

INTERREG VI-A ROMANIA-BULGARIA PROGRAMME

CONSIDERATIONS AND METHODOLOGY FOR THE ASSESSMENT OF THE INTEGRATED TERRITORIAL STRATEGY

Priority: P4 - An integrated region

- 🌐 Specific objective: SO5.2. Fostering the integrated and inclusive social, economic and environmental local development, culture, natural heritage, sustainable tourism and security, in areas other than urban areas

Approved by MC decision no..../2024

April 2024

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APPROVED

Preamble

This document represents the bases for developing the Integrated Territorial Strategy for the Romania-Bulgaria cross-border area (ITS), under the Priority 4 - *An integrated region*, Specific objective RSO5.2. *Fostering the integrated and inclusive social, economic and environmental local development, culture, natural heritage, sustainable tourism and security, in areas other than urban areas*, and includes two parts:



- The first part is dedicated to the Integrated Territorial Strategy for the Romania-Bulgaria cross-border area. This section includes the conditions the ITS needs to fulfil in order to be considered by the Interreg VI-A Romania-Bulgaria Programme.
- The second part is dedicated to the project ideas/concept notes included in the Integrated Territorial Strategy proposed to be to be financed from Interreg VI-A Romania-Bulgaria Programme. The second section includes the main conditions to be fulfilled by a project ideas/concept notes in order to receive funding under Interreg VI-A Romania-Bulgaria Programme.

The project ideas/concept notes accepted for funding under the Programme should be later on developed into full applications (projects), based on the Programme invitation. The invitation shall include details regarding specific conditions that needs to be observed by the project in order to be contracted.

The language of our Programme is English. Thus, all official communication is conducted in English and all documents regarding the project application are produced in English only or translated if issued in other language than English.

General information

The Interreg VI-A Romania-Bulgaria Programme

1.1. General overview



Interreg VI-A Romania-Bulgaria Programme is financed by the European Regional Development Fund (ERDF) under the European Territorial Cooperation goal of EU Cohesion Policy 2021-2027.

Interreg VI-A Romania-Bulgaria Programme area 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.

1.2. Programme Priorities and Specific Objectives

The Interreg VI-A Romania Bulgaria Programme is organized along 4 priorities, out of which Priority 4 - An integrated region (PO5) is dedicated to finance Policy Objective 5 - A Europe closer to citizens by (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.

Policy Objective 5 “A Europe closer to citizens” is implemented through the Strategy for Integrated Territorial Development of the Romania-Bulgaria cross-border area, developed around the EuroVelo6 Route.

The Integrated Territorial Strategy is developed, owned and implemented by the relevant stakeholders from the covered territory, as mentioned by article 29 paragraph 2 of Regulation (EU) 2021/1060. In this regard, a Strategy Board was set-up. The Strategy Board is a partnership structure comprising Romanian and Bulgarian relevant stakeholders from the cross-border region, created with the purpose to elaborate an integrated territorial strategy of the area. Romania and Bulgaria designated the members of the Strategy Board through transparent procedures from among national, regional and local level public institutions, local and regional authorities, NGO’s etc. At the moment, the SB includes 28 members from the both countries (14 organisations from each side of the border) and 2 non-voting members.

The Programme strategy, priorities and specific objectives, as well as the related outputs and results are described in the Interreg Programme (<https://interregviarobg.eu/en/home>).

1.3. Programme bodies

The governance and management of the Programme is shared between different bodies that, in compliance with EU Regulation, are responsible with the Programme management, coordination, supervision and control. These bodies are:

-  Monitoring Committee (MC)
-  Managing Authority (MA)
-  Joint Secretariat (JS)
-  National Authority (NA)
-  Audit Authority (AA) and Group of Auditors (GoA)
-  National Controllers (NC)

The role of each body is detailed in the Project Implementation Manual, available on the Programme website, <https://interregviarobg.eu/en/project-implementation-manual>.

1.4. Joint Electronic Monitoring System (JeMS)

JeMS, the Joint Electronic Monitoring System, is the Programme Monitoring System for the 2021-2027 period. JeMS is developed by the Interact Programme and is used by a large number of the Interreg programmes across Europe.



JeMS is an online system conceived to cover the full project and Programme life-cycle in one monitoring tool that allows to reduce the need for additional paper processes to a minimum. Users can fill in online forms (e.g. application, reporting, assessment etc.) and upload/download files.

JeMS is available on line at <https://jems-robg.mdlpa.ro/> and it can be accessed via standard web browsers like Google Chrome, Microsoft Edge or Mozilla Firefox, etc. For working in JeMS, it is recommended to use a PC or notebook rather than mobile devices.

Details regarding the access and usage of JeMS are provided in the JeMS manual. A helpdesk for technical support specifically dedicated to JeMS can be reached via email at jems.admin@mdlpa.gov.ro.

All the concept notes considered by the Programme shall be developed in JeMS, based on invitation.

If decided by SB, and agreed by the Managing Authority, the calls carried out by SB for identifying the project ideas to be funded under Interreg VI-A Romania-Bulgaria, can be developed in JeMS.

Section 1 - Conditions to be observed by the Integrated Territorial Strategy, in the context of the Programme

1.1. Features of the Integrated Territorial Strategy

To strengthen the integrated territorial development approach, investments in the form of territorial tools, such as integrated territorial investments, community-led local development, or any other territorial tool that supports initiatives designed by the Member State, should be based on territorial and local development strategies. To this end, PO 5 was developed and proposed by the EC, and selected for funding under Interreg VI-A Romania-Bulgaria.

As such, Policy Objective 5 “A Europe closer to citizens” is implemented through a tool designed in line with provisions of Article 28 of Regulation (EU) 2021/1060, Article 28 (c), the namely the Strategy for Integrated Territorial Development of the Romania-Bulgaria cross-border area (ITS), developed around the EuroVelo6 Route.

The main goal of the strategy is to ensure the development of the area by boosting tourism and culture heritage, interlinked with all related socioeconomic fields, such as: tourism and culture infrastructure, environment, human resources and education system, business development, accessibility etc. The backbone of the strategy, integrating all these fields, is the development of the Euro Velo 6 Route.

The Integrated Territorial Strategy is developed, owned and implemented by the relevant stakeholders from the covered territory, as mentioned by article 29 paragraph 2 of Regulation (EU) 2021/1060. In this regard, a Strategy Board was set-up.

One of the main tasks of the SB is to develop the integrated territorial strategy of the area and to select the projects contributing to the strategy’s objectives, namely the list of operations to



be supported by both Interreg VI-A Romania-Bulgaria Programme and/or other financing sources.

Article 29 of Regulation (EU) 2021/1060 sets the elements that a territorial strategy must contain:

- the *geographical area* covered by the strategy
- an *analysis of the development needs and the potential of the area*, including economic, social and environmental interlinkages
- a *description of an integrated approach* to address the identified development needs and the potential of the area
- a *description of the involvement of partners* in accordance with article 8 in the preparation and in the implementation of the strategy
- a *list of operations* to be supported.

1.2. Budget

The financial allocation dedicated by the Programme for the Integrated Territorial Strategy is of **65,000,000 euro**. **Out of the total amount:**

- **56,250,000 euro** are allocated to the development of cycling infrastructure; protection, development and promotion of public tourism assets and tourism services; protection, development and promotion of cultural heritage and cultural services; protection, development and promotion of natural heritage and eco-tourism other than Natura 2000 sites.
- **6,250,000 euro** are allocated to the development of private sector business (SMEs).
- **2,500,000 euro** are allocated to the *Governance Project* developed to support the Strategy Board in implementing the ITS.

1.3. Objectives and Indicators

ITS should contribute to the Programme objectives and indicators, detailed in the programme document¹ and Section 2.

1.4. Submission of ITS to the Programme

Following the endorsement of the Strategy by the Strategy Board, the Monitoring Committee shall appraise the strategy in order to determine whether it is in line with the Programme provisions for Policy Objective 5 and if it complies with the applicable provisions of the European Regulations related to integrated territorial strategies content. Moreover, when assessing the Integrated Territorial Strategy, the Monitoring Committee shall consider the assessment criteria, considering the regulations provisions, including the integrated multi-sectoral approach and the functional delimitation of the targeted territory.

¹ <https://interregviarobg.eu/assets/2022/11/interreg-vi-a-romania-bulgaria-programme-approved-by-ec.pdf>



Thus, in accordance to the Interreg VI-A Romania-Bulgaria Programme, the ITS will be developed by the relevant stakeholders from the area and sent for the approval of the Monitoring Committee not later than 18 months from the IP adoption by EC.

ITS must be submitted to the Programme structures by 30th of May 2024. The ITS, including the initial list of the project ideas² must be submitted by the SB Chair, in electronic format to the Managing Authority in the set deadline, at the robg@mdlpa.gov.ro.

The ITS **must be accompanied** by the SB **decision approving the ITS, including the list of operations (project ideas).**

1.5. Assessment process of the Integrated Territorial Strategy

Before the approval of the ITS at Monitoring Committee level, the Managing Authority, with the support of the National Authority, will assess the Integrated Territorial Strategy. The methodology for assessment is detailed in Annex 1 - Methodology to be used for the assessment of the Integrated Territorial Strategy for the Romania-Bulgaria cross-border area.

An important part of the assessment process of the ITS is dedicated to the assessment of the list of operations annexed to the ITS and proposed for funding under Interreg VI-A Romania-Bulgaria Programme. This aspect is detailed in **Section 2**.

If needed, during the assessment process, Programme structures can submit clarifications request to the Strategy Board.

The Programme structures can make recommendations for improving the quality of the Integrated Territorial Strategy, including in relation to the list of operations.

1.6. Acceptance of the of the Integrated Territorial Strategy by the Monitoring Committee

Following the assessment process of the ITS and of concept notes, a report shall be submitted to the Monitoring Committee for taking a decision. The MC can accept the ITS or reject it. The rejection can related also to individual project notes.

Section 2 - Conditions for the list of concept notes (project ideas) to be invited and funded under the Programme

According to Article 29 of EU Regulation 2021/1060, a territorial strategy may contain a list of operations to be supported. The list of operations included in the Integrated Territorial Strategy will be developed based on calls for projects, designed by the SB.

² In the meaning of this document, concept notes=concept ideas=project ideas



For the time being, in the context of the ITS development and project ideas identification, the first calls launched aims to provide an initial list of projects. Based on the results of these calls, the list of operations proposed for funding under Interreg VI-A Romania-Bulgaria will be set up.

Depending on the results of this approach, projects ideas/projects can be identified also at a later stage, after the development of the ITS, within the Programme framework. In this context, the IP structures will develop and carry out the calls, in coordination with the SB.

The initial list of operations, identified by the SB, will include projects that will ensure the implementation of the ITS, in an integrated approach. To this end, the projects identified must ensure that:

- all projects included in the list are consistent with the measures and investment priorities identified in the ITS
- considering that out of the list, projects to be financed through Interreg VI-A Romania-Bulgaria will be extracted and recommended for funding, the projects proposed to be financed under the Interreg VI-A Romania-Bulgaria Programme will have to be consistent with the types of actions included for Priority 4 (dedicated to PO 5.2)
- according to the Programme, “Projects must demonstrate the link and contribution to the ITS, as well as to the development of the EuroVelo 6 route and the economic sectors present in the CBC area. They also need to have a clear CBC dimension.”

2.1 Conditions set by the Programme for accepting the project ideas included in the ITS

In order for the Programme to consider the project ideas identified during the development process of the ITS and included in a dedicated annex, certain rules must be observed. The observance of these rules will be assessed by the Programme structures, during the assessment process of the ITS, prior to the Monitoring Committee acceptance.

2.1.1. Conditions regarding the partners and the applications

The Programme accepts the following type of partners:

- National, regional and local public bodies, institutions, administrations, agencies, including the bodies governed by public law (which fall under the definition of Article 2(1) of Directive 2014/24/EU on public procurement), county/district councils, local councils/ municipalities active, etc. in the field of cycling, tourism, culture, registered and functioning in the ITS area acting in the
- Chambers of Commerce and Regional Development Agencies functioning in the ITS area and registered in accordance to national law, registered and functioning in the ITS area
- Non-governmental organizations (associations or foundations) in the sense of art. 192, of Regulation (EU, Euratom) 2018/1046³, registered and functioning in the ITS area

³ Grants shall not have the purpose or effect of producing a profit within the framework of the action or the work programme of the beneficiary ('no-profit principle').



- Offices/ branches of public national/regional authorities and other public bodies active on the themes of the priority in the programme area (registered and functioning in the ITS area). If those offices/ branches which are functioning in the ITS area are not legal bodies, the project idea should be submitted by their Headquarters indicating the office/ branch responsible for implementing the activities).

! SMEs (including micro-enterprises) are eligible only under a dedicated call designed and launched by the Programme. This call will be organized separately for the exercise carried out by the SB. As such, no project ideas including SMEs as partners can be accepted for funding by the Programme, under this exercise.

In order to be **accepted by the Programme, these partners must fulfil the following criteria:**

- Be a Romanian or Bulgarian entity, legally established according to the national legislation of the state on whose territory they are located
- Prove their competence in the field and the activities envisaged under the project through ownership acts, legal acts/strategies/action plans references, etc.
- Not be in any of the situations mentioned under Art. 136 of REGULATION (EU, Euratom) 2018/1046
- Have their headquarters in the ITS area
- Are Romanian or Bulgarian national public authorities, agencies, or other types of organizations whose area of competence, established by legal acts, extends to the ITS area.
- In case of infrastructure envisaged, the applicants should be the owners of the given territory/building subject of that investment activities. For Bulgarian partners, in case of infrastructure, the investment activities should be carried out on public property.
- The partnership should include project partners or associated project partners legally responsible for the field of interventions/policy domain addressed by the project and who will be the user of the project outputs.

! The applicants that are in any of the situations mentioned under Art. 136 of REGULATION (EU, Euratom) 2018/1046 shall not be considered by the programme.

Partners, outside the ITS area, but from the Programme area or Romania and Bulgaria, can also participate in projects, but only in exceptional cases, namely if they:

- Are competent in their scope of action for certain parts of the eligible area (e.g. ministries, national agencies, research institutes, organizations etc.);
- Carry out activities that are beneficial for the ITS area ;
- Their participation must bring clear added value and expertise to the implementation of a project and has to be beneficial for the ITS area.
- They cannot take the Lead Partner role.

In exceptional cases, if SB decides so, partners outside the Programme area can be participate in the projects, in the following conditions:



- ⦿ Are competent in their scope of action for certain parts of the eligible area (e.g. ministries, national agencies, research institutes, organizations etc.);
- ⦿ Carry out activities only in the ITS area, that are beneficial for the ITS area;
- ⦿ Their participation must bring clear benefits and expertise to the implementation of a project and has to be beneficial for the ITS area.
- ⦿ They cannot take the Lead Partner role.

! The Programme does not encourage a partnership including partners outside the ITS area, however, if the SB decides so, the conditions mentioned above should be observed by these partners.

Associated partners

The partners involved in the project **without financially** contribution are considered as associated partners. Associated partners are key stakeholders of the project, whose involvement can improve the planning and development of project outputs and results. They can help to sustain and mainstream project results generate multiplier and leverage effects. Information on the involvement of associated partners should be provided in the relevant sections of the application form.

Partners from third country partners (outside and inside EU) can participate as associated partners but cannot receive ERDF funding from the Interreg VI-A Romania-Bulgaria Programme.

Lead partner principle

In compliance with the “lead partner principle”, each project partnership shall appoint one applicant acting as lead partner, which takes full financial and legal responsibility for the implementation of the entire project. The responsibilities of the lead partner are laid down in detail in the subsidy contract signed with the Managing Authority.

The tasks, responsibilities and the relations between the lead partners and the partners are included in the partnership agreement. The template of the subsidy contract and the partnership agreement are available at the Programme website, under the specific call.

! Political parties are not accepted as partners under the Programme!

Target groups of the project ideas:

- ⦿ Local communities/citizens who will benefit from the new amenities and local development, including jobseekers who will find more job opportunities
- ⦿ Tourists, particularly users of the EuroVelo 6 cycling route
- ⦿ Short-distance commuters, who will have alternatives to public transport or personal cars
- ⦿ Local stakeholders active in the field of tourism, cycling, culture and related fields
- ⦿ Local and regional administrations (local, county/ district, regional)
- ⦿ Etc.



Size and format of the partnership

The Programme **does not encourage an extended partnership**. Ideally, we recommend a partnership of maximum 5 partners.

However, the size of the partnership should reflect the scope of the project and the role of each partner should be clear justified.

The mandatory condition imposed by the Programme in relation to the partnership is:

- at least one partner from each Member State participating the Programme (Romania, Bulgaria) from the ITS area.

The associated partners are not considered for the maximum number of partners included in the partnership.

2.1.2. Conditions regarding the types of actions to be approached by the project ideas

The project ideas proposed by the ITS must be developed based on and in the scope of the indicative types of actions included in the Interreg Programme.

! For all project ideas, it is compulsory that the partners have among its attributions, according with its statute or according to the national legislation, the implementation of the proposed activities or that the applicant has an agreement with the relevant institutions to implement such activities, according with its statute or according to the national legislation.

For Bulgarian partners, in case of infrastructure and works, the investment activities should be carried out on public property, which includes the public and private property of the state/municipality.

Indicative type of actions:

Actions supporting the development of the EuroVelo 6 route and secondary routes:

- Developing the cycling infrastructure and signposting
- Developing the necessary cycling infrastructure - safety measures
- Developing the necessary cycling infrastructure and connected services - first aid and service points, information, rest and recreation areas
- Developing the e-bike rental and charging infrastructure
- Ensuring connection to tourist attractions - cultural, natural heritage sites (physical - signposting, access and through communication and promotion means)
- Ensuring connection to other means of transport (e.g. ports and rail stations)
- Ensuring road safety for the sections overlapping the EuroVelo Route and/or additional development of infrastructure dedicated to cyclists and pedestrians (e.g. tunnels, bypasses, bridges, overpasses and walkways, protected cycling paths etc.)
- Ensuring availability of public transportation in connection to the cycling route



- Communication and information, online and along the route, including mobile/e-applications for cyclists, etc.
- Promotion campaigns for green and non-motorized transport
- Promotion campaigns the EuroVelo 6 route and connected routes

Actions supporting local development, tourism activities, connected sectors and industries:

- Support and promotion of local producers - e.g. wineries, agro-farms (e.g. lavender farms/fields; roses farms/fields, traditional oil factories etc.)
- Digitalisation of local business and tourism services
- Training of staff, particularly digital skills
- Set-up of natural sites for economic use: trails / paths, signalling, camping sites, open-air attractions, adventure parks, amenities etc.
- Construction, modernization/ restauration of built heritage/ cultural objectives: castles, fortresses, churches, monasteries, palaces, archaeological sites, museums, libraries, galleries etc.
- Joint cultural and event agenda and promotion
- Joint communication and promotion of accommodation, food and related services
- Joint promotion of touristic objectives /sites / experiences, including by creating sustainable tourism trails/ routes, developing quality labels for excellence in services, promoting and marketing the touristic offer etc.
- Joint strategies, plans, technical documentations

Projects mixing actions to ensure an integrated approach will be encouraged.

2.1.4. Types of operations

Usually, the Programme defines what types of operations will be financed and the specific conditions in relation to their size and the duration. In this respect, the Programme suggests to the SB to consider the following definitions and features when identifying the concept notes:

Soft operation - is a project that has works/infrastructure/equipment component below 50% of the eligible budget.

Hard operation - is a project that has works/infrastructure/equipment component equal or more than 50% of the total project eligible budget.



The maximum duration of operations limitations should be in line with requirements set below. However, a concept note cannot propose a duration of implementation beyond 30 June 2029.

The budgetary size proposed by the Programme is indicative, however, the Strategy Board is responsible to set limits in such manner to ensure the reaching of the Programme indicators in the allocated budget.



Type of operation	Project duration - mandatory to be observed by the concept notes	Total financial support from the programme (including ERDF, and the national co-financing from the state budget and corresponding own contribution) - suggestion to be considered by the concept notes.	Features
Soft operation	not exceeding 18 months from the starting date of the project	between 300,001 Euro and 750 000 Euro	Has works/infrastructure/equipment component below 50% of the eligible budget
Hard operation	not exceeding 36 months from the starting date of the project	between 500,000 Euro and 3 500 000 Euro	Has infrastructure/works/equipment component equal or more than 50% of the total project eligible budget

2.1.3. Project outputs and results

The achievement of the ITS objectives will be measured based on a set of indicators. Each concept note must contribute to at least one objective and one corresponding indicator of the ITS.

The concept notes proposed must ensure the reaching of the Programme indicators, as set in the table below:

Indicator	Measurement unit	Target 2024	Target 2029	Indicator	Measurement unit	Target 2029
Output				Result		
RC076 Integrated projects for territorial development	projects	0	31	RCR84 Organisations cooperating across borders after project completion	organisations	45
RC087 Organisations cooperating across borders	organisations	0	60			



RCO 58 Number of cultural and tourism sites supported	cultural and tourism sites	0	18	RCR77 Visitors of cultural and tourism sites supported	visitors/year	32,400
RCO58 Dedicated cycling infrastructure supported	km	0	200	RCR64 Annual users of dedicated cycling infrastructure	users/year	5,000

! If a concept note for a project does not contribute to the SO output and result indicators, it will not be considered for funding under Interreg VI-A Romania-Bulgaria.

The pair of indicators RCO87 *Organisations cooperating across borders* and RCR84 *Organisations cooperating across borders after project completion* cannot be used as a standalone pair. If this pair of indicators is chosen, at least another pair of indicators must be selected (RCO58-RCR77 and/or RCO58-RCR64). If this rule is not observed, the concept note not be considered for funding Interreg VI-A Romania-Bulgaria.

The output indicator RCO76 *Integrated projects for territorial development* shall be considered exclusively by the *Governance project*. No other concept note should include this indicator.

2.1.4. Specific project features

Considering the specificity of the ITS, promoting an integrated approach on the development of the Romania-Bulgaria cross-border area, each project must:

- ④ Have an integrated approach and territorial impact
- ④ Contribute to the ITS indicators
- ④ Contribute to the Programme indicators
- ④ Have a cross-border character and impact
- ④ Integrate, as much as possible the core values of the New European Bauhaus (sustainability, aesthetics and inclusion)
- ④ Promote solutions that are friendly with the environment and comply with the Do no significant Harm Principle
- ④ The projects submitted under Priority 4 should promote integrated territorial development
- ④ Promote the equal opportunities, transparency and green procurement
- ④ Partners must cooperate in the development and implementation of projects, as well as in the staffing or financing, or both, thereof.



- ! Any concept note that does not have a cross-border character and impact and does not observe the cooperation criteria shall not be considered for funding under Interreg VI-A Romania-Bulgaria Programme.

Cooperation Criteria

Partners shall cooperate in the development and implementation of Interreg operations, as well as in the staffing or financing, or both, thereof. Thus, in order to be eligible, projects must contribute to at least three out of the following four cooperation criteria.

Mandatory cooperation criteria (to all concept notes proposed for funding under Interreg VI-A Romania-Bulgaria):

- ⊕ **Joint development (mandatory)** - means that the project must be designed in common by partners from both sides of the border. This means that project proposals must clearly integrate the ideas, priorities and actions of stakeholders on both sides of the border. The lead partner is the coordinator of this process but should include other partners from the beginning of the development process.
- ⊕ **Joint implementation (mandatory)** - means that activities must be carried out and coordinated among partners on both sides of the border. It is not enough that activities run in parallel. There must be clear content-based links between what is happening on either side of the border and regular contact between the two sides. The lead partner is responsible for ensuring that activities are properly coordinated, that schedules are kept and that the right quality levels are achieved.

And at least one of the following criteria (the projects can chose one or both of these criteria):

- ⊕ **Joint financing (at project decision)** - means that there will be only one contract per project and there must therefore be one joint project budget. The budget should be divided between partners according to the activities carried out. There is also only one project bank account for the EU contribution (held by the Lead Partner) and payments representing EU support are made from the Programme to this account. The lead partner is responsible for administration and distribution of these funds and for reporting on their use. Funding should come from both sides of the border and illustrates the commitment by each partner to the joint project. The distribution of financial resources should reflect tasks and responsibilities of the partners.
- ⊕ **Joint staffing (at project decision)** - means that the project should not duplicate functions on either side of the border. Therefore, regardless of where the person is located, there should be one joint project manager, one joint financial manager etc., (of course more staff may be required for larger projects). These staff will be responsible for project activities on both sides of the border. The lead partner is generally the employer of core project staff.

2.1.5. Budget available for the concept notes

The financial allocation dedicated by the Programme for the Policy Objective 5 is of **65,000,000 euro**.



! At this stage, the list proposed by SB to be funded under Interreg V-A Romania-Bulgaria should include concept notes in the limits of the financial allocation of 56,250,000 euro.

A reserve list, if concept notes are available, may be set. Based on the availability of funds under the Programme, the partners having submitted concept notes, which are part of the reserve list, shall be invited for further developing their project idea into full applications, depending on the availability of financing.

When setting the list of concept notes, the SB should consider, as much as possible the following indicative financial allocation per type of field:



No	Type of field addressed by the concept notes	Indicative total financial allocation available at Programme level/field
1.	cycling infrastructure	22,500,000
2.	protection, development and promotion of public tourism assets and tourism services	16,250,000
3.	protection, development and promotion of cultural heritage and cultural services	11,250,000.00
4.	protection, development and promotion of natural heritage and eco-tourism other than Natura 2000 sites	6,250,000.00
Total		56,250,000

In addition, the list should include also the Governance Project developed to support the Strategy Board in implementing the ITS, with an available allocation of maximum 2,500,000 euro. This amount shall be added to the total amount included in the table above.

For the projects related to the development of private sector, the Programme structure, in cooperation with the SB, shall launch a dedicated call, with a total amount of 6,250,000 euro.

2.1.6. Eligibility of expenditures

When setting the indicative budget of the concept note, the following aspects should be considered by the partners:

-  The starting date of the eligibility of the expenditures is 1st of January 2021.
-  The following types of costs are eligible:



- **Project preparation** (based on lump sum 14,000 euro (total amount) and real costs⁴, if the case)
- **Staff costs** (flat rate, up to 20% of the direct eligible costs of the operation)
- **Travel & Accommodation** (flat rate up to 15 % of the eligible direct staff costs of the operation)
- **Office & administrative costs** (flat rate up to 15 % of the eligible direct staff costs of the operation)
- **Project closure** (lump sum - 6,500 euro, total amount)
- **Real costs:**
 - External expertise and services costs;
 - Equipment costs;
 - Costs for Infrastructure and works.

Details regarding the conditions shall be detailed in the invitation that will be submitted by the Programme to the concept notes considered for funding under the Programme.

For the Governance Project developed to support the Strategy Board in implementing the ITS, specific conditions shall be set in the dedicated invitation.

2.1.7. Horizontal issues

All the operations funded by the Programme must observe the implementation of the horizontal issues set at IP level. In this respect, the operations will have to clearly describe how will comply with the horizontal principles set in the EU regulations and described in the Programme. **The Horizontal issues are detailed and describes in the Programme Implementation Manual.**

In brief, the principles that should be observed in all stages of a concept note/project development refer to:

- fundamental rights⁵ (sustainable development, equal opportunities and non-discrimination and equality between men and women)
- New European Bauhaus⁶
- European Green Deal⁷
- Do no significant Harm⁸

⁴ For example, the costs related to the mandatory technical documents requested by the Programme when developing the project can be reimbursed based on real costs (non-exhaustive list: feasibility study or equivalent technical document, Cost Benefit Analysis, studies and costs for documentation necessary to obtain the necessary endorsements and authorizations, documentation concerning the urban planning plan, impact assessments, location studies/appraisals, including their technical verification etc.).

⁵ In accordance with the Charter of Fundamental Rights of the European Union and in compliance with Article 9 of Regulation (EU) 2021/1060.

⁶ https://europa.eu/new-european-bauhaus/index_en

⁷ https://ec.europa.eu/info/strategy/priorities-2019-2024/european-green-deal_en

⁸ Referring to six environmental objectives as laid down in the EU Taxonomy Regulation, https://ec.europa.eu/info/law/sustainable-finance-taxonomy-regulation-eu-2020-852_en



- 🌱 Green Procurement
- 🌱 Horizontal aspects included in the document “Dare to be Green”, elaborated at Programme level and published on the Programme website <https://interregviarobg.eu/en/project-implementation-manual> must be taken into consideration
- 🌱 The recommendations from the Programme SEA Report⁹

In addition to these, all the operations must describe the contribution to the European Union Strategy for Danube Region (EUSDR)¹⁰ and EU Territorial Agenda 2030 and other relevant strategies/plans/paper for area. Also, UN Sustainable Development Goals¹¹ and the Paris Agreement¹² should be considered.



When developing the concept note, we recommend all partners to consider the horizontal principles set at the level of the Programme, and to plan the activities and the resource in such manner to ensure the compliance with these requirements.

Details regarding this requirements shall be detailed in the invitation that will be submitted by the Programme to partners from the concept notes selected for funding under the Programme.

2.1.8 Communication and branding

When designing your project, for the communication activities, you should observe the mandatory communication rules set in the document “*Project Communication Guidelines (Starter Kit)*”, applicable for all projects funded by Interreg VI-A Romania-Bulgaria Programme. The document may be consulted and downloaded from the Programme website here: <https://interregviarobg.eu/en/project-implementation-manual>.

Please check this document, as mandatory provisions during the project development need to be considered including from budgetary perspective. In addition, other relevant documents that need to be observed during the project implementation are the Visual Identity Manual and the Communication Strategy¹³.

2.2 Assessment, prioritisation and selection methodology

The list of operations will include the prioritised list of project ideas, endorsed by the SB. The Programme will assess the project ideas included on the list of operations against its own criteria.

The assessment, prioritisation and selection process for project ideas aims to obtain a list of priority projects to support the implementation of the ITS and the achievement of the proposed vision and objectives. Those projects should be financially sustainable and feasible to implement in the short and medium term (by 2027-2030). SB should assess, prioritise and select

⁹ <https://interregviarobg.eu/assets/2022/11/environmentalreport-en-pdf.pdf>

¹⁰ <https://danube-region.eu/about/>

¹¹ <https://sdgs.un.org/goals>

¹² <https://unfccc.int/process-and-meetings/the-paris-agreement/the-paris-agreement>

¹³ Visual Identity Manual and the Communication Strategy: <https://interregviarobg.eu/en/implementation-rules>



project ideas to be part of the ITS list of operations based on its own rules and according to the details it sets through the calls it will launch. For further obtaining the financing from the Interreg VI-a Romania-Bulgaria Programme, the assessment, prioritisation and selection process of the SB should comply with several minimum requirements:

- 1. Transparency and equal treatment** - The SB should ensure the transparency and the equal treatment when identifying and selecting the project ideas. As such, the criteria and procedures must be non-discriminatory and transparent, ensure accessibility to persons with disabilities, gender equality and take account of the Charter of Fundamental Rights of the European Union and the principle of sustainable development and of the Union policy on the environment in accordance with Article 11 and Article 191(1) TFEU.
- 2. Assessment:** SB (with the support of assessors/experts) will analyse the submitted project ideas against a clear and prior-defined set of criteria (set in line with the provisions of Art. 22 of Regulation 1059/2021).
- 3. Ranking:** Based on the results of the assessment, i.e. the total score for each project idea, the projects will be ordered from the highest to lowest score, hence **prioritised** for support in implementation.
- 4. Reducing redundancies:** SB may decide to clear the list by eliminating some project ideas by applying criteria such as: geographic distribution, number of similar project ideas in the same geographic area or total value of the budget for certain types of projects. Reducing redundancies should be justified in the SB's selection decision;
- 5. Prioritisation and selection:** Based on the prioritised list, SB will decide on the list of project ideas to be proposed for financing under Interreg VI-A Romania-Bulgaria. It is recommended that only high qualitative project ideas, with highly ranked are proposed for funding under Interreg VI-A Romania-Bulgaria.

It is the responsibility of the Strategy Board to set the standard format for submitting project ideas, so as to collect the needed information for assessing project ideas against the criteria set by the Programme.

Eligibility assessment criteria:

Only projects that answer all eligibility criteria will be allowed to go through the quality assessment!

Qualitative assessment criteria:

All selected project ideas have to provide meaningful contributions to the Strategy, focusing on results. In this context, project generation as an open participative process is the key: PO5 being about projects dedicated to a single joint territory - with people sharing the same feature.

The limited resources allocated to PO5 requires funding to be directed where it is likely to provide highest added value; therefore, it is important to rank the projects in terms of merit to ensure that only the best proposals for funding were considered.

Consequently, the Programme strongly encourages SB to maintain a strong prioritization based on merit and to ensure complementarity of selected project ideas with those of the mainstream



programmes. The project ideas proposed for funding under integrated territorial development should respond to the identified main investment needs, such as:

- ④ Enhancing physical connectivity and mobility both across the North-South and the East-West axes of the border, as a precondition for territorial integration;
- ④ Further advance the place-based/ functional area approach of territorial integration in places where access is less problematic, such as in twin cities and along the Black Sea Coast, by developing common strategies and delivering joint local services.
- ④ 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.
- ④ 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.

To this end, the project ideas identified at the level of Integrated Territorial Strategy should envisage, in an integrated multi-thematic and cross-sectoral territorial approach, to contribute to sustainable development by placing the Eurovelo 6 at the heart of the region's integrated approach to economic diversification. The SO will directly contribute to the SDG 8 - aiming to promote inclusive and sustainable economic growth in the region.

Policy Coherence for Integrated Territorial Development implies the need for alignment and coordination between different policies and sectors to achieve sustainable and holistic development outcomes, given the interdependencies and interactions between various territorial elements.

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

The Programme will promote the durability and financial sustainability of the project results, in line with the EU provisions, and the partners will be encouraged to coordinate the investments on stimulating tourism activities in the area.

The planned actions will contribute to EUSDR by developing the region as an important EU tourist destination by promoting the development of quality products, infrastructure and innovative forms of tourism and culture by direct support of SMEs and public private partnerships. The Programme will contribute to the PA 03 of EUSR.

All operations under the ITS will include, to the extent possible, measures to adapt public infrastructure to the needs of people with disabilities. Additionally, all interventions will



be invited to follow, where the case, the European Quality Principles for EU-funded Interventions with potential impact upon Cultural Heritage¹⁴.

When selecting concept notes, SB should consider to the extent possible the *Transition Pathway for Tourism*¹⁵ and promote the development of the environmental and social sustainability of tourism services.

Taking into account the above information, SB may decide to launch a variable number of calls for project ideas and/or for project proposals. Calls may be organised in different manners:

- open calls (competitive);
- restricted/dedicated calls;
- calls for pilot projects;
- thematic calls.

Calls may have a predefined deadline or may be considered “continuous” calls.

In all situations, SB may decide to get involved and to actively support possible applicants by providing them with guidance and advice, directly or through the Permanent Secretariat, with the purpose of increasing the quality of submitted project ideas/applications, while respecting the transparency principle. As such, SB, with the support of PS may organise public consultations, conferences workshops, ad-hoc working groups, etc. PS may provide written assistance and/or ensure the functioning of an enquiry service opened for all possible applicants. During the assessment, prioritisation and selection process, SB may decide to give applicants a second chance and allow them to re-submit their project idea/application after improving it, based on SB’s recommendations, even during the same call.

SB must promote, prioritize and propose concept ideas that ensure the achievement of the Programme output and result indicators, in the available financial allocation.

After receiving the draft ITS, as part of the assessment process of the Integrated Territorial Strategy, MA and NA will examine the list of operations annexed to the ITS, in accordance with Annex 1 - Methodology to be used for the assessment of the Integrated Territorial Strategy for the Romania-Bulgaria cross-border area. The examination of the list of operation will not entail a full re-assessment of concept notes/applications. As a result of the examination, MA & NA may propose to the MC:

- To fully accept the proposed list of operations
- To accept only part of the list of operations
- To make recommendations to the SB for amending some project ideas/applications so as to ensure the full compliance with the Programme’s policy, objectives and indicators - such recommendations are mandatory for the concerned projects, in order to obtain financing from the Programme;

¹⁴ https://institute.eib.org/wp-content/uploads/2019/05/European_Quality_Principles_2019_EN.pdf

¹⁵ <https://op.europa.eu/en/publication-detail/-/publication/404a8144-8892-11ec-8c40-01aa75ed71a1>



- To make recommendations to the SB to supplement the list of operations with new project ideas / project proposals, for contributing Programme's policy, objectives and indicators;

For their examination of the list of operations annexed to the ITS, the Programme will focus on:

- Integrated approach and territorial impact
- Cross-border character and impact
- Contribution to the ITS objectives and indicators
- Contribute to the Programme indicators
- Compliance with the do no significant harm principle
- Compliance with the horizontal principles (equal opportunities, sustainable development etc.)
- The relevance of project ideas / project proposals;
- Sustainability of project ideas / project proposals;
- Compliance with the eligible activities under the Programme;
- The relevance of the partnership;
- The budget impact for the Programme.

Final considerations

Following the IP structures analyse, a report will be submitted to the MC for deciding on the acceptance of the Strategy and the list of the project ideas proposed for funding under Interreg VI-A Romania-Bulgaria Programme.

The SB members can be invited to the MC meeting, to advocate for the Integrated Territorial Strategy. The MC may decide to request additional clarification when debating and taking the decision.

Following the MC decision, the project ideas that were accepted by the MC to be funded under Interreg VI-A Romania-Bulgaria, will be invited to submit the full application, based on the prioritization set by SB and in the limits of the financial allocation available. In this respect, the MA shall invite all the lead partners to develop and submit the full applications through a public announce. The invitation will include all the conditions that need to be observed by the projects in order to be contracted by the Managing Authority.

All the projects will be submitted in JeMS, by the deadline set in the invitation. The indicative deadline for submitting the project will be of around 4 months. The partners can submit the project any time during the set period.

The appraisal of project proposals against the conditions set by the Programme shall start after the submission in JeMS. During the appraisal process, the programme structures may request clarifications and make recommendations for enhancing the quality of the projects.



Please note that if the project does not comply with the conditions set by the Programme for contracting, the Programme can decide to renounce to the project and invite other lead partners with projects included in the ITS list of operations, as accepted by MC, to develop their full applications.

If no project idea is available and financial allocation is existing, a new call shall be organized by the Programme, in cooperation with the SB.

Please note that the Programme structures will check if the partners have among their attributions, according with their statute or according to the national legislation, the implementation of the proposed activities or that the partners have an agreement with the institutions able to implement such activities, according with their statute or according to the national legislation.

Legal Bases (non-exhaustive list)

- Commission Decision No. 8928/30.11.2022 approving the Interreg VI-A Romania-Bulgaria Programme;
- Regulation (EU) 2021/1060 of the European Parliament and of the Council of 24 June 2021 laying down common provisions on the European Regional Development Fund, the European Social Fund Plus, the Cohesion Fund, the Just Transition Fund and the European Maritime, Fisheries and Aquaculture Fund and financial rules for those and for the Asylum, Migration and Integration Fund, the Internal Security Fund and the Instrument for Financial Support for Border Management and Visa Policy;
- Regulation (EU) 2021/1059 of the European Parliament and of the Council of 24 June 2021 on specific provisions for the European territorial cooperation goal (Interreg) supported by the European Regional Development Fund and external financing instruments;
- Regulation (EU) 2021/1058 of the European Parliament and of the Council of 24 June 2021 on the European Regional Development Fund and on the Cohesion Fund;
- Regulation (EU, Euratom) 2018/1046 of the European Parliament and of the Council of 18 July 2018 on the financial rules applicable to the general budget of the Union, amending Regulations (EU) No 1296/2013, (EU) No 1301/2013, (EU) No 1303/2013, (EU) No 1304/2013, (EU) No 1309/2013, (EU) No 1316/2013, (EU) No 223/2014, (EU) No 283/2014, and Decision No 541/2014/EU and repealing Regulation (EU, Euratom) No 966/2012, with further modifications and completions;
- COMMISSION NOTICE Technical guidance on the climate proofing of infrastructure in the period 2021-2027 (2021/C 373/01);
- Transition pathway for tourism, <https://op.europa.eu/en/publication-detail/-/publication/404a8144-8892-11ec-8c40-01aa75ed71a1>
- Other relevant national and European legislation

Applicable law:



Project ideas must be in line with all relevant national and European legislation, including legislation on sustainable development and environmental protection, gender equality, equal opportunities and non-discrimination (art. 22.2 of REGULATION (EU) 2021/1059 and art. 9 of Regulation (EU) 2021/1060), public procurement (art. 58 of REGULATION (EU) 2021/1059) and state aid.

Projects must observe the European legislation provisions on communication, information and publicity (art.36.4 of the Regulation (EU) 2021/1059)).

- ! Please note that all these legal provisions must also be observed by the applicants during both project elaboration and implementation phases.

Annexes to be submitted together with the Integrated Territorial Strategy:

- SB Decision approving the Integrated Territorial Strategy
- List of the project ideas proposed for funding under Interreg VI-A Romania-Bulgaria Programme
- The assessment report of the SB regarding the assessment process of the project ideas proposed for funding under Interreg VI-A Romania-Bulgaria Programme
- Reports, minutes, other documents to prove the compliance with the ITS with the legal provisions set by the Regulation.

Annexes to the current document

- Annex 1 - Methodology to be used for the assessment of the Integrated Territorial Strategy for the Romania-Bulgaria Cross-border area

Relevant documents to be observed when preparing the concept notes:

- Interreg VI-A Romania-Bulgaria Programme - <https://interregviarobg.eu/assets/2022/11/interreg-vi-a-romania-bulgaria-programme-approved-by-ec.pdf>
- Project Implementation Manual - <https://interregviarobg.eu/en/project-implementation-manual>
 - Communication Starter Kit
 - Dare to go green!
 - Practical guide on fraud for applicants and project partners
 - Methodological descriptions of Interreg VI-A RO-BG indicators - SO 5.2 - <https://interregviarobg.eu/assets/2024/01/guidance-on-monitoring-programme-indicators-annex-5-so-52.pdf>



- 📄 Manual for Visual Identity of the Programme - <https://interregviarobg.eu/en/implementation-rules>
- 📄 Code of Conduct for Interreg VI-A Romania-Bulgaria - <https://interregviarobg.eu/en/implementation-rules>
- 📄 JEMS manual - <https://jems.interact-eu.net/manual/>.



Although we do not plan to, in case changes to the present document are necessary, please note that we will use the following means of communication:

- 1. Announcement on the Programme website: <https://interregviarobg.eu/en>*
- 2. Announcement on the Programme Facebook Page: <https://www.facebook.com/RomaniaBulgariaCbcProgramme>*

Should any questions arise, please contact us for further assistance at robg@mdlpa.gov.ro.

Annex 1

Methodology¹⁶

to be used for the assessment of the Integrated Territorial Strategy for the Romania-Bulgaria cross-border area

1. Objective and scope of the assessment

The assessment aims to provide feedback on the development of the Integrated Territorial Strategy (ITS) for the Romania-Bulgaria cross-border area and to give assurance as to the quality of the strategy, based on a pre-defined set of criteria. The assessment will also serve the Monitoring Committee to take an informed decision when approving the ITS. Finally, the assessment will concern the list of projects developing from the ITS and make recommendations as to their financing from the Interreg VI-a Romania-Bulgaria Programme, subject to subsequent conditions.

The assessment is performed by the Managing Authority, together with the National Authority.

A robust assessment is the foundation of the successful design and implementation of the ITS. The assessment has to ensure that the allocated budget will be spent wisely, especially as the money comes from public funds

When assessing the ITS, the Programme's structures will consider the legal provisions set by the Regulation 1060/2021 in relation to the content of the ITS¹⁷.

The assessment exercise should be performed after the Strategy Board agrees on the content of the future Integrated Territorial Strategy (first half of 2024) and before the approval of the Integrated Territorial Strategy by the Monitoring Committee of the Interreg VI-a Romania-Bulgaria Programme.

¹⁶ To be consulted with Interact, before its approval by MA and NA.

¹⁷ Notably articles 28 -30 of Regulation 1060/2021.



However, the MA and NA may decide to start the assessment process during the development of the ITS and can make recommendation for the improvement of the strategy in due time.

The assessment exercise will be conducted as desk research, based on consulting documents, on research of information or on interviews and meetings, if needed.

The assessment of the ITS shall include:

- ④ An administrative check of the content of the Strategy (namely the existence of the mandatory sections set by the Art. 29 of Regulation 1060/2021).
- ④ The qualitative check of the strategy, according to the assessment matrix presented below.
- ④ The check of the project ideas according to the criteria set in Section 2 Conditions for the list of concept notes (project ideas) to be invited and funded under the Programme.

2. Assessment matrix

2.1. Administrative check of the content of the Strategy

The administrative check (yes/no answer) of the Strategy is focused on verifying if the conditions set by Art. 29 of Regulation 1060/2021 are observed, namely:

- ④ the *geographical area* covered by the strategy
- ④ an *analysis of the development needs and the potential of the area*, including economic, social and environmental interlinkages
- ④ a *description of an integrated approach* to address the identified development needs and the potential of the area
- ④ a *description of the involvement of partners* in accordance with article 8 in the preparation and in the implementation of the strategy
- ④ a *list of operations* to be supported.
- ④ the ITS is approved by the SB and the decision is submitted to MA.

All conditions must be observed. In case a No is received, MA and NA can request clarifications.

2.2. The qualitative check of the strategy, according to the assessment matrix presented below

The cornerstone of the assessment exercise is to identify specific and robust evaluation questions linked to the intervention logic of the strategy. As the intervention logic was not fully developed when preparing this methodology, the authors used to the extent possible all the available information from the Programme and from other sources of information to approximate the ITS intervention logic. Assessment questions (criteria) together with correlated sub-questions, judgement criteria and indicators were grouped into an assessment matrix, presented hereunder. The assessment matrix serves to guide the assessment exercise and may be adjusted, if justified, during the assessment exercise.

The main objective of this exercise is to give assurance to the MC that the ITS is a highly qualitative document, in line with the Programme objective and indicators, with a clear logic of intervention and an adequate monitoring system, developed with the involvement of the relevant territorial stakeholders, authorities or bodies, where the principles of transparency and equal treatment were considered.



Assessment matrix

Questions (criteria)	Sub-question	Judgement criteria	Indicator	Data	
1. Relevance	1.1. To what extent the ITS addresses the needs/challenges identified through the territorial analysis?	1.1.a. To what extent the objectives of the ITS respond to the needs? 1.1.b. Are the strategic objectives, the expected impacts and the impact pathways identified in a convincing way?	Territorial analysis was performed ex-ante and provides a comprehensive list of needs and findings Territorial analysis refers/includes an evaluation of the tourist potential of the area The stakeholders were involved in identifying the main needs/challenges of the territory. The ITS contains a clear intervention logic, responding to the needs.	Territorial analysis report approved by SB and including: - demographic & migration data and related challenges; - economic data, e.g. entrepreneurship, productivity, poverty situation, etc.; - data on tourism and cycling in the ITS area	- meetings with stakeholders - Territorial analysis report (provided by the consultant) - minutes of the consultations - Consultant reports - involvement of stakeholders
	1.2. Is the ITS area defined in such a way as to maximize the expected impact?	1.2.a. Is the ITS area defined by applying a coherent and relevant approach based on geographical, socio-economic and regulatory criteria? 1.2.b. Does the ITS establish a vision / objectives for the coherent and integrated development of touristic activities? 1.2.c. Is the geographical area defined by taking into consideration the results of the public consultations?	- SB members agreed clear criteria for defining the ITS area - The ITS defines distinctive and coherent leading concepts for the development of the cross-border tourist offer; - The ITS area contains elements for ensuring a balanced distribution of tourism benefits across the ITS area (on the east-west and north-south axis); - The geographical area of the strategy reflects to a large extent the views/expectations of the stakeholders.	- size of the ITS area (km ² , in Romania and Bulgaria - number of stakeholders participating in the consultation - number of local administrative units overlapping with the ITS area - number of population living in the ITS area - number of UNESCO sites and UNESCO tentative sites in the ITS area, in Romania and Bulgaria - number and area (hectares) of natural protected areas (national parks, RAMSAR and/or NATURA2000 sites, etc.) in the ITS area	- survey/meetings of stakeholders - territorial analysis report
	1.3. Is the ITS taking advantage of the opportunities offered by EuroVelo6 Route?	1.3.a. Is the EuroVelo Route 6 identified completely, in detail and in a sound manner within the ITS? 1.3.b. Does the ITS set specific objectives for: - the uptake of sustainable transport and - the development of sustainable cycle tourism in the area?	- The identification process of the national, regional and local cycling routes is based on the analysis of the territory and the consultation of stakeholders; - The description of the main route of EuroVelo 6 is precise and made public in both Romania and Bulgaria; - the ITS contains estimations of the expected impact to be generated by EuroVelo 6 Route and secondary cycle routes in the area.	- length of EuroVelo6 Route to be developed in the area to be developed by 2029 - length of secondary routes to be developed in the area to be developed by 2029 - number of cyclists recorded in the ITS area annually - number of travels by bike in the ITS area (estimate - annually) - Number of tourist overnights in the ITS area (per year)	- minutes of the consultations - content of ITS - surveys -cyclists counters - tourists data - published information about EuroVelo 6 Route in Romania and Bulgaria



				- Number of registered tourists in selected touristic attractions (per year)	
2. Utility (effectiveness)	2.1. To what extent the ITS has an integrated approach covering the economy, social, environment, transport, demography, social cohesion, tourism, culture fields, etc. and their interlinkages?	2.1.a. Does the ITS cover multiple fields and provide solutions to a majority of identified needs/challenges?	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - The main needs/challenges from the area in fields like: economic, social, environment, transport, demography, social cohesion, tourism, culture, etc. (or any other field needed for the purpose of the strategy) were identified and described. - The Strategy justifies the choice of certain options / scenarios as solutions to one or several identified needs/challenges. 		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - content of ITS - territorial analysis
	2.2. Are the expected effects of the ITS clearly defined, achievable and measurable in time?	<p>2.2.a. Are ITS objectives designed in a SMART manner?</p> <p>2.2.b. Is the list of projects associated with the ITS containing a general indication of the expected outputs and results?</p> <p>2.2.c. Is there a process/method in place for measuring the contribution of the ITS to the economic development of the area?</p> <p>2.2.d. How many users are estimated to travel through / employ EuroVelo6 route, annually, in RO and BG?</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - ITS has objectives specified in SMART terms and a rationale which justifies its contribution to the overall development of the area - ITS identifies a list of relevant outputs and results - ITS contains a list of projects contributing to its objectives, including relevant information about such projects (scope, budget, expected outputs, results, timeline); - Length of Euro Velo route 6, in Romania and Bulgaria, to be completed by 2029 (km), split between Interreg VI-A Romania-Bulgaria Programme and other sources. - % of newly developed segments of EuroVelo6 Route in Romania and Bulgaria financed from Interreg, from national contributions and from other sources (e.g. PNRR) 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - number of objectives / specific objectives / actions / indicators in the ITS - outputs and results as well as data sources for monitoring are clearly indicated within the ITS 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - SB report of the assessment process of the project ideas included in the ITS - ITS content
	2.3. Are the expected effects of the ITS acceptable from the point of view of stakeholders (including direct or indirect beneficiaries)?	<p>2.3.a. Was the public consultation effective?</p> <p>2.3.b. Were any members of the Strategy Board objecting to ITS content?</p>	<p>Public consultation was effective - A consultation process with the relevant stakeholders from the area, in order to collect the opinions and to validate the strategy's objectives, priorities, types of actions and indicators was carried out.</p> <p>The stakeholder analysis was performed thoroughly, including all relevant representatives of national, regional and local authorities, NGO's and SMEs (stakeholders representing the social, environmental and economic dimensions, including equal opportunities and non-discrimination as well as youth organisations).</p> <p>Criticisms from SB members on the ITS draft have been heard and discussed</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - number of consultation meetings/events - number of participants in such consultation events 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - ITS content - other supporting documents - SB meeting minutes



	<p>2.5. To what extent the ITS contains an appropriate governance mechanism to support its future implementation?</p>	<p>2.5.a. Is the ITS governance mechanism clearly described? 2.5.b. Does the ITS governance comply with the partnership and multi-level governance principles mentioned by article 8 of Regulation (EU) 2021/1060? 2.5.c. Does the governance mechanism establish rules for ensuring ownership and the avoidance of conflict of interest? 2.5.d. Is the governance mechanism allowing for transparency and does it provide constant public communication and accountability? 2.5.d. Is the appropriate level of political and strategic leadership defined for ensuring the approval & implementation of the ITS? 2.5.e. Resources and responsibilities were identified for ensuring the governance of the ITS at least till 2029?</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - The mechanism for the ITS governance is clearly described (including coordination approaches, partners involved) - The partnership and multi-level governance principles set out by article 8 of Regulation (EU) 2021/1060 and Commission Delegated Regulation (EU) No 240/2014 on the European code of conduct on partnership in the framework of the European Structural and Investment Funds measures were respected. - ITS includes communications procedures - ITS refers to procedures for avoiding the conflict of interests - ITS establishes a set of indicators that allow the monitoring of the progress in strategy implementation; the proposed indicators complement the indicators proposed for PO5 by Interreg VI-A Romania-Bulgaria Programme. - Relevant elected / nominated representatives of NUTS2 level in the ITS area as well as governments in Romania and Bulgaria expressed their support/endorsed the strategy; - ITS is published and referred to as a common strategic document by all NUTS2 level administrative units in the area and by all organizations members of the SB; - a Permanent Secretariat for the ITS is foreseen to exist, with appropriate resources 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - governance chapter of the ITS exists - reference is made to rules concerning the avoidance of conflicts of interest - rules for the functioning of the Permanent Secretariat exist, including on the operational planning and reporting to SB - ITS is published on Programme website and websites of all county level territorial units - the tasks of the Permanent Secretariat include, at least, the support for the least developed municipalities to develop project ideas - the ITS foresees the allocation of appropriate resources for the Permanent Secretariat 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> -
	<p>2.6. What potential risks could be anticipated at this stage concerning ITS?</p>	<p>Does the ITS contain minimal risk assessment and mitigation plan?</p>	<p>ITS identifies the most relevant risks and provides for mitigation measures ITS governance provides for periodical risk assessment and assigns responsibilities for it</p>	<p>- risk chapter in the ITS</p>	
<p>3. Efficiency</p>	<p>3.1. To what extent the expected effects of the ITS overcome or justify the total need for financing?</p>	<p>Does the ITS contain an estimation of financial resources needed for its implementation? Are the benefits (or estimated impact) envisaged after ITS implementation justifying the estimated financial resources and effort committed to it?</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - ITS list of projects contains an estimation of necessary budget; - ITS contains an estimation of the benefits for the area 		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> -survey among stakeholders - ITS content - minutes of the SB
	<p>3.2. Is the estimated budget for projects and the total need for ITS financing realistic?</p>	<p>3.2.a. Do ITS financing needs have been generated based on a sound methodology? 3.2.b. Does the ITS indicate in a credible manner the sources of financing?</p>	<p>Total estimated cost of implementing the ITS during the 2021-2029 period</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - detailed references to all sources of financing 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - ITS content (budget estimation)
	<p>3.3. Are the expected costs and benefits distributed in a balanced</p>	<p>3.3.a. How are costs and expected benefits distributed among different stakeholders/areas of the</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Contributions in terms of financing and work should be balanced with estimated benefits; 		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - ITS content (budget estimation)



	manner amongst ITS areas / stakeholder categories?	ITS (urban/rural, east / west, north/south)?	- Distribution of benefits should be balanced among urban/rural areas as well as geographically (north-south and east/west).		
	3.4. Is the ITS presented in an impactful and readable manner?	3.4.a. Is the ITS presentation accessible for the public and specialists in terms of length, style, complexity, and format?	- ITS is accompanied by a maximum 10 pages citizens summary, to be publicly presented; - ITS text respects clear writing guidelines; - ITS is presented using storytelling techniques and in an engaging manner; - ITS contains relevant statistics, to support the storyline.	- review panel opinion (at least 3 panellists)	- ITS content - review grid sent back to authors
4. Consistency & Coherence	4.1. Does the ITS build on existing plans, strategic documents and legislation from Romania and Bulgaria impacting the economic and social development of the border area?	4.1.a. Were relevant strategic documents and plans taken into consideration in the process of the identification of the specific geographical area and in defining the ITS objectives? 4.1.b. Was relevant legislation from Romania and Bulgaria consulted when drafting the ITS, notably in the field of cycling, tourism and environment protection?	The ITS contains a comprehensive list of strategic documents, plans and legislation referenced and used while drafting it.		- ITS content
	4.2. Is the ITS aligned with EuroVelo requirements at EU level and with the EUSDR?	4.2.a. To what extent the ITS defines the Romanian and Bulgarian parts of Euro Velo 6 route in line with EuroVelo requirements, allowing for its future certification? 4.2.b. Does the ITS proposes a target in time for the completion of the RO and BG sectors of EuroVelo6 route? 4.3.c. Is the ITS supporting or in line with at least Priority Area 1b and Priority Area 3 of the EUSDR?	- EU relevant bodies and other entities with impact or interest in EuroVelo 6 route were consulted; - ITS associated document refer to the European Certification (Standard Quality criteria for long-distance cycle routes) and/or to other national similar standards; - ITS objectives contribute to priority areas of EUSRD (promoting cycling and sustainable tourism) - ITS underlies the objectives that can be promoted through cross-border cooperation projects in complementarity with other funds and programmes, in a macro-regional context (namely EUSDR Strategy).		- EuroVelo website - Consultant reports
	4.3. Is the ITS contributing to the Interreg VI-A Romania-Bulgaria Programme objectives and indicators related to PO 5 and proposed types of actions, as described in the Programme document?	4.3.a. Is the territory covered by the ITS included in the Interreg VI-A Romania-Bulgaria Programme area? 4.3.b. Are the ITS projects contributing to the achievement of the Interreg VI-A Romania-Bulgaria Programme objectives? 4.3.c. Are the identified ITS projects respecting the indicative types of actions, as described by the Programme under priority 4 (PO5)?	- ITS area is included and it is smaller than the Programme area - Targets (results and outputs) in the ITS are equal or exceed the targets for the indicators in the Interreg VI-a Romania-Bulgaria under Priority 4 (policy objective 5) - The ITS projects proposed to be financed under the Interreg VI-a Romania-Bulgaria Programme satisfy mandatory selection criteria , in line with requirements under the Interreg VI-a Romania-Bulgaria Programme, notably:	- Programme indicators and targets under Priority 4 (PO5)	- Interreg VI-a Romania-Bulgaria Programme - ITS content - ITS selection criteria for projects - ITS projects' concept notes/project ideas - Assessment report of the assessors checking the project ideas in the ITS context - Assessment report of the AC of the project



		<p>4.3.d. Does the ITS include a set of selection criteria for the ITS projects harmonized with the requirements of the Interreg VI-A Romania-Bulgaria Programme</p> <p>4.3.d. Does the ITS demonstrate to have a cross-border impact?</p> <p>4.3.e. Is the contribution of the ITS projects to the Programme result and output indicators ensuring the achievement of the targets set under the Priority 4 of the Programme?</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> the cross-border character and impact criteria, the partnership principle, the integrated character, the contribution to the objectives of Interreg VI-a RoBG Programme and the contribution to the Programme's output and results indicators; non-discrimination, transparency and accessibility of persons with disabilities, gender equality, taking into account the Charter of Fundamental Rights of the European Union; <p>- The ITS projects proposed to be financed under the Interreg VI-a Romania-Bulgaria Programme have been selected (to various degrees) based on supplementary criteria which ensure a contribution to the Programme including, at least:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> the proximity to EuroVelo6 route; the support for cycle tourism; the economic impact; the social impact & target group the environmental impact, sustainable development & horizontal issues (including New European Bauhaus) the complementarity with other projects/ initiatives the partnership capacity; the project maturity, including the environmental requirements (EIA, climate proofing, other documentation if requested by the national legislation etc.) value for money. <p>- Are the projects prioritized based on agreed principles and ranking?</p>		<p>ideas, in the context of the Programme</p> <p>- The verification report of the MA and NA on the assessment process carried out by the AC</p>
	4.4. Does the ITS comply with formal requirements imposed by the integrated territorial development instruments?	4.4.a. Is the ITS compliant with the provisions of Regulation 1060/2021?	- Compliant with conditions in art. 29 of Reg. (EU) 2021/1060 - common provisions regulation		- ITS content
	4.5. Is the list of projects developing from the ITS contributing to ITS objectives?	<p>4.5.a. The objectives of projects do contribute to the specific objectives of ITS?</p> <p>4.5.b. Are there major areas / risks which could contribute to achieving ITS objectives left behind or not covered by the list of projects?</p>	Proposed projects included in the list are in accordance with the measures and investment priorities identified in the ITS	- Proportion of ITS objectives covered by selected project ideas (proposed projects).	- ITS content - assessment report / minutes of the SB
5. (Financial) Sustainability	5.1. Are the required financial resources needed for ITS implementation identified, available and sufficient?	5.2.a. Is the list of projects/operations under the ITS defined, including their estimated budget?	- A public consultation was organized (or a public call for projects) in order to select the projects to be developed under the ITS - The		- ITS content (budget estimation)



		<p>5.2.b. What is the total need for financing for projects under ITS?</p> <p>5.2.c. To what extent the Interreg programme may finance these needs?</p> <p>5.2.d. Are there other financing sources identified, except from Interreg?</p>	<p>entire process of identifying the list of projects was transparent and public</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - A list of projects is attached to ITS - ITS includes an analysis of potential funding sources (additional to the Interreg VI-A Romania-Bulgaria Programme);and these sources cover to the full extent the total need for financing 		
	<p>5.2. Are there clear rules for identifying, selecting and financing projects depending on the strategy?</p>	<p>5.2.a. Does the ITS contain or make reference to a clear methodology/rules for identifying, selecting and financing projects?</p> <p>5.2.b. Does the methodology / do rules allow for prioritizing among the list of projects developing from the ITS?</p> <p>5.3.c. Does the methodology/rules favour selecting those projects which may generate revenue or sustain themselves on the long term?</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - The ITS outlines the concrete measures/types of actions for the development of the EuroVelo route and of the area covered by strategy and make a prioritization of interventions and investment measures in Bulgaria and Romania - A selection methodology that include the type of calls (targeted, open call, restrictive call etc.), the evaluation and selection criteria, and template of the concept note/application form was elaborated - The evaluation and selection criteria were clear and ensured the equal opportunity and treatment of all applicants - The identification process of the projects including private partners was made in accordance with the EU legal bases relevant to State aid 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - ratio between the total budget of submitted project ideas and the total budget of financing possible to be allocated through Interreg through the respective call; - number and proportion of project ideas rejected / not selected for financing after assessment (for the first call) 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - ITS content - call for project ideas
	<p>5.3. How likely are the economic and/or social and/or environmental effects of the ITS to last after the interventions ends?</p>	<p>5.3.a. Does the ITS formally adhere to the rules for ensuring the durability of investments?</p> <p>5.3.b. Is the ITS favouring investment in operations (e.g. infrastructure, buildings) which have a durability of at least 5 years?</p> <p>5.3.c. Is the ITS promoting the horizontal issues of “do no significant harm”, climate proofing and the New European Bauhaus Initiative, when appropriate?</p>	<p>Proportion of ITS operations involving investment with a durability of at least 5 years is higher than 50% of the total need for financing identified by the ITS.</p>		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - ITS content - List of projects associated to the ITS

Romania – Bulgaria

2.3. The verification of the project ideas according to the criteria set in Section 2 - Conditions for the list of concept notes (project ideas) to be invited and funded under the Programme.

MA and NA shall check the project ideas proposed for funding under Interreg VI-A Romania-Bulgaria¹⁸. The main objective of this check will be to assess the concept notes against the Programme conditions. MA and NA will not perform the assessment against the ITS conditions.

Since the Programme results are measured by indicators, the contribution to Programme output and result indicators shall also be taken into consideration at selection. Thus, when deciding the list of projects proposed for financing, the Monitoring Committee makes the final decision on the selection of projects based also on the Programme level of reaching indicators, the Programme status and timeframe also.

The criteria set by the Programme are presented below:

No.	CRITERIA	YES	NO	Justification
A. ADMINISTRATIVE CRITERIA				
1	The concept note and it's mandatory annexes has been assessed by the SB/nominated structures by SB and included in the list of operations proposed for funding under Interreg VI-A Romania-Bulgaria Programme			
2	The concept note is accompanied by a letter of commitment of all partners (or partner declarations)			
B. ELIGIBILITY CRITERIA				
1.RELEVANCE TO THE PROGRAMME				
3	The overall objective of the project is clearly defined and in line with the programme's specific objective and field of action			
4	The outputs and results are clearly linked and contribute to Programme's specific objective and its related indicators			
5	The output and result indicators are realistically quantified and achievable with the planned resources (partners, budget and time)			
6	Is the project results and outputs likely to have a long-term impact going far beyond the project lifetime			
7	The activities to be approached by the project idea are in line with the programme's indicative types of actions			

¹⁸ If decided by MA and NA, an Assessment Committee can be set, including JS staff for checking the project ideas.



2. CROSS-BORDER COOPERATION CHARACTER				
8	The importance of cooperation on the Romania-Bulgaria cross border area for the topic addressed and the cross-border impact are clearly demonstrated			
9	The project idea demonstrates the integrated character (vis-a vis the project's activities or through complementarity with other projects selected under the ITS).			
3. PARTNERSHIP RELEVANCE				
10	The partnership composition is relevant for the proposed project idea and includes at least one partner from ITS territory of Romania and Bulgaria			
11	The partners are eligible organizations and are observing the requirements set by Considerations and Methodology for the Assessment of ITS			
12	The partnership observes the cooperation mandatory criteria set by the Programme			
4. BUDGET				
13	The budget allocated to the activities is in line with the project idea content and proportionate to the project outputs and project's contribution to the Programme indicators aimed for The costs are realistic and necessary.			
5. HORIZONTAL ISSUES				
14	The concept note describes the contribution to the horizontal principles set at the Programme level and foreseen in the Applicant's Guide (ITS - Considerations and Methodological Assessment): equal opportunities and non-discrimination, equality between men and women, environment protection and sustainable development, the New European Bauhaus, "Do No Significant Harm" principle, European Green Deal, Green procurement.			

Only the concept notes which received "yes" to all the following criteria will be accepted by the Programme and invited to submit the full application.

During this process, clarifications may be requested Programme structures from the lead partner and/or SB.

3. Data needs and data collection

For assessing the ITS draft (before its approval by the Monitoring Committee), a significant amount of data is needed. On top of that, for monitoring the ITS during implementation and for assessing it by the end of its implementation, supplementary information should be constantly collected and processed. As such, recommended socio-economic data sets to be analysed during assessment and monitoring include:



- The areas' resident population and its profile, from the census results and other official statistical data published annually by the NIS, including data on population evolution, migration, etc.;
- The number and distribution of jobs in the area;
- Employment by sector and by gender, full time and part time;
- Workforce skills and qualifications;
- Unemployment, ideally including area, age and gender;
- The business landscape, numbers and size of companies;
- Local infrastructure provision and access to services;
- Deprivation and disadvantage based on other social aspects (e.g. income, health and housing).

4. Deliverable

The assessment of the ITS RO-BG will take the form of a 15-40 pages document to be prepared by the Managing Authority (MA) together with the National Authority (NA) and the involvement of Joint Secretariat, if the case. The report shall base its conclusions also on the assessment report of the concept notes / project ideas included in the ITS. The report shall base its conclusions also on the assessment report of the concept notes of the project ideas included in the ITS. MA and NA shall check the project ideas/concept notes included on the list proposed for funding under Interreg VI-A Romania-Bulgaria. The assessment shall be carried out in line with the set criteria, approved by MC and presented in advance to the SB.

This assessment shall be part of the overall process of the ITS assessment process, carried out by the MA and NA , as described at point 1 from above.

After the MC decision on the ITS, the Lead Partners of project ideas/concept notes proposed for funding under Interreg VI-A Romania-Bulgaria, and accepted by MC, shall be invited to submit the full applications, in line with the specific rules set by the Programme.

During the assessment process, SB may be asked to clarify certain issues related to the ITS. The assessment document will be presented to the Monitoring Committee of the Interreg VI-a Romania Bulgaria Programme, for discussion and endorsement of the ITS, from the Programme perspective.

5. References

1. A Practical Guide on Ex Ante Evaluation for Research Infrastructures - https://www.interreg-danube.eu/uploads/media/approved_project_output/0001/32/027d46e71b43f79af6eeac478564654e95bd0b3f.pdf



2. European Commission - Better regulation toolbox - Chapter 4 - How to carry out an evaluation and fitness check - https://commission.europa.eu/system/files/2023-07/BR_toolbox_Jul_2023_en.pdf
3. Regulation 1060/2021 - <https://eur-lex.europa.eu/legal-content/EN/TXT/PDF/?uri=CELEX:32021R1060>
4. Programme description - <https://interregviarobg.eu/en/general-data>

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