

SFC2021 INTERREG Programme

CCI	2021TC16IPCB009
Title	Interreg VI-A IPA Greece-North Macedonia
Version	1.1
First year	2021
Last year	2027
Eligible from	01-Jan-2021
Eligible until	31-Dec-2029
EC decision number	
EC decision date	
NUTS regions covered by the programme	EL522 - Θεσσαλονίκη EL523 - Κιλκίς EL524 - Πέλλα EL526 - Σέρρες EL531 - Γρεβενά, Κοζάνη EL533 - Φλώρινα MK001 - Вардарски MK003 - Југозападен MK004 - Југоисточен MK005 - Пелагониски
Strand	Strand A: CB Cross-Border Cooperation Programme (ETC, IPA III CBC, NDICI-CBC)

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1. Joint programme strategy: main development challenges and policy responses

1.1. Programme area (not required for Interreg C programmes)

Reference: point (a) of Article 17(3), point (a) of Article 17(9)

The Programme area extends to 29,259 km² (Greece: 14,422 km² ; North Macedonia: 14,837 km²) and has a total population of 2.4 millions (Greece: 1.7 millions ; North Macedonia: 0.7 millions).

The cross border area covers 6 territorial units at NUTS II level, and 10 territorial units at NUTS III level as follows:

- *2 Greek regions – EL522 Thessaloniki, EL523 Kilkis, EL524 Pella and EL526 Serres from the Region of Central Macedonia and EL533 Florina and EL531 Kozani from the Region of Western Macedonia*
- *4 regions from North Macedonia – MK001 Vardar, MK003 Southwest, MK004 Southeast, MK005 Pelagonia*

Key territorial specificities of the CB area:

- *The area is characterized by the presence of 1 large city – Thessaloniki, with above 40% of the total population, 14 medium cities (>50.000 inhabitants) with approx. 25 % of the total population, and small cities (10.000-50.000 inhabitants) where the remaining 35% of the population lives.*
- *The area is neighbouring Bulgaria (east) and Albania (west).*
- *The area is characterized by large economic and social disparities, especially across borders.*
- *Compared to the EU average, the economy remains considerably more agricultural, less industrial, and more service-dependent.*

Functional Area

The Functional Area is considered the key element for cooperation in the regions of the Programme. This area is defined by joint characteristics, challenges and development opportunities. More importantly, it is possible to address the joint needs satisfactorily and deliver tangible results.

Ideas shall be generated from stakeholders within the Programme area. For some topics, the solution might be found with the cooperation of partners outside the programme area. Nonetheless, the selected interventions shall benefit the Programme area.

The programme will enable efficient interventions based on joint characteristics, challenges and development opportunities for the functional area. Possible territorial typologies for the aforementioned area could be the followings:

- Lakes areas

Prespas, Ohrid, Kastoria (out of the eligible area) Vegoritis.

Doiran, Kerkini, Volvi

- River areas

Axios – Vardar. One river crossing the eligible area from North to South

- Mountain Areas – Valleys

Pelagonia / Western Macedonia: Includes Florina, Kozani, Bitola Prilep, surrounded by mountains Voras, Pelister.

1.2 Joint programme strategy: Summary of main joint challenges, taking into account economic, social and territorial disparities as well as inequalities, joint investment needs and complimentary and synergies with other funding programmes and instruments, 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.

Reference: point (b) of Article 17(3), point (b) of Article 17(9)

Socio-Economic analysis

According to Hellenic Statistical Authority data, the population of Greece was 10.816.286 inhabitants (ELSTAT Population - Housing Census, 2011), individuals of which 5,3m were males (49,0%) and 5,51m females (51,0%). The current population of North Macedonia is 2.083.320 (Worldometer elaboration of United Nations data, 2021).

On the Greek side of the Programme area, the actual population stands at 1.708.690 inhabitants (incl. Kozani), of which 826.473 are males (48,37%) and 882.217 are females (51,63%). On the side of North Macedonia, the population was 770.333 inhabitants (State Statistical Office, 2019). The gender ratio is 387.961 males (50,36%) and 382.372 females (49,64%).

In the eligible area of Greece (incl. Kozani), 16,73% of the population hold a PhD/Masters/Bachelor degree, 4,54% graduated from a Vocational Training Centre or College, 23,28% graduated Lyceum, 13,44% graduated high school, 23,25% graduated elementary school.

The unemployment rate in Greece in 2020 was 15,47%, i.e. one of the highest rates in the EU. Due to its debt crisis since 2010, the unemployment rate increased to its highest rate in 2013, reaching 27,47%. Regarding the Greek regions of the cross-border area, the average unemployment rate of the active population is approximately 22% in almost all regions. The unemployment rate is very high in the younger population, from 15 to 34 years old, and ranges from 30,83% to 37,71%, (ELSTAT database).

The unemployment rate in North Macedonia was 14.8% in 2021, corresponding to males at 15.6% and females at 13.5% (State Statistical Office – Census published on 30.03.2022). The unemployment rate has significantly decreased over the last decade, but is still one of the highest in Europe. The highest percentages of unemployment refer to the younger population (15- 24: 34.8%, 25-49: 14.5%, 50-64: 10.5%). The employment rate of 20 to 64 year-olds at 47.1 % (1st quarter 2022) is much lower than the EU average of 73.1%. (Eurostat 2021). The employment rate of persons with tertiary education, aged 20 to 64 years is 80.4 % (2021), lower than in the EU (average rate of 85.0 % in 2021).

The Unemployment Rates in the Programme area, (State Statistical Office – Census published on 30.03.2022[1]) are: 12.8% (Vardar Region), 21.2% (Southwest Region), 3.8% (Southeast Region), 12.2% (Pelagonia Region).

According to ELSTAT and World Bank, the Gross Domestic Product (GDP) in Greece was worth 183,4 billion euros in 2019. The Greek cross-border area produced 13% of the total GDP in 2018. Most of the GDP in this area is contributed by Thessaloniki and reaches 15,77 billion euros. The GDP per Capita of Greece in 2018 was 16.745 euros, while the highest value was back in 2008 at 21.845 euros. The results of the GDP per Capita per region suggest there is a significant drop in Florina, Kilkis and Kozani after 2015, while Thessaloniki, Pella and Serres were largely not affected (ELSTAT 2018). However, Florina and Kozani show a higher GDP per capita compared to the country's average due to the power generation establishments in their region. Decarbonization will severely affect the GDP within the region as the energy generation will drop significantly, and many related jobs will be lost. Their GDP will normally drop to the level of Pella and Serres.

Regarding North Macedonia, in 2020 and based on State Statistical Office, the GDP was 655.931 million denars (approximately 10.722 million euros) and the GDP per Capita was 316.488 denars (approximately 5.173 euros). The cross-border area offers 36,50% of the total GDP in 2019. While 3 of 4 Programme

regions present a GDP per Capita higher than the state's average, the Southwest region is lower by 25.18%, which agrees with the previous data with regards to unemployment.

In summary, the recent economic crisis hit hard Greece. The GDP fell sharply, unemployment rose to very high levels and subsequently brought poverty and social exclusion for a large number of inhabitants. Moreover, gender inequality, lifelong learning and recycling are targets far behind the national targets. However, after 2016, the economy started to rebalance, but a higher effort is needed to reach the targets that lead to sustainable growth according to UN Sustainable Development Goals and EU27 targets.

(i) joint challenges and social disparities

There are large differences in prosperity and related outlooks in the CBC area. These disparities concern employment opportunities and quality of life, income levels, innovation potential, connectivity and accessibility.

This is a particular problem in less prosperous regions of the Programme area with long-term unemployment. Differences in employment and training opportunities often translate into further social challenges such as social exclusion. The risk of poverty and social exclusion remains an important issue in the Programme area, particularly in the rural regions.

The challenge for social policies is dual: a) to mitigate the negative consequences of lower levels of economic development, and b) to address the causes of economic stagnation in the first place.

The needs and challenges of the Programme area arise through open consultation with the population, local enterprises and local authorities in both countries, as well as with direct exchanges with the bodies listed below.

Aristotle University of Thessaloniki

Goce Delcev University of Stip

Chamber of Small and Medium-Sized Industries of Thessaloniki

Waste management of Western Macedonia S.A. (Diadyma SA)

Southwest planning region

Craft Chamber of Thessaloniki

Technical Chamber of Greece / Section of Central Macedonia

Chamber of Commerce and Industry of Thessaloniki

Decentralized Administration of Macedonia-Thrace

Pelagonia Planning Region

Decentralized Administration of Epirus - Western Macedonia

Ministry of Development & Investment, Special Secretariat for the Management of ERDF & TA Programs

Region of Western Macedonia

Ministry for Foreign Affairs

Secretariat of European affairs and NIPAC

National Confederation of Disabled People, Greece

Ministry of Health

Ministry of Culture and Sports

Synergies with other policies need to be sought, that explicitly support economic and territorial development. This asks for example for integrated policies that address social innovation and (digital) skills development. Such policy actions need to involve local stakeholders from both the private and public sectors as well as citizens working together to fulfil local needs and thereby exploit local

knowledge. This is particularly important for rural regions.

The Programme is fully aligned with the “Prespa Agreement” of June 2018 and its prospects.

Challenges/needs of the region, taking into account the disparities:

- reducing unemployment
- attracting scientists to the Programme area
- development of the regions’ economy
- cooperation and exchange of know-how between partner countries
- tackling differences in educational and technological levels between the Programme areas

(ii) joint investment needs

The following elements describe the joint investment needs which take into account the prerequisite to have continuity to the previous IPA-CBC Programme and lessons learned, the new EU 2021-2027 Strategy, regulations and rules of the new programming period for territorial - cooperation, the input from all consultation phases, the current situation analysis and needs and priorities addressed.

To form the joint investment strategy, emphasis is given to strategic choices that could have added value for the cross-border area, joint actions among potential beneficiaries and the fact that this Programme is a supplementary tool to EU and national strategies, and not appropriate for large scale interventions, in terms of funding and size.

- Joint investments for the environmental protection and sustainable management of natural resources
- Joint investments to promote the transition to a circular and resource-efficient economy
- Joint investments to promote employment
- Joint investments to improve access to social and health care
- Joint investments to improve governance for cooperation

The operations under the Interreg VI-A IPA Programme will act as a solid investment for the enlargement policy of the EU, which will support North Macedonia in the implementation of key political, institutional, social and economic reforms to comply with EU standards and progressively align with its rules and policies. This Programme will be a source providing funds and play a significant role to underpin the economic recovery of the region. Investments in key sectors such as environment and climate, energy, connectivity, infrastructure, as well as health and governance, will boost the convergence with the EU and bring tangible benefits to North Macedonia.

(iii) complementarity with other forms of support

The impact of transnational cooperation depends, amongst others, on the extent to which Interreg project results can be transferred and scaled up by other EU and/or national Programmes with a larger scope and financial envelope. Therefore, coordinating and cooperating with other funding instruments creates opportunities to capitalize on project outputs and results, and consequently multiply their territorial impact.

Interreg VI-A IPA Programme aims to make use of potential synergies and complementarities with:

a) other Interreg programmes such as:

- INTERREG VI-A IPA “Greece-Albania 2021-2027
- INTERREG VI-A "Greece-Bulgaria 2021-2027"

b) Regional and National Cohesion Policy programmes, e.g. (Sectoral Programmes, Regional Programmes)

c) IPA III funds, earmarked for the Programme area (side of North Macedonia)

d) programmes related to the European Green Deal

Complementarities and synergies are sought throughout the Programme cycle.

During the consultation stage, the Managing Authority monitored the input from key stakeholders-policy makers. Proposals from the Regional Authorities of Western Macedonia and Central Macedonia have been earmarked for joint planning between the Interreg VI-A IPA Programme and the respective Regional Operational Programmes.

As Regional Authorities are members of the Programme's Joint Monitoring Committee, synergies are further exploited at the level of Programme Governance and policymaking.

The Managing Authority is an umbrella organization with several Programmes under its responsibility. As such, it oversees the project proposals submitted under the Programme of Greece-North Macedonia, together with the proposals submitted under the bilateral Programmes with Albania and Bulgaria. During the implementation phase, the Managing Authority can still steer project activities to avoid duplications between Programmes with common beneficiaries and similar Policy objectives.

The Managing Authority regularly monitors the European Commission's programme "EU for Prespa"[1] under the Instrument for Pre-Accession (IPA) III[2]. The latest iteration of the Programme was reviewed by the MA and discussed with the EU Delegation, to coordinate the activities.

As part of this exercise, a targeted CfP of the 2014-20 IPA CBC Programme will fund support activities of the strategic project in Prespa, which are complementary to the activities funded under IPA III.

The Managing Authority, together with the National Authority of North Macedonia, maintains communication links with the EU Delegation. Under the Priority 'Strategic focus on Prespas Area', further actions may be explored, with relevance to the EU Strategy for Western Balkans[1][2]

General guidelines regarding the decision-making process

Applicants will be invited to submit their project proposals under specific Calls for Project Proposals. The Calls will be launched by the Managing Authority/Joint Secretariat under the mandate of the Monitoring Committee. The proposals will be assessed based on pre-defined criteria. The criteria will be elaborated by the Managing Authority/Joint Secretariat and will be approved by the Joint Monitoring Committee. In accordance with the European Union and national rules, the criteria shall - ensure the contribution of operations to the achievement of the specific objectives and results of the relevant priority;

-be non-discriminatory and transparent.

-take into account the general principles of promotion of equality between men and women and

-non- discrimination and sustainable development

-ensure that a selected operation falls within the scope of the IPA III and can be attributed to a category of intervention of the Programme

-ensure that beneficiaries shall cooperate in the operations in accordance with the Commission Regulations.

Assessment of Proposals

The proposals will be assessed by the Joint Secretariat or external evaluators, based on the predefined criteria, and scoring methodology, which will be established in the Project Manual and may be further specified in each Call for Proposals. There are two phases within the selection process:

Administrative and eligibility complianceAdministrative compliance: It confirms that the Application Form is complete and meets all the requirements and formalities set in the respective Call.

Eligibility criteria: These criteria examine whether the proposal fulfils the requirements for funding by the Programme. These requirements are, for instance, the structure of the cross-border partnership, the general compatibility with the Programme objectives and principles, the co-financing requested, the duration of the project etc.

Applicants will be asked to demonstrate the compliance with the DNSH principle. Under the 2014-20 Programme, applicants were required to submit a preliminary checklist regarding environmental considerations. Under the current Programme, the required templates will be adjusted to capture the dimensions of the DNSH principle.

Quality assessment.

Only projects that demonstrate administrative compliance and satisfy the eligibility criteria will be subject to quality assessment. It covers: the nature of the proposed project, its relevance with and contribution to the achievement of the specific objectives of the Programme, its viability, sustainability and results in the eligible territory, the cross border cooperation and capitalization, the quality of the crossborder partnership, as well as the monitoring and management methodology proposed, information and publicity actions and planning of the budget.

Proposals with the highest assessment score will be recommended for approval. The final decision on the project to be funded will be taken by the Monitoring Committee of the Programme.

Approval of Proposals

The Joint Monitoring Committee may delegate the task of project approval to a dedicated Joint Steering Committee. Following the assessment of the project proposals, the Joint Steering Committee will convene to decide on the approval of the recommended projects.

Provisions for Complaints

Procedures for the examination of complaints shall be in place. The two partner countries shall set up a joint Complaint Committee, with separate and independent members from the JMC, to review any complaint addressed to the Managing Authority regarding the selection of operations under a given call for proposals.

The Joint Complaint Committee will evaluate the relevant complaints and give an opinion to the Joint Monitoring Committee which will make the final decision.

The Managing Authority will send this decision to the interested parties and inform the applicants about their judicial rights under Greek law.

Greece as the country hosting the Managing Authority of the Programme shall, upon request by the Commission, examine any complaints submitted to the Commission falling within the scope of its arrangements. The Managing Authority shall inform the Commission, upon request, of the results of those examinations.

Most synergies will be sought during programme implementation along with the following principles:

- In general, applicants, when submitting project proposals, have to outline the coherence and complementarity with EU, national and regional programmes in the application form. This information will be subject to evaluation.
- Continuous exchange of information with the Managing Authorities and Joint Secretariat, especially during project assessment and monitoring, will take place to avoid overlaps and promote synergies between projects, while minimizing the risk of double financing. Furthermore, actions set by the programme (e.g. targeted calls) will allow activation of synergies and complementarities of Interreg VI-A IPA Programme and projects funded by other Interreg programmes.
- Other Cohesion Policy programmes: coordination will be sought through National committees (or other mechanisms set by national rules) involving representatives of institutions participating in the implementation of national and regional programmes. Moreover, adequate control arrangements and fraud-fight measures will limit the risk of double financing.

Detailed procedures for the implementation of the above measures will be defined in the description of the programme management and control system as well as in the “Programme Manual” setting the rules for participation in the Programme.

To ensure avoidance of double funding, the Programme will apply the mechanisms in accordance with Article 191 regarding the principle of non-cumulative award and prohibition of double funding of the Financial Regulation[2]:

1. Each action may give rise to the award of only one grant from the budget to any one beneficiary, except where otherwise authorised in the relevant basic acts.

A beneficiary may be awarded only one operating grant from the budget per financial year.

An action may be financed jointly from separate budget lines by different authorising officers responsible.

2. The applicant shall immediately inform the authorising officers of any multiple applications and multiple grants relating to the same action or to the same work programme.

3. In no circumstances shall the same costs be financed twice by the budget.

4. In relation to the following types of support, paragraphs 1 and 2 shall not apply and, where appropriate, the Commission may decide not to verify whether the same cost was financed twice:

(a) study, research, training or education support paid to natural persons;

(b) direct support paid to natural persons most in need, such as unemployed persons and refugees.

Close coordination between the Managing Authority and the EU Delegation in North Macedonia will be maintained to maximise the effect of the assistance with other EU activities in the overlapping areas of support.

MA is an umbrella organization, overseeing beneficiaries’ projects participating in several CBC Programmes. Therefore, the MA is well equipped to avoid duplications of activities and double funding

There is close cooperation for the use of the technical assistance, in order to support the strengthening of the institutional capacity of the partner country.

(iv) lessons learnt from past experience

The Interreg IPA Cross Border Cooperation Programme "Greece - North Macedonia 2014-2020" promoted chances for sustainable local development and offered opportunities for cooperation, good neighbourly relations and socio-economic development to both countries.

The Priority Axes that reflect the identified needs and challenges are described below:

Priority Axis 1 - Development and Support of Local Economy

Priority Axis 2 - Protection of Environment – Transportation

A review of lessons learned from Interreg IPA Cross Border Cooperation Programme "Greece - North Macedonia 2014-2020" monitoring reports (2020) and European Commission mid-term evaluation provided the following information for the strategy development:

- 52 projects+- were implemented during the 2014 –2020 programming period. (up to the date of the Programme’s submission)
- The Programme empowered Public authorities, NGOs and other institutions as well as the citizens to work together on joint challenges and problems, seeking smarter solutions, which can be better achieved when they cooperate.
- Shared activities in all sectors of common interest, such as competitiveness, environment, tourism, transportation, employment, health and social issues become joint actions of the cross-border area.
- The European Union, Greece and North Macedonia are offering more than 45.000.000€ (Total OP budget: € 45,470,066. Total EU contribution: €38,649,552), from 2014 to 2020.
- Project partners did well regarding their compliance with EU and INTERREG specific procedures,

according to Lead Partners testimonials.

Lessons learnt from the previous Programme of 2014-2020 have shown that, in order to maximise the Programme impact on the CBC area, thematic concentration should go further in the 2021-2027 Programming period, with objectives that all converge towards climate and environment goals and concentration on the added value of transnational cooperation.

Moreover, the operational and impact evaluations show that, assuming a continuation of a thematic community approach, clear and effective coordination measures between the Joint Secretariat and the projects should be set up from the start of the Programme. The thematic specialisation, ownership and proximity of stakeholders that derive from this approach should be maintained, but with a clearer project architecture.

The Programme should make provisions for revisions to allow for necessary adaptations to procedures or content. This would allow for the improvement of weaknesses and adaptation to strategic priorities that may emerge during the programming period.

The main recommendations and the highlighted points to consider for the Programme period 2021-2027, are:

- The MA/JS should organize Info Days based on the needs in order to efficiently and effectively address identified issues also during the Programme implementation.
- The use of modern communication and promotion tools (e.g. Skype, Webinar software, social media) should be further explored, live Webinars to better advise applicants on a daily basis in a resource-efficient manner.
- To monitor the smooth operation of the MIS and make improvements, if necessary
- Improve the structure and better consistency of the applicant's package for project proposals.
- The application of direct support to small partner entities shall be envisaged. Application of the Small Projects Fund tool.
- The exploitation of the project development (calls and proposals preparation and submission practices) will use the technical skills and capacity that has already been built. This will enhance established partnerships (fostering continuation, sustainability, and capitalization) and will also allow the Programme to start without delays.

Significant added value in the CBC area:

- Created employment opportunities for educated graduates by exploiting comparative advantages of the cross-border area, with the use of innovative tools and practices
- Improved the attractiveness and promoted the tourism potential of the cross-border area
- Improved the preventive health care and social services for children and the elderly population
- Prevented, mitigation and management of natural disasters, risks and hazards
- Sustainable management and recycling of bio-wastes
- Sustainable management of protected areas, ecosystems and biodiversity
- Upgraded public infrastructure to improve road travel time, safe border crossings and promoted energy efficiency towards green transport.

(v) macro-regional strategies and sea-basin strategies

Macro-regional strategies have become an integral part of EU regional policy. The partner countries, together with Albania, participate in the European Strategy for the Adriatic and Ionian Region (EUSAIR.) The respective IPA Programmes are expected to contribute to the EUSAIR.

Macro-Regional Strategies such as the EUSAIR constitute an integrated framework endorsed by the European Council. Macro-regional Strategies have a common vision and a shared mission to address

common challenges and promote the prosperity of the regions involved in the Strategy that represents a defined geographical area relating to Member States and third countries located in the same geographical area. The participating countries benefit from strengthened cooperation, the creation of a common brand name and joint activities that contribute to economic, social and territorial cohesion. The 2021-2027 Interreg programmes should be ready –where relevant- to support actions arising from the macro-regional strategies, provided that these actions also contribute to the specific objectives of the programme area. The coordination between programmes and macro-regional strategies can ensure a wider territorial impact and better visibility. This, however, requires good and proactive coordination. In order to promote macro-regional strategies, the programme may consider one of these mechanisms: specific selection criteria (ex. bonus points if the project contributes to a macro-regional strategy); earmarking of a budget, or specific calls.

EU Strategy for the Adriatic and Ionian Region (EUSAIR)

The EU Strategy for the Adriatic and Ionian Region (EUSAIR) is a macro-regional strategy adopted by the European Commission and endorsed by the European Council in 2014.

The Strategy was jointly developed by the Commission and the Adriatic-Ionian Region countries and stakeholders, which agreed to work together on the areas of common interest for the benefit of each country and the whole region.

The EUSAIR covers nine countries: four EU Member States (Croatia, Greece, Italy, Slovenia) and five non-EU countries (Albania, Bosnia and Herzegovina, Montenegro, North Macedonia and Serbia). San Marino will join the Strategy, following the AII Ministerial Meeting and the Izola Declaration in May 2021.

The general objective of the EUSAIR is to promote economic and social prosperity and growth in the region by improving its attractiveness, competitiveness and connectivity, while safeguarding the environmental protection of the sea waters and the hinterland areas of the participating countries. With four EU members and five non-EU countries the strategy will contribute to the further integration of the Western Balkans.

The participating countries of the EUSAIR agreed on areas of mutual interest with high relevance for the Adriatic-Ionian countries, be it common challenges or opportunities. The countries are aiming to create synergies and foster coordination among all territories in the Adriatic-Ionian Region in the four thematic areas pillars:

1. BLUE GROWTH

- To promote research, innovation and business opportunities, in blue economy sectors, by facilitating the brain circulation between research and business communities and increasing their networking and clustering capacity.
- To adapt to sustainable seafood production and consumption, by developing common standards and approaches for strengthening these two sectors and providing a level playing field in the macro-region.
- To improve sea basin governance, by enhancing administrative and institutional capacities in the area of maritime governance and services.

2. CONNECTING THE REGION

- *To strengthen maritime safety and security and develop a competitive regional intermodal port system.*
- *To develop reliable transport networks and intermodal connections with the hinterland, both for freight and passengers.*
- *To achieve a well-interconnected and well-functioning internal energy market supporting the three energy policy objectives of the EU – competitiveness, security of supply and sustainability.*

3. ENVIRONMENTAL QUALITY

- To ensure a good environmental and ecological status of the marine and coastal environment by 2020 in line with the relevant EU acquis and the ecosystem approach of the Barcelona Convention.

- To contribute to the goal of the EU Biodiversity Strategy to halt the loss of biodiversity and the degradation of ecosystem services in the EU by 2020, and restore them in so far as feasible, by addressing threats to marine and terrestrial biodiversity.
- To improve waste management by reducing waste flows to the sea and, reducing nutrient flows and other pollutants to the rivers and the sea.

4. SUSTAINABLE TOURISM

- Diversification of the macro-region's tourism products and services along with tackling seasonality of inland, coastal and maritime tourism demand.
- Improving the quality and innovation of tourism products and enhancing the sustainable and responsible tourism capacities of the tourism actors across the macro-region.

The INTERREG IPA Cross Border Cooperation Programme "Greece - North Macedonia 2014-2020", in order to fulfil its objectives, is based and built upon the pillars:

3) - ENVIRONMENTAL QUALITY and

4) - SUSTAINABLE TOURISM

Actions implemented under PO3. (**A more connected Europe by enhancing mobility and regional ICT connectivity**) and PO4 (SOvi: **Enhancing the role of culture and sustainable tourism in economic development, social inclusion and social innovation**) will explore cooperation and direct or indirect contribution of project results to EUSAIR.

The results of those Priorities could be directly transferrable and enriched from activities within Programmes that share the priorities of the EUSAIR Environmental Quality and Sustainable Tourism pillars and the Interreg VI-A IPA Programme goals.

Horizontal Principles

The Programme ensures respect for the Charter of Fundamental Rights of the European Union when implementing the European Structural and Investment Funds ('ESI Funds') (2016/C 269/01).

Horizontal principles (sustainable development, gender equality, equal opportunities and equal treatment) in accordance with Article 9 of Regulation (EU) 2021/1060 (CPR) will be duly taken into consideration in the application, selection, monitoring and evaluation procedures. The particulars on how these principles will be applied in practice will be set out in the Programme manual.

The adoption of acts and drawing up of documents, e.g. the Partnership Agreement and operational programmes (OPs), will act within the scope of the EU law. The content of the document will be in compliance with the provisions of the Charter and, with the help of the 'Fundamental Rights Check-list', will respect the rights protected by it and observe the principles there.

Durability of Results (Long lasting Project results)

General considerations

The European Court of Auditors definition for "long-lasting project results" is the 'continued flow of net benefits achieved' by the project. It applies during the project duration and ideally extends after the legal durability period.

The accrual of benefits after the project duration has been a challenge in the previous iterations of the Programme, in the absence of revenue generating projects. Nonetheless, the Managing Authority has identified good practices with the potential for longer lasting project results.

Considerations for grants to businesses

The projects should generate an acceptable level of financial and economic return on costs. Although the grants awarded to small businesses will be very small, beneficiaries will be required to describe the

projected increase in production, productivity, and employment, where applicable.

The Managing Authority will adjust the templates of the CfP documentation accordingly. Further, the Secretariat will revise its project and risk monitoring procedures, to account for relevant milestones and mitigating measures.

The MA will ensure that the following conditions will apply to grants awarded under the Small Project Funds:

- establishment of a non-discriminatory and transparent selection procedure;
- objective criteria apply for the selection of projects, which avoid conflicts of interest;

UN Sustainable Development goals

The Programme aims to contribute to the implementation of the UN Sustainable Development Goals. Actions will consider sustainable development through the use of the Green Public Procurement (GPP).

The selected operations will be implemented by avoiding negative environmental impacts. Clear and verifiable environmental criteria for products and services shall be included, directly or indirectly.

Environment-related project interventions shall be compatible with the UN SDGs. Further information is provided in the POs/SOs sections.

The Global Goals' targets and measurement indicators are geared towards 2030. As the Programme duration is until 2027, it will be sought to have project targets, which are compatible with the 2030 Global targets.

Strategic Environmental Assessment (SEA)

The Environmental Licensing Directorate of the Hellenic Ministry of Environment, acting as the competent authority for assessing the environmental effects of the Programme, concludes that no significant effects on the environment of the Programme Areas of both countries area are foreseen.

The Managing Authority ensured the widest possible publicity of the SEA. The following milestones are recorded:

- 3 March 2022: Initial publishing of the SEA on the Programme website
- 23 March 2022:

a) Official notification by the Greek Ministry of Environment and Energy (DG of Environmental Licensing) regarding the SEA to selected recipients, namely:

- Pertinent Secretariats of the Ministry of Development and Investments
- Pertinent Secretariats of the Ministry of Environment
- Ministry of Tourism ; Secretariat of Tourism Policy and Development
- Ministry of Rural Development and Food
- Pertinent Secretariats of the Ministry of Maritime
- Ministry of Culture and Sports
- Pertinent Secretariats of the Ministry of Infrastructure and Transport
- Region of Central Macedonia ; Regional Council and Directorate of Development and Environment
- Region of Western Macedonia ; Regional Council and Directorate of Environment and Spatial Planning

b) Notification of the Managing Authority to the National Authority of North Macedonia regarding:

- the content of the SEA, the opinion of the Competent Authority, the consultation and publicity procedures.

- 29 & 30 March 2022

Announcements on the Programme and Managing Authority organization websites regarding the SEA and invitation to the public to consult the relevant material and submit their comments.

the of the relevant material on the websites of the Program and the Managing Authority, and urging the National Authority to arrange the consultation of the SMP in North Macedonia, according to the current procedures of the country.

- Announcement of the Publication on the website of the Program regarding: a) the posting of the PIC on the above web address, and b) the invitation to the public to express their opinion and any comments on its content.

Feedback on the SEA

The Environment and Spatial Planning Directorate of the Region of Western Macedonia expressed a positive opinion and suggested specific environmental terms for the adoption of the Programme. The Programme and the SEA report comply with the Region's opinion and suggestions.

On 26 May 2022, the Spatial Planning Department of the Ministry of Environment and Physical Planning of North Macedonia shared its consultation. The consultation is deemed not applicable to the scope of the Strategic Environmental Assessment report.

Do Not Significant Harm Principle (DNSH)

Legal Basis and Reference documents

Articles 9 & 17 of Reg 2020/852

European Commission Explanatory note of 28.09.2021 regarding the compatibility with the DNSH principle

Technical guidance regarding the DNSH principle with reference to Regulation 2021/C 58/01

The compatibility with the DNSH has been ensured at two levels:

a) Programme.

An ex-ante compatibility with the DNSH principles under cohesion policy has been ensured. All the activities or types of actions, of the Programme, fully comply with the principle of DNSH. The latter focuses on avoiding significant adverse impacts on the six environmental and climate objectives of the taxonomy, (addressing climate change, adaptation to climate change, sustainable use and protection of water and marine resources, circular economy, prevention and control of pollution, protection and restoration of biodiversity, and ecosystems).

A comprehensive analysis has been elaborated by the Greek Ministry of Development. The report is attached to the Programme. It includes the exhaustive list of Programme indicative actions, which have been assessed against the DNSH.

b) Strategic Environmental Assessment

At the strategic level of assessment, all the considerable negative impacts of the Programme are evaluated. The Programme will not finance any significant transport infrastructure, but it will contribute to sustainable transport solutions by decreasing bottlenecks and barriers. The assessment of the compliance of the programme categories of actions with the DNSH principle will be monitored in cooperation with the relevant responsible bodies.

In the SEA, the DNSH principle evaluates all the possible negative impacts of the Programme, in a strategic level, according to the most important environmental objectives. From the above mentioned, the actions promoted by the Programme are not expected to harm the environment. For any project

implemented by the Programme, falling within the scope of Directive 2011/92/EU of the European Parliament on the assessment of the effects of certain public and private projects on the environment, an Environmental Impact Assessment is required for the environmental licensing of the project and a further DNSH analysis will be implemented in this case.

Approach:

An action or a project is considered to do significant harm to the *protection and restoration of biodiversity and ecosystems* if it is significantly detrimental to the good condition and resilience of ecosystems, or detrimental to the conservation status of habitats and species. For the assessment of the impacts on Biodiversity-flora and fauna and for each Priority and Specific Objective (SO), the following questions have been used:

Is the implementation of the SO expected to affect:

B1: The extent and consistency (internal) of protected areas?

B2: the conservation of habitats and protected species of flora and fauna?

B3: The extent and consistency (internal) of forest ecosystems?

B4 The maintenance of racial or genetic diversity, richness and composition of populations of wildlife species?

From the analysis, the actions promoted by the programme are not expected to harm the environment.

Summary of the Programme Support for : a) biodiversity and climate objectives, and b) Contribution to environmental targets

In addition to the SEA, an appraisal of the Programme's alignment with specific environmental dimensions has been elaborated. The appraisal under a) is mandatory, while the appraisal under b) is not.

Approach: EU funds are earmarked for intervention fields. The contribution to the environmental dimensions is based on: a) the European Commission coefficients assigned to the Programme's intervention fields, and b) the allocation of funds to the respective intervention fields.

Referring to the biodiversity objectives, the Programme shall address the ambition set in recital 11 CPR:

“Reflecting the importance of tackling the loss of biodiversity, the Funds should contribute to mainstream biodiversity action in the Union policies and to the achievement of the overall ambition of providing 7,5 % of annual spending under the multiannual financial framework (MFF) to biodiversity objectives in the year 2024 and 10 % of annual spending under the MFF to biodiversity objectives in 2026 and 2027, while considering the existing overlaps between climate and biodiversity goals.”

The Programmes score is 10.66%

The Programme is well-positioned to achieve both the mid-term (2024: 7.5%) and long term (2026-27: 10%) biodiversity goals. During Programme implementation, the Managing Authority will monitor the gradual achievement of the biodiversity goals.

Referring to the climate objectives, the Programme should aim for a climate target contribution of 30%, as set in Article 6 CPR, Annex I CPR, Recital 5 Interreg.

The Programme's score is 55.38%.

The Programme is well-positioned to achieve the target, based on the initial funding allocations. The Managing Authority will monitor the implementation of the Programme and may advise the Programme Authorities to steer their decisions in the direction to capture the 30% target. Example: Reallocations of

funds within the same Specific Objective.

It is noted that overlaps exist between climate and biodiversity goals. These overlaps explain the common goals which are being achieved through the implementation of both climate and biodiversity targets. It can be inferred, that the achievement of a climate target may indirectly contribute to the achievement of a biodiversity target.

In general, the indicative actions already identified are strongly related to both objectives.

Referring to the contribution to the environmental targets, there is no obligation for IPA Programmes. Nonetheless, a relevant calculation was made on a voluntary basis.

The Programme's score is 40.98%.

The calculations of all three environmental dimensions are derived from the European Commission's coefficient tracking methodology. They are submitted as an attachment to the Programme.

Implementation of E-Cohesion systems

- The Programme ensures that all exchanges of information between beneficiaries and the Programme authorities are carried out by means of electronic data exchange systems in accordance with Annex XIV of the CPR. Article 69(8) Reg 2021/1060.
- The reliable and fully functional electronic system M.I.S. (Monitoring Information System), including links with electronic data exchange systems with beneficiaries, between beneficiaries and all the Programme authorities has already been established during the 2014-2020 Period. Further development of the System will take place to make it more user-friendly. This will secure the full integration of the procedures/reports and the interface with the institutions of both countries, to record and accumulate data for monitoring, evaluation, financial management, verifications and audits. Appropriate additional processes to ensure the security, integrity and confidentiality of the data and the authentication of users will be included.

Public Procurement

During the implementation of the 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.

The New European Bauhaus (NEB)

Through its operations, the Interreg VI-A IPA Programme 'Greece – North Macedonia 2021 - 2027' is planning to promote and mainstream the New European Bauhaus initiative.

The NEB principles (global/local, participatory and transdisciplinary approach) and values (sustainability, inclusivity, aesthetics) are planned to frame all the actions falling under the scope of this very high political priority of the EU.

In a nutshell, the Bauhaus 'manifesto' stands for the promotion of the following elements:

- buildings designed to respect the planet and the staff working in it,

- sustainable building solutions that are affordable and lead to more inclusive communities,
- building structures that blend in and respect the co-existence with nature,
- sustainable forms of living that come up to more resilient communities and impact transition towards locally productive and connected cities,
- buildings that become experiences and provide value beyond their housing function.

The above elements are directly or indirectly compatible with the planned actions foreseen under the three core Programme Priorities (PO2, PO3, and PO4).

Consistency with regulation (EU) 2021/1059

The Interreg VI-A IPA Programme ‘Greece – North Macedonia is fully aligned with the multi-annual strategy document according to Article 18 (1) of the Regulation (EU) 2021/1059 of the European Parliament and of the Council of 24 June 2021 on specific provisions for the European territorial cooperation goal (Interreg) supported by the European Regional Development Fund and external financing instruments PE/49/2021/INIT.

Intervention logic

The intervention logic outlined in the Programme for each priority axis is driven by the specific objectives established based on the analysis of development needs and by the expected results.

The intervention logic creates reasonable links between all of the following elements:

1) The analysis of development needs and the strategy set out in the Programme, including:

- development needs or challenges identified (including both sectoral and territorial development needs);
- the strategic approach to maximise impact and effectiveness - identification of the funding priorities.
- the selection of thematic priorities to be supported.

2) The outcomes of past experience analysis were combined with the results of the consultation, the evaluation of the IPA CBC Programme for the Period 2014-2020 and compared with the list of CBC thematic priorities.

Finally, the Interreg VI-A IPA Programme ‘Greece - North Macedonia 2021 - 2027’ was built on the following priorities identified during the programming process as most relevant for the eligible cross-border area:

PRIORITY 1: Transition to a low carbon economy

PRIORITY 2: Strategic focus on the Prespas area

PRIORITY 3: Support and upgrade the Health and Social Services

PRIORITY 4: Improving governance for cooperation

By combining the thematic priorities, the overall strategy statement of the Interreg VI-A IPA Programme ‘Greece - North Macedonia 2021 - 2027’ is: **"to enhance territorial cohesion by improving living standards and employment opportunities holding respect to the environment and by using the natural resources for tourism"**

[1] C (2021)9732 Commission Implementing Decision of 16.12.2021

[2] OJ L 330, 20.09.2021

[1] <https://www.stat.gov.mk>

[2] European Commission, Directorate-General for Budget, Financial regulation applicable to the general budget of the Union: July 2018, Publications Office, 2019, <https://data.europa.eu/doi/10.2761/816722>

[1] https://ec.europa.eu/info/sites/default/files/communication-credible-enlargement-perspective-western-balkans_en.pdf

[2] https://www.eeas.europa.eu/sites/default/files/annex_en.pdf

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

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

Table 1

Selected policy objective or selected Interreg specific objective	Selected specific objective	Priority	Justification for selection
<p>2. A greener, low-carbon transitioning towards a net zero carbon economy and resilient Europe by promoting clean and fair energy transition, green and blue investment, the circular economy, climate change mitigation and adaptation risk prevention and management, and sustainable urban mobility</p>	<p>RSO2.6. Promoting the transition to a circular and resource efficient economy</p>	<p>PR1. Transition to a low carbon economy (PO2)</p>	<p>The transition to a circular economy is a key challenge for the CBC area, as it is still at a primary development stage and shows the need for efforts to reach the European targets (e.g. 65% recycling rate by 2035). Based on the “EU Green Deal” strategy the economic growth is decoupled from resource use. Western Macedonia is a region with a dependence on fossil fuels. The Greek government has set a goal of withdrawing all lignite plants by 2028, with the majority of units - representing over 80% of current installed capacity - being withdrawn by 2023. Throughout the de-carbonization effort, the priority is to ensure a fair development transition of the lignite areas of Western Macedonia, based on three pillars: employment protection, compensation for the socio-economic impact of the transition and energy self-sufficiency of lignite areas. Greece has a strategic plan and a mixture of interventions and measures of economic diversification such as clean energy, industry, technology, education, agriculture, tourism etc. North Macedonia has prepared a Strategy for Energy Development according to the requirements of the new Energy Law, which was adopted end of May 2018 and will be implemented until 2040. The transnational cooperation on the CBC area offers benefits in addressing the specific needs below: - Fostering circular economy policies -</p>

Selected policy objective or selected Interreg specific objective	Selected specific objective	Priority	Justification for selection
			<p>Building up circular value-added chains and development of resource efficient solutions and technologies - Increasing resource efficiency and waste recycling - Establishing and bracing circular economy skills in the sectors - Inspiring attitudes and giving rise to the generation of new life and business models By selecting this SO the Programme will have an added value to cross-border cooperation and will play a role by: - answering the central issue of climate change for the future - assisting local communities to adopt efficient use of resources and circular economy models - SMEs and civil society organizations that have limited access to mainstream financial instruments will create advantages and increase added value by introducing green and circular innovations - the main result of the cross-border actions will be the more sustainable use of resources and the reduction of waste production. Grants will be the form of support, since projects don't generate revenues</p>
<p>2. A greener, low-carbon transitioning towards a net zero carbon economy and resilient Europe by promoting clean and fair energy transition, green and blue investment, the circular economy, climate change mitigation and adaptation risk prevention and management, and sustainable urban mobility</p>	<p>RSO2.7. Enhancing protection and preservation of nature, biodiversity and green infrastructure, including in urban areas, and reducing all forms of pollution</p>	<p>PR1. Transition to a low carbon economy (PO2)</p>	<p>The protection of the environment is a policy area, which is highlighted by the EU Green Deal and the EU Biodiversity Strategy for 2030. SO (vii) is suitable for strategies, pilot actions, and resolutions, which aim to protect nature and render environmental management viable and sustainable. The actions should emphasize the implementation of policies and the development of procedures, integrated into local conditions. For sensitive ecosystems like ecological corridors, river basins, etc., it is an opportunity to benefit from transnational cooperation and multilateral initiatives such as European Green Belt initiative, Environmental</p>

Selected policy objective or selected Interreg specific objective	Selected specific objective	Priority	Justification for selection
			<p>Conventions and action plans of macro-regional strategies. Joint actions of the cross-border dimension, under this SO, focus on the protection of nature and biodiversity and aim at setting up ecological corridors to maintain and enhance healthy ecosystems. The protected natural sites, the heritage and the biodiversity of the CBC area represent significant resources. The ecological environment of the mountainous settlements, the biodiversity, the Mediterranean and continental climate, with available large percentage for agricultural activity, the natural resources – biomass, water, sun and wind, offer perfect conditions for eco-tourism, and renewable energy sources. The CBC area covers significant ecosystems and ecological corridors, which are stretching across borders. At the same time, the loss of biodiversity - due to climate change, land-use changes and extraction of natural resources – has been documented. Unsustainable economic activities lead to air, water and soil pollution, which is high in the industrial parts of the area. Detrimental ecosystem conditions reduce their ability to offer essential eco-system services. The cooperation in the CBC area offers benefits in addressing, among others, the following specific needs: - Decrease water, air and soil pollution - Maintaining and enhancing ecosystems services - Preventing biodiversity loss and ensuring ecological connectivity - Lengthening green infrastructure that connects habitats and strengthens their recreational potential - Protecting natural resources and supporting their sustainable use. Grants will be the form of support, since projects don't generate revenues.</p>

Selected policy objective or selected Interreg specific objective	Selected specific objective	Priority	Justification for selection
3. A more connected Europe by enhancing mobility	RSO3.2. Developing and enhancing sustainable, climate resilient, intelligent and intermodal national, regional and local mobility, including improved access to TEN-T and cross-border mobility	PR2. Strategic focus on Prespas area	<p>The Programme area has a key geographical location and direct interconnection in the Balkans. It holds the position of the gateway to the EU in the Western Balkans, through the ‘Egnatia’ Highway. Thessaloniki is the metropolitan centre which makes it a gateway to the Mediterranean. North Macedonia's landlocked geographical position necessitates access to several 'channels'. A road infrastructure across the position of Corridor 10 has been developed. The CBC area is an important junction for the Balkans, in north-south and east-west connections, and makes it a hub for the key corridors to which the closed regions are physically or socio-economically connected. Connectivity between and within regions is an important factor ensuring the economic prosperity and cohesion of the CBC area. In alignment with the “EU Green Deal”, there is the need for sustainable transport solutions. The Programme will not finance transport infrastructure, but it can contribute to these goals via synergies with other instruments and act as a catalyst in the preparation of bigger investments. Through the Programme, joint studies may be implemented to render the Prespas area as a catalyst that connects the two eligible countries for cooperation. The Programme may act as a supportive tool for actions on ICT investments, (e.g. settlement of a roaming-free zone in the Western Balkans through the “Roam Like at Home” regime, which started on July 2021). The connection of the rural areas with the nodes of the TEN-T core network corridors (CNC), is a need, as it may remove bottlenecks and bridge missing transport links. This comes in line with the</p>

Selected policy objective or selected Interreg specific objective	Selected specific objective	Priority	Justification for selection
			Territorial Agenda 2030 goals of a Just and Green Europe in terms of balanced territorial development and sustainable connectivity. The cooperation in the CBC area offers benefits in addressing, among others, the following specific needs: - focus on public transport, promote better links between rural and peripheral areas to the main transport corridors and nodes, - Fostering greener solutions - upgrading transport across borders and decreasing bottlenecks and barriers - creating and strengthening mobility in rural areas, as a means toward territorial cohesion and social inclusion - enhancing logistic chains in areas of the periphery. Grants will be the form of support, since projects don't generate revenues.
4. A more social and inclusive Europe implementing the European Pillar of Social Rights	RSO4.5. Ensuring equal access to health care and fostering resilience of health systems, including primary care, and promoting the transition from institutional to family- and community-based care	PR3. Support and upgrade of Health and Social Services	The unprecedented global public health crisis due to the outbreak of the pandemic in early 2020 and its consequent deep imprint on economic activity, affected considerably the macroeconomic developments. The COVID-19 outbreak has imposed a burden on the economy of the Programme area, as also on the rest of the world economy, reverting the initial favourable short-term forecast. Bridging the social disparities, caused by the public health crisis and incentivizing social and environment-friendly investment are now primary goals, expected to promote productivity and foster sustainable economic growth in the short and long-term. Emphasis should be given to actions implemented for healing the COVID -19 short and long term consequences in order to fully normalize the situation. In terms of health care, one of the crucial challenges of the Programme is the lack of medical personnel and the establishment of measures for

Selected policy objective or selected Interreg specific objective	Selected specific objective	Priority	Justification for selection
			<p>COVID-19 treatment. Additionally, health care should be part of an integrated system ensuring coordinated care and preventing unnecessary expenditure. An important aspect that should be improved is the mitigation of emergency care based on a finer planned health system. Unpredictable circumstances and economic issues due to the conditions caused by the pandemic (COVID 19) pay particular attention to the new challenges. This is a problem, which has impacts across national borders. Consequently, cooperation is advisable to reduce the impact of the threat on the population living in border areas. At the same time, once established, cooperation pays off in future similar occurrences. The distribution of health care resources and personnel across both countries is a concern, especially for people living in remote and sparsely populated areas. Access to health services, especially for remote rural areas of the border area, is a main concern considering that these areas are also facing a severe ageing problem. Investments are required for ensuring equal access to health care services, especially for the more vulnerable social groups of the cross-border area. Better coordination and joint solutions for facilitating the population near borders are considered important for the improvement of the quality of life in the cross-border area. Grants will be the form of support, since projects don't generate revenues</p>
4. A more social and inclusive Europe implementing the European Pillar of Social Rights	RSO4.6. Enhancing the role of culture and sustainable tourism in economic development, social inclusion and social innovation	PR3. Support and upgrade of Health and Social Services	The existence of folk traditions, folk crafts and material resources of historical and cultural heritage and unique natural values are assets, which could increase the importance of the tourism sector in the

Selected policy objective or selected Interreg specific objective	Selected specific objective	Priority	Justification for selection
			<p>cross-border area. Border areas of North Macedonia and Greece constitute an environmentally and culturally ‘integrated’ area. Yet, there is no system for joint management, for culture or tourism purposes, in place. Due to the significant ongoing impact of the COVID-19 pandemic, (which may turn out to be long-lasting) on the tourism industry, it is proposed to support tourism entrepreneurs in finding their way in the new era. The free movement of workers, one of the fundamental rights enjoyed by European citizens, has facilitated intra-EU labour mobility. However, in some regions (‘sending regions’) this freedom has led to a significant out-migration of their highly educated workforce to the advantage of other regions (‘receiving regions’). This is determined by the growing competition for talent and the limited capacity of sending regions to create attractive conditions for these workers. Local and regional authorities (LRAs) in sending regions have to cope directly with the socio-economic effects caused by the significant loss of talent or brain drain. Addressing these effects may require the formulation of appropriate policies and/or measures to retain, attract, or regain a highly educated workforce. Investing in human capital would help promote economic growth in the cross-border region of Greece and North Macedonia. In practice, jobs could be created in the ripe sectors of agro-economy (e.g. local food and wine). Further, networking opportunities and synergies could emerge between academia and the business community. Businesses will benefit from the knowledge and innovation capability released by academic institutions, while young scientists will benefit from upgrading their</p>

Selected policy objective or selected Interreg specific objective	Selected specific objective	Priority	Justification for selection
			skills and competencies. This in turn will maximize their ability to enter the local labour market, thus avoiding migration elsewhere. Grants will be the form of support, since projects are not generating revenues.
6. Interreg: A better Cooperation Governance	ISO6.6. Other actions to support better cooperation governance (all strands)	PR4. Improving governance for cooperation	The conception of governance calls attention to the growing convolution in the political, social and economic environment and the interaction of local, national and transnational levels, to address new challenges, coordinate collective actions and reach a consensus on common strategic goals. Despite many functional binds and connections, there is insufficient cooperation between involved stakeholders in the eligible area, mainly due to the legal and administrative barriers. By enhancing the governance of stakeholders, the Programme will not only foster cooperation between the two partner countries but will also promote the EU strategy for Western Balkans. Merged, integrated policies and multi-level governance processes are significant for enhancing regional development and cohesion across borders. This comes in line with the Territorial Agenda 2030. Territorial challenges such as digitisation, health or common crises affect the eligible region in similar ways. They are best addressed by integrated and cross-sectoral approaches and require the provision of equal access to public services. The transnational cooperation in the CBC area offers significant benefits in addressing, among others, the following specific needs: - Enhancing the area with functional links that will act as cross-border operational amplifiers. - Reducing legal and administrative barriers to cooperation - Promoting place-based,

Selected policy objective or selected Interreg specific objective	Selected specific objective	Priority	Justification for selection
			<p>integrated policymaking, addressing complex societal challenges - Assisting high-quality public services of general interest - Promoting digital governance and better digital public services - Strengthening multi-level governance - Enhancing the operational capacity of implementing entities and organizations, especially those of the civil society - Adoption of the EU acquis by the IPA local bodies, as a means to facilitate the accession process of the candidate country to the European Union Grants will be the form of support, since projects don't generate revenues.</p>

2. Priorities

Reference: points (d) and (e) of Article 17(3)

2.1. Priority: PR1 - Transition to a low carbon economy (PO2)

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

2.1.1. Specific objective: RSO2.6. Promoting the transition to a circular and resource efficient economy

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

Promoting the transition to a circular and resource efficient economy

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

Reference: point (e)(i) of Article 17(3), point (c)(ii) of Article 17(9)

PO2. A greener, low-carbon Europe by promoting clean and fair energy transition, green and blue investment, the circular economy, climate adaptation and risk prevention and management

SO (vi) Promoting the transition to a circular and resource-efficient economy

PRIORITY 1: Transition to a low carbon economy

According to the new EU Circular Economy Action Plan (2020), pertinent actions shall cover the entire life cycle of products, promoting viable consumption through circular economy processes. The concept of a circular economy has a high potential for reducing environmental pressure and offers job opportunities and new green businesses, thus bringing socio-economic benefits. The CBC area is standing far away from the European targets for recycling and waste reuse. Several of its regions are still lagging. In order to gain a competitive economy, it is necessary to scale up and develop circular economy initiatives that are adjusted to the specific needs of urban and rural areas. It will require a policy framework for sustainable products, improved waste management, a re-arrangement of key value chains and the creation of new business models.

By using the SPF instrument, the enterprises supported by the grants of the Programme will be SMEs which usually have limited access to other grants and financial instruments (very small SMEs, located in remote areas etc). The general and more specific criteria, for evaluating the enterprises' participation, will be specified in the respective Programme invitations.

As the outcomes of the public consultation and resources of the Programme indicate, actions under this SO will support transnational synergies to increase the implementation of circular economy approaches across the CBC area. Potential cooperation actions include the joint creation and implementation of strategies, action plans, pilot actions and related solutions. Actions should be implemented considering the EU Circular Economy Action Plan and the EU Green Deal. Therefore, actions that promote the improvement of product life cycles, foster sustainable consumption and circular economy processes (reduce, recover, reuse, repair, refurbish, remanufacture, recycle) will be developed and implemented. Transnational synergies should boost the transition to a circular economy by promoting expertise and knowledge, improving policy learning and testing good practices.

List of planned actions

The programme will fund the following type of actions (non-exhaustive list):

- 1. Support joint product design for durability, reparability, upgradability and recycling.*
- 2. Supporting industrial symbiosis, better tracking of resources and matching surplus or by-product materials across industry sectors by using common best practices.*
- 3. Circular economy collaboration for resilient value chains*
- 4. Investment in reverse logistics and feedback loops use, refurbishment and remanufacturing, in order to*

generate zero waste. Through these investments corporate take-back programs, where product producers also take responsibility for its disposal.

5. Actions to promote investment and cooperation in the key value chains (plastic, textiles, ICT, construction products)

6. Common actions for raising public awareness about the climate change and environmental opportunities of a circular economy, (actions under and SPF with a plethora of small projects such as festivals, etc)

7. Creation and establishment of a monitoring system of energy efficiency at the local and regional levels and creation of a data centre system for common use for the authorities in two countries.

8. Use of the SPF instrument to support targeted activities of circular economy and Green Deal activities, promotional campaigns, educational activities, management tools etc.

9. Raising awareness activities for reducing various pollution forms (exchanges, campaigns).

10. Joint actions concerning decarbonisation between cross-border areas, especially areas under the European Initiative for just transition for the Western Balkans and Ukraine.

The types of actions have been assessed as compatible with the DNSH principle, in accordance with preamble 10 of Reg 2021/1060, since they are not expected to have any significant negative environmental impact due to their nature.

The New European Bauhaus principles will affect the setting up and the implementation of the related actions under this SO.

The actions will be pursued in line with the objective of promoting sustainable development taking into account the UN Sustainable Development Goals and the Paris Agreement

2.1.1.1b. Definition of a single beneficiary or a limited list of beneficiaries and the granting procedure

Reference: point (c)(i) of Article 17(9)

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2.1.1.2. Indicators

Reference: point (e)(ii) of Article 17(3), point (c)(iii) of Article 17(9)

Table 2 - Output indicators

Priority	Specific objective	ID	Indicator	Measurement unit	Milestone (2024)	Target (2029)
PR1	RSO2.6	RCO02	Enterprises supported by grants	enterprises	10	31
PR1	RSO2.6	RCO01	Enterprises supported (of which: micro, small, medium, large)	enterprises	10	31
PR1	RSO2.6	RCO107	Investments in facilities for separate waste collection	euro	500000	2500000
PR1	RSO2.6	RCO81	Participations in joint actions across borders	participations	50	252
PR1	RSO2.6	RCO115	Public events across borders jointly organised	events	5	20
PR1	RSO2.6	RCO87	Organisations cooperating across borders	organisations	10	40

Table 3 - Result indicators

Priority	Specific objective	ID	Indicator	Measurement unit	Baseline	Reference year	Target (2029)	Source of data	Comments
PR1	RSO2.6	RCR01	Jobs created in supported entities	annual FTEs	0.00	2021	21.00	Programme Monitoring Information System	
PR1	RSO2.6	RCR84	Organisations cooperating across borders after project completion	organisations	0.00	2021	20.00	Programme Monitoring Information System	

2.1.1.3. Main target groups

Reference: point (e)(iii) of Article 17(3), point (c)(iv) of Article 17(9)

Target groups of funded actions can be both individuals and organisations that will be involved or positively affected by the actions. As a result, they will be stimulated to take up solutions that lead to improved energy efficiency, an increased use of renewable energies and a more climate-neutral central Europe. More concretely, target groups include both public and private actors such as, policy makers and planners, energy agencies, operators and distributors, infrastructure providers and other local and regional energy actors, as well as different economic sectors including SMEs. Target groups include also all population groups, which will benefit from an improved regional and local energy performance.

Inhabitants of the Programme area will be the main target group of actions under the priority Environment in terms of enhancing biodiversity, green infrastructure in the urban environment, and reducing pollution. Intervention in this area may significantly improve biodiversity, increase ecological awareness of the inhabitants and reduce pollution in the support area, and thus improve the condition of the entire natural environment. These activities will have a positive impact on the quality of life of the local population. They may also affect the tourist attractiveness of the area, and thus constitute a great potential for the development of entrepreneurship.

Additional initiatives are planned at enhancing biodiversity, green infrastructure in the urban environment and reducing pollution, e.g. organizing events, meetings, or jointly creating a strategy. Participants/recipients of such events may be anyone interested in the subject related to the specific objective, e.g. residents, entrepreneurs, non-governmental organizations, research centres, local government units and other entities.

It is proposed that interventions, under the Environment priority, in the scope of enhancing biodiversity, green infrastructure in the urban environment, and reducing pollution should be undertaken under the support of the Programme by:

Target groups

- Region's residents
- Regional and Local Authorities
- Industry and SMEs and their associations

Potential Beneficiaries:

- Organisations responsible for the management of waste
- Regional and Local Authorities and their enterprises
- Universities, Educational / Research Institutions
- Research Centres, Civil Society Organizations
- Companies, SMEs and their associations

It should also be considered that the actions undertaken under each objective involve beneficiaries from at least two Programme countries, of which at least one is a beneficiary from a Member State.



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

Reference: Article point (e)(iv) of 17(3)

Actions can be implemented throughout the programme area and address all types of territories, i.e. both urban and rural areas. Actions could address territories which show a lower performance in energy efficiency and renewable energy use, or which have deficiencies regarding climate-neutral actions as well as more advanced regions. This will allow exchanges and learning from each other. Cooperation will also allow the more advanced regions to strengthen further their energy performance.

All possible actions need to consider the specific territorial characteristics of targeted areas and be aligned to the relevant territorial strategies at the respective governance level (local, regional, national).

2.1.1.5. Planned use of financial instruments

Reference: point (e)(v) of Article 17(3)

There are no provisions for the adoption of financial instruments under any Specific Objective.

The Programme predominantly covers remote areas with a sparse population density. Small projects are the norm, therefore overall demand for services is limited.

Project beneficiaries are Non-profit entities, often with limited capacity and resources.

Projects do not generate grants. Also, the services are either free or provided with a nominal ticket price (if applicable). By covering investment and development costs, grants effectively subsidise projects' positive externalities.

Further, under Regional Development Programmes, grants remain the main form of support.

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

Reference: point (e)(vi) of Article 17(3), point (c)(v) of Article 17(9)

Table 4 - Dimension 1 – intervention field

Priority	Specific objective	Fund	Code	Amount (EUR)
PR1	RSO2.6	IPA III	075. Support to environmentally friendly production processes and resource efficiency in SMEs	1,636,364.00
PR1	RSO2.6	IPA III	046. Support to entities that provide services contributing to the low carbon economy and to resilience to climate change, including awareness raising measures	2,909,091.00

Table 5 - Dimension 2 – form of financing

Priority	Specific objective	Fund	Code	Amount (EUR)
PR1	RSO2.6	IPA III	01. Grant	4,545,455.00

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

Priority	Specific objective	Fund	Code	Amount (EUR)
PR1	RSO2.6	IPA III	33. Other approaches - No territorial targeting	4,545,455.00

2.1.1. Specific objective: RSO2.7. Enhancing protection and preservation of nature, biodiversity and green infrastructure, including in urban areas, and reducing all forms of pollution

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

Enhancing protection and preservation of nature, biodiversity and green infrastructure, including in urban areas, and reducing all forms of pollution

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

Reference: point (e)(i) of Article 17(3), point (c)(ii) of Article 17(9)

PO2. A greener, low-carbon Europe by promoting clean and fair energy transition, green and blue investment, the circular economy, climate adaptation and risk prevention and management

SO (vii) Enhancing protection and preservation of nature, biodiversity and green infrastructure, including in urban areas, and reducing all forms of pollution

PRIORITY 1: Transition to a low carbon economy

The rich biodiversity, ecosystems and wealth of nature in the CBC area, are exposed to dangers due to phenomena such as pollution, invasive alien species, land use and the exhaustion of natural resources.

Objective: Protection of the environment. To protect the environment and ecological connectivity, various and integrated approaches are necessary to be implemented. The protection of the environment is a policy area, which is highlighted by the EU Green Deal and the EU Biodiversity Strategy for 2030.

Focus: Projects aim to develop and implement strategies, pilot actions, and related resolutions, which aim to protect nature and make environmental management viable and sustainable. These actions should emphasize the implementation of environmental policies and development of procedures, which are integrated into particular local conditions. For ecosystems such as, ecological corridors, river basins, etc., which are extended across borders, it is an opportunity to benefit from transnational cooperation and multilateral initiatives such as the European Green Belt initiative, Environmental Conventions and action plans of macro-regional strategies.

The added value of this SO is the fact that the actions will contribute to the overall upgrade of the quality of life in the area. The most significant added value will be formed by the cooperation of local authorities and civil society organizations to exchange practices to upgrade the urban and peri-urban space with innovative solutions based on the promotion of ecosystem services.

List of planned actions

The programme will fund the following type of actions (non-exhaustive list):

1. Joint actions for improving the system of protection against natural disasters

2. Joint actions of cross-border dimension to protect nature and biodiversity aiming at setting up ecological corridors to maintain and enhance healthy ecosystems

3. *Actions related to the protection of the environment and especially in the management and monitoring of Axios/Vardar river water quality and the establishment of early warning mechanisms (using ICT).*
4. *Actions for improving competencies of stakeholders through the exchange of best practices and knowledge to promote the management of natural resources such as air, water and soil as well as nature-based solutions for infrastructure investments*
5. *Actions for capacity building and knowledge exchange for the management of water ecosystems (e.g. by applying innovative water treatment technologies)*
6. *Actions for exchange of good practices and innovative solutions that enhance sustainable environmental management practices (e.g. for forest and agriculture management, pollinator-friendly management, lakes, sustainable food chains)*
7. *Enhancing the transnational coordination of environmental management and nature protection through various cooperation structures such as the Green Belt Initiative.*
8. *Operational instalment and application of a telescoping system for the monitoring and management of the water quality (phytoplankton) at Lake Doiran and raising awareness activities.*
9. *Sustainable management of protected areas with the involvement of local communities and the use of ICT applications.*

The types of actions have been assessed as compatible with the DNSH principle, in accordance with preamble 10 of Reg 2021/1060, since they are not expected to have any significant negative environmental impact due to their nature.

The New European Bauhaus principles will affect the setting up and the implementation of all the related actions under this SO.

The actions will be pursued in line with the objective of promoting sustainable development taking into account the UN Sustainable Development Goals and the Paris Agreement.

Actions under this Priority will ensure the gender perspective and track the women benefiting from developed activities. Actions will respect gender equality, equal opportunities, non-discrimination, and accessibility in accordance with article 9 of the CPR regulation.

2.1.1.1b. Definition of a single beneficiary or a limited list of beneficiaries and the granting procedure

Reference: point (c)(i) of Article 17(9)

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2.1.1.2. Indicators

Reference: point (e)(ii) of Article 17(3), point (c)(iii) of Article 17(9)

Table 2 - Output indicators

Priority	Specific objective	ID	Indicator	Measurement unit	Milestone (2024)	Target (2029)
PR1	RSO2.7	RCO84	Pilot actions developed jointly and implemented in projects	pilot actions	1	6
PR1	RSO2.7	RCO115	Public events across borders jointly organised	events	5	18
PR1	RSO2.7	RCO87	Organisations cooperating across borders	organisations	10	36

Table 3 - Result indicators

Priority	Specific objective	ID	Indicator	Measurement unit	Baseline	Reference year	Target (2029)	Source of data	Comments
PR1	RSO2.7	RCR104	Solutions taken up or up-scaled by organisations	solutions	0.00	2021	5.00	Programme Monitoring Information System	
PR1	RSO2.7	RCR84	Organisations cooperating across borders after project completion	organisations	0.00	2021	18.00	Programme Monitoring Information System	

2.1.1.3. Main target groups

Reference: point (e)(iii) of Article 17(3), point (c)(iv) of Article 17(9)

Inhabitants of the Programme area will be the main target group of actions under the priority Environment in terms of enhancing biodiversity, green infrastructure in the urban environment, and reducing pollution. Intervention in this area may significantly improve biodiversity, increase ecological awareness of the inhabitants and reduce pollution in the support area, and thus improve the condition of the entire natural environment. These activities will have a positive impact on the quality of life of the local population. It may also affect the tourist attractiveness of the support area, and thus it will constitute a great potential for the development of entrepreneurship.

Additional initiatives are planned aimed at enhancing biodiversity, green infrastructure in the urban environment and reducing pollution, e.g. organizing events, meetings, or jointly creating a strategy. Participants/recipients of such events may be anyone interested in the subject related to the specific objective, e.g. residents, entrepreneurs, non-governmental organizations, research centres, local government units and other entities.

Target groups

- Regions residents*
- Regional and Local Authorities*
- Management Bodies of Protected Areas*
- Stakeholders*
- Eco-friendly organisations, Natural Environment & Climate Change Agency*

Potential Beneficiaries:

- State, regional and local administration units, associations of these units and institutions subordinate to them,*
- Other public law entities (e.g. chambers, government administration bodies),*
- Administrations and Managing Authorities of nature protection areas, such as national parks, nature parks, landscape parks, biosphere reserves, etc,*
- Entities administering forest areas and state forest holdings with their organizational units,*
- Units of higher education and research institutions,*
- Non-governmental organizations.*

It should also be considered that the actions under each objective shall involve beneficiaries from at least two Programme countries, of which at least one is a beneficiary from a Member State.

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

Reference: Article point (e)(iv) of 17(3)

Actions can be implemented throughout the programme area and address all types of territories, i.e. both urban and rural areas. Territories with valuable natural assets and regions that are much affected by environmental pressures or that have a significant potential for environmental rehabilitation (e.g. urban industrial areas, brownfields, degraded rivers) should however be in the focus. Furthermore, regions which are lagging behind regarding the implementation of environmental policies will profit most from knowledge exchanges with more advanced regions, which will in turn also be able to strengthen further their environmental management practices. For pushing implementation on local and regional level, place-based approaches should respect the specific territorial settings of the targeted areas and be aligned to the relevant territorial strategies at the respective governance level (local, regional, national).

2.1.1.5. Planned use of financial instruments

Reference: point (e)(v) of Article 17(3)

There are no provisions for the adoption of financial instruments under any Specific Objective.

The Programme predominantly covers remote areas with a sparse population density. Small projects are the norm, therefore overall demand for services is limited.

Project beneficiaries are Non-profit entities, often with limited capacity and resources.

Projects do not generate grants. Also the services are either free or provided with a nominal fee (if applicable). By covering investment and development costs, grants effectively subsidise projects' positive externalities.

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

Reference: point (e)(vi) of Article 17(3), point (c)(v) of Article 17(9)

Table 4 - Dimension 1 – intervention field

Priority	Specific objective	Fund	Code	Amount (EUR)
PR1	RSO2.7	IPA III	064. Water management and water resource conservation (including river basin management, specific climate change adaptation measures, reuse, leakage reduction)	545,455.00
PR1	RSO2.7	IPA III	079. Nature and biodiversity protection, natural heritage and resources, green and blue infrastructure	909,091.00
PR1	RSO2.7	IPA III	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)	1,818,182.00
PR1	RSO2.7	IPA III	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)	1,272,727.00

Table 5 - Dimension 2 – form of financing

Priority	Specific objective	Fund	Code	Amount (EUR)
PR1	RSO2.7	IPA III	01. Grant	4,545,455.00

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

Priority	Specific objective	Fund	Code	Amount (EUR)
PR1	RSO2.7	IPA III	33. Other approaches - No territorial targeting	4,545,455.00

2.1. Priority: PR2 - Strategic focus on Prespas area

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

2.1.1. Specific objective: RSO3.2. Developing and enhancing sustainable, climate resilient, intelligent and intermodal national, regional and local mobility, including improved access to TEN-T and cross-border mobility

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

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

Reference: point (e)(i) of Article 17(3), point (c)(ii) of Article 17(9)

PO3. A more connected Europe by enhancing mobility and regional ICT connectivity

SO (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

PRIORITY: Strategic focus on Prespas area

Based on public consultation findings, Programme resources shall be dedicated to one or several strategic projects focused on the development of the Prespas area.

In the CBC area, the accessibility to the main nodes and transport corridors is still limited especially for rural and peripheral regions, including those that cross borders. It is necessary to develop sustainable and smart transport services, to enhance connections and remove bottlenecks, ensuring improved accessibility. In line with the EU Green Deal, transport emissions need to be reduced by 90% by 2050. This is a challenge for smart and sustainable approaches to regional mobility, as well as the introduction of IT-supported solutions for mobility management.

One or more projects could include infrastructures and services for the opening of a border-crossing checkpoint in Prespas area. It is expected that the accessibility of the Prespas area, which is remote and isolated will provide opportunities for the development of tourism, improvement of the business environment and support citizens in their everyday life.

List of planned actions

The programme will fund the following type of actions (non-exhaustive list):

1. Strategic actions and projects related to the BC "Markova Noga/Laimos" between North Macedonia and Greece in the Prespa region.

Background

The inception of a border crossing dates back several years ago. The bilateral IPA CBC 2014-2020 Programme contributed significantly to the planning of the relevant strategic project. In 2022 a preparatory project was approved.

Preparatory project budget: € 690.000, including project management and communication activities.

Objective of the preparatory project: Increase the maturity of the core project, under the IPA III Programme.

Partners: Region of Western Macedonia (LP), Development Organisation of Western Macedonia, Ministries of Interior of partner countries.

Core activities: Maturation of border-crossing works, namely:

Greece:

Topographic works and technical works assessment, studies of buildings and shelters at the border crossing, environmental studies and licencing, geotechnical studies, water streams and hydrological studies.

North Macedonia:

Engineering services and tender documentation for the reconstruction and renovation of the SB Police Station. Design of connection to the BCP facilities.

The border crossing project's exact scope and Terms of Reference will be specified in a targeted Call for Proposals. Pertinent input will be fed from the aforementioned IPA II preparatory project.

List of planned actions (continued)

2. Sharing good practices and developing sustainable solutions for the improvement of regional mobility services in the public interest and to increase their resilience in times of emergency circumstances.

3. Designing solutions, developing and implementing multi-modal mobility strategies promoting effective and sustainable connections within rural and peripheral regions and their connection to the major transport nodes and corridors.

4. Actions to reconstruct public buildings with improved energy performance (police stations, Cross-border Customs)

5. Actions to identify and address the missing links in road infrastructure of the cross-border area

6. Actions to improve and expand the cross-border connection: studies regarding road traffic, connectivity/mobility studies for understanding freight and

passenger flows, commuting etc.

Under this SO, the Interreg CB Programme will act as a catalyst to lever further investment for large-scale transport infrastructure and as a coordination tool for combined smaller interventions (e.g. with environmental dimension). Actions should seek synergies and coordinate with other European instruments and national funds. Alignment with the EUSAIR and the EU Strategy for Western Balkans should be envisaged.

The location of the strategic project and the Prespa/Resen region, in general, are environmentally sensitive areas.

Nonetheless, the programme will not finance any significant transport infrastructure, but it will contribute to sustainable transport solutions by decreasing bottlenecks and barriers.

For any project implemented by the Programme falling within the scope of Directive 2011/92/EU of the European Parliament on the assessment of the effects of certain public and private projects on the environment, an Environmental Impact Assessment is required for the environmental licensing of the project and a project-specific DNSH analysis will be implemented in this case.

More information is provided in the Programme's Strategic Environmental Assessment.

The types of actions have been assessed as compatible with the DNSH principle, in accordance with preamble 10 of Reg 2021/1060, since they are not expected to have any significant negative environmental impact due to their nature.

The New European Bauhaus principles will affect the setting up and the implementation of all the related actions under this SO.

The actions will be pursued in line with the objective of promoting sustainable development taking into account the UN Sustainable Development Goals and the Paris Agreement.

2.1.1.1b. Definition of a single beneficiary or a limited list of beneficiaries and the granting procedure

Reference: point (c)(i) of Article 17(9)

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2.1.1.2. Indicators

Reference: point (e)(ii) of Article 17(3), point (c)(iii) of Article 17(9)

Table 2 - Output indicators

Priority	Specific objective	ID	Indicator	Measurement unit	Milestone (2024)	Target (2029)
PR2	RSO3.2	GSO61	Public Buildings Supported	Public Buildings (number of)	0	2
PR2	RSO3.2	RCO115	Public events across borders jointly organised	events	2	6
PR2	RSO3.2	RCO81	Participations in joint actions across borders	participations	50	168
PR2	RSO3.2	RCO87	Organisations cooperating across borders	organisations	4	12

Table 3 - Result indicators

Priority	Specific objective	ID	Indicator	Measurement unit	Baseline	Reference year	Target (2029)	Source of data	Comments
PR2	RSO3.2	GSR61	Number of people crossing the new border station	Number of people	0.00		5,000.00	Programme Monitoring Information System	
PR2	RSO3.2	RCR84	Organisations cooperating across borders after project completion	organisations	0.00	2021	6.00	Programme Monitoring Information System	

2.1.1.3. Main target groups

Reference: point (e)(iii) of Article 17(3), point (c)(iv) of Article 17(9)

The main target groups, in the field of border crossing management, will be people visiting or travelling through the Programme area and its inhabitants, as well as border services. Intervention in this area may help entrepreneurs (including those from the tourism industry) to conduct cross-border economic activity (including tourism) by enabling more efficient movement of workers and tourists across the border.

Target groups

- Regions residents
- National, Regional / Local Authorities

Potential Beneficiaries:

- Central Government & Regional Authorities
- Ministries of Finance – Customs Office
- Ministries of Interior
- Police Authorities
- Municipality of Prespa and Municipality of Resen

It should also be considered that the actions undertaken under each objective involve beneficiaries from at least two Programme countries, of which at least one is a beneficiary from a Member State.

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

Reference: Article point (e)(iv) of 17(3)

The indicated actions under this PO predominantly concern the Prespa Lake Region. As the area is labelled of strategic importance, any 'spill-over' effects to the wider Programme Area will be positive.

Actions should primarily address rural and peripheral regions including cross-border regions which are suffering from low accessibility. They will profit most from knowledge exchanges with already well-connected regions which in turn will also be able to further improve the sustainability of their regional mobility services.

All possible actions need to consider the specific territorial challenges and settings of the targeted areas and be aligned to the relevant territorial strategies at the respective governance level (local, regional, national).

2.1.1.5. Planned use of financial instruments

Reference: point (e)(v) of Article 17(3)

There are no provisions for the adoption of financial instruments under any Specific Objective.

The Programme predominantly covers remote areas with a sparse population density. Small projects are the norm, therefore overall demand for services is limited.

Project beneficiaries are Non-profit entities, often with limited capacity and resources.

Projects do not generate grants. Also, the services are either free or provided with a nominal ticket price (if applicable). By covering investment and development costs, grants effectively subsidise projects' positive externalities.

Under Transport / Connectivity, grants remain the main form of support under EU funded Programmes.

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

Reference: point (e)(vi) of Article 17(3), point (c)(v) of Article 17(9)

Table 4 - Dimension 1 – intervention field

Priority	Specific objective	Fund	Code	Amount (EUR)
PR2	RSO3.2	IPA III	045. Energy efficiency renovation or energy efficiency measures regarding public infrastructure, demonstration projects and supporting measures compliant with energy efficiency criteria	6,181,819.00

Table 5 - Dimension 2 – form of financing

Priority	Specific objective	Fund	Code	Amount (EUR)
PR2	RSO3.2	IPA III	01. Grant	6,181,819.00

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

Priority	Specific objective	Fund	Code	Amount (EUR)
PR2	RSO3.2	IPA III	32. Other approaches - Other types of territories targeted	6,181,819.00

2.1. Priority: PR3 - Support and upgrade of Health and Social Services

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

2.1.1. Specific objective: RSO4.5. Ensuring equal access to health care and fostering resilience of health systems, including primary care, and promoting the transition from institutional to family- and community-based care

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

Ensuring equal access to health care and fostering resilience of health systems, including primary care, and promoting the transition from institutional to family-based and community-based care

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

Reference: point (e)(i) of Article 17(3), point (c)(ii) of Article 17(9)

PO4. A more social and inclusive Europe implementing the European Pillar of Social Rights

SO (v) Ensuring equal access to health care and fostering resilience of health systems, including primary care, and promoting the transition from institutional to family-based and community-based care

PRIORITY: Support and upgrade of Health and Social Services

The health care should function as part of an integrated system guaranteeing coordinated care and preventing unnecessary expenditure. Relieving emergency care as a result of a better planned health system is an important aspect that should be improved. The COVID-19 pandemic has drawn particular attention to the new challenges posed by the occurrence of unpredictable circumstances. The pandemic transcends national borders, therefore cooperation is advisable to minimize the impact of the threat on the population living in border areas. At the same time, once established cooperation pays off in future similar occurrences.

According to the needs and priorities raised and indicated by the public consultation, actions under this SO will support synergies in order to implement and develop strategies, pilot actions, actions and related resolutions, which aim to ensure equal access to primary health care development of infrastructure and purchase of medical and rescue equipment and specialised health care through the joint improvement of qualifications of medical and rescue.

List of planned actions

The programme will fund the following type of actions (non-exhaustive list):

1. Mobile and other health services for children and elderly people in mountainous and remote areas through Mobile Groups of Health Professionals (MGHP) from the nearest urban centres or mobile Units, e-distance health services with modern technological products, stations for telemedicine. This action will be developed on both sides of the border.

2. Development of initiatives for supporting communities to assess the primary health care system, in order to secure social and family care. This will include

cross-border initiatives for the promotion of health and well-being of children and elderly persons, with a special focus on identified marginalised communities (Roma, people with disabilities, people with a migrant background, etc) to ensure equal access to quality and inclusive mainstream services in healthcare. that will be supported by interpreters.

3. Actions aimed at preventing the occurrence and effects of unpredictable adverse events such as crisis situations, e.g. epidemics, nosocomial infections. These actions will contribute to the creation of a Pandemic Task Force to coordinate a response to the pandemic on multiple levels (e.g. monitoring the availability of intensive care beds, setting up a cross-border information exchange system to jointly coordinate issues raised by pandemic crisis, etc.), online tools to respond to nosocomial infections on multiple levels (e.g. monitoring the types and the departments, setting up a cross border information tool, decision support for reducing spreading etc)

4. Actions, in parallel in both countries, will take place for acquiring new skills in the field of medical care among medical staff, which will improve its quality and may translate into its effectiveness in the treatment of diseases. As part of the action, it is proposed to organize joint meetings and cross-border seminars between medical staff to exchange good practices, trainings, workshops or conferences aimed at improving qualifications and drawing attention to common problems in the field of health care and emergency services in the Programme area.

Actions under this Priority will ensure the gender perspective and track the women benefiting from developed activities. Actions will respect gender equality, equal opportunities, non-discrimination, and accessibility in accordance with article 9 of the CPR regulation.

The New European Bauhaus principles will affect the setting up and the implementation of the related actions under this SO

The investments under this Priority will be fully in line with the requirements of UNCRPD with due respect for the principles of equality, freedom of choice, the right to independent living, accessibility and prohibiting all forms of segregation. The investments will need to demonstrate compliance with the de-institutionalisation strategy and relevant EU policy and legal frameworks for upholding human rights obligations namely: Charter of Fundamental Rights, European Pillar of Social Rights and Strategy for the Rights of Persons with Disabilities 2021-2030.

The types of actions have been assessed as compatible with the DNSH principle, in accordance with preamble 10 of Reg 2021/1060, since they are not expected to have any significant negative impact due to their nature.

2.1.1.1b. Definition of a single beneficiary or a limited list of beneficiaries and the granting procedure

Reference: point (c)(i) of Article 17(9)

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2.1.1.2. Indicators

Reference: point (e)(ii) of Article 17(3), point (c)(iii) of Article 17(9)

Table 2 - Output indicators

Priority	Specific objective	ID	Indicator	Measurement unit	Milestone (2024)	Target (2029)
PR3	RSO4.5	RCO87	Organisations cooperating across borders	organisations	4	16
PR3	RSO4.5	RCO69	Capacity of new or modernised health care facilities	persons/year	5000	15000
PR3	RSO4.5	RCO81	Participations in joint actions across borders	participations	40	112

Table 3 - Result indicators

Priority	Specific objective	ID	Indicator	Measurement unit	Baseline	Reference year	Target (2029)	Source of data	Comments
PR3	RSO4.5	RCR84	Organisations cooperating across borders after project completion	organisations	0.00	2021	8.00	Programme MIS	
PR3	RSO4.5	RCR73	Annual users of new or modernised health care facilities	users/year	0.00	2021	15,000.00	Supported Projects	
PR3	RSO4.5	RCR72	Annual users of new or modernised e-health care services	users/year	0.00	2021	40,000.00	Supported Projects	

2.1.1.3. Main target groups

Reference: point (e)(iii) of Article 17(3), point (c)(iv) of Article 17(9)

The main target groups for actions under the Health priority to improve the accessibility, effectiveness and resilience of health systems and long-term care services across borders will be the inhabitants of the Programme area. Intervention in this area may significantly improve the health services provided, and thus improve the health condition of residents. Activities related to long-term care will have a positive impact on the quality of life of elderly and terminally ill residents. Investments in infrastructure, equipment and improving the qualifications of medical and rescue personnel will significantly affect the comfort of work and the number of successes achieved by health care and emergency services workers.

Target groups

- *Regions residents*
- *Regional and Local Authorities*
- *Disadvantaged and marginalised individuals and social groups, as defined by the Committee on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights (CESCR General Comment No. 19, art. 9)[1].*

Potential Beneficiaries

- *State, regional and local administration units, associations of these units and institutions subordinate to them that deal with medical care,*
- *Public entities providing medical services and long-term care services,*
- *Civil protection authorities and Rescue services (i.e. mountain rescue services)*
- *Entities of higher education, e.g. medical departments & universities, educational entities in the field of health protection, research laboratories etc.*
- *Non-governmental organizations, specializing in the field*

It should also be considered that the actions undertaken under each objective involve beneficiaries from at least two Programme countries, of which at least one is a beneficiary from a Member State.

[1] <https://socialprotection-humanrights.org/wp-content/uploads/2015/06/CESCR-General-Comment-19.pdf>

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

Reference: Article point (e)(iv) of 17(3)

Actions can be implemented throughout the programme area and address all types of territories. Cooperation is particularly encouraged to improve primary health structures and processes within and between territories that are sharing functional ties (e.g. metropolitan regions, adjacent or neighbouring cities and their rural hinterlands, cross-border regions). The exchanges of knowledge and experiences between more and less advanced regions will strengthen further their implementation capacities.

All possible actions need to consider the specific territorial settings and existing governance systems of targeted areas and be aligned to the relevant territorial strategies at the respective governance level (local, regional, national).

2.1.1.5. Planned use of financial instruments

Reference: point (e)(v) of Article 17(3)

There are no provisions for the adoption of financial instruments under any Specific Objective.

The Programme predominantly covers remote areas with a sparse population density. Small projects are the norm, therefore overall demand for services is limited.

Project beneficiaries are Non-profit entities, often with limited capacity and resources.

Projects do not generate grants. Also, the services are either free or provided with a nominal ticket price (if applicable). By covering investment and development costs, grants effectively subsidise projects' positive externalities.

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

Reference: point (e)(vi) of Article 17(3), point (c)(v) of Article 17(9)

Table 4 - Dimension 1 – intervention field

Priority	Specific objective	Fund	Code	Amount (EUR)
PR3	RSO4.5	IPA III	128. Health infrastructure	1,090,909.00
PR3	RSO4.5	IPA III	129. Health equipment	727,273.00
PR3	RSO4.5	IPA III	160. Measures to improve the accessibility, effectiveness and resilience of healthcare systems (excluding infrastructure)	727,273.00
PR3	RSO4.5	IPA III	131. Digitalisation in health care	727,273.00

Table 5 - Dimension 2 – form of financing

Priority	Specific objective	Fund	Code	Amount (EUR)
PR3	RSO4.5	IPA III	01. Grant	3,272,728.00

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

Priority	Specific objective	Fund	Code	Amount (EUR)
PR3	RSO4.5	IPA III	33. Other approaches - No territorial targeting	3,272,728.00

2.1.1. Specific objective: RSO4.6. Enhancing the role of culture and sustainable tourism in economic development, social inclusion and social innovation

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

Enhancing the role of culture and sustainable tourism in economic development, social inclusion and social innovation

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

Reference: point (e)(i) of Article 17(3), point (c)(ii) of Article 17(9)

PO4. A more social and inclusive Europe implementing the European Pillar of Social Rights

SO (vi) Enhancing the role of culture and sustainable tourism in economic development, social inclusion and social innovation

PRIORITY: Support and upgrade of Health and Social Services

Fostering local traditions and tourist attractions draws attention, and thus encourages tourists to visit specific attractions.

The culture and heritage of the Programme area, active cultural units, valuable natural areas, the existence of folk traditions, folk crafts and material resources of historical and cultural heritage constitute capital, the proper use of which may enable the economic and social development of the CBC area. Cultivating and promoting local traditions, joint cross-border cultural undertakings, caring for valuable natural areas and other activities for the use and tourism values are essential in the development of the cross-border area. Actions under this SO should aim to enhance the role of culture and tourism in economic development, social inclusion and social innovation as indicated by the outcomes of the public consultation.

Moreover, the Programme should support the development of cooperation and entrepreneurial links across borders and promote actions, which nurture business start-ups and employment.

The programme intends to address the high-risk poverty and social exclusion in the programme area through these actions and investments in order to ensure a positive impact on local communities and contribute to the economic and social development of areas relying on the culture and tourism sectors.

Actions should seek synergies and coordinate with other European instruments and national funds. Alignment with the EUSAIR and the EU Strategy for Western Balkans should be envisaged.

It is essential for the rural economies to invest in actions for amplifying tourism competitiveness. Improving the tourism branding and promoting the local culture, will help the communities to boost their competitiveness, compared to other developed areas of both countries. Tourism can be a key sector of the cross-border area. It may provide a stimulus to generate small-scale businesses and offer the potential for the creation of a larger number of tourism-related SMEs. It will be a contribution to raise the social capabilities of the area, to create new job placements and create circumstances for a potentially more sustainable source of employment in the border area.

The planned actions in culture and tourism will ensure a positive impact on the local communities of the area. The utilization of cultural heritage and tourism will contribute to socio-economic development. Such specialized actions will help address the high risk of poverty and social exclusion in the Programme area.

Actions under this Priority will aim reinforcement of all aspects of sustainability, such as environmental, social and financial, in addition to other actions providing resilience and digital/green transformation of culture and tourism sectors.

List of planned actions

The Programme will fund the following type of actions (non-exhaustive list):

- 1. Actions to support youth and unemployed people, aiming at gaining skills and professional qualifications in the tourism sector and more specifically in the growing 'cultural tourism' segment. The actions will be in the form of courses, pieces of training and exchange workshops, including both green and digital upskilling and reskilling, on how to set up and promote an enterprise in the tourism industry and manage it effectively.*
- 2. Networking initiatives, supporting employment mechanisms and joint efforts in the CBA towards the goal of creating new jobs in the field of tourism.*
- 3. Actions that will create new opportunities through investment and cooperation in the field of tourism and environment, the adaption of ICT innovation, eco-innovation and attract additional investment and private funding within the border area. The main target of this action is to create the opportunity of supporting the diversification of the tourism product and invest in lesser-known destinations of high potential.*
- 4. Actions for the support of entities/ enterprises in the field of sports / recreational / natural / cultural activities under SPF with a plethora of small projects (e.g. food festivals). These actions aim to encourage the use of private funds as well for improving financial self-sustainability.*
- 5. SPF for the support of private and public beneficiaries in order to improve the accessibility to cultural and touristic events (benefitting for example the elderly and / or people with disabilities).[1]*
- 6. Accessibility improvement in historical monuments and sites of cultural heritage in the cross-border area, including remote sites.*
- 7. Promotion of cross-border cultural initiatives (joint actions and cultural events, digitalization of cultural content and cultural routes).*

The types of actions have been assessed as compatible with the DNSH principle, in accordance with preamble 10 of Reg 2021/1060, since they are not expected to have any significant negative environmental impact due to their nature

The New European Bauhaus principles will affect the setting up and the implementation of all the related actions under this SO.

The actions will be pursued in line with the objective of promoting sustainable development taking into account the UN Sustainable Development Goals and the Paris Agreement.

Actions under this Priority will ensure the gender perspective and track the women benefiting from developed activities. Actions will respect gender equality, equal opportunities, non-discrimination, and accessibility in accordance with article 9 of the CPR regulation.

[1] Authorities will follow the 'European quality principles for EU-funded interventions with potential impact upon cultural heritage' (http://openarchive.icomos.org/id/eprint/2436/1/EUQS_revised-2020_EN_ebook.pdf), which were drafted by ICOMOS under the Commission mandate of the European Year of Cultural Heritage 2018.

2.1.1.1b. Definition of a single beneficiary or a limited list of beneficiaries and the granting procedure

Reference: point (c)(i) of Article 17(9)

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2.1.1.2. Indicators

Reference: point (e)(ii) of Article 17(3), point (c)(iii) of Article 17(9)

Table 2 - Output indicators

Priority	Specific objective	ID	Indicator	Measurement unit	Milestone (2024)	Target (2029)
PR3	RSO4.6	RCO115	Public events across borders jointly organised	events	3	10
PR3	RSO4.6	RCO87	Organisations cooperating across borders	organisations	6	20
PR3	RSO4.6	RCO81	Participations in joint actions across borders	participations	60	196
PR3	RSO4.6	RCO77	Number of cultural and tourism sites supported	cultural and tourism sites	2	8

Table 3 - Result indicators

Priority	Specific objective	ID	Indicator	Measurement unit	Baseline	Reference year	Target (2029)	Source of data	Comments
PR3	RSO4.6	RCR77	Visitors of cultural and tourism sites supported	visitors/year	0.00	2021	12,857.00	Supported Projects	
PR3	RSO4.6	RCR84	Organisations cooperating across borders after project completion	organisations	0.00	2021	10.00	Programme MIS	

2.1.1.3. Main target groups

Reference: point (e)(iii) of Article 17(3), point (c)(iv) of Article 17(9)

Interventions under this S.O are expected to increase the tourist attractiveness of the support area, and thus provide great potential for the development of entrepreneurship.

The participants of such events may be all, i.e. residents, entrepreneurs, local government units, and non-governmental organizations operating in the Programme area.

Target groups

- *Regions residents*
- *Regional and Local Authorities*
- *Management Bodies of Protected Areas*
- *Stakeholders*
- *Disadvantaged and marginalised individuals and social groups, as defined by the Committee on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights (CESCR General Comment No. 19, art. 9)[1].*

Potential Beneficiaries:

- *State, regional and local administration units, associations of these units and institutions subordinate to them,*
- *Other public law entities (e.g. chambers, government administration bodies),*
- *Units of higher education and research institutions,*
- *Administrations and Managing Authorities of nature protection areas, such as national parks, nature parks, landscape parks, biosphere reserves, etc.*
- *Personnel development institutions (OAED),*
- *Non-governmental organizations.*

It should also be considered that the actions under each objective shall involve beneficiaries from at least two Programme countries, of which at least one is a beneficiary from a Member State.

[1] <https://socialprotection-humanrights.org/wp-content/uploads/2015/06/CESCR-General-Comment-19.pdf>

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

Reference: Article point (e)(iv) of 17(3)

Actions can be implemented throughout the programme area and address all types of territories. Cooperation is particularly encouraged to improve governance structures and processes within and between territories that are sharing functional ties (e.g. metropolitan regions, adjacent or neighbouring cities and their rural hinterlands, cross-border regions). The exchanges of knowledge and experiences between more and less advanced regions will strengthen further their implementation capacities.

All possible actions need to consider the specific territorial settings and existing governance systems of targeted areas and be aligned to the relevant territorial strategies at the respective governance level (local, regional, national).

2.1.1.5. Planned use of financial instruments

Reference: point (e)(v) of Article 17(3)

There are no provisions for the adoption of financial instruments under any Specific Objective.

The Programme predominantly covers remote areas with a sparse population density. Small projects are the norm, therefore overall demand for services is limited.

Project beneficiaries are Non-profit entities, often with limited capacity and resources.

Projects do not generate grants. Also, the services are either free or provided with a nominal ticket price (if applicable). By covering investment and development costs, grants effectively subsidise projects' positive externalities.

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

Reference: point (e)(vi) of Article 17(3), point (c)(v) of Article 17(9)

Table 4 - Dimension 1 – intervention field

Priority	Specific objective	Fund	Code	Amount (EUR)
PR3	RSO4.6	IPA III	167. Protection, development and promotion of natural heritage and eco-tourism other than Natura 2000 sites	1,090,909.00
PR3	RSO4.6	IPA III	166. Protection, development and promotion of cultural heritage and cultural services	1,090,909.00
PR3	RSO4.6	IPA III	165. Protection, development and promotion of public tourism assets and tourism services	1,090,909.00

Table 5 - Dimension 2 – form of financing

Priority	Specific objective	Fund	Code	Amount (EUR)
PR3	RSO4.6	IPA III	01. Grant	3,272,727.00

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

Priority	Specific objective	Fund	Code	Amount (EUR)
PR3	RSO4.6	IPA III	33. Other approaches - No territorial targeting	3,272,727.00

2.1. Priority: PR4 - Improving governance for cooperation

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

2.1.1. Specific objective: ISO6.6. Other actions to support better cooperation governance (all strands)

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

Other actions to support better cooperation governance

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

Reference: point (e)(i) of Article 17(3), point (c)(ii) of Article 17(9)

ISO 1 - A better cooperation governance (objective 6 “other actions to support better cooperation governance”)

PRIORITY: Improving governance for cooperation

Integrated policies and multi-level governance approaches are significant and crucial for strengthening regional development and cohesion, by eliminating legal obstacles and other barriers in border regions. A specific need for better governance and exchanging good practices between actors of multi-level governance systems shall be addressed. It will lead to more socially equitable public services and increase territorial and social cohesion as well as promote the principle of equal opportunities across the CBC area.

Actions under this SO, will support transnational synergies aiming at improving multi-sectoral governance processes on all territorial levels, given the complex challenges related to digitalisation, demographic change, public services of general interest (such as health, education, social services) and tourism including culture. Actions should follow a cross-sectoral approach and foster the horizontal and vertical cooperation of relevant actors of the public and, where appropriate, the private sector. Furthermore, actions should also strengthen the capacity of public authorities to prepare integrated territorial development strategies. Possible cooperation actions include the joint development and implementation of strategies, action plans, tools, pilot actions and related solutions.

Actions should foresee cooperation with other European instruments and initiatives such as the ERDF mainstream programmes, the Rural Programmes (including LEADER) cross-border Interreg programmes, as well as transboundary and transnational governance structures (e.g. EGTCs and EUREGIOS). Actions should also take into account relevant international initiatives and platforms, which seek better coordinating governance processes in specific thematic areas and in particular the EU macro-regional strategies.

In short, improved governance shall involve: integration (where possible) of policy sectors, policy dialogue among relevant institutions, and by encouraging the involvement of citizens and other stakeholders (e.g. by proliferating the use of digital tools)

List of planned actions

The programme will fund the following type of actions (non-exhaustive list):

- 1. Enhancing cooperation in cross-border and transnational territories by establishing new or developing existing structures for cooperation governance, including joint decision-making processes, civil protection and coordinated action plans as well as by supporting cross-border public services.*
- 2. Developing and implementing integrated strategies for territories with functional ties addressing high quality public services of general interest (such as health, education).*
- 3. Developing smart digital services for coordination and better cross-border cooperation of relevant Public Administration Authorities (e.g. health sector units, civil protection and risk management authorities)*
- 4. Actions in parallel in both countries will take place for acquiring new skills among rescue staff for improving its quality and its effectiveness. Joint meetings between rescue staff of both countries will be organized as well, to exchange good practices, trainings, workshops or conferences aimed at improving qualifications and drawing attention to common problems in the field of emergency services in the Programme area.*

The types of actions have been assessed as compatible with the DNSH principle, in accordance with preamble 10 of Reg 2021/1060, since they are not expected to have any significant negative environmental impact due to their nature.

The actions will be pursued in line with the objective of promoting sustainable development taking into account the UN Sustainable Development Goals and the Paris Agreement.

2.1.1.1b. Definition of a single beneficiary or a limited list of beneficiaries and the granting procedure

Reference: point (c)(i) of Article 17(9)

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2.1.1.2. Indicators

Reference: point (e)(ii) of Article 17(3), point (c)(iii) of Article 17(9)

Table 2 - Output indicators

Priority	Specific objective	ID	Indicator	Measurement unit	Milestone (2024)	Target (2029)
PR4	ISO6.6	RCO115	Public events across borders jointly organised	events	2	8
PR4	ISO6.6	RCO81	Participations in joint actions across borders	participations	40	112
PR4	ISO6.6	RCO87	Organisations cooperating across borders	organisations	4	16

Table 3 - Result indicators

Priority	Specific objective	ID	Indicator	Measurement unit	Baseline	Reference year	Target (2029)	Source of data	Comments
PR4	ISO6.6	RCR84	Organisations cooperating across borders after project completion	organisations	0.00	2021	8.00	Programme Management Information System / Survey, if necessary	In terms of links with common output indicator, RCR84 may be used together with RCO87. The value reported for RCR84 can be equal to or lower than the value of RCO87, but no higher.

2.1.1.3. Main target groups

Reference: point (e)(iii) of Article 17(3), point (c)(iv) of Article 17(9)

The inhabitants of the Programme area.

Interventions in this area may favour entrepreneurs and representatives of local government units by facilitating local government cooperation and conducting cross-border economic activity.

There are planned initiatives aimed at increasing the efficiency of public administration by promoting legal and administrative cooperation as well as cooperation between citizens and institutions, especially to eliminate legal obstacles and other barriers in border regions, e.g. in the form of public consultations, workshops and conferences in the supported area. Such events shall be open to the public, i.e. residents, entrepreneurs, local government units, non-governmental organizations and scientific and research centres.

Potential Beneficiaries:

State, regional and local administration units, associations of these units and institutions subordinate to them,

Other public law entities (e.g. chambers, government administration bodies),

Schools and educational institutions,

Units of higher education and research institutions,

Non-governmental organizations,

Other entities conducting cultural or educational activities.

It should also be considered that the actions under each objective shall involve beneficiaries from at least two Programme countries, of which at least one is a beneficiary from a Member State.

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

Reference: Article point (e)(iv) of 17(3)

Actions can be implemented throughout the programme area and address all types of territories. Cooperation is particularly encouraged to improve governance structures and processes within and between territories that are sharing functional ties (e.g. metropolitan regions, adjacent or neighbouring cities and their rural hinterlands, cross-border regions). The exchanges of knowledge and experiences between more and less advanced regions will strengthen further their implementation capacities.

All possible actions need to consider the specific territorial settings and existing governance systems of targeted areas and be aligned to the relevant territorial strategies at the respective governance level (local, regional, national).

2.1.1.5. Planned use of financial instruments

Reference: point (e)(v) of Article 17(3)

There are no provisions for the adoption of financial instruments under any Specific Objective.

The Programme predominantly covers remote areas with a sparse population density. Small projects are the norm, therefore overall demand for services is limited.

Project beneficiaries are Non-profit entities, often with limited capacity and resources.

Projects do not generate grants. Also, the services are either free or provided with a nominal ticket price (if applicable). By covering investment and development costs, grants effectively subsidise projects' positive externalities.

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

Reference: point (e)(vi) of Article 17(3), point (c)(v) of Article 17(9)

Table 4 - Dimension 1 – intervention field

Priority	Specific objective	Fund	Code	Amount (EUR)
PR4	ISO6.6	IPA III	173. Enhancing institutional capacity of public authorities and stakeholders to implement territorial cooperation projects and initiatives in a cross-border, transnational, maritime and inter-regional context	727,273.00
PR4	ISO6.6	IPA III	171. Enhancing cooperation with partners both within and outside the Member State	954,545.00
PR4	ISO6.6	IPA III	170. Improve the capacity of programme authorities and bodies linked to the implementation of the Funds	727,273.00

Table 5 - Dimension 2 – form of financing

Priority	Specific objective	Fund	Code	Amount (EUR)
PR4	ISO6.6	IPA III	01. Grant	2,409,091.00

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

Priority	Specific objective	Fund	Code	Amount (EUR)
PR4	ISO6.6	IPA III	33. Other approaches - No territorial targeting	2,409,091.00

3. Financing plan

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

3.1. Financial appropriations by year

Table 7

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

Fund	2021	2022	2023	2024	2025	2026	2027	Total
IPA III CBC	0.00	4,511,353.00	4,609,044.00	4,676,779.00	4,761,599.00	4,005,520.00	4,085,705.00	26,650,000.00
Total	0.00	4,511,353.00	4,609,044.00	4,676,779.00	4,761,599.00	4,005,520.00	4,085,705.00	26,650,000.00

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

Policy objective	Priority	Fund	Basis for calculation EU support (total eligible cost or public contribution)	EU contribution (a)=(a1)+(a2)	Indicative breakdown of the EU contribution		National contribution (b)=(c)+(d)	Indicative breakdown of the national counterpart		Total (e)=(a)+(b)	Co-financing rate (f)=(a)/(e)	Contributions from the third countries
					without TA pursuant to Article 27(1) (a1)	for TA pursuant to Article 27(1) (a2)		National public (c)	National private (d)			
2	PR1	IPA III CBC	Total	10,000,000.00	9,090,909.00	909,091.00	2,500,000.00	2,500,000.00	0.00	12,500,000.00	80.000000000000%	0.00
3	PR2	IPA III CBC	Total	6,800,000.00	6,181,818.00	618,182.00	1,700,000.00	1,700,000.00	0.00	8,500,000.00	80.000000000000%	0.00
4	PR3	IPA III CBC	Total	7,200,000.00	6,545,455.00	654,545.00	1,800,000.00	1,800,000.00	0.00	9,000,000.00	80.000000000000%	0.00
6	PR4	IPA III CBC	Total	2,650,000.00	2,409,091.00	240,909.00	662,500.00	662,500.00	0.00	3,312,500.00	80.000000000000%	0.00
	Total	IPA III CBC		26,650,000.00	24,227,273.00	2,422,727.00	6,662,500.00	6,662,500.00	0.00	33,312,500.00	80.000000000000%	0.00
	Grand total			26,650,000.00	24,227,273.00	2,422,727.00	6,662,500.00	6,662,500.00	0.00	33,312,500.00	80.000000000000%	0.00

4. Action 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)

Programme Preparation

All partners are selected transparently and given opportunities to participate in the consultation process, bringing their experience to the process.

The partners cover a broad social spectrum, and derive from:

(a) regional, local, urban and other public authorities,

(b) economic and social partners,

(c) bodies of civil society, such as environmental partners, NGOs, bodies for promoting social inclusion, fundamental rights, rights of persons with disabilities, gender equality and non-discrimination;

(d) research organisations and universities.

The European code of conduct on partnership (Reg No 240/2014) will continue to apply for the 2021-27 period.

● Procedures for selecting partners and ensuring their representativeness

Partners have been involved in the programming process, primarily through:

- Meetings of the ad hoc Planning and Programming Group, Joint Programming Committee

- Consultations with the stakeholders

- Internet-based consultations.

● Representativeness and identification of partners (Article 2 and 4 of the Code).

The process for identifying all types of stakeholders

Before the public consultation, the Managing Authority recorded and updated information of eligible bodies in the Programme area and beyond, using:

1. Existing databases of the Managing Authority

2. Database of Ministries related to research institutes, new university departments, NGOs, administrations of protected areas, cultural institutions, youth organizations, etc.

3. Databases of Regions, Regional Units and Municipalities

4. National Organization for the Certification of Qualifications & Vocational Guidance database for the training centres in the area

5. Database of business support structures (e.g. chambers)

6. Internet search

The Managing Authority together with the Governing bodies will encourage the involvement of independent fundamental rights bodies and human rights organizations in all the stages of programming, implementation, monitoring, evaluation of investments in social and health care infrastructure, in order to ensure the respect of the principles of independent living, non-segregation, and non-discrimination in line with the UNCRPD and the Charter of Fundamental Rights

Electronic Participation

The method of electronic participation raises the expectations of greater participation, especially as it

relates to the expansion of the scale and basis of participation, overcoming the constraints imposed by the rate of attendance in traditional processes. Also, due to the Covid-19 pandemic, it is an important tool in a time when gatherings are avoided to protect public health.

● **Information and consultation (8 and 9 of the Code)**

Suggestions from the partners were taken into account. The partnership was established in a bottom-up approach. During the consultation, questions were given from the lower level participants to the top.

Field experts were involved, too.

The ample time frame and means to participate ensured wide impact. Electronic and telephone contributions were appropriate amidst the Covid-19 pandemic.

Relevant documents are available in a timely manner and easily accessible.

1st phase of public consultation

A structured questionnaire was created via EU e-survey. The questionnaire was formulated in both two languages of the partner countries. The consultation period lasted one (1) month from 12.01.2021 to 12.02.2021.

An online survey was designed to collect information and feedback from the local stakeholders of the two cross-border countries on several issues, such as their preferences regarding the new Programme, potential project ideas and opinions on the tools and solutions which could be applied in the area.

A link with the questionnaire was published at:

- *Managing Authority Organisation*
- *2014-2020 Programme*
- *Ministry of Local Self Government (North Macedonia)*
- *Social Media accounts*

Moreover, promotional activities and campaigns took place for: the JMC and JSC members of the 2014-20 Programme, Beneficiaries and applicants under the 1st CfP, potential beneficiaries under the 2. CfP, stakeholders and policymakers of the two partner countries.

The questionnaire aimed to maximize data collection and different viewpoints of the stakeholders, based on:

- ***the stakeholders' previous experiences with the cross-border Programs***
- ***Challenges and Opportunities***
- ***Pertinent topics for a cross-border Program***
- ***Potential project ideas for the next programming period***
- ***Perceptions of the different innovative tools***

The consultation was successful. 194 valid answers were registered. This figure is comparable with Programmes of larger scope, which are also under the responsibility of the Managing Authority's organisation. More importantly, the responses were balanced between the two partner countries, despite the larger population of the Greek side of the Programme (Greece: 98 ; North Macedonia: 96).

2nd phase of public consultation

Summary: A semi-structured interview and discussion took place. First, a questionnaire was submitted to selected institutions of both partner countries, in their respective languages. Second, semi-structured interviews were conducted between the Consultation specialists and the institutions' designated officials.

Analysis: The main scope of the second phase is the collection of proposals, from local stakeholders and

policymakers. Also, the analysis of information pertinent to the preparation of the Programme strategy.

A semi-structured interview with public bodies was deemed appropriate. It was based on the responses on 6 topics for discussion, aiming to avoid imposing answers on the respondents, while maintaining boundaries in the discussion – interview. The topics were elaborated on questions that were sent via email to the public bodies for their preparation:

1. Needs of the Area: The Researcher did not present the findings of the first stage analysis to record the perception and the point of view of the respondents.

2. Knowledge of cross-border cooperation: The researcher asked for opinions on the current Cooperation Programme and recorded the role and way of involvement.

3. Strategy Focus: It was carried out, based on the Policy Priorities and the Specific Objectives (SOs). Which SOs were most pertinent for the cross-border area? A formulation / analysis of the respondent's opinion was given.

4. Suggested types of interventions: The respondent was asked to describe types of interventions and/or specific projects that she/he deemed appropriate. The Researcher recorded the proposals asking for a description of the results in each case.

5. Proposals for projects and actions: In cases where elaborated actions or projects were proposed, more questions were requested about the cost, the implementing body and partnership, the maturity/time of preparation and implementation, the outputs, and the potential risks.

6. Problems/obstacles to the cross-border cooperation in general, but also in the context of their proposals.

Selected Participants:

Greece:

- Ministry of Dev't & Investments
- Ministry of Interior and Public Administration
- Ministry of Culture and Sports
- Thessaloniki Industrial Chamber
- Thessaloniki Chamber of Commerce and Industry
- Decentralized Administration of Macedonia-Thrace
- Decentralized Administration of Epirus – Western Macedonia
- Region of Western Macedonia
- National Confederation of People with Disabilities
- Technical Chamber of Central Macedonia
- Greek Exporters Association
- University of Western Macedonia

North Macedonia:

- Ministry of Local Self-Government
- Ministry for Foreign Affairs
- Pelagonija Planning Region
- Secretariat of European Affairs – NIPAC
- Southwest Planning Region

Implementation:

The central idea of the principle of partnership is the 'multi-level governance (MLG)'. The Managing Authority will ensure the involvement of civil society, social partners and taking on board the expertise and experience of various pertinent stakeholders. In doing so, the members of the Joint Monitoring Committee will include at a minimum:

- a) competent regional, local, urban and other public authorities.*
- b) economic and social partners;*
- c) Bodies representing civil society, environmental partners, and bodies responsible for promoting social inclusion, fundamental rights, rights of persons with disabilities, gender equality and non-discrimination.*

As the Programme will pursue a Macro-regional Strategy, the MA will identify and bring on board bodies with expertise in the development and implementation of EUSAIR objectives. The guidance of the European Commission will also be sought after.

Monitoring:

The Joint Monitoring Committee (JMC) is the main decision body of the Programme. The JMC is responsible for monitoring the Programme's implementation and reviewing the Programme's overall effectiveness in meeting its objectives and will be regularly informed about the activities of the Technical Assistance.

The JMC will act as a tool to regularly review any issues that affect the performance of the Programme and progress in administrative capacity building (Article 30(1)(g) Interreg).

The JMC will be governed by the 'partnership principle' in managing, monitoring and evaluating the operations and overall Programme in all stages of its implementation.

Members of the JMC (and the Joint Selection Committee for project selection, if applicable) will be required to declare any conflict of interest.

Evaluation:

Programme Evaluation is carried out at multiple layers:

An Evaluation plan is conducted to determine the most appropriate evaluation method(s). It includes the suggested evaluation reports and respective timelines.

Interim Evaluations are carried out according to the Ev. Plan. Their findings feed the Programme's Annual reports.

In addition, monitoring of the project implementation (by the Secretariat) and Programme developments (by the MA) may trigger additional evaluation issues to be addressed.

Programme Authorities have traditionally opted for external evaluations, to safeguard the integrity of the process and the independence of the evaluation results.

The Managing Authority will apply a transparent tendering procedure and will inform the Programme stakeholders of the scope, objectives and results of the evaluation.

The approach under the 2014-20 Programme will be appraised. In summary, it aimed to:

determine the performance of the implemented actions, the degree of achievement of the objectives and the effectiveness of the Programme.

It covered the achievement of the Performance Framework Indicators and the relevance of the intervention logic with the Programme's Strategy.

It evaluated the communication strategy and impact of the Programme.

The evaluation employed a robust mix of qualitative and quantitative data collection and evaluation methods tailored to each evaluation task.

At the level of Programme administration, the functions and procedures followed by the Managing Authority and Joint Secretariat staff are covered by ISO. Relevant procedures include surveys of the satisfaction of the Programme and project participants in events. Finally, the staff is subject to an annual assessment by supervisors and subordinates.

The users of the Evaluation results fall into Internal and External users:

Internal users

- *The Managing Authority and Joint Secretariat*
- *The Members of the Monitoring Committee*

External users

- *Lead Partners and Partners*
- *Other regional policy stakeholders*
- *Elected representatives*
- *Journalists*
- *Wider public affected by implementation of the projects*

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)

A dynamic Communication Strategy will capture the different stages of Programme implementation. It will be prepared at the beginning of the Programme implementation. Its main pillars are:

- The Strategy covers the entire Programme Period, including the provision of planning, implementation and evaluation. The needs for communication activities are different throughout the phases of the Programme cycle. In the beginning, the Programme shall target applicants while the need to capitalise on results grows towards the end of the Programme period.

- The Universal Communication Objective is defined as: ‘To make the Programme known, attractive, and easily approachable throughout the Programme Area’

- The Universal Communication Objective is broken down on periodical objectives described in respective action plans. The captured periods (e.g. annual, bi-annual) will be defined in line with expectations and the specific characteristics of Programme Policy Objectives.

- The action plans take into account the distinct phases of implementation (e.g. Calls published, Projects under implementation, Capitalisation of results).

- The action plans define the appropriate annual Communication objectives, target audiences, and pertinent outreach activities.

Main Considerations:

The Universal Communication Objective is deliberately set in general terms, because it shall be aligned with all four selected Programme Policy Objectives.

Each one of the four policy objectives will have tailored communication objectives.

The tailored communication objectives will not only support the Communication Strategy but ideally, will contribute to the overall Programme goals.

Channels

Three categories of “channels” will be used for promotion: events, advocacy, web & social media.

The use of Facebook, Twitter, LinkedIn and YouTube will mostly promote the programme, project activities & results, programme calls and relevant initiatives from the European Commission or other pertinent international organisations. Facebook will allow us to continue growing our community by bonding with actual & potential project beneficiaries but also with the general public thanks to simple and interactive content.

The Website will remain the main communication portal for internal and external target groups. Pertinent content includes:

- programme information,

- handbooks,

- webinars,

- project descriptions,

- contact details of the programme bodies

The website shall be online at the latest within six months from the adoption of the programme. It shall provide access to the Programme's: objectives and priorities, geographical and/or thematic scope, proposal submission deadlines, allocation of funds, information on results, including data and examples of projects.

The website will be linked to the single website portal providing access to all programmes as requested by Article 46(b) of the CPR regulation.

Target Audiences

The target audiences are divided into 5 categories, which are further detailed in the communication strategy. These categories include: potential applicants and project partners within the Programme eligible area; multipliers and/or strategic stakeholders such as NGOs, associations, SMEs, Intergovernmental Organisations working on or interested in Programme topics; political end users/policy-makers working on or interested in Programme topics, Technical end-users; general public.

-

Implementation Considerations:

A designated Programme Communication officer will be responsible to monitor, review and steer the Strategy and relevant means accordingly.

The combination of communication platforms will be tailored to the communication objectives. By selecting the appropriate mix of media platforms and narratives, the media strategy will seek to engage stakeholders throughout the Programme cycles.

The communication strategy will be funded by the TA.

Programme Authorities are committed to keeping the communication budget at the same level as the previous Programme. To augment the Communication impact, support from all programme bodies, including the national contact point network, will be employed.

Indicative budget distribution per year / budget (%)

2021(0%), 2022(26%), 2023(20%), 2024(16%), 2025(12%), 2026(10%), 2027(8%), 2028(5%), 2029(3%)

Indicative budget lines

Events 40%

IT tools 28%

Branding 12%

Content strategy 10% (social media campaigns, podcasts, videos),

Press 5%

Relevant training 5%

Monitoring and Evaluation:

An evaluation plan will be prepared and submitted to the Joint Monitoring Committee within 12 months of the Programme approval. It will include detailed provisions for the monitoring and evaluation of the Communication Strategy, including pertinent questions to be addressed.

Nonetheless, the Managing Authority will seek to monitor the Communication arrangements from the

start of Programme implementation. To this end, the MA will make use of the recommendations of the 2014-20 Programme evaluation, with respect to the dissemination of results.

At the individual project level, beneficiaries elaborate on their communication activities throughout the project life. The Programme Bodies will ensure that the flagship border crossing project receives widespread promotion.

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

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

Background information and Lessons learnt

The ‘typical’ Programme beneficiary is a relatively small organization, stemming from civil society.

Calls for Project Proposals of the previous Programme(s) were oversubscribed, indicating a ‘funding gap’.

Several applicants did not manage to secure funding. The majority of organizations that ‘did not make it’ are small municipalities, local organizations based in remote areas and newly established NGOs.

SPFs and Programme Strategy

The Small Project Funds (SPFs), as a tool, are well-positioned to support organizations with limited resources, be it administrative, financial or staff related. The SPF can therefore address the ‘funding gap’ of small-scale organizations.

The Programme will finance projects of limited financial volume within the small project fund, under specific objectives “PO2 (SO vi), Promoting the transition to a circular and resource-efficient economy” and “PO4 (SO vi) Enhancing the role of culture and sustainable tourism in economic development, social inclusion and social innovation”

The related information of the small-scale projects per specific objective is as follows:

Specific Objective PO2 (SO vi), Promoting the transition to a circular and resource-efficient economy

Types of Actions:

- Targeted activities of circular economy and Green Deal activities.*
- Raising awareness activities for reducing various pollution forms (exchanges, campaigns).*

Specific Objective PO4 (SO vi) Enhancing the role of culture and sustainable tourism in economic development, social inclusion and social innovation.

Types of Actions

- Actions for the support of entities/ enterprises in the field of sports, recreational, natural, and cultural activities with a plethora of small projects (e.g. food festivals).*
- Support of private and public beneficiaries in order to improve the accessibility to cultural and touristic events (benefiting for example the elderly and/or people with disabilities)*

The target groups under both S.O.s are:

- bodies with legal personality.*
 - small-scale organizations,*
 - local communities,*
 - non-governmental organizations,*
 - civil organizations*
- and associations*

Implementing Provisions

One SPF will be set up for each one of the above three Priorities. They will be managed by an SPF 'beneficiary'.

The beneficiary will be a body with a legal personality. The selection of the SPF beneficiary will be decided by the Programme Joint Monitoring Committee.

Considerations for the selection of the SPF beneficiary / beneficiaries:

- *sound organizational structure*
- *capacity to provide financial flows to final recipients across borders, experience in verification and/or auditing, including adequate staffing of personnel with relevant skills*
- *experience in the management of EU funded Programmes and/or Interreg Projects*

As an illustration:

- *the Region of Central Macedonia (RCM), will invite an entity with proven organisational capacity from North Macedonia to participate in the implementation of the SPF (e.g. the Region of Southeast). They will submit their proposal to the JMC to manage the SPF.*

- *The RCM, as the SPF beneficiary signs a Subsidy Contract with the Managing Authority and is responsible for the management of the SPF operation, in line with article 25 of the CPR Regulation.*

- *The two entities (RoCM and RoS) will establish a Steering Committee composed of representatives of both organisations. The Steering Committee will establish its own Rules of Procedure and will be responsible for the award of grants to the 'final recipients'*

- *According to the Regulation, the selection of the small projects will be done by representatives of both partner countries.*

In line with Art 25(3), the SPF beneficiary is responsible for the "operation's" communication activities. To this end, the RCM shall

- *make available to the public the list of the final recipients who benefit from the operation,*
- *ensures that the final recipients meet their respective obligations ("Final recipients shall communicate publicly on the Interreg operation")*

Further implementing modalities

As the SPF is treated as a project, the SPF beneficiary shall be responsible for financial flows to the final recipients. As such, the RCM shall demonstrate its legislative and technical capacity to provide the money transfers to the final recipients in both countries. Further, the SPF beneficiaries are accountable for the implementation of the operation and bookkeeping (audit trail requirements).

Management Verifications:

The objective of management verifications is to verify that outputs were delivered.

Depending on the nature of the outputs, the usual reporting procedures may be relaxed. In addition, the Programme Authorities (e.g. Joint Secretariat, Info Points) may follow up when necessary, substituting the traditional verification activities of the First Level Controllers.

Illustration

Each S.O will be served by a single SPF.

Two end beneficiaries at least, one from each country, have to develop a partnership scheme under the small projects. Eligible beneficiaries to participate in small projects shall have a legal personality. A special focus will be given to the participation of small-scale organizations, local communities, non-

governmental organizations, civil organizations and associations.

The financial volume of each SPF is planned at EUR 1 mil. Assuming a grant size of EUR 50.000, each SPF will have 20 recipients.

Final Considerations

Early activation of the SPFs will be envisaged. Benefits:

- *Dissemination results and 'advertisement' of the Programme*
- *Contribution to the output indicators, before the maturity of the 'traditional' projects.*

The exact Terms of Reference will be specified in relation to each SPF's Call, addressing the potential final recipients. As a general rule:

Assessment criteria will be less stringent to 'favour' newcomers

Costs will be calculated with a Simplified Cost Option (SCO) methodology.

Simplification will be sought throughout the Project cycle.

The idea is to minimise the administrative requirements, as a means to reduce the arrangements for selection, reporting and control. Ultimately, the error risk will also decrease.

At the same time, provisions will be in place to encourage the participation of small-scale organisations. As such, pre-financing may still be available.

7. Implementing provisions

7.1. Programme authorities

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

Table 9

Programme authorities	Name of the institution	Contact name	Position	E-mail
Managing authority	Managing Authority of European Territorial Cooperation Programmes ; Greek Ministry of Development & Investments	Head of the Managing Authority		interreg@mou.gr
Audit authority	General Accounting Office/Financial Audit Committee ; Greek Ministry of Finance	General Director of Management and Control of EU Co-financed programmes		gdde@mof-glk.gr
National authority (for programmes with participating third or partner countries)	Ministry of Local Self-Government ; North Macedonia	Coordinator Territorial Cooperation Management Structure		info@mls.gov.mk
Group of auditors representatives	Audit Authority for Audit of Instrument for Pre-Accession Assistance	Head of Authority		emilija.jovanovic@aaipa.mk
Body to which the payments are to be made by the Commission	Special Service 'Certifying and Verifying Authority of co-financed Programmes' ; Hellenic Ministry of Development and Investments	Vassiliki Alesta (Ms)	Head of Certifying Authority	spa@m nec.gr
Body other than the managing authority entrusted with the accounting function	Decentralised FLC system established and coordinated by the National Authority ; North Macedonia	Nada Petrusheva Neskovski (Ms)	Head of Unit 1.2	petrusevan@yahoo.com
Body other than the managing authority entrusted with the accounting function	First Level Control ; Greece	Head of Unit C 'Expenditure Verifications'		interreg@mou.gr

7.2. Procedure for setting up the joint secretariat

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

The Joint Secretariat is set up after consultation with the Partner countries under the responsibility of the Managing Authority. The partner countries delegate the task to the Managing Authority (i.e. MA of European Territorial Cooperation Programmes of the Greek Ministry of Development & Investments) to carry out all necessary actions for the swift and smooth transition from the 2014-2020 implementing structures to the 2021-2027 implementing structures.

As such, the Managing Authority takes advantage of the arrangements, already in place, from the 2014-2020 programming period. The current structure of the 'Joint Technical Secretariat' will be retained with possible adjustments and enhancements to achieve efficiency and effectiveness.

The location of the Joint Secretariat is in Thessaloniki, Greece. An Antenna office will be established in the eligible area of the Programme in North Macedonia

The Joint Secretariat assists the Monitoring Committee, Managing Authority, and where appropriate, the Audit Authority in carrying out their duties. The exact framework of the JS shall be laid out in its Rules of Procedures, in agreement with the MA and the partner countries.

The Joint Secretariat is funded from the technical assistance budget.

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

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

Legal Basis:

Article 52 (2 of the Interreg Reg)

The arrangements related to irregularities and the apportionment of liabilities, in principle, will continue from the 2014-2020 programming period. In the eventuality that the Managing Authority suspects or is informed about an irregular use of granted funds, it shall undertake the necessary follow-up actions, such as suspending the reimbursement of the financing related to the Lead Partner (LP) or Project Partner (PP) as well as withdrawing or recovering the irregular amounts.

Without prejudice to the Partner Countries' (PCs') responsibility for detecting and correcting irregularities and for recovering amounts unduly paid in accordance with Article 69 (2) of the CPR, as stated in Article 52 (1) of the Interreg Regulation, the Managing Authority shall ensure that any amount paid as a result of an irregularity is recovered from the LP. The PPs shall then repay the LP any amounts unduly paid.

In line with Article 52 (2 of the Interreg Reg), the Managing Authority will not recover an amount unduly paid if it does not exceed EUR 250 IPA (not including interest) paid to an operation in a given accounting year. If the LP does not succeed in securing repayment from a PP, or if the Managing Authority does not succeed in securing repayment from the LP, the PC on whose territory the LP or PP concerned is located, shall reimburse the Managing Authority the amount unduly paid to that PP in accordance with Article 52 (3) of the Interreg Regulation.

The Managing Authority (MA) is responsible for reimbursing the amounts recovered to the general budget of the Union, in accordance with the apportionment of liabilities among the PC's as laid down below. The MA will reimburse the funds to the Union once the amounts are recovered from the LP/PP/PC.

Should the Managing Authority bear any legal expenses for recovery recourse proceedings – initiated after consultation and in mutual agreement with the respective PC - even if the proceedings are unsuccessful it will be reimbursed by the country hosting the LP or PP responsible for the said procedure.

Since PCs have the overall liability for the IPA support granted to LPs or PPs located on their territories, they shall ensure that any financial corrections required will be secured and they shall seek to recover any amounts lost as a result of an irregularity or negligence caused by a beneficiary located on their territory. Where appropriate a country may also charge interest on late payments.

In accordance with Article 52 (4) of the Interreg Regulation, once the PC has reimbursed the Managing Authority any amounts unduly paid to a partner, it may continue or start a recovery procedure against that partner under its national law.

Should the PC not reimburse the Managing Authority (MA), in accordance with Article 52 (5) the amounts shall be subject to a recovery order by the European Commission that, where possible, will be executed by offsetting with amounts due to the participating country. Such recovery shall not constitute a financial correction and shall not reduce the support from the IPA to the respective Interreg programme. The offsetting shall concern subsequent payments to the same Interreg programme. In such an eventuality, the MA will start bilateral discussions with the concerned Partner Country until a joint solution is found on how and from where to offset the amount deducted by the European Commission.

PCs will bear liability in connection with the use of the programme IPA funding as follows:

- Each PC bears liability for possible financial consequences of irregularities caused by LPs and PPs located on its territory.

- In case of a systemic irregularity or financial correction (decided by the programme authorities or the European Commission), the PC will bear the financial consequences in proportion to the relevant irregularity detected in the respective country. For a systemic irregularity or financial correction on the

programme level that cannot be linked to a specific PC, the liability shall be jointly borne by the PCs in proportion to the IPA claimed to the European Commission (for the expenditure of beneficiaries located on the PCs' territories) during the period which forms the basis for the systemic irregularity or financial correction.

The above liability principles also apply to corrections to Technical Assistance (TA) calculated in compliance with Article 27 of the Interreg regulation, since such corrections would be the direct consequence of project related irregularities (whether systemic or not) if they cannot be reused. The Managing Authority will keep the PCs informed about all irregularities and their impact on TA. At the latest at the end of the programming period, the Managing Authority will carry out a reconciliation to verify if there is a remaining balance of irregularities that have affected the TA budget and could not be reused. In case of a remaining balance, the Managing Authority will inform and ask the respective PC/s to reimburse the corresponding IPA amount. The amount shall be transferred to the TA account of the Managing Authority.

As stated in Article 69 (12) of the CPR, irregularities shall be reported by the Partner Country, which shall also inform the Managing Authority who will, in turn, inform the Audit Authority. Specific procedures in this respect will be part of the description of the programme management and control system to be established in accordance with Article 69 of the CPR.

In the event of financial corrections imposed by the Managing Authority or the Commission and in case liabilities cannot be assigned to a specific PC (e.g. systemic error), an apportionment of liabilities among the PCs will be made. The apportionment will be based on the projection of the specific error rate to the population of project beneficiaries per Partner Country potentially affected.

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 CPR	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 the priority according to Article 94 CPR	<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	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>

Appendix 1

A. Summary of the main elements

Priority	Fund	Specific objective	Estimated proportion of the total financial allocation within the priority to which the simplified cost option will be applied in %	Type(s) of operation covered		Indicator triggering reimbursement		Unit of measurement for the indicator triggering reimbursement	Type of simplified cost option (standard scale of unit costs, lump sums or flat rates)	Amount (in EUR) or percentage (in case of flat rates) of the simplified cost option
				Code(1)	Description	Code(2)	Description			

(1) This refers to the code for the intervention field dimension in Table 1 of Annex 1 CPR

(2) This refers to the code of a common indicator, if applicable

Appendix 1

B. Details by type of operation

C. Calculation of the standard scale of unit costs, lump sums or flat rates

1. Source of data used to calculate the standard scale of unit costs, lump sums or flat rates (who produced, collected and recorded the data, where the data is stored, cut-off dates, validation, etc):

--

2. Please specify why the proposed method and calculation based on Article 94(2) is relevant to the type of operation:

3. Please specify how the calculations were made, in particular including any assumptions made in terms of quality or quantities. Where relevant, statistical evidence and benchmarks should be used and, if requested, provided in a format that is usable by the Commission:

--

4. Please explain how you have ensured that only eligible expenditure was included in the calculation of the standard scale of unit cost, lump sum or flat rate:

5. Assessment of the audit authority or authorities of the calculation methodology and amounts and the arrangements to ensure the verification, quality, collection and storage of data:

--

Appendix 2

A. Summary of the main elements

Priority	Fund	Specific objective	The amount covered by the financing not linked to costs	Type(s) of operation covered		Conditions to be fulfilled/results to be achieved triggering reimbursement by the Commission	Indicator		Unit of measurement for the conditions to be fulfilled/results to be achieved triggering reimbursement by the Commission	Envisaged type of reimbursement method used to reimburse the beneficiary or beneficiaries
				Code(1)	Description		Code(2)	Description		

(1) This refers to the code for the intervention field dimension in Table 1 of Annex 1 to the CPR and Annex IV to the EMFAF Regulation.

(2) This refers to the code of a common indicator, if applicable.

B. Details by type of operation

Land Border Crossing in Laimos / Dolno Dupeni , in Lake Prepsa region.

As indicated under Priority 2, the project will benefit from preparatory activities funded under the bilateral IPA CBC 2014-2020 Programme.

The preparatory activities consist of:

- a) Maturation of border-crossing works in the Municipality of Prespes
- b) Engineering services and tender documentations on the side of North Macedonia.

Following the above, the scope of the project under the Interreg VI-A IPA 2021-2027 Programme can be defined as:

1. At minimum: Construction of a police / customs station on the Greek side of the border.

Renovation of the existing police station on the North Macedonia side of the border. Design and construction of all necessary installations.

Procurement of equipment for both sides.

2. Auxilliary actions: Interventions in the cross-border municipalities. These actions will include small local and neighborhood upgrade interventions such as regeneration activities and markings (signposts). They will be complementary to other local activities which will be implemented and financed through the support of the ESI Funds and the RFF in the two countries.

Budget: Up to € 8 mil. will be earmarked from the Interreg VI-A IPA 2021-2027 Programme, depending on the project specifications. Additional funding can be provided by the IPA III instrument.

Timetable: The core activities are expected to start after mid-2023, at the earliest, following the preparatory activities under the 2014-20 Programme.

Partnership: Customs Authorities; Ministries of Interior; Municipalities and Development Agencies of partner countries.

Communication: The project is focal to the respective Policy Priority; therefore it will be promoted throughout the Programme cycle. Definition of major publicity event(s), with the participation of the European Commission and the Managing Authority, will be made in the Programme Communication strategy, which will be updated to capture the dynamic nature of the project.

DOCUMENTS

Document title	Document type	Document date	Local reference	Commission reference	Files	Sent date	Sent by
Map of the Programme Area	Map of Programme Area	02-Aug-2022			Map		