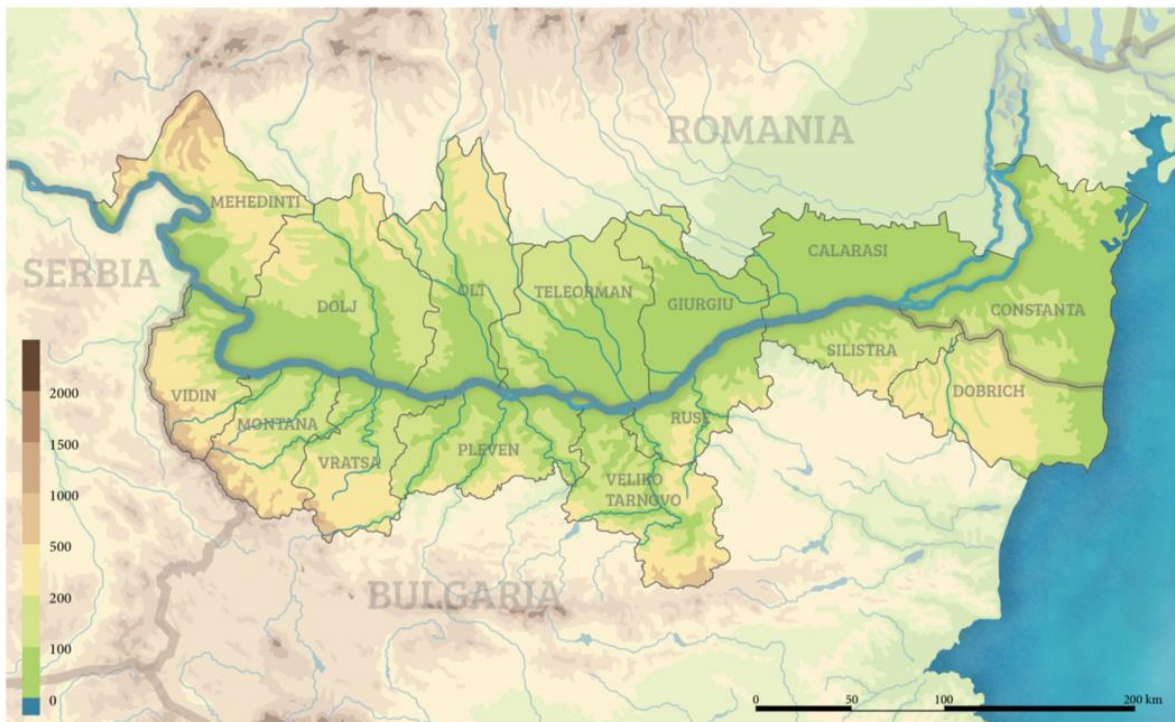


Interreg VI-A Romania-Bulgaria Programme

- EXTRACT, draft August 2021 -
- Version 2 -



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ANNEX

TEMPLATE FOR INTERREG PROGRAMMES¹

CCI	[15 characters]
Title	Interreg VI-A Romania-Bulgaria Programme
Version	Draft 0
First year	2021
Last year	2027
Eligible from	01.01.2021
Eligible until	31.12.2029
Commission decision number	
Commission decision date	
Programme amending decision number	
Programme amending decision entry into force date	
NUTS regions covered by the programme	Bulgaria BG311 - Видин (Vidin) BG312 - Монтана (Montana) BG313 - Враца (Vratsa) BG314 - Плевен (Pleven) BG321 - Велико Търново (Veliko Tarnovo) BG323 - Русе (Ruse) BG325 - Силистра (Silistra) BG332 - Добрич (Dobrich) Romania RO223 - Constanța RO312 - Călărași RO314 - Giurgiu RO317 - Teleorman RO411 - Dolj RO413 - Mehedinți RO414 - Olt
Strand	A

¹ Without prejudice to further alignment in relation to the outcome of interinstitutional negotiations on the articles of the CPR and the fund-specific regulations. Alignments on the external Interreg programmes still to follow.

1. Programme strategy: main development challenges and policy responses

1.1. Programme area (2000 characters)

The Interreg VI-A Romania-Bulgaria Programme (RO-BG Programme) stretches over seven counties in the Southern part of Romania (Mehedinți, Dolj, Olt, Teleorman, Giurgiu, Călărași and Constanța) and eight districts in the Northern part of Bulgaria (Vidin, Vratsa, Montana, Veliko Tarnovo, Pleven, Ruse, Dobrich and Silistra). All 15 NUTS3 regions are situated along the 630 km of Romanian-Bulgarian border.

The programme area (map in Annex 1) covers a total territory of 69.285 square km, amounting to 19.8% of the two countries, with about two thirds in Romania and one third in Bulgaria. It is also home for about 4.20 million inhabitants (1.35 million in Bulgaria and 2.85 million in Romania). The main geographical element, shaping the entire landscape is the Danube River, which unfolds along 470 km of the border from West to East. Only two districts, Dobrich (BG) and Constanta (RO) are connected by land, in the East.

The territory is predominantly rural, and large areas of land are used for agriculture. There are also significant surfaces covered by forests and water bodies, mostly tributaries to the Danube. The area also encompasses many natural sites on both sides of the border, with a rich biodiversity (many Natura 2000 and Ramsar sites).

The cross-border area is one of the least developed territories in the EU. All regions are lagging compared to their EU and national peers, facing major socio-economic disparities, which have remained constant over time. The overall low level of economic development weakens the business environment and encourages outward migration, which in turn, prevent the region from achieving its potential. The North-South divide along the Danube, especially in terms of physical accessibility and connectivity, but also because of language and administrative barriers, are among the most important structural challenges affecting the cross-border area.

1.2. Summary of main joint challenges, taking into account economic, social and territorial disparities as well as inequalities, joint investment needs and complementary and synergies with other forms of support, lessons-learnt from past experience and macro-regional strategies and sea-basin strategies where the programme area as a whole or partially is covered by one or more strategies.

1.2.1. Joint challenge and programme strategy

50000 characters

Based on the main development challenges identified at the level of the cross-border region, informed by the lessons learned from the implementation of the two previous programmes in the area and taking into account the other forms of support available, as well as the strategic framework relevant for the area, the following joint investments needs have been identified.

Regional economy

Despite the positive economic evolution, the RO-BG cross-border area ranks among the least developed territories in the EU and is confronted with significant economic disparities between the Northern and Southern sides of the Danube. Four out of the six NUTS2 regions covering the cross-border area in the top ten poorest at EU level. Compared to their Romanian counterparts, Bulgarian districts have experienced lower GDP growth rates

over time, contribute with only 24% to the total GDP of the area and have an average GDP per capita of approx. 4600 euro, 70% of their Romanian counterparts (2017 data).

Development disparities also manifest between the different territories, on each side of the border. Overall, intra-regional disparities seem to be more pronounced on the Romanian side of the border, with Constanta and Dolj contributing with 45% of the entire cross-border area GDP and with 60% to the GDP of the Romanian side (million PPS, 2017 data). On the Bulgarian side, Ruse, Veliko Tarnovo, Vratsa and Pleven perform better than the rest of the districts, yet worse than their Romanian counterparts. Silistra and Vidin maintain a worrying low level of economic development, with GDP levels below 20% of the cross-border area average.

Significant structural shortcomings impede general competitiveness. As resulting from the EU Regional Competitiveness Index² and highlighted in the Border Orientation Papers (BOP)³, both Bulgarian and Romanian regions along the Danube border are among the poorest performers in the EU. Their overall competitiveness is hampered by significant structural shortcomings, stemming either from deficiencies at national level (such is the case of indicators like “quality of institutions”, “education” or “health”), or at regional level (such as poor infrastructure).

On both sides of the border, economic activity is affected by longstanding challenges related to productivity and specialisation. According to the National Statistical Institutes of Romania and Bulgaria, the number of enterprises has increased in the cross-border area by 6.1% since 2013, more on the Romanian side (9.1%)⁴, than in Bulgarian regions (3.2%).⁵ However, the SME density is still well below the EU average. The limited level of coordination between national and regional institutions with respect to innovation and entrepreneurship support and the additional labour market problems such as migration of highly qualified workforce and lower accessibility, pose a series of challenges for the SMEs in the region. Industry, services and trade are concentrated in a few centres, mostly in Romania and in the Eastern part of the area. Lack of innovation and poor digitalization of enterprises prevent them from responding effectively to customer demand and from aligning to the global efforts of environment protection.

Enterprises are mainly located in the Eastern part of the territory and in more developed districts. There are approx. 120 thousand active companies in the cross-border area, relatively evenly distributed on both sides of the border. They represent around 11% of all active companies in Romania, and 14.5% of the total in Bulgaria. Compared to those in the rest of the territory, SMEs in the cross-border area face challenges regarding lower accessibility, high dependence on a limited number of sectors, and a relatively immature innovation and entrepreneurship ecosystem. They generally depend on neighbouring cities for the provision of general services and face a rather unfavourable legislative and administrative support⁶.

Insufficient cross-border cooperation is depriving the region of reaching its potential. Estimates show that legal and administrative barriers hampering cross-border cooperation reduce regional GDP by approx. 3.5 percent and employment by 6-8 percent. Most of this is

² https://ec.europa.eu/regional_policy/sources/docgener/work/rci2019_scorecards.pdf

³ <https://www.interregobg.eu/images/fisiere/Future%20programme/CE%20Orientation%20Paper%20RO-BG.pdf>

⁴ <http://statistici.insse.ro:8077/tempo-online/#/pages/tables/insse-table> (INT1010 - Active enterprises, by activity of national economy at level of CANE Rev.2 section, size classes of number of employees, macroregions, development regions and counties)

⁵ <https://www.nsi.bg/en/content/12907/%D0%BF%D1%83%D0%B1%D0%BB%D0%B8%D0%BA%D0%B0%D1%86%D0%B8%D1%8F/regions-districts-and-municipalities-republic-bulgaria-2013>

⁶ ESPON, 2017

caused by inefficient use of the agglomeration economies, of the trust capital and of the productive capacity⁷.

Overall, there are almost 1 million employees in the cross-border area, concentrated in traditional, low-tech and low knowledge-intensive sectors. In broad lines, agriculture hires the lowest share of employees, however its importance has slightly increased from 5.2% in 2012 to 5.8% in 2017. The industrial sector has gradually reduced its number of employees, yet it remains higher than that of the EU28 average of 15.3% (as of 2016). On the Bulgarian side of the border, the sector shows a slight increase in employment, indicating some potential for attracting investments for modernization and innovation⁸. Industry is closely related to electricity production and distribution in both Romania and Bulgaria cross-border area, as it is the case in Dolj and Ruse, or petroleum and chemical industry, in Constanta, Ruse and Olt. Ruse has two industrial areas which contain a logistics and a business park, but if we look at its pair city Giurgiu, development is limited. The services sector contributes with more than 40% to the total number of employees, while other economic sectors, such as retail and construction, make up around 26-27% of the total.

Supported by the rich natural and cultural heritage, tourism could provide good conditions for economic diversification in the entire cross-border area, but its potential remains untapped. Both sides of the border region share a strong common historical and cultural heritage - e.g. remains from Roman times, religious sites, traditions. The Black Sea Coast is a popular tourist destination, albeit the limited length of the season. Numerous attractions are present all along the Danube, together with the river itself.

However, tourism and heritage assets are not exploited to their potential. This situation is generated by a variety of factors such as: poor quality of the tourism infrastructure (qualitative accommodation, beds, related amenities), site degradation and pollution (in case of natural sites), limited accessibility and poor transport infrastructure, lack of supporting services and ineffective promotion, as well as lack of labour force (skilled workers). The touristic offer is not coordinated across the border.

Low physical connectivity prevents local businesses from tapping into the potential cross-border market and reaping the benefits of participating in cross-border business ecosystems. For most of the area, the physical barrier imposed by the Danube is the most important factor hindering businesses operations across the border⁹. While digitization can be an alternative way to virtually bridge the gap across the river, better physical mobility is essential for the small local businesses to reach new markets and attract new customers.

Main investment needs

- *Better access to finance for SMEs is needed, throughout their business lifecycle, to allow them to grow, thrive and expand internationally; support for the transition to sustainability and digitalisation is particularly important, to increase their competitiveness and help them access the untapped potential for development;*
- *Digital connectivity needs to be improved to support investments in the economic revitalization of the region, to compensate for the lack of physical connectivity and help SMEs embrace e-commerce as a way to reach new markets. Joint e-solutions are also encouraged;*
- *Investments in the tourism value chain could also contribute to economic revitalization and could increase the attractiveness of the region as a green*

⁷ EC, *Quantification of the effects of legal and administrative border obstacles in land border regions*, https://ec.europa.eu/regional_policy/sources/docoffic/2014/boosting_growth/quantif_effect_borders_obstacle_s.pdf

⁸ Territorial Analysis of the Romania-Bulgaria Cross Border Region, [200618-territorial-analysis-updated.pdf](https://interregviarobg.eu/200618-territorial-analysis-updated.pdf) (interregviarobg.eu)

⁹ EC, *Easing legal and administrative obstacles in EU border regions, 2017*, https://ec.europa.eu/regional_policy/sources/docgener/studies/pdf/obstacle_border/final_report.pdf

tourism/cultural heritage destination. Connected sectors, such as agri-food and creative industries could also support the diversification of the local economy;

- *A safer and greener transport infrastructure would also be of benefit to the local economy by bringing more visitors to the region. This would also increase local and regional mobility, improving SMEs' access to cross-border markets, knowledge and support.*

Connectivity

Both sides of the Danube borders are characterized by a strong East - West direction of flows and development of settlements. During the last years, North-South links lost their priority status as investments focused on completing the road and rail segments of the Rhine Danube and Orient East Med corridors. The cross-border territory is therefore still disconnected from the main transport networks of the EU, and the Danube remains the only strong and continuous link to Central Europe.

The “hard border” between the two countries (non-Schengen) and the low number of border crossings greatly hinder mobility across the border. Various national transport corridors are rerouted to the few border crossings available at the moment, as there are just two bridges crossing the Danube within a distance of 470 km (Giurgiu - Ruse and Calafat - Vidin). The most important border crossing for freight remains the Giurgiu-Ruse Bridge, while the Vidin-Calafat Bridge and Vama Veche-Durankulak crossing are secondary links. Land-based border crossing in the Eastern part provides the best conditions in terms of cross-border connectivity.¹⁰ In addition, a pre-feasibility study elaborated within SPATIAL project analysed the possibility of building new bridges in Călărași-Silistra, Giurgiu-Ruse, Bechet-Oreahovo, Turnu Magurele - Nicopol. Also, a Memorandum of Understanding between the two Ministries of Transport was signed during 2019 for analysing a possible location of the 3rd bridge for preparing the feasibility study¹¹.

The transport of goods and passengers on the Danube is below potential. The amount of freight carried on various sections of the Danube is 10 times lower than on Europe's most performant inland waterways. The main challenges that reduce waterborne transport performance are related to the shallow river depth and the capacity of ports (including their hinterland connections).

The quality of roads greatly increased in the last years (especially on the Bulgarian side), but their density is still under the EU average and the infrastructure is not effective in supporting either ports or water border crossings. Motorways are still missing, as the only segment in the cross-border area is the A2 motorway between Constanța and Bucharest. Ports on both sides lack an effective transport infrastructure to serve a larger hinterland. Ports Silistra or Lom lack road belts, which makes it difficult for freight to reach or leave the ports. Except for Constanta, none of the ports along the Danube is served by a motorway; some may be linked to railways but most of them are degraded. The most developed Danube ports in terms of freight handles are still on the Romanian part and are connected to larger cities.

Neither of the two Eurovelo corridor segments passing through Romania and Bulgaria are developed or at least signalised. Most of the Eurovelo 6 route is completed or at least signalised across Europe, but the segments of Eurovelo 13 and Eurovelo 6 between Romania and Bulgaria are not developed yet. Their completion would ensure a complete cycling route of 3,653 km, linking important tourist attractions within Europe. This could greatly boost

¹⁰https://www.interregrobg.eu/images/fisiere/Future%20programme/200618_Territorial%20analysis_updated.pdf A preliminary impact analysis was performed as part of the Pre-feasibility study for “Building a bridge between Romania and Bulgaria”, synthesis available at <http://www.spatial.mdrap.ro/files/Project%20results/Work%20Package%206/Brosura%20Proiect%20pilot%20transport.pdf>

¹¹ One location from 5 possible options: Călărași-Silistra, Giurgiu-Ruse, Bechet-Oreahovo, Turnu Magurele – Nicopol and Zimnicea-Svishtov

touristic activity, strengthen the local economy while also providing a sustainable transport corridor between settlements along the Danube.

Rail transport is underdeveloped and underutilized. The only high-speed rail (up to 160 km/h) is in Romania, between Constanța and Bucharest. The Bulgarian side is missing high-speed rails but has most of the rail infrastructure electrified. This territory is served by four important lines connecting Varna to Sofia but also continuing to the important border crossings at Ruse and Vidin. Unfortunately, this is not the case of Romanian railways, where most lines going towards the Danube are dead ends and not electrified. Therefore, the role of the rail infrastructure remains rather local.

Currently, there is no concrete, functional intermodal system of transportation in the area. The only identifiable multimodal facility is located in the Port of Constanța, Romania. One of the main impediments for having intra-modality in the region is the fact that the rail infrastructure associated to the ports is either inoperable or lacks direct connections to the water-based transport infrastructure. This calls for a better optimization of the existing infrastructure, as well as for better hinterland connections for the ports in the area.

Nevertheless, the location of the two countries, as well as data on the means of transportation being used for freight transport show a high potential for intermodality to be developed in the cross-border region¹². Such a development is needed as the inland waterways are the main transportation way between Eastern and Western Europe, through the TEN-T Rhine-Danube Corridor. In this sense, several cities along the border are key points for the intermodal transportation system of the cross-border region: Ruse, Vidin and Gorna Oriahovitsa (in Bulgaria) and Constanța, Calafat and Giurgiu (commercial transport), Corabia, Turnu Măgurele, Oltenița, Călărași (touristic transport) (in Romania).

Due to a lack of connectivity and a less dense settlement network, the population along the Danube within the cross-border area has poor access to services of general interest (SGI). This is why most counties and districts in the cross-border territory are considered “inner peripheries” in terms of accessibility (access to services of general interest and to urban centres), territories that face specific challenges. The only exception is the cross-border urban system of Giurgiu and Ruse together with the Black Sea coast.

In terms of digital connectivity, none of the two countries managed to reach the target of 100% coverage with broadband. Silistra is the only district which managed to reach this target while other districts still remain between 70 and 75% coverage. On the other hand, Romania is between the few countries that had over 45% of households with a subscription to ultrafast broadband (over 100Mbps). While fixed broadband coverage should be still slightly below the 2020 targets, ultrafast broadband, mostly accessible in major cities, is advancing fast. Rural areas, with a low density of population still face issues in terms of broadband coverage. Investments in better, more reliable and faster connectivity would help to attract higher value-added businesses and are a prerequisite for improving the level of digitalization.

Main investment needs

Since the river Danube still acts like an important barrier in terms of cross-border territorial connectivity, the main investment needs are related to the insufficient density and quality of the transport infrastructure, on road, rail, water or other types of transport.

A coherent, strategic approach is needed to maximize added value of investments and to ensure benefits for the entire cross-border area. Joint investments should aim at improving access and mobility, contributing to the EU Green Deal Objectives and encouraging the shift towards more sustainable transport modes.

To this end, investments are needed to:

¹² IntermodalCBC (ROBG 2, project financed under Interreg V-A Romania-Bulgaria Programme), Strategy regarding the consolidation of the TEN-T network by improving the capacity of intermodal nodes in the border region of Romania-Bulgaria 2018-2050.

- *Further develop the Eurovelo 6 route within the cross-border region, which would contribute to boosting touristic activity, strengthen the local economy also providing a sustainable transport corridor between settlements along the Danube;*
- *Improve the performance of water transport on the Danube, by increasing river depth, port capacity and transport safety;*
- *Improve the currently poor hinterland connections with ports (railway and road), by upgrading and extending secondary roads serving ports and water border crossings;*
- *Identify and address bottlenecks and support the preparatory process for further improving border connectivity, including the construction of new bridges crossing the Danube, extending and upgrading of railway infrastructure, improving ferry transport etc.*
- *Address the missing links in road and rail infrastructure across the border and the lack of connectivity between less dense settlement and cities/towns*
- *Develop transport intermodality by implementing terminals or modal transfer points in the key points along the Danube.*

Climate change mitigation and environment protection

The area comprises several natural parks and protected areas as well as three national biosphere reserves, with important potential for tourism exploitation. These are situated in the Southern part of the Danube Delta Biosphere Reserve - marine area (located in the eligible area), with a total area of 32.5 hectares in Romania, and the Biosphere Reserves of Chuprene and Srebarna (Ramsar site) in Bulgaria, covering a total area of 2.3 ha. Natura 2000 areas cover a surface of 2.21 million ha, out of which 46.70% in Romania and 53.29% in Bulgaria. Constanța is by far the county with most of the Natura 2000 sites in the area (38), especially due to the large biodiversity in the proximity of the Danube Delta and in the coastal area.

All the area is considered to have a high degree of vulnerability to climate change. With increasing annual average temperatures, the region encountered various extreme weather events, mostly tornados, severe winds, large hail and heavy rains, as well as more severe droughts, which are atypical for this area. The Romanian side is more exposed, especially Constanța County, in the case of tornados. Furthermore, erosion, together with storms and rivers draining in low-lying coastal areas, are the main factors triggering coastal flood-risk. Coastal erosion is a threat not only to households or economic activities, but also to biodiversity. Droughts will have serious consequences in the agricultural sector and will also result in desertification.

The entire cross-border area is facing significant challenges in relation to maintaining and protecting the quality of its environment and mitigating the negative effects of human activities. Protected areas, including Natura 2000 sites, are exposed to great risks because of illegal logging, tourism, constructions, and illegal hunting. Deforestation is a major challenge on both sides of the border. These problems are aggravated by administrative issues, such as the lack of management plans. Specific efforts should be directed towards Natura 2000 sites and the existing conflicts in the areas, especially on designating more Natura 2000 sites, on implementing viable management plans and finding the best ways of stopping logging and destruction.

The main natural risks presented in the cross-border area are floods, earthquakes and landslides. All the localities in the floodplain of the Danube are exposed to the incidence of floods. Outside the Danube floodplain, the largest areas affected by flood risk are located in Mehedinți, Giurgiu and Constanta (Romania), Montana, Veliko Tarnovo and Pleven (Bulgaria). The Vrancea epicentric area has an influence predominant over the Romanian sector and is also felt in the North of the Bulgarian sector (Dobrogea, Veliko Tarnovo and Shabla-Kaliakra Cape). The Black Sea coast (near Cape Kaliakra) and the Veliko Tarnovo region constitute areas with relatively intense seismic activity. The counties of Dolj, Constanța, Pleven and Dobrich have the highest risk of landslides.

The programme area also has a number of sites exposed to technology risks. These put a significant pressure on the control of the floods and of the protection measures that need to be taken in order to avoid major accidents with serious consequences on the urbanised areas. These sites are located in Craiova-Slatina, Giurgiu-Ruse, Silistra-Călărași-Tămădău Mare and Mangalia-Constanța-Năvodari and are either related to harbour activities or are developed on former communist industrial sites and use the proximity of the water resource as an asset for their activity. A special situation is represented by the location of objectives in settlements from areas at risk to floods such as: Bâcu village in Giurgiu county, Isalnița and Podari communes in Dolj County, Kozloduy from Vratsa district, Svishtov locality from Veliko Tarnovo district. Two major industrial infrastructures in the area present a high level of risk - Kozloduy Nuclear Power Plant and Cernavodă Nuclear Power Plant.

Waste management is still very low, compared to EU targets. The counties with the largest waste production in 2017 are Constanța, Ruse and Dolj, having also the lowest recycling rate (under 3%) while the highest recycling rate has been registered in Olt county (13.79%), which is still low considering the European target of 50%. Many counties/districts do not report any recycling (e.g. Vidin, Silistra, Călărași, and Giurgiu). Against this background, circular economy is severely underdeveloped.

Main investment needs

- *As both sides of the border share similar natural landscapes, common socio-economic profiles and matching challenges, investments are necessary for planning and implementing common systems and instruments for monitoring the quality of the environment and the extent of human activities, promoting joint coordination mechanisms and initiatives, developing joint risk management strategies and systems, as well as implementing innovative actions across the border for prevention purposes.*
- *Moreover, hard investments are needed to reduce the high vulnerability of the cross-border region to natural risks (such as floods, droughts, desertification etc.), particularly through integrated actions.*
- *Significant efforts are necessary for protecting the environment and for mitigating the negative effects of human activities, through soft and hard investments in risk prevention, climate change adaptation, green economy and green infrastructure. Particular attention is needed in areas where natural and industrial risks overlap.*
- *The rich biodiversity of the area could lead to further development of sustainable and eco-friendly economic activities which can contribute to local employment and growth. There is high untapped potential for the local economy that needs to be exploited more, but within strict environmental protection standards, including in the tourism sector.*
- *Expanding existing cross-border networks and developing new ones is necessary for supporting the adoption of common approaches, build awareness and promote successful solutions. Additional efforts are also necessary to promote education and to increase the awareness and raise engagement of people, enterprises and administrations in relation to restoring and protecting the environment.*

Human capital

The Romanian-Bulgaria cross-border area has an overall low population density, which affects economic development and discourages investment. Outward migration, population ageing and low fertility rates have led to a constant population decrease and to a depletion of labour resources. The districts of Vidin and Montana have registered some of the highest values for population decline in Europe, with many areas that are turning into so-called “ghost-towns”. Rural depopulation is registering alarming levels across the area. This has led to a depletion of labour resources, which is visible across the territory but most acute in Teleorman (-17%), Călărași (-15.6%) and Giurgiu (-13.2%).

The remaining labour force is unable to find suitable work opportunities. As such, each of the two sides of the cross-border area hold over 21% (in the case of Romania) and over 30%

(in the case of Bulgaria) of the total unemployed population in the respective country. The highest unemployment rate was found in Vidin, where the unemployed accounted for 19.7% of the active population. Overall, the cross-border area has an unemployment rate of 6.7% in 2018, down from 10.4% in 2013. Poor mobility and language barriers prevent job seekers to effectively access job opportunities across the border.

The education level of the population is the lowest in the two countries. The illiteracy rate is worrying, especially on the Romanian area of the cross-border region. According to the 2011 National Population and household census, the 1st, 2nd and 4th counties in term of highest rate of illiteracy in Romania are located in the cross-border region (Călărași, Giurgiu, and Teleorman). In Bulgaria, two of the districts (Dobrich and Silistra) are above the national percentage of illiterate population. This is due to the fact that these two districts are rural, with a higher number of ethnic minority groups, among which this indicator is traditionally high.

Against the low level of economic development, more than a third of the population in the programme area is at risk of poverty or social exclusion. The situation is particularly concerning in respect to in-work at-risk of poverty, manifested widely, given the low salaries in the region, up to five times smaller than the EU average and well below the national averages.

Main investment needs

Efforts are necessary to improve the quality of the labour force in the RO-BG programme area. Area-focused initiatives are necessary for curbing down illiteracy, for upskilling and reskilling the workforce in the region, as well as to increase cross-border mobility in learning and working.

- *Joint initiatives are sought to curb the rate of adult illiteracy, to support life-long learning and to promote the uptake of digital skills, so as to provide sufficient and suitable labour resources for businesses.*
- *Joint learning programmes, platforms and contents are necessary for mobilizing networks of teachers and trainers, for promoting successful initiatives, raising awareness and promoting participation to education, especially for persons from remote and rural areas.*

Integrated territorial development

The cross-border region is primarily rural with few major urban centres, the biggest of which are located further away from the border. The only urban centre on the Danube exceeding 100,000 inhabitants is Ruse in Bulgaria, while all the rest have under 65,000 inhabitants. Overall, the largest agglomerations are in Constanța (300,000) and Craiova (243,000) and Pleven (107,000). These are the main development engines of the territory, which have the capacity to attract socio-economic development, while also influencing their surrounding territories.

The Danube River is a factor of discontinuity and an obstacle to territorial integration. Bridges and, to a lesser extent, ferries, contribute to North-South mobility, whereas the land-based border significantly improves connectivity. Currently, only the towns of Ruse and Giurgiu have developed strong connections and formed an urban system - this is also the largest cross-border urban system in Europe, with more than 200,000 people living in these cities. However, there are other six twin-cities along the border with opportunities for cross-border interaction via labour mobility, joint education or business support services: Calafat-Vidin, Bechet-Oryahovo, Turnu Măgurele-Nicopole, Zimnicea-Svishtov, Oltenița-Tutrakan and Călărași-Silistra.

The cross-border area has common endowments and opportunities, but integrated territorial development remains weak. From East to West, Romania and Bulgaria share a coastal region, a land-connected border section and a vast water-connected border section. The Danube is the most important landmark defining the territory and the identity of its

inhabitants. The region boasts of a strong common natural, historical and cultural heritage. Territorial integration is, however, limited by the poor connectivity. Competition, rather than collaboration often characterizes the general approach in respect to valorising existing potential, particularly in respect to the tourism sector. The management of common assets, such as the Danube, is treated at national level.

Main investment needs

Investments are necessary to enhance territorial integration in the cross-border area, on the following:

- *Enhancing physical connectivity and mobility both across the North-South and the East-West axes of the border, as a precondition for territorial integration;*
- *Further advance the place-based/ functional area approach of territorial integration in places where access is less problematic, such as in twin cities and the Black Sea Coast, by developing common strategies and delivering joint local services;*
- *Support the implementation of an integrated development vision for the cross-border territory, relying on the network of its urban centres and enhancing border interaction via labour mobility, joint education, business support services and improved access to finance for SMEs;*
- *Support a shared approach in diversifying the local economy, by valorising common assets, such as the natural, historical and cultural heritage. Investments in the Eurovelo Route could increase cross-border mobility and attract more visitors to the region. Support for the tourism sector, as well as for connected sectors like creative industries or agri-food will boost the local economy, create jobs and increase the attractiveness of the region, building its long-term resilience.*

Safety and security

With the Danube River as an internal and the Black Sea as an external border of the EU, the region is faced with a number of challenges, against the rising migration flows, growing population mobility and increasing trade of goods and services.

Problems often arise from different regulatory frameworks, procedures, practices or tactics, as well as from capacity gaps (common on both sides or among them) referring to training, equipment or technology. These challenges are ever more pressing, as both countries are striving to access the Schengen area.

These pose enhanced risks in relation to the safety and security of the region and require permanent action in updating and expanding the use of technology and data-led decision-making for border management and control, regulating travel and tracking movement across the border, securing identities and preventing illicit activities.

The following sectors are directly envisaged: transport of goods and passengers, on inland and coastal waters, as well as on land; environment protection, particularly of the river and the maritime ecosystems; fisheries; border control and customs; law enforcement and defence. According to the available information, only about 30% of the useful data is shared across sectors¹³.

¹³ Maritime safety and security & Post 2020, Interact

https://www.google.com/url?sa=t&rct=j&q=&esrc=s&source=web&cd=&ved=2ahUKEwj9_LZsKvtAhWy_CoKHx6nCFUQFjAAegQIAxAC&url=http%3A%2F%2Fwww.interact-eu.net%2Fdownload%2Ffile%2Ffid%2F12797&usg=AOvVaw3aSFCvC3P3XZxnvJq2ZU34

Main investment needs:

- *Capitalize on and consolidate the current cooperation on risk prevention and rapid response management;*
- *Counteract illegal activities affecting environmental quality, such as illegal exploitations and poaching;*
- *Increase rapid response capacities and further develop joint intervention procedures/ schemes.*

1.2.2. Complementarities and synergies with other forms of support

Both Romania and Bulgaria will benefit from extensive funding under the Cohesion Policy for the 2021-2027 programming period. Complementarity of support will ensure an efficient use of the Programme budget and enable the synergies which are necessary for achieving the desired development objectives. Coherence of the programme with other national and EU forms of support has been ensured through extensive stakeholders' consultations and the use of existing coordination mechanisms set-up at national level in the two countries.

In order to address the region's diverse and substantial development challenges, joint investments will be financed from POs 2, 3, 4 and 5. While the Programme will focus on projects that jointly solve challenges specific to the area, have a real cross-border impact and will benefit the population, businesses and institutions in the cross-border region, the mainstream interventions supported by the operational programs in Romania and Bulgaria will focus on tackling problems affecting wider areas (NUTS2 regions) or the whole country, respectively.

Investments under PO2 will focus on promoting climate change adaptation in line with Green Deal objectives to minimize the economic, social and environmental impact generated by climate change. Specific efforts are to be directed towards Natura 2000 sites, biodiversity and the existing conflicts in the areas. They will be complementary to mainstream interventions aiming to support a sustainable shift toward a low-carbon and climate resilient economy, encouraging environment protection and climate action within the Sustainable Development Operational Programme 2021-2027(RO) and Operational Programme Environment 2021 - 2027 (BG), as well as to other funding programmes such as LIFE, EAFRD and EMFF.

Investments under PO3 will focus on the development of the cross-border transport infrastructure on two tiers: addressing the missing links in relation to the TEN-T networks (e.g. road, rail) and improving the efficiency of inland water transport.

Regarding PO3 and PO5, complementarity will also be ensured with Connecting Europe Facility (CEF), a EU funding instrument aiming to promote, growth, jobs and competitiveness through targeted infrastructure investment at European level.

Also, the Programme will complement the mainstream initiatives (focused on upgrading cross-border crossing points on the TEN-T network and creating additional new transport connections across the Danube and modernizing and developing port infrastructure of the primary network) with preparatory works in financing relevant studies (feasibility studies for new bridges on Danube River or studies identifying and proposing solutions for ferry transport efficiency and reliability) or by complementary interventions to link the large infrastructure created through mainstream to cross-border relevant infrastructure, such as secondary roads or ports, road safety measures.

Investments under PO4 will focus on increasing access and participation to education and training, taking into account the specific context of the cross-border area. Support will be provided to improve access and participation to education and support lifelong learning in the perspective of the cross-border area, in order to overcome the language and administrative barriers that have an impact on the quality, mobility and adaptability of the labour force on both sides of the border.

Investments under PO 5 will focus on supporting the integrated territorial development of the cross-border area, backboneed by Eurovelo 6 cycling route and by investing in the tourism value chain with relevance at cross-border level.

The Programme also ensures the complementarity with the National Plans of Recovery and Resilience of both Romania and Bulgaria, developed within the Recovery and Resilience Facility, which sets out the priority investment areas for overcoming the crisis, economic recovery and increasing resilience.

Other complementarities are envisaged with the Black Sea Basin Joint Operational Programme, supporting better cooperation between the member countries, notably in the areas of environment protection and climate change, energy and transport, education, culture, or with the Interreg IPA with Serbia, for Mehedinti (in RO) and Vidin, Montana, Vratsa (in Bulgaria). The RO-BG CBC Programme will assume a coordination mechanism extended to other relevant EU programmes, in order to ensure effective complementarities and synergies.

1.2.3. Lessons learned from past experience

Romania and Bulgaria benefited from Interreg programmes for two programming periods. The Programme ensures continuity of the results obtained so far in certain areas of investments, in order to further amplify their results and effects and to bring a structural value in the cross-border region. The areas in which a continuity of investments will be ensured are climate change adaptation and risk prevention, protection and preservation of nature, biodiversity and green infrastructure and enhancing regional and local mobility while developing sustainable transport.

Throughout the two implementation cycles, the Programme acted as a catalyst to facilitate co-operation and future operations can benefit from what has been achieved. The Programme's role in helping to establish conditions for enhanced co-operation has been instrumental in delivering project achievements and has contributed to reducing various barriers to cooperation. As a result of the Programme, the cross-border area now benefits from a strong network of stakeholders, who can be actively engaged in the next programming cycle.

The Programme will continue the good practice of the 2014 - 2020 period, in which the monitoring and reporting of the Programme was performed exclusively in the eMS system at all levels (beneficiaries, FLC, JS, MA). The use of eMS increases the level of simplification and transparency across the entire monitoring procedural workflow.

Another lesson learned from the previous programmes is that gold-plating has a negative impact, thus efforts were made and will be continued in order to reduce and avoid its usage, as it is proven to be leading to increasing administrative costs and burden, with the risk of making financing less attractive and more error prone. Therefore, at programme level the programme bodies will focus to provide clarity for beneficiaries and make more use of SCOs.

The new programme will extensively use the Simplified Costs Option (SCO), as they proved to have a positive impact on the implementation of the 2014-2020 programme, reducing the administrative burden both for beneficiaries and the programme bodies. Moreover, the activities and trainings provided by the MA, supported by the NA and the Joint Secretariat will be continued. The cross-border character is at the centre of the interventions. Acknowledging the tendency to develop "mirroring" projects, which manifested strongly in the 2007-2013 period, extensive measures were taken for the 2014-2020 period, in order to ensure the integrated cross-border character, such as: specific grids emphasizing the cross-border approach requesting real cross-border character and not just filling in the Regulation cooperation criteria, strict monitoring, double-checks in the pre-contractual phase, multiple campaigns of best practice projects with real cross-border impact.

Other aspects that ensured the smooth implementation of the previous programme are related to the 2 steps approach of the calls for proposals and targeted calls on programme indicators. The 2 steps approach (express of interest and full applications) ensured the selection of high

quality projects, reduction of evaluation deadline (only the Eols selected under 1st step were further developed in full applications, thus a reduced number of projects were evaluated, and of the costs at the level of applicants -additional documents/permits etc. were requested only in the 2nd step). Through the targeted calls, the programme indicators were secured by selecting relevant projects with high contribution. These aspects, with positive impact, will be considered further on by the Programme. Measures for reducing the contracting process are also envisaged (e.g. reducing the number of pre-contracting documents requested from beneficiaries, introducing the possibility of signing the documents digitally, reducing the number of pre-contracting visits).

Given the fact that the budget of the Programme is considerably smaller than in the previous periods, an increased focus is necessary, both in respect to the number of thematic priorities addressed and to the types of activities supported. In line with the EC orientation towards results, the current programming period already encompassed this approach. Further attention will be paid to properly defining specific actions, so as to better respond to the specific needs identified in the programme area and to increase the impact.

The programme was elaborated emphasizing the identification of new potential beneficiaries and partners from the area, asking for their valuable contribution in proposing new types of project ideas. Moreover, the private sector was further involved in the process of identifying the needs and priorities of the programme, in order to stimulate the integration of services and the exchange of good practices between the public and private sectors in the cross-border area.

Some barriers are still persistent and require additional efforts. Cultural and language differences entail additional efforts to address the target groups, legislative and administrative differences prevent, delay or pose significant challenges for the development of some actions. The implementation of the programme and of the projects has been simplified, mainly taking into account the administrative burden imposed on beneficiaries and monitoring bodies. These actions need to be further addressed.

During the implementation of the Programme the Managing Authority will promote the strategic use of public procurement to support Policy Objectives (including professionalization efforts to address capacity gaps). Beneficiaries should be encouraged to use more quality-related and lifecycle cost criteria. When feasible, environmental (e.g. green public procurement criteria) and social considerations as well as innovation incentives should be incorporated into public procurement procedures.

1.2.4. Coordination with the macro-regional strategies

The Programme aligns with the EU Strategy for Danube Region (EUSDR), striving to boost the development of the Danube Region, by creating synergies and supporting coordination between the existing policies and initiatives in the region and approaching common challenges in partnership.

While good connections are key for the Danube Region, joint projects will be supported in line with the EUSDR, to improve the connectivity in this area. The Programme will contribute to infrastructure consolidation, as well as to enhancing the connections between people, especially through culture and tourism.

The programme contributes to the first pillar of the EUSDR, *Connect the region*, addressing several priority areas such as: **waterways mobility** (1A), **rail-road-air mobility** (1B), **sustainable energy** (02) and **culture and tourism** (03).

The programme has an important contribution to develop the inland navigation and to remove the bottlenecks, aiming to improve the performance for transport of the Danube, by increasing river depth, port capacity and transport safety, by supporting the preparatory process for further improving border connectivity.

Secondly, the Programme may contribute to the improvement of rail-road-air mobility, by supporting interventions in development of efficient multimodal terminals at sea, river and

dry ports in the Danube Region and ensure their connectivity and access through the integration of all modes of transport and efficient logistics services by 2030.

The Programme may also contribute to improving the currently poor hinterland connections with ports (railway and road), including by upgrading and extending secondary roads serving ports and water crossings. Also, the missing links in road and rail infrastructure across the border and the lack of connectivity between less dense settlement and cities could be addressed. Interventions are envisaged in order to develop transport intramodality by implementing terminals or modal transfer points in the key points along the Danube.

In order to promote Culture and Tourism Priority 3 within EUSDR, the Programme contributes to establish the Danube region as an important European tourist destination and further develop and strengthen the Danube Brand for the entire Danube Region (target 1), Establish the Danube as a transnational cultural and natural travel route (target 3), Develop sustainable forms of tourism, including green tourist products and sustainable mobility solutions along the Danube region (target 4), Promote the development of quality products, infrastructure and innovative forms of tourism and culture by SMEs and public private partnerships (target 8) and to Promote skilled labour workforce, education and skills development in the areas of tourism and culture for sustainable jobs in the region (target 9).¹⁴

Thus, the programme supports interventions aiming to develop cycling infrastructure (Euro Velo Route 6), to develop the tourism facilities along this route and to rehabilitate the historical objectives with tourist potential. Moreover, it will support the small businesses in the tourism, agri-food (including local farms) and in the creative industries sector, to create common historical, natural and cultural heritage products and services, to expand/ improve their services, target new markets and create jobs in the cross-border area, including by setting up on-site and on-line shops for traditional / local products (local food, bread, wine, cheese, rose, lavender, honey etc.). More actions will be financed for qualifying the labour force in the tourism ecosystem hospitality.

Finally, the Programme will contribute to EUSDR Priority 9, particularly Action 6 Relevant and High-Quality Knowledge, Skills and Competences and Action 7. Lifelong Learning and Learning Mobility by supporting mobility of learners and teachers as well as partnerships among schools and educational institutions, reducing low achievement in basic skills and addressing the development of digital competences at all levels of learning.

1.3. Justification for the selection of policy objectives and the Interreg specific objectives, corresponding priorities, specific objectives and the forms of support, addressing, where appropriate, missing links in cross-border infrastructure

Table 1 (2000 characters each)

PO2. A greener, low-carbon Europe	2.4. Promoting climate change adaptation and disaster risk prevention, resilience, taking into account ecosystem-based approaches	P2. A greener region	Regarding the natural hazards the most important risks in the cross-border area are the floods. Most of the region is in the floodplain of the Danube and that makes it sensitive to that risk. In addition, the Vrancea seismic epicentric area affects the Romanian side and the Northern Bulgaria. The counties of Dolj, Constanța, Pleven and Dobrich experience high risk of landslides. Erosion, together with storm events and rivers draining in low-lying coastal areas, are the main factors triggering coastal flood-risk. According to the Territorial Analysis, the region displays an increase of the average annual temperature by more than 3.6 C on both banks of the Danube. Also, since 2010, the region encountered various extreme weather events,
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¹⁴ <https://cultureandtourism.danube-region.eu/priority-area-3/pa3-targets/>

			<p>mostly, severe winds, large hail and heavy rains, atypical meteorological phenomena.</p> <p>Not least, the entire area is a major contributor to the overall Greenhouse gas (GHG) emissions in both countries, given the relatively high share of agriculture in its economic structure.</p> <p>Therefore, PO2, SO 2.4 was selected to support actions aiming to mitigate the risks affecting the area and to promote climate change adaptation in line with Green Deal objectives, to minimize the economic, social and environmental impact generated by climate change.</p> <p>Future interventions are expected to increase the ability to adapt to climate change and to support preventive actions while raising awareness towards climate change objectives as comprised within the European Green Deal. Projects aiming to evaluate the vulnerability of settlements to different categories of hazards are to be envisaged, along with interventions introducing new innovative technologies and equipment designed to address the aforementioned hazards. The response capacity in case of floods, seismic events and other natural hazards should be increased in order to enhance the disaster resilience of the region.</p>
PO2. A greener, low-carbon Europe	2.7. Enhancing protection and preservation of nature, biodiversity and green infrastructure, including in urban areas, and reducing all forms of pollution	P2. greener region A	<p>The biodiversity and natural heritage of the cross-border area face several threats and adverse impacts of human and natural origin. Habitat degradation, land conversion and fragmentation, deforestation, industrialization, pollution, urbanization and overexploitation of natural resources, mass tourism, as well as climate change, have adverse effects on the environment and on the biodiversity in the cross-border area, disrupting ecosystems and the migration of animals. Natura 2000 and Ramsar sites are particularly vulnerable.</p> <p>Also, one underlying challenge is the lack of consistent, comprehensive data. For example, in the case of air quality, data is available only for certain types of pollutants, and only for certain regions and years. This could indicate deficiencies in relation to monitoring or insufficient transparency.</p> <p>Based on existing data, the cross-border region and particularly its urban areas, are affected by water, air and soil pollution.</p> <p>SO 2.7 was selected to support actions enhancing and protecting biodiversity, reduction all form of pollution and supporting the local potential for a greener economy. Investments are expected to contribute to finding solutions for stopping the destruction of natural areas, expanding existing cross-border networks, building awareness and promoting successful solutions.</p> <p>In line with the EC Communication “Green Infrastructure (GI) - Enhancing Europe’s Natural Capital”, under PO2, green infrastructures will be supported to enhance the natural capital, to the sustainable development of the cross-border area.</p> <p>All projects will be supported as grants.</p>

<p>PO3. A more connected Europe - mobility and regional ICT connectivity</p>	<p>3.3. Developing and enhancing sustainable, climate resilient, intelligent and intermodal national, regional and local mobility, including improved access to TEN-T and cross-border mobility</p>	<p>P1. A well-connected region</p>	<p>As highlighted by the territorial analysis, the competitiveness and the cohesion of the border area is hindered by the relatively low physical connectivity between the regions North and South of the Danube. The low density of border crossings reduces the mobility between the two sides of the border, hinders commercial flows and makes commuting difficult. It also prevents the capitalization of the existing natural and anthropic resources for touristic purposes, due to limited access, limiting economic potential and job creation. While the territory with water border has a limited connection (except for the areas in the proximity of ferry routes and the bridges in Vidin-Calafat and Giurgiu-Ruse), the best conditions in terms of cross-border connectivity can be seen between Dobrich and Constanța, the only part of the area connected by land.</p> <p>The River Danube shapes the geography and the economy of the territory, upholding a pivotal role in connecting the region to the rest of Europe. However, inland navigability suffers from bottlenecks, both because of the shallow river depth and the capacity of ports, including their hinterland connections. Ports and ferries on both sides lack an effective transport infrastructure to serve a larger hinterland, including road belts, which makes it difficult for freight and passengers to travel across the river.</p> <p>PO3, SO 3.3. was selected to support the development of the cross-border transport infrastructure on two tiers: enhancing connectivity and mobility across the Danube (e.g. road, rail) and improving the navigation conditions and safety on the Danube. Priority will be given to investments of strategic importance, with demonstrated cross-border relevance and supporting clean, environmentally friendly transport, in line with the Border Orientation Papers. All investments will be financed as grants.</p> <p>These investments will contribute to strengthening local economies and to consolidating the functional role of the cities located along the border, while also providing a sustainable transport corridor.</p>
<p>PO4. A more social and inclusive Europe [implementing the European Pillar of Social Rights]</p>	<p>4.2. Improving equal access to inclusive and quality services in education, training, and lifelong learning through developing accessible infrastructure, including by fostering resilience for distance and on-line education and training - contribution to SO 4.5 ESF+</p>	<p>P3. An educated region</p>	<p>On both sides of the border, the region is affected by systemic challenges: high levels of illiteracy and poverty, low participation to education, training and life-long learning. Language barriers prevent the people in the cross-border region from reaping the benefits of learning or working mobility, whereas the limited collaboration between the national and local authorities in the training and education sector as well as between the education authorities and the business further decrease the opportunities for enhancing the quality and inclusiveness of the two education and training systems and for increasing employment opportunities (RO and BG).</p> <p>SO 4.2 was selected to support actions enhancing cross-border collaboration in the field of education and training, to create new opportunities for cross-border mobility and joint actions in increasing access and participation to education and training, including for disadvantaged groups (persons with low education levels and/or affected by poverty).</p> <p>Future interventions are expected to support efforts for curbing down illiteracy in the cross-border region, for</p>

			<p>enhancing basic digital and languages skills (RO and BG) of the population and for increasing the quality of the labour force in the region.</p> <p>The quality of infrastructure, including endowments for digital education and training and development of digital skills, is low.</p> <p>All projects will be supported as grants.</p>
PO5. A Europe closer to citizens	5.2 Fostering the integrated and inclusive social, economic and environmental local development, culture, natural heritage, sustainable tourism and security, in areas other than urban areas.	P4. An integrated region	<p>Considering the relatively low economic development of the border area as well as the significant unfavourable economic and social effects of COVID-19 crisis, it is essential that an integrated approach be adopted for the future, building on the existing networks of cities and helping the local economy to embrace the digital transformation, access new markets and become more resilient to global shocks.</p> <p>The historical, cultural and natural heritage is a common asset which could be used to support economic diversification across the region. However, existing sites are often inaccessible, unpromoted and in poor condition.</p> <p>At the same time, the Eurovelo 6 cycling route presents a remarkable opportunity for the area to benefit from the potential tourist flows and valorise its historical, natural and cultural heritage and to support the local economy. The route is nearly completed and has gained significant popularity among travellers, but the only missing link is currently on the Romanian-Bulgarian border.</p> <p>Additional infrastructure and services are necessary, to accommodate the needs of the visitors and prolong their stay. Support along the value chain and in connected sectors (such as creative industries or agri-food) will also be necessary. The available work resources will also need preparation, to take on the newly created jobs in the respective sectors.</p> <p>It is expected that economic activities be developed in a sustainable manner, in order to reduce the negative effects on the environment.</p> <p>As such, SO 5.2 was selected to support an integrated approach to the economic development of the region, having as a backbone the Eurovelo 6 route. A direct support to the local SMEs will also be envisaged. All investments will be financed as grants. Priority will be given to projects in direct connection to the EuroVelo 6.</p>

2. Priorities

2.1. Priority 1: A well connected region

2.1.1. Specific objective: 3 (iii) Developing and enhancing sustainable, climate resilient, intelligent and intermodal national, regional and local mobility, including improved access to TEN-T and cross-border mobility;

2.1.1.1. *Related types of action and their expected contribution to those specific objectives and to macro-regional strategies and sea-basin strategies, where appropriate*

While the Programme area is covered by maritime and river-based transport, road and railway networks, and also air transport, the current infrastructure does not have either sufficient density or proper quality to ensure access to the TEN-T and major national corridors or to safeguard a good connectivity across the border and alongside the border area. Moreover, there is no optimized system of connections between the different modes of transportation.

This is partially the consequence of the historical design of the regional transport grid, which considered the Danube as a rigid border and focused on ensuring connectivity with the two national capitals and national urban poles. This resulted in a low connectivity across the border and within the area caused by significant gaps along the territory, such as few crossing connections along Danube, limited railway links and weak cross-border mobility between the twin cities along the Danube, due to the lack of cross-border public transport and intermodal facilities.

The Danube River, whose 470 km-long navigable waterway is part of the 7th pan-European transport corridor, has relatively few river crossings, as follows: Calafat - Vidin, Bechet - Oryahovo, Turnu Măgurele - Nikopol, Giurgiu - Ruse, Oltenița - Tutrakan and Călărași - Silistra (ferryboat). The main challenges affecting ferry crossings are mainly related to the quality and capacity of their road connection, as well as to the infrastructure.

The lack of a stable and functional river crossing infrastructure is widely acknowledged as the main problem, affecting not only freight and passenger transport on the major EU TEN-T corridors, but also cross-border socio-economic flows, and cooperation among the pairs of towns located on the two banks of the river, as accessibility is seriously limited for people and businesses.

The Danube represents an opportunity to connect the European space to the Black Sea and to reduce the congestion of road transport, pollutants and consumers of non-renewable sources, insofar as investments ensure appropriate navigation conditions throughout the year. The inland navigation along Danube depends on the conditions of infrastructure and on the impact of natural factors.

Thus, there are sections of the river and its canals that have deficiencies in both width and depth, generated by the natural factors or by the weather impact (low precipitations). That leads to low reliability and navigability of the waterway especially during summer, when the water level is very low, and makes travel times for barges and vessels longer compared to other modes of transport.¹⁵ That has a significant negative effect on the costs and attractiveness of inland navigation. Moreover, the fairway conditions of the Danube waterway along the Romanian-Bulgarian cross-border, needs to be further improved and suitable modernization/upgrading measures along the entire waterway shall be implemented.¹⁶ These measures are essential for the navigation sector to be able to offer reliable services and conduct cost-effective business.

¹⁵ <https://publications.jrc.ec.europa.eu/repository/handle/JRC104224>

¹⁶ *Ibidem.*

The existing ports and ferry crossings are poorly connected to the road and rail infrastructure. The improved interconnectivity will enhance the transport of freight and passengers along and across the river.

In order to facilitate the programme implementation, a strategic approach is envisaged. Thus, this PO will be implemented through operations of strategic importance. Activities related to road infrastructure shall comply with national masterplans. The following types of actions could be supported:

1) Actions enhancing connectivity and mobility across the Danube

Soft measures:

- Identifying and addressing the missing links in road and rail infrastructure: studies, strategies, joint solutions, joint tools etc.
- Supporting the preparatory process for enhancing the border connectivity and mobility in the area, for all transport modes, including the construction of new bridge crossings across the Danube, through pre-feasibility and feasibility studies, design projects, environmental assessments, joint solutions, tools, action plans etc.
- Improving and expanding transport infrastructure: studies regarding traffic safety reducing accidents on all modes of transport, awareness campaigns, connectivity/mobility studies for understanding freight and passenger flows, commuting etc.
- Increasing and implementing the efficiency of public transport: studies, equipment and IT solutions for increasing predictability, reliability and efficiency of public transport, especially in relation to water transport (e.g. ferries).
- Designing and implementing integrated solutions for supporting mobility and connectivity in time of crisis.
- Designing and implementing sustainable transport solutions for better connectivity and mobility in the area.

Hard measures:

- Improving and expanding road infrastructure - Works for road infrastructure modernization (only in duly justified cases, with high cross-border impact and character), safety measures (equipment/signalling);
- Improving and expanding rail infrastructures -works for modernization, reconstruction and construction of railway stops and stations;
- Improving access to port and ferries - Works for infrastructure modernization leading to ferries, works improving hinterland connections with ports (railway and road);
- Improving and developing intermodal nodes and connections.

2). Actions improving the navigation conditions and safety on the Danube and Black Sea (non-exhaustive list)

Soft measures:

- Reducing administrative burden and other types of bottlenecks: studies, analyses, solutions, tools
- Developing and implementing joint co-ordinated strategies, tools and pilot applications to improve the navigation conditions on Danube and Black Sea (e.g, joint feasibility studies, engineering planning documents, morphological and hydrodynamic studies in establishing the sediment accumulation conditions etc.).

Hard measures:

- Developing and implementing integrated measures in order to improve the navigation conditions for the common sector of the Danube and the Black Sea in the cross-border area (eg. integrating the marking systems on Danube, equipment, signalling etc.).

All projects will have to demonstrate strategic relevance for the cross-border area, contribution to national and EU strategic documents, including the Master plans of both countries and to clearly indicate the funding sources of the future investment/project. The projects should be in the benefit of the entire area of the Programme and should focus also on the Green Deal objectives (e.g. water transport/navigability). Not least, projects should enhance cross-border mobility and eliminate the missing links and administrative barriers.

Direct effects are expected in respect to increased transport flows and improved mobility at border crossing, contributing to increasing accessibility in the Balkan area from the fluvial TEN-T network. Other expected effects include an increased economic activity in the served areas.

This approach is complementary to national strategies and the mainstream operational programs in the two countries, which are more targeted towards supporting connectivity nationally and less focused on supporting mobility across the border.

The planned actions will contribute to EUSDR by improving the performance for transport of the Danube, by increasing river depth, port capacity and transport safety, namely Pillar 1, PA 1a - Water mobility. Also, the actions may contribute to PA 1b - Rail-Road-Air Mobility.

2.1.1.2. Indicators

Table 2: Output indicators - to be updated

Priority	Specific objective	ID	Indicator	Measurement unit	Milestone (2024)	Final target (2029)
PO3. A more connected Europe - mobility and regional ICT connectivity	Developing sustainable, climate resilient, intelligent and intermodal national, regional and local mobility, including improved access to TEN-T and cross-border mobility	RCO 84	Pilot actions developed jointly and implemented in projects	Pilot action		
PO3. A more connected Europe - mobility and regional ICT connectivity	Developing sustainable, climate resilient, intelligent and intermodal national, regional and local mobility, including improved access to TEN-T and cross-border mobility	RCO 87	Organisations cooperating across borders	Organizations		

Table 3: Result indicators

Priority	Specific objective	ID	Indicator	MU	Baseline	Reference year	Final target (2029)	Source of data	Comments
PO3. A more connected Europe - mobility and regional ICT connectivity	Developing sustainable, climate resilient, intelligent and intermodal national, regional and local mobility, including improved access to TEN-T and cross-border mobility	RCR 84	Organisations cooperating across borders after project completion	Organisation	0	2021		MA monitoring system (project reports)	

Priority	Specific objective	ID	Indicator	MU	Baseline	Reference year	Final target (2029)	Source of data	Comments
PO3. A more connected Europe - mobility and regional ICT connectivity	Developing sustainable, climate resilient, intelligent and intermodal national, regional and local mobility, including improved access to TEN-T and cross-border mobility	RCR104	Solutions taken up or up-scaled by organisations	Solution	0	2021		MA monitoring system (project reports)	

2.1.1.3. The main target groups

Reference: Article 17(4)(e)(iii), Article 17(9)(c)(iv)

The target groups envisaged by this priority are individuals and organisations that live and/ or work in the programme area:

- Port / ferry operators
- Enterprises transporting passengers/freight across the river
- Commuters
- Tourists
- Population and enterprises in the counties in the immediate proximity where the supported infrastructure projects are located.

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

Reference: Article 17(4)(e)(iv)

Not applicable

2.1.1.5. Planned use of financial instruments

Reference: Article 17(4)(e)(v)

Not applicable

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

Reference: Article 17(4)(e)(vi), Article 17(9)(c)(v)

Table 4: Dimension 1 - intervention field

Priority no	Fund	Specific objective	Code	Amount (EUR)
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PO3. A more connected Europe - mobility and regional ICT connectivity	ERDF	Developing sustainable, climate resilient, intelligent and intermodal national, regional and local mobility, including improved access to TEN-T and cross-border mobility	090 newly built or upgraded other national, regional and local access roads	
			098 Other newly built or upgraded railways	
			114 Inland waterways and ports (TEN-T)	

Table 5: Dimension 2 - form of financing

Priority no	Fund	Specific objective	Code	Amount (EUR)
A greener region	ERDF	Developing sustainable, climate resilient, intelligent and intermodal national, regional and local mobility, including improved access to TEN-T and cross-border mobility	01 Grant	

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

Priority No	Fund	Specific objective	Code	Amount (EUR)
A greener region	ERDF	Developing sustainable, climate resilient, intelligent and intermodal national, regional and local mobility, including improved access to TEN-T and cross-border mobility	48 No territorial targeting	

2.2. Priority 2: A greener region

2.2.1. Specific objective: 2.4. Promoting climate change adaptation and disaster risk prevention, resilience, taking into account ecosystem-based approaches

2.2.1.1. Related types of action and their expected contribution to those specific objectives and to macro-regional strategies and sea-basin strategies, where appropriate

The entire Romania-Bulgaria cross-border area is facing significant challenges in relation to maintaining the quality of its environment and mitigating the negative effects of natural disasters and human activities. As noted in the Cross-Border Orientation Paper, the region faces high vulnerability to climate change, high exposure to negative effects of human activities, as well as to natural and technological risk.

As the river Danube crosses the entire territory, all the localities in the floodplain of the Danube are exposed to the incidence of floods. Other natural risks in the border area are earthquakes and landslides.

For both countries, droughts represent an important issue. The significant increase in drought episodes, as well as erosion, esp. on the banks of the Danube and along the Black Sea was highlighted at the top of the problems in the field of environment and risk by stakeholders, in consultations during the programme preparation phase.

Taking into account the challenges faced by the cross-border area, the Programme will support actions related to the following fields (non-exhaustive list):

- climate change adaptation and mitigation actions
- risk prevention and management of natural and hazardous events (e.g. flood, fires, droughts, erosion, earthquakes and landslides) and risks linked to human activities
- promoting disaster resilience

Types of actions (*non-exhaustive list*):

The actions related to disaster risk prevention and resilience will be implemented through strategic projects jointly developed by public authorities together with other relevant stakeholders on both sides of the border, taking into account ecosystem-based approaches. The disaster risk prevention and resilience taking into account ecosystem-based approaches actions will focus on:

- Improving risk prevention and intervention capacity in the RO-BG CBC region, through the development of joint operational centers, intervention plans and training curricula, in order to develop disaster resilience.
- Improving cross-border coordination, knowledge and capability to adapt water management in the RO-BG CBC region to climate change and to the associated risks (floods, fires, hydrological droughts, pollution).

The types of actions related to risk prevention and resilience are subject of further scrutiny following the development of the strategic projects by the partners.

Types of actions related to climate change (*non-exhaustive list*):

- Raising awareness, building networks of communities and stakeholders and implementing educational activities on the negative effect of the climate change, especially among the local communities, tourists and forest owners;
- Developing methods and tools to improve the capacity of relevant stakeholders in the prevention and mitigation of climate change impact (e.g. designing and implementation of action plans, methodologies, policies, tools etc.) and to exchange knowledge and good practices related to help adaptation planning and decision-making on climate change related issues;
- Identifying, assessment and reducing of the negative implications of climate change on socio-economic activities in the area (e.g. development and implementation of joint strategies, tools, plans, solutions , joint support activity);
- Developing methods and tools to help adaptation planning and decision-making on climate change adaptation measures;
- Reforestation, conservation and forest protection measures, including implementing community-based forest monitoring systems related to climate change;
- Preventing and reversing desertification through integrated management of land and water (e.g. protecting the vegetative cover, planting trees, establishing seed banks, enriching the soil with nutrients, reintroducing selected species) in order to adapt to climate change;
- Development of flood defence structures and addressing all aspects of flood management focusing on limiting the climate change impact, including flood forecasts and early warning systems such as bridge and rail track improvements, improvement of dam facilities, building/consolidating river banks, building green "buffer areas" in urban areas to allow drainage, mobilizing cross-border stakeholders by:
 - o standardising the procedures of climate change adaptation;
 - o collaborating on developing local adaptation / mitigation plans.

The types of actions related to climate change will be implemented through targeted/regular calls for projects.

Projects should be jointly developed by the competent public authorities, other relevant stakeholders and actors on both sides of the border and should be in line with the respective national, regional and local strategic documents. In order to ensure higher added value and quality of the financed operations, competent Romanian and Bulgarian institutions/bodies will be actively involved in the preparation of the call for proposals guidelines and strongly recommended in the project selection process. In addition, in line with the Bulgarian national legislation, the Bulgarian applicants shall have to receive a letter of support from the respective national/regional competent body/ies before submitting their project proposal.

Projects will have to demonstrate relevance for the cross-border area and contribution to national and EU strategic documents. The projects should be in the benefit of the entire area of the Programme and refer to the Green Deal objectives, in respect to protecting ecosystems, anticipating the adverse effects of climate change and taking appropriate action to prevent or minimise the damages.

This approach is complementary to national strategies and operational programmes in the two countries, supporting projects of national importance.

The planned actions will contribute to EUSDR Environmental Risks Priority Area (PA5) by supporting efforts to mitigate effects of draughts (Target 1), achieve significant reductions of flood risk events (Target 2), improve knowledge and information sharing on accident hazard spots (Target 3) and support the assessment of disaster risks in the Danube Region, encouraging actions to promote disaster resilience, preparedness and response activities (Target 4). They also support EUSDR Priority Area 10 (PA 10) by supporting capacity building actions, information exchange and coordination among the relevant stakeholders across the border.

2.2.1.2. Indicators

Table 2: Output indicators - to be updated

Priority	Specific objective	ID	Indicator	MU	Milestone (2024)	Final target (2029)
A greener region	iv) promoting climate change adaptation and disaster risk prevention, resilience, taking into account eco-system based approaches	RCO 84	Pilot actions developed jointly and implemented in projects	Pilot action		
A greener region	iv) promoting climate change adaptation and disaster risk prevention, resilience, taking into account eco-system based approaches	RCO 87	Organisations cooperating across borders	Organisations		
A greener region	iv) promoting climate change adaptation and disaster risk prevention, resilience, taking into account eco-system based approaches	PSO1 (Programme specific output indicator)	Investments in new or upgraded disaster monitoring, preparedness, warning and response systems against all risks	Euro		

Table 3: Result indicators

Priority	Specific objective	ID	Indicator	MU	Baseline	Ref year	Final target (2029)	Source of data	Comments
A greener region	iv) promoting climate change adaptation and disaster risk prevention, resilience, taking into account eco-system based approaches	RCR 84	Organisations cooperating across borders 6-12 months after project completion	Number	0	2021		MA monitoring system (project reports)	
A greener region	iv) promoting climate change adaptation and disaster risk prevention, resilience, taking into account eco-system based approaches	RCR 104	Solutions taken up or up-scaled by organisations	Solution	0	2021		MA monitoring system (project reports)	
A greener region	iv) promoting climate change adaptation and disaster risk prevention, resilience, taking into account eco-system based approaches	PSR01 (Programme specific result indicator)	Population benefiting from protection measures against all risks	Population	0	2021		MA monitoring system (project reports)	As a result indicator for PSO1

2.2.1.3. The main target groups

Reference: Article 17(4)(e)(iii), Article 17(9)(c)(iv)

Target groups are defined as individuals and/or organisations benefiting from the results of projects funded by the programme.

- Organizations in the public sector, policy makers and planners and organisations impacted by climate change adaptation, risk prevention and disaster resilience.
- Population of the cross-border area - people and communities will be more protected from the negative effects of climate change and the risks it entails; they will also be better informed and educated in relation to climate change adaptation measures and the risks and mitigation.
- Scientists and researchers;
- Environmental educators and environmental organisations.

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

Reference: Article 17(4)(e)(iv)

Not applicable

2.2.1.5. Planned use of financial instruments

Reference: Article 17(4)(e)(v)

Not applicable

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

Reference: Article 17(4)(e)(vi), Article 17(9)(c)(v)

Table 4: Dimension 1 - intervention field

Priority no	Fund	Specific objective	Code	Amount (EUR)
A greener region	ERDF	iv) promoting climate change adaptation and disaster risk prevention, resilience, taking into account eco-system based approaches	058 Adaptation to climate change measures and prevention and management of climate related risks: floods and landslides (including awareness raising, civil protection and disaster management systems, infrastructures and ecosystem based approaches)	
A greener region	ERDF	iv) promoting climate change adaptation and disaster risk prevention, resilience, taking into account eco-system based approaches	059 Adaptation to climate change measures and prevention and management of climate related risks: fires (including awareness raising, civil protection and disaster management systems, infrastructures and ecosystem based approaches)	
A greener region	ERDF	iv) promoting climate change adaptation and disaster risk prevention, resilience, taking into account eco-system based approaches	060 Adaptation to climate change measures and prevention and management of climate related risks: others, e.g. storms and drought (including awareness raising, civil protection and	

			disaster management systems, infrastructures and ecosystem based approaches)	
A greener region	ERDF	iv) promoting climate change adaptation and disaster risk prevention, resilience, taking into account eco-system based approaches	061 Risk prevention and management of non-climate related natural risks (i.e. earthquakes) and risks linked to human activities (e.g. technological accidents), including awareness raising, civil protection and disaster management systems, infrastructures and ecosystem based approaches	

Table 5: Dimension 2 - form of financing

Priority no	Fund	Specific objective	Code	Amount (EUR)
A greener region	ERDF	iv) promoting climate change adaptation and disaster risk prevention, resilience, taking into account eco-system based approaches	01 Grant	

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

Priority No	Fund	Specific objective	Code	Amount (EUR)
A greener region	ERDF	iv) promoting climate change adaptation and disaster risk prevention, resilience, taking into account eco-system based approaches	48 No territorial targeting	

2.2.2. Specific objective: 2(vii) Enhancing protection and preservation of nature, biodiversity and green infrastructure, including in urban areas, and reducing all forms of pollution

2.2.2.1. Related types of action and their expected contribution to those specific objectives and to macro-regional strategies and sea-basis strategies, where appropriate

The region has rich biodiversity, particularly along and around the River Danube. The area has numerous natural protected areas, like Natura 2000 and Ramsar sites, on both sides of the border. Both countries have joint responsibility for preserving certain species (such as the Danube sturgeon¹⁷) and share similar challenges in protecting the unique Danube ecosystem, according to Danube River Protection Convention. Protected areas are affected by illegal logging and hunting, tourism and constructions activities.

Waste management is one important challenge in the cross-border area, despite formal progress due to the adoption of the national waste management plans affecting air, soil and water quality.

Unsustainable agricultural activities cause environmental degradation, including biodiversity loss, irrigation problems, soil pollution and degradation and waste. According to the United Nations Environment Programme's 2021, agriculture is both a driver and an industry under threat from environmental degradation (Making Peace with Nature Report, 2021¹⁸).

Human dwellings or activities such as river damming and transport have led to a high level of fragmentation of wildlife habitats, both along the banks of the Danube and on the land border between Romania and Bulgaria. However, numerous challenges prevent effectively addressing the environmental connectivity in the area, including: research and knowledge gaps, cooperation and communication gaps, institutional gaps etc. ([Ecological Connectivity in the Danube Region](#), 2018).

As highlighted in the Territorial Analysis, air quality in Bulgaria and Romania is affected mainly by the burning of solid fuels in the domestic sector, pollution from road transport and food production, with higher levels of air pollution in urban areas. Insufficient monitoring infrastructure prevent comprehensive tracking of air quality and effective management solutions.

Equipment and infrastructure are insufficient for the water supply and wastewater systems, as well. Wastewater from households and economic activities represents a major pressure on the aquatic environment, due to the loads of organic matter and nutrients, as well as hazardous substances. These lead to the pollution of surface and groundwater (organic, nutrient, hazardous substances) hydro-morphological alterations (interruption of river and habitat continuity, disconnection of adjacent floodplains/ wetlands, hydrological alteration).

Considering the challenges affecting the cross-border area, the Programme could support actions related to the following fields (non-exhaustive list):

- reducing environment pollution;
- supporting the development of green infrastructures.
- enhancing biodiversity conservation, recovery and sustainable use and protection of natural heritage, including Natura 2000 and RAMSAR sites.

¹⁷ Sturgeon 2020. A program for the protection and rehabilitation of Danube sturgeons.

<https://www.icpdr.org/main/sites/default/files/nodes/documents/sturgeon2020-final.pdf>

¹⁸ [MPN.pdf \(unep.org\)](#)

Measures addressing green infrastructure and reduction of all forms of pollution will be considered a higher priority among the rest of the activities under Specific objective 2(vii).

Examples of types of actions (non-exhaustive list):

- Promoting, facilitating and encouraging citizens engagement in protecting biodiversity, including its conservation and sustainable use;
- Data collection and information sharing in respect to biodiversity between the two sides of the border;
- Evaluation, enhancement and promotion of ecosystem services on local and regional level;
- Sharing good practices and implementing eco-friendly and innovative solutions that address invasive alien species and strengthen sustainable environment management practices (e.g. pollinator-friendly management, management of water bodies, forests etc.)
- Supporting the establishment of seed banks, restocking of soil organic matter and organisms that promote higher plant establishment and growth, and reintroduction of selected species.
- Protecting nature and biodiversity located near settlements by creating new access passages/green infrastructure, etc.;
- Promoting and using of eco-friendly building materials and services, for example through developing guidelines, promoting of best practices, adopting green principles in public procedures, promoting the ecological urbanism principle etc.);
- Raising awareness of the benefits of green spaces, including in urban areas, encouraging local actions for greener settlements and rehabilitation of brownfields;
- Developing green architecture to increase roofing and facade greening, support gardening, promoting green eco-friendly solutions for replacing pesticides and herbicides in urban areas etc.;
- Developing urban and peri-urban green areas, including connections between green spaces (urban parks, green sport facilities, forests, riverbank greens);
- Improving pollution control by supporting investments in monitoring and data collection on air, soil and water pollution, particularly in urban areas, including through setting up tools for measuring the air, soil and water quality and providing real-time data (e.g. networks of sensors and applications and platforms to allow reporting by the public);
- Promoting effective waste management thorough: waste separation and recycling; awareness raising on sustainable waste management;
- Supporting water and land management through green solutions (for example: swales, creek restoration and nature scaping, urban drainage systems, naturalized stormwater pond, etc.).

All projects will have to demonstrate relevance for the cross-border area, and contribute to national and EU strategic documents, especially the EU Biodiversity Strategy for 2030 and the EU Nature Restoration Plan¹⁹. The projects should be in the benefit of the entire area of the Programme and should focus also on the Green Deal objectives in respect to supporting the preservation of biodiversity, safeguarding protected areas and promoting green urban spaces.

This approach will be implemented through targeted/regular calls for proposals and is complementary to national strategies and the mainstream operational programs in the two countries.

¹⁹ [EUR-Lex - 52020DC0380 - EN - EUR-Lex \(europa.eu\)](https://eur-lex.europa.eu/eli/reg/2020/2253/oj)

Projects should be jointly developed by the competent public authorities and other relevant stakeholders and actors on both sides of the border, and should be in line with the respective national and, regional and local strategic documents. In order to ensure the demarcation and complementarity with other environmental programmes and projects, as well as to guarantee higher added value and quality of the financed operations, competent Romanian and Bulgarian institutions/bodies will be actively involved in the preparation of the call for proposals guidelines and strongly recommended in the project selection process. In addition, in line with the Bulgarian national legislation, the Bulgarian applicants shall have to receive a letter of support from the respective national/regional competent body/ies before submitting their project proposal.

The planned actions will contribute to EUSDR Priority Area “To preserve biodiversity, landscapes and the quality of air and soils” (PA6), particularly by preventing the deterioration of species and habitats. They also support EUSDR Priority Area 10 (PA 10) by supporting capacity building actions, information exchange and coordination among the relevant stakeholders across the border.

2.2.2.2. Indicators

Table 2: Output indicators - to be updated

Priority	Specific objective	ID	Indicator	MU	Milestone (2024)	Final target (2029)
A greener region	vii) Enhancing biodiversity, green infrastructure in the urban environment, and reducing pollution	RCO 84	Pilot actions developed jointly and implemented in projects	Pilot action		
A greener region	vii) Enhancing biodiversity, green infrastructure in the urban environment, and reducing pollution	RCO 87	Organisations cooperating across borders	Organisations		

Table 3: Result indicators - to be updated

Priority	Specific objective	ID	Indicator	MU	Baseline	Ref year	Final target (2029)	Source of data	Comments
A greener region	vii) Enhancing biodiversity, green infrastructure in the urban environment, and reducing pollution	RCR 84	Organisations cooperating across borders 6-12 months after project completion	Number	0	2021		MA monitoring system (project reports)	
A greener region	vii) Enhancing biodiversity, green infrastructure in the urban environment, and reducing pollution	RCR104	Solutions taken up or up-scaled by organisations	Solution	0	2021		MA monitoring system (project reports)	

2.2.2.3. The main target groups

Reference: Article 17(4)(e)(iii), Article 17(9)(c)(iv)

Target groups are defined as individuals and/or organisations benefiting from the activities carried out with the support of the programme and from the results of these activities. Target groups are not necessarily involved directly in the operation. They include:

- Public sector institutions and local authorities - policy makers and planners, including local authorities are at the core of the supported interventions, given their mandate and ability to promote and implement activities in the field of protection and preservation of nature, biodiversity and green infrastructure.
- NGOs with relevant activities will also be targeted, given their ability and power to influence both the policy agenda and to mobilize civic engagement.
- University and academia in the relevant sectors will be targeted, given their role in generating knowledge and expertise. Support will enable them to share their knowledge, contribute to improving policy making, extending networks and also improve the delivery of their own activity by access to data and practice on the ground.
- Population of the cross-border area - people and communities will be better informed and educated in relation to protecting the environment and adopting greener practices and lifestyles.
- Local businesses will also be targeted by the projects, enabling them to adopt safer and more sustainable practices and production cycles.

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

Reference: Article 17(4)(e)(iv)

Not applicable

2.2.2.5. Planned use of financial instruments

Reference: Article 17(4)(e)(v)

Not applicable

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

Reference: Article 17(4)(e)(vi), Article 17(9)(c)(v)

Table 4: Dimension 1 - intervention field - to be updated

Priority no	Fund	Specific objective	Code	Amount (EUR)
A greener region	ERDF	vii) Enhancing biodiversity, green infrastructure in the urban environment, and reducing pollution	077 Air quality and noise reduction measures	
A greener region	ERDF	vii) Enhancing biodiversity, green infrastructure in the urban environment, and reducing pollution	078 Protection, restoration and sustainable use of Natura 2000 sites	
A greener region	ERDF	vii) Enhancing biodiversity, green infrastructure in the urban environment, and reducing pollution	079 Nature and biodiversity protection, natural heritage and resources, green and blue infrastructure	
A greener region	ERDF	vii) Enhancing biodiversity, green infrastructure in the urban environment, and reducing pollution	080 Other measures to reduce greenhouse gas emissions in the area of preservation and restoration of natural areas with high potential for carbon absorption and storage, e.g. by rewetting	

			of moorlands, the capture of landfill gas	
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Table 5: Dimension 2 - form of financing

Priority no	Fund	Specific objective	Code	Amount (EUR)
A greener region	ERDF	vii) Enhancing biodiversity, green infrastructure in the urban environment, and reducing pollution	01 Grant	

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

Priority No	Fund	Specific objective	Code	Amount (EUR)
A greener region	ERDF	vii) Enhancing biodiversity, green infrastructure in the urban environment, and reducing pollution	48 Other outside PO5: No territorial targeting	

2.3. Priority 3: An educated region

2.3.1. Specific objective: 4.2. Improving equal access to inclusive and quality services in education, training and lifelong learning through developing accessible infrastructure, including by fostering resilience for distance and on-line education and training (contribution to SO 4.5 ESF+)

2.3.1.1. *Related types of action, and their expected contribution to those specific objectives and to macro-regional strategies and sea-basis strategies, where appropriate*

Education outcomes show a relatively poor performance, on both sides of the border well below the EU average (both on basic and higher education as well as lifelong learning). As a result, the region has a much higher need rate than average level of young people neither in employment nor in education or training (NEETs).

Also, the illiteracy rate is worrying and bilingualism 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 neighboring language. Lifelong learning (LLL) is very low in both countries. In 2017, 38.5% out of the European citizens were students. In the same year, in the Romania-Bulgaria cross-border area, there were only 2.11% persons enrolled in tertiary education. Moreover, in order to be better equipped for smart specialization, industrial transition and entrepreneurship, more investments are needed in employees' upskilling and mobility, in connection to the market demands.

Collaboration is limited between the key stakeholders in the sector at national and local level and linkages between the education system and the business sector are weak, further reducing the opportunities for improving the quality of the education and training services and for increasing employment opportunities. The situation is similar on both sides of the border.

The following types of actions could be supported (non-exhaustive list):

- Investments in infrastructure and educational facilities (e.g. learning spaces such as classrooms, labs, libraries, workshops, gyms, outdoor learning spaces but also other facilities, such as restrooms, lockers, teachers' offices, cafeterias, dorms) for all education levels, including technical and vocational training and LLL etc.; special attention will be given to ensuring accessibility for persons with disabilities.

- Investments in ensuring proper endowment for learning facilities with focus on digitalization: equipment, tools, etc., especially those that support the development of practical and/or digital skills and remote learning, such as computers, videoconferencing/distance education equipment VR learning etc.
- Development of extensive and structured language-learning activities, as a vector for building trust across the border, for creating the basis for future exchanges and also an employment-boosting factor;
- Development of joint education and training schemes in areas where accessibility is not a hindrance or using digitised learning tools and methods.
- Development of cross-border internship or placements and student exchange programmes for young graduates/students.
- Development of partnerships between secondary and higher education establishments and businesses, in order to improve the market orientation and the quality aspect of education and offer young students the possibility to train and/or study on the other side of the border. Long-term exchanges are particularly envisaged.
- Development of partnerships between education and training institutions and stakeholders, at all education levels (early to tertiary), to support mutual learning and exchange of practices between teachers and trainers on both sides of the border.
- Development of joint initiatives supporting adult education and learning (LLL), including facilitating learning mobility.
- Development of joint initiatives and actions to support access to quality inclusive education and training, including LLL, to vulnerable or marginalized groups, including disabled persons, SEN ('Special educational needs' is a legal definition and refers to children with learning problems or disabilities that make it harder for them to learn than most children the same age), Roma ethnic group etc.
- Measures for developing highly technical skills and competences.

Applying small project fund, as a possible instrument to support projects of limited financial volume, shall be analysed by the programme structures during the implementation stage, depending on the programme evolution.

The supported actions will contribute to EUSDR Priority 9, particularly *Action 6 Relevant and High-Quality Knowledge, Skills and Competences* and *Action 7. Lifelong Learning and Learning Mobility* by supporting mobility of learners and teachers as well as partnerships among schools and educational institutions, reducing low achievement in basic skills, covering language, literacy, mathematics, science and digital literacy, strengthening transversal and key competences, in particular entrepreneurship and language competences, addressing the development of digital competences, including media literacy, at all levels of learning.

2.3.1.2. Indicators

Table 2: Output indicators - to be updated

Priority	Specific objective	ID	Indicator	MU	Milestone (2024)	Final target (2029)
2. An educated region	4(2). Improving equal access to inclusive and quality services in education, training and lifelong learning through developing accessible infrastructure, including by fostering resilience for distance and on-line education and training	RC085	Participations in joint training schemes	Number		

2. An educated region	4(2). Improving equal access to inclusive and quality services in education, training and lifelong learning through developing accessible infrastructure, including by fostering resilience for distance and on-line education and training	RCO87	Organisations cooperating across borders	Number				
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Table 3: Result indicators - to be updated

Priority	Specific objective	ID	Indicator	MU	Baseline	Reference year	Final target (2029)	Source of data	Comments
2. An educated region	4(2). Improving equal access to inclusive and quality services in education, training and lifelong learning through developing accessible infrastructure, including by fostering resilience for distance and on-line education and training	RCR81	Completion of joint training schemes	Participants				MA monitoring system (project reports)	
2. An educated region	4(2). Improving equal access to inclusive and quality services in education, training and lifelong learning through developing accessible infrastructure, including by fostering resilience for distance and on-line education and training	RCR84	Organisations cooperating across borders after project completion	Number				MA monitoring system (project reports)	

2.3.1.3. The main target groups

Reference: Article 17(4)(e)(iii), Article 17(9)(c)(iv)

<p>The target groups envisaged by this priority are:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Children enrolled in preschool education - Pupils, students in all education levels - Teachers, trainers, managers and auxiliary staff of education and training institutions - Employees, particularly young people - SMEs
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2.3.1.4. Indication of the specific territories targeted, including the planned use of ITI, CLLD or other territorial tools

Reference: Article 17(4)(e)(iv)

37 Other PO5 territorial: Other types of territories targeted

2.3.1.5. Planned use of financial instruments

Reference: Article 17(4)(e)(v)

Not applicable

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

Reference: Article 17(4)(e)(vi), Article 17(9)(c)(v)

Table 4: Dimension 1 - intervention field

Priority no	Fund	Specific objective	Code	Amount (EUR)
An educated region	ERDF	4(2). Improving equal access to inclusive and quality services in education, training and lifelong learning through developing accessible infrastructure, including by fostering resilience for distance and on-line education and training	121 Infrastructure for early childhood education and care	
An educated region	ERDF	4(2). Improving equal access to inclusive and quality services in education, training and lifelong learning through developing accessible infrastructure, including by fostering resilience for distance and on-line education and training	122 Infrastructure for primary and secondary education	
An educated region	ERDF	4(2). Improving equal access to inclusive and quality services in education, training and lifelong learning through developing accessible infrastructure, including by fostering resilience for distance and on-line education and training	123 Infrastructure for tertiary education	
An educated region	ERDF	4(2). Improving equal access to inclusive and quality services in education, training and lifelong learning through developing accessible infrastructure, including by fostering resilience for distance and on-line education and training	124 Infrastructure for vocational education and training and adult learning	
An educated region	ERDF	4(2). Improving equal access to inclusive and quality services in education, training and lifelong learning through developing accessible infrastructure, including by fostering resilience for distance and on-line education and training	148 Support for early childhood education and care (excluding infrastructure)	

An educated region	ERDF	4(2). Improving equal access to inclusive and quality services in education, training and lifelong learning through developing accessible infrastructure, including by fostering resilience for distance and on-line education and training	149 Support for primary to secondary education (excluding infrastructure)	
An educated region	ERDF	4(2). Improving equal access to inclusive and quality services in education, training and lifelong learning through developing accessible infrastructure, including by fostering resilience for distance and on-line education and training	150 Support for tertiary education (excluding infrastructure)	
An educated region	ERDF	4(2). Improving equal access to inclusive and quality services in education, training and lifelong learning through developing accessible infrastructure, including by fostering resilience for distance and on-line education and training	151 Support for adult education (excluding infrastructure)	

Table 5: Dimension 2 - form of financing

Priority no	Fund	Specific objective	Code	Amount (EUR)
An educated region	ERDF	4(2). Improving equal access to inclusive and quality services in education, training and lifelong learning through developing accessible infrastructure, including by fostering resilience for distance and on-line education and training	01 Grant	

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

Priority No	Fund	Specific objective	Code	Amount (EUR)
An educated region	ERDF	4(2). Improving equal access to inclusive and quality services in education, training and lifelong learning through developing accessible infrastructure, including by fostering resilience for distance and on-line education and training	37. Other PO5 territorial: Other types of territories targeted	

2.4. Priority 4: An integrated region

2.4.1. Specific objective: 5.2 Fostering the integrated and inclusive social, economic and environmental local development, culture, natural heritage, sustainable tourism and security, in areas other than urban areas.

2.4.1.1. Related types of action, and their expected contribution to those specific objectives and to macro-regional strategies and sea-basis strategies, where appropriate

An integrated territorial development strategy will be developed by the relevant stakeholders from the area not later than 6 months from the programme adoption by EC.

As mentioned in the previous chapters, apart from several integrated urban nodes (such as Ruse-Giurgiu) the territory is quite heterogeneous in terms of both challenges and level of development. In order to reflect and capture the integrated character of the strategy the **Eurovelo 6 cycling route will serve as a linking element, bringing coherence and a single goal: development of the border area by multiple-sector interventions** (development of the necessary infrastructure and auxiliary facilities, safety related measures, accommodation, food, drink and rest areas). **Most of the proposed indicative types of actions can be also implemented by SMEs, including micro-enterprises.** Building the resilience of the local economy is essential for sustainable development of the area and for increasing its competitiveness. Under this PO, operations related to SMEs will be supported, with a dedicated budget and respective indicators.

An integrated multi-thematic and cross-sectoral territorial approach based on the following elements is considered:

1. Developing the Eurovelo 6 cycling route is the backbone of the integrated approach to economic diversification in the programme area. The cycling route has a significant potential to attract new visitors to the entire area. It can also be used to create and consolidate a brand for the region, not only for the seaside or the riverside but as a holistic heritage/ eco-destination.

Interventions concerning both the Core Route - the main EuroVelo Route 6 line - along Danube River, both in Romania and Bulgaria and the Comprehensive network - secondary routes leading inside border area to different cultural and tourist objectives are envisaged.

The following types of actions could be supported (non-exhaustive list):

- Developing the necessary cycling infrastructure, including safety measures, first aid and service points, signalling etc. Priority will be given to projects ensuring connection to tourist attractions - cultural, natural heritage sites and to other means of transport. Connecting infrastructure (incl. reconstruction or modernization of relevant road sections) is also considered, on a limited length, in duly justified cases.
- Ensuring road safety for the sections overlapping the EuroVelo Route, in view of complying with standards related to traffic signalling systems and/or additional development of infrastructure dedicated to cyclists and pedestrians, such as tunnels, bypasses, bridges, overpasses and walkways and protected cycling paths
- Ensuring effective connections with and access to and from other means of transport, including ports and rail stations - adapting infrastructure
- Ensuring availability of public transportation in connection to the cycling route
- Ensuring appropriate services along the EuroVelo Route, such as: accommodation, food, drink and rest and recreation areas, services including Bike Pit-Stops, information, bookable offers, other assistance

- Ensuring communication and information, online and along the route, including mobile/e-applications for cyclists, etc.

Soft measures, such as promotion campaigns for green and non-motorized transport and/or advertising for the EuroVelo 6 route are also envisaged, as supporting measures.

2. Supporting tourism activities, connected sectors and industries

Actions will be financed to complement and expand the existing offer and to increase the attractiveness of the region along the EuroVelo 6 route, by capitalizing on the available natural and cultural heritage and tourism attractions. Small, family and local businesses - SMEs - are also particularly targeted.

Given the character of the region, the development of the following types of tourism are envisaged: cultural and historical, leisure, religious, agro-tourism, eco-tourism, culinary and enotourism, ancestry tourism, sport tourism.

The following types of actions could be supported (non-exhaustive list):

- Investments in economic competitiveness of local businesses including, but not limited to: construction/ modernisation of productive facilities; supply of relevant equipment; adoption of digital technologies etc.
- Set-up of natural sites for economic use: trails / paths, waste disposal, security, signalling, camp sites, other open-air attractions etc.
- Supporting sites with tourist potential: construction, modernization/restoration of castles, fortresses, churches, monasteries, palaces, archaeological sites, private/public museums, libraries, art collections/galleries, exhibitions places, wineries, agro-farms (e.g. lavender farms/fields; roses farms/fields, traditional oil factories, sheepfolds), adventure parks, open air attractions etc.
- Creating common historical, natural and cultural heritage products and services, expanding and improving services, targeting new markets and creating jobs in the cross-border area, including by setting up on-site and on-line shops, especially for traditional / local products (local food, bread, wine, cheese, rose, lavender, honey etc.);
- Support for local and regional actors to valorise potentially valuable touristic objectives /sites / experiences, including by creating sustainable tourism trails, or developing quality labels for excellence in services, promoting and marketing the touristic offer etc. taking advantage of social media trends - such as “insta-tourism”, is also encouraged.
- Training of staff, particularly digital skills.

Projects have to demonstrate the link and contribution to the integrated territorial strategy, as well as to the development of the EuroVelo 6 route and the economic sectors present in the cross-border area. They also need to have a clear cross-border dimension.

The planned actions will contribute to EUSDR by developing the region as an important European tourist destination and establishing the Danube as a transnational cultural and natural travel route. The programme will also aim to develop sustainable forms of tourism and sustainable mobility solutions along the Danube region promoting the development of quality products, infrastructure and innovative forms of tourism and culture by direct support of SMEs and public private partnerships. Through all these objectives, the programme will contribute to the Priority Area 03 (PA 03) of the EUSDR.

2.4.1.2. Indicators

Table 2: Output indicators

Priority	Specific objective	ID	Indicator	MU	Milestone (2024)	Final target (2029)
PO5. An Integrated region	5 (ii) Fostering the integrated and inclusive social, economic and environmental local development, culture, natural heritage, sustainable tourism and security, in areas other than urban areas	RCO58	Dedicated cycling infrastructure supported	Km		
PO5. An Integrated region	5 (ii) Fostering the integrated and inclusive social, economic and environmental local development, culture, natural heritage, sustainable tourism and security, in areas other than urban areas	RCO 77	Number of cultural and tourism sites supported	Number		
PO5. An Integrated region	5 (ii) Fostering the integrated and inclusive social, economic and environmental local development, culture, natural heritage, sustainable tourism and security, in areas other than urban areas	RCO 87	Organisations cooperating across borders (SMEs)	Organisations		

Table 3: Result indicators

Priority	Specific objective	ID	Indicator	MU	Baseline	Ref year	Final target (2029)	Source of data	Comments
PO5. An Integrated region	5 (ii) Fostering the integrated and inclusive social, economic and environmental local development, culture, natural heritage, sustainable tourism and security, in areas other than urban areas	RCR77	Visitors of cultural and tourism sites supported	Persons	0	2021		MA monitoring system (project reports)	
PO5. An Integrated region	5 (ii) Fostering the integrated and inclusive social, economic and environmental local development, culture, natural heritage, sustainable tourism and security, in areas other than urban areas	RCR 64	Annual users of dedicated cycling infrastructure	Users	0	2021		MA monitoring system (project reports)	
PO5. An Integrated region	5 (ii) Fostering the integrated and inclusive social, economic and environmental	RCR84	Organisations cooperating across borders after project	Organisations	0	2021		MA monitoring system (project reports)	

	local development, culture, natural heritage, sustainable tourism and security, in areas other than urban areas.		completion (related to SMEs)						
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2.4.1.3. *The main target groups*

Reference: Article 17(4)(e)(iii), Article 17(9)(c)(iv)

The target groups envisaged by this priority are:

- Tourists, particularly users of the Eurovelo 6 cycling route
- Short-distance commuters, who will have alternatives to public transport or personal cars
- Job-seekers who will find more job opportunities
- Local population, who will benefit from improved cultural amenities and more leisure opportunities
- Local businesses
- Municipalities, which will benefit from the increase in revenues

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

Reference: Article 17(4)(e)(iv)

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2.4.1.5. *Planned use of financial instruments*

Reference: Article 17(4)(e)(v)

<i>Not applicable</i>

2.4.1.6. *Indicative breakdown of the EU programme resources by type of intervention*

Reference: Article 17(4)(e)(vi), Article 17(9)(c)(v)

Table 4: Dimension 1 - intervention field

Priority no	Fund	Specific objective	Code	Amount (EUR)
An Integrated region	ERDF	5 (ii) Fostering the integrated and inclusive social, economic and environmental local development, culture, natural heritage, sustainable	083 Cycling infrastructure	

		tourism and security, in areas other than urban areas		
An Integrated region	ERDF	5 (ii) Fostering the integrated and inclusive social, economic and environmental local development, culture, natural heritage, sustainable tourism and security, in areas other than urban areas	165 Protection, development and promotion of public tourism assets and tourism services	
An Integrated region	ERDF	5 (ii) Fostering the integrated and inclusive social, economic and environmental local development, culture, natural heritage, sustainable tourism and security, in areas other than urban areas	166 Protection, development and promotion of cultural heritage and cultural services	
An Integrated region	ERDF	5 (ii) Fostering the integrated and inclusive social, economic and environmental local development, culture, natural heritage, sustainable tourism and security, in areas other than urban areas	021 SME business development and internationalisation, including productive investments	

Table 5: Dimension 2 - form of financing

Priority no	Fund	Specific objective	Code	Amount (EUR)
An Integrated region	ERDF	5 (ii) Fostering the integrated and inclusive social, economic and environmental local development, culture, natural heritage, sustainable tourism and security, in areas other than urban areas	01 Grant	

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

Priority No	Fund	Specific objective	Code	Amount (EUR)
An Integrated region	ERDF	5 (ii) Fostering the integrated and inclusive social, economic and environmental local development, culture, natural heritage, sustainable tourism and security, in areas other than urban areas	37. Other PO5 territorial: Other types of territories targeted	