



First Evaluation of the Cooperation Programme
“INTERREG V-A GREECE - BULGARIA 2014-2020”

2nd Deliverable:
1st Report

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List of Abbreviations

Acronym	Definition	Page
AMIF	Asylum, Migration and Integration Fund	59
BU	Budget Used	44
CBA	Cross Border Area	58
CP	Cooperation Programme	15
EAFRD	European Agricultural Fund for Rural Development	13
EC	European Community	79
ESF	European Social Fund	82
EEA	European Economic Area	82
EMFF	European Maritime and Fisheries Fund	13
ERDF	European Regional Development Fund	5
ESPON	European Spatial Planning Observation Network	63
EU	European Union	5
GDP	Gross Domestic Product	5
GES	Good Ecological Status	79
GVA	Gross Value Added	4
ICT	Information and Communication Technology	30
ID	Identity	28
IP	Investment Priority	28
JMC	Joint Monitoring Committee	8
JS	Joint Secretariat	27
KIS	Key Implementation Step	36
MA	Managing Authority	27
MIS	Monitoring Information System	31
NA	Not Applicable/Not Available	20
NCA	National Coordination Authority	6
NSI	National Statistical Institute (Bulgaria)	79
NUTS	Nomenclature des Unités Territoriales Statistiques	4
OA	Output Achieved	45
OAP	Output Achieved Programme	44
OECD	Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development	60
PA	Priority Axis	16
PPS	Purchasing Power Standards	4
RBMP	River Basin Management Plan	81
REG	Regulation	83
SEVE	Greek Exporters Association	81
SME	Small Medium Enterprise	12
TBE	Theory Based Evaluation	79
TO	Thematic Objective	28
UK	United Kingdom	61
WFD	Water Framework Directive	81

Introduction

The present report (**1st Report**) consists to the **2nd Deliverable** of the Service Contract between the Managing Authority of European Territorial Cooperation Programmes and the company EEO GROUP with regards to the “Updating of the 1st Evaluation of the implementation and the communication, and the impact assessment of the Cooperation Programme “**Interreg V-A Greece-Bulgaria 2014-2020**” of the European Territorial Cooperation for the programming period 2014-2020” (ΑΔΑΜ: 21SYMV008034533 2021-01-21).

The Council Regulation (EU) 1303/2013 (General Regulation), with an emphasis on the Chapter 2 “Evaluation” and in particular, Articles 54 “General provisions” and 56 “Evaluation during the programming period” set the framework for the implementation evaluations within the programming period 2014-2020. At the same time, the European Commission Guidelines, such as the “EU Guidance Document on Monitoring and Evaluation (ERDF and Cohesion Fund) - Concepts and recommendations” (March 2014), EU Guidelines "Guidance Document on Assessment Plans: Guidelines for Quality Management of External Evaluations", (February 2015), etc. in combination with Working Documents of the National Coordination Authority (NCA), as well as its document entitled "Guidelines and Instructions for the Activation of Evaluation Plans and the Call for Proposals for the Evaluation of the Implementation of the Operational Programmes 2014-2020", highlight the strong orientation of the evaluations of this programming period towards the assessment of the effectiveness and the efficiency of the programmes’ implementation progress, as well as of their Performance Framework and Intervention Logic.

To this extent, the implementation evaluations consist to an on-going process where the implementation progress data is analysed, elaborated and assessed, resulting to duly justified estimations and predictions for targets’ achievements (key milestones, target values of output & result indicators, target values of Performance Framework indicators, financial targets etc.) as well as to proposals for Programmes’ revision or modifications related to the performance frameworks and the intervention logics (if considered necessary).

The “Updating of the 1st Evaluation of the implementation and the communication, and the impact assessment of the Cooperation Programme “**Interreg V-A Greece-Bulgaria 2014-2020**” of the European Territorial Cooperation for the programming period 2014-2020” is fully

aligned to all this above as drafted both to the approved Evaluation Plan of the Programme and the terms of reference included in the relevant service contract.

Consequently, as it is stated in the contracting document, the 1st deliverable should include the 1st plan for updating the evaluation of the implementation performance of the Programme (excluding the communication strategy) and the 1st plan for the assessment of the impact evaluation of the Programme that would include at least the structure of the impact evaluation and a preliminary analysis per Specific Objective.

Based on the above the deliverable has the following structure:

PART I (corresponding to B.1. Updating of the 1st Evaluation)

Part I is aiming to the assessment of the effectiveness and the efficiency of the Programme’s implementation progress up to 31/12/2020. This report elaborates, analyses, evaluates and finally includes the following aspects related to the Programme’s implementation. The 1st deliverable addresses fully aspects A to C as follows:

- A. The implementation progress per **Priority Axis** and **Investment Priority** in terms of **effectiveness**, as well as per output indicator up to 31/12/2020, identification of any significant delays and contributing factors and finally estimations on the achievement of the targets set for the output indicators in 2023.
- B. The progress achievement of the **Performance Framework** indicators per Priority Axis with regards to the milestones set for 2018, the identification of any significant delays and contributing factors and finally estimations on the targets’ achievement for 2023
- C. The **implementation progress** in terms of **efficiency** per Priority Axis and Investment Priority, as well as per output indicator up to 31/12/2020, the sufficiency of the available budget for the implementation of the Programme interventions, the identification of any significant delays and contributing factors and finally estimations on the targets’ achievement for 2023.

Aspects D and E are linked with B2 and need the updating of the result indicators. Therefore, they are treated as follows.

- D. The deliverable addresses the **relevance of the intervention logic** and the **specific objectives** of the Cooperation Programme (including the examination of the objectives of the Europe 2020 Strategy and other policies), as well as the contribution of the

output and result indicators to the intervention logic. Nevertheless, it **does not address** the progress of the result and output indicators up to 31/12/2020 and estimations on the achievement of the targets set for the result indicators in 2023 which is going to be addressed in **Deliverable 3**.

- E. The deliverable also does not address aspect E concerning the **need for the revision** of the Programme and in particular for modifications related to the intervention logic and the performance framework. Since to tackle this issue a greater understanding of the evolution of the result indicators, as well as the possible impact of the Programme, is needed, aspect E will be addressed in **Deliverable 3**.

PART II (corresponding to B.2. Impact Evaluation)

- A. This section is presenting the framework and the methodological aspects of impact evaluation setting the basis for the particular methodology to be utilized for the questions of section B. Moreover, this section also presents the structure of the Impact Assessment Report.
- B. The current section is briefly discussing the way that the two main questions of the evaluation will be addressed.

The methodological approach of the present implementation evaluation is to a great extent defined by the Terms of Reference (evaluation questions, time frame, deliverables) and described in detail within the Deliverable 1 “Methodology”, employing a mix of techniques in order to contextualize the quantitative data available by the Programme’s Monitoring System with the quantitative and qualitative data collected by the various Programme generated documents (programming document, annual implementation reports, calls, JMC minutes etc.).

1. Cooperation Programme Overview

1.1. The Border Cooperation Programmes

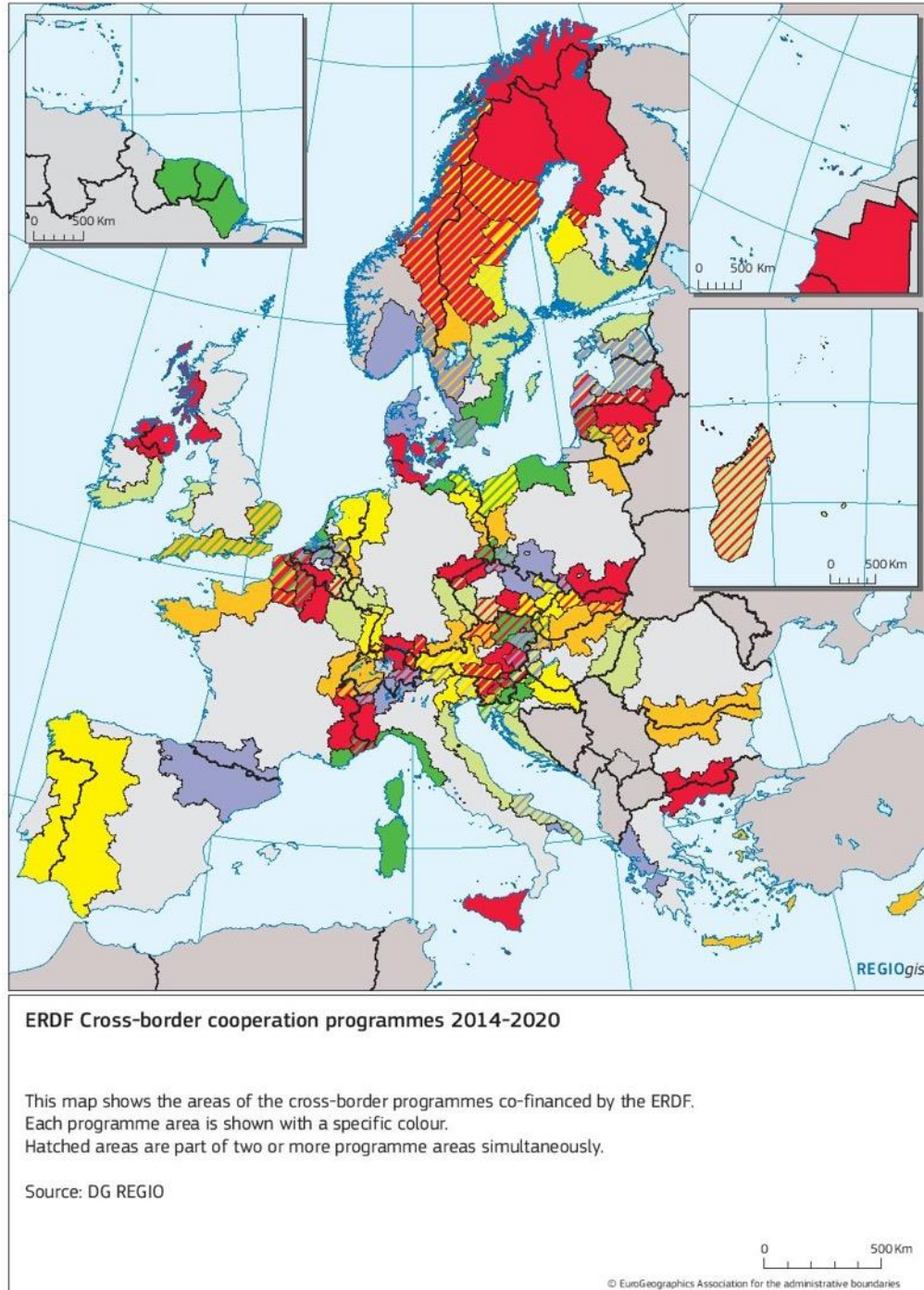
For the last 30 years, the **European Union** has been investing in **European Cross-Border cooperation**, through a specific instrument known as Interreg A that supports cooperation between NUTS III regions from at least two different Member States lying directly on the borders or adjacent to them. It aims to tackle common **challenges** identified jointly in the border regions and to exploit the **untapped growth potential** in border areas, while **enhancing the cooperation** process for the purposes of the overall harmonious development of the Union.

Investing in EU internal border regions is of high importance taking into consideration that these regions cover the **40% of the EU territory** and include a population **150 million people** (30% of the EU population), while in terms of economy and employment, they produce 30% of the EU's GDP and host almost 2 million cross-border commuters, 1.3 million of which are cross border workers representing 0.6% of all persons employed across the EU (e.g. 450,000 in France, 270,000 in Germany, 140,000 in Poland and 135,000 in Slovakia)¹.

For the programming period **2014-2020**, 60 cross-border programmes all over European Union will manage a total amount of 6.6 billion € in favour of 40 EU internal border regions aiming to ensure maximum impact and even more effective use of the investments.

¹ EC COM(2017) 534 final "Boosting Growth and Cohesion in EU Border Regions", Sept 2017, available online at http://ec.europa.eu/regional_policy/sources/docoffic/2014/boosting_growth/com_boosting_borders.pdf

Figure 1: Areas of the cross-border programmes co-financed by the ERDF



1.2. The Cooperation Programme "INTERREG V-A GREECE-BULGARIA 2014-2020"

The Cooperation Programme "INTERREG V-A Greece-Bulgaria 2014-2020" was initially approved by the European Commission on 09.09.2015 by the Decision C(2015) 628 with a total budget of **€129,695,572.00** (85% ERDF funding equal to **€ 110,241,234.00** and **15% national contribution** of the participating countries equal to **€19,434,338.00**), while its first modification was approved on 13.12.2016 by the Decision C(2016)8708 resulting to a total revised budget of €130,262,835.00 (85% ERDF funding equal to **€110,723,408.00** and 15% national contribution of the participating countries equal to **€19.539,427.00**).

The Programme area extends to 40.202 km² and has a total population of 2.7 million inhabitants, covering 4 territorial units at NUTS II level (Regions) and 11 territorial units at NUTS III level (Districts):

Table 1. Regions (Nuts II) and Districts (Nuts III) participating in the Cooperation Programme "Interreg V-A Greece-Bulgaria 2014-2020"

NUTS II	Regions	NUTS III	Districts
BG41	Yugozapaden	BG413	Blagoevgrad
BG42	Yuzhen tsentralen	BG422	Haskovo
		BG424	Smolyan
		BG425	Kardzhali
EL51	Anatoliki Makedonia, Thraki	EL111	Evros
		EL112	Xanthi
		EL113	Rodopi
		EL114	Drama
		EL115	Kavala
EL52	Kentriki Makedonia	EL122	Thessaloniki
		EL126	Serres

Source: Cooperation Programme "INTERREG V-A Greece-Bulgaria 2014-2020" approved by the European Commission on 09.09.2015 by the Decision C(2015) 628 (CCI 2014TC16RFCB022), available at http://www.greece-bulgaria.eu/gallery/Files/2nd%20call-1st%20Phase/1st%20info/OP_2014TC16RFCB022_en.pdf

The Programme area extends across the entire Greek-Bulgarian border and is neighbouring with Turkey (east) and the Republic of North Macedonia (west), both countries aspiring to access to the EU. It is part of the most south-eastern non-insular area of EU. Finally, it sits at the crossroad of strategic fossil fuel pipelines supplying the EU market and TEN transport axes.

Figure 2 : Eligible area map of the Cooperation Programme "Interreg V-A Greece-Bulgaria 2014-2020"



Source: http://www.greece-bulgaria.eu/com/4_A-few-words-about-our-Programme

The settlement structure of the area is characterized by the presence of **10 medium-large cities** (>50.000 inhabitants) which accumulate **38.2% of total population**, and 25 small cities (10.000-50.000 inhabitants). Despite the historically relatively small amounts of funds allocated, there is a long history of cooperation in the eligible area, which started with Community initiative INTERREG I (1989-1993).

For the current programming period, the Cooperation Programme "INTERREG V-A Greece-Bulgaria 2014-2020" aims to increase entrepreneurial activity in the eligible area and to improve SME capacity to expand beyond local markets. Furthermore, the Programme is expected to **improve cross-border cooperation in flood risk management** and will develop and **promote the border area's cultural and natural heritage** for tourist purposes.

Additionally, the foreseen actions will lead to better joint surface and groundwater management systems and will **improve cross-border accessibility** leading to reduced travel times for people and goods as well as improved traffic safety. Finally, the Programme aims to expand **social entrepreneurship** in the border area leading to **increased employment** in social enterprises and increased delivery of social services to communities with poor socio-economic indicators.

To this extent, the Programme lies on 4 Priority Axis (excluding the 5th Priority Axis referring to the Technical Assistance).

Table 2. Analysis of Priority Axis, Thematic Objectives, Investment Priorities and Specific Objectives of the Cooperation Programme "Interreg V-A Greece-Bulgaria 2014-2020"

Priority Axis	Thematic Objective	Investment Priority	Specific Objective
1. A competitive and Entrepreneurship promoting Cross-Border area	03 - Enhancing the competitiveness of small and medium-sized enterprises, the agricultural sector (for the EAFRD) and the fisheries and aquaculture sector (for the EMFF)	3a - Promoting entrepreneurship, in particular by facilitating the economic exploitation of new ideas and fostering the creation of new firms, including through business incubators	(1) To Improve entrepreneurship SME support systems
		3d - Supporting the capacity of SMEs to grow in regional, national and international markets, and to engage in innovation processes	(2) To improve SME capacity to expand beyond local markets
2. A Sustainable and climate adaptable Cross-Border area	05 - Promoting climate change adaptation, risk prevention and management	5b - Promoting investment to address specific risks, ensuring disaster resilience and developing disaster management systems	(3) To improve CB cooperation on flood risk management plans at river basin level
		06 - Preserving and protecting the environment and promoting resource efficiency	(4) To valorise CB area cultural and natural heritage for tourist purposes
		6c - Conserving, protecting, promoting and developing natural and cultural heritage	
		6d - Protecting and restoring biodiversity and soil and promoting ecosystem services, including through Natura 2000, and green infrastructure	(5) To enhance the effectiveness of biodiversity protection activities

Priority Axis	Thematic Objective	Investment Priority	Specific Objective
		6f - Promoting innovative technologies to improve environmental protection and resource efficiency in the waste sector, water sector and with regard to soil, or to reduce air pollution	(6) To enhance water management
3. A better interconnected Border area	07 - Promoting sustainable and removing bottlenecks in key network infrastructures	7b - Enhancing regional mobility by connecting secondary and tertiary nodes to TEN-T infrastructure, including multimodal nodes	(7) Improve cross-border accessibility
4. A socially inclusive Cross-Border area	09 - Promoting social inclusion, combating poverty and any discrimination	9a - Investing in health and social infrastructure which contributes to national, regional and local development, reducing inequalities in terms of health status, promoting social inclusion through improved access to social, cultural and recreational services and the transition from institutional to community-based services	(8) To improve access to primary and emergency health care (at isolated and deprived communities) in the CB area
		9c - Providing support for social enterprises	(9) To expand social entrepreneurship in the CB area

Source: Cooperation Programme “INTERREG V-A Greece-Bulgaria 2014-2020” approved by the European Commission on 09.09.2015 by the Decision C(2015) 628 (CCI 2014TC16RFCB022), available at http://www.greece-bulgaria.eu/gallery/Files/2nd%20call-1st%20Phase/1st%20info/OP_2014TC16RFCB022_en.pdf

PART I

1. Evaluation Module A. Effectiveness of the Cooperation Programme

This chapter focuses on the evaluation of the implementation progress of the Cooperation Programme “Interreg V-A Greece-Bulgaria 2014-2020”. The **central question** to be tackled in this chapter is to **which extent the planned benefits from the Programme intervention have been achieved for the reference period.**

The effectiveness evaluation of the Cooperation Programme “Interreg V-A Greece-Bulgaria 2014-2020” has been approached based on the **following axis:**

- The **quantitative evaluation of the Programme implementation progress**, in terms of effectiveness per Priority Axis and Investment Priority with reference point the 31/12/2020, including whether it is considered satisfactory or not.
- The **quantitative evaluation of the achievement level of output indicators’ targets** as well as the qualitative analysis of possible significant delays in the implementation of the Programme, and the corresponding contributing targets.
- **Conclusions and proposals** based on the above-mentioned analysis.

1.1. Assessment of the implementation progress of the Cooperation Programme in terms of effectiveness per Priority Axis and Investment Priority

The current section includes the:

- Analysis of the implementation progress level
- Evaluation of the implementation progress of the CP in terms of effectiveness per Priority Axis and Investment Priority of the Programme (reference period up to 31/12/2020)

In particular, the analysis takes into account the financial, call and project data for each **priority axis and investment priority** in order to quantitatively assess the implementation

progress of the Programme. The current data is summarized in the Tables 3 and 4 for the priority axis level and the investment priority level respectively.

1.1.1. Implementation progress

Overall Progress

The implementation progress of the Programme based on the financial data for the reference period 31/12/2020 is detailed in the Tables 3 and 4 below.

- Out of an overall budget of 130,262,835 € of the Programme a total of 107,435,295 € has been included in 6 calls and an additional 6,764,706 € corresponds to the technical Assistance. The amount that total to 114,200,001 € i.e., 88% of the total Programme budget is overall considered to be satisfactory (high) for the reference period.
- The contracted total is even higher totalling the amount of 127,306,315 € (i.e., 98% of the overall budget). This was due to a contracted budget higher than the initially budgeted amounts for Priority Axis 2 and 3, at 99% for PA 4 and 100% for PA5. In particular, in PA2 the total contracted amount equals 129% of the initially allocated budget. PA1 remains problematic since despite the 2 calls since the last evaluation, the overall contracted amount remains zero².
- On the contrary to the progress made on calls and contracts, the payment level for the reference period has been 46,808,076 € that corresponds to 36% of the total amount budgeted for the Programme.

In general, we could say that the overall implementation progress is considered to be satisfactory as far as the calls and contractual procedures are concerned. The amounts of certified payments lag behind, nevertheless due to the characteristics of the process and the programme the lag is not considered problematic

Progress per Priority Axis

Similarly, to the different implementation stages of the Programme, there is a difference concerning the implementation progress between the different priority axes of the Programme. More specifically, calls and projects for **the priority axes 2, 3, 4, 5 have advanced**,

² Especially for the projects of the 5th Call for Proposals, 35 Subsidy Contracts have been signed at the end of 2020.

though this is not the case for Priority Axis 1: “A Competitive and Entrepreneurship Promoting Cross-Border Area” even though 2 calls were put forward since the last evaluation³.

- Priority Axis 1 poses an issue in the implementation progress since no projects are contracted yet.
- Priority Axis 2 was included in 3 calls that amounted 85.12% of the allocated budget, while an overall 129% of the allocated budget has been contracted. As far as certification of expenditures is concerned PA 2 is 27% of the contracted budget corresponding to 14,708,094 euros.
- Priority Axis 3 was included in 1 call that amounted 98.54% of the allocated budget. Since the last evaluation, there is a change in the contracted budget from 100.00% to 114% which corresponds to VAT of Egnatia which is not eligible, though it is financed by the PIP (Public Investment Programme - Greece). The certified expenses are equal to 18,223,707 i.e., 42% of the contracted budget.
- Priority Axis 4 was included in 1 call that amounted 72.76% of the allocated budget. Since the last evaluation, the budget contracted from 90.97% of the allocated budget, has increased to 99% with additional budget provided to the projects. PA4 has the highest percentage of certified expenses with 58% of the contracted amount, equal to 12,340,917 euros.
- Lastly, for Priority Axis 5 100% of the allocated budget, has been contracted and certified expenses are equal to 1,535,358 i.e., 23%.

Table 4 describes in detail the implementation progress per thematic objective and priority axis.

- Thematic Objective 03 includes 2 calls in Investment Priorities 3a and 3b that were included in calls 6 and 5 respectively. The calls included a total of 17,000,000€, though no projects have been contracted during the reference period. TO3 has no contracted and therefore no certified amounts.
- Thematic Objective 05 includes 2 calls (3rd and 4th). 2 projects have been contracted amounting in 16,782,518 €, or 152% of the budget included in the calls. TO5 has certified 20% of the contracted amount that corresponds to 3,308,459 euros, the lowest per thematic objective.
- Thematic Objective 06 includes a total of 39 projects in Investment priorities 6c (21), 6d (12), and 6f (6) amounting to a total of 38,680,317 € surpassing the amount budgeted in the 2nd call and corresponding to a total of 198% of it. Certified expenses are equal to 11,399,634 euros corresponding to 29%. Investment priorities breakdown differs from 22% to 46% with 6c lagging behind the other two.

³ u.s.

- Thematic Objective 07 includes 1 strategic project of 38.802.558,Ç” (43,721,429 ,Ç” in total corresponding to 38.802.558,Ç” plus the VAT cost of the Lead Beneficiary which is not eligible). Under Investment Priority 7b the budget corresponds to 100% of the respective call (1st Call). Certified expenses correspond to 47% of the budget and are equal to 18,223,707 euros.
- Thematic Objective 09 is the second objective with a large number of projects – a total of 24 (13 in Investment Priority 9a and 11 in 9c). The contracted projects exceeded the initial budget allocated in the call (15,700,000€ based on the 2nd Call Document p.7) amounting to a total of 21,357,345 % € or the 136% of the call’s initial budget. TO9 has the highest certified percentage of expenses with an overall 58% (12,340,917 euros). Both investment priorities have high expenses certification rates with 9c reaching 65% of the contracted budget.

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Table 3: A. Implementation progress per Priority Axis

Titles	Total	Decided ¹	Contracted	Verified	Decided ¹	Contracted	Verified
					% of total	% of total	% of total
1 A Competitive and Entrepreneurship Promoting Cross-Border Area	20,235,295	17,000,000	-	-	84%	0%	0%
2 A Sustainable and climate adaptable Cross-Border area	42,882,353	36,500,000	55,462,835	14,708,094	85%	129%	34%
3 A Better interconnected Cross-Border Area	38,802,558	38,235,295 ²	38,235,295	18,223,707	99%	99%	47%
4 A socially inclusive Cross-Border area	21,577,923	15,700,000	21,357,345	12,340,917	73%	99%	57%
5 Technical Assistance	6,764,706	6,764,706	6,764,706	1,535,358	100%	100%	23%
Total	130,262,835	114,200,001	121,820,181	46,808,076	88%	94%	36%

¹ correspond to amounts included in a call.

² 43,721,429 including the non-eligible VAT

B. Implementation progress per Priority Axis

Priority axis		Budget		Calls			Projects contacted			Payments Certified			
No	Titles	Total	% of total	No	Budget	% of the PA budget	No	Euros	% of the call	% of the overall budget	Euros	% of the call	% of contracted
1	A Competitive and Entrepreneurship Promoting Cross-Border Area	20.235.295	15.53	2	17.000.000	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
2	A Sustainable and climate adaptable Cross-Border area	42.882.353	32.92	3	36.500.000	85%	41	55.462.835	152%	129%	14.708.094	40%	27%

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No	Priority axis Titles	Budget		Calls			Projects contacted			Payments Certified			
		Total	% of total	No	Budget	% of the PA budget	No	Euros	% of the call	% of the overall budget	Euros	% of the call	% of contracted
3	A Better interconnected Cross-Border Area	38.802.558	29.79	1	38.235.295	99%	1	38.235.295 ¹	100%	99%	18.223.707	48%	42%
4	A socially inclusive Cross-Border area	21.577.923	16.56	1	15.700.000	73%	24	21.357.345	136%	99%	12.340.917	79%	58%
5	Technical Assistance	6.764.706	5.19	-	6.764.706	100%	2	6.764.706	100%	100%	1.535.358	23%	23%
	Total	130.262.835	100	7	91.700.001	70%	53	121.820.181	133%	94%	46.808.076	51%	37%

¹ 43,721,429 including the non-eligible VAT

Table 4: Implementation progress per Investment Priority

Priority Axis	Thematic Objective	Investment Priority	Budget Decided	Budget Contracted	Expenditures Certified	Projects	Contracted %	Certified %
1	03 - Enhancing the competitiveness of small and medium-sized enterprises, the agricultural sector (for the EAFRD) and the fisheries and aquaculture sector (for the EMFF)	3a - Promoting entrepreneurship, in particular by facilitating the economic exploitation of new ideas and fostering the creation of new firms, including through business incubators		0	0			NA
		3d - Supporting the capacity of SMEs to grow in regional, national and international markets, and to engage in innovation processes		0	0			NA
		Total 3		17.000.000				

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Priority Axis	Thematic Objective	Investment Priority	Budget Decided	Budget Contracted	Expenditures Certified	Projects	Contracted %	Certified %	
2	05 – Promoting climate change adaptation, risk prevention and management	5b – Promoting investment to address specific risks, ensuring disaster resilience and developing disaster management systems		16,782,518	3,308,459	2	NA	20%	
	Total 5		17,000,000	16,782,518	3,308,459	2	99%	20%	
	06 - Preserving and protecting the environment and promoting resource efficiency	6c - Conserving, protecting, promoting and developing natural and cultural heritage			23,158,452	5,102,120	21	NA	22%
		6d - Protecting and restoring biodiversity and soil and promoting ecosystem services, including through Natura 2000, and green infrastructure			11,023,352	4,230,790	12	NA	38%
		6f – Promoting innovative technologies to improve environmental protection and resource efficiency in the waste sector, water sector and with regard to soil, or to reduce air pollution			4,498,513	2,066,724	6	NA	46%
Total 6		19,500,000	38,680,317	11,399,634	39	198%	29%		
3	07 – Promoting sustainable transport and removing bottlenecks in key network infrastructures	7b - Enhancing regional mobility by connecting secondary and tertiary nodes to TEN-T infrastructure, including multimodal nodes		38,235,295 ¹	18,223,707	1	NA	48%	
	Total 7		38,235,295	38,235,295	18,223,707	1	100%	48%	

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Priority Axis	Thematic Objective	Investment Priority	Budget Decided	Budget Contracted	Expenditures Certified	Projects	Contracted %	Certified %
4	09 - Promoting social inclusion, combating poverty and any discrimination	9a - Investing in health and social infrastructure which contributes to national, regional and local development, reducing inequalities in terms of health status, promoting social inclusion through improved access to social, cultural and recreational services and the transition from institutional to community-based services		15,310,527	8,408,973	13	NA	55%
		9c - Providing support for social enterprises		6,046,818	3,931,945	11	NA	65%
		Total 9	15,700,000	21,357,345	12,340,917	24	136%	58%
5	NA	NA	6,764,706	6,764,706	1,535,358	2	100%	23%
Grant total			114,200,001	121,820,181	46,808,076	68	107%	38%

1 43,721,429 including the non-eligible VAT

1.1.2. Calls

Overall, there have been **6 Calls** within the framework of the Cooperation Programme “Interreg V-A Greece-Bulgaria 2014-2020”. The calls are summarized in the Table 5.

Three (3) out of the 4 calls were restricted amounting to a total of **55,235,295.00 €** corresponding to the **61.1% of the total budget included in the calls**. The other 3 calls (2nd, 5th, 6th) amounted in **52,200,000.00 €** corresponding to the **40%** of the total budget.

As is clear from the above, by the end of the reference period the overall contracted budget was up to 98% of the overall programme budget, even though there were no contracted projects in PA1. In particular, even though the calls were issued for an overall budget of 17,000,000 euros, the available non-contracted budget of the Programme is only 8,442,654 euros. It is assumed that the Joint Secretariat based on the previous experience on implementation is expecting important gaps between the contracted and certified expenses that are enough to cover this budget gap.

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Table 5: Table of Calls per Priority Axis, Thematic Objective, Investment Priority, and budget

Call No	Date	Type	Priority Axis	Thematic Objective	Investment Priority	Budget
1 st	17/11/2015	Restricted	Priority Axis 3: A Better interconnected Cross-Border Area3	07: Promoting sustainable transport and removing bottlenecks in key network infrastructures	7b-Enhancing regional mobility by connecting secondary and tertiary nodes to TEN-T infrastructure, including multimodal nodes	38.235.295
2 nd	11/12/2015	Open	Priority Axis 2: A Sustainable and Climate adaptable Cross-Border area	06 - Preserving And Protecting The Environment And Promoting Resource Efficiency	(6C)Conserving, protecting, promoting and developing natural and cultural heritage.	19.500.000
					(6d)Protecting and restoring biodiversity, soil protection and restoration and promoting ecosystem services including NATURA 2000 and green infrastructures	
			Priority Axis 4: A Socially Inclusive Cross Border Area	09 - Promoting social inclusion, combating poverty and any discrimination	6f) Promoting innovative technologies to improve environmental protection and resource efficiency in the waste sector, water sector, soil protection or to reduce air pollution.	15.700.000
					(9a) Investing in health and social infrastructure which contribute to national, regional and local development, reducing inequalities in terms of health status, promoting social inclusion through improved access to social, cultural and recreational services and the transition from institutional to community-based services.	
3 rd	22/12/2016	Restricted	Priority Axis 2: A Sustainable and Climate adaptable Cross-Border area	05 – Promoting climate change adaptation, risk prevention and management	5b – Promoting investment to address specific risks, ensuring disaster resilience and developing disaster management systems	11.500.000

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Call No	Date	Type	Priority Axis	Thematic Objective	Investment Priority	Budget
4 th	28/09/2017	Restricted	Priority Axis 2: A Sustainable and Climate adaptable Cross-Border area	05 – Promoting climate change adaptation, risk prevention and management	5b – Promoting investment to address specific risks, ensuring disaster resilience and developing disaster management systems	5.500.000
5 th	21/12/2018	Open	Priority Axis 1: A Competitive and Innovative Cross-Border Area	03 - Enhancing the competitiveness of small and medium-sized enterprises, the agricultural sector (for the EAFRD) and the fisheries and aquaculture sector (for the EMFF)	3d - Supporting the capacity of SMEs to grow in regional, national and international markets, and to engage in innovation processes	10.000.000
6 th	10/06/2019	Open	Priority Axis 1: A Competitive and Innovative Cross-Border Area	03 - Enhancing the competitiveness of small and medium-sized enterprises, the agricultural sector (for the EAFRD) and the fisheries and aquaculture sector (for the EMFF)	3a: Promoting entrepreneurship, in particular by facilitating the economic exploitation of new ideas and fostering the creation of new firms, including through business incubators	7.000.000

1.2. Analysis of the implementation progress of the output indicators

The next section focuses on the **operational output indicators** as they were included and/or developed in the Operational Working Document of the INTERREG V-A Greece-Bulgaria 2014-2020”. The overall indicator framework includes in total **17 output indicators** that are detailed in the following table, concerning **the priority axis, thematic objective, investment priority** as well as the target of the output indicator and the achieved values for 2020 where available. In addition to the above, the table presents the expected overall achievement based on the contracted projects in each of the investment priorities and the corresponding reasoning based on the available argumentation.

1.2.1. Implementation progress of the output indicators up to 31.12.2020

The implementation progress with regards to the output indicators can be summarized as follows:

- In the **majority of the investment priorities**, the target is expected to be achieved with the completion of the contracted projects.
- It should be noted that the current achievement of the output indicators is far lesser than the target. Nevertheless, taking into consideration that the results and subsequently the achievement of most indicators of most of the projects are expected with their completion, this is anticipated.
- An important issue is the Priority Axis 1, for which only at the end of 2020, 35 Subsidy Contracts have been signed - related to the 5th Call for Proposals. The results of the 6th Call have been also announced and the process for contracting is well underway. The COVID-19 pandemic measures posed additional hurdles on the process and will most probably affect implementation. Therefore, special care should be given for the timely completion of the contracting process.
- Other **output indicators** that should be taken into consideration are the following. The following indicators are of concern
 - O0203 The original estimation of the projects corresponds to 15% of the original target. Nevertheless, with the new methodological note (December 2020) the projects’ contribution amount to 7,305 hm³ i.e. 97.4% of the target.
 - CO13a (63% of the target): The project contributing to the project is expected to develop only 5 out of the 8km of the target. The programme’s indicators are expected to be achieved with the contribution of the contracted project and by

mobilizing additional European and national funding sources. Nevertheless, it should be noted that the current indicator was identified to be revised in the ongoing project modification.

For all of the above, the JS and the MA took the necessary steps to ensure that the targets will be achieved.

Table 6: Output Indicators per Priority Axis, Thematic Objective, and Investment Priority

PA	TO	IP	ID	Indicator	Measurement unit	Target value (2023)	Value (2020)	Projects cumulative target (2013)	Level Achieved (2020)	Level Expected (2023)	Comments
1	3	3a	CO01	Productive investment: Number of enterprises receiving support	Enterprises	275	0	Unknown	0%	Unknown	A call has been issued and results are published, though no projects were contracted within the reference period.
1	3	3a	CO05	Productive investment: Number of new enterprises supported	Enterprises	275	0	Unknown	0%	Unknown	A call has been issued and results are published, though no projects were contracted within the reference period.
1	3	3d	CO01	Productive investment: Number of enterprises receiving support	Enterprises	330	0	Unknown	0%	Unknown	A call has been issued and results are published ¹ .
1	3	3d	CO04	Productive investment: Number of enterprises receiving non-financial support	Enterprises	330	0	Unknown	0%	Unknown	A call has been issued and results are published ¹ .
1	3	3d	O0201	Number of clusters and other collaborative schemes composed of stakeholders/enterprises from both sides of border	Collaborative Schemes	4	0	Unknown	0%	Unknown	A call has been issued and results are published ¹ .
2	5	5b	CO20	Risk prevention and management: Population benefiting from flood protection measures	Persons	747,000	206,140	747,000	28%	100%	The contracted projects have a target value of 747,000 persons in the CO20 output indicator. This value covers the indicator in the programming document by 100%. It is expected that the Output target will be achieved.
2	6	6c	CO09	Sustainable Tourism: Increase in expected number of visits to supported sites of cultural and natural heritage and attractions	Visits/year	140,000.	803	152,085	1%	100%	The contracted projects have targets that contribute to 109% of the overall final target in the programming document. The target value is expected to be fully achieved.

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PA	TO	IP	ID	Indicator	Measurement unit	Target value (2023)	Value (2020)	Projects cumulative target (2013)	Level Achieved (2020)	Level Expected (2023)	Comments
2	6	6c	O0202	Number of cultural and/or natural assets rehabilitated/protected	Number	10	3	20	30%	100%	The contracted projects have targets that contribute to 100% of the overall final target value in the programming document.
2	6	6d	CO23	Nature and biodiversity: Surface area of habitats supported to attain a better conservation status	Hectares	356,000	64,713	391,362	18%	110%	The contracted projects have targets totalling 315,667.72 ha equal to the 89% of the overall final target in the programming document. The target value is expected to be fully covered with the implementation of the reserve list projects (decision of the 3rd Monitoring Committee) that are planned to be activated in 2018.
2	6	6f	O0203	Surface water resources under joint monitoring	hm ³	7,500	-	1,089 (7,305)	0%	15% (97.4%)	The original estimation of the projects corresponds to 15% of the original target. Nevertheless, with the new methodological note (December, 2020) the projects' contribution amount to 7,305 hm ³ i.e. 97.4% of the target.
3	7	7b	CO13a	Roads: Total length of newly built roads, of which: TEN-T	km	8	-	5	0%	63%	The contracted project has a target of 5 km.
4	9	9a	CO36	Health: Population covered by improved health services	Persons	632,000	267,623	607,644	42%	96%	The contracted projects have targets totalling to 607,644 i.e. that contribute to 96% of the final target. Nevertheless, with an overachievement of the projects 100% is expected.
4	9	9a	O0204	Number of health care institutions reorganized, modernized or reequipped	Number	12	3	12	24%	100%	The contracted projects have targets totalling to 12.00 i.e. that contribute to 100% of the final target.

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PA	TO	IP	ID	Indicator	Measurement unit	Target value (2023)	Value (2020)	Projects cumulative target (2013)	Level Achieved (2020)	Level Expected (2023)	Comments
4	9	9a	O0205	Number of health I systems developed	Number	3	1	3	33%	100%	The contracted projects have targets totalling to 3.00 i.e. that contribute to 100% of the final target.
4	9	9c	O0206	Number of participants in social entrepreneurship projects promoting gender equality, equal opportunities and social inclusion across borders.	Number	50	25	50	50%	100%	The contracted projects have targets totalling to 50.00 i.e. that contribute to 100% of the final target.
5	NA	NA	O0207	Number of employees (FTEs) whose salaries are co-financed by technical assistance	Employees	12	12	12	100%	100%	The programme has already achieved the 2023 level.
5	NA	NA	O0208	Number of publicity and outreach events organized	Events	15	15	15	100%	100%	The programme has already achieved the 2023 level.

1 Though no projects were incorporated in the under the 5th Call for Proposals, 35 Subsidy Contracts have been signed at the end of 2020 for PA1.

1.2.2. Significant delays and contributing factors

According to the implementation report the JS has faced a number of challenges concerning the implementation of the programme. More in particular, the most crucial factors were the following:

Operation of the Monitoring and Information System (MIS)

During the current implementation period the new MIS came into operation, starting in early 2018 and throughout 2019 and 2020. While, currently the Programming Bodies staff, as well as the beneficiaries are familiar with the systems there are still some challenges. A small number of beneficiaries is still struggling with the new processes leading to mistakes and therefore, additional administrative burden and delays. Such issues are burdensome for the Secretariat that devote a great part of their workday to support beneficiaries, but also to identify functionality issues to those responsible for the development and operation of the MIS. Progressively, the new MIS is adapting to the needs of the Programme.

National Legislation Requirements

The national legislation requirements lead to lengthy tender and procurement procedures. Appeals may be submitted on two levels causing substantial delays. Unfortunately, appeals are observed in tendering and procurement of all types, whether it is about construction works, external services or specific equipment. The delays may result to redrafting of projects' procurement plans and often projects need to be extended. Pre-tender checks by the Managing Authority has improved the procedure for Greek beneficiaries, minimizing appeals and financial corrections; however only a small random sample is checked per year, thus the issue cannot be addressed completely in this way. The need for quicker procedures, without neglecting the principles of transparency and equal treatment, needs to be tackled governmentally on central level.

Project Beneficiaries

Despite the original screening of the project consortia during the evaluation of the project proposals, unavoidably there are cases of beneficiaries that lack the capacity for implementation. Additionally, public beneficiaries in both countries face a number of important challenges. Changes in the administration may lead to changes on the project management team, may lead to substantial modification requests or even beneficiaries' withdrawals. In specific cases with severe lack of commitment from the beneficiaries the Joint Secretariat and the Managing Authority consider of imposing budgetary measures, given that in some few cases the rather flexible stance has not produced any positive results on the project implementation.

Political Developments

Both countries had local authorities' election in 2019 (Greece: May 26 – June 02, Bulgaria October 27 – November 3). The elections have led to certain delays for municipalities and regional authorities, since there are legal bindings and administrative requirements in the pre- and post-election period.

COVID-19 Pandemic

The COVID-19 pandemic crisis has marked 2020 all over the world and in Greece and Bulgaria. Both countries have been heavily affected by the pandemic. Greece reported its 1st case on the 26 of February 2020, while Bulgaria on the 8th of March 2020. Both countries experienced the 1st death on the 12th of March 2020.

The situation during the time that this deliverable was compiled, was still crucial with Greece having a cumulative of 575 deaths/million inhabitants, much higher than the global average, though better than most EU counterparts, while Bulgaria 1355 deaths/million inhabitants, one of the highest in the world (Our world in data). At the same time, both countries were facing problems with their vaccination programmes. Greece's vaccination programme was similar to those of most EU countries, though Bulgaria was lagging significantly behind.

Both countries have taken measures to address this crisis. Greece had two lockdown periods (March - May 2020 and from November 2020) with a total of 140 days of lockdown (141 for Thessaloniki). Similarly, Bulgaria had also two lockdown periods (March to June 2020, November 2020 to January 2021) for a total of 159 days of lockdown. While the severity of the measures and the adherence to them by the population varied significantly, measures such as working from home, rotation of personnel, closure of businesses, limitations of gatherings etc were in effect almost all months since March to the end of 2020.

These measures greatly affected the implementation of the projects as well as the selection and contracting procedures for the 5th and 6th call. While progressively, both the Managing Authority and the Beneficiaries adapted to the situation, the pandemic has led to significant delays.

1.2.3. Estimations on the achievement of the targets set for the output indicators in 2023

As stated above, based on the contracted projects and their internal output targets and timeline, most of the Output Indicators are expected be achieved, or reach an achievement ratio greater than 100%. Exception to the above are the following:

- **Priority Axis 1:** No projects have been contracted so far. While the results of both calls have been announced (in June 2020 and in December 2020 respectively), the process for contracting is well underway. The COVID-19 pandemic measure posed additional hurdles on the process and will most probably affect implementation.
- Other **output indicators** that should be taken into consideration are the following. The following indicators are of concern
 - O0203 The original estimation of the projects corresponds to 15% of the original target. Nevertheless, with the new methodological note (December 2020) the projects' contribution amount to 7,500 hm³ i.e. 100% of the target.
 - CO13a (63% of the target): The project contributing to the project is expected to develop only 5 out of the 8km of the target. The programme's indicators are expected to be achieved with the contribution of the contracted project and by mobilizing additional European and national funding sources. Nevertheless, it should be noted that the current indicator was identified to be revised in the ongoing project modification.

1.3. Conclusions and proposals

The Cooperation Programme INTERREG V-A Greece-Bulgaria 2014-2020” had in **total 6 different calls** under **5 different Priority Axis** (including the technical assistance) and **9 Investment Priorities** contracting 68 projects in total.

Based on the overall data, the projects have achieved satisfactory levels as far as the call procedures and contracting procedures are concerned with the exception of PA1, TO3 as far as contracting is concerned. This is also true for the certified expenditures which are reasonably high, taking into consideration the character of the process, the programme and the challenges of implementation presented above.

Therefore, even though overall the programme has achieved **high level of overall contracting ratio** an important issue remains for Priority Axis 1.

As far as the achievement level of the output indicators is concerned, there is still an important gap to be covered till 2023. While this should be of some concern, it should be noted that most of the projects are expected to achieve the outputs with their completion, therefore this gap is anticipated. The fact that the first outputs are being manifested in 2019 and 2020 is encouraging, but the MA should follow output indicators closely. Nevertheless, there are two output indicators that remain in low levels when taking into account the projections based on the contracted project targets that need the attention of the JS staff.

Lastly, it should be noted that the Managing Authority has taken into consideration the suggestion of the interim evaluation addressing most of the issues that were identified considering the implementation of the Programme.

Taking the above into account, the following are suggested as far as implementation progress is concerned.

- Immediate conclusion of the contracting processes Priority Axis 1 (Call 6).
- Close monitoring and incorporation of the projects contracted under Call 5 to ensure timely implementation

2. Evaluation Module B. Performance Framework of the Cooperation Programme

The Performance Framework of the Programme was developed based on the

- Council Regulation (EU) 1303/2013 (General Regulation) and in particular Articles 20,21, 22, and 96 as well as Annex II of the Method for Establishing the Performance Framework
- Implementing Regulation (EU) 215/2014 and especially Chapter II on Determining Milestones and Targets in the Performance Framework and Assessing their Achievement (articles 4, 5, 6, and 7)
- Delegated Regulation (EU) 480/2014
- European Commission Guidelines, such as the “EU Guidance Document on Monitoring and Evaluation (ERDF and Cohesion Fund) - Concepts and recommendations” (March 2014), EU Guidelines "Guidance Document on Assessment Plans: Guidelines for Quality Management of External Evaluations", (February 2015)
- Working Documents of the National Coordination Authority (NCA), as well as its document entitled "Guidelines and Instructions for the Activation of Evaluation Plans and the Call for Proposals for the Evaluation of the Implementation of the Operational Programmes 2014-2020"

Based on the above, the types of indicators utilized in the performance framework of the Programme are:

- Output indicators
- Key Implementation Steps
- Financial Indicators

that is, the Performance Framework does not include result indicators.

The Cooperation Programme “Interreg V-A Greece-Bulgaria 2014-2020” has a total of 13 indicators and in particular, **5 Output Indicators, 4 Key Implementation Steps, 4 Financial Indicators**. Each **Priority Axis 1-4** (the Technical Assistance is not included in the Performance Framework), has a set of 1 indicator of each type with the exception of Priority Axis 2 that includes 2 output indicators.

The selection of the indicators fulfils all the necessary requirements with regards to the §3 of Annex II of the EU Reg. 1303/2013 concerning the milestones and targets of Performance Frameworks, while the selection ensures that there is a representation of at **least 50% of the resources per each Priority Axis**. Additionally, the Performance

Framework follows the guidelines to be concise and comprehensive including only a small number of indicators.

For each Priority Axis, the financial indicators examine the “**eligible verified (certified) expenditure**”, while Key Implementation Steps have been included in as well to provide the necessary input taking into account the expected related weighting of the output indicators in the Performance Framework.

It should be noted that under the proposed revision of the programme there are going to be some minor changes in the Performance Framework.

2.1. Assessment of the progress achievement of the Performance Framework indicators per Priority Axis with regards to the milestones set for 2018

The evaluation of the assessment framework is detailed in the Table 7 below, taking into account the 2018 milestones, the 2023 final target, as well as the value of each indicator in 2017.

For Priority Axis 1

Programming Document Version 2.1

- The output indicator of the Performance Framework chosen is “**Number of new enterprises supported**” with a 2023 target set at 275.00 based on the unitary cost for similar actions and no milestone for 2018.
- The **Key Implementation Step (KIS)** for Priority Axis 1 is the selection of enterprises with 9.00 as a 2023 target and 6 as a 2018 milestone.
- The **Financial Indicator** is the eligible verified expenditures 20,235,295.00 target in 2023 and a 1,011,765.00 milestone in 2018, based on the verified expenses of similar programmes and timespans.

Programming Document Version 3.1 (Proposed)

- The **output indicator** of the Performance Framework chosen is CO02 Productive investment: Number of enterprises receiving grants with a 2023 target set at 60 and no milestone for 2018 and CO04 Productive investment: Number of enterprises receiving non-financial support with a 2023 target of 275 and no milestone for 2018.
- The **Key Implementation Step (KIS)** for Priority Axis 1 is the selection of enterprises with 9.00 as a 2023 target and 6 as a 2018 milestone.

- The **Financial Indicator** is the eligible verified expenditures 20,235,295.00 target in 2023 and a 1,011,765.00 milestone in 2018, based on the verified expenses of similar programmes and timespans.
-

For Priority Axis 2

Programming Document Version 2.1

- Two **output indicators** were chosen for the **Performance Framework**
 - Population benefiting from flood protection measures with a 747,000.00 population target in 2023 and no milestone for 2018
 - Number of cultural and/or natural assets rehabilitated/protected with a 10.00 sites target in 2023 and a 3.00 milestone for 2018
- The **Key Implementation Step** for PA 2 is the selection of 10.00 projects contributing to the second of the above-mentioned output indicators for 2023 and milestones of 3.00 for 2018.
- **The Financial Indicator** is the eligible verified expenditures 42,882,353.00 targets in 2023 and a 4,328,.00 milestone in 2018, based on the verified expenses of similar programmes and timespans.

Programming Document Version 3.1 (Proposed)

- Two **output indicators** were chosen for the **Performance Framework**
 - Population benefiting from flood protection measures with a 747,000.00 population target in 2023 and no milestone for 2018
 - Number of cultural and/or natural assets rehabilitated/protected with a 16.00 sites target in 2023 and a 3.00 milestone for 2018
- The **Key Implementation Step** for PA 2 is the selection of 10.00 projects contributing to the second of the above-mentioned output indicators for 2023 and milestones of 2.00 for 2018.
- **The Financial Indicator** is the eligible verified expenditures 47,602,197.00 targets in 2023 and a 4,328,.00 milestone in 2018, based on the verified expenses of similar programmes and timespans.

For Priority Axis 3

Programming Document Version 2.1

- The **output indicator** chosen for the Performance Framework is the total length of newly built roads, of which: TEN-T with an 8.00 km target for 2023 and no milestone for 2018.

- The **Key Implementation Step** for Priority Axis 3 is the number of projects with at least one signed Contract of technical - construction works sub-projects with a target of 4.00 for 2023 and milestones of 2.00 for 2018.
- **The Financial Indicator** is the eligible verified expenditures 38,802,558.00 targets in 2023 and an 8,602,941.00 milestone in 2018, based on the verified expenses of similar programmes and timespans.

Programming Document Version 3.1 (Proposed)

- The **output indicator** chosen for the Performance Framework is the total length of newly built roads, of which: TEN-T with an 5.00 km target for 2023 and no milestone for 2018.
- The **Key Implementation Step** for Priority Axis 3 is the number of projects with at least one signed Contract of technical - construction works sub-projects with a target of 4.00 for 2023 and milestones of 2.00 for 2018.
- **The Financial Indicator** is the eligible verified expenditures 38,802,558.00 targets in 2023 and an 8,602,941.00 milestone in 2018, based on the verified expenses of similar programmes and timespans.

For Priority Axis 4

- The **output indicator** chosen for the PA is the number of healthcare institutions reorganised, modernised or reequipped with a 12.00 target for 2023 and no milestone for 2018.
- The **Key Implementation Step** for PA 4 is the number of projects with at least one signed Contract of technical - construction works sub-projects with a target of 12.00 for 2023 and milestones of 8.00 for 2018.
- **The Financial Indicator** is the eligible verified expenditures targeting to 21,577,923.00€ in 2023 and to a milestone of 1,078,896.00€ in 2018, based on the verified expenses of similar programmes and timespans.

2.1.1. Implementation progress of the output indicators taking into consideration the milestones set for 2018 and the development for 2020.

The progress based on the Performance Framework is detailed in Table with data available from MIS reports and Annual Implementation Reports for 2015 to 2019.

Concerning the PA where there are contracted projects and therefore there is data upon which to base a projection, the following aspects are of concern with respect to the Performance Framework targets:

- KIS K0202 Selected projects CO20 (decision of approval)
- Output Indicator CO13a Total length of newly built roads of which TEN-T

All of the above will not reach the threshold of 75% for the end of the programme for 2023, based on programming document Version 2.1, but are expected to be achieved based on the Proposed Document 3.1.

It should be noted that the KIS functions as a safeguard concerning the implementation progress of the Programme and therefore should work as an “early warning system” well in advance before actual output data are available. Taking the above into consideration, the shortcoming of K0202 should not be of concern since all relevant data for the output indicators for PA2 show that the targets will be achieved⁴.

Nevertheless, as far as the Performance Framework is concerned the most pressing issues is that of PA1 where no projects have been contracted leading to a corresponding delay in the attainment level of output indicators or possibly a failure to achieve the targets.

⁴ See previous sections concerning O0203 Surface water resources under joint monitoring

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Table 7: Performance Framework

Priority Axis	Indicator type	ID	Indicator	Measurement unit	Target value (2023)	Milestone (2018)	Value 2020	Contracted (Target Budget)	or Expected achievements -2023
1	Output	CO05	Number of new enterprises supported	Enterprises	275	0	0	0	Unknown
(1)*	(Output)	(CO02)	(Number of Enterprises receiving grants)	(Enterprises)	(60)	(0)	0	0	Unknown
(1)	(Output)	(CO04)	(Number of Enterprises receiving non-financial support)	(Enterprises)	(275)	(0)	0	0	
1	Key implementation step	K0201	Selection of enterprises	Number	9	6	0	0	Unknown
1	Financial	F0201	Eligible verified (certified) Expenditure of the Axis	Euro	2,023,529 €	1,011,765 €	0	0	Unknown
2	Output	CO20	CO20 Population benefiting from flood protection measures	Persons	747,000	0	206,140	747,000	100%
2	Output	O0202	Number of cultural and/or natural assets rehabilitated/protected"	Number	10 (16)	3	3	20	200% (125%)
2	Key implementation step	K0202	Selected projects CO20 (Decision of approval)	Number	3 (2)	2	2	2	67% (100%)
2	Financial	F0202	Eligible verified (certified) Expenditure of the Axis	Euro	42,882,353 € (47,602,197)	4,328,824 €	14,708,093 €	55,462,835 €	129% (116%)
3	Output	CO13a	Total length of newly built roads of which TEN-T	km	8 (5)	0	0	5	63% (100%)
3	Key implementation step	K0203	Projects with at least one signed Contract of technical - construction works sub-projects (number)	Number	4	2	1	1	25%
3	Financial	F0203	Eligible verified (certified) Expenditure of the Axis	Euro	38,802,558 €	8,602,941 €	18,223,707 €	38,235,295 ¹ €	100%

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Priority Axis	Indicator type	ID	Indicator	Measurement unit	Target value (2023)	Milestone (2018)	Value 2020	Contracted (Target Budget) or	Expected achievements -2023
4	Output	O0204	Number of health care institutions reorganized, modernized or reequipped	Number	12	0	3	12	100%
4	Output	O0205	Number of health ICT systems developed	Number	3	0	1	3	100%
4	Key implementation step	K0204	Projects with at least one signed Contract of (technical - construction works or other) sub-projects (number)	Number	12	8	13	13	108%
4	Financial	F0204	Eligible verified (certified) Expenditure of the Axis	Euro	21,577,923 €	1,078,896 €	12,340,917 €	21,357,345 €	99%

*() Brackets correspond to V3.1 targets.

2.1.2. Significant delays and contributing factors

The progress in the Performance Framework was hindered by a number of factors. These factors share a common core with the factors hindering the overall implementation of the Programme as they were described in the previous sections.

Namely the most important factors were:

- Operation of the Monitoring and Information System (MIS)
- National Legislation Requirements
- Political Developments
- COVID-19 Pandemic

The last contributing factor gravely affected the progress of the PA1 calls (5 and 6) which remain the most crucial issue for the implementation of the Programme.

2.2. Assessment of targets' achievement for 2023

Even though the **overall evaluation of the Performance Framework is positive**, there are important discrepancies between the different priority axis with most important the lagging behind of Priority Axis 1. Currently, **the Programme is not facing issues that may lead to an overall problematic implementation of the Programme**. Nevertheless, there are specific issues that should be addressed by the MA. The section below presents in more detail the status of the current implementation progress concerning the Performance Framework for each Priority Axis.

Priority Axis 1

The Priority Axis 1 has been underperforming and could jeopardise the overall implementation level of the Programme. All performance indicators of Priority Axis 1 are 0⁵. Therefore, especially taking into consideration the further limitations due to the COVID-19 pandemic, it is probable that the Programme will underperform significantly in Priority Axis 1 and that would be able to achieve its targets only with very concentrated and laborious efforts from all the involved stakeholders.

Priority Axis 2

The performance according to the Performance Framework concerning the Priority Axis 2 **is considered satisfactory**. Even though the output values for 2020 are low this is expected

⁵ It should be noted that although 35 Subsidy Contracts have been signed at the end of 2020 concerning the projects approved within the 5th Call for Proposals, they have not been incorporated in the MIS yet.

and the expected underperformance of KIS K0202 selected projects CO20 (decision of approval) for 2023 should not be considered an issue since output targets are expected to be reached for the PA.

It should be noted that the overallocation of contracted budget is taking into consideration significant overestimation of the costs during the projects’ development and by 2023 the actual certified expenses will not be as high. These sums presumably will be diverted to PA1 projects.

Priority Axis 3

The Priority Axis 3 may be another reason for concern. Current performance data show that an achievement of a 63% (for the targets of V2.1 and 100% for targets V3.1) of the CO13a output indicator based on the contracted project. While on its own such an event should not be of concern, taking into consideration the underperformance of the output indicator raises some concerns.

As with PA2 the overallocation of contracted budget is taking into consideration the previous experience of lower implementation costs.

Priority Axis 4

The performance of the Priority Axis 4 is also satisfactory. Based on the current data of contracted projects’ targets as well as the first output data all indicators are expected to reach the set target in 2023.

2.3. Conclusions and proposals

The Performance Framework analysis is consistent with the effectiveness analysis of the previous section. **Overall, the Programme implementation is on a positive track and the progress is satisfactory, though there are concerns for the implementation of PA1.**

In particular, financial indicators are well on track in 2020 and are expected to be achieved by 2023. Since the last evaluation there has been great progress in the expenditure certification and some improvement in the output indicators. While KIS are falling behind targets, this should not be of concern with the exception of PA3.

An exception to the above, are all the indicators of the Priority Axis 1, which are lagging behind and despite efforts made by the MA since the last evaluation, there is limited progress. While the delays so far are not pointing to a certain problematic situation by 2023, Priority Axis 1, as well as Priority Axis 3, should become the focus of the JS in the following period.

3. Evaluation Module C. Efficiency of the Cooperation Programme

The Cooperation Programme “Interreg V-A Greece-Bulgaria 2014-2020” had a payment ratio for the reference period of 31/12/2020 had certified expenses that were equal to 37% of the overall programme budget. Moreover, the years 2019 and 2020 there had been the first reported outcomes from the programmes and therefore there can be some assessment of the efficiency of the Programme.

In this section the Evaluator is assessing the efficiency of the programme based the aforementioned data. Nevertheless, it should be noted that both the outputs and the certified expenses of the Programme follow an exponential-like curve with an important lag phase in the first years.

Therefore, despite the fact the 2/3 of the duration of the implementations have already passed, it was expected that the outputs and the certified expenses would be quantifiable late in the programming period. This is because of the nature of the calls’ procedure, because most of the projects by design develop their outputs upon their completion and due to the expenditure certification process.

Taking the above into consideration the Evaluator is analysing both the actual efficiency of the projects, as well as the expected efficiency of the projects based on the contracted projects’ projections.

3.1. Assessment of the implementation progress of the Cooperation Programme in terms of efficiency per Priority Axis and Investment Priority

The assessment of the implementation progress of the Programme in terms of efficiency is based on juxtaposing the planned implementation with the actual implementation of the Programme. In particular, the assessment takes into account the planned unit costs and the actual unit costs whereas this refers to the project, action, or indicator level.

Therefore, the efficiency analysis is meaningful for those priority axes for which there has been a call and that the contracted projects have produced the necessary feedback in terms of implementation, such as payments and output and result indicator data.

Ideally, the efficiency analysis would take into account the level of output and result indicators’ achievement level in addition with the financial indicators’ data and benchmark

this data with data of previous interventions of the same Programme of similar intervention of other programmes.

Since the evaluation concerns only this Programme there can only be an internal evaluation of the efficiency between different investment priorities and with original estimation of the budget needed to achieve the targets.

To assess the implementation progress in terms of efficiency, we should take into consideration the actual efficiency presented below and the expected efficiency presented in the following section.

Actual Efficiency

The actual efficiency can be processed based on the following measures: The cumulative contracted budget, the amount of certified expenses up to 2020, the projects' output indicators contribution up to 2020, the cumulative output targets of the projects, the output targets of the programme.

The above will give as the following indexes per investment priority.

The percentage of budget used (BU):

$$\%BU = \frac{\text{Certified expenses in 2020}}{\text{Contracted budget}} \%$$

The output achieved in 2020 based on the projects' cumulative targets

$$\% OAPs = \frac{\text{value of output indicators reached in 2020}}{\text{projects' cumulative target for the output indicator}} \%$$

The output achieved in 2020 based on programme targets

$$\% OAP = \frac{\text{value of output indicators reached in 2020}}{\text{programme target for the output indicator}} \%$$

Based on the above, we can create two ratios that can give us insights concerning the efficiency of the investment priorities between them and the original planning. These ratios are:

- OAPs/BU which gives us a measure on the efficiency and progress of the implementation of the projects based on the outputs the projects themselves set and

- OAP/BU which gives us a measure on the efficiency and progress of the implementation with respect with the Programme targets.

It should be noted that both of the above ratios only provide indications since most of the projects are expected to have outputs with their finalization, thus outputs commonly lag behind significantly from expenses. For this reason, no specific threshold is proposed for the above ratios and results are presented juxtaposed to the expected outcomes.

The Table 7 below details the above measures and ratios for the available data.

3.2. Assessment of the sufficiency of the available budget for the implementation of the Programme interventions

Based on the above, we do two levels of analysis to address the **expected efficiency** and the **actual efficiency** up to 2020. We opted for the above analysis since most of the projects are expected to have their outputs achieved with their completion. Therefore, a snapshot of 2020 might lead to results that do not give justice to the implementation progress.

Expected Efficiency

A basic analysis can be conducted taking into consideration the committed amounts per Priority Axis and Investment Thematic Objective and the expected output indicators based on the already contracted projects. This analysis is summarized in Table 8, taking into consideration the amount of budget contracted and the expected achievement of output targets, according to the Annual Implementation Reports.

Based on the percentage of the contracted budget (% CB) to the total amount and the percentage of the achievement of output indicators (% OA), an estimation can be made on whether the budget is sufficient to reach the targets set for the output indicators. If % CB is the % of (contracted budget)/ (available budget). Since there is no breakdown on available budget per IP the computation is done on a PA level.

$$\% CB = \frac{\text{contracted budget}}{\text{available budget}} \%$$

and % OA is the % of (output indicators estimated to be reached)/ (target for the output indicator) per investment priority

$$\% OA = \frac{\text{output indicators expected to be reached}}{\text{target for the output indicator}} \%$$

With the CB and OA a Ratio can be constructed in order to assess the expected efficiency of the specific investment priority actions.

Taking into consideration that there is an overall overallocation of budget by the MA, based on previous experience that the actual certified expenses are smaller than those planned, due to the efficiency of the procuring procedures and other reasons, the Evaluator uses as a threshold ratio $\leq 0,7$. Investment priorities with such ratios are considered problematic in terms of efficiency.

Unit costs

Unit costs are estimated by dividing the contracted budget with the cumulative project value per output indicator. Ideally, this would give us a clear understanding of the unit costs in the Programme and it could be compared both with the original estimated unit costs and the costs of other similar projects.

Nevertheless, there are some issues that should be taken into consideration.

1. There is no specific allocation of budget per IP, only per PA, therefore the original estimated unit cost cannot be assessed.
2. Projects contribute to several output indicators therefore the budget that contributes in e.g., O0202 “Number of cultural and/or natural assets rehabilitated/protected” is embedded in the cost of CO09 “Increase in expected number of visits to supported sites of cultural and natural heritage and attractions”.

Therefore, the results presented here have limitations and the actual unit costs should be considered lower for IPs 6c and 9a.

3.2.1. Implementation progress of output indicators up to 31.12.2020

The Table 8 presents the efficiency ratios for each of the investment priorities and output indicators. As commented above the analysis takes into consideration the expected efficiency and the actual efficiency juxtaposing the two.

Expected efficiency

The expected efficiency can be **considered sufficient** for the PAs that have contracted projects with the exception of PA3. All PAs and investment priorities have an Expected Efficiency Ratio over 0.8 which is considered to be satisfactory. The highest ratios can be found in Investment Priority 6c with 1.0 and 1.6 for the Output Indicators CO20 and O0202 respectively. The IP 6f had a low efficiency rate taking into consideration the original methodology (0.1) though taking into consideration the revised methodology of O0203, expected efficiency is 0.8 which is considered satisfactory.

PA3 is problematic since despite the overallocation of the budget, the target is not expected to be achieved, while the efficiency ratio is 0.5. This is not true under the proposed v.3.1 programming document targets, where the ratio is equal to 0.9.

All other IPs with contracted projects have expected efficiency ratio 0.7 or higher that is considered acceptable, especially since the actual expenses are expected to be lower than the initial budgets.

Actual efficiency

The actual efficiency for 2020 paints a somewhat different picture with much lower ratios. As with the expected efficiency, IP 6c has ratios higher than 1 which suggests that there is going to be an overachievement in terms of efficiency. PA 9 in both IPs had also relatively high efficiency ratios for the projects' target and the programme targets. IP 6d is performing much better than all other IPs and is equal to the PA 9 IP 9a, though there is no other evidence (as in the case of IP 9a) to suggest that its current efficiency is high.

All other efficiency ratios equal to 0, which should be anticipated, since the outputs are not expected to be delivered before the completion of the projects.

Budget sufficiency

All PA and IPs with contracted projects have sufficient funds allocated to reach the targets taking into account the new methodology for O023 output indicator.

This may prove not to be the case for PA1 since the remaining non – allocated budget is not sufficient to cover the Calls 5 and 6. Non utilized contracted funds from other PAs are expected to cover this gap.

Unitary costs

As it is presented above Unit costs for IPs 6c and 9a should be considered to be lower since projects contribute to more than one output indicator. That said, we can conclude that the highest unit cost is linked with CO13a: “length of newly built roads of which TEN-T”, while both CO23: “Nature and biodiversity: Surface area of habitats supported to attain a better conservation status” and CO20: “Population benefiting from flood protection measures” have low costs.

It is also worth noticing that the unit cost for those two IPs and in particular for O0202: “Number of cultural and/or natural assets rehabilitated/protected” and O0204: “Number of health care institutions reorganized, modernized or reequipped” is comparable. Even though there is no assessment for the impact of these two IPs it should be noted that a clear choice can be made between the two, as far as development priorities are concerned.

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Table 8: Budget Sufficiency based on the Output Indicators and the Budget Contracted

PA	ID	Target value (2023)	Projects cumulative target (2013)	Contracted Budget	Expected Efficiency				Actual 2020 efficiency					Unit Cost (Output Indicator Level)	
					CB (PA Level)	Value (2020)	OA	OA/CB Ratio	BU	OAPs	OAP / BU Ratio	OAP/BU Ratio			
1	CO01	Productive investment: Number of enterprises receiving support	275	0	0	0	0%	U	0%	0%	0%	U	U	U	
1	CO05	Productive investment: Number of new enterprises supported	275	0	0	0	0	0%	U	0%	0%	0%	U	U	U
1	CO01	Productive investment: Number of enterprises receiving support	330	0	0	0	0	0%	U	0%	0%	0%	U	U	U
1	CO04	Productive investment: Number of enterprises receiving non-financial support	330	0	0	0	0	0%	U	0%	0%	0%	U	U	U
1	O0201	Number of clusters and other collaborative schemes composed of stakeholders/enterprises from both sides of border	4	0	0	0	0	0%	U	0%	0%	0%	U	U	U
2	CO20	CO20 Population benefiting from flood protection measures	747,000	747,000	16,782,518	99%	206,140	100%	1,0	20%	28%	28%	1,4	1,4	22
2	O0202	Number of cultural and/or natural assets rehabilitated/protected"	10	20	20,808,379	129%	3	200%	1,6	22%	15%	30%	0,7	1,4	1,040,419
2	CO09	Increase in expected number of visits to supported sites of cultural and natural heritage and attractions	140,000	152,085	23,158,452	129%	803	109%	0,8	38%	1%	1%	0,0	0,0	152

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PA	ID	Target value (2023)	Projects cumulative target (2013)	Contracted Budget	Expected Efficiency				Actual 2020 efficiency					Unit Cost (Output Indicator Level)
					CB (PA Level)	Value (2020)	OA	OA/CB Ratio	BU	OAPs	OAP	OAPs / BU Ratio	OAP/BU Ratio	
2	CO23	356,000	391,362	11,023,352	129%	64,713	110%	0,9	38%	17%	18%	0,4	0,5	28
2	O0203	7,500	1,089 (7,500*)	4,498,513	129%	-	15% (100%)	0,1 (0,8)	46%	0%	0%	0,0	0,0	4,131
3	CO13a	8 (5**)	5	38,235,295	100%	-	63% (100%)	0,6 (0,1)	42%	0%	0%	0,0	0,0	7,647,059
4	O0204	12	12	14,087,484	136%	3	100%	0,7	55%	25%	25%	0,5	0,5	1,173,957
4	O0205	3	3	2,156,604	136%	1	100%	0,7	55%	33%	33%	0,6	0,6	718,868
4	CO36	632,000	607,644	15,310,527	136%	267,623	96%	0,7	55%	44%	42%	0,8	0,8	25
4	O0206	50	50	6,046,818	136%	25	100%	0,7	65%	50%	50%	0,8	0,8	120,936

*New methodology based in December 2020 methodological note

** Proposed target in v.3.1 programming document.

3.2.2. Significant delays and contributing factors

The efficiency of the Programme did not have any specific factors contributing to delays other than the overall factors hindering the Programme implementation in general. These factors have been described and analysed in detail in section 2.2.2.

Nevertheless, it should be said that all of the reasons have a straightforward effect in the current state of the efficiency of the Programme. In particular, the delays in the completion of the MIS and the changes made in the pre-tendering procedures have had an impact in the timing of pre-tendering, tendering and certification of expenses procedures.

While the changes overall rationalized the management and control system and allow for faster and more efficient procedures, the efficiency of the programme during these first stages was negatively affected.

The progress concerning the certification of expenses is evident since the previous evaluation period with the certified expenses goes from 0 to 37% of the contracted budget.

3.2.3. Estimations on the achievement of the targets set for the output indicators in 2023

As it is shown in Table 8 based on the decided (included in a call) and contracted budgets, as well as the projections based on the contracted projects and their respective output target projections PA 2 and 4 are estimated to achieve their efficiency targets, while PA 3 is not expected to achieve its targets under v.2.1 targets, but it will under the proposed v.3.1 targets. No data are available for PA1. More specifically the following can be said for each of the priority axes.

Priority Axis 1

The fact that there are no projects incorporated in the MIS does not allow us to have any safe conclusion concerning the efficiency of the current priority axis⁶.

Priority Axis 2

Priority Axis 2 has some of the most efficient IP of the Programme. With an allocated budget between 99% and 129%, all output indicators are expected to achieve 100% or higher with the exception of O0203 which as it was discussed earlier had a very ambitious target.

Investment Priority 5b

⁶ It should be noted that although 35 Subsidy Contracts have been signed at the end of 2020 concerning the projects approved within the 5th Call for Proposals, they had not been incorporated in the MIS at the time that this deliverable was compiled.

For CO20 “Population benefiting from flood protection measures”, a 99% achievement level is projected, showing that the unitary cost is almost equal to the one planned by the programming document.

Investment Priority 6c

For O0202 “Number of cultural and/or natural assets rehabilitated/protected”, 200% achievement level is projected, and thus the unit cost for this output indicator was estimated higher during planning than the data show currently.

For CO09 “Increase in expected number of visits to supported sites of cultural and natural heritage and attractions”, the achievement level is projected to reach 109% indicating that there was a small under-estimation of the unitary cost in this indicator. Nevertheless, with budget utilized expected to be lower than 129% the unit cost might evolve to be equal to the original estimation.

Investment Priority 6d

For CO23 “Nature and biodiversity: Surface area of habitats supported to attain a better conservation status”, the achievement level is expected to reach 110% that suggests that unitary costs were estimated, somewhat higher than the ones that current data suggest. As in the case of CO09 with a possible readjustment of actual expenses, the unit cost might prove to be very similar to that originally estimated.

Investment Priority 6f

For O0203 “Surface water resources under joint monitoring”, the achievement level was expected to reach 15%. Nevertheless, the new detailed methodology for the output indicator shows that the target will be achieved.

Priority Axis 3

Investment Priority 7b

PA 3 appears to be problematic as far as both effectiveness and efficiency are concerned but taking into consideration the proposed revision it is not. All the allocated budget is contracted, the corresponding output indicators’ projection shows that the current targets are not going to be reached.

For CO13a “Total length of newly built roads of which TEN-T” only 63% of the output indicators is expected to be achieved with 100% of the allocated budget contracted. Therefore, the unitary cost in the particular output indicator was severely underestimated, based on the current data.

Nevertheless, it should be noted that under the new proposed targets of the programming document v.3.1 the target will be achieved in full.

Priority Axis 4

PA 4 is also performing sufficiently. PA 4 with 136% of the allocated budget contracted is on track to achieve the respective output targets of 96% or higher.

Investment Priority 9a

For O0204 “Number of health care institutions reorganized, modernized or reequipped”, the expected achievement level is 100%; thus, there was a slight overestimation of the unitary cost in the planning of the programme.

For Output CO36 “Population covered by improved health services” the projected achievement level is 96% suggesting that the planned unitary cost might have been underestimated.

For O0205 “Number of health ICT systems developed”, the projected achievement level is also 100% suggesting similarly an underestimation of the unitary cost in planning.

Investment Priority 9c

For O0206 “Number of participants in social entrepreneurship projects promoting gender equality, equal opportunities and social inclusion across borders”, the achievement level is projected to be 100%.

3.3. Conclusions and proposals

Based on the available data from the MIS, the Annual Implementation Reports etc. there are some data for a preliminary analysis of the efficiency of the Programme. Nevertheless, the analysis’s results should be taken with prudence since significant deviations from the original budgets are expected. These deviations that are not yet reflected in the monitoring of the Programme are expected to lead to an implementation much closer to the original estimations.

In all PAs and IPs with the exception of 5a and 6c (in one output indicator), the allocated budget hints to a higher unit cost than originally. Unless there are significant changes in these two IPs such as withdrawing support from the MA, it is safe to assume that unit costs were overestimated.

Therefore, as far as expected efficiency is concerned, the Programme is well on track with the exception of 5a and 6c and PA 1.

The MA took into consideration that projects are overestimating costs or that the tendering procedures lead to much lower prices than originally assumed to greater competition. These amounts saved can be diverted to address possible needs in PA1. Unfortunately, there are no available data currently to assess the deviations between the budgeted costs and the actual costs of projects’ deliverables and therefore assess the practice. Nevertheless, the MA should take all necessary measures to provide adequate funds to PA 1 in order to achieve the necessary targets.

As far as unit costs are concerned, the highest unit costs are linked with transportation infrastructure, and some of the lowest with climate change adaptation and nature conservation.

No data were available for PA 1 and therefore no efficiency assessment can be conducted.

4. Evaluation Module D. Relevance of the intervention logic within the Programme Strategy

4.1. Relevance of the intervention logic and the specific objectives of the Cooperation Programme (including the examination of the objectives of the Europe 2020 Strategy and other policies)

4.1.1. Current situation analysis

Regional economic data

Gross Domestic Product (GDP) per inhabitant in PPS is the key variable for determining the eligibility of NUTS 2 regions in the framework of the European Union's structural policy. Studying the available relative statistic data for the Greek-Bulgarian border regions, we notice that there is no any remarkable change since 2014, while numbers vary significantly from region to region, where South-West Planning Region is the one closest to the average GDP per inhabitant in PPS in EU-28, while the lowest rate is identified in the South-Central Planning Region. The Greek border regions are both close to the 50% of the EU-28.

Table 9. Regional gross domestic product (PPS per inhabitant in % of the EU28 average) by NUTS 2 regions in 2014-2016

Regional gross domestic product (PPS per inhabitant in % of the EU28 average)						
Regions	2014	2015	2016	2017	2018	Rate of change
Yugozapaden	75	76	78	81	86	14%
Yuzhen Tsentralen	32	33	34	35	37	17%
Anatoliki Makedonia, Thraki	49	48	46	47	49	1%
Kentriki Makedonia	55	54	53	54	56	3%

Source: Eurostat, Data processed by the Authors

GVA (obligatory as gross value added) is an indicator that reflects the total value of all goods and services produced less the value of goods and services used for intermediate consumption in their production.

The table below shows the real growth rate of regional gross value added (GVA) at basic prices by NUTS 2 regions expressed as the percentage change with 2015 as the base (100%). It is obvious from the above that the Bulgarian regions are in developing course, while the Greek regions are experiencing an anaemic increase in the relevant indicators. While this should be more expected for the Yuzhen Tsentralen region that is less developed, the Yugozapaden id also experiencing strong increase the regional GVA. Nevertheless, it should be noted the region also includes the capital Sofia, not part of the Programme area.

Table 10. Real growth rate of regional gross value added (GVA) at basic prices by NUTS 2 regions - percentage change on previous year for the period 2014-2016

Real growth rate of regional gross value added (GVA) at basic prices by NUTS 2 regions					
Regions	2014	2015	2016	2017	2018
Yugozapaden	95,4	100	102,9	107	110
Yuzhen Tsentralen	93,3	100	103	107	113
Anatoliki Makedonia, Thraki	101,1	100	100,4	101	:
Kentriki Makedonia	99,4	100	100,6	103	:

Source: Eurostat

Regional tourism data

According to the data available at NUTS 2 level (meaning that not only the eligible Programme area, but the whole area of the Regions participating in the Programme is included), there is a significant increase since 2014 (launch of the current programming period) concerning nights spent at tourist accommodation establishments. While in the case of the Bulgarian regions, nights spent were associated with an increase in arrivals, in the case of the Greek regions there was a decrease in arrivals but an increase in night stays hinting in a change of the tourists profile.

Table 11. Arrivals at tourist accommodation establishments by NUTS 2 regions for the period 2014-2019)

Arrivals at tourist accommodation establishments by NUTS 2 regions								
	2014	2015	2016	2017	2018	2019	2014-2018	2014-2019
Yugozapaden	843465	920015	1052806	1072617	1070429	1111206	27%	32%
Yuzhen tsentralen	761678	811856	918831	916764	965189	1026426	27%	35%
Anatoliki Makedonia, Thraki	369328	386153	394191	406249	388889	:	5%	
Kentriki Makedonia	1233636	1337738	1315219	1377829	1207319	:	-2%	

Source: Eurostat, Data processed by the Authors

Table 12. Nights spent at tourist accommodation establishments by NUTS 2 regions (2014-2019)

Nights spent at tourist accommodation establishments by NUTS 2 regions								
	2014	2015	2016	2017	2018	2019	2014-2018	2014-2019
Yugozapaden	1799696	1846131	2039840	2315248	2410490	2408886	34%	34%
Yuzhen tsentralen	445786	472311	517317	577002	606896	606369	36%	36%
Anatoliki Makedonia, Thraki	1939169	2158765	1820586	2349007	2151610	:	11%	
Kentriki Makedonia	10071849	10426966	10508584	11126503	11660054	:	16%	

Source: Eurostat, Data processed by the Authors

Regional labour data

Taking into consideration the Europe 2020 benchmark target about the EU-28 employment rate for persons aged 20-64 that should be at least 75% by 2020, the Eurostat’s recent data shows that the target has been almost achieved reaching the 72.2% in 2017 at EU level with almost 50% of the EU regions having achieved equal or higher rates comparing to the 75%.

Unfortunately though, the Greek border regions (Kentriki Makedonia and Anatoliki Makedonia Thraki) have not yet reached the 60% (54% and 57% respectively), while the national target for 2020 is the 70%. At the same time, Bulgarian border regions are in a much better situation with the employment rate to be in 69% in the South-Central Planning Region (Yuzhen Tsentralen) and in 76% in the South-West Planning Region (Yugozapaden), while the national target for 2020 is at 76%.

Table 13. Employment rate in the ages 15-64 in the Greece-Bulgaria border regions (NUTS2) 2014-2019

Employment rate of the age group 15-64 by NUTS 2 regions								Target for 2020 (at country level)
	2014	2015	2016	2017	2018	2019	2014-2019	
Yugozapaden	66,1	68	69	72	74	76	14%	76%
Yuzhen tsentralen	62	62	62	67	67	69	12%	
Anatoliki Makedonia, Thraki	50	51	52	54	56	57	14%	70%

Kentriki Makedonia	46	49	51	52	53	54	16%	
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Source: Eurostat, Data processed by the Authors

The regional statistics about unemployment also highlight the different challenges faced in the two sides of the borders: the total unemployment rate in the Greek border regions is 16% and 20% respectively, while in the Bulgarian border regions do not exceed the 3%. However, a remarkable decrease in the unemployment rates has been reported at annual level for all the four regions for the past years.

That said with the 2020 COVID-19 pandemic and its impacts in the global and national economies it is expected that unemployment rates are going to increase again after 2020.

Table 14. Total unemployment rate in the Greece-Bulgaria border regions (Nuts II) 2014-2017

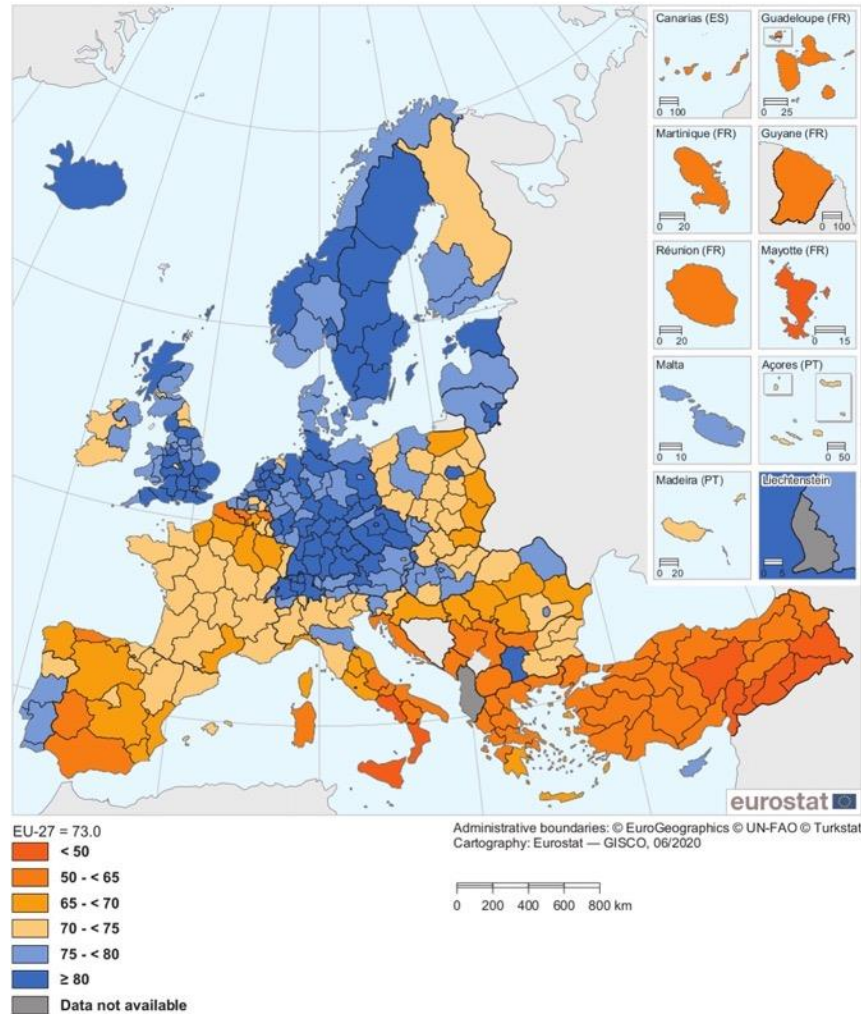
Unemployment rate by NUTS 2 regions							
	2014	2015	2016	2017	2018	2019	2014-2019
Yugozapaden	8,9	7	5	3	3	2	-74%
Yuzhen tsentralen	12	9	7	5	4	3	-75%
Anatoliki Makedonia, Thraki	24	23	23	20	16	16	-33%
Kentriki Makedonia	29	26	25	23	21	20	-32%

Source: Eurostat, Data processed by the Authors

Figure 3. Maps reflecting employment and unemployment rates at Nuts II level, 2017

Employment rate, 2019

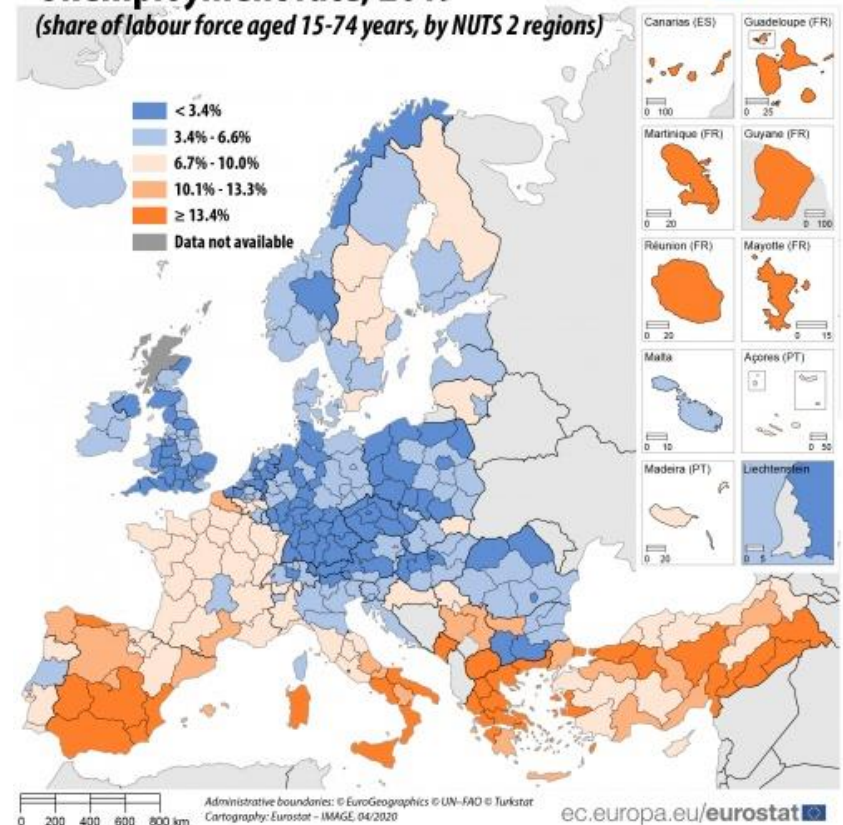
(% share of people aged 20-64 years, by NUTS 2 regions)



Unemployment rate, 2019

(share of labour force aged 15-74 years, by NUTS 2 regions)

EU-27 6.7%



Source: Eurostat 2017

Regional social data

Between the regions within the Programme area the only one with low at-risk-of-poverty rate is the Southwest Planning Region (Yugozapaden) that also includes the capital Sofia. All other regions have at-risk-of-poverty rates over 20% with the South-Central Planning Region to 28%. The percentages are even higher when it comes to the total number of people at-risk-of-poverty or social inclusion, even though there was an important decrease in the case of the Bulgarian regions.

Table 15. At-risk-of-poverty rate by NUTS 2 regions in 2014-2019

At-risk-of-poverty rate by NUTS 2 regions							
	2014	2015	2016	2017	2018	2019	2014-2019
Yugozapaden	11,3	12	13	14	13	14	27%
Yuzhen tsentralen	32	31	30	30	27	28	-13%
Anatoliki Makedonia, Thraki	25	24	23	22	22	24	NA
Kentriki Makedonia					19	21	NA

Source: Eurostat, Data processed by the Authors

Table 16. At-risk-of-poverty or social inclusion rate by NUTS 2 regions in 2014-2019

People at risk of poverty or social exclusion by NUTS 2 regions							
	2014	2015	2016	2017	2018	2019	2014-2019
Yugozapaden	28,6	30	30	29	23	23	-21%
Yuzhen tsentralen	47	49	46	44	38	37	-20%
Anatoliki Makedonia, Thraki	37	36	36	34	34	35	NA
Kentriki Makedonia					30	32	NA

Source: Eurostat, Data processed by the Authors

Refugee Crisis

An important development in the area has been the refugee crisis of 2015 - 2017. While refugees and migration are not a priority of the Programme, the strain that the crisis has put intervention fields of the Programme has been important. The influx of refugees made even more prominent the challenges that the CBA faces in terms of employability opportunities, as well as the infrastructure for a social inclusive area.

Priority Axis 4 and Investment Priority 9a has been the intervention field more affected by the crisis, but Investment Priority 9c and Priority Axis 1 are becoming also more prominent as the needs that try to address intensified.

Also, since 2015, Greece has experienced an unprecedented influx of refugees and migrants. Between January 2015 and March 2016, more than one million people transited through Greece, most of them fleeing conflict in their own countries. As a consequence of the closure of the border between the Former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia and Greece in early March 2016, more than 57,000 migrants remain in Greece, waiting for a decision about their futures while often without adequate access to shelter, food and water. There has been a dramatic reduction in the number of migrants arriving in Greece since the agreement of 18 March 2016 between Turkey and the EU came into force. The Commission had earmarked EUR 280 million for the first six months of the plan. On 18 March 2016, it approved another EUR 30 million of support for the Greek army as it helps the refugees in the country.

While the AMIF is supporting Greece to some extent and the great influxes of 2015 were not repeated, there is still a steady inflow of refugees in Greece. With Greece developing eventually a Policy for the Integration of third country citizens in 2013 and updating it in 2019 the situation should be normalized to some extent. Nevertheless, the issues still remain with severe conditions for refugee populations reported both in the islands' camps, but also camps within the Programme area, while there are huge gaps in efforts to integrate refugee and immigrant populations, especially since the 1990 model of integration through economic advancement cannot be supported anymore.

Health sector

Pre COVID developments

Last but not least, with regards to the health sector, important changes have gone forward at institutional level in Greece. According to the Article 1 of the Law 4238/2014, public health services are provided through a unified and decentralized Primary Health National Network (PEDI), which operates through the Regional Health Districts, in charge since then for the management and the operation of all the Primary Health Care Centres that up to then were under the authority of the General Hospitals. Three years later, a new operational framework for Public Primary Health Care has been legislated and introduced, through the strategic reform of the system of primary health care services and the protection of the rights of health care beneficiaries. With this law, the existing primary care facilities (PEDI Health Units and Agricultural Health Centres) will be called Health Centres. At the same time, new decentralized structures, regional Health Centres, Local Health Units (TCMs), are targeted at a specific population, staffed by a multidisciplinary health team, including family doctors and nurses, nurses, health visitors, social workers etc. These

new structures are expected to work more effectively and efficiently in favour of all the citizens with no discrimination.

Similarly, in Bulgaria, there were some important changes in the healthcare system. The 2020 Health Strategy of 2015 identified the following priorities, i. provision of financial stability for the health care system, ii. health system oriented towards the main health challenges, iii. active approach to care and creation of a supportive environment for specific and vulnerable population groups, and iv) strengthening the capacity of public health. Some of the provision of the plan such as the universal health card has been recently implemented. Furthermore, changes to the Law on Health introduced the concept of integrated care (2015). This law established and allowed a new type of health care provider, integrated social and health service centres for children with disabilities and chronic conditions. A recent EU-funded initiative aims to develop electronic health records, electronic referral and electronic prescription systems (EU Commission, 20117).

Lastly, new Public Procurement Legislation was adopted in April 2016 as a transposition of the EU Directive that defines the procurement process based on specific threshold amounts. Even though the new law did not specifically target healthcare, procurement in this field is between those regulated (OECD, 2016).

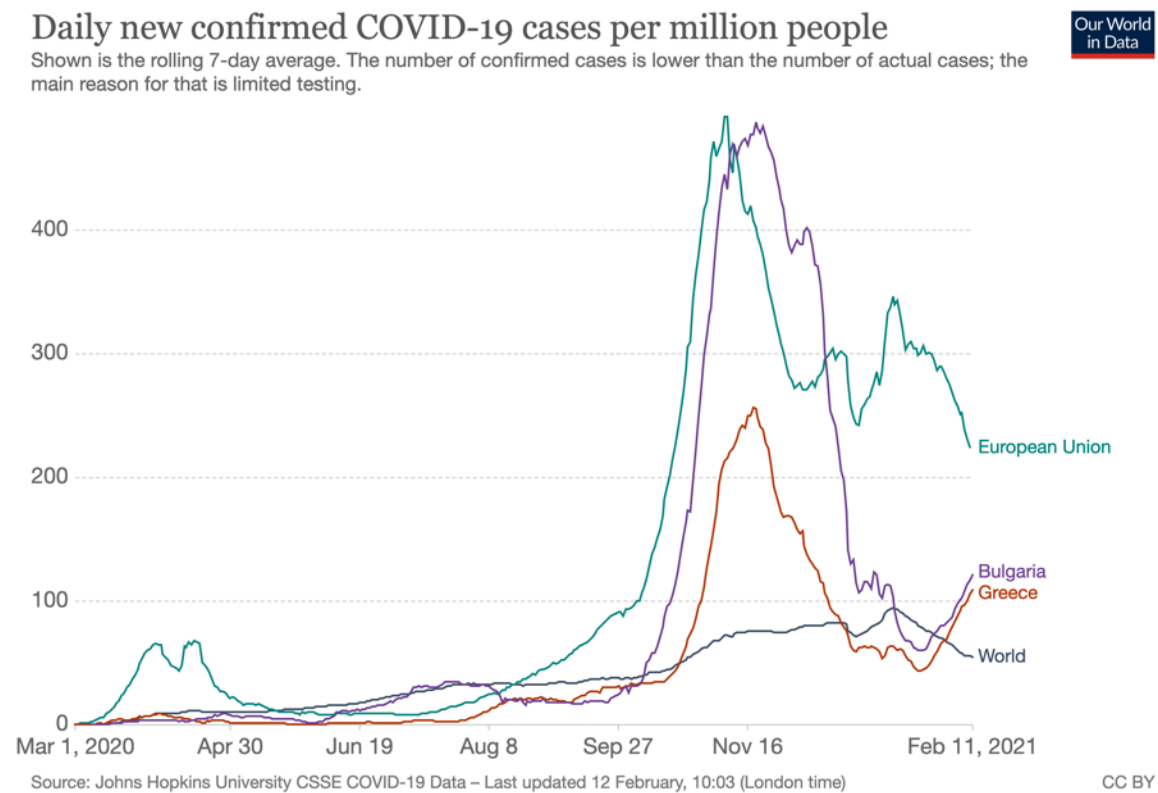
In 2018, the government pledged to go ahead with the most substantial healthcare reforms since 1998, including the partial or full de-monopolisation of the National Health Insurance Fund.

COVID-19 Developments

As it is presented above the COVID-19 epidemic crisis has marked 2020 all over the world and in Greece and Bulgaria. Both countries have been heavily affected by the pandemic. Greece reported its 1st case on the 26 of February 2020, while Bulgaria on the 8th of March 2020. Both countries experienced the 1st death on the 12th of March 2020.

Both counties have taken measures to address this crisis. Greece had two lockdown periods (March – May 2020 and November 2020) with a total of 140 days of lockdown (141 for Thessaloniki). Similarly, Bulgaria had also two lockdown periods (March to June 2020, November 2020 to January 2021) for a total of 159 days of lockdown. While the severity of the measures and the adherence to them by the population varied significantly, measures such as working from home, rotation of personnel, closure of businesses, limitations of gatherings etc. were in effect for almost the entire 2020.

Figure 4: Daily new confirmed COVID-19 cases per million people



Nevertheless, at the time when this deliverable was compiled both countries number of cases per million people were in ascendency with both countries having reported the new UK strain and Greece also the South African strain.

Moreover, as far as confirmed deaths are concerned, at the time of the deliverable compilation, Greece had a cumulative of 575 deaths/million inhabitants, much higher than the global average, though better than most EU counterparts, while Bulgaria 1355 deaths/million inhabitants, one of the highest in the world.

At the same time both countries were facing problems with their vaccination programmes. Greece’s vaccination programme was similar to those of most EU countries which in general was falling behind to the vaccination plans, since among the challenges was the issue of securing enough doses. That said the vaccination programme in Bulgaria was lagging significantly behind even with the world standard that includes countries that had no effective access to vaccines.

Figure 5: Cumulative confirmed COVID-19 deaths per million people

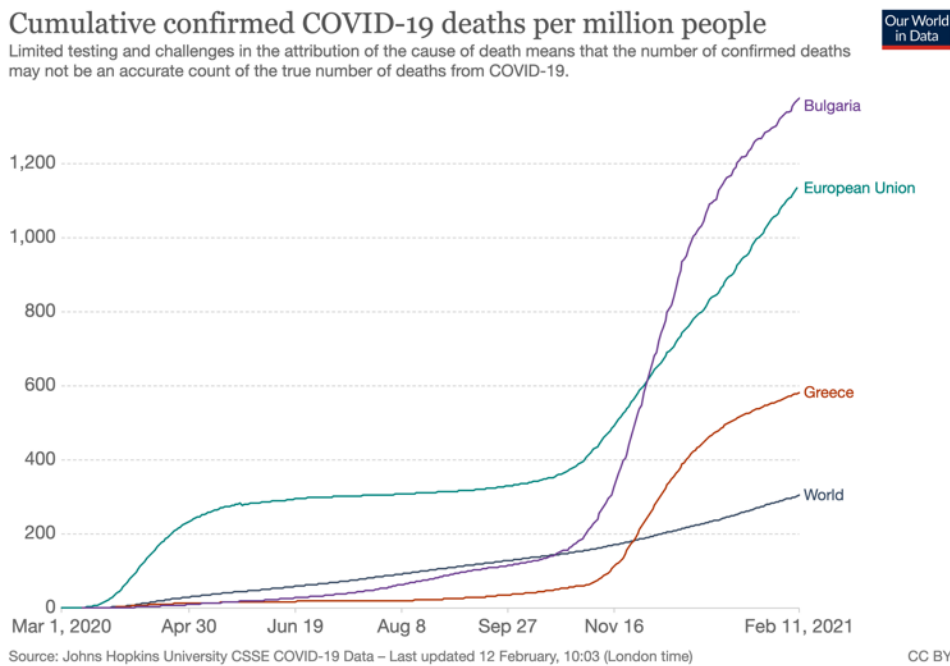
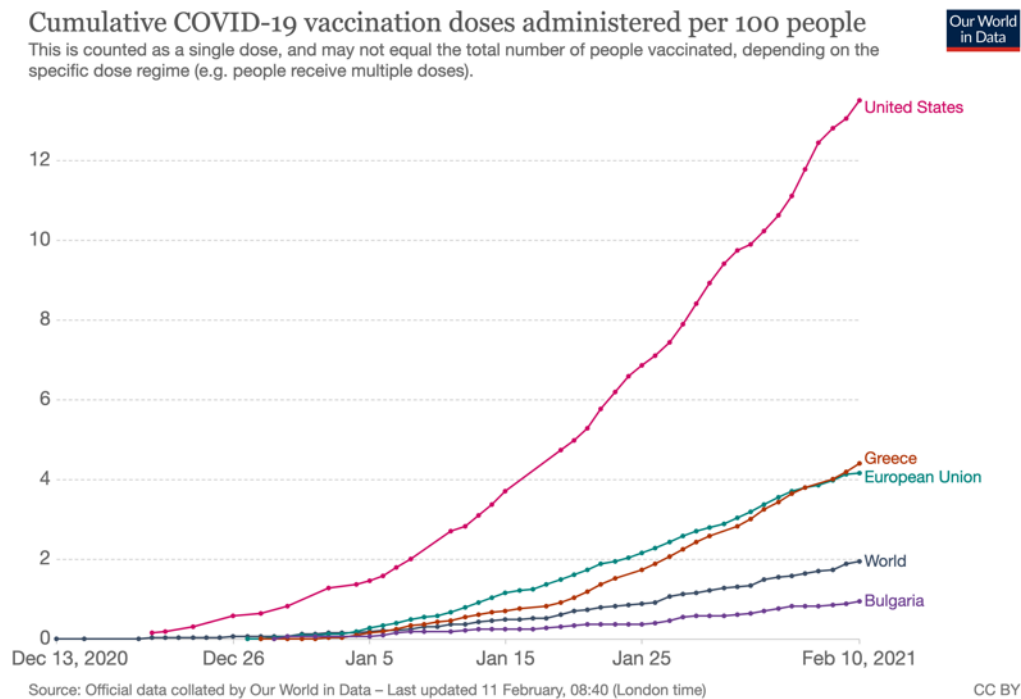


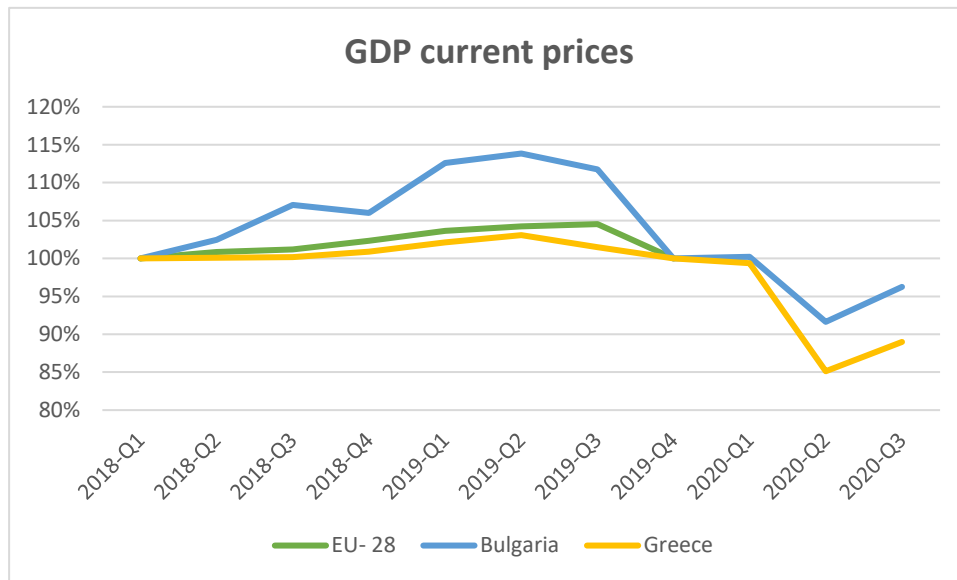
Figure 6: Cumulative COVID-19 vaccination doses administered per 100 people



All of the above hint to important issues in both countries and the programming area. Greece has again been more affected by the COVID – 19 pandemic as far as the economy

is concerned, to a great extent because of the Greek economy’s reliance in the tourism sector.

Figure 7: GDP at current prices for 2018 – 2020



Environment

Climate change

The cross - border area in which the Programme focuses is one of the most vulnerable to climate change. All the regional units are characterized by medium negative or highest negative impact concerning the aggregate potential of impact and potential vulnerability according to the ESPON-CLIMATE project. These findings are further supported from the “National Climate change vulnerability and risk assessments in Europe, 2018” by the European Environmental Agency and the National Report of the Bank of Greece on the environmental, economic and social impacts of climate change in Greece. Similarly, the National Adaptation Strategy of Greece that was published in 2016 categorizes the two Greek regions within the cross-border area as highly vulnerable. While no National Adaptation Strategy has been published for the Bulgaria Regions, their vulnerability area is also expected to be high in agreement with the previous studies.

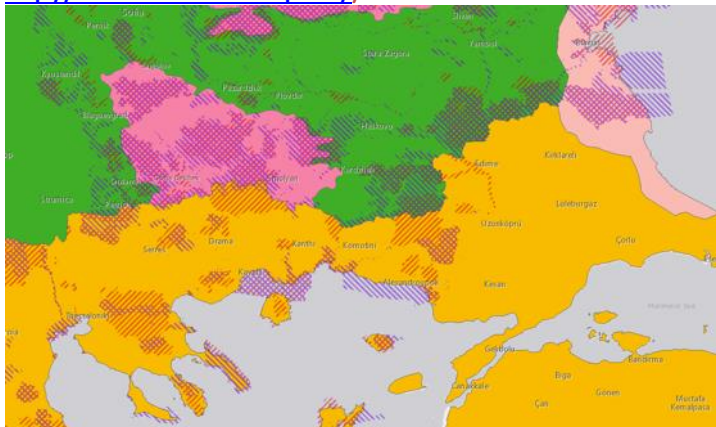
In addition, all units have the lowest to low capacity to adapt into climate change. Impacts are expected to be heatwaves, recessionary or cyclonic rains, floods, wildfires, landslides and erosion. While there are no significant changes in the vulnerability or adaptation capacity level in the region during the current years, the recent flash flood in Thessaloniki in May 2018, the Evros/ Maritsa overflow in March 2018 showcase the importance for adaptation measures like those in Investment Priority 5b.

Biodiversity and habitat conservation

The cross-border area is a very important area for biodiversity and is very rich in natural resources. The area includes three distinct bio-geographical regions (Mediterranean, Alpine, and Continental). The area comprises of the mountain ranges of Rila, Pirin and Rhodopi, featuring outstanding forests and important habitats for fauna including species such as the Brown Bear (*Ursus arctos*), the Griffon vulture (*Gyps fulvus*), the Cinereous vulture (*Aegypius monachus*) etc.

The threats that the biodiversity and habitats are facing remain stable during the reference period and there were no distinct changes. In general, on a biodiversity and habitat management basis there are no significant changes in the status and/or legislation on a local, national and/or European level.

Figure 8: Bio-geographical Areas and protected areas in the Greece-Bulgaria Cross-Border Areas (Source: <http://natura2000.eea.europa.eu/>)



Waste and Wastewater

Wastewater treatment remains an important issue in the area, especially for settlements between 2,000-10,000 inhabitants. The main issue is focused on the Bulgarian side where only a small part of the population is covered by wastewater treatment of some kind, and mainly in urban areas. Nevertheless, the issue is not fully resolved in Greece part of the Cross-Border area either.

Waste streams are also an important aspect in both part of the cross-border area with major advancements that can be made in recycling, energy recovery, etc.

Surface water

The area is characterized by important cross-border rivers Strymon (Struma), Nestos (Mesta), Ardas (Arda) and Evros (Maritsa). The rivers create several important bird habitats

such as Kerkini, Vistonida, and Maritsa Delta. Pressures in the water bodies in the area include urban wastewater, industry wastewater, livestock point and diffused pollution sources, Landfill Sites – Uncontrolled Waste Dumping Sites runoffs, and Agriculture nutrient diffused runoff. All rivers and lakes are susceptible to the above, with nutrient runoff being more threatening in the Greek part of the Cross-Border Area that includes plains. Moreover, riverside settlements are susceptible to overflows as it was described above (Ministry for Environment, Energy and Climate Change, 2013).

4.2. Review of the result indicators’ progress

NOTA BENE

The current section will be addressed in the 3rd deliverable, as it is explained in the Introduction.

4.3. Contribution of output and result indicators to the intervention logic

NOTA BENE

The current section will be further updated in the 3rd deliverable with a deeper understanding of the result indicators of the programme. Nevertheless, a preliminary analysis is presented below based on the previous evaluation of the Programme.

The Programme is based on an intervention logic that links the identified needs expressed as priority axes with the identified thematic objectives and the corresponding investment priorities to the specific objectives of the Programme. Based on the above, the projects produce actions which in turn produce outputs (monitored through output indicators) and through them results and finally impacts. The current sections assess the programme’s intervention regarding the changes in the macroeconomic, social and environmental status of the intervention area to assess to which extent the intervention logic is still relevant.

The following section presents the intervention logic of the projects while the next one is juxtaposing the current needs with the in-force logic of the Programme to evaluate the level of its relevance.

4.3.1. Intervention logic

Table 17: Intervention Logic

Priority Axis	Thematic Objective	Investment Priority	Specific Objective
1. A competitive and Entrepreneurship promoting Cross-Border area	03 - Enhancing the competitiveness of small and medium-sized enterprises, the agricultural sector (for the EAFRD) and the fisheries and aquaculture sector (for the EMFF)	3a - Promoting entrepreneurship, in particular by facilitating the economic exploitation of new ideas and fostering the creation of new firms, including through business incubators	(1) To Improve entrepreneurship SME support systems
		3d - Supporting the capacity of SMEs to grow in regional, national and international markets, and to engage in innovation processes	(2) To improve SME capacity to expand beyond local markets
2. A Sustainable and climate adaptable Cross-Border area	05 - Promoting climate change adaptation, risk prevention and management	5b - Promoting investment to address specific risks, ensuring disaster resilience and developing disaster management systems	(3) To improve CB cooperation on flood risk management plans at river basin level
		6c - Conserving, protecting, promoting and developing natural and cultural heritage	(4) To valorise CB area cultural and natural heritage for tourist purposes
	06 - Preserving and protecting the environment and promoting resource efficiency	6d - Protecting and restoring biodiversity and soil and promoting ecosystem services, including through Natura 2000, and green infrastructure	(5) To enhance the effectiveness of biodiversity protection activities
		6f - Promoting innovative technologies to improve environmental protection and resource efficiency in the waste sector, water sector and with regard to soil, or to reduce air pollution	(6) To enhance water management
3. A better interconnected Cross-Border area	07 - Promoting sustainable transport and removing bottlenecks in key network infrastructures	7b - Enhancing regional mobility by connecting secondary and tertiary nodes to TEN-T infrastructure, including multimodal nodes	(7) Improve cross-border accessibility
4. A socially inclusive Cross-Border area	09 - Promoting social inclusion, combating poverty and any discrimination	9a - Investing in health and social infrastructure which contributes to national, regional and local development, reducing inequalities in terms of health status, promoting social inclusion through improved access to social, cultural and recreational services and the transition from institutional to community-based services	(8) To improve access to primary and emergency health care (at isolated and deprived communities) in the CB area

Priority Axis	Thematic Objective	Investment Priority	Specific Objective
		9c - Providing support for social enterprises	(9) To expand social entrepreneurship in the CB area

4.3.2. Affinity Matrix

The following matrix is examining the level of relevance between the identified needs in the intervention area of the Programme as they were updated by the current analysis of the economic, social and environmental aspects with the investment priorities of the CP for the period 2014-2020.

The vertical axis details the identified needs updating them from those identified by the programming document, while the horizontal axis summarizes the intervention logic. The colour of the cells corresponds to the affinity level of the intervention regarding the particular need. Green colour suggests a positive need, while red cells represent a negative link. The intensity of the colour corresponds to the intensity of expected impact in the specific need.

The affinity matrix clearly shows that the intervention logic is still valid and relevant. The investment priorities not only address identified needs, but also work complementary to other needs, thus providing the necessary background for the development of synergies. New needs, such as the increased refugee and migrant flows in the cross-border area are addressed by the intervention logic. Nevertheless, the increased interconnectivity of the cross-border area may have a negative effect increasing migratory flows and policing needs. The low migratory flows between the countries and the positive aspects of the intervention weigh in favour of the intervention logic.

Table 18: Affinity Matrix

Needs	A Competitive and Innovative Cross-Border Area		A Sustainable and Climate adaptable Cross-Border area				A Better Interconnected Cross-Border Area	A Socially Inclusive Cross-Border Area	
	3a	3d	5b	6c	6d	6f	7d	9a	9c
Road Connectivity	Light Green	Light Green					Dark Green	Light Orange	
Cross Border connectivity							Dark Green	Light Orange	
Increase of goods transportation potential							Dark Green		
Improvement of communications infrastructure									
Attractiveness to population	Light Green	Light Green					Light Green	Light Green	Light Green
Growth stimulation	Dark Green	Dark Green		Light Green	Light Green			Light Green	Dark Green
Innovation capacity increase	Dark Green	Dark Green							
Tourist capacity increase				Dark Green	Light Green			Light Orange	
New tourism paradigm due to COVID – 19				Light Orange	Light Green			Light Orange	
Better access to non-compulsory education									Light Green

Needs	A Competitive and Innovative Cross-Border Area		A Sustainable and Climate adaptable Cross-Border area				A Better Interconnected Cross-Border Area	A Socially Inclusive Cross-Border Area	
	3a	3d	5b	6c	6d	6f	7d	9a	9c
Vocational education and training									
Social exclusion and poverty									
Refugee and migratory flows									
Climate change vulnerability									
Flood and river overflow protection									
Improvement of protected areas management schemes									
Efficiency regarding water resources									
Valorisation of natural and cultural heritage									

4.3.3. Contribution of the of output and result indicators

NOTA BENE

The current section will be addressed in the 3rd deliverable, as it is explained in the Introduction.

4.4. Conclusions and proposals

NOTA BENE

The current section will be addressed in the 3rd deliverable, as it is explained in the Introduction.

5. Evaluation Module E. Revision of the Programme

NOTA BENE

The current section will be addressed in the 3rd deliverable, as it is explained in the Introduction.

PART II

1. Framework and the methodological aspects of impact evaluation

1.1. Evidence-based policy and Impact Assessment

The European Union sets as a common underlying theme among all its policy interventions; the principle of fact-based policies, as opposed to the normative driven policies. To this extent, it encourages, as well as binds, policy implementing institutions to develop and operate a monitoring and evaluation system concerning the impacts of the policy intervention. This impact evaluation can be utilized as tool for the analysis and the improvement of policy interventions, as well as hindrances that might lead to underperformance or undesired results.

The evaluation of cohesion policy impact on the citizens’ wellbeing, takes into account the financial, social and environmental aspects of wellbeing as one of the building blocks of any of these policies and it is an integral part of the monitoring and evaluation system.

The European Union’s legal framework concerning the Cohesion policies for the period 2014-2020 postulates that

- there should be a clear articulation of the intervention logic for all programmes, as well as clear targets and expected results
- every impact assessment should take into account confounding factors outside of the Programme when assessing its impacts

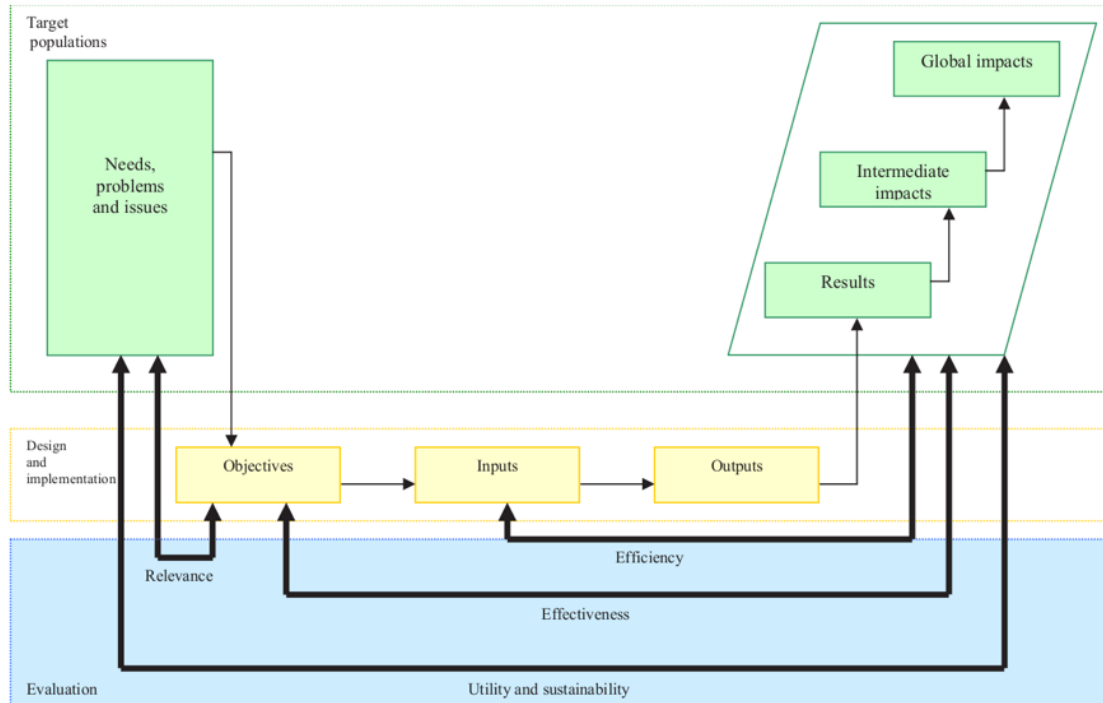
Taking the above into consideration, the present deliverable will elaborate on the basic notions concerning the monitoring and evaluation system before getting into the impact assessment of the particular Programme.

1.2. Evaluation of Policy Interventions: a comprehensive glossary

This section focuses on the theoretical notion of the planning, monitoring and evaluation of Cohesion Policies during the 2014-2020 period. It visits some basic notions in order to provide the necessary background for the following sections.

Figure 9 summarizes the underlying logic concerning policy interventions on an EU level and how the particular notions being utilized in the current document are interconnected within this framework.

Figure 9: Design, implementation and evaluation of policy interventions (Source: Evaluating EU activities - A Practical Guide for the Commission Services)



Below, specific notions linked with the evaluation process are presented in a comprehensive way.

Outputs

Outputs: Outputs refer to the direct products of the project actions within the framework of the Programme that in turn contribute to particular results. Outputs are monitored through a number of output indicators, i.e., variables that quantify the products of the projects' actions and are linked with the overall programme scope.

Output indicators: The output indicators are quantifiable variables to assess the products of the projects' actions. A common set of output indicators to assess the aggregated progress of the programmes' implementation at European Union level is set, corresponding to the investment priority and type of action supported in accordance with this Regulation and the relevant provisions of Regulation (EU) No 1303/2013. These common output indicators are complemented by programme-specific result indicators and, where relevant, by programme-specific output indicators.

Results

Results: Results are what each priority axis aspires to change or achieve in the Programme intervention area of the specific target group. Results are quantified through specific result indicators, which are variables representing the changes in one particular area or field, due to the intervention policy and other factors. The monitoring process from the managing authorities includes, to the extent possible, the changes in the indicators' value based on predetermined timeframes.

Result indicators: correspond to the specific objectives of each priority axis and thematic objective and their main scope is to express in a quantified way the changes that the programme aspires to make.

Based on the regulatory framework concerning monitoring and evaluation of the programmes, there should be at least one result indicator corresponding to a specific objective and should take into account the overall change that the intervention policy aspires to make, not just the possible results that the programme brings about.

Result indicators, in contrast with the output indicators that are internal part of the monitoring scheme and can be monitored through the monitoring system, are external data and can be collected from external and independent data sources such national statistical authorities, institutions (e.g., Ministries, local authorities, public authorities), and respective European institutions.

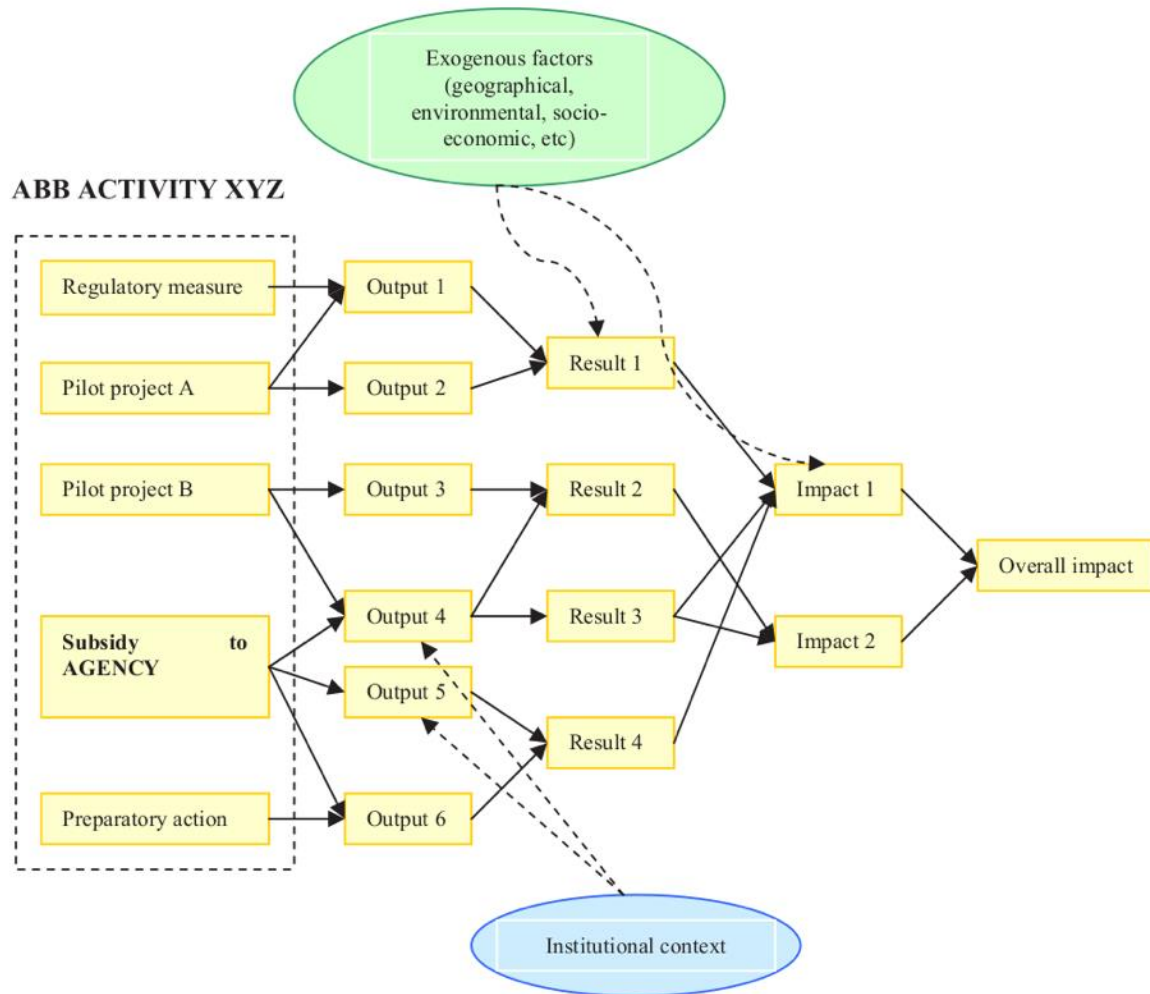
Impacts

Impacts: Impacts refer to the changes in the result (indicators) that can be meaningfully attributed to the policy intervention. It is crucial that a change in the result indicator per se does not suffice to substantiate an impact, since a number of factors may lead to such changes. Therefore, an important part of the impact evaluation process is discerning the contribution of the intervention policy to the observed result indicator changes.

Diagram 2 (below) highlights that a number of factors external to the intervention logic are affecting output, result and impact performance. The institutional framework can synergise or hinder the delivery of specific output either through hindering the overall implementation process and/or hindering specific output of the intervention to materialize. Similarly, external factors may hinder and/ or work in synergy with the programme and project actions to enhance results and impacts. Moreover, a number of exogenous factors can lead to not intended intermediate or long-term impacts.

Taking the above into account it is crucial to further elaborate on the issue of impact assessment.

Figure 10: Internal and External Factors that may Influence Results and Impacts of an Intervention source:



Evaluating EU activities – A Practical Guide for the Commission Services)

1.3. Impact Assessment

As stated above, the impact assessment evaluates the changes in an area and/or field that can be logically and meaningfully attributed to a specific intervention. The impact assessment takes into account not only the intended impacts but should also consider any unintended ones having positive or negative results.

In addition to the above, the impact assessment aims in assessing the results of the specific intervention, the level of achieving the targets set and the extent of which there would be a change in the result indicators, irrespective of the implementation of the intervention. Therefore, the scope of the impact assessment is to discern between the impacts that are the result of the intervention and the impacts that are the result of other exogenous (from the intervention) factors.

Taking the above into account, there are two distinct traits that come about concerning the effects of an intervention, with the first one focusing on the quantification of these effects and the next one dealing with the issue of causality of the intervention to the effects. These traits lead to equally distinct sets of methods that are primarily devoted to:

- assess the effects of the intervention based on a pre-established interest area and/or field, thus trying to shed light to whether the interventions do have effects based on counterfactual methods
- understand why a specific intervention leads to such intended or unintended effects and within which context this is happening. Therefore, the main focus of these methods is “why it works”, juxtaposing theoretical expectations with the actual implementation.

Counterfactual Impact Evaluation

The Counterfactual Impact Evaluation has a narrower scope and is typically a quantitative process, with the results expressed as a number of differences between areas where there has been an intervention and where there has not been one. Based on specific assumptions and empirical evidence, some causality can be attributed in the effects observed.

The Counterfactual Impact Assessment is useful because:

“(i) it gives easily interpretable information; (ii) it is an essential ingredient for cost-benefit and cost-effectiveness calculations; (iii) it can be broken down into separate numbers for subgroups, provided that the subgroups are defined in advance”.

While Counterfactual Impact Assessment methods try to tackle the question of “how much difference does an intervention make”, Theory-Based Impact Assessment methods try to answer other aspects that will inform decision-making, such as why interventions produce the specific results, for whom are these effects produced and within which context.

Theory-Based Impact Evaluation

Theory-Based Impact Assessment methods do not share the quantitative character of their counterfactual counterparts and thus in many cases are considered to be less objective and normative driven. Nevertheless, they are indispensable in order to shed light on how things do or do not work. These methods scrutinize the validity of the intervention logic and put forward a theory of change (how things should logically work to produce the desired change) where the category is named after.

1.4. Structure of the Impact Assessment Report

The following section presents the structure of the Impact Assessment Report which will be presented as a draft in Deliverable 3 and finalized in Deliverable 4.

1. Introduction
2. Theoretical and Methodological Framework
3. Operationalization of the Methodology
 - 3.1.1. Data collection per Specific Objective
4. Data Analysis and Results per Specific Objective
5. Conclusions and Recommendations

2. Operationalization of the Methodological Framework for the Programme

The current section is briefly discussing the way that the two main questions of the evaluation will be addressed i.e.

1. What is the result indicator value for each result indicator; How does it compare with the baseline?
2. If there is in an improvement in the result indicator can it be attributed to the programme interventions? If there isn't any improvement what are the contributing factors?

The Evaluator will assess the aforementioned questions through a Theory Based approach.

More in particular at the EVALSED Sourcebook: Method and Techniques comments:

Theory-based evaluation is an approach in which attention is paid to theories of policy makers, programme managers or other stakeholders, i.e., collections of assumptions, and hypotheses - empirically testable - that are logically linked together.

These theories can express an intervention logic of a policy: policy actions, by allocating (spending) certain financial resources (the inputs) aim to produce planned outputs through which intended results in terms of people's well-being and progress are expected to be achieved. The actual results will depend both on policy effectiveness and on other factors affecting results, including the context. An essential element of policy effectiveness is the mechanisms that make the intervention work. Mechanisms are not the input-output-result chain, the logic model or statistical equations. They concern amongst others beliefs, desires, cognitions and other decision- making processes that influence behavioural choices and actions. Theory based evaluation explores the mechanisms which policy makers believe make the policy effective and compares these with research-based evidence.

Theory-based evaluation focuses on this intervention theory; it aims to find and articulate this theory, to test it and to improve it, if necessary.

Theory-based evaluation has at its core two vital components. The first is conceptual, the second empirical. Conceptually, theory-based evaluations articulate a policy or programme theory. Empirically, theory-based evaluations

seek to test this theory, to investigate whether, why or how policies or programmes cause intended or observed results.

Testing the theories can be done on the basis of existing or new data, both quantitative (experimental and non-experimental) and qualitative. TBE does not apply a hierarchy of research designs and methods; it does not favour any over any others, as long as they are rigorously applied. Their choice depends on the evaluation design and they should be selected if they are appropriate to answer the evaluation questions.

Theories underlying a policy or programme are often not directly visible or knowable to evaluators. They are often not explicitly expressed in official documents. Evaluators have to search for these theories – if they have not been concisely articulated - and explain them in a testable way. Then they have to test them. (p. 51 – 52).

2.1. Data collection per Specific Objective

Table 19 summarizes the Programme’s Result Indicator as well as the source for their updating. In particular the indicators will be updated as follows:

- **R0201: Entrepreneurial business support environment:** A survey based on the methodology of the definition of the baseline will be conducted.
- **R0202: Total Value of Annual CB Area Exports :** Data are available from ΣΕΒΕ in Greece and the National Statistical Institute (NSI) in Bulgaria.
- **R0203: Number of international river basin districts with jointly coordinated flood risks management plans in compliance with Directive 2007/60/EC:** Data are available to the Special Secretariat for Water
- **R0204: Annual tourist overnight stays at accommodation establishments:** Available publicly through the Hellenic Statistical Authority and NSI
- **R0205: % of Natura areas reporting excellent or good degree of conservation:** Data will be collected either through a survey to respective managing authorities or through the reporting scheme for NATURA 200 sites.
- **R0206: % of characterized surface water bodies in GES:** Data publicly available through the River Basin Management Plans for Greece and Bulgaria. The timeframe for updating status does not correspond to the programme’s respective timeframe.
- **R0207: Number of operating border crossings:** Data available from respective Ministries of Exterior.

- **R0208: Annual visits to primary healthcare:** Data Available through the BI Health System for Greece and the National Health Insurance Fund
- **R0209: Annual visits to secondary/tertiary healthcare:** Data Available through the BI Health System for Greece and the National Health Insurance Fund
- **R0210: Social enterprise employees in the CB area:** Data available through the Social Entrepreneurship Registries in Greece and Bulgaria.

Data will be collected for the baseline year and the respective interim years in a granular enough level to allow for juxtaposing the changes manifested with programme interventions that are affecting the respective area.

2.2. Data Analysis and Results per Specific Objective

The analysis of data and the presentation of results per Specific Objective will be based on juxtaposing the changes manifested with programme interventions that are affecting the respective area, as well as taking into consideration the overall external environment context that may affect the value of a result indicator.

If we take as an example the evolution of the result indicator R0204: “Annual tourist overnight stays at accommodation establishments”, we can see that based on the available data that the value of the indicator for 2018 has been 7.7 million overnight stays for the Programme Area, higher than the target of the programme for 2023. While the evolution of the result indicators on a first level suggests that the Programme had a favourable impact in the sector and indicator this is not supported by further evidence. In particular, the first outputs for the IP did not take place before 2019 therefore it cannot be assumed that this was an impact of the programme. Additionally, if the increase was manifested in regional (statistical) units where there was no intervention from the programme, the hypothesis of the programme’s impact cannot be substantiated.

The Evaluator will assess the impacts of the Programme based on the above logic for all SOs and will triangulate data - if necessary - with personal interviews of focus groups of beneficiaries.

Table 19: Result Indicators System with the respective Data Sources

PA	IP	ID	Indicator	Measurement unit	Baseline value	Baseline Year	Target Value (2023)	No of Projects contibuting	Sources of Data
1	3a	R0201	Entrepreneurial business support environment	entrepreneurship barometer composite index in 1-10 scale	5.34	2015	5.90	NA	Survey
	3d	R0202	Total Value of Annual CB Area Exports	m. euros	4,407.47	2013	4,540.00	NA	SEVE and NSI
2	5b	R0203	Number of international river basin districts with jointly coordinated flood risks management plans in compliance with Directive 2007/60/EC	Number	0.00	2014	3.00	2	Special Secretariat of Water
	6c	R0204	Annual tourist overnight stays at accommodation establishments	millions stays	5.80	2013	7.40	21	Hellenic Statistical Service and NSI
	6d	R0205	% of Natura areas reporting excellent or good degree of conservation	%	54.00	2015	60.00	12	NATURA 2000 reporting or Survey
	6f	R0206	% of characterized surface water bodies in GES	%	43.88	2014	55.00	6	RBMP for WFD 2000/60/EC
3	7b	R0207	Number of operating border crossings	Number	6.00	2014	7.00	1	Egnatia Odos Ministry of Interior
4	9a	R0208	Annual visits to primary healthcare	Visits	1,123,561.00	2013	1,235,917.00	13	BI Health System
	9a	R0209	Annual visits to secondary/tertiary healthcare	Visits	477,275.00	2013	421,097.00	13	BI Health System
	9c	R0210	Social enterprise employees in the CB area	Employees	954.00	2014	1,004.00	11	Social Enterprise Registries

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