



## **Draft Programme's Intervention Logic**

---

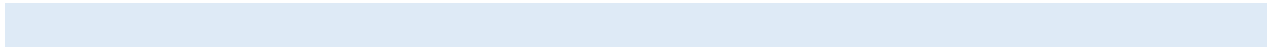
**Republic of Bulgaria - Republic of North Macedonia  
CBC Programme 2021-2027**



**INTERREG IPA  
REPUBLIC OF BULGARIA-REPUBLIC OF NORTH MACEDONIA  
PROGRAMME 2021-2027**

## Table of Contents

1. INTRODUCTION.....	3
2. TERRITORIAL ANALYSIS .....	3
3. LESSONS LEARNT.....	6
4. BORDER ORIENTATION PAPER (BOP).....	8
5. INVOLVEMENT OF THE RELEVANT PARTNERS IN THE PROGRAMME PREPARATION (Respecting of partnership principle) .....	9
6. DRAFT INTERVENTION LOGIC .....	11



## 1. INTRODUCTION

According to the draft cohesion policy legal framework for 2021-2027, the funds shall support 5 general Policy Objectives and 2 Policy Objectives dedicated to Interreg Programmes, namely:

General Policy Objectives:

- A smarter Europe by promoting innovative and smart economic transformation ('PO 1')
- A greener, low-carbon Europe by promoting clean and fair energy transition, green and blue investment, the circular economy, climate adaptation and risk prevention and management ('PO 2')
- A more connected Europe by enhancing mobility and regional ICT connectivity ('PO 3')
- A more social Europe implementing the European Pillar of Social Rights ('PO 4')
- A Europe closer to citizens by fostering the sustainable and integrated development of urban, rural and coastal areas and local initiatives ('PO 5')

Interreg specific objectives:

- A better Interreg Governance (ISO 1)
- A safer and more secure Europe (ISO 2)

Based on the draft Regulations, at least 60% of the ERDF and, where applicable, of the external financing instruments of the Union allocated to each Interreg strand A, B and D programme, shall be allocated on Policy objective 2 and a maximum of two other policy objectives as set out in Article 15 (1) in the new ETC Regulation.

## 2. TERRITORIAL ANALYSIS

The Territorial Analysis of the Cross-border region identifies the needs and the potential of the area in the following main fields: economic development, regional connectivity, tourism, environment, human capital, governance etc. The main conclusion of the analysis is that both countries in the cross-border area share many common challenges such as:

- Sparsely populated rural and peripheral areas in the mountains along the border;
- Negative demographic change;
- Increasing income inequalities;
- Eurostat data<sup>1</sup> show that the CBC territory falls within the groups of regions with the second highest rate of poverty risk and social exclusion;
- Both countries' performance is among the weakest in the EU for entrepreneurship, skills & innovation;
- Output production and export is still far more focused on medium- and low-technology products;
- Underdeveloped year-round tourist infrastructure;
- Urban and peri-urban areas lagging behind from greening practices;

---

<sup>1</sup> [https://ec.europa.eu/eurostat/statistics-explained/index.php?title=Living\\_conditions\\_statistics\\_at\\_regional\\_level#Poverty\\_and\\_deprivation](https://ec.europa.eu/eurostat/statistics-explained/index.php?title=Living_conditions_statistics_at_regional_level#Poverty_and_deprivation)

- High vulnerability to biodiversity loss and natural hazards – both countries perform below the EU average on the environment principle, particularly on resource efficiency and production of green products and services;
- High Covid-19 vulnerability according to the INFORM Covid-19 Risk Index of the European Commission. Both countries rank equally - 122 out of 191 who bear the highest Covid-19 risk)

On the other hand, the CBC area exhibits great potential in key development directions exemplified through:

- Growing GDP;
- Net migration;
- Started Smart Specialization processes, yet differently staged - more advanced in the Republic of Bulgaria and less advanced in the Republic of North Macedonia;
- Growing export and household consumption;
- SMEs in the ‘non-financial business economy’ of both countries have achieved consistent growth;
- In both countries internationalization practices continue to perform in line with the EU average;
- Increased cross-border traffic;
- Rich in natural resources and landscapes

The prospects of the renewed EU Territorial Agenda 2030 provides important directions for the future course of development of the CBC area taking into account the above-summarized challenges and potentials. Persistent territorial and economic obstacles can be transformed into development drivers only if have been equally addressed in a cooperative and integrated manner, because territorial governance and cooperation, as well as the quality of governance, are preconditions to counter the current social, economic, connectivity and environmental challenges that the CBC area faces. The outcomes of the Territorial Analysis outlines the following **groups of territorial obstacles and missing links**, that need complex, but targeted measures, to get resolved in a balanced, multi-level governance, multi-dimensional and multi-thematic mode of operation, who will eventually contribute to the strengthening of the territorial cohesion of the programme area, particularly in the light of the speeded up EU enlargement.

### **(1) Lack of ecosystem-based practices in dealing with environmental challenges**

The link between biodiversity and the provision of ecosystem services has not yet been built in the CBC area, despite the large amount of natural areas that enjoy various national and international protection statuses. The Territorial Analysis outlines the pollution of rivers, floods, landslides and fires as the biggest environmental problems of the border region. There are highly polluted river sections particularly within the catchment area of the Struma, Bregalnitzka, Strumica and part of the Vardar river resulting mainly from the direct flow of waste waters from industry (and mine sites) and households, mine deposits and the use of pesticides and fertilizers in agriculture. According to the EU 2030 biodiversity strategy, ecosystems and their services can be maintained and enhanced by establishing Green Infrastructure (GI) and restoring degraded ecosystems. GI is a strategically planned network of natural and semi-natural areas that are aimed at providing large scope of ecosystem services with a positive impact on all environmental components. As highlighted in the

EU Green Infrastructure Strategy, investments in GI have significant potential to strengthen regional and urban development, including by maintaining or creating jobs. The development and deployment of ecosystem-based services in the CBC area would enhance the greening practices benefiting from the existing potential of the border region in and building on the well preserved nature and landscape, rich biodiversity, large number of protected areas and landscapes, taken environmental protection and risk prevention and mitigation measures.

## **(2) Underdeveloped infrastructure favoring equal cross-border provision of services of general interest<sup>2</sup> and business services**

The accessibility, proximity, affordability and quality of public services is important to quality of life and business development. Differences in access to services of general interest risk driving service providers, enterprises and social activities to relocate to areas with better access. This especially concerns remote areas that lack access to public services and economic and social opportunities. The same holds true when it comes to business and entrepreneur services, as being outcome of the TA. The borderline depicts a barrier and business activity remains mainly local and urban, with absent cross-border dimension and impact. Missing links in the CB provision of business services and such of general interest are a main factor behind the negative demographic dynamics that the area exhibits. The lack of infrastructure favoring the provision of services of community and business interest further impose severe social implications including increased social exclusion and inequalities, as well as challenges for recreational service provision, labour markets and housing. The support for development of new and improvement of existed services of general interests shall be provided in the new EU policy context of integrated territorial development accounting for full compliance with the Territorial Agenda 2030's priorities, because uncoordinated and dot-like interventions failed to generate sustainable impact on the economic development. The need to combat unevenly dispersed economic effects of isolated and sporadic interventions gave rise to the concept of participative and integrated territorial development as a horizontal policy tool that is able to boost inclusiveness, sustainability, competitiveness and resilience by gathering key actors from any sectoral value chain in cooperative actions.

## **(3) Limited entrance to the competitively-growing world of entrepreneurship and innovation**

Both countries' performance is among the weakest in the EU for entrepreneurship, skills & innovation, as the 2019 SBA countries' factsheets showcase. Annual review of European countries on their performance within the Small Business Act initiative allow for consistent assessment of SMEs outputs in a set of 10 indicators ranging from entrepreneurship and responsive administration to internationalisation. In terms of entrepreneurship Bulgaria performs considerably below the EU average in 7 out of 12 sub-indicators, while in 'Established business ownership rate', 'Entrepreneurship as a desirable career choice' and 'Share of high growth enterprises' performs above the EU average. The Republic of North Macedonia depicts similar performance – the country performs below the EU average in 6 out of 12 sub-indicators, while in 'Entrepreneurial intentions', 'Entrepreneurship education at basic school' and 'Entrepreneurship as a desirable career choice'

---

<sup>2</sup> [https://ec.europa.eu/info/topics/single-market/services-general-interest\\_en](https://ec.europa.eu/info/topics/single-market/services-general-interest_en)

performs above the EU average. The identical overall underperformance of both countries in entrepreneurship and innovation skills calls on the mobilization of business actors in joint cross-border actions to develop and implement proper integrated territorial measures overcoming that obstacle to balanced economic development.

#### **(4) Limited regional connectivity**

In terms of interregional connectivity, the lack of railway connection between the two countries, the increasing cross-border traffic and the prospects of expanding the access to core TEN-T network have urged the need to open a new border crossing checkpoint (BCCP) taking also into account the prospects of the accelerated EU enlargement. Opening a new BCCP will have an undisputable positive economic, political and social impact for the cross-border region and beyond it. Therefore, a proposal of a strategic project for establishing a new BCCP at Klepalo connecting the municipalities of Strumiani (Republic of Bulgaria) and Berovo (Republic of North Macedonia) has been now on the agenda.

### **3. LESSONS LEARNT**

#### *Experience in current and previous programming periods*

The IPA CBC Programme Bulgaria- the former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia 2007-2013 operated in a wide range of priority areas and covered a variety of sectors, without clear prioritization. Despite the thematic concentration imposed by the EU Regulations in 2014 -2020 period, the areas of intervention defined under INTERREG-IPA CBC Programme 2014 -2020 still remained quite diverse and without any interdependence.

Opposite to limited (even reduced in 2014-2020 period) financial resources, the interest in the programme remained high during both programming periods. In 2007-2013 period – under the 3 open calls 320 projects were submitted and 100 contracts signed while in 2014-2020 period – under the 2 open calls 379 projects were submitted and 73 project signed. This comes to show that more than 75 % of the project proposals were not financed and that the scattered sectoral investments based on open calls have led on one hand to severe competition and high expectations of potential beneficiaries and on the other hand to fragmented and dot-like interventions, some of which were not directly linked to the actual needs and potential of the cross-border region.

Despite the demonstrated high interest, the low competence of some beneficiaries in terms of project implementation of certain measures and the low level of partnership between public and non-governmental sectors contributed to insufficient capitalization of the project results. In addition exhaustion in generation of project ideas was observed – e.g. increased number of projects, with already financed similar ideas/objectives and in all calls most of the applicants are one and the same organizations/institutions.

#### *Outcomes of the performed mid-term and ex-post evaluations*

The Impact Evaluation of the 2007-2013 Programme, as well as the Midterm evaluation of 2014-2020 Programme, showed that, in correspondence to the diversity of the spheres of intervention, a wide number and range of outputs were delivered. From a financial perspective, it was observed a drastic discrepancy between available, requested and contracted funds - in average, the total budget of all applications exceeds with 345 % the available one, while only 20 % of the total requested funding has been contracted. Often, such financial disproportion is a precondition for weak programme effects in terms of efficiency and sustainability. That is why it is difficult for the programme to bring out benefits for the communities, to intensify its effects for the region and especially its value added achieved through cooperation. In that respect, in order a visible impact to be achieved, a new, more results-oriented approach in the implementation of the future programmes was recommended. It is expected that a better programme focus would strengthen linkages between needs and resources (through concentrating more funds to most demanded intervention areas) thus generating proportionate and sustainable effects on the territory.

### Conclusions

The above lessons learned from current and previous programming periods show that for avoiding uncoordinated, dot-like investments and ensuring a stronger impact of the programme results, a more strategic approach is desirable, based on the needs and competitive advantages of the CBC region. This can be achieved in the following ways:

- *PO 2 “A greener, low-carbon Europe by promoting clean and fair energy transition, green and blue investment, the circular economy, climate adaptation and risk prevention and management”* had been chosen as the exploitation of new forms of ecosystem-based services, through the large variety of greening measures, would contribute to the maintenance of healthy green, physical and living environment, and moreover would generate non-material benefits for people, including aesthetic qualities and recreational experiences.
- The socio-economic interlinkages between the two countries have been gradually expanding due to positive prospects of the EU enlargement. The need for strengthening the regional connectivity and to facilitate the increasing traffic of people and goods between the Republic of Bulgaria and the Republic of North Macedonia has since long been on the agenda. In this context, a strategic project for establishing a new Broder crossing checkpoint between the countries is proposed under *PO3 “A more connected Europe by enhancing mobility and regional ICT connectivity”*.
- *PO5 “A Europe closer to citizens by fostering the sustainable and integrated development of all types of territories”* is extremely appropriate to be part of the programme intervention logic. It will give the opportunity the multi-thematic challenges of the border area to be tackled through a territorial development strategy, applying integrated measures across different sectors. The integrated investments for fostering the territorial development in local economy will bring higher added value and ensure the leverage effect of the funds.

#### 4. BORDER ORIENTATION PAPER (BOP)

The Border Orientation Paper for the INTERREG-IPA CBC cooperation programmes between Republic of Bulgaria and respectively: Republic of North Macedonia, Republic of Serbia and Republic of Turkey sets out the key characteristics of the cross-border territories and outlines suggestions for the programming of the next INTERREG-IPA programmes.

Considering the limited programme budget and in order to increase effectiveness and efficiency, the Orientation Paper highlights the following main aspects to be taken into account during the programme preparation and implementation:

- Re-inforcing the strategic dimension of the future programme by linking them more strongly with existing strategic frameworks and political initiatives (such as the macro-regional strategies) and applying a top-down approach for part of its envelope (through strategic/thematic/flagship projects);
- Exploring the use of simple financial instruments with a grant component to make them attractive and manageable – putting in place mechanisms to finance small projects or people-to-people projects that make a strong contribution to the social and civil cohesion of the cross-border region.
- Refocusing on functional areas and avoiding duplication, fragmentation and overlapping of measures in order the programme effectiveness to be increased;

Orientations are structured in view of the proposed objectives for Cohesion Policy, as follows:

##### ***PO1: A smarter Europe by promoting innovative and smart economic transformation***

The BOP outlines that the current framework conditions for competitiveness of SMEs in the programme area are challenging and the impact of earlier actions funded by previous programmes on socio-economic development has been limited.

In that respect direct support to local SMEs is suggested that could take the form of grants, voucher schemes and other tools (such as Small project fund), leading to reducing the administrative burden and simplification of the projects implementation. Joint measures to increase resource efficiency and to promote the circular economy in SMEs may be envisaged as well.

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

A possible strategic/flagship project may include actions concerning climate change and risk prevention, among which:

- Joint climate change measures with a strong focus on sustainable and eco-friendly measures (such as green infrastructure (e.g. flood plains and reforestation));
- Facilitating existing cooperation through the development of joint policies, protocols, procedures and approaches on risk prevention and rapid response management to many potential emergencies (such as wildfires, flooding, natural disasters, severe weather evacuations, health emergencies).



***PO 3: A more connected Europe by enhancing mobility and regional ICT connectivity***

In principle IPA CBC programmes can play an important role for coordinated actions aimed at improving cross-border mobility and connectivity. Taking into consideration the limited programme budget major infrastructure projects are not feasible to be envisaged for financing.

On the other hand such measures are more appropriate to be developed as strategic projects leading to more tangible results but they require good coordination between the responsible bodies well in advance, as well as sufficient resources. The connectivity element could be however very well tackled under PO5 with the respective justification for integrated territorial investment.

***PO4: A more social Europe implementing the European Pillar of Social rights***

The BOP outlines negative demographic trends in both countries (mostly due to ageing and net migration), as well as employment performance considerably lower as the EU average.

In that respect measure addressing the above issues are more appropriate to be tackled at national level and in case activities under PO4 are foreseen a more pro-active interaction and convergence with national employment programmes should be established.

***PO5: A Europe closer to citizens by fostering the sustainable and integrated development of all types of territories***

The BOP outlines that since possible areas of intervention under PO5 can refer to all other policy objectives (PO1-PO4) they should be based on an integrated, place-based strategy, i.e. a strategy targeting a specific geographical area, identifying common challenges and objectives based on the local needs, developed with appropriate stakeholders involvement, and endorsed by the relevant urban, local or other territorial authorities or bodies.

## **5. INVOLVEMENT OF THE RELEVANT PARTNERS IN THE PROGRAMME PREPARATION (Respecting of partnership principle)**

### **5.1. Establishment of the Joint Working Group**

In October 2019 a *Joint Working Group (JWG)* has been set up for elaboration of the Programme. One of its main tasks was to periodically review and make suggestions and proposals to the programming progress as well as to approve the main stages of the programme preparation and finally the Programme as a whole.

The JWG members were nominated in accordance with the relevant institutional and legal framework and respecting the partnership principle. The JWG is composed of a balanced number of representatives of the two partnering countries, including representatives of public authorities (national, regional and local), economic and social partners, relevant bodies representing civil society, including environmental partners, non-governmental organisations, and bodies responsible for promoting social inclusion, gender equality and non-discrimination. The first meeting of the JWG took place in Sofia on 09.10.2019 on which Rules and procedures and a Concept note with a

timeschedule for the programming process were adopted. The Territorial analysis of the Cross-border Area, including SWOT analysis, was approved via a written procedure in July 2020.

The establishment of the JWG was preceded by a large **regional consultation process** implemented in both countries. In September 2019 two meetings of regional focus groups were conducted, respectively in Blagoevgrad (Republic of Bulgaria) and in Strumica (Republic of North Macedonia). Their aim was to identify the local needs and potentials, following the bottom-up approach and to incorporate proposals by the stakeholders regarding the prioritization of policy objectives and possible interventions. Representatives of wide range of relevant stakeholders (more than 100) took part in the meetings – among which local and regional authorities, educational institutions, local business, non-governmental organizations from the CBC region.

## **5.2.Regional consultations**

Participants in the extensive cross-border regional consultations agreed on the need to propose joint measures to tackle the untapped tourism potential, that is different from the one related to ski and spa tourism, by addressing the underdeveloped tourist infrastructure. The regional and local stakeholders expressed willingness for including new type of beneficiaries, partnerships and activities (through a direct support to SMEs), but also insisted on the sustainability of the previous ones and on capitalizing the experience in cooperation between the two countries.

Policy objective 5 ‘Europe closer to citizens’ was supported by the participating stakeholders as the most suitable way for implementation of integrated measures that could contribute for solving common and diverse challenges in the border region.

The issue concerning the project (proposed under the External Border Initiative in 2003 that failed to be completed) for construction of access road and opening of a new border crossing between the two countries at Strumiani – Berovo, was raised by the stakeholders as an extremely important one. In that respect, it was suggested that the Programme should support a strategic project for fulfilment of the still pending bilateral governmental engagements (signed back in 1999).

## **5.3.Questionnaires**

Following the regional consultations a **questionnaire** was sent to the participants where they pointed out the challenges the area faces in regard to the socio economic development and the spheres of interventions in which the programme could bring an added value. The respondents strongly supported the future programme to be more focussed by addressing local challenges and needs of the border region. In addition direct support to environmental protection, local businesses, as well as promoting integrated territorial development was also highlighted.

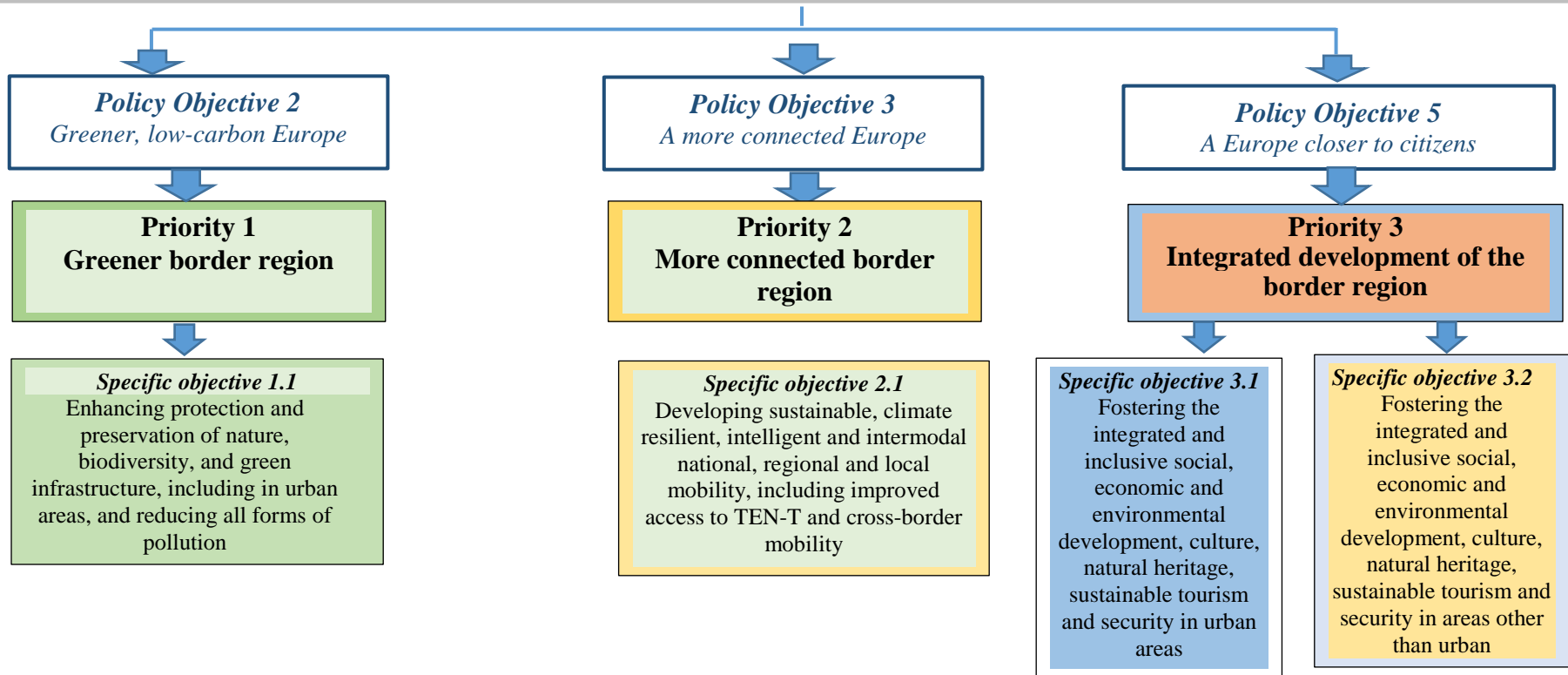
For the purpose of implementation of PO 5, the Managing and National authorities, will support the local stakeholders for the elaboration of a territorial strategy for integrated measures. A **Steering Committee** will be established representing all relevant regional and local authorities and bodies, as well as other local stakeholders related to the preparation and implementation of the strategy (pursuant to Art. 23 of the CPR). The Steering Committee will be involved in each stage

of the elaboration and implementation of the abovementioned strategy as well as will be responsible for its approval and review.

## **6. DRAFT INTERVENTION LOGIC**

The present chart represents the proposal for intervention logic for the new IPA CBC Programme Republic of Bulgaria- Republic of North Macedonia 2021-2027.

**OVERALL OBJECTIVE:**  
To strengthen the territorial cohesion of the Republic of Bulgaria-Republic of North Macedonia Cross-border region



*Indicative distribution of the financial resources (share of the total programme budget)*

<b>PRIORITIES</b>	<b>%<sup>3</sup></b>
<b>P 1: Greener border region</b>	<b>15%</b>
<b>P 2: More connected border region</b>	<b>30%</b>
<b>P 3: Integrated development of the border region</b>	<b>45%</b>
<b>Technical assistance as part of the allocation for each priority</b>	<b>10 %</b>

The proposed above Intervention logic is based on:

- The findings of the territorial analysis;
- Border Orientation Paper
- Lessons learnt;
- Regional consultations and questionnaires / interviews (if applicable);
- The restrictions set by the regulations related to the thematic concentration<sup>5</sup>;
- Limited budgetary resources

---

<sup>3</sup> Indicative allocations between priorities are presented herewith, the final allocations will be determined upon receiving decision on the budget of the programme and taking into account the specificities envisaged under each priority

<sup>4</sup> According to art. 26 of the draft ETC Regulation, Technical Assistance (TA) shall not be presented as a separate Priority Axis. The amount of the funds allocated to TA shall be identified as part of the financial allocation of each priority of the programme. It shall take the form of a flat rate of 10% of the ERDF and the external financing instruments of the Union (art. 26 (2) (b) of the draft ETC Regulation)

<sup>5</sup> Based on the draft Regulations (Council general approach), At least 60% of the ERDF and, where applicable, of the external financing instruments of the Union allocated to each Interreg strand A, B and D programme, shall be allocated on Policy objective 2 and a maximum of two other policy objectives as set out in Article 15 (1) in the new ETC.

**PRIORITY 1 Greener border region**

<b>Selected policy objective / Selected specific objective</b>	<b>Justification for selection</b>	<b>Actions to be Supported</b>	<b>Outputs</b>	<b>Results</b>	<b>Target groups / Beneficiaries</b>
<p><b>PO2.</b> A greener, low- carbon Europe by promoting clean and fair energy transition, green and blue investment, the circular economy, climate adaptation and risk prevention and management</p> <p><b>Specific objective 1.1.</b> Enhancing protection and preservation of nature,</p>	<p>The programme area enjoys a great biological diversity. However, due to its highly varied geological, topographic and hydrologic conditions, the area is vulnerable to biodiversity harmful practices. According to the EU 2030 Biodiversity Strategy, biodiversity loss and ecosystem collapse are one of the biggest threats facing humanity in the next decade. That makes preserving nature and restoring healthy ecosystems a European priority. Central to this priority is the establishment of green infrastructure (GI) whose wide effects positively impact human health and wellbeing, support a green economy, create job opportunities and enhance biodiversity. While the EU 2030 Biodiversity Strategy calls on national authorities to further strengthen and widen protection practices of natural sites, the regional and local authorities have been increasingly recognized as key providers of ecosystem services in building and restoring green spaces. The 2019 ESPON interim report 'State of the European Territory' showcases that the CBC area enjoys high potential GI network coverage. That assessment entails policies and practices promoting sustainable</p>	<p>The actions to be supported<sup>6</sup> are based on the EU typology of GI<sup>7</sup> and can be presented in the following groups of investments:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- <b>Investments in building greens</b> (green balconies, green walls, green roofs, atrium, green pavements, green parking, green fences, noise barriers, etc.);</li> <li>- <b>Investments in developing urban and peri-urban green areas, including improving connections between green spaces</b> (tree alley and street tree/hedge, street green and green verge, green playground/school ground, riverbank greens);</li> <li>- <b>Investments in developing natural urban green areas</b> (urban park, historical park/garden, pocket</li> </ul>	<p>RCO36 Green infrastructure supported for other purposes than adaptation to climate change</p> <p>RCO84 Joint pilot activities implemented in projects</p>	<p>RCR 95 Population having access to new or improved green infrastructure</p> <p>RCR104 Solutions taken up or up-scaled by organisations</p>	<p><b>Target groups:</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>– Local population and visitors</li> <li>– Local authorities and regional structures of central administration</li> <li>– R&amp;D, academic and scientific institutions</li> <li>– NGOs</li> </ul> <p><b>Beneficiaries:</b> Public authorities, scientific institutions, NGOs</p>

<sup>6</sup> The actions presented herewith are indicative. At the stage of draft programme elaboration the scope of action will be further streamlined based on the available resources and specificities of the measures

<sup>7</sup> <https://biodiversity.europa.eu/green-infrastructure/typology-of-gi>

<p>biodiversity, and green infrastructure, including in urban areas, and reducing all forms of pollution</p>	<p>land use and increased biodiversity. In addition to that, the programme area shows a decrease in green space coverage mainly due to urbanisation and economic development. As the green space coverage on urban scale is generally decreasing, policies addressing that deficit should focus on greening urban and peri-urban areas, improving the connectivity of urban spaces and on transforming land uses, dominated by non-vegetated open spaces (e.g. former industrial platforms, parking lots, brownfields), into green spaces with improved ecological qualities. These are only part of the measures the programme will seek to support in order to enhance biodiversity by setting up ecological corridors to prevent genetic isolation, allow for species migration, and maintain and enhance healthy ecosystems. In this context, the EU 2030 Biodiversity Strategy encourages investments in green infrastructure to be implemented through cross-border cooperation among Member States, including through the European Territorial Cooperation. The EU strategy for promoting GI has also underlined the regional/cohesion dimension of the GI promotion. The implementation of the specific objective will be based on the following approaches: <b>integration</b> (integration and coordination of urban green with other urban infrastructures in terms of physical and functional relations), <b>multi-functionality</b> (combine ecological, social and economic/abiotic, biotic and cultural functions of green spaces), and <b>connectivity</b> (physical and functional connections between green spaces at different scales and from</p>	<p>park/park let, neighbourhood green space, institutional green space, green sport facility, forest, shrubland, abandoned and derelict area with patches of wilderness);</p> <p>- <b>Investments in developing green areas for water management</b> (swales, creek restoration and nature scaping, rain gardens or sustainable urban drainage systems (SUDS), naturalized storm water pond, bio retention areas);</p> <p>In addition to the abovementioned investments, the programme could support the following actions in line with the needs to promote GI and ecosystem-based solutions:</p> <p>- Investments in activities dedicated to the control of pollution and rehabilitation of rivers and brownfields;</p> <p>- Support for joint strategies and action plans for increasing awareness and developing new tools, instruments, as well as</p>			
--	---	---	--	--	--

	<p><i>different perspectives). The CB cooperation in the field of GI is in line with the recommendation of the Border Orientation Paper to put a strong focus on sustainable and eco-friendly measures (such as green infrastructure). The CB cooperation in that policy area is expected to unlock ecosystem-based solution potential justified by the presence of a rich biological diversity as well as by the vast opportunities to build on bio-related achievements of the two previous programming periods.</i></p> <p><i>For the purposes of implementation of Priority 1 the participating countries will seek to apply new instruments that would correspond to the limited budget and the objectives set, such as Small Project fund or other simplified options.</i></p>	<p><i>transferring solutions between relevant stakeholders;</i></p>			
--	--	---	--	--	--



**PRIORITY 2 More connected border region**

<b>Selected policy objective / Selected specific objective</b>	<b>Justification for selection</b>	<b>Actions to be Supported</b>	<b>Outputs</b>	<b>Results</b>	<b>Target groups / Beneficiaries</b>
<p><b>PO3</b></p> <p>A more connected Europe by enhancing mobility and regional ICT connectivity</p> <p><b>Specific objective 2.1.</b> Developing sustainable, climate resilient, intelligent and intermodal national, regional and local mobility, including improved access to TEN-T and cross-border mobility</p>	<p>The enhanced EU enlargement process has called on the Republic of Bulgaria and the Republic of North Macedonia to rise to the challenge of facilitating the annually increasing traffic of freight (by an average of 10%, Bulgarian Customs Agency) and movement of people between the two countries. The need for opening a new border crossing checkpoint (BCCP) between the two countries has been recognized back in 1999 when the Republic of Bulgaria and the Republic of North Macedonia have signed a Bilateral Agreement for establishment of a new BCCP at the village of Klepalo connecting the municipalities of Strumiani (Republic of Bulgaria) and Berovo (Republic of North Macedonia). The Commission's recent proposals envisage further integration of Western Balkan countries into EU policies, programmes and markets, which would deliver some of the benefits of EU membership even before accession and if border mobility obstacles persist, the speed up of the EU enlargement process may be jeopardized by the lack of basic connectivity factors which are the fundamentals of an effective EU. On an economic note, connectivity is considered a cornerstone of regional economic cooperation and integration especially in the context of efforts to find new drivers of regional economic growth, and to create additional domestic and aggregate regional demand. To best unlock the potential of</p>	<p><b>Title of the project:</b> "Establishment of a new Border crossing check point (BCCP) "Klepalo" between the Republic of Bulgaria and the Republic of North Macedonia"</p> <p><b>Main project goal:</b> To improve regional connectivity and to boost the economic growth of the CBC area</p> <p><b>Specific project objectives:</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- To facilitate the increasing traffic of people and goods between the two countries</li> <li>- To strengthen communication links between the two countries</li> <li>- To improve and extend access to core TEN-T</li> </ul> <p><b>Indicative types of actions:</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Upgrade of the existing and construction of new</li> </ul>	<p><b>New indicator:</b></p> <p>New BCCP operating</p>	<p>RCR 56</p> <p>Time savings due to improved road infrastructures</p>	<p><b>Beneficiaries:</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Customs Administration of the Republic of North Macedonia and</li> <li>- Ministry of Interior and Customs Agency of the Republic of Bulgaria;</li> <li>- competent local, regional and national public authorities</li> </ul> <p><b>Partners:</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Road Infrastructure Agencies;</li> <li>- other relevant institutions</li> </ul>

	<p><i>ever-more closely interlinked production networks and value chains, providing the footing for connectivity will be key. The new BCCP will facilitate the flows of goods, services, people and shorten the time for accessing the very popular Bansko ski resort in Bulgaria (among the first ten in any topical rankings) and thus allowing for branding the region in a more feasible and attractive way. The CBC area still lacks a tourist competitive image despite the abundance of tourism-related natural resources. Furthermore, the strategic project will create added value in a broader economic perspective spreading the spillovers to and facilitating the interlinkages in the transport sector. It is envisaged to extend the access to the core TEN-T network by providing a direct road connection to the Struma highway in Bulgaria which belongs to the core TEN-T network as part of the Orient/East-Med core Corridor. The road construction component of the project will produce considerable time travel savings roughly estimated to 1.30 hour less travel time. Last but not least, the implementation of the project will contribute to the EU external policy by adhering to most up-to-date standards in safeguarding security and border control. The broad and multi-sectoral impact of the project on various EU policy strands defend its strategic orientation. The selection of PO3, as a leading policy objective under which the project is presented, is determined by the dominant role of the strategic intervention on the regional connectivity and cross-border mobility in an area that is soon expected to join the EU family.</i></p>	<p><i>BCCP facilities;</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li><i>- Purchase of specialized technical new generation equipment based on the latest ICT solutions;</i></li> <li><i>- Rehabilitation of existing and construction of new roads in both countries;</i></li> <li><i>- Environmental and other project-related assessments</i></li> </ul>			
--	---	---	--	--	--

**PRIORITY 3 Integrated development of the cross-border region**

<b>Selected policy objective / Selected specific objective</b>	<b>Justification for selection</b>	<b>Actions to be Supported</b>	<b>Outputs</b>	<b>Results</b>	<b>Target groups /Beneficiaries</b>
<p><b>PO 5</b> A Europe closer to citizens</p> <p><b>Specific objectives</b></p> <p>3.1 Fostering the integrated social, economic and environmental development, cultural heritage and security in urban areas</p> <p>3.2 Fostering the integrated social, economic and environmental development, cultural heritage and security in areas other than urban</p>	<p>The expected increase in regional disparities and peripheralization, the urban-rural divide and the polarisation around the main urban centres ask for integrated policies and an increasingly important role of the local level in development policies. This emphasises the importance of tailored place-based approaches rather than territorially blind policies with little relation to territorial reality. The selection of the two specific objectives, that the programme has embodied, has been made with a view to tackle these challenges, accounting as well for compliance with the core priorities of the Territorial Agenda 2030 – to strive for more balanced development and more equal living conditions for all territories addressing demographic and societal imbalances. The selection of the two SO has been further justified by the need to place on an equal footing urban and rural areas when it comes to provision and securing services of general interest. Thus, the programme will contribute to the ‘A just Europe’ priority of the Territorial Agenda 2030 by applying a place-based approach, in contrast</p>	<p>The actions under this priority will be selected on the basis of an integrated territorial strategy (ITS), but in general terms their thematic coverage will not differ substantially from the thematic concentration of the present programme. The ITS is the instrument who shapes and leads the implementation of PO5 (CPR Art 22 (c)). In other words, it operationalises the support to integrated territorial development. The ITS shall, in close coordination with a Task Force (composed by relevant regional and local stakeholders), identify the needs and propose interventions for their addressing following the SMART approach (specific, measurable, attainable, relevant and time-bound). In close coordination with the Task Force, a list of operations, accompanied by concrete NACE codes, to be supported will be established, based on mapping of possible</p>	<p>RCO74 Population covered by projects in the framework of strategies for integrated territorial development</p> <p>RCO83 Strategies and action plans jointly developed</p> <p>RCO119 Projects supporting cooperation across borders to develop urban-rural linkages</p> <p>RCO01 Enterprises supported (of which: micro, small, medium, large)</p>	<p>RCR104 Solutions taken up or up-scaled by organisations</p>	<p>Target groups:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>– Civil society</li> <li>– Local/regional bodies and authorities, regional structures of central public authorities</li> <li>– NGOs</li> <li>– R&amp;D, academic and training institutions</li> <li>– Social institutions</li> <li>– SMEs</li> <li>– Local population</li> </ul> <p>Beneficiaries: will be identified in the Strategy</p>

	<p><i>to the dot-like one. The former is expected to unleash the territorial potential and satisfy identified needs in a more consistent, efficient and sustainable way. This entails the involvement of all actors playing active roles in the border economy, such as SMEs, public authorities, NGOs, special-purpose organizations, etc. and thus allowing for accountable partnerships that are set up to support the prosperity of the border region. Effective integrated territorial development at a place-based level requires a broad range of economic and community-led incentives that foster active collaborations of stakeholders and service providers from both sides of the border. The selected specific objectives provides a very good strategic framework to bring business, citizens and authorities together in collective actions that produce shared benefits and widely agreed solutions to common territorial challenges. As far as the implementation framework of PO5 is concerned (in terms of actions to be supported), its concrete parameters will be designed and detailed in the Integrated territorial strategy, whose short description is presented under column "Actions to be supported". Although the strategy will be elaborated at a later stage, it is known that it will prioritize the</i></p>	<p><i>interventions for an integrated development of the region, as well as identifying target groups and potential beneficiaries. The operations from the list shall be grouped, prioritized and time-bound (based on a transparent and clear methodology).</i></p>	<p><i>RCO02 Enterprises supported by grants</i></p>		
--	---	--	---	--	--

	<p><i>support for some projects/operations/activities over others. That is specifically valid for the integrated territorial development of business services, services of general interest, urban-rural linkages, etc. The CBC area is considered to have untapped economic potential and actions targeted at SMEs and their improved participation in regional value chains are expected to strengthen the territorial cohesion and positively contribute to the economic growth of the region. In this regard, a proportion of 20% of the priority budget shall be allocated under the form of direct support to SMEs through the tool of Small Project Fund in compliance with art. 24 of the ETC Regulation.</i></p>				
--	---	--	--	--	--

