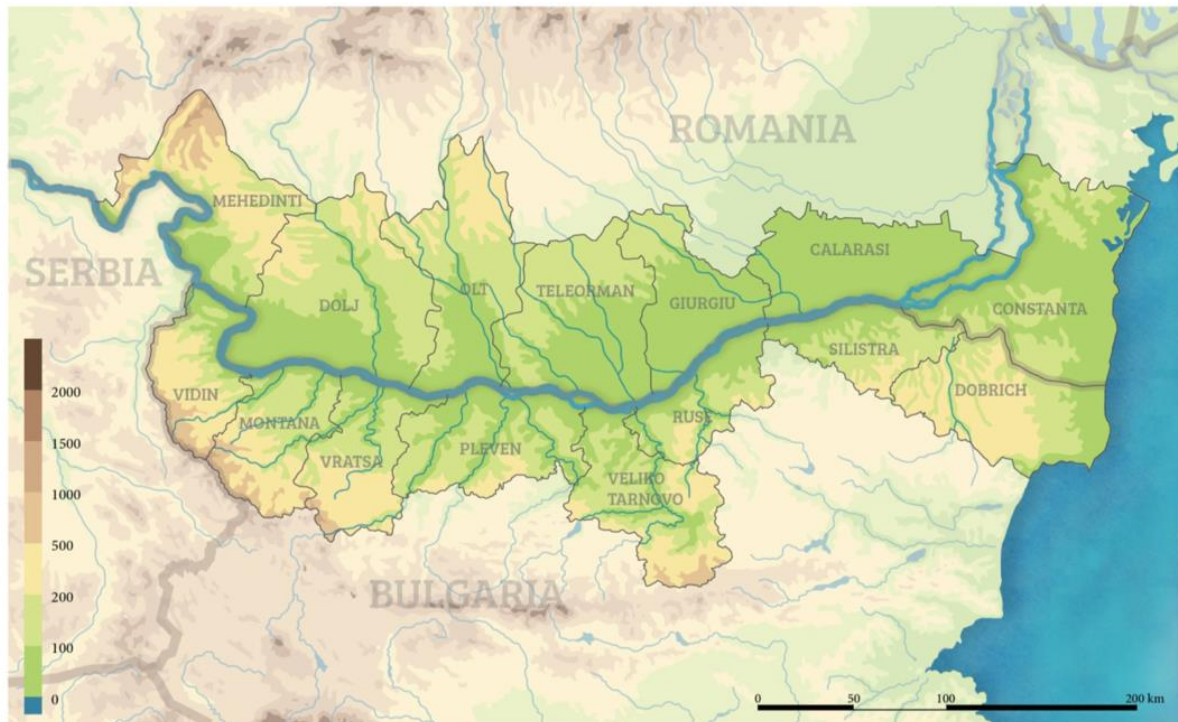


Interreg VI-A Romania-Bulgaria Programme

- Final version -



3rd of FEBRUARY 2022

APPROVED by JWG

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ANNEX

TEMPLATE FOR INTERREG PROGRAMMES¹

CCI	[15 characters]
Title	Interreg VI-A Romania-Bulgaria Programme
Version	Draft 0
First year	2021
Last year	2027
Eligible from	01.01.2021
Eligible until	31.12.2029
Commission decision number	
Commission decision date	
Programme amending decision number	
Programme amending decision entry into force date	
NUTS regions covered by the programme	<p>Bulgaria</p> <p>BG311 - Видин (Vidin)</p> <p>BG312 - Монтана (Montana)</p> <p>BG313 - Враца (Vratsa)</p> <p>BG314 - Плевен (Pleven)</p> <p>BG321 - Велико Търново (Veliko Tarnovo)</p> <p>BG323 - Русе (Ruse)</p> <p>BG325 - Силистра (Silistra)</p> <p>BG332 - Добрич (Dobrich)</p> <p>Romania</p> <p>RO223 - Constanța</p> <p>RO312 - Călărași</p> <p>RO314 - Giurgiu</p> <p>RO317 - Teleorman</p> <p>RO411 - Dolj</p> <p>RO413 - Mehedinți</p> <p>RO414 - Olt</p>
Strand	A

¹ Without prejudice to further alignment in relation to the outcome of interinstitutional negotiations on the articles of the CPR and the fund-specific regulations. Alignments on the external Interreg programmes still to follow.

1. Programme strategy: main development challenges and policy responses

1.1. Programme area (2000 characters)

The Interreg VI-A Romania-Bulgaria Programme (RO-BG Programme) stretches over seven counties in the Southern part of Romania (Mehedinți, Dolj, Olt, Teleorman, Giurgiu, Călărași and Constanța) and eight districts in the Northern part of Bulgaria (Vidin, Vratsa, Montana, Veliko Tarnovo, Pleven, Ruse, Dobrich and Silistra). All 15 NUTS3 regions are situated along the 630 km of Romanian-Bulgarian border.

The programme area (map in Annex 1) covers a total territory of 69.285 square km, amounting to 19.8% of the two countries, with about two thirds in Romania and one third in Bulgaria. It is also home for about 4.20 million inhabitants (1.35 million in Bulgaria and 2.85 million in Romania). The main geographical element, shaping the entire landscape, is the Danube River, which unfolds along 470 km of the border from West to East. Only two districts, Dobrich (BG) and Constanta (RO) are connected by land, in the East.

The territory is predominantly rural, and large areas of land are used for agriculture. There are also significant surfaces covered by forests and water bodies, mostly tributaries to the Danube. The area also encompasses many natural sites on both sides of the border, with a rich biodiversity (many Natura 2000 and Ramsar sites).

From the socio-economic perspective, the cross-border area is one of the least developed territories in the EU. All regions are lagging compared to their EU and national peers, facing significant disparities which have remained constant over time. The overall low level of economic development weakens the business environment and encourages outward migration, which in turn, prevent the region from achieving its potential. The hard border of the Danube causes a North-South divide in terms of physical accessibility and connectivity, while the different languages and administrative barriers add up to the structural challenges affecting the cross-border area.

1.2. Summary of main joint challenges, taking into account economic, social and territorial disparities as well as inequalities, joint investment needs and complementary and synergies with other forms of support, lessons-learned from past experience and macro-regional strategies and sea-basin strategies where the programme area as a whole or partially is covered by one or more strategies. (50000 characters)

1.2.1. Joint challenges and programme strategy

Based on the main development challenges identified at the level of the cross-border region, informed by the lessons learned from the implementation of the two previous programmes in the area and taking into account the other forms of support available, as well as the strategic framework relevant for the area, the following joint investments needs have been identified.

Regional economy

Despite the positive economic evolution, the RO-BG cross-border area ranks among the least developed territories in the EU and is confronted with significant economic disparities between the Northern and Southern sides of the Danube. According to 2017 Eurostat data, four out of the six NUTS2 regions covering the cross-border area in the top ten poorest at EU level. Compared to their Romanian counterparts, Bulgarian districts have experienced lower

GDP growth rates over time, contribute with only 24% to the total GDP of the area and have an average GDP per capita of approx. 4600 euro, 70% of their Romanian counterparts.

Development disparities also manifest between the different territories, on each side of the border. Overall, intra-regional disparities seem to be more pronounced on the Romanian side of the border, with Constanta and Dolj contributing with 45% of the entire cross-border area GDP and with 60% to the GDP of the Romanian side (million PPS, 2017 data). On the Bulgarian side, Ruse, Veliko Tarnovo, Vratsa and Pleven perform better than the rest of the districts, yet worse than their Romanian counterparts. Silistra and Vidin maintain a worrying low level of economic development, with GDP levels below 20% of the cross-border area average.

Significant structural shortcomings impede general competitiveness. As resulting from the EU Regional Competitiveness Index and highlighted in the Border Orientation Paper (BOP), both Bulgarian and Romanian regions along the Danube border are among the poorest performers in the EU. Their overall competitiveness is hampered by significant structural shortcomings, stemming either from deficiencies at national level (such is the case of indicators like “quality of institutions”, “education” or “health”), or at regional level (such as poor infrastructure).

On both sides of the border, economic activity is affected by longstanding challenges related to productivity and specialisation. According to the National Statistical Institutes of Romania and Bulgaria, the number of enterprises has increased in the cross-border area by 6.1% since 2013, more on the Romanian side (9.1%)², than in Bulgarian regions (3.2%).³ However, the SME density is still well below the EU average. The limited level of coordination between national and regional institutions with respect to innovation and entrepreneurship support and the additional labour market problems such as migration of highly qualified workforce and lower accessibility, pose a series of challenges for the SMEs in the region. Industry, services and trade are concentrated in a few centres, mostly in Romania and in the Eastern part of the area. Lack of innovation and poor digitalization of enterprises prevent them from responding effectively to customer demand and from aligning to the global efforts of environment protection.

Enterprises are mainly located in the Eastern part of the territory and in more developed districts. There are approx. 120 thousand active companies in the cross-border area, relatively evenly distributed on both sides of the border. They represent around 11% of all active companies in Romania, and 14.5% of the total in Bulgaria. Compared to those in the rest of the territory, SMEs in the cross-border area face challenges regarding lower accessibility, high dependence on a limited number of sectors, and a relatively immature innovation and entrepreneurship ecosystem. They generally depend on neighbouring cities for the provision of general services and face a rather unfavourable legislative and administrative support⁴.

Insufficient cross-border cooperation is depriving the region of reaching its potential. Estimates show that legal and administrative barriers hampering cross-border cooperation reduce regional GDP by approx. 3.5% and employment by 6-8%. Most of this is caused by inefficient use of the agglomeration economies, of the trust capital and of the productive capacity⁵.

Overall, there are almost 1 million employees in the cross-border area, concentrated in traditional, low-tech and low knowledge-intensive sectors. In broad lines, agriculture hires the lowest share of employees, however its importance has slightly increased from 5.2% in 2012 to 5.8% in 2017. The industrial sector has gradually reduced its number of employees, yet it remains higher than that of the EU28 average of 15.3% (as of 2016). On the Bulgarian side of

² <http://statistici.insse.ro:8077/tempo-online/#/pages/tables/insse-table> (INT1010 - Active enterprises, by activity of national economy at level of CANE Rev.2 section, size classes of number of employees, macroregions, development regions and counties)

³ <https://www.nsi.bg/en/content/12907/%D0%BF%D1%83%D0%B1%D0%BB%D0%B8%D0%BA%D0%B0%D1%86%D0%B8%D1%8F/regions-districts-and-municipalities-republic-bulgaria-2013>

⁴ ESPON, 2017

⁵ EC, *Quantification of the effects of legal and administrative border obstacles in land border regions*, https://ec.europa.eu/regional_policy/sources/docoffic/2014/boosting_growth/quantif_effect_borders_obstacles.pdf

the border, the sector shows a slight increase in employment, indicating some potential for attracting investments for modernization and innovation⁶. Industry is closely related to electricity production and distribution in both Romania and Bulgaria cross-border area, as it is the case in Dolj and Ruse, or petroleum and chemical industry, in Constanta, Ruse and Olt. Ruse has two industrial areas which contain a logistics and a business park, but if we look at its pair city Giurgiu, development is limited. The services sector contributes with more than 40% to the total number of employees, while other economic sectors, such as retail and construction, make up around 26-27% of the total.

Supported by the rich natural and cultural heritage, tourism could provide good conditions for economic diversification in the entire cross-border area, but its potential remains untapped. Both sides of the border region share a strong common historical and cultural heritage - e.g. remains from Roman times, religious sites, traditions. The Black Sea Coast is a popular tourist destination, albeit the limited length of the season. Numerous attractions are present all along the Danube, together with the river itself.

However, tourism and heritage assets are not exploited to their potential. This situation is generated by a variety of factors such as: poor quality of the tourism infrastructure (related amenities), site degradation and pollution (in case of natural sites), limited accessibility and poor transport infrastructure, lack of supporting services and ineffective promotion, as well as lack of labour force (skilled workers). The touristic offer is not coordinated across the border.

Low physical connectivity prevents local businesses from tapping into the potential cross-border market and reaping the benefits of participating in cross-border business ecosystems. For most of the area, the physical barrier imposed by the Danube is the most important factor hindering businesses operations across the border⁷. While digitization can be an alternative way to virtually bridge the gap across the river, better physical mobility is essential for the small local businesses to reach new markets and attract new customers.

Main investment needs

- *Better access to finance for SMEs is needed, throughout their business lifecycle, to allow them to grow, thrive and expand internationally; support for the transition to sustainability and digitalisation is particularly important, to increase their competitiveness and help them access the untapped potential for development.*
- *Digital connectivity needs to be improved to support investments in the economic revitalization of the region, to compensate for the lack of physical connectivity and help SMEs embrace e-commerce as a way to reach new markets. Joint e-solutions are also encouraged.*
- *Investments in the tourism value chain could also contribute to economic revitalization and could increase the attractiveness of the region as a green tourism/cultural heritage destination. Connected sectors, such as agri-food and creative industries could also support the diversification of the local economy.*
- *A safer and greener transport infrastructure would also be of benefit to the local economy by bringing more visitors to the region. This would also increase local and regional mobility, improving SMEs' access to cross-border markets, knowledge and support.*

Connectivity

Both sides of the Danube borders are characterized by a strong East - West direction of flows and development of settlements. During the last years, North-South links lost their

⁶ Territorial Analysis of the Romania-Bulgaria Cross Border Region, [200618-territorial-analysis-updated.pdf](https://interregviarobg.eu/200618-territorial-analysis-updated.pdf) (interregviarobg.eu)

⁷ EC, *Easing legal and administrative obstacles in EU border regions*, 2017, https://ec.europa.eu/regional_policy/sources/docgener/studies/pdf/obstacle_border/final_report.pdf

priority status as investments focused on completing the road and rail segments of the Rhine Danube and Orient East Med corridors. The cross-border territory is therefore still disconnected from the main transport networks of the EU, and the Danube remains the only strong and continuous link to Central Europe.

The “hard border” between the two countries (non-Schengen) and the low number of border crossings greatly hinder mobility across the border. Various national transport corridors are rerouted to the few border crossings available at the moment, as there are just two bridges crossing the Danube within a distance of 470 km (Giurgiu - Ruse and Calafat - Vidin). The most important border crossing for freight remains the Giurgiu-Ruse Bridge, while the Vidin-Calafat Bridge and Vama Veche-Durankulak crossing are secondary links. Land-based border crossing in the Eastern part provides the best conditions in terms of cross-border connectivity.⁸ In addition, a pre-feasibility study elaborated within SPATIAL project analysed the possibility of building new bridges in Călărași-Silistra, Giurgiu-Ruse, Bechet-Oreahovo, Turnu Magurele - Nicopol. Also, a Memorandum of Understanding between the two Ministries of Transport was signed during 2019 for analysing a possible location of the 3rd bridge for preparing the feasibility study⁹.

Passenger and freight transport on the Danube is below potential. The amount of freight carried on various sections of the Danube is 10 times lower than on Europe’s most performant inland waterways. The main challenges that reduce waterborne transport performance are related to the shallow river depth and the limited capacity of ports (including their hinterland connections).

The quality of roads greatly increased in the last years (especially on the Bulgarian side), but their density is still under the EU average and the infrastructure is not effective in supporting either ports or water border crossings. Motorways are still missing, as the only segment in the cross-border area is the A2 motorway between Constanța and Bucharest.

Ports on both sides lack an effective transport infrastructure to serve a larger hinterland. Silistra or Lom lack road belts, which makes it difficult for freight to reach or leave the ports. Except for Constanta, none of the ports along the Danube is served by a motorway; some may be linked to railways, which are mostly degraded. The most developed Danube ports in terms of freight handles are on the Romanian part and are connected to larger cities.

Neither of the two Eurovelo corridor segments passing through Romania and Bulgaria are developed or at least signalled. Most of the Eurovelo 6 route is completed or at least signalled across Europe, but the segments of Eurovelo 13 and Eurovelo 6 between Romania and Bulgaria are not developed yet. Their completion would ensure a complete cycling route of 3,653 km, linking important tourist attractions within Europe. This could greatly boost touristic activity, strengthen the local economy while also providing a sustainable transport corridor between settlements along the Danube.

Rail transport is underdeveloped and underutilized. The only high-speed rail (up to 160 km/h) is in Romania, between Constanța and Bucharest. The Bulgarian side is missing high-speed rails but has most of the rail infrastructure electrified. This territory is served by four important lines connecting Varna to Sofia but also continuing to the important border crossings at Ruse and Vidin. Unfortunately, this is not the case of Romanian railways, where most lines going towards the Danube are dead ends and not electrified. Therefore, the role of the rail infrastructure remains rather local.

Currently, there is no concrete, functional intermodal system of transportation in the area. The only identifiable multimodal facility is located in the Port of Constanța, Romania. One of the main impediments for having intra-modality in the region is the fact that the rail

⁸https://www.interregrobg.eu/images/fisiere/Future%20programme/200618_Territorial%20analysis_updated.pdf

⁹A preliminary impact analysis was performed as part of the Pre-feasibility study for “Building a bridge between Romania and Bulgaria”, synthesis available at <http://www.spatial.mdrap.ro/files/Project%20results/Work%20Package%206/Brosura%20Proiect%20pilot%20transport.pdf>

infrastructure associated to the ports is either inoperable or lacks direct connections to the water-based transport infrastructure. This calls for a better optimization of the existing infrastructure, as well as for better hinterland connections for the ports in the area.

Nevertheless, the location of the two countries, as well as data on the means of transportation being used for freight transport show a high potential for intermodality to be developed in the cross-border region¹⁰. Such a development is needed as the inland waterways are the main transportation way between Eastern and Western Europe, through the TEN-T Rhine-Danube Corridor. In this sense, several cities along the border are key points for the intermodal transportation system of the cross-border region: Ruse, Vidin and Gorna Oriahovitsa (in Bulgaria) and Constanța, Calafat and Giurgiu (commercial transport), Corabia, Turnu Măgurele, Oltenița, Călărași (touristic transport) (in Romania).

Due to a lack of connectivity and a less dense settlement network, the population along the Danube within the cross-border area has poor access to services of general interest (SGI). This is why most counties and districts in the cross-border territory are considered “inner peripheries” in terms of accessibility (access to services of general interest and to urban centres), territories that face specific challenges. The only exception is the cross-border urban system of Giurgiu and Ruse together with the Black Sea coast.

In terms of digital connectivity, none of the two countries managed to reach 100% broadband coverage. Silistra is the only district that achieved this target while other districts still remain between 70 and 75% coverage. On the other hand, Romania is between the few countries that have over 45% of households with a subscription to ultrafast broadband (over 100Mbps). While fixed broadband coverage is still slightly below the 2020 targets, ultrafast broadband, mostly accessible in major cities, is advancing fast. Rural areas, with a low density of population still face issues in terms of broadband coverage. Investments in better, more reliable and faster connectivity would help to attract higher value-added businesses and are a prerequisite for improving the level of digitalization.

Main investment needs

Since the river Danube still acts like an important barrier in terms of cross-border territorial connectivity, the main investment needs are related to the insufficient density and quality of the transport infrastructure, on road, rail, water or other types of transport.

A coherent, strategic approach is needed to maximize added value of investments and to ensure benefits for the entire cross-border area. Joint investments should aim at improving access and mobility, contributing to the EU Green Deal Objectives and encouraging the shift towards more sustainable transport modes.

To this end, investments are needed to:

- Further develop the Eurovelo 6 route within the cross-border region, which would contribute to boosting touristic activity, strengthen the local economy also providing a sustainable transport corridor between settlements along the Danube;*
- Improve the navigation conditions and safety on the Danube and Black Sea, through reducing bottlenecks and developing and implementing joint co-ordinated strategies and integrated measures; improve the performance of water transport on the Danube, by increasing river depth, port capacity and transport safety;*
- Improve the performance of cross-border rail transport, by modernizing and expanding the rail infrastructure and by modernization, reconstruction and construction of railway stops and stations;*

¹⁰ Intermodal CBC (ROBG 2, project financed under Interreg V-A Romania-Bulgaria Programme), Strategy regarding the consolidation of the TEN-T network by improving the capacity of intermodal nodes in the border region of Romania-Bulgaria 2018-2050.

- *Improve the currently poor hinterland connections with ports (railway and road), by upgrading and extending secondary roads and rail serving ports and water border crossings;*
- *Identify and address bottlenecks and support the preparatory process for further improving border connectivity, including the construction of new bridges crossing the Danube, extending and upgrading of railway infrastructure, improving ferry transport etc.*
- *Address the missing links in road and rail infrastructure across the border and the lack of connectivity between less dense settlement and cities/towns;*
- *Develop transport intermodality by implementing terminals or modal transfer points in the key points along the Danube.*

Climate change and environment protection

The area comprises several natural parks and protected areas as well as three national biosphere reserves, with important potential for tourism exploitation. These are situated in the Southern part of the Danube Delta Biosphere Reserve - marine area (located in the Programme area), with a total area of 32.5 hectares in Romania, and the Biosphere Reserves of Chuprene and Srebarna (Ramsar site) in Bulgaria, covering a total area of 2.3 ha. Natura 2000 areas cover a surface of 2.21 million ha, out of which 46.7% in Romania and 53.3% in Bulgaria. Constanța is by far the county with most of the Natura 2000 sites in the area (38), especially due to the large biodiversity in the proximity of the Danube Delta and in the coastal area.

All the area is considered to have a high degree of vulnerability to climate change. With increasing annual average temperatures, the region encountered various extreme weather events, mostly tornados, severe winds, large hail and heavy rains, as well as more severe droughts, which are atypical for this area. The Romanian side is more exposed, especially Constanța County, in the case of tornados. Furthermore, erosion, together with storms and rivers draining in low-lying coastal areas, are the main factors triggering coastal flood-risk. Coastal erosion is a threat not only to households or economic activities, but also to biodiversity. Droughts will have serious consequences in the agricultural sector and will also result in desertification.

The entire cross-border area is facing significant challenges in relation to maintaining and protecting the quality of its environment and mitigating the negative effects of human activities. Protected areas, including Natura 2000 sites, are exposed to great risks because of illegal logging, tourism, constructions, and illegal hunting. Deforestation is a major challenge on both sides of the border. These problems are aggravated by administrative issues, such as the lack of management plans. Specific efforts should be directed towards Natura 2000 sites and the existing conflicts in the areas, especially on designating more Natura 2000 sites, on implementing viable management plans and finding the best ways of stopping logging and destruction.

The main natural risks presented in the cross-border area are floods, earthquakes and landslides. All the localities in the floodplain of the Danube are exposed to the incidence of floods. Outside the Danube floodplain, the largest areas affected by flood risk are located in Mehedinți, Giurgiu and Constanta (Romania), Montana, Veliko Tarnovo and Pleven (Bulgaria). The Vrancea epicentric area has an influence predominant over the Romanian sector and is also felt in the North of the Bulgarian sector (Dobrogea, Veliko Tarnovo and Shabla-Kaliakra Cape). The Black Sea coast (near Cape Kaliakra) and the Veliko Tarnovo region constitute areas with relatively intense seismic activity. The counties of Dolj, Constanța, Pleven and Dobrich have the highest risk of landslides.

The programme area also has a number of sites exposed to technology risks. These put a significant pressure on the control of the floods and of the protection measures that need to be taken in order to avoid major accidents with serious consequences on the urbanised areas. These sites are located in Craiova-Slatina, Giurgiu-Ruse, Silistra-Călărași-Tămădău Mare and Mangalia-Constanța-Năvodari and are either related to harbour activities or are developed on

former communist industrial sites and use the proximity of the water resource as an asset for their activity. A special situation is represented by the location of objectives in settlements from areas at risk to floods such as: Bâcu village in Giurgiu County, Isalnița and Podari communes in Dolj County, Kozloduy from Vratsa district, Svishtov locality from Veliko Tarnovo district. Two major industrial infrastructures in the area present a high level of risk - Kozloduy Nuclear Power Plant and Cernavodă Nuclear Power Plant.

Waste management is still very low, compared to EU targets. The counties with the largest waste production in 2017 are Constanța, Ruse and Dolj, having also the lowest recycling rate (under 3%) while the highest recycling rate has been registered in Olt county (13.79%), which is still low considering the European target of 50% set for 2020. Moreover, the European objective was recently revised to include new and more ambitious targets: 55 % to be achieved by 2025, 60 % by 2030 and 65 % by 2035. Many counties/districts do not report any recycling (e.g. Vidin, Silistra, Călărași, and Giurgiu). Against this background, circular economy is severely underdeveloped.

Main investment needs

- *As both sides of the border share similar natural landscapes, common socio-economic profiles and matching challenges, investments are necessary for planning and implementing common systems and instruments for monitoring the quality of the environment and the extent of human activities, promoting joint coordination mechanisms and initiatives, developing joint risk management strategies and systems, as well as implementing innovative actions across the border for risk prevention purposes.*
- *Moreover, hard investments are needed to reduce the high vulnerability of the cross-border region to natural and human-related risks, particularly through integrated actions.*
- *Significant efforts are necessary for reducing the negative effects of human activities, through soft and hard investments in climate change adaptation, green economy and green and blue infrastructure. Particular attention is needed in areas where natural and industrial risks overlap.*
- *The rich biodiversity of the area could lead to further development of sustainable and eco-friendly economic activities which can contribute to local employment and growth. There is high untapped potential for the local economy that needs to be exploited more, but within strict environmental protection standards, including in the tourism sector.*
- *Expanding existing cross-border networks and developing new ones is necessary for supporting the adoption of common approaches, build awareness and promote successful solutions. Additional efforts are also necessary to promote education and to increase the awareness and raise engagement of people, enterprises and administrations in relation to restoring and protecting the environment.*

Human capital

The Romanian-Bulgaria cross-border area has an overall low population density, which affects economic development and discourages investment. Outward migration, population ageing and low fertility rates have led to a constant population decrease and to a depletion of labour resources. The districts of Vidin and Montana have registered some of the highest values for population decline in Europe, with many areas that are turning into so-called “ghost-towns”. Rural depopulation is registering alarming levels across the area. This has led to a depletion of labour resources, which is visible across the territory but most acute in Teleorman (-17%), Călărași (-15.6%) and Giurgiu (-13.2%).

The remaining labour force is unable to find suitable work opportunities. As such, each of the two sides of the cross-border area hold over 21% (in the case of Romania) and over 30% (in the case of Bulgaria) of the total unemployed population in the respective country. According to the National Institute of Statistics in Romania and Bulgaria, the highest unemployment rate was found in Vidin, where the unemployed accounted for 19.7% of the active population.

Overall, the cross-border area has an unemployment rate of 6.7% in 2018, down from 10.4% in 2013. Poor mobility and language barriers prevent job seekers to effectively access job opportunities across the border.

The education level of the population is the lowest in the two countries. The illiteracy rate is worrying, especially on the Romanian area of the cross-border region. According to the 2011 National Population and household census, the 1st, 2nd and 4th counties in term of highest rate of illiteracy in Romania are located in the cross-border region (Călărași, Giurgiu, and Teleorman). In Bulgaria, two of the districts (Dobrich and Silistra) are above the national percentage of illiterate population. This is due to the fact that these two districts are rural, with a higher number of ethnic minority groups, among which this indicator is traditionally high.

Against the low level of economic development, more than a third of the population in the programme area is at risk of poverty or social exclusion. The situation is particularly concerning in respect to in-work at-risk of poverty, manifested widely, given the low salaries in the region, up to five times smaller than the EU average and well below the national averages.

Main investment needs

Efforts are necessary to improve the quality of the labour force in the RO-BG programme area. Area-focused initiatives are necessary for curbing down illiteracy, for upskilling and reskilling the workforce in the region, as well as to increase cross-border mobility in learning and working.

- *Joint initiatives are sought to curb the rate of adult illiteracy, to support life-long learning and to promote the uptake of digital skills, so as to provide sufficient and suitable labour resources for businesses.*
- *Joint learning programmes, platforms and contents are necessary for mobilizing networks of teachers and trainers, for promoting successful initiatives, raising awareness and promoting participation to education, especially for persons from remote and rural areas.*

Integrated territorial development

The cross-border region is primarily rural with few major urban centres, the biggest of which are located further away from the border. The only urban centre on the Danube exceeding 100,000 inhabitants is Ruse in Bulgaria, while all the rest have under 65,000 inhabitants. Overall, the largest agglomerations are in Constanța (300,000) and Craiova (243,000) and Pleven (107,000). These are the main development engines of the territory, which have the capacity to attract socio-economic development, while also influencing their surrounding territories.

The Danube River is a factor of discontinuity and an obstacle to territorial integration. Bridges and, to a lesser extent, ferries, contribute to North-South mobility, whereas the land-based border significantly improves connectivity. Currently, only the towns of Ruse and Giurgiu have developed strong connections and formed an urban system - this is also the largest cross-border urban system in Europe, with more than 200,000 people living in these cities. However, there are other six twin-cities along the border with opportunities for cross-border interaction via labour mobility, joint education or business support services: Calafat-Vidin, Bechet-Oryahovo, Turnu Măgurele-Nicopole, Zimnicea-Svishtov, Oltenița-Tutrakan and Călărași-Silistra.

The cross-border area has common endowments and opportunities, but integrated territorial development remains weak. From East to West, Romania and Bulgaria share a coastal region, a land-connected border section and a vast water-connected border section. The Danube is the most important landmark defining the territory and the identity of its inhabitants. The region boasts of a strong common natural, historical and cultural heritage. Territorial integration is, however, limited by the poor connectivity. Competition, rather than collaboration often characterizes the general approach in respect to valorising existing potential, particularly in respect to the tourism sector. The management of common assets, such as the Danube, is treated at national level.

Main investment needs

Investments are necessary to enhance territorial integration in the cross-border area, on the following:

- *Enhancing physical connectivity and mobility both across the North-South and the East-West axes of the border, as a precondition for territorial integration;*
- *Further advance the place-based/ functional area approach of territorial integration in places where access is less problematic, such as in twin cities and the Black Sea Coast, by developing common strategies and delivering joint local services;*
- *Support the implementation of an integrated development vision for the cross-border territory, relying on the network of its urban centres and enhancing border interaction via labour mobility, joint education, business support services and improved access to finance for SMEs;*
- *Support a shared approach in diversifying the local economy, by valorising common assets, such as the natural, historical and cultural heritage. Investments in the Eurovelo Route could increase cross-border mobility and attract more visitors to the region. Support for the tourism sector, as well as for connected sectors like creative industries or agri-food will boost the local economy, create jobs and increase the attractiveness of the region, building its long-term resilience.*

Safety and security

With the Danube River as an internal and the Black Sea as an external border of the EU, the region is faced with a number of challenges, against the rising migration flows, growing population mobility and increasing trade of goods and services.

Problems often arise from different regulatory frameworks, procedures, practices or tactics, as well as from capacity gaps (common on both sides or among them) referring to training, equipment or technology. These challenges are ever more pressing, as both countries are striving to access the Schengen area.

These pose enhanced risks in relation to the safety and security of the region and require permanent action in updating and expanding the use of technology and data-led decision-making for border management and control, regulating travel and tracking movement across the border, securing identities and preventing illicit activities.

The following sectors are directly envisaged: transport of goods and passengers, on inland and coastal waters, as well as on land; environment protection, particularly of the river and the maritime ecosystems; fisheries; border control and customs; law enforcement and defence. According to the available information, only about 30% of the useful data is shared across sectors¹¹.

¹¹ Maritime safety and security & Post 2020, Interact, 21-22 November 2017

Porto, Portugal, [https://www.interact-](https://www.interact-eu.net/library?title=Maritime+safety+and+security+%26+Post+2020&field=fields_of_expertise_tid=All&field_networks_tid=All#1679-report-maritime-safety-and-security-post-2020)

[eu.net/library?title=Maritime+safety+and+security+%26+Post+2020&field=fields_of_expertise_tid=All&field_networks_tid=All#1679-report-maritime-safety-and-security-post-2020](https://www.interact-eu.net/library?title=Maritime+safety+and+security+%26+Post+2020&field=fields_of_expertise_tid=All&field_networks_tid=All#1679-report-maritime-safety-and-security-post-2020)

Main investment needs:

- *Capitalize on and consolidate the current cooperation on risk prevention and rapid response management;*
- *Counteract illegal activities affecting environmental quality, such as illegal exploitations and poaching;*
- *Increase rapid response capacities and further develop joint intervention procedures/ schemes.*

The Programme investment strategy strives to strengthen cooperation across the cross-border area, seeking to support the harmonious economic, social and territorial development of the programme area. Addressing the needs of the territory, the Programme provides investments to improve regional connectivity, enhance environment protection, reduce environmental risks and support climate change adaptation, develop human capital and strengthen the local economy. Acknowledging the challenges posed by the hard border of the River Danube, the Programme builds upon the rich cultural heritage to promote collaboration and reinforce common values.

In support of the European Green Deal objectives, the RO-BG Programme strives to actively promote and comply with the ‘do no significant harm’ (DNSH) principle.

1.2.2. Complementarities and synergies with other forms of support

Both Romania and Bulgaria will benefit from extensive funding under the Cohesion Policy for the 2021-2027 programming period. Complementarity of support will ensure an efficient use of the Programme budget and enable the synergies which are necessary for achieving the desired development objectives. Coherence of the programme with other national and EU forms of support has been ensured through extensive stakeholders’ consultations and the use of existing coordination mechanisms set-up at national level in the two countries.

In order to address the region’s diverse and substantial development challenges, joint investments will be financed from POs 2, 3, 4 and 5. While the Programme will focus on projects that jointly solve challenges specific to the area, have a real cross-border impact and will benefit the population, businesses and institutions in the cross-border region, the mainstream interventions supported by the operational programs in Romania and Bulgaria will focus on tackling problems affecting wider areas (NUTS2 regions) or the whole country, respectively.

Investments under PO2 will focus on promoting climate change adaptation in line with Green Deal objectives, Climate change will have serious effects both on urbanized areas and on the cross-border protected areas. Therefore, climate change adaptation should be a priority in policy making and territorial planning in the area in the next decades. Specific efforts are also to be directed towards Natura 2000 sites, biodiversity, development of green infrastructure and reducing all forms of pollution. They will be complementary to mainstream interventions aiming to support a sustainable shift toward a low-carbon and climate resilient economy, encouraging environment protection and climate action within the Sustainable Development Operational Programme 2021-2027(RO) and Operational Programme Environment 2021 - 2027 (BG), as well as to other funding programmes such as LIFE, EAFRD and EMFF.

Investments under PO3 will focus on the development and promoting the local and regional cross-border mobility and connectivity on two tiers: enhancing rail connectivity and mobility across the Danube and improving the navigation conditions and safety on the Danube.

Regarding PO3 and PO5, complementarity will also be ensured with Connecting Europe Facility (CEF), a EU funding instrument aiming to promote, growth, jobs and competitiveness through targeted infrastructure investment at European level. This will be ensured both in relation to CEF cross-border interventions in transport, aiming at upgrading infrastructure and removing the existing bottlenecks, and in relation to CEF telecom interventions, aiming to consolidate the digital service infrastructures. The Programme will complement the ERDF / CF support

under mainstream programmes, in order to promote and facilitate the connectivity in the area, avoid duplication of efforts and support synergies between the different initiatives.

Investments under PO4 will focus on increasing access and participation to education and training, considering the specific context of the cross-border area. Support will be provided to improve access and participation to education and support lifelong learning in the perspective of the cross-border area, to overcome the language and administrative barriers that have an impact on the quality, mobility and adaptability of the labor force on both sides of the border. The Programme will complement the ERDF and +ESF support under mainstream programme for Education, both in Romania and Bulgaria.

Investments under PO 5 will focus on supporting the integrated territorial development of the cross-border area, backboneed by Eurovelo 6 cycling route and by investing in the tourism value chain with relevance at cross-border level.

The Programme also ensures the complementarity with the National Plans of Recovery and Resilience of both Romania and Bulgaria, developed within the Recovery and Resilience Facility, which sets out the priority investment areas for overcoming the crisis, economic recovery and increasing resilience.

Other complementarities are envisaged with the Black Sea Basin Joint Operational Programme, supporting better cooperation between the member countries, notably in the areas of environment protection and climate change, energy and transport, education, culture, or with the Interreg IPA with Serbia, for Mehedinți (in RO) and Vidin, Montana, Vratsa (in BG). The RO-BG CBC Programme will promote the synergies and complementarities with other relevant EU programmes

1.2.3. New European Bauhaus and other horizontal issues

New European Bauhaus will guide the implementation of the interventions, as the Programme will contribute several dimensions envisaged by the initiative. All projects will have the opportunity to explore ways to contribute to creating and delivering sustainable, affordable, accessible, inclusive and beautiful products and services, whether we refer to new cycling infrastructure, digitalization of heritage, learning programs or green areas in cities.

Projects implemented under the programme can contribute with a wide range of solutions, from educational and cultural activities, which play a key role in the shift of paradigm towards new behaviour and values, to implementation of nature-based solutions which address floods, for example, while making the built environment more attractive.

Also, implementing solutions for making cities greener and using sustainably sourced nature-based materials and a zero pollution ambition model, throughout the Programme, from environmental actions to tourism, are horizontal objectives which can contribute to the New European Bauhaus initiative implementation.

Fostering sustainable living by improving the common spaces to be used by the local community and making use of the cultural assets (heritage, arts, local craft, etc.) and natural assets (landscapes, natural resources, etc.) projects can offer opportunities for connection and social interaction, including for people at risk of exclusion or poverty, the binding element that creates a sense of belonging.

Interventions under PO2 will particularly contribute to support reconnecting with nature, with countless possibilities for projects to align to the principles of the **New European Bauhaus**, from the construction materials used, to the architecture to make public spaces more beautiful and closer to nature, to building awareness towards more sustainable behaviors.

Projects under PO5 will particularly support place-based interventions. Tourism and cultural projects will contribute to consolidating the identity of the cross-border area and the sense of belonging. SMEs will be developing and delivering products and services adapted to the needs of their customers, and will be particularly encouraged to do so in the context of the local economy.

The Programme will promote the durability of operations in line with legal provisions in order to ensure that projects can deliver their intended benefits over an extended period of time after the end of the Programme support.

Through a place-based approach and the multi-level governance framework, the Programme is aligned with the priorities of the 2030 Territorial Agenda, aiming to contribute to reducing inequalities between places and people and to more sustainable territorial development.

Safeguarding the protection of the fundamental rights is both a precondition for obtaining financing and a priority during project implementation, which will be required to comply with the EU Charter of Fundamental Rights. Subsequently, the horizontal principles of gender equality and non-discrimination, in all its forms, will be embedded in the project appraisal process. Ensuring access and opportunities for all, removing barriers to employment, education or culture, ensuring availability of timely and quality public services and enabling civic engagement are objectives enshrined in the design of the Programme.

Throughout the preparation, implementation, monitoring, reporting and evaluation of programme, mechanisms will be considered to ensure compliance with the EU Charter of Fundamental Rights, in accordance with the principles and priority areas promoted by the relevant national strategies. Compliance with the national provisions in force regarding Equal Opportunities, Inclusion and Non-Discrimination will be promoted in the applicant's guidelines. Thus, clear reference regarding the promotion of gender equality, the prohibition of any actions that have the potential to discriminate on the basis of sex, race or ethnic origin, disability, age or sexual orientation, as well as the prohibition of any actions that contribute in any form to segregation or exclusion will be included in the Programme documents. The applicant's guidelines will also include provisions on facilitating access for people with various disabilities, including those with reduced mobility, and will recommend that potential beneficiaries ensure a gender balance in management teams.

Also, as a result of improved cross-border connectivity and mobility due to the supported operations, it is estimated that the socio-economic activities in the area will be strengthened and an increase is expected in the number of jobs, including for people who are part of vulnerable groups. The interventions will ensure that everyone has the right to equal treatment and opportunities in terms of access to goods and services available to the public, especially essential services (such as transport), but also services tailored to the needs. Vulnerable people, in order to allow them to participate in socio-economic activities in the region.

The Programme will support interventions in sustainable and environmentally friendly modes of transport, avoiding negative environmental impacts. The operations promoting the cross-border connectivity and mobility will directly contribute to the SDG 9 - Industry, innovation and infrastructure, developing and modernizing resilient infrastructure to improve connectivity across the border and reduce mobility gaps along the territory. Through the socio-economic development that is expected to be generated, the operations promoting the cross-border connectivity and mobility will also be able to contribute to SDG 8, promoting sustained, inclusive and sustainable economic growth.

Sustainability is at the core of the Programme interventions. The environmental dimension of sustainability is the focus of Priority 2 and a cross-cutting theme in Priorities 1, 3 and 4. The human and social dimension are the focus of Priority 3, aimed at developing human capital and creating new opportunities particularly for youth and children, as well as for active ageing, including through investments in digital skills. Economic sustainability is at the core of Priority 4, aimed at creating new opportunities business growth and for improving the quality of life of the citizens.

The specific objectives set by the Programme shall also be pursued in line with the objective of promoting sustainable development, taking into account the UN Sustainable Development Goals, the Paris Agreement and the "do no significant harm" principle.

Thus, the Programme will take into account the importance of combating the decline of biodiversity and will address the Biodiversity Strategy for 2030, estimating an indicative contribution to biodiversity objectives representing approximately 24% of its ERDF allocation

(based on related calculation methodology). The Programme estimates an indicative contribution representing approximately 49% of its ERDF allocation to support climate change objectives and approximately 58% to meet environmental objectives (based on related calculation methodology).

Also, through the entire life-cycle of the Programme and its projects, elements such as strategic use of green procurement, lifecycle costing criteria, do no significant harm, will be promoted.

1.2.4. Lessons learned from past experience

Romania and Bulgaria benefited from Interreg programmes for two programming periods. The Programme ensures continuity of the results obtained so far in certain areas of investments, in order to further amplify their results and effects and to bring a structural value in the cross-border region. The areas in which a continuity of investments will be ensured are climate change adaptation and risk prevention, protection and preservation of nature, biodiversity and green infrastructure and enhancing regional and local mobility while developing sustainable transport.

Throughout the two implementation cycles (2007-2013/2014-2020), the Programmes acted as a catalyst to facilitate co-operation and future operations can benefit from what has been achieved. The 2014-2020 Programme's role in helping to establish conditions for enhanced co-operation has been instrumental in delivering project achievements and has contributed to reducing various barriers to cooperation. As a result of the 2014-2020 Programme, the cross-border area now benefits from a strong network of stakeholders, who can be actively engaged in the next programming cycle.

The new Programme will continue the good practice of the 2014 - 2020 period, in which the monitoring and reporting of the 2014-2020 Programme was performed in the eMS system at all levels (beneficiaries, FLC, JS, MA). The use of eMS increased the level of simplification and transparency across the entire monitoring procedural workflow.

Another lesson learned from the previous programmes is that gold-plating has a negative impact, thus efforts were made and will be continued in order to reduce and avoid its usage, as it is proven to be leading to increasing administrative costs and burden, with the risk of making financing less attractive and more error prone. Therefore, at 2021-2027 Programme level the programme bodies will focus to provide clarity for beneficiaries and make more use of SCOs.

The new Programme will extensively use the Simplified Costs Option (SCO), as they proved to have a positive impact on the implementation of the 2014-2020 Programme, reducing the administrative burden both for beneficiaries and the programme bodies. Moreover, the activities and trainings provided by the MA, supported by the NA and the Joint Secretariat will be continued. The cross-border character is at the centre of the interventions. Acknowledging the tendency to develop "mirroring" projects, which manifested strongly in the 2007-2013 period, extensive measures were taken for the 2014-2020 period, in order to ensure the integrated cross-border character, such as: specific grids emphasizing the cross-border approach requesting real cross-border character and not just filling in the Regulation cooperation criteria, strict monitoring, double-checks in the pre-contractual phase, multiple campaigns of best practice projects with real cross-border impact.

Other aspects that ensured the smooth implementation of the previous programme are related to the 2 steps approach of the calls for proposals and targeted calls on programme indicators. The 2 steps approach (Express of Interest - Eols - and full applications) ensured the selection of high quality projects, reduction of evaluation deadline (only the Eols selected under 1st step were further developed in full applications, thus a reduced number of projects were evaluated, and of the costs at the level of applicants -additional documents/permits etc. were requested only in the 2nd step). Through the targeted calls, the programme indicators were secured by selecting relevant projects with high contribution. These aspects, with positive impact, might be considered further on by the new Programme. Measures for shortening the contracting process are also envisaged (e.g. reducing the number of pre-contracting documents requested

from beneficiaries, introducing the possibility of signing the documents digitally, reducing the number of pre-contracting visits).

Given the fact that the budget of the new Programme is considerably smaller than in the previous periods, an increased focus is necessary, both in respect to the number of thematic priorities addressed and to the types of activities supported. In line with the reinforced orientation towards results, the programming period 2014 - 2020 already encompassed this approach. Further attention will be paid to properly defining specific actions, so as to better respond to the specific needs identified in the programme area and to increase the impact.

The new Programme was elaborated emphasizing the identification of new potential beneficiaries and partners from the area, asking for their valuable contribution in proposing new types of project ideas. Moreover, the private sector was further involved in the process of identifying the needs and priorities of the programme, in order to stimulate the integration of services and the exchange of good practices between the public and private sectors in the cross-border area.

Some barriers are still persistent and require additional efforts. Cultural and language differences entail additional efforts to address the target groups, legislative and administrative differences prevent, delay or pose significant challenges for the development of some actions. The implementation of the programme and of the projects has been simplified, mainly taking into account the administrative burden imposed on beneficiaries and monitoring bodies. These actions need to be further addressed.

During the implementation of the new Programme the Managing Authority will promote the strategic use of public procurement to support Policy Objectives (including professionalization efforts to address capacity gaps). Beneficiaries should be encouraged to use more quality-related and lifecycle cost criteria. When feasible, environmental (e.g. green public procurement criteria) and social considerations as well as innovation incentives should be incorporated into public procurement procedures.

Taking stock of the valuable results obtained during the 2014-2020 programming period, the new Programme will actively seek to support the capitalization of these results in future projects. Observing the remarkable achievements of other Interreg, mainstream and pan-European programmes in addressing challenges similar to those in the RO-BG area, the programme will encourage capitalization and transfer of these results, as well.

During the entire life-cycle of the funded projects (preparation, selection, implementation, monitoring and reporting), the new Programme will ensure that the entire exchange of the information will be carried out through the JeMS (the electronic system developed by INTERACT and used by Programme), in line with the EU regulation provisions. Training sessions on state-aid, control and financial management will be carried out after the launch of the calls for proposals and also during the implementation period of the projects (especially for financial management and control).

Respect of the principles of gender equality and non-discrimination, including for people with a migrant background, will be better emphasized during the implementation of projects, through the implementation procedures (Applicant Guides, the foreseen declarations).

Off-the-shelf SCO's and lump sums for project preparation and project closure are intended to be used to the largest extent.

More resources could be allocated to the communication channels that proved to be the most effective in reaching the beneficiaries and potential beneficiaries, with a stronger focus on social media.

1.2.5. Coordination with the macro-regional strategies

The Programme aligns with the EU Strategy for Danube Region (EUSDR), striving to boost the development of the Danube Region, by creating synergies and supporting coordination between

the existing policies and initiatives in the region and approaching common challenges in partnership.

While good connections are key for the Danube Region, joint projects will be supported in line with the EUSDR, to improve the connectivity in this area. The Programme will contribute to infrastructure consolidation, as well as to enhancing the connections between people, especially through culture and tourism.

The programme contributes to the first pillar of the EUSDR, *Connect the region*, addressing several priority areas such as: **waterways mobility** (1A), **rail-road-air mobility** (1B), and **culture and tourism** (03).

The programme has an important contribution to develop the inland navigation and to remove the bottlenecks, aiming to improve the performance for transport of the Danube, by increasing river depth, port capacity and transport safety, by supporting the preparatory process for further improving border connectivity.

Secondly, the Programme may contribute to the improvement of rail-road-air mobility, by supporting interventions in development of efficient multimodal terminals at sea, river and dry ports in the Danube Region and ensure their connectivity and access through the integration of all modes of transport and efficient logistics services by 2030.

The Programme may also contribute to improving the currently poor hinterland connections with ports (railway), including by upgrading and extending the railways serving water crossings. Also, the missing links in rail infrastructure across the border and the lack of connectivity between less dense settlement and cities could be addressed. Interventions are envisaged in order to develop transport intramodality by implementing terminals or modal transfer points in the key points along the Danube.

In order to promote Culture and Tourism Priority 3 within EUSDR, the Programme contributes to establish the Danube region as an important European tourist destination and further develop and strengthen the Danube Brand for the entire Danube Region (target 1), Establish the Danube as a transnational cultural and natural travel route (target 3), Develop sustainable forms of tourism, including green tourist products and sustainable mobility solutions along the Danube region (target 4), Promote the development of quality products, infrastructure and innovative forms of tourism and culture by SMEs and public private partnerships (target 8) and to Promote skilled labour workforce, education and skills development in the areas of tourism and culture for sustainable jobs in the region (target 9).¹²

Thus, the Programme supports interventions aiming to develop cycling infrastructure (Euro Velo Route 6), to develop the tourism facilities along this route and to rehabilitate the historical objectives with tourist potential. Moreover, it will support the small businesses in the tourism, agri-food (including local farms) and in the creative industries sector, to create common historical, natural and cultural heritage products and services, to expand/ improve their services, target new markets and create jobs in the cross-border area, including by setting up on-site and on-line shops for traditional / local products (local food, bread, wine, cheese, rose, lavender, honey etc.). More actions will be financed for qualifying the labour force in the tourism ecosystem hospitality.

The Programme will contribute to EUSDR Priority 9, particularly Action 6 Relevant and High-Quality Knowledge, Skills and Competences and Action 7. Lifelong Learning and Learning Mobility by supporting mobility of learners and teachers as well as partnerships among schools and educational institutions, reducing low achievement in basic skills and addressing the development of digital competences at all levels of learning.

¹² <https://cultureandtourism.danube-region.eu/priority-area-3/pa3-targets/>

1.3. Justification for the selection of policy objectives and the Interreg specific objectives, corresponding priorities, specific objectives and the forms of support, addressing, where appropriate, missing links in cross-border infrastructure

Table 1 (2000 characters each)

PO3. A more connected Europe - mobility and regional ICT connectivity	3.2. Developing and enhancing sustainable, climate resilient, intelligent and intermodal national, regional and local mobility, including improved access to TEN-T and cross-border mobility	P1. A well-connected region	<p>As highlighted by the territorial analysis, the competitiveness and the cohesion of the border area is hindered by the relatively low physical connectivity between the regions North and South of the Danube. The low density of border crossings reduces the mobility between the two sides of the border, hinders commercial flows and makes commuting difficult. It also prevents the capitalization of the existing natural resources and cultural heritage for touristic purposes, due to limited access, limiting economic potential and job creation. While the territory with water border has a limited connection (except for the areas in the proximity of ferry routes and the bridges in Vidin-Calafat and Giurgiu-Ruse), the best conditions in terms of cross-border connectivity can be seen between Dobrich and Constanța, the only part of the area connected by land.</p> <p>The River Danube shapes the geography and the economy of the territory, upholding a pivotal role in connecting the region to the rest of Europe. However, inland navigability suffers from bottlenecks, both because of the shallow river depth and the capacity of ports, including their hinterland connections. Ports and ferries on both sides lack an effective transport infrastructure to serve a larger hinterland, including road belts, which makes it difficult for freight and passengers to travel across the river.</p> <p>PO3, SO 3.2. was selected to support the local and regional cross-border mobility and connectivity by the development of the cross-border transport infrastructure on two tiers: enhancing rail connectivity and mobility across the Danube and improving the navigation conditions and safety on the Danube. Operations of strategic importance, with demonstrated cross-border relevance and supporting clean, environmentally friendly transport, in line with the BOP, will be supported.</p> <p>These investments will contribute to strengthening local economies and to consolidating the functional role of the cities located along the border, while also providing a sustainable transport corridor for local and regional cross-border mobility and connectivity. All projects will be supported as grants considering the nature of the operations (cross-border dimension and relative reduced budget).</p>
PO2. A greener, low-carbon Europe	2.4. Promoting climate change adaptation and disaster risk prevention, resilience, taking into account ecosystem-based approaches	P2. A greener region	<p>Both sides of the border are particularly vulnerable to climate change (mainly through temperature increase and high precipitation) and experience increased frequency of climate change-related extreme events, such as droughts and floods. Such events may lead to loss of human life or cause considerable damage, affecting economic growth and prosperity, both nationally and across borders. Available studies predict a high likelihood the frequency and magnitude of extreme weather events will increase in the future.</p>

			<p>Most of the region is in the floodplain of the Danube and that makes it sensitive to that risk. In addition, the Vrancea seismic epicentric area affects the Romanian side and the Northern Bulgaria. The counties of Dolj, Constanța, Plevn and Dobrich experience high risk of landslides. Erosion, together with storm events and rivers draining in low-lying coastal areas, are the main factors triggering coastal flood-risk.</p> <p>Climate change effects are visible on both sides of the border area and are creating negative effects on Biodiversity and ecosystem services, forestry, human health, economy, tourism, urban environment etc. A key cross-cutting issue for all economic sectors is the vulnerability to extreme weather events and the need to develop resilience and preparedness.</p> <p>Therefore, PO2, SO 2.4 was selected to support actions aiming to promote climate change adaptation and disaster risk prevention, resilience, in line with Green Deal objectives, to minimize the economic, social and environmental impact generated by climate change.</p> <p>Future interventions are expected to increase the ability and capacity to adapt to climate change and to support preventive actions,</p> <p>Projects aiming to evaluate the vulnerability of settlements to different categories of hazards are to be envisaged, along with interventions introducing new innovative technologies and equipment designed to address the aforementioned hazards. The response capacity in case of floods, seismic events and other natural hazards should be increased in order to enhance the disaster resilience of the region.</p> <p>All projects will be supported as grants considering the nature of the operations (cross-border dimension and relative reduced budget).</p>
PO2. A greener, low-carbon Europe	2.7. Enhancing protection and preservation of nature, biodiversity and green infrastructure, including in urban areas, and reducing all forms of pollution	P2. A greener region	<p>The biodiversity and natural heritage of the cross-border area face several threats and adverse impacts of human and natural origin. Habitat degradation, land conversion and fragmentation, deforestation, industrialization, pollution, urbanization and overexploitation of natural resources, mass tourism, as well as climate change, have adverse effects on the environment and on the biodiversity in the cross-border area, disrupting ecosystems and the migration of animals. Natura 2000 and Ramsar sites are particularly vulnerable.</p> <p>Also, one underlying challenge is the lack of consistent, comprehensive data. For example, in the case of air quality, data is available only for certain types of pollutants, and only for certain regions and years. This could indicate deficiencies in relation to monitoring or insufficient transparency.</p> <p>Based on existing data, the cross-border region and particularly its urban areas, are affected by water, air and soil pollution.</p> <p>SO 2.7 was selected to support actions enhancing and protecting biodiversity, encouraging active participation of civil society and implementing joint solutions for nature and biodiversity protection and restoration in an attempt to combat the unsustainable human activities that cause</p>

			<p>environmental degradation throughout the region. The SO will also support the reduction of all forms of pollution generated by the local economy (illegal exploitations, tourism, constructions, poaching, etc.) Investments are expected to contribute to finding solutions for stopping the destruction of natural areas and improve pollution control, by expanding the existing cross-border networks of sensors for measuring the air, soil and water quality, building awareness and promoting successful solutions and real-time data.</p> <p>In line with the EC Communication “Green Infrastructure (GI) - Enhancing Europe’s Natural Capital”, under PO2, green infrastructures will be supported to enhance the natural resource, to the sustainable development of the cross-border area.</p> <p>All projects will be supported as grants considering the nature of the operations (cross-border dimension and relative reduced budget).</p>
PO4. A more social and inclusive Europe [implementing the European Pillar of Social Rights]	4.2. Improving equal access to inclusive and quality services in education, training, and lifelong learning through developing accessible infrastructure, including by fostering resilience for distance and on-line education and training	P3. An educated region	<p>On both sides of the border, the region is affected by systemic challenges: high levels of illiteracy and poverty, low participation to education, training and life-long learning. Language barriers prevent the people in the cross-border region from reaping the benefits of learning or working mobility, whereas the limited collaboration between the national and local authorities in the training and education sector as well as between the education authorities and the business further decrease the opportunities for enhancing the quality and inclusiveness of the two education and training systems and for increasing employment opportunities (RO and BG).</p> <p>SO 4.2 was selected because of the systemic challenges that are present on both sides of the border. The high rate of illiteracy and poverty, low participation in education and training, low language skills, are the main problems. Thus, SO 4.2 will support actions enhancing cross-border collaboration in the field of education and training, to create new opportunities for cross-border mobility and joint actions in increasing access and participation to education and training, including for disadvantaged groups (persons with low education levels and/or affected by poverty).</p> <p>Future interventions are expected to support joint educational activities for curbing down illiteracy in the cross-border region, for enhancing basic digital and languages skills (RO and BG) of the population and for increasing the quality of the labour force in the region.</p> <p>Moreover, since the quality of educational infrastructure in the cross-border area is low, including the endowments for digital education, training and development of digital skills, SO 4.2 will also support investments in educational infrastructure and facilities, in order to improve and facilitate the participation to high quality educational services.</p> <p>All projects will be supported as grants considering the nature of the operations (cross-border dimension and relative reduced budget).</p>

PO5. A Europe closer to citizens	5.2 Fostering the integrated and inclusive social, economic and environmental local development, culture, natural heritage, sustainable tourism and security, in areas other than urban areas.	P4. An integrated region	<p>Considering the relatively low economic development of the border area as well as the significant unfavourable economic and social effects of COVID-19 crisis, it is essential that an integrated approach be adopted for the future, building on the existing networks of cities and helping the local economy to embrace the digital transformation, access new markets and become more resilient to global shocks.</p> <p>The historical, cultural and natural heritage is a common asset which could be used to support economic diversification across the region. However, existing sites are often inaccessible, unpromoted and in poor condition.</p> <p>At the same time, the Eurovelo 6 cycling route presents a remarkable opportunity for the area to benefit from the potential tourist flows and valorise its historical, natural and cultural heritage and to support the local economy. The route is nearly completed and has gained significant popularity among travellers, but the only missing link is currently on the Romanian-Bulgarian border.</p> <p>Additional infrastructure and services are necessary, to accommodate the needs of the visitors and prolong their stay. Support along the value chain and in connected sectors (such as creative industries or agri-food) will also be necessary. The available work resources will also need preparation, to take on the newly created jobs in the respective sectors.</p> <p>It is expected that economic activities be developed in a sustainable manner, in order to reduce the negative effects on the environment.</p> <p>As such, SO 5.2 was selected to support an integrated approach to the economic development of the region, having as a backbone the Eurovelo 6 route. A direct support to the local SMEs will also be envisaged. All investments will be financed as grants. Priority will be given to projects in direct connection to the EuroVelo 6.</p> <p>All projects will be supported as grants considering the nature of the operations (cross-border dimension and relative reduced budget).</p>
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2. Priorities

2.1. Priority 1: A well connected region

2.1.1. Specific objective: 3 (ii) Developing and enhancing sustainable, climate resilient, intelligent and intermodal national, regional and local mobility, including improved access to TEN-T and cross-border mobility;

2.1.1.1. *Related types of action and their expected contribution to those specific objectives and to macro-regional strategies and sea-basin strategies, where appropriate*

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While the Programme area is covered by maritime and river-based transport, road and railway networks, and also air transport, the current infrastructure does not have either sufficient density or proper quality to ensure access to the TEN-T and major national corridors or to

safeguard a good connectivity across the border and alongside the border area. Moreover, there is no optimized system of connections between the different modes of transportation.

This is partially the consequence of the historical design of the regional transport grid, which considered the Danube as a rigid border and focused on ensuring connectivity with the two national capitals and national urban poles. This resulted in a low connectivity across the border and within the area caused by significant gaps along the territory, such as few crossing connections along Danube, limited railway links and weak cross-border mobility between the twin cities along the Danube.

The railway network is mainly designed on an East-West direction, linking through its main lines the most important cities in the area, while the North-South connections are rather weak. The Romanian part of the cross-border area has a denser network of railways, but these are simple and not electrified (there are 3 secondary and un-electrified lines crossing the border (Medgidia - Negru Voda - Dobrich; Bucharest - Giurgiu - Ruse - Veliko Tarnovo; Craiova - Calafat - Vidin - Vraca - Sofia). The Bulgarian cross-border region has a less dense railway network, but more electrified double lines. This territory is served by 4 important lines connecting Varna to Sofia, but also continuing to the important border crossings at Ruse and Vidin. There are just a few cross-border trains linking main cities in Romania and Bulgaria. However, due the poor quality of the rail infrastructure the connections cannot compete with road traffic. The Danube River, has relatively few river crossings, as follows: Calafat - Vidin, Bechet - Oryahovo, Turnu Măgurele - Nikopol, Giurgiu - Ruse, Oltenița - Tutrakan and Călărași - Silistra. The lack of a stable and functional river crossing infrastructure is widely acknowledged as the main problem, affecting not only freight and passenger transport on the major EU TEN-T corridors, but also cross-border socio-economic flows, and cooperation among the pairs of towns located on the two banks of the river. The inland navigation along Danube depends on the conditions of infrastructure and on the impact of natural factors. There are sections of the river and its canals that have deficiencies in both width and depth, generated by the natural factors or by the weather impact (low precipitations). That leads to low reliability and navigability of the waterway especially during summer, when the water level is very low, and makes travel times for barges and vessels longer compared to other modes of transport.¹³ This has a significant negative effect on the costs and attractiveness of inland navigation. Further modernization measures along the entire RO-BG Danube waterway shall be implemented, these being essential for the navigation sector to be able to offer reliable services and conduct cost-effective business.¹⁴

Both the modernization of the railway network and of the river crossing infrastructure would represent an opportunity to connect the European space to the Black Sea and to reduce the congestion of road transport, pollutants and consumers of non-renewable sources.

Also, due to the geographic specificities of the Programme area, the Danube it represents almost the entire borderline between the Romania and Bulgaria; thus the interventions along Danube will contribute to the enhancement of cross-border connectivity and mobility between Romania and Bulgaria. Moreover, the cross-border rail crossing are very limited, so each investment of improving the infrastructure will facilitate of the cross-border mobility and connectivity.

The main aim of the envisaged operations under the Programme is to promote the cross-border mobility and connectivity, and to ensure access to TEN-T at regional and local level.

In order to facilitate the programme implementation, a strategic approach is envisaged. Thus, this PO will be implemented through operations of strategic importance. The operations of strategic importance implementing the types of actions related to rail connectivity and mobility across the Danube shall be identified through a targeted call during the Programme implementation.

The following types of actions will be supported (non-exhaustive):

¹³ <https://publications.jrc.ec.europa.eu/repository/handle/JRC104224>

¹⁴ *Ibidem*.

1) Actions enhancing rail connectivity and mobility across the Danube (non-exhaustive list)

- Elaboration of feasibility studies for the electrification and digitalization of the railway infrastructure.
- Designing and implementing sustainable transport tools and solutions for better connectivity and mobility in the cross-border area, for the railway transport, including, but not limited to: safety, territorial deployment, reliability, efficiency, real-time knowledge of schedules, traffic and ticketing etc.
- Identifying and addressing the missing links and bottlenecks in rail and river crossing infrastructure: studies, strategies, joint solutions, joint tools etc.
- Improving and expanding rail transport: studies regarding traffic safety, awareness campaigns, connectivity/mobility studies for understanding freight and passenger flows, commuting etc.
- Designing and implementing integrated solutions for supporting mobility and connectivity in time of crisis.
- Designing and implementing sustainable transport solutions for better connectivity and mobility in the area.
- Modernization, upgrading and expanding the rail infrastructure
 - Works for railway modernization (including electrification of the railway lines and introduction of the ERTMS / ETCS railway signalling system);
 - Works for modernization, reconstruction and construction of railway stops and stations.

2). Actions improving the navigation conditions and safety on the Danube and Black Sea in order to enhance the mobility and connectivity in the cross-border area (non-exhaustive list)

- Reducing administrative burden and other types of bottlenecks: studies, analyses, solutions, tools.
- Developing and implementing joint co-ordinated strategies, tools and pilot applications to improve the navigation conditions on Danube and Black Sea (e.g. joint feasibility studies, engineering planning documents, morphological and hydrodynamic studies in establishing the sediment accumulation conditions etc.).
- Developing and implementing integrated measures to improve the navigation conditions for the common sector of the Danube and the Black Sea in the cross-border area (e.g. integrating the marking systems on Danube, equipment, signalling etc.).

All projects will have to demonstrate strategic relevance for the cross-border area, contribution to national and EU strategic documents, including the Master plans of both countries and to clearly indicate the funding sources of the future investment/project. The projects should be in the benefit of the entire area of the Programme and should focus also on the Green Deal objectives (e.g. water transport/navigability). Not least, projects should enhance cross-border mobility and eliminate the missing links and administrative barriers.

The types of actions have been assessed as compatible with the DNSH principle since they are not expected to have any significant negative environmental impact due to their nature.

Direct effects are expected in respect to increased transport flows and improved mobility at border crossing, contributing to increasing accessibility in the Balkan area from the fluvial TEN-T network. Other expected effects include an increased economic activity in the served areas.

This approach is complementary to national strategies and the mainstream operational programs in the two countries, which are more targeted towards supporting connectivity nationally and less focused on supporting mobility across the border.

The planned actions will contribute to EUSDR by improving the performance for transport of the Danube - Pillar 1, PA 1a - Water mobility and to PA 1b - Rail-Road-Air Mobility.

2.1.1.2. Indicators

Table 2: Output indicators - to be updated

Priority	Specific objective	ID	Indicator	Measurement unit	Milestone (2024)	Final target (2029)
PO3. A well connected region	3.2. Developing sustainable, climate resilient, intelligent and intermodal national, regional and local mobility, including improved access to TEN-T and cross-border mobility	RCO 84	Pilot actions developed jointly and implemented in projects	Pilot action	0	1
PO3. A well connected region	3.2. Developing sustainable, climate resilient, intelligent and intermodal national, regional and local mobility, including improved access to TEN-T and cross-border mobility	RCO 87	Organisations cooperating across borders	Organizations	0	4
PO3. A well connected region	3.2. Developing sustainable, climate resilient, intelligent and intermodal national, regional and local mobility, including improved access to TEN-T and cross-border mobility	RCO 49	Length of rail reconstructed or modernised - TEN-T	km	0	0.5
PO3. A well connected region	3.2. Developing sustainable, climate resilient, intelligent and intermodal national, regional and local mobility, including improved access to TEN-T and cross-border mobility	RCO 53	New or modernised railway stations and	stations and stops	0	2

Table 3: Result indicators

Priority	Specific objective	ID	Indicator	MU	Baseline	Reference year	Final target (2029)	Source of data	Comments
PO3. A well connected region	3.2. Developing sustainable , climate resilient, intelligent and intermodal national, regional and local mobility, including improved access to TEN-T and cross-border mobility	RCR 84	Organisations cooperating across borders after project completion	Organisation	0	2021	2	MA monitoring system (project reports)	
PO3. A well connected region	3.2. Developing sustainable , climate resilient, intelligent and	RCR 104	Solutions taken up or up-scaled by organisations	Solution	0	2021	1	MA monitoring system (project reports)	

Priority	Specific objective	ID	Indicator	MU	Baseline	Reference year	Final target (2029)	Source of data	Comments
	intermodal national, regional and local mobility, including improved access to TEN-T and cross-border mobility								
PO3. A well connected region	3.2. Developing sustainable , climate resilient, intelligent and intermodal national, regional and local mobility, including improved access to TEN-T and cross-border mobility	RC R 58	Annual users of newly built, upgraded, reconstructed or modernised railways	users/year	0	2021	5000	MA monitoring system (project reports)	

2.1.1.3. The main target groups

Reference: Article 17(4)(e)(iii), Article 17(9)(c)(iv)

The target groups envisaged by this priority are individuals and organisations that live and/ or work in the programme area:

- Port and ferry operators
- Enterprises transporting passengers/freight across the river
- Commuters (workers, students)
- Tourists
- Inhabitants in areas targeted by investments particularly those in remote locations, elderly, persons affected by disability
- Enterprises located in areas targeted by investments
- Local authorities in the Programme area

Port and ferry operators, as well as transport providers are among the main target groups that will immediately benefit from the interventions.

Alongside these, local authorities are important target groups, in view of their responsibilities in relation to their legal competencies in spheres of rail accessibility, public transport, and local development.

Commuters, tourists, inhabitants in the cross-border area will benefit of the results of the investments supported by the Programme. In developing and implementing the planned investments, particular attention should be given to vulnerable target groups such as persons living in remote areas, the elderly or disabled.

Local enterprises are of particular importance, as they drive economy activity, generate commuter flows and freight transport. Their needs also have to be taken into consideration when developing and implementing the envisaged investments.

2.1.1.4. Indication of the specific territories targeted, including the planned use of ITI, CLLD or other territorial tools

Reference: Article 17(4)(e)(iv)

Not applicable

2.1.1.5. Planned use of financial instruments

Reference: Article 17(4)(e)(v)

Not applicable

2.1.1.6. Indicative breakdown of the EU programme resources by type of intervention

Reference: Article 17(4)(e)(vi), Article 17(9)(c)(v)

Table 4: Dimension 1 - intervention field

Priority no	Fund	Specific objective	Code	Amount (EUR)
PO3. A well connected region	ERDF	Developing sustainable, climate resilient, intelligent and intermodal national, regional and local mobility, including improved access to TEN-T and cross-border mobility	100 Reconstructed or modernized railways - TEN-T core network	7,000,000
			102 Other reconstructed or modernised railways	2,000,000
			104 Digitalisation of transport: rail	2,000,000
			105 European Rail Traffic Management System (ERTMS)	1,000,000
			115 Inland waterways and ports (TEN-T) excluding facilities dedicated to transport of fossil fuels	8,000,000

Table 5: Dimension 2 - form of financing

Priority no	Fund	Specific objective	Code	Amount (EUR)
PO3. A well connected region	ERDF	Developing sustainable, climate resilient, intelligent and intermodal national, regional and local mobility, including improved access to TEN-T and cross-border mobility	01 Grant	20,000,000

Table 6: Dimension 3 - territorial delivery mechanism and territorial focus

Priority No	Fund	Specific objective	Code	Amount (EUR)
PO3. A well connected region	ERDF	Developing sustainable, climate resilient, intelligent and intermodal national, regional and local mobility, including improved access to TEN-T and cross-border mobility	48 No territorial targeting	20,000,000

Priority 2: A greener region

2.1.2. Specific objective: 2.4. Promoting climate change adaptation and disaster risk prevention, resilience, taking into account ecosystem-based approaches

2.1.2.1. *Related types of action and their expected contribution to those specific objectives and to macro-regional strategies and sea-basin strategies, where appropriate*

The entire area is facing significant challenges in relation to maintaining the quality of its environment and mitigating the negative effects of natural disasters and human activities. As noted in the BOP, the region faces high vulnerability to climate change, high exposure to negative effects of human activities, as well as to natural and technological risk.

As the river Danube crosses the entire territory, all the localities in the floodplain of the Danube are exposed to the incidence of floods. Other natural risks in the border area are earthquakes and landslides.

For both countries, droughts represent an important issue. The significant increase in drought episodes, as well as erosion, especially on the banks of the Danube and along the Black Sea was highlighted at the top of the problems in the field of environment and risk by stakeholders, in consultations during the programme preparation phase.

Taking into account the challenges faced by the cross-border area, the Programme will support actions related to the following fields (non-exhaustive list):

- climate change adaptation measures to reduce the vulnerability of natural and human systems to actual or expected effects of climate change. These actions aim at anticipating the adverse effects of climate change and taking appropriate action to prevent or minimise the damage they can cause, or taking advantage of opportunities that may arise.
- risk prevention and management of natural and hazardous events (e.g. flood, fires, droughts, erosion, earthquakes and landslides) and risks linked to human activities.
- promoting disaster resilience.

Types of actions in the field of risk prevention and resilience (*non-exhaustive list*):

Actions related to disaster risk prevention and resilience will be implemented through operations of strategic importance jointly developed by public authorities together with other relevant stakeholders on both sides of the border, taking into account ecosystem-based approaches. The actions will focus on:

- Improving risk prevention and intervention capacity in the cross-border region, by developing joint operational centers and joint intervention plans,
- Increasing the capacity of intervention and reaction through investments in equipment and vehicles, IT systems etc.
- Developing common training curricula and deployment of joint exercises, including the voluntary response services.
- Improving cross-border coordination and capacity for adaptation to climate change and its associated risks (floods, fires, hydrological droughts, pollution).
- Developing joint methodologies for risk assessment and risk monitoring in the cross-border area (risk of floods, including torrential floods, risk of drought).

Ecosystem-based disaster risk reduction (Eco-DRR) solutions will be particularly encouraged.

Types of actions related to climate change adaptation (*non-exhaustive list*):

The types of actions related to climate change adaptation will be implemented through targeted/regular calls for projects.

- Supporting behavioural change, by raising awareness, building networks of communities and stakeholders and implementing educational activities on how to adapt to the negative effects of the climate change, especially among the local communities, the tourism sector and forest owners;
- Developing joint methods and tools to improve the planning, decision-making and intervention capacity of relevant stakeholders, including public engagement, in the adaptation to climate change (e.g. identification, assessment of needs, designing and implementing joint cross-border strategies, action plans, procedures, methodologies, policies, tools, monitoring systems etc.);
- Developing methods and tools to support adaptation planning and decision-making on climate change adaptation measures;
- Identifying, assessing and reducing the negative implications of climate change on socio-economic activities in the area (e.g. development and implementation of joint strategies, tools, plans, solutions, joint support activity);
- Implementing joint ecosystem-based measures for climate change adaptation, for example:
 - Reforestation, conservation and forest protection measures, including implementing community-based forest monitoring systems related to climate change;
 - Preventing and reversing desertification through integrated management of land and water (e.g. protecting the vegetative cover, planting trees, establishing seed banks, enriching the soil with nutrients, reintroducing selected species, building green "buffer areas");
 - Supporting water and land management through green solutions (for example: swales, creek restoration and nature scaping, green solutions for drainage systems, naturalized storm-water ponds, etc.)

The ecosystem-based approach is central to implementing actions under this specific objective. This means that nature-based solutions will be preferred, wherever possible, above hard or grey infrastructure. This includes flood plains, ecosystem restoration, afforestation, natural water retention measures and other green (or blue) infrastructure measures that have a direct benefit for climate change adaptation and risk prevention.

Projects should be jointly developed by the competent public authorities, other relevant stakeholders and actors on both sides of the border and should be in line with the respective national, regional and local strategic documents.

In order to ensure higher added value and quality of the financed operations, competent Romanian and Bulgarian institutions/bodies will be actively involved in the preparation of the call for proposals guidelines and strongly recommended in the project selection process.

Projects will have to demonstrate relevance for the cross-border area and contribution to national and EU strategic documents. The projects should be in the benefit of the entire area of the Programme and refer to the Green Deal objectives, in respect to protecting ecosystems, anticipating the adverse effects of climate change and taking appropriate action to prevent or minimise the damages.

This approach is complementary to national strategies and operational programmes in the two countries, supporting projects of national importance.

The types of actions have been assessed as compatible with the DNSH principle since they are not expected to have any significant negative environmental impact due to their nature.

The planned actions will contribute to EUSDR PA5 by supporting efforts to achieve significant reductions of flood risk events (Target 2), improve knowledge and information sharing on accident hazard spots (Target 3) and support the assessment of disaster risks in the Danube Region, encouraging actions to promote disaster resilience, preparedness and response activities (Target 4). They also support EUSDR PA 10 by supporting capacity building actions, information exchange and coordination among the relevant stakeholders across the border.

All types of interventions will provide specific measures to prevent and minimize the effects of climate change for vulnerable and marginalized groups, which in some cases are among the most vulnerable to such effects. Also, awareness raising activities will be adapted to the needs of disabled people, encouraging the use of new technologies or tailored measures for people with different disabilities, for the elderly or for people from marginalized groups. Sustainable development is a main point for this SO. This will be ensured by all interventions on climate change adaptation, risk prevention and disaster resilience. Ecosystem-based approach will be promoted, meaning that nature-based solutions will be preferred, wherever possible, above hard or grey infrastructure and traditional technical solutions, which will make a major contribution to the sustainable development of the region.

The SO will directly contribute to the SDG 13 - Climate action, taking actions to adapt to climate change, focusing on awareness-raising activities, developing means to adapt to climate change and consolidating institutional capacity regarding risk prevention and resilience.

2.1.2.2. Indicators

Table 2: Output indicators - to be updated

Priority	Specific objective	ID	Indicator	MU	Milestone (2024)	Final target (2029)
A greener region	2.4. promoting climate change adaptation and disaster risk prevention, resilience, taking into account eco-system based approaches	RCO 84	Pilot actions developed jointly and implemented in projects	Pilot action	0	4
A greener region	2.4. promoting climate change adaptation and disaster risk prevention, resilience, taking into account eco-system based approaches	RCO 87	Organisations cooperating across borders	Organisations	0	13
A greener region	2.4. promoting climate change adaptation and disaster risk prevention, resilience, taking into account eco-system based approaches	RCO 24	Investments in new or upgraded disaster monitoring, preparedness, warning and response systems against natural disasters	Euro	0	20,000,000
A greener region	2.4. promoting climate change adaptation and disaster risk prevention, resilience, taking into account eco-system based approaches	RCO 122	Investments in new or upgraded disaster monitoring, preparedness, warning and response systems against non-climate related natural risks	Euro	0	4,000,000

Table 3: Result indicators

Priority	Specific objective	ID	Indicator	MU	Baseline	Ref year	Final target (2029)	Source of data	Comments
A greener region	2.4. promoting climate change adaptation and disaster risk prevention, resilience, taking into account eco-	RCR 84	Organisations cooperating across borders after project completion	Number	0	2021	4	MA monitoring system (project reports)	

Priority	Specific objective	ID	Indicator	MU	Baseline	Ref year	Final target (2029)	Source of data	Comments
	system based approaches								
A greener region	2.4. promoting climate change adaptation and disaster risk prevention, resilience, taking into account eco-system based approaches	RCR 104	Solutions taken up or up-scaled by organisations	Solution	0	2021	1	MA monitoring system (project reports)	
A greener region	2.4. promoting climate change adaptation and disaster risk prevention, resilience, taking into account eco-system based approaches	RCR 35	Population benefitting from flood protection measure	Persons	0	2021	1,000,000	MA monitoring system (project reports)	
A greener region	2.4. promoting climate change adaptation and disaster risk prevention, resilience, taking into account eco-system based approaches	RCR 37	Population benefitting from protection measures against climate related natural disasters (other than floods or wildfire)	Persons	0	2021	1,000,000	MA monitoring system (project reports)	
A greener region	2.4. promoting climate change adaptation and disaster risk prevention, resilience, taking into account eco-system based approaches	RCR96	Population benefitting from protection measures against non-climate related natural risks and risks related to human activities	Persons	0	2021	300,000	MA monitoring system (project reports)	

2.1.2.3. The main target groups

Reference: Article 17(4)(e)(iii), Article 17(9)(c)(iv)

Target groups are defined as individuals and/or organisations benefiting from the results of projects funded by the programme.

- Organizations in the public sector, policy makers and planners and organisations impacted by climate change adaptation, risk prevention and disaster resilience;
- Population of the cross-border area - people and communities will be more protected from the negative effects of climate change and the risks it entails; they will also be better informed and educated in relation to climate change adaptation measures and the risks;
- Scientists and researchers;
- Environmental educators and environmental organisations;
- Local authorities.

2.1.2.4. Indication of the specific territories targeted, including the planned use of ITI, CLLD or other territorial tools

Reference: Article 17(4)(e)(iv)

Not applicable

2.1.2.5. Planned use of financial instruments

Reference: Article 17(4)(e)(v)

Not applicable

2.1.2.6. Indicative breakdown of the EU programme resources by type of intervention

Reference: Article 17(4)(e)(vi), Article 17(9)(c)(v)

Table 4: Dimension 1 - intervention field

Priority no	Fund	Specific objective	Code	Amount (EUR)
A greener region	ERDF	2.4. promoting climate change adaptation and disaster risk prevention, resilience, taking into account eco-system based approaches	058 Adaptation to climate change measures and prevention and management of climate related risks: floods and landslides (including awareness raising, civil protection and disaster management systems, infrastructures and ecosystem based approaches)	16,000,000
A greener region	ERDF	2.4. promoting climate change adaptation and disaster risk prevention, resilience, taking into account eco-system based approaches	059 Adaptation to climate change measures and prevention and management of climate related risks: fires (including awareness raising, civil protection and disaster management systems, infrastructures and ecosystem based approaches)	15,000,000
A greener region	ERDF	2.4. promoting climate change adaptation and disaster risk prevention, resilience, taking into account eco-system based approaches	060 Adaptation to climate change measures and prevention and management of climate related risks: others, e.g. storms and drought (including awareness raising, civil protection and disaster management systems, infrastructures and ecosystem based approaches)	6,310,309
A greener region	ERDF	2.4. promoting climate change adaptation and disaster risk prevention, resilience, taking into account eco-system based approaches	061 Risk prevention and management of non-climate related natural risks (i.e. earthquakes) and risks linked to human activities (e.g. technological accidents), including awareness raising, civil protection and disaster management systems, infrastructures and ecosystem based approaches	3,500,000

Table 5: Dimension 2 - form of financing

Priority no	Fund	Specific objective	Code	Amount (EUR)
A greener region	ERDF	iv) promoting climate change adaptation and disaster risk prevention, resilience, taking into account eco-system based approaches	01 Grant	40,801,309

Table 6: Dimension 3 - territorial delivery mechanism and territorial focus

Priority No	Fund	Specific objective	Code	Amount (EUR)
A greener region	ERDF	iv) promoting climate change adaptation and disaster risk prevention, resilience, taking into account eco-system based approaches	48 No territorial targeting	40,801,309

2.1.3. Specific objective: 2.7 Enhancing protection and preservation of nature, biodiversity and green infrastructure, including in urban areas, and reducing all forms of pollution

2.1.3.1. *Related types of action and their expected contribution to those specific objectives and to macro-regional strategies and sea-basis strategies, where appropriate*

The region has rich biodiversity, particularly along and around the River Danube. The area has numerous natural protected areas, like Natura 2000 and Ramsar sites, on both sides of the border. Both countries have joint responsibility for preserving certain species (such as the Danube sturgeon¹⁵) and share similar challenges in protecting the unique Danube ecosystem, according to Danube River Protection Convention.

Available evidence show that both sides of the border are equally affected by unsustainable human activities, which cause environmental degradation, including biodiversity loss, soil, water and air pollution, degradation and waste. Human dwellings or activities have led to a high level of fragmentation of wildlife habitats, both along the banks of the Danube and on the land border between Romania and Bulgaria.

As highlighted in the Programme Territorial Analysis, protected areas are especially affected by human activities, whereas urban areas are particularly affected by pollution. Insufficient monitoring infrastructure prevents comprehensive tracking of air quality and effective management solutions. Further activities are needed to improve the quality of the biodiversity and to eliminate/reduce pollution, considering also the benefit to preserving human health. Numerous burdens prevent effectively addressing the environmental challenges in the area, including research and knowledge gaps, cooperation and communication gaps, insufficient capacity, including monitoring infrastructure.

Considering the challenges affecting the cross-border area, the Programme will support actions related to the following fields (non-exhaustive list):

- reducing all types of pollution, by supporting investments in monitoring and data collection on air, soil and water pollution.

¹⁵ Sturgeon 2020. A program for the protection and rehabilitation of Danube sturgeons.
<https://www.icpdr.org/main/sites/default/files/nodes/documents/sturgeon2020-final.pdf>

- supporting the development of green infrastructures, including by developing and protecting green areas in human settlements and raising awareness of the benefits of green spaces.
- enhancing biodiversity conservation, recovery and sustainable use and protection of natural heritage, including Natura 2000 and RAMSAR sites.

Measures addressing green infrastructure and reduction of all forms of pollution will be considered a higher priority among the rest of the activities under Specific objective 2(vii).

Examples of types of actions (non-exhaustive list):

- Promoting, facilitating and encouraging citizens engagement in protecting biodiversity, including its conservation and sustainable use;
- Conservation of biodiversity and habitats through application of best practices from government agencies, research institutes, non-governmental organizations, as well as active participation of civil society.
- Protection and restoration of nature and biodiversity, located within and near settlements through appropriate joint solutions, including through the creation of ecological corridors, green bridges, eco- passages, green infrastructure, ecoducts, etc. to reconnect artificially fragmented natural areas;
- Supporting data collection and information sharing in respect to biodiversity between the two sides of the border;
- Joint evaluation, enhancement and promotion of ecosystem services on local and regional level in a cross-border context;
- Developing ecosystem services to support biodiversity and reduce pollution;
- Sharing good practices and implementing eco-friendly and innovative solutions that address invasive alien species and strengthen sustainable environment management practices (e.g. pollinator-friendly management, management of water bodies, forests etc.);
- Supporting the establishment of seed banks, restocking of soil organic matter and organisms that promote higher plant establishment and growth, and reintroduction of selected species;
- Developing green infrastructures and supporting biodiversity and protecting nature in human settlements, including by: roofing and facade greening, gardening, promoting green eco-friendly solutions for replacing pesticides and herbicides in urban areas etc.;
- Developing green areas, including connections between green spaces (urban parks, green sport facilities, forests, riverbank greens);
- Raising awareness of the benefits of green spaces, including in urban areas, encouraging local actions for greener settlements and rehabilitation of brownfields, driving behavioural change in respect to enhancing nature and biodiversity protection and preservation, and reducing pollution;
- Improving pollution control by supporting investments in monitoring and data collection on air, soil and water pollution, particularly in urban areas, including through setting up tools for measuring the air, soil and water quality and providing real-time data (e.g. networks of sensors and applications and platforms to allow reporting by the public).

All projects will have to demonstrate relevance for the cross-border area, and contribute to national and EU strategic documents, especially the EU Biodiversity Strategy for 2030 and the EU Nature Restoration Plan. The projects should be in the benefit of the entire area of the Programme and should focus also on the Green Deal objectives in respect to supporting the preservation of biodiversity, safeguarding protected areas and promoting green urban spaces.

This approach will be implemented through targeted/regular calls for proposals and is complementary to national strategies and the mainstream operational programs in the two countries.

Projects should be jointly developed by the competent public authorities and other relevant stakeholders and actors on both sides of the border, and should be in line with the respective national and, regional and local strategic documents. In order to ensure the demarcation and complementarity with other environmental programmes and projects, as well as to guarantee higher added value and quality of the financed operations, competent Romanian and Bulgarian institutions/bodies will be actively involved in the preparation of the call for proposals guidelines and strongly recommended in the project selection process.

The planned actions will contribute to EUSDR Priority Area “To preserve biodiversity, landscapes and the quality of air and soils” (PA6), particularly by preventing the deterioration of species and habitats. They also support EUSDR Priority Area 10 (PA 10) by supporting capacity building actions, information exchange and coordination among the relevant stakeholders across the border.

The types of actions have been assessed as compatible with the DNSH principle since they are not expected to have any significant negative environmental impact due to their nature.

The interventions will aim at improving the access of people with disabilities both to the green infrastructure to be developed and to natural heritage. Moreover, the interventions will consider the access in conditions of equality and non-discrimination to all information and communication products, including awareness raising activities and activities aiming to promote the protection of biodiversity.

Sustainable development is also central to this SO. This will be directly ensured by all interventions aiming to reduce pollution, to develop green infrastructure and enhance biodiversity conservation. While by prioritizing pollution reduction, the SO will focus on the improvement of pollution control, by prioritizing the development of green infrastructure, the environmental conditions are to be enhanced, along with the health and life of citizens.

The SO will directly contribute to the SDG 15 - aiming to protect, restore and promote sustainable use of the region’s ecosystem, developing green areas, and halt and reverse land degradation and biodiversity loss.

2.1.3.2. Indicators

Table 2: Output indicators - to be updated

Priority	Specific objective	ID	Indicator	MU	Milestone (2024)	Final target (2029)
A greener region	2.7. Enhancing biodiversity, green infrastructure in the urban environment, and reducing pollution	RCO 84	Pilot actions developed jointly and implemented in projects	Pilot action	0	16
A greener region	2.7. Enhancing biodiversity, green infrastructure in the urban environment, and reducing pollution	RCO 87	Organisations cooperating across borders	Organisations	0	32

Table 3: Result indicators - to be updated

Priority	Specific objective	ID	Indicator	MU	Baseline	Ref year	Final target (2029)	Source of data	Comments
A greener region	2.7. Enhancing biodiversity, green infrastructure in the urban environment, and reducing pollution	RCR 84	Organisations cooperating across borders after project completion	Number	0	2021	8	MA monitoring system (project reports)	
A greener region	2.7. Enhancing biodiversity, green infrastructure in the urban environment, and reducing pollution	RCR 104	Solutions taken up or up-scaled by organisations	Solution	0	2021	4	MA monitoring system (project reports)	

2.1.3.3. The main target groups

Reference: Article 17(4) (e) (iii), Article 17(9) (c) (iv)

Target groups are defined as individuals and/or organisations benefiting from the activities carried out with the support of the programme and from the results of these activities. Target groups are not necessarily involved directly in the operation. They include:

- Public sector institutions and local authorities - policy makers and planners, including local authorities are at the core of the supported interventions, given their mandate and ability to promote and implement activities in the field of protection and preservation of nature, biodiversity and green infrastructure.
- NGOs with relevant activities will also be targeted, given their ability and power to influence both the policy agenda and to mobilize civic engagement.
- University and academia in the relevant sectors will be targeted, given their role in generating knowledge and expertise. Support will enable them to share their knowledge, contribute to improving policy making, extending networks and also improve the delivery of their own activity by access to data and practice on the ground.
- Population of the cross-border area - people and communities will be better informed and educated in relation to protecting the environment and adopting greener practices and lifestyles.
- Local businesses will also be targeted by the projects, enabling them to adopt safer and more sustainable practices and production cycles.
- Local authorities

2.1.3.4. Indication of the specific territories targeted, including the planned use of ITI, CLLD or other territorial tools

Reference: Article 17(4) (e) (iv)

Not applicable

2.1.3.5. Planned use of financial instruments

Reference: Article 17(4) (e) (v)

Not applicable

2.1.3.6. Indicative breakdown of the EU programme resources by type of intervention

Reference: Article 17(4) (e)(vi), Article 17(9)(c)(v)

Table 4: Dimension 1 - intervention field - to be updated

Priority no	Fund	Specific objective	Code	Amount (EUR)
A greener region	ERDF	vii) Enhancing biodiversity, green infrastructure in the urban environment, and reducing pollution	077 Air quality and noise reduction measures	5,000,000
A greener region	ERDF	vii) Enhancing biodiversity, green infrastructure in the urban environment, and reducing pollution	078 Protection, restoration and sustainable use of Natura 2000 sites	5,000,000
A greener region	ERDF	vii) Enhancing biodiversity, green infrastructure in the urban environment, and reducing pollution	079 Nature and biodiversity protection, natural heritage and resources, green and blue infrastructure	15,000,000
A greener region	ERDF	vii) Enhancing biodiversity, green infrastructure in the urban environment, and reducing pollution	080 Other measures to reduce greenhouse gas emissions in the area of preservation and restoration of natural areas with high potential for carbon absorption and storage, e.g. by rewetting of moorlands, the capture of landfill gas	3,000,000

Table 5: Dimension 2 - form of financing

Priority no	Fund	Specific objective	Code	Amount (EUR)
A greener region	ERDF	2.7. Enhancing biodiversity, green infrastructure in the urban environment, and reducing pollution	01 Grant	28,000,000

Table 6: Dimension 3 - territorial delivery mechanism and territorial focus

Priority No	Fund	Specific objective	Code	Amount (EUR)
A greener region	ERDF	2.7. Enhancing biodiversity, green infrastructure in the urban environment, and reducing pollution	48 Other outside PO5: No territorial targeting	28,000,000

2.2. Priority 3: An educated region

2.2.1. Specific objective: 4.2. Improving equal access to inclusive and quality services in education, training and lifelong learning through developing accessible infrastructure, including by fostering resilience for distance and on-line education and training

2.2.1.1. *Related types of action, and their expected contribution to those specific objectives and to macro-regional strategies and sea-basis strategies, where appropriate*

Education outcomes show a relatively poor performance, on both sides of the border, well below the EU average (both on basic and higher education as well as lifelong learning). The geographical conditions and isolation also prevented local communities from developing close links, including when it comes to learning the neighbouring language. Therefore, the illiteracy rate is worrying and bilingualism is not widespread among the population. In addition, the cross-

border area has seen a high number of emigrations of people with educational qualifications in science and technology in recent decades.

The number of underachieving students (15-year-olds, PISA survey, 2018) in math, reading and sciences is more than double than the average EU (country-level data). Participation to higher education is very low, with only about 11% of the population in the Romanian regions and 20% in the Bulgarian regions having completed tertiary education, compared to 29% at EU level (Eurostat, 2020 data). NEET (persons not in education, employment, or training) rates are higher than EU average (11%) in all RO-BG border regions, with values up to 27% in Severozapaden (BG) and 19.9% in South-Est (RO) (Eurostat, 2020 data). Participation to adult education and training is significantly below the average EU of 9.2%, with values around 1% or even lower in the RO-BG regions (Eurostat, 2020 data). Thus, lifelong learning (LLL) is very low in both countries.

Collaboration is also limited between the key stakeholders in the sector at national and local level and linkages between the education system and the business sector are weak, further reducing the opportunities for improving the quality of the education and training services and for increasing employment opportunities. The situation is similar on both sides of the border.

To be better equipped for smart specialization, industrial transition and entrepreneurship, more investments are needed in employees' up-skilling and mobility, in connection to the market demands.

In this context, actions under SO 4.2 seek to address the systemic challenges that are present on both sides of the border.

The joint actions (e.g. joint events, trainings, curricula, facilities etc.) will aim at lowering the discrepancies in the area, and it will facilitate the development of the cross-border cooperation between the two sites of the border.

The following types of actions will be supported (non-exhaustive list):

- Development of extensive and structured language-learning schemes, as a vector for building trust across the border, for creating the basis for future exchanges and also as an employment-boosting factor.
- Development of joint cross-border education and training schemes - on-site in areas where accessibility is not a hindrance or online, using digitised learning tools and methods, if physical presence is not an option.
- Development of cross-border internship or placements and student exchange programmes for young graduates/students.
- Development of joint initiatives supporting adult education and learning (LLL), including facilitating learning mobility.
- Development of partnerships between secondary and higher education establishments and businesses, in order to improve the market orientation and the quality aspect of education and offer young students the possibility to train and/or study on the other side of the border. Long-term exchanges are particularly envisaged.
- Development of partnerships between education and training institutions and stakeholders, at all education levels (early to tertiary), to support mutual learning and exchange of practices between teachers and trainers on both sides of the border.
- Development of joint initiatives and actions to support access to quality inclusive education and training, including LLL, to vulnerable or marginalized groups, including disabled persons, SEN ('Special educational needs' is a legal definition and refers to children with learning problems or disabilities that make it harder for them to learn than most children the same age), Roma ethnic group etc.
- Joint measures for improving the link between the labour market and the education and training system.
- Investments in the infrastructure of educational facilities (e.g. learning spaces such as classrooms, labs, libraries, workshops, gyms, outdoor learning spaces but also other

facilities) for all education levels and educational activities (including remedial and after-school), technical and vocational training and LLL etc.; special attention will be given to promoting accessible and inclusive learning for all persons.

- Investments in ensuring proper endowment for joint learning facilities with focus on digitalization: equipment, tools, etc., especially those that support the development of practical and/or digital skills and remote learning, such as computers, videoconferencing/distance education equipment, VR learning etc.

Applying small project fund, as a possible instrument to support projects of limited financial volume, shall be analysed by the programme structures during the implementation stage, depending on the programme evolution.

All the activities foreseen under this specific objective will aim to improve the education and training services in correlation with all the economic sectors and stakeholders targeted in the other POs, as well as with their training needs and should be jointly developed. Also, the projects must promote and enhance cooperation between the two sides of the border.

The types of actions have been assessed as compatible with the DNSH principle since they are not expected to have any significant negative environmental impact due to their nature.

The supported actions will contribute to EUSDR Priority 9, particularly *Action 6 Relevant and High-Quality Knowledge, Skills and Competences* and *Action 7. Lifelong Learning and Learning Mobility* by supporting mobility of learners and teachers as well as partnerships among schools and educational institutions, reducing low achievement in basic skills, covering language, literacy, mathematics, science and digital literacy, strengthening transversal and key competences, in particular entrepreneurship and language competences, addressing the development of digital competences, including media literacy, at all levels of learning.

The development of any learning and education schemes and initiatives will be tailored to all vulnerable groups that could benefit from them (for example, blind people or people with reduced mobility). Also, the joint initiatives that will be developed will ensure the adequate inclusion of vulnerable and marginalized groups, as well as people with disabilities and special educational needs and ethnic minorities, in the envisaged activities. Interventions will pay special attention to the adaptation of educational infrastructure for people with disabilities, through measures such as: providing access ramps, marking access routes, adapting the learning space to facilitate access and functionality for people with disabilities, ensuring access at the toilets and classrooms.

All the learning and education schemes and initiatives to be developed and implemented within this SO will have to contribute to sustainable development, by providing content that promotes sustainable development. In this regard, potential beneficiaries will be encouraged to include in the content of learning and education schemes materials related to the principle of sustainable development, and to promote "green skills". Moreover, the interventions will have to ensure the efficient use of resources and the use of materials labelled as green products.

The SO will directly contribute to the SDG 4 - aiming to ensure inclusive and equitable quality education and promote lifelong learning opportunities for all citizens in the cross-border region.

2.2.1.2. Indicators

Table 2: Output indicators - to be updated

Priority	Specific objective	ID	Indicator	MU	Milestone (2024)	Final target (2029)
2. An educated region	4.2. Improving equal access to inclusive and quality services in education, training and lifelong	RCO 85	Participations in joint training schemes	Number	0	2,600

	learning through developing accessible infrastructure, including by fostering resilience for distance and on-line education and training					
2. An educated region	4.2. Improving equal access to inclusive and quality services in education, training and lifelong learning through developing accessible infrastructure, including by fostering resilience for distance and on-line education and training	RCO 87	Organisations cooperating across borders	Number	0	33

Table 3: Result indicators - to be updated

Priority	Specific objective	ID	Indicator	MU	Baseline	Reference year	Final target (2029)	Source of data	Comments
2. An educated region	4.2. Improving equal access to inclusive and quality services in education, training and lifelong learning through developing accessible infrastructure, including by fostering resilience for distance and on-line education and training	RRC 81	Completion of joint training schemes	Participants	0	2021	1,560	MA monitoring system (project reports)	
2. An educated region	4.2. Improving equal access to inclusive and quality services in education, training and lifelong learning through developing accessible infrastructure, including by fostering resilience for distance and on-line education and training	RRC 84	Organisations cooperating across borders after project completion	Number	0	2021	8	MA monitoring system (project reports)	

2.2.1.3. The main target groups

Reference: Article 17(4) (e) (iii), Article 17(9)(c)(iv)

<p>The target groups envisaged by this priority are:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Children enrolled in preschool education - Pupils, students in all education levels - Teachers, trainers, managers and auxiliary staff of education and training institutions - Employees, particularly young people - SMEs - Local authorities

2.2.1.4. Indication of the specific territories targeted, including the planned use of ITI, CLLD or other territorial tools

Reference: Article 17(4) (e) (iv)

37 Other PO5 territorial: Other types of territories targeted

2.2.1.5.Planned use of financial instruments

Reference: Article 17(4) (e) (v)

Not applicable

2.2.1.6.Indicative breakdown of the EU programme resources by type of intervention

Reference: Article 17(4) (e) (vi), Article 17(9) (c)(v)

Table 4: Dimension 1 - intervention field

Priority no	Fund	Specific objective	Code	Amount (EUR)
An educated region	ERDF	4.2. Improving equal access to inclusive and quality services in education, training and lifelong learning through developing accessible infrastructure, including by fostering resilience for distance and on-line education and training	122 Infrastructure for primary and secondary education	2,000,000
An educated region	ERDF	4.2. Improving equal access to inclusive and quality services in education, training and lifelong learning through developing accessible infrastructure, including by fostering resilience for distance and on-line education and training	123 Infrastructure for tertiary education	2,000,000
An educated region	ERDF	4.2. Improving equal access to inclusive and quality services in education, training and lifelong learning through developing accessible infrastructure, including by fostering resilience for distance and on-line education and training	124 Infrastructure for vocational education and training and adult learning	2,000,000
An educated region	ERDF	4.2. Improving equal access to inclusive and quality services in education, training and lifelong learning through developing accessible infrastructure, including by fostering resilience for distance and on-line education and training	149 Support for primary to secondary education (excluding infrastructure)	2,000,000
An educated region	ERDF	4.2. Improving equal access to inclusive and quality services in education, training and lifelong learning through developing accessible infrastructure, including by fostering resilience for distance and on-line education and training	150 Support for tertiary education (excluding infrastructure)	2,000,000
An educated region	ERDF	4.2. Improving equal access to inclusive and quality services in education, training and lifelong learning through developing accessible infrastructure, including by fostering resilience for distance and on-line education and training	151 Support for adult education (excluding infrastructure)	2,000,000

Table 5: Dimension 2 - form of financing

Priority no	Fund	Specific objective	Code	Amount (EUR)
An educated region	ERDF	4.2. Improving equal access to inclusive and quality services in education, training and lifelong learning through developing accessible infrastructure, including by fostering resilience for distance and on-line education and training	01 Grant	12,000,000

Table 6: Dimension 3 - territorial delivery mechanism and territorial focus

Priority No	Fund	Specific objective	Code	Amount (EUR)
An educated region	ERDF	4.2. Improving equal access to inclusive and quality services in education, training and lifelong learning through developing accessible infrastructure, including by fostering resilience for distance and on-line education and training	37. Other PO5 territorial: Other types of territories targeted	12,000,000

2.3. Priority 4: An integrated region

2.3.1. Specific objective: 5.2 Fostering the integrated and inclusive social, economic and environmental local development, culture, natural heritage, sustainable tourism and security, in areas other than urban areas.

2.3.1.1. *Related types of action, and their expected contribution to those specific objectives and to macro-regional strategies and sea-basis strategies, where appropriate*

An integrated territorial development strategy will be developed by the relevant stakeholders from the area not later than 18 months from the programme adoption by EC.

In order to reflect and capture the integrated character of the strategy the **Eurovelo 6 cycling route will serve as a linking element, bringing coherence and a single goal: development of the border area by multiple-sector interventions** (development of the necessary infrastructure and auxiliary facilities, safety related measures, accommodation, food, drink and rest areas).

Most of the proposed indicative types of actions can be also implemented by SMEs, including micro-enterprises. Building the resilience of the local economy is essential for sustainable development of the area and for increasing its competitiveness.

An integrated multi-thematic and cross-sectoral territorial approach based on the following elements is considered:

1. Developing the Eurovelo 6 cycling route is the backbone of the integrated approach to economic diversification in the programme area. The cycling route has a significant potential to attract new visitors to the entire area. It can also be used to create and consolidate a brand for the region, not only for the seaside or the riverside but as a holistic heritage/ eco-destination.

Interventions concerning both the Core Route - the main EuroVelo Route 6 line - along Danube River, both in RO and BG and the Comprehensive network - secondary routes leading inside border area to different cultural and tourist objectives are envisaged.

The following types of actions will be supported (non-exhaustive list):

- Developing the necessary cycling infrastructure, including safety measures, first aid and service points, signalling etc. Priority will be given to projects ensuring connection to tourist attractions - cultural, natural heritage sites and to other means of transport. Connected infrastructure (incl. new, reconstruction or modernization of relevant road sections) is also considered, in duly justified cases and in line with the list of operations.
- Ensuring road safety for the sections overlapping the EuroVelo Route, in view of complying with standards related to traffic signalling systems and/or additional development of infrastructure dedicated to cyclists and pedestrians, such as tunnels, bypasses, bridges, overpasses and walkways and protected cycling paths
- Ensuring effective connections with and access to and from other means of transport, including ports and rail stations - adapting infrastructure

- Ensuring availability of public transportation in connection to the cycling route
- Ensuring appropriate services along the EuroVelo Route, such as: accommodation, food, drink and rest and recreation areas, services including Bike Pit-Stops, information, bookable offers, other assistance
- Ensuring communication and information, online and along the route, including mobile/e-applications for cyclists, etc.

Soft measures, such as promotion campaigns for green and non-motorized transport and/or advertising for the EuroVelo 6 route are also envisaged, as supporting measures.

2. Supporting tourism activities, connected sectors and industries

Actions will be financed to complement and expand the existing offer and to increase the attractiveness of the region along the EuroVelo 6 route, by capitalizing on the available natural and cultural heritage and tourism attractions. Small, family and local businesses - SMEs - are also particularly targeted.

Given the character of the region, the development of the following types of tourism are envisaged: cultural and historical, leisure, religious, agro-tourism, eco-tourism, culinary and ecotourism, ancestry tourism, sport tourism.

The following types of actions could be supported (non-exhaustive list):

- Investments in economic competitiveness of local businesses including, but not limited to: construction/ modernisation of productive facilities; supply of relevant equipment; adoption of digital technologies etc.
- Set-up of natural sites for economic use: trails / paths, waste disposal, security, signalling, camp sites, other open-air attractions etc.
- Supporting sites with tourist potential: construction, modernization/ restauration of castles, fortresses, churches, monasteries, palaces, archaeological sites, private/public museums, libraries, art collections/galleries, exhibitions places, wineries, agro-farms (e.g. lavender farms/fields; roses farms/fields, traditional oil factories, sheepfolds), adventure parks, open air attractions etc.
- Creating common historical, natural and cultural heritage products and services, expanding and improving services, targeting new markets and creating jobs in the cross-border area, including by setting up on-site and on-line shops, especially for traditional / local products (local food, bread, wine, cheese, rose, lavender, honey etc.), including the related tourist infrastructure, access and links to the tourist sites;
- Support for local and regional actors to valorise potentially valuable touristic objectives /sites / experiences, including by creating sustainable tourism trails, or developing quality labels for excellence in services, promoting and marketing the touristic offer etc. taking advantage of social media trends - such as “insta-tourism”, is also encouraged.
- Training of staff, particularly digital skills.

3. Support for implementing the integrated territorial strategy

The following types of actions could be supported (non-exhaustive list):

- Developing the stakeholders' capacity to implement the integrated territorial strategy;
- Support for implementing and monitoring the integrated territorial strategy.

Projects must demonstrate the link and contribution to the integrated territorial strategy, as well as to the development of the EuroVelo 6 route and the economic sectors present in the CBC area. They also need to have a clear cross-border dimension.

The types of actions have been assessed as compatible with the DNSH principle since they are not expected to have any significant negative environmental impact due to their nature.

The Programme will promote the durability of the project results, in line with the EU provisions. As regards the SME, there is a risk, as their financial capacity may decrease, if an economic downturn will follow the COVID-19 medical crisis. Also, SMEs in the area don't have experience in carrying out CBC projects in the Ro-Bg border. This may limit their ability to ensure the operation durability. However, the Programme authorities will support this type of partners by providing paid advances and adopting a flexible and supporting approach during implementation. Also, the Programme will analyse the possibility to use the flexibility offered by the regulation to reduce the durability period to 3 years in cases concerning the maintenance of investments or jobs created by SMEs. The final decision shall be taken by the MC.

The planned actions will contribute to EUSDR by developing the region as an important European tourist destination and establishing the Danube as a transnational cultural and natural travel route. The programme will also aim to develop sustainable forms of tourism and sustainable mobility solutions along the Danube region promoting the development of quality products, infrastructure and innovative forms of tourism and culture by direct support of SMEs and public private partnerships. Through all these objectives, the programme will contribute to the Priority PA 03.

All interventions will include measures to adapt public infrastructure to the needs of people with disabilities, by: providing access ramps and ensuring mandatory accessibility measures for people with disabilities and for addressing their individual needs.

This SO will contribute to sustainable development by placing the Eurovelo 6 at the heart of the region's integrated approach to economic diversification and promoting green and non-motorized transport, and ecotourism.

The SO will directly contribute to the SDG 8 - aiming to promote inclusive and sustainable economic growth in the region, that creates jobs and promotes local culture and products.

2.4.1.2 Indicators

Table 2: Output indicators

Priority	Specific objective	ID	Indicator	Measurement Unit	Milestone (2024)	Final target (2029)
PO5. An Integrated region	5.2. Fostering the integrated and inclusive social, economic and environmental local development, culture, natural heritage, sustainable tourism and security, in areas other than urban areas	RCO 58	Dedicated cycling infrastructure supported	Km	0	200
PO5. An Integrated region	5.2. Fostering the integrated and inclusive social, economic and environmental local development, culture, natural heritage, sustainable tourism and security, in areas other than urban areas	RCO 77	Number of cultural and tourism sites supported	Number	0	18

PO5. An Integrated region	5.2. Fostering the integrated and inclusive social, economic and environmental local development, culture, natural heritage, sustainable tourism and security, in areas other than urban areas	RCO 87	Organisations cooperating across borders	Organisations	0	31
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Table 3: Result indicators

Priority	Specific objective	ID	Indicator	Measurement Unit	Baseline	Ref year	Final target (2029)	Source of data	Comments
PO5. An Integrated region	5.2. Fostering the integrated and inclusive social, economic and environmental local development, culture, natural heritage, sustainable tourism and security, in areas other than urban areas	RCR 77	Visitors of cultural and tourism sites supported	Persons	0	2021	32,400	MA monitoring system (project reports)	
PO5. An Integrated region	5.2. Fostering the integrated and inclusive social, economic and environmental local development, culture, natural heritage, sustainable tourism and security, in areas other than urban areas	RCR 64	Annual users of dedicated cycling infrastructure	Users	0	2021	5,000	MA monitoring system (project reports)	
PO5. An Integrated region	5.2. Fostering the integrated and inclusive social, economic and environmental local development, culture, natural heritage, sustainable tourism and security, in areas other than urban areas.	RCR 84	Organisations cooperating across borders after project completion (related to SMEs)	Organisations	0	2021	7	MA monitoring system (project reports)	

2.4.1.3. The main target groups

The target groups envisaged by this priority are:

- Tourists, particularly users of the Eurovelo 6 cycling route
- Short-distance commuters, who will have alternatives to public transport or personal cars
- Jobseekers who will find more job opportunities
- Local population, who will benefit from improved cultural amenities and more leisure opportunities
- Local businesses
- Municipalities, which will benefit from the increase in revenues
- Local authorities

2.4.1.4. Indication of the specific territories targeted, including the planned use of ITI, CLLD or other territorial tools

7000 characters

The aim of the Interreg VI-A Romania-Bulgaria is to strengthen cohesion and cooperation among regional policy actors across the programme territory. Targeted investments will enhance cooperation and improve the underlying conditions for the sustainable and resilient development of the regional economy, namely by supporting sustainable tourism, environment protection, reducing environmental risks, developing human capital and assisting local businesses.

While the region shares numerous common characteristics in terms of geography, demography and economy, the local diversity in terms of vulnerabilities and opportunities is also significant, requiring a place-based approach, to give local communities the means to design and implement the measures that better respond to their specific needs.

Considering the Border Orientation Paper, taking into account the results of the territorial analysis, and based on extensive consultations with the local stakeholders on both sides of the border, it became evident that interventions such as supporting local businesses and developing tourism opportunities, are common priorities which could provide better results if implemented in a coherent, integrated manner across the Programme area. Moreover, stakeholders identified* the development of the Eurovelo Route 6 as a potential backbone for attracting tourists in the RO-BG area and considered it a significant priority for the programme, given that the RO-BG section of the route is the least developed of the entire route (*based on direct consultations and the survey conducted in the area during the programming phase).

As such, the Joint Working Group for Strategic Planning and Programming (JWG) decided (by Decision no. 4/16.09.2020) that the Interreg VI-A Romania-Bulgaria Programme shall finance PO 5.2. and that the implementation of this PO shall be done through an integrated territorial strategy, designed by the relevant stakeholders in the area.

The integrated territorial strategy will allow the spatial harmonisation of the sectoral policies (tourism, business support, connectivity, protection and promotion of natural and cultural heritage etc.) and would enable a more territorial focussed approach for development, while being embedded in the organisational, legal, economic and social context of the area.

The main goal of the strategy is to ensure the development of the area by boosting tourism and culture heritage, interlinked with all related socioeconomic fields, such as: tourism and culture infrastructure, environment, human resources and education system, business development, accessibility etc. The backbone of the strategy, integrating all these fields, is the development of the Euro Velo 6 Route.

The integrated territorial strategy will cover the area crossed by the Euro Velo 6 Route and the adjacent territory, which overlaps almost the entire programme area, namely counties in the Southern part of Romania (Mehedinți, Dolj, Olt, Teleorman, Giurgiu, Călărași and Constanța) and seven districts in the Northern part of Bulgaria (Vidin, Vratsa, Montana, Veliko Tarnovo, Pleven, Ruse, Silistra). The Euro Velo 6 enters the programme area in Mehedinți and Vidin, goes along the both sides of the Danube up to Silista and Călărași, and then, through Constanța up to the Black Sea. Even if Dobrich district is not

crossed by Euro Velo 6 Route, it represents an important adjacent territory with great potential for making the area attractive for the Euro Velo 6 users. Moreover, the development of secondary cycling routes in Dobrich and in the South part of Constanta that may connect the Black Sea coast to the main line of the Euro Velo 6 Route could be considered.

Secondary links of cycling lines (comprehensive network) are envisaged to be supported, as they emerge from the main EuroVelo Route 6 line (core line) and lead to the different cultural and tourist objectives, providing the vital connection to the main cycling route.

In order to develop this strategy, a Strategy Board (SB) was set up, comprising relevant actors from both sides of the border, namely: local and regional authorities, NGOs and representatives of the socio-economic fields related to the development of the Euro Velo 6. Part of them were identified from the relevant actors in the area and others were selected through a transparent process, via an open call to all interested parties following the respective national procedures (<https://interregviarobg.eu/en/join-us-in-the-strategy-board-responsible-with-the-drafting-of-the-integrated-territorial-strategy-for-policy-objective-5-a-europe-closer-to-citizens>). The institutional composition of the SB is available on the programme website.

The main responsibilities of the Strategy Board are to:

- develop the integrated territorial strategy, starting from the main needs in the region correlated with clear and measurable objectives and indicators. When selecting the strategy indicators, their contribution to the Programme specific indicators shall be considered. The objectives may be broader than the Programme objectives and the strategy may provide a widely shared vision for the future development of the region.
- identify the list of projects contributing to the achievement of the strategy objectives, which should be line with the objectives of the Programme.
- select the projects to be included in the strategy. Clear selection criteria shall be considered by the SB when proposing the projects under the strategy, such as: the projects are in line with the strategy and the Programme objectives (PO 5, ii), the projects are in line with the types of actions proposed by the Programme, the projects are observing the programme's requirements for eligibility, legality, regularity and sound financial management.
- engage stakeholders in an open and productive manner during preparation of the strategy and communicate results.
- ensure the Strategy implementation and monitoring.

The Managing Authority and the Joint Secretariat shall have the responsibility of contracting the operations and monitoring them during the implementation period.

Following the endorsement of the Strategy by the Strategy Board, the Monitoring Committee shall appraise the strategy in order to determine whether it is in line with the Programme strategy for Policy Objective 5 and if it complies with the applicable provisions of the European Regulations related to integrated territorial strategies.

Up to this moment, the complete delimitation of EuroVelo6 route is not finalized, thus, the main task of the territorial strategy would be to trace the exact route, to identify the area covered by EuroVelo 6 and the adjacent territory with high potential for developing the attractiveness of the region and to identify actions and projects to develop this area.

Moreover, a high attention will be given to the complementarity with other instruments that support the development of the Euro Velo 6 Route (e.g. the Romanian Recovery and Resilience Plan).

In order not jeopardise the implementation of the Programme, the final version of the territorial development strategy has to be ready and sent for Monitoring Committee approval within 18 months following the approval of the programme.

2.4.1.5. *Planned use of financial instruments*

Reference: Article 17(4) (e)(v)

Not applicable

2.4.1.6. *Indicative breakdown of the EU programme resources by type of intervention*

Reference: Article 17(4) (e)(vi), Article 17(9)(c)(v)

Table 4: Dimension 1 - intervention field

Priority no	Fund	Specific objective	Code	Amount (EUR)
An integrated region	ERDF	5.2. Fostering the integrated and inclusive social, economic and environmental local development, culture, natural heritage, sustainable tourism and security, in areas other than urban areas	083 Cycling infrastructure	18,000,000
An integrated region	ERDF	5.2. Fostering the integrated and inclusive social, economic and environmental local development, culture, natural heritage, sustainable tourism and security, in areas other than urban areas	169 Territorial development initiatives, including preparation of territorial strategies	2,000,000
An integrated region	ERDF	5.2. Fostering the integrated and inclusive social, economic and environmental local development, culture, natural heritage, sustainable tourism and security, in areas other than urban areas	165 Protection, development and promotion of public tourism assets and tourism services	13,000,000
An integrated region	ERDF	5.2. Fostering the integrated and inclusive social, economic and environmental local development, culture, natural heritage, sustainable tourism and security, in areas other than urban areas	166 Protection, development and promotion of cultural heritage and cultural services	9,000,000
An integrated region	ERDF	5.2. Fostering the integrated and inclusive social, economic and environmental local development, culture, natural heritage, sustainable tourism and security, in areas other than urban areas	167 Protection, development and promotion of natural heritage and eco-tourism other than Natura 2000 sites	5,000,000
An integrated region	ERDF	5.2. Fostering the integrated and inclusive social, economic and environmental local development, culture, natural heritage, sustainable tourism and security, in areas other than urban areas	021 SME business development and internationalisation, including productive investments	5,000,000

Table 5: Dimension 2 - form of financing

Priority no	Fund	Specific objective	Code	Amount (EUR)
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An integrated region	ERDF	5.2. Fostering the integrated and inclusive social, economic and environmental local development, culture, natural heritage, sustainable tourism and security, in areas other than urban areas	01 Grant	52,000,000
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Table 6: Dimension 3 - territorial delivery mechanism and territorial focus

Priority No	Fund	Specific objective	Code	Amount (EUR)
An integrated region	ERDF	5.2. Fostering the integrated and inclusive social, economic and environmental local development, culture, natural heritage, sustainable tourism and security, in areas other than urban areas	37. Other P05 territorial: Other types of territories targeted	52,000,000

3. Financial plan

Reference: point (f) of Article 17(3)

3.1 Financial appropriations by year

Reference: point (g)(i) of Article 17(3), points (a) to (d) of Article 17(4)

Table 7

Fund	2021	2022	2023	2024	2025	2026	2027	Total
ERDF (Territorial cooperation goal)	0	27,930,292	28,378,935	28,836,554	29,303,320	24,281,338	24,766,962	163,497,401
Total	0	27,930,292	28,378,935	28,836,554	29,303,320	24,281,338	24,766,962	163,497,401

3.2 Total financial appropriations by fund and national co-financing

Reference: point (f) (ii) of Article 17(3), points (a) to (d) of Article 17(4)

Table 8

<u>Policy objective No</u>	<u>Priority</u>	<u>Fund</u> (as applicable)	<u>Basis for calculation EU support (total eligible cost or public contribution)</u>	<u>EU contribution</u> (a)=(a1)+(a2)	<u>Indicative breakdown of the EU contribution</u>		<u>National contribution</u> (b)=(c)+(d)	<u>Indicative breakdown of the national counterpart</u>		<u>Total</u> (e)=(a)+(b)	<u>Co-financing rate</u> (f)=(a)/(e)	<u>Contributions from the third countries</u> (for information)
					<u>without TA pursuant to Article 27(1) (a1)</u>	<u>for TA pursuant to Article 27(1) (a2)</u>		<u>National public</u> (c)	<u>National private</u> (d)			
<u>PO 3</u>	<u>Priority 1</u>	<u>ERDF</u>	<u>total</u>	21,400,000	20,000,000	1,400,000	5,753,846	5,653,846	100,000	27,153,846	78.81%	0
<u>PO 2</u>	<u>Priority 2</u>	<u>ERDF</u>	<u>total</u>	73,617,401	68,801,309	4,816,092	19,793,607	19,449,601	344,007	93,411,008	78.81%	0
<u>PO 4</u>	<u>Priority 3</u>	<u>ERDF</u>	<u>total</u>	12,840,000	12,000,000	840,000	3,452,308	3,392,308	60,000	16,292,308	78.81%	0
<u>PO 5</u>	<u>Priority 4</u>	<u>ERDF</u>	<u>total</u>	55,640,000	52,000,000	3,640,000	14,960,000	14,700,000	260,000	70,600,000	78.81%	0
<u>TOTAL</u>				163,497,401	152,801,309	10,696,092	43,959,761	43,195,755	764,007	207,457,162	78.81%	0

4. Actions taken to involve the relevant programme partners in the preparation of the Interreg programme and the role of those programme partners in the implementation, monitoring and evaluation

Reference: point (g) of Article 17(3)

Text field [10 000]

According to Art. 8 of the CPR, each MS shall organize a partnership with the competent regional and local authorities, according with the multi-level governance principle, to involve those partners throughout the preparation and implementation of the programme.

The consultation process was designed to capture the stakeholders' vision on the challenges and needs of the cross-border area, to agree on the strategic prioritization of the policy and specific objectives and, to engage them in the definition of the results to be achieved within each priority axis and the strategic interventions to be implemented in this respect. The cross-border relevant stakeholders have been involved during the entire programme preparation process, to ensure useful results and meeting their demands. This was achieved through various consultation activities, organized during different phases of the programme development process.

Both in the development of the territorial analysis and the elaboration of the programme, the consultation process with the partners was planned in close correlation with the schedule of the main sections of the programme, so that the consultations provide timely feedback.

Stakeholders mapping was used to determine a list of key stakeholders, ensuring the participation of all relevant categories. This approach followed three steps: identifying relevant groups based on their potential level of "interest" and "influence" related to the territorial development and cooperation along the RO-BG border; providing a clear and comprehensive picture of stakeholder interests, importance, and involvement; and developing a strategy for mobilizing and sustaining effective stakeholder participation throughout the project implementation.

1. Setting up the JWG

A Joint Working Group for Strategic Planning and Programming (JWG) was established at the programme level. This is composed of members from Romania and Bulgaria, as well as observers from both countries. Its members include the MA, the NA, ministries and regional development agencies/ councils, and representatives of the NGO and academic environment. The composition of the JWG has been defined so as to take into consideration the provisions of the Code of Conduct on Partnership. As regards the selection of NGOs and the academic environment, a transparent selection process was organized, a call for proposals being launched online (<https://interregviarobg.eu/selection-of-ngos-public-institutions-of-higher-education-for-the-joint-working-group-for-planning-and-strategic-programming-for-the-romanian-bulgarian-border-for-the-programming-period-2021-2027> and <https://www.mrrb.bg/bg/pokana-do-yuridicheski-lica-s-nestopanska-cel-za-uchastie-v-rabotna-grupa-za-izrabotvane-na-teritorialna-strategiya-po-programa-interreg-vi-a-rumuniya-bulgariya-2021-2027-g/>). The main tasks of the JWG are to steer the programming phase and ensure the quality and effectiveness of the preparation of the programme.

Both the programming document draft and the final version have been presented to the JWG and the programme was revised accordingly after each consultation with partners.

2. Developing the Territorial Analysis

An online survey aiming to collect the stakeholders' opinion regarding the territorial needs, challenges, and investment priorities, as well as to identify potential project ideas was conducted. The questionnaires were sent to stakeholders from all counties/ districts in the cross-border area targeting the following categories of respondents: public administration, business environment, NGOs, universities, R&D bodies and deconcentrated structures (culture, environment, business and economy, etc.).

Four stakeholders' workshops (Giurgiu, Craiova, Vidin, Silistra) targeting the entire border area have been organised, to discuss and validate the first findings of the territorial analysis. The stakeholders were asked to prioritise the objectives, providing their feedback on the perceived relevance of each objective for the programme area. Altogether, 153 participants joined the workshops. 107 of the participants were from Romania and 46 from Bulgaria. The events gathered 92 representatives from public authorities, 45 from Chambers of Commerce and NGOs and 11 from Universities and R&D institutions.

Each workshop consisted in discussions on the main problems, challenges, needs and opportunities in the region and on the main objectives of the next Programme. These 2 main sections were preceded by a presentation of the stakeholders' survey findings and were guided by the preliminary results of the territorial analysis.

Two focus groups (Pleven and Constanta) have been also organised, engaging the stakeholders from the entire border area in feedback and assessment discussions on the viability of the objectives' selection and their potential territorial impact. Altogether, 44 participants joined the focus groups. 33 participants were from Romania and 11 from Bulgaria. The events gathered 27 representatives from public authorities and 14 from NGOs and Chambers of Commerce.

Each focus group consisted in a presentation of the key findings of the territorial analysis, a discussion on the potential impact of different strategic options for Programme (per objective of the ERDF) and a discussion on potential operations of strategic importance for the cross-border territory.

3. Developing the Programme

Policy Objectives 3, 2, 4 and 5 were selected to be financed by the JWG. JWG decided that only operations of strategic importance will be financed within PO3 and PO 2 - risk activities for SO 2.4, and the implementation of PO5 will be achieved through an integrated territorial strategy for a certain area which should be owned and implemented by the relevant stakeholders from the covered territory.

A call for ideas for operations of strategic importance was launched on October 5, 2020, regarding PO3. E-mail notifications were sent to relevant stakeholders interested in the development of cross-border mobility, and a public announcement was shared on the programme website: <https://interregviarobg.eu/aveti-o-idee-de-proiect-strategic-pentru-imbunatatirea-conectivitatii-transfrontaliere-impartasiti-ne-viziunea-voastra>, as well as on social networks. Over 50 strategic project ideas were received and, following the evaluation process one project idea was selected to be included in the Appendix 3.

For identifying the strategic ideas for the PO2 - actions related to risks, a consultation process of the relevant stakeholders was carried out. Following this process, 2 ideas for operations of strategic importance were selected to be included in the Appendix 3.

Within PO5, the Integrated Territorial Strategy will be the result of a collaboration between public institutions and relevant NGOs operating in the field of tourism, cycling, and promoting and supporting the local economy small businesses, including local farms, craftsmen) in the cross-border area.

These partners formed a Strategy Board which is responsible for drafting the integrated territorial strategy, within 18 months from Programme approval, focusing on the integrated development of the cross-border region, and on the development of the Euro Velo 6 route. Relevant public institutions in both countries have been notified of the establishment of this board and have been asked to nominate a representative to actively participate in this body.

A call was also launched allowing all interested NGOs to apply to be part of the Strategy Board. Their applications were evaluated based on selection criteria that were made known in advance. The NGOs had to meet certain criteria such as: that they carry out relevant activities in the field of cycling, tourism, advocacy for supporting the local economy, that they have implemented relevant projects in the field or that they have previous experience in participating in other consultative or decision-making structures. A first meeting of the members was held on July 2021 where the role and the responsibilities of each structure involved in the programme were discussed.

The first draft of the programme has been published for consultation on November 4, 2020. This version contained the Programme Strategy and the Priorities and comments and proposals for improvement of the programming document could be submitted until December 15, 2020. All other versions of the programme, including the final one, have also been published for public consultation, each time partners receiving sufficient time to submit their proposals. All the feedback received was eventually discussed and approved within the JWG meetings. Both the draft programming documents and other relevant information have been periodically uploaded on the programme webpage <https://interregviarobg.eu/en/partnership>. Thus, the partners could always be up to date with the programming process status, all relevant news and notifications regarding any phase of the elaboration of the programme being easily accessible on a dedicated platform.

Two more workshops have been organised online having the objective to present and discuss the programme logic of intervention with the stakeholders. The events have been organised on a videoconference platform on different dates, so as to facilitate the participation of as many partners as possible. The workshops started with a plenary session gathering all the participants, where the logic of intervention was presented for each policy objective. Subsequently, the participants were divided into thematic working groups to discuss the objectives and related types of actions.

Also, the MA was part of the OECD pilot project for strengthening citizens' engagement in cohesion policy. Thus, for a period of 12 months, MA has received technical assistance from OECD experts for improving and introducing new initiatives for citizen's involvement in the 2021-2027 Programme, with the aim to have a more transparent programme post 2020, closer to the needs of people and local communities from our border area.

OECD experts organized a half day Citizen Participation Workshop for the staff of JS, MA, NA and JWG members. This workshop covered different forms of citizen participation, various

available methods, key benefits of citizen participation, as well as challenges and how to address them.

4. Implementation, monitoring and evaluation

After the approval of the operational programme by the EC, a Monitoring Committee will be set in line with the provisions of Code of Conduct on Partnership and with Article 29 of the Interreg Regulation. The Programme will try to ensure the continuity between the two programming periods as concerns the composition of the MC, in order to capitalize on the experience gained by the members. Regarding the social partners, a transparent procedure shall be organized. To this end, a call shall be launched, advertised on the Programme's website and social media, aiming to select the organisations to be part of the MC.

The Programme will continue to promote transparency by publishing all important documents for consultation on the Programme's website. All interested parties will be invited to send observations. An important role in the implementation of PO 5 will belong to the Strategy Board, who will work closely with the MC of the Programme in order to ensure the successful implementation of PO 5.

5. Approach to communication and visibility for the Interreg programme

(objectives, target audiences, communication channels, including social media outreach, where appropriate, planned budget and relevant indicators for monitoring and evaluation)

Reference: point (h) of Article 17(3)

Text field [4 500]

The following specific communication objectives are considered by taking into account the communication needs specific for each stage of Programme life cycle and the communication needs of each target group:

1. To raise general awareness towards the Programme;
2. To attract the interest of potential beneficiaries about financing opportunities;
3. To support beneficiaries in all stages of project implementation, including communication of project results;
4. To disseminate the achievements and the results of the Programme and highlight the added value of EU funding;
5. To strengthen communication between Programme bodies and cooperation with other external support groups.

Each communication objective is developed into specific communication activities.

The Programme identified the following target groups from both countries: beneficiaries and potential beneficiaries, governmental and non/governmental actors national and regional, national/regional/local media, EU institutions and bodies, general public (citizens from the Programme area and EU general public), internal support group, external support groups.

A mix of communication tools is considered, customized to the type of the target group. The messages and communication channels will be tailored to address the characteristics and needs of each specific target group, covering all stages of the life cycle of the programme: preparation and launching of the programme, launching of calls of proposals, selection of projects, implementation of projects, closure of the programme etc. For each communication campaign addressed to a specific target group, we intend to use the preferred communication channel as well a specific tailored message (for ex., for youth campaigns we plan to use social media and promote a specific language and attracting messages).

A dedicated website was set up: www.interregviarobg.eu and is functional since 2020.

The website will present all the information required by art. 36 paragraph 2 of EU Regulation no.1059/2021, but also additional useful information, proven the Programme commitment towards transparency. As well, a timetable of the planned call for proposals will be published on the website, including all mandatory data mentioned in art. 49 paragraph 2 of EU Regulation no. 1060/2021 and will be updated at least three times a year. Moreover, the list of selected operations published on the website will include all mandatory data mentioned in art. 49 paragraph 3 of EU Regulation no. 1060/2021, in all 3 languages, in an open, readable format and will be constantly updated, at least every four months.

As social media was intensively used for promoting the Programme and project results during the programming period 2014-2020, therefore the new programme will continue this approach. The programme will encourage the beneficiaries to be more active in promoting their projects on social media, by providing them specific guidelines with visibility rules

included, namely a communication package for promoting their project (“Communication Starter Kit”).

Facebook is the most common social media platform used during 2014-2020 period and the most popular social media platform in Romania and Bulgaria.

Twitter is used by the Programme for important announcements presented in a short and specific message, accompanied by a suggestive image.

YouTube is a frequently used platform by us and it will use it as well in the future to upload videos and tutorials dedicated to potential beneficiaries and beneficiaries of projects and to ensure live streaming of the organised events.

The following events will be organised:

- conferences and promotion public events addressing to all target groups (eg. launching conference and annual conference of the Programme, EC Day, Europe Day, outdoor campaigns etc.
- events with the purpose of offering support to potential beneficiaries in preparing their project idea and application (eg. info days, caravans, trainings, thematic seminars etc.
- thematic seminars and trainings covering topics related to the implementation of the project, project visits, online meetings etc.

Short videos, podcasts, interviews etc. may be designed for presenting the new programme and different stages of the life cycle of the programme, to promote the use of online publications, online communication platforms and networks and eco-friendly promotional materials.

The communication and information measures will be subject to evaluations as part of the Programme evaluations, based on the following main indicators:

- Events: no of events (31 in 2029) no of participants (600 in 2029), overall usefulness of the event for the participants (4 questionnaires in 2029)
- Website: no. of page views (250.000 in 2029), overall usefulness for the readers regarding the information received on Programme EU funding intervention in the region (4 questionnaires in 2029)

With reference to projects of strategic importance and projects with a value exceeding 5 mil Eur, the communication activities will need to reflect the results and strategic impact which these projects will bring to the cross border area. Support can be provided if needed.

At the Programme level, a communication officer, responsible for coordinating the communication and visibility measures, will be designated by the MA.

The total TA estimated budget foreseen for publicity and information activities is around 1 million Euro.

6. Indication of support to small-scale projects, including small projects within small project funds

Reference: point (i) of Article 17(3), Article 24

Text field - 7000 characters

For the 2021-2027 programming period, projects of limited financial value (small-scale projects) will be financed under Policy Objective 4, Specific objective: 4.2. Improving equal access to inclusive and quality services in education, training and lifelong learning through developing accessible infrastructure, including by fostering resilience for distance and on-line education and training, in-line with the provisions of Article 24 1(a) from Regulation 1059/2021. The purpose and the target groups for the limited financial projects shall therefore correspond to the indicators and to the target groups identified for this specific objective.

2007-2013 CBC Romania-Bulgaria Programme and Interreg V-A Romania-Bulgaria Programme did not implement small scale projects, however, people to people projects or projects tackling education, training, labour market etc. were financed under the previous 2 programming programmes. The median values for the regular projects targeting education, training, labour market integration was of approximately 500,000 euro for 2014-2020 and 200,000 euro for 2007-2013.

However, considering the EU-level experience with projects of limited financial value (small scale projects), where the budget threshold varies up to 200,000/250,000 euro, and also the activities implemented in projects during 2007-2013 and 2014-2020 and those envisaged for the Interreg VI-A Romania-Bulgaria Programme, for the 2021-2027 period a SSP may be considered as a project with an indicative budget below a threshold of 300,000 euro (total budget), selected within the same call as other types of projects.

The projects of limited financial value (small scale projects) can finance all the types of actions envisaged by the Programme under SO 4.2. These should have a cross-border impact, with the specific purpose to contribute to the reduction of cross-border obstacles related to access to education and training, by developing closer links among local communities and between key stakeholders in the sector. Thus, the small-scale projects added value is that they can function as a specific tool for the programme, to reach as many citizens and stakeholders as possible in the border region, providing a key contribution to extended simplification of procedures for beneficiaries.

For the implementation of small-scale projects, simplified cost options will be used, in line with the EU regulations (e.g: flat rate for staff costs and administration costs, unit costs, lump sum).

Also, under PO 4, SO 4.2, applying small project fund, as a possible instrument to support projects of limited financial volume, shall be analysed by the programme structures during the implementation stage, depending on the programme evolution.

7. Implementing provisions

7.1. Programme authorities

Reference: point (a) of Article 17(6)

Table 10

Programme authorities	Name of the institution [255]	Contact name [200]	E-mail [200]
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Managing authority	Ministry of Development, Public Works and Administration	Iulia Hertzog	robg@mdlpa.ro iulia.hertzof@mdlpa.ro
National authority (for programmes with participating third or partner countries, if appropriate)	Ministry of Regional Development and Public Works, "Territorial cooperation management" Directorate	Desislava Georgieva	NA-RO-BG@mrrb.government.bg
Audit authority	Romanian Court of Accounts	Dan Vlădescu	autoritateadeaudit@rcc.ro dan.vladeascu@rcc.ro
Group of auditors representatives	Romanian Court of Accounts Ministry of finance, Executive Agency "Audit of EU Funds", Directorate "Audits of funds under ETC and other programmes"	Daniela Dumitrache Iskra Torbova - Hristova	Daniela.dumitrache@rcc.ro aeuf@minfin.bg
Body to which the payments are to be made by the Commission	Managing Authority Ministry of Development, Public Works and Administration	Daniela Albu	Daniela.albu@mdlpa.ro

7.2. Procedure for setting up the Joint Secretariat

Reference: point (b) of Article 17(6)

Text field [3 500]

After consultations, the Joint Working Group for Programming decided that the Regional Office for Cross-Border Cooperation Călărași (ROC) will host the Joint Secretariat (JS) based on the following arguments:

- ROC hosted the joint (technical) secretariat for 2007-2013 Romania-Bulgaria Cross Border Programme and for Interreg V-A Romania-Bulgaria Programme. Thus, it is an already existing institution with entirely functional management structures and multicultural human resources, with both Romanian and Bulgarian staff, and with experience in programme management.
- the management structures and the working procedures of the JS have been audited during 2014-2020 programming period and only minor changes will be made in order to reflect the provisions of the new EU regulations and the lessons learned
- the know-how, human resources and the experience of last two programming periods will allow to start the implementation of the new Programme as soon as possible
- a good visibility and close relations with the stakeholders in territory.

Both JS and national control staff (for Romanian partners) are established in a regional authority, where have been working for the previous programming periods (2007-2013/2014-2020) and are already trained and experienced.

The JS shall carry out the functions set in the Interreg Regulation. In this respect, a delegation and financing agreement (MA-JS-ROC) will be concluded. The costs related to the JS functionality shall be supported by the Programme TA funds, as long as they are related to the tasks delegated by the Managing Authority.

As the staff of JS for Interreg V-A Romania-Bulgaria is already trained and experienced and it was involved in the programming process of 2021-2027 period, it will take over responsibilities for the Interreg VI-A Romania-Bulgaria Programme, according to each person's expertise.

The recruitment procedures for new staff will take into account the programme partnership and will follow the principles of transparency, non-discrimination and equal opportunities. The staff of the JS must be proficient in English and in at least one of the relevant local languages, Romanian or/and Bulgarian.

Both the Managing Authority and the National Authority may observe the selection process for the Joint Secretariat. Therefore, representatives from the Managing Authority/National Authority will be invited to participate in the selection process of the staff.

Also, the MA and NA have decided to establish info-points on the Bulgarian territory (in Ruse and Sofia), under the NA responsibility. The info-point shall perform the following tasks:

- Support to Bulgarian stakeholders and beneficiaries during project preparation and implementation.
- Information and communication activities.

All these tasks shall be carried out in close cooperation with the JS, under NA responsibility.

When performing the tasks, the programme structures shall ensure adequate separation of functions, in order to avoid the conflict of interest. The description of control and management system and the relevant working procedures shall provide details regarding how the principle of separation of functions between and within programme structures is respected.

7.3 Apportionment of liabilities among participating Member States and where applicable, the third countries and OCTs, in the event of financial corrections imposed by the managing authority or the Commission

Reference: point (c) of Article 17(6)

Text field [10 500]

According to art. 69 (2) of Regulation (EU) 2021/1060 - CPR, each partner State shall be responsible for investigating irregularities committed by the beneficiaries located on its territory. In the case of a systematic irregularity, the partner State shall extend its investigation to cover all operations potentially affected. The partner State shall make the financial corrections in connection with individual or systemic irregularities detected in operations or operational programme. Financial correction shall consist of cancelling all or part of the public contribution to an operation or to the operational programme. Financial

corrections shall be recorded in the annual accounts by the managing authority for the accounting year in which the cancellation is decided.

The managing authority shall ensure that any amount paid as a result of an irregularity is recovered from the lead partner. Beneficiaries shall repay the lead partner any amounts unduly paid. Special provisions regarding the repayment of amounts subject to an irregularity shall be included both in the contract to be signed with the lead partner and in the partnership agreement to be signed between the beneficiaries.

If the lead partner does not succeed in securing repayment from other beneficiaries or if the managing authority does not succeed in securing repayment from the lead partner, the partner State on whose territory the beneficiary concerned is located shall reimburse the managing authority the amount unduly paid to that beneficiary. Where a Member State has not reimbursed the managing authority any amounts unduly paid to a partner, those amounts shall be subject to a recovery order issued by the Commission which shall be executed, where possible, by offsetting to the respective Member State.

The managing authority shall be responsible for reimbursing the amounts concerned to the general budget of the Union, in accordance with the apportionment of liabilities among the participating partner States as detailed in the Memorandum of Implementation.

In accordance with article 104 of Regulation (EU) 2021/1060 - CPR, the Commission has the right of making financial corrections by cancelling all or part of the Union contribution to the programme and effecting recovery from the partner States in order to exclude from Union financing expenditure which is in breach of applicable Union and national law, including in relation to deficiencies in the management and control systems.

In case of any financial corrections by the Commission, the two partner States commit to dividing the amount between the two partner States proportionally with the approved project budgets and performed activities by Romanian and Bulgarian beneficiaries affected by the financial correction. In case of financial corrections by the Commission, due to random or anomalous irregularities, the two partner States commit to investigate on a case-by-case basis. The financial correction by the Commission shall not prejudice the partner States' obligation to pursue recoveries under the provisions of the applicable European Regulations.

In case of unlawful/misused State aid/de minimis aid awarded in the context of Interreg VI-A Romania-Bulgaria, MA, with the support of each Member State shall be responsible for recovering the respective amounts from the beneficiaries located on its territory, according to the national procedures in force. Also, the Bulgaria (National Authority) shall reimburse the Managing Authority the amounts to be recovered - the aid granted from ERDF and related interests calculated according to the methodology provided by the Commission Regulation, in case MA fails on recovering the unlawful /misused State aid/de minimis aid awarded.

The Memorandum of Implementation between the Member States which are part of the Interreg VI-A Romania-Bulgaria Programme shall provide for detailed provisions with regard to the apportionment of liabilities, debts recovery, setting-up a buffer fund for securing the cash-flow at Programme level, recovery of TA funds (if the case), as well as in respect of state aid/de minimis aid granted.

8. Use of unit costs, lump sums, flat rates and financing not linked to costs

Reference: Articles 94 and 95 of Regulation (EU) 2021/1060 (CPR)

Table 10: Use of unit costs, lump sums, flat rates and financing not linked to costs

Intended use of Articles 94 and 95	YES	NO
From the adoption the programme will make use of reimbursement of the Union contribution based on unit costs, lump sums and flat rates under priority according to Article 94 CPR (if yes, fill in Appendix 1)	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>
From the adoption the programme will make use of reimbursement of the Union contribution based on financing not linked to costs according to Article 95 CPR (if yes, fill in Appendix 2)	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>

Appendix 3. List of planned operations of strategic importance with a timetable- Article 17(3)

Text field [2 000]

Priority 1: A well connected region, PO 3, SO 3.2

1. Project Title: DISMAR - Danube Integrated System for MARKing

Lead Partner: River Administration of the Lower Danube Galati - AFDJ Galati

Partners: Executive Agency for exploration and maintenance of the Danube River - EAEMDR Ruse

Indicative budget: 8,000,000 euro (ERDF)

2. Enhancing rail connectivity and mobility across the Danube

Potential Lead Partner/Partners: Romanian and Bulgarian ministries; Romanian and Bulgarian Railway National Companies, other actors relevant for this field

Indicative budget: 12,000,000 euro (ERDF)

Priority 2: A greener region, PO 2, SO 2.4

1. Project Title: STREAM 2 - Streamlining cross-border cooperation: Joint approach in disaster resilience

Lead Partner: General Inspectorate for Emergency Situations, Romania

Partners: Directorate General Fire Safety and Civil Protection, Bulgaria; “Dobrogea” Constanța County Inspectorate for Emergency Situations, Romania; Territorial Inspectorate of Border Police Giurgiu, Romania; Academy of Ministry of Interior, Bulgaria; National Association of Volunteers in the Republic of Bulgaria.

Indicative budget: 19,500,000 euro (ERDF)

2. Project Title: (Danube RISK) - Danube Risk Prevention

Lead Partner: Ministry of Environment, Waters and Forests, Romania

Partners: National Administration „Romanian Waters”, Ministry of Environment and Water, Bulgaria, Danube River Basin Directorate, Bulgaria

Indicative budget: 14,000,000 euro (ERDF)

Indicative timetable - the operations of strategic importance shall be developed and implemented during the entire programming period.

The proposed partnerships can be modified/extended, if the case, with other relevant partners necessary for achieving the project’s objectives.