

# Border Orientation Paper

## Romania-Bulgaria



## 1. INTRODUCTION

This document sets out key characteristics of the cross-border region between Romania and Bulgaria and outlines options and orientations for the programming of the next Interreg programme along this border. It is part of a series of similar papers prepared by DG REGIO for all EU land borders (and borders with Norway and Switzerland).

The objective of this paper is to serve as a basis for a constructive dialogue both within cross-border regions and with the European Commission for the 2021-2017 Romania-Bulgaria Interreg cross-border cooperation programme.

The paper is based for a large part on objective information stemming from three studies commissioned by DG REGIO:

- “Border needs study” (“Collecting solid evidence to assess the needs to be addressed by Interreg cross-border cooperation programmes”) conducted in 2016;
- “Easing legal and administrative obstacles in EU border regions” conducted in 2015-16; and
- “Comprehensive analysis of the existing cross-border transport connections and missing links on the internal EU borders” conducted in 2017-18.

In addition, many data sources available at European level were also used to describe certain aspects socio-economic and territorial development. A full list of information sources is provided in annex.

Cross-border cooperation is much broader than Interreg programmes. The objective is to facilitate cross-border cooperation by reducing remaining persisting obstacles to cross-border activities and linkages as outlined in the 2017 Communication on Boosting Growth and Cohesion in EU Border Regions. The instruments available are not only the funds (in particular Interreg and other European Structural and Investment Funds (ESIF) programmes which may invest in cooperation), but also European and national legal instruments (European Grouping for Territorial Cooperation (EGTC), regional agreements (e.g. in the Benelux and the Nordic countries), bi-lateral agreements, etc.) as well as a number of policies e.g. on labour mobility, transport, health, etc. The Interreg programmes should therefore not only aim to fund projects but should also seek to reduce cross-border obstacles. To do so, the legislative proposal on Interreg foresees that part of the budget is dedicated to cross-border governance (including capacity building and contribution to the macro-regional/sea-basin strategies).

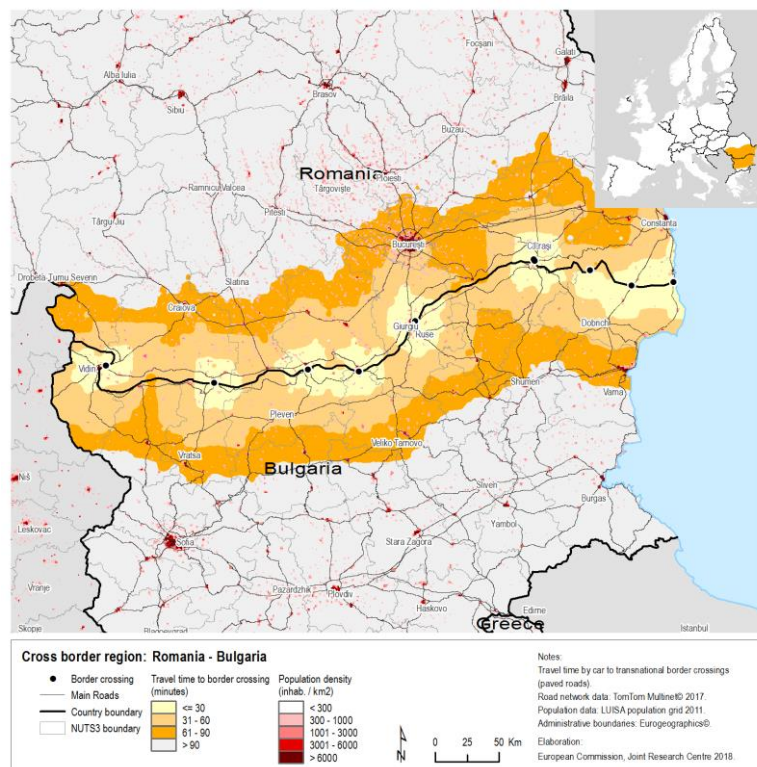
That is why this paper goes beyond the traditional activities of Interreg programmes (funding projects) and also covers governance issues (reducing cross-border obstacles). On this, the roles of the programmes are: (a) to initiate the work on the obstacles (e.g. the members of the Monitoring Committee could contact the relevant public authorities and stakeholders); (b) to facilitate the work (by funding working groups as well as possible studies and pilot projects); and (c) to contribute to this work (providing input from the wide knowledge gained in past programming periods). Whilst the budget is limited, the impact can be important as the actions concerned will have a limited cost (meetings, studies, pilot projects, etc.) but structural effects.

## 2. ANALYSIS OF THE BORDER AREA

- The border between Romania and Bulgaria is in European terms a very long border stretching over **630 km**. One of its main features is that it is for its largest part made of the **Danube River** (470 km) which over its entire common length only has two fixed links, the Friendship Bridge between Ruse and Giurgiu and the New Europe Bridge between Vidin and Calafat.
- Of the **14 districts along the border**, only one in Bulgaria (Dobrich) and one in Romania (Constanța) are connected by land. The rest are separated by the Danube. The cross-border area is very rural in nature.
- Land use is largely agricultural. There are also significant forests and water bodies. There are **many natural sites** on both sides of the border with a rich biodiversity (many Natura 2000 and Ramsar sites).
- The cross-border region counts more than **4 million inhabitants**, with 2/3 located in Romania and 1/3 in Bulgaria (based on the current geography of the CBC programme). The demographic trend in the region indicates a continuous decline over recent years with both natural ageing and net emigration taking their toll.
- The **economic performance** of the cross-border region is well below the EU average, with all regions below 50% of the average. However, the region has experienced a positive GDP growth of around 5% over the 2007-2015 period.
- The region was for several decades on the Eastern side of the Iron Curtain when cross-border links were very limited. Since the early 1990s, the political situation has radically changed and contacts between the populations on both sides have increased steadily. However, the level of interaction and population flows cannot be compared with that in more integrated border regions in Western Europe – a combination of limited physical access and historical isolation means that cooperation levels start from a relatively low base.
- When it comes to **cross-border cooperation activities** financed by the European Union via the Interreg programmes, cooperation is also in its infancy compared to other parts of the EU. Both Romania and Bulgaria joined the EU in 2007 and the programming 2007-2013 period was the first for them. The current programme is only the second one to be implemented. So far, programme implementation has been satisfactory, many projects – both hard and soft - have been successfully completed in particular in green tourism and environmental protection, improved road access to Danube crossing points, education. Only limited progress has been achieved on Danube navigability.
- Although both Romania and Bulgaria meet the technical requirements to join the Schengen Area, neither has acceded to it yet.
- There are virtually **no well-established, stable institutional cross-border cooperation structures** or bodies in the cross-border region.
- The two sides of the border use **different languages** which belong to two different linguistic families (Latin and Slavic). There is no bi-lingualism to speak of.

### 3. TERRITORIAL DIMENSION

1. The cross-border region is primarily rural with few major urban centres – the biggest urban centres directly on the Danube being Ruse (140,000), Vidin (56,000) and Silistra (35,000) on the Bulgarian side, Calarasi (65,000) and Giurgiu (55,000) on the Romanian side. There are other important urban centres in the cross-border region but they are located further away from the border: Pleven (107,000), Montana (90,000), Dobrich (90,000) and Veliko Tarnovo (73,000) in Bulgaria, Constanța (300,000), Craiova (243,000), Dobreța-Turnu Severin (92,000) and Alexandria (42,000) in Romania.
2. The Danube River is a real factor of discontinuity, although in certain sectors it offers opportunities for sustainable socio-economic development. The map below highlights the accessibility issues for certain parts of the cross-border region and clearly identifies those areas which are less affected, because of existing links (either bridges or ferries). From the Western part of the border to the eastward area where the Danube ceases to form the national border between the two countries, there are 6 clearly identified zones where access to the other side of the border takes 30 minutes or less. The Eastern part of the border is land-based, which has a clearly positive effect on connectivity.



3. For the 2021-2027 CBC programme, the cross-border region should not be strictly limited to the administrative boundaries of the NUTS3 areas along the border but should have a flexible geography depending on the topic concerned. This is the notion of functional area.

4. For certain topics, solutions can only be found if partners outside the programme area are involved (e.g. to reduce flood risks, you may need to reintroduce wetlands or dams upstream of a river but outside the programme area; to establish cross-border rail links you may need to involve national train companies, ministries, etc.). For other topics, solutions are purely local, corresponding to an area much smaller than the programme (e.g. a bus line between urban centres close to the border).
5. This shows that problem-solving should be based on functional areas rather than on administrative boundaries defining the programme area. What matters is that the projects benefit the cross-border area and its citizens.
6. Based on these considerations and on the findings highlighted in the driving time map above, the programme should consider how it can promote further territorial integration in those areas where access is less problematic.
7. For instance, "twin towns" along the banks of the river Danube offer potential for cross-border interaction via labour mobility, joint education or business support services. Currently, only the towns of Ruse and Giurgiu seem to have developed strong connections based on a shared vision of their future. The presence of the main Danube Bridge linking the two towns has contributed to this. Building on this, it could prove very useful to implement an integrated vision for socio-economic and territorial development in Ruse-Giurgiu, including the provision of common public services to their populations. The ITI tool offered in the EC regulations could be an appropriate instrument for this purpose, all the more so as it allows a multi-fund approach whereby ERDF and ESF contributions can be combined. Similar opportunities might exist between Vidin and Calafat or between Silistra and Calarasi.
8. Romania and Bulgaria also share a coastal region along the Black Sea. Although Black Sea cooperation is supported by multi-lateral agreements and by the Black Sea ENI CBC programme, the joint coastal zone in Bulgaria and Romania would benefit from specific activities and investments that promote and implement Integrated Coastal Zone Management at bi-lateral level. The coastal hinterland might also benefit from specific joint measures stemming from its maritime nature.
9. Both sides of the border region share a strong common historical and cultural heritage – e.g. remains from Roman times, religious sites. There is real potential to invest in common products and put in place strategies to keep visitors longer in the region. Existing practices elsewhere in Europe, especially in thematic tourism routes or quality labels could provide useful inspiration.
10. The cross-border region is included in its entirety in the EU Strategy for the Danube Region (Danube Strategy). Macro-regional strategies (MRS) are supported at the highest political level of the EU, the Member States and the regions concerned and have become an integral part of EU regional policy. MRS require trust and confidence between their partners (Member States, regions, stakeholders, etc.) in order to share a common vision which will bring concrete actions and projects. It is the same for cross-border cooperation. Hence, the two levels of cooperation are very much interlinked by nature. The 2021-2027 Romania-Bulgaria CBC programme should be ready to support those actions arising from the Danube Strategy, provided they contribute to the specific objectives of the cross-border region. This requires a good and proactive coordination with the MRS and requires continuous dialogues with the National Contact Points and Priority Coordinators responsible for implementing the Danube Strategy.

11. Different types of projects could be funded: groups of projects (e.g. several programmes fund several projects which together form a coherent 'group of projects' complementing each-other and creating synergies); and single projects (e.g. one programme funds one project, the impact of which is on the entire macro-region). In addition, cross-border programmes may consider one of these mechanisms: specific selection criteria (e.g. bonus points if the project contributes to a macro-regional strategy); earmarking of a budget; specific calls; or labelling (e.g. ex-post identification of projects that could be replicated).
12. The current cross-border cooperation programme has already made a significant contribution to the Danube Strategy (e.g. extra points have been allocated during project selection). More can be done to strengthen convergence between the two, particularly when it comes to **navigation, water quality, risk prevention and management and biodiversity**. At programming stage, Bulgaria and Romania should seek to exploit the numerous potential synergies possible under the Danube Strategy Action Plan in its current and revised forms.
13. In addition, the programme should seek to build stronger links with the neighbouring IPA CBC programmes Romania-Serbia and Bulgaria-Serbia. In the Western part of the border, there are Romanian and Bulgarian regions which take part in overlapping cross-border programmes. Many benefits could be gained by establishing close working relationships between the three programmes with a view to supporting tri-lateral cooperation where appropriate. Since the three programmes are part of the Danube Strategy, there is obvious scope for identifying joint challenges and opportunities.

#### **ORIENTATIONS:**

- *Explore the possibility of establishing **joint territorial instruments** adapted to the characteristics of the border region, especially with a view to tackling specific situations such as a joint urban centre (ITI) or a rural region (CLLD) facing similar challenges on both sides of the border.*
- *Invest in **joint coastal management** measures along the Black Sea coast.*
- *Invest further in **common historical, natural and cultural heritage products and services**, with a strong focus on creating employment for small companies and family businesses. Sustainable tourism trails or the development of quality labels for excellence in services could contribute to increasing the attractiveness of the region as a green tourism/cultural heritage destination.*
- *Identify projects of a strategic nature which will enhance the implementation of the objectives of the **Danube Strategy**, possibly in cooperation with neighbouring IPA CBC programmes and certainly in cooperation with national and regional programmes.*

## 4. GROWTH, COMPETITIVENESS AND CONNECTIVITY

- *Innovation and enterprises*

14. All the indicators available to characterise the innovation level or potential of the cross-border region depict a very challenging situation. The framework conditions required to strengthen economic development based on innovation do not seem to be in place in the region.
15. The indicators used to establish the Regional Competitiveness level of EU regions all indicate that both sides of the border perform less well than the EU average. Technology readiness, business sophistication and innovation potential are well below the EU average.
16. Additional indicators such as R&D intensity confirm this trend. All regions on both sides of the border spend much less than the EU average on research and innovation but also much less than their respective national averages (e.g. Bulgarian regions spend between 0,37% and 0,56 % of GDP whilst the national average is 0,96% and the EU average is 2,04% - Romanian regions spend between 0,08% and 0,34% of GDP while the national average is 0,49%).
17. When it comes to the human factor, all indicators point towards a region facing many deep challenges. Basic education, higher education and lifelong learning levels are all distant from the EU averages. For instance the share of population with Higher Education Qualifications is higher in Bulgaria than in Romania but in both cases it is below the EU average.
18. The cross-border region has faced net emigration over recent decades and in particular loss of people with education qualifications in science and technology (brain drain). The current employment rate of recent graduates aged 20-34 is well below average and is particularly low in the Western part of the border region (South-Muntenia in Romania and North-West in Bulgaria).
19. These indicators show that much progress is required on a number of basic conditions to further develop the cross-border region's competitiveness and innovation potential. Significant measures need to be taken at national level concerning education (all levels), business infrastructure and public spending in research and innovation in order to support future cross-border cooperation actions and investments.
20. Clustering is for instance an effective way to step up innovation. The Smart Specialisation Strategies available for the regions located along the border (for Bulgaria, this is only available at national level) indicate that there is potential in sectors such as ICT, tourism, creative industries and biotechnology.
21. When it comes to enterprises, the region has a higher share of employment in traditional sectors, especially manufacturing (electrical goods and engineering) and agriculture than the national averages on either side of the border.

22. There is significant employment across the region in the agri-food business (food and beverages) and in manufacturing (textile, motor vehicles, metal products). However, for most of these sectors recent trends have been negative and employment levels have declined – except in very local cases where single large employers have secured stable employment.
  23. The region's competitiveness is hampered by negative conditions. In particular, indicators such as "quality of institutions", "access to public services" (e.g. education and health) point towards significant structural shortcomings that impede general competitiveness.
  24. Taking into account these challenges, investments may be envisaged to support collaboration between public research institutions and innovative companies. Actions that will reinforce research infrastructures and ensure participation in EU programmes and initiatives and will increase the capacities and skills of regional and local stakeholders on both sides of the border could be supported.
- ***Connectivity (transport and digitisation)***
25. When it comes to developing the region across the border, the poor level of accessibility and connectivity presents a major challenge.
  26. The cross-border region suffers from lack of mobility due mainly to the presence of the Danube River and the lack of effective crossing points. In terms of access to both rail and road connections, the cross-border region scores low compared to the EU average.
  27. Low population density and the rural character of the region are not conducive to further massive investments in bridges across the Danube.
  28. Nevertheless, mobility is an essential element of cross-border cooperation and there is much to be gained for the local population and businesses by improving the current situation. Even for a region with a low density of population, two bridges over a distance of 470 km is limited. Ferry connections exist along the common stretch of the river. Some of these have recently been upgraded but there is still room for improvement.
  29. Provided this is also part of the two countries' national transport master plans, possible options to increase the capacity of existing bridges or to build new ones could be explored using support from the 2021-2017 programme.
  30. In line with the objectives of the Danube Strategy, navigation on the Danube should be facilitated and promoted. The recent Conclusions signed by the Danube Region Transport Ministers (December 2018) commit Bulgaria and Romania to stepping up their efforts to secure safe navigation all year round by ensuring both stable navigability conditions and implementing important flanking measures (such as the reduction of administrative barriers in cross-border Danube navigation as well as the further greening of the inland fleet).



31. The cross-border rail transport study carried out for the European Commission identified the rail link between Negru Vodă and Kardam as presenting the potential to offer better connectivity in the Eastern part of the cross-border region. At the moment, this link is used only for freight. Furthermore, the study concluded that improvements to cross-border rail services between Romania and Bulgaria should also be made to the existing operational cross-border links, i.e. the Friendship Bridge and the new Europe Bridge. This is also justified with regard to the populations of the cities located on them: Craiova [RO; 270 000] with Vidin [BG; 43 000] and Giurgiu [RO; 61 000] with Ruse [BG; 145 000]. Due to their poor passenger services, both links have been classified as “exploited with shortcomings (services)” within this study.
32. A purely bottom-up approach in funding transport projects can prevent the pursuit of a coherent strategy in certain cases. If Romania and Bulgaria want to continue working on transport in the framework of Interreg, they should consider **strategic projects** instead of open calls. A list of **planned operations of strategic importance** can be submitted already at the adoption phase of the new programme. For a complex area such as transport, this might be a better way to attract projects than using open calls. A smaller allocation could be reserved for open calls, in particular for projects promoting low-carbon transport systems.
33. In terms of digitisation, most information is available only at national level. Therefore, it is not possible to make any informed observations with regard to the situation at the regional level in the border region.
34. At national level, the main trends indicate that both countries are well below the EU average when it comes to levels of digitisation. For instance, the use of the internet to interact with public authorities is at 21% in Bulgaria and 9% in Romania compared with an EU average of 49%. A similar picture emerges when looking at Digital Skills and ICT usage or availability of digital-based services. The Digital Economy and Society Index places both countries in the bottom 6 EU Member States.
35. Having said that, and in view of the analysis above on transport and mobility, it seems that the cross-border region needs to consider digitisation as an alternative way to bridge the physical gap created by the Danube. There is much to be gained by connecting public institutions, business support entities, education and training facilities and citizens via an elaborate network of digital connections. This requires investment in hard-ware but also in softer accompanying measures to ensure that the systems designed meet the needs of users and that users receive quality training and encouragement to use the systems.

#### **ORIENTATIONS:**

- *The current conditions for cross-border innovation are challenging. However, there is potential to improve the framework conditions for innovation by promoting linkages between research institutions and innovative businesses in the cross-border area. These linkages need to be re-enforced through complementary projects financed under the respective national/regional programmes dedicated to innovation in Romania and in Bulgaria. Full complementarity between those programmes and the cross-border cooperation programme need to be ensured.*

- Consider investing directly in **small companies** in order to maintain employment levels in promising sectors such as agri-food, creative industries and tourism, by ensuring sufficient adaptation to a changing economic environment and to foster possible expansion via cross-border work. SME support via for instance voucher schemes to purchase cross-border business advice through competent and vetted services could be considered. This process could benefit from a **cluster approach**, with a focus on a few common sectors of activities.
- Consider supporting necessary technical steps in order to assess the appropriateness of increasing the capacity of existing **bridges** or of building new ones and support investments in improving the performance of the most frequently used **ferry connections**.
- Support cooperation between **rail transport** stakeholders in order to improve the Negru Vodă-Kardam railway connection to obtain better connectivity at low marginal cost and to tackle the operational shortcomings along the two lines using the Friendship and the New Europe Bridges.
- Continue to support in-land **navigation** and river management authorities, river users, investors and local authorities to better exploit Danube navigation (link to the EUSDR).
- For all transport measures to be financed under the cross-border cooperation programme, strong linkages with the Transport Operational Programmes in both countries should be built in. Local one-sided transport projects with limited cross-border impact should be avoided.
- Consider investing in increased digitisation of the border region, on the basis of a commonly agreed cross-border strategy and action plan. Focus this investment on improving general conditions for **joint e-solutions** for instance in education, health care, business support, cultural cooperation.

## 5. GREENER, LOW CARBON ECONOMY

36. The entire cross-border region offers great potential to generate energy from renewable sources, especially solar, geothermal and biomass (from straw). Wind power does not seem to offer sustainable opportunities outside a confined region along the Black Sea Coast. Having in mind the high investment costs required for facilities producing energy from renewable sources, both countries need to explore effective ways to invest jointly in common small-scale infrastructure or to organise joint access to a regional smart grid. Small-scale demonstration projects in renewable energy sources could be envisaged.
37. Energy efficiency from public buildings is also required but there is limited scope for working on this effectively in a cross-border context mainly because of the limited accessibility across the border.
38. The cross-border region faces serious risks of floods due largely to the presence of the Danube River which often presents flood episodes, some of which have been devastating in the past. Investments in this sector have already been made. However, the appropriateness of some measures needs to be reviewed: building hard banks along segments of the river displaces flood risks rather than addresses them. Longer-term, more eco-friendly solutions exist which need to be investigated and possibly implemented along the common stretch of the Danube. Much is to be learned from previous projects, including those developed on a transnational scale via the Danube programmes.
39. Recent trends have also shown a significant increase in drought episodes, with related issues of erosion, especially on the banks of the Danube and along the Black Sea coast.
40. Besides the natural risks linked to climate change described above, the region is exposed to risks due to the presence of nuclear power plants located on both sides of the border – the Danube water being a major resource in cold water for cooling purposes.
41. Chemical activities in the border region are also a source of potential danger, especially for the many rivers and the ground water that feed the Danube.
42. The region is very rich in natural areas, in particular Natura 2000 and Ramsar sites. These exist on both sides of the border, even though they are more present on the Bulgarian territory. Biodiversity is particularly rich, both in terms of water flora and fauna and land wildlife. Certain rare animal species are to be found in the region and nowhere else in Europe. The area is a biodiversity hotspot for several fish and bird species. The Danube sturgeon species for instance is a protected species whose habitat is shared by Bulgaria and Romania which have joint responsibility for preserving it and should be subject to dedicated conservation measures. The migratory and nesting bird species are numerous on both sites of the river and therefore should be as well subject to coordinated protection.
43. There are many natural parks in the region. Cooperation among some of the parks has already developed mainly via Interreg support (e.g. the Danube Parks project financed through transnational programmes). More on this can be done, in particular to reduce the level of fragmentation of wildlife habitats. This fragmentation presents a sure risk to wildlife and efforts need to be made to "reconnect" green areas, both along the banks of the Danube and on the land border between Romania and Bulgaria.

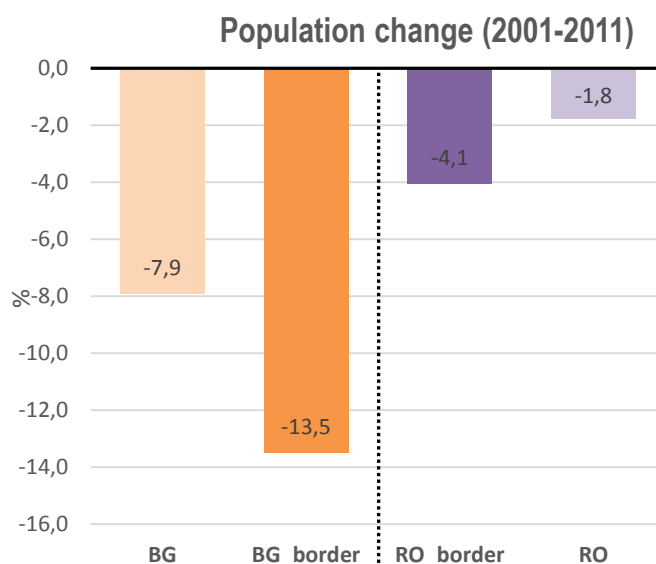
44. The presence of such rich biodiversity could lead to further development of sustainable and eco-friendly tourism activities which can contribute to local employment and growth. However, it seems that there is currently a lack of capacity on the part of the environmental authorities at all levels on both sides of the border to manage the fragile balance between nature protection and economic development. There is high untapped potential for the local economy that needs to be exploited more, but within strict environmental protection standards.

**ORIENTATIONS:**

- *Consider investing in **cross-border small-scale energy production** from renewable sources, provided investment and distribution conditions are favourable.*
- *Invest in **joint climate change adaptation and mitigation**, with a strong focus on sustainable and eco-friendly measures (such as flood plains and reforestation).*
- *Consolidate current cooperation on **risk prevention and rapid response** management. Obstacles linked to the presence of the Danube, as well as to the lack of historical institutional cooperation need to be overcome to achieve a higher degree of protection for the entire border population.*
- *Support actions to **jointly protect nature and biodiversity**. Ensure that actions are more strategic in their approach and that awareness of the local population and visitors is raised on some of the specific challenges of the cross-border region when it comes to biodiversity.*
- *Develop the capacity of environmental authorities and the non-governmental sector to exploit the **common natural heritage** of the region while respecting environmental standards and securing sustainability. Joint capacity-building measures for environmental authorities should be considered.*

## 6. EMPLOYMENT, EDUCATION, HEALTH AND INCLUSION

45. The demographic trends in the region have shown a continuous decline over recent years with both natural ageing and net emigration taking their toll. The trend is more marked on the Bulgarian side than on the Romanian side and is also more acute in the Western part of the cross-border region.



46. Population is not only declining in absolute numbers, it is also ageing. In the entire border region there are more deaths per year than there are births. The worst affected regions are Vidin and Montana in Bulgaria. Across all NUTS3 border regions, the annual decline in absolute population levels was just over 29,000.
47. When it comes to education, existing indices show a relatively poor performance, with both sides of the border well below the EU average (both on basic education and on higher education & lifelong learning). As a result the region has a much higher than average level of young people neither in employment nor in education or training (NEETs).
48. The employment rate of recent graduates aged between 20 and 34 is again well below the EU average. This is particularly acute in the Western part of the cross-border region.
49. Labour market productivity (data at NUTS2 level only) is substantially below the EU average and the border regions are also well below their national averages on both sides of the border.
50. Long-term unemployment levels are high in the entire cross-border region, although this phenomenon is more acute in Bulgaria.
51. There is only very limited labour mobility – physical access to the other side of the border is a clear obstacle to cross-border commuting. However, even in areas not separated by the Danube River there are virtually no commuters. There is no EURES Cross-Border Partnership in the region. Activities related to labour mobility need to take full account of the accessibility restrictions – past experience seems to indicate that limited impact is obtained from job fairs to promote cross-border employment in areas with difficult transport conditions.

52. Instead, a focus on young people and on long-term exchanges or placements should be considered. Partnerships between higher education establishments and the business community should be developed in order to offer young students the possibility to train and/or study on the other side of the border, thereby enhancing trust and mutual knowledge.
53. Levels of trust between the two sides of the border are rather on the low side. A border-specific Eurobarometer survey carried out in 2015 among all Interreg cross-border cooperation programmes established that mutual social trust levels put the programme in the bottom 8. The situation is even more negative when measuring trust levels towards a potential family member (second bottom) or manager (sixth bottom) coming from the other side of the border.
54. Two very different languages are spoken on either side of the border. Bi-lingualism is not widespread among the population. Decades of isolation from each other have prevented local communities from developing close links, including when it comes to learning the neighbouring language.
55. In the Eurobarometer survey mentioned above, 60% of respondents located within the area of the CBC programme Romania-Bulgaria considered that language differences are a real obstacle to cooperation.

#### **ORIENTATIONS:**

- *Invest significantly in measures that will increase citizens' knowledge of each other and **build trust**. This could for instance take the shape of Small Project Funds or micro-project schemes across the border area, focused on **people-to-people** activities.*
- *Support more extensive and structured **language-learning activities** as a vector for building trust but also as an employment-boosting factor.*
- *Consider investing in **joint education schemes** in areas where accessibility is not a hindrance or using digitised tools and methods. Supplement this by developing cross-border **traineeships or placements** and **student exchange programmes** for young graduates/students.*

## 7. GOVERNANCE

### Section 1: Cross-Border Governance in a wider context (and use of the new "Interreg Governance" specific objective)

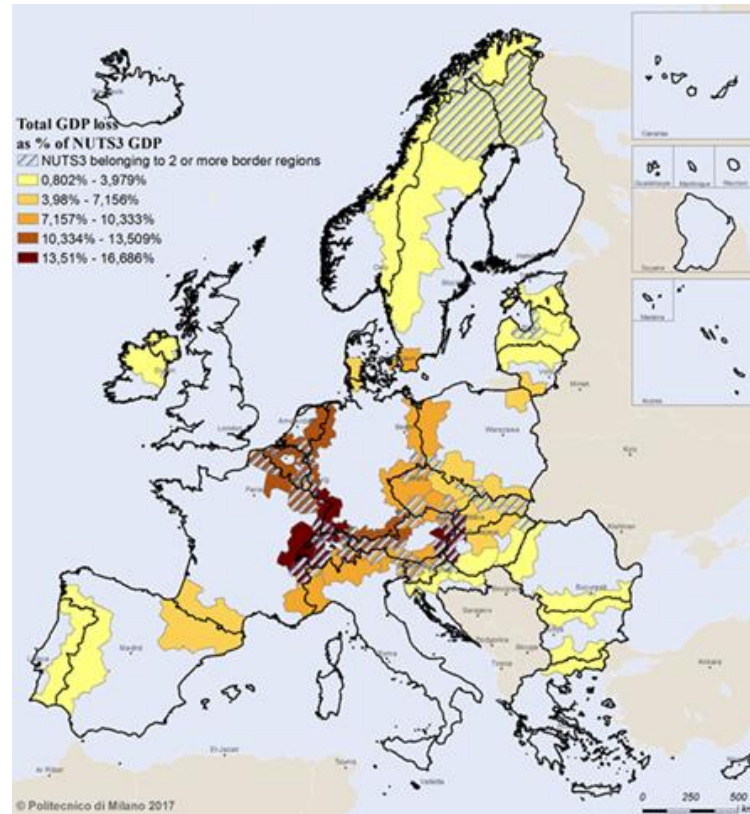
56. Cross-border cooperation is not limited to Interreg programmes. It also builds on policies (e.g. cross-border mobility), on legal instruments (e.g. bi-lateral agreements, treaties, European Groupings of Territorial Cooperation) and on funding (including but not limited to Interreg).
57. Actions and orientations set out in this section may be supported by using the programme's budget under the specific objective for 'a better Interreg governance', as proposed in the ETC (Interreg) Regulation.

- *Working on border obstacles and potential*

58. As illustrated in the Commission Communication "Boosting Growth and Cohesion in EU Border Regions" and the map below, there are many different types of obstacles to cross-border cooperation which have different effects on border regions. There is also scope for greater sharing of services and resources in cross-border regions. Among the obstacles, legal, administrative and institutional differences are a major source of bottlenecks. Other issues include: use of different languages or lack of public transport for instance. When it comes to unused potential, the shared use of health care or educational facilities could contribute greatly to improving the quality of life in border regions. As the Interreg programmes are instrumental to effective cross-border cooperation, they should seek to address these particular obstacles and tap the common potential to facilitate cooperation in this wider context. The map below illustrates the GDP loss in border regions if such obstacles are not tackled.

**ORIENTATIONS:**

*Identify precisely key obstacles and unused potential and facilitate the process of finding ways to reduce these obstacles or exploit the potential (e.g. by funding meetings, experts, pilot projects, etc.).*



- ***Links with existing strategies***

59. Cross-border cooperation cannot be done in isolation. It has to be framed in existing strategies (e.g. national, regional or sectoral). Ideally, there should be a dedicated cross-border strategy based on reliable cross-border data, politically supported and in line with stakeholders' views. It is a useful exchange forum and a necessary step for sustainable and structural cooperation (i.e. a Monitoring Committee is not sufficient as its focus is on funding and not on designing a development strategy with strong political support). At present, no such strategy exists along the Romania-Bulgaria border.

**ORIENTATIONS:**

*Explore ways to develop a common vision for the cross-border region, possibly using public participation tools and practices (citizens' consultations, townhall meetings, competitions, etc).*

- ***Role of existing cross-border organisations***

60. Many regions have cross-border entities established under EU law (e.g. European Groupings of Territorial Cooperation – EGTC), national law (e.g. private law associations or public law bodies) or international law (e.g. under bilateral agreements). The cross-border region between Bulgaria and Romania does not have many such institutions - the euroregion Danubius is the only well-established joint body that operates on a cross-border basis.



61. On the other hand, there are three Inter-Governmental Commissions between the two countries: one on regional development, one on Danube navigation and one on Danube bridges. Some of these Commissions have established working groups which are more or less active.

**ORIENTATIONS:**

- *Institutionally and financially support the development of cross-border bodies which can play a key role in deepening cooperation both through Interreg (e.g. by managing a Small Projects Fund) and beyond any funding mechanism.*
- *Explore whether the programme can provide financial and/or technical support to the Inter-Governmental Commissions and their respective working groups, if appropriate.*

- ***Links with other Cohesion policy programmes***

62. The proposed Common Provisions Regulation stipulates that “each programme shall set out, for each specific objective the interregional and transnational actions with beneficiaries located in at least one other Member State”. Whilst a similar provision was already present in the past, it is now compulsory for the mainstream programmes to describe the possibilities for cooperation for each specific objective.
63. This new obligation may have many benefits for cross-border areas: more ambitious projects (e.g. joint infrastructures), involvement of new players (e.g. the national authorities such as Ministries) and overall more ambitious policies (e.g. spatial planning with associated funds).

**ORIENTATIONS:**

*Establish (or participate to) a strong coordination mechanism with the authorities managing mainstream programmes in Romania and Bulgaria, in particular the national programmes dealing with transport, environment, regional development, ICT and labour issues. Any future regional programme located along the border should also be closely associated to the CBC programme. This coordination implies exchange of information and cooperation and should happen at all stages: planning (e.g. designing complementarities), implementation (e.g. building on synergies) and communication (showing the benefits for the citizens and the region).*

- ***Cross-border data***

64. Good public policies (e.g. spatial planning, transport, health care) should be based on evidence (i.e. data, studies, mapping). Whilst this is generally available at national level, it is not always the case at regional/ local level and even less at cross-border local level. Some of this evidence is particularly important: economic flows, transport flows and trends, labour mobility and mapping of skills, health of citizens, mapping of important infrastructures and services (such as energy, waste treatment, hospitals, emergency services, universities), mapping of risk areas (to floods, fires, etc.), mapping of natural areas (e.g. Natura 2000, Ramsar sites, etc.) and mapping of the main inclusion difficulties (poverty, marginalised communities, etc.).

**ORIENTATIONS:**

*Identify the sectors where important cross-border data is missing and support projects that would fill the gap at the latest by 2027 (e.g. in cooperation with national statistical offices, by supporting regional data portals etc.).*

## **Section 2: Governance of the Interreg programme**

- ***Partnership principle***

65. The principle of partnership is a key feature of the whole programme cycle (including preparation, implementation and participation in monitoring committees), building on the multi-level governance approach and ensuring the involvement of economic, social and environmental partners. Examples of good practice include involving representatives of different interests in the programming process; involving them in programme evaluation or other strategic tasks for instance by setting up temporary working groups; consulting all members on key documents also between meetings. An active involvement of economic, social and environmental partners should be ensured by their participation in key steps. Technical Assistance can be made available to facilitate their full involvement in the process.

- ***Role of the monitoring committee***

66. The **monitoring committee** (MC) is the strategic decision-making body of the programme. In 2021-2027 the MC will be given a more prominent role in supervising programme performance.
67. **Therefore**, MCs currently concentrating on project selection should be invited to widen their scope of action and take on a more strategic role. Good practices include having strategic discussions as a standing agenda point, inviting contact points of macro-regional strategies or institutions playing a key role in the border area, organising project visits. Some examples of strategic discussion themes: border obstacles, cross-border data needs, inclusion of SMEs, NGOs and other under-represented beneficiaries or target groups of the programme.

68. **Project selection** shall take place in the MC or in steering committee(s) established under the MC in full respect of the partnership principle. It is crucial that all are involved in the process. Selection criteria and their application must be non-discriminatory and transparent. They should also be clear and they must enable the assessment of whether projects correspond to the objectives and the strategy of the programme. They are to be consulted with the Commission and communicated to applicants in a clear and systematic way. The cross-border dimension is compulsory in every selected project. The programme might consider the use of independent expert panels for preparation of project selection. Projects of strategic importance (i.e. designed and implemented by public authorities without a call) may be pre-defined in the programme document or selected via a transparent and agreed procedure. It is up to each programme partnership to decide on the optimal balance between different types of projects to reach the overall programme objectives (flagship projects, regular projects, bottom-up or top-down project selection, small projects etc).

69. **Decision-making** must also be non-discriminatory and transparent. The procedure should also be inclusive. Each monitoring (or steering) committee member shall have a vote. Voting by delegation should not be encouraged unless it is transparent and puts weaker partners at equal footing with "institutional" partners.

- ***Role of the Joint Secretariat***

70. The Joint Secretariat (JS) should be the cross-border executive body of the programme, implementing the decisions made by the managing authority and the Monitoring Committee. It should as now consist of professional and independent staff from the participating countries, with linguistic competences and relevant border knowledge. As now, the JS should have a decentralised contact point in view of the length and accessibility issues of the Romania-Bulgaria cross-border area.

71. Its procedures should be efficient and transparent, avoiding unnecessary bureaucracy (such as excessive documentation requirements). Communication with beneficiaries, potential applicants and the general public should be ensured in a speedy and transparent manner.

- ***Conflict of interest***

72. Conflict of interest between decision-making bodies and applicants and beneficiaries is to be avoided at any moment in the programme cycle, including project generation, project preparation, project selection and project implementation. One way to avoid this is to ensure a proper segregation of duties between institutions and persons.

- ***Communication and visibility***

73. The programme makes use of the Interact-developed eMS. This is very positive as it also provides a direct interface with the KEEP database of projects which is an invaluable resource for all actors of territorial cooperation. The programme should ensure it continues to contribute to the completeness and correctness of KEEP.

74. The programme runs a clear and well-structured website that contains good and up-to-date information including for instance on progress towards achieving the programme's targets. This level of transparency is much welcome and should continue.
75. In the future, the programme should make use of the opportunities offered by the Interreg Volunteers Youth Initiative (IVY) and host young volunteers in the programme management bodies or within individual projects.

## Existing sources of information

- Border needs study (Commission, 2016) – [Collecting solid evidence to assess the needs to be addressed by Interreg cross-border cooperation programmes - Regional Policy - European Commission](#)
- EC ex-post evaluation of ETC 2007-2013 [http://ec.europa.eu/regional\\_policy/en/policy/evaluations/ec/2007-2013/#11](http://ec.europa.eu/regional_policy/en/policy/evaluations/ec/2007-2013/#11)
- European Territorial Cooperation - best practices and innovative measures, European Parliament, 2016 [REPORT on European Territorial Cooperation - best practices and innovative measures - A8-0202/2016](#)
- Quantification of the effects of legal and administrative border obstacles in land border regions (Commission, 2016) – [quantification of the effects of legal and administrative obstacles in land border regions - Bing](#)
- Easing legal and administrative obstacles (Commission, 2017) – [Easing legal and administrative obstacles in EU border regions - Regional Policy - European Commission](#)
- Comprehensive analysis of the existing cross-border transport connections and missing links on the internal EU borders (Commission, 2017-2018) – [https://ec.europa.eu/regional\\_policy/sources/docgener/studies/pdf/cb\\_rail\\_connections\\_en.pdf](https://ec.europa.eu/regional_policy/sources/docgener/studies/pdf/cb_rail_connections_en.pdf)
- DG SANTE's study on cross-border health care [Building Cooperation in Cross-border Healthcare: new study published! | FUTURIUM | European Commission](#)
- ESPON's Targeted Analysis on Cross-Border Public Services [CPS - Cross-border Public Services | ESPON](#)
- Smart Specialisation Strategies in Bulgaria and Romania –
  - Bulgaria: <http://s3platform.jrc.ec.europa.eu/regions/BG/tags/BG>
  - Romania (national): <http://s3platform.jrc.ec.europa.eu/regions/RO/tags/RO>
  - Romania (SW): <http://s3platform.jrc.ec.europa.eu/regions/RO41/tags/RO41>
  - Romania (SE): <http://s3platform.jrc.ec.europa.eu/regions/RO22/tags/RO22>
  - Romania (South): <http://s3platform.jrc.ec.europa.eu/regions/RO31/tags/RO31>
- Strategy of the 2014-2020 Interreg VA Romania-Bulgaria programme (ex-ante evaluation, SWOT, priorities, evaluations)
- EU Strategy for the Danube Region <http://www.danube-region.eu/>
- Eurobarometer No 422 conducted in border regions in 2015, <http://ec.europa.eu/COMMFrontOffice/publicopinion/index.cfm/Survey/getSurveyDetail/instruments/FLASH/surveyKy/1565>