Communication Evaluation Report

Evaluation services regarding the implementation and impact of the Interreg V-A Romania-Bulgaria Programme

Provider: SC ACZ Consulting SRL & VVA SRL

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Acronyms

AA	Audit Authority
CBC	Cross-border Cooperation
EC	European Commission
EQ	Evaluation question
EU	European Union
HR	Human Resources
JS	Joint Secretariat
MA	Managing Authority
MC	Monitoring Committee
NA	National Authority
Q&A	Questions and Answers
SO	Specific Objective
Programme	Interreg V-A Romania – Bulgaria Programme
VIM	Visual Identity Manual

Executive summary

This document represents the final communication evaluation report and it is part of the implementation evaluation of the Interreg V-A Romania-Bulgaria Programme. The current report has the purpose to evaluate the quality, relevance and effectiveness of the communication strategy for the Interreg V-A Romania-Bulgaria Programme. The analysis of the communication activities carried out within the Programme involved the application of different evaluation methods and instruments, such as: literature review, interviews with the programme bodies and stakeholders, survey applied among the beneficiaries and focus group with programme structures, beneficiaries and applicants.

The triangulation of the above-mentioned evaluation methods led to the formulation of the following **conclusions:**

- The communication activities implemented by the Programme are in line with the general and specific objectives established in the Communication Strategy document and in the Annual Communication Plans. The existing communication documents are clear, have well-defined objectives and present concrete measures to be taken in the field of communication.
- The communication objectives established at the level of the Programme documents are quantifiable and easy to monitor and are designed to allow the presentation of the implementation stage of the communication activities carried out by the Programme's structures.
- The Programme was effective so far in achieving the objectives, indicators and results of the Communication Strategy.
- The evaluation of the communication activities reveals that the capacity of the Programme to mobilise potential beneficiaries and beneficiaries is good, as well as the one to inform the general public about the opportunities offered by the Programme.
- The Programme Communication activity supports the beneficiaries in implementing the communication activities through a set of tools and initiatives which are perceived by beneficiaries as very useful.
- The Programme Communication activity is contributing to increasing the visibility of the Programme opportunities among potential beneficiaries and the general public.
- The Programme performed very well in increasing the awareness on the opportunities offered by the Programme, thus resulting consequently in a greater visibility of the EU contribution.
- Among the communication channels most preferred by the beneficiaries, in terms of transmitting information related to the programme, are the website of the Programme, the training sessions and events, as well as the online tools.

The main **recommendations** that emerged from the evaluation of the communication activities performed for the Interreg V-A Romania-Bulgaria Programme are:

- It is recommended to continue the good efforts in completing the achievement of communication-related indicators, by 2023.
- The focus for the Programme bodies in the next programming period should be on the dissemination of information through social media as the beneficiaries expressed interest in receiving information through this channel.
- A handbook with examples for the communication measures is considered useful in order to establish the same level of visibility to all the projects, by giving freedom of creativity to beneficiaries in defining the most suitable actions for their project types.
- The beneficiaries should focus on targeted promotion of their success stories at the local level, for a clearer association with the European funding obtained through the Interreg V-A Romania-Bulgaria Programme.
- Using an online interactive platform for debates and updated information on implementation of the projects and their results would be useful for the beneficiaries in order to have a greater interaction with other beneficiaries in similar situations.
- Increasing the visibility actions based on the projects and their results through storytelling actions, stories of the beneficiaries distributed in the online environment as well as on the Youtube online platform.

Prezentul document reprezintă raportul final de evaluare a activităților de comunicare și face parte din raportul de evaluare a implementării Programului Interreg V-A Romania-Bulgaria. Scopul actualului raport este acela de a evalua calitatea, relevanța și eficacitatea Strategiei de Comunicare a Programului Interreg V-A Romania-Bulgaria. Evaluarea activităților de comunicare desfășurate în cadrul programului a presupus aplicarea a diferite metode și instrumente de evaluare, precum: recenzia literaturii de specialitate, interviuri cu autoritățile Programului și actorii cheie implicați în implementarea acestuia, sondaj de opinie aplicat în rândul beneficiarilor, precum și organizarea unui focus grup cu structurile programului, beneficiari și potențiali beneficiari.

Triangularea metodelor de evaluare menționate mai sus a permis formularea următoarelor **concluzii:**

- Activitățile de comunicare desfășurate în cadrul programului sunt în concordanță cu obiectivele generale și specifice stabilite în Strategia de Comunicare și în Planurile Anuale de Comunicare. Documentele de comunicare existente sunt clare, au obiective bine definite și prezintă măsuri concrete care trebuie aplicate în domeniul comunicării.
- Obiectivele de comunicare stabilite la nivelul documentelor programului sunt cuantificabile și ușor de monitorizat. Acestea sunt concepute pentru a prezenta stadiul de implementare a activităților de comunicare întreprinse de autoritățile Programului.

- Programul s-a dovedit a fi eficace în realizarea obiectivelor, indicatorilor și rezultatelor Strategiei de Comunicare, până la acest moment.
- Evaluarea activităților de comunicare relevă faptul că Programul are o capacitate adecvată de a mobiliza potențiali beneficiari și beneficiari, precum și de a informa publicul larg cu privire la oportunitățile oferite de Program.
- Activitățile de comunicare realizate în cadrul Programului sprijină beneficiarii în implementarea propriilor activități de comunicare printr-un set de instrumente și inițiative, care sunt percepute de beneficiari ca fiind foarte utile.
- Activitatea de comunicare a Programului contribuie la creșterea vizibilității oportunităților oferite de acesta în rândul potențialilor beneficiari și a publicului larg.
- Programul a avut o performanță foarte bună în creșterea gradului de conștientizare asupra oportunităților oferite de acesta, contribuind astfel la o creștere a vizibilității contribuției UE.
- Printre canalele de comunicare preferate de beneficiari, din perspectiva transmiterii informațiilor referitoare la Program, se numără website-ul programului, sesiunile de formare și evenimentele organizate, precum și instrumentele online.

Principalele **recomandări** care au rezultat în urma evaluării activităților de comunicare implementate în cadrul Programului Interreg V-A România-Bulgaria sunt:

- Continuarea eforturilor de atingere a indicatorilor aferenți activităților de comunicare propuși pentru anul 2023.
- Pentru perioada următoare de programare se recomandă ca autoritățile Programului să se concentreze asupra diseminării informațiilor preponderent prin intermediul social media, ca urmare a exprimării interesului din partea beneficiarilor de le fi furnizate informații prin acest canal.
- Elaborarea unui manual care să conțină exemple de bune practici în ceea ce privește activitățile de comunicare. Se recomandă că manualul să propună măsuri de asigurare a aceluiași nivel de vizibilitate pentru toate proiectele și să ofere, totodată, libertate de creativitate beneficiarilor în definirea celor mai potrivite acțiuni pentru propriile proiecte.
- Este recomandat ca beneficiarii să se concentreze pe o promovare bine direcționată către grupuri țintă specifice a poveștilor de succes rezultate în urma proiectelor, la nivel local, fapt care va contribui la o corelare mai clară a proiectelor implementate cu finanțarea europeană obținută prin Programul Interreg V-A România-Bulgaria.
- Este considerată benefică utilizarea unei platforme interactive online pentru dezbateri și informații actualizate cu privire la implementarea proiectelor și a rezultatelor acestora. Această platformă ar fi utilă beneficiarilor întrucât ar permite o interacțiune mai mare cu alți beneficiari care se regăsesc în situații similare.
- Se recomandă îmbunătățirea vizibilității proiectelor și a rezultatelor acestora prin acțiuni de diseminare a ”poveștilor de succes” în mediul online, precum și pe platforma YouTube.

Този документ представлява окончателния доклад за оценка на комуникационните дейности и е част от доклада за оценка на изпълнението на Програмата Interreg V-A Румъния-България. Целта на настоящия доклад е да оцени качеството, уместността и ефективността на комуникационната стратегия на Програма Interreg V-A Румъния-България. Оценката на комуникационните дейности, осъществявани в рамките на програмата, включва прилагането на различни методи и инструменти за оценка, като например: преглед на специализираната литература, интервюта с органите на програмата и ключови участници, участващи в нейното изпълнение, анкета на бенефициентите и организация на фокус група с програмни структури, бенефициенти и потенциални бенефициенти.

Триангулацията на споменатите по-горе методи за оценка позволи да се направят следните **заключения**:

- Комуникационните дейности, осъществявани в рамките на програмата, са в съответствие с общите и специфични цели, заложени в комуникационната стратегия и в Годишните комуникационни планове. Съществуващите документи за комуникация са ясни, имат ясно определени цели и представят конкретни мерки, които да се прилагат в областта на комуникацията.
- Целите за комуникация, посочени в програмните документи, са количествено измерими и лесни за наблюдение. Те са предназначени да представят етапа на изпълнение на комуникационните дейности, предприети от програмните органи.
- Програмата се оказа ефективна за постигане на целите, показателите и резултатите от комуникационната стратегия досега.
- Оценката на комуникационните дейности показва, че програмата има достатъчен капацитет за мобилизиране на потенциални бенефициенти и бенефициенти, както и за информиране на широката общественост за възможностите, предлагани от програмата.
- Комуникационните дейности, осъществявани в рамките на програмата, подпомагат бенефициентите в осъществяването на техните собствени комуникационни дейности чрез набор от инструменти и инициативи, които се възприемат от бенефициентите като много полезни.
- Комуникационната дейност на програмата допринася за увеличаване на видимостта на възможностите на програмата сред потенциалните бенефициенти и широката общественост.
- Постигнати са много добри резултати в повишаването на осведомеността относно възможностите, предлагани от програмата, като по този начин се увеличава видимостта на приноса на ЕС.
- Сред предпочитаните от бенефициентите комуникационни канали, от гледна точка на предаването на информацията относно програмата, са уебсайтът на програмата, обученията и организираните събития, както и онлайн инструментите.

Основните **препоръки**, получени в резултат на оценката на комуникационните дейности, осъществявани в рамките на програма Interreg V-A Румъния-България, са:

- Продължаване на усилията за постигане на показателите, свързани с комуникационните дейности, предложени за 2023 г.
- За следващия програмен период се препоръчва програмните органи да се съсредоточат върху разпространението на информация главно чрез социални медии, след изразяване на интерес от бенефициентите да им бъде предоставена информация по този канал.
- Да се разработи наръчник, съдържащ примери за добри практики в комуникационните дейности. Препоръчва се ръководството да предлага мерки за осигуряване на еднакво ниво на видимост за всички проекти и в същото време да предлага свобода на творчество на бенефициентите при определяне на най-подходящите действия за техните собствени проекти.
- Препоръчва се бенефициентите да се съсредоточат върху добре насоченото популяризиране към конкретни целеви групи от истории за успех на проекта на местно ниво, което ще допринесе за по-ясното съотношение на проектите, реализирани с европейското финансиране, получени чрез програмата Interreg V-A. Румъния-България.
- Смята се за полезно да се създаде интерактивна онлайн платформа за дебати и актуална информация за изпълнението на проектите и техните резултати. Тази платформа би била полезна за бенефициентите, тъй като би позволила по-голямо взаимодействие с други бенефициенти, които се намират в подобни ситуации.
- Препоръчва се да се подобри видимостта на проектите и техните резултати чрез действия за разпространение на „истории на успех“ в онлайн средата, както и в платформата YouTube.

1. Introduction

The *Evaluation services regarding the implementation and impact of the Interreg V-A Romania-Bulgaria Programme* has been carried out by the independent evaluator formed by ACZ Consulting SRL & VVA Group SRL, contracted by the MA of the Programme, the Romanian Ministry of Public Works, Development and Administration. The evaluation contract was signed on 08th of October 2019, having an overall implementation period of 13 months and a total budget of 626,934 lei. In order to keep track of the activities undertaken and to plan the next steps in the evaluation process, the Provider submits every two months activity reports, which also present the status of implementation for each activity.

As a part of the overall Programme implementation evaluation, the evaluation of the Interreg V-A Romania-Bulgaria Programme communication activities considered the evaluation of the quality and effectiveness of the communication strategy, in terms of:

- achievement of objectives;
- instruments, actions and tools;
- impact on the awareness of beneficiaries/potential beneficiaries.

The scope of the present Communication Evaluation Report is to formulate answers for the following evaluation questions:

- E.CO.01. Do the communication activities carried out by the Programme authorities lead to the achievement of the general and specific objectives, expected results and indicators set out in the Communication Strategy?
- E.CO.02. Could more effect be achieved by using different instruments or actions? Which actions or tools were the most successful in spreading the information about the Programme and which could be considered as excessive or ineffective?
- E.CO.03. Which were the most relevant and efficient tools/actions/channels of communication used by project beneficiaries to promote their project?
- E.CO.04. Do communication activities have sufficient impact on the awareness of the beneficiaries/potential beneficiaries of the Programme? To what extent have the objectives of visibility and awareness of the programme and the role played by the Community been achieved?
- E.CO.05. Are there any measures recommended in order to raise the impact of information and publicity activities carried out by the Programme bodies for each of the target groups identified in the Communication Strategy?
- E.CO.06. What can be improved in terms of communication activities for the next programming period?

2. Methodology

As illustrated by the table below and in order to investigate the evaluation of the Programme effectiveness – *Communication activities*, the consortium proposed a set of the main methodological tools to use in answering the proposed list of evaluation questions for collecting and analysing information: desk research, interviews, survey and focus group.

Table 1 Evaluation questions and methodological tools to evaluate the Programme effectiveness – *Communication activities*

Evaluation questions	Desk research	Interviews	Questionnaire survey	FG
E.CO.01. Do the communication activities carried out by the programme authorities lead to the achievement of the general and specific objectives, expected results and indicators set out in the Communication Strategy?	●	●		
E.CO.02. Could more effect be achieved by using different instruments or actions? Which actions or tools were the most successful in spreading the information about the Programme and which could be considered as excessive or ineffective?	●	●	●	
E.CO.03. Which were the most relevant and efficient tools/actions/channels of communication used by project beneficiaries to promote their project?	●	●	●	●
E.CO.04. Do communication activities have sufficient impact on the awareness of the beneficiaries/potential beneficiaries of the Programme? To what extent have the objectives of visibility and awareness of the programme and the role played by the Community been achieved?	●	●	●	●
E.CO.05. Are there any measures recommended in order to raise the impact of information and publicity activities carried out by the programme bodies for each of the target groups identified in the Communication Strategy?	●	●	●	●
E.CO.06. What can be improved in terms of communication activities for the next programming period?	●	●	●	●

The preliminary results obtained from the desk research were further completed with the results and findings obtained in the field research, respectively by applying the questionnaires among the direct beneficiaries of the Programme, by conducting the interviews with Programme's bodies and with potential beneficiaries and by organizing the Focus Group with the beneficiaries, potential beneficiaries and with the structures involved in the management of the Interreg V-A Romania-Bulgaria Programme.

3. Key finding of the analysis

The analysis was articulated in four different activities:

- Screening of the administrative documents and more specifically the Communication Strategy, and the Communication Action Plans;
- Analyzing the results of the interviews with the Programme structures and beneficiaries;
- Analyzing the findings of the survey applied among the project beneficiaries;
- Completing the analysis with the information collected during the focus group organized with the key actors involved in the management of the Programme (MA, JS, beneficiaries and potential beneficiaries).

3.1 Documental analysis

3.1.a. Coherence between the Communication Strategy and the Communication Action Plans

After the screening of the Communication Strategy and the Annual Communication Plans (presented in Annex 2), it can be noted that there is a strong coherence between these documents, both in terms of objectives established, as well as in terms of actions to be performed.

As a general conclusion, after the analysis of the Annual Communication Plans elaborated for the Interreg V-A Romania-Bulgaria Programme, it can be stated that:

- The Communication Plans are clearly structured and coherent to set the objectives for each relevant year;
- The planned measures for each year are coherent with the objectives not only of the Communication Plans, but also of the Communication Strategy, and address the identified target groups (potential beneficiaries, applicants, general public, stakeholders);
- The Communication Plans include a set of impact, result and output indicators that are SMART and generally cover the identified measures;
- The Communication Plans show a good progress rate, giving an overall image on what has been done, in terms of communication and promotion activities, in the previous year(s);
- Moreover, the communication activities are structured in a consistent and clear manner within the Annual Communication Plans, being reported, monitored and evaluated annually in order to achieve the objectives.
- In what concerns the target groups addressed by the Communication Plans, they are clearly identified and properly structured, creating the premises to achieve the targets of the annual communication plans and the objectives of the communication strategy, through the planned activities.

The plans for communication, information and publicity are structured in a consistent and clear manner, aiming to ensure both the awareness of the target groups about the existence of the Programme, its progress and results, through a continuous, transparent, appropriate (oriented towards the needs of different categories of target group), diversified (use of various communication channels, methods and tools) and attractive information, and to provide support to beneficiaries / potential beneficiaries and representatives of the managing and implementation bodies, for an adequate implementation of the projects and of the Programme and for developing a communication network of the Programme, which operates as a group of information multipliers.

The activities that are foreseen and described at the level of the Communication Plans are addressing each category of target group in the eligibility area of the Programme, and are ensuring the dissemination of all the information necessary for achieving the targets of the communication plans and the goals of the Communication Strategy.

These activities are addressed to a primary target group, consisting of potential beneficiaries/ applicants for funding and of Programme beneficiaries, as well as to a secondary target group, represented by the general public and stakeholders in the eligible area and by mass-media representatives from local and regional level of the two countries (Romania and Bulgaria).

Thus, considering the above mentioned aspects related to the Communication Strategy and the Annual Communication Plans issued for the Interreg V-A Romania-Bulgaria Programme, it can be concluded that these documents present indicators for the communication activities, both in terms of proposed and achieved values. The objectives established at the level of the Programme documents are easy to monitor and are designed to allow the presentation of the implementation stage of the communication activities carried out by the Programme's structures. From a qualitative point of view, the Programme documents create the necessary framework for focusing the communication activities to the areas of interest for all the potential stakeholders.

3.1.b Analysis of the accomplishments related to communication activities

The following table illustrates the indicators to be achieved through the Communication Strategy by 2019 and 2023. Until 2018, all output and result indicators for 2019 achieved a high value, with the indicator *"Number of participants in the events"* overachieving the target already from 2018. More than that, the indicator related to "*Website traffic on programme Internet page www.interregrobg.eu*" has already achieved the target value established for 2023.

Type of indicator	Indicator	Intermediate target value 2019	Target value 2023	Total 2018[1]	Achievement rate (%) related to 2019 target value	Achievement rate (%) related to 2023 target value
Output	No of events for beneficiaries	60	120	58	96.67	48.33
Output	Number of publications issued	15	30	11	73.33	36.66
Output	Number of press releases, interviews, advertisements in all kind of mass-media	30	60	30	100	50
Result	Website traffic on programme Internet page www.interregrobg.eu (page views)	250,000	500,000	511,117	204.45	102.22
Result	Number of participants in events	2,500	5,000	3,000	120	60
Result	Number of users who receive the electronic newsletter	100	200	No information identified		

The great rate of achievement of the indicators for the communication activities have obtained high values already from the end of December 2018 (dates available from the Annual Implementation Report for 2018), due to the efficient measures undertaken in this field by the Programme structures.

The information and communication measures aimed at potential beneficiaries, beneficiaries, multipliers and the wider public are being implemented as foreseen within the Communication Strategy. At the end of 2018 there have been organized 58 events (out of 60 events – intermediate target value 2019), to which around 3.000 persons participated (out of 2,500 - intermediate target value 2019); 511,117 page views have been registered since the creation of the Programme website (www.interregrobg.eu) until 31.12.2018 (out of 250,000 page views - intermediate target value 2019); 11 publications have been issued (out of 15 - intermediate target value 2019), etc.

A new website (www.interregrobg.eu) was designed and dedicated exclusively to Interreg V-A Romania-Bulgaria Programme. The new website was designed to be modern and well structured, user friendly and accessible to people with disabilities. The official website of the Programme presents the information of interest in a complete and correct way using attractive graphics and visual tools that capture the reader's attention, it is also available in the three working languages of the Programme, Romanian, Bulgarian and English and it is available for visually impaired people.

The website played an important role in promoting the Programme, as according to information provided in the Annual Implementation Report 2018, the website has had 511,117 page views. The website is constantly updated with general information regarding the Programme, the opportunities

[1] Based on the information available from the Annual Implementation Report 2018

for financing, contact details of the Programmes' managing structures, lists with selected/contracted projects, details on the composition of the Monitoring Committee, news for the events organized within the Programme, modifications occurred within the national legislation of the two countries, fiches of the projects in implementation and of those which are already finalized, information regarding tender procedures, Project Implementation Manual, Visual Identity Manual and other manuals, procedures and instructions useful for beneficiaries etc. In addition, the Programme has a very active social media presence (Facebook, Twitter). Online campaigns, aiming at promoting the projects, implemented under the Programme were organized and promoted on both website and social media.

The events for Programme promotion as the Annual Conference, on site visit for a project promotion organized in 2018 and 2019 were web streamed live on Youtube and the links to the videos are available on the Programme website for future viewings, thus increasing the visibility even more. In support of beneficiaries, several tutorials have been created (e-MS User assignment; e-MS – How to create partner report; e-MS Procurements), published on the website and Facebook page of the Programme.

The information and communication measures undertaken within Interreg V-A Romania-Bulgaria Programme during the period 2015-2019 are considered to be very effective because of the following reasons:

- The number of organized initiatives and events complied with the planning included in the Communication Strategy, with cases in which proposed values were exceeded;
- The level of attendance in organized events was high, which proves that the information and promotion activities have been effective;
- The high number of participants in information and promotion events organized within the Programme has secured direct transmission of information regarding the Programme to the public, while creating a multiplier effect, through subsequent dissemination of information by participants to other stakeholders.

3.2 Interviews performed with the Programme structures and beneficiaries

The communication strategy and the activities implemented for reaching its objectives have been evaluated also by conducting several interviews with:

- Managing Authority for Interreg V-A Romania-Bulgaria Programme (26/02/2020);
- Bulgarian National Authority, represented by the Bulgarian Ministry of Regional Development and Public Works (27/02/2020);
- The Joint Secretariat (JS) for Interreg V-A Romania-Bulgaria Programme (06/03/2020);
- 10 local stakeholders (also programme beneficiaries) (27/02/2020 – 11/03/2020).

The interviews with beneficiaries were held either face-to-face, on Skype or by phone, each having a duration between 1 and 2 hours. The selection of respondents was based on criteria such as the type of beneficiary, the country, etc. The evaluation team interviewed directly the representatives of the Programme beneficiaries, in order to obtain relevant qualitative data on the information and communication activities organized within the Programme, useful for this evaluation, as well as recommendations for improving such activities in the future.

The interviews aimed the evaluation of the communication activities performed at 2 different levels:

- At Programme level, by interviewing the structures in charge of implementing communication activities;
- At project level, by collecting information on the perception of the beneficiaries.

At Programme level, the interviews with the Programme structures emphasized the following results of the communication activities organized at the level of Interreg V-A Romania-Bulgaria Programme:

- The Interreg V-A Romania-Bulgaria Programme had a good performance in terms of raising interest in the financing opportunities and in **increasing the level of awareness** among the beneficiaries/potential beneficiaries in the eligible cross-border area. This fact is also emphasised by the high number of participants to all the communication events that have been organized within the Programme and also by the large number of applications submitted.
- The communication and information activities carried out for potential beneficiaries/ beneficiaries can be considered **adequate and sufficient** to support applicants in submitting applications and beneficiaries in implementing the projects.
- **The visibility of the Programme is quite high** considering also the organization of events in the entire eligible area. The overall appreciation is that the objectives related to the visibility of the Programme had been achieved to a great extent.
- The promotion of the Interreg V-A Romania-Bulgaria Programme was permanently conducted online by constantly updating the website, the Facebook and Twitter pages of the Programme.

Initially, when the Programme was designed, the previous Programme (Romania-Bulgaria Cross-border Cooperation Programme 2007-2013) website was used, namely www.cbcromaniabulgaria.eu. At the end of 2015, MA together with JS initiated the action to design a new website (www.interregrobg.eu), dedicated exclusively to Interreg V-A Romania-Bulgaria Programme. The new website was designed to be modern and well structured, user friendly and **accessible to people with disabilities**. This is an added value of the application of non-discrimination principle compared to the previous programming period.

- The Programme also made a step forward **on social media** – promotion tools used are Facebook, Twitter, Youtube and Instagram. The MA received positive feedback from the EC on the social media presence.
- The most important communication channels used to transmit the information about the Programme financing opportunities were the online tools, namely the website of the Programme, the social media pages and the newsletters published on the website. The Facebook social network of the Programme has an important role in promoting not only the Programme's opportunities, but also the results of the projects considered as most performing.
- There are various public campaigns for the information and communication activities organized every year.
- Regarding the degree of detail of the **information provided by the Programme authorities to the potential applicants during opened calls**, the content of the answers provided by JS to the questions raised by the them were appropriate and formulated in a short time. For ensuring the transparency of information and equal treatment of all potential applicants, all the questions and answers related were posted on the Programme website under a dedicated section – Q&A. Within the information events organized by JS and MA, there were addressed both general topics regarding the nature of interventions funded by the Programme, as well as specific subjects regarding the launched calls for proposals.
- In general, it is considered that the information made available to potential beneficiaries through the published documents and the information tools used is sufficient to understand the overall concepts of the project implementation mechanism.
- In what concerns the application phase, relevant stakeholders were involved starting from the moment when the Applicant's pack was elaborated. Thus, all efforts have been taken to ensure that potential beneficiaries were informed in real time.
- As a support measure provided by the Programme structures for simplification, submission, implementation and monitoring of the projects financed was done through the introduction and use of eMS electronic platform.
- There were also organized communication activities to inform the **general public** about the Programme results. Press conferences were held periodically and the related outcomes were posted on the Programme's official website. Promotional activities were also carried out during the European Cooperation Day, organised on an annual basis.
- In order to present what the Programme obtained in terms of results and for exchanging experiences with others, the MA representatives were invited as speakers to different events.

- The communication activities performed by the Programme structures lead to the achievement of the general and specific objectives set out in the Communication Strategy. Furthermore, the Programme structures organized multiple campaigns showcasing best proactive projects, as well as a campaign with project ideas for the future programming period. There was created a database with all project outputs which is an innovative tool to promote the results of the projects.

At project level, the main conclusions collected from the interviews with the beneficiaries referred to the following aspects:

- The beneficiaries have registered a great progress in terms of communication and information activities. In the current programming period, the beneficiaries promote their own results obtained from the projects implementation.
- At the level of the beneficiaries, there is nothing imposed in terms of visibility (no indicators are foreseen at project level, thus sometimes it was hard to assess the level of achievement of the communication activities).
- Previous evaluations show that the beneficiaries were aware of the Programme and had access to sufficient information about it.
- The level of communication between JS and beneficiaries is well appreciated among the institutions interviewed; the communication follows both formal and informal channels, and the intensity in communicating with JS depends from a beneficiary to another.
- The overall appreciation of the local stakeholders interviewed (beneficiaries of the Programme) about the efficiency of the communication between beneficiaries and Joint Secretariat/Antenna is very positive.
- The general opinion is that the instruments and actions of communication used are suitable for the desired results and there is no need to implement new instruments or actions in the future.
- The interviewed beneficiaries considered that the info days were amongst the most efficient tools in spreading the information about the Programme.
- Some measures were recommended for the future by the interviewed beneficiaries in order to raise the impact of information and publicity activities carried out by the Programme structures:
    - To increase the visibility in online media in order to easily reach greater number of potential beneficiaries and general public – these costs should be also included in the TA budgets;
    - The information and publicity activities made on paper (using flyers, brochures, leaflets etc.) provide no added value.
- The Programme beneficiaries considered that a good measure to capitalize the project results was the creation of a database with all the projects and results.

3.3 On-line survey

The survey targeted project beneficiaries who received funds under the Interreg V-A Romania-Bulgaria Programme. In this section, the main findings are synthesised, while in Annex 3 to the present report the full analysis is displayed.

The total number of respondents is 49 (45% of the respondents were from Romania and 55% from Bulgaria, thus the territorial distribution of the respondents being balanced). There were 6 respondents who applied in the first call for proposals, 16 in the second call and 27 in the third call. With the exception of SO 1.2, all the other specific objectives were covered.

The main conclusions coming from the survey applied among the beneficiaries have emphasised the following aspects:

- The majority of respondents consider that the most common channels of communication used to obtain information about the Programme are the official website and the information/ training session: out of 49 respondents, 96% declared that the most common communication channel they used is the Programme official website, while 69% of the respondents mentioned the information/training sessions. On the other hand, the least mentioned channels of communication are the radio and the newspapers, as well as the Youtube channel: 6% out of all respondents mentioned either the newspapers, Youtube or radio.
- In what concerns the effectiveness of the communication activities, 61% of the respondents considered communication as being very effective, while 33% perceived the communication activities as being effective. Thus, the majority of respondents (94%) are satisfied with the level of effectiveness of the communication activities. Only 6% of the respondents consider that communication activities have a medium or lower level of effectiveness.
- Invited to indicate what information would like to receive in the future, 61% of the respondents declared that they would like to receive details about Programme monitoring and evaluation of the applications. Moreover, respondents declared, in a percentage of 57%, that they would like to receive control and financial management information, as well as information about the compliance with state aids and procurement regulation. In addition, 39% of respondents declared that they would like to be informed about communication results and capitalization.
- Evaluating the effectiveness of several communication channels, the respondents declared that the most effective communication channels are the Programme official website and the information/training sessions, as well as the events organized: 75% of the respondents declared that the events are very effective/effective when disseminating information, 75% declared that the information/training sessions are very effective/effective and all the respondents (100%) perceived the website as being the most effective channel through which they receive information about the Programme. It can be observed that some communication

channels, such as newspapers/Youtube, are considered to be less effective than the other channels: only 17% of respondents consider newspapers as being very effective and only 19% mentioned the Youtube channel. Regarding the Facebook social media channel, 46% of respondents declared that it is effective, while 29% assess its effectiveness at a medium level. Thus, 75% of respondents are content with the Facebook communication.

- Evaluating the level of satisfaction of the respondents about the responsiveness of the Programme structures, the beneficiaries declared that:
    - 72% of respondents declared a very high level of satisfaction in what concerns the interaction with the Managing Authority, 19% mentioned a high level of satisfaction, while only 4% mentioned a medium level of satisfaction in what concerns the responsiveness of the MA.
    - In what concerns the Joint Secretariat, the level of satisfaction resulted after the analysis of the answers from questionnaires is very high for 65% of the respondents, high for 25%, while 10% of the respondents mentioned a medium level of satisfaction in what concerns the responsiveness of the JS.
    - For the National Authority, the level of satisfaction declared by the respondents is: 59% are very satisfied with the responsiveness of the personnel of the NA, 13% are satisfied, 20% are neutral about the responsiveness of the personnel, and 9% declared a lower level of satisfaction.
    - Regarding the Antenna, 44%, respectively 32% of the respondents are very satisfied, respectively satisfied with the level of responsiveness of the personnel. 15% are neutral regarding the responsiveness of the personnel, while 5%, respectively 5% are unsatisfied or very unsatisfied about the responsiveness of the personnel.

Overall, for all the Programme structures, the level of satisfaction of the respondents about the responsiveness of the personnel was very high, the majority of the respondents being very satisfied of the responsiveness of the personnel of all the Programme bodies.

3.3 Focus group

The focus group represented a complementary evaluation method, through which additional qualitative information was collected from the participants. The purpose of the focus group was for the evaluator to express the key findings from its examination of the Programme, to receive feedback from the MA, NA, and other relevant public stakeholders (beneficiaries and potential applicants), as well as to evaluate the communication tools used at the Programme level. The focus group had nine participants (3 from Programme structures, 1 beneficiary, also having the quality of MC member, 1 applicant and 4 persons from the evaluation team).

The first part of the focus group was dedicated to the evaluation of the Programme implementation and the preliminary results obtained by the evaluators, while the second part of the focus group consisted in presenting the results on the communication activities performed within the Interreg V-A Romania-Bulgaria Programme, followed by discussing the opinions of the participants in the focus group on the presented findings.

The discussion regarding the communication activities was structured on three aspects:

- The visibility of the Programme for the general public;
- The level of information transmitted to potential beneficiaries;
- The communication and informational process for the beneficiaries.

The following assessments related to the communication activities undertaken in the Interreg V-A Romania-Bulgaria Programme were presented:

- Progresses towards goals: the communication plans show a good progress rate, generally ahead of the intermediate target values for 2019, for most of the activities;
- Effectiveness of the communication activities: The website of the Programme and the events organized, information/training sessions, proved to be the most effective in reaching the potential beneficiaries;
- Capacity to raise interest: The capacity of the Programme to mobilize potential beneficiaries and beneficiaries, as well as to inform the general public about the opportunity offered by the Programme, is high.

The main conclusions from the discussions in the focus group related to the communication activities were:

- Regarding the visibility, the Programme structures organized a series of events (info days, thematic conferences, brochures, etc.), and they used online tools such as website, social media (Facebook, YouTube, Instagram, Twitter). The participants agreed on the use of these tools for the visibility of the Programme among the general public. The participants agreed that the visibility of the Programme is high; the citizens are updated about the projects at the local level since the projects were implemented. The participants considered that the citizens know only in low percentage that the projects are financed under a cross-border Programme, but they are aware of the fact that the projects received funds from the European Union.
- Although the project fiches for all the contracted projects are available on the website and are updated constantly and an “Outputs” section is available on the Programme website, some participants considered that a database of good practices would help to better identify and disseminate the results of the projects and to increase their visibility. In this sense, the proactive attitude of the Programme structures should be emphasised,

considering that the importance of such a database was anticipated and it is already online and functional since the beginning of 2020.

- The promotion on social media is much more preferred than the one made on the official website.
- The participants considered that beneficiaries should take care of the visibility of their own projects at local level. The beneficiaries have a budget dedicated for the publicity and communication of the projects.
- The level of information that is provided to the potential beneficiaries is considered sufficient.
- The participants considered that all the tools for communication should also be maintained for the next programming period. Even if the eMS could be improved, it was well appreciated by the beneficiaries and potential applicants of the Programme.
- Participants considered that the helpdesk was very useful for the application phase, while for the implementation phase the communication and the share of information was performed at the level of beneficiaries and the project officers in charge.
- In order to update the beneficiaries about the news and modifications at the Programme level, the information was shared both on the website, Facebook and by e-mail.
- The participants to the Focus Group considered that the most efficient communication is the direct communication, the one between the officers of the projects and the beneficiaries.
- All the participants agreed that the communication between the Programme structures and the beneficiaries is good and efficient.

4. Evaluation Questions

E.CO.01.	Do the communication activities carried out by the Programme authorities lead to the achievement of the general and specific objectives, expected results and indicators set out in the Communication Strategy?

1.Analysis

From the **documental analysis**, the main findings are:

At the end of 2018, all communication-related output and result indicators for 2019 were achieved in a great extent, with the indicator *"Number of participants in the events"* achieving the target for 2019 already from 2018. More than that, the indicator related to "*Website traffic on programme Internet page www.interregrobg.eu*" has already achieved the target established for 2023.

From the **interviews** with Programme bodies and beneficiaries, the main findings are:

- In what concerns the communication activities carried out at Programme level, the managing structures stated that relevant stakeholders were involved from the moment when the Applicant's pack was elaborated.
- The Applicant's packs were consulted with all Programme structures and with the relevant stakeholders (including public consultation on the Programme website). As a final step, the final packs were approved by the Monitoring Committee.
- A draft version of the Applicant's pack was published on the Programme's official website for public consultations and during the process, MA, JS and NA representatives answered the questions of the potential beneficiaries by phone and e-mail. Thus, all efforts have been taken in order to ensure that potential beneficiaries were informed in real time.
- The Programme's structures supported the beneficiaries in the application phase, by organizing training sessions on how to write the applications and by organizing caravans on the border area.
- As a support measure provided by the Programme structures for simplification, submission, implementation and monitoring of the projects was done through the introduction and use of eMS electronic platform.
- In the current Programme, the website became accessible for people with disabilities, which is an added value of the application of non-discrimination principle compared to the previous programming period.
- The potential beneficiaries receive all the information they needed and requested. In each county and district Info days were organized for each call for proposals and afterwards there has been a specific orientation (in some districts were more events that in other).

- The Facebook page has an important role in promoting not only the Programme's opportunities, but also the results of the projects considered as most performing. However, the website of the Programme continues to be the most accessed and accessible method of promoting the Programme.

From the **survey** with beneficiaries, the main findings are:

The channels of communication that were the most used in order to obtain information about the Programme are the official website and the information/training session: out of 49 respondents, 96% declared that the most common communication channel is the Programme official website, while 69% of respondents mentioned the information/ training sessions.

Concerning the level of accessibility to the information related to the Programme, the beneficiaries who answered the survey stated that the information is easily accessible, and the language used is user friendly, however somehow technical. Referring to the attractiveness of the promotion materials, the beneficiaries believe that the promotional materials are attractive.

2. Conclusions

- Combining the achievements in term of indicators with the above-mentioned finding of the field research, it can be concluded that the Programme was effective so far in achieving the objectives, indicators and results of the Communication Strategy.
- The website of the Programme and the events organized, information/training sessions, proved to be the communication tools contributing the most to this success.

3. Recommendations

R.CO.01. It is recommended to continue the good efforts in completing the achievement of communication-related indicators, by 2023, while tuning the content of the communication to the implementation status of the Programme, with actions such as:

- Organizing events for the beneficiaries: considering the status of the Programme implementation, this kind of events can also be dedicated to cross-disseminate projects' results in the cross-border area and stimulate the development of an informal network among beneficiaries;
- Issuing more online publications for the large public, aiming to capitalize both on the Programme's results, as well as on the impact created by specific projects in the cross-border area, or on the dissemination of "personal stories" of the beneficiaries;
- To increase the number of press releases, interviews, advertisements in all kind of mass-media and to concentrate their scope towards the promotion and dissemination of Programme results as well as on the best practices and success stories.

E.CO.02	Could more effect be achieved by using different instruments or actions? Which actions or tools were the most successful in spreading the information about the Programme and which could be considered as excessive or ineffective?

1.Analysis

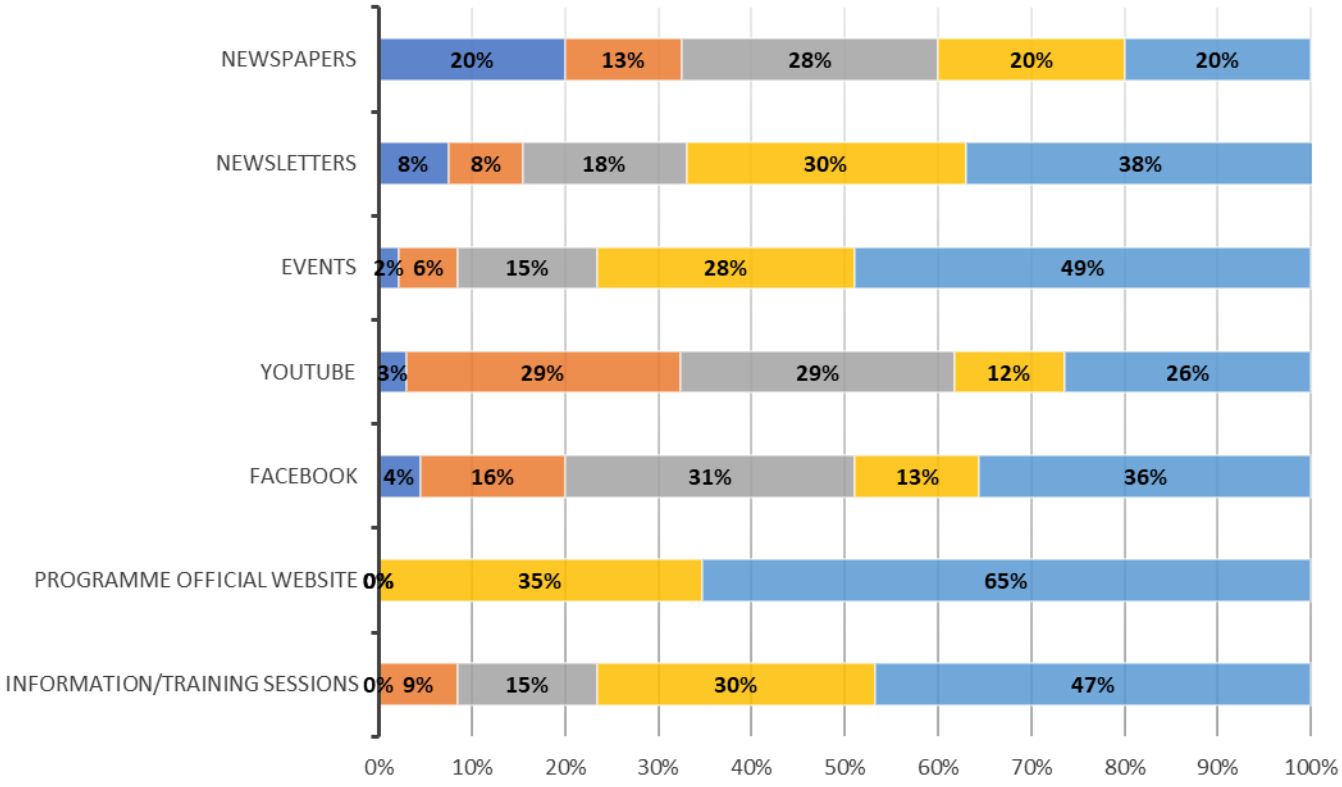
From the **interviews** with Programme bodies and beneficiaries, the main findings are:

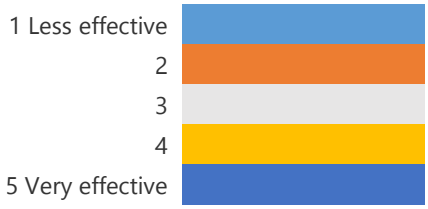
- In order to raise the impact of information and publicity activities carried out by the Programme structures, the interviewed beneficiaries considered that the following actions can create a greater effect in terms of spreading the Programme information:
  - Increasing the level of visibility online to easily reach a greater number of potential beneficiaries and general public.
  - The information and publicity activities on paper (using flyers, brochures etc.) provide no added value.
- The beneficiaries considered that a good measure to capitalize the project results is the creation of a unique database with all the projects and their achieved results/deliverables, which can support and facilitate the easy identification of the projects outputs per domains. It is important to mention that the Programme structures anticipated the importance of such an instrument and they already created and published on the website of the Programme a database with the results of the projects.

From the **survey** with beneficiaries, the main findings are:

Evaluating the effectiveness of several communication channels, the respondents declared that, from their perspective, the Programme official website and the information/trainings session are the most effective communication channels, together with the events organized by the Programme's structures: 74% of the respondents declared that the events are very effective or effective when disseminating information, 77% declared that the information/training sessions are very effective or effective, while all the respondents mentioned the website as being the channel they use the most in order to get informed about the Programme. On the other hand, only 20% of the respondents consider newspapers as being very effective and only 26% mentioned the Youtube channel. Regarding the Facebook social media channel, 49% of the respondents declared that it is very effective or effective, while 31% assess its effectiveness at a medium level.

Figure no 1. Effectiveness of the communication tools





Source: Data analysis from the survey

Invited to indicate what information would like to receive in the future about the Programme, 61% of the respondents declared that they would like to receive details about Programme monitoring and evaluation of projects. Moreover, respondents declared, in a percentage of 57%, that they would like to receive control and financial management information, as well as information about the compliance with state aids and procurement regulation. In addition, 39% of respondents declared that they want to be informed about communication results and capitalization.

From the **focus group** with Programme bodies and stakeholders, the main findings are:

- The participants considered that all the tools for communication should also be maintained for the next programming period. Even if the eMS could be improved, it was well appreciated by the beneficiaries and potential applicants of the Programme.
- Participants considered that the helpdesk was very useful for the application phase, while for the implementation phase the communication and the share of information was performed at the level of beneficiaries and the officers in charge.
- In order to update the beneficiaries about the news and modifications at the Programme level, the information was shared both on the website and by e-mail.
- The participants to the Focus Group considered that the most efficient communication is the direct communication, the one between the officers of the projects and the beneficiaries.

2. Conclusions

- The Programme communication activities proved to have a high level of effectiveness in what concerns the achievement of 2019 milestones.
- Based on the analysis conducted, the use of different instruments or actions does not appear necessary, as the communication tools already activated by the Programme's structures proved to have a great impact.
- In what concerns the actions or tools that were considered to be the most successful in spreading the information, those have been indicated to be the official website of the Programme, the training sessions and events organized in the cross-border area. Although Facebook was indicated as a preferred communication channel by the beneficiaries and potential applicants, when it comes to find official information about the Programme, their first option was always the Programme's website, instead of other social media pages.
- No actions or tools related to communication were considered to be excessive or ineffective, but the on-the-field research has shown that the printed promotional materials (leaflets, brochures, flyers, etc.) have only a limited effect and limited added value for increasing the visibility of the Programme, as their utility and efficiency is lower compared to online tools.
- With regard to the most impacting information and communication tools used in the period 2015-2019, the general opinion is that the most effective are the online tools, which have a high degree of accessibility, attractiveness and promptness. This type of tool is preferred by all the beneficiaries who answered the survey/were interviewed, being considered a means by which information can be disseminated massively, much faster and in real time. In what concerns the printed and information materials (flyers, infographics), they are considered appropriate, but their utility and efficiency is lower compared to online tools.

3. Recommendations

R.CO.02. It is highly recommended to keep using the same communication platforms as used between 2015-2019, as they proved to be the most effective and efficient in achieving their targets, with the following suggestions:

- The focus for the Programme bodies in the next programming period should be on the dissemination of information through social media as the beneficiaries expressed interest in receiving information through this channel.
- A special attention should also be given for increasing the visibility online to easily reach a greater number of potential beneficiaries, beneficiaries and general public.
- A better promotion on the project results should consider the improvement and extension of the unique database with all the projects and results (a well-structured web-repository of the projects materials and findings per domains) which should continue to be maintained on the Programme's website.
- To enhance communication of the financed projects and continue the dissemination of their results, it would be appropriate to continue the organization of the events (fairs, seminars, etc.) in which to present the successful results obtained from the implementation of the projects: this firstly at national level, but then also at European level. Representatives of the press and local/regional decision makers should be invited to events, in order to raise awareness about the impact created at community/cross-border level, etc.

E.CO.03	Which were the most relevant and efficient tools/actions/channels of communication used by project beneficiaries to promote their project?

1.Analysis

From the **documental analysis**, the main findings are:

Based on the information available in the projects' application, the communication activities foreseen by the beneficiaries were mainly related to events and conferences; press releases and press articles; dissemination materials (leaflets, brochures, flyers, other presentation materials); websites, etc. The beneficiaries are reporting the specific communication activities performed in their projects at the level of the implementation reports, by also indicating the expenditures related to the communication activities.

The Programme structures created and published on the website of the Programme, specific templates ready to be used by beneficiaries – in relation to all communication activities, especially advertising materials produced at project level.

From the **interviews** with Programme bodies and beneficiaries, the main findings are:

- The overall opinion of the beneficiaries is that the instruments and actions of communication used for disseminating the information about the projects are suitable for the desired results and there is no need to implement new instruments or actions.
- The beneficiaries considered that the Info days and other categories of events were the most efficient in spreading the information about the Programme.
- The information and publicity materials on paper (flyers, brochures etc.) provide limited added value in increasing the visibility of projects and in reaching different target groups of the projects.

From the **focus group** with Programme bodies and beneficiaries, the main findings are:

- The communication tools that have been used by the Programme structures are considered efficient, thus the participants consider that they should be maintained also in the future for ensuring the same level of visibility and information among the interested target groups of the Programme.
- Participants considered that the helpdesk was very useful for the application phase, while for the implementation phase the communication and the share of information was performed at the level of beneficiaries and the officers in charge, this being considered a very efficient way to ensure the direct, transparent and solid exchange of information between the Programme structures and beneficiaries.
- In order to update the beneficiaries about the news and modifications at the Programme level, the information was shared both on the website and by e-mail.
- Moreover, the participants to the Focus Group considered that the most efficient communication is the direct communication, the one between the officers of the projects and the beneficiaries.

2. Conclusions

- From the perspective of the beneficiaries, the most relevant and efficient tools/actions/channels of communication used for the promotion of their projects are the events organized (conference for launching and finalizing the projects), the websites and the online tools (videos, tutorials, etc).
- Great progress in terms of visibility of projects in the cross-border area has been registered, also due to the actions undertaken by the beneficiaries in promoting their projects (websites, Facebook pages, events, videos).

3. Recommendations

- R.CO.03.1. A handbook with examples for the communication measures is considered useful in order to establish the same level of visibility to all the projects, by giving freedom of creativity to beneficiaries in defining the most suitable actions for their project types.
- R.CO.03.2. The Programme authorities should continue the efforts to encourage the beneficiaries to perform targeted promotion of their success stories at the local level, for a

clearer association with the European funding obtained through the Interreg V-A Romania-Bulgaria Programme.

- R.CO.03.3. The Programme structures should continue their efforts in informing/training the beneficiaries on important aspects to consider for the projects promotion activities, the dissemination of project results, so as to provide a greater and continuous visibility of the progress of project implementation and, respectively, the benefits of these projects for the local community, both in the press and in the online environment.
- R.CO.03.4. Using an online interactive platform for debates and updated information on implementation of the projects and their results would be useful for the beneficiaries in order to have a greater interaction with other beneficiaries in similar situations.

E.CO.04.	Do communication activities have sufficient impact on the awareness of the beneficiaries/potential beneficiaries of the Programme? To what extent have the objectives of visibility and awareness of the Programme and the role played by the Community been achieved?

1.Analysis

From the **documental analysis**, the main findings are:

- The number of organized initiatives and events complied with the planning included in the Annual Communication Plans, with cases in which proposed values were exceeded.
- The level of attendance in organized events was high, which proves that the information and promotion activities have been effective.
- The high number of participants in information and promotion events organized within the Programme has secured direct transmission of information regarding the Programme to the public, while creating a multiplier effect, through subsequent dissemination of information by participants to other stakeholders.
- The structures of the Programme stayed close to the target groups of the Programme by providing through the Programme website, social media tools, e-mail, regular up-to-date information about the Programme rules, documents, events and other relevant information important for the smooth implementation of the Programme.
- The managing bodies of the Programme, with the JS as the main player, maintained contact with the beneficiaries of the Programme by providing through the website, social media tools, e-mail, regular up-to-date information about the Programme rules, documents, events and other relevant information important for the smooth implementation of the Programme.

From the **interviews** with Programme bodies and beneficiaries, the main findings are:

- The Programme is quite visible because there were events organised in the entire eligible area. The role of the JS is very important for increasing the visibility of the Programme.

- The potential beneficiaries received all the information they need. In each county and district info days were organized for each call for proposals and afterwards there has been a specific orientation aiming to clarify particular aspects related to the application phase or documents required for submitting the financing requests through Q and A.
- The level, frequency and scope of the communication between JS (including Antenna) and beneficiaries is considered good. The beneficiaries appear to trust the Joint Secretariat and its personnel. The communication follows both formal and informal channels. Not all the beneficiaries communicate with the JS to the same intensity
- The only problematic aspect underlined during the interviews refers to the geographical location of the Joint Secretariat which imposes certain logistic challenges for some project beneficiaries, especially from the Bulgarian side of the border.

From the **survey** with beneficiaries, the main findings are:

- The opinion from the beneficiaries involved in the survey indicates a general high interest in the funding opportunities of the Programme and consider the communication activities very efficient in promoting the visibility of the Programme.
- In what concerns the impact on the awareness of the beneficiaries/potential beneficiaries of the Programme, 61% of the respondents declared that they consider communication as being very effective, while 33% view communication as effective. Thus, the majority of respondents (94%) is satisfied with the level of effectiveness of the communication activities. Only 6% of the respondents consider that communication activities have a medium or lower level of effectiveness.
- Predominantly, beneficiaries consult the Programme website to get relevant information, but the participation to the training sessions is also considered very effective to collect information on project creation and implementation.

2. Conclusions

The evaluation of the communication activities reveals that the capacity of the Programme to mobilise potential beneficiaries and beneficiaries is good, as well as to inform the general public about the opportunities offered by the Programme. This evidence comes from the number of project proposals received within the three calls for proposals. There was a large number of project applications since the beginning and this high level of application was maintained during all the calls for proposals, this showing the high level of interest in the Programme, as well as the relevance of the problems addressed by the projects.

The objectives related to visibility and awareness of the Programme have been achieved to a great extent, also considering all the efforts done by the Programme's bodies and beneficiaries to disseminate the projects' results in the cross-border area.

The quality and the scope of the communication have a very good perception among all the players.

The MA intends however to evolve the system, by moving JS even closer to the needs of beneficiaries, by enhancing its support and guidance role.

The information sessions were organized at key moments where the transmission of information to potential beneficiaries of the Programme was of high interest and relevance. Thus, it is noted that the Programme structures ensure the process of informing the potential beneficiaries in a targeted way and taking into account the needs of the potential beneficiaries.

The information and communication within the Programme has been carried out both at specific moments, during the planned events, as well as in ad-hoc or continuously, whenever it was needed or requested by the potential beneficiaries (individual meetings with them, support provided through online channels or by phone).

3. Recommendations

- R.CO.04.1. In general, it is recommended that the documents/reports of the Programme, where possible, present the results of the communication activities carried out with a higher degree of detail.
- R.CO.04.2. Improved visibility can result from focusing communication efforts at the project level, rather than at the Programme level, by communicating the results, the real cases, the examples of changes, through a storytelling approach.
- R.CO.04.3. The effort to intensify and improve the communication between JS and beneficiaries, in the sense of a closer support to them, should be focused on the capitalization of the very good communication and reciprocal support achieved so far.

E.CO.05.	Are there any measures recommended in order to raise the impact of information and publicity activities carried out by the Programme bodies for each of the target groups identified in the Communication Strategy?

According to the information provided in the Communication Strategy, the Programme identified the following target groups:

- Beneficiaries and potential beneficiaries;
- Governmental and non/governmental actors national and regional;
- National/regional/local media;
- EU institutions and bodies;
- General public (citizens from the Programme area and EU general public);
- Internal public.

In order to identify the measures for raising the impact of information and publicity activities carried out by the Programme bodies, the analysis, evaluation and formulation of recommendations were structured on each category of target group, as presented below.

1.Analysis

Beneficiaries and potential beneficiaries	General public	National/ regional/ local media	Internal public	National and regional actors	EU institutions and bodies
According to the interviews, the MA intends to elaborate a guide for the next programming period with standard communication measures for beneficiaries, in order to establish the same level of visibility to all the projects. The beneficiaries that were interviewed considered that a good measure to capitalize the project results is the implementation of a unique database with all the projects and results (a well-structured web-repository of the projects materials and findings per fields). Some participants at the focus group considered that a database of good practices would help to better identify and disseminate the results of the projects and to increase their visibility. The Programme structures already anticipated the importance and relevance of such a database, which already exists and has been published online since the beginning of the current year. The promotion on social media is much more preferred both by beneficiaries and potential beneficiaries than the one made on the official website. The participants to the focus group considered that all the tools for communication	The visibility of the Programme among the general public is quite high considering also the organization of events in the entire eligible area. The overall appreciation is that the objectives related to the visibility of the Programme had been achieved to a great extent. The citizens are updated about the projects at the local level and about their proposed results since the moment when the projects were launched. The citizens know only in low percentage that the projects are financed under a cross-border Programme, but they are aware of the fact that the projects received funds from the European Union.	Communication activities to inform the general public about the programme results were organized. Press conferences were held periodically and the related outcomes were posted on the Programme's official website. Promotional activities were also carried out during the European Cooperation Day, organised on an annual basis.	The staff of the management bodies of the programme received information on how to improve the rules and procedures of the Programme. Through trainings, conferences and seminars, the internal public had the role to exchange information and best practices in order to increase the level of knowledge and performance at all life changes of the Programme.	In what concerns the national and regional governmental and non/governmental actors, the information focused on the added value of the Programme in the region and on the improvements that resulted from the implementation of the projects.	As for the EU institutions and bodies, the Programme aimed to transmit information regarding the progress of the programme implementation, results and achievements.

Beneficiaries and potential beneficiaries	General public	National/ regional/ local media	Internal public	National and regional actors	EU institutions and bodies
should also be maintained for the next programming period. The beneficiaries and potential beneficiaries considered that the most efficient communication is the direct communication, the one between the officers of the projects and the beneficiaries.					

2. Conclusions

Beneficiaries and potential beneficiaries	General public	National/ regional/ local media	Internal public	National and regional actors	EU institutions and bodies
The focus of the Programme on disseminating success stories and transmitting simple messages of big impact on people, considering different approaches for different categories of target groups, is well appreciated. Both for beneficiaries and potential applicants, it is important to continue the optimization of the online tools and means of communication. The differentiated presentation of the communication activities (including proposed and achieved indicators) per stakeholder categories allows the orientation of the information and communication measures in the directions in which there is a need and interest.	The dissemination, among the general public, of information on the implementation of successful projects is considered to be very useful for the promotion of the Programme.	The involvement of the regional and local media is considered effective for the dissemination of the projects' results and the added value at local level.	The communication actions carried out for the internal public of the Programme have a high level of effectiveness, considering the positive results obtained by the Programme's structures in carrying the information and promotion activities among different categories of target groups and stakeholders.	The information and publicity activities carried out by the Programme bodies among the national and regional actors are considered sufficient for the adequate dissemination of the projects' results in the local/ regional communities.	The EU institutions and bodies are aware of the information and publicity activities carried out by the Programme structures and in some case they even provided positive feedback on the results obtained through the implementation of the specific actions.

3. Recommendations

R.CO.05. In order to better promote the Programme, people-to-people initiatives (ways to promote Programme opportunities through interpersonal contacts) and Programme promotion in the online environment such as Facebook, Instagram and Youtube, have been considered as the most effective tools. Therefore, the adaptation of information, communication activities and promotional materials according to the target group concerned is beneficial in terms of promoting the Programme.

Beneficiaries and potential beneficiaries	General public	National/ regional/ local media	Internal public	National and regional actors	EU institutions and bodies
The Programme should focus more on switching the communication of results to project level, with specific budget for beneficiaries. As previously described, a recommendation for the future programming period is to create a handbook with examples of communication initiatives that the beneficiaries could activate in their projects, by also giving freedom to the beneficiaries to use their innovation and creativity in carrying their own activities. Continuing organizing technical meetings with the attendance of all partners involved within the implementation of a project. Continue to offer information and materials prepared and distributed in a targeted way for the different categories of the target group, tailored to the needs and level of understanding of these categories, including facilitating the interaction between beneficiaries and the potential beneficiaries (workshops and seminars, online platforms, etc.) to ensure exchange of information, best practice models and setting up of partnerships (facilitation of the formation of a network for partnerships, a list of the eligible partners per regions and fields of activity etc.).	Improving the way of communicating the results of the Programme, so that the perceived problems in the local community are associated with examples of solutions provided by the Programme or, at least, mentioning the benefits for the local communities. The Programme should continue the adaptation of the language used to inform the general public. Issuing more online publications for the large public, aiming to capitalize both on the Programme's results, as well as on the impact created by specific projects in the cross-	The Programme should continue the adaptation of language used to inform the media. The Programme bodies should support the beneficiaries in transmitting press releases and articles that will be published in the media, by encouraging them to focus on the impact and successful results of the projects in a more focused way, than just transmitting technical information about their projects. To increase the number of press releases, interviews, advertisements in all kind of mass-media and to concentrate their scope towards the promotion and dissemination of Programme results as well as on the best practices and success stories. Representatives of the press and local/regional decision makers should be invited to events, in order to raise	To continue the organization of communication actions carried out for the internal public of the Programme.	It is recommended to maintain the dissemination of the projects' results in the local/ regional/ communities and to organize general events with the national and regional actors in which the results of the projects are emphasised in connection to the impact they create in the cross-border area. The transmission of a biannual newsletter should also be considered, presenting the progressive results obtained by the Programme.	The Programme structures should continue the efforts to maintain the communication of the Programme's results and best practices among the EU institutions and bodies, at the same level of intensity as in the current programming period.

Beneficiaries and potential beneficiaries	General public	National/ regional/ local media	Internal public	National and regional actors	EU institutions and bodies
It would be useful to create an interactive platform to facilitate the intensification of the communication between the beneficiaries and to encourage the exchange of experiences and good practices between them. Continue the organization of workshops and seminars bringing the beneficiaries who can provide examples of good practice - for a clearer association with the impact and results that can be produced by the Programme. Adaptation of language used to inform the various categories of the target group and adapting the language to the origin area of the target groups (rural, urban). Simplifying the way of presenting the information and the terminology used in communication and information activities (a general presentation of the interest topics in a less technical language and indication of the sources where more detailed information can be consulted by those interested).	border area, or on the dissemination of "personal stories" of the beneficiaries; A special attention should also be given to increasing the visibility online to easily reach a greater number of potential beneficiaries and general public.	awareness about the impact created at community / cross-border level, etc. Massive involvement of the media to the most important events and activities organized by the Programme bodies (when launching the call for proposals, when organizing events and seminar for beneficiaries and potential applicants, when disseminating the results of the Proramme/ projects).			

E.CO.06.	What can be improved in terms of communication activities for the next programming period?

Conclusions

As a general conclusion, it appears that the communication activities undertaken in the Interreg V-A Romania-Bulgaria Programme had a satisfactory impact, in general, and they were effective for the following reasons:

- Activities were well planned in terms of timing and quantified targets.
- Communication activities are structured in a consistent and clear way in the Annual Communication Plans.
- The target groups are properly identified and structured.

- The messages were clear and largely effectively reached target groups.
- The number of initiatives and events organized complied with the planning developed in the Annual Communication Plans, there are situations where proposed values were even exceeded.
- Participation in events has been satisfactory.
- The objectives for information and promotion activities implemented within the Programme have been achieved (and sometimes exceeded).
- Furthermore, documental analysis on the Communication Strategy reveals that the Programme planned specific actions to support the EU visibility in compliance with the relevant regulation. There are not specific conclusion or suggestions.
- As reported in the evaluation questions above, the Programme performed very well in increasing the awareness on the opportunities offered by the Programme, thus resulting consequently in a greater visibility of the EU contribution.

Recommendations

R.CO.06. In order to increase the impact of the communication activities for the next programming period, the following suggestions are made:

- In general, it is recommended that the Programme documents/reports, where possible, present the results of the implemented communication activities with a higher level of detail.
- It is recommended to continue updating the Programme's website and Facebook account, with information of interest for the beneficiaries and the transmission of newsflashes to the JS contact database, in the key moments of the Programme implementation.
- It is recommended that in the future, the beneficiaries continue to be directly involved in the information events, possibly by being invited to present those successful projects, in order to disseminate positive results of the projects and of the Programme. The Programme management bodies are considering the presentation of examples of good practices also through the online campaigns/newsletters, capturing the impact of projects on the financed domains (e.g. the health sector, infrastructure, etc.).
- Increasing the visibility actions based on the projects and their results through storytelling actions, stories of the beneficiaries distributed in the online environment as well as on the Youtube online platform.
- The visibility strategy should continue to be focused in the future much more at the project level, communicating concrete results and real stories about the change that the projects created at community level. It is recommended to use the information channels that turned out to be preferred in the eligible area of the Programme.
- Continue to improve the visibility of Programme (especially among the general active population) by expanding online communication (digitization of information regarding the Programme and promotion of the project results).

- Continued use of electronic means of promotion and communication (website, email, social networking, etc.) because they offer accessibility and reach a wide range of audience.
- Promoting existing functional and interactive tools on the Programmes' website and the facilities provided by them for different target groups.

5. General Conclusions

The present evaluation report has analysed the communication activities carried out for the Interreg V-A Romania- Bulgaria Programme, from its beginning till the end of 2019.

Our attention has focused on the achievement of the communication objectives, on the instruments, actions and tools that were used for the communication activities, as well as on the impact on the awareness of beneficiaries/potential beneficiaries.

The main conclusion of the evaluation process is that the Programme was effective so far in achieving the objectives, indicators and results of the Communication Strategy. Moreover, the website of the Programme and the events organized, information/training sessions, proved to be the communication tools contributing the most to this success.

The programme communication activities proved to have a high level of effectiveness in what concerns the achievement of 2019 milestones. Thus, it is highly recommended to keep using the same communication platforms as used in the 2015-2019 period, as they proved to be the most effective and efficient in achieving their targets.

From a qualitative point of view, the Programme documents create the necessary framework for directing the communication activities towards the areas of interest for all the potential applicants. The differentiated presentation of the communication activities from the Communication Strategy of the Programme by target groups categories, allows the orientation of the information and communication measures in the directions in which there are needs and interest.

The quality and the scope of the communication have a very good perception among all the players. The Managing Authority intends however to evolve the system, by moving Joint Secretariat, even closer to the needs of beneficiaries, by enhancing its support and guidance role.

Great progress in terms of visibility of projects in the cross-border area, also due to the actions undertaken by the beneficiaries in promoting their projects (websites, Facebook pages, events, videos) has been registered. The evaluation of the communication activities reveals that the capacity of the Programme to mobilise potential beneficiaries and beneficiaries is good, as well as to inform the general public about the opportunities offered by the Programme.

Annexes

Annex 1 - Link between findings, conclusions and recommendations

EQ	Findings	Conclusions	Recommendations
ECO.01. Do the communication activities carried out by the Programme authorities lead to the achievement of the general and specific objectives, expected results and indicators set out in the Communication Strategy?	At the end of 2018, all communication-related output and result indicators for 2019 were achieved in a great extent, with the indicator *"Number of participants in the events"* achieving the target for 2019 already from 2018. More than that, the indicator related to "*Website traffic on Programme Internet page www.interregrobg.eu*" has already achieved the target established for 2023. The channels of communication that were the most used in order to obtain information about the Programme are the official website and the information/training session: out of 49 respondents, 96% declared that the most common communication channel is the Programme official website, while 69% of respondents mentioned the information/ training sessions.	• Combining the achievements in term of indicators with the finding of the field research, it can be concluded that the Programme was effective so far in achieving the objectives, indicators and results of the Communication Strategy. • The website of the Programme and the events organized, information/training sessions, proved to be the communication tools contributing the most to this success.	• R.CO.01. It is recommended to continue the good efforts in completing the achievement of communication-related indicators, by 2023, while tuning the content of the communication to the implementation status of the Programme, with actions such as: • Organizing events for the beneficiaries: considering the status of the Programme implementation, this kind of events can also be dedicated to cross-disseminate projects' results in the cross-border area and stimulate the development of an informal network among beneficiaries; • To issue more online publications for the large public, aiming to capitalize both on the Programme's results, as well as on the impact created by specific projects in the cross-border area, or on the dissemination of "personal stories" of the beneficiaries; • To increase the number of press releases, interviews, advertisements in all kind of mass-media and to concentrate their scope towards the promotion and dissemination of Programme

EQ	Findings	Conclusions	Recommendations
			results as well as on the best practices and success stories.
ECO.02. Could more effect be achieved by using different instruments or actions? Which actions or tools were the most successful in spreading the information about the Programme and which could be considered as excessive or ineffective?	Evaluating the effectiveness of several communication channels, it was found out that the Programme official website and the information/trainings session are the most effective communication channels, together with the events organized by the Programme's structures. In order to update the beneficiaries about the news and modifications at the Programme level, the information was shared both on the website and by e-mail. Beneficiaries consider that the most efficient communication is the direct communication, the one between the officers of the projects and the beneficiaries. In order to update the beneficiaries about the news and modifications at the Programme level, the information was shared both on the website and by e-mail.	• The Programme communication activities proved to have a high level of effectiveness in what concerns the achievement of 2019 milestones. • Based on the analysis conducted, the use of different instruments or actions does not appear necessary, as the communication tools already activated by the Programme's structures proved to have a great impact. • In what concerns the actions or tools that were considered to be the most successful in spreading the information, those have been indicated to be the official website of the Programme, the training, sessions and events organized in the cross-border area. Although Facebook was indicated as a preferred communication channel by the beneficiaries and potential applicants, when it comes to find official information about the Programme, their first option was always the	• R.CO.02. It is highly recommended to keep using the same communication platforms as used between 2015-2019, as they proved to be the most effective and efficient in achieving their target, with the following suggestions: • The focus for the Programme bodies in the next programming period should be on the dissemination of information through social media as the beneficiaries expressed interest in receiving information through this channel. • A special attention should also be given for increasing the visibility online to easily reach a greater number of potential beneficiaries, beneficiaries and general public. • A better capitalization on the project results should consider the improvement and extension of the unique database with all the projects and results (a well-structured web-repository of the projects materials and findings per domains) which should continue to be maintained on the Programme's website. • To enhance communication of the financed projects and continue the dissemination of their results, it would be appropriate to continue the organization of the events (fairs, seminars, etc.) in which to present the successful results obtained from the implementation of the projects: this

EQ	Findings	Conclusions	Recommendations
		Programme's website, instead of other social media pages. • No actions or tools related to communication were considered to be excessive or ineffective, but the on-the-field research has shown that the printed promotional materials (leaflets, brochures, flyers, etc.) have only a limited effect and limited added value for increasing the visibility of the Programme, as their utility and efficiency is lower compared to online tools • With regard to the most impacting information and communication tools used in the period 2015-2019, the general opinion is that the most effective are the online tools, which have a high degree of accessibility, attractiveness and promptness. This type of tool is preferred by all the beneficiaries who answered the survey/were interviewed, being considered a means by which information can be disseminated massively, much faster and in real time. In what concerns the printed and	firstly at national level, but then also at European level. Representatives of the press and local/regional decision makers should be invited to events, in order to raise awareness about the impact created at community/cross-border level, etc.

EQ	Findings	Conclusions	Recommendations
		information materials (flyers, infographics), they are considered appropriate, but their utility and efficiency is lower compared to online tools.	
ECO.03. Which were the most relevant and efficient tools/actions/channels of communication used by project beneficiaries to promote their project	Based on the information available in the projects' application, the communication activities foreseen by the beneficiaries were mainly related to events and conferences; press releases and press articles; dissemination materials (leaflets, brochures, flyers, other presentation materials); websites, etc. The beneficiaries are reporting the specific communication activities conducted in their projects at the level of the implementation reports, by also indicating the expenditures related to the communication activities. The Programme structures created and published on the website of the Programme, specific templates ready to be used by beneficiaries – in relation to all communication activities, especially advertising materials produced at project level. The overall opinion of the beneficiaries is that the instruments and actions of communication used for disseminating the information about the projects are suitable for the desired results and there is no need to implement new instruments or actions.	• From the perspective of the beneficiaries, the most relevant and efficient tools/actions/channels of communication used for the promotion of their projects are the events organized (conference for launching and finalizing the projects), the websites and the online tools (videos, tutorials, etc). • Great progress in terms of visibility of projects in the cross-border area has been registered, also due to the actions undertaken by the beneficiaries in promoting their projects (websites, Facebook pages, events, videos).	• R.CO.03.1. A handbook with examples for the communication measures is considered useful in order to establish the same level of visibility to all the projects, by giving freedom of creativity to beneficiaries in defining the most suitable actions for their project types. • R.CO.03.2. The beneficiaries should focus on targeted promotion of their success stories at the local level, for a clearer association with the European funding obtained through the Interreg V-A Romania-Bulgaria Programme • R.CO.03.3. The Programme structures should continue their efforts in informing/training the beneficiaries on important aspects to consider for the projects promotion activities, the dissemination of project results, so as to provide a greater and continuous visibility of the progress of project implementation and, respectively, the benefits of these projects for the local community, both in the press and in the online environment, • R.CO.03.4. Using an online interactive platform for debates and updated information on implementation of the projects and their results would be useful for the beneficiaries in order to

EQ	Findings	Conclusions	Recommendations
			have a greater interaction with other beneficiaries in similar situations.
ECO.04. Do communication activities have sufficient impact on the awareness of the beneficiaries/potential beneficiaries of the Programme? To what extent have the objectives of visibility and awareness of the Programme and the role played by the Community been achieved?	• The number of organized initiatives and events complied with the planning included in the Annual Communication Plans, with cases in which proposed values were exceeded. • The level of attendance in organized events was high, which proves that the information and promotion activities have been effective. • The high number of participants in information and promotion events organized within the Programme has secured direct transmission of information regarding the Programme to the public, while creating a multiplier effect, through subsequent dissemination of information by participants to other stakeholders. • The structures of the Programme stayed close to the target groups of the Programme by providing through the Programme website, social media tools, e-mail, regular up-to-date information about the Programme rules, documents, events and other relevant information important for the smoothly implementation of the Programme.	The evaluation of the communication activities reveals that the capacity of the Programme to mobilise potential beneficiaries and beneficiaries is good as well as to inform the general public about the opportunities offered by the Programme. This evidence comes from the number of project proposals received within the three calls for proposals. There was a large number of project applications since the beginning and this high level of application was maintained during all the calls for proposals, this showing the high level of interest in the Programme as well as the relevance of the problems addressed by the projects. The objectives related to visibility and awareness of the Programme have been achieved to a great extent, also considering all the efforts done by the Programme's bodies and beneficiaries to disseminate the projects' results in the cross-border area. The quality and the scope of the	• R.CO.04.1. In general, it is recommended that the documents/reports of the Programme, where possible, present the results of the communication activities carried out with a higher degree of detail. • R.CO.04.2. Improved visibility can result from focusing communication efforts at the project level, rather than at the Programme level, by communicating the results, the real cases, the examples of changes, through a storytelling approach. • R.CO.04.3. The effort to intensify and improve the communication between JS and beneficiaries, in the sense of a closer support to them, should be focused on the capitalization of the very good communication and reciprocal support achieved so far.

EQ	Findings	Conclusions	Recommendations
	• The managing bodies of the Programme, with the JS as the main player, maintained contact with the beneficiaries of the Programme by providing through the website, social media tools, e-mail, regular up-to-date information about the Programme rules, documents, events and other relevant information important for the smooth implementation of the Programme.	communication have a very good perception among all the players. The MA intends however to evolve the system, by moving JS even closer to the needs of beneficiaries, by enhancing its support and guidance role. The information sessions were organized at key moments where the transmission of information to potential beneficiaries of the Programme was of high interest and relevance. Thus, it is noted that the Programme structures ensure the process of informing the potential beneficiaries in a targeted way and taking into account the needs of the potential beneficiaries. The information and communication within the Programme has been carried out both at specific moments, during the planned events, as well as in ad-hoc or continuously, whenever it was needed or requested by the potential beneficiaries (individual meetings with them, support provided through online channels or by phone).	
ECO.05. Are there any measures recommended in order	R.CO.05. In order to better promote the Programme, people-to-people initiatives (ways to promote Programme opportunities through interpersonal contacts) and Programme promotion in the online environment such as Facebook, Instagram and Youtube, have been considered as the most effective tools. Therefore, the adaptation of information, communication activities and promotional materials according to the target group concerned is beneficial in terms of promoting the Programme.		

EQ	Findings	Conclusions	Recommendations
to raise the impact of information and publicity activities carried out by the Programme bodies for each of the target groups identified in the Communication Strategy?	**Beneficiaries and potential beneficiaries**		
	• According to the interviews, the MA intends to elaborate a guide for the next programming period with standard communication measures for beneficiaries, in order to establish the same level of visibility to all the projects. • The beneficiaries that were interviewed considered that a good measure to capitalize the project results is the implementation of a unique database with all the projects and results (a well-structured web-repository of the projects materials and findings per fields). • Some participants at the focus group considered that a database of good practices would help to better identify and disseminate the results of the projects and to increase their visibility. The Programme structures already anticipated the importance and relevance of such a database, which already exists and has been published online since the beginning of the current year. • The promotion on social media is much more preferred both by beneficiaries and potential beneficiaries than the one made on the official website.	• The focus of the Programme on disseminating success stories and transmitting simple messages of big impact on people, considering different approaches for different categories of target groups, is well appreciated. • Both for beneficiaries and potential applicants, it is important to continue the optimization of the online tools and means of communication. • The differentiated presentation of the communication activities (including proposed and achieved indicators) per stakeholder categories allows the orientation of the information and communication measures in the directions in which there is a need and interest.	• The Programme should focus more on switching the communication of results to project level, • As previously described, a recommendation for the future programming period is to create a handbook with examples of communication initiatives that the beneficiaries could activate in their projects, by also giving freedom to the beneficiaries to use their innovation and creativity in carrying their own activities. • Continuing organizing technical meetings with the attendance of all partners involved within the implementation of a project. • Continue to offer information and materials prepared and distributed in a targeted way for the different categories of the target group, tailored to the needs and level of understanding of these categories, including facilitating the interaction between beneficiaries and the potential beneficiaries (workshops and seminars, online platforms, etc.) to ensure exchange of information, best practice models and setting up of partnerships (facilitation of the formation of a network for partnerships, a list of the eligible partners per regions and fields of activity etc.).

EQ	Findings	Conclusions	Recommendations
	• The participants to the focus group considered that all the tools for communication should also be maintained for the next programming period. • The beneficiaries and potential beneficiaries considered that the most efficient communication is the direct communication, the one between the officers of the projects and the beneficiaries.		• It would be useful to create an interactive platform to facilitate the intensification of the communication between the beneficiaries and to encourage the exchange of experiences and good practices between them. • Continue the organization of workshops and seminars bringing the beneficiaries who can provide examples of good practice - for a clearer association with the impact and results that can be produced by the Programme. • Adaptation of language used to inform the various categories of the target group and adapting the language to the origin area of the target groups (rural, urban). • Simplifying the way of presenting the information and the terminology used in communication and information activities (a general presentation of the interest topics in a less technical language and indication of the sources where more detailed information can be consulted by those interested).
	General public		
	The visibility of the Programme among the general public is quite high considering also the organization of events in the entire eligible area.	The dissemination, among the general public, of information on the implementation of successful projects is	Improving the way of communicating the results of the Programme, so that the perceived problems in the local community are associated with examples of solutions

EQ	Findings	Conclusions	Recommendations
	The overall appreciation is that the objectives related to the visibility of the Programme had been achieved to a great extent. The citizens are updated about the projects at the local level and about their proposed results since the moment when the projects were launched. The citizens know only in low percentage that the projects are financed under a cross-border Programme, but they are aware of the fact that the projects received funds from the European Union.	considered to be very useful for the promotion of the Programme.	provided by the Programme or, at least, mentioning the benefits for the local communities. The Programme should continue the adaptation of the language used to inform the general public. Issuing more online publications for the large public, aiming to capitalize both on the Programme's results, as well as on the impact created by specific projects in the cross-border area, or on the dissemination of "personal stories" of the beneficiaries; A special attention should also be given to increasing the visibility online to easily reach a greater number of potential beneficiaries and general public.
	National/ regional/ local media		
	Communication activities to inform the general public about the programme results were organized. Press conferences were held periodically and the related outcomes were posted on the Programme's official website. Promotional activities were also carried out during the European Cooperation Day, organised on an annual basis.	The involvement of the regional and local media is considered effective for the dissemination of the projects' results and the added value at local level.	The Programme should continue the adaptation of language used to inform the media. The Programme bodies should support the beneficiaries in transmitting press releases and articles that will be published in the media, by encouraging them to focus on the impact and successful results of the projects in a more focused way, than just transmitting technical information about their projects. To increase the number of press releases, interviews, advertisements in all kind of mass-media and to concentrate their scope towards the promotion and

EQ	Findings	Conclusions	Recommendations
			dissemination of Programme results as well as on the best practices and success stories. Representatives of the press and local/regional decision makers should be invited to events, in order to raise awareness about the impact created at community / cross-border level, etc. Massive involvement of the media to the most important events and activities organized by the Programme bodies (when launching the call for proposals, when organizing events and seminar for beneficiaries and potential applicants, when disseminating the results of the Proramme/ projects).
	Internal public		
	The staff of the management bodies of the programme received information on how to improve the rules and procedures of the Programme. Through trainings, conferences and seminars, the internal public had the role to exchange information and best practices in order to increase the level of knowledge and performance at all life changes of the Programme.	• The communication actions carried out for the internal public of the Programme have a high level of effectiveness, considering the positive results obtained by the Programme's structures in carrying the information and promotion activities among different categories of target groups and stakeholders.	• To continue the organization of communication actions carried out for the internal public of the Programme.
	National and regional actors		
	In what concerns the national and regional governmental and non/governmental actors, the	• The information and publicity activities carried out by the Programme bodies	It is recommended to maintain the dissemination of the projects' results in the local/ regional/ communities

EQ	Findings	Conclusions	Recommendations
	information focused on the added value of the Programme in the region and on the improvements that resulted from the implementation of the projects.	among the national and regional actors are considered sufficient for the adequate dissemination of the projects' results in the local/ regional communities.	and to organize general events with the national and regional actors in which the results of the projects are emphasised in connection to the impact they create in the cross-border area. The transmission of a biannual newsletter should also be considered, presenting the progressive results obtained by the Programme.
	EU institutions and bodies		
	• As for the EU institutions and bodies, the Programme aimed to transmit information regarding the progress of the programme implementation, results and achievements.	• The EU institutions and bodies are aware of the information and publicity activities carried out by the Programme structures and in some case they even provided positive feedback on the results obtained through the implementation of the specific actions.	• The Programme structures should continue the efforts to maintain the communication of the Programme's results and best practices among the EU institutions and bodies, at the same level of intensity as in the current programming period.
ECO.06. What can be improved in terms of communication activities for the next programming period?		As a general conclusion, it appears that the communication activities undertaken in the Interreg V-A Romania-Bulgaria Programme had a satisfactory impact, in general, and they were effective for the following reasons: • Activities were well planned in terms of timing and quantified targets; • Communication activities are structured in a consistent and clear	E.CO.06. In order to increase the impact of the communication activities for the next programming period, the following suggestions are made: • In general, it is recommended that the Programme documents/reports, where possible, present the results of the implemented communication activities with a higher level of detail. • It is recommended to continue updating the Programme's website and Facebook account,

EQ	Findings	Conclusions	Recommendations
		way in the Annual Communication Plans; • The target groups are properly identified and structured; • The messages were clear and largely effectively reached target groups; • The number of initiatives and events organized complied with the planning developed in the Annual Communication Plans, there are situations where proposed values were even exceeded; • Participation in events has been satisfactory; • There have been achieved (and sometimes exceeded) the objectives for information and promotion activities implemented within the Programme.Furthermore, documental analysis on the Communication Strategy reveals that the Programme planned specific actions to support the EU visibility in compliance with the relevant regulation. There are not specific conclusion or suggestions.	with information of interest for the beneficiaries and the transmission of newsflashes to the JS contact database, in the key moments of the Programme implementation. • It is recommended that in the future, the beneficiaries continue to be directly involved in the information events, possibly by being invited to present those successful projects, in order to disseminate positive results of the projects and of the Programme. The Programme management bodies are considering the presentation of examples of good practices also through the online campaigns/newsletters, capturing the impact of projects on the financed domains (e.g. the health sector, infrastructure, etc.). • Increasing the visibility actions based on the projects and their results through storytelling actions, stories of the beneficiaries distributed in the online environment as well as on the Youtube online platform. • The visibility strategy should continue to be focused in the future much more at the project level, communicating concrete results and real stories about the change that the projects created at community level. It is recommended to use the

EQ	Findings	Conclusions	Recommendations
		• As reported in the evaluation questions above, the Programme performed very well in increasing the awareness on the opportunities offered by the Programme, thus resulting consequently in a greater visibility of the EU contribution.	information channels that turned out to be preferred in the eligible area of the Programme. • Continue to improve the visibility of Programme (especially among the general active population) by expanding online communication (digitization of information regarding the Programme and promotion of the project results). • Continued use of electronic means of promotion and communication (website, email, social networking, etc.) because they offer accessibility and reach a wide range of audience. • Promoting existing functional and interactive tools on the Programmes' website and the facilities provided by them for different target groups.

Annex 2 – Documental analysis

Annex 2.1. Analysis of the Communication strategy

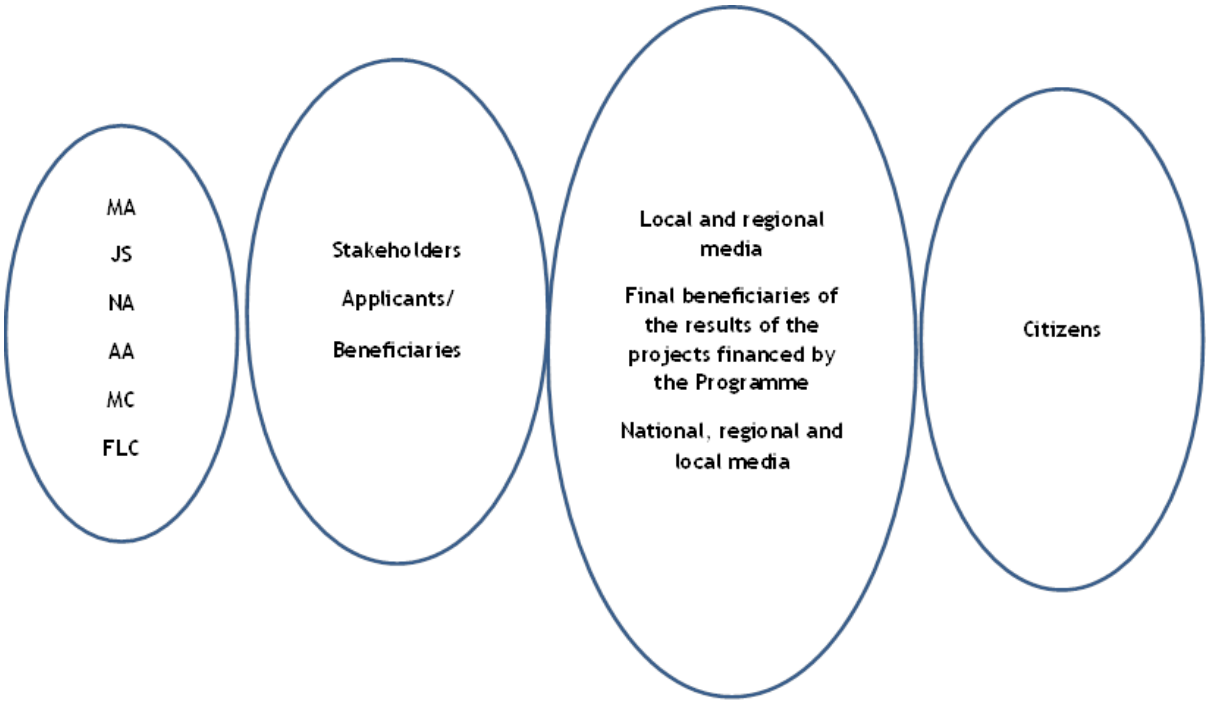
General and specific objectives

The Communication Strategy aims to promote Interreg V-A Romania-Bulgaria Programme by focusing on highlighting the role of EU financing in the cross-border region and developing common projects with impact in the region. In the same time, the Communication Strategy aims to ensure easy access to all interested parties and transparency regarding the use of public funding.

The **general objective** of the Communication Strategy is to increase the visibility of the Programme and EU funding and its benefits in the cross-border region. On the same time, **the specific objectives** of the Strategy are:

1. To raise general awareness towards the Programme
2. To inform potential beneficiaries about financing opportunities
3. To support beneficiaries in all stages of project implementation
4. To disseminate the achievements and the results of the Programme
5. To strengthen communication between Programme bodies
6. To strengthen cooperation with other external support groups
7. To highlight the role of the EU and ensure transparency about the use of public funding

The target groups addressed through the communication activities are:



Source: Communication Strategy of the Interreg V-A Romania-Bulgaria Programme

The specific communication activities described in the document are:

- events (launching conference, seminars, tutorials, conferences, infodays, caravans, partner search and thematic seminars etc.);
- website and social media campaigns;
- publications and promotional materials;
- press articles;
- thematic seminars and trainings for beneficiaries;
- newsletters;
- direct mail;
- communication platforms among beneficiaries to share best practices;
- Tutorials;
- staff exchange.

In what concerns the specific measures undertaken by the Programme and the correspondent tools used by the Programme authorities, they are focused on four important components, as described below: information, promotion, training and monitoring and evaluation of the Communication Strategy.

Information

- Website www.interregrobg.eu
- Social media (Facebook, Youtube, twitter, etc.)
- Publications (leaflets, brochures, guidelines for applicants, Visual Identity Manual)
- Mailing list
- Electronic Buletin / Newsletter
- Information network
- List of contracted projects

Promotion

- Launching events
- Publicity and promotion campaign (print/online media campaign, press releases, press advertisments, meetings, road shows, closing events
- Promotional materials
- Signaling

Training

- Thematic meetings and trainings for the potential beneficiaries/ beneficiaries
- Trainings for the representatives of MA,NA,JS,AA,FLC and the support services within the CBC RO Călăraşi

Monitoring and Evaluation

- The quantitative and qualitative evaluation of the CoS will be carried out within the Programme evaluations.

Monitoring indicators of the communication activity and established targets:

Type of indicator	Indicator	Finding method	Intermediate target value 2019	Target value 2023
Output	No of events for beneficiaries	Sum of own data	60	120
Output	Number of publications issued	Sum of own data	15	30
Output	Number of press releases, interviews, advertisements in all kind of mass-media	Sum of own data, media monitoring	30	60

Type of indicator	Indicator	Finding method	Intermediate target value 2019	Target value 2023
Result	Website traffic on Programme Internet page www.interregrobg.eu (page views)	Sum of own data	250.000	500.000
Result	Number of participants in events	Attendance lists	2.500	5.000
Result	Number of users who receive the electronic newsletter	Sum of own data (electronic registration)	100	200

Annex 2.2 Analysis of the Communication Plans

According to the provisions of the Communication Strategy, each year, the Managing Authority, together with the Joint Secretariat and the National Authority shall develop the Annual Communication Plan, which includes the communication activities that will be carried out by the management bodies during the related year. The Annual Communication Plan shall be approved by the Monitoring Committee. The Communication Plans were designed to include specific communication activities for each year so that they contribute directly to the implementation of the objectives and communication actions from the Communication Strategy.

The main objective of the Communication Plans for Interreg V-A Romania-Bulgaria Programme was to disseminate information about the Programme, to improve and support the beneficiaries' capacity on implementing the projects financed under the Programme and to increase awareness about the Programme and the EU Funds to the general public and the citizens of the regions involved.

By the moment when this evaluation is performed, there have been elaborated and approved four Annual Communication Plans referring to the period 2015-2019 (one joint Communication Plan covering 2016 and 2017 period). Based on the information available in the Annual Communication Plans for Interreg V-A Romania-Bulgaria Programme, during the 2015-2019 period there were carried out a series of activities for the information and promotion of the Programme.

Having as a starting point the approved Communication Strategy, the communication plans contain:

- the aims and the target groups;
- the strategy and content of the information and publicity measures to be taken by the Member States;
- the communication activities that will be carried out by the management bodies during the related year as well as the planned information and communication activities to be carried out in the following year;
- the administrative departments or bodies responsible for the implementation of the above-mentioned measures;
- the indicators and the methods used for the evaluation;
- the communication activities carried out during the previous year.

In the 2015-2019 period, the measures provided in the Annual Communication Plans were related to the following components:

- Information;
- Promotion;
- Training
- Monitoring and evaluation of the Annual Communication Plans (covered in the Communication Plan for 2015).

The specific communication activities described in the document are:

- *Activities implemented in 2015* (based on the information available in the 2016 Annual Communication Plan)**:**
    - 15 events addressed to potential beneficiaries organized in the eligible area with a total of 848 participants;
    - The official launching conference of Interreg V-A Romania-Bulgaria Programme and launching of first call for proposals, event organized by the MA, NA, and JS;
    - 7 thematic meetings with potential beneficiaries held at the JS Călărași headquarters;
    - The dissemination of information about Interreg V-A Romania-Bulgaria Programme was done by posting of 30 articles and press advertisements in newspapers in Romania and Bulgaria;
    - The monitoring of the presence of the Programme in mass media in Romania and Bulgaria (628 articles were identified, out of which 480 in online media and 148 in central and local media);
    - The target group of the Programme was informed periodically via email about the status of the Programme.
    - Infodays for promoting the launching of first call for proposals were organized in the border counties and district by JS;

- The road shows to provide potential beneficiaries with important information regarding the financing opportunities took place in each of the 8 eligible districts in Bulgaria and 7 counties in Romania;
- Promotion of the Interreg V-A Romania-Bulgaria Programme and informing of potential applicants was permanently made in online media by constantly updating the website dedicated to the Programme (www.cbcromaniabulgaria.eu) on the Facebook and Twitter pages of the Programme. At the end of 2015, MA together with JS initiated the action to design a new website (www.interregrobg.eu), dedicated exclusively to Interreg V-A Romania-Bulgaria Programme. The new website was designed to be modern and well structured, user friendly and **accessible to people with disabilities**.
- Publications issued by the management bodies to promote the Programme and its financing opportunities:
    - a brochure to present the Programme and its financing opportunities was designed in December 2015 and published in January 2016;
    - 2 leaflets promoting the first and second call for proposals were drafted by JS in Romanian and Bulgarian languages, published on the Programme website and sent to a total number of over 1000 potential applicants.
- 2 presenting walls and 2 roll-ups with the Programme logo were purchased by JS and used in all the events organized;
- Plates with the Programme logo were installed at the entrance in the office inside the headquarters of JS;
- JS experts together with MA representatives participated to the elaboration of the Visual Identity Manual (VIM) and Applicant's Guidelines for both calls launched during 2015.

➢ *Activities implemented in 2016 (*based on the information available in the 2018 Annual Communication Plan)**:**

- 4 events dedicated to the Programme beneficiaries in order to present the implementation rules of the Programme organised in Călăraşi, Pleven and Alexandria;
- 5 infodays for promoting the launching of the second call for proposals were organised in the border counties and districts: Dobrich, Giurgiu, Craiova, Pleven and Bucharest;
- 1 event to celebrate the 9th of May- "Europe Day", organised in schools in Călăraşi and Silistra under the slogan „We are Europeans";
- "European Cooperation Day" organised on 21.09.2016 in Călăraşi and Silistra;
- the Annual Conference of the Programme organised in Călăraşi on 21.11.2016;
- on site visit for promoting the project e-MS code: ROBG-21, organized in Craiova on 17.11.2016;

- Promotion of Interreg V-A România-Bulgaria Programme and informating the potential applicants was permanently made in on line media by constantly updating the website dedicated to the Programme (www.interregrobg.eu), the Facebook and Twitter pages of the Programme.

➢ *Activities implemented in 2017 (*based on the information available in the 2018 Annual Communication Plan)**:**

- 7 infodays for promoting the launching of the third call for proposals were organised in the border counties and districts: Veliko Târnovo, Slatina, Giurgiu, Constanţa, Vidin, Silistra and Bucharest;
- 1 online session dedicated to the projects implemented in order to answer the questions regarding introduction of data in eMS system;
- 1 photo contest under the slogan "Europe through the European eyes" promoted on the Facebook page of the Programme;
- 1 event to celebrate the 9th of May- "Europe Day", organised in Călăraşi and Ruse;
- 2 infodays for potential beneficiaries selected in step 2 of the third call for proposals were organised in Giurgiu and Pleven;
- "European Cooperation Day" organised on 22.09.2017 in Călăraşi;
- the Annual Conference of the Programme organised in Balchik on 16.11.2017;
- on site visit for promoting the project e-MS code: ROBG-15, organized in Balchik on 17.11.2017;
- online campaign promoted on the Facebook page of the Programme to present the results of several projects implemented;
- Promotion of Interreg V-A România-Bulgaria Programme and informating the potential applicants was permanently made in online media by constantly updating the website dedicated to the Programme (www.interregrobg.eu), the Facebook and Twitter pages of the Programme.

➢ *Activities implemented in 2018 (*based on the information available in the 2019 Annual Communication Plan)**:**

- 4 technical meetings for beneficiaries on project implementation rules, organised in Slatina, Pleven, Alexandria and Veliko Tarnovo;
- 1 event to celebrate the 9th of May - "Europe Day", dedicated to young generation of Europeans – students from Ruse University "Angel Kanchev", to find more about our common past in this European region by taking a glimpse in the future of technology through the 3D objects and artefacts developed within the ARCHIVE project, ROBG – 9;
- 1 photo contest – My place is better connected, greener, safer, more skilled and inclusive and more efficient;

- "European Cooperation Day" organised on 20.09.2018 in Pleven, Bulgaria, organised in the framework of the European Year of Cultural Heritage 2018;
- Annual Conference of the Programme organised in Craiova on 27.09.2018 at the Mirror Hall of Art Museum;
- On the spot visit for promotion of the project e-MS code: ROBG-123, "Rapid intervention force to chemical, biological, radiological and nuclear emergencies on the Danube river" carried out on 28.09.2018 in Calafat;
- 2 thematic meetings for Lead beneficiaries of projects financed under the third call of the Programme - in Silistra, Bulgaria and in Drobeta Turnu Severin, Romania;
- promoting ARCHIVE project within the social media competition launched on Facebook by EC and participating with this selected project within the "Interreg Talks: 6 projects, 1 slam" workshop that took place during the EU Regions week 2018;
- Promotion of Interreg V-A România-Bulgaria Programme and informing the potential applicants was permanently made in on line media by constantly updating the website dedicated to the Programme (www.interregrobg.eu), the Facebook and Twitter pages of the Programme.
- In support of beneficiaries several tutorials have been created (e-MS User assignment; e-MS – How to create partner report; e-MS Procurements), published on the website and Facebook page of the Programme.

Annex 3 - Data collected by the on-line survey

Section III – Communication strategy

Table 1 Details on respondents

Beneficiaries	N.	%
Romania	22	45%
Bulgaria	27	55%
Total	**49**	**100%**

Source: analysis of the data collected through the survey

Table 2 Details on respondents, Calls

Call	Count	%
First Call		
Romania	3	50%
Bulgaria	3	50%
Total	**6**	100%
Second Call		
Romania	9	56%
Bulgaria	7	44%
Total	**16**	100%
Third Call		
Romania	10	37%
Bulgaria	17	63%
Total	**27**	100%

Source: analysis of the data collected through the survey

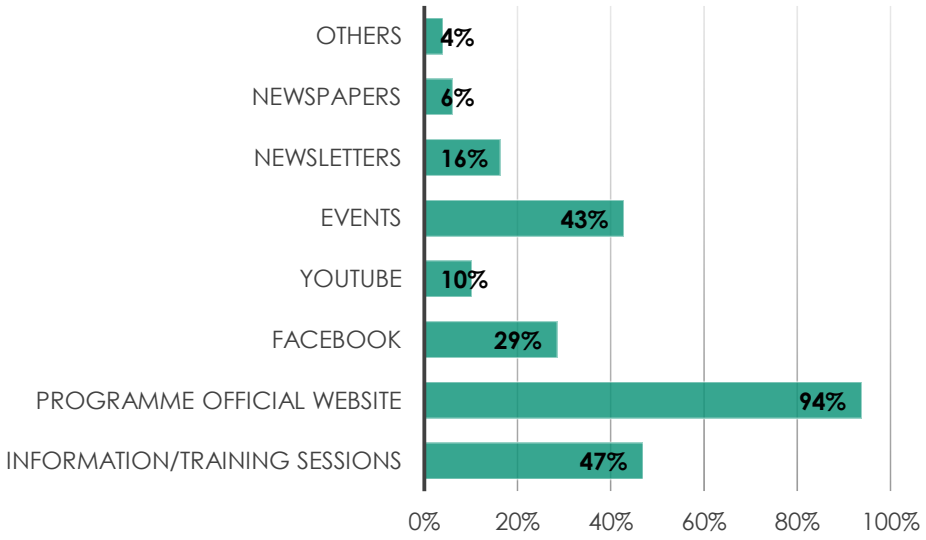
Table 3 *Details on respondents, Specific objectives*

Specific Objective (OS)	N.	%
Specific objective 1.1: Improve the planning, development and coordination of cross-border transport systems for better connections to TEN-T transport network	5	10%
Specific objective 1.2: Increase transport safety on waterways and maritime transport routes	0	0%
Specific objective 2.1: Improve the sustainable use of natural heritage and resources and cultural heritage	17	35%
Specific objective 2.2: To enhance the sustainable management of the		2%

ecosystems from the cross-border area		
Specific objective 3.1: To improve joint risk management in the cross-border area	9	18%
Specific objective 4.1: To encourage the integration of the cross-border area in terms of employment and labour mobility	9	18%
Specific objective 5.1: To increase cooperation capacity and the efficiency of public institutions in a CBC context.	8	18%

Source: analysis of the data collected through the survey

Figure 1. What were the main sources that you used in order to get informed about the financing opportunities provided by the Interreg V-A Romania-Bulgaria Programme?



Source: analysis of the data collected through the survey

Figure 2. What are the main channels of communication through which you would prefer to be informed about the financing opportunities offered by the Interreg V-A Romania-Bulgaria Programme?

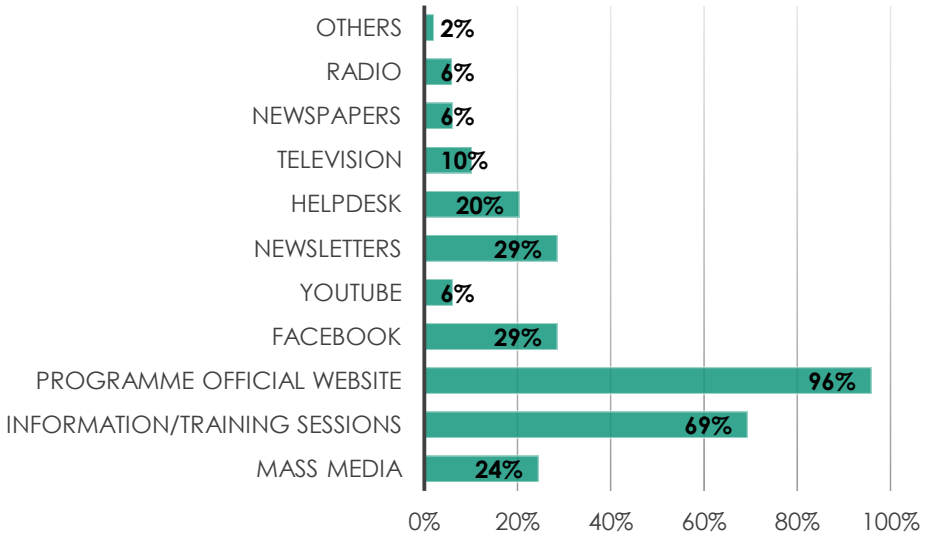
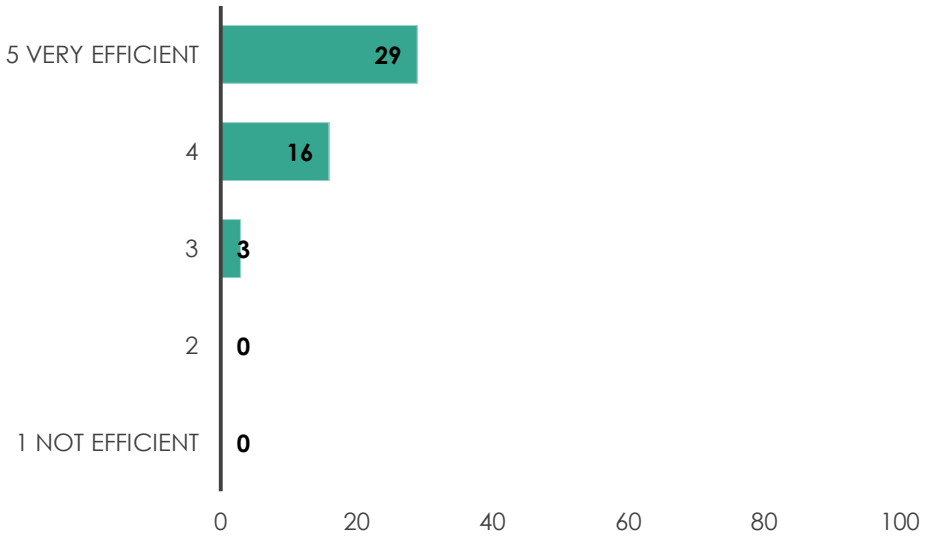
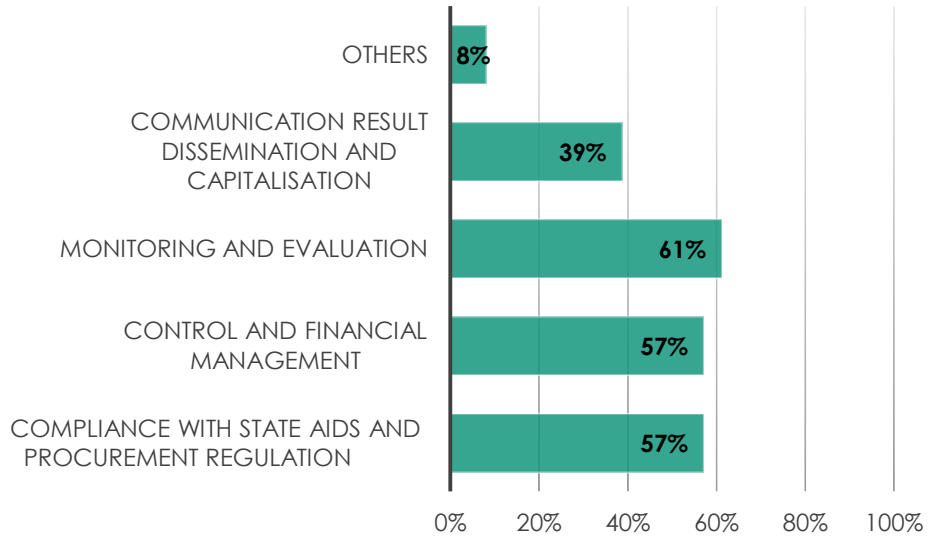


Figure 3. To what extent the communication activities implemented by the Programme are efficient?



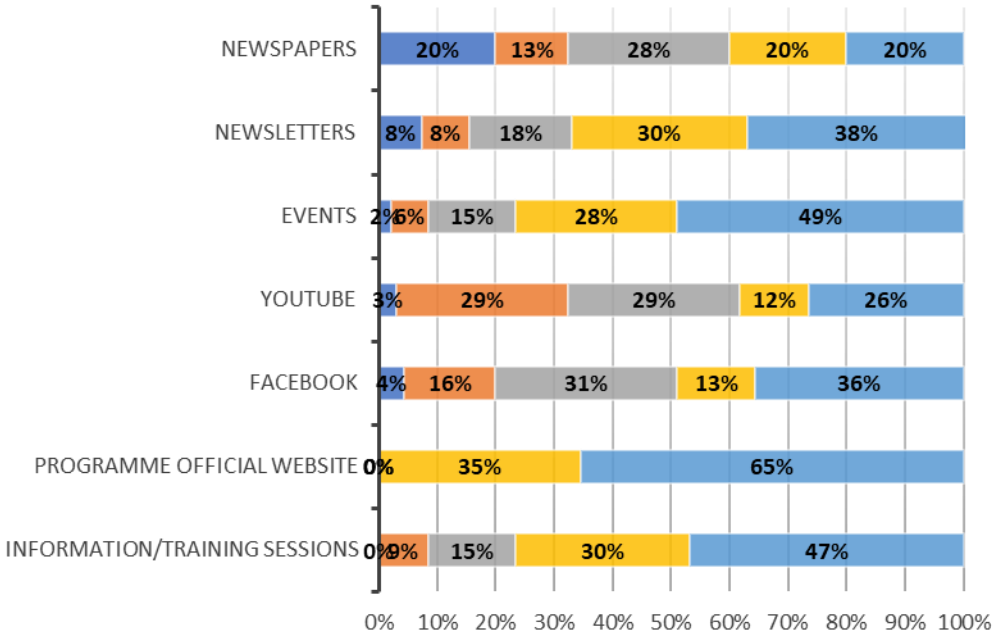
Source: analysis of the data collected through the survey

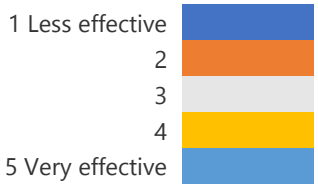
Figure 4. What types of information, in addition to those already available, would you like to receive about the Programme?



Source: analysis of the data collected through the survey

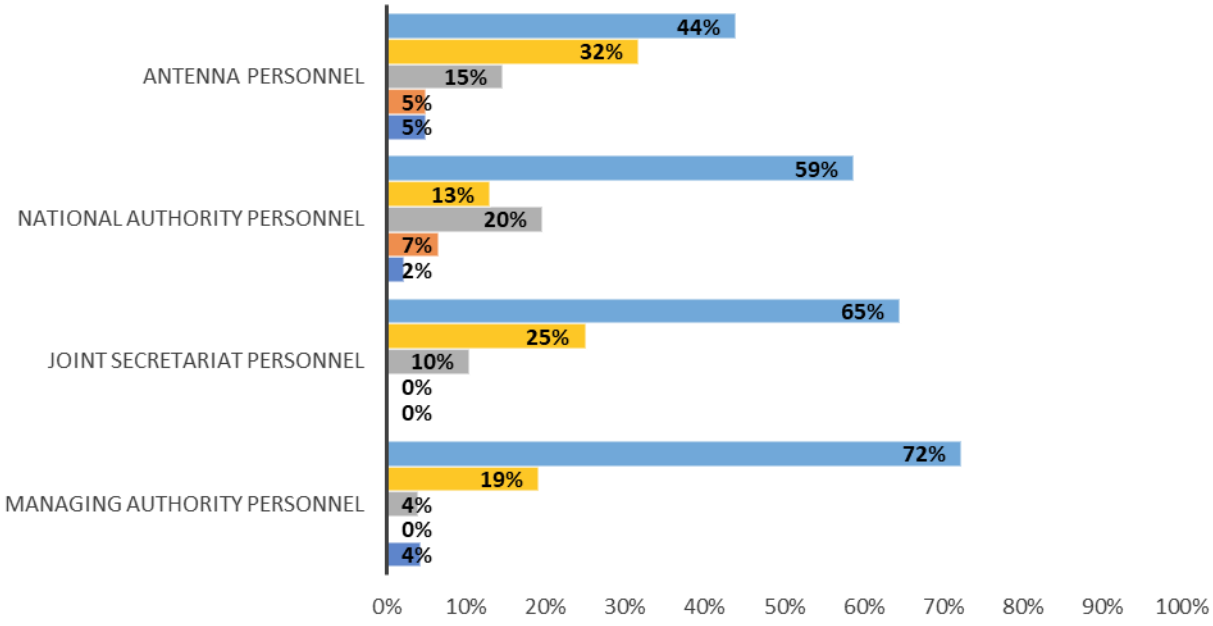
Figure 5. How would you rate the effectiveness of the following communication channels? (Please tick a score from 1 to 10, where 1 means very ineffective and 5 means very effective)

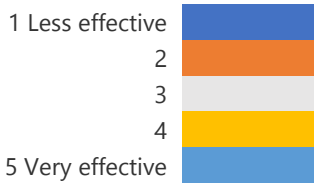




Source: analysis of the data collected through the survey

Figure 6. How satisfied you are about the responsivity of the Programme with: (please tick a score from 1 to 10, where 1 means very unsatisfied and 5 means very satisfied)





Source: analysis of the data collected through the survey

Annex 4 - Interviews with Programme structures and beneficiaries

Interviewees: Mrs. Ioana Mantog, Mrs. Marcela Glodeanu, Mrs. Valeria Paice, Mrs. Mihaela Piroi - Managing Authority for the Interreg V-A Romania-Bulgaria Programme 2014-2020
Date: 26.02.2020

Extracts from Communication's part

Main aspects highlighted during the interview:

- There are various public campaigns for the information and communication activities organized every year.
- The Programme also made a step forward on social media – promotion tools used are Facebook and Twitter. The MA received positive feedback from the EC on the social media posts.
- In order to present what the Programme obtained in terms of results and for exchanging experiences with other programmes, the MA representatives were invited as speakers to different events.
- There is an interest in attracting new beneficiaries, not only the same beneficiaries that apply all the time.
- In terms of promotion activities of the beneficiaries, a great progress has been registered. Now the beneficiaries promote their results (MA received videos made by beneficiaries about their projects). For the 2021-2027 period, MA will elaborate a guide with standard communication measure in order to establish the same level of visibility of all projects. The majority of beneficiaries do not know how to promote their projects.
- The communication with beneficiaries is also maintained through the website where MA and JS publish everything that is new in terms of legislation and all the documents useful for beneficiaries
- The JS should be also the body that helps the projects in communication activities, not having only a monitoring role.
- For the beneficiaries there is nothing imposed in terms of visibility, except for MIV provisions.
- Previous evaluations realized at the Programme level (evaluation of the communication activities performed in the last programming period) show that the beneficiaries were aware of the Programme.

Interviewees: Mr. Milen Obretov - Ministry for Territorial Development (National Authority for the Interreg V-A Romania-Bulgaria Programme 2014-2020)
Date: 27.02.2020

Extracts from Communication's part

Main aspects highlighted during the interview:

- The language barrier is also an issue. Bulgarian and Romanian are very different and local stakeholders are not fluent in English.
- The relation between beneficiaries and Joint Secretariat 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.

Interviewees: Mr. Bogdan Mușat - Joint Secretariat (JS)/CBC RO Calarasi for the Interreg V-A Romania-Bulgaria Programme 2014-2020)
Date: 06.03.2020

Extracts from Communication's part

Main aspects highlighted during the interview:

- The key elements are related to a good partnership: communication and respect between the partners. The communication between partners could be done in any way: by phone, e-mail, meetings, formal or informal. The important thing is to communicate and share. Partnerships with scarce communication or reciprocal respect/consideration, are often failing.
- Human resources is indeed an important factor: However, the beneficiaries have the personal responsibility to update themselves about the legislation that had been modified and the rules of the Programme. If they keep themselves informed it is a positive factor in terms of well implementation of the projects and good communications among beneficiaries and Programme structures.
- The level of communication between JS and beneficiaries is good; it follows formal and informal channels. Not all the beneficiaries communicate with the JS to the same intensity. Some of them are strong from the institutional and HR point of view and are very prepared.
- Communication between partners, the degree of assistance required and provided by JS to the beneficiaries and the self-knowledge and preparation of the beneficiaries about the legislation and the Programme, all contribute to a well implementation of the projects.
- The communication is really good. The beneficiaries have trust in Joint Secretariat and its personnel.

- Antenna is not a separated body compared to the JS. It is a part of the staff delegated in a premises in Bulgaria, without any autonomous organization.
- *Some projects were addressed primarily for the young people, fact that encouraged them to be really involved and aware of the Programme. Currently, most of them are informed and they know about the Programme*
- The potential beneficiaries received all the information they need. In each county and district info days were organized for each call period and afterwards there has been a specific orientation (in some districts there were more events that in other districts).

Interviewees: Mehedinți City Council – Dl. Aladin Gigi GEORGESCU Olt City Council – Dl. Marius OPRESCU Teleorman City Council – Dl. Ionel – Dănuț CRISTINESCU Giurgiu City Council – Dl. Marian MINA South East Regional Development Agency – Dna. Luiza ȚIGĂNUȘ
Date: 28th February – 10th March 2020

Extracts from Communication's part

Main aspects highlighted during the interview:

- Another risk/unresolved problem identified by the local stakeholders is the communication at national authority level from the two partner countries when taking the decisions to approve the list of projects in the MC. They consider that the communication could be improved.
- Such risks/unsolved problems should be addressed from the very beginning by the Programme so that potential beneficiaries are aware of what to expect.
- The Programme is considered to have now and in the future a positive impact. The Programme represented the chance to consolidate partnerships for joint problem solving. The communication with the authorities of the Programme in Romania was also close to the level required by beneficiaries.
- The local stakeholder emphasized that the Applicant's pack is well-written and helped them to a great extent to prepare well-written applications.
- The overall appreciation of the local stakeholders about the efficiency of the communication between beneficiaries and Joint Secretariat/Antenna is very good.
- The overall opinion is that the instrument and actions of communications used are suitable for the desired results and there is no need to implement new instruments or actions.
- The local stakeholders considered that the info days were the most efficient in spreading the information about the Programme.
- The overall appreciation is that the objectives of visibility of the Programme had been achieved to a great extent.
- Some measures were recommended by the local stakeholders in order to raise the impact of information and publicity activities carried out by the Programme bodies:

- Greater visibility in online to easily reach greater number of potential beneficiaries and people– costs to be also included in the TA budgets
- The information and publicity activities on paper (using flyers, brochures etc.) provide no added value

- The beneficiaries interviewed considered that a good measure to capitalize the project results is the implementation of a database with all the projects and results.

Interviewees: Mr. Chavdar Hristov – Association Centre for Development (Local Stakeholder) Mrs. Svetlana Doncheva, Mr. Stanislav Popdonchev – Bulgarian Industrial Association Mr. Daniel Popov – Centre for Environmental Information and Education (Local Stakeholder) Mrs. Albena Georgieva – Vidin District Administration Mr. Momchil Mladenov – Vratsa District Administration Mr. Evtim Stefanov – Association Regional Partnerships for Sustainable Development
Date: 26th February – 04th of March 2020

Extracts from Communication's part

Main aspects highlighted during the interview:

- Even though the stakeholders' consultations 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.
- The EU intervention was perceived as being relevant and necessary.
- As a key result of the implemented projects under the Romania-Bulgaria Programme 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.
- In principle, EU intervention through relevant programs is welcomed by stakeholders.
- 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 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.

Annex 5 - Focus Group Report

Minute from Focus Group (06/03/2020)

Interreg V-A Romania-Bulgaria Programme Implementation Evaluation

Purpose

The focus group is the last stage of the evaluation, the validation. The purpose of the focus group day was for the evaluator to express the key findings from its examination of the Programme, to receive feedback from the MA, NA, and other relevant public stakeholders, as well as to evaluate the communications tools used within the Programme.

Outline

The agenda of the Focus Group included:

- Introduction and presentation of the Focus Group objectives
- Group discussions on the preliminary related findings on implementation
- Group discussions on the communication strategy and the communication instruments used during the implementation of the Programme
- Conclusions on the implementation and communication strategy

Attendees

The attendees for this focus group day were:

No.	Name	Institution
1	Mrs. Marcela Goldeanu	Managing Authority
2	Mrs. Alina Anton	Managing Authority
3	Mr. Razvan Zamfir	Joint Secretariat
4	Mr. Nici Mardale	Consiliul Județean Giurgiu
5	Mrs. Roxana Aștefănoaiei	Institutul Național pentru Formare și Cercetare Culturală
6	Mr. Andrea Floria	ACZ Consulting
7	Mrs. Cristina Cojoacă	ACZ Consulting
8	Mrs. Anela Pleșcan	ACZ Consulting
9	Mrs. Andreea Dobrița	ACZ Consulting

The focus group was held by the expert evaluators from the provider consortium (ACZ Consulting and VVA). In this regard, the introductory part and presentation about the preliminary results on the implementation of the Programme were held by Mr. Andrea Floria, while the presentation regarding the Communication Strategy and the activities organized for the promotion and visibility of the Programme was held by Mrs. Cristina Cojoacă. The main objective proposed through this focus group was the completion and validation of the findings of the evaluation team, as a result of analyzing the data from the monitoring system and other statistical sources, the application of the questionnaires among the beneficiaries of the 2014-2020 Interreg V-A Romania-Bulgaria Programme, as well as the interviews with the Programme's authorities and beneficiaries. Also, the focus group has proposed the collection of qualitative data from the contribution of the participants present to the focus group.

Programme Implementation and Relevance, Implementation at Project level, Programme management

Mr. Floria discussed the main findings on implementation of the Programme, obtained by the evaluation team, on the basis of the following evaluation criteria: relevance, effectiveness (implementation at Programme level, project level, Programme management and horizontal principles), efficiency and communication.

Communication

The second part of the focus group consisted in presenting the results on the communication activities performed within the Interreg V-A Romania-Bulgaria Programme made by the team of experts, followed by discussing the opinions of the participants in the focus group on the presented findings. The Communication Strategy aims to establish the actions undertaken within the Programme in order to present the information to the most important target groups. The general objective is to increase the visibility of the Programme in the cross-border area. An introduction to specific objective and the target groups was also made by the moderator. The communication plans are clearly structured and coherent to set the objectives aimed by the Communication Strategy.

The discussion regarding the communication activities was structured on three aspects:

- The visibility of the Programme for the general public
- The level of information transmitted to potential beneficiaries
- The communication and informational process for the beneficiaries

Mrs. Cojoacă presented the Communication Strategy's progress towards its goals, the effectiveness of the Communication Strategy and which elements proved most effective, as well as the capacity to mobilize potential beneficiaries. She made the following assessments:

- Progresses towards goals: the plan shows a good progress rate, generally ahead of the intermediate target values for 2019, for most of the activities (appreciation has been

expressed by surveyed applicants for information days, Programme website and helpdesk functions

- Effectiveness of communication activities: The website of the Programme and the events organized, information/training sessions, proved to be the most effective in reaching the potential beneficiaries
- Capacity to rise interest: The capacity of the Programme to mobilize potential beneficiaries and beneficiaries is high as well as to inform the general public about the opportunity offered by the Programme.

The main conclusions from the discussions in the focus group related to the communication activities were:

- Regarding the visibility, the authorities involved in the implementation of the Programme organised a series of events (info days, thematic conferences, etc.), and they used online tools such as website, social media (Facebook, YouTube etc.). The participants agreed on the use of these tools for the visibility of the Programme among the general public. The participants agreed that the visibility of the Programme is high; the citizens are updated about the projects at the local level since the projects were implemented. The citizens know only in low percentage that the projects are financed under a cross-border Programme, but they are aware of the fact that the projects received funds from the European Union. Some participants considered that a database of good practices would help to better identify and disseminate the results of the projects and to increase their visibility. A budged dedicated for the visibility of the Programme is taken into consideration for the next programming period. The promotion on social media is much more preferred than the one made on the official website
- The participants considered that beneficiaries should take care of the visibility of their own projects at local level. The beneficiaries should have a budget dedicated for the publicity and communication of the projects.
- The level of information that is provided to the potential beneficiaries is considered sufficient.
- The participants considered that all the tools for communication should also be maintained for the next programming period. Even if the eMS could be improved, it was well appreciated by the beneficiaries and potential applicants of the Programme.
- Participants considered that the helpdesk was very useful for the application phase, while for the implementation phase the communication and the share of information was performed at the level of beneficiaries and the officers in charge.
- In order to update the beneficiaries about the news and modifications at the Programme level, the information was shared both on the website and by e-mail.

- The public procurement process is difficult and it affected both the Romanian and Bulgarian beneficiaries.
- The participants to the Focus Group considered that the most efficient communication is the direct communication, the one between the officers of the projects and the beneficiaries.
- All the participants agreed that the communication with the beneficiaries is good and efficient.

Annex 6 - List of documents and literature reviewed

- The Interreg V-A Romania – Bulgaria Programme
- The Applicant's pack, Call for proposals no.1, Call for proposals no.2, Call for proposals no. 3 for Interreg V-A Romania – Bulgaria Programme;
- The Annual Implementation Report for 2018;
- Communication Plans 2015-2018;
- Communication Strategy for Interreg V-A Romania – Bulgaria Programme;
- Visual Identity Manual of the Interreg V -A Romania – Bulgaria Programme.

Annex 7 - Detailed analysis of the evaluation activities and of the methodology

In order to evaluate the communication activities undertaken by the Programme authorities, the consortium used a set of main methodological tools to answer the related evaluation questions. The methodological approach consisted in the realization of the following activities, as presented in the table below:

Methodological Tool	Details regarding the methodological tools
Literature review	The team considered as sources previous studies on similar programmes as well as academia and scientific literature
Survey	Online survey applied among the beneficiaries of the Programme
Interviews	Interviews with the Institutions/bodies involved in programme management and online/phone interviews with beneficiaries
Focus Group	The focus group was organized with key stakeholders and actors regarding the communications activities of the programme.

The Consortium planned and organized the application of the on-the-field activities (interviews, survey and focus group). The application of the interviews, surveys, and focus group have been supported by the Managing Authority that had issued an address of support, facilitating the contacting of the beneficiaries. The Managing Authority, through the approval of the Inception Report for Implementation Evaluation, approved the interviews and survey structures, as well as the focus group agenda.

Semi-structured Interviews

In order to evaluate the communication activities of the Programme, semi-structured interviews were organized with the beneficiaries of the Programme, national and local authorities considered to have a particular relevance in the research. The interviewed actors were selected based on the role played in the Programme implementation and/or on their representativeness in the Programme area. The semi-structured interviews were generally carried out face-to-face or online, based on the availability of the respondents. The interviews were based on a grid of interview and an indicative structure of the interview grid that was sent to the interviewed persons before the organization of the interview. The interview grid was previously approved by the MA in the Implementation Evaluation Inception Report.

Between 26th of February – 13th of March, 15 interviews were conducted as follows: 3 with the programme authorities (Managing Authority, National Authority and Joint Secretariat), and 12 with the Romanian and Bulgarian beneficiaries of the programme (as presented in the tables below):

Type of actor	No. of interviews Romania	No. of interviews Bulgaria	Total interviews
Programme Bodies	2	1	3
Local Authorities	4	2	6
Local Stakeholder	1	5	5
Total	**7**	**8**	**15**

Institution	Country	Date
Managing Authority for the Interreg V-A Romania-Bulgaria Programme 2014-2020	Romania	26th of February
Ministry for Territorial Development (National Authority for the Interreg V-A Romania-Bulgaria Programme 2014-2020)	Bulgaria	27th of February
Joint Secretariat (JS)/CBC RO Calarasi for the Interreg V-A Romania-Bulgaria Programme 2014-2020)	Romania	5th of March
Vidin District Administration	Bulgaria	3rd of March
Eurointegra Association	Bulgaria	5th of March
Vratsa District Administration	Bulgaria	4th of March
Association Regional Partnerships for Sustainable Development	Bulgaria	26th of February
Bulgarian Industrial Association	Bulgaria	27th of February
Association Centre for Development	Bulgaria	26th of February
Centre for Environmental Information and Education	Bulgaria	28th of February
Mehedinți City Council	Romania	28th of February
Olt City Council	Romania	26th of February
Teleorman City Council	Romania	2nd of March
Giurgiu City Council	Romania	10th of March
South East Regional Development Agency	Romania	5th of March

The analysis and interpretation of the information collected through interviews were based on the interview reports written as results of the interviews. The findings obtained from the interviews were integrated in the elaboration of the Communication Evaluation Report.

Survey for Beneficiaries

As part of the consultative process, an online questionnaire, addressed to the Programme beneficiaries, was conducted all over the Programme area. The survey was launched online, through the Microsoft Forms platform, and it was disseminated by the Provider. A support address issued by the MA was attached to the invitation e-mail sent to potential respondents to the survey. Out of 150 invitations that were sent to the Romanian and Bulgarian beneficiaries, the final number of respondents that filled in the survey was 49, 22 Romanian respondents and 27 Bulgarian respondents. The survey for the beneficiaries was launched in February for a period of 14 days, as presented in the tables bellow:

No. of surveys Romania	No. of Surveys Bulgaria	Total surveys
22	27	**49**

Name of the institution/association/organization	Country
Agigea Town Hall	Romania
Alexandria Municipality	Romania
Alexis Project Filiasi	Romania
Arete-Sport	Bulgaria
Association Access for All (Branch Constanta)	Romania
Association “Center for Development Montanesium”	Bulgaria
Association AISSER Calarasi	Romania
Association Sport Club ACTIS	Romania
Associations for Development of North- West Bulgaria	Bulgaria
Belene Municipality	Bulgaria
Boynitsa Municipality	Bulgaria
Business Support Centre for Small and Medium Enterprises	Bulgaria
Byala Municipality	Bulgaria
Calafat City Hall	Romania
Calarasi County Emergency Situations Inspectorate	Romania
Civil Association for Development	Bulgaria
National College Barbu Știrbei	Romania
Danube Alternative Association	Bulgaria
Directorate General Fire Safety and Civil Protection	Bulgaria
Face for Art and Culture Foundation	Bulgaria
Foundation Sustainable development and prosperity	Bulgaria
Free Youth Centre	Bulgaria
Future Today Association	Bulgaria
General Inspectorate for Emergency Situations	Romania
GIEDD	Romania
Giurgiu County Council	Romania
Global Libraries - Bulgaria Foundation	Bulgaria
Harsova Town	Romania
Mare Nostrum NGO	Romania
Mehedinti County	Romania
Mehedinti County Gendarmes Inspectorate	Romania
Municipality of Dobrichka	Bulgaria
NGO Agengy for Economic Development and Investments – Silistra	Bulgaria
NGO 'Paralel-Silistra'	Bulgaria
Olt County Council	Romania
Open hand foundation	Bulgaria
Ovidiu Municipality	Romania
Regional administration Ruse (Ruse District Administration)	Bulgaria
Regional Development Agency and Business Centre 2000 Montana	Bulgaria

Regional Historical Museum – Silistra	Bulgaria
Regional Inspectorate of Environment and Water - Veliko Tarnovo	Bulgaria
Romanian Naval Authority	Romania
RPSD-Vidin	Bulgaria
Ruse Municipality	Bulgaria
S.N.C.R.R. (ROMANIAN RED CROSS) - DOLJ BRANCH	Romania
The University of Agronomic Sciences and Veterinary Medicine Bucharest	Romania
Videle Municipality	Romania
Vidin chamber of commerce and industry	Bulgaria
Youth Organisation for European Silistra	Bulgaria

The information obtained from data processing and analysis of the answers to the survey have been synthesized and integrated in the context of the Communication Evaluation Report.

Focus Group

The team of experts organized one focus group with key stakeholders and actors targeted by the Programme. The focus group's main purpose was to evaluate the communication tools used within the Programme and to gain information about the participants' views and experiences on this topic.

The organization of the focus group was discussed with the Contracting Authority and planned accordingly. The focus group was organized on 6th of March. Out of 15 invitation sent, 4 participants were present to the focus group, along with 4 members of the evaluation team, as presented in the table below:

Participant	Institution
Mrs. Marcela Goldeanu	Managing Authority
Mrs. Alina Anton	Managing Authority
Mr. Razvan Zamfir	Joint Secretariat
Mr. Nici Mardale	Giurgiu City Council
Mrs. Roxana Aștefănoaiei	National Institute for Cultural Research
Mr. Andrea Floria	ACZ Consulting
Mrs. Cristina Cojoacă	ACZ Consulting
Mrs. Anela Pleșcan	ACZ Consulting
Mrs. Andreea Dobrița	ACZ Consulting

The agenda of the Focus Group included, as presented below, the following:

- Introduction and presentation of the Focus Group objectives
- Group discussions on the preliminary related findings on implementation
- Group discussions on the communication strategy and the communication instruments used during the implementation of the Programme
- Conclusions on the implementation and communication strategy

Time	Sessions	Participants involved
9:00 – 9:30 AM	**Welcoming the participants**	
9:30 – 9:40 AM	1. Presentation of the objective of the focus group and of the participants (10 minutes): • Introduction - participants will be presented general information about the rules of the discussion; • General information about the object of the contract - general information about the general objective and the specific objectives of the contract and more specific information about the focus group objective; • Presentation of participants - Each participant is invited to present in approximately one minute.	Team of experts
9:40 – 10:10 AM	2. Session of discussion about the preliminary results on EQs about implementation/effectiveness, at programme level and project level. (30 minutes)	
10:10 – 10:30 AM	3. Session of discussions regarding the communication activities carried out by the programme authorities (20 minutes).	The participants to the focus group, through the facilitation realized by the team of experts
10:30 – 11:00 AM	4. Discussion session on the evaluation of information and publicity tools and activities - questions will be addressed to participants regarding information and publicity tools and activities. Finally, the moderator will note the most relevant opinions to use as information that will underpin the subsequent analysis of the focus groups (30 minutes).	
11:00 – 11:15 AM	**Coffee Break**	
11:15 – 11:45 AM	5. Collection of suggestions and recommendations (30 minutes) Discussion session on favourite information channels - participants will be invited by the moderator to express their opinions on favourite information channels;	Team of experts
11:45 – 12:15 PM	End of the session - The moderator summarizes the general topics and then requests a final feedback and recommendations (30 minutes).	
12:15 – 13:30 PM	**Lunch**	

Annex 8 – Action Plan for the Recommendations

Recommendation CO.01	Organizing events for the beneficiaries	
Action	Responsible	Timeframe
Planning the organization of events and meetings with Programme beneficiaries	Managing Authority / Joint Secretariat	2020-2023
Organization of events in all the eligible area, dedicated to cross-disseminate projects' results in the cross-border area and stimulate the development of an informal network among beneficiaries.	Managing Authority / Joint Secretariat	2020-2023
Create a network among Programme beneficiaries so that they can start communicating between them on specific aspects	Managing Authority / Joint Secretariat	2020-2023

Recommendation CO.01	Issuing more online publications for the large public	
Action	Responsible	Timeframe
Selecting attractive messages/topics for the online campaigns (success stories, lessons learnt, personal stories, etc.)	Managing Authority / Joint Secretariat	Continuously in 2020
Identifying the most appropriate online tools for each category of target group (general public)	Managing Authority / Joint Secretariat	Continuously in 2020
Issue online publications and massive promotion of projects results through online tools	Managing Authority / Joint Secretariat	Continuously in 2020

Recommendation CO.01	To increase the number of press releases, interviews, advertisements in all kind of mass-media and to concentrate their scope towards the promotion and dissemination of Programme results as well as on the best practices and success stories	
Action	Responsible	Timeframe
Selecting attractive messages/topics for the media campaigns (success stories, lessons learnt, personal stories, etc.)	Managing Authority / Joint Secretariat	Continuously in 2020
Identifying the representative of local/regional media to be invited at the Programme's events	Joint Secretariat	Continuously in 2020
Organization of events for all kind of mass-media	Managing Authority / Joint Secretariat	Second half of 2020

Elaboration of press-releases and massive promotion of projects results among the press representative	Managing Authority / Joint Secretariat	Continuously in 2020

Recommendation CO.02	Dissemination of information through social media as the beneficiaries expressed interest in receiving information through this channel.	
Action	Responsible	Timeframe
Selecting attractive messages/topics for the social media campaigns (success stories, lessons learnt, personal stories, etc.)	Managing Authority / Joint Secretariat /Beneficiaries	Continuously in 2020
Identifying the most appropriate social media channels for each category of target group	Managing Authority / Joint Secretariat /Beneficiaries	Continuously in 2020
Permanent posting of "catchy" messages about the projects on different social media channels	Managing Authority / Joint Secretariat /Beneficiaries	Continuously in 2020

Recommendation CO.02	Increasing the visibility online to easily reach a greater number of potential beneficiaries, beneficiaries and general public.	
Action	Responsible	Timeframe
Selecting attractive messages/topics for the online campaigns (success stories, lessons learnt, personal stories, etc.)	Managing Authority / Joint Secretariat	Continuously in 2020
Identifying the most appropriate online tools for each category of target group (general public)	Managing Authority / Joint Secretariat	Continuously in 2020
Issue online publications and massive promotion of projects results through online tools	Managing Authority / Joint Secretariat	Continuously in 2020

Recommendation CO.02	Improvement and extension of the unique database with all the projects and results (a well-structured web-repository of the projects materials and findings per domains)	
Action	Responsible	Timeframe
Collecting information about the projects results and deliverables that were elaborated	Managing Authority / Joint Secretariat	Second half of 2020
Centralization of the information/results/ deliverables in a unique database, structured on different domains (Priority Axis)	Managing Authority / Joint Secretariat	Second half of 2020
Creating the possibility to identify in the database very specific results/key words, so that the beneficiaries of the same type can easily get in touch	Managing Authority / Joint Secretariat	Second half of 2020

Publishing the database online (Programme website) and offering the option to start forums/discussions between actors interested in the same topics	Managing Authority / Joint Secretariat	Second half of 2020

Recommendation CO.02	The organization of the events (fairs, seminars, etc.) in which to present the successful results obtained from the implementation of the projects	
Action	Responsible	Timeframe
Selecting attractive messages/topics for the media campaigns (success stories, lessons learnt, personal stories, etc.)	Managing Authority / Joint Secretariat	Second half of 2020
Identifying the key stakeholders to be invited at the Programme's events. Representatives of the press and local/regional decision makers should be invited to events, in order to raise awareness about the impact created at community/cross-border level, etc.	Managing Authority / Joint Secretariat	Second half of 2020
Organization of events (fairs, seminars, etc.) in which to present the successful results obtained from the implementation of the projects: this firstly at national level, but then also at European level	Managing Authority / Joint Secretariat	Second half of 2020

Recommendation CO.03.1	Elaboration of a handbook with examples for the communication measures in order to establish the same level of visibility to all the projects, by giving freedom of creativity to beneficiaries in defining the most suitable actions for their project types.	
Action	Responsible	Timeframe
Elaboration of the content for the handbook, covering all types of communication tools, messages, channels that the beneficiaries can use	Managing Authority / Joint Secretariat	Second half of 2020
Identifying real examples of communication measures that should be included in the handbook	Joint Secretariat	Second half of 2020
Realizing an attractive and user friendly design for the handbook	Managing Authority / Joint Secretariat	Second half of 2020
Promotion and dissemination of the handbook among beneficiaries and potential beneficiaries	Managing Authority / Joint Secretariat	Starting from 2021

Recommendation CO.03.2	The beneficiaries should focus on targeted promotion of their success stories at the local level, for a clearer association with the European funding obtained through the Interreg V-A Romania-Bulgaria Programme.	
Action	Responsible	Timeframe
Selecting attractive messages/topics for promoting the projects results (success stories, lessons learnt, personal stories, etc.)	Beneficiaries	Continuously in 2020
Identifying the most appropriate tools for each category of target group (general public)	Beneficiaries	Continuously in 2020
Transmitting clear messages to the general public about the financing source of the projects	Beneficiaries	Continuously in 2020

Recommendation EQ CO.03	The Programme structures should continue their efforts in informing/training the beneficiaries on important aspects to consider for the projects promotion activities	
Action	Responsible	Timeframe
Organizing information/training sessions for beneficiaries on important aspects to consider for the projects promotion activities	Managing Authority / Joint Secretariat	Second half of 2020
Organizing practical workshops on the most attractive messages/topics for promoting the projects results (success stories, lessons learnt, personal stories, etc).	Managing Authority / Joint Secretariat	Continuously

Recommendation CO.03.3	Building an online interactive platform for debates and updated information on implementation of the projects and their results would be useful for the beneficiaries in order to have a greater interaction with other beneficiaries in similar situations.	
Action	Responsible	Timeframe
Using a platform for debates and communication among the beneficiaries/potential applicants interested in the same topics, possibly on social media (a Facebook/LinkedIn group for debates), as it is more cost effective.	Managing Authority / Joint Secretariat	Second half of 2020
Testing the platform	Managing Authority / Joint Secretariat	Second half of 2020

Promoting the platform	Managing Authority / Joint Secretariat	Second half of 2020

Recommendation CO.03.4	Focusing communication efforts at the project level, rather than at the Programme level, by communicating the results, the real cases, the examples of changes, through a storytelling approach.	
Action	Responsible	Timeframe
Selecting attractive messages/topics for promoting the projects results (success stories, lessons learnt, personal stories, etc.)	Beneficiaries	Continuously in 2020
Identifying the most appropriate tools for each category of target group (general public)	Beneficiaries	Continuously in 2020
Transmitting clear messages to the general public about the financing source of the projects	Beneficiaries	Continuously in 2020

Recommendation EQ CO.05	The adaptation of information, communication activities and promotional materials according to the target group concerned is beneficial in terms of promoting the Programme.	
Action	Responsible	Timeframe
Switching the communication of results to project level, with specific budget for beneficiaries.	Managing Authority	2021
Create a handbook with examples of communication initiatives that the beneficiaries could activate in their projects, by also giving freedom to the beneficiaries to use their innovation and creativity in realizing their own activities	Managing Authority / Joint Secretariat	Second half of 2020
Organizing technical meetings with the attendance of all partners involved within the implementation of a project	Managing Authority / Joint Secretariat	2020/2021
Offer information and materials prepared and distributed in a targeted way for the different categories of the target group, tailored to the needs and level of understanding of these categories	Managing Authority / Joint Secretariat	2020/2021
Create an interactive platform to facilitate the intensification of the communication between the beneficiaries and to encourage the exchange of experiences and good practices between them	Managing Authority / Joint Secretariat	Second half of 2020

Adaptation of language used to inform the various categories of the target group and adapting the language to the origin area of the target groups (rural, urban).	Managing Authority / Joint Secretariat	2020/2021
Simplifying the way of presenting the information and the terminology used in communication and information activities (a general presentation of the interest topics in a less technical language and indication of the sources where more detailed information can be consulted by those interested).	Managing Authority / Joint Secretariat	2020/2021
Issuing more online publications for the large public, aiming to capitalize both on the Programme's results, as well as on the impact created by specific projects in the cross-border area, or on the dissemination of "personal stories" of the beneficiaries;	Managing Authority / Joint Secretariat/ Beneficiaries	2020/2021
Increase the number of press releases, interviews, advertisements in all kind of mass-media and to concentrate their scope towards the promotion and dissemination of Programme results as well as on the best practices and success stories	Managing Authority / Joint Secretariat	2020/2021

Recommendation CO.06	Increase the impact of the communication activities for the next programming period	
Action	Responsible	Timeframe
The Programme documents/reports, where possible, present the results of the implemented communication activities with a higher level of detail	Managing Authority / Joint Secretariat	Continuous
Updating the Programme's website and Facebook account, with information of interest for the beneficiaries and the transmission of newsflashes to the JS contact database, in the key moments of the Programme implementation	Managing Authority / Joint Secretariat	Continuous
Presentation of examples of good practices also through the online campaigns/newsletters, capturing the impact of projects on the financed domains (e.g. the health sector, infrastructure, etc.).	Managing Authority / Joint Secretariat	Continuous
Storytelling actions, stories of the beneficiaries distributed in the online environment as well as on the Youtube online platform.	Managing Authority / Joint Secretariat	Continuous

Expanding online communication (digitization of information regarding the Programme and promotion of the project results).	Managing Authority / Joint Secretariat	Continuous
Continued use of electronic means of promotion and communication (website, email, social networking, etc.) because they offer accessibility and reach a wide range of audience	Managing Authority / Joint Secretariat	Continuous
Promoting existing functional and interactive tools on the Programmes' website and the facilities provided by them for different target groups.	Managing Authority / Joint Secretariat	Continuous

Annex 9 – Answers to ESC comments

Evaluation Question	Section	Comment	Answer
General	-	Evaluation Unit MEF: To include a chapter with general conclusions and recommendations	Suggestion taken into account

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.