



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

4th Deliverable:
Final Report

2021
August

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List of Abbreviations

Acronym	Definition	Page
AMIF	Asylum, Migration and Integration Fund	65
BU	Budget Used	44
CBA	Cross Border Area	64
CP	Cooperation Programme	19
EAFRD	European Agricultural Fund for Rural Development	17
EC	European Community	79
ESF	European Social Fund	82
EEA	European Economic Area	82
EMFF	European Maritime and Fisheries Fund	17
ERDF	European Regional Development Fund	9
ESPON	European Spatial Planning Observation Network	69
EU	European Union	9
GDP	Gross Domestic Product	13
GES	Good Ecological Status	71
GVA	Gross Value Added	59
ICT	Information and Communication Technology	45
ID	Identity	44
IP	Investment Priority	32
JS	Joint Secretariat	31
KIS	Key Implementation Step	40
MA	Managing Authority	31
MC	Joint Monitoring Committee	12
MIS	Monitoring Information System	35
NA	Not Applicable/Not Available	24
NCA	National Coordination Authority	9
NSI	National Statistical Institute (Bulgaria)	71
NUTS	Nomenclature des Unités Territoriales Statistiques	13
OA	Output Achieved	50
OAP	Output Achieved Programme	49
OECD	Organization for Economic Co-operation and Development	66
PA	Priority Axis	20
PPS	Purchasing Power Standards	59
RBMP	River Basin Management Plan	110
REG	Regulation	83
SEVE	Greek Exporters Association	71
SME	Small Medium Enterprise	16
TBE	Theory Based Evaluation	106
TO	Thematic Objective	28
UK	United Kingdom	67
WFD	Water Framework Directive	110

Introduction

The present report (**2nd Report**) is the **4th 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 of 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 4th deliverable should include the final updated version concerning the implementation assessment, including the Communication Strategy of the Programme, as well as the 2nd Plan for the Impact Evaluation of the Programme.

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.
- 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 **addresses** the progress the programme implementation up to 31/12/2020 and also assesses the expected progress of the implementation for 2023.
- E. The deliverable also address the **need for the revision** of the Programme and in particular for modifications related to the intervention logic and the performance framework. The deliverable addresses these issues based on the external factors affected the programme, the implementation progress of the programme and the expected results.
- F. The assessment (and possible amendment) of the communication strategy in order to -assess the effectiveness according to its targets for the period under examinations i.e. from the beginning of the Programme up to the 31/12/2020-to assess the efficiency of the communication actions.

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 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, MC minutes etc.).

Nevertheless, it should be noted that the current deliverable takes into consideration data that were included in the programme implementation monitoring platform (MIS) up to 31/12/2020, but also advancements and data of 2021 in order to provide a better understanding of the overall assessment of the programme implementation. The later data are presented separately in the respective Annex.

1. Cooperation Programme Overview

1.1. The Border Cooperation Programmes

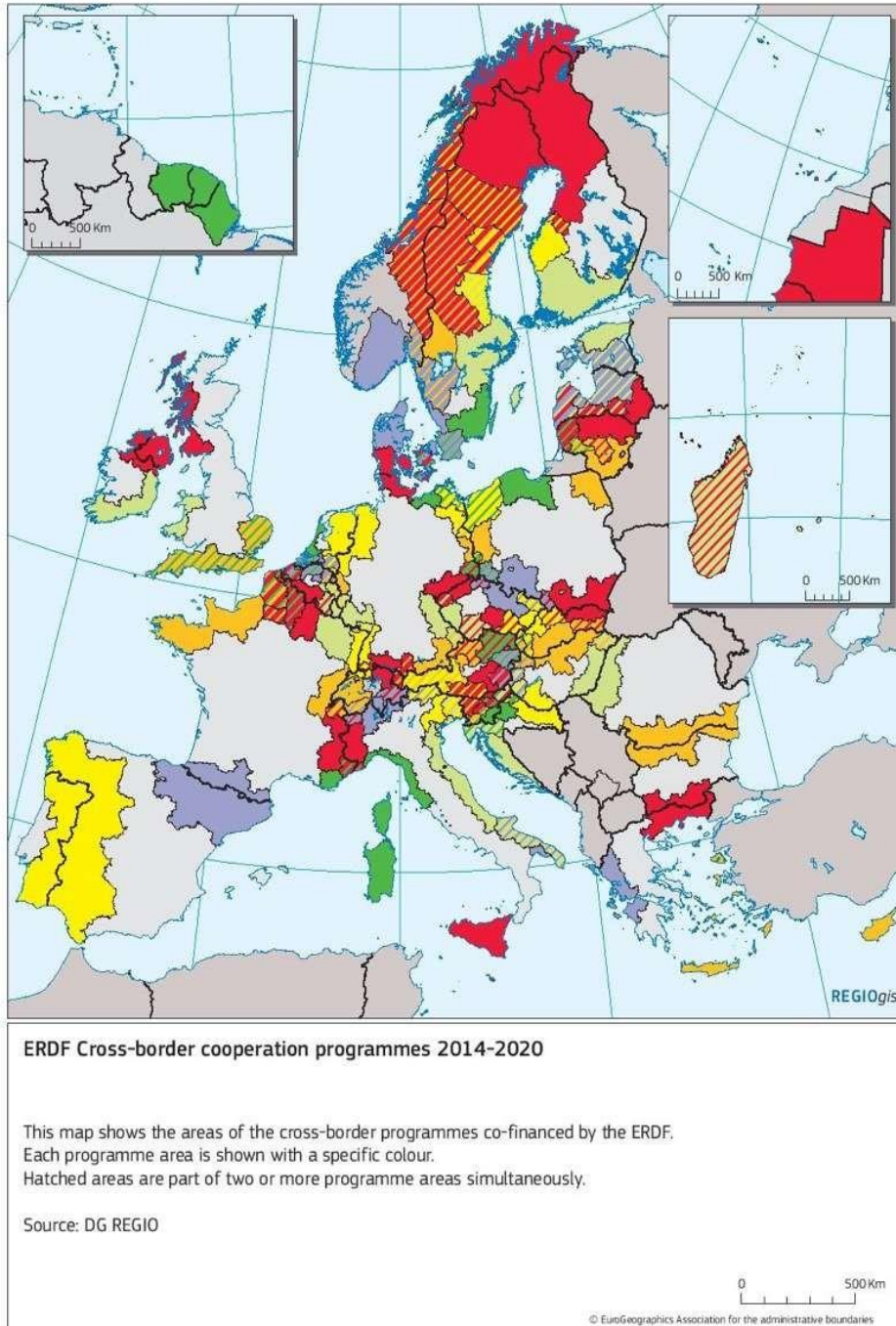
For the last 30 years, the **European Union** has been investing in **European Cross-Border cooperation**, through a specific instrument known as Interreg A that supports cooperation between NUTS III regions from at least two different Member States lying directly on the borders or adjacent to them. 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 favor 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) 6283 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 neighboring 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 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

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Priority Axis	Thematic Objective	Investment Priority	Specific Objective
		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 (CC/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 overall amount included equals 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 totaling 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 at first glance seems to concern since despite the 2 calls considering the last evaluation, the overall contracted amount remains zero².
- On the contrary to the progress being made on calls and contracts, the payment level for the reference period has been 46,802,076 € that corresponds to 37% 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 of concern.

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, 36 projects have been approved for financing. Until 31/12/2020 the contracted amounts were 16,4 MEURO (10,6 MEURO Public funding). However these had not been inserted in MIS by 31/12/2020. For the 6th Call, 25 projects have been approved for financing with a further 6 placed in the reserve list, which was activated in 28/02/2020 with the 53rd written procedure

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 seems to concern in the implementation progress as 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., 48% 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 12,335,534 euros.
- Lastly, for Priority Axis 5 100% of the allocated budget, has been certified expenses are equal to 1,535,358 i.e., 22.8%.

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 certified amounts.
- Thematic Objective 05 includes 2 calls (3rd and 4th). 2 projects have been contracted amounting in 16,782,518 €, or 99% 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 Especially for the projects of the 5th Call, 36 projects have been approved for financing. Until 31/12/2020 the contracted amounts were 16,4 MEURO (10,6 MEURO Public funding). However these had not been inserted in MIS by 31/12/2020. For the 6th Call, 25 projects have been approved for financing with a further 6 placed in the reserve list, which was activated in 28/02/2020 with the 53rd written procedure

- Thematic Objective 07 includes 1 strategic project of 38,802,558 € (43,721,429 €, € in total corresponding to 38,802,558 € 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% (12,335,534 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	Budget Calls ¹	of Contracted	Certified	Budget Calls ¹	of Contracted	Certified
					% of total	% of total	% of total
1 A Competitive and Entrepreneurship Promoting Cross-Border Area	20,235,295	17,000,000	*	*	84%	*	*
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	12,335,534	73%	99%	58%
5 Technical Assistance	6,764,706	6,764,706	6,764,706	1,535,358	100%	100%	22.8%
Total	130,262,835	114,200,001	121,820,181	46,802,076	88%	94%	37%

1 correspond to amounts included in a call.

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

*See Annex

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	*	*	*	*	*	*	*	*
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%	12.335.534	79%	58%
5	Technical Assistance	6.764.706	5.19	-	6.764.706	100%	2	6.764.706	100%	100%	1.535.358	22.8 %	23%
	Total	130.262.835	100	7	114.200.001	70%	53	121.820.181	133%	94%	46.802.076	51%	37%

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

Percentages are rounded to the closest natural number

*See Annex

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		*	*	*	*	*
		3d - Supporting the capacity of SMEs to grow in regional, national and international markets, and to		*	*	*	*	*

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Priority Axis	Thematic Objective	Investment Priority	Budget Decided	Budget Contracted	Expenditures Certified	Projects	Contracted %	Certified %
		engage in innovation processes						
	Total 3		17.000.000					
	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%
		6c - Conserving, protecting, promoting and developing natural and cultural heritage		23,158,452	5,102,120	21	NA	22%
	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		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%
2	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%

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Priority Axis	Thematic Objective	Investment Priority	Budget Decided	Budget Contracted	Expenditures Certified	Projects	Contracted %	Certified %
	Total 7		38,235,295	38,235,295	18,223,707	1	100%	48%
	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%
4		Total 9		15,700,000	21,357,345	12,335,534	24	136%
5	NA	NA	6,764,706	6,764,706	1,535,358	2	100%	23%
	Grant total		114,200,001	121,820,181	46,802,076	68	107%	37%

* See Annex

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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	100%	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	12,335,534	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	46,802,076	68	107%	37%

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 it 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.

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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	
					6f) Promoting innovative technologies to improve environmental protection and resource efficiency in the waste sector, water sector, soil protection or to reduce air pollution.	
3 rd	22/12/2016	Restricted	Priority Axis 4: A Socially Inclusive Cross Border Area	09 - Promoting social inclusion, combating poverty and any discrimination	(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.	15.700.000
					(9c) Providing support for social enterprises	
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, subsidy contracts related to the 5th Call and 6th Call for Proposals have been signed. 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.

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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	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

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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
				cultural and natural heritage and attractions							document. The target value is expected to be fully achieved.
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 totaling to 607,644 i.e. that contribute to 96% of the final target. Nevertheless, with an overachievement of the

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											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 totaling to 12.00 i.e. that contribute to 100% of the final target.
4	9	9a	O0205	Number of health I systems developed	Number	3	1	3	33%	100%	The contracted projects have targets totaling 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 totaling to 50.00 i.e. that contribute to
5	NA	NA	O0207	Number of employees (FTEs) whose salaries are co-financed by technical	Employees	12	9	9	75%	75%	The programme has already achieved the 2023 level.
5	NA	NA	O0208	Number of publicity and outreach events organized	Events	15	22	15	146%	146%	The programme has already achieved the 2023 level.

1 Though no projects were incorporated in the under the 5th Call for Proposals, 36 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. Lessons learnt

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.
- Close monitoring and incorporation of the projects 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 to account the expected belated 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 2020.

For Priority Axis 1

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- 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 certified expenditures 20,235,295.00 target in 2023 and a 1,011,765.00 milestone in 2018, based on the certified 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 certified expenses of similar programmes and timespans.

For Priority Axis 2

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- 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 certified expenditures 42,882,353.00 targets in 2023 and a 4,328,.00 milestone in 2018, based on the certified 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 certified expenditures 47,602,197.00 targets in 2023 and a 4,328,.00 milestone in 2018, based on the certified 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 certified expenditures 38,802,558.00 targets in 2023 and an 8,602,941.00 milestone in 2018, based on the certified expenses of similar programmes and timespans.

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- 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 certified expenditures 38,802,558.00 targets in 2023 and an 8,602,941.00 milestone in 2018, based on the certified 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 certified expenditures targeting to 21,577,923.00€ in 2023 and to a milestone of 1,078,896.00€ in 2018, based on the certified 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 projects have been contracted in 2021 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	*	*	Unknown
(1)*	(Output)	(CO02)	(Number of Enterprises receiving grants)	(Enterprises)	(60)	(0)	*	*	Unknown
(1)	(Output)	(CO04)	(Number of Enterprises receiving non-financial support)	(Enterprises)	(275)	(0)	*	*	*
1	Key implementation step	K0201	Selection of enterprises	Number	9	6	*	*	Unknown
1	Financial	F0201	Eligible verified (certified) Expenditure of the Axis	Euro	2,023,529 €	1,011,765 €	*	*	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	3	3	100%
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 €	12,335,534 €	21,357,345 €	99%

*See Annex

() 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 though it will not jeopardize 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 in Priority Axis 1 and that would be able to achieve its targets with the 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 Especially for the projects of the 5th Call, 36 projects have been approved for financing. Until 31/12/2020 the contracted amounts were 16,4 MEURO (10,6 MEURO Public funding). However these had not been inserted in MIS by 31/12/2020. For the 6th Call, 25 projects have been approved for financing with a further 6 placed in the reserve list, which was activated in 28/02/2020 with the 53rd written procedure

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 may not be as high. The remaining sums presumably could be diverted to other axes.

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.

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. Lessons learnt

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 concern, 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 is equal to 37% of the overall programme budget. Moreover, in 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):

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

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

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

The output achieved in 2020 based on programme targets

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

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 to be of concern 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 of concern 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 4 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 4 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.

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	OAPs / BU Ratio	OAP/BU Ratio		
1	CO01	275	*	*	*	*	*	*	*	*	*	*	*	*	*
1	CO05	275	*	*	*	*	*	*	*	*	*	*	*	*	*
1	CO01	330	*	*	*	*	*	*	*	*	*	*	*	*	*
1	CO04	330	*	*	*	*	*	*	*	*	*	*	*	*	*
1	O0201	4	*	*	*	*	*	*	*	*	*	*	*	*	*
2	CO20	747,000	747,000	16,782,518	99%	206,140	100%	1,0	20%	28%	28%	1,4	1,4		22
2	O0202	10	20	20,808,379	129%	3	200%	1,6	22%	15%	30%	0,7	1,4		1,040,419
2	CO09	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	Nature and biodiversity: Surface area of habitats supported to attain a better conservation status	356,000	391,362	11,023,352	129%	64,713	110%	0,9	38%	17%	18%	0,4	0,5	28
2	O0203	Surface water resources under joint monitoring	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	Total length of newly built roads of which TEN-T	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	Number of health care institutions reorganized, modernized or reequipped	12	12	14,087,484	136%	3	100%	0,7	55%	25%	25%	0,5	0,5	1,173,957
4	O0205	Number of health ICT systems developed	3	3	2,156,604	136%	1	100%	0,7	55%	33%	33%	0,6	0,6	718,868
4	CO36	Population covered by improved health services	632,000	607,644	15,310,527	136%	267,623	96%	0,7	55%	44%	42%	0,8	0,8	25
4	O0206	Number of participants in social entrepreneurship projects promoting gender equality, equal opportunities and social inclusion across borders.	50	50	6,046,818	136%	25	100%	0,7	65%	50%	50%	0,8	0,8	120,936

* See Annex

**New methodology based in December 2020 methodological note

*** Proposed target in v.3.1 programming

document.U Unknown

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 analyzed 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. 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 Especially for the projects of the 5th Call, 36 projects have been approved for financing. Until 31/12/2020 the contracted amounts were 16,4 MEURO (10,6 MEURO Public funding). However these had not been inserted in MIS by 31/12/2020. For the 6th Call, 25 projects have been approved for financing with a further 6 placed in the reserve list, which was activated in 28/02/2020 with the 53rd written procedure

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 of concern 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. Lessons learnt

Based on the available data from the MIS, the Annual Implementation Reports etc. there is 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 6c (in one output indicator), the allocated budget hints that the original estimation of unit cost was higher than the actual one. In the case of 6c and in particular for indicator 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 much higher during planning than the data show currently. Unless there are significant changes in this IP, it is safe to assume that unit costs were overestimated. Significant changes may include e.g. withdrawal of the support from the MA, due to underperformance of the relevant projects if the projects have overestimated their contribution to the output indicator. Therefore, as far as expected efficiency is concerned, the Programme is well on track. The MA took into consideration that projects are overestimating costs or that the tendering procedures lead to much lower prices that originally assumed to greater competition. These amounts saved can be diverted to address possible needs in other axes. Unfortunately, there is 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 all axes 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.

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 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 anemic 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
	2014	2015	2016	2017	2018	2019	2014-2019	(at country level)
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%	

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.

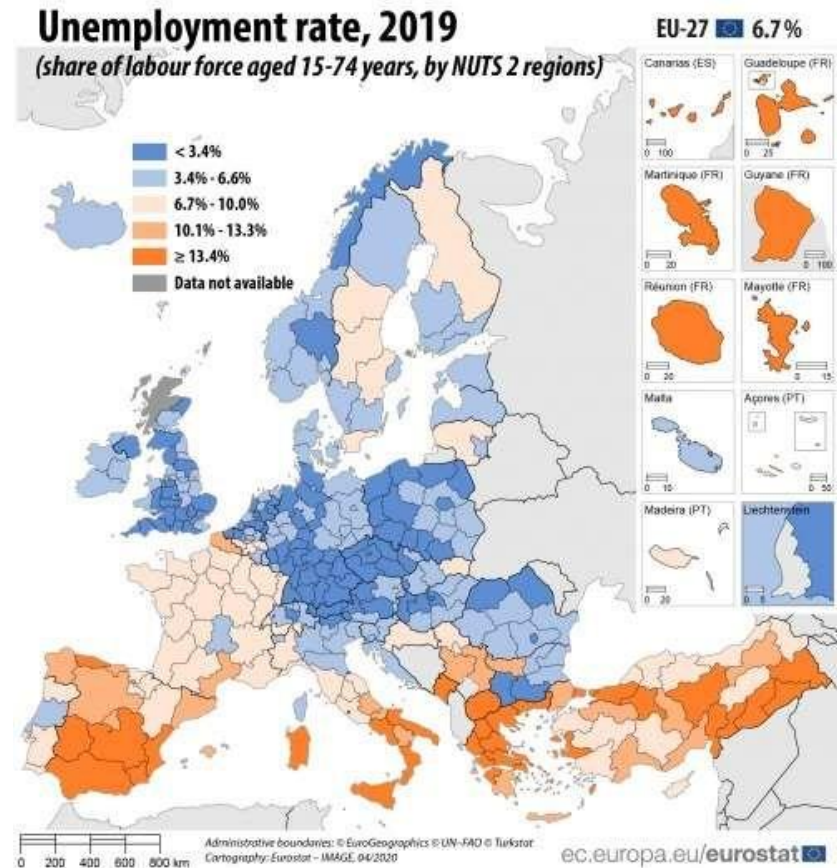
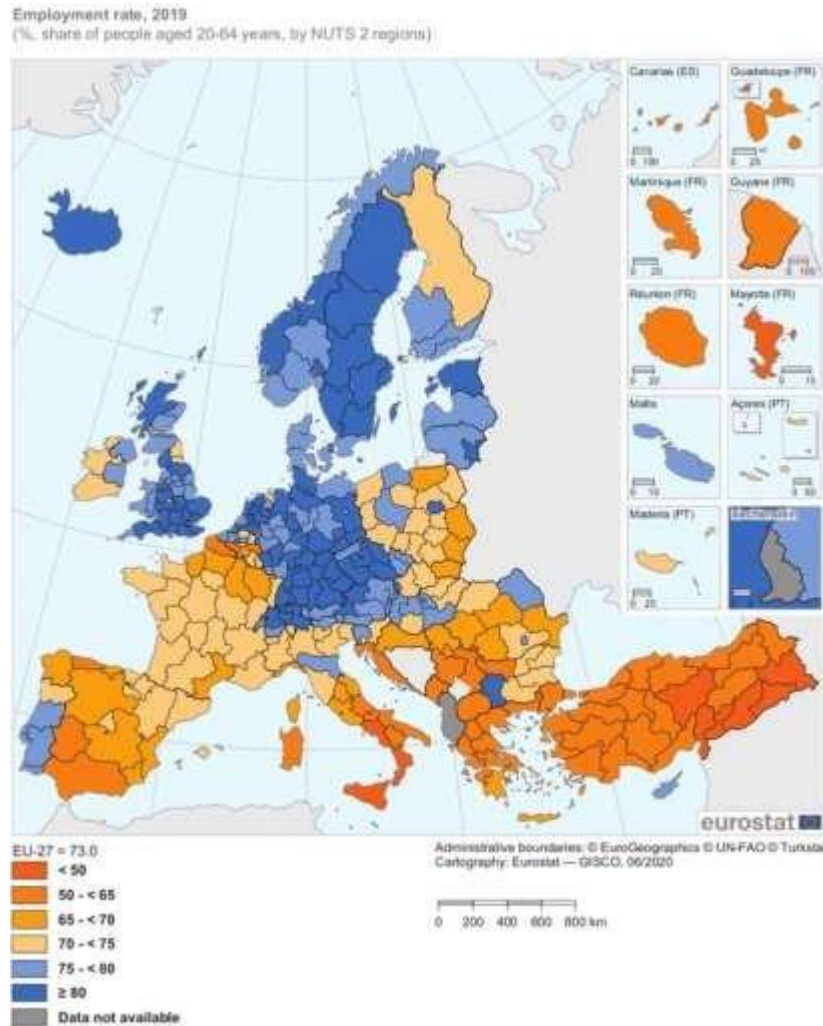
That said with the 2020 COVID-19 pandemic and its impacts in the global and national economies it is expected that unemployment rates are going to increase again after 2020.

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



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 Republic of North 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 been put 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 Centers 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 Centers) will be called Health Centers. At the same time, new decentralized structures, regional Health Centers, 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 favor 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 centers 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, 2017).

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).

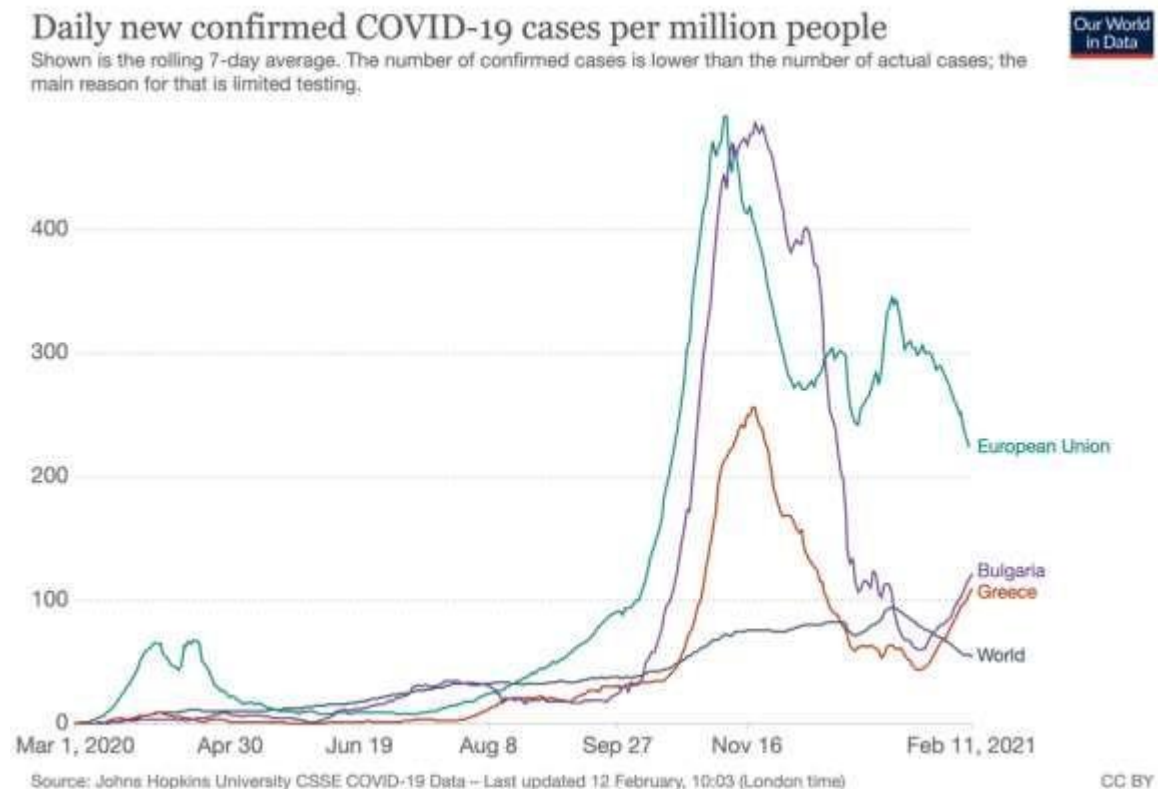
In 2018, the government pledged to go ahead with the most substantial healthcare reforms since 1998, including the partial or full de-monopolization of the National Health Insurance Fund.

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 countries have taken measures to address this crisis. Greece had two lockdown periods (March – May 2020 and since 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

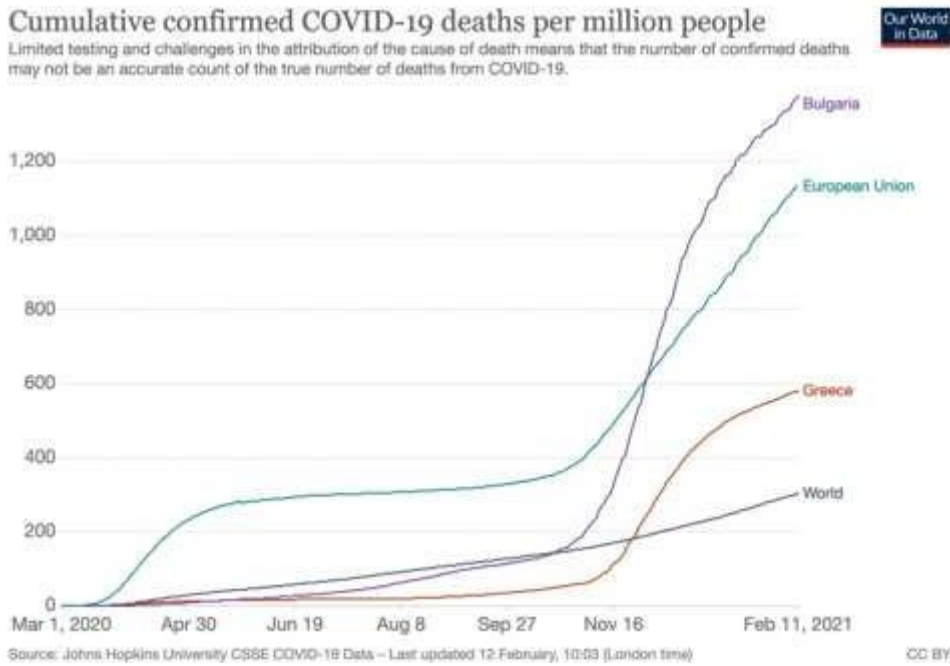
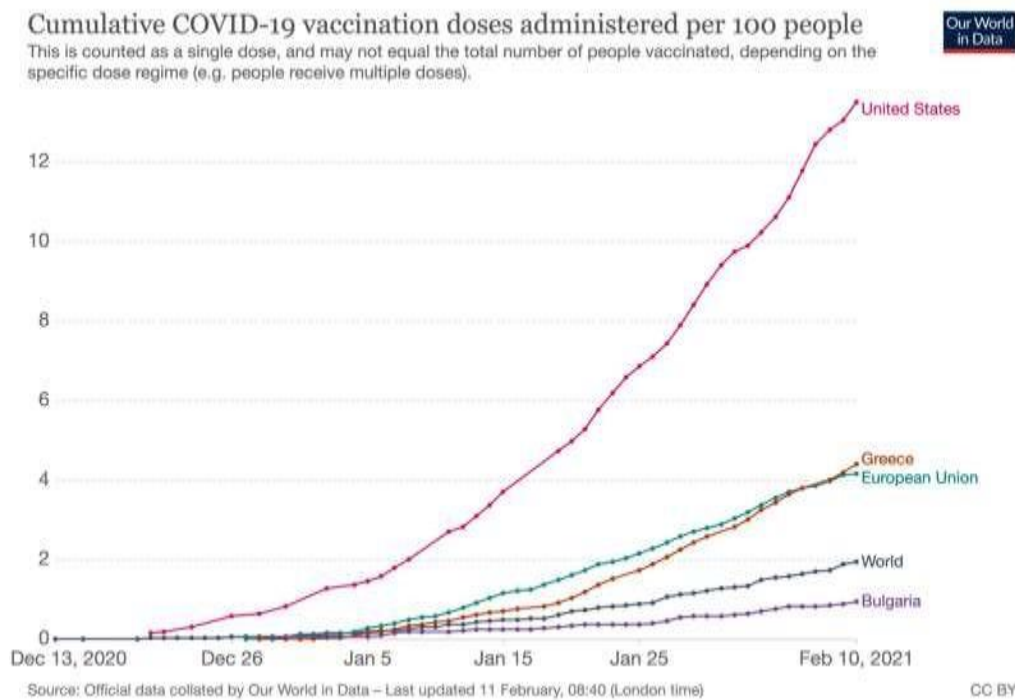


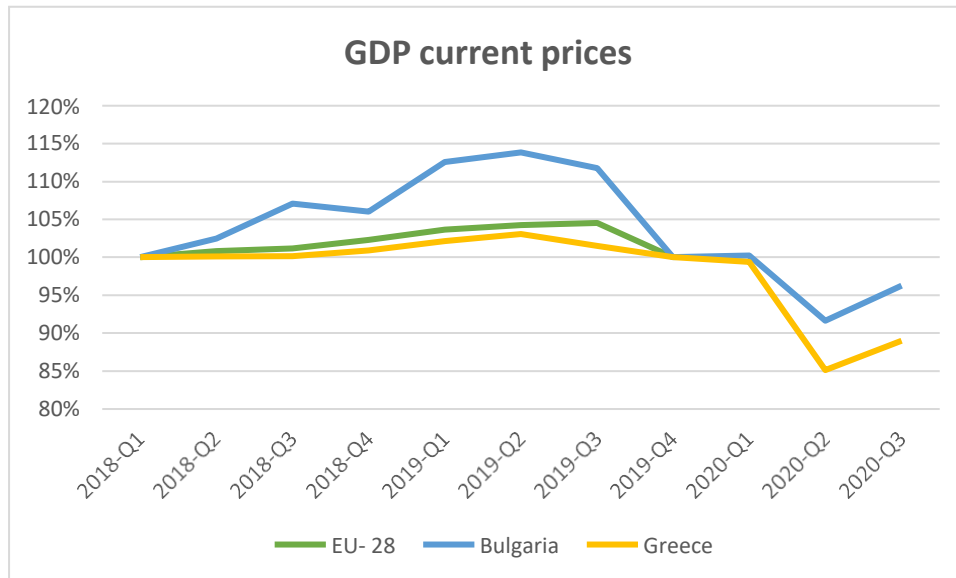
Figure 6: Cumulative COVID-19 vaccination doses administered per 100 people



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.

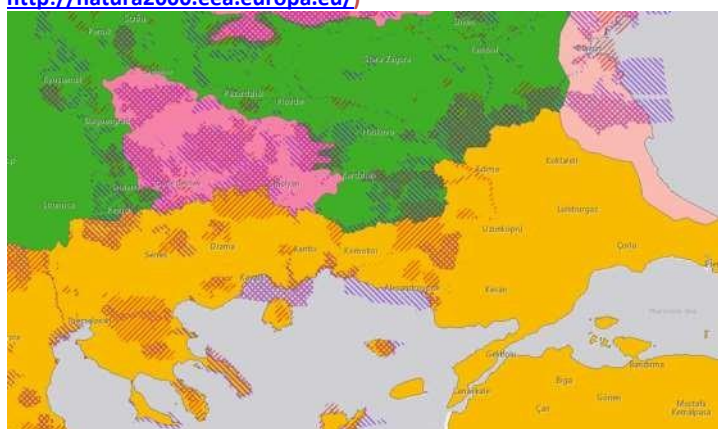
In addition, all units have the lowest to low capacity to adapt into climate change. Impacts are expected to be heatwaves, recessionary or cyclonic rains, floods, wildfires, landslides and erosion. While there are no significant changes in the vulnerability or adaptation capacity level in the region 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

The following section concerns the results indicators progress that are detailed below. The evaluator has updated the result indicators for which the data are readily available and the process for acquiring the other relevant data is underway. In particular the indicators are updated as follows:

- **R0201: Entrepreneurial business support environment:** A survey based on the methodology of the definition of the baseline has been conducted.
- **R0202: Total Value of Annual CB Area Exports:** Data is available from SEVE 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 is 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, therefore there is no updating planned before the conclusion of the programming period.
- **R0207: Number of operating border crossings:** Data available from respective Ministries of Foreign Affairs.
- **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

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Table 17: Result Indicators Performance

PA	IP	ID	Indicator	Measurement unit	Baseline 2013	Value (2018)	Value(2020)	Level Achieved (2018 or 2020)	Level Expected (2023)	Comments
1	3a	R0201	Entrepreneurial business support environment		5.34		5.6	63%	5.9	
1	3	R0202	Total Value of Annual CB Area Exports	Million Euros	4,407		5,276 ⁱ	116%	4,540	Data adjusted to the baseline
2	5b	R0203	Number of international river basin districts with jointly coordinated flood risks management plans in compliance with Directive 2007/60/EC	No	0		0	0%	3	
2	6c	R0204	Annual tourist overnight stays at accommodation establishments	Millions	5.8	7.5	NA	105%	7.4	
2	6d	R0205	% of Natura areas reporting excellent or good degree of conservation	%	54%	79%	79%	132%	60%	
2	6f	R0206	% of characterized surface water bodies in GES	%	44%	59%	59%	106%	55%	
3	7b	R0207	Number of operating border crossings	No	6	6(2)	6(2)	86%	7	
4	9a	R0208	Annual visits to primary healthcare	Visits	1,123,561	1,309,240 ⁱⁱ	1,063,241 ⁱⁱ	95% ⁱⁱ	1,235,917	Data adjusted to the baseline
4	9a	R0209	Annual visits to secondary/tertiary healthcare	Visits	477,275	547,195 ⁱⁱ	461,964 ⁱⁱ	110% ⁱⁱ	421,097	Data adjusted to the baseline
4	9c	R0210	Social enterprise employees in the CB area	Employees	954 (604 ⁱⁱⁱ - 4849 ^{iv})	3,391	2,054	204%	1,004	

ⁱ Values for 2019. Data availability for the Bulgarian side were not available and no increase of value was taken under consideration. Additionally, due to initially value discrepancies for the values of Greek Exports in 2013 a respective adjusted value is taken into consideration for 2019. In particular, the

value was adjusted as follows $Value_{2019} = \left(\frac{Value_{MN\ 2013}}{Value_{SEVE\ 2013}} \right) * Values_{SEVE\ 2019}$, where MN : Methodological Note. Values for the Bulgarian Export Data are the result of a projection based on the national level data, due data unavailability.

ⁱⁱ Data adjusted to baseline (raw data 5,755,193 for 2013, 6,706,295 for 2018, 5,441,097 for 2020 for R0208 and 348,960 for 2013, 400,082 for 2018 and for 337,765 for 2020 for R0209)

ⁱⁱⁱ Baseline 2012

^{iv} Baseline 2013

Based on the available data for the result indicators the programme has achieved already the target that was set for 2023 for indicators R0202, R0204, R0205, R0206 and R0210. Moreover, targets are expected to be achieved for R0201, R0203, R0207 is also expected to be achieved by 2023. Based on the available data targets may be achieved for R0208 and R0209 by 2023 though this is not probable, since the 2020 values include the COVID effect that reduced hospital visits to both countries.

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

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 18: 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	(6) To enhance water

				technologies to improve management environmental protection and resource efficiency in the waste sector, water sector and with regard to soil, or to reduce air pollution	
3.	A better interconnected Cross-Border area	07 - Promoting sustainable transport and removing bottlenecks in key 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

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 19: 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

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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

The monitoring system and performance framework of the Programme is satisfactory. All output and result indicators have the potential to assess the intervention magnitude of the programme, as well as to assess the results of this interventions in the area. Based on the intervention logic breakdown and taking into account the corresponding specific objectives and needs, the output and result indicators constructively contribute in the monitoring and impact assessment of the programme.

In all priority axes, there is a balance between the financial aspects of the programme and the representation of the outputs and results that the interventions are expected to have. Output indicators consider all the investment priorities while at the same time remain comprehensive and manageable.

The selection of the output and especially the result indicators is towards the right direction in the sense that is based mainly on publicly available data and/or data gathered from institutions that are independent of the programme. This selection while in some cases put hurdles in the evaluation prosses greatly enhances transparency.

Nevertheless, there were some difficulties concerning the acquisition of the relevant data. Taking into consideration the level of detail in the methodological note, these difficulties can be attributed to the discontinuation of data collection and availability. That said a clearer methodological note detailing all relevant methodological steps would be of great value to the evaluation effort.

4.4. Lessons learnt

The relevance of the intervention logic remained relevant thought-out the evaluation period since the needs that the programme is trying to address also remained the same in context. One can make the argument for differences in the magnitude of the needs, though the core remained the same.

While the two countries follow a very different macroeconomic trajectory the last decade, development in Bulgaria is not equally distributed with the CBA lagging significantly behind. Therefore, the despite the differences nation-wide the local needs remain the same.

More rapid changes would be expected in the next programming period in the side of Bulgaria if the country manages to stay within the current trajectory. Therefore, the ex-ante and the interim evaluation should take into consideration such changes in order to sustain the relevance of the programme.

5. Evaluation Module E. Revision of the Programme

5.1. Need for revision

The revision of programmes is stipulated in the REG EU 1303/2013, through specific provisions. Any revision of a programme should be justified accordingly and take into account any impacts that such revision might have in the achievement of the EU priorities for smart and sustainable development as well as the specific objectives of the projects. Revisions should also consider the specific provision of each fund, the horizontal principles and any other relevant provision on a thematic level.

Programmes’ revisions may include different levels of modifications, that is

- modifications in the intervention logic;
- modification in the performance framework;
- modifications due to the need to include new intervention codes per priority axis.

While modifications in the targets and unitary cost assumptions of the performance framework may not lead in modifications in other levels, modifications in the intervention logic should and is legally expected to be reflected into the performance framework and the output and result indicators’ system.

For any revision of programmes, issues that should be taken under consideration include the low decision and the low contracted level of funds, as well as the low payments of funds. Additionally, programme revisions should be advanced in cases where the monitoring scheme of output and result indicators is not considered to sufficiently represent the intervention logic, and/or the baselines, milestones, and targets are problematic.

5.2. Modifications to the intervention logic

Based on the analysis presented in the Evaluation Module D, the Intervention logic of the Programme is still relevant and valid. Changes, in the economic environment, the labour market, the environmental status or the connectedness of the area that have been identified, do not justify changes in the intervention logic of the project.

It must be noted that this is due to the comprehensive and complementary character of the intervention logic that addresses multiple needs simultaneously, but also to the low performance of the intervention area in most of the socioeconomic indicators.

In particular, the area underperforms in economic indicators such as GDP and GVA, has very high and extremely high unemployment in the Bulgarian and Greek part respectively, and is one of the most vulnerable areas to climate change.

Considering the above there is no need for modification in the intervention logic.

5.3. Modifications due to budget reallocation

Based on the financial indicators of the performance network and taking into account the projected achievement of output indicators, no changes in the budget allocation are needed.

The allocated budget for Priority Axis 1 cannot be assessed based on the current data. Considering the high unemployment rates in the region and considering the approved projects in 2020, no reallocation of budget is suggested.

The achievement level of all other PAs suggests that there is no need for changes in the allocation of budget, since all output indicators have or are expected to have high and very high achievement level.

5.4. Modifications to the performance framework

In case of modifications in the performance framework, the new proposed framework should take into account that the indicators and/or key implementation stages would correspond to at least 50% of the resources and should include an overall revision of the methodology of the performance framework.

Moreover, the rationale for such changes should be based on the Reg. EU 1303/2013 stipulating that such changes are acceptable in the case of important changes in the economic, labour market, environmental conditions or other assumptions that have been taken in the programming document. Additionally, such changes should also consider commitments concerning climate change and sustainable urban development.

The current analysis and evaluation does not justify changes in the performance framework. The selection of output indicators, key implementation stages, and financial indicators represents satisfactory the programme intervention logic and grasps its performance level. Similarly, there is no need for changes in the assumptions, milestones, and targets.

5.5. Lessons learnt

The evaluation of the Cooperation Programme Interreg V-A Greece-Bulgaria 2014-2020 has taken a number of aspects and levels into account. The analysis presented in the sections above deals with the effectiveness of the programme, the progress of the performance framework, the efficiency of the interventions, the relevance of the intervention logic before concluding in the current section about possible modifications and revisions of the programme.

The overall analysis shows that the programme has been founded on a solid planning document that assessed the challenges and opportunities that the intervention area is facing. Furthermore, considering the progress of the programme in all different levels, as well as the current status of the economic, social and environmental parameters, there is no justified need for revision and modifications of the programme at this stage.

6. Evaluation Module F. Amendment of Communication Strategy

Module F of the Evaluation concerns the Evaluation of the communication strategy. In particular,

The effectiveness of the communication strategy with regards to the Programme’s performance, the information received by the beneficiaries, the stakeholders and other involved parties

The objective of this Chapter is to analyse and evaluate the implementation progress of the Programme’s communication strategy, emphasising on what extent the strategy and the communication activities implemented up to 31.12.2020 contributed to the implementation progress of the Programme and especially with regards to:

- The sufficiency of the information for the Programme, its role, the objectives, the results and its impact, as well as for the enhancement of the EU and ERDF contribution to the interested parties: targeted audiences (potential beneficiaries, project partners, end-users etc.) and general public.
- The effectiveness of the communication actions (e.g. conferences, seminars, exhibitions, annual events/ EC Day, information provided through the Programme website and social media accounts etc.) for the eligible area.

6.1. Content of the Communication Strategy of the Programme

The main principles of the Communication Strategy were presented, discussed and adopted during the meeting of the Joint Monitoring Committee of the “Interreg V-A Greece-Bulgaria 2014-2020 Cooperation Programme” that took place on the 2nd of March 2016.

The successful implementation of the communication strategy is vital for the achievement of the strategic and operational goals of the Programme thus

- promotes the Programme itself;
- promotes the Projects that run under the Programme;
- highlights the significance of the European Territorial Cooperation /INTERREG Programmes in general;
- stresses the added value of the investments through regional and urban policy as one of the most visible and tangible areas of EU action for citizens.

The general principles of the overall Communication Strategy that characterize all the proposed measures and actions is:

- Increase transparency and awareness of EU funds
- Ensure maximum benefit by multiplying the effects of EU funding
- Creating awareness of project activities and results

General Objectives

The general objectives set by the Communication Strategy are:

- **Awareness:** Highlighting of the role of the European Union and the Structural Funds of the European Union for the public and the promotion of the added value of EU participation in the jointly funded Projects of the INTERREG V-A Greece-Bulgaria 2014-2020 Cooperation Programme.
- **Transparency:** Ensuring transparency as far as access to the Funds is concerned in all levels. That includes dissemination of information on specific benefits from the Programme’s contribution to different groups as well as the general public as well as provision of clear, specific and adequate information regarding the Programme’s rules and procedures.
- **Equal Opportunities and non-discrimination:** Equality between men and women and the integration of the gender perspective during the various stages of implementation of the Funds and avoidance of any discrimination based on sex, racial or ethnic origin, religion or belief, disability, age or sexual orientation. Special attention was given to equal opportunity to access to information for women as well as people with disabilities and all ethnic minorities living in the eligible border region.

Specific Objectives

The Communication Strategy of the “Interreg V-A Greece-Bulgaria 2014-2020 Cooperation Programme keeps the main specific objectives of the 2007-2013 Communication Plan:

- Promote the Programme and its results to the general public and to all the interested parties.
- Deliver adequate information about the Programme, its role, impact and aims to the identified target groups.
- Inform the institutions involved in the implementation of the Programme about their role in information and publicity.
- Ensure that the potential Final Beneficiaries have complete, valid, and timely information.
- Inform target groups about the conditions and criteria to be met to access the Programme’s funds.

- Demonstrate the role of the European Union and the way, in which Community/EU resources are spent with transparency.

and sets additional specific priorities for the Programming Period 2014-2020 as presented below:

- Promote the Programme’s contribution in the eligible area during the 2014-2020 period.
- Provide evidence of impact and results in the eligible area during the 2014-2020 period.
- Highlight good practice examples from the 2007-2013 period.
- Stress the added value of Cohesion Policy and Regional and Urban Policy.
- Undertake communication initiatives in order to:
 - raise the visibility and the outcomes of the cross-border cooperation and
 - increase the percentage of people who are aware of EU-funded projects.
- Achieve tangible results and measurable changes both at Programme and Project level.
- Further support and encourage beneficiaries in communication activities.

Moreover, the Communication Strategy foresees the implementation of intense, targeted social responsibility actions helping to address environmental and social issues. The INTERREG V-A Greece- Bulgaria 2014-2020 Cooperation Programme, through its socially responsible communication activities, strives to inspire and create opportunities for advancement by making improvements to daily life in its eligible area.

The main targeted groups for the Cooperation Programme “Interreg V-A Greece-Bulgaria 2014-2020” are:

Table 22. Target groups to be addressed through the implementation of the Programme’s Communication strategy

Target Groups	
Internal	External
European Commission/DG REGIO	Potential Beneficiaries
Hellenic Ministry of Development and Investments	Final Beneficiaries/ Project Partners
Bulgarian Ministry of Regional Development and Public Works	Other Entities
Managing Authority (MA)	Different stakeholders thematically related to the Programme or its Projects
Bulgarian National Authority (NA)	Media: local, regional, national and European level
Monitoring Committee of the Programme (MC)	

Source: Communication Strategy of the Cooperation Programme “Interreg V-A Greece-Bulgaria 2014-2020”, Version 1, 2016

Indicative strategic choices

In order to fulfil the goals of the communication strategy five (5) different indicative strategic choices were set up:

- Activation of the Beneficiaries
- Ensuring the continuity, uniformity and simplicity of communication at all the stages of the Programme and for each targeted audience.
- The operation of networks of cooperating entities in order to maximize results in terms of communication.
- The promotion of already existing examples of participation in the previous Programming Period.
- Pursuing the use of alternative and innovative ideas.

The communication Strategy foresees information and publicity measures that are expected to cover the entire duration of the Operational Programme and to be differentiated for each targeted audience. The Communication Strategy includes all the obligatory measures that the Managing Authorities must take in accordance with Regulation (EC) no. 1303/2013 while the official language is English. However, the communication tools/ events/ materials are also developed in the languages of the Partner States, Greece and Bulgaria, in order to facilitate the recipient of the information in the population of Programme Area.

The Communication of the Programme was structured in three main implementation stages:

1st stage (2015-2016): General information about the Programme

The objective of this stage was to inform the target audiences about the Programme and its content: general objectives, axes, financing opportunities, Calls, Strategic Projects, expected results.

Indicative actions: launching event, publication and dissemination of approved Programme documents, deliver adequate information to the Potential Beneficiaries, informational meetings, Info Day events, single day conferences, working meetings

2nd stage (2016-2020): Creation of a specific opinion about the Programme and its actions among the various target audiences, ensuring easy access to particular actions and to the opportunities that it offers

The second stage of communication concerns the provision of specialized information in order to reinforce the pace of implementation of the Programme. During this stage, the aim was to motivate the target audiences, either to participate in the Programme’s events or to function as multipliers of information. This stage is characterized by the provision of more specialized knowledge about the content and the evolution of the Programme, the criteria and the procedures for the integration of actions, the management and monitoring of the actions of the Programme. In addition, among the other goals of the present stage is to inform the general public in a simple and understandable way about the evolution of the Programme’s and Project’s interventions as well.

Indicative actions: implementation of annual activities, publication and distribution of special informational guides/catalogues, systematic organization of thematic meetings and seminars with the Beneficiaries, special informational bulletins and periodic informational printed material, press Conferences, Media Campaign (television, radio, internet, printed press, digital press, social media, outdoor advertising, polls).

3rd stage (2020-2023): Dissemination of the results and benefits achieved, highlighting of good practices

During the third stage of communication, the objective is to demonstrate to the general public that the goals of intervention in the eligible area have been implemented.

Indicative actions: Promotion of good examples and good practices in the eligible area, Utilization of Media in order to promote the expected results.

Communication approaches adopted for the “external” target groups are presented in the table below and will be commented in the following sections with regards to their level of implementation and their efficiency and effectiveness.

Table 23. Target groups to be addressed through the implementation of the Programme’s Communication strategy

Targeted audience	Information/ Message	Goals/ Expected result
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<p>Potential Beneficiaries</p>	<p>Benefits from cross-border cooperation Available financing: how much, when, how, for what purpose Information about the Programme: nature, goals, procedures, benefits, and expected results</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Clear and sufficient information related to: (a) the funding opportunities and the launching of Calls; (b) the eligibility of expenditure conditions to be met in order to qualify for support under the Programme; (c) a description of the procedures for examining applications for funding and of the time periods involved; (d) the criteria for selecting the operations to be supported; • Submission of proposals from all the eligible area of the Programme • Information about the publicity rules after financing is ensured
<p>Final Beneficiaries/Project Partners</p>	<p>How an action is managed in the framework of the Programme How results are publicized and better promoted Reinforcement of the expected results through the recognized good practices of the previous period</p> <p>Benefits from cross-border cooperation and expected results</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Clear, detailed, and continuous information and support concerning the obligations and rights of the Project Partners • Motivation and creation of a climate of healthy competition • Information about and commitment to adhere to the publicity rules and regulations • Dissemination of information about the results of the Programme and the Project to other Partners as well • Capitalizing on the results of the Programme and the Project • Transparency concerning the management of resources of the European Union
<p>Other entities</p> <p>Economic and Social Partners, Universities, Research institutions, Chambers, Federations and Associations, Non-Governmental Organizations</p>	<p>Information about the Programme: nature, goals, procedures, benefits, and the expected results Information about the available financing: how much, when, how, for what purpose and who can apply/submit an application Benefits from cross-border cooperation and expected results</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Promotion of the role and the achievements of cohesion policy and of the Funds through information and communication actions on the results and impact of partnership agreements, operations, joint initiatives etc. • Dissemination of information about the results of the Programme and its Projects • Capitalizing on the results of the Programme and its Projects • Transparency concerning the management of resources of the European Union

<p>The end users & the general public</p> <p>Local, regional, national and European level</p>	<p>Benefits from cross-border cooperation and expected results both in Programme and Project level</p> <p>Highlighting of the role of the European Union</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Entrenchment of the message of joint contribution by the European Union and the Partner States • Promotion of the Programme, its axes, its vision, and its goals • Promotion of the results and benefits of the implementation of the Programme and its Projects through highlighting the good practices • Promotion of the role and the achievements of cohesion policy and of the Funds through information and communication actions on the results and impact of partnership agreements, operations, joint initiatives etc. • Promotion of the social and economic impact of the Programme and its Projects
<p>Media</p> <p>Local, regional, national and European level Television, Radio, Printed Press, Digital Press, Social Media</p>	<p>Information about the Programme: its nature, goals, procedures, the resources available, how they are managed, etc.</p> <p>Which are the approved Projects, who is implementing them and where</p> <p>The benefits and expected results of the Projects</p> <p>The benefits and expected results of the Programme</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Media Campaign • Regular provision to the Media of interesting news about the Programme and its Projects • Participation of the Media in events and actions related to the Programme and its Projects • Ensuring precision, clarity, and reliability concerning the information related to the Programme and its Projects • Promotion of the results from the implementation of the Programme and its Projects • Categorization of news items and promotion with the appropriate Media • Transparency concerning the management of resources of the European Union

Last but not least, within the Programme Communication Strategy, specific output and result indicators have been proposed in order the implementation progress and the impact of the Communication Strategy to be assessed.

Table 24. Output and result indicators included in the Programme’s Communication strategy

Output Indicators	Result Indicators
Number of events (Info Day events, single-day conferences, seminars, workshops).	Number of participants per single-day conference.
Number of appearances in the Media (television, radio, press, internet).	Number of appearances in the press and the mass media.
Cooperation with journalists and the Media (press conferences).	Amount of printed matter in circulation.
Updating the Website.	Number of press releases published, etc.
Types and number of printed matter.	

Source: Communication Strategy of the Cooperation Programme “Interreg V-A Greece-Bulgaria 2014-2020”, Version 1, 2016

6.2. Presentation of the actions implemented up to 31.12.2020

From the launch of the Programme up to 31.12.2020, a series of communication activities were implemented aiming initially to the information of the potential beneficiaries and the various stakeholders in the cross-border area and afterwards (especially after the approval of the projects submitted under the 2nd Call for Proposals) to the information of the project partners as well. At the same time, special activities were designed and implemented targeting to the wide public.

Also, in terms of human resources involved in the implementation and the monitoring of the Communication Strategy, as well the planning and organization of the communication activities, there is an Officer fully in charge (Communication Officer), while all the members of the JS support and participate in the communication activities. At the same time, following to the necessary procedures, specific tasks such as printing, translation services, hall renting etc. are being outsourced.

Corporate identity

The Programme adopted the Joint Branding initiative of Interreg Programmes under one single brand name and logo. The Programme’s logo and visual identity is aligned to the one commonly applied throughout EU and this initiative was also extended to the projects as

well, as all the approved projects were requested to follow the same branding instructions, thus creating a homogenized visual identity, combining the logo of the Programme with their acronym.

The Programme identity including designs and mock-ups for various communication materials was finalized in August 2016.

Information and Publicity Project Partners Guidebook

Aiming not only to homogenize the projects’ visual identities, but also to ensure the compliance of the projects’ communication strategy and objectives with the Programme’s ones, a detailed guidebook was developed since the very beginning of the programming period. The content of the guidebook covers all the aspects of the planning and implementation of the Information and Publicity activities of the projects, starting from the development of the project communication strategy and plan up and covering also very practical issues such as marking objects.

Programme Website

The technical specifications for the launch for the new site had been completed in 2015, while the tendering procedure started in 2016 resulting also within the same year in a contract assignment. The development of the new website design started in 2016 and the website became fully operational in April 2017 (earlier than expected according to the AIR 2016). In the meantime, everyone interested could be informed about the Programme through the old website (the one designed for the period 2007-2013) that was continuously updated.

The address remained the same with the one of the previous programming period (2007-2013), while the new site is WCAG 2.0 compliant (<https://www.w3.org/TR/WCAG20/>) on AA level, which means that is accessible and usable by a wider range of users, including users with disabilities. Finally, it is mobile-friendly with a new, user-friendly and innovative design thus being apparently a valuable tool in the Programme’s Communication Strategy.

It is also very useful that the old version of the Programme website is easily accessible through the new Programme’s website, ensuring the access to all kind information and material generated/ uploaded there both for the current as well as the previous programming period.

Nevertheless, there is also a continuous promotion of the projects’ activities through the Programme’s website that enhance the integrated communication approach of the Programme.

Finally, Programme’s Facebook Page is easily accessible through the website as well as the YouTube channel of the Managing Authority of European Territorial Cooperation Programmes.

However, a very important effort should be done in order the visibility of the Programme Facebook page to be ensured, given that at the moment amounts 481 followers by 31/12/2020.

Events

Concerning the indicator “Number of publicity and outreach events organized”, a target value of 15 events was set (O0208) as the cumulative target. Up to 31.12.2020, in total 20 events have been organized (1 event in 2014, 2 in 2015, 4 in 2016, 3 in 2017, 5 in 2018, 4 in 2019 , 1 in 2020), while JS participated in other 5 events during these years. For the calculation of the output indicator with ID O0208, the Programme publicity and outreach events have been grouped in the following categories according to their “nature”:

- Monitoring Committee Meetings (1 per year)
- European Cooperation Day (EC-Day) Event (1 per year)
- Information Days / Seminars for the beneficiaries and/or other information events (approximately 1 per year)

Example: The Information Days for the 5th Call of Project Proposals are calculated as 1 major event, even though 4 events were organized (2 in Greece and 2 in Bulgaria), since all of them were on the same topic (5th Call) and were addressed to the same target group (SMEs). Respectively, the EC-Day event is calculated as 1 event per year, even though 2 events may be organized, one in Greece and one in Bulgaria. It is estimated that approximately 3 major events will take place each year of the Programme’s implementation, thus the target value of the output indicator O0208 is calculated to 15 events.

Events	
Events targeting stakeholders, potential beneficiaries/ project partners	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. European Territorial cooperation conference: Promoting Best Practices & sharing experiences, Thessaloniki 8-9/5/2014 – (443 participants) 2. Launching of the Programming Period 2014-2020 of the Greece-Bulgaria Cooperation Programme - 5th November 2015 – Sandanski, Bulgaria http://www.greece-bulgaria.eu/event/3_Launching-the-Programming-Period-2014-2020-of-the-Greece-Bulgaria-Cooperation-Programme 3. Launching event at Sandanski (05.11.2015)

	<ol style="list-style-type: none">4. Infoday event – Serres – 2nd Call (Axis 2 & 4) 26/01/20165. Infoday event – Haskovo – 2nd Call (Axis 2 & 4) 9/2/20166. Infoday event – Blagoevgrad – 2nd Call (Axis 2 & 4) 1/3/2016 <p>496 people attended the three infodays in 2016 that were dedicated to the presentation of the 2nd Call for Proposals</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none">7. 1st Info Day Event of the INTERREG V-A Greece–Bulgaria 2014-2020 Cooperation Programme - PROJECT IMPLEMENTATION - September 26th 2017 - Drama, Greece (167 participants - no evaluation questionnaires found) http://www.greece-bulgaria.eu/event/9_1st-Info-Day-in-Drama-(Greece)-on-26-09-20178. 2nd Info Day Event of the INTERREG V-A Greece–Bulgaria 2014-2020 Cooperation Programme - PROJECT IMPLEMENTATION - October 11th 2017 - Blagoevgrad, Bulgaria (167 participants - no evaluation questionnaires found) http://www.greece-bulgaria.eu/event/10_2nd-Info-Day-in-Blagoevgrad-(Bulgaria)-on-11-10-20179. 1st Info Day Event on the 5th Call - Friday, February 1st 2019 - Thessaloniki, Greece (76 participants – There are Evaluation Questionnaires) http://www.greece-bulgaria.eu/event/37_5th-Call:-Registration-for-the-1st-Info-Day-(1-2-2019)-is-now-open!-10. 2nd Info Day Event on the 5th Call - Thursday, February 7th 2019 - Blagoevgrad, Bulgaria (89 participants – There are Evaluation Questionnaires) http://www.greece-bulgaria.eu/event/38_5th-Call:-Registration-for-the-2nd-Info-Day-(7-2-2019)-is-now-open!11. 3rd Info Day Event on 5th Call - Wednesday, February 20th 2019 - Alexandroupoli, Greece (82 participants – There are Evaluation Questionnaires) http://www.greece-bulgaria.eu/event/40_3rd-Info-Day-on-the-5th-Call12. 4th Info Day Event on 5th Call - Wednesday, March 20th 2019 - Haskovo, Bulgaria (94 participants – There are
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	<p>Evaluation Questionnaires) http://www.greece-bulgaria.eu/event/43_4th-Info-Day-on-the-5th-Call</p> <p>The two infodays of 2017, where a total of 334 representatives of the project beneficiaries attended, focused on project implementation, procurement, project modifications, project funding and cash-flows, progress report, capitalization, eligibility and certification of expenses including First Level Control guidelines and procedures, project management (MIS and reporting) and project communication and dissemination. The four infodays of 2019 were targeted to the potential applicants (SMEs) of the 5th Call. The total number of participants of the 4 infodays were 341.</p> <p>Following these infodays, short presentations of the 5th Call took place at local Chambers of Commerce, after relevant invitation of their behalf. More specifically:</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none">13. Chamber of Drama – 21.03.2019/ 18.00 pm [21 participants]14. Chamber of Serres – 22.03.2019/ 18.30 pm. [15 participants]15. Rodopi Chamber of C&I – 03.04.2019/ 18.30 pm[5 participants]16. Chamber of Kavala – 08.04.2019/18.00 pm. [19 participants]17. Chamber of Xanthi – 09.04.2019/18.00 pm. [11 participants]18. “Capitalization Event of all 9a Priority projects funded by the Programme Greece-Bulgaria 2014-2020” at Thessaloniki (01.10.2020) 35 participants and 653 Facebook livestreaming views. <p>Finally, up to 31.12.2020, seven(7) Monitoring Committee’s meetings were organized with more than 347 participants:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none">-1st Monitoring Committee Meeting – 4th November 2015 – Sandanski, Bulgaria (187 participants – 52 members)-2nd Monitoring Committee Meeting – 18th October 2016 – Komotini, Greece(61 participants)
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	<p>-3rd Monitoring Committee Meeting – 16th March 2017 – Blagoevgrad, Bulgaria (64 participants)</p> <p>-4th Monitoring Committee Meeting – 13th June 2017 – Serres, Greece (47 participants)</p> <p>-5th Monitoring Committee Meeting – 4th December 2018 – Xanthi, Greece (67 participants)</p> <p>-6th MC meeting Sofia, Bulgaria , 19/11/2019 , Sofia BG (56 participants)http://www.greece-bulgaria.eu/article/165_6th-Monitoring-Committee-meeting-of-the-CP-INTERREG-VA-</p> <p>-7th Monitoring Committee meeting – online Webex – 10/12/2020 http://www.greece-bulgaria.eu/article/222_7th-Monitoring-Committee-meeting-of-the-Programme</p> <p>Also two (2) programming committee meetings took place in 2020:</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. 1st Programming Committee meeting – online Webex – 28/9/2020 http://www.greece-bulgaria.eu/gallery/Files/2021-2027/1st-PC_INTERREG-Gr-Bg-21-27.pdf 2. 2nd Programming Committee meeting – online Webex – 10/12/2020 http://www.greece-bulgaria.eu/gallery/Files/2nd-PC_INTERREG-Gr-Bg-21-27.pdf <p>Also in 2017 the EU commissioned a group of external experts to evaluate the Interreg Cooperation Cross-Border Programs in order to draw conclusions on their effectiveness in achieving their objectives (23/2/2017).</p>
<p>Events targeting the general public</p>	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. EC day - open blood donation event in Xanthi- 21/9/2016 2. EC day - open blood donation event in Smolyan Hospital 27/9/2016 3. ECDAY 20/9/2017 – Haskovo (Museum Activities & Exhibition) http://www.greece-bulgaria.eu/event/8_EC-day-2017-Discover-the-other-Become-another!

	<ol style="list-style-type: none">4. ECDAY 21/9/2017 – Orestiada (Blood Donation day) http://www.greece-bulgaria.eu/event/8_EC-day-2017-Discover-the-other-Become-another!5. Event “Weaving the Future - Coloring Silk Memories” (educational visits and activities, exhibition etc.) at Soufli in the occasion of the EC Day in 2018 (26.09.2018)6. All day event for the Celebration of the European Cooperation Day 2019 (sports games for children and adolescences, seminars on first aid and relevant medical issues, preventive medical exams provided by volunteer doctors), which took place in Thessaloniki on 22.09.2019[more than 60 participants]7. Project "BORDERLESS CULTURE": ECDAY 2019 - BALKAN GAMES FESTIVAL (announcement on the Programme website here) _28-29/9/2020 – Blagoevgrad_ organized by the Municipality of Blagoevgrad with the support of the JS and BG National Authority <p>Other events took place were:</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none">1.Launching the PP 2014-2020 – The challenge of Synergies , June, 22nd-23rd, 2015, Makedonia Palace Hotel, Thessaloniki2.Infoday_for inclusion of people with disabilities in INTERREG projects in 29/2/20163. MIS seminar Athens 30.10.2018 (organized by MOΔ) http://www.greece-bulgaria.eu/event/27_Seminar-on-Management-Information-System-(MIS)---Athens-30-10-20184. MIS seminar Thessaloniki 27.11.2018 (organized by MOΔ) http://www.greece-bulgaria.eu/event/28_Seminar-on-Management-Information-System-(MIS)---Thessaloniki-27-11-20185. 1st Forum for Innovative Young CBC Entrepreneurs hosted by Drama Chamber of Commerce and Industry - Drama, 25 – 28 June 2018 (organized by AEBR in collaboration with Chamber of Drama & MA-JS GR-BG) http://www.greece-bulgaria.eu/event/22_1h-Diasynoriakh-Synanthsh-Newn-me-thema-
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<p>Participation in exhibitions/ other events</p>	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Participation in the International Fair of Thessaloniki, autumn 2016 with a stand organized by the Managing Authority of European Territorial Cooperation Programmes 2. Participation in the International Fair of Thessaloniki, autumn 2017 with a stand organized by the Managing Authority of European Territorial Cooperation Programme 3. Participation in the International Fair of Thessaloniki, autumn 2018 with a stand organized by the Managing Authority of European Territorial Cooperation Programme 4. Participation in the 84th International Fair of Thessaloniki in September 2019 5. Participation in the Interreg Project Slam event, in the framework of the EU Regions Week 2019, on the 08.10.2019. A total of 8 projects performed on a live stage, one of which was the project MEDICINET II, a project of the CP INTERREG VA "Greece-Bulgaria 2014-2020"
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Printed material

Printed material includes various materials/ objects both with informative and marketing character:

- A leaflet was created in 2016 and printed in 3,000 pieces. It was jargon-free, while the use of the pronoun “we” was the tool to promote “joint ownership” by the public and in addition texts in Greek, English and Bulgarian were used to make it more direct and closer to the public.
- Calendars were designed and printed in approximately 100 pieces per year (every year 2016-2020), while for 2017 calendars were also printed in Braille for blind people.
- In 2018 were produced business cards for 5 members of the JS: 5*240=1.200 pieces , 300 folder pieces, 500 pens, 70 trackers , 100 business cards’ cases. Moreover, in ECDAY 2019 in Thessaloniki – agendas, flyers and press releases in EN/GR sent to schools of Thessaloniki and distributed to participants of the event. Also distributed by the co-organisers.
- For 2020, masks and calendars were produced.

Publications

Web-Press publications regarding the 3rd Info Day on the 5th Call were five (5):

1. Thrakinea.gr: <http://www.thrakinea.gr/archives/136245>
2. Alexpolis.gr: <https://www.alexpolis.gr/prosklisi-se-imerida-me-titlo-schedio-epichorigisis-gia-ti-stirixi-ton-mikromesaion-epicheiriseon-mme-gia-anaptyxi-kai-epektasi-pera-apo-tis-topikes-agores/>
3. Alexpolisonline.gr: https://www.alexpolisonline.com/2019/02/blog-post_98.html
4. thraki.com.gr: <https://www.thraki.com.gr/schedio-epichorigisis-gia-ti-stirixi-ton-mikromesaion-epicheiriseon-mme-gia-anaptyxi-kai-epektasi-pera-apo-tis-topikes-agores/>
5. faros-24.gr: <https://faros-24.gr/site/info-day-%CF%83%CF%87%CE%AD%CE%B4%CE%B9%CE%BF-%CE%B3%CE%B9%CE%B1-%CF%84%CE%B7%CE%BD-%CF%80%CF%81%CF%8C%CF%83%CE%BA%CE%BB%CE%B7%CF%83%CE%B7-%CF%84%CE%BF%CF%85-%CE%B9nterreg-%CE%B5%CE%BB%CE%BB%CE%AC/>

Web-Press publications regarding the 5th Call were three(3):

1. alexpoli.gr : <https://alexpoli.gr/apo-15-2-oi-aitiseis-gia-stirixi-ton-mikro/>
2. Evros24.gr: <https://www.evros24.gr/prosklisi-gia-epicheirimatika-schedia-sto-interreg-v-a-ellada-voylgaria/>
3. ka-business.gr : <http://www.ka-business.gr/pages/business-news/20828/interreg-v-a-ellada-boylgaria>

Web-Press publications regarding the ECDAY 2019 event in Thessaloniki:

It was sent to all the websites listed below, as well to all schools of Thessaloniki and surroundings:

Webpage	Email
thestival.gr	thestival@gmail.com
typosthes.gr	typosthe@gmail.com
parallaximag.gr	info@parallaximag.gr
seleo.gr	info@seleo.gr
cityportal.gr	info@cityportal.gr
karfitsa.gr	grammateia@karfitsa.gr ; press@karfitsa.gr
rthess.gr	pirgos@radiothessaloniki.gr
thessalonikiguide.gr	info@thessalonikiguide.gr
thessalonikiartsandculture.gr	info@ThessalonikiArtsAndCulture.gr
biscotto.gr	biscotto@mediaview.gr
alterthess.gr	info@alterthess.gr
rejected.gr	info@rejected.gr
thesout.gr	info@thesout.gr

thessalonikicityguide.gr	press@thessalonikicityguide.gr	
https://www.dailythess.gr	dailythess@gmail.com	
sincity.gr	info@sincity.gr	
https://www.voria.gr	voriam@voriam.gr	

6.3. Assessment of the publicity effectiveness for the Programme area

6.3.1. Assessment of the communication activities effectiveness with regards to the Programme’s performance

Concerning the indicator “Number of publicity and outreach events organized” which is included in the Performance Framework, a target value of 15 events was set (O0208). Up to 31.12.2018, 24 events have been organized (1 event were organised in 2015, 6 in 2016, 4 in 2017, 1 in 2018 and 11 in 2019).

In terms of participants, 1200 people participated in the five infodays in 2016 and 2017, as well as the EC Days Campaigns for the years 2016, 2017 and 2018. Wide public was reached through the participation of JS of the Programme in the TIF at Thessaloniki in 2016, 2017, 2018 and 2019.

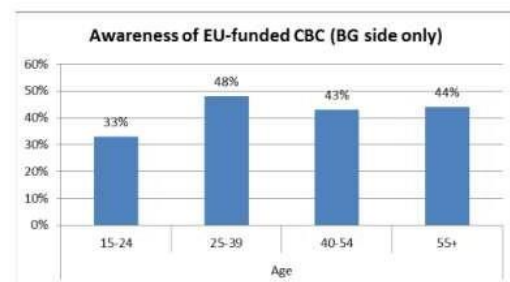
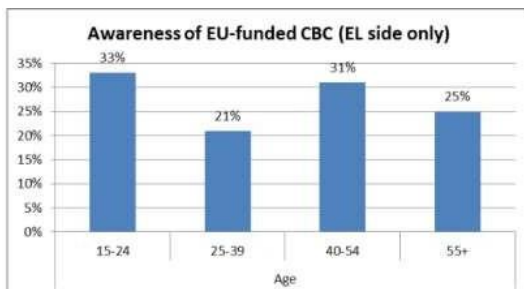
As far as the year 2019 the target value of the output indicator O0208 for the Greek TA (TAGRBG_GR) was reduced from 48 to **13 events** in the latest version of the Greek TA – Application Form. By the end of 2019, the achieved value of the indicator for the GR-TA is **12 events**. Respectively, the target value of the output indicator O0208 for the Bulgarian TA (TAGRBG_BG) is 2 events, and it has already been achieved. Therefore, the total achieved value of the output indicator O0208 is 12+2=14 events out of the 15 which is the target value. It is expected that by the end of the Programming period the target value will be exceeded.

As far as the participants of events in 2019 are concerned, the programme has achieved more than 412 participants both in info days and events addressed to the general public. Moreover, 7 monitoring meetings have been organized so far with approximately 237 participants already in 2020, as well as a capitalization event with almost 35 participants and 300+ views. In this context, it can be assessed in the first place that the programme’s target is succeeded and can be enhanced.

6.3.2. Assessment of the communication activities effectiveness and sufficiency with regards to the beneficiaries

The Result indicators are monitored in an on-going procedure with an online questionnaire - created in 2016 - which is for the evaluation of the Programme's Communication Strategy. Indicatively, the results of the questionnaire demonstrate an overall positive evaluation of the information provided within the Programme where 33% of the respondents characterized it as very good and 50% as good. Additionally, according 66.7% of the respondents declared that the level of knowledge on the Programme has improved over the last two years becoming “somewhat more knowledgeable”.

According to the Eurobarometer results in the end of 2015 about the awareness of EU-funded cross-border cooperation in the Programme Greece-Bulgaria, 36% of respondents had heard about EU funded CBC activities, which is a satisfying result since it is quite higher than the EU average of 31%. Awareness is significantly higher on the Bulgarian side (45%) than on the Greek side (27%) Age trends in relation to the level awareness are different on the two sides of the borders.



Finally, the effectiveness of the communication activities (info days, website etc.) has been highlighted with

- the high number of the proposals submitted in the 2nd Call for Proposals (221 proposals) and by the fact that most of them met successfully the eligibility criteria (173)
- the continuous references of the Programme by important stakeholders, potential beneficiaries and project partners that very often promote press releases referring their participation in the Programme's Calls, the approval and the implementation of their projects etc.

6.4. Lessons learnt

The implementation progress of the Programme Communication Strategy is considered very satisfactory both in terms of activities' content as well as targets' achieved. More

precisely, the target of 15 events set for the indicator “Number of publicity and outreach events organized” (O0208), was almost achieved concerning the 20 events took place. Moreover, in 2021 (even if it is not considered the period of evaluation) we have already the organization of an event(5th Call – SAMIS training of PBs – online Webex – 1,10,12/3/2021 (30 / 12 / 18) http://www.greece-bulgaria.eu/event/93_5th-Call-approved-projects--training-for-the-Project-Beneficiaries).

At the same time, based on recent surveys (Eurobarometer, JS in-house online survey), there is a satisfying awareness’ level with regards to the EU-funded cross-border cooperation in the Programme Greece-Bulgaria (36% of respondents had heard about EU funded CBC activities), while the results of the online questionnaire promoted by the JS, demonstrated an overall positive evaluation of the information provided within the Programme where 33% of the respondents characterized it as very good and 50% as good.

Besides, the high number of proposals submitted within the 2nd Call for Project Proposals, as well as the fact that the majority of them were evaluated as eligible for the 2nd evaluation phase, highlight the sufficiency of the information provided for the Programme to all the interested parties and potential beneficiaries.

It should be also commented that there is balanced geographical allocation of the communication activities in both sides of the borders and in all the eligible area. Nevertheless, special communication actions facilitate and support the provision of the Programme information in special groups (e.g. diaries in Braille for blind people, website that is WCAG 2.0 compliant in AA level).

Having studied carefully all the communication strategy phases and the measures activated, overall the first phase of the communication strategy was successfully completed, while the second one has already achieved a satisfying implementation level.

In terms, of specific communication measures, it should be paid some further attention in the promotion of the Programme through the social media, since at the moment the Facebook page has 491 followers (which has been doubled in the last couple of years). Posting more often (at least twice per week) in combination with some advertising could help to the increase of the followers. At the same time, so as the Programme website, the Facebook page should also attract the interest of all potential beneficiaries, end-users, project partners etc. and it could promote not only Programme related news and activities but also the events and the achievements of the approved projects within the Programme. Online petitions, surveys etc. could also attract a greater number of followers.

PART I

1. Introduction

The impact evaluation has as an objective the systematic and comprehensive assessment of the project implementation and the evaluation of the impact that the implementation has in the CBA and in the specific intervention sectors. Additionally, it takes into consideration the broader financial, social and environmental context during the implementation period of the programme in general and the projects in particular i.e., since the beginning of the Programme up to the 31st of December of 2020 for this assessment.

To this end the impact assessment tackles the following:

- The real impact/contribution of the intervention in the effect to the relevant result indicators
- Whether the result indicators would have changed if the programme interventions did not take place.

In order to assess systematically the impacts of the programme it is important distinguish the effects of other background factors and the effects of the programme.

This understanding of the notion “impact” is in agreement with the Framework that the Regulations concerning the Programming Period 2014-2020 set and that is different with the notion of “impact” in previous programming periods. The new guidelines are clearly different with the previous notion concerning both the “use” and the “position” of the impact in the programming period (see sections below). In the new framework “impact” concern the changes that can be attributed to the effect of the specific interventions, taking into considerations that changes in the result indicators may be the effect of several factors. Therefore, the evaluation should focus, make prominent and evaluate the (real) contribution of the programme in specific results and indicators changes that are linked with the programme’s interventions.

2. Theoretical and Methodological Framework

2.1. 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

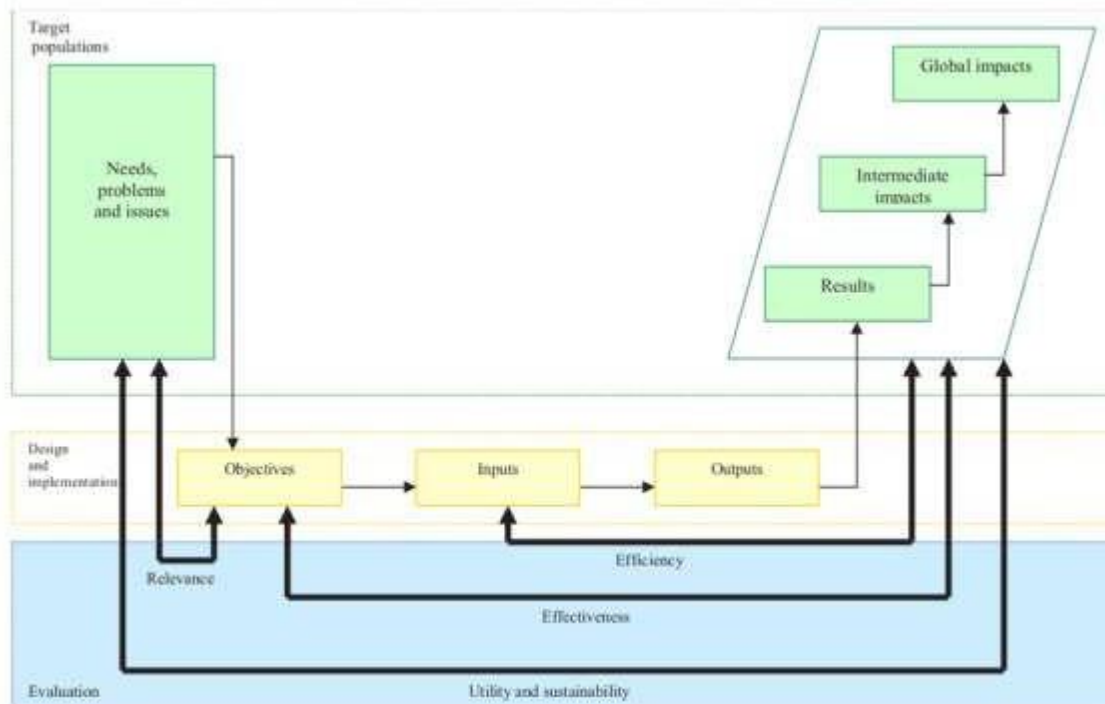
Taking the above into consideration, the present deliverable will elaborate on the basic notions concerning the monitoring and evaluation system before getting into the impact assessment of the particular Programme.

2.2. 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's 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.

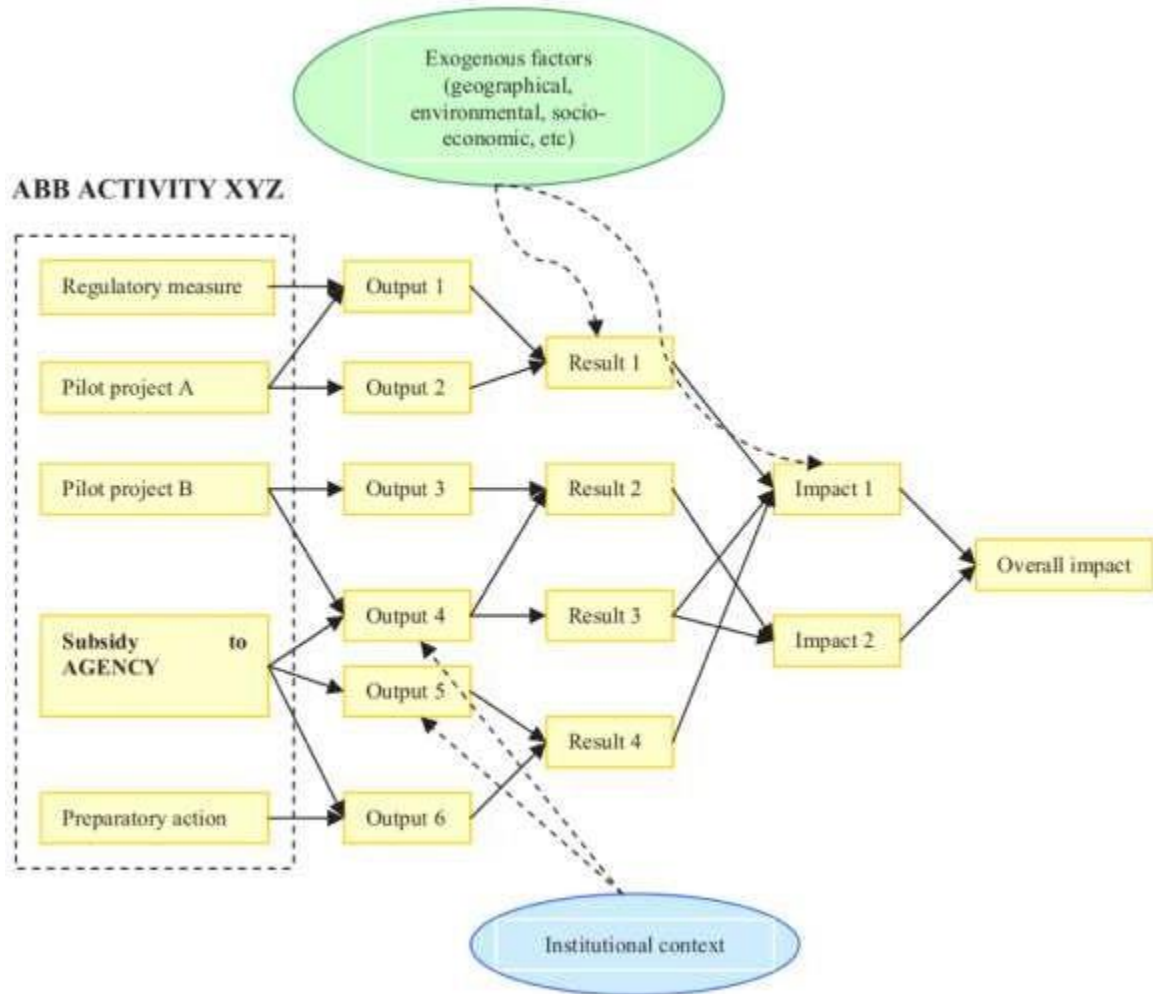
Impacts

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 synergize 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)



2.3. 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.

2.4. Structure of the Impact Assessment Report

The following section presents the structure of the Impact Assessment Report.

1. Introduction
2. Theoretical and Methodological Framework
3. Operationalization of the Methodolog
4. Data Analysis and Results per Specific Objective
5. Lessons learnt

3. 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 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 behavioral 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).

3.1. Data collection per Specific Objective

Table 19 summarizes the Programme’s Result Indicators 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 has been conducted.
- **R0202: Total Value of Annual CB Area Exports:** Data is available from SEVE 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 from the General Secretariat of Natural Environmental and 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 Foreign Affairs.

- **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’s interventions that are affecting the respective area.

4. 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’s 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.

The analysis is based on a series of steps/criteria that are described below:

1. **Establishing the value of the result indicator and assessing to which extent there is a change from the background rate of change:** While the first part is easily tackled the second part is not, since in most cases there are no sufficient data for a robust statistical analysis. Therefore, the evaluator in most cases has to assume the change is manifested may be due to the programme actions, unless there is a clear indication otherwise e.g., the trend is opposite to what the intervention logic should suggest.
2. **Assessing whether the change can be in be broadly linked with the outputs of the programme:** Based on the intervention logic the changes in the result indicators would come about due to changes in the outputs of the programme. Therefore, the change in the result indicator value should follow the change in corresponding the output indicator.
3. **Assessing whether the changes in the output indicators corroborate the changes in the result indicators:** There might be cases where the first two steps / criteria are met, but nevertheless on a more granular level the data do not corroborate the attribution of the impact to the programme e.g., an improvement of the result indicator, that is following the expected change in the output indicator, that nevertheless is manifested in an area where a programme action has not taken place.

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.

As it is clear from the previous the achievement of the target is not adequate to assign the impact to the project. Besides, this is the main scope of the evaluation to credibly assess the contribution of the programme actions to the change manifested, since this change can be either due to the programme itself, the overall background trend of change, or even the impact of other interventions. The following sections presents the analysis for the result indicators that data are available.

Table 20: Result Indicators System with the respective Data Sources

PA	IP	ID	Indicator	Measurement unit	Baseline value	Baseline Year	Target Value (2023)	No of Projects contributing	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	General Secretariat of Natural Environment and Water
	6c	R0204	Annual tourist overnight stays at accommodation establishments	million 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

Table 21: Result Indicators Performance

**“Final Report within the Updating of the Evaluation of Cooperation Programme
INTERREG V-A Greece-Bulgaria 2014-2020”**

PA	IP	ID	Indicator	Measurement unit	Baseline 2013	Value (2018)	Value(2020)	Level Achieved (2018 or 2020)	Level Expected (2023)	Comments
1	3a	R0201	Entrepreneurial business support environment		5.34		5.6	63%	5.9	
1	3	R0202	Total Value of Annual CB Area Exports	Million Euros	4,407		5,276 ⁱ	116%	4,540	Data adjusted to the baseline
2	5b	R0203	Number of international river basin districts with jointly coordinated flood risks management plans in compliance with Directive 2007/60/EC	No	0		0	0%	3	
2	6c	R0204	Annual tourist overnight stays at accommodation establishments	Millions	5.8	7.5	NA	105%	7.4	
2	6d	R0205	% of Natura areas reporting excellent or good degree of conservation	%	54%	79%	79%	132%	60%	
2	6f	R0206	% of characterized surface water bodies in GES	%	44%	59%	59%	106%	55%	
3	7b	R0207	Number of operating border crossings	No	6	6(2)	6(2)	86%	7	
4	9a	R0208	Annual visits to primary healthcare	Visits	1,123,561	1,309,240 ⁱⁱ	1,063,241 ⁱⁱ	95% ⁱⁱ	1,235,917	Data adjusted to the baseline
4	9a	R0209	Annual visits to secondary/tertiary healthcare	Visits	477,275	547,195 ⁱⁱ	461,964 ⁱⁱ	110% ⁱⁱ	421,097	Data adjusted to the baseline
4	9c	R0210	Social enterprise employees in the CB area	Employees	954 (604 ⁱⁱⁱ - 4849 ^{iv})	3,391	2,054	204%	1,004	

ⁱ Values for 2019. Data availability for the Bulgarian side were not available and no increase of value was taken under consideration. Additionally, due to initially value discrepancies for the values of Greek Exports in 2013 a respective adjusted value is taken into consideration for 2019. In particular, the value was adjusted as follows $Value = \left(\frac{value_{MN 2013}}{value_{SEVE 2013 SEVE 2019}}\right) * Values$, where MN : Methodolgoical Note 2019 Values for the Bulgarian Export Data are the result of a projection based on the national level data, due data unavailability.

ⁱⁱ Data adjusted to baseline (raw data 5,755,193 for 2013, 6.706.295 for 2018, 5,441,097 for 2020 for R0208 and 348,960 for 2013, 400,082 for 2018 and for 337,765 for 2020 for R0209)

ⁱⁱⁱ Baseline 2012

^{iv} Baseline 2013

4.1.1. R0201 Entrepreneurial business support environment

The “R0201 Entrepreneurial business support environment” indicator is a composite indicator based on surveys of Businesses in the CBA area.

Three questions constitute the composite index, with no weights assigned to the questions. Therefore, each question contributes equally to the index⁷. For each of the questions, the average percentage per level of the scale is computed and multiplied by the scale level (1-5) to provide the weighted score. The weighted score is multiplied by two to provide the index. The composite index consists of the sum of the index per question. The final composite index “Entrepreneurial Business Support Environment” is equal to the average of the composite index of the three questions.

Based on the new survey that was conducted the Entrepreneurial Business Support Environment indicator is 5.6. Therefore, there seems to be a 63% achievement of the target which is 5.9 for 2023. Taking into consideration that no projects have been implemented yet in PA1, the improvement of the indicator cannot be attributed to the impact of the programme actions.

Nevertheless, since there is a significant room for improvement for the indicator, as well as enough time for the impact of the programme to take effect, revisiting the indicator in 2023 would give greater insights to the impacts of the programme.

4.1.2. R0202 Total Value of Annual CB Area Exports

The “R0201 Entrepreneurial business support environment” is an indicator based on a dataset collected from independent sources.

The data were not made fully available, since granular data on a CBA level were not available from the Bulgarian side., Moreover, the 2013 data provided by the same source had differences for the Greek data. In order to estimate the current Greek value an adjustment was made. In particular, the value was adjusted as follows:

$$Value_{2019} = \left(\frac{Value_{MN\ 2013}}{Value_{SEVE\ 2013}} \right) * Values_{SEVE\ 2019}$$

⁷ The three questions are : How feasible is it to become a new business owner? According to your knowledge of your business field, how do you value the importance of the following factors, concerning their availability (or how well they function) with regards to the proper operation of your business? Have you ever participated/benefited from any of the following categories of action?

To address the Bulgarian data gap, national data at current prices were acquired from the NSI and adjusted based on the AMECO database. The values were also adjusted to the baseline based following the same method as above.

The estimated value for 2019 is equal to 5,276 million euros which corresponds to the overachievement of the target. Nevertheless, since no projects have been implemented in this PA, these changes cannot be credibly attributed to the programme interventions.

4.1.3. R0203 Number of international river basin districts with jointly coordinated flood risks management plans in compliance with Directive 2007/60/EC

To assess the “R0203 Number of international river basin districts with jointly coordinated flood risks management plans in compliance with Directive 2007/60/EC” the Evaluation team communicated with the projects that are being implemented and in particular with the responsible authority and project partner i.e. the “General Secretariat of Natural Environment and Water.”

Based on their communication the project is currently implementing an action that will lead to the development of jointly coordinated flood risks management plans in compliance with Directive 2007/60/EC for the rivers Evros/Maritsa, Strimonas/Struma, and Nestos/Mesta.

Therefore, once the project actions are completed the impact will be due to the contribution and impact of the programme.

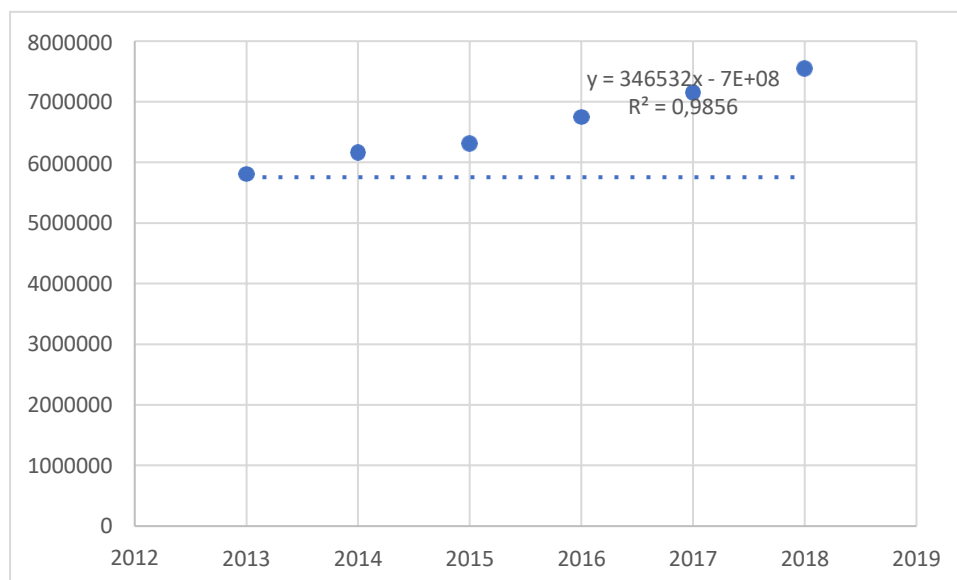
4.1.4. R0204 Annual tourist overnight stays at accommodation establishments

The “R0204 Annual tourist overnight stays at accommodation establishments” indicator is the most readily available and straightforward indicator to assess as far as impact assessment is concerned.

The Baseline for the indicator has been 5.8 million stays and the target for 7.4 million for 2023. Based on the actual data for 2018 the nightstays for the area under consideration is 7.5 million (7.9 for 2019) that would suggest that the programme has had important impact. The following scatter diagram presents the trendlines of nightstays based on the

data from 2013 to 2018 for the CBA. The blue line corresponds to the linear fit and the red line to the polynomial fit (2 degree), that has a much better fit. As it is shown the evolution of the night stays follows a linear increase suggesting that they do not necessarily correspond to the programme impact but might be evolution of the normal trend.

Figure 11: Nightstays projections based on the 2013-2018 data



This is further corroborated by the fact that the output indicator value for 2020 corresponded to 15% (3 out of 20) of the projects cumulative value, while the same value from interim evaluation of 2018 (2017 data) was 0%.

That said, the impact of the programme interventions could be manifested in the following years, either by increased night stays or by relatively lower decrease of night stays, since the COVID-19 pandemic have had a devastating impact on the tourism sector.

4.1.5. R0205 % of Natura areas reporting excellent or good degree of conservation

The “R0205 % of Natura areas reporting excellent or good degree of conservation” indicator is a much more difficult result indicator to be assessed. The indicator is based on degree of conservation of habitats present in the NATURA 2000 areas in the CBA. While the selection of such an indicator is clearly linked with the objectives of the Programme, natural systems usually manifest a high degree of resilience meaning that changes in their conservation status main not manifest in a short period of time.

That said, based on the methodological note there was an increase in the % of Natura areas reporting excellent or good degree of conservation between 2013 and 2018 by 79% which is much higher than the 60% that was set as a target by the programming document.

As in the case of Result indicator R0204, the corresponding output indicator for the interim evaluation of 2018 (data of 2017) was 0. Therefore, the corresponding change could not be assigned to the effect of the programme.

4.1.6. R0206 % of characterized surface water bodies in GES

The “R0206 % of characterized surface water bodies in GES” indicator is also a difficult result indicator to be assessed. The indicator is based on evaluation of water bodies according to the Water Framework Directive. For the programming period under consideration both countries have amended the River Basin Management Plans and there are no other amendments before 2021.

Based on the available data there is an increase in the percentage of water bodies characterized in GES from 44% to 59% higher than the 55% that the programme has set as a target. Nevertheless, the corresponding amendments were completed in 2017 and 2016 in Greece and Bulgaria respectively, while in the interim evaluation the corresponding output indicators were 0. Therefore, the changes cannot be assigned to the programme. It is expected that the impact of the programme would be visible in the second amendment of the River Basin Management Plans that is under way.

4.1.7. R0207 Number of operating border crossings

The “R0207 % Number of operating border crossings” is an indicator that can be assessed in a straightforward manner. Any changes in the indicator can be attributed to the programme, since the actual result is a clear result of the programme⁸.

Currently, the corresponding project is underway and therefore the result indicators has not been achieved. The project is expected to be finalized and the result indicator achieved by 2023.

⁸ It should be noted that even though it is not explicitly articulated in the methodological note the indicator refers to operating road transport border crossings.

Therefore, once the project actions are completed the impact will be due to the contribution and impact of the programme.

4.1.8. R0208 Annual visits to primary healthcare and R0209 Annual visits to secondary/tertiary healthcare

Indicators R0208 and R0209 are examined together since they are indicators that are affected by the same projects, and moreover to a great extent are the different aspects of the same phenomenon.

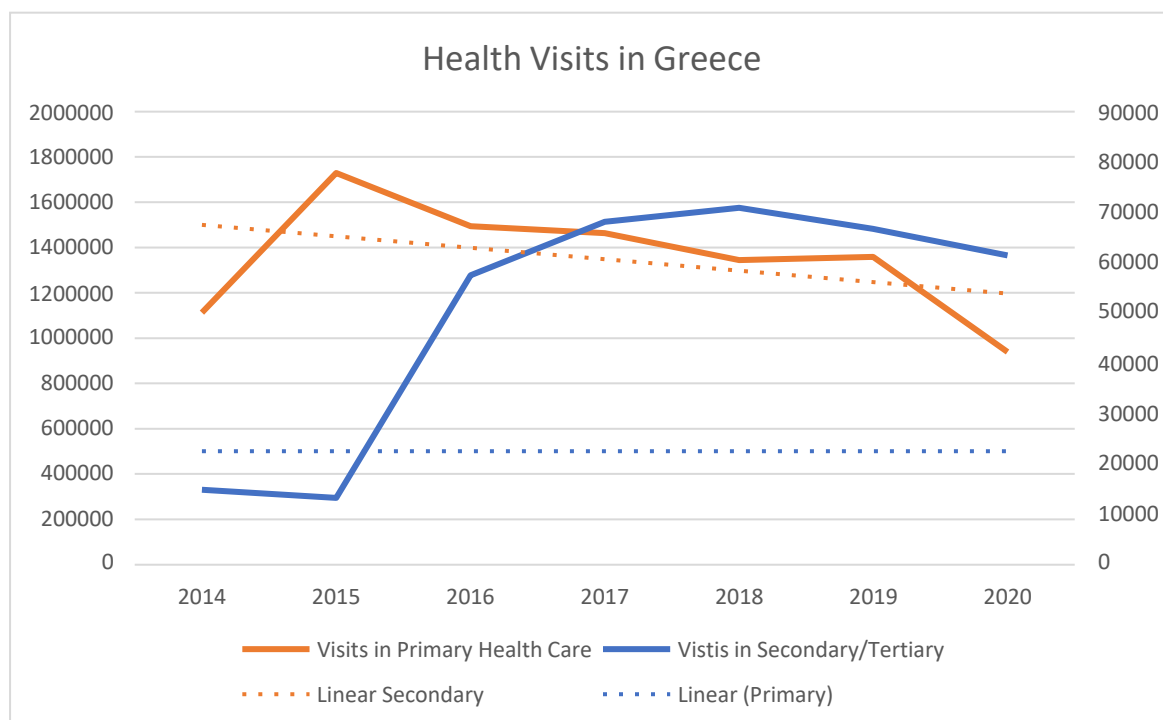
It should be noted that data although eventually all the corresponding data was collected, data did not correspond to the original values in the methodological note. Data seemed to be more consistent in the Greek side and for the secondary/tertiary visits. To address this issue the data points were adjusted to the respective baselines, based on the method that was utilized for R0202.

Based on the above values for 2020 for R0208 and R0209 the programme is close to its targets with 95% and 110% respectively, but they have not yet been achieved (R0209 should be 100% or lower). That said the programme impact is not clear.

Based on the available yearly data from the 4th Health District in Greece, it is clear that during the programming period the trends are opposite to those that the programme aspires to achieve. In particular, the Primary health visits are decreasing while secondary and tertiary visits have increased significantly. Especially between 2015 and 2016 there is an important increase in the secondary and tertiary visits that is closely linked with Law 4368/2016 and the JMD A3(γ)/ΓΠ/οικ.25132/4-4-2016 allowing uninsured patients to make use of health services. While there are more data expected, as it was discussed above they will mainly contribute to R0209 and are not expected to differ substantially to the above data.

Moreover, it is clear from the respective data from the 3rd Health District in Greece that the increase in primary health visits was to a great extent external to the programme impact. In particular, in April 2014 with I.4238/2014 a number of primary healthcare institutions previously under the supervision of National Organization for the Provision of Health Services (ΕΟΠΥΥ), became the responsibility of the Health Districts.

Figure 12: Health visits of Primary and Secondary/tertiary health care units in Greece



The trends differ substantially in the case of Bulgaria. In Bulgaria data shows an increase of visits in both primary and secondary/tertiary health institutions for 2018, followed by a decrease in 2020. Nevertheless, in 2020 it was the effect of the measures against the pandemic that have led to this decrease.

4.1.9. R0210 Social enterprise employees in the CB area

The “R0210 Social enterprise employees in the CB area” is a clear indicator that is based on an independent source thus supporting transparency and accountability. Nevertheless, there are several issues with the available data.

Firstly, updating the baseline value for 2013 showed an important change in the number of values for the Bulgarian side. Moreover, the corresponding value for the year 2020 differs significantly with the value of 2013 and 2012. Based on the data provided by the Ministry of Labour and Social Policy, this significant change is due to the changes that have been made in the corresponding law that defines enterprises can be characterized “Social Enterprises”. While up to 2012 the NSI was collecting data based on the self-reporting of “Social enterprises”, the newly established Social Enterprises registry has defined stricter rules. Therefore, the overall number of businesses and employees has declined

significantly. In particular, Social enterprise employees in Bulgaria have decreased from 4849 in 2013, to 1794 in 2018, and 45 in 2020.

As far as the Greek side is concerned the data are available from the Registry of Social Enterprises⁹. The data cover all the programming period and they give a clear view of the possible impact of the programme.

Based on the data there is an important increase in the employees of Social Enterprises after 2016. This is most probably due to the new law 4430/2016 on Social Enterprises enacted on 10/2016 that greatly improved the framework in place in Greece.

This increase cannot be attributed to the Programme impact since the relevant project were initiated in autumn 2017 and therefore could not have yet have an important impact. Nevertheless, the significant increase continued in the 2018 that could partly be linked with the programme actions. The effect is not attributed in general to the Programme since we would expect a similar increase in the Bulgarian side, which was not the case. On the contrary the new rules from the Social Enterprise Registry has led to a decrease to only 45 employees in 2020 in the Bulgarian CBA, i.e. much lower from the baseline.

Figure 13: Number of Social Enterprise Employees in Greek CBA



Based on the above there are no significant data to assess the impact of the programme.

⁹ The data are based on the number of natural persons that are members in social enterprises.

5. Lessons learnt

The Programme has made an important effort to utilize transparent, independent, and dependable indicators to assess the impact of its actions. This choice, despite posing significant difficulties to evaluating the impact that is logically and meaningfully attributed to a specific intervention is a step towards the right direction.

Despite this significant effort that enhances the transparency and accountability of the programme, several aspects should be raised. One important aspect is that there was a significant change in the definition of the data collected in the case of “R0210 Social enterprise employees in the CB area”. Continuity of data are of crucial importance in order to establish the impact of the programme.

The continuity of data, as well as the periods that are updated was also a concern in other indicators, namely “R0205 % of Natura areas reporting excellent or good degree of conservation” and “R0206 % of characterized surface water bodies in GES”. The data for these indicators are based on recurrent evaluation of the Habitats and Water Bodies quality that also takes place between long periods of time to assess the impact of relevant policy measures. In the case of the programme updating the status prior to the implementation of the programme interventions creates a data gap that will not be covered before the end of the programming period.

Even in cases where the data should be readily available and derive from the same original sources, issues arose. There was a case of discrepancy in the baseline data (R0202 Total Value of Annual CB Area Exports) and in several indicators data were not made available.

In most cases, the case can be made that the targets set were not ambitious. In many cases only the exogenous factors have led to changes higher than the target set for 2023 (R0202 Total Value of Annual CB Area Exports, R0204 Annual tourist overnight stays at accommodation establishments, R0205 % of Natura areas reporting excellent or good degree of conservation, R0206 % of characterized surface water bodies in GES, R0210 Social enterprise employees in the CB area). In some other cases (R0208, R0209) the trends are opposite to what the programme was aspiring to achieve. Nevertheless, we must also take into consideration that there is a lag on the possible effects of the programme, as well as that the underlying trends and factors may overshadow the programme’s impact in some of the cases.

Furthermore, one should recognize the positive aspects of the evaluation framework. The selection of the indicators would have allowed for continuity and transparency if the data sources were more reliable. Additionally, with minor improvements in the methodological note, would further support the data manipulation techniques and would allow independent evaluators to assess indicators longitudinally.

Further suggestions for improvements that lie within the JS locus of control are:

- The shift of focus from expected outcome to expected result evaluation of the projects though a clear logical and meaningful intervention logic or theory of change
- The establishment of strong ties with the indicator providers, as well as the assignment of a liaison officer between the data providers and the JS in order to:
 - Safeguard that data are available on the necessary timeseries and level for a meaningful impact assessment
 - Timely address changes in the indicators methodologies in order to achieve continuity
- Ex-ante development of a Monitoring and Evaluation system that would allow granular counterfactual analysis of the projects and programmes impact.

PART III

Communication Plan

The current document has as a scope to define the Users of the “1st Evaluation of the Implementation Progress and the impact of the Cooperation Programme Interreg V-A Greece-Bulgaria 2014-2020”, as well as categorize them according to their interests and characteristics. The defined user groups for the Evaluation report are the following:

- the members of the Monitoring Committee of the Programme
- the internal stakeholders for the implementation of the Programme
- the beneficiaries of the Programme
- the external stakeholders implementing or benefiting by respective Programmes
- the general public of the cross-border area

Taking the above into account, the main findings of the evaluation, the conclusions and recommendations of the report should be publicly available in all the above stakeholders, as well as in the general public, in order to ensure transparency and public scrutiny.

Moreover, the findings of the evaluation can be useful and add value in the implementation of similar or future programmes that are co-funded by the European Union, not only as a repository or data, but also as means to enhance the effectiveness and efficiency of such interventions by avoiding the mistakes and replicating the strengths of the particular programme and evaluation.

Even though the evaluation per se is a technical document hindering usability by the general public, the main findings and conclusions should be clearly stated in order to be accessible and understandable by all possible users of the document, including non-experts.

Taking all of the above into account the following table summarizes the proposed actions for the communication of the 1st Evaluation of the Implementation Progress and the impact of the Cooperation Programme “Interreg V-A Greece-Bulgaria 2014-2020”.

Table Communication content and actions.

User Group	Content to be Available	Communication Action
Monitoring Committee of the Programme	Complete Report	Presentation in Committee, Seminars, Conferences etc Publication on the Internet
Internal implementation stakeholders	Complete Report	Presentation in Committee, Seminars, Conferences etc. Publication on the Internet
Beneficiaries	Complete Report	Presentation in Committee, Seminars, Conferences etc. Publication on the Internet Inclusion in the Programme Newsletter
External Implementation stakeholders	Complete Report	Publication on the Internet
General public	Executive Summary and Citizens Summary	Publication on the Internet Press release

Presentations in the Monitoring Committee, Seminars, Conferences etc: Presentation of the Findings, Conclusions and Recommendations of the Evaluation “may be extremely useful to all interested parties. The access to the external evaluators and the implementing stakeholders can provide a comprehensive but in-depth analysis of the programme.

As a process such seminars could be useful to all interested parties learning from each other methodological approaches, challenges faced etc.

Publication on the Internet: Access of the report on the Internet through the Programme’s webpage and social media accounts (Facebook) can be a useful tool for all relevant stakeholders within and outside the intervention area and fields. Access to relevant information, not only contributes to the public accountability, but can work towards a better evaluation and implementation of programmes, by sharing the experiences, challenges, and lessons learned.

ANNEX

The following section is focusing on the projects of PA1, in order to provide a better overview of the implementation of the programme. As it is presented above in the main section, actions concerning the activation of PA1 have been taking place since 2018. Nevertheless, the progress in PA1 was not reflected in the in the implementation monitoring system up to the 31/12/2020. Taking the above into consideration this section presents a short overview of the progress made under PA1.

Calls

PA1 was activated with two calls. The 5th Call was launched on 21/12/2018 and the 6th on 11/06/2019.

The 5th Call included a budget of 10,000,000 euros and was active till 15/07/2019. The call activated Specific Objective 2 “To improve SME capacity to expand beyond local markets” and the submitted projects were eligible for funding between 300,000 and 600,000 euros. Eligible entities were enterprises active in one of the smart specialization sectors: agro-food industry, waste management for recycling or energy production, renewable energy and energy saving and efficiency, sustainable tourism, health, materials – technology, construction materials and textile industry. Proposals, should include one potential beneficiary and another eligible potential beneficiary from the other participating country. The project beneficiary should cooperate in some capacity for the development and implementation of the proposed investment plan.

The 6th call included a budget of 7,000,000 euros. The call was organized in two phases, with the 1st phase open till 07/10/2019. The second phase of the call was open up to 5/10/2020. The call activated Specific Objective 1 “To Improve entrepreneurship SME support systems” and the submitted projects were eligible for funding between 250,000 and 700,000 euros. Eligible entities included national bodies, bodies governed by public law and private non-profit organizations. Eligible activities included investment in business support infrastructure and systems and/or soft actions.

Results and Contracting

Results for the 5th Call were announced on 15/07/2020 with 36 projects approved for funding, out of the total of 55. The total budget of approved projects amounted to 18.907.430,95€. The contracted period, also started within 2020, though due to the COVID restrictions did not advance as fast as it was expected. By the end of 2020 32 projects have been contracted, while the last 4 were contracted in 2021. The total contracted budget amounted to 18.166.277,81 € (11.808080,55 € public funding) and the projects’ cumulative output indicators target is expected to cover the respective programme target. Results for the 6th Call were announced on 16/02/2020 with 25 projects approved for funding, out of

the total of 34. The total budget of approved projects amounted to 14.468.758,40€. Under the 6th call 31 projects have been contracted (25 plus those in the reserve lists) with a total budget of 16.084.561,76 €. The projects’ cumulative output indicators target is expected to cover the respective programme target.

Report within the Updating of the Evaluation of Cooperation Programme
INTERREG V-A Greece-Bulgaria 2014-2020”

Table : Priority Axis 1 performance outline

Priority Axis	Thematic Objective	Investment Priority	Budget Decided	Budget Contracted	Expenditures Certified	Projects	Contracted %	Output Indicators
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	10.000.000	18.166.277,81	0	36	181%	Project targets are expected to cover the respective programme targets
		3d - Supporting the capacity of SMEs to grow in regional, national and international markets, and to engage in innovation processes	7.000.000	16.084.561,76	0	31	229%	

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INTERREG V-A COOPERATION PROGRAMME: GREECE – BULGARIA 2014-2020 Annual Implementation Report 2019

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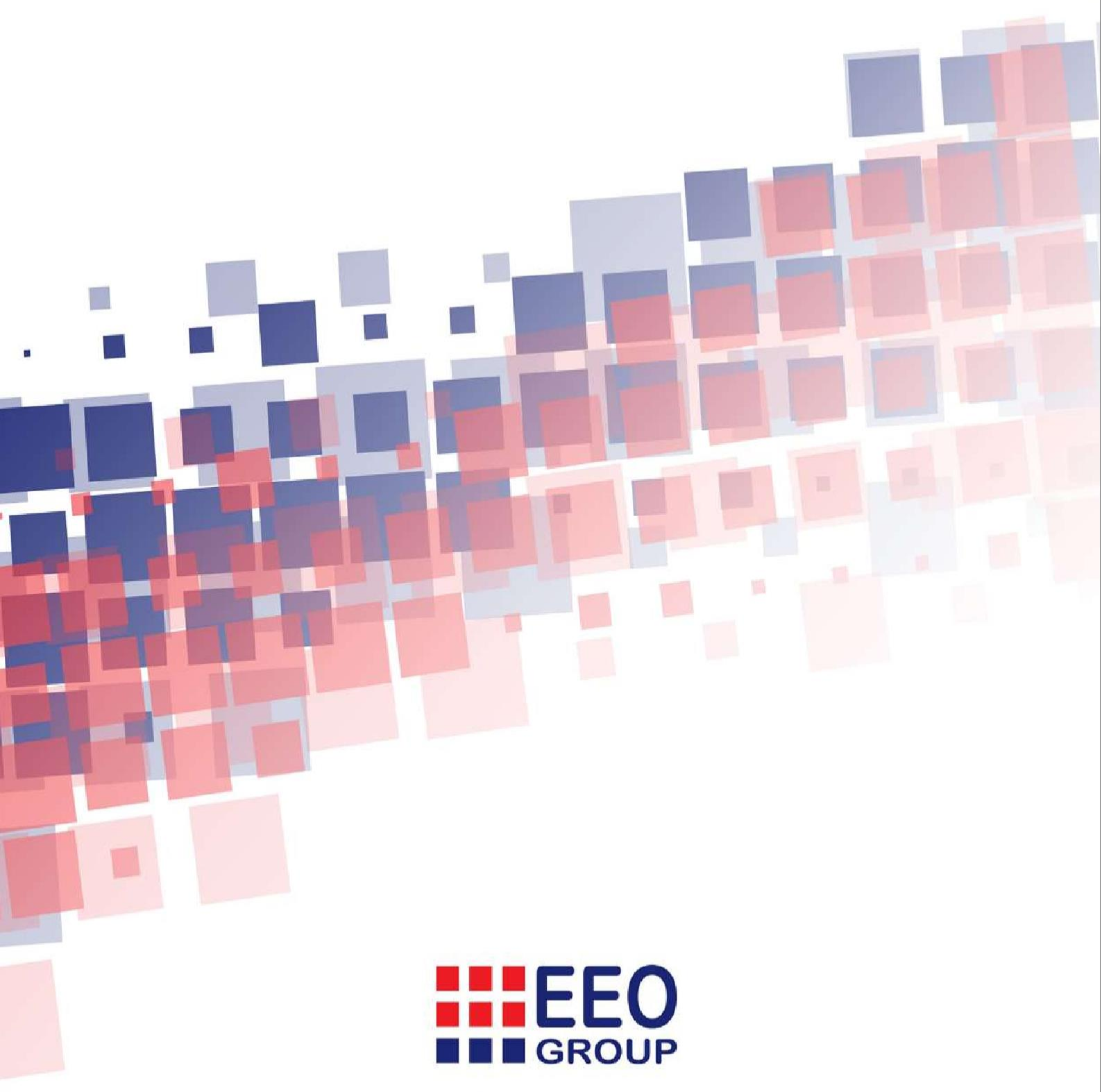
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