

IPA II Cross-border Cooperation Programme Bulgaria – Serbia

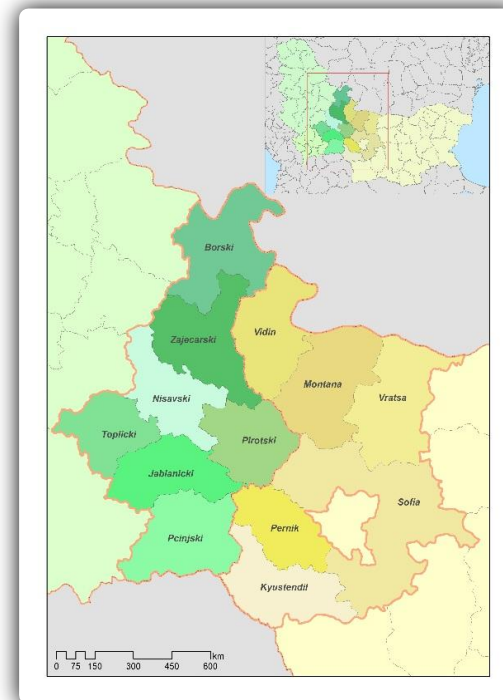
The Programme Area

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

The Programme area includes 13 administrative units: **6 districts in Bulgaria**, which correspond to NUTS level III (EUROSTAT), and the equivalent NUTS III **7 districts in Serbia**. The core area remains in larger part the same as in the period 2007 – 2013, with the addition of 2 new districts: on the Bulgarian side – the Vratsa district, and on the Serbian side – the Toplička district.

The Vision

Programme contributes to **smart, sustainable and inclusive growth**, and **interacts with the EU Strategy for the Danube Region** through an integrated approach addressing common territorial challenges. The vision for the border region development in line with EU2020 perspective can be formulated in one brief message: **“Well-preserved regional resources – people, land, and heritage – as a guarantee for cross-border identity and sustainable development of the border region”**.



The Overall Objective

To create a positive socio-economic environment, necessary for the development of the border area, **two main challenges** are faced: **(1)** to invest in the effective valorisation and the efficient management of the territory; and **(2)** to increase cross-border networks, interactions and connections both at the social, economic and environmental spheres.

These are to be considered as pillars of the new Programme, reflected in its overall objective: **to stimulate the balanced and sustainable development of the Bulgaria-Serbia border region integrated in the European space – achieved through smart economic growth, environmental change adaptation and learning culture enhancement.**

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Thematic Priorities

In view of the general cross-border cooperation concept, and based on objective facts, comparative advantages, resources and potentials, the Programme recommends the above strategic vision to be achieved through targeted **integrated support** in the following thematic priority areas¹:

♦ **Thematic priority (d): Encouraging tourism and cultural and natural heritage**

Preservation and development of the cross-border system of protected natural and cultural values for the purpose of maintaining the environmental balance, the natural and cultural identity of the territory and for integrating their values into the modern life is seen as a priority for development in the period 2014-2020.

Tourism as an economic sector is considered above all in the aspect of its development potential and orientation. Hence, the proposed Programme's interventions are aimed at supporting the border area competitiveness and existing economic advantages, especially those related to its unique natural and cultural values, while valorising them through sustainable development of tourism sector.

♦ **Thematic priority (e): Investing in youth, education and skills**

Youth are the key to sustainable and innovative development of the border region.

Therefore, the Programme is targeting a support for enhanced learning environment for youth, using peer counselling, economic, social and environmental entrepreneurship opportunities and providing various networking models across the border.

The targeted integrated approach in this field search to engage youth as valued partners in building more prosperous and secure futures for themselves, their families and their communities.

♦ **Thematic priority (b): Protecting the environment and promoting climate change adaptation and mitigation, risk prevention and management**

Protection and rehabilitation of the ecological balance and adaptation to climate change, as well as preservation of natural resources in cross-border context are clearly fields, which are to be dealt in an integrated way.

Joint and co-ordinated actions in the border region contribute to the creation of synergic effects in environmental protection and resource management. This guarantees achievement of the desired strategic vision and implementation of the strategic objectives for preservation of the natural and cultural heritage, for sustainable tourism development of the border region and improvement of the quality of life (incl. youth).

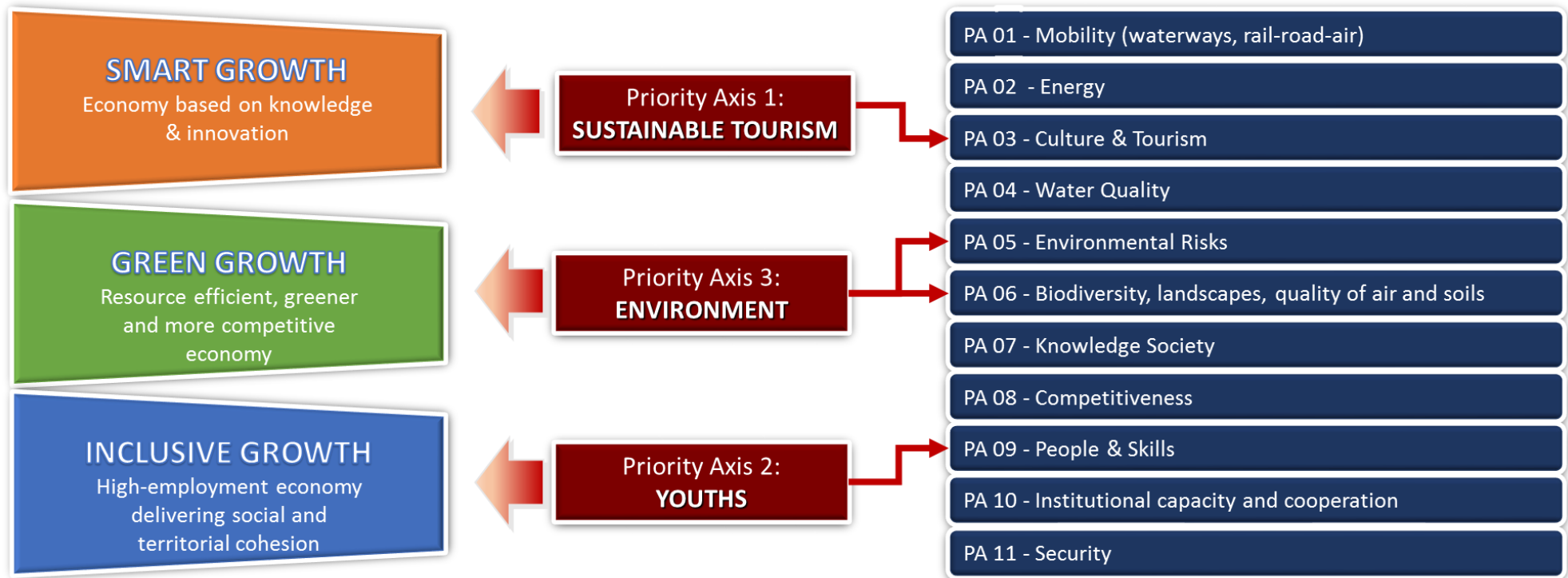
¹ In conformity with Regulation 213/2014 REGULATION (EU) No 231/2014 OF THE EUROPEAN PARLIAMENT AND OF THE COUNCIL of 11 March 2014 establishing an Instrument for Pre-accession Assistance (IPA II), ANNEX III - Thematic priorities for assistance for territorial cooperation

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Policy Context: EU 2020

External coherence

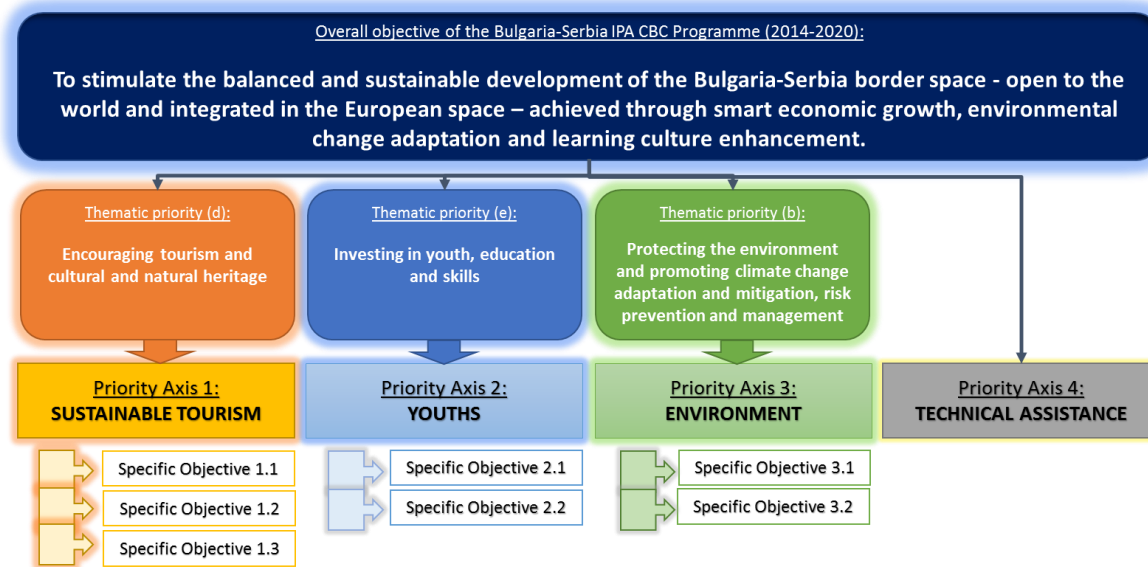
EU Strategy for the Danube Region



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Programme Strategy

The selected thematic priorities are structured into **3 priority axes**, reflecting the needs and challenges as identified in the territorial (situation) analysis of the Programme area:



The Budget

The total Programme budget is almost **34 million Euro**, of which 85% are contributed by the European Regional Development Fund (ERDF) and the Instrument for Pre-Accession Assistance (IPA) and 15% are National co-financing, distributed among the priority axis of the Programme as follows:

1. Sustainable Tourism – 35%
2. Youths – 25%
3. Environment – 30%
4. Technical Assistance – 10%

The financial commitment for each priority include expected results to be achieved, planned types of actions under each priority axis, as well as types of investments to be made.

Selection of operations

The Programme will be implemented through **Calls for Proposals** and/or **strategic projects**. The selection of operations is to be made **at level of 'specific objectives'**, e.g. potential applicants should apply with project application focusing on only one Specific Objective under one Priority Axis.

The detailed assessment criteria will be adopted by the Joint Monitoring Committee and will be made available to potential applicants in the Calls for proposals' documentation, which will be prepared and disseminated by the Programme's Managing Authority.

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Priority Axis 1 – SUSTAINABLE TOURISM

Specific Objective	Expected Result	Target Group	Potential Beneficiaries
SO 1.1 TOURIST ATTRACTIVENESS: Supporting the development of competitive tourist attractions achieved through cooperation and thus contributing to the diversification of tourist product(s) in the cross-border region	R 1.1.1 Increased tourist attractiveness of the cross-border area through better utilisation of natural, cultural and historical heritage and related infrastructure	- Residents of the cross-border area - Visitors and guests of tourist attractions and cross-border destinations - People with disabilities (improving of the accessibility will contribute to their social inclusion) - Touristic organisations and associations - Administrations of protected areas	- All levels of regional/local authorities - Regional and sector development agencies - Central and regional offices and structures of relevant government institutions/administrations - Public cultural institutes (museum, library, community centres, etc.) - Non-government organizations and tourist associations

The indicative actions to be supported under specific objective 1.1 are:

- **Preservation of natural and cultural heritage** (e.g. restoration and maintenance of sites of historical and cultural importance; conservation and protection of both tangible and non-tangible natural, historical and cultural heritage, etc.).
- **Development of small-scale support infrastructure to touristic attractions** (e.g. rehabilitation of access roads; upgrade of public utilities related to natural, cultural and historic tourism sites; small touristic border crossings and related facilities; ICT facilities development/upgrade, etc.).
- **Development of additional small scale technical infrastructure, encouraging the visits to the tourist attractions** (playgrounds; recreational and sports facilities; landscaping; signing and lighting; other support facilities serving tourist attraction and visitors).
- **Development of joint transport access schemes and adventure routes** (e.g. cross-border public transport to touristic sites; tourist paths and health paths, climbing, horse riding and biking routes, etc.).
- **Development of tourist attraction accessible to persons with disabilities** (e.g. encouraging the modification of access points, washrooms, stairs, transportation vehicles, rough paths, etc.).
- **Development of information access facilities** (e.g. info-centres and/or kiosks to guide potential visitors; joint GIS platforms; joint platforms for online reservations, payment, etc.).

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Specific Objective	Expected Result	Target Group	Potential Beneficiaries
SO 1.2 CROSS-BORDER TOURISTIC PRODUCT: Capturing economic benefits from development of natural and cultural heritage in the border area through creating common cross-border touristic destination(s)	R 1.2.1 Enhanced capacity for sustainable development of cross-border touristic destination(s)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Touristic operators - Tourist associations - SMEs in the eligible border area operating in the field of tourism and hospitality sector - Young entrepreneurs - Cultural institutes (museum, library, art gallery, community centres, etc.) - Residents of the cross-border area and the visitors (tourists) 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - All levels of regional/local authorities - Regional touristic associations - NGOs - Business support structures - chamber of commerce, business association, business cluster - Education / Training Centres - Regional and sector development agencies - Central and regional offices and structures of relevant government institutions/administrations

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

- **Development of joint cross-border touristic destinations** (e.g. improve development strategies and action plans based on innovative service concepts and products; carrying out joint researches on tourism demand for new tourist destinations; adoption of joint visitor management plans to ensure that tourism does not damage natural and cultural resources; risk management plans for cultural and natural heritage sites exposed to climate change; elaborating joint monitoring programmes to measure trends and impacts, and facilitate adaptive management of natural, cultural and historical heritage in the region, etc.).
- **Development of sustainable cross-border touristic products and services** (e.g. research activities to identify tourist products with potential for cross-border branding; development of new and innovative tourist products and services; development of local brand/s based on natural, historical and cultural heritage of the border region; establishment of networks/clusters/entities for management of joint tourist products; creating knowledge networks for tourism innovations in the border area, etc.).
- **Joint marketing and promotion of cross-border tourist destinations and products** (e.g. joint market perception analysis with the aim to assess the customer understanding of the border region as a consistent tourism destination; application of best practices in tourism promotion; preparation and dissemination of information and advertising materials; studies of the impact of the implemented marketing and advertising activities; organisation of tourism exhibitions and fairs; visualisation of local tourist products/ brand/s/ destinations, incl. 3D visualisation; mobile applications, social networks, tailor-made internet platforms, and other innovative tools; creating multi-lingual on-line tourist platforms, etc.).

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Specific Objective	Expected Result	Target Group	Potential Beneficiaries
SO 1.3 PEOPLE-TO-PEOPLE NETWORKING: Capitalising the effect of cultural, historical and natural heritage tourism on border communities through common actions	R 1.3.1 Extended cross-border networks operating in the field of sustainable tourism	- Residents of the cross-border area - Tourist enterprises/establishments in the border region - Touristic organisations and associations - Youth organisations	- All levels of regional/local authorities - Regional touristic associations - Civil society structure (association/foundation/NGOs) - Business support structures - Education / Training Centres - Cultural institutes (museum, library, art gallery, community centres, etc.)

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

- **Support for public awareness activities and information services** (e.g. awareness raising campaigns on the values of cross-border cultural, historical and natural heritage, incl. joint events among youth; dissemination of relevant information to the touristic providers in the border region; organizing travel forums to promote effective two-way communication; participation and involvement of local touristic enterprises in recognizing and solve common problems; organisation of different events such as conferences, forums, seminars, platforms and networking meetings in order to improve the recognition and trust among existing partners and to assure the political commitment at all levels, etc.).
- **Capacity building activities addressed to local community and business** (e.g. training and consultancy support services for tourist enterprises/establishments to improve skills and performance; organising online forums for exchange of good practices in sustainable tourism management; support the cooperation of public and private institutions in fields of competence, etc.).
- **Organization of joint events to promote cross-border natural and cultural heritage** (e.g. promotion and cultivation of the common traditions of the borderland areas; support to activities in the fields of multiculturalism, cultural exchange and the establishment of connections on field of creative industry in order to increase cultural diversity; organisation of festivals, exhibitions, performances, etc.).

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Priority Axis 2 – YOUTHS

Specific Objective	Expected Result	Target Group	Potential Beneficiaries
SO 2.1 SKILLS & ENTREPRENEURSHIP: Supporting the development of attractive environment for advancement of young people in the border region achieved through cooperation	R 2.1.1 Improved environment for youth development	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Pupils of primary and secondary schools - Young people (up to age of 29) - Youth organisations - Marginalised minority communities - Children and youth with special needs - Employment services 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - All levels of regional/local authorities - Education institutions and training service providers - Vocational training institutions - Universities, knowledge / research institutes - Civil society structure (association/foundation)/ NGOs - Business support structures - Cultural institutes, local community centres

The indicative actions to be supported under specific objective 2.1 are:

- **Development of youth-related small-scale infrastructure, and training and information facilities** (e.g. construction/ reconstruction/ rehabilitation/ refurbishment of youth, education-related and recreational infrastructure and facilities – for instance: lecture facilities, libraries, laboratories, sport facilities, campuses; investments to ensure physical accessibility to youth and education-related and recreational infrastructure and facilities; investments in ICT- facilities’ development and upgrade, etc.).
- **Development of small-scale “entrepreneurship” infrastructure** (e.g. business incubators, shared workspace, start-up factories and “start-up garage”, equipment provision/sharing, etc.).
- **Support to youth entrepreneurship schemes and initiatives** (e.g. initiatives to encourage learning in support of young people's innovation, creativity and entrepreneurship; students’ mini-companies, school-entrepreneur/ business activities and events; simulation games [e.g. computer-based]; business skills training, guidance and counselling services [one-stop-shops and youth enterprise centres, on-the-job training and workshops, mentor support and business coaching, online portals and web sites, etc.]; support to joint market initiatives and networking, incl. promotion and marketing campaigns for youth entrepreneurs, encouraging the development of joint initiatives for research and innovations, etc.).

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Specific Objective	Expected Result	Target Group	Potential Beneficiaries
SO 2.2 PEOPLE-TO-PEOPLE NETWORKING: Promoting cooperation initiatives for and with young people, thus enhancing mobility of young people across borders	R 2.2.1 Enhanced networking between young people in the border region	- Pupils of primary and secondary schools - Young people (up to age of 29) - Marginalised communities - Children and youth with special needs	- All levels of regional/local authorities - Youth organisations / NGOs - Local and national education institutions, and training service providers - Universities, knowledge / research institutes - Civil society structure (association/foundation) - Business support structures - Cultural institutes, local community centres

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

- **Support to youth networking initiatives** (e.g. promotion of young people's participation in representative democracy and civil society; cross-border initiatives aimed at combating youth poverty and social exclusion; community initiatives to support and recognize the value of youth volunteering; supporting youth capacity and opportunities to be creative and youth access to culture; cross-border initiatives for promotion of health and well-being of young people, etc.).

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Priority Axis 3 – ENVIRONMENT

Specific Objective	Expected Result	Target Group	Potential Beneficiaries
SO 3.1 JOINT RISK MANAGEMENT: Preventing and mitigating the consequences of natural and man-made cross-border disasters	R 3.1.1 Enhanced joint interventions, ensuring preparedness of public authorities, civil organisations and targeted volunteers for better management of the natural and man-made disasters	- Affected population of the CBC region - All levels of regional/local authorities - Administrations of protected areas - Young people (up to age of 29)	- Relevant local and regional structures dealing with emergency situations - Central and regional offices and structures of relevant government institutions/ administrations - Regional and sector development agencies

The indicative actions to be supported under specific objective 3.1 are:

- **Establishing joint early warning and disaster management systems** (e.g. surveys of actually applied procedures, policies and measures for disaster protection, prevention and provisions; establishing spatial data base for disaster risk assessment, containing terrestrial, meteorological and sociological features; preparing joint risk assessment and mapping strategies; preparing joint plans and procedures for emergency situation liquidation and disaster force accumulation responding to the incidents and emergency situations; developing joint protocols and communication channels for risk prevention and management of natural and man-made disasters, etc.).
- **Investments in equipment related to disaster resilience** (e.g. up-to-date ICT solutions in pre-fire, fire and post-fire activities; supply of specialized fire-fighting equipment; supply of specialized equipment for floods prevention, and for search and rescue interventions; supply of system for air surveillance of the surface and real time transmission of data, etc.).
- **Support of small-scale interventions/investments** (e.g. green infrastructure for natural water retention: restoration of flood plains and wetlands, afforestation, re-meandering; sanitation of river banks; building flood defence like dikes and canals; forestation of non-permanent vulnerable land; cuttings for emergency situations, etc.).
- **Capacity building related to disaster resilience** (e.g. conducting joint theoretical-tactical exercises and field trainings for emergency situations management; trainings in the use of ICT technologies for risk management; exchange of experience and good practice (study visits, round-tables, conferences); joint trainings and raising awareness of public service actors and population (volunteers) for disaster resilience, measures related to risk communication and to awareness-raising of population, accompanied with specific educational actions, information-sharing, drills and training for local population; cooperation activities within river basin districts promoting natural flood risk management approach, etc.).

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Specific Objective	Expected Result	Target Group	Potential Beneficiaries
SO 3.2 NATURE PROTECTION: Promoting and enhancing the utilization of common natural resources, as well as stimulate nature protection in the programme area, through joint initiatives across the border	R 3.2.1 Enhanced capacity of regional and local stakeholders for nature resources management in the programme area through joint initiatives across borders	- Groups of population of the CBC region - Civil society structure in the CBC region - Economic operators in the CBC region	- Central and regional offices and structures of relevant government institutions/ administrations in the sphere of their competence - Regional and sector development agencies - Administrations of protected areas - All levels of regional/local authorities - Research and academic institutes - Environmental NGOs

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

- **Joint cooperation initiatives targeting the effective management of Natura 2000 sites and other protected areas** (e.g. development and implementation of joint management plans/coordinated concrete conservation activities for protected areas based on innovative concepts; exchange of experience and capacity building for protected areas/Natura 2000 sites administrations; community involvement, visitor management and tourism development measures; coordinated management planning, implementation and evaluation; public awareness about Natura 2000 sites and protected areas, with the help of e.g. the National Ecological and Rural Networks or the European Network for Rural Development; etc.)
- **Joint initiatives towards the protection and enhancement of biodiversity, nature protection and green infrastructure** (e.g. joint initiatives targeting the effective management of environmental resources; restoration activities targeting the achievement of favourable conservation status of the species and natural habitats, subject of conservation in the established in the area protected areas; education and awareness raising, as well as capacity building measures in the field of ecosystems protection and restoration, which should target predominantly the young people in the CBC region; introduction of Low Carbon practices shared for adaptation climate change, etc.).
- **Preservation and improvement of the quality of soils, air and water** (e.g. developing new governance tools and the "learning region" concepts towards multifunctional use of land and soil and inter-linkages to the regional development; cooperation initiatives and developing policy networks in the field of horizontal and vertical integration of air quality creation of "carbon proofing" tools for integrated spatial development policies, sustainable urban mobility plans, strategies and processes for setting up local/regional low carbon model areas and regions including special needs areas such as nature protection regions; awareness-raising about the needs of reducing and recycling waste; raising awareness about soil protection; actions for improvement of the quality of air, cooperation initiatives and networking tackling water pollution including Danube pollution and indirectly Black Sea pollution, etc.).
- **Capacity building and promotion initiatives** (e.g. provision of training to local and regional authorities in the field of environment related matters, such as waste or protected areas management; establishment of help-desks with mobile expert groups helping regions and cities resolving environmental problems; creating networks for exchange of good practices; creating knowledge networks for innovations in the field of sustainable use of common natural resources; awareness raising on all levels (individual persons, organizations, businesses, public administration, schools) on issues related to environmental and nature protection, including marginalized communities and other vulnerable groups).

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Management Structures

Authority/body	Name of authority/body and department or unit
MANAGING AUTHORITY	DG “Territorial Cooperation Management”, Ministry of Regional Development of the Republic of Bulgaria
NATIONAL AUTHORITY	Department for Cross-border and Transnational Cooperation Programs, Government of the Republic of Serbia - Serbian European Integration Office
CERTIFYING AUTHORITY	National Fund Directorate at the Ministry of Finance of the Republic of Bulgaria
AUDIT AUTHORITY	Audit of European Union Funds Executive Agency to the Minister of Finance of the Republic of Bulgaria
BODIES DESIGNATED TO CARRY OUT CONTROL TASKS	For the Republic of Bulgaria: Ministry of Regional Development of the Republic of Bulgaria For Republic of Serbia: Ministry of Finance of the Republic of Serbia, Department for Contracting and Financing of EU Funded Programmes – CFCU, Division for first level control of projects financed under IPA cross-border and transnational cooperation component
BODIES DESIGNATED TO BE RESPONSIBLE FOR CARRYING OUT AUDIT TASKS	For the Republic of Bulgaria: Audit of European Union Funds Executive Agency to the Minister of Finance of the Republic of Bulgaria For the Republic of Serbia: Representing group of auditors - Government of the Republic of Serbia Audit Authority Office of EU Funds
JOINT MONITORING COMMITTEE	Composed of representatives of MA, NA, and the Commission and the NIPAC, macro-regional strategy representatives (EU Strategy for the Danube region), as well as other relevant national authorities and stakeholders, including civil society and non-governmental organisations. The composition of the JMC will respect the principles of partnership and multi-level governance.
JOINT SECRETARIAT	The JS will be established in Sofia (Bulgaria) with a branch office in Nis (Serbia). The JS provides daily help to the Managing Authority, National Authority and the Joint Monitoring Committee of the Programme and assists where appropriate the Certifying Authority and Audit Authority in carrying out their respective duties. The JS also provides information and support to the beneficiaries of the Programme.