

Bulgaria – Serbia IPA Cross-border Programme 2014 – 2020

Draft Programme

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NUTS level III regions (or equivalent regions in the non-MS) covered by the cross-border cooperation programme	<p>Republic of Bulgaria - 6 NUTS III level districts: Vidin, Montana, Vratsa, Sofia-oblast, Pernik, Kyustendil</p> <p>Republic of Serbia – 7 NUTS III districts: Borski, Zaječarski, Pirotski, Nišavski, Toplički, Jablanički, Pčinjski</p>

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I. STRATEGY FOR THE COOPERATION PROGRAMME'S CONTRIBUTION TO THE SELECTED THEMATIC PRIORITIES AND THE RELEVANT PARTNERSHIP AGREEMENT AND COUNTRY STRATEGIC PAPER(S)

1.1 Strategy for the cooperation programme's contribution to the selected thematic priorities and the relevant Partnership Agreement and Country Strategic Paper(s)

1.1.1 Description of the cooperation programme's strategy for contributing to the selected thematic priorities and the relevant Partnership Agreement and Country Strategic Paper(s)

STRATEGIC POLICY CONTEXT

The IPA CBC Programme Bulgaria-Serbia (2014-2020) is designed in the framework of the European strategy for a smart inclusive and sustainable growth. Below are summarized the main policy frameworks at European, National and regional level.

- ◆ **The Europe 2020 strategy**

Europe 2020 strategy puts forward three mutually reinforcing priorities:

- **Smart growth:** developing an economy based on knowledge and innovation.
- **Sustainable growth:** promoting a more resource efficient, greener and more competitive economy and
- **Inclusive growth:** fostering a high-employment economy delivering social and territorial cohesion.

It also sets focus on five overarching headline targets that have to be reached by 2020. These targets require a mixture of national and EU action, utilising the full range of policies and instruments available. The same principle applies for the seven underpinning flagship initiatives.

In the context of the IPA CBC synergies with the aforementioned national and EU actions are to be sought. Additionally, the European Territorial Agenda 2020 identifies some key challenges and potentials for territorial development. These include increased exposure to globalisation, demographic changes, social and economic exclusion, climate change, and loss of biodiversity, all relevant to the Programme area.

- ◆ **Role of the Cross Border Cooperation in the ETC strategy**

The European Territorial Agenda describes the European Territorial Cooperation (ETC) and CBC Programmes, as *".... a key factor in global competition... facilitating better utilisation of*

development potentials and the protection of natural environment". A typology of results of cooperation programmes, which reveals some crucial aspects of the ETC approach, is the following¹:

- **Integration related results**, i.e. the establishment and implementation of joint territorial governance mechanisms for common assets;
- **Investment related results**, i.e. delivering socio-economic benefits similar to mainstream programmes either by direct investments or by preparing such investments; and
- **Performance related results**, i.e. inducing improvements on organisational and individual performance.

While these three categories provide a starting point, the Commission working document "Elements for a Common Strategic Framework 2014 to 2020" suggests in Annex II a number of other characteristics of cross-border cooperation:

- Support the joint management and promotion of the shared major geographic features;
- Achieving a critical mass for success, especially in the field of innovation and ICT;
- Achieving economies of scale for more efficient investments in services and infrastructure;
- Providing support for the coherent planning of transport infrastructure (including TEN-T) and the development of environmentally friendly and interoperable transport modes in larger geographical areas.

The present Programme is fully compliant with about CBC characteristics, while also adding the integration into macro area framework (e.g. the Danube Macro Region), that generates substantial challenges and opportunities of coordination and synergies.

♦ **The Danube Region Strategy (EUSDR)**

The Programme contributes to and interacts with, the Macro Regional strategy that the EU has devised for the countries and regions that share common needs and objectives in the Danube Region.

The newly elaborated EU Strategy for the Danube Region (DRS) provides an overall framework for parts of Central and South East Europe area aiming at fostering integration and integrative development. The Danube Region covers 12 countries (Austria, the Slovak Republic, the Czech Republic, Hungary, Slovenia, Romania and Bulgaria as Member States of the EU as well as Croatia, Serbia, Bosnia and Herzegovina, Montenegro and the Republic of Moldova) plus the 'Danubian' regions of Germany and the Ukraine.

Thus, the Danube Region encompasses the entire IPA CBC Programme Bulgaria-Serbia eligible area.

The open-ended EU Strategy for the Danube Region was adopted in December 2010. The strategy includes four pillars

¹ INTERACT, working documents.

- (1) Connecting the Danube Region,
- (2) Protecting the environment in the Danube Region,
- (3) Building prosperity in the Danube Region and
- (4) Strengthening the Danube Region.

It is accompanied by a “rolling” Action Plan breaking down 11 Priority Areas into actions and project examples. The proposed list of the strategic actions were taken into account in elaborating the IPA CBC Programme strategy.

- ♦ **EU strategic Frameworks: Bulgaria Partnership Agreement**

The last draft of the Bulgarian Partnership Agreement submitted to the EC in April 2014, highlights the central role of the CBC programmes participated by Bulgaria, for the contribution to the EU development strategy,.

The Partnership Agreement emphasizes the importance of promoting the EUSDR, as macroeconomic strategies offer a new, more substantial and consistent cooperation platform that can be financed not only from dedicated funds. CBC programs should also emphasize the importance of promoting employment, improving tourism and promoting cultural heritage while enhancing the connection between the communities of the border areas. Improvement of the environmental system is also to be promoted.

- ♦ **The National Plan for the Adoption of the *acquis communautaire* (2103-2016) of the Republic of Serbia.**

According to the National plan, the Republic of Serbia is highly motivated to develop relations with immediate neighbours and countries in the region of South-East Europe, thus affirming one of the priorities of its foreign policy – improvement of regional cooperation. In the strategy of Serbia, regional cooperation, especially through regional fora and initiatives, although not replacing the process of integration to the EU, represents a central contribution to strengthening of bilateral relations with the neighbours and the states from the South- East Europe region.

Republic of Serbia is actively contributing specially to the Danube Macro Region Strategy, thus assigning a special role to the IPA CBC Programme Bulgaria-Serbia, for the contribution to the wider strategy, and the creation of an integrated framework for the achievement of the EUSDR objectives.

PROGRAMME AREA AND REGIONAL STRUCTURE

The eligible border area of Bulgaria-Serbia IPA Cross-border Programme (2014-2020) covers **a territory of 43 933 sq. km**, or around 22% of the both countries' territories (Bulgaria and Serbia). It borders with Romania to the North and with the former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia to the South. The border length between the two countries is 341 km.

The Programme area **settlement structure** is characterized by sparse population, small size of settlements and limited number of bigger cities. The total number of settlements is 2754, distributed in 105 municipalities. The major urban areas are concentrated in the districts' administrative centres.

The Programme area includes 13 administrative units: **6 districts in Bulgaria**, which correspond to NUTS level III (EUROSTAT), and the equivalent NUTS III **7 districts in**

Serbia. The core area remains in larger part the same as in the period 2007 – 2013, with the addition of 2 districts: on the Bulgarian side – the Vratsa district, and on the Serbian side – the Toplička district.

The possibility of inclusion of additional NUTS 3 regions to the eligible area of the Bulgaria-Serbia IPA Cross-border programme 2014-2020 was subject of discussion during the 1st Joint Working Group (JWG) meeting, held on 7th November 2013 in Sofia (BG). The JWG made a decision to provide an opportunity the interested regions (outside the so far eligible territory) to apply by justified proposals submitted to the Managing Authority – the Ministry of Regional Development of Republic of Bulgaria. The decision of including the two new regions in the eligible Programme territory was taken by the JWG on 14th December 2013 according to the Article 6 of the JWG Rules of Procedures, adopted on 25th November 2013 (written-decision making procedure).

One of the newly included districts in the Programme area - **Vratsa district (BG)** - is located in the North-West part of Bulgaria, which is the most disadvantaged region of Bulgaria and EU. In terms of the current eligible Programme area, District Vratsa was considered into a zoning restriction. The neighbouring districts Vidin and Montana fall within the Programme's territorial scope, but Vratsa was so far excluded. This restriction is considered an obstacle to the implementation of policies at the territorial level, to the flexible approaches for solving the common problems and to create special preferences. As an evidence of the close location of Vratsa district to two of the border checkpoints of the eligible programme area distances from and to can be compared as follows: Vratsa-Kalotina 120 km (Vidin-Kalotina 197 km); Vratsa-Strezimirovtsi 164 km (Vidin-Strezimirovtsi 241 km). An argument in favour of Vratsa district inclusion in the Programme is the presence of a pan-European transport corridors № 4 (Northern and Central Europe - Vidin-Sofia-Athens) and № 7 the Danube river. Regional analysis clearly demonstrates the same problems and threats to the three districts that have to be tackled together. In addition to its favourable geographic location, Vratsa district is rich of natural and culture heritage sites. Local institutions and organisations already have developed partnerships and networks with their counterparts from Serbia. District Vratsa has built expertise and administrative capacities at a district and municipal administrations level in the pre-accession period and mainly in the current period from 2007 - 2013 during the process of application and implementation of projects under the ETC OP Romania - Bulgaria 2007-2013 and can successfully apply in the next period within the IPA CBC Programme Bulgaria – Serbia (2014-2020). Vratsa district is also an eligible territory within the EU Strategy for the Danube Region as well is part of the Bulgarian region, which the Government of Bulgaria determined as a pilot initiative under the mechanism for application of Integrated Territorial Investments (ITI). In this context, the IPA CBC Programme Serbia – Bulgaria (2014-2020) is an opportunity to support projects and initiatives in the direction of convergence and overcome the regional disparities. Thus the financial resources of the Programme will be used effectively and efficiently.

The second new district, proposed for inclusion in the Programme - **Toplička district (RS)** - is located in the south of Serbia, 140 km away from the state border with Republic of Bulgaria, which is, at the same time, the closest EU member state in its proximity. The region is equivalent to NUTS III level of statistical classification and on the east it borders two districts which are already part of eligible Programme territory, namely Nisavski and Jablanicki districts. The demographic and socio-economic trends in Toplička district are seen to be identical to those of the cross-border area as a whole. It has economic, cultural and

historical, infrastructural and natural connections with the districts bordering on the east. On the other side, the administrative, cultural, economic and educational centre of the Toplička district's municipalities is the City of Nis. In view of the last fact only, the extension of the Programme territory towards inclusion of Toplička district is seen more than natural, while also giving impetus to further balanced development of the eligible programme territory but also improving the strategic partnerships in various sectors.

SITUATION ANALYSIS OF THE BORDER REGION

The Programme area is characterized by wide geographical and environmental diversity. The location **in the centre of the Balkan Peninsula** is its strongest asset, since the European transport corridors 7 (Danube river), and 10 cross the territory of both Serbian and Bulgarian part, and corridors 4 and 8 cross Bulgarian part of the eligible territory. A big area of the border region could be categorized as **economically underdeveloped rural area**. It is characterized by clean and preserved natural environment and large biodiversity. Numerous plains and valleys form a strong natural potential for the development of agriculture, forestry and tourism. A variety of unique natural landmarks, natural parks and protected sites, are also located in the area.

Population development is often seen as an indicator for the long-term economic development and attractiveness of a region for people and business. However, in both countries, Bulgaria and Serbia, these developments have been characterized by strong population decline over the last decades, and this especially valid for their border regions. The total population of the Programme's area (as of 2012) is 2 144 054 inhabitants (14.7% of the total population of both countries) with average population density is 49 inhabitants per sq. km. It should also be recognized that depopulation trends of these peripheral areas is significantly higher than the core areas around the capital cities. In general, the demographic situation and development of the border area is characterized by a continuous tendency of decreasing birth rates and **aging population**, which coupled with significant outer migration, leads to a general trend of **depopulation**.

A common characteristic of the regions from both sides of the border is their **low economic development**, mainly represented by the trade and service sector, being clearly underdeveloped as compared to other partnering countries' territories. As a result, the cross-border economic cooperation is very limited, despite the existing regional development strategies in the border regions.

The main **socio-economic trends** can be summarized as follows:

- ♦ The GDP per capita is very low (EURO 3422, as of 2012), as compared to EU27 (EURO 25500);
- ♦ The economic structure of the border region could be described as outdated and with related risks for competitiveness, employment and innovations;
- ♦ Low level of employment of the population, low wages and low mobility of labour force; increased risk of poverty;
- ♦ Large migration from smaller towns (villages) to bigger cities because there is no opportunity for prosperity in the small settlements;
- ♦ The region is attractive as tourist destination, developed in various forms (eco,

cultural, winter, spa) – a strong potential for the region which now is lagging behind compared to other areas both in Bulgaria and Serbia, but also in other neighbouring countries;

- ◆ The existing transport infrastructure is not adequate to the contemporary technical requirements and needs substantial rehabilitation and reconstruction;
- ◆ Investments in R&D in the region are very low;
- ◆ The innovative capacity of local firms operating in the cross-border area is still underdeveloped.

The **industry** on both sides of the border is mainly represented by mining, being a leading sector in the past and still keeping its most important part in the regional industrial production. Other important industries are energy generation, metallurgy and machine engineering, chemicals, textiles, etc. In Bulgaria and partly in Serbia industrial production had a substantial drop during the time of the transition to market economy with restructuring and the privatization of major enterprises, and it has not yet recovered. **Agriculture** holds a substantial share in GDP for all border districts (average for the Programme's area 16.2%). Due to the fertile land and favourable climate conditions a great variety of agricultural crops are grown in the region – cereals and fodder, fruit and vegetables, vines, sunflower, sugar beet, etc. Stockbreeding covers all types of animals, involving also a wide use of mountain pastures. The region's geographical location and rich natural resources form an excellent base for the development of the **service sector** as well, specifically international trade, transport and related services, tourism, thus becoming an important engine for boosting the socio-economic development of the border region. However, the underdeveloped transport links in the bordering region has predetermined the relative isolation of the area. The proximity to the Pan-European corridors and the major infrastructure projects to be completed in the coming years (the most important for the region being the highway Sofia-Niš) should become the driving force for the development of various trade and transport-related services – wholesale markets and showrooms, logistic parks, warehouse facilities, hotels and catering, repair services, etc.

Still, **investments in R&D** in the region are very low. Their predominant concentration is in the countries' capitals (Sofia and Belgrade). The **innovative capacity** of local firms operating in the cross-border area is still underdeveloped. Bulgarian firms spent 0.3% of GDP on R&D, compared to 1.23% for all EU firms; they ranked 71st out of 139 countries in productivity; and were 95th in business sophistication and innovation. Serbia is ranked at the meagre 144th place (as per World Economic Forum's Global Competitiveness Index 2012/13). The reasons for this substantial gap between the EU average and Bulgaria-Serbia region (both national and cross-border) innovative capacities is the lower efficiency of the R&D systems due to limited institutional capacity, lack of commercialization expertise, low level of public-private collaboration in R&D and lack of incentives to do so. Government support in the form of R&D spending for the border area is inadequate, while the private R&D spending—or the lack of it - has a particularly strong effect on innovation. Studies have shown that the propensity of firms to innovate is positively and significantly correlated with their R&D spending and related investments in technological infrastructure; and that their output increases with their innovation efforts, whether or not the firm is new to the market.

The restructuring of the industry following the transition to market-led economy and the agricultural reform have significantly affected the region thus resulting in **increased**

unemployment rates, higher levels of long-term unemployment with severe skill depreciation of lay-offs from the closed down large industrial enterprises, as well as inadequate utilization of the available natural resources and industrial infrastructure. Therefore, **the economic structure of the border region could be described as outdated and with related risks for competitiveness, employment and innovations**. This is particularly expressed on the level of municipalities – the economic structure of most (smaller) municipalities is mono-sector.

Overall, the border area is characterized by low **level of employment** of the population, low wages and low mobility of labour force. The average employment rate in the Bulgarian border region as of 2012 is about 42%. Compared to 2009, the percentage remains stable. The activity rate is 47.7%, which is close to the 58.8% average for the country. On the Serbian side of the border region, the employment rate for 2012 is 29.9%. The most important sector in employment creation is agriculture, forestry and fishing, followed by manufacturing and wholesale and retail trade, repairs.

However, the current situation of the labour market does not enhance the porosity of the border with respect to the migration between both parts of the border region. There are still **restrictions with respect to the labour regulation** between the two countries that make the economic permeability of the border very limited.

Officially, the **unemployment rate** in Serbia was 23.9% in 2012, while the border region with Bulgaria has the highest unemployment rate in the whole country with 42.5%. Unemployment affected mostly the people in the age group between 18-24 and 25-34. In Bulgaria, unemployment rate is 12.03%, which almost equals the average 12.3% for the country. 35% of the unemployed have been registered at the labour offices for more than one year. The unemployed not older than 29 years of age are 21.6%, and there are 33% unemployed at the age 50+.

The problem of **long-term unemployment** is particularly difficult to tackle given the fact that the bulk of long-term unemployed are people without professional qualification and with a low level of education thus in a particularly vulnerable position on the labour market. The highest share of unemployed is among the Roma population, with 80% or more officially unemployed. There is also an overall lack of employment opportunities, especially in rural areas and an increase in the grey economy. The similar, but very high unemployment on both sides does not enhance the permeability across the border and the young people from both sides are more willing to choose other survival strategies instead of looking for a job in the neighbouring country.

Long-term unemployment, coupled with low economic activity rates in the region, lead to an **increased risk of poverty**. Some 24.6% of Serbian citizens are exposed to the risk of becoming poor - those aged up to 18 being most at risk. Households comprising two adults with three or more dependent children had the highest at-risk-of-poverty rate in 2012 (44.4%), as well as single parents with one or more dependent children (36.2%). At the same time, Bulgaria has recorded the highest shares of persons being at risk of poverty or social exclusion in EU - almost 49.3% of the population (the EU average for 2012 was 24.8%). The figures at national level for both Bulgaria and Serbia are proportionally equal to those in the border region.

The process of **educational development** in the eligible border region is bound within the established network of institutions at all educational levels. As of 2012, the existing

educational basis of the border area includes 17 universities/faculties, 9 colleges, 172 vocational gymnasiums, training schools and special schools, and 1288 general (elementary) schools. The education, as a primary focus of every young person, is relatively good in the cross-border area. Though primary education infrastructure in Serbia is available in almost all cities, towns and villages the availability of secondary and tertiary learning institutions highlights disparities across the border. **The availability of teaching staff is also a problem** in rural and remote areas.

The initial research showed that there is a **large migration from smaller towns (villages) to bigger cities because there is no opportunity for prosperity in smaller settlements**. There is no accurate data on number of youth that migrate, but it is suspected that there is a very small number of youth that returns after completed higher education (high school, university). However, the situation is not getting any better also in the cities, as there is a big competition and job offers are limited due to economic crisis; therefore, youth that migrated from villages to cities is “forced” to go back and start some private economic activity.

In general, **youth entrepreneurship** should be a cross-cutting issue in educational systems, and should not be a part of just students that took interest in economics. However, the Serbian educational system is outdated and does not recognise the entrepreneurship as a theme that needs to be included in the regular curriculum. On contrary, the Bulgarian educational systems, especially the vocational schools, could provide good know-how and practical experience on how to promote entrepreneurs amongst youths.

The IPA CBC Programme Bulgaria-Serbia (2007-2013) already proved to be a good starting point for the collaboration among youth of both countries. It initiated **a large number of cross-border youth project and there is a still a good interest**.

The preservation and careful management of the **natural environment** is one of the key factors for the sustainable development of the border area and the improvement of its attractiveness as a tourist destination. It has wide-reaching social and economic implications in terms of added value to the quality of life in the region.

The diverse relief (hills and mountains, but also wide plains), the rich forests (over 30% share of the total regional territory), the thermal springs, the outlet to the Danube river and the continental-temperate climate, favour the development of agriculture, forestry and woodworking, as well as various forms of tourism throughout the year.

A distinctive feature of the Bulgarian-Serbian border region is its **wide biological diversity**. It is rich in **natural parks**, protected areas and natural reserves. Part of the largest national park of Bulgaria - The Rila National Park and the Vitosha National Park are located here. A smaller nature park “Belogradchishki Skali” is designated in 2004 as a result of local initiative. The area of Chuprene in Bulgaria is a natural reserve which is included in the UNESCO and UNO list of protected areas. Other protected sites are the Seven Lakes of Rila, and the Stob Pyramids. Special bird protection areas can be found on the Bulgarian side as well. Many natural areas have been proposed for inclusion in the NATURA 2000 areas.

The Djerdap National Park, located in the Serbian part of the region near the towns of Golubac, Kladovo and Majdanpek and the Nature Park Stara Planina are currently undergoing a procedure for designation as a **biosphere reserves**. Nature Park Sićevačka gorge and the landscape of outstanding qualities Vlasina are also located here. Area envisaged for protection in Serbia includes following sites (approximately 140.000 ha): Kučaj

as National Park, Suva Planina as special nature reserve, Jerma as nature park and Radan as landscape of outstanding qualities. The Lazar Canyon is one of the most important centres of plant and trees diversity on the Balkans. The Mali and Veliki Krš mountains are interesting, being the habitat of 11 species of birds of prey that are endangered species in Europe.

Numerous geomorphologic phenomenon (caves, natural bridges, gorges and canyons), hydrologic (springs), dendrology monuments and smaller nature reserves are protected by formal instruments as well. Surrounding landscape of the archaeological site Gamzigrad is also formally protected as "Area of cultural and historical importance". The surroundings of the town of Bor represent one of the most interesting geographical locations in Serbia. The area has more than 200 explored caves, with two of them accessible for tourists. These natural beauties combined with the rich historical and cultural heritage of the region are unique regional assets which should be built on, invested in and further developed to improve the **region's attractiveness as a tourist destination** and a place for living with good quality of life.

Expenditures on **protection and restoration of the environment** made during the past few years are significant. The municipalities in the eligible region are relatively active in applying for and obtaining financing for construction and reconstruction of the sewerage and water supply network, but still the region is lagging behind the national average indicators on environment – i.e. population with access to WWTP, waste collection, population connected to sewerage networks, etc. There are few WWT facilities currently in construction which are expected to significantly improve the environmental situation at the Bulgarian CBC region.

In terms of **environmental risks**, the situation in the eligible Programme's area could be summarised as follows:

- ♦ **Air pollution** (low risks): The decline of industrial enterprises which seriously damaged the environment, is determining the relatively low risks towards air pollution. However, a few regional black spots with heavy industrial pollution, mainly related to coal mining and heavy industries still exist. The industrial complexes in Negotin and Bor (Serbia), Sofia and Pernik (Bulgaria) still **impose serious air-pollution problems**.
- ♦ **Water pollution** (moderate risks): Apart from their commitment to comply with EU water and environmental legislation, Bulgaria and Serbia are effectively involved in trans-boundary cooperation within the frame of international conventions, particularly within the Danube river basin. As signatories to the Danube River Protection Convention, both countries have agreed to co-operate on fundamental water management issues by taking *"all appropriate legal, administrative and technical measures to at least maintain and where possible improve the current water quality and environmental conditions of the Danube river and of the waters in its catchments area, and to prevent and reduce as far as possible adverse impacts and changes occurring or likely to be caused."*
- ♦ **Droughts, floods, forest fires, land slides** (high risks): Due to the ongoing climate change, future increase of natural risks like droughts, floods, forest fires, landslides has to be assumed for the Programme area. The Central and Southern part of the area face greater risks from droughts, fires and landslides in the mountainous regions, while the Northern part of the area face greater risks from floods in the

plains. Forests in the region preserve the majority of the area's protected plants and endangered animal species. In that respect the forest fires also represent a specific risk for the environment in the region. During the 2012, the territory of the state forests that are governed by the Public Company "Serbia Forests" has recorded a total of 328 forest fires on the surface of 11,462.73 hectares. According to the Department for Emergency Situations Ministry of Interior, the total damage was around 50 million EUR. The largest part of the fire engulfed areas was reported in the south-eastern part of Serbia (part of the cross-border area) - around 60%. Similarly, in Bulgaria a fire engulfed about 32000 ha of forests (only for 2012).

In view of the above, there is a persistent need for establishing joint initiatives towards **prevention and mitigation the consequences of natural and man-made cross-border disasters**.

Favourable natural and environmental characteristics, abundance of cultural landmarks and natural resources of the border area provide opportunities for diversification of the currently available tourist products and services for **sustainable development of tourism**. Tourism centres in the region include Belogradchik (cultural and eco-tourism), Chiprovzi (cultural tourism), Vurshez and Berkoviza (spa), Trun (eco-tourism and cultural tourism), Zemen (cultural), Kyustendil (spa), Sapareva Banja (spa), Panichiste (mountain resort with skiing) and Rila monastery in Bulgaria; Gamzigrad (cultural tourism), Niš and Negotin (cultural tourism), Pirot (cultural tourism), Zvonačka banja (spa, district of Pirot), Vranjska banja (district of Pčinja), and Niška banja (spa, district of Nišava), Stara Planina (mountain tourism) in Serbia. These are complemented by cultural attractions, including various archaeological sites, monasteries, museums and galleries.

Other biggest strengths of the border region are its **rich and unique culture**, which could easily be utilized as a driving engine for regional development, regeneration and prosperity. Culture is among the most important factors in the cross-border cooperation framework, since it provides a clear view of common features and provides a common identity for the region. Professional institutes of culture are very well developed both in Bulgaria and in Serbia. Traditional cultural organizations such as libraries, museums, galleries, community and cultural centers, etc., have a long-lasting presence and are well recognized by local communities. Despite their very significant potential, the cultural heritage monuments are in disrepair and require enormous investments for restoration and preservation. Funds have been invested in culture preservation since 2007 but still the need of investment in development of tourist attractions and cultural monuments exists.

Although it is strategically located in view of current and future international transport traffic flows, the border area is presently not in a position to fully benefit from this asset. The existing **transport infrastructure** is not adequate to the contemporary technical requirements and needs substantial rehabilitation and reconstruction. It is distributed unevenly throughout the region's territory and is not sufficiently developed to meet the intensifying traffic needs. Furthermore, the connections between the two parts of the regions are incomplete and limited (no motorway connection, only one railway line); there are **5 border crossing checkpoints**, but only one of them (at Kalotina – Gradina) is suited for international traffic.

All these factors not only hamper the accessibility of the region thus increasing its relative isolation, but also impede the development of cross-border relations between the two sides

of the border. A new positive trend for improving regional accessibility is the agreement for opening of three new border crossing checkpoints between the two countries: Salash – Novo Korito, Bankya – Petachinci, and Treklyano – Bosilegrad.

The main **roads** relate to the Pan European corridors crossing the region: No. 4 – Greek border-Sofia-Vidin/Lom (with a ferry to Kalafat in Romania), No. 8 – Gjueshevo (former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonian border) – Sofia – Plovdiv – Burgas (with a highway between Sofia and Plovdiv – outside the border region) and No. 10 with a section that crosses the Bulgarian – Serbian border region. Since 2007 there have been some positive tendencies in transport infrastructure development, but transport in the region still suffers from a lag in the development of combined transportation and modern logistic technologies as well as from a low level of information technologies of the transport systems.

The **railway network** of the region is very much identical to the road one in terms of its general layout – almost each main road link has as a parallel railway line. Along corridor No. 4 this is the railroad Vidin-Sofia – Thessaloniki (Plovdiv-Istanbul), along corridor No. 8 – Gjueshevo – Sofia – Burgas, and along corridor No 10. – Belgrade – Niš – Sofia. The only railway connection between the two countries (Sofia-Niš-Belgrade) is single-tracked; at present almost fully electrified but has several black points where the speed has to be seriously slowed down (parts of the Niš – Preševo and the Niš – Dimitrovgrad lines are designed for speeds of only 80 – 100 km/ h).

With the purpose of meeting the intensifying traffic needs, both countries have operated a joint railway crosschecking control at Dimitrovgrad since December 2006. Most of the railway lines inside the border area are quite old and need a complete overhaul. The situation is similar for the track equipments, the signals and the control system. The reconstruction of the rail infrastructure in the Bulgarian part of the cross-border region is already in progress.

There are two main **airports** in the border region where the quantity of trade of commodities is substantial (besides personal traffic) - international airport in Sofia-city (the capital of Bulgaria) and the international airport in Niš (Serbia). Though the city of Sofia is out of the eligible are, this still is the only airport on the Bulgarian side of the border region. There is one more airport located at Vidin (Bulgaria) but it has not been in operation since the beginning of the 1990s. The airport in Niš is a small but developing international airport (the second biggest in Serbia). It was designed for both cargo and passenger transport. In order to boost the development of the airport, the local-self-government subsidised the plane tickets and that attracted several low cost companies.

The **waterborne transport** provides opportunities for the development of environmental friendly and low cost transport services which makes it a viable alternative to road transport. Having an outlet to one of the most important European waterways – the Pan European Corridor No. 7 – the Danube River, the region thus gains a significant advantage. Two of the Bulgarian ports with international importance are located in the border area – the ports of Lom and Vidin. Another important port in the region is the Serbian port – Kladovo. Their main problem is the outdated facilities, lack of investments to improve and develop the ports infrastructure.

The **public transport** is mainly concentrated in the municipal centres. The transport connections are limited and do not correspond to the population needs. Most of the routes of the intercity transport are indirect in order to cover more settlements. The most developed public transportation in the border region is that of the City of Niš.

POTENTIALS AND BARRIERS THE BORDER AREA IS FACING

The identified **potentials** and **barriers** are mainly dealing with issues such as competitiveness, alternative forms of economic activities (i.e. tourism), coherence of the education with the needs of the regional labour market and investments in youth entrepreneurship, as well as improving the region's preparedness with reference to natural and man-made hazards and disasters prevention. The following sections describe the identified potentials and barriers, and explain them in more detail:

- ♦ **Existing Potential [EP1]: Define a common, international market for cross border products and services**

Within the eligible programme area, growth in business-related services can be identified, which is accompanied by a tradition for cross-border cooperation. Additionally, the area is located in a specific geopolitical position, which gained positive influence of proximity to TENs and European markets. These strengths, identified within the area, are positively influenced by the issue of the enhancement of competitiveness regulations which trigger especially the development of SMEs. This is additionally positively influenced of the policy support of co-operative economic activities as well as the development of clusters and networks.

Through the enhancement of competitiveness it is assumed, that bordering districts can also benefit from overall EU and global developments. Especially co-operative economic activities may promote networking between local and regional SMEs at horizontal (for instance clusters) and vertical level (for instance supply chains).

- ♦ **Existing Potential [EP2]: Sustainable tourism and utilization of cultural natural heritage**

Tourism was identified as a main opportunity to balance regional disparities and job creation. The EP2 combines internal strengths such as the richness and diversity of landscape as well as the natural and cultural heritage with opportunities such as the promotion of niche tourism development (e.g. eco-, ethno- gourmet- tourism) thus valorising the favourable conditions for diversified tourism in the border area.

The construction of the TEN-networks improves the accessibility of former marginalised areas catching-up. Furthermore, the improvement of accessibility and the already existing specific benefits of the geographically attractive locations of the region would increase the attractiveness of the area.

Additionally, a well protected environment – equipped with specific environmental infrastructure – and the containment of increasing land use – mainly due to enhanced reuse of deprived areas and brown fields – preserve the richness and diversity of the landscape, which is one main location as well as economic factor of the touristic use of the region. It's assumed, that an environment, which is protected as well as fostered and used in a sustainable way, is generally more attractive for touristic use.

- ♦ **Possible Potential [PP1]: Co-operative initiatives and cluster development reducing access and employment deficits in peripheral regions**

This possible potential represents a combination of certain opportunities and weaknesses the border area demonstrates. Such a combination may create a possible and achievable potential for the future development of the cross-border area at hand.

The eligible programme area is marked by bad accessibility to service and employment in districts which are dominated by small villages and sparse population. In addition, the activity rate is low and the number of (youth) unemployment is increasing; so is the risk of poverty. This reinforces strong economic disparities which do exist between the BG and RS districts as well as inequalities in GDP. Additionally, the access to finance is out of line with current needs, especially for start-ups and small loans (micro credit), which are of high importance, especially for small and medium enterprises.

These internal weaknesses can be combined with the opportunity of the policy provision of co-operative economic activities such as the development of clusters and networks as well as the opportunity/issue of tourism as a tool to balance regional disparities and job creation. Furthermore the increase in green employment and eco-innovations may be opportunities, which may reveal possible potentials of development.

Moreover improved connections – on various levels – can be positively linked with the current situation of unemployment rate and poverty, increasing accessibility, coming along with new employment opportunities. Besides, the maturity of the European knowledge society and the exchange of knowledge and cultural values may influence positively the increasing number of youth unemployment on the one side and the risk of poverty on the other side. Knowledge transfer in marginalised regions may encourage new developments (employment, education, innovation-transfer, etc.).

Through improved accessibility, the adaption of alternative employment forms, green employment, eco-innovation and additional foreign investment within the border area, positive stimuli may increase employment and help improving the access to services; this avoids the risk of poverty and an increase in social diversity and polarisation. Especially for rural areas and small villages with the disadvantage of bad access to service and employment, cross-border co-operation can initiate positive regional development; these issues – also in combination with tourism – can display possible development potentials, overcoming unemployment and low activity rates by reason of increasing regional attractiveness and raising opportunities.

Marginalised regions – both in terms of accessibility and employment opportunities – may benefit from alternative employment forms and a more flexible labour market in addition to the improvement of cross-border connections and co-operations. The development of clusters and networks, represents an important opportunity (through the policy support of co-operative economic activities), which may be one important point, representing the unique position of marginalised, peripheral areas and one possible process of change.

♦ **Possible Potential [PP2]: Involvement of youth in development and progress**

Main weaknesses identified within the eligible programme area are the out-migration of young and educated people, high level of early-school leavers due to poor perspectives of the youth, high level of youth unemployment and low level of participation of youth in decision making, entrepreneurship etc.

Additionally, brain drain of young and creative people as well as increasing market competition, the pressure on economic productivity and disadvantages of peripheral areas (shrinking regions, depopulation etc.) represent major threats for the further development of the area. Underlying phenomena of demographic change such as the ageing society, shrinking population, brain drain occurrences and strong economic disparities – already existing in some peripheral regions – are being intensified and positive development gets

aggravated.

Therefore, it is imperative to engage youth to actively participate in all relevant levels of decision-making processes because it affects their lives today and has implications for their futures. In addition to their intellectual contribution and their ability to mobilize support, they bring unique perspectives that need to be taken into account. Numerous actions and recommendations within the international community have been proposed to ensure that youth are provided a secure and healthy future, including an environment of quality, improved standards of living and access to education and employment. These issues are of extreme urgency for the border area between Bulgaria and Serbia in view of declining demographic trends (aging of population and migration flows).

- ♦ **Possible potential [PP3]: Development of unified cross-border tourism brand**

The cross-border area between Bulgaria and Serbia is characterised by a broad heritage of dense and diverse histories, cultures and ethnicities. In line with international conventions in the field of culture (with special reference to the UNESCO Conventions), culture can promote values of inclusiveness, openness, and acceptance of the others based on mutual respect. It can reinforce socio-economic development by strengthening of regional cooperation and intercultural dialogue while ensuring sustainability and joint action.

The areas of developing tourism, tourism infrastructure and improving tourism services, cultural heritage and intercultural dialogue are typically inter-related topics. They benefit particularly from the integrated approach such is the building of a unified cross-border tourism brand.

The results of the territorial (situation) analysis indicate that tourism is a growing sector in the border region but the tourism growth is not associated anyhow with the CBC region as a popular tourism destination. On the one hand, the area have own problems and challenges in developing tourism that certainly affect negatively on the development of overall tourism in the region. On the other hand, there is a potential that is currently not utilised and sometimes underestimated including niche tourism prospects and realities. Such potential is significantly correlated with the urgent needs to overcome challenges that the border region is facing.

The nature of tourism sector itself is fragmented as it is made of many service providers such as different companies, authorities, travel agencies, regional tourism boards, numerous local tourism organizations and many other stakeholders having a wide range of weaknesses and strengths that can have a major impact on the image of a destination. Therefore, further development in cross-border tourism depends on consolidation of efforts of all stakeholders as well as public organizations to provide them support. It is important to create a strategic cooperation among destinations for regional promotion provided that all parties are highly interested and committed to the goals of cooperation. In order to support the competitiveness and sustainability of tourism (destinations, accommodations, tour operators, services like cruises, excursions, etc.) it is necessary to be defined criteria for high quality tourism, i.e. building a local cross-border touristic "brand".

- ♦ **Existing Barrier [EB1]: Increasing lagging behind of peripheral, badly accessible regions**

The EB1 points out the combination of several weaknesses and threats. It illustrates certain already existing barriers of development. Main weaknesses identified within the eligible border area are the partly low level of R&D as well as the insufficient technology transfer and

lack in the access to R&D-results especially for SMEs. Furthermore, the insufficient access to services and employment especially in peripheral areas and in regions dominated by small villages being accompanied by high numbers of (youth) unemployment.

Supplementary, the accessibility is low – especially outside of agglomerations – and strong economic disparities in GDP can be identified (core-periphery pattern). These weaknesses can be linked with a number of threats, such as the lack of competitiveness, increasing embeddedness into global capital flows, which may threaten local market potentials, as well as the lack of investments in local infrastructure. These threats do not support the already existing deficits concerning R&D, accessibility, transportation and employment, but represent a major barrier for further development.

- ♦ **Existing Barrier [EB2]: Managing environmental risks**

The EB2 combines mainly three weaknesses: low level of disaster management systems and emergency preparedness; underdeveloped solid waste treatment infrastructure and waste-water facilities; and insufficient management systems of hazardous waste. Threats identified which may be combined with these weaknesses in a negative way are the insufficient financial sources from state budgets for financing environmental infrastructure and the related inefficient prevention and management of climate related risks in the border region.

- ♦ **Existing Barrier [EB3]: Raising social polarisation due to demographic change and lack of investment in peripheral areas**

The EB3 combines five internal weaknesses with three external threats, and combines therefore a variety of internal and external factors. Especially, the issue of an ageing population defines negative linkages to internal weaknesses, such as the increasing (youth) unemployment and poverty. The increasing social diversity as well as demographic change increase problems of financing social and technical infrastructure especially in shrinking regions. Furthermore the still existing disadvantages for ethnic minorities such as social problems including lower levels of education and high rates of unemployment, making catching-up processes difficult.

Demographic change and the phenomenon of an ageing society as well as the disadvantage of peripheral areas (agglomeration advantages of cities tend to represent disadvantages for rural/peripheral regions) harden the already existing contrasts between urban and rural areas. Increasing disparities and the risk of poverty are tightened by shrinking regions. The intensified marginalisation tendencies do not attract investments or innovation within the public administration system or important transportation links (to increase accessibility of these marginalised regions).

The increasing number of (youth) unemployment leads to rising brain drain occurrences within peripheral districts; well-educated employees without job opportunities prefer urban agglomerations and their advantages – which on the other hand illustrate disadvantages for rural or peripheral areas. This tendency supports demographic change in a negative way – the ageing of the society in general and the migration of young well-educated employees outlines simultaneously the loss of regional know-how and experience.

- ♦ **Possible Barrier [PB1]: Brain drain occurrences due to disadvantages of shrinking areas**

The PB1 is based on the strength of skilful workforce, with industrial and agricultural tradition

and good adult education system. These regional strengths of the eligible programme area can be negatively influenced by suburbanisation processes and the ageing society – issues such as the increasing number of depopulated areas and the increasing contrasts between urban and rural areas were identified as relevant linkages of a possible regional barrier.

Furthermore, the increasing level of education, lifelong learning as well as female education participation and the consequence of a qualified workforce can cushion the negative effects of an ageing population. These identified connections may illustrate a constant danger of demographic processes. Regions, in which a high level of experience – mainly in industrial and agricultural sectors – exists, may be endangered by demographic processes such as shrinking population and brain drain occurrences. The regionally and locally existing knowledge of employees will be at risk. If a region, which is partly based on the experience and know-how of its employees, is scarred by an ageing society and declining opportunities, the trend of shrinking population figures and emigration may be an important and challenging issue.

♦ **Possible Barrier [PB2]: Loss of border region attractiveness by reason of environmental quality decline, demographical change and lack of investment**

The PB2 combines some region's strengths with possible threats. The tradition of cross-border cooperation on institutional, political and administrative level and within projects can be negatively influenced by a lack of investments in regional infrastructures which increases the core-periphery disparities as well as the phenomenon of ageing, brain drain occurrences and disadvantages of rural areas due to agglomeration advantages of cities.

The issue of the richness and diversity of landscape and natural and cultural heritage as important location factors are endangered by on-going desertification and increasing aridity as well as by negative effects of climate change and unsustainable use of environmental resources. Furthermore these strengths can – linked with aridity as well as with natural disasters – represent a possible barrier.

Regions which are oriented towards their touristic potentials and the richness and diversity of landscape and nature (as is the BG-RS border area) are endangered by natural disasters, climate change and its effects such as increasing aridity. This affects the entire natural and cultural heritage, which represents an important location factor for tourism usage.

PROGRAMME STRATEGY

As described in the previous chapter, the border between Bulgaria and Serbia is still to be considered a noticeably segmented space from the economic point of view, where the substantial development axes does not cross or connect, while it seems to have quite a potential in social and cultural similarities. In these specific circumstances, the border really functions as a real barrier and do not allow any expansion of such development axes.

The highly **fragmented economy** together with **depopulation trend** represent the main challenges to be faced by the border area when, at the perspective of Serbian accession in the EU, a major cross border dynamism is utmost required.

Cross-border cooperation will have to mitigate this phenomenon by facilitating economic, social and institutional integration and by creating a desirable economic and social environment in the border area. This will contribute to a general socio-economic stabilization of the whole region and mostly contrast its abandonment and depopulation.

An improved cross-border collaboration between the two countries, working together to face new problems and challenges, in the many different fields, such as: economy, environment protection, public services and social security can reduce the actual distances between Serbians and Bulgarians. At this specific extent, cross-border cooperation have to turn borders from being a barrier to defend different and opponent interests into a dynamic contact point to develop common measures to achieve same aims.

To create a positive socio-economic environment, necessary to the development of the area, two main challenges have to be faced. These two are to be considered as pillars of the whole setting up of this joint programming document, since they result from the deepened analysis of the whole border area and stand before the precise definition of the strategy and actions through which the cross-border cooperation is going to be implemented.

The first challenge is referred to a key issue: to **invest in the effective valorisation and the efficient management of the territory**. This is related to:

- Promoting the development of niche tourism activities (e.g. eco-, ethno- gourmet-tourism) thus valorising the favourable conditions for diversified tourism in the border area;
- Improving access to sites of touristic interest thus stimulating the utilisation of natural and cultural heritage;
- Exploiting the cultural heritage as a potential generator of new products and employment possibilities;
- Improving the image of the border area as touristic designation through creating common cross-border touristic brand;
- Promoting traditional productions, leading to cross-border area specialization (branding, trade marks, certification) thus utilising proximity to markets;
- Increasing potential of the “silver economy” - opportunities related to developing services for the elderly as a target market;
- Balancing the conserving and developing aspects of natural resources in creating sustainable tourist attractions used to improve the quality of visiting environment and also to contribute to the quality of living environment.

The second challenge is to **increase cross border networks, interactions and connections both at the social and economic spheres**. This is related to:

- Developing entrepreneurial attitude in the society already from the early school years via adding entrepreneurial or business approaches to curricula;
- Initiating partnerships between school and economic units in order to achieve a better integration on the labour market of the graduates from vocational and technical schools;
- Promoting cooperation between universities / research institutes and entrepreneurs in order to identify activities with high value added which provide best chances to foster local competitiveness.
- Identifying common interests (on the basis of clusters of different economic sectors) and further develop and market those clusters to achieve new markets;

- Engaging citizens and local communities in local decision-making and service delivery thus developing a sense of ownership;
- Improving exchange of know-how, best practice and information between the relevant administrations from both sides of the border;
- Promoting projects for decreasing environmental vulnerability to natural hazards (reforestation, land improving etc), including establishing some joint risk management structures (drawing / updating maps for regions / areas with high fire risk / risk management plans);
- Increasing the accessibility of combined emergency (rescue) services in rural areas;
- Raising awareness for commune environmental resources at the level of cross border area).

The above represent decisive factors to make the area more attractive for investments, to stimulate internal demand and to enhance general development in the border area.

Hence, the overall aim of the IPA CBC Programme Bulgaria-Serbia (2014-2020) is: **to foster territorial cohesion by increasing cross-border relations mainly through the implementation of actual interventions on the territory and its economy and through the support of inter-linkages among the local actors and the local communities.**

Such overall objective is the basis of a strategic framework that builds on three IPA CBC thematic priorities identified during programming process as most relevant for the eligible cross-border area:

- **Thematic priority 4:** Encouraging tourism and cultural and natural heritage
- **Thematic priority 5:** Investing in youth, education and skills
- **Thematic priority 2:** Protecting the environment and promoting climate change adaptation and mitigation, risk prevention and management

The selected thematic priorities have been structured into **three priority axes**, which reflect the needs and challenges as identified in the situation analysis of the programme area:

PA 1: Sustainable Tourism

Specific Objectives related to Priority 1:

- **Tourist Attractiveness:** Increasing tourist attractiveness of the border area through better utilisation of natural and cultural heritage
- **Cross-Border Touristic Product:** Valorising the favourable conditions for diversified tourism in the border area through creating common cross-border touristic brand(s)
- **People-To-People Networking:** Capitalise the effect of cultural and natural heritage tourism on border communities

This priority axis contributes to all three pillars of the **EU 2020 Strategy** since it aims at encouraging entrepreneurship and networking, incl. through implementation of innovative approaches in the area of tourism and at the same time at developing and protecting nature and culture heritage.

The **EU strategy for the Danube region** accents on the development of stronger synergic connections between the authorities on all levels aiming the optimization of the impact of

activities and financing. The PA is fully corresponding to its Pillar “A”: Connecting the Danube Region and the priority to promote culture and tourism, people to people contacts.

The PA is in line with the **Partnership Agreements of the Republic of Bulgaria** which defines the nature and culture heritage protection and investments in “green” growth, economy, and tourism as one of the main objectives for territorial and cross-border cooperation.

PA 2: Youth

Specific Objectives related to Priority 2:

- **Skills & Entrepreneurship:** To develop skills and encourage youth entrepreneurship thus creating prerequisites for improving youth employment opportunities in the border area
- **People-To-People Networking:** Promote sustainable, long-term and collaborative initiatives for and with young people, including enhancing mobility of young people

This priority axis directly aims at achieving the objectives of the **EU 2020** and in particular the following priority: „Inclusive growth: fostering a high-employment economy delivering social and territorial cohesion“, focusing on education and skills.

The **EU strategy for the Danube region** accents on the investments in young people and making best use of border’s area human capital. The PA2, therefore, corresponds to the Pillar “C”: Building Prosperity in the Danube Region; Priority Area 9: "To invest in people and skills"

It contributes to achieving the Partnership Agreement of the Republic of Bulgaria objectives for territorial cooperation aimed at supporting joint actions in the field of education, skills and life-long learning initiatives for young people in order to promote the linkage between education and labour market; exchange of good practices to reduce the level of early-school leavers; implementation of new methods and forms of education and training; setting up of networks between business entities, institutions and schools, exchange of training and educational practices and internships, incl. development and implementation of joint training programmes.

PA 3: Environment

Specific Objectives related to Priority 3:

- **Joint Risk Management:** To prevent and mitigate the consequences of natural and man-made cross-border disasters
- **Nature Protection:** To enhance the capacity of regional and local stakeholders for improved environmental and natural resources management in the border region

This priority axis contributes in particular to the “sustainable growth”: promoting a more resource efficient, greener and more competitive economy of the **EU 2020** Strategy as eligible activities within the priority will be related to environment protection, risk prevention and management.

The CBC dimension is extremely relevant, for the integrated and interdependent environmental systems both for the border region as a whole, but also with reference to the Danube Basin as formulated in the **EUDRS**. The PA 3 corresponds to the Pillar B: Protecting the Environment in the Region.

It is also in line with the Partnership Agreement of the Republic of Bulgaria, which states as one of the main priorities for territorial, incl. cross-border cooperation environmental and nature heritage protection. In addition, it contributes to the achievement of the following priority area for cooperation: development of joint strategies, coordinated investments, actions and systems for efficient resources management, adaptation to climate change and prevention and risk management.

1.1.2 Justification for the choice of thematic priorities, based on an analysis of the needs within the programme area as a whole and the strategy chosen in response to such needs, addressing, where appropriate, missing links in cross-border infrastructure, taking into account the results of the ex-ante evaluation

Table 1: Justification for the selection of thematic priorities

Selected thematic priority	Justification for selection
<p>TP4: Encouraging tourism and cultural and natural heritage</p>	<p>The Thematic Priority is highly relevant since the natural and cultural potential of the area is a significant comparative advantage of the area and an important development asset stretching across the border. CBC projects can help achieve critical mass and demonstrate immediate effects.</p> <p>The choice of TP is based on identified needs and potential of the eligible border area, namely:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - [+] Good quality, attractive natural environment offering favourable conditions for diversified form of tourism; - [+] Availability of historical, ethno and cultural sites; - [-] Limited access and lack of infrastructure at a number of natural, cultural and historic tourism sites; - [-] Lack of common touristic identity and image; - [-] Low integration of cultural heritage in the border area tourist products' development; - [+] Opportunities for development of cross-border tourism brand; - [+] Established past cooperation and high interest for future cooperation in tourism sector.
<p>TP5: Investing in youth, education and skills</p>	<p>The advantages of encouraging youth to become more actively involved in making decisions can be far-reaching. When young people have the opportunity to identify the problems that affect their lives and, most importantly, find and implement the solutions, it builds their self-confidence and encourages them to value the positive impact they can have</p>

	<p>on the lives of others.</p> <p>The choice of TP is based on identified needs and potential of the eligible border area, namely:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - [-] High level of early-school leavers due to poor perspectives of the youth; - [-] Educational /Training system not corresponding to labour market demands; - [-] High level of youth unemployment; - [+] Opportunities for development of mechanisms for career counselling and guidance for young people; - [+] Availability of youth support institutions such as youth centres in a number of municipalities; - [-] Low level of participation of youth in civil society.
<p>TP2: Protecting the environment and promoting climate change adaptation and mitigation, risk prevention and management</p>	<p>The Thematic Priority is highly relevant since the protection of the environment and the elimination and mitigation of existing environmental hotspots and hazards and the adaptation for new risks is considered an absolute prerequisite for any development plan. Environmental protection and risk management are by definition cross-border.</p> <p>The choice of TP is based on identified needs and potential of the eligible border area, namely:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - [+] Partnership of public, private and civil sector in implementing of environmental protection initiatives; - [-] Low level of disaster management systems and emergency preparedness; - [-] Inefficient fire fight management and fire prevention measures across the border; - [-] Insufficient cross-border cooperation in management of natural resources; - [+] Potential for efficient and sustainable use of natural resources (e.g. toward sustainable tourism).

1.2 Justification for the financial allocation

The main objective behind the financial allocation to Programme thematic objectives (priorities) is to effectively achieve the Programme results with resources available.

The Programme is financed by the European Regional Development Fund (ERDF) and Instrument for Pre-Accession Assistance (IPA). The total EU support to the Programme is EURO 28.986.914,00 of which maximum 10% shall be allocated to the Technical Assistance.

Main arguments behind the financial commitment for each priority include expected results to

be achieved, planned types of actions under each priority, as well as types of investments to be made.

Table 2: Overview of the investment strategy of the cooperation programme

Priority axis	Union support (in EUR)	Proportion (%) of the total Union support for the cooperation programme	Thematic priorities	Result indicators corresponding to the thematic priority*
PA1 “Sustainable Tourism”	11.594.765,60	40%	TP4: Encouraging tourism and cultural and natural heritage	RI 1.1.1 Increased number of visitors to the cross-border region
				RI 1.2.1 Increased level of valorization of natural and cultural heritage
				RI 1.3.1 Increased number of cross-border networks operating in the field of sustainable tourism
PA2 “Youths”	5.797.382,80	20%	TP5: Investing in youth, education and skills	RI 2.1.1 Young people who would like to set up their own business in the Programme’s eligible territory
				RI 2.2.1 Level of youth participation in networks across the border (sports clubs, leisure time or youth clubs/associations or cultural organisations)
PA3 “Environment”	8.696.074,20	30%	TP2: Protecting the environment and promoting climate change adaptation and mitigation, risk prevention and management	RI 3.1.1 Increased number of supported interventions in the field of risk prevention and management
				RI 3.1.2 Increased number of joint initiatives in the field of risk prevention and management
				RI 3.2.1 Increased capacity of public and private sector in the field of sustainable use of common natural resources
PA4 “Technical Assistance”	2.898.691,40	10%		

**Result indicators will be further developed*

II. PRIORITY AXES

2.1 Description of the priority axes (other than technical assistance)

2.1.1 Priority axis 1

ID of the priority axis	1
Title of the priority axis	SUSTAINABLE TOURISM

<input type="checkbox"/> The entire priority axis will be implemented solely through financial instruments	
<input type="checkbox"/> The entire priority axis will be implemented solely through financial instruments set up at Union level	
<input type="checkbox"/> The entire priority axis will be implemented through community-led local development	

2.1.2 Fund, calculation basis for Union support and justification of the calculation basis choice

Fund	
Calculation basis (total eligible expenditure or public eligible expenditure)	
Justification of the calculation basis choice	

2.1.3 The specific objectives of the thematic priority and expected results

ID	1.1
Specific objective	TOURIST ATTRACTIVENESS: Increasing tourist attractiveness of the border area through better utilisation of natural and cultural heritage
The results that the partner States seek to achieve with Union support	R 1.1 Increased tourist attractiveness of the cross-border region

The relationship between tourism and the Programme area's **natural and cultural heritage** is of critical importance for increasing tourist attractiveness of the border area. Looked at the other way, the quality of the natural and cultural heritage is, in most areas, fundamentally important to the generation of economic prosperity through tourism, to the quality of life of local communities and to the visitor experience.

Therefore, the Programme will focus on overcoming the existing challenges in the eligible area, namely:

- Supporting conservation of natural and cultural heritage, linked where appropriate to tourism, including the restoration of heritage buildings and the maintenance of traditional landscapes.
- Adopting visitor management plans to ensure that tourism does not damage natural and cultural resources.
- Developing monitoring programmes to measure trends and impacts, and facilitate adaptive management of natural and cultural heritage in the region.

However, creating the right balance between the welfare of tourists, host communities and the environment, reducing conflict and recognising mutual dependency, requires a special approach to the management of touristic destinations in the Programme area. Therefore, the Programme will also try to improve the **accessibility to touristic sites** in the region, in line with the overall concept for sustainable tourism development.

Tourism is an industry dependent on transport by definition. The predominant forms of travel, by air and car, are also the most environmentally damaging in terms of local pollution and contribution to climate change. Visitors are naturally making their own decisions about how they travel to and around the cross-border region. Programme's role is to ensure they do so with a better understanding of the environmental impacts and practicalities of different forms of travel and to make public transport more accessible, e.g. through producing user-friendly travel itineraries. In addition, however, tourism planners and businesses should work together to promote a modal shift towards the use of more environmentally friendly forms of transport for tourism (train, coach/bus, water, cycle, foot), both to

	<p>and within the tourist destination, through:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Actively and creatively promoting alternative transport options (equally for the enjoyable experience they offer as well as for their low impact) and providing high quality information to tourists on them. - Investing in appropriate infrastructure and services (cycle trails, rail services, coach and car parking, etc.). - Continuously improving integration between different types of transport service and ease of use by tourists. - Careful location of new tourism development with respect to accessibility. <p>Social inclusion and equity are other important principles of sustainable development. In line with this, the achievement of Programme's specific result 1.1 should ensure that tourism experiences are available to all without discrimination, namely the following specific target groups:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - People with physical disabilities (affected by mobility or sensory impairment); - The economically disadvantaged tourists and young people, in particular.
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ID	1.2
Specific objective	<p>CROSS-BORDER TOURISTIC PRODUCT:</p> <p>Valorising the favourable conditions for diversified tourism in the border area through creating common cross-border touristic brand(s)</p>
<p>The results that the partner States seek to achieve with Union support</p>	<p>R 1.2 Enhanced competitiveness of touristic offers and improved touristic visibility of the border area</p> <p>Two types of change present particular challenges and opportunities for local communities in the Programme area. The first relates to property development, associated with tourism. Whereas this can bring considerable economic benefits to communities, it can also result in spreading urbanisation leading to loss of local amenity and green space. Changes in property values can threaten quality of life for local people, and some kinds of development and use may bring little</p>

return to the local economy. A second type of change comes from the restructuring of local economies, resulting from a decline in traditional activities, with tourism seen as an answer to the replacement of local income and jobs.

In response to both types of change, careful **destination planning and management** is required to:

- Influence the scale, nature and location of development, to ensure that tourism is integrated with existing activities and that the cross-border community remains in balance.
- Check that proposed new development is in line with market trends and future demand.
- Give priority to types of products and services that reflect the special character of the destination, minimise environmental impact and deliver value to the community (economic and employment).
- Maximise the proportion of income that is retained locally and other benefits to local communities, through strengthening local supply chains and promoting use of local produce, shops and other services by visitors.

The main precondition for **sustainable tourism development** in the Programme's area is the engagement of a wide range of stakeholders within and at the level of the region, along with adequate support at the national level, so as to take advantage of numerous possibilities provided by dynamic cross-border cooperation in this field. One of possible steps is to form **cross-border tourism cluster (brand)**, i.e. to consider the CBC region between Bulgaria and Serbia as a primary tourism area which will enable networking of the cross-border tourism destinations/zones and joining their efforts to complete and integrate the existing all-year round tourism offer, develop relating infrastructure and marketing activities, and protect and promote valuable natural and cultural heritage of the region.

It is important that Programme's work to promote sustainability is based on sound evidence regarding the interface between tourism and sustainability and visitor and business demand for sustainability. **Innovation**, therefore, is of crucial importance for the border

	<p>tourism, for it impacts on tourism demand as well as supply. Innovation by the tourism enterprises in the Programme's eligible territory should be targeted at lowering costs and improving service quality thus increasing competitiveness. The same is true with regard to the uninterruptedly increasing online travel which not only changes consumer habits, but also facilitates new marketing strategies in the tour operator sector.</p> <p>Regarding product innovation, tourism is a very innovative sector. Lots of new products (nature-based tourism, wellness, cultural tourism etc.) could be developed to meet evolving demand. Special emphasis should be given to stimulating the development of "silver economy" – i.e. opportunities related to developing touristic services for the elderly as a target market.</p>
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ID	1.3
Specific objective	<p>PEOPLE-TO-PEOPLE NETWORKING:</p> <p>Capitalise the effect of cultural and natural heritage tourism on border communities</p>
<p>The results that the partner States seek to achieve with Union support</p>	<p>R 1.3 Enhanced capacity of public and private sector for the sustainable use of natural and cultural heritage and resources</p> <p>Sustainable tourism provides an optimal contribution to local/regional economy in interaction with other activities through fostering a multi-sectoral and participative approach to development. Sustainable tourism, interaction with complementary activities, is seen as direct contribution to the rise in employment and growth of the border economy, seriously affected by depopulation and economic crises.</p> <p>Pursuing social tourism (addressing tourists at age 65+) in the Programme's area is seen as supplementary tool for reducing seasonality of demand and supporting stable year-round employment. In view of this, the Programme will:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Encourage policies and actions to support social tourism at all levels; - Raise enterprise awareness of the size of the market and the economic advantages as well as

social benefits;

- Improving information relevant to disabled people and under-privileged groups.

As mentioned already, tourism sector offers many **job opportunities to people of all ages and skills**. Particularly for young people, a job in tourism often represents the first contact with working life, supplying them with interpersonal and social competencies highly needed in a customer-minded service industry. Increasingly, there is scope for tourism to add value to cross-border employment in other sectors, through multiple occupations, and to provide new opportunities for employment in fields related to the environment and heritage. The Programme area's challenge is for tourism business, however still small, to develop well designed human resources practices.

There is also another challenge, and this relates to improving job quality in the sector, and giving it a competitive edge, which requires more **coordinated effort to strengthen training and establish a careers structure**. This will also assist in labour mobility, geographically and between sectors. With reference to this, the Programme will target:

- Strengthening the application of common standards in tourism training across the cross-border region;
- Exchanging good practice in tourism training across the eligible border area, removing language and other barriers to common uptake;
- Integrating sustainability issues into mainstream tourism training;
- Active promotion and PR work to stimulate response to tourism as a career and participate in training at all levels;
- Strengthening the development, interpretation and promotion of quality products and services based on natural and cultural heritage, including traditional crafts, local produce and other elements of local distinctiveness, as a component of the visitor experience.

Tourist product quality and innovation are important factors to avoid the decline of destinations. But since a tourist usually takes a decision in favour of the destination that offers to meet a bundle of wishes

	(accommodation, events, activities) the competitiveness of CBC destinations can only be maintained or improved when the respective stakeholders in the border region are networking .
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2.1.4 Elements of other thematic priorities added to the priority axis

ID	
Contribution to the specific objective of the priority axis	
The results that the partner States seek to achieve with Union support	

2.1.5 Actions to be supported under the thematic priority (by thematic priority)

2.1.5.1 A description of the type and examples of actions to be supported and their expected contribution to the specific objectives, including, where appropriate, identification of the main target groups, specific territories targeted and types of beneficiaries

Thematic Priority	TP-4: Encouraging tourism and cultural and natural heritage
<p>The indicative actions to be supported under specific objective 1.1 are:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Rehabilitation of access roads to natural, cultural and historic tourism sites; - Public utilities upgrade (electricity, water-supply, sewerage, etc.); - Small touristic border crossings and related facilities; - ICT facilities developed/upgrade; - Development of cross-border public transport, cycling routes and walking paths to touristic sites; - Restoration and maintenance of sites of historical and cultural importance; - Conservation and protection of (both tangible and non-tangible) natural, historical and cultural heritage; - Establishment of info-centres and/or kiosks to guide potential visitors; - Development of joint GIS platforms; - Development of joint platforms for online reservations, payment, etc. <p>Target groups:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - All levels of regional/local authorities - Administrations of protected areas - Touristic organisations and associations 	

- Residents of the cross-border area and the visitors (tourists)

Potential Beneficiaries:

- All levels of regional/local authorities
- Regional and sector development agencies
- Central and regional offices and structures of relevant government institutions/administrations
- Public cultural institutes (museum, library, community centres, etc.)
- Non-government organizations and tourist associations

The **indicative actions** to be supported **under specific objective 1.2** are:

- Joint researches on potential niche tourism activities and/or on the demand for new tourist destinations and experience;
- Research activities to identify tourist products with potential for cross-border branding;
- Development of local brand/s based on natural, historical and cultural heritage of the region;
- Support for the development of new and innovative touristic products and services to be delivered on sites;
- Creating knowledge networks for tourism innovations in the border area;
- Multi-lingual on-line touristic platforms;
- Visualisation of local brand/s, incl. 3D visualisation, mobile applications, social networks, tailor-made internet platforms, and other innovative tools;
- Identification and application of best practices in tourism promotion;
- Organisation (and participation in) of fairs and related activities (i.e. exhibitions, conferences, seminars, round tables, presentations, etc.).

Target groups:

- Touristic operators in the eligible border area
- SMEs operating in the field of tourism and hospitality sector
- Young entrepreneurs
- Cultural institutes (museum, library, art gallery, community centres, etc.)
- Residents of the cross-border area and the visitors (tourists)

Potential Beneficiaries:

- All levels of regional/local authorities
- Regional touristic associations
- NGOs
- Business support structures - chamber of commerce, business association, business

cluster

- Education / Training Centres
- Regional and sector development agencies
- Central and regional offices and structures of relevant government institutions/ administrations

The **indicative actions** to be supported **under specific objective 1.3** are:

- Training and consultancy support services for tourism enterprises/establishments to improve skills and performance;
- Organization of networking events, incl. online forums, for exchange of good practices in sustainable tourism management;
- Surveys on domestic and international demand for cross-border tourism experiences; surveys on quality of extant services, projects to monitor sustainable tourism development and related services, etc.;
- Organization of joint events to promote cross-border natural and cultural heritage, such as one-day festivals, exhibitions, performances, etc.;
- Promotion and cultivation of the common traditions of the borderland areas;
- Awareness raising campaigns on the values of regional cultural and natural heritage, incl. among youth.

Target groups:

- Residents of the cross-border area and the visitors (tourists)
- All levels of regional/local authorities
- Touristic organisations and associations
- Youth organisations

Potential Beneficiaries:

- All levels of regional/local authorities
- Regional touristic associations
- Civil society structure (association/foundation/NGOs)
- Business support structures
- Education / Training Centres
- Cultural institutes (museum, library, art gallery, community centres, etc.)

2.1.5.2 *Guiding principles for the selection of operations*

Thematic Priority	TP-4: Encouraging tourism and cultural and natural heritage
The selection of operations is to be made at level of 'specific objectives' , e.g. potential applicants should apply with project application focusing on only one Priority Axis and only	

one Programme's Specific Objective.

The selection of projects will be carried out following a standardized assessment procedure using the following **sets of criteria**:

- **Strategic coherence:** this criterion examines the coherence and contribution of each project application to the relevant Programme's Specific Objective, while addressing in a coherent way the achievement of the Programme's specific results envisaged. Furthermore, the cross-border added value of the operation, its territorial dimension and the relevance of the partnership will also be assessed in this context.
- **Operational quality:** this criterion examines the design of the project application in relation to clarity and coherence of the operational objectives, activities and means, feasibility, efficiency, communication of the project and its specific results, potential for uptake and embedment into operative procedures of the partners involved.
- **Compliance to horizontal principles:** this criterion examines the coherence and contribution of each project application to the Programme's Horizontal Principles and the demonstration of their integration and advancement within the project proposal intervention logic.

The strategic coherence criterion basically examines the relevance of the project proposal; hence it retains primacy over the other two criteria.

The detailed assessment criteria will be laid down and made available to potential applicants in the calls for proposals documentation that will be prepared and disseminated by the Programme's Managing Authority.

Under this Priority axis **strategic projects** could also be identified outside calls for proposals for the achievement of the programme objectives and priority specific objectives (namely 1.1). Strategic projects should contribute to achievement of a bigger impact through real and strong cross-border impact and long-term results, in respect of the Programme's objectives. Strategic Projects must be effective and answer the territory's needs as envisaged by the Programme and result in a significant and long-lasting change or improvement on the whole or large parts of programme area.

The basic principles for the eligibility of a strategic project should be the following:

- To address key specific objectives that can be achieved only through the involvement of large partnerships and /or of key stakeholders on the two sides of the border;
- To be based on a larger financial size than common project applications under open call for proposals.

The decision of selecting strategic projects under Priority 1 lies down within the competence of the Joint Monitoring Committee of the Programme.

2.1.5.3 *Planned use of financial instruments (where appropriate)*

Thematic Priority	TP-4: Encouraging tourism and cultural and natural heritage
Planned use of financial instruments	

No financial instruments will be used

2.1.6 Common and programme specific indicators

2.1.6.1 Priority axis result indicators (programme specific)

Table 3: Programme specific result indicators

ID	Indicator	Measurement unit	Baseline value	Baseline year	Target value (2023)	Source of data	Frequency of reporting
RI 1.1.1	Increased number of visitors to the cross-border region	Number/Percentage	659.994	2012	8%	National statistics (BG & RS); Annual Implementation reports (AIR)	2018 2023
RI 1.2.1	Increased level of valorization of natural and cultural heritage	Percentage	To be established	2014	To be established	Survey among target groups; AIR	2018 2023
RI 1.3.1	Increased number of cross-border networks operating in the field of sustainable tourism	Number/Percentage	To be established	2013	To be established	AIR	2018 2023

Remark: The result indicators need to capture the desired change in the programme area, be close to policy, and not relate only to programme beneficiaries, but to the whole target population. However, result indicators may measure only some of the relevant dimensions of the results to be achieved.

2.1.6.2 Priority axis output indicators (common or programme specific)

Table 4: Common and programme specific output indicators

ID	Indicator (name of indicator)	Measurement unit	Target value (2023)	Source of data	Frequency of reporting
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OI 1.1.1	Total length of reconstructed or upgraded access roads to natural, cultural and historic tourism sites	Kilometres	30	Progress and Annual Implementation Reports	Annually
OI 1.1.2	Total length of newly built, reconstructed or upgraded cycling routes / walking paths	Kilometres	60	Progress and Annual Implementation Reports	Annually
OI 1.1.3	Total number of newly built / reconstructed facilities in / leading to touristic sites in the eligible border area	Number	45	Progress and Annual Implementation Reports	Annually
OI 1.1.4	Total number of reconstructed / restored cultural and historical touristic objects in the eligible border area	Number	15	Progress and Annual Implementation Reports	Annually
OI 1.1.5	Total number of created/reconstructed facilities for disabled people in the supported touristic sites	Number	25	Progress and Annual Implementation Reports	Annually
OI 1.1.6	Visitors using the online touristic platforms created under the Programme	Number	2000	Progress and Annual Implementation Reports	Annually
OI 1.2.1	Total number of touristic innovations (product / process / market / logistic / organisational)	Number	40	Progress and Annual Implementation Reports	Annually
OI 1.2.2	Established touristic products and services concerning persons with disabilities	Number	10	Progress and Annual Implementation Reports	Annually
OI 1.2.3	Tools developed and/or implemented for promotion of sustainable tourism potential of the eligible border area	Number	20	Progress and Annual Implementation Reports	Annually
OI 1.2.4	Tools developed and/or implemented for marketing of tourism products in the eligible border area	Number	8	Progress and Annual Implementation Reports	Annually
OI 1.3.1	Public awareness initiatives promoting sustainable use of natural and cultural heritage and resources	Number	20	Progress and Annual Implementation Reports	Annually

OI 1.3.2	Promotional events for capitalisation of the common touristic product/services	Number	35	Progress and Annual Implementation Reports	Annually
OI 1.3.3	Common strategies or policies for valorizing (including raising awareness) the cultural and natural heritage through its restoration and promotion for sustainable economic uses	Number	5	Progress and Annual Implementation Reports	Annually
OI 1.3.4	Number of participants in training activities aimed at strengthening the application of common standards in tourism across the cross-border region	Number	750	Progress and Annual Implementation Reports	Annually

2.1.7 Categories of intervention

Table 5: Categories of intervention - Dimension 1 Intervention field

Priority axis	Code	Amount (EUR) EU (ERDF+IPA)
PA1	092 - Protection, development and promotion of public tourism assets	4.407.709,00
PA1	094 - Protection, development and promotion of public cultural and heritage assets	2.320.653,00
PA1	090 - Cycle tracks and footpaths	1.156.076,50
PA1	079 - Access to public sector information (including open data e-Tourism)	808.231,00
PA1	075 - Development and promotion of tourism services in or for SMEs	1.971.107,50
PA1	095 - Development and promotion of public cultural and heritage services	930.988,60

Table 6: Categories of intervention - Dimension 2 Form of finance

Priority axis	Code	Amount (EUR) EU (ERDF+IPA)
PA1	01 - Non-repayable grant	11.594.765,60

Table 7: Categories of intervention - Dimension 3 Territory type

Priority axis	Code	Amount (EUR) EU (ERDF+IPA)
PA1	05 - Cooperation across national or regional programme areas in national context	11.594.765,60

Table 8: Categories of intervention - Dimension 6 Territorial delivery mechanisms

Priority axis	Code	Amount (EUR) EU (ERDF+IPA)
PA1	07 - Not applicable	

2.1.8 A summary of the planned use of technical assistance including, where necessary, actions to reinforce the administrative capacity of authorities involved in the management and control of the programmes and beneficiaries and, where necessary, actions for to enhance the

administrative capacity of relevant partners to participate in the implementation of programmes (where appropriate)

Priority axis	1
<p>Capacity building initiatives:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - For project generation, assisting potential beneficiaries for the identification of needs among target groups, coordination of administrative procedures. <p>Promotion initiatives:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - To activate participation among potential beneficiaries groups; - To inform target groups on outputs of the programme. <p>Surveys and evaluation activities:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Surveys among target groups to evaluate the achievement of PA's results indicators. 	

2.2.1 Priority axis 2

ID of the priority axis	2
Title of the priority axis	Youths

<input type="checkbox"/> The entire priority axis will be implemented solely through financial instruments	
<input type="checkbox"/> The entire priority axis will be implemented solely through financial instruments set up at Union level	
<input type="checkbox"/> The entire priority axis will be implemented through community-led local development	

2.2.2 Fund, calculation basis for Union support and justification of the calculation basis choice

Fund	
Calculation basis (total eligible expenditure or public eligible expenditure)	
Justification of the calculation basis choice	

2.2.3 The specific objectives of the thematic priority and expected results

ID	2.1
Specific objective	<p>SKILLS & ENTREPRENEURSHIP:</p> <p>To develop skills and encourage youth entrepreneurship thus creating prerequisites for improving youth employment opportunities in the border area</p>
The results that the partner States seek to achieve with Union support	<p>R 2.1 Improved environment for youth development</p> <p>The achievement of Programme's specific result 2.1 should lead to substantial improvement in some of the most demanding youth entrepreneurship challenges the cross-border region between Bulgaria and Serbia faces nowadays:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Promoting an entrepreneurial culture among young people. Promoting an entrepreneurial culture is one of the most essential and neglected components of entrepreneurship development in the border region. Changing cultural practices and beliefs around entrepreneurship is a long-term process. Therefore, the Programme's efforts will generally focus on four major issues: (1) understanding cultural influences on entrepreneurship and assessing the attitude of young people; (2) promoting role models of successful entrepreneurship; (3) stimulating the organisation of youth business fairs, expositions and competitions; (4) enhancing public relations campaigns, internet and media coverage. - Improving entrepreneurial education. Entrepreneurship education equips youth to be innovative and to identify, create, initiate and successfully manage personal, community, business and work opportunities, including working for them. Entrepreneurial education can also foster greater personal responsibility, flexibility and creativity necessary to cope with today's uncertain employment paths. Yet, even certain incentives towards active enterprise education programs to be attempted in the border region, the topic still face numerous constraints: i.e. inadequate and poorly integrated curricula; teaching entrepreneurial

	<p>skills and behaviours is often not properly integrated into school curricula and may not teach students to think and act independently, to be self-reliant and take risks; outdated learning methods (the education systems still lack practical, experiential and teamwork learning); insufficient career information and assistance; weak links between schools and businesses; inadequate ICT infrastructure/capability. It will be ambitious to say that IPA CBC Programme will overcome all the above constrains; it will rather concentrate on facilitating the overall environment for youth development in the border regions (incl. small-scale related infrastructure where needed), while facilitating the process of entrepreneurial education through wider utilisation of cross-border networking opportunities.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Improving business assistance and development services. The more assistance an entrepreneur obtains during the start-up the better are the chances of creating a successful and sustainable business. However, young entrepreneurs in the cross-border area often lack the support services that are considered a key to transforming fragile one-person start-ups into successful small- and medium-sized businesses. Therefore, the Programme will concentrate on enhancing the provision of support services: i.e. business skills training, guidance and counselling services; one-stop shops; physical or electronic online portals to assist with registrations, financing applications etc.; on-the-job training and workshops; mentor support and business coaching.
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ID	2.2
Specific objective	<p>PEOPLE-TO-PEOPLE NETWORKING:</p> <p>Promote sustainable, long-term and collaborative initiatives for and with young people, including enhancing mobility of young people</p>
The results that the partner States seek to achieve with Union support	<p>R 2.2 Enhanced networking between young people in the border region</p> <p>The searched change with reference to achieving</p>

Programme's specific result 2.2 is focused on encouraging **youth to become more actively involved in making decisions**. When young people have the opportunity to identify the problems that affect their lives and, most importantly, find and implement the solutions, it builds their self-confidence and encourages them to value the positive impact they can have on the lives of others. Through increasingly meaningful and active participation in decision-making they can develop their own identity, a sense of belonging and usefulness. This encourages them to respond to educational opportunities and enter more fully into life at school.

To overcome the challenges outlined, the IPA CBC Programme will give ground for youth networking actions, as to help bring about the structural changes necessary to create an environment that makes young people feel welcomed and empowered to actively participate in decision-making processes, namely:

- **Advocacy.** The Programme will support advocacy campaigns to review existing social policies and/or put in place appropriate policies to ensure the creation of structures and opportunities for children and young people's meaningful participation.
- **Good Governance.** The Programme will promote good governance in public institutions and civil society organizations and undertake to ensure that the provisions and principles of participatory rights are widely understood by decision makers. These rights should be implemented and monitored with the active participation of children and young people. At the same time, systematic training in participatory skills for all professionals working with, and for, children and young people should be made available.
- **Education & Information.** The Programme will mobilize the public to lobby for the establishment of child-friendly formal and non-formal education systems that enable the effective development and participation of young people. It will promote the principle of involving young people in the design and management of effective, safe and protective learning environments.

	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Opportunities for Volunteers. The Programme will stimulate all sectors of society, including governments and businesses, to create opportunities for voluntary service for children and young people to contribute, with their enthusiasm, idealism, experience and skills, to community development. - The Media. The Programme will also encourage and promote communication mechanisms among young people in the border region that will enable the sharing of experiences and ideas, as well as the creation of peer support and information networks.
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2.2.4 Elements of other thematic priorities added to the priority axis

ID	
Contribution to the specific objective of the priority axis	
The results that the partner States seek to achieve with Union support	

2.2.5 Actions to be supported under the thematic priority (by thematic priority)

2.2.5.1 *A description of the type and examples of actions to be supported and their expected contribution to the specific objectives, including, where appropriate, identification of the main target groups, specific territories targeted and types of beneficiaries*

Thematic Priority	TP5: Investing in youth, education and skills
<p>The indicative actions to be supported under specific objective 2.1 are:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Rehabilitation and refurbishment of existing youth and education-related infrastructure and facilities (e.g. lecture facilities, libraries, laboratories, sport facilities, campuses, etc.); - Investments to ensure physical accessibility to youth and education-related infrastructure and facilities; - Investments in ICT- facilities' upgrade ; - Small-scale “working” infrastructure (e.g. business incubators, shared workspace, start-up factories and ‘garage incs.’ (i.e. a new shared workspace model “start-up garage” – http://www.garage-lausitz.de), equipment provision/sharing, etc.); - Initiatives to encourage learning in support of young people's innovation, creativity and entrepreneurship; 	

- Curricula and study programmes (e.g. KAB, NFTE, CEFE);
- Students' mini-companies (competitions) (e.g. "Junior", "Achievers International");
- School-entrepreneur/business activities and events (e.g. "KEIP", "Students in the boss's chair");
- Simulation games (often computer-based) (e.g. "Primanager", "Gründungswerkstatt");
- Business skills training, guidance and counselling services (e.g. one-stop shops and youth enterprise centres, on-the-job training and workshops, mentor support and business coaching, YE online portals and web sites, etc.);
- Support to joint market initiatives and networking, incl. promotion and marketing campaigns for youth entrepreneurs.

Target groups:

- Pupils of primary and secondary schools
- Young people (up to age of 29)
- Youth organisations
- Marginalised minority communities
- Children and youth with special needs
- Employment services

Potential Beneficiaries:

- All levels of regional/local authorities
- Local and national education institutions, and training service providers
- Vocational training institutions
- Universities, knowledge / research institutes
- Civil society structure (association/foundation)/ NGOs
- Business support structures
- Cultural institutes, local community centres

The **indicative actions** to be supported **under specific objective 2.2** are:

- Promotion of young people's participation in representative democracy and civil society;
- Cross-border initiatives aimed at combating youth poverty and social exclusion;
- Community initiatives to support and recognize the value of youth volunteering;
- Supporting youth capacity and opportunities to be creative and youth access to culture;
- Cross-border initiatives for promotion of health and well-being of young people;
- Better "translation" of competitive skills and future labour market needs into curricula

and teaching processes.

Target groups:

- Pupils of primary and secondary schools
- Young people (up to age of 29)
- Marginalised roma communities
- Children and youth with special needs

Potential Beneficiaries:

- All levels of regional/local authorities
- Youth organisations / NGOs
- Local and national education institutions, and training service providers
- Universities, knowledge / research institutes
- Civil society structure (association/foundation)
- Business support structures
- Cultural institutes, local community centres

2.2.5.2 Guiding principles for the selection of operations

Thematic Priority	TP5: Investing in youth, education and skills
<p>The selection of operations is to be made at level of ‘specific objectives’, e.g. potential applicants should apply with project application focusing on only one Priority Axis and only one Programme’s Specific Objective.</p>	
<p>The selection of projects will be carried out following a standardized assessment procedure using the following sets of criteria:</p>	
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Strategic coherence: this criterion examines the coherence and contribution of each project application to the relevant Programme’s Specific Objective, while addressing in a coherent way the achievement of the Programme’s specific results envisaged. Furthermore, the cross-border added value of the operation, its territorial dimension and the relevance of the partnership will also be assessed in this context. - Operational quality: this criterion examines the design of the project application in relation to clarity and coherence of the operational objectives, activities and means, feasibility, efficiency, communication of the project and its specific results, potential for uptake and embedment into operative procedures of the partners involved. - Compliance to horizontal principles: this criterion examines the coherence and contribution of each project application to the Programme’s Horizontal Principles and the demonstration of their integration and advancement within the project proposal intervention logic. 	
<p>The strategic coherence criterion basically examines the relevance of the project proposal; hence it retains primacy over the other two criteria.</p>	
<p>The detailed assessment criteria will be laid down and made available to potential applicants</p>	

in the calls for proposals documentation that will be prepared and disseminated by the Programme's Managing Authority.

2.2.5.3 *Planned use of financial instruments (where appropriate)*

Thematic Priority	TP5: Investing in youth, education and skills
Planned use of financial instruments	
No financial instruments will be used	

2.2.6 Common and programme specific indicators

2.2.6.1 Priority axis result indicators (programme specific)

Table 9: Programme specific result indicators

ID	Indicator	Measurement unit	Baseline value	Baseline year	Target value (2023)	Source of data	Frequency of reporting
RI 2.1.1	Young people who would like to set up their own business in the Programme's eligible territory	% of young people (15-30) answering "Yes" to question 'Would you like to set up your own business in the Programme's eligible territory?'	To be established	2014	Increase	Survey among target groups	2018 2023
RI 2.2.1	Level of youth participation in networks across the border (sports clubs, leisure time or youth clubs/associations or cultural organisations)	% of young people (15-30) reporting that they have participated in cross-border networking activities in last 12 months	To be established	2014	Increase	Survey among target groups	2018 2023

Remark: The result indicator needs to capture the desired change in the programme area, be close to policy, and not relate only to programme beneficiaries, but to the whole target population. However, result indicators may measure only some of the relevant dimensions of the results to be achieved.

2.2.6.2 Priority axis output indicators (common or programme specific)

Table 10: Common and programme specific output indicators

ID	Indicator (name of indicator)	Measurement unit	Target value (2023)	Source of data	Frequency of reporting
OI 2.1.1	Total number of supported small-scale youth-related physical infrastructure	Number	20	Progress and Annual Implementation Reports	Annually
OI 2.1.2	Total number of small-scale youth-related physical infrastructure for disabled people or such with	Number	6	Progress and Annual Implementation Reports	Annually

	special educational needs				
OI 2.1.3	Supported investments addressing the refurbishment of education-related facilities	Number	25	Progress and Annual Implementation Reports	Annually
OI 2.1.4	Supported investments addressing the establishment of small-scale “working” facilities	Number	10	Progress and Annual Implementation Reports	Annually
OI 2.1.5	Young people involved in training courses	Number	600	Progress and Annual Implementation Reports	Annually
OI 2.2.1	Cross-border linkages between different youth organizations and institutions created	Number	14	Progress and Annual Implementation Reports	Annually
OI 2.2.2	Cross-border promo events carried out	Number	14	Progress and Annual Implementation Reports	Annually
OI 2.2.3	Awareness campaigns carried out	Number	20	Progress and Annual Implementation Reports	Annually
OI 2.2.4	Number of young people with disabilities and or from vulnerable groups involved in cross-border networking	Number	250	Progress and Annual Implementation Reports	Annually

2.2.7 Categories of intervention

Table 11: Categories of intervention - Dimension 1 Intervention field

Priority axis	Code	Amount (EUR) EU (ERDF+IPA)
PA2	055 - Other social infrastructure contributing to regional and local development	2.669.348,50
PA2	117 - Enhancing equal access to lifelong learning for all age groups in formal, non-formal and informal settings, upgrading the knowledge, skills and competences of the workforce, and promoting flexible learning pathways including through career guidance and validation of acquired competences	1.913.135,80
PA2	109 - Active inclusion, including with a view to promoting equal opportunities and active participation, and improving employability	1.214.898,50

Table 12: Categories of intervention - Dimension 2 Form of finance

Priority axis	Code	Amount (EUR) EU (ERDF+IPA)
PA2	01 - Non-repayable grant	5.797.382,80

Table 13: Categories of intervention - Dimension 3 Territory type

Priority axis	Code	Amount (EUR) EU (ERDF+IPA)
PA2	05 - Cooperation across national or regional programme areas in national context	5.797.382,80

Table 14: Categories of intervention - Dimension 6 Territorial delivery mechanisms

Priority axis	Code	Amount (EUR) EU (ERDF+IPA)
PA2	07 - Not applicable	

2.2.8 A summary of the planned use of technical assistance including, where necessary, actions to reinforce the administrative capacity of authorities involved in the management and control of the programmes and beneficiaries and, where necessary, actions for to enhance the administrative capacity of relevant partners to participate in the implementation of programmes (where appropriate)

Priority axis	2
<p>Capacity building initiatives:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - For project generation, assisting potential beneficiaries for the identification of needs among target groups, coordination of administrative procedures. <p>Promotion initiatives:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - To activate participation among potential beneficiaries groups; - To inform target groups on outputs of the programme. <p>Surveys and evaluation activities:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Surveys among target groups to evaluate the achievement of PA's results indicators. 	

2.3.1 Priority axis 3

ID of the priority axis	3
Title of the priority axis	Environment

<input type="checkbox"/> The entire priority axis will be implemented solely through financial instruments	
<input type="checkbox"/> The entire priority axis will be implemented solely through financial instruments set up at Union level	
<input type="checkbox"/> The entire priority axis will be implemented through community-led local development	

2.3.2 Fund, calculation basis for Union support and justification of the calculation basis choice

Fund	
Calculation basis (total eligible expenditure or public eligible expenditure)	
Justification of the calculation basis choice	

2.3.3 The specific objectives of the thematic priority and expected results

ID	3.1
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<p>Specific objective</p>	<p>JOINT RISK MANAGEMENT:</p> <p>To prevent and mitigate the consequences of natural and man-made cross-border disasters</p>
<p>The results that the partner States seek to achieve with Union support</p>	<p>R 3.1 Improved preparedness of the region concerning natural and man-made hazards and disasters</p> <p>R 3.2 Improved capacity of the Bulgarian and Serbian partners for joint intervention in case of forest fires, floods and other emergency situations and disasters</p> <p>Disaster prevention & management as well as adaptation to climate change is largely a local/regional topic as it is the local/regional authorities that are first confronted with the potential impacts of disasters and have to implement prevention measures. At the same time, cross-border and cross-sectoral impacts must be kept in consideration, as forest fires, floods and other natural and man-made disasters do not recognize state borders and other artificial boundaries imposed by humans. In border areas discrepancy of interests and approaches, heterogeneous equipment and tactics, as well as diversities in legislative can decrease the ability to effectively deal with emergency situations.</p> <p>In addition, natural disasters and impacts of climate change can significantly affect the socio-economic development and competitiveness of the Bulgaria-Serbia cross-border region. Investments in prevention and adaptation preserve existing assets have a high economic return: the costs of action are lower than those of inaction.</p> <p>The Programme's specific objective 3.1 is targeted at eliminating differences and barriers that reduce the effectiveness of joint cross-border activities, and the major change expected after its successful implementation is the enhanced capacity of local administrations and public bodies competent for early cross-border identification and assessment of emergency situation, and joint disaster management actions. These include, but are not limited to:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Enhanced coordination mechanisms at both sides of the Bulgaria-Serbia border for risk prevention and disaster response management. - Operating joint protocols and communication

	<p>channels for an alert network of relevant institutions between bordering regions, which will reduce response time and to enhance and coordinate actions.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Developed advanced monitoring and surveillance system for the whole cross-border area. - Improved capacity of local institutions to play active and efficient role in interventions for environmental emergencies, due to natural or man-made disasters, rehabilitation of infrastructures and equipment.
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ID	3.2
Specific objective	<p>NATURE PROTECTION:</p> <p>To enhance the capacity of regional and local stakeholders for improved environmental and natural resources management in the border region</p>
The results that the partner States seek to achieve with Union support	<p>R 3.2 Improved capacity for nature protection and sustainable use of common natural resources in the border region</p> <p>The eligible Programme's area enjoys the benefits of having a vast, varied and mostly unspoilt natural environment. The region has a rich mixture of natural heritage in the form of flora and fauna, rivers, and forests the potential of which is not fully exploited yet. On the other side, sustainable development implies economic growth together with the protection of environmental quality, each reinforcing the other. The essence of this form of development is a stable relationship between human activities and the natural world.</p> <p>Hence, the protection of the environment is crucial to the sustainable and economic success of the eligible border area. There is a need to support activities aimed at ensuring that the management and development of the region's resources are carried out in an environmentally sustainable way.</p> <p>Environmental protection and the preservation of natural resources in cross-border context are clearly fields, which are to be dealt with in an integrated way. Joint and co-ordinated actions in the border region</p>

	<p>contribute to the creation of synergic effects in environmental protection and resource management.</p> <p>The Programme, therefore, intends to bring people, communities, civil society and economic actors of the border area closer to each other as a prerequisite for ensuring sustainable development in the border area. It will stimulate joint initiatives to develop environmental networks in implementing concerted management, monitoring and promotion of a sustainable protection and use of resources in the cross-border area.</p>
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2.3.4 Elements of other thematic priorities added to the priority axis

ID	
Contribution to the specific objective of the priority axis	
The results that the partner States seek to achieve with Union support	

2.3.5 Actions to be supported under the thematic priority (by thematic priority)

2.3.5.1 *A description of the type and examples of actions to be supported and their expected contribution to the specific objectives, including, where appropriate, identification of the main target groups, specific territories targeted and types of beneficiaries*

Thematic Priority	TP2: Protecting the environment and promoting climate change adaptation and mitigation, risk prevention and management
<p>The indicative actions to be supported under specific objective 3.1 are:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Development of early warning and disaster management systems; - Investments in equipment related to disaster resilience (e.g. up-to-date ICT solutions in pre-fire, fire and post-fire activities; supply of specialized fire-fighting equipment; supply of specialized equipment for floods, and for search and rescue interventions; supply of system for air surveillance of the surface and real time transmission of data, etc.); - Support of small-scale interventions / investments (e.g. sanitation and reforestation of river banks; building flood defence like dikes and canals; forestation of non-permanent vulnerable land; cuttings for emergency situations, etc.); - Developing joint protocols and communication channels for risk prevention and management of natural and man-made disasters (e.g. for disaster protection and prevention policies and mechanisms, prevention and fire fighting management etc.); 	

- Awareness campaigns in the field of efficient risk prevention and management;
- Conducting joint theoretical-tactical exercises and field trainings for emergency situations management;
- Trainings in the use of ICT technologies, including introduction of innovative methods for learning (e-learning);
- Exchange of experience and good practice (study visits, round-tables, conferences);
- Joint trainings and raising awareness of public service actors and population (volunteers) for disaster resilience.

Target groups:

- Affected population of the CBC region
- All levels of regional/local authorities
- Administrations of protected areas
- Young people (up to age of 29)

Potential Beneficiaries:

- Relevant local and regional structures for dealing with emergency situations
- Central and regional offices and structures of relevant government institutions/administrations
- Regional and sector development agencies

The **indicative actions** to be supported **under specific objective 3.2** are:

- Joint initiatives targeting the effective management of protected areas;
- Joint initiatives towards the protection and restoration of ecosystems and endangered flora and fauna species;
- Preservation and improvement of the quality of natural resources (air, soil, water);
- Building capacities of local authorities in the environment-related matters;
- Awareness raising (and training) on all levels (individual persons, organizations, businesses, public administration, schools) on issues related to environmental and nature protection, including marginalized communities and other vulnerable groups.

Target groups:

- Groups of population of the CBC region
- Civil society structure in the CBC region
- Economic operators in the CBC region

Potential Beneficiaries:

- Central and regional offices and structures of relevant government institutions/administrations in the sphere of their competence
- Regional and sector development agencies

- Administrations of protected areas
- All levels of regional/local authorities
- Research and academic institutes
- Environmental NGOs

2.3.5.2 Guiding principles for the selection of operations

Thematic Priority	TP2: Protecting the environment and promoting climate change adaptation and mitigation, risk prevention and management
<p>The selection of operations is to be made at level of ‘specific objectives’, e.g. potential applicants should apply with project application focusing on only one Priority Axis and only one Programme’s Specific Objective.</p> <p>The selection of projects will be carried out following a standardized assessment procedure using the following sets of criteria:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Strategic coherence: this criterion examines the coherence and contribution of each project application to the relevant Programme’s Specific Objective, while addressing in a coherent way the achievement of the Programme’s specific results envisaged. Furthermore, the cross-border added value of the operation, its territorial dimension and the relevance of the partnership will also be assessed in this context. - Operational quality: this criterion examines the design of the project application in relation to clarity and coherence of the operational objectives, activities and means, feasibility, efficiency, communication of the project and its specific results, potential for uptake and embedment into operative procedures of the partners involved. - Compliance to horizontal principles: this criterion examines the coherence and contribution of each project application to the Programme’s Horizontal Principles and the demonstration of their integration and advancement within the project proposal intervention logic. <p>The strategic coherence criterion basically examines the relevance of the project proposal; hence it retains primacy over the other two criteria.</p> <p>The detailed assessment criteria will be laid down and made available to potential applicants in the calls for proposals documentation that will be prepared and disseminated by the Programme’s Managing Authority.</p> <p>Under Priority axis 3, strategic projects could also be identified outside calls for proposals for the achievement of the programme objectives and priority specific objectives (namely 3.1). Strategic projects should contribute to achievement of a bigger impact through real and strong cross-border impact and long-term results, in respect of the Programme’s objectives. Strategic Projects must be effective and answer the territory’s needs as envisaged by the Programme and result in a significant and long-lasting change or improvement on the whole or large parts of programme area.</p> <p>The basic principles for the eligibility of a strategic project should be the following:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - To address key specific objectives that can be achieved only through the involvement of large partnerships and /or of key stakeholders on the two sides of the 	

border;

- To be based on a larger financial size than common project applications under open call for proposals.

The decision of selecting strategic projects under Priority 3 lies down within the competence of the Joint Monitoring Committee of the Programme.

2.3.5.3 *Planned use of financial instruments (where appropriate)*

Thematic Priority	TP2: Protecting the environment and promoting climate change adaptation and mitigation, risk prevention and management
Planned use of financial instruments Planned use of financial instruments	
No financial instruments will be used	

2.3.6 Common and programme specific indicators

2.3.6.1 Priority axis result indicators (programme specific)

Table 15: Programme specific result indicators

ID	Indicator	Measurement unit	Baseline value	Baseline year	Target value (2023)	Source of data	Frequency of reporting
RI 3.1.1	Increased number of supported interventions in the field of risk prevention and management	Percentage	To be established	2014	To be established	AIR	2018 2023
RI 3.1.2	Increased number of joint initiatives in the field of risk prevention and management	Percentage	To be established	2014	Increase	Survey among target groups	2018 2023
RI 3.2.1	Increased capacity of public and private sector in the field of sustainable use of common natural resources	Percentage	To be established	2014	Increase	Survey among target groups	2018 2023

Remark: The result indicator needs to capture the desired change in the programme area, be close to policy, and not relate only to programme beneficiaries, but to the whole target population. However, result indicators may measure only some of the relevant dimensions of the results to be achieved.

2.3.6.2 Priority axis output indicators (common or programme specific)

Table 16: Common and programme specific output indicators

ID	Indicator (name of indicator)	Measurement unit	Target value (2023)	Source of data	Frequency of reporting
OI 3.1.1	Joint protocols for risk prevention and management	Number	3	Progress and Annual	Annually

	of natural and man-made disasters			Implementation Reports	
OI 3.1.2	Joint tools/services established or improved for risk protection measures	Number	6	Progress and Annual Implementation Reports	Annually
OI 3.1.3	Purchased specialised equipment related to disaster management	Number	10	Progress and Annual Implementation Reports	Annually
OI 3.1.4	Number of supported interventions / investments related to risk prevention	Number	8	Progress and Annual Implementation Reports	Annually
OI 3.1.5	Joint theoretical-tactical exercises and field trainings for fire fighting and emergency situations management	Number	30	Progress and Annual Implementation Reports	Annually
OI 3.1.6	Number of people participated in risk prevention and management training activities	Number	600	Progress and Annual Implementation Reports	Annually
OI 3.2.1	Awareness raising joint initiatives, in the field of preservation and protection of natural resources and landscape	Number	20	Progress and Annual Implementation Reports	Annually
OI 3.2.2	Trainings in the field of sustainable use of natural resources	Number	35	Progress and Annual Implementation Reports	Annually
OI 3.2.3	Participants in environmental related trainings	Number	700	Progress and Annual Implementation Reports	Annually
OI 3.2.4	Joint measures for preservation and restoration of ecosystems and endangered flora and fauna species	Number	10	Progress and Annual Implementation Reports	Annually

2.3.7 Categories of intervention

Table 17: Categories of intervention - Dimension 1 Intervention field

Priority axis	Code	Amount (EUR) EU (ERDF+IPA)
PA3	087 - Adaptation to climate change measures and prevention and management of climate related risks e.g. erosion, fires, flooding, storms and drought, including awareness raising, civil protection and disaster management systems and infrastructures	6.523.750,00
PA3	085 - Protection and enhancement of biodiversity, nature protection and green infrastructure	2.172.324,20

Table 18: Categories of intervention - Dimension 2 Form of finance

Priority axis	Code	Amount (EUR) EU (ERDF+IPA)
PA3	01 - Non-repayable grant	8.696.074,20

Table 19: Categories of intervention - Dimension 3 Territory type

Priority axis	Code	Amount (EUR) EU (ERDF+IPA)
PA3	05 - Cooperation across national or regional programme areas in national context	8.696.074,20

Table 20: Categories of intervention - Dimension 6 Territorial delivery mechanisms

Priority axis	Code	Amount (EUR) EU (ERDF+IPA)
PA3	07 - Not applicable	

2.3.8 A summary of the planned use of technical assistance including, where necessary, actions to reinforce the administrative capacity of authorities involved in the management and control of the programmes and beneficiaries and, where necessary, actions for to enhance the administrative capacity of relevant partners to participate in the implementation of programmes (where appropriate)

Priority axis	3
Capacity building initiatives:	
- For project generation, assisting potential beneficiaries for the identification of needs	

among target groups, coordination of administrative procedures.

Promotion initiatives:

- To activate participation among potential beneficiaries groups;
- To inform target groups on outputs of the programme.

Surveys and evaluation activities:

- Surveys among target groups to evaluate the achievement of PA's results indicators.

2.2 Description of the priority axes for technical assistance

2.2.1 Priority axis 4

ID of the priority axis	4
Title of the priority axis	Technical Assistance

2.2.2 Fund, calculation basis for Union support

Fund	
Calculation basis (total eligible expenditure or public eligible expenditure)	
Justification of the calculation basis choice (only if total eligible expenditure basis selected)	

2.2.3 The specific objectives of the thematic priority and expected results

ID	4.1
Specific objective	<p>PROGRAMME'S ADMINISTRATION</p> <p>To maximise the effectiveness and efficiency of the management and implementation of the IPA CBC Programme Bulgaria-Serbia (2014-2020)</p>
The results that the partner States seek to achieve with Union support²	Not applicable

² Required where the Union support to technical assistance in the cooperation programme exceeds EUR 15 million.

2.2.4 Actions to be supported and their expected contribution to the programme implementation

Priority axis	Technical Assistance
<p>Technical Assistance will finance the programme's Joint Secretariat as well as certain activities undertaken by the Managing Authority/National Authority and Certifying Authority.</p> <p>The Joint Secretariat needs a team of professionals bundling the skills and competences needed for the management, content delivery, financial and communication tasks related to implementing this IPA CBC Programme. Staffing and equipping the Joint Secretariat is a core part of the Technical Assistance budget expenditure.</p> <p>In addition to sustaining the personnel of the Joint Secretariat, the Technical Assistance priority will support a range of activities and tools that are instrumental to achieving the specific objective of this priority. These include following types of activities:</p> <p>Project generation and selection:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Developing application forms, calls for proposals/terms of reference and guidance documents for potential project applicants. - Providing assistance and advice to potential applicants in the process of developing their project application, e.g. through seminars, bilateral consultations and contacts. - Performing quality assessments of applications for projects. <p>Support to actors involved in implementing IPA CBC projects</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Providing tools and guidance documentation (manuals, supporting project beneficiaries implement their project). - Providing assistance and advice to lead partners and partners on the implementation of their project e.g. through seminars, first level control seminars and bilateral contacts. - Participating in project related meetings and events and performing "on-the-spot visits" to projects to address project progress, outputs and results as well as obstacles in the implementation. <p>Monitoring, control and reporting</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Operating a computerised system for programme management, monitoring, audit and control. - Providing guidance and support to ensure adequate control of the programme actions at all levels (partners, controllers, Partner State bodies responsible for first level controller approbation) e.g. through seminars, guidance documents and advice. - Coordinating and organising of programme level audit activities, including the (external) audits on projects and supporting the Group of Auditors. - Regular reporting to the European Commission on progress of the programme. <p>Communication, dissemination and capitalisation</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Continuous development of the programme website. 	

- Creation and printing of programme information and publications.
- Organisation of events to generate interest for participation in the programme, showcase and disseminate results of the programme supported actions to professional audiences and the wider public and facilitate inter-project interaction and cooperation.

Programme management and steering

- Organisation, preparation and facilitation of meetings of the programme bodies, in particular the Monitoring Committee and Group of Auditors meetings.
- Evaluations, analysis and studies related to the delivery of the programme in support of the continuous improvement of its management and implementation.

In addition to the activities and programme bodies described above, the Programme may decide to use Technical Assistance funding to contribute to activities carried out by Partner States.

2.2.5 Programme specific indicators

2.2.5.1 Programme specific output indicators expected to contribute to results

Table 21: Programme specific output indicators

ID	Indicator (name of indicator)	Measurement unit	Target value (2023)	Source of data	Frequency of reporting
OI 4.1.1	No. of cross-border cooperation projects approved	Number	100	Progress and Annual Implementation Reports	Annually
OI 4.1.2	No. of project visits and participations in project events by JS	Number	100	Progress and Annual Implementation Reports	Annually
OI 4.1.3	No. of publications and appearances in other media of the programme	Number	30	Progress and Annual Implementation Reports	Annually
OI 4.1.4	No. of Monitoring Committee meetings	Number	14	Progress and Annual Implementation Reports	Annually

2.2.6 Categories of intervention

Table 22: Categories of intervention - Dimension 1 Intervention field

Priority axis	Code	Amount (EUR) EU (ERDF+IPA)
PA4	121 - Preparation, implementation, monitoring and inspection	2.174.017,80
PA4	122 - Evaluation and studies	361.487,15
PA4	123 - Information and communication	363.186,45

Table 23: Categories of intervention - Dimension 2 Form of finance

Priority axis	Code	Amount (EUR) EU (ERDF+IPA)
PA4	01 - Non-repayable grant	2.898.691,40

Table 24: Categories of intervention - Dimension 3 Territory type

Priority axis	Code	Amount (EUR) EU (ERDF+IPA)
PA4	05 - Cooperation across national or regional programme areas in national context	2.898.691,40

2.3 Overview table of indicators per priority axis and thematic priority

Table 25: Table of common and programme specific output and result indicators

Priority axis	Thematic priority	Specific objective(s)	Selected results indicators	Selected output indicators
PA1	TP-4	SO 1.1 TOURIST ATTRACTIVENESS: Increasing tourist attractiveness of the border area through better utilisation of natural and cultural heritage	RI 1.1.1 Increased number of visitors to the cross-border region	OI 1.1.1 Total length of reconstructed or upgraded access roads to natural, cultural and historic tourism sites
				OI 1.1.2 Total length of newly built, reconstructed or upgraded cycling routes / walking paths
				OI 1.1.3 Total number of newly built / reconstructed facilities in / leading to touristic sites in the eligible border area
				OI 1.1.4 Total number of reconstructed / restored cultural and historical touristic objects in the eligible border area
				OI 1.1.5 Total number of created/reconstructed facilities for disabled people in the supported touristic sites
				OI 1.1.6 Visitors using the online touristic platforms created under the Programme
PA1	TP-4	SO 1.2 CROSS-BORDER TOURISTIC PRODUCT: Valorising the favourable conditions for diversified tourism in the border area through creating common cross-border touristic brand(s)	RI 1.2.1 Increased level of valorization of natural and cultural heritage	OI 1.2.1 Total number of touristic innovations (product / process / market / logistic / organisational)
				OI 1.2.2 Established touristic products and services concerning persons with disabilities
				OI 1.2.3 Tools developed and/or implemented for promotion of sustainable tourism potential of the eligible border area
				OI 1.2.4 Tools developed and/or implemented for marketing of tourism products in the eligible border area
PA1	TP-4	SO 1.3	RI 1.3.1 Increased number of cross-border networks	OI 1.3.1 Public awareness initiatives promoting sustainable use of natural and cultural heritage and

Priority axis	Thematic priority	Specific objective(s)	Selected results indicators	Selected output indicators
		PEOPLE-TO-PEOPLE NETWORKING: Capitalise the effect of cultural and natural heritage tourism on border communities	operating in the field of sustainable tourism	resources OI 1.3.2 Promotional events for capitalisation of the common touristic product/services OI 1.3.3 Common strategies or policies for valorizing (including raising awareness) the cultural and natural heritage through its restoration and promotion for sustainable economic uses OI 1.3.4 Number of participants in training activities aimed at strengthening the application of common standards in tourism across the cross-border region
PA2	TP-5	SO 2.1 SKILLS & ENTREPRENEURSHIP: To develop skills and encourage youth entrepreneurship thus creating prerequisites for improving youth employment opportunities in the border area	RI 2.1.1 Young people who would like to set up their own business in the Programme's eligible territory	OI 2.1.1 Total number of supported small-scale youth-related physical infrastructure OI 2.1.2 Total number of small-scale youth-related physical infrastructure for disabled people or such with special educational needs OI 2.1.3 Supported investments addressing the refurbishment of education-related facilities OI 2.1.4 Supported investments addressing the establishment of small-scale "working" facilities OI 2.1.5 Young people involved in training courses
PA2	TP-5	SO 2.2 PEOPLE-TO-PEOPLE NETWORKING: Promote sustainable, long-term and collaborative initiatives for and with young people, including enhancing mobility of young people	RI 2.2.1 Level of youth participation in networks across the border (sports clubs, leisure time or youth clubs/associations or cultural organisations)	OI 2.2.1 Cross-border linkages between different youth organizations and institutions created OI 2.2.2 Cross-border promo events carried out OI 2.2.3 Awareness campaigns carried out OI 2.2.4 Number of young people with disabilities and or from vulnerable groups involved in cross-border networking
PA3	TP-2	SO 3.1	RI 3.1.1 Increased number	OI 3.1.1 Joint protocols for risk prevention and

Priority axis	Thematic priority	Specific objective(s)	Selected results indicators	Selected output indicators
		JOINT RISK MANAGEMENT: To prevent and mitigate the consequences of natural and man-made cross-border disasters	of supported interventions in the field of risk prevention and management	management of natural and man-made disasters
				OI 3.1.2 Joint tools/services established or improved for risk protection measures OI 3.1.3 Purchased specialised equipment related to disaster management OI 3.1.4 Number of supported interventions / investments related to risk prevention
			RI 3.1.2 Increased number of joint initiatives in the field of risk prevention and management	OI 3.1.5 Joint theoretical-tactical exercises and field trainings for fire fighting and emergency situations management OI 3.1.6 Number of people participated in risk prevention and management training activities
PA3	TP-2	SO 3.2 NATURE PROTECTION: To enhance the capacity of regional and local stakeholders for improved environmental and natural resources management in the border region	RI 3.2.1 Increased capacity of public and private sector in the field of sustainable use of common natural resources	OI 3.2.1 Awareness raising joint initiatives, in the field of preservation and protection of natural resources and landscape
				OI 3.2.2 Trainings in the field of sustainable use of natural resources
				OI 3.2.3 Participants in environmental related trainings
				OI 3.2.4 Joint measures for preservation and restoration of ecosystems and endangered flora and fauna species
PA4	N/A	SO 4.1 PROGRAMME'S	N/A	OI 4.1.1 No. of cross-border cooperation projects approved

Priority axis	Thematic priority	Specific objective(s)	Selected results indicators	Selected output indicators
				<p data-bbox="1352 373 2042 437">OI 4.1.2 No. of project visits and participations in project events by JS</p> <p data-bbox="1352 453 2042 517">OI 4.1.3 No. of publications and appearances in other media of the programme</p> <p data-bbox="1352 533 2042 564">OI 4.1.4 No. of Monitoring Committee meetings</p>

III. FINANCING PLAN

3.1 Financial appropriation from the IPA (in EUR)

Table 26: Financial appropriation

Fund	2014	2015	2016	2017	TOTAL
EU (ERDF+ IPA)	1.447.186,17	2.095.179,94	3.002.371,79	5.443.145,32	28.986.914,00
	2018	2019	2020		
	5.551.144,76	5.659.144,21	5.788.741,80		

3.1.1 Total financial appropriation from the IPA and national co-financing (in EUR)

Table 27: Financial Plan

Priority axis	Basis for calculation of Union support (Total eligible cost or public eligible cost)	Union support (a)	National counterpart (b) = (c) + (d)	Indicative breakdown of the national counterpart *		Total funding (e) = (a) + (b)	Co-financing rate (f) = (a)/(e) (2)	For information	
				National Public funding (c)	National private funding (d) (1)			Contributions from third countries	EIB contributions
PA1		11.594.765,60	2.046.135,11	1.023.067,56	1.023.067,56	13.640.900,71	85,00%	0,00	0,00
PA2		5.797.382,80	1.023.067,55	511.533,78	511.533,78	6.820.450,35	85,00%	0,00	0,00
PA3		8.696.074,20	1.534.601,33	767.300,67	767.300,66	10.230.675,53	85,00%	0,00	0,00
PA4		2.898.691,40	511.533,78	511.533,78	0,00	3.410.255,18	85,00%	0,00	0,00
TOTAL		28.986.914,00	5.115.337,77	2.813.435,78	2.301.902,00	34.102.251,77	85,00%	0,00	0,00

* The indicative breakdown of the national counterpart is indicatively split to equal contribution (50/50) by the participation countries. The real co-financing will be amounted on the base of the projects participation.

→ For Republic of Bulgaria, the entire amount for all priority axes is covered by National Public funding.

→ For Republic of Serbia, the amount for the PA4 is ensured by National Public funding. The amounts for the rest of the priority axes are covered by Serbian project partners through own contribution.

(1) To be completed only when priority axes are expressed in total costs.

(2) This rate may be rounded to the nearest whole number in the table. The precise rate used to reimburse payments is the ratio (f).

3.2 Breakdown by priority axis and thematic priority

Table 28: Breakdown by priority axis

Priority axis	Thematic priority	Union support	National counterpart	Total funding
PA1	TP-4	11.594.765,60	2.046.135,11	13.640.900,71
PA2	TP-5	5.797.382,80	1.023.067,55	6.820.450,35
PA3	TP-2	8.696.074,20	1.534.601,33	10.230.675,53
PA4		2.898.691,40	511.533,78	3.410.255,18
TOTAL		28.986.914,00	5.115.337,77	34.102.251,77

IV. INTEGRATED APPROACH TO TERRITORIAL DEVELOPMENT (WHERE APPROPRIATE)

4.1 Community-led local development (where appropriate)

Not Applicable

4.2 Integrated Territorial Investment (ITI) (where appropriate)

Not Applicable

4.3 Contribution of planned interventions towards macro-regional and sea basin strategies, subject to the needs of the programme area as identified by the relevant partner States and taking into account, where applicable, strategically important projects identified in those strategies (where appropriate)

The priorities of the Bulgaria-Serbia IPA CBC Programme (2014-2020) has taken consideration of its potential contribution to implementing the **EU Strategy for the Danube Region (EUSDR)**, within the areas delineated by the EUSDR Action Programme to make the region environmentally sustainable, prosperous, accessible and attractive, as well as safe and secure. The Danube Region Strategy addresses a wide range of issues; these are divided among 4 pillars and 11 priority areas.

The IPA CBC Programme demonstrates a **high relevance and coherence** to EUSDR strategic initiatives, namely:

PA1 “Sustainable Tourism”

The priority is coordinated to the Danube region strategy that identifies actions for the sustainable development based on the natural and cultural resources among the main pillars of the regional strategy:

- **Pillar “A”:** **Connecting the Danube Region**; Priority Area 3: To promote culture and tourism, people to people contacts
- **Pillar “C”:** **Building Prosperity in the Danube Region**; Priority Area 08 "To support the competitiveness of enterprises" [partially]
- **Pillar “D”:** **Strengthening the Danube Region**; Priority Area 10 "To step up institutional capacity and cooperation" [partially]

The results to be achieved by the programme are the creation of a recognizable identity for the entire area as a destination for sustainable tourism, the promotion of innovative type of tourism, the integration of the area in the touristic networks targeting the diverse environmental systems.

PA2 “Youths”

By investing in young people and making best use of border’s area human capital, the IPA CBC Programme could substantiate its support to progress and grow in the Programme’s eligible territory. To arrive at a knowledge based and inclusive growth it requires empowering people through high levels of employment, investing in skills, fighting poverty and modernising labour markets, training and social protection systems. With reference to this, the Programme will have direct contribution to achieving the aims of:

- **Pillar “C”:** **Building Prosperity in the Danube Region;** Priority Area 9: "To invest in people and skills"
- **Pillar “C”:** **Building Prosperity in the Danube Region;** Priority Area 08 "To support the competitiveness of enterprises" [partially]
- **Pillar “C”:** **Building Prosperity in the Danube Region;** Priority Area 07 "To develop the Knowledge Society (research, education and ICT)" [partially]
- **Pillar “D”:** **Strengthening the Danube Region;** Priority Area 10 "To step up institutional capacity and cooperation" [partially]

The achievement of Programme’s specific objectives should lead to substantial improvement in some of the most demanding youth entrepreneurship challenges the cross-border region between Bulgaria and Serbia faces nowadays: promoting an entrepreneurial culture among young people; improving entrepreneurial education; and improving business assistance and development services.

The IPA CBC Programme will also give ground for youth networking actions, as to help bring about the structural changes necessary to create an environment that makes young people feel welcomed and empowered to actively participate in decision-making processes, namely: through advocacy, good governance, education & information, opportunities for voluntaries, as well as media involvement.

PA3 “Environment”

The Priority Axis is objective closely correlated to the EUDRS, namely:

- **Pillar B: Protecting the Environment in the Region;** Priority Area 5: "To manage environmental risks" and Priority Area 6: "To preserve biodiversity, landscapes and the quality of air and soils"
- **Pillar “D”:** **Strengthening the Danube Region;** Priority Area 10 "To step up institutional capacity and cooperation" [partially]

The CBC dimension is extremely relevant, for the integrated and interdependent environmental systems both for the border region as a whole, but also with reference to the Danube Basin as formulated in the EUDRS.

Due to the financial capacity of the programme, the coordination of projects implemented in the cooperation area with those implemented in the Danube Region is particularly relevant.

V. IMPLEMENTING PROVISIONS FOR THE COOPERATION PROGRAMME

5.1 Relevant authorities and bodies

Table 29: Programme authorities

Authority/body	Name of authority/body and department or unit	Head of authority/body (position or post)
Managing authority	DG "Territorial Cooperation Management" Ministry of Regional Development of the Republic of Bulgaria 17-19 Kiril and Metodii Str 1000 Sofia phone: +359 2 9405 487 /488 mobile phone: +359 882 492 223 tcm@mrrb.government.bg	Director General of DG "Territorial Cooperation Management" within the Ministry of Regional Development of the Republic of Bulgaria
Certifying authority, where applicable	National Fund Directorate at the Ministry of Finance of the Republic of Bulgaria 102 G.S. Rakovski Str 1040 Sofia, Bulgaria Phone: +359 2 9859 2782 Fax: +359 2 9859 2790 natfund@minfin.bg	Director of National Fund Directorate within the Ministry of Finance of the Republic of Bulgaria
Audit authority	Audit of European Union Funds Executive Agency at the Ministry of Finance of the Republic of Bulgaria 4 Slavjanska Str. 1040 Sofia, Bulgaria Phone: +359 2 9859 5200 Fax: +359 2 9859 5202 aeuf@minfin.bg	Executive Director of the Audit of the European Union Funds Executive Agency within the Ministry of Finance of the Republic of Bulgaria

The body to which payments will be made by the Commission is:

<input type="checkbox"/> The Managing Authority	
<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> The Certifying Authority	National Fund Directorate at the Ministry of Finance of the Republic of Bulgaria

Table 30: Body or bodies carrying out control and audit tasks

Authority/body	Name of authority/body and department or unit	Head of authority/body (position or post)
Body or bodies designated to carry out control tasks	For the Republic of Bulgaria: Ministry of Regional Development of the Republic of Bulgaria	Minister of Regional Development of the Republic of Bulgaria
	For Republic of Serbia: Ministry of Finance of the Republic of Serbia, Department for Contracting and Financing of EU Funded Programmes – CFCU, Division for first level control of projects financed under IPA cross-	Assistant Minister for Contracting and Financing of EU Funded Programmes – CFCU Head of division for first level control of projects financed under IPA cross-border and transnational cooperation component

	border and transnational cooperation component	
Body or bodies designated to be responsible for carrying out audit tasks	For the Republic of Bulgaria: Audit of European Union Funds Executive Agency at the Ministry of Finance of the Republic of Bulgaria	Executive Director of the Audit of the European Union Funds Executive Agency within the Ministry of Finance of the Republic of Bulgaria
	For the Republic of Serbia: Representing group of auditors - Government of the Republic of Serbia Audit Authority Office of EU Funds	Director of Audit Authority Office of EU Funds

5.2 Joint Monitoring Committee

According to article 38, Joint monitoring committee, of Commission Implementing regulation (EU) No 447/214 of 2 May 2014 on the specific rules for implementing Regulation (EU) No 231 of the European Parliament and of the Council establishing an Instrument for Pre-accession Assistance (IPA II) the following provisions shall apply:

1. Within three months of the date of notification to the Member State of the decision approving cross-border cooperation programme, the participating countries shall set up a Joint monitoring committee (hereinafter referred to as 'JMC').
2. The JMC shall be composed of representatives of the Commission, the NIPAC and other relevant national authorities and bodies of the IPA II beneficiary, the participating Member State(s) and, where relevant, international financial institutions and other stakeholders, including civil society and private sector organisations.
3. The JMC shall be chaired by a representative of one of the participating countries or of the managing authority.
4. The Commission shall participate in the work of the JMC in an advisory capacity.
5. If the EIB contributes to a programme, it may participate in the work of the JMC in an advisory capacity.
6. The JMC shall review the overall effectiveness, quality and coherence of the implementation of all actions towards meeting the objectives set out in the cross-border programme, the financing agreements and the relevant strategy paper(s). It may make recommendations for corrective actions whenever needed. Articles 49 and 110 of Regulation (EU) No 1303/2013 concerning its functions shall also apply. The JMC and the managing authority shall carry out monitoring by reference to indicators laid down in the relevant cross-border cooperation programme, in accordance with Article 16 of Regulation (EU) No 1299/2013.
7. The JMC shall adopt its rules of procedure.
8. The JMC shall meet at least once a year. Additional meetings may also be convened at the initiative of one of the participating countries or of the Commission, in particular on a thematic basis.

Table 31: Indicative list of Joint Monitoring Committee members

Name of authority/body and department or unit	Role in the programme	Contact details of the authority/body
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EU Commission	Advisory	European Commission, Directorate Regional and Urban Policy
NIPAC	Decision	
Managing Authority	Decision	Ministry of Regional Development of the Republic of Bulgaria
National Authority	Decision	Government of the Republic of Serbia - Serbian European Integration Office
Macro-regional strategy representative (where the programme is overlapping a macro-region covered by an EU Strategy)	Consultative	For Republic of Bulgaria: Ministry of Regional Development For Republic of Serbia: Government of the Republic of Serbia – Serbian European Integration Office Department for Cross-border and Transnational Cooperation Programs – Natalija Matunovic – Milosevic, coordinator for EU MRS related to ETC (nmatunovic@seio.gov.rs) Department for planning, programming, monitoring and reporting on EU funds and development assistance – Sanja Knezevic Mitrovic (sknezevic@seio.gov.rs)
Regional authorities	Decision	
Local authorities	Decision	
Competent Public Central administration Authorities	Decision	
Social and economic partners	Decision	
Civil society organisations (environmental, equal opportunities, non-discrimination)	Decision	
Academic and scientific society	Decision	
EIB	Consultative	
Other (as agreed by the partner countries)		

5.3 Procedure for setting up the joint secretariat

The Managing Authority in cooperation with National Authority establishes a Joint Secretariat. It is placed in Sofia, Republic of Bulgaria. JS has an antennae in Nis, Republic of Serbia. The JS (including its antennae as part of the same body) consists of equal number Bulgarian and Serbian experts contracted by the MA or NA.

JS provides daily help to the Managing Authority, National Authority and the Joint Monitoring Committee of the Programme and assists where appropriate the Certifying Authority and Audit Authority in carrying out their respective duties. The JS also takes part in preparation and implementation of the decisions of Joint Monitoring Committee and carries out usual duties of a secretariat.

The JS is in particular responsible for the following joint tasks:

- Participation in planning and organisation of programme information campaigns and other activities related to raising public awareness on the programme;
- Establishing and managing a joint projects data base and project partners data base;
- Supporting projects generation and development,
- Supporting MA and National Authority for the preparation of all standardised forms for the implementation of Programme such as application package, evaluation, contracting, implementation, monitoring and reporting,
- Preparing the full application package for CfPs and submit to MA and National Authority for approval,
- Advising beneficiaries on the implementation of operations and financial administration;
- Receiving and registering of applications submitted;
- Performing a formal check of project applications in terms of administrative compliance and eligibility;
- Presenting a work plan via the Managing Authority to the Joint Monitoring Committee once a year for approval;
- Organising all meetings and events, draft the minutes, prepare, ensures the administrative management of tasks and services;
- Providing secretariat services for Evaluation Committees and submitting the results of the project technical evaluation sessions to the JMC;
- Monitoring of project implementation, collecting of information from the lead beneficiaries and updating data in the Management Information System; Coordinating the work of the controllers;
- Collecting and checking project reports from the lead partners before submitting to the MA;
- Preparation of the reports on programme implementation;
- Receiving requests from the lead beneficiaries on any modifications as well as preparation of addendums to projects and submitting them to MA or JMC respectively for approval;
- Cooperation with the programme implementing authorities in Bulgaria and Serbia, and with other territorial cooperation programmes;
- Collaboration with central, regional and local stakeholders involved in the CBC Programme.

5.4 Summary description of the management and control arrangements

Managing Authority

According to article 37, Functions of the programme authorities, of Commission Implementing regulation (EU) No 447/2014 of 2 May 2014 on the specific rules for implementing Regulation (EU) No 231 of the European Parliament and of the Council establishing an Instrument for Pre-accession Assistance (IPA II) in line with article 125 of Regulation (EU) No 1303/2013 and article 23(1), (2), (4) and (5) of Regulation (EU) No 1299/2013 concerning the functions of the managing authority, the following provisions shall apply:

Art. 125 of Regulation (EU) No 1303/2013

1. The managing authority shall be responsible for managing the operational programme in accordance with the principle of sound financial management.

2. As regards the management of the operational programme, the managing authority shall:

(a) support the work of the monitoring committee referred to in Article 47 and provide it with the information it requires to carry out its tasks, in particular data relating to the progress of the operational programme in achieving its objectives, financial data and data relating to indicators and milestones;

(b) draw up and, after approval by the monitoring committee, submit to the Commission annual and final implementation reports referred to in Article 50;

(c) make available to intermediate bodies and beneficiaries information that is relevant to the execution of their tasks and the implementation of operations respectively;

(d) establish a system to record and store in computerised form data on each operation necessary for monitoring, evaluation, financial management, verification and audit, including data on individual participants in operations, where applicable;

(e) ensure that the data referred to in point (d) is collected, entered and stored in the system referred to in point (d), and that data on indicators is broken down by gender where required by Annexes I and II of the ESF Regulation.

3. As regards the selection of operations, the managing authority shall:

(a) draw up and, once approved, apply appropriate selection procedures and criteria that:

(i) ensure the contribution of operations to the achievement of the specific objectives and results of the relevant priority;

(ii) are non-discriminatory and transparent;

(iii) take into account the general principles set out in Articles 7 and 8;

(b) ensure that a selected operation falls within the scope of the Fund or Funds concerned and can be attributed to a category of intervention or, in the case of the EMFF, a measure identified in the priority or priorities of the operational programme;

(c) ensure that the beneficiary is provided with a document setting out the conditions for support for each operation including the specific requirements concerning the products or services to be delivered under the operation, the financing plan, and the time-limit for execution;

(d) satisfy itself that the beneficiary has the administrative, financial and operational capacity to fulfil the conditions referred to in point (c) before approval of the operation;

(e) satisfy itself that, where the operation has started before the submission of an application for funding to the managing authority, applicable law relevant for the operation has been

complied with;

(f) ensure that operations selected for support from the Funds or the EMFF do not include activities which were part of an operation which has been or should have been subject to a procedure of recovery in accordance with Article 71 following the relocation of a productive activity outside the programme area;

(g) determine the categories of intervention or, in the case of the EMFF, the measures to which the expenditure of an operation shall be attributed.

4. As regards the financial management and control of the operational programme, the managing authority shall:

(a) verify that the co-financed products and services have been delivered and that expenditure declared by the beneficiaries has been paid and that it complies with applicable law, the operational programme and the conditions for support of the operation;

(b) ensure that beneficiaries involved in the implementation of operations reimbursed on the basis of eligible costs actually incurred maintain either a separate accounting system or an adequate accounting code for all transactions relating to an operation;

(c) put in place effective and proportionate anti-fraud measures taking into account the risks identified;

(d) set up procedures to ensure that all documents regarding expenditure and audits required to ensure an adequate audit trail are held in accordance with the requirements of point (g) of Article 72;

(e) draw up the management declaration and annual summary referred to in points (a) and (b) of Article 59(5) of the Financial Regulation.

By way of derogation from point (a) of the first subparagraph, the ETC Regulation may establish specific rules on verification applicable to cooperation programmes.

5. Verifications pursuant to point (a) of the first subparagraph of paragraph 4 shall include the following procedures:

(a) administrative verifications in respect of each application for reimbursement by beneficiaries;

(b) on-the-spot verifications of operations.

The frequency and coverage of the on-the-spot verifications shall be proportionate to the amount of public support to an operation and to the level of risk identified by such verifications and audits by the audit authority for the management and control system as a whole.

6. On-the-spot verifications of individual operations pursuant to point (b) of the first subparagraph of paragraph 5 may be carried out on a sample basis.

7. Where the managing authority is also a beneficiary under the operational programme, arrangements for the verifications referred to in point (a) of the first subparagraph of paragraph 4 shall ensure adequate separation of functions.

8. The Commission shall be empowered to adopt delegated acts, in accordance with Article 149, laying down rules specifying the information in relation to the data to be recorded and stored in computerised form within the monitoring system established under point (d) of paragraph 2 of this Article.

The Commission shall adopt implementing acts laying down the technical specifications of the

system established under point (d) of paragraph 2 of this Article. Those implementing acts shall be adopted in accordance with the examination procedure referred to in Article 150(3).

9. The Commission shall be empowered to adopt delegated acts, in accordance with Article 149, laying down the detailed minimum requirements for the audit trail referred to in point (d) of the first subparagraph of paragraph 4 of this Article in respect of the accounting records to be maintained and the supporting documents to be held at the level of the certifying authority, managing authority, intermediate bodies and beneficiaries.

10. The Commission shall, in order to ensure uniform conditions on the implementation of this Article, adopt implementing acts concerning the model for the management declaration referred to in point (e) of the first subparagraph of paragraph 4 of this Article. Those implementing acts shall be adopted in accordance with the advisory procedure referred to in Article 150(2).

Article 23(1), (2), (4) and (5) of Regulation (EU) No 1299/2013

1. Without prejudice to paragraph 4 of this Article, the managing authority of a cooperation programme shall carry out the functions laid down in Article 125 of Regulation (EU) No 1303/2013.

2. The managing authority, after consultation with the Member States and any third countries participating in a cooperation programme, shall set up a joint secretariat.

The joint secretariat shall assist the managing authority and the monitoring committee in carrying out their respective functions. The joint secretariat shall also provide information to potential beneficiaries about funding opportunities under cooperation programmes and shall assist beneficiaries in the implementation of operations.

3. Where the managing authority is an EGTC, verifications under point (a) of Article 125(4) of Regulation (EU) No 1303/2013 shall be carried out by or under the responsibility of the managing authority at least for those Member States and third countries or territories from which there are members participating in the EGTC.

4. Where the managing authority does not carry out verifications under point (a) of Article 125(4) of Regulation (EU) No 1303/2013 throughout the whole programme area, or where the verifications are not carried out by or under the responsibility of the managing authority for those Member States and third countries or territories from which there are members participating in the EGTC in accordance with paragraph 3, each Member State or, where it has accepted the invitation to participate in the cooperation programme, each third country or territory shall designate the body or person responsible for carrying out such verifications in relation to beneficiaries on its territory (the 'controller(s)').

The controllers referred to in the first subparagraph may be the same bodies responsible for carrying out such verifications for the operational programmes under the Investment for growth and jobs goal or, in the case of third countries, for carrying out comparable verifications under external policy instruments of the Union.

The managing authority shall satisfy itself that the expenditure of each beneficiary participating in an operation has been verified by a designated controller.

Each Member State shall ensure that the expenditure of a beneficiary can be verified within a period of three months of the submission of the documents by the beneficiary concerned.

Each Member State or, where it has accepted the invitation to participate in the cooperation programme, each third country shall be responsible for verifications carried out on its territory.

5. Where the delivery of co-financed products or services can be verified only in respect of an entire operation, the verification shall be performed by the managing authority or by the controller of the Member State where the lead beneficiary is located.

National authority

The counterpart for the Managing Authority in charge of the coordination role in Serbia is the Government of the Republic of Serbia - Serbian European Integration Office, acting as National Authority.

Certifying authority

According to article 37, Functions of the programme authorities, of Commission Implementing regulation (EU) No 447/214 of 2 May 2014 on the specific rules for implementing Regulation (EU) No 231 of the European Parliament and of the Council establishing an Instrument for Pre-accession Assistance (IPA II) in line with article 126 of Regulation (EU) No 1303/2013 and Article 24 of Regulation (EU) No 1299/2013 concerning the functions of the certifying authority the below provisions shall apply. The certifying authority shall receive the payments made by the Commission and shall, as a general rule, make payments to the lead beneficiary in accordance with Article 132 of Regulation (EU) No 1303/2013.

The certifying authority of an operational programme shall be responsible in particular for:

- (a) drawing up and submitting payment applications to the Commission, and certifying that they result from reliable accounting systems, are based on verifiable supporting documents and have been subject to verifications by the managing authority;
- (b) drawing up the accounts referred to in point (a) of Article 59(5) of the Financial Regulation;
- (c) certifying the completeness, accuracy and veracity of the accounts and that the expenditure entered in the accounts complies with applicable law and has been incurred in respect of operations selected for funding in accordance with the criteria applicable to the operational programme and complying with applicable law;
- (d) ensuring that there is a system which records and stores, in computerised form, accounting records for each operation, and which supports all the data required for drawing up payment applications and accounts, including records of amounts recoverable, amounts recovered and amounts withdrawn following cancellation of all or part of the contribution for an operation or operational programme;
- (e) ensuring, for the purposes of drawing up and submitting payment applications, that it has received adequate information from the managing authority on the procedures and verifications carried out in relation to expenditure;
- (f) taking account when drawing up and submitting payment applications of the results of all audits carried out by, or under the responsibility of, the audit authority;
- (g) maintaining, in a computerised form, accounting records of expenditure declared to the Commission and of the corresponding public contribution paid to beneficiaries;
- (h) keeping an account of amounts recoverable and of amounts withdrawn following cancellation of all or part of the contribution for an operation. Amounts recovered shall be repaid to the budget of the Union prior to the closure of the operational programme by deducting them from the subsequent statement of expenditure.

Audit authority

According to article 37, Functions of the programme authorities, of Commission Implementing regulation (EU) No 447/214 of 2 May 2014 on the specific rules for implementing Regulation (EU) No 231 of the European Parliament and of the Council establishing an Instrument for Pre-accession Assistance (IPA II) in line with article 127 of Regulation (EU) No 1303/2013 and Article 25 of Regulation (EU) No 1299/2013 concerning the functions of the audit authority the below provisions shall apply.

Article 127 of Regulation (EU) No 1303/2013

1. The audit authority shall ensure that audits are carried out on the proper functioning of the management and control system of the operational programme and on an appropriate sample of operations on the basis of the declared expenditure. The declared expenditure shall be audited based on a representative sample and, as a general rule, on statistical sampling methods.

A non- statistical sampling method may be used on the professional judgement of the audit authority, in duly justified cases, in accordance with internationally accepted audit standards and in any case where the number of operations for an accounting year is insufficient to allow the use of a statistical method.

In such cases, the size of the sample shall be sufficient to enable the audit authority to draw up a valid audit opinion in accordance with the second subparagraph of Article 59(5) of the Financial Regulation.

The non-statistical sample method shall cover a minimum of 5 % of operations for which expenditure has been declared to the Commission during an accounting year and 10 % of the expenditure which has been declared to the Commission during an accounting year.

2. Where audits are carried out by a body other than the audit authority, the audit authority shall ensure that any such body has the necessary functional independence.

3. The audit authority shall ensure that audit work takes account of internationally accepted audit standards.

4. The audit authority shall, within eight months of adoption of an operational programme, prepare an audit strategy for performance of audits. The audit strategy shall set out the audit methodology, the sampling method for audits on operations and the planning of audits in relation to the current accounting year and the two subsequent accounting years. The audit strategy shall be updated annually from 2016 until and including 2024. Where a common management and control system applies to more than one operational programme, a single audit strategy may be prepared for the operational programmes concerned. The audit authority shall submit the audit strategy to the Commission upon request.

5. The audit authority shall draw up:

(a) an audit opinion in accordance with the second subparagraph of Article 59(5) of the Financial Regulation;

(b) a control report setting out the main findings of the audits carried out in accordance with paragraph 1, including findings with regard to deficiencies found in the management and control systems, and the proposed and implemented corrective actions.

Where a common management and control system applies to more than one operational programme, the information required under point (b) of the first subparagraph may be grouped

in a single report.

6. The Commission shall, in order to ensure uniform conditions for the implementation of this Article, adopt implementing acts laying down models for the audit strategy, the audit opinion and the control report. Those implementing acts shall be adopted in accordance with the advisory procedure referred to in Article 150(2).

7. The Commission shall be empowered to adopt delegated acts, in accordance with Article 149, to set out the scope and content of audits of operations and audits of the accounts and the methodology for the selection of the sample of operations referred to in paragraph 1 of this Article.

8. The Commission shall be empowered to adopt delegated acts, in accordance with Article 149, laying down detailed rules on the use of data collected during audits carried out by Commission officials or authorised Commission representatives.

Article 25, of Regulation (EU) No 1299/2013

1. The Member States and third countries participating in a cooperation programme may authorise the audit authority to carry out directly the functions provided for in Article 127 of Regulation (EU) No 1303/2013 in the whole of the territory covered by a cooperation programme. They shall specify when the audit authority is to be accompanied by an auditor of a Member State or a third country.

2. Where the audit authority does not have the authorisation referred to in paragraph 1, it shall be assisted by a group of auditors composed of a representative from each Member State or third country participating in the cooperation programme and carrying out the functions provided for in Article 127 of Regulation (EU) No 1303/2013. Each Member State or, where it has accepted the invitation to participate in a cooperation programme, each third country shall be responsible for audits carried out on its territory.

Each representative from each Member State or third country participating in the cooperation programme shall be responsible for providing the factual elements relating to expenditure on its territory that are required by the audit authority in order to perform its assessment.

The group of auditors shall be set up within three months of the decision approving the cooperation programme. It shall draw up its own rules of procedure and be chaired by the audit authority for the cooperation programme.

3. The auditors shall be functionally independent of controllers who carry out verifications under Article 23.

4. The Audit Authority shall be assisted by a Group of Auditors, comprising representatives of Bulgaria and Serbia.

First Level Control system

For Republic of Bulgaria – to be further developed

For Republic of Serbia

Serbia set up a centralised control system. Standard rules and procedures for carrying out the control activities are defined in national FLC Manual and other relevant documents.

The actual verification of expenditures is performed by the Division for First Level Control Activities of Projects Financed under IPA Component Cross-Border Cooperation, within the Department for Contracting and Financing of EU Funded Projects (CFCU), Ministry of Finance

– Republic of Serbia. The above mentioned Division is involved in the verification of expenditures and takes responsibility for issuing declarations on validation of expenditures. The verification of expenditures is performed by the controllers employed with the Ministry of Finance of the Republic of Serbia as civil servants or engaged on the Service Contract bases between Ministry of Finance, Serbian European Integration Office and expert..3. tThe requirement for formal separation of functions between the bodies having responsibilities in programme management, project selection and approval, project activities, the verification of project expenditure and delivery of the products and services, is fully respected (according to Article 47 of Regulation (EC) No447/2014 and Article 72 (b) of the Regulation (EU) No 1303/2013).y The salaries of the First Level Control officers for Serbian partners are financed from the national budget allocation of the Ministry of Finance of the Republic of Serbia and additionally for maximum two controllers financed from NA TA Annual budget, while all travel costs for the on the spot checks or participation to the relevant Programme meetings or events or audit activities will be covered from NA TA Annual Budget of the Bulgaria – Serbia IPA Cross-border Cooperation Programme.

5.5 Apportionment of liabilities among partner States in case of financial corrections imposed by the managing authority or the Commission

In case a cooperation between Member state and IPA country, according to article 46 (6), Financial management, decommitment, examination and acceptance of accounts, closure and financial corrections, of Commission Implementing regulation (EU) No 447/214 of 2 May 2014 on the specific rules for implementing Regulation (EU) No 231 of the European Parliament and of the Council establishing an Instrument for Pre-accession Assistance (IPA II) the following ESIF rules will apply:

- Articles 85, 122(2) and 143 to 147 of Regulation (EU) No 1303/2013 concerning financial corrections and recoveries
- Article 27(2) and (3) of Regulation (EU) No 1299/2013

5.6 Use of the Euro (where applicable)

In accordance with the ETC Regulation, Article 28, expenditure incurred by project partners located in countries, which are outside of the Euro zone, shall be converted into euro. The conversion is to be made by the beneficiaries using the accounting exchange rate of the EC applied during the month of the incurring of the expenditure.

5.7 Involvement of partners

Participation of partners in the preparation of the programme.

The entire programme cycle, embracing the programme preparation, implementation, monitoring and evaluation alike, has been designed to ensure the active involvement of the relevant partners. As presented above, partners have been involved in the programming process, primarily through:

- Meetings of the Task Force and Joint Working Group;
- Consultation with the partners;

- Consultations with the stakeholders – local and regional authorities, central and regional offices of national institutions, Chambers of commerce and industry, NGOs, etc;
- Internet based consultations.

The entire CBC Programme promotes the concept of a special form of partnership – cross-border partnership. Thus only joint projects of Bulgarian and Serbian partners can be supported. The application of the Lead partner principle also enhances partnership. In addition, the implementation procedures and the structure and composition of the various institutions and bodies have all been designed to ensure balanced partnership of every relevant partner, from both counties, across the whole programme cycle management process.

The consultations for the Situation analysis and SWOT

The participation to all stages of consultation was active. Programme partners and stakeholders were asked to contribute to the areas of cooperation with their vision through an on-line survey based on questionnaires. The survey was performed in February 2014. The respondents expressed their views and opinions by answering the questionnaire provided, and offering a quantitative ranking for their opinion. The respondents to the survey are partners of projects financed by the current programme, and among them were included representatives of NGO, educational and university institutions, local administrations and others. More than 180 respondents from local public authorities, national public authorities, and civil society (associations, foundations, etc.), private sector gave their feedback during the survey.

The contribution to the Situation analysis and SWOT by the stakeholders and potential beneficiaries were given during the First round of regional consultations that have been performed between 5th and 14th of March 2014 in eleven districts in the programme cross-border area.

The Situation analysis and SWOT were also consulted with the Task force and Joint working group members. The Situation analysis and SWOT were accepted by the Joint working group members during the joint meeting hold in Nis on 8th of May 2014. During the same meeting the three Thematic Priorities as per IPA II Regulation were approved so to be a base for the Priority axes of the OP IPA CBC BG-RS 2014-2020, e.g. sustainable tourism, youths and environment.

A second round of consultations

Over the period 23th of April – 24th of April 2014 in Nis (Turkey) and Sofia (Bulgaria) a second round of regional consultations was performed so to present the First draft of the Intervention logic of OP IPA CBC BG-RS 2014-2020. The stakeholders gave their input in terms of specific objectives, results, target groups, beneficiaries, indicative activities.

Consultations on of the Draft versions of OP IPA CBC BG-RS 2014-2020.

On 16th of June 2014 the First draft OP IPA CBC BG-RS 2014-2020 was submitted to Managing authority for working consultation. Over the period 16th – 30th of June 2014 the First draft OP IPA CBC BG-RS 2014-2020 was also consulted with the Task force and Joint working group members.

VI. HORIZONTAL PRINCIPLES

6.1 Sustainable development

Sustainable development is one of the main pillars of IPA CBC Programme Bulgaria-Serbia (2014-2020). The Programme supports several Priority Axes and specific objectives that focus fully on sustainable development, notably: PA1 (SO1 and 2) and PA3 (SO2).

Under these PAs and respective specific objectives the Programme will support cross-border cooperation projects that have as their primary aim to improve the implementation of cross-border cooperation initiatives related to sustainable development issues. Projects will have to clearly demonstrate in their application that the activities they propose will make the implementation of those initiatives better, in order to eventually contribute to the sustainable development of the border area. Projects that fail to demonstrate this clear contribution to improving cross-border sustainable development policies will not be selected.

PA2 is targeted entirely on policy learning related to youth entrepreneurship and do not directly focus on sustainable development issues. However, it is quite likely that projects supported under this priority also address aspects of sustainable development in their work. This may for instance be the case for innovation related projects that focus on capacities and skills for eco-innovation, or projects that concentrate on the internationalisation of young people in green technology sectors. Project applicants under this PA will be invited to explain in their application how their project will comply with and possibly even strengthen sustainable development. At the end of the project the partners will be asked to report how their project activities and outputs actually contributed to this horizontal principle.

Based on the aggregated contributions reported by projects the IPA CBC Programme will be able to monitor and demonstrate how the Programme concretely contributed to sustainable development. However, no specific selection criteria are foreseen to favour the development of projects dealing with this issue. The activities may address relevant cross-border cooperation experiences and practices related to the principle of sustainable development.

The activities of IPA CBC Programme are likely to generate a lot of travel which leads to related CO2 emissions. While these travels are an essential aspect of cross-border cooperation activities, beneficiaries of the Programme will be encouraged to use modes of interaction that do not require travelling when possible.

6.2 Equal opportunities and non-discrimination

IPA CBC Programme Bulgaria-Serbia (2014-2020) does not intend to develop specific actions uniquely aimed at the promotion of equal opportunities and the prevention of discrimination. The reason that this horizontal principle is not pro-actively supported primarily lies in the thematic scope of the Programme's strategy adopted.

With its focus on sustainable touristic development, youth entrepreneurship, environment and resource efficiency as well as risk prevention, most of the specific objectives of the programme cover thematic areas that have no direct link to the horizontal principle of equal opportunities and non-discrimination. Rather, the programme adopts social inclusion, which also implies equal opportunities and non-discrimination, as a crosscutting theme, to be applied

in relevant cases within the scope of the Programme's action. This cross-cutting theme is most likely to emerge in projects under the PA2 (SO 2.1 and SO 2.2) dedicated to supporting young people development and entrepreneurship. Even if the primary focus of this specific objective is not on addressing the equal opportunities/non discrimination principle, it is anticipated that certain cross-border cooperation projects may emerge that focus on, or at least incorporate the equal opportunities principle. It may benefit the innovation climate to encourage diversity in terms of gender, ethnicity, religion and age etc. to provide a broadened framework for the projects. Diversity in this respect may also increase the possibilities of reaching new markets, improve market positions, broaden the recruitment base and increase creativity.

Under PA2 specifically, projects could for instance address the issue of promoting entrepreneurship among specific target groups at risk of discrimination (e.g. youth with disabilities, marginalised and/or ethnical groups of young people). The development of such projects, among the possible applications that may come forward in the corresponding Priority Axis, would be welcomed by the Programme bodies, as also indicated in the presentation of specific objectives in section 2 of the Programme document.

Project applicants will be invited to explain in their application how their project will comply with and possibly even strengthen equal opportunities and non-discrimination. At the end of the project the partners will be asked to report how their project activities and outputs actually contributed to this horizontal principle. Based on the aggregated contributions reported by projects the Programme will be able to monitor and demonstrate how the programme concretely contributed to equal opportunities and non-discrimination.

6.3 Equality between men and women

The horizontal principle of gender equality is not considered to be a primary focus of the Programme. As with the previous point, the reason for this lies in the nature of the thematic Programme's strategy. The specific objectives of the Programme cover thematic areas that have no direct link to the horizontal principle of gender equality.

In the case of the specific objectives (2.1 and 2.2) dedicated to supporting youth development and entrepreneurship, also the primary focus is not on addressing this horizontal principle. But in this case, it is not unlikely that cross-border cooperation projects may emerge that deal with related issues. There is evidence indicating a positive correlation between gender equality and factors promoting economic growth. Support schemes for innovative youth development initiatives might also have an impact on gender equality as men and women tend to be involved in different industry sectors. Similarly, under the same PA2, projects could for instance address the issue of promoting female youth entrepreneurship. The development of such projects as part of the wider thematic scope of PA2 specific objectives would be welcomed by the Programme bodies, as also indicated in the presentation of the respective specific objectives in section 2 of the Programme document.

Project applicants will be invited to explain in their application how their project will comply with and possibly even strengthen gender equality. At the end of the project the partners will be asked to report how their project activities and outputs actually contributed to this horizontal principle. Based on the aggregated contributions reported by projects the Programme will be able to monitor and demonstrate how the Programme concretely contributed to equality between men and women. However, no specific selection criteria are foreseen to favour the development of projects dealing with this issue.

VII.ANNEXES

- 7.1 Draft report of the ex-ante evaluation (including an executive summary of the report)**
- 7.2 Confirmation of agreement in writing to the contents of the cooperation programme (Reference: Article 8(9) of Regulation (EU) No 1299/2013)**
- 7.3 A map of the area covered by the cooperation programme**
- 7.4 A "citizens summary" of the cooperation programme**
- 7.5 Strategic Environmental Assessment**