after the conditions for the good implementation of the activities were created, and the dragging is one of these conditions. Because the dragging stays in the attributes of higher institutions, it could not have been considered in the cross-border projects' activities, but its inclusiveness could be beneficial. There are some proposals to include the dragging in the national programmes but not in Interreg.
- Some projects, even if they are not finalized under Interreg, they are continued in other programmes (e.g. POR). POR assures a link with other programmes in order to cover a bigger area.
- The respondent considered that the number of people that cross the border had increased as a result of all the projects implemented in the cross-border area in the transport field.
- The respondent considered that the number of tourists will increase even more within the next years also as a result of the projects implementation.
- The high flow of tourists that travel from one side of the border to the other will contribute to the economic growth of each country, as well as to the development of HORECA industry sector in the cross-border area.
- The respondent considered that the impact of the projects implemented under PA 2 would be even bigger if the navigability on the Danube will improve, because almost all the domains under the Interreg depend on the navigability on the Danube.
- The programme management has issued a specific instruction (Instruction no. 13) that established some measures that the beneficiaries could identify for reducing the effects caused by the pandemic situation. This instruction approved the acquisition of the equipment designated to tackle Covid-19. The money spent on this equipment came from the economies that each project had made.
- The respondent considered that the crisis caused by the Covid-19 is the applicability of risk scenarios on which the projects under the PA 3 designed their activities.
- The respondent mentioned that their projects aim to target the entire population of the two counties from the cross-border area, as beneficiaries of the actions taken in risk management interventions.



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- The respondent mentioned that together with the Bulgarian partner they created an intervention plan in case of emergencies.
- The respondent considered that the inter-institutional collaboration improved in the sector of risk management as a result of the projects implementation. All the institutions involved in the project not only directly but also indirectly, collaborated extremely well.
- The respondent considered that there is an improvement in the employment opportunities for both Romanian and Bulgarian citizens and that these opportunities will increase if the transport on the Danube will be easier.
- From the previous programming period, the impact of one project implemented in the employment field can still be observed in the actual programming period: the common online platform created under this project still function and people from Bulgaria and Romania can use it in order to see the job opportunities in Silistra and Călărași.
- The respondent mentioned that some Romanian entrepreneurs opened several small businesses in Silistra in the field of services.
- The language barrier is still an important factor that has a negative impact on employment rate, even if the citizens can access some language courses. The Bulgarian citizens are more interested in learning the official language in Romania.
- The respondent considered that the current programme (2014-2020) has a higher impact in terms of regional development than the one from the previous programming period.
- The respondent considered that the continuation of the Interreg Program is extremely needed and there are still needs to be covered.
- The respondent's opinion was that all the domains should be financed in the future programming period, especially the one related to the risk management.



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Interviewees: Mrs. Miruna Elena Eftimiu, Counsellor – European Programmes and Projects Depart., CJ Giurgiu

Date: 03.06.2020 (10:00-13:00)

Topics: Impact/Transport, Impact/Heritage, Impact/Environmental; Impact/Risks; Impact/Employment; Impact/institutional capacity; Impact/regional development

Main aspects highlighted during the interview:

- Very good and highly appreciated partnership with Ruse – they've created an NGO - Association "Euroregion Danubius" - established in 2002 by Regional administration – Ruse and County Council Giurgiu, representatives of local and regional authorities from Bulgaria and Romania, NGOs and public organisations, chambers of commerce, culture representatives etc situated in Prefecture Giurgiu County and Ruse Region. The Euroregion is registered as an independent legal entity, whose founders are CJ Giurgiu and Ruse Regional administration. Inside this Association, they have strong partnerships for projects implementation within Interreg V a Romania-Bulgaria.
- Projects implemented or under implementation: 3 projects – Transport (2 projects – road infrastructure Giurgiu-Ruse and 1 project – rehabilitation boulevard in Ruse and on Romanian side – procurement of equipment for Transport Department); 2 projects – Risks; 1 – institutional capacity (Priority Axis 5).
- The projects implemented under Priority Axis 1 are a continuation of 2 previous projects financed under the previous Interreg programme. Their impact is not fully quantifiable as the projects under Priority Axis 1 are still under implementation, but mentioned:
 - Improved transport flow,
 - Improved safety conditions on the roads,
 - Reduced journey time,
 - Isolated areas which had no chance to benefit of improved road infrastructure or basic road infrastructure without EU funding through this programme,
 - Infrastructure means a way to give these isolated areas a chance for development,
 - The region is better connected with the rest of the country.
- Problems encountered:
 - High risks for transit,
 - Long distance roads in a very bad shape, in a dire state of disrepair.
- Key improvements as far as transport is concerned in the area: safety in transport; improvements on the economical side as it helps local producers to better sell their products and reach specific markets/target groups; traffic signs improved; better maintained infrastructure etc.
- Key gaps and needs that should be addressed in the near future:



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- there are still areas in the cross-border area that need to be covered and have their infrastructure upgraded/reconstructed;
 - given the new requirements under COVID-19 measures – the need for up-to-date road markings, waiting time for pedestrians to cross the street, up-to-date safety rules in traffic;
 - digitalisation of transport and logistics across all modes of transport (electronic transport information – minutes to arrival, time spent in traffic etc);
 - exclude all the risks transport-associated (accidents, bad weather circumstances);
 - prioritise a lane of traffic for the single use of firefighters, ambulance, police, public means of transportation
 - upgrade Giurgiu bridge/built a new bridge across Danube.
- Danube navigation: improvement of the flow on the Danube (given the implementation of a project whose beneficiary was Giurgiu City Hall); border police needs to get modern equipment; online payment for crossing the bridge is needed; the urgent need to remove the sediment accumulations on Danube; high pollution on Danube; the riverbanks are in very poor shape.
 - Better use of the railway and naval infrastructure as they are non-pollutant, safe and at hand.
 - TEN-T: still there are a large no of needs to be covered in improving the secondary and tertiary nodes connections to TEN-T infrastructure in the cross-border area.
 - The roads in the cross-border area given the investments made are more used, the no of cars is increasing.
 - The need for the Ministry of Transport, Border Police, Giurgiu City Hall etc to be able to apply for projects under this programme to solve issues such as: -ensure connectivity at very good parameters all year long, not only at transit level, given that we are talking about a cross border area; - implement measures to reduce time transit for tourists on both sides of the border (e-payments, e-taxes etc).
 - The need to submit integrated projects that are able to solve different aspects within the same project (for example, infrastructure and the related aspects).
 - Factors that have most influenced/determined such changes: time spent in traffic, the wear/degradation for different means of transportation; passengers safety; certain people weren't able to get a job as they didn't have the possibility to daily travel to the workplace; access to schools – now, the upgraded/reconstructed roads ensure connectivity in safety conditions for all the fore-mentioned target groups.
 - Future Programme should clearly rely upon real needs in the cross-border area, upon institutions that are able to implement and reach such needs, upon experience in project implementation, upon clearly defined aspects based on lessons learnt from the current programme implementation.
 - CJ Giurgiu is satisfied with the current contributions of the interventions in this field (transport).



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- Projects' results are being promoted in the whole county, to be known by all county inhabitants; same aspects are covered on the Bulgarian side.
- Relevant target groups that have reaped significant unintended benefits: local communities near the upgraded/reconstructed roads; transporters; students that travel to school; people that travel to working place etc.
- 2 projects submitted, none of them financed;
- For the next programming period, they have in mind institutions such as: the theatre, the public library etc;
- 3 key factors that in your opinion have facilitated the contribution of the OP to the progress in using sustainably the natural and cultural heritage and in improving the tourism in the cross-border area: partnerships created inside the projects; designing of the calls, financial allocation, use of grants, stakeholders' consultation and needs assessment – all are important;
- the cross-border dimension as well as previously existing common institutional framework have been a success factor;
- CJ Giurgiu played an important role facilitating the results of the Programme in this field (heritage);
- unintended social effects related conserving, protecting, promoting and developing natural and cultural heritage and tourism in the cross-border area: garbage/waste left behind tourists – the need for civic education on waste generated by tourism activities (an idea is to be included in the horizontal principles) or to be part of each project for the future programming period;
- evidence of unexpected positive side effects on local communities (i.e. social mobility, creation of new business, real-estate requalification): integrated investments ensure stronger and reliable positive effects;
- relevant target groups that have reaped significant unintended benefits: local communities, small businesses, local transportation etc; there should be taken into consideration the significant pollution aspects that a higher no of tourists could bring in a remote, isolated area and the way public institutions react so that projects are sustainable and good for environment;
- Project sustainability should be placed for a longer period out of the investment exploitation to avoid degradation and further environmental distress.
- very good relationship with Firefighters Department in Ruse – many projects developed under this Programme;
- they have 2 complementary projects under implementation which follow the previous financed ones;
- the direct beneficiaries develop common exercises and common interventions most of them outside projects implementation;
- main aspects that have undergone a change: level of trust in each other; they rely on the equipment & logistics acquired inside the projects; learn from one another etc;



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- the factors that have most influenced/determined such changes: the lack of equipment, logistics etc;
- key contributions this line of interventions has achieved or is likely to achieve modern equipment for interventions is still very much needed.
- CJ Giurgiu has played a very important role facilitating the results of the Programme in this field.
- 3 key factors that in your opinion have facilitated the contribution of the OP to the progress in preventing and managing the capacity of mitigation and disaster resilience in the cross-border area: partnerships, previous projects results, the degree of involvement from the direct beneficiaries.
- In the future programming period – the need to rethink Priority Axis 4 towards cooperation on medical and social services.
- 1 project finalised;
- They now know each other better from administrative point of view, how each department works, how the financings are distributed etc;
- possible progress in the field of institutional capacity:
 - ✓ Developing specific skills (renewable energies training course);
 - ✓ Capacity building for civil servants (i.e. training courses, workshop, traineeships programmes);
 - ✓ Investments in IT equipment;
 - ✓ Best practices mentorships;
 - ✓ Exchanges for best practices in Sweden (waste management, infrastructure etc) and Austria (renewable energies);
 - ✓ Developed a strategy for renewable energies;
 - ✓ Action plan developed to cover potential project ideas for the next programming period.
- perception about the interventions under this priority axis (5.1) and their effects in the cross-border area in the last 5 years: such interventions are still needed in the cross-border area; public institutions on each side of the border should know each other better so as to build strong interventions together; there is a need to find solutions for schools and school inspectorates to work together and build their own projects;
- main aspects that have undergone a change: partnerships, created trust, IT equipment procured, project management as such became popular among public institutions employees; the Programme itself became more popular and better known in the area;
- possible factors facilitating the contribution: stakeholders' consultation; constant discussions with Bulgarian partners;
- Synergies with POCA projects, EU Strategy for the Danube Region, Danube Transnational Programme etc.
- Improvements in the following regional development theme
 - Employment and job creation (i.e. recent trends on employment rate, creation of job opportunities, labour market dynamics such as rate of skilled work) – indirect effect (the



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- companies that won the tenders on public procurement hired new personnel to fulfil the contracts);
- Climate change adaptation (i.e. disaster resilience, disaster management system.) – indirect effect based on the up-to-date equipment for ISU;
 - Sustainable transport and key network infrastructures (regional mobility, environmentally friendly and low carbon transport systems, multimodal links...) – their interventions are sustainable, but the results are to be seen in the future, depending on other investments to be performed;
 - Institutional capacity of public authorities: - efficiency of the public administration, cooperation between citizens and institution.
- It is the Programme they most accessed for financing; built strong partnerships; one of the Programmes that better responds to their identified needs;
 - main aspects that have undergone a change: each cross-border region tries to have a common approach on every financed area by the Programme; strong partnership, good trust in each other
 - the factors that have most influenced/determined such changes: project results; the Euroregion they've created; they've strongly benefited as institution given the projects financed; projects included in local development strategies were financed with the assistance of this Programme;
 - in case of stopping or withdrawing the EU intervention:
 - loss of jobs,
 - needs not covered any longer,
 - lose the projects results and good effects;
 - lose the experience gained;
 - No longer cohesions with Bulgarian partners.



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Interviewees: Mrs. Daniela Lungu, Head of Department – Regional Development Depart., CJ Olt

Date: 09.06.2020 (11:00-11:30)

Topics: Impact/Transport, Impact/Heritage, Impact/Environmental; Impact/Risks; Impact/Employment; Impact/institutional capacity; Impact/regional development

Main aspects highlighted during the interview:

- CJ Olt underlines improvements in the following aspects:
 - Accessibility (i.e. the transport system and connection had extended, reaching areas which were poorly covered previously),
 - Travel time (i.e. upgraded and/or newly created infrastructures allow users to save time while travelling),
 - Safety (i.e. reduction of road accidents),
 - Connectivity (i.e. the region is better connected with the rest of the country),
 - Upgrade in the quality of road infrastructure,
 - Better traffic flows.
- They face the same needs as in the current programming period.
- Improvements/change as far as the Danube navigation is concerned: positive aspects (financed by ROP) – the new tourist and recreational harbour in Corabia for the development and promotion of the tourism potential on Danube and the operational harbour as a whole in Corabia.
- There are many needs to address as regards the proper navigability of the Danube.
- Main aspects that have undergone a change: upgrade road networks TEN-T connected; traffic safety.
- Factors that have most influenced/determined such changes: the EU funds for construction and modernization of road infrastructure.
- The calls were efficiently designed to select most suitable projects to achieve overarching objectives;
- They are satisfied with the current contributions of the interventions and consider that they have played a role facilitating the results of the Programme in this field (transport).
- main aspects that have undergone a change:
 - improved joint risk management in the cross-border area;
 - improved training and capacity building for authorities involved in risk prevention;
 - increased response capacity to emergency situations;
 - shortening the operational time in case of interventions;
 - improved technical capacity and infrastructure as a whole;
 - public access to safe risk preventions services.
- improvement at a local level: technical equipment improved which enable the authorities in this field to intervene more rapidly and more efficiently; strong partnerships.
- They have developed action plans for disaster resilience and mitigation.



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- benefits the programme added to the cross-border regional development in the last 5 years: better infrastructure; better living conditions; safer roads; local communities had the chance to develop under such circumstances.
- factors that have most influenced/determined such changes: road infrastructure which brings added value to the quality of life inside local communities; a safer community given the investments for the authorities in the emergency situations caused by natural disasters.
- most likely consequences of stopping or withdrawing the EU intervention: most probably the projects would not have a great impact in communities; there would be small-sized projects with little overall impact.



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Interviewees: Mrs. Adriana Barothi, Chamber of Commerce, Industry, Navigation and Agriculture Constanta (CCINA)

Date: 05.06.2020

Topics: Transport, Heritage, Regional Development, Institutional Capacity, Employment, Environment,

Main aspects highlighted during the interview:

- The Chamber of Commerce is an extremely important actor that interact directly with the private stakeholders.
- Chamber of Commerce mentioned that for the Programme's impact on transport the feedback is not too positive because the road transport possibilities are quite limited, and the mobility is quite reduced. The construction of a new roads is taking too much time and for this reason the respondent considered that it should be important to improve the water transport (e.g. to build pontoons) that would take less time to build.
- About the transport mobility, the respondent mentioned that a lot of business affirmed that the mobility is heavy, especially for people from Teleorman or Ilt.
- The CCINA affirmed that businesses consider that there a too few crossing points on the Danube and more work need to be done in this area. Too much waiting time to cross the border.
- It was mentioned that for this programming period the impact is much more observed than the impact from the previous programming period.
- It was mentioned that several businesses were interested in this field and for this reason the Chamber was trying to get more information in order to inform better the business.
- The number of tourists increased in comparison with the previous programming period. It is difficult to measure the cause of the increased number of tourists because other measures than the programme implementation were taken in this fields (e.g. vouchers).
- Also, the respondent from CCINA mentioned that the analysis of this indicator (number of tourists) should take into consideration that the number of tourists will decrease because of the Covid-19 situation, not necessary because the projects were not effective, but because of the social distancing' restrictions imposed by this health emergency situation.
- The Chamber of Commerce mentioned that the Programme facilitated the cross-border communication between the employers and employees due to the mobility of the employers.
- The mobility of employers was more from Romania to Bulgaria than from Bulgaria to Romania.
- The respondent from CCINA affirmed that the work mobility is hampered by the language barrier and transport difficulties.



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- The respondent mentioned that during the programme implementation several campaigns were organized aimed to inform the citizens about the job opportunities across borders, the eligibility criteria etc.
- Because the Chamber of Commerce is not a local authority is difficult to observe the impact that Programme had in this field.
- It was mentioned that the Romania-Bulgaria border is not too developed compared to other Romanian borders. Hence, it was outlined the idea that more funds and work is needed in this area.
- The private sector would be interested to be involved in the next programming period.



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Interviewees: Mrs. Hanc Elena Silvia, IPA SA, Craiova, Dolj

Date: 09.06.2020 (09:00-10:30)

Topics: Impact/Transport, Impact/Heritage, Impact/Environmental; Impact/Risks; Impact/Employment; Impact/institutional capacity; Impact/regional development

Main aspects highlighted during the interview:

- 1 project – *A network of electrical bicycles, which people can use to move freely in the whole cross-border area* – people still do not understand the proper way to use the bikes and the operators who operate electric bicycles and charging stations are reluctant to rent them (possibility not to get them back); on the other hand, bikes are highly used to cross over Calafat bridge on one side and the other side of Danube (Calafat-Vidin route);
- Problems: the lack of cycle tracks – basically there is no infrastructure designated for bikes alongside the border area, on both sides of the border; no designated spaces to park them, no special designated traffic signs etc;
- The projects for transport are mostly implemented by public institutions;
- The need for upgraded public means of transportation together with a designated route split by hours of arrival.
- Brought on the market new, innovative products (electrical bicycles, electrical charging stations, mobile application for bicycle routes (including places to visit, where to eat etc)) that are good for environment and not only.
- Danube is not properly exploited; it needs a real strategy based on practical projects. It could bring a real economic growth; the transport on water is cheaper and less polluting; build more bridges (Bechet, Silistra etc); the ferry is not the fastest way to cross Danube.
- Historical buildings were brought into public attention and following their projects, some of them were renovated; built a network of architects and constructors in the area interested in modernising such historical buildings;
- Learn from each other experiences; know each other traditions, culture, history; their projects could be the start for important touristic routes that cover both sides of the border. Lots of tour-operators and bloggers and newspapers were involved in knowing projects results and they hope they will take advantage of the opportunities envisaged and create attractive touristic routes in the border area.
- Public institutions should also support projects results and turn them as well into added value for the area they manage.
- They have played a role facilitating the results of the Programme in this field.
- Setting up centres for information and counselling and training courses (including requalification authorized training courses) on both sides of the border; inside the centres, beneficiaries are able to find information about job openings on each side of the border, work legislation etc
- Signed protocols with local labour market agencies to facilitate the relation job seeker – employer;
- Beneficiaries better prepared and better skilled for the labour market; trainings in accordance with the labour market needs – able to find better paid jobs;



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- Any person interested in upgrading her/his skills is able to attend online authorised training courses (even inside the designated centres which are equipped with computers for public use) and receive certificates at the end of each training course they followed;
- main aspects that have undergone a change:
 - increase the level of qualification for those attending the authorised training courses;
 - people had to find jobs in new working domains and needed a certificate to do so;
 - improvement in people's lives as a whole;
 - improving digitalisation;
 - economic growth.
- the migration is high and people tend to go to bigger cities around;
- they have played a role facilitating the results of the Programme in this field;
- unintended effects of the programme in this field: new businesses (constructions) following the training courses; new jobs for the unemployed who participated in the courses.
- main aspects that have undergone a change: improving digitalisation of public administration; online documents etc.
- improvements noticed/perceived in the following regional development theme?
 - Employment and job creation (i.e. recent trends on employment rate, creation of job opportunities, labour market dynamics such as rate of skilled work) – some small steps were taken
 - Environmental protection and preservation (i.e. natural and cultural heritage, biodiversity, green infrastructure) – electrical bikes used in the mountains and alongside border areas; attractive for tourists and environmentally friendly;
 - Institutional capacity of public authorities (i.e. efficiency of the public administration, cooperation between citizens and institution).
- most likely consequences of stopping or withdrawing the EU intervention: The Programme brings social and economic development; keeps people in the border area (less migration).



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Annex 5: Case Studies Reports

Case Study for Specific Objective 1.1

**Case study on project: ROBG-418, Road Safety and TEN-T connectivity Ruse-Giurgiu
Programme: Interreg VA Romania -Bulgaria Programme**

Author: Liviu Calofir

Date of finalization: 03/07/2020

Introduction

This project case study is part of the Interreg VA Romania -Bulgaria Programme Impact Evaluation. Basic information on the project studied is given below.

Project name (full title and/or acronym)	Investing in Road Safety and Improving the Connectivity of Ruse Municipality and Giurgiu County to TEN-T Transport Network Acronym: ROAD SAFETY AND TEN-T CONNECTIVITY RUSE-GIURGIU
Programme priority axis (number and title)	PA1 - A well connected region
Programme priority specific objective	SO 1.1: Improve the planning, development and coordination of cross border transport systems for better connections to TEN-T transport network
Project Lead Partner organisation	Ruse Municipality, Bulgaria
Other project partner organisations	Giurgiu County Council, Romania
Other organisations involved in or associated to the project (if existing)	NA
Amount of EU co-financing (in €)	5 377 480.11
Amount of national co-financing (in €)	948 967.09
Main objective(s) of the project (see application form)	The overall objective of the current project is to contribute to the sustainable and safe mobility of people and goods in the CBC area through applying coordinated cross-border actions for the improvement and maintenance of the road infrastructure connected to the TEN-T network and using joint mechanisms for planning and common actions in the field traffic safety and security.
Key activities implementing the project (see application form)	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Reconstruction and modernization of 3.1 km of road covering the key for the City of Ruse Blvd. "Treti Mart" and the connected to it Bridge "Sarayski" 2. Delivery of equipment for cross-border traffic monitoring and road security in Giurgiu County 3. Development of a Joint Traffic Security Strategy for Ruse-Giurgiu CBC Region



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	4. Conducting joint awareness campaigns for traffic security education of the population in partnership with relevant stakeholder institutions on both sides of the border.
Current status of project implementation (select one option)	Ongoing implementation (15.08.2018 / 14.08.2021)

Project preparation and project implementation

The genesis of the project idea/project partnership

The reconstruction and modernisation of the key infrastructures for the City of Ruse “Treti Mart” Boulevard and the connected “Sarayski” Bridge are an old idea. Both are in bad conditions, causing high risks of road accident and traffic jams, which lengthen journey times and hinders cross-border regional mobility. Each day both facilities are used by heavy vehicles that transport raw materials and commercial products to the production enterprises, operating in the area.

These key infrastructures connect the city-centre to the industrial hub (which for instance hosts important structures such as the fire brigade) but also to other Bulgarian cities, such as Sofia, the capital-city, but also Veliko-Tarnovo, another key city in the cross-border area.

For all these reasons it is necessary to rehabilitate and modernize the bridge and the entire length of the boulevard to the connection with the TEN-T network.

Similarly, in the Giurgiu County, the constant traffic of vehicles and the destructive effect of weather conditions incessantly damage the roads (which need constant maintenance) providing the connection for most settlements in the county to the TEN-T network.

Also, the project sets up joint mechanisms for planning and common actions in the field traffic safety and security, delivers equipment for cross-border traffic monitoring and road security and conducts joint awareness campaigns for traffic security education in the cross-border area.

The Ruse Municipality found in the Interreg Programme the most suitable funding opportunity and in the Giurgiu County Council a very strong partner/beneficiary in the cross-border region. Previously, the Ruse Municipality had a very good relationship with the Giurgiu Municipality, with which they cooperate on several cross-border projects, financed under both the previous funding period and the current one. This is the first project in implementation between the Ruse Municipality and the Giurgiu County Council, and the partnership is going very well.

The preparation of the project

This project has a long history. The partners submitted a first proposal for the same project idea in 2015 under the previous call for proposal, but the result was unsuccessful. The second time, the partners refined the project concept, by addressing the comments from the Joint Secretariat to the previous proposal, and the outcome was satisfactory.



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Its evaluation and contracting process

Regarding the contracting process, the partners received requests for clarifications, more specifically regarding the budget, which led to a budget-reduction of some sections related to the engineering aspects, as some of the costs were considered too high by the Joint Secretariat.

The partners subcontracted realisation the concept design, but they developed the project application themselves. Back in 2015, they subcontracted the project application and the outcome was not as expected, so the second time, in 2017, they decided to develop the project application internally.

The history of its implementation

After the approval of the project, as part of project activities, the partners subcontracted the elaboration of procurement documentations for each of the contracts under the project.

For some of the contracts they received requests for corrections, during the verification process, by the first level control unit. The contracts subjected to revision concerned a) the concept design, b) the elaboration of the procurement documents, and c) the reconstruction engineering of the bridge and the boulevard.

They appealed against all the corrections and, so far, the settlement of appeals concerning the elaboration of procurement documents contract that has resolved by the courts in favour of the two partners. The contracts for the concept design and the engineering are still under appeal procedure.

Achievements and successful implementation aspects

The project promotes a set of soft implementation measures and the exchange of best practices between the Municipality of Ruse and Giurgiu County Council, for ensuring safe and secure cross-border mobility. As an example, the partners are implementing joint awareness campaigns for traffic security, for which the implementation will be concluded in Autumn 2020. Also, they are currently carrying out without major problems the majority of the contracts under this project.

Major implementation difficulties

The partners highlighted as major implementation difficulties the fact that they had to restart the public procurement of the reconstruction engineering, which delayed the starting of the works for about 6 months. Indeed, they launched, in the winter of 2018, a public procurement procedure related the reconstruction engineering contract, which was successfully concluded; however, at the signature stage, the subcontractor resigned on the basis that the price was considered too low and they would not manage to carry out reconstruction of the boulevard and the bridge at the same price.

Also, they have experienced several problems regarding to the language barriers. The Partners referred about mistranslations and misinterpretations in Romanian, Bulgarian and English, which slowed sometimes the communication flow. However, in such cases, they received prompt assistance from the Ruse-Giurgiu Association "Euroregion Danubius", which has experts fluent in both Romanian and Bulgarian.

The Covid-19 pandemic slowed down the implementation and the supervision of the road sections' works.



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Interaction and relationship with the management system (JS/MA)

The collaboration with both Joint Secretariat and Managing Authority is very good. The partners highlighted the good communication flow and the timely responses in case of problems.

Project contributions to expected results (specific objectives) and programme-wide objectives

The general progress of the project area in the domain targeted by the relevant specific objective

In terms of the total length of the reconstructed road network, since the 3,1 km of the “Treti Mart” Boulevard (2700 m) and the Sarayski Bridge (400 m) do not represent a very long stretch of road, the project does not contribute extensively to achieve the targets and indicators under Priority Axis 1, and this is one of the reasons why the project has been subjected to budget reduction.

According to the partners, while it is true that the reconstruction part of project does not contribute extensively in achieving the Programme’s objectives and indicators, the road-infrastructures subjected to intervention are very strategic for the Municipality of Ruse and for the whole cross-border area, and thus for the Programme as such.

Also, the partners suggested, for the next programming period, to take more in account, while assessing the projects’ matching with the indicators and targets, the strategic importance of the modernized roads for the cross-border area and for citizens’ life and not only the actual length of the intervention.

On the other side, the project serves the objectives and indicators under PA 1, by promoting several actions in direction of common planning and joint implementation of measures for traffic security and traffic culture of the population. Indeed, the low traffic security culture of the population using the road network in the region is one of the main cause of roads accident in the cross-border area, apart from the poor infrastructures’ conditions.

The current and expected contribution of the project to this progress;

The rehabilitation of the road infrastructures will lead to a significant improvement in the connectivity of Ruse to the TEN-T network, which will directly and indirectly contribute to the development and expansion of the economic activities, and thus increase the attractiveness of the City of Ruse and the cross-border area as such.

These infrastructure improvements will have potentially had a very positive effects on the TEN-T network, hence preventing possible overloading to the other entry–exit arteries of the Ruse City and leading to increased access security and enhanced mobility, but also positive repercussions on the environment.

The mobility of the cross-border area will be also positively affected by the implementation of joint measures for traffic security and traffic culture in the cross-border area, which will result in fewer car accidents.



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Also, the relationship between Giurgiu and Ruse have demonstrated to be among the most successful examples of cooperation in the cross-border area, and the achievements of this project will enhance the synergies between the two cities.

The factors facilitating this contribution

The main factors that have facilitated the contribution are the high commitment of the two partners to improve in a tangible way the cross-border mobility and road safety, but also the existence of the Interreg Programme itself.

For instance, concerning the modernisation of the “Treti Mart” Boulevard and the Sarayski Bridge in the City of Ruse, there are other national operational programmes in Bulgaria that can finance such kind of works, but the partners were interested to improve the connection to the TEN-T network, and the priorities of the cooperation Programme facilitated this intent.

Any unintended (positive or negative) effects of the project in the relevant field

The project is causing some negative unintended effects because the road works Ruse are slowing down the operating economic activities in the area, as well as the transport of goods and people.

The works are also negatively affecting the public transport in the Ruse Municipality, as the trolleybus depo is situated in the industrial area connected to the city centre by the bridge, which must be closed during the reconstruction, thus hindering the smooth functioning of the public transport.

For these reasons, the partners and subcontractors are trying to finish the works as soon as possible

Direct effects achieved by the project contributing to the relevant Programme priority axis

The implementation period is not ended; thus, the project’s direct effects are not fully identifiable.

External factors influencing the achievement/unachievement of such effects

At this stage, some external factors might be identified. The first one concerns the reliability of the construction works subcontractor, and the subcontractor for the supervision of the works. Another external factor is related to the change in the City of Ruse’s local political situation and the difficulties to adapt to the new mayor’s team, in the middle of the project implementation.

Internal factors facilitating the project direct effects;

Regarding the internal factors facilitating the project’s direct effects the partners mentioned the supervision activities of the road sections carried out by the internal project implementation team of experts

Key findings and aspects of wider relevance for the programme evaluation

Indications on the capacity of the programme of generating impact considering the relevant specific objective

The programme has high capacity of generating positive impact for what concerns the regional mobility cross-border area. This leads to positive consequences for the development of the cross-border and citizens’ well-being and safety.



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Evidence on general challenges or problems that emerge when addressing a particular specific objective

Regarding the challenges that emerged in the context of addressing the S.O 1.1, it has been highlighted that the projects' evaluation should take more in consideration the strategical importance of the modernisation of certain infrastructures rather actual length subjected to intervention.



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Case Study for Specific Objective 1.2

Case study on project: ROBG-522, Danube Safety Net
Programme: Interreg V-A Romania - Bulgaria Programme
Author: Liviu Calofir
Date of finalization: 03/07/2020

Introduction

This project case study is part of the Interreg VA Romania -Bulgaria Programme Impact Evaluation. Basic information on the project studied is given below.

Project name (full title and/or acronym)	ROBG-522, Danube Safety Net
Programme priority axis (number and title)	PA 1 – A well connected region
Programme priority specific objective	S.O 1.2 – Increase Transport safety on waterways and maritime transport routes
Project Lead Partner organisation	Bulgarian Executive Agency “Maritime Administration” (EAMA)
Other project partner organisations	Romanian Naval Authority (ANR).
Other organisations involved in or associated to the project (if existing)	N/A
Amount of EU co-financing (in €)	€ 4 844 670.93 (85%)
Amount of national co-financing (in €)	€ 854 941.94
Main objective(s) of the project (see application form)	The overall objective of the Danube Safety Net project is: To improve the safety of river Danube navigability for the whole length of the common stretch between Romania and Bulgaria
Key activities implementing the project (see application form)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Establishment of Emergency Response centers (ERC) in Romania in the town of Turnu Magurele) and Bulgaria in the towns of Ruse and Lom; - Supply, development and integration of a common Geographic Information System for Emergency Response; - The content of this website does not necessarily represent the official position of the European Union - Supply of specialized crafts carrying emergency response equipment for the two partners; - Development of a Common Action Plan for reaction in situations related to transport safety on the common stretch of the Danube river.
Current status of project implementation (select one option)	Ongoing implementation (15.09.2018 / 14.09.2021)

Project preparation and project implementation

The genesis of the project idea/project partnership

The Lead Partner Bulgarian Executive Agency “Maritime Administration” (EAMA) and the Romanian Naval Authority (ANR) have started the Danube safety after the successful completion of the ROBG 172 -



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DANRiSS project, approved under the first call for proposal, under the current programming period of the Interreg VA Romania -Bulgaria Programme.

Thanks to fruitful collaboration from DANRiSS, a very good relationship has matured between the two authorities and optimal synergies have been developed at the operational level. When the two authorities started to look into loopholes in their bilateral cooperation concerning general transport safety, the main idea was to develop both joint pre-emptive and reactive measures.

Throughout the DANRiSS project the two authorities covered the pre-emptive measures, but the reactive part was somehow missing, as they lacked of both administrative and hardware capacity to react in case of major disasters (on the Bulgarian side there is for instance a power-plant and several chemical factories around the Danube River). On this basis and the need to develop common reactive measures, the beneficiaries discussed the development of the Danube Safety Net project.

The authorities took advantage of the opportunity offered by the Programme, also because Romania and Bulgaria have poor cooperation records in terms of large-scale projects, especially in the Transport field.

The preparation of the project

The drafting process of the proposal has been a pretty straightforward process, since it was not the first time that the two authorities presented a joint proposal.

While general outline of the projects was discussed by the two beneficiaries, the authorities subcontracted the proposal design and its drafting component. Basically, they perfectly knew what they wanted from the technical point of view, they only need an external help to transform the idea into a concrete proposal, to be understandable in the best possible way for the evaluators.

Its evaluation and contracting process

Regarding the evaluation of the project, the lead beneficiary stated, when asked to comment about some low scores in the application assessment, that they are dealing with very technical matters (for instance IT tools to support transport safety are very complex), which are sometimes are less intuitive and not immediately understandable.

For want concerns the contracting process, the authorities subcontracted the development of the IT system and the public procurement documentation procedures. Although the subcontracting side went well, the lead beneficiary commented that sometimes externalisation processes are challenging.

The history of its implementation

First of all, the Danube Safety Net project itself was a big achievement. The beneficiaries have been able to discuss in detail the joint operations on the Danube river. The stakeholder meetings were quite successful, especially the one in Ruse, which attracted the attention of local media on what the two countries are achieving for the safety of the Danube River.



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Achievements and successful implementation aspects

Danube Safety Net is a unique project at the EU level, thanks to which the Naval authorities in Romania and Bulgaria will exchange information between their IT platforms and pool resources in case of major accidents.

Major implementation difficulties

Regarding the language barriers, they have not encountered significant obstacles, because Naval authorities utilise English as operational language, and both authorities they also have some internal resources that are also fluent in the other cross-border language.

Interaction and relationship with the management system (JS/MA)

The Beneficiaries are very happy about their relationship with management system of the programme, as both Managing Authority and Joint Secretariat are very collaborative.

Project contributions to expected results (specific objectives) and programme-wide objectives

The general progress of the project area in the domain targeted by the relevant specific objective

Danube Safety Net has a high cross-border relevance and presents a direct and immediate link between the project and programme result indicator I7 – “Percent of the RO-BG CBC Danube length and Black Sea where safety of the navigation has been improved by joint actions”. The project’s outputs will bring major improvement in the fields of the:

- Navigability on the Danube River;
- General transport safety;
- Development of integrated solutions such as joint traffic management;
- Traffic safety measures.

The current and expected contribution of the project to this progress

The Romanian and Bulgarian naval authorities will develop will have two operational full systems, that will allow them to conduct joint operations. In practical terms, this will improve the:

- Communication and synchronization of emergency response activities on the Danube;
- Rescue teams’ capability;
- Reaction times in case of calamity events.

Danube Safety Net will also provide for more adequate and up to date equipment for more efficient rescue missions.

The factors facilitating this contribution

Among the factors that facilitated the contribution of the project the beneficiaries highlighted the:

- Professional attitude of all the staff in the two agencies;
- Correct identification of the main needs;
- National governments’ support on the project to the naval authorities;
- Interreg VA Romania -Bulgaria Programme, which provided for the right Priority Action within which carrying out coordinated actions in the safety navigation field, between the Romanian and Bulgarian counterparts.



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Any unintended (positive or negative) effects of the project in the relevant field

There are no unintended effects so far, and according to the beneficiaries there can only be positive effects from the improvement of the safety navigation on the Danube River. Also, the improvement in terms of navigation safety will have positive spillover effects on the sustainable management of the Danube. Danube Safety Net represents just a first step, which needs to be taken further, as many things must be upgraded in terms of navigation safety

Direct effects achieved by the project contributing to the relevant Programme priority axis;

The implementation period is not ended; thus, the project's direct effects are not fully identifiable.

Key findings and aspects of wider relevance for the programme evaluation

Indications on the capacity of the programme of generating impact considering the relevant specific objective

The Programme has been able to generate high impact in the cross-border region in the context of the S.O "1.2 – Increase Transport safety on waterways and maritime transport routes". Indeed, thanks to the cross-border Programme the Romanian and Bulgarian naval authorities have been able to coordinate their actions in case of major disaster on the Danube, which will help to preserve the environment and human lives in the cross-border area

Evidence on general challenges or problems that emerge when addressing a particular specific objective;

No general challenges and/or problems have been highlighted by the beneficiary when addressing actions within the project under S.O "1.2 – Increase Transport safety on waterways and maritime transport routes



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Case Study for Specific Objective 2.1

0.1 Cover page:

Case study on project: A heritage-friendly cross-border economy in Romania and Bulgaria

Programme: Interreg V-A Romania-Bulgaria 2014-2020

Author: Andrea Floria, Cristina Cojoacă

Date of finalisation: 02.02.2018

0.2 List of abbreviations:

JS-Joint Secretariat
LP-Lead Partner
PA-Priority Axis
SO-Specific Objective

0.3 Table of contents:

1. Introduction

This project case study is part of the Interreg V-A Romania-Bulgaria Programme Impact Evaluation. Basic information on the project studied is given below:

Project name (full title and/or acronym)	A heritage-friendly cross-border economy in Romania and Bulgaria (Heritage for RO-BG Economy)
Programme priority axis (number and title)	PA2 – A Green Region
Programme priority specific objective	SO 2.1. To improve the sustainable use of natural heritage and resources and cultural heritage
Project Lead Partner organisation	Constanta Chamber of Commerce, Industry, Shipping and Agriculture
Other project partner organisations	Chamber of Commerce and Industry, Dobrich
Other organisations involved in or associated to the project (if existing)	
Amount of EU co-financing (in €)	€ 284 053.84
Amount of national co-financing (in €)	€ 43 440.21
Main objective(s) of the project (see application form)	The project overall objective is to facilitate the adoption of a common cross-border approach on the sustainable use of cultural and natural heritage, in order to determine and promote new models of viable and heritage-friendly economic activities, and improve the tourism in the cross-border area, by elaborating a cross-border strategy for a



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	<p>heritage-friendly business environment and creating the cross-border framework for supporting businesses to adopt and implement heritage-friendly strategies.</p> <p>The project's main results are:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • An assumed cross-border strategy for developing a heritage-friendly economy – a framework for guiding, volunteer regulation and recognition of sustainably using natural and cultural. • An implementation framework covering the RO and BG chambers of commerce and other business support organisation along the border to be involved in the Strategy implementation, including trainings for their experts, and production of various implementation tools. • A pilot implementation phase including an information and educational campaign targeting local business communities in Constanta and Dobrich, pilot training sessions and recognition.
<p>Key activities implementing the project (see application form)</p>	<p>WP1 – Elaboration of the Strategy for a heritage-friendly business environment in the Romanian-Bulgarian border area</p> <p>WP2 – Establishment of the Strategy implementation frame for CCI's and other business associations, as implementing entities</p> <p>WP3 – Pilot implementation actions of the Strategy for developing of a heritage friendly business environment</p> <p>WP4 – Visibility and publicity of the project</p> <p>WP5 – Project management</p>
<p>Current status of project implementation (select one option)</p>	<p>Finalised on 02.02.2018</p>

2. Project preparation and project implementation

Constanta has a long history of partnership with Dobrich and it is an important and trustful partner. This is the reason why the partnership functioned very well.

The Constanta Chamber of Commerce aimed to implement a project that could be useful to the community and to make the community aware of the existing problems in the field of heritage. A pilot action was designed to create an implementation group consisting of 15 actors from both countries. The results obtained during the implementation process were well received. Through the project it was set up a working group with 10 stakeholders that met and discussed about the industries that could affect the



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domain. Consulting services were used in order to elaborate the application. The procurement process was easy, the requirements were very clear.

The project was designed in common by partners from both sides of the border, on the base of their ideas and priorities. The Lead Partner coordinated this process. As result of this activity, the present Application form and all necessary annexes were prepared. The contract started on 03.02.2016 for a duration of 24 months.

The project supported directly the following target groups:

- **General public:** Romanian border; tourists arrived in the 15 counties/districts, in 2014, namely 1,850,876 of which 1,100,720 in Romania; - population at large in the 15 counties/districts, by 1.01.2014, namely 4,420,413 persons, of which 2,963,964 persons in Romania. All statistics have been provided by the national institutes of the two countries;
- **Business support organisation:** business associations and CCIs in the 15 counties/districts, namely 31 entities: 15 local CCIs, one cross-border CCI, and at least one business association in each county/district;
- **Local public authority:** local authorities in the 15 counties/districts, in 2014, namely 626, of which 565 communes and towns on the Romanian border;
- **Other:** Business associations and CCIs. Business associations and CCIs in the 15 counties/districts, namely 31 entities: 15 local CCIs, one cross-border CCI, and at least one business association in each county/district; private sector/ formed of active enterprises in the 15 counties/districts, as per 2013, namely 102,494 companies, of which 56,468 on Romanian border;

The project is tackling common territorial challenges that are affecting both Constanta and Dobrich. The territorial challenges identified are:

- Despite being active business communities, their reduced economic results place RO-BG peripheral areas among the poorest in EU and in the two countries, while recent evolution of the macroeconomic and local statistics shows a very slow recovery.
- Enterprises lack of knowledge and the allocation of few financial resources to restore, protect and sustainably use their most important assets – the heritage their businesses draw out their wealth, while communities draw their identity and pride.

In this context, by supporting businesses to identify, promote and implement new ways of economic usage of heritage, covering the entire value chain of customers/tourists – company – local community, under a common cross-border strategy, the project will pave the way for maintaining harmony between heritage protection and its economic usage, and thus improve the tourism in the border area.

A cross-border approach is more relevant for the cultural heritage, as reflecting the common history, while the natural heritage reflects unique and common geographic regions, mostly concentrated along Danube;



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The project activities were carried out in the mirror with the Bulgarian partner, being a cross-border project.

3. Project contributions to expected results (specific objectives) and programme-wide objectives

Project main result is the *Strategy for a heritage-friendly business environment in the Romanian-Bulgarian border area* addressing cross-border economy and aiming at facilitating enterprises to adopt measures for sustainably using and thus valorising the natural and cultural heritage, as direct or indirect assets of their business, with the view of improving cross-border tourism. Its concepts will be largely promoted to allow business and local communities to change mentalities and action.

Coherent framework to implement the strategy mentioned above consisting in a network of institutions formed of at least one implementing entity for each border county/district, trained and well equipped with implementation tools (guidelines, on-line tools, training modules, multi-annual action plans and communication plan). The implementing entities will be involved in the elaboration of the strategy and identify with it.

List of literature references

Project documentation available on eMS
Project documentation available on website
Annual Implementation Reports
Interreg V-A Romania – Bulgaria Programme

Other information sources used

(a) Online sources

(b) Project websites or other websites accessed (with link and date of access):
<https://www.interregrobg.eu/en>,

(c) Interview(s): Dna. Adriana Barothi, Chamber of Commerce Industry, Shipping and Agriculture Constanta. 26.06.2020, 30 minutes.

Case Study for Specific Objective 2.2.

Case study on project Innovative and collaborative management of Natura 2000 sites in the Danube border region

Programme: PA2 - A green region

Author: Calin Moldovan-Teselios

Date of finalisation: 04.07.2020

0.2 List of abbreviations:

(...)

1. Introduction

This project case study is part of the Interreg V-A Romania-Bulgaria Programme Impact Evaluation. Basic information on the project studied is given below:

Project name (full title and/or acronym)	Innovative and collaborative management of Natura 2000 sites in the Danube border region
Programme priority axis (number and title)	PA2 - A green region
Programme priority specific objective	SO 2.2: To enhance the sustainable management of the ecosystems from the cross-border area
Project Lead Partner organisation	Garda Nationala de Mediu / National Environmental Guard (NEG)
Other project partner organisations	Регионална инспекция по околната среда и водите – Велико Търново РИОСВ – Велико Търново / Regional Inspectorate of Environment and Water – Veliko Tarnovo (RIEW)
Other organisations involved in or associated to the project (if existing)	-
Amount of EU co-financing (in €)	988,395.56
Amount of national co-financing (in €)	151,166.38 (and 23,256.37 Own Contribution)
Main objective(s) of the project (see application form)	To promote and strengthen the partnership between the border environment communities to sustainably management of ecosystems in zones of European Natura 2000 network and to support the cross-border investments in Natura 2000 sites.
Key activities implementing the project (see application form)	Development and implementation of a common management plan for Natura 2000 sites in the cross-border Danube area. Information system development and implementation to support the common management plan. Information and publicity for the project; public awareness concerning Natura 2000 sites.



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Current status of project implementation (select one option)	Finalised (X) Close to finalisation (...) Ongoing implementation (...)
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Project preparation and project implementation

A synthetically information about:

- the genesis of the project idea/project partnership.
- the preparation of the project.
- its evaluation and contracting process.
- the history of its implementation.
- achievements and successful implementation aspects.
- major implementation difficulties.
- interaction and relationship with the management system (JS/MA).

In a society where the exposure of the environment to destructive actions has become a constant, threatening and vulnerable habitats and ecosystems, the concern for a protected, harmoniously developed environment, in which human intervention does not create difficulties of regeneration has become a priority policy of the European Union. Natura 2000, the network of sites designed to protect certain habitats or populated areas of endangered species, endemic or with a small number of members, areas of transnational importance, has developed from the desire to extend the differentiated effects of national legislation on reservations natural parks, national parks or other protected sites and to standardize the legislative framework, imposing common requirements for a common problem that transcends state borders.

Selected to ensure the long-term survival of protected species and habitats (there are currently around 2,000 species and 230 habitat types for which essential sites need to be designated Natura 2000 sites) under the Birds Directive and of the Habitats Directive, using scientific criteria, Natura 2000 sites are initially proposed by the Member States, so that later, the European Commission, with the help of the European Environment Agency (EEA), analyses, evaluates and adopts the following list of sites. to be designated as Special Areas of Conservation (AUC). In 2017, Natura 2000 protected 27,312 sites with terrestrial area 787,606 km² (around 18 percent of land of the EU countries) and marine area 360,350 km² in 2017 and is considered almost complete in the EU terrestrial environment.

In Natura 2000 sites, the work and, in general, human activities regime is not excluded or restricted, as in nature reserves. In a different approach of ownership (most of the land remains privately owned) and income generating activities, the program is “much wider, largely centred on people working with nature rather than against it”¹³. But this specific philosophy of human-nature coexistence could imply some risks and could generate some unexpected and unwanted effects.

¹³ https://ec.europa.eu/environment/nature/natura2000/index_en.htm



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As is mentioned in the “Innovative and collaborative management of Natura 2000 sites in the Danube border region (INCOLAB)” project’s application form, there is a significant risk which could affect the protected area, because of the local or national economic pressure and the lack of experience in the management of natural resources. Illegal exploitations, uncaring tourism, tasteless constructions, and poaching are the consequences of a poor control and a lack of effective cooperative measures (e.g. joint planning, strategies, mapping, management plans or coordinated management tools) related to biodiversity conservation and landscape protection and promotion in Natura 2000 sites have been elaborated and enforced so far. Also, the industrial risk, present in the cross-border region it, is another threat of Natura 2000 area, their biodiversity.

The context of the start of the project managed by the National Environment Guard (NEG) and Regional Inspectorate of Environment and Water - Veliko Tarnovo (RIEW) was determined by the problems in the cross-border region regarding the implementation of common environmental policies and actions, cooperation between national bodies. of the two states to establish a partnership structured on several levels:

- a. The need of a common framework of administration on both sides of the Danube
- b. The need of a strong partnership determined by common interests
- c. The implementation of a common framework for reporting and exchanging valuable information
- d. The need of involvement the social actors at various levels, especially the involvement of public in tourism, preserving the area activities, in irresponsible income generating activities
- e. The need of solving issues related to relevant policies (Water Framework and Flora, Fauna, Habitat Directive and Birds Directives) in a modern, collaborative, and innovative way.

The project was awarded according to the decision of Monitoring Committee no. 16 on 15th of October 2015. The project duration was 24 months, without exceeding 31st of December 2023. The total eligible value was 1,162,818.31 euro, out of which 988,395.56 euro (85%) represented ERDF contribution, 151,166.38 euro (13%) represented State Budget Co-financing and 23,256.37 euro was Partners Own Contribution. The initial duration of 24 months, starting with 19.02.2016, was extended with other 5 months and the date of project finalization was set to 18.07.2018. the project budget was 1,082,716.06 euro, out of which 920,308.65 euro was ERDF financing.

Briefly, the history of project implementation includes the following relevant milestones:

The financing contract number 15448 for the implementation of the project "ROBG 10 - INCOLAB Innovative Collaboration Management of Natura 2000 Sites in the Danube Border Area" financed under the Interreg VA Romania-Bulgaria Program, for the objective European Territorial Cooperation 2014-2020, Priority Axis 2, was signed on the 11th of February 2016.

On the 8th of March 2016, The National Environmental Guard appoints the project team. During April 2016, the project team establishes the framework of the project implementation



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On the 18th of May 2016 the first progress report is submitted to the Joint Secretariat. On the 31st of May 2016, the invitation to the first common management meeting is sent to the Bulgarian partner - Regional Inspectorate of Environment and Water - Veliko Tarnovo (RIEW).

Between 7th – 9th of June 2016, the first common management meeting takes place in Bucharest, and, in July 2016, the project team implemented the contract for the consultancy.

On the 18th of August 2016, the second progress report was submitted to the Joint Secretariat.

In October 2016, the procurement responsible together with the project team prepares the necessary documents for several procurement procedures: binoculars, IT equipment, website, radio stations.

On November 8, 2016, a joint meeting took place between the representatives of the project partner, the Regional Environment and Water Inspectorate - Veliko Tarnovo (RIEW), the representatives of the lead beneficiary, the National Environmental Guard, and the representatives of CBC Calarasi.

In December 2016, the IT equipment procedure is finalized, the contract no 8/INCOLAB/15.12.2016 is signed and the equipment is accepted on the 27th of December 2016.

Between 23 and 27 October 2017, the lead beneficiary received the audit mission of the Court of Accounts - the Audit Authority.

Thus, on 16th of November 2017, following a request from the leading beneficiary, a technical assistance meeting was held between the representatives of the lead beneficiary and those of CBC Calarasi, where possible delays were reported in the implementation of the project activities and the request for an extension of the date of the project completion.

On the 18th of August 2018, the First Level Control request was submitted to the Joint Secretariat.

During the project implementation, were encountered some problems emerged from:

- Change of legislation: in Bulgaria, the legislation regarding Natura 2000 sites has changed and is different than in Romania. The situation in Bulgaria is the following: the Bulgarian ministry of environment is developing a strategy to establish the legal frame of Natura 2000 sites management and management plan organization. Therefore, mentioning all these legislative differences between the two countries, the project partner submitted a letter to the Lead Beneficiary, in order to inform the JS about those aspects mentioned above.
- Lack of interest for some project procurement procedures: Lead Beneficiary, National Environmental Guard has prepared all the necessary documents for a simplified procurement procedure regarding an English course for 50 employees, specified in the approved application form, but no offer was submitted. In these circumstances, the training in English was scheduled to be realized in the sustainability period.

From interviews carried out with the Management Authority and Joint Secretariat, the interaction between partners and management institutions was good, without some significant issues. The Lead



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partner informed MA/JS about any problem or potential risk, anticipating any delay and offering solutions for overcome the obstacles.

Project contributions to expected results (specific objectives) and programme-wide objectives

A coherent, informative, and analytical narrative, which addresses the aspects of the following list, from the perspective of the studied project. This will be done by combining relevant qualitative or quantitative evidence from different information sources. This will include local statistics, project related documents, the interviews with the Lead Partner and all other project partners, as well as local stakeholders, if the case.

- the general progress of the project area in the domain targeted by the relevant specific objective.
- the current and expected contribution of the project to this progress.
- the factors facilitating this contribution.
- any unintended (positive or negative) effects of the project in the relevant field.
- direct effects achieved by the project contributing to the relevant Programme priority axis.
- external factors influencing the achievement/unachievement of such effects.
- internal factors facilitating the project direct effects.

Because until 2016, no major or effective cooperative measures (e.g. joint planning, strategies, mapping, management plans or coordinated management tools) related to biodiversity conservation and landscape protection and promotion in cross border Natura 2000 sites have been elaborated and enforced, the main INCOLAB project objectives were to promote and strength the partnership between the border environment communities to sustainably management of ecosystems in zones of European Natura 2000 network:

- Establishment of a joint model for better planning, protection and use of ecosystems in the transboundary region of Danube river.
- Implementation of a common approach for green initiatives to protect the biodiversity.
- Support of cross-border investments in Natura 2000 sites.

By this project, 27,059ha were helped to get a better conservation status by developing a common management plans for 4 NATURA 2000 sites (Suhaia and Confluenta Olt-Dunare in Romania and Ostrov Vardim and Ribarnitzi Hadji Dimitrovo in Bulgaria) and by cataloguing and studying 7 other NATURA 2000 sites and protected areas from Vidin to Oriahovo („Zlatiyata“ Bg0002009; “Island Next To Gorni Tsibar” Bg0002008; “Orsoya Fishponds” - Bg0002006; Island Ibisha” - Bg0002007; „Tsibar Swamp“ - Bg0002104; “Golya Island” - Bg0002067; „Orsoya“ - Bg 0000182; „Kozloduy“ - Bg000527; „Tsibar“ - Bg0000199; „Island Steppe Vadin“ - Bg0000528; „Ostrov“ - Bg0000334; „Ogosta River“ - Bg0000614; „Archar“ - Bg0000497; “Kozloduy Islands“ - Bg0000533; “Tbliznatsi Islands” - Bg0000532; “Kutovo Island” - Bg0000552) and Mehedinti (“Iron Gates“ - Rosci0206; „Blahnita“ - Rospa0011; „Starmina Forest“ - Rosci0173; Area Along The Danube To Garla Mare – Maglavit - Rosci0299; „Mehedinti Plateau“ - Rosci0198).



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The project, through some specific activities, followed to create the context for a common management plan implementation through the common reports and sharing of information from both sides of the Danube:

- A1. Project Management and Monitoring.
- A2. Development and implementation of a common management plan for Natura 2000 sites in the cross-border Danube area.
- A3. Information system development and implementation to support the common management plan.
- A4. Information and publicity for the project; public awareness concerning Natura 2000 sites

If A1 was intended to project management, through A2, the partners developed a common management plan for the 4 sites envisaged by this project, based on the usage of the data collected using information system tools. During this activity, the experts and operators from both partners worked together to create a common umbrella for implementation of a management plan and a support in an innovative manner for cross border cooperation.

Data were gathered after some terrain tasks (observation, surveillance, using professional scientific resources, exchange of information) and involved both internal and external expertise. Creating a common knowledge database concerning the problems within the 4 Natura 2000 sites territories contributed to more articulated, fact-based management decisions and a higher reaction of the system to solve some environment-related issues.

During this activity A3, the project reached another important goal: to develop and implement a common information system for reporting and monitoring the Natura 2000 sites. More than A2, A3 is the most innovative and collaborative activity of the project, being a real innovation for the common management strategies and common purposes. During A3, using external expertise, was created the reporting information system, used to collect, and record various types of data directly from the selected Natura 2000 sites.

The system has 2 interfaces in RO and BG, operated by each partner. Using the most advanced devices for monitoring and gathering information (tablets, drones, different devices installed in boats or cars), the partners operators will provide directly from field a huge amount of data, stored on servers both in Romania and Bulgaria. More than that, the application permits statistics, descriptive interpretations of data, business intelligence analysis and reports, which became the main support for managerial decision for Natura 2000 sites, a support for a better administration and understanding of these areas. The system will be applied first for 4 sites as mentioned in the Project summary, but in time it can be extended easily to all other Natura 2000 sites from all over the cross-border region.

The last activity, A4, was intended to aware the public about the European financed project as usual publicity for European funded projects. Using promotional materials (stickers, agenda, rollups, brochures), and one website both in Romania and Bulgaria, all done accordingly to the Visual Identity Manual, this



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sub-activity raised the public awareness concerning the Natura 2000 sites and also the information system created.

Involving the citizens for alert and information upload significantly increased the volume of data and, the public consciousness about his role in the protection system, to alert the authorities about some broke the law facts. Together with the qualified personnel from NEG and RIEW, the public provide useful information about some facts, in a complementary way, covering a higher percentage from protected area.

Making people aware of his importance in preserving Natura 2000 sites and conscious of the real value of this sites using an innovative way of involving in the process of reporting and data gathering has determined a change of behaviour and attitudes toward the care for nature and environment.

In terms of sustainability and transferability, INCOLAB project targeted few specific objectives:

- a. To test an information system and a common strategy for common management for 4 Natura 2000 sites, for a replication of these tools to another sites. The value of information increases as the network grows, so, this generates an added value easy to get.
- b. To develop an “one language” management for a system with 2 language interfaces, by using a common approach, more coherent, innovative, with a faster reaction time, involving less costs and a common informational infrastructure. The best practices also, could be transferred to other management units.
- c. To generate local or regional strategies based on common practices of sharing knowledge, management, and common outputs, involving other actors (public authorities, companies, NGOs, public).
- d. To set new tools and standards for reporting, monitoring, and exchanging data about the area, including all relevant facts and indicators, and assuring a “professional traceability of common interests”.

In terms of project’s contribution to relevant European, national, regional or local strategies and policies; in particular, those concerning the project or program area, the project followed one of the directory lines, mentioned as Innovation Union: “to develop a strategic research agenda focused on challenges such as energy security, transport, climate change and resource efficiency, health and ageing, environmentally-friendly production methods and land management, and to enhance joint programming with Member States and region”. The innovative aspects from the projects are a contribution to these aspects of the EU2020 strategy. Also, the project addressed the challenge item no.3 – Environment, from the European Union Strategy for Danube Region, the Communication from the Commission, 2010, being in line with the challenges concerning “regional approach to nature conservation” and with “tourist development”.

Without identifying many unintended effects, positive or negative, from interviews, the MA representatives mentioned the situation of some not very visible sites, hide from the eye of large public, which became more visible, attracting a higher number of tourists and being expose to the risks of abusive exploitation, with a significant impact on nature.



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In correlation with this, the internal factors which affected or could affect the effects of the project are related to the feedback offered by the responsible authorities (NEG, RIEW) about the cases reported by the public. Lack of feedback, to complete the communicational chain, could affect people trust in the effectiveness of their involvement.

Also, in terms of identifying the external factors which influenced the projects effects, by including Natura 2000 sites in the list of new destinations for cross border tourism, the number of visitors and the potential users of the application raised, increasing the stock of data collected from the terrain.

Key findings and aspects of wider relevance for the programme evaluation

A summary of key findings of the case study and identified aspects that can be of wider relevance for the programme evaluation. The latter may include:

- indications on the capacity of the programme of generating impact considering the relevant specific objective.
- evidence on general challenges or problems that emerge when addressing a particular, specific objective.
- new or alternative evaluation questions to be addressed and explored by future evaluations.

The project, based on a high innovative manner of gathering information, provided a new way of management for the Natura 2000 sites, based on real time analysis of some fact and terrain evidences, which reduced the gap between the cause and reaction and made the decision process more efficient. The approach was made to the several levels, including various actors, which contributed locally to a plus of social cohesion and knowledge, offering a new pattern of management and social involvement. This could be a trigger for some follow-ups, using this pattern in other similar activities and transferring the knowledge into various circumstances.

Promoting the selected Natura 2000 sites, the project contributes to the presence of these sites in the public tourist circuit, as a new income generating activity for stakeholders. For the future, is important to evaluate how these activities evolved, how they affected the Natura 2000 sites, in order to avoid some abusive exploitation and to not put the sites in the risk.

Involving both specialists and public, the project increased the quantity of collected information, but to keep up the interest of public's interest and implication, a feedback is needed. The involved institutions, NEG and RIEW, could communicate more efficiently with the mass media, to present some interesting cases which were reported by the public or specialists and how were solved. Without this feedback, the public implication is expected to be reduced, because they do not see the utility of their implication. In plus, involving other local actors (NGOs, local companies), the chances of maintaining public interest will

Other information sources used

Online resources

https://ec.europa.eu/environment/nature/natura2000/index_en.htm

<https://www.interregobg.eu/en/programme/programme-publications.html>

<http://biodiversitate.mmediu.ro/rio/natura2000/static/pdf/rosa0024.pdf>



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(b) Project websites or other websites accessed (with link and date of access)

<https://www.interregrobg.eu/en/15-2-1-052-incolab.html>

<http://prunepentrugunoi.ro/>

(c) Interview(s):

- Interview with Management Authority representative (Interviewees: Mrs. Ioana Mantog, Mrs. Marcela Glodeanu - Managing Authority for the Interreg V-A Romania-Bulgaria Programme 2014-2020, Date: 05.06.2020)
- Interview with Joint Secretariat representative (Interviewees: Mr. Bogdan Muşat – Joint Secretariat for the Interreg V-A Romania-Bulgaria Programme 2014-2020, Date: 25.06.202



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Case Study for Specific Objective 3.1(First)

0.1 Cover page:

Case study on project (Safe Schools Network/SSN)

Programme: (Interreg V-A Romania-Bulgaria Programme)

Author: (Free Youth Centre (FYC), Bulgaria)

Date of finalisation: (02.02.2018)

0.2 List of abbreviations:

JS-Joint Secretariat

LP-Lead Partner

PA-Priority Axis

SO-Specific Objective

0.3 Table of contents:

1. Introduction (0.5 page)

This project case study is part of the Interreg V-A Romania-Bulgaria Programme Impact Evaluation. Basic information on the project studied is given below:

Project name (full title and/or acronym)	Safe Schools Network/SSN
Programme priority axis (number and title)	PA3-A safe region
Programme priority specific objective	SO3.1: To improve joint risk management in the cross-border area
Project Lead Partner organisation	Free Youth Centre (FYC)/Свободен младежки център (СМЦ)
Other project partner organisations	Asociatia Vasiliada Regional Network for Innovative Education (RNIE)/Регионална мрежа за иновативно образование (РМИО)
Other organisations involved in or associated to the project (if existing)	
Amount of EU co-financing (in €)	€ 244 871.57
Amount of national co-financing (in €)	€ 37 448.08
Main objective(s) of the project (see application form)	Raising awareness in the field of efficient risk prevention through formal and informal education of children and youth in border area - creation and promotion



	of an international network of 20 “Safe schools” – a new model for disaster opposition
Key activities implementing the project (see application form)	<p>WP T1: Project promotion</p> <p>WP T2: Implementation of Comparative Research</p> <p>WP T3: First international meeting of experts</p> <p>WP T4: Methodical Set elaboration</p> <p>WP T5: Second International meeting of experts</p> <p>WP T6: Website development and maintenance</p> <p>WP T7: Training of trainers</p> <p>WP T8: Training sessions</p> <p>WP T9: Volunteer clubs</p> <p>WP T10: Material provision of education and network</p> <p>WP T11: National competitions</p> <p>WP T12: International camp</p> <p>WP T13: Conclusion forum</p> <p>WP T14: Publications</p> <p>WP T15: Information and publicity</p> <p>WP T16: Project management</p>
Current status of project implementation (select one option)	Finalised (X)

2. Project preparation and project implementation (1.5 – 2 pages)

The project was designed in common by partners from both sides of the border, on the base of their ideas and priorities, but with consultant support. The Lead Partner coordinated this process. As result of this activity, the present Application form and all necessary annexes were prepared.

The subsidy contract was signed on 02.02.2016 for a duration of 2 years. The project was submitted in June 2015 and the precontracting phase begun in December 2015. The initial subsidy contract has been modified by 2 Addenda (Addendum no 1 from May 2017 and Addendum no 2 from January 2018).

The project supported directly the following target groups:

- teachers in 20 schools in border area, approximately 1000 persons, from which 120 participated directly in the project activities, through: proper theoretical education oriented to develop their



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- pedagogical knowledge and skills in disaster protection education – formal and informal (extra-curricular); necessary minimal equipment for such education; chance to meet, interact and share experience with their colleagues from other schools and even countries;
- psychologists and school counsellor teachers in schools in border area - approximately 200 persons, from which 40 participated directly in the project activities, through: proper education for psychological work with potential victims of disaster events in their schools and in the cross-border communities; chance to meet, interact and share experience with their colleagues from other schools and countries.
 - students in 20 schools (volunteers and others), approximately 8000 persons, from which 640 took direct participation in the project activities, through: proper education and practical training in disaster protection issues; better motivation to receive knowledge in the same direction; chance to meet, interact and share experience with their peers from other schools and countries.
 - School management/administration in 20 schools in border area, around 80 persons, out of which 40 took direct participation in the project activities; group supported in two ways: proper education to direct beneficiaries from this group in disaster management issues; two persons were trained on the risk preventions issues and they will also provide training to students.

The targeted schools were located in settlements of Dolj county, Romania and Vidin and Montana districts in Bulgaria.

The protection of the population in cases of disaster events depends in first place on an adequate risk management. This management operates with different kind of resources, but human resources available on spot are the most important. The SSN project contributed to the risk management through: education at the level of local school authorities, people who are decision makers; preparation of methodical experts in schools, who will support their colleagues in compulsory classes for disaster prevention – this will have influence on whole student community; preparation of school psychologists and school counsellor teachers to work with victims of disaster – also has influence on whole cross-border community; preparation of volunteers. All project's results contribute to the school disasters resistance and in this way benefit all: teachers, students, administrative staff.

Other achievements and successful implementation aspects:

- facilitating the exchange of experience between Romanian and Bulgarian participants, on emergency management in schools;
- better risk prevention in schools implemented;
- joint methodology for extra-curricular education and motivation in this field developed;
- disaster risk prevention education and school risk management envisaged;
- involving students in voluntary work in disaster protection;
- a pool of teachers who can support volunteer clubs inside targeted schools, thus contributing to increase the level of preparedness of student community in case of disaster;
- a comparative research about current situation and identified needs in participating countries/schools for capacity building for better protection and disasters risk management (with a focus on ways for motivation and active learning);
- 40 school managers and administrative staff, 80 teachers and 40 psychologists and school teachers counsellors from both countries were trained on disaster protection - every school has: better planning of measures for protection, 4 teachers from different school levels - methodical



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experts in disaster education, at least one psychologist/ school teacher counsellor prepared for adequate support of potential victims;

- 643 youth volunteers trained in disaster protection;
- a “community of practice” created - ICT tool for communication and sharing of best practices in civil protection;
- a pool of practical exercises and practical equipment to support common initiatives in this field;
- education campaigns for prevention of risks and risk management.

The project created better conditions for protection of all population in target regions, mainly in public educational facilities. It contributed on first place to the safety of final beneficiaries who traditionally are in a vulnerable position, such as children and young people, who have not enough life experience and skills to protect themselves and are very common victims in disaster situations.

The strengthening of capacity for disaster prevention through building the culture of safety and disaster resilient communities ensure sustainable development.

The impact of the project to the quality of joint risk management includes: increasing the number of school authorities which are able to plan better their risk management; preparation of methodical experts who can support their colleagues in disaster risk education; preparation of specialists to offer psychological support in case of disaster; preparation of resources for extra- curricular activities in the same field; preparation of young volunteers inside schools; creation of an international network - “community of practice” to share best practices in prevention.

The project did not face major difficulties. It had certain delays due to challenges faced with tender procedures, mostly the Romanian partner faced such challenges on public procurement. The project also faced some difficulties concerning cash-flow, reporting (change from paper to eMS during project implementation), motivation of target groups to take part in the project activities. Also, one project activity (*WP T8: Training sessions for psychologists*) was postponed until the last month of the project, when it was also implemented. The training for psychologists was postponed as the project faced, during implementation, the reality that public schools do not have in their team psychologists, but teacher counsellors, school counsellors or psycho-pedagogical counsellor (who do not necessarily have Psychology studies). Based on the Addendum no 2, the training was finally addressed to 20 psychologists and school counsellor teachers.

The interaction and relationship with the management system (JS) was particularly challenging and a rather difficult one (as stated during the interview with Lead Partner). The JS is considered to be excessively bureaucratic (had to send everything on paper as the JS does not respond unofficially to requests, had to wait a long period of time to receive answers to their written requests etc), although some improvement was seen during project implementation (given the introduction of eMS).

3. Project contributions to expected results (specific objectives) and programme-wide objectives (3 – 4 pages)



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The main aim of the project – which tackles soft measures - is to raising awareness in the field of efficient risk prevention through formal and informal education of children and youth in border area (Vidin and Montana districts, Bulgaria and Dolj county, Romania). The way to achieve this aim is through creation of an international network of “Safe schools”, educational institutions who put in focus disaster protection and who collaborate in this field and share good practices. The project was oriented to whole school and cross-border community – school management, teachers, psychologists, students.

The project addressed disaster and accident protection for schools and for the whole local cross-border communities around the targeted schools. The pupils/students were prepared inside dedicated training and learning programmes for joint actions in case of disasters.

Although it proves hard to continue, the project’s sustainability is currently supported by a variety of actions: training sessions for the Young Volunteer Teams, using the equipment made available within the project (fire behavior, first aid injuries, water rescue etc.); different network projects (Australia in flames, memory of disasters etc.) to support the “community of practice” created; Fire Safety and Population Protection Department; practical lessons from specialists from the Regional Directorate Fire Safety and Population Protection on adequate response in the event of a flood etc.

The schools on the Bulgarian side of the border proved to be much more involved in project activities and results as their counterparts on the Romanian border were located in rural areas, less properly equipped. Free Youth Centre took the decision to include also other schools inside the community of practice created as to also give others the chance to benefit from project results and lessons learnt.

The factors facilitating project’s contribution to expected results and programme-wide objectives come from the fact that there is a more urgent need to prepare population to react and to help pro-actively and on voluntary basis to such actions (emergency response, adequate response in the event of a flood/fire etc). The need for emergency and disaster response volunteers to work together with professionals in disaster protection is a reality in the 2 countries alongside the border. Although emergency response structures and relevant legislation are in place, it is recognized by local, state and international authorities that they lack sufficient capacity. Effective risk management requires capacity building at community level. To build disaster resistant communities means to involve whole population in the process of risk reduction, not only responsible institutions and experts/specialists. In this context, a very important target group are young people, because, on one side, they are potential victims in disastrous events, but on the other – future resource for disaster prevention/mitigation (the project gives them the opportunity to protect themselves and others in such situations).

The school curriculum does not include any topic/subject related to disaster protection, there are no school hours dedicated to this topic during a school year. The project managed to distribute its achievements and results – comprised in a collection – to the schools involved in the project, to school inspectorates in the cross-border area, to county/district inspectorates for emergency situations, to the



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Ministries of Education – in its attempt to bring a change in schools curriculum and schools education by drawing the attention upon the need to have such a subject dedicated for students.

Some of the unintended positive effects of the project in the relevant field relate to the assistance the project made to the civil protection institutions, given the fact that part of their work is to prepare the population in case of disasters and to deliver trainings and learning programmes to the local communities regarding prevention methods, first aid techniques etc. The collaboration with the civil protection public institutions inside and outside the project proved to be a positive one and part of the direct effects achieved by the project contributing to the relevant Programme priority axis. On the other hand, local authorities have expressed support for a greater culture of prevention to increase people' resilience and reduce risks related to different hazards. The project highlighted the need for preventive action. The cross-border approach is reflected in the implementation of project activities. Another unintended effect is based on the key collaborations established inside the school network, collaboration that concluded in another cross-border project that involved some of the schools from the current network (on the Romania-Serbia border). Another unintended effect, this time a negative one, is related to the 3rd partner inside the project which is no longer active in the moment.

The LP faces challenges in finding means to motivate people to continue after there are no money involved. There are cases where the people actively involved in project implementation are no longer part of the school teams or even part of the LP/partners' teams. Despite this fact, there are settled some strong key collaborations inside the schools' network and every school in the border area has now the tools to introduce such a subject in their curriculum (all project materials, documents, methodical materials etc are published on the website). Also, the resource-people, the ones trained inside the project, are available to train others.

The model "Safe School" created inside the project is a valuable contribution to the quality of school risk management in the cross-border area, because it has potential for multiplication as a good practice. One of its most important results is related to setting up an international network of schools which cooperate and share good practices in the field of disaster protection, network that has a strong multiplication potential. The project will also contribute for development of disaster protection volunteering, using of new methods for motivation through linking formal and informal education, creating a web-based "community of practice", networking, etc.

4. Key findings and aspects of wider relevance for the programme evaluation (0.5 pages)

A summary of key findings of the case study and identified aspects that can be of wider relevance for the programme evaluation. The latter may include:

- indications on the capacity of the programme of generating impact considering the relevant specific objective;



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- evidence on general challenges or problems that emerge when addressing a particular specific objective;
- new or alternative evaluation questions to be addressed and explored by future evaluations.

The risk management in case of an educational institution includes not only “hard” measures, but mostly well-prepared human resources – administrators, teachers, students. The contribution to the quality of joint risk management in this case includes: increasing the number of school authorities who are able to plan better their risk management and the way they teach students to respond to such situations; preparation of methodical experts – key resources - who can support their colleagues in disaster risk education; preparation of specialists to offer psychological support in case of disaster; preparation of resources for extra-curricular activities in the same field; preparation of volunteers inside schools; creation of an international network – “community of practice” to share best practices in prevention. The strengthening of capacity for disaster prevention and response is a sustainable growth measure in Europe 2020 Strategy. Community participation has been recognized as the additional element in disaster management necessary to build a culture of safety and disaster resilient communities, and ensure sustainable development for all. The protection of life, health and property of the people is related with effective use of resources – human, natural, economical, reducing losses and providing a base for further growth.

Annexes

List of literature references

Project documentation available on eMS

Project documentation available on website

Annual Implementation Reports

Interreg V-A Romania – Bulgaria Programme

Other information sources used

(a) Online sources: n/a

(b) Project websites or other websites accessed (with link and date of access): <http://fycvidin.org/ssn/en>; <https://www.interregrobg.eu/en/>; <https://keep.eu/projects/>

(c) Interview(s): Mr. Nikolay TSOLOV, chairman Free Youth Center, 05.06.2020, 10:00-11:00

Case Study for Specific Objective 3.1(Second)

0.1 Cover page:

Case study on project (Safe Schools Network/SSN)
Programme: (Interreg V-A Romania-Bulgaria Programme)
Author: Andrea Floria, Anela Pleşcan
Date of finalisation: (02.02.2018)

0.2 List of abbreviations:

JS-Joint Secretariat
LP-Lead Partner
PA-Priority Axis
SO-Specific Objective

0.3 Table of contents:

1. Introduction

This project case study is part of the Interreg V-A Romania-Bulgaria Programme Impact Evaluation. Basic information on the project studied is given below:

Project name (full title and/or acronym)	Safe Schools Network/SSN
Programme priority axis (number and title)	PA3-A safe region
Programme priority specific objective	SO3.1: To improve joint risk management in the cross-border area
Project Lead Partner organisation	Free Youth Centre (FYC)/Свободен младежки център (СМЦ)
Other project partner organisations	Asociatia Vasiliada Regional Network for Innovative Education (RNIE)/Регионална мрежа за иновативно образование (РМИО)
Other organisations involved in or associated to the project (if existing)	
Amount of EU co-financing (in €)	€ 244 871.57
Amount of national co-financing (in €)	€ 37 448.08
Main objective(s) of the project (see application form)	Raising awareness in the field of efficient risk prevention through formal and informal education of children and youth in border area - creation and promotion of an international network of 20 "Safe schools" – a new model for disaster opposition



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Key activities implementing the project (see application form)	WP T1: Project promotion WP T2: Implementation of Comparative Research WP T3: First international meeting of experts WP T4: Methodical Set elaboration WP T5: Second International meeting of experts WP T6: Website development and maintenance WP T7: Training of trainers WP T8: Training sessions WP T9: Volunteer clubs WP T10: Material provision of education and network WP T11: National competitions WP T12: International camp WP T13: Conclusion forum WP T14: Publications WP T15: Information and publicity WP T16: Project management
Current status of project implementation (select one option)	Finalised (X)

2. Project preparation and project implementation

The project was designed in common by partners from both sides of the border, on the base of their ideas and priorities, but with consultant support. The Lead Partner coordinated this process. As result of this activity, the present Application form and all necessary annexes were prepared.

The subsidy contract was signed on 02.02.2016 for a duration of 2 years. The project was submitted in June 2015 and the precontracting phase begun in December 2015. The initial subsidy contract has been modified by two Addenda (Addendum no 1 from May 2017 and Addendum no 2 from January 2018).

The project supported directly the following target groups:

- teachers in 20 schools in border area, approximately 1000 persons, from which 120 participated directly in the project activities, through: proper theoretical education oriented to develop their pedagogical knowledge and skills in disaster protection education – formal and informal (extra-curricular); necessary minimal equipment for such education; chance to meet, interact and share experience with their colleagues from other schools and even countries;
- psychologists and school counsellor teachers in schools in border area - approximately 200 persons, from which 40 participated directly in the project activities, through: proper education for psychological work with potential victims of disaster events in their schools and in the cross-border communities; chance to meet, interact and share experience with their colleagues from other schools and countries.
- students in 20 schools (volunteers and others), approximately 8000 persons, from which 640 took direct participation in the project activities, through: proper education and practical training in



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disaster protection issues; better motivation to receive knowledge in the same direction; chance to meet, interact and share experience with their peers from other schools and countries.

- School management/administration in 20 schools in border area, around 80 persons, out of which 40 took direct participation in the project activities; group supported in two ways: proper education to direct beneficiaries from this group in disaster management issues; two persons were trained on the risk preventions issues and they will provide training to students.

The targeted schools were located in settlements of Dolj county, Romania and Vidin and Montana districts in Bulgaria.

The protection of the population in cases of disaster events depends in first place on an adequate risk management. This management operates with different kind of resources, but human resources available on spot are the most important. The SSN project contributed to the risk management through: education at the level of local school authorities, people who are decision makers; preparation of methodical experts in schools, who will support their colleagues in compulsory classes for disaster prevention – this will have influence on whole student community; preparation of school psychologists and school counsellor teachers to work with victims of disaster – also has influence on whole cross-border community; preparation of volunteers. All project's results contribute to the school disasters resistance and in this way benefit all: teachers, students, and administrative staff.

Other achievements and successful implementation aspects:

- facilitating the exchange of experience between Romanian and Bulgarian participants, on emergency management in schools;
- better risk prevention in schools implemented;
- joint methodology for extra-curricular education and motivation in this field developed;
- disaster risk prevention education and school risk management envisaged;
- involving students in voluntary work in disaster protection;
- a pool of teachers who can support volunteer clubs inside targeted schools, thus contributing to increase the level of preparedness of student community in case of disaster;
- a comparative research about current situation and identified needs in participating countries/schools for capacity building for better protection and disasters risk management (with a focus on ways for motivation and active learning);
- 40 school managers and administrative staff, 80 teachers and 40 psychologists and school teachers counsellors from both countries were trained on disaster protection - every school has: better planning of measures for protection, 4 teachers from different school levels - methodical experts in disaster education, at least one psychologist/ school teacher counsellor prepared for adequate support of potential victims;
- 643 youth volunteers trained in disaster protection;
- a "community of practice" created - ICT tool for communication and sharing of best practices in civil protection;
- a pool of practical exercises and practical equipment to support common initiatives in this field;
- Education campaigns for prevention of risks and risk management.

The project created better conditions for protection of all population in target regions, mainly in public educational facilities. It contributed on first place to the safety of final beneficiaries who traditionally are



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in a vulnerable position, such as children and young people, who have not enough life experience and skills to protect themselves and are very common victims in disaster situations.

The strengthening of capacity for disaster prevention through building the culture of safety and disaster resilient communities ensure sustainable development.

The impact of the project to the quality of joint risk management includes: increasing the number of school authorities which are able to plan better their risk management; preparation of methodical experts who can support their colleagues in disaster risk education; preparation of specialists to offer psychological support in case of disaster; preparation of resources for extra-curricular activities in the same field; preparation of young volunteers inside schools; creation of an international network - “community of practice” to share best practices in prevention.

The project did not face major difficulties. It had certain delays due to challenges faced with tender procedures; mostly the Romanian partner faced such challenges on public procurement. The project also faced some difficulties concerning cash flow, reporting (change from paper to eMS during project implementation), and motivation of target groups to take part in the project activities. Also, one project activity (*WP T8: Training sessions for psychologists*) was postponed until the last month of the project, when it was also implemented. The training for psychologists was postponed as the project faced, during implementation, the reality that public schools do not have in their team psychologists, but teacher counsellors, school counsellors or psycho-pedagogical counsellor (who do not necessarily have Psychology studies). Based on the Addendum no 2, the training was finally addressed to 20 psychologists and school counsellor teachers.

The interaction and relationship with the management system (JS) was particularly challenging and a rather difficult one (as stated during the interview with Lead Partner). The JS is considered to be excessively bureaucratic (had to send everything on paper as the JS does not respond unofficially to requests, had to wait a long period of time to receive answers to their written requests etc), although some improvement was seen during project implementation (given the introduction of eMS).

3. Project contributions to expected results (specific objectives) and programme-wide objectives

The main aim of the project – which tackles soft measures - is to raising awareness in the field of efficient risk prevention through formal and informal education of children and youth in border area (Vidin and Montana districts, Bulgaria and Dolj county, Romania). The way to achieve this aim is through creation of an international network of “Safe schools”, educational institutions who put in focus disaster protection and who collaborate in this field and share good practices. The project was oriented to whole school and cross-border community – school management, teachers, psychologists, students.

The project addressed disaster and accident protection for schools and for the whole local cross-border communities around the targeted schools. The pupils/students were prepared inside dedicated training and learning programmes for joint actions in case of disasters.



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Although it proves hard to continue, the project's sustainability is currently supported by a variety of actions: training sessions for the Young Volunteer Teams, using the equipment made available within the project (fire behaviour, first aid injuries, water rescue etc.); different network projects (Australia in flames, memory of disasters etc.) to support the "community of practice" created; Fire Safety and Population Protection Department; practical lessons from specialists from the Regional Directorate Fire Safety and Population Protection on adequate response in the event of a flood etc.

The schools on the Bulgarian side of the border proved to be much more involved in project activities and results as their counterparts on the Romanian border were located in rural areas, less properly equipped. Free Youth Centre took the decision to include also other schools inside the community of practice created as to also give others the chance to benefit from project results and lessons learnt.

The factors facilitating project's contribution to expected results and programme-wide objectives come from the fact that there is a more urgent need to prepare population to react and to help pro-actively and on voluntary basis to such actions (emergency response, adequate response in the event of a flood/fire etc). The need for emergency and disaster response volunteers to work together with professionals in disaster protection is a reality in the 2 countries alongside the border. Although emergency response structures and relevant legislation are in place, it is recognized by local, state and international authorities that they lack sufficient capacity. Effective risk management requires capacity building at community level. To build disaster resistant communities means to involve whole population in the process of risk reduction, not only responsible institutions and experts/specialists. In this context, a very important target group are young people, because, on one side, they are potential victims in disastrous events, but on the other – future resource for disaster prevention/mitigation (the project gives them the opportunity to protect themselves and others in such situations).

The school curriculum does not include any topic/subject related to disaster protection, there are no school hours dedicated to this topic during a school year. The project managed to distribute its achievements and results – comprised in a collection – to the schools involved in the project, to school inspectorates in the cross-border area, to county/district inspectorates for emergency situations, to the Ministries of Education – in its attempt to bring a change in schools curriculum and schools education by drawing the attention upon the need to have such a subject dedicated for students.

Some of the unintended positive effects of the project in the relevant field relate to the assistance the project made to the civil protection institutions, given the fact that part of their work is to prepare the population in case of disasters and to deliver trainings and learning programmes to the local communities regarding prevention methods, first aid techniques etc. The collaboration with the civil protection public institutions inside and outside the project proved to be a positive one and part of the direct effects achieved by the project contributing to the relevant Programme priority axis. On the other hand, local authorities have expressed support for a greater culture of prevention to increase people's resilience and reduce risks related to different hazards. The project highlighted the need for preventive action. The cross-border approach is reflected in the implementation of project activities. Another unintended effect is based on the key collaborations established inside the school network; collaboration that concluded in another cross-border project that involved some of the schools from the current network (on the



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Romania-Serbia border). Another unintended effect, this time a negative one, is related to the 3rd partner inside the project which is no longer active in the moment.

The LP faces challenges in finding means to motivate people to continue after there are no money involved. There are cases where the people actively involved in project implementation are no longer part of the school teams or even part of the LP/partners' teams. Despite this fact, there are settled some strong key collaborations inside the schools' network and every school in the border area has now the tools to introduce such a subject in their curriculum (all project materials, documents, methodical materials etc are published on the website). Also, the resource-people, the ones trained inside the project, are available to train others.

The model "Safe School" created inside the project is a valuable contribution to the quality of school risk management in the cross-border area, because it has potential for multiplication as a good practice. One of its most important results is related to setting up an international network of schools which cooperate and share good practices in the field of disaster protection, network that has a strong multiplication potential. The project will also contribute for development of disaster protection volunteering, using of new methods for motivation through linking formal and informal education, creating a web-based "community of practice", networking, etc.

4. Key findings and aspects of wider relevance for the programme evaluation

The risk management in case of an educational institution includes not only "hard" measures, but mostly well-prepared human resources – administrators, teachers, students. The contribution to the quality of joint risk management in this case includes: increasing the number of school authorities who are able to plan better their risk management and the way they teach students to respond to such situations; preparation of methodical experts – key resources - who can support their colleagues in disaster risk education; preparation of specialists to offer psychological support in case of disaster; preparation of resources for extra-curricular activities in the same field; preparation of volunteers inside schools; creation of an international network – "community of practice" to share best practices in prevention. The strengthening of capacity for disaster prevention and response is a sustainable growth measure in Europe 2020 Strategy. Community participation has been recognized as the additional element in disaster management necessary to build a culture of safety and disaster resilient communities and ensure sustainable development for all. The protection of life, health and property of the people is related with effective use of resources – human, natural, economical, reducing losses and providing a base for further growth.

List of literature references

- Project documentation available on eMS
- Project documentation available on website
- Annual Implementation Reports
- Interreg V-A Romania – Bulgaria Programme

Other information sources used

- (a) Online sources: n/a



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(b) Project websites or other websites accessed (with link and date of access):

<http://fycvidin.org/ssn/en>; <https://www.interregrobg.eu/en/>; <https://keep.eu/projects/>

(c) Interview(s): Mr. Nikolay TSOLOV, chairman Free Youth Center, 05.06.2020, 10:00-11:00



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Case Study for Specific Objective 4.1

0.1 Cover page:

Case study on project (Cross Border virtual incubator for promoting employment on bio agriculture, bio products processing and connected services (BIOVIRTNIC))
Programme (Interreg V-A Romania-Bulgaria 2014-2020)
Author: Valentina Vasile, Cristina Cojoacă
Date of finalisation: 27.10.2018

0.2 List of abbreviations:

JS-Joint Secretariat
LP-Lead Partner
PA-Priority Axis
SO-Specific Objective

0.3 Table of contents:

1. Introduction

This project case study is part of the Interreg V-A Romania-Bulgaria Programme Impact Evaluation. Basic information on the project studied is given below:

Project name (full title and/or acronym)	Cross Border virtual incubator for promoting employment on bio agriculture, bio products processing and connected services (BIOVIRTNIC)
Programme priority axis (number and title)	PA4 – A skilled and inclusive region
Programme priority specific objective	SO 4.1 To encourage the integration of cross border area in terms of employment and labour mobility
Project Lead Partner organisation	Romania Movement for Quality
Other project partner organisations	National Center for Information Service, Pleven
Other organisations involved in or associated to the project (if existing)	
Amount of EU co-financing (in €)	€ 637 129.82
Amount of national co-financing (in €)	€ 97 443.39
Main objective(s) of the project (see application form)	To encourage integration of the cross-border area (Dolj - Pleven) in terms of employment, labour mobility, business development



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	<p>in the field of bio agriculture, bio products processing and connected services. Results: trained for new jobs/entrepreneurship: 315 (80 rural, 100students, 80 entr, 15 org inspect, 40 sales ag); 5000 on platform, 200 job seekers/specialists,30 employers/entrepreneurs, 10 landowners; 100 consultancy ben. for certification; pop. informed: 137444 from radio/TV , 8000 from flyers</p>
<p>Key activities implementing the project (see application form)</p>	<p>WP T1: A2 Project management (Implementation Activity) WP T2: A3 Elaboration of Studies regarding bio agriculture, bio products processing and connected services in the cross-border area Dolj Pleven (Implementation Activity) WP T3: A4 Integrated business-oriented campaign for promotion of employment and entrepreneurship opportunities on bio agriculture, bio products processing and connected services on Dolj and Pleven WP T4: A5 Creation of online Business and Mobility tools tailored to the specific needs of job seekers and entrepreneurs in the DJ-Pleven CB area (Implementation Activity) WP T5: A6 Training sessions on bio agriculture dedicated to students and graduated specialists in agriculture (Implementation Activity) WP T6: A7 Training sessions on bio agriculture dedicated to rural citizens or unemployed from urban area (Implementation Activity) WP T7: A8 Entrepreneurial training course (Implementation Activity) WP T8: A9 Consultancy for certification on bio-agriculture products WP T9: A10 Integrated measures for Bio products Marketing WP T10: A11 A common strategy and action plan for job creation and cross-border mobility by developing business on bio agriculture, bio products processing and connected services (Implementation Activity) WP T11: A12 Information and publicity (Implementation Activity)</p>
<p>Current status of project implementation (select one option)</p>	<p>Finalised on 27.10.2018</p>

2. Project preparation and project implementation



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The project was designed in common by partners from both sides of the border, on the base of their ideas and priorities. The Lead Partner coordinated this process. As result of this activity, the present Application form and all necessary annexes were prepared. The contract started on 19.04.2017 for a duration of 20 months.

The project supported directly the following target groups:

- **General public:** Citizens from the rural areas or unemployed from urban area. The location of target group is Dolj-Pleven. There are approximatively 60 participants to training on bio agriculture dedicated to rural citizens or unemployed from urban and receiving individual and group counselling sessions (35 Bg, 25Ro). Another 60 participants to Entrepreneurial training (25 Ro, 35 Bg), 30 certified sales agent on bio products, 15 certified organic inspectors(12Ro, 3Bg); 80% from Business and Mobility tools viewers on platform – 4000, 160 registered job seekers, 24 employers/entrepreneurs, 10 land owners; 100 beneficiaries of soil sample analyses, 100 using Help desk; 100 benefiting by on line bio product show case. The total number of this target group 4659.
- **Higher education and research:** Students and graduated specialists in agriculture fields from Dolj – Pleven. There are approximatively 100 Ro participants to training sessions on bio agriculture dedicated to students and graduated specialists in agriculture; 20 participants to Entrepreneurial training (15 Ro, 5 Bg); 15 (12Ro, 3 Bg) certified organic inspectors; about 20% from Business and Mobility tools viewers on platform – 1000, 40 registered job seekers, 6 employers/entrepreneurs. The total number of this target group 1181.
- **Other:** Population of cross border area Dolj Pleven. Beneficiaries of Integrated business oriented campaign for promotion of employment and entrepreneurship opportunities on bio agriculture, bio products processing and connected: 240 from direct meetings, 3000 beneficiaries of brochures, 6000 of flyers, about 15% of the Dolj and Pleven population – 137444 from film broadcasting; beneficiaries of Consumer awareness and education on bio products activity: at least 15% of the Dolj and Pleven population – 137444 due to informative interviews on local radio station accessed; 8000 of promotional flyers regarding bio products benefits distributed on most populated areas such as supermarkets, mall, schools, university. The total number of this target group is 292128.

The project is tackling common territorial challenges that are affecting both Dolj and Pleven. The territorial challenges identified are:

- unemployment 9% Pleven, 9,4% Dolj;
- rural population 36,5% in Pleven, 44% in Dolj;
- low standard of life in rural area contributed to population migration from rural to urban but also to increased unemployment.
- Major high share of agriculture.

Based on the challenges mentioned above, the project's partners considered that bio agriculture can create more jobs than large mechanized agriculture fact that can be fructified due to increased market request for bio products that increased farmers' interest for switching to organic farming. Particularly, the project aimed through the elaborated studies to complete the official data on bio farmers and bio processors that at that moment were partial complete.



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However, the share of bio products on domestic markets is under 1% in Bulgaria and 2,5% in Romania, most of products being exported (EU, USA), mainly unprocessed; less than 1% of economic operators are bio product processors.

Moreover, in order to develop business with high impact on job creation in this field and to increase the domestic market interest on, more information and qualification was requested in order to make the necessary behaviour changes both on producers and buyers. Hence, the project aimed to create CB virtual incubator BIOVIRTINC, fostering bio business development, offering information, trainings, consultancy for certification, business and mobility tools tailored to the specific needs of job seekers and entrepreneurs in Dolj-Pleven area.

The association has economic activities, including the certification of agro-food products in the ecological field. The idea of the project was based on this economic activity. One reason for implementing this project was that if it is linked to an economic activity already existing at the level of the Association, the sustainability of the project will be ensured. Therefore, any project that the Association has is closely correlated with the activities of the Association.

It was stated that during the activities carried out by the Association, people with little training in the field related to the association were met and thus the need to carry out a project aimed at providing training in this field was identified.

The project activities were carried out in the mirror with the Bulgarian partner, being a cross-border project.

3. Project contributions to expected results (specific objectives) and programme-wide objectives

At the last reporting period (18.12.2018) the target value of the target group was achieved as follow:

- For the general public the target values were exceeded with 543 (the final value is 5202).
- For higher education and research, target group the target value was not achieved. It was achieved 1065 out of 1200.
- For another target group the target value was not achieved. It was achieved only 155599 out of 290000.

The need for cross-border skills growth was not observed, but it was necessary to demonstrate it in the project.

The contribution of the project to the development of the labour force is high to a high extent. Even if the project is finalized, the trend of the development of the labour force in the field will be maintained, especially after the completion of the training courses.

There are no external or internal factors mentioned because the project's field is a regulated area where the national and European legislation requires certification. The public procurement process was difficult, but there have been no problems.



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An unexpected effect was the weaker involvement in entrepreneurship courses. Moreover, accessing the platform was difficult; the indicator was difficult to reach, with a lot of effort from the side of the Association.

The sustainable cross-border results cannot be estimated. The major needs that should be addressed by the program in the following periods in terms of labour mobility is the development of the digital competencies. Higher education is not oriented to the need of labour, those who want to hire do not have the necessary skills (computer skills).

4. Key findings and aspects of wider relevance for the programme evaluation

The following results of the project are indications that prove the capacity of the programme to generate impact:

- radio/TV CB population awareness on business and job creation opportunities on bio field, bio products- 27%;
- Trainings – 0,06%;
- Business and Mobility tools: 1%;
- Consultancy for certification 0,02%.

Quality indicator: developing new job/entrepreneurship opportunities by qualifying and informing will speed up qualified jobs special on rural area; Increased domestic market on bio products increase number of producers/jobs; certification consultancy and soil sample analyses stimulates bio farming.

List of literature references

Project documentation available on eMS
Project documentation available on website
Annual Implementation Reports
Interreg V-A Romania – Bulgaria Programme

Other information sources used

(a) Online sources

(b) Project websites or other websites accessed (with link and date of access):
<https://www.interregrobg.eu/en>,

(c) Interview(s): Dna. Mariana Poenaru, President of the Romania Free Movement Association, 19.06.2020, 30 minutes.



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Case Study for Specific Objective 5.1

Case study on project: ROBG-174 , Your health matters! – Modernization of the hospitals in Zimncea and Svishtov

Programme: Interreg V-A Romania -Bulgaria Programme

Author: Liviu Calofir

Date of finalization: 03/07/2020

Introduction

This project case study is part of the Interreg VA Romania -Bulgaria Programme Impact Evaluation. Basic information on the project studied is given below.

Project name (full title and/or acronym)	Your health matters! – Modernization of the hospitals in Zimncea and Svishtov
Programme priority axis (number and title)	Priority axis 5. - An efficient region
Programme priority specific objective	S.O. 5.1 – To increase cooperation capacity and the efficiency of public institution in a CBC context
Project Lead Partner organisation	Zimnicea Town
Other project partner organisations	Svishtov Municipality
Other organisations involved in or associated to the project (if existing)	Not the case
Amount of EU co-financing (in €)	1,127,462.86 €
Amount of national co-financing (in €)	198,964.11 €
Main objective(s) of the project (see application form)	Improving health services and collaboration between health care providers in Zimnicea and Svishtov
Key activities implementing the project (see application form)	T1 Project management T2 Information and publicity T3 Modernization of the hospital in Zimnicea T4 Exchange of experience and best practices I1 Modernization of the hospital in Svishtov
Current status of project implementation (select one option)	Finalised

2. Project preparation and project implementation

The genesis of the project idea/project partnership

Zimnicea and Svishtov are two of the so-called twin cities, separated by the Danube River. Even before Romania and Bulgaria joined the European Union, a close cooperation relationship began between the two local public authorities, which materialized in several cross-border cooperation projects implemented in partnership, financed by both PHARE and structural funds.



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Low social cohesion is one of the main challenges in the cross-border area. Some of the causes that generate these challenges are:

- Public health system is unsustainable and inaccessible;
 - Reduced availability of healthcare: funding and staffing issues;
 - Many smaller cities without adequate health care facilities, leading the population to seek quality health services in large cities;
- The Interreg V-A Romania-Bulgaria 2014-2020 Programme provided the perfect opportunity to address these issues.

In this regard, the project provides for the improvement of health services and collaboration between health care providers in the communities of Zimnicea and Svishtov, based on an integrated approach, to contribute to the development of sustainable and accessible public health services, by:

- Creation of spaces (modernization of healthcare infrastructure) to improve the quality of public healthcare in a cross-border context;
- Exchange of experiences and good practices with a focus on cross-border healthcare cooperation for better healthcare delivery, in terms of efficiency, adaptability and comparable quality.

The preparation of the project

After the partners agreed on the project idea, they proceeded to the elaboration of the financing request and to the preparation of the necessary documentation for submission. For the integration of the two parts of the project, considering that the partners come from states with different legislation, consulting services were subcontracted.

The low budget but also the short preparation period of the project made them focus on the endowment of the two medical units. The partners decided to divide equally the budget allocated through the Programme, and on the other side the hospitals enlisted the necessary endowment, taking into account the available budget.

In the project preparation process, the structure of the implementation team, a mixed one was established, consisting of representatives of the two partners, Zimnicea City Hall and Svishtov, but also of the direct beneficiaries of the project, Zimnicea City Hospital and Svishtov Hospital.

Its evaluation and contracting process

The project was submitted in October 2015, the evaluation and contracting process was completed in April 2017. There were several requests for clarification, both in the evaluation phase and in pre-contracting. The two stages went smoothly.

The history of its implementation

Activity 1 - Project management

Both partners issued decisions by which the members of the project team were appointed according to the approved financial request. This activity ensured the implementation of the project, in accordance with the objectives and results of the project, and with the rules and provisions provided in the financing



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contract. The activity took place during the entire period of project implementation and involved the organization of 12 project team meetings of (6 in Romania and 6 in Bulgaria).

Activity 2 - Information and advertising

This activity ensured the visibility and promotion of the project in accordance with the rules of the Visual Identity Manual of the Programme. Two press conferences were organized in Bulgaria (30 participants / conference) and 2 press conferences in Romania (73 participants / conference) during the project implementation period (2 project launch conferences, 2 final conferences at the end of the implementation). Event interpretation and organization services were contracted.

A project logo was designed, which was posted on each material issued during the project implementation.

Promotional materials were purchased such as: Leaflets, roll-ups, banners, posters, engraved aluminium pens, folders, block notes.

The purchased equipment was personalized with stickers in accordance with the Visual Identity Manual of the Interreg V-A Program.

Activity 3 - Modernization of the hospital in Zimnicea

The activity consisted in the procurement through the public procurement procedure of 69 types of equipment. All equipment was delivered and installed on time, and the medical staff was trained on how to use it.

Activity 4 - Exchange of experience and good practices

Two exchanges of experience and good practices took place during the project implementation period.

20 medical staff from the Zimnicea hospital visited the Svishtoc Hospital, between 10th and 12th October 2018. Instead, 20 medical staff from the Svishtov hospital visited the Zimnicea hospital between 12th and 14th November 2018.

The Exchanges of experience and good practices provided the preconditions for further strengthening cross-border cooperation between the two beneficiaries. The principles of the partnership agreement were discussed during these meetings.

Activity 5 Modernization of the hospital in Svishtov

This activity consisted in the acquisition of a CT scanner, the arrangement of the space in which it was installed and the acquisition of a TYPE C ambulance.

Achievements and successful implementation aspects

The hospitals in Zimnicea and Svishtov benefit from the new equipment that has contributed to the improvement of the quality of the medical services they offer to the population.

The two hospitals have become more attractive to specialists in the medical field and thus have helped to maintain and attract new medical staff. The new endowments contributed to the increase of the incomes of the two medical units.



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The two exchanges of experience laid the foundations for future cooperation between the two hospitals and facilitated the exchange of information and good practices on how to organize and operate public health systems in the two neighboring countries.

A partnership agreement was signed between the local authorities and the two hospitals in Zimnicea and Svishtov to improve and strengthen cooperation in the field of health care services provided to the population. All this has contributed to increasing the level of coordination of public institutions in the eligible area.

Major implementation difficulties

Due to the large number of items that had to be purchased, the open tender procedure took longer than planned for what concerns the Zimnicea Hospital. However, this risk was anticipated during project preparation, which is why it was estimated that the implementation period was assumed to be 24 months; and the procedure was completed on time.

Another reason that caused delays was the fact that both the Bulgarian and the Romanian partners had appeals to the procurement procedures, which is common, however, the settlement of appeals that were resolved in favour of the two partners by the national authorities. However, the implementation and objectives of the project were not jeopardized.

Another very common problem is that from the moment the financing requests are conceived, budgets are established and until the moment of signing the supply contracts, the prices of the products increase. Certain categories of products, although they were in stock at the time when the tenders were submitted by the tenderers, it happens that on the moment when they should be delivered they are no longer manufactured and a next generation is already on the production lines, thus there is a risk of inconsistency between the technical tenders declared accepted and the products supplied.

Interaction and relationship with the management system (JS/MA)

The relationship between the program bodies and the beneficiaries was excellent. The partners have benefited from a very good collaboration both with the Joint Secretariat and with the Managing Authority. There were no communication difficulties.

3. Project contributions to expected results (specific objectives) and programme-wide objectives

The general progress of the project area in the domain targeted by the relevant specific objective

The project increased the level of coordination of public institutions in the eligible area.

The implementation of the project “Your health problems! - Modernization of the hospitals from Zimnicea and Svishtov ” led to the improvement of the institutional relations between the two administrative-territorial units and the two hospital units from Zimnicea, respectively Svishtov.



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Before this project, the cross-border cooperation between Zimnicea and Svishtov was limited to the two local administrations. "Your health matters! - Modernization of hospitals in Zimnicea and Svishtov is the beginning of cross-border cooperation between the two neighboring communities in the field of medical services provided to the population, involving as direct beneficiaries of Zimnicea City Hospital and Dr. Dimitar Pavlovich Hospital in Svishtov, public institutions between which there were no relations cooperation.

The current and expected contribution of the project to this progress

The preparation of the project meant that the four public institutions coordinated in identifying the problems of the two medical institutions, the solutions for solving them and in prioritizing the needs according to the specifics of the two hospitals. The next step involved establishing the project activities by mutual agreement and framing the provisions of the applicant's guide on the eligibility of the activities and the costs offered by the project.

The implementation of the project was completed on time and successfully, all activities planned to be carried out within the project being carried out in accordance with the provisions of the approved funding application, the implementation manual of the Programme and the European, Romanian and Bulgarian legal provisions.

The project implementation team was a mixed one, with representatives of the four public institutions involved throughout the entire project implementation period. The organization of information and dissemination events to promote the project and the Programme was done by involving the representatives of the four public institutions and by distributing promotional materials

The acquisition of medical equipment required in addition to their installation, also the training of medical staff who use them and this is a further evidence of the improved coordination at the level of public institutions involved in the project.

Within the project, there were also two exchanges of experience and good practices that involved the visit of twenty employees of the two hospitals. The results achieved in terms of information exchanges and best practices led the representatives of the authorities and institutions to further expand institutional cooperation by promoting partnerships between different types of entities in the field of medical services, with common or complementary development intentions in order to pursue joint results, such as developing new policies, laws, strategies or knowledge / practices.

An environment has also been created in which people from different entities work together for common goals that generate mutual trust and understanding.

As a result of the collaboration, a professional network and partnerships have been created that can establish and lead to further cooperation beyond projects and programs funded by European funds, for the development of communities and for the benefit of citizens.

The factors facilitating this contribution

Among the factors that facilitated the contribution there is the existence of the Interreg Programme itself, the good collaboration between the two administrations and the commitment of the project teams.





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Any unintended (positive or negative) effects of the project in the relevant field

In the current context of the pandemic caused by the Covid-19 coronavirus, the Caritas Rosiorii de Vede Municipal Hospital, in Teleorman County, has been designated as a support hospital for the treatment of patients infected with this virus. As it does not have all the necessary equipment for a large influx of critically ill patients, the Ministry of Health through the Public Health Directorate of Teleorman County asked the Zimnicea City Hospital to make available to Caritas Hospital in Roşiorii de Vede, Teleorman County some equipment purchased through the Project “Your health matters! - Modernization of hospitals in Zimnicea and Svishtov ” funds.

Direct effects achieved by the project contributing to the relevant Programme priority axis

The results obtained by the project implementation laid the foundations for cooperation between the two medical units and local public administration to continue efforts to develop and increase the quality of medical services population.

The project activities generated a positive impact in the target area by increasing public confidence in the medical service provided by the two hospitals, gave a boost of confidence to medical staff who now have adequate medical equipment in their daily activities and will serve as an example of good practice. for the future development of medical services in the area. Also, hospital revenues increased after the use of medical equipment.

The beneficiaries of the project results are the people from Zimnicea, Svishtov and the surrounding villages and the medical staff from the hospital from Zimnicea and Svishtov.

New medical staff was hired in the Zimnicea City Hospital, and the local administration has two major investment projects prepared for the medical unit for the rehabilitation of the building and the endowment with medical equipment, meant to raise the standards of medical services. These projects are complementary

According to the beneficiaries all this will ensure the sustainability of the project.

External factors influencing the achievement/unachievement of such effects

The unachievement of effects may be caused by the public health policy of the two states, namely the tendency to underfund the health system and maintain tariffs older than 5 years

Another threat, at least for Zimnicea Hospital, is the healthcare system reform announced by the Romanian Government, thanks to which small hospitals are clearly threatened with underfunding and even closure.

An external factor that could contribute favourably to achieving the effects, would be the opening of financing opportunities to give continuity to this project.

Internal factors facilitating the project direct effects

The internal factor that has facilitated most the project direct effects concerns the strong commitment of the implementation team, local decision-makers and hospital staff.



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4. Key findings and aspects of wider relevance for the programme evaluation

Indications on the capacity of the programme of generating impact considering the relevant specific objective

The Programme had a capacity to generate positive impacts in the eligible area. The implementation of the project, increased citizens' confidence in the health system and raised awareness on the European cohesion funds' effectiveness.

Evidence on general challenges or problems that emerge when addressing a particular specific objective

The challenges that emerged during the implementation of the project were mainly caused by problems arising from national contexts, such as the slowness of public procurement procedures and downsizing of national funds to the health system that may threaten the sustainability of the project.

Another challenge concerned the low budget which led the partners to focus on very specific actions, limiting wider perspectives.



Annex 6: Table presenting the link between findings, conclusions and corresponding recommendations to be considered for 2021-2027 programming period

N. Evaluation questions (EQ) As apprehended by the evaluator		Findings				Conclusions	Recommendations
		Desk research	Interviews	Questionnaire	Case Studies		
I.TR. 01	What is the progress in improving the secondary and tertiary nodes connections to TEN-T infrastructure in the cross-border area?	<p>More than 120 Kms of roads have been concerned by modernisation projects. While 7% of them (about 8 Kms) are already implemented, the remaining sections will be finalised by 2020. So far, over 2,000 people have benefited from an improved road network, more are expected to do so in next years. In fact, it appears that the Implementation Report suggest that is somehow too early to assess overall impacts.</p> <p>Investments on transport networks aimed at improvement connectivity in the area are key policy priorities. Romania and Bulgaria signed a co-operation memorandum in 2017 with the objective of carrying significant investments in local infrastructures, especially bridges. This convergence of priorities and objectives</p>	<p>The focus should lay on the improvements of municipal roads which are not necessarily linked to TEN-T network.</p> <p>Indeed, according to the same interviewee, there is a National OP focused on TEN-T Network and overlapping between the two programmes may be an issue.</p> <p>Most of local stakeholders agree that there is a substantial improvement in transport network in the area, but do not have a clear understanding of the added value related to TEN-T Network. In addition, they struggle to attribute these positive impacts to a specific</p>	<p>The calls aimed at improving the secondary and tertiary nodes connections to TEN-T infrastructure were considered by 70% of the respondents to be effective, while another 30% of the respondents mentioned that design of the calls was fully effective. These results are extremely positive, since no respondent considered that the calls' design was ineffective or barely effective.</p> <p>The contribution of projects to the improvement of the connection of secondary and tertiary nodes was appreciated by all the respondents to be high and significant. 80% of them affirmed that the project contributed to a great extent to the improvement of nodes, and 20% mentioned that their projects contribute to some</p>		<p>The above-described evidence consistently points towards an overall success of the programm in improving TEN-T connections. This is due to several reasons, especially the relevance of programme's actions and the design of the calls.</p>	<p>R1. The only minor recommendations would concern the coordination between similar policies in the area. As emerged from one interview – there is an overlapping risk. In addition, it may be worth to assess possible synergies between the TEN-T and local road network.</p>



N. Evaluation questions (EQ) As apprehended by the evaluator		Findings				Conclusions	Recommendations
		Desk research	Interviews	Questionnaire	Case Studies		
		should – in principle – expand possible impact of the programme.	Programme, as they often mention major infrastructural improvements .	extent to the improvement of nodes.			
I.TR.0 2	What is the current and expected contribution of the interventions under the programme to this progress?	<p>The financial allocation to PA1 “A well connected Region” is by far the largest of the whole programme. This was based on a need analysis which highlighted several scopes for intervention in the region mobility. As the Programme proved to be particularly relevant, it is likely that the contribution would be significant.</p> <p>By assessing the list of projects financed under SO 1.1., it is possible to conclude that road modernisation and improvement of safety is a key feature</p>	<p>The relevance of the interventions is indeed the strong point of this programme. Indeed, most of the projects are needed due to the lack of functioning infrastructure in the area. In addition, the quality of the partnership is also an important factor as it ensures a smooth implementation of the project.</p> <p>According to an interviewee from the Programme Bodies, the lack of substantial investments in the region’s road network makes Programme intervention particularly significant.</p> <p>However, there might be a misalignment between the focus on the TEN-T and the local needs.</p>	<p>30 % of the respondents to this question mentioned that it was somehow difficult to align the project’s features to its contribution to the Programme’s objective, but 70% of the respondents affirmed that it was easy and very easy to align the project’s features to the Programme’s objectives. These results point out that project beneficiaries do not encounter significant difficulties in adapting local specificities to the broader goal of the programme. This reinforces the findings concerning the relevance.</p> <p>30% of the respondents to this question mentioned that the calls were fully effective in balancing the local needs with the overall Programme’s objectives and 70% considered that the call were fairly effective in assuring the mentioned balancing between needs and objectives. Together with the previous figure, these findings confirm that</p>		<p>The collected evidence consistently points out to a significant contribution of the programme to transport infrastructure in the area – which is likely to materialise in the next years. On the other hand, there is room for improvement concerning the synergies between the types of projects and the boosting of modal shifts.</p>	<p>R.2. In what concerns the expected contribution of the interventions under the programme to this progress, the main recommendation concerns to further encourage the synergies between the types of projects and the boosting of modal shifts, complementing the secondary and tertiary nodes connections to TEN-T with waterways transport along the Danube to make the first less congested.</p>



N. Evaluation questions (EQ) As apprehended by the evaluator		Findings				Conclusions	Recommendations
		Desk research	Interviews	Questionnaire	Case Studies		
				calls and selection criteria are designed to suit local needs.			
I.TR.0 3	What are the factors facilitating that contribution?	The key factors facilitating Programme contribution are its relevance to the regional needs and the lack of local resources to cover them. Another relevant factor is the synergies with other	It is also interesting to highlight that – according to several interviewees – the cross-border dimension (i.e. the partnership between Romanian and	Relevance with the TEN-T network has been the most recurrent element chosen by 80% of the respondents, being considered the most important elements which facilitated the		The alignment between the needs and the needs and the logic of projects is arguably the most significant factors ensuring success in this field.	No specific recommendations for this EQ.



N. Evaluation questions (EQ) As apprehended by the evaluator		Findings				Conclusions	Recommendations
		Desk research	Interviews	Questionnaire	Case Studies		
		EU financed policies – especially the National Operational Programme on TEN-T Connectivity.	Bulgarian project beneficiaries) was considered as a positive factor. Local stakeholders express some concern related to the lack of environmentally friendly measures due to an unbalanced focus on road transportation. For instance, bikes and electric mobility should be prioritised. In this regard, the project E-Bike Network can be a best practice.	implementation of the project, 60% of the outlined the ERDF support, while 40% highlighted the effective assessment of local needs, adequate financial support and clear and effective call design.			
I.TR.0 4	Are there any unintended effects of the programme in this field?		A remarkable unintended but significant effect related to the improvements on roads safety is the spill over on the local economy. Improved connectivity brought about more internal mobility and thus the creation of new business and economic initiatives. Indeed, according to the interviewee, one of the key limitations of regional	When asked if there are any unintended effects under the programme in this field, 86% of the respondents did not highlight any unintended effects, while 14% of the respondents answered affirmatively, without further specification. This led to the conclusion that no major unintended effect had happened.		Except for few local stakeholders who highlighted the existence of positive spill-overs, projects in the transport sector did not have major unintended effects.	Given the limited unintended effects, specific recommendations are negligible.



N. Evaluation questions (EQ) As apprehended by the evaluator	Findings				Conclusions	Recommendations	
	Desk research	Interviews	Questionnaire	Case Studies			
		development is the obstacles to the movement of goods and people.					
I.TR.0 5	<p>What is the progress in increasing Danube navigation safety for freight and passenger traffic in the cross-border area? What is the current and expected contribution of the interventions under the programme to this progress?</p>	<p>An uneven achievement of target indicators related to Danube navigation safety. The indicator – mainly related to soft projects - “improving safety of the navigation on the Danube and the Black Sea” was achieved only to a 40% extent. None of the projects still in contracting or on the reserve list at the end of 2018 is contributing to this indicator, therefore the perspective for entire programming period is only 40%. This is however fully compensated but an overachievement on other relevant indicators such as “Total length of new or improved inland waterway” – which exceeded 100% completion rate.</p>	<p>There is substantial consensus among the Programme Management Bodies on the fact that there is scope for improvement in the Danube navigation in the relevant areas. On interviewee highlighted that the need of finance on the Danube navigability is high, but the allocated budget is limited – meaning that the projects financed under this SO were few.</p> <p>On the other hand, the implementation of the Project “Danube Safety Net” will provide substantial progress to the area – by significantly improving the navigation safety. However, navigation safety is a national issue which should need more focus at the national</p>	<p>The beneficiary mentioned that the project contributed to some extent to the improvement of navigation safety on the Danube. According to his/her first-hand experience, about the level of difficulty in aligning the project features to its contribution to the Programme’s objective, the respondent did not offer any answer. The beneficiary’s perspective is that the calls were fairly effective in balancing the local needs with the overall Programme’s objectives.</p>	<p>Once the project will be completed, two fully operational control system will be available for both sides of the Danube. This will significantly improve the safety of navigation. Another contribution would be developing capability to respond together to any kind of disaster (chemicals, fuels, nuclear power-plant), to preserve environment and human lives</p>	<p>As acknowledged by the Programme Bodies and confirmed by the desk research, there is scope for improvement as far as navigation safety is concerned. Programme’s contribution is yet to be fully materialised. However, some progress has been made even though it is difficult to attribute it to the programme itself. Indeed, the most important project financed under this SO is not operational yet.</p>	<p>As the impacts are yet to materialise, it is not possible to give detailed recommendations. However, the project Danube Safety Net is likely to be a best practice in this field.</p>



N. Evaluation questions (EQ) As apprehended by the evaluator		Findings				Conclusions	Recommendations
		Desk research	Interviews	Questionnaire	Case Studies		
			level and be funded accordingly.				
I.TR.0 6	What are the factors facilitating that contribution?	A key factor facilitating the contribution on this objective is the lack of alternative sources of finance with a cross-border approach. Indeed, both Romania and Bulgaria have several national policies related to Danube Navigation. However, these policies are hardly intertwined and coordinated. Thus, the Interreg Programme remains the only policy instrument suitable to address common issues.	Local stakeholders could not identify any key factors and struggle to see significant improvement on Danube navigation. On the other hand, they recognise that any kind of investment in this area would be highly beneficial for the whole area	The beneficiary mentioned that the project considered some of the indicators for monitoring the environmental impact proposed through the Strategic Environmental Assessment (SEA). The mentioned indicators involved: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> o No of projects having a negative impact on landscape; o Number of projects creating a modal shift from road transport to waterways; o Number of projects focusing on river transport infrastructure 		It is hard to determine the real contribution and impact of the programme to the Danube Navigation. Thus, it is even harder to identify the key factors facilitating this contribution.	There is not sufficient evidence to provide recommendations for this EQ.
I.TR.0 7	Are there any unintended effects of the program?	No relevant sources concerning unintended impacts has been found. Many of these are likely to materialise in the next years.	Local stakeholders struggle to identify any effect on Danube navigation – either intended or			The timing of the analysis does not allow to draw significant conclusions. Most of the unintended effects – if	There is not sufficient evidence to provide recommendations for this EQ.



N. Evaluation questions (EQ) As apprehended by the evaluator		Findings				Conclusions	Recommendations
		Desk research	Interviews	Questionnaire	Case Studies		
	e in this field?		unintended. On the other hand, many of them acknowledge that the most likely unintended effects will be on tourism – as the Danube river has great potentiality in that field.			any – will materialise in the next years.	
HE.01	What is the progress in using sustainably the natural and cultural heritage and in improving the tourism in the cross-border area?	The total number of accommodation establishments in the eligible area increased by 1,74%, with Silistra, Dobrich, Constanta and Gorj seeing the most significant increases on this indicator in 2019 compared to 2015. 40% in the case of Silistra, 21% in the case of Dobrich and 25,2% in the case of Constanta	The number of tourists increased in comparison with the previous programming period. It is difficult to measure the cause of the increased number of tourists because other measures than the programme implementation were taken in this field (e.g. vouchers). The analysis of the indicator (number of tourist overnights) should take into consideration that the number of tourists will decrease because of the Covid-19 situation, not necessary because the projects were not effective, but because of the social distancing' restrictions imposed			In general, based on the indicators analysed so far, the eligible area of the Programme has witnessed a significant improvement within the touristic sector, registering an average yearly increase of the number of tourist overnights. However, certain factors still need to be kept in view, such as: Dobrich District and Constanta County have contributed the most to the progress registered in the region concerning the number of tourist overnights; the values for the eligible area overall number of overnights peaked between 2016 and 2017, falling between 2017 and 2018, and stabilising in 2019.	





N. Evaluation questions (EQ) As apprehended by the evaluator	Findings				Conclusions	Recommendations	
	Desk research	Interviews	Questionnaire	Case Studies			
		by this health emergency situation.					
HE.02	<p>What is the current and expected contribution of the intervention under the Programme to this progress?</p>	<p>The data for both the programme and project level, as well as the data at the country level (National Institutes of Statistics) were available only for the period 2015 – 2019. In this context, a final analysis to measure the net impact of the programme to the development of the domain 2.1 will only be possible to elaborate at the end of 2021 or 2022 when all the projects will be finalized and the countries will update their national data about the result indicator of the Programme.</p> <p>For both Romania and Bulgaria, the main indicator through which the progress of using in a sustainable way the natural and cultural heritage and of improving the tourism in the cross-border area can be measured is the indicator ‘number of tourist overnights in the CBC region’.</p> <p>According with the data provided in the Annual Implementation Report for 2018, the total value of number of tourist overnights across the entire eligible area was 8,826, 399. Taking into account the data, the</p>	<p>The number of tourists is perceived as increased in comparison with the previous programming period. It is however difficult to measure the cause of the increased number of tourists because other measures than the programme implementation were taken in this fields (e.g. vouchers, other national or european interventions, etc.).</p>	<p>The respondents confirm the current impact of the Programme Interreg V-A Romania-Bulgaria 2014-2020. These findings confirm what was described above, namely that the Programme is having a great contribution to the progress registered in the domain of cultural heritage. Interestingly enough, no respondent consider that projects implemented within the programme are having no impact at the local level</p>	<p>Considering the general aim of the project, the succesful finalization of this project will significantly improve the growth and creation of jobs in the border area, by improving tourism sector (see Annex 3 for more details).</p>	<p>The programme contributions to the progress in using sustainably the natural and cultural heritage and in improving the tourism in the cross-border area is high. However, considering that there are still projects in implementation, as well as due to the COVID-19 situation, the number of tourists will decrease, not necessary because the projects were not effective, but because of the social distancing’ restrictions imposed by the health emergency situation.</p>	<p>There are no specific recommendations for this evaluation question</p>



N. Evaluation questions (EQ) As apprehended by the evaluator		Findings				Conclusions	Recommendations
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		contribution of Interreg V-A Romania-Bulgaria can be considered substantial. The number of overnights achieved by the programme is 8,826, 399, while the number of overnights achieved in the statistical data offered by the two National Institutes is 8,833,903					
HE. 03	What are the factors facilitating that contribution?	<p>Out of the contracted projects, 30 have already been finalized the implementation until the end of 2019.</p> <p>The type of activities that the projects developed (eg. new tourists routes, trainings, workshops and festivals, strategies and plan) can be considered a factor that facilitated the contribution of the Programme in using sustainably the natural and cultural heritage and in improving the tourism in the cross-border area.</p>	<p>The joint intervention and joint approach of the projects had an important effect on the contribution of the programme to the sustainable usage of natural and cultural heritage.</p> <p>The key factors that in the opinion of the interviewed persons have facilitated the contribution of the Programme to the progress in using sustainably the natural and cultural heritage and in improving the tourism in the cross-border area were the quality of the partnerships created inside the projects, the use of grants, stakeholders'</p>	<p>The majority of the beneficiaries agreed that the common approach, common promotion of the touristic products, as well as the exchange of good practices between the two countries adopted within the projects were important factors through which the Programme contributed to the sustainable use of the natural and cultural heritage and to improving the tourism in the cross-border area.</p> <p>The projects ensured wider accessibility of common historical and cultural heritage based on technology and innovative tools and services.</p>	<p>The factors at the project level that facilitated the contribution of the project, and thereby of the Programme to the progress, were the implementation of a well-established institutional framework visible and discussed with the economic environment from the eligible area, as well as efficient implementation tools and methods</p>	<p>Several factors facilitated the contribution of the programme to the usage of sustainable natural and cultural heritage. The key factor that have facilitated the contribution of the Programme to this progress was the quality of the partnerships created inside the projects. The partnerships created were based on communication, aspect that strenghtend the partnerships and contributed to the overall succes of the projects. The quality of the partnershis had been also ensured in those partnerships continuing from the previous programming period that succeeded to implement continous and solid projects. In addition, another aspect that</p>	<p>There are no specific recommendations for this evaluation question.</p>



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N. Evaluation questions (EQ) As apprehended by the evaluator		Findings				Conclusions	Recommendations
		Desk research	Interviews	Questionnaire	Case Studies		
			consultation and needs assessment.			ensured the quality of the partnerships was the expertise of the partners, a necessary aspect in developing and implementing the projects. Other factors that contributed to the progress registered by the Programme in the eligible area were the use of grants, stakeholders' consultation and needs assessment.	
HE. 04	Are there any unintended effects of the programme in this field?	The projects contracted under the Specific Objective 2.1 impressed by their innovative ideas to approach the objectives of this domain. The progress reports, annual implementation reports and the official declarations of the programme bodies emphasised that this innovative approach is considered an unintended positive effect	It was considered by the Programme management bodies that the projects were extremely innovative. Hereby, innovation was considered to be an unintended positive effect toward the programme in general, and towards the Priority Axis 2 in particular. Another unintended effect would be that a place hidden from the eyes of the people would be discovered by many tourists and that place will somehow be destroyed. The unintended positive and negative effects can	Most of the respondents considered that the projects implemented in this domain created positives changes in people's attitude towards the preservation of the natural and cultural heritage. The joint strategies and the common approach of the projects linked developed tourist sites with the one less developed or underdeveloped by promoting them together to different audiences and on different markets.	The involvement of stakeholder from different domains in the development of heritage domain offered new perspectives on the challenges that the domain rise.	The key conclusion is that the Programme generated also unintended positive effects at the level of this domain. One of the most important unintended positive effect is the innovative aspect that was approached by all the projects under this specific objective	R.3. The need for civic education on waste generated by tourism activities it is recommended to be included in the horizontal principles or to be part of each project for the future programming period. Moreover, in the next programming period should be taken into consideration the significant pollution aspects that a higher number of tourists could bring in a remote, isolated area and the way public institutions react so that projects are sustainable and good for environment.



N. Evaluation questions (EQ) As apprehended by the evaluator		Findings				Conclusions	Recommendations
		Desk research	Interviews	Questionnaire	Case Studies		
			only be observed after a longer period(5 to 10 years).				
EN. 01	What is the progress in improving the management and protection of NATURA 2000 sites in the cross-border area, especially as regards joint solutions?	The RO-BG border region is favored by a number of natural and cultural heritage opportunities. The NATURA 2000 network is well presented on both sides, including the Persina Nature Park (covering part of Plevan and Veliko Tarnovo districts in Bulgaria). The Black Sea resorts located in the county of Constanța (RO) and in Dobrich district (BG) provide a combination of summer tourism opportunities and varied cultural attractions, thus generating around 80% of all overnight stays in the eligible area of the programme.	The main aspects that have undergone a change were the increased awareness and social responsibility, increased awareness of protected areas and increased public involvement in environmental protection in cities and Natura 2000 sites.	The beneficiary mentioned that the joint solutions envisaged by the project had contributed to a great extent to the improvement of joint management and protection of NATURA 2000 sites in the cross-border area.	The beneficiary mentioned that the joint solutions envisaged by the project had contributed to a great extent to the improvement of joint management and protection of NATURA 2000 sites in the cross-border area.	The NATURA 2000 network is well presented on both sides of the border. Additional investments are required for the rehabilitation, socialization and promotion of many cultural sites, especially ones that are outside the main cities and routes. The tourist potential of the Danube river is still largely underused.	There are no specific recommendations for this evaluation question.
EN. 02	What is the current and expected contribution of the interventions under the Programme to this progress?	The baseline value of this indicator in the programme, referring to jointly developed/aligned management tools (2014) is 2. The gross impact is calculated as the total number of jointly developed/aligned management tools of NATURA 2000 sites (7, reported by the 2 project beneficiaries in their final reports of completed projects) is divided to the baseline value. The net impact is estimated to be 100% based on the	The beneficiaries mentioned that the projects contributed to a great extent in improving the management and protection of Natura 2000 sites in the cross-border area. The stakeholders mentioned that the joint solutions envisaged by the project had contributed to a great extent to the	•The beneficiary who participated to the survey mentioned that the project contributed to a great extent in improving the management and protection of NATURA 2000 sites in the cross-border area.	Through the project selected as case study for SO 2.2, 27,059 ha were supported to get a better conservation status by developing a common management plans for 4 NATURA 2000 sites (Suhaia and Confluenta Olt-Dunare in Romania and Ostrov Vardim and Ribamitzi Hadji Dimitrovo in Bulgaria) and by cataloguing and studying 7 other NATURA 2000 sites and	In a very innovative manner, using the modern technologies in synergy with the social actors and knowledge resources, the projects succeeded to implement a real and significant changes in Natura 2000 sites management. Because of regional importance of the projects, which targeted cross border natural area, the cross-border added value was higher and	There are no specific recommendations for this evaluation question.





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		assumption shared by the workshop participants that no other common NATURA 2000 management tools have been developed through other funding sources during the same period.	improvement of joint management and protection of sites. The projects contributed to a great extent in improving the management and protection of NATURA 2000 sites in the cross-border area by his innovative approach. The joint solution offers an important improvement of joint management and protection of NATURA 2000 sites		protected areas from Vidin to Oriahovo. The project, through some specific activities, followed to create the context for a common management plan implementation through the common reports and sharing of information from both sides of the Danube.	generated the premises of a regional development in areas where national policies are not focused on.	
EN. 03	What are the factors facilitating that contribution?	There are several factors that facilitate the contribution of the interventions under the Programme to this progress, such as public implication and the synergies with NATURA 2000.	Some measures must be taken together with Romania and Bulgaria. There are places where if not intervened on both sides of the border, the effect would not be as great and with as great impact, since the Programme addresses common problems for Romania and Bulgaria		The internal factors, which affected or could affect the effects of the projects, are related to the feedback offered by the responsible authorities (NEG, RIEW) about the cases reported by the public. The lack of feedback, to complete the communicational chain, could affect people trust in the effectiveness of their involvement. In terms of identifying the external factors, which influenced the projects effects, by	Using joint solutions and common approach, the partners developed and implemented modern tools for collecting raw, primary data from the source, contributing to the new-shared knowledge database. By involving more actors, they resuscitated the local economic and social environments, creating new links between stakeholders from both sides of the Danube.	There are no specific recommendations for this evaluation question.

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N. Evaluation questions (EQ) As apprehended by the evaluator		Findings				Conclusions	Recommendations
		Desk research	Interviews	Questionnaire	Case Studies		
					including Natura 2000 sites in the list of new destinations for cross border tourism, the number of visitors and the potential users of the application raised, increasing the stock of data collected from the terrain.		
EN. 04	Are there any unintended effects of the Programme in this field?	The projects contracted under the Specific Objective 2.1 impressed by their innovative ideas to approach the objectives of this domain. The progress reports, Annual Implementation Reports and the official declarations of the programme bodies emphasized that this innovative approach is considered an unintended positive effect	There are currently no undesirable effects; these might be able to be observed after a longer period. The public has become aware of the existence of NATURA 2000 sites and protected areas, and this is extremely beneficial. The innovation of the projects was an unintended very positive effect. The reason why the projects were innovative is that this PA was a new axis for the beneficiaries, and they had the possibility to not be biased with their previous experiences and thinks projects from		Without identifying many unintended effects, positive or negative it could be important to mention the situation of some not very visible sites, hide from the eye of large public, which became more visible, attracting a higher number of tourists and being exposed to the risks of abusive exploitation, with a significant impact on nature.	The key conclusion is that the Programme generated also unintended positive effects at the level of this domain. One of the most important unintended positive effect is the innovative aspect that was approached by all the projects under this specific objective. Another unintended positive effect important to me mentioned is the know-how gained by tourists and stakeholders about the preservation of natural and cultural heritage. The transfer of knowledge and managerial approach should be realized from the sites, which already use it to all Natura 2000 site.	There are no specific recommendations for this evaluation question.

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N. Evaluation questions (EQ) As apprehended by the evaluator		Findings				Conclusions	Recommendations
		Desk research	Interviews	Questionnaire	Case Studies		
			scratch. Their results were really impressive.				
EN.0 5	Does the implementation of the programme have significant environmental effects, based on measuring the indicators for monitoring the environmental impacts proposed under SEA?	The Territorial Analysis of the Romania – Bulgaria Cross Border Area identifies several development challenges pointing out that the regions included in the area are amongst the poorest in Europe (with average GDP below national and European averages). The resulting needs analysis lists a set of priorities in the following areas. One of these challenges was related to the climate change and environmental risk, which are not efficiently tackled in the region. The cross-border area remains significantly exposed to natural disasters – such as flood. Likewise, the transition towards renewable energy is significantly lagging to the EU standards.	The MA representative underlines, in the interviews, that, in what concerns the SEA indicators, no problems were identified, and the SEA indicators were reported to the Ministry of Environment in accordance with the legal provisions. JS representative mentioned that some measures must be taken together with Romania and Bulgaria. The overall opinion of local stakeholders is that they are satisfied with more measures related to reducing carbon emissions, green methods and methodologies, education on these topics and environmental educational actions.	The beneficiaries' perception (from the Impact Evaluation Report 2018) of the impact of Programme specific actions is positive. More than 75% of the cross-border area inhabitants consider these actions being fairly or fully effective.	In the case of Danube Safety Net, a mentioned contribution would be developing the capability to respond together to any kind of disaster (chemicals, fuels, nuclear power-plant), to preserve environment and human lives. (PA 1)	Without having a very detailed and comprehensive analysis of the environmental effects of the projects based on measuring the indicators for monitoring the environmental impacts proposed under SEA, the data collected show that the beneficiaries accorded a high importance to the environmental indicators and followed their achievement. On the other hand, indirectly, we can observe an improvement of certain environmental indicators in the NATURA 2000 sites, improvement which, even if cannot be exclusively associated with the implementation of the projects, is certainly partially their effect.	There are no specific recommendations for this evaluation domain.
RM. 01	What is the progress in preventing and	Between 2014 and 2018 , the damages produced in Bulgaria nationally by landslides and floods alone		The respondents' views with regards to the progress achieved in enhancing DRM capacities		In the current programming period, there have been relevant developments in terms of	



N. Evaluation questions (EQ) As apprehended by the evaluator	Findings				Conclusions	Recommendations
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<p>managing the capacity of mitigation and disaster resilience in the cross-border area, especially as regards joint solutions?</p>	<p>amounted to 586.069.000 BGN, while damages produced by floods in the North border region of Bulgaria (comprising the 8 eligible districts) amounted in the same reference period to 103.251.000 BGN (while landslides damages amounted to 3.485.000 BGN). The zones most prone to earthquakes in the Northern border region include Shabla, Veliko Turnovo, and Gorna Oryahovitsa In the case of Romania, the counties most affected by floods in the Southern border region include Teleorman, Giurgiu and Călărași , while Călărași and Giurgiu are at the highest risk in the region to be affected by earthquakes.</p>		<p>in the past 5 years, revealed that:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The capacity to prevent, manage and mitigate disasters has been perceived as having greatly increased; • The level of local awareness towards DRM actions and importance has been perceived as having increased; • The capacity for joint interventions and emergency response has been perceived as increased; • The operational capacity (new specialised equipment, logistics, new partnerships) for risk management has been perceived as increased. 		<p>preventing and managing the capacity of mitigation and disaster resilience in the cross-border area. However, the bulk of the progress is related to various joint risk management projects. Particularly, the assessment team identified a number of projects related to the specific scenarios such as CBRN-related emergencies, emphasized by a number of cross-border projects aimed at enhancing cooperation in this area. Further progress has been registered by the relevant emergency intervention institutions in terms of their capacity to react to various natural and anthropogenic hazards, particularly through investments in specialized equipment and tools that can facilitate emergency interventions.</p> <p>However, this progress, highly important in increasing joint as well as local DRM capacities, depends very much upon dedicated funding such as the CBC Programmes,</p>	



N. Evaluation questions (EQ) As apprehended by the evaluator		Findings				Conclusions	Recommendations
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						particularly because of the distinct lack of national funding in terms of capacity building of emergency response institutions in certain areas of intervention. For instance, according to the annual reports of regional emergency institutions for which data was available, the vast majority of the cross-border training exercises have been performed within the scope of CBC programmes including but not exclusively limited to the RO-BG CBC programme	
RM. 02	What is the current and expected contribution of the interventions under the programme to this progress?	In 2018, a total of 6 joint projects in the field of joint early warning and emergency responses were finalized. However, at the level of the entire programme, a total of 44 joint partnerships are expected to be reached, which would represent a rate of achievement of 88% by the end of the programme.	Inter-institutional communication between Romanian and Bulgarian response forces has improved. Partnerships have been established in the field of early warning and emergency response and the capacity of the specialized units have been increased. The most important aspects that have	The general overview of respondents was that Programme has contributed significantly towards improving joint risk management in the cross-border area. Thus, 72% of the surveyed beneficiaries that implemented projects under SO 3.1 considered that their intervention contributed to a great extent towards improving joint risk management.		The current and expected contribution of the Programme towards the progress made by the NUTS 3 regions covered by the Programme in terms of risk management and disaster resilience and mitigation capacity is quite evident and is enabled by a variety of highly relevant projects that can facilitate the strengthening of the institutional capacity of	There are no specific recommendations for this evaluation question.



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		Desk research	Interviews	Questionnaire	Case Studies		
			undergone change are related to both the enhancement of the capacity of the specialized units for joint prevention activities and the provision and/or improvement of the available equipment.			<p>relevant emergency intervention institutions at the level of both Member States. This fact is particularly emphasised by the disproportionate amount of hard measures that were implemented at the level of the present specific objective.</p> <p>However, a net impact of the contribution of the Programme's interventions is unfeasible to measure, particularly due to the lack of relevant statistical indicators at regional level and due to the unavailability of data on the utilization of equipment at the level of the regional and local institutions</p>	
RM. 03	What are the factors facilitating that contribution?		<p>Based on the analysis of the interviews, the following factors have been emphasised as having an impact upon the contribution of the Programme in the region:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - The good or excellent 	<p>Based on the analysis of the survey data, the respondents considered the following factors as facilitating the contribution of the funded interventions to the change generated:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Enhanced and improved communication and access to information; 	<p>Local authorities from both countries have understood the urgent need to better prepare their populations to react in cases of emergency. Moreover, there was also a shared understanding that effective risk management requires capacity building at community level. And in order to build disaster</p>	<p>According to the analysis made at the level of this evaluation question, the main factors that facilitated this contribution is the effective design of the intervention logic and its relevant correlation with the needs of the regions in terms of risk management and disaster resilience. Furthermore,</p>	<p>There are no specific recommendations for this evaluation question.</p>



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			<p>cooperation within the partnerships and the degree of involvement from the direct beneficiaries;</p> <p>- The strength of the design of the Programme's intervention logic and strategy, which led to the relevance of the interventions funded by the Programme in relation to the needs of the beneficiaries.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The solid cross-border partnership that have been established; • The good communication and openness of stakeholders; • Improved levels of specialised know-how built through work visits and good practices exchanges; • The openness of the general public and of target groups towards new information on DRM and ways of getting involved. 	<p>resistant communities one needs to involve the whole population in the process of risk reduction, and not only the responsible institutions and experts/specialists</p>	<p>another aspect of high importance is the high quality of the collaboration between the project partners, which facilitated not only the smooth implementation of the projects but has also strengthened the inter-institutional cross-border relationship between Romania and Bulgaria.</p>	
RM. 04	<p>Are there any unintended effects of the programme in this field?</p>			<p>Based on the survey data, the majority of respondents, beneficiaries of the Programme mentioned no notable unintended effects being generated from the implementation of the projects. However, in the cases of soft projects, respondents focused more on the multiplication potential of their results, mentioning that by raising the level of awareness of their communities with regards to the importance of nurturing a culture of prevention generated more openness towards</p>	<p>Based on the analysis of the study case, both positive and negative unintended effects have been generated by the project funded under the SO 3.1. More specifically:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • New collaboration opportunities have been generated while implementing the project, one such opportunity materialising itself into a new cross-border project that involved part of the actors involved in the Interreg project. 	<p>The unintended effects are mainly enabled by the smooth collaborations between project partners that implemented interventions through the programme. However, the programme faces an increased risk regarding the sustainability of the interventions, particularly due to the unavailability of stakeholders to continue implementing activities in the absence of further funding opportunities.</p>	<p>There are no specific recommendations for this evaluation question.</p>



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				volunteering in the field of risk management.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> There is a risk of opportunistic collaborations, difficulties being encountered when attempting to motivate stakeholders to continue implementing activities specific to the project in the absence of further funding. 		
EM. 01	What is the progress in integrating the cross-border area in terms of employment and labour mobility?	<p>In this programming period, it was the first time when the employment aspect was targeted in the Interreg V-A Romania-Bulgaria Programme. So, one of the limitations of the research consists in the lack of comparative assessment with the previous implementation period.</p> <p>The main outcomes of the projects financed through SO 4.1 aimed at creating tools for the development of employment opportunities such as job fairs, one stop shops, rather than actions with direct results on employment (where people can find out information about hiring process in the border area, job openings, selection criteria etc. or at least pre-</p>	<p>In terms of employment, progress has been made, notably in measures to increase information and promote labor mobility, as an opportunity to tackle unemployment. The area is affected by a long-lasting and structure unemployment which is a major obstacle to the impact of the programme. In addition, there is a substantial lack of infrastructure to support labour mobility. The local stakeholders mentioned that some improvements were achieved in the employment field,</p>	<p>The respondents to the survey mentioned that is that the following aspects related to the employment field changed the most in the last years: access to the labor market and an increase in labor market access for youth, an increase in the cross-border mobility of individuals within Romania and Bulgaria, as well as investments in local businesses and the development of new industries. Moreover, some beneficiaries mentioned that these investments have effectively created new jobs, in turn increasing the rate of employment in certain cross-border areas.</p>	<p>The need for cross-border skills growth was not observed in the cross-border area but it was necessary to be demonstrated in the project. The development of the labour force in the cross-border area is very necessary. The trend of the development of the labour force in the field will be maintained, especially after the completion of the training courses.</p>	<p>The eligible area covered by the Programme presents a low level of development, with economic and social performances below the national average. Even at a low level of development, there are significant differences in the economic performance between the eligible districts/counties. Some improvements were noticed in the employment field, such as the development of infrastructure directly linked to increase labor mobility, actions plans for disaster resilience and mitigation, social impacts and wider economic impacts such as lifelong learning, respectively the creation of cross-border business incubators and virtual</p>	<p>There are no specific recommendations for this evaluation question.</p>



N. Evaluation questions (EQ) As apprehended by the evaluator		Findings				Conclusions	Recommendations
		Desk research	Interviews	Questionnaire	Case Studies		
		contracts or expressions of interest).	such as the development of infrastructure directly linked to increase labor mobility, actions plans for disaster resilience and mitigation, social impacts and wider economic impacts such as lifelong learning, respectively the creation of cross-border business incubators and virtual incubators for promoting employment			incubators for promoting employment.	
EM. 02	What is the current and expected contribution of the interventions under the programme to this progress?	The current and expected contribution of the interventions under the Programme to the progress of the cross-border area integration in terms of employment and labor mobility, is mainly related to active social inclusion/mobility measures and general/youth joint local employment initiatives and trainings. However, measuring the net current and expected contribution of the interventions under the programme to the progress made by the relevant NUTS 3 regions	The conducted interviews highlighted the weak correlation between the indicators for measuring the results of the implemented projects and the objectives pursued by SO 2.1 from the perspective of determining / measuring the impact and sustainability in the territory. The inclusion of this SO at the Programme level		The project has a multidimensional approach - stimulating the business environment, training the workforce soundly with the development demand model and including the certification of agro-food products in the ecological field. It is worth mentioning that the project continues an already existing initiative at the level of the Lead Partner, completing it with the creation of mobility tools tailored to the specific needs of job seekers and entrepreneurs	Overall, the implementation of the Interreg V-A Romania-Bulgaria Programme had positive effects on employment in the eligible region, although difficult to measure quantitatively as a result, and especially in terms of impact. The Programme addresses the issue of employment as a complementary objective, rather residual than one of direct effect, although one of the important indirect effects	R.4. Promoting the organization of training courses through projects is an important step to facilitate further employment. However, in order to secure a more targeted effect upon the labour market, for the next programming period, one potential aspect to consider could be the prioritisation of certain profiles and areas of training, so that activities of skills development be better correlated with labour market demand. As such, for the next programming period, in case this field is tackled by the future programme, authorities could consider supporting





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	<p>is unfeasible due to the lack of relevant regional statistical indicators that can be used as a basis for comparison.</p> <p>The Programme has made considerable progress in strengthening the labor market competitiveness of the individuals at the level of these regions, a fact that is emphasized by the high level of overachievement of the output indicators that are related to SO 4.1</p>	<p>was justified by the specificities of the eligible area, being, in both countries represented by counties and districts with a lower level of development, with associative vulnerabilities that limit the access to the labor market, especially the population in rural areas, such as: poverty, unemployment, lack of education for the labor market, lack or inadequacy of available labor force skills, high share of NEETs, low availability of internal mobility for employment, history of external mobility for occasional jobs with medium or low level of qualification. In order to increase the attractiveness of funding through SO 4.1, the MA will consider the state aid in the following programming period.</p>			<p>of funding, regardless the SO under which the projects are finance, is the quality of life in the region, which implicitly also means increasing employment, income, reducing economic, social, environmental inequalities, etc., but also new opportunities to expand the business environment - entrepreneurship, self-employment, etc.</p>	<p>interventions better adapted to the current context that could have finality in the level and quality of employment in the region, including through cross-border mobility for work. As we are estimating a slow recovery after COVID-19 crisis, with a high challenge for employment for the last graduates from 2020 and probably from 2021, we propose, as examples, as possible future eligible actions in projects: training for digital skills and digital management of the companies, restructuring employment model at company level from the perspective of the employees involvement in projects implementation - as expert or target groups; a more developed and complex platform for project visibility, on-line implementation activities and results dissemination (integrated project site to allow on-line activities with the target group, associated with the allocation of eligible expenses with support logistics-equipment, payment of IT experts, access to online communication forms, etc.); providing coaching competencies for better</p>



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		Desk research	Interviews	Questionnaire	Case Studies		
							<p>integration in firms jobs structure and for higher productivity; redesign of the business model and of the employment framework in affected/ risk activities like tourism etc.</p> <p>R.5. Finally, the monitoring system could also be developed such that sustainability indicators could be developed and monitored (for example number of persons still employed at specific periods of time after the finalisation of projects as a result of the implementation of the financed actions). This recommendation is particularly useful for the evaluation of soft measures and their impact and sustainability over time.</p>
EM.O 3	What are the factors facilitating this contribution?	<p>Institutional cross-border collaboration relations from other funding lines and already created/</p> <p>In addition, the digitalization of economies, as a global trend, will increase the demand for soft skills both for the mature labor force on the labor market, but also for a permanent updating of skills for young people, which must</p>	<p>The fact that the projects could not benefit from state aid affected the overall results of the projects. The reason why the projects did not receive state aid is that the interest in the eligible area of the Programme for such schemes is low. The MA mentioned that they would take into consideration</p>	<p>The opinion of the beneficiaries regarding the main factors that have driven the change related to projects financed under SO 4.1, the respondents have repeatedly mentioned a number of main factors, such as flexibility of employment, work migration, cross-border labor mobility schemes and direct investments in small and medium enterprises. One</p>	<p>The activities of the projects aimed to create a cross-border virtual incubator BIOVIRTINC that fosters bio business development, as well as offers information, trainings, consultancy for certification, business and mobility tools tailored to the specific needs of job seekers and entrepreneurs in Dolj-Pleven area rising in the</p>	<p>The key factors that have facilitated the contribution of the interventions to the progress of employment domain in the cross-border area were mainly represented by the will and interest of the key actors in the region to create and develop soft measures to improve the labor market and labor mobility, such as: the studies elaborated to</p>	<p>There are no specific recommendations for this evaluation question.</p>

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N. Evaluation questions (EQ) As apprehended by the evaluator		Findings				Conclusions	Recommendations
		Desk research	Interviews	Questionnaire	Case Studies		
		be added to the requirements of the business environment.	the state aid in the following programming period. The opportunity offered by the Programme, the correct identification of the problems that exist in the eligible area and the target groups, as well as the structure of a partnership are positive factors for ensuring the sustainability. The language barrier is still an important factor that has a negative impact on employment rate, even if the citizens can access some language courses. The Bulgarian citizens are more interested in learning the official language in Romania.	beneficiary mentioned that an increase in tourism was a driving factor for the observable changes in labor market and employment in the cross-border region.	process of labor market inclusion. The factors that facilitated the achievement of the project's objectives were the openness of the cross-border population to receive information about bio agriculture and bio products. Another factor was the fact that the project provided to local business free soil analyses sets.	improve employment; the self-assessment tools implemented to support job seekers; the dissemination of various information campaigns, trainings and roundtables.	
EM.O 4	Are there any unintended effects of the programme in this field?	Up to now it is difficult to define such effects, but some possible tendencies that are likely to occur can be advanced: a) Favorable: (1) increasing the competition for projects specific to the	Many projects targeted disadvantaged people. Hence, the inclusive aspects were added to the unintended effects that the projects	The most prevalent answers offered by the beneficiaries participating to the survey were represented by the development of cross-border cooperation, creation of SME's with cross-border participation,	Beside the expected effects of the project (project was expected to promote joint mobility with a min. of 5000 viewers on social media/platform, 200 registered job seekers/specialists, 30	The Programme is capable of generating unintended effects at the level of this domain, but up to now it is difficult to define such effects for the medium and long term. However, some possible effects that are	There are no specific recommendations for this evaluation question.



N. Evaluation questions (EQ) As apprehended by the evaluator		Findings				Conclusions	Recommendations
		Desk research	Interviews	Questionnaire	Case Studies		
		<p>priority axis, between the traditional applicants for this Programme and those who have experience in implementing similar thematic projects, but through other programs, had a beneficial effect on the quality of project proposals;</p> <p>b) Unfavorable: (1) labor market volatility and increased external mobility for work of the young and young adult population segment - up to 40 years, so there may be a shortage of eligible people for the target group</p>	<p>under Priority Axis 4 created.</p> <p>Other unintended effects of the Programme in the field of employment are represented by the creation of new businesses as a result of the participation to the training courses organized in the projects, as well as the creation of new jobs for the unemployed persons who participated in the courses.</p>	<p>the development of business networks and joint cross-border activities.</p>	<p>employers/entrepreneurs, 10 land owners), the unexpected effects will consist in the multiplication of the results with an increased rate of 5% yearly within the next five years.</p>	<p>likely to occur consist in the implementation of new businesses due to the participation to the training courses, as well as the creation of new jobs for the unemployed person who participated in the courses.</p>	
I.I.C. 01	<p>Have the interventions under this priority axis (5.1) led to the achievement of any effects, intended or unintended ?</p>	<p>From the documental analysis, the main findings are:</p> <p>The analysis conducted at project level suggests that the approved interventions under priority axis 5.1 can be categorised in four main domains: health, social services and poverty alleviation, education and public administration strengthening coordination.</p>	<p>To keep up in the progress in the field of institutional capacity, it is necessary to support capacity building for civil servants, to support the development of specific skills (language courses, training courses etc), improve the efficiency and capacity building of public administrations and cross-border mechanisms.</p>	<p>beneficiaries (4) mentioned that the project is fully operational and that there is enough evidence concerning its effects; others (4) mentioned that the project is already operational and some effects are visible; while one beneficiary mentioned that the project is not yet fully operational; and two beneficiaries mentioned that the project is at an early stage.</p> <p>Most beneficiaries mentioned that the main</p>	<p>Following the discussion with Zimnicea Town, lead partner of the project ROBG-174 Your health matters!, the main conclusions are:</p> <p>•The results obtained by implementing the project are the modernization of hospitals in Zimnicea and Svishtov by equipping them with medical equipment according to identified needs and laid the foundations for cooperation between the two medical units and local public</p>	<p>The areas of intervention touched on some of the most urgent issues in the cross border area, intervening in a very practical (as in the case of medical supplies in hospitals and IT equipment in schools) but also in a cross-cutting way, by promoting cooperation, capacity building and exchange of experiences. It is however true that the projects financed under this priority axis intervened in a limited number of town/cities,</p>	<p>R.6. To further involve the private sector in the needs and priorities identification process, for what concerns the next programming period.</p>





N. Evaluation questions (EQ) As apprehended by the evaluator		Findings				Conclusions	Recommendations
		Desk research	Interviews	Questionnaire	Case Studies		
			<p>One respondent highlighted the need to foster platforms and forums to exchange experiences and best practices, especially in the field of social services; Thanks to the Programme specialized forums for the exchange of experience and expertise in the field of social services have been organised, with very positive effects;</p>	<p>field of institutional capacity is the enhancement of cooperation capacity (7). The rest of the beneficiaries mentioned relevance in the following fields: improving health care services and the collaboration between health care providers</p>	<p>administration to continue efforts to develop and increase the quality of medical services population; •The project activities generated a positive impact in the target area by increasing the population's confidence in the medical service provided by the two hospitals</p>	<p>therefore it is not possible to detect a geographical homogeneous improvement in the cross-border area.</p>	
I.IC.0 2	How much of the effects identified are directly attributable to interventions under the programme?	<p>The Projects analysed give a great importance to boosting capacity of common cross-border cooperation schemes, creating room for exchange experiences and best practices and support the most suitable arrangements that maximise synergies on the two sides of the borders;Modernization and better efficiency of public services are two of the recurrent strongholds that emerge throughout the analysis of interventions, in the context of complementarity and</p>	<p>The programme has a visible effect on cooperation among public civil servants. For instance, all the mayors know each other, and this is considered a key impact; Partnership agreements create spill-over effects, allowing partners to share their experiences. Also, the Programme allowed that an increasing number of experts are being consulted in a wide range of</p>	<p>One beneficiary reported the elaboration of a joint strategy to improve the public services environment in the RO-BG cross-border region, as well as the development of a platform named E-GoverNet, while another beneficiary reported establishing a platform to exchange information about public institutions in the cross-border regions, which was aimed at the general public.</p>		<p>The initiatives of the Programme showed to be effective in creating synergies, facilitating the dialogue and creating common development opportunities for stakeholders and actors from a wide range of sectors, that would have hardly had space for discussion, improvement and exchange of ideas without the Programme; The synergies created have also stimulated the partners involved to deepen collaboration opportunities, laying the</p>	<p>R.7. Although the Programme has been instrumental in stimulating cross-border dialogue and exchange of experiences, it is recommended to further stimulate the integration of services and the exchange of good practices between the public and private sectors in the cross-border area.</p>



N. Evaluation questions (EQ) As apprehended by the evaluator		Findings				Conclusions	Recommendations
		Desk research	Interviews	Questionnaire	Case Studies		
		<p>harmonization. In practical terms this leads to the elaboration of common studies, common exchanges platforms, shared trainings, joint actions and development information tools, involving a wide range of categories and target groups (from policymakers to medical specialists) that otherwise they would not have had the opportunity to confront each other;</p>	<p>areas, strengthening the overall regional institutional capacity;</p>			<p>foundations for long-term collaborations.</p>	
I.IC.0 3	What are the factors facilitating this direct effect?	<p>Creation of new cross-border networks and reinforce the existing ones, throughout the development of common structures, mechanisms and exchange tools, as well as promotion of horizontal cooperation between administrative public actors in key local and cross-border aspects;</p> <p>Foster civil society participation in public decision-making and development of public-private partnerships;</p>	<p>Institutional cooperation has impact on daily life of citizens, for instance exchanging of best practices may lead to an overall better administration of the concerned areas;</p> <p>The success of the Programme's direct effects depends on many factors which must be in unison to be truly effective;</p> <p>The effective use of grants and stakeholder consultations have been highlighted among those factors which facilitated the</p>	<p>Most beneficiaries (4) believed that the effective assessment of local needs and alignment with the Programme's priority axis were the main drivers of successful implementation, followed closely clear and effective call design (3). Only one beneficiary mentioned adequate financial support as the main driver, while 2 beneficiaries mentioned that ERDF support and the EU added value were the main driving factors.</p>		<p>The projects were able to intercept the main cross-border needs identified by the Programme. One of the factors behind the success of this PA was the freedom of the participants to be able to choose their own area of interest. This allowed the creation of not only to create true partnerships and to encourage an effective exchange of good practices, but also to have positive effects on the lives of the cross-border inhabitants themselves.</p>	



N. Evaluation questions (EQ) As apprehended by the evaluator		Findings				Conclusions	Recommendations
		Desk research	Interviews	Questionnaire	Case Studies		
			Programme's direct effect; The synergies with other EU-level programmes have played an important role in making the Programme more effective.				
I.RD. 01	To what extent does the programme add benefits to the cross-border regional development and complement it and enhance the effect of other related policies or strategies? How does this mechanism work and what can be improved?	Before the Programme, there was weak record of historical cooperation between Romania and Bulgaria. The presence of a physical obstacle such as the Danube has been a real factor of discontinuity and one of the main reasons why cooperation in the cross-border area has not taken off. To the present date, the problem remains very relevant: the fact that there are only two bridges on a 450 km border, one of which has only been operational since 2014	Positive developments have been recorded in the field of climate change adaptation and environmental protection; while less positive developments have been remarked under employment and job creation, and regional mobility; Although to some extent the Programme has had an impact on increasing mobility and outreach in the labour market by promoting initiatives aimed at both workers and entrepreneurs; Improved institutional and expert capacity have been noted among the cross-border development aspects that have undergone	The majority of the respondents (54%) answered that they experienced synergies and/or complementarities with other projects financed under other programmes and/or policies while 42% stated that there are not similar projects in the relevant area.		The regional development progress in the cross-border area is still in its early stages, and much remains to be done. However, the opportunities for cooperation and regional progress brought forward by the Programme have had a significant spill-over and indicate that this is the way to go.	R.8. It is recommended to further stimulate and encourage synergies and complementary coordination between the projects funded by the Programme and other projects financed by other programme/policies, such as EUSDR.



N. Evaluation questions (EQ) As apprehended by the evaluator		Findings				Conclusions	Recommendations
		Desk research	Interviews	Questionnaire	Case Studies		
			the most important changes in the last years, together with the joint trainings for the newly introduced technical solutions and management systems;				
I.RD. 02	What is the current and estimated aggregated effect of the programme in the eligible area?	<p>More than 2000 people have benefited from the improvement of road infrastructure in the cross-border area.</p> <p>There has been an increase of over 2.1 million tourist overnight stays, conforming to Bulgarian and Romanian national statistics, from the beginning of the Programme until the end of 2018, thanks to the tourism services' improvements in the eligible area.</p> <p>In the fields of joint risk management, flood and forest fire protection measures, there have been significant improvements in the eligible area.</p> <p>Participants show a growing interest in cross-border labour mobility. Indeed, more than 260,000 people will have access to joint employment initiatives,</p>	<p>According to the stakeholders, the program through the identification of the 5 priority axes has intercepted the main needs of the cross-border area.</p> <p>However, in some sectors such as transport, where the construction costs are very high, even for small works, close integration with other European and national funds and policies is necessary to be more effective, given the limited budget of the Programme.</p>			<p>All the priority axes have recorded significant improvements and demonstrated how all the areas of intervention are connected to each other and are capable of creating positive spillover effects in other domains. An eloquent example is how road safety and the implementation of climate change and risk prevention management policies have had positive spillover effects on the improvement of tourism and related services, which in practical terms leads to increase of 2.1 million overnight stays in the cross-border area.</p>	



N. Evaluation questions (EQ) As apprehended by the evaluator		Findings				Conclusions	Recommendations
		Desk research	Interviews	Questionnaire	Case Studies		
		corresponding to 87% of the target by 2023; The number of cross-border mechanisms stands at 14% of the total target, and according to the 2018 implementation report there are no risks for the completion of this indicator by 2019.					
I.RD. 03	How support from ERDF has contributed to the objectives of each priority, in line with the result-focus of cohesion policy?		The interviews revealed that progress had been made in many areas, such as tourism, climate change disaster management, sustainable transport and public administration coordination; However, much progress still needs to be achieved for a structural qualitative leap in the eligible area, but the Programme has certainly shown the way forward	A very large proportion of the respondents (71%) mentioned that the project goals were fully aligned with the ERDF financial availability, while 21% of the respondents mentioned that the project objectives were only fairly aligned. Even though 16% of the beneficiaries stated they do not know/they cannot answer, the overwhelming majority of the beneficiaries had their project objectives at the very least fairly aligned with the ERDF financial availability. The overwhelming majority of the respondents (93%) mentioned that the ERDF support was the deciding factor for the successful implementation of their project, while 7% mentioned that the ERDF support was the deciding		The Programme considerably contributed to the main objectives of cohesion policy, since the thematic objectives well intercept the needs but also the potential of the cross-border area, but also highlighting the need for large-scale interventions.	R.9. It is also recommended to follow the ERDF thematic concentration for the next programming period 2021-2027, as it has been done during the 2014-2020 programming period, in order to further strengthen the cross-border area's attractiveness and strategic relevance, following to the 5 main investment priorities identified by the EU for the 2021-27 Regional Development and Cohesion Policy framework: Innovation and digitisation of SMEs (a Smarter Europe), Energy transition, renewables and the fight against climate change (a Greener Europe), Strategic transport and digital networks (a Connected Europe); Supporting quality employment, education, skills, social inclusion and equal access to healthcare (a Social Europe), Supporting locally-led development strategies and sustainable



N. Evaluation questions (EQ) As apprehended by the evaluator		Findings				Conclusions	Recommendations
		Desk research	Interviews	Questionnaire	Case Studies		
				factor only to a certain extent. No beneficiary disagreed with this statement.			urban development across the EU (a Europe closer to citizens).
I.RD. 04	What is the additional value resulting from the EU intervention (in this case, support from ERDF), compared to what could reasonably have been expected from the two Member States acting at regional level?	The main objective of the Programme is not only to finance projects, but to create synergies and reduce the obstacles to further cooperation and regional development prospects. Although the limited budget, it has laid the foundations for further structural actions and for ideas for cooperation that can go beyond European funding schemes and be sustainable in the long term; One of the best examples of structural approach to cooperation concern the cities of Ruse and Giurgiu, which have developed a series of territorial and economic common visions, certainly facilitated by the great advantage of the bridge that connects the two cities, but also thanks to the Programme, which has facilitated several actions concerning sustainable development, cross-border governance and cultural initiatives;	Without the Programme, there would have been little towards no cooperation between the two countries, steadily improving the expertise capacity in the eligible area Projects' sustainability would have been very complicated, if not impossible without funds granted by the Programme	Considering the decision to participate in the calls if such funds were available at the national level, only 33% of the respondents mentioned that they would have participated in the call, while a large proportion of the respondents (41%) mentioned that they wouldn't have participated in the calls. Regarding the main added value of the RO-BG programme for the cross-border area, apart from the availability of funds, the main answers of the beneficiaries are related towards an increase in cross-border cooperation between Romanian and Bulgarian actors, the collaboration of various actors that would not have been otherwise possible without the RO-BG programme, the simplification of documentation and management procedures. In general, most of the		The added value of the European intervention, has made the difference in the region, creating synergies between the cross-border communities and laying the foundations for other cooperation opportunities, which may go beyond European funding schemes and be sustainable in the long term.	R.10. It is then important to give continuity to the results obtained so far in the next Cooperation Programme, beyond 2020, strengthening the investment priorities in order to amplify the achievements of the current Programme.



N. Evaluation questions (EQ) As apprehended by the evaluator		Findings				Conclusions	Recommendations
		Desk research	Interviews	Questionnaire	Case Studies		
		Similar integration opportunities might also exist between Vidin and Calafat and Silistra and Calarasi.		beneficiaries mentioned that, in general, the only available funds for projects regarding cross-border cooperation are not at the national level, further enforcing the need for Interreg programs in general.			
I.RD. 05	What would be the most likely consequences of stopping or withdrawing the EU intervention?	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Without the Programme's funds, the valorisation of tourism and cultural resources would also be compromised, given the results achieved so far in unlocking their potential; Road safety actions would also be affected, given the improvements achieved so far, for which the Programme had a great contribution, in terms of intra-regional mobility and spill-overs on the regional economy 	<p>Some beneficiaries highlighted the loss in terms experience gained and cohesion with the partners on the other side of the Danube.</p> <p>The withdrawal of EU intervention would bring negative consequences of due to limited financial resources of local authorities in the cross-border area.</p>	<p>Considering the main consequences on the RO-BG cross-border area of an interruption of the EU CBC funding in the field covered by their project, the main answers of the respondents aimed towards a severe reduction in the possibility of implementation of cross-border projects, a big drop in the Romanian-Bulgarian relationship as well as a significant drop in the investments regarding cross-border cooperation. The beneficiaries consider that cross-border partnerships would have been severely limited, while some beneficiaries mentioned that, in absence of EU intervention, there would be no projects on the cross-border cooperation of RO-BG actors.</p>		<p>The programme has stimulated on the one hand the cross-border dialogue and concretely helped the citizens on the other, for this reason a possible withdrawal or stopping of EU funds is perceived as detrimental by local stakeholders and from the documental analysis' results.</p>	<p>R.11. The Programme also needs continuity of investments to bring a structural value in the cross-border region, together with a more integrated territorial approach to avoid uncoordinated events, taking in consideration the competitive advantages of the cross-border region, together with an integrated-solution approach to avoid strictly sectoral orientation. However, it has so far produced very promising results in terms of regional development and laid the foundation for new progress and spill over effects.</p>



N. Evaluation questions (EQ) As apprehended by the evaluator		Findings				Conclusions	Recommendations
		Desk research	Interviews	Questionnaire	Case Studies		
SU.0 1	Are the programme's outputs and results sustainable on long term?	<p>Applicants are required to provide detailed description about the measures taken to ensure long-term sustainability. Applicants were expected to deliver a “clear, concrete and reliable exit plan”.</p> <p>In addition, extra points were given to projects which proved to have a sound long-term sustainability plan. By doing so, applicants have an extra incentive to consider sustainability criteria in their project design.</p>	<p>Projects results are – in principle – sustainable in the long term. On other hand, there is some concern about the financial sustainability and solvency of project beneficiaries, as they may lack resources and experience to manage long lasting projects.</p> <p>Local stakeholders pointed out that political divergences may lead to unsustainable projects. For instance, changes in the municipal councils’ majority may reverse priorities and thus some projects may be prioritised over others.</p> <p>According to another local stakeholders, the key principle of sustainability is relevance. If the project is needed, then its sustainability will be ensured by this very fact</p>	<p>43% of the respondents considered that the calls and/or the selection criteria took into consideration to a great extent the long-term sustainability, and other 43% agreed that the calls and/or selection criteria took into consideration to some extent the long-term sustainability. Only 9% of the respondents considered that the calls and/or selection criteria took into consideration to a small extent the long-term sustainability. This is substantially in line with what emerged from interviews and desk research.</p>		<p>The collected evidence led to the conclusion that project’s outputs are likely to be sustainable in the long term. This is due to both an effective ex-ante planning – which push applicants to consider sustainability implications while designing the projects – and projects’ relevance to local needs. The long-lasting continuity amongst programmes is also a key factor ensuring sustainability.</p>	



N. Evaluation questions (EQ) As apprehended by the evaluator		Findings				Conclusions	Recommendations
		Desk research	Interviews	Questionnaire	Case Studies		
SO.0 2	How can future programming (2021-2027) be streamlined in order to achieve higher and ensure sustainability of the financial assistance provided?	During the analysis, it emerged that financial corrections are arguably the most significant threat to financial sustainability as far as the Programme is concerned. While local specific issues need to be considered, a relevant document to be considered is the recent Commission Decision (14.5.2019) “laying down the guidelines for determining financial corrections to be made to expenditure financed by the Union for non-compliance with the applicable rules on public procurement”.	According to an interviewee from the Programme Management Body, a more substantial involvement of local SMEs as project beneficiaries would enhance projects’ sustainability. From their point of view, SMEs (and private entity) have an implicit interest in ensuring project continuity as their goal is to preserve cash flows and profits. Another Programme Management Body highlighted that “ideal exist strategy will be to capitalize the results of the projects but this is more common in the transnational or interregional programme, while in the cross-border programmes the beneficiaries propose more real concrete actions”.	40% of project beneficiaries consider that financial corrections as a serious risk to project sustainability. This is in line with what emerged from interviews and reinforce the case for an intervention on this issue in the next programming period. 75% of project beneficiaries considered the environmental sustainability was easy to reach, more than 50% believed that financial sustainability was challenging. Respondents were asked to motivate their answers and there were many references to the timing of budget allocation. This is in line with what emerged from interviews.		As mentioned in the previous EQ, the Programme’s outputs and results are likely to be sustainable in the long run. Thus – if the overall same approach would be implemented also in the next programming period – no major issues on sustainability should arise. However, concerns remain over financial corrections and the allocation of funds.	R.12. Recommendations mostly concern the issues of financial corrections and their effective prevention. On one hand, it is strongly advised to continue the activity of events and training provided by the MA, supported by the NA and the Joint Secretariat, highly appreciated by project beneficiaries. As far as procedures simplifications is concerned, the MA’s initiative to extend the use of simplified cost options in the next programming is indeed in line with policy recommendations. To improve the financial sustainability of projects, a pre-financing mechanism may be suitable.
SO.0 3	What are the major factors		There is a substantial consensus amongst the interviewees that	The vast majority of project beneficiaries are satisfied with the support		The internal factors (i.e. factors related to the Programme) were	R.13. The recommendations to further enhance internal factors are already listed and



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N. Evaluation questions (EQ) As apprehended by the evaluator	Findings				Conclusions	Recommendations
	Desk research	Interviews	Questionnaire	Case Studies		
<p>which influenced the achievement or non-achievement of sustainability of the programme?</p>		<p>one key factor influencing the sustainability is the relevance. Projects that tackle relevant and perceived needs are likely to preserve their outputs in the long run. This is also due to the fact that they tend to receive public interest and scrutiny – forcing project beneficiaries to ensure maintenance. On the other hand, the same Programme Management Body highlighted that the one the critical factors affecting sustainability is the financial solvency of project beneficiaries – which can be rather weak, considering the development of the area. There is little that the Programme can do to improve internal financial solvency.</p>	<p>provided by the Programme bodies on sustainability issues. Only a tiny minority complains about a lack of support. These results lead to the conclusion that the Programme Body support was effective, and it managed to tackle key sustainability issues.</p> <p>The most common type of support is advice during monitoring visit – which means active and specific support likely to be tailored on the project beneficiary needs. This may explain its success.</p>		<p>designed to support sustainability and they largely achieve their objective. However, external factors – such as the weak financial solvency of project beneficiary – fall outside the scope of Programme intervention and pose the most significant threat to project sustainability.</p>	<p>described in the previous EQ. Realistically, there is little the Programme can do to address external factors – especially the weak solvency. A possible solution may be a stricter pre-screening of applicant’s financial solvency during the selection phase.</p>



Annex 7 – Indicative Action Plan for the impact recommendations

Recommendation 1 - SO 1.1./Transport evaluation domain	Improve coordination between similar policies in the border area	
Action	Responsible	Timeframe
Kick-off an inter-institutional platform combining local and national administration (i.e. Ministries and local governments) to discuss key issues and coordinate policies)	Managing Authority	Early 2021

Recommendation 3 - SO 2.1./Heritage evaluation domain	Include civic education on waste generated by tourism activities in the horizontal principles	
Action	Responsible	Timeframe
Analyze the possibility to include civic education on waste generated by tourism activities in the project proposals and assess the feasibility of such actions	Managing Authority supported by JS and NA	Late 2020 (November) – Early 2021
Redefine or detail the horizontal principles (in the guidelines for call for proposals on heritage) so that the actions related to civic education on waste generated by tourism are awarded with extra score, under the sustainable development component		

Recommendation 4 - SO 4.1./Employment evaluation domain	Promoting the organization of training courses through projects	
Action	Responsible	Timeframe
Assess the feasibility of introducing, at project level, possible future eligible actions in projects, such as: training for digital skills and digital management of the companies, restructuring employment model at company level from the perspective of the employees involvement in projects implementation in order to diminish the impact of COVID-19 for the graduates from 2020 and possible from 2021, etc	Managing Authority supported by JS and NA	Beginnig of 2021
Analyze the possibility to prioritise certain profiles and areas of training, so that activities of skills development be better correlated with labour market demand.		

Recommendation 5 - SO 4.1./ Employment evaluation domain	The development of a monitoring system that can measure and monitorize the number of persons still employed at specific periods of time after the finalisation of projects as a result of the implementation of the financed actions.	
Action	Responsible	Timeframe
Assess the possibility to include, as results related to sustainability part for the projects targeting the employment fields, the number of persons still employed at specific periods of time after the finalisation of projects	Managing Authority and stakeholders of the Programme	Beginnig of 2021

Recommendation 6 - SO 5.1./Institutional capacity evaluation domain	Further involvement of the private sector	
Action	Responsible	Timeframe



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Ensure a higher representation and participation of the private sectors in the consultation through the organisation of dissemination events in the area	Managing Authority	Late 2020 (November)
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Recommendation 7 - SO 5.1. /Institutional capacity evaluation domain	Further stimulate the integration of services and the exchange of good practices between the public and private sectors in the cross-border area	
Action	Responsible	Timeframe
Launch online consultations (web surveys) targeted on specific domain and invite the local stakeholders to deepen the needs assessment and best practices sharing	Managing Authority	Late 2020 (November)

The action plan for the thematic recommendations proposed above is only applicable if the domains are selected for financing under the next cross-border cooperation programme.

Recommendation 13 - Sustainability evaluation domain	(Optional) stricter pre-screening of applicant's financial solvency during the selection phase.	
Action	Responsible	Timeframe
Develop a questionnaire addressed to project beneficiaries to self-assess their financial soundness and their capacity to carry out projects	Managing Authority	Early 2021

Recommendation 8 - Regional Development evaluation domain	Further stimulate and encourage synergies and complementary coordination between the projects funded by the Programme and other projects financed in connection to other programmes/policies	
Action	Responsible	Timeframe
Kick-off an inter-institutional platform combining local and national administration (i.e. Ministries and local governments) to discuss key issues and coordinate policies.	Managing Authority	Early 2021



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Annex 8 – List of documents and literature reviewed

Previous studies on similar programmes

- Interim Evaluation of the Romania -Bulgaria cross border cooperation programme 2007-2013
- Study on means of transport, registered vehicles and road accidents, National Statistical Institute of Romania, 2020
- Traffic accidents in the Republic of Bulgaria 2018
- The Sofia Globe, Bulgarian, Romanian prime ministers open new border checkpoint, sign co-operation memoranda
- Regional statistics and indicators for monitoring, National Statistical Institute of Bulgaria
- The length of transport routes at the end of 2019, National Statistical Institute of Romania
- CBC for MaST Education (ROBG-165), Coordination of joint policies and equipment investments in the field of education in the cross-border area, Progress Reports
- PARC (ROBG-17), Development and promotion of a common natural heritage tourism product: Route “Protected natural heritage within the cross-border region Romania-Bulgaria, Progress Reports
- Strategic Environmental Assessment of the Romania-Bulgaria Cross Border Cooperation Programme 2014-2020 ENVIRONMENTAL REPORT
- Study on the status of protected areas and existing wetlands along the Danube River in Mehedinti County, 2016
- Factsheets, Profile of the Romania country risk
- Bulgaria Overview of the National Disaster Management System, European Commission
- Advisory Services on a National Climate Change Adaptation Strategy and Action Plan Assessment of the Disaster Risk Management Sector, 2018
- European Commission (2020): European Civil Protection and Humanitarian Aid Operations – Romania - Overview of the National Disaster Management System
- Romania Systematic Country Diagnostic BACKGROUND NOTE Climate and Disaster Management, 2018
- 2015-2016 Programme for peer reviews in the framework of EU cooperation on civil protection and disaster risk management
- European Commission (2016): European Territorial Cooperation Work Package 11. Ex post evaluation of Cohesion Policy programmes 2007-2013, focusing on the European Regional Development Fund (ERDF) and the Cohesion Fund (CF)
- EUROPEAN COMMISSION. Border orientation paper, Romania-Bulgaria
- EURACTIVE, 2018. Less money, a new legal framework, what future for the Interreg post-2020?
- Europe 2020 Targets
- Europe 2020 targets: statistics and indicators for Bulgaria
- Partnership Agreement of the Republic of Bulgaria outlining the support from the European Structural and Investment Funds for the 2014-2020 period, p. 59.
- Contribution Analysis
- What is Theory of Change?



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- DRMKC - Disaster Risk Management Knowledge Centre Operational Evaluation of Danube Transnational Programme
- Operational Evaluation of ESPON Programme
- Operational Evaluation of INTERACT Programme
- Operational Evaluation of INTERREG Europe Programme
- Ex-ante Operational Evaluation of URBACT III Programme
- Ex-post evaluation of Cohesion Policy Programmes 2007 – 2013, focusing on the European Regional Development Fund (ERDF) and the Cohesion Fund (CF)
- Neighbourhood Programme Poland – Belarus - Ukraine INTERREG/TACIS CBC (Ex Post Evaluation)
- Ex Post Evaluation INTERREG III (2000-2006)
- Previous evaluations/impact assessments, Project Implementation Manual, Relevant programme procedures
- The Interreg V-A Romania-Bulgaria Programme, Annual Implementation Reports
- Gender equality and non-discrimination within the Interreg V-A Romania - Hungary Programme 2014-2020
- Interreg V-A Romania – Bulgaria, version 1.3
- A Sustainable Europe for a Better World:
- A European Union Strategy for Sustainable Development
- Interreg V-A - Italy-Slovenia
- Interreg V-A – Romania – Hungary

Academia and scientific literature consulted

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- C. Murphy, C. Creamer, A. McClelland, M. Boyle (2016): “The value of cross-border emergency management in adapting to climate change” in Borderlands: The Journal of Spatial Planning in Ireland, 5. pp. 34-46



Annex 9 – Answers to ESC comments

1. ESC comments received on the draft evaluation report

Evaluation Question	Section	Comment	Page	Answer
EQ I.RI.01	Analysis	EC: “Moreover, although significant progress has been reached especially in early warning, preparedness, and risk information, actual investments in risk reduction are reported as still limited, especially when the scale of climate and disaster risk in Romania is considered. In the case of Bulgaria, a European Commission funded peer-review <u>funded under the European Union Civil Protection Mechanism¹⁸</u> observed that...”	43	Suggestion taken into account to avoid potential ambiguities
EQ.I.RD.04	Analysis	EC: “Romania and Bulgaria joined the EU in 2007 and this is only the second programming period, compared to other long-term cross-border programmes. Moreover, according to <u>an article of October 2018 the EU Commission</u> , with a selection rate that overcomes <u>at that stage of over 90% according to the European Commission</u> , the Programme ranks <u>was placed</u> among the best performing programmes ²⁴ .”	73	Suggestion taken into account to avoid potential ambiguities
General	Introduction	For the final report: there are some overlaps and repetitions in the text, please make it shorter and more focused.	2	Suggestion taken into account
General	Introduction	This evaluation task is not covered at all, please make the necessary changes	2	the contribution to the targets of Europe 2020 strategy was included
General	Methodology	Benchmark analysis is missing (for questions I.RD.01 and I.RD.02). It should be added in the final report both here and in the analysis for these two questions	6	Benchmarking analysis was added at the section corresponding to RD 01 and RD 02
General	Methodology	General comment: TBIE should have its roots in the theory of change. The report does not present the thorough analysis performed in this regard (how you performed the steps at page 5 in the inception report to serve as basis for any further analysis). This resulted in a sometimes weak analysis which in some cases simply puts together collected information. In addition, one evaluation task (contribution to the targets of Europe 2020) and one evaluation question are not covered at all.	6	The Theory of Change analysis was included
Evaluation Questions	Evaluation Questions	One evaluation question is completely missing: EQ I.EN.05 Does the implementation of the programme have significant environmental effects, based on measuring the indicators for monitoring the environmental impacts proposed under SEA? (This question will investigate potential environmental effects by measuring the indicators for monitoring the environmental impacts proposed under SEA)	7	The analysis of EN.05 was included as discussed



Evaluation Question	Section	Comment	Page	Answer
<i>Evaluation Questions</i>	<i>Evaluation Questions</i>	For the analyses of the specific objectives, it would be more useful and reader-friendly to leave the analysis separate but group together at the end of each SO the conclusions and recommendations for the SO (also move the title 1. Analysis above the first EG) - I exemplified for the first SO	7	Suggestion taken into account in order to be more reader-friendly
<i>EQ.I.TR.01</i>	<i>Analysis</i>	General comment: Please consider the updated information related to indicators provided during the evaluation of implementation.	7	Suggestion taken into account
<i>EQ.I.TR.01</i>	<i>Analysis</i>	The focus is connection of secondary and tertiary nodes to TENT. Please rephrase considering the SO of the PO.	7	The suggestion to rephrase was taken into account
<i>EQ.I.TR.01</i>	<i>Conclusions and recommendation</i>	Group 2&3 at the end of SO	8	Suggestion taken into account
<i>EQ.I.TR.02</i>	<i>Analysis</i>	Please detail what do you mean by this statement (the projects should reflect the local need, in line with the Programme objectives). Moreover, 70% have stated that the calls were fairly effective in assuring the mentioned balancing between needs and objectives. Together with the previous figure, these findings confirm that calls and selection criteria are designed to suit local needs.	9	Suggestion taken into account
<i>EQ.HE.01</i>	<i>Analysis</i>	Please change move labels to make it better visible	17	Suggestion taken into account. The colour was changed to be more visible
<i>EQ.HE.03</i>	<i>Analysis</i>	General comment – please included a statement regarding the cutoff date used and check the correlation with the other evaluation report	21	The cutoff date was included
<i>EQ.I.RI.01</i>	<i>Analysis</i>	Please keep the same formatting for all questions titles (there are 2 cells for the questions above)	29	The same formatting was replaced for all question title
<i>EQ.I.SU.02</i>	<i>Analysis</i>	Please make the labels for “difficult” the same size as the others and maybe try to make the graphic larger so that the full words fit under the x axis instead of “1 2 3”	63	The graph was modified as suggested
<i>Annexes</i>	<i>Annexes</i>	Please insert a table of contents with link to each annex	1	The table of contents with the annexes was included
<i>EQ.I.TR.01</i>	<i>Analysis</i>	Please state the source: • According to one academic expert, “the available infrastructure is outdated, inadequate or insufficient, necessitating reconstruction, reconstruction, modernization and expansion, and at a higher level of accompanying and additional investments”.	8	The source was stated in the footnotes
<i>EQ.I.TR</i>	<i>Conclusion</i>	The report does not seem to reflect the cause. We have set up a dedicated SO, we have launched dedicated calls. Beneficiaries did not apply. This should be noted.	14	Suggestions was taken into account
<i>EQ.I.EM</i>	<i>Analysis</i>	Clearly not all interviews, so please state that part/who has made such affirmation.	36	The source was added



Evaluation Question	Section	Comment	Page	Answer
EQ I.EM	EQ I.EM	All these recommendations are inapplicable. You basically make recommendations to revise the Programme intervention logic and indicators, which was already ex-ante evaluated + approved by EC. This are not only not feasible, but they simply disregards the targets we did set. We consider the entire chapter related to PA 4 needs considerable redrafting	42	The chapter related with PA 4 was revised accordingly
General	Executive summary	NA: We suggest that, apart from general findings regarding the specific objectives / the thematic evaluation domains, key messages relating to the effects on the cross-border regional development and cooperation and sustainability of outputs and results and recommendations for future programming are also included in the Executive summary. Contribution to the targets of Europe 2020 strategy could be mentioned also in one sentence	1	Suggestion taken into account in the executive summary
E. I.EM.03	Analysis	NA: We suggest that in the recommendations' section a sentence or two in favour of direct support to SMEs are included. Given the fact that most affected from the crisis are the micro, small and medium enterprises (providing a very large share of employment) typically having insufficient capital and poor development potentials, a direct support to SMEs is more appropriate than the usual indirect support from the current and previous programming periods	38	Text unchanged
E. I.RD.01	Analysis	NA: We suggest that this statement is further developed in order to present more clear the message. [...] Also, the beneficiaries mentioned synergies within the current Romania-Bulgaria cross-border Programme and the national operational programmes in Romania and Bulgaria.	47	Text slightly rephrased to emphasize the clarity: [...] Also, the beneficiaries mentioned synergies within the context of the current Romania-Bulgaria cross-border Programme, but also with the national operational programmes in Romania and Bulgaria.
E. I.RD.02	Analysis	The NA is curious about the conclusions and recommendations resulting from the assessment of EQ I.RD.01 and I.RD.02, especially of benchmarking, and in general of the results concerning the evaluation domain of Sustainability and Regional Development, the	48	Benchmarking analysis was elaborated accordingly.



Evaluation Question	Section	Comment	Page	Answer
		<p>main conclusions of which NA suggests to be included in the report's Executive Summary.</p> <p>[...] benchmarking results</p>		
E. I.RD.04	Analysis	<p>NA: Could you please elaborate a little more on that (maybe in the conclusions' section)? What will be the scenarios with and without the ERDF support, which is related also with the next evaluation question. For example, principles of programming of the EU funding ensure a clear link between the local and regional needs and programmes' outputs and results which is recognized as one of the main factors of sustainability, etc.</p> <p>On the other hand, in the recommendations' section we would like to see a reference to the strategic regional development planning documents that have not been so widely taken into consideration when generating cooperation programmes for the last two programming periods.</p> <p>MA: We kindly disagree with the NA remark, both Programmes did take into account the national documents and strategies, however, the focus needed and continues to need to remain on the cross-border character.</p> <p>[...] it is important to ensure continuity beyond 2020.</p>	49	<p>We consider this observation as relevant. Indeed, coordination with regional and national policies. However, this impact assessment needs to consider impacts only attributable to the cross-border programme. Hence, the evaluators agree with the comment of the Managing Authority.</p>
E.I.RD.05	Conclusion	<p>NA: A few words can be added here about the need of operations of strategic importance according the needs identified in the region. Also, the issue with interruption of the EU funding can be included here and explained in more detail.</p> <p>[...]large-scale interventions.</p>	52	<p>Text changed as follow:</p> <p>[...] large-scale interventions.</p> <p>Moreover, as suggested by the Programme's National Authority in Bulgaria it might be also advisable to consider territorial-based strategic interventions, together with an integrated-solutions approach in order to overcome strictly sectoral orientations.</p>



Evaluation Question	Section	Comment	Page	Answer
E.I.RD.05	Recommendation	<p>NA: An approach based on the potential and specific needs of the border regions (place based approach), oriented towards the objectives laid down in the new regulations could enhance the effectiveness of the cohesion policy and contribute to closer linkages with the territorial dimension of the national sectoral policies. The new approach of implementing investments at regional level in Bulgaria shall be taken into consideration.</p> <p>[...] It is recommended to further stimulate and encourage synergies and complementary coordination between the projects funded by the Programme and other projects financed in connection to other programmes/policies, such as EUSDR.</p>	52	The comments addressed in the conclusion section.
E.I.RD.05	Recommendation	<p>NA: We consider suitable to include here a short text recommending a more integrated investments for the next programming period, like: For avoiding uncoordinated, dot-like investments a more integrated territorial approach is desirable based on the needs and competitive advantages of the region. For the last two programming periods the resources of the programme were directed to scattered sectoral investments based only on open calls where coordination with the local territorial needs is not sufficient. For the future programme high attention shall be given to the specific features of the territory and an integrated approach to address the local needs and priorities. Such an approach will support the regional economies through dedicated measures which will exploit the full potential of the region. Smart integrated investments for fostering the territorial development and in particular local economy would bring high added value and ensure the leverage effect of the funds.</p> <p>[...]The Programme also needs continuity of investments to bring a structural value in the cross-border region, however it has so far produced very promising results in terms of regional development and laid the foundation for new progress and spill over effects.</p> <p>NA: Conclusions and recommendations relating to general evaluation questions could be further elaborated in view of continuity of interventions (aggregated effect of interventions) from Romania – Bulgaria Programme which was one of the</p>	52	The Programme also needs continuity of investments to bring a structural value in the cross-border region, together with a more integrated territorial approach to avoid uncoordinated events, taking in consideration the competitive advantages of the cross-border region, together with an integrated-solution approach to avoid strictly sectoral orientation. However, it has so far produced very promising results in terms of regional development and laid the foundation for new progress and spill over effects.



Evaluation Question	Section	Comment	Page	Answer
		<p>aspects that were agreed upon during the kick-off meeting to be taken into consideration when evaluating the current cooperation programme's impact.</p> <p>[...]It is then important to give continuity to the results obtained so far in the next Cooperation Programme, beyond 2020, strengthening the investment priorities in order to amplify the achievements of the current Programme.</p>		
E I.SU.03	Analysis	<p>NA: The meaning of this conclusion/sentence is unclear. Please elaborate further this sentence in a way to explain this general statement. For example, add one more sentence to justify how selection of eligible expenditures is related with sustainability.</p> <p>NA: We suggest, that the issue with financial corrections and the administrative burden on beneficiaries are mentioned here again. Solutions like projects with shorter implementation period, introduction of simplified costs, reducing the administrative burden can be included as recommendations below that can be taken into consideration when designing the future programme.</p>	56	<p>Please note that this was a close-ended question in the survey. Few respondents provide further details.</p> <p>Text adapted as follow: As one respondent noted, both the selection of eligible expenditures and an effective adoption of simplified cost-options were important factors in ensuring sustainability.</p> <p>While financial corrections were perceived as an issue by several stakeholders, we cannot over value this information. Project beneficiaries tend to overestimate these issues as they are directly affected. It would be inappropriate to suggest that financial corrections and admin burden are the severely hindering sustainability. As reported, the key challenge is the weak financial solvency of the project beneficiaries</p>



Evaluation Question	Section	Comment	Page	Answer
E I.SU.03	Recommendation	<p>NA: Something more, programme bodies are strongly encouraged to continuously support project generation and project implementation and this could be not only the MA but also JS and info point/s.</p> <p>As regards the programme structures, we find that the established Antennae office of JS in Ruse as a structure on Bulgarian territory should be reconsidered in terms of their functions.</p> <p>The efforts made by both parties to establish a branch of the Secretariat in Ruse were a step in the right direction, but unfortunately did not meet the expectations of the Bulgarian beneficiaries. The activities of the employees appointed in the branch were and are fully coordinated by the main office of the Secretariat in Calarasi, which significantly slows down and complicates our (NA) interaction with them.</p> <p>The creation of additional structure/s on BG territory will significantly facilitate and support the Bulgarian institutions and organizations interested in participating in the programme, by providing adequate, up-to-date and timely information, as well as methodological and technical assistance. In addition, the future structure/s aim to support the Bulgarian beneficiaries in the management and implementation of their projects, including reporting, minimizing the risk of errors, improving and shortening the time for document flow between the project partners and the NA/MA/JS. In 2019 the NA was addressed by several key Bulgarian beneficiaries which stated that establishment of new structures on BG territory would significantly support their participation in the future programme.</p>	56	<p>Text modified as follow:</p> <p>[...] On one hand, it is strongly advised to continue the activity of events and training provided by the MA, supported by the NA and the Joint Secretariat</p>
General	Conclusions	<p>NA: We would rather recommend skipping the text between dashes as it strays from our already agreed approach for implementing the future programme through a mixture of pre-defined operations of strategic importance, open calls and where relevant – small projects fund.</p> <p>Instead, the following text from the Concept paper could be included here: Taking into account the added value of the Interreg programmes and their growing impact on the economic and social development of a given territory and in particular the border regions, applying a more strategic approach for the future Romania-Bulgaria Interreg programme should be analyzed and reflected upon. In this respect, pre-defining a few</p>	65	Text unchanged



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Evaluation Question	Section	Comment	Page	Answer
		strategic projects, covering respective territory and thematic objective could ensure the sound Programme implementation.		
General	Comments received on Conclusions and Recommendations sections	MA: The evaluation needs to remain impartial. We need to rely on the professional judgement of the evaluators and not add on their conclusions and recommendations aspects that did not appear in the evaluation process.	38-65	Taken into account while analysing the comments received



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Annex 10 – List of ESC Members

Evaluation Steering Committee Members:

- The Head of the Managing Authority (or his/her designate);
- A representative of the Bulgarian National Authority of the Programme;
- The Evaluation Unit staff;
- A representative of DG Regio;
- A representative of the Evaluation Unit with coordination role within the Romanian Ministry of European Funds.