

Evaluation (Impact assessment) of Interreg IPA Cross-border cooperation Programme Croatia-Bosnia and Herzegovina-Montenegro 2014-2020

Final Evaluation Report

Report drafted by:

Nicola Brignani, Team leader
Mladen Vojković, Key expert 1
Valentina Jug, Key expert 2
Dea Hrelja, Dario Gašparić, Mona Manojlović, Emma Zimprich Budanović, Non-key experts

Date: September 17, 2021

"The preparation of this report is financed under the European Territorial Cooperation Programme, the cross-border co-operation programme INTERREG IPA Croatia-Bosnia and Herzegovina-Montenegro 2014-2020 from the European Regional Development and IPA II Funds. The views presented in this report represent the views of independent evaluation experts and not necessarily the official opinion of the Ministry of Regional Development and European Union Funds."

PROJECT SHEET

Report	Final Evaluation Report
Contract number	07-C-U-0510/21-21
Name of the project	Evaluation (Impact assessment) of Interreg IPA Cross-border cooperation Programme Croatia-Bosnia and Herzegovina-Montenegro 2014-2020
Duration of implementation of activities	6 months
Client	Ministry of Regional Development and European Union Funds OIB: 69608914212
Address	Miramarska 22, 10 000 Zagreb, Croatia
Contractors/ Address	WYG Consulting Ltd., Ulica grada Vukovara 269 G, 10000 Zagreb, Croatia, OIB: 04303799227; T33Srl. Ancona, Italy, via Calatafimi 1, OIB: IT02343620429

Acronyms

BA: Bosnia and Herzegovina

CBC: Cross-border Cooperation

HR: Croatia

EC: European Commission

EP: Evaluation plan

EQ: Evaluation questions

ESIF: European Structural and Investment Funds

ERDF: European Regional Development Fund

ETC: European Territorial Cooperation

EU: European Union

EUSAIR: EU Strategy for the Adriatic and Ionian Region

EUSDR: EU Strategy for the Danube Region

IPA: Instrument for Pre-Accession Assistance

JS: Joint Secretariat

JSC: Joint Steering Committee

JMC: Joint Monitoring Committee

MA: Managing Authority

ME: Montenegro

SO: Specific Objective

PA: Priority axis

KOM: Kick-off meeting

Contents

Executive summary.....	6
Introduction	13
Purpose and objectives of the evaluation	13
Scope of evaluation	14
Evaluation context	14
Interreg IPA CBC Croatia-Bosnia and Herzegovina-Montenegro 2014-2020	15
Evaluation research methodology	17
Programme’s achievement of planned objectives.....	18
Programme strategy’s consistency with emerging results.....	25
Linkages between financed interventions and results.....	27
Conclusions for future interventions	31
Horizontal issues	41
SO 1.1: Improve the quality of the services in public health and social care sector across the borders.....	48
SO 2.1: Promote and improve environment and nature protection and management systems for risk prevention.....	49
SO 2.2: To promote utilization of renewable energy resources and energy efficiency.....	52
SO 3.1: To strengthen and diversify the tourism offer through cross border approaches and to enable better management and sustainable use of cultural and natural heritage	54
SO 4.1: To enhance institutional infrastructure and services in order to accelerate the competitiveness and development of business environment in the programme area	57
Annex 1 – Case studies.....	60
Annex 2 – Web survey figures	106

List of figures

Figure 1. Map of the area covered by the Interreg IPA CBC Programme Croatia-Bosnia and Herzegovina-Montenegro.....	16
Figure 2. Financial absorption per PA compared to 2023 final target.....	24
Figure 3. Eligible expenditure declared by beneficiaries out of the total Programme budget – comparison among IPA programmes.....	25
Figure 4. Logic underpinning the questions on the CB added value.....	37
Figure 5. Analysis of correlation between size of the partnership and budget absorption.....	40

Figure 6. Analysis of correlation between size of the partnership and days of delay	41
Figure 7. Projects' intended impact in relation to horizontal principles.....	42
Figure 8. Contribution to EUSDR Pillars.....	45
Figure 9. A share of projects that conducted the following activities	50
Figure 10. Study Visit and Collaborative Lab in a district heating plant in Pokupsko (HR)	85
Figure 11. BACAR Workshops	100

List of tables

Table 1. Detailed indicative total programme budget breakdown per Priority Axes	19
Table 2. Financial resources demanded and approved per PA for both published CFPs.....	20
Table 3. Progress towards the 2023 targets.....	21
Table 4. Development needs detected	28
Table 5. What is the key cross-border added value of the project?	37
Table 6. Funding opportunities provided by the Programme.....	38
Table 7. Synergies with other policy instruments	39

Executive summary

The objective of this report is to illustrate the impact of the results and effects of Interreg IPA Programme considering the assessment of achieved results and impacts of the programme and their sustainability, communication towards planned objectives and assessment of the impact of programmes and projects financed under the programme area on cross-border population, project partners and other target groups.

The evaluation findings should serve as a tool for improving the quality of future Programme implementation, and as one of the bases for planning future policies for the development of the Interreg IPA Programme in the coming financial period.

Due to a very low response rate of project Lead Partners to the web survey, the findings presented below are not without certain limitations.

Programme's achievement of planned objectives

EQ 2: Is the programme structure (e.g. priority axes and specific objectives, examples of activities, etc.) in line with the requirements and needs of potential beneficiaries?



Based on survey feedback it can be summarised that programme structure, selected priorities and specific objectives, fully meet the needs of potential applicants in the targeted area.

EQ 3: Are the financial resources allocated for each priority axis in accordance with the requested funds of applicants for project proposals?



The interest of project applicants for both Calls from Proposals was higher than the programme financial allocation was able to cover. Only 20% of all project proposals submitted were selected for financing. Concerning each priority axis, PA1 has the highest percentage of approved projects (31%) and budget (29%), while the lowest percentage has been recorded under PA3 (14% of projects and 15% of requested budget).

EQ 4: How successful and efficient is the implementation of the project?



Priority Axis 3 is the first Priority Axis most likely to reach all Programme targets for 2023, already having two fully achieved indicator targets in 2020 and four indicators with a level of achievement higher than 50%. Priority Axis 2 is the least likely to reach all Programme targets for 2023 due to low percentages of achievement for one indicator in 2020 – *Population benefiting from flood protection measures* (only 3%). Regarding financial progress, PA2 has the best results, reaching almost half of the target value in 2020, while PA1 seems to be the slowest in financial progress, reaching close to only one-third of the final target in 2020. As for the progress in absorbing the available financial resources at Programme level, the performance of the Interreg IPA CBC Croatia – Bosnia and

Herzegovina – Montenegro Programme (34%) is below the average performance of all CBC programmes in 2020 (44%).

Programme strategy/s consistency with emerging results

EQ 1: Do the programme effects and results cover the relevant project outcomes and achievements?

EQ 5: What objectives of the programme have been undoubtedly achieved?

EQ 9: Are there any changes in the programme area resulting from programme interventions that were not defined and foreseen by the Programme?

EQ 10: Did the projects achieve the expected programme results?



The results of the web survey show that under all the specific objectives (SO) projects included have achieved expected programme results, except for one project under SO 2.2 (RMPPI) while some of them also produced results that had not been initially planned. All programme effects and results cover the relevant project outcomes and achievements. It can further be concluded that SOs 2.1 and 4.1. have been undoubtedly achieved since the projects covered within their scope yielded all the anticipated results, whereas only one result had not been foreseen at the very beginning. One of the projects under SO 4.1 (COMPETE PLAMET) that encompassed unplanned results had a notable impact on the programme area as it resulted in clearer connections between secondary education and the needs of the labour market.

Linkages between financed interventions and results

EQ 6: What changes have been made in the programme area in terms of the needs and challenges of the programme area?



Available *Territorial and socio-economic analysis of the programme area* of the 2021-2027 Interreg IPA CBC Programme HR-BA-ME shows that priority goals from 2014-2020 period remain relevant.

EQ 7: What programme interventions can be considered particularly successful in contributing to positive developments in the programme area?



The analysed projects within all four priority axes show a positive trend in reaching Programme goals. Implemented projects clearly contribute to the development of programme area in terms of health services availability, energy efficiency implementation models, preservation of nature, fostering cross-border tourism development and improving skills and competences in business environment.

EQ 8: What are the conclusions given the project results and their expected impact? What are the key elements for achieving long-term cross-border impact?



Although projects have had an overall positive impact, sustainability of their activities is difficult to achieve due to the lack of key elements for achieving long-term cross-border impact such as other funding opportunities and uncertainty of circumstances as a result of the Covid-19 pandemic that has had a large impact on the continuation of project activities.

Conclusions for future interventions

Evaluation question 11: What are the links between activities and/or programme achievements and the overall EU framework for the post-2020 period?



Looking to the key results achieved under 2014-2020 the most relevant SO for the future programming period are:

- PO 1 SO (i) Developing and enhancing research and innovation capacities and the uptake of advanced technologies
- PO 1 SO (iii) Enhancing sustainable growth and competitiveness of SMEs (small and mid-size enterprises) and job creation in SMEs, including by productive investments
- PO 1 SO (iv) Developing skills for smart specialisation, industrial transition and entrepreneurship
- PO 2 SO (i) "Promoting energy efficiency and reducing greenhouse gas emissions"
- PO 2 SO (ii) Promoting renewable energy in accordance with Renewable Energy Directive
- PO 2 SO (iv) "Promoting climate change adaptation and disaster risk prevention, resilience"
- PO 4 SO (iv) "Ensuring equal access to health care and fostering resilience of health systems, including primary care".
- PO 4 SO (vi) "Enhancing the role of culture and sustainable tourism in economic development, social inclusion and social innovation"

Evaluation question 12: Is there a gap between the realized and remaining/new needs of the programme area? What are the conclusions and recommendations for the post-2020 period?



The analysis shows that, during the 2014-2020 programming period, the funds provided by the Programme played a key role in responding to the needs of the territory (they were considered "essential" or "important" by more than 80% of respondents). Data also indicate that the capacity of beneficiaries to mobilise other funds is limited. All in all, the analysis suggests that the territory still has needs in terms of funding, for which the future programme is called to play a crucial role.

The analysis of the cross-border added value and of the possible capitalisation activities suggests that the future programme shall pay particular attention to supporting actions aimed at improving the policy instruments of the area, creation of new policy instruments (plans, agreements) integrated across borders; introduction of new monitoring and evaluation systems on a local or regional scale; introduction of new monitoring and evaluation systems at cross-border level.

Moreover, the future programme shall pay particular attention to the difficulties in ensuring the financial sustainability of the projects since the application phase, to guide future project partners in planning specific actions for ensuring synergies with other policy instruments and for consequently increasing the capacity of the projects to mobilise other funds.

Evaluation question 13: Is there a more cost-effective and/or simple way to achieve the programme specific objectives?



This evaluation question aims to investigate the efficiency and effectiveness of projects according to their partnership size, i.e. to verify if the presence of a larger partnership represents an added value or a risk in terms of achievement of the intended objectives (at project and programme level).

The analysis of the financial absorption (i.e., total amount of expenditures certified by MA and CA out of the total budget of the project) and of the delays with respect to the project deadline initially established (i.e., difference between the initial end date and the new end date agreed with the MA/JS) of the projects financed under the first call shows no evidence about possible correlations between the size of the partnership and delays in the implementation of projects.

Horizontal issues

Evaluation question 14: Did the planned measures/projects successfully contribute to the horizontal programme principles



The analysis based on the review of project application forms points to the overwhelmingly positive contribution to horizontal programme principles. Simultaneously, survey results – conducted after the projects were finalized – confirm that the projects had a positive net impact, albeit a more modest one.

Evaluation question 15: How much has the Programme contributed to the relevant macro-regional strategies?



Most of the of the analysed projects was aligned with some of the EUSAIR's and EUSDR's Pillars. On the basis of self-assessment, their perceived contribution to the strategies can be deemed as average to high.

Evaluation question 16: Have the established communication goals been achieved and how have the target groups accepted the Programme?



Most of the Programme communication goals have been achieved, such as the goal to ensure successful external communication towards other relevant programmes and benefits of cross-border cooperation by disseminating the results to different stakeholder groups in the project and/or Programme area

and/or to the general public. Target groups gained new knowledge and improved their capacities which were the initially expected impacts of the projects.

SO 1.1: Improving the quality of the services in public health and social care sector across the borders

Evaluation question 17: Have new services and skills in the public health and social care sectors been introduced thanks to the interventions of the Programme?

Evaluation question 18: To what extent has the availability of services in the public health and social care sectors improved thanks to activities financed by the programme?



Data from the survey indicate that new services and skills in the public health and social care sectors have been introduced mostly thanks to the interventions of the Programme such as developing, testing or adopting new solutions in the field of health care and social care services and improving competences/skills of key stakeholders. This suggests that the availability of services in the public health and social care sectors improved thanks to activities financed by the programme.

SO 2.1: Promote and improve environment and nature protection and management systems for risk prevention

Evaluation question 19: How much has risk management been strengthened and improved through activities financed from the programme?

Evaluation question 20: How did the interventions of the programme affect the environment and biodiversity in the programme area?

Evaluation question 21: Have the activities related to the importance of nature conservation been implemented, enhanced understanding of the conservation of biodiversity and ecosystems among the local population and visitors of the area?



Within projects in the scope of the Specific Objective 2.1. activities were conducted that resulted in a positive impact and strengthened risk management systems. That was achieved mostly through conducting studies and research in the field of nature protection and risk prevention and improving the competencies and skills of relevant stakeholders. Simultaneously, their impact was the weakest when it came to the development of policy instruments for improving cross-border governance in the field. Concerning the interventions that were intended to have an impact on biodiversity and awareness-raising, the evaluation team observed that the projects were successful in achieving their stated objectives.

SO 2.2: Promote utilization of renewable energy resources and energy efficiency

Evaluation question 22: Did the projects develop new energy solutions?

Evaluation question 23: Can changes in public awareness be recognised as a result of the promotion of sustainable energy sources?

Evaluation question 24: How much did the implemented project activities contribute to the reduction of electricity consumption in public buildings in the programme area?



Under the specific objective 2.2. four interventions have been implemented within the 1st Call for Proposals (finalisation of projects: one project ended mid 2019, one project ended end 2018, another project ended end 2019 and the last project ended at the beginning of 2020). The outputs and results of these projects suggest that the cross border area has experienced an increase in energy efficiency and use of renewable energy resources. The contribution to the PA2 indicator *Additional capacity of renewable energy production* consists of 1,91 MW renewable energy produced by the 4 implemented projects. Furthermore, implemented project activities led to increased capacity of policy makers in the sustainable energy planning, better governance in energy planning (tools, regulatory frameworks, standards), reduction of energy consumption and increased awareness of the benefits coming from the use of energy efficiency measures.

SO 3.1: Strengthen and diversify the tourism offer through cross border approaches and to enable better management and sustainable use of cultural and natural heritage

Evaluation question 25: Did the interventions of the programme contribute to the improvement and diversity of the tourist offer in the programme area?

Evaluation question 26: How much has programme interventions enabled better management of cultural and natural heritage?

Evaluation question 27: How much did the projects contribute to increasing the number of visitors and/or the number of overnight stays in the programme area?



Interventions of the programme had notable impact on the improvement and diversity of the tourist offer, which is evidenced by the results of several projects that managed to create new touristic content and make it more accessible and attractive for visitors in the programme area. Results of project activities indicate that the management of cultural and natural heritage was significantly improved, mostly through training sessions and seminars with relevant stakeholders. Even though some of the projects recorded increased numbers of visitors and/or overnight stays in those project areas, the overall figures for the whole programme area are below the target value, whose fulfilment was further hampered by the COVID-19 pandemic.

SO 4.1: Enhance institutional infrastructure and services in order to accelerate the competitiveness and development of business environment in the programme area

Evaluation question 28: How much has institutional infrastructure and services in the business environment improved?

Evaluation question 29: Did the interventions of the programme strengthen competitiveness and the business environment in the programme area?

Evaluation question 30: Did programme interventions affect the development of innovations, new technologies and ICT solutions in the programming area?



Institutional infrastructure and services in the business environment improved in the following sectors: green economy, tourism and materials sector (use of metal and plastic) by testing capacity building and training schemes for SME and by creating innovative clusters and networks between research and business actors. Capacity to network was the dimension in which all projects increased the skills and competences of SMEs. Programme interventions affected the development of innovations, new technologies and ICT solutions in the programme area, which was seen in the project competenceNET where the project involved use of new, smart technologies and approaches to perform tasks of production, education or cooperation.

Introduction

This Report is the final deliverable of the evaluation of the Interreg IPA Cross-border Cooperation Programme Croatia-Bosnia and Herzegovina-Montenegro 2014-2020 managed by the Ministry of Regional Development and EU Funds of the Republic of Croatia as the Managing Authority (MA).

The objective of this report is to illustrate the impact of the results and effects of Interreg IPA Programme considering the assessment of achieved results and impacts of the programme and their sustainability, communication towards planned objectives and assessment of the impact of programmes and projects financed under the programme on the programme area, cross-border population, project partners and other target groups.

The evaluation findings should serve as a tool for improving the quality of future Programme implementation, and as one of the bases for planning future policies for the development of the Interreg IPA Programme in the coming financial period.

Purpose and objectives of the evaluation

The purpose of this service is to evaluate cross-border cooperation programme whose overall aim is to strengthen the social, economic and territorial development of the cross-border area through the implementation of joint projects and activities.

The evaluation is aimed at assessing the impact of results and impacts of Interreg IPA programme regarding the assessment of achieved results and effects of the Programme and their sustainability, assessing the effects of communication towards planned objectives and assessing the impact of programme and projects financed under the Programme on the programme area, cross-border population, project partners and other target groups.

The evaluation of the effects of the Programme should assess how and to what extent, thanks to the EU (ERDF/IPA II), the programme funds have contributed to the objectives of the Programme, i.e. to the overall objective of the Programme and to the specific objectives of each priority axis of the Programme. The evaluation of the effects of the Programme should assess what the Programme has achieved through its implementation and identify which key challenges and which improvements are necessary for the programming period 2021-2027.

The following specific objectives are also defined: impact assessment of individual priority axes, review of achievement of target values of impact and result indicators, review of target groups, indicative activities and structure of beneficiaries, evaluation of compliance with horizontal principles, socio-economic review of programme area with SWOT analysis, risk evaluation between achieved results of programme implementation and planned values, assessment of contribution to European strategy for smart, sustainable and inclusive growth - Europe 2020 and evaluation of communication strategy in relation to planned objectives.

The evaluation will be carried out by a team of evaluation experts who will work in accordance with the basic principles of evaluation including:

- transparency in the evaluation process - a clear and unambiguous involvement of all relevant stakeholders;
- a clear methodology - in accordance with the work methodology presented in this report;
- impartiality and independence vis-à-vis the service provider, the institutions and users involved;
- visibility of the results - in accordance with the activities set out in the invitation to tender and in agreement with the contracting entity.

Scope of evaluation

Interreg IPA Cross-border Cooperation Programme Croatia-Bosnia and Herzegovina-Montenegro 2014-2020 is a cross-border cooperation Programme whose overall objective is to strengthen the social, economic and territorial development of the cross-border area through the implementation of joint projects and activities. The overall Programme budget is EUR 67,241,552.00, of which EUR 57,155,316.00 is a grant from the EU (ERDF / IPA II).

Within the Interreg IPA Cross-border Cooperation Programme Croatia-Bosnia and Herzegovina-Montenegro 2014-2020, 2 calls for proposals have been published and all appropriations have been allocated on the basis of the decisions of the Joint Monitoring Committee. The last of the 24 projects from the 1st call for proposals have been completed in 2020, while out of 35 projects from the 2nd call for proposals, 31 projects have started their implementation in 2020. The remaining 4 projects from the 2nd Call started implementation at the beginning of 2021.

Evaluation context

Interreg IPA Cross-border Cooperation Programmes are specific instruments whose purpose is to support the cross-border cooperation between the EU Member States and candidate countries or potential candidate countries. Like all Interreg, Interreg IPA CBC Programmes are subject to the Regulations (EU) ¹No 1303/2013 and ²No 1299/2013. Furthermore, the presence of IPA funding requires compliance with Commission Implementing Regulation (EU) ³No 447/2014. The following paragraphs provide an overview of the state of play of the implementation of the Programme. Paragraphs are based on the information provided by the MA during the kick-off meeting in Zagreb.

¹ Common Provisions Regulation (EC) No 1303/2013 (CPR), particularly Articles 54 describing general provisions on assessment, Article 56 on assessment during implementation of the Programme, Article 110 defining functions of the Joint Monitoring Committee, and Article 114 related to conditions regarding submission of the implementation report.

² ETC Regulation (EC) No 1299/2013, particularly recital 26 on Managing Authority's responsibility to undertake the evaluation based on the evaluation plan, and Article 14 describing applications for Implementation report. ³Commission Implementing Regulation (EU) No 447/2014 on the specific rules for implementing Regulation (EU) No 231/2014 of the European Parliament and of the Council establishing an Instrument for Pre-accession assistance (IPA II), particularly Article 41 on evaluation.

Interreg IPA CBC Croatia-Bosnia and Herzegovina-Montenegro 2014-2020

In the financial period 2014-2020 The Ministry of Regional Development and European Union Funds performs the function of the Managing Authority for Interreg IPA cross-border cooperation Programme Croatia-Bosnia and Herzegovina-Montenegro 2014-2020. The overall Programme objective is to increase socio-economic growth through interventions in the sectors of:

- health and social care;
- environment and nature protection/risk prevention and sustainable energy and energy efficiency promotion;
- development of sustainable tourism and culture;
- strengthening competitiveness and business environment.

As illustrated by the following map, the Programme covers twelve (12) counties in Croatia, 109 municipalities and one (1) district (District Brčko) in Bosnia and Herzegovina, and eleven (11) municipalities in Montenegro. The programme area covers 87.454 km².

Figure 1. Map of the area covered by the Interreg IPA CBC Programme Croatia-Bosnia and Herzegovina-Montenegro 2014-2020



Source: <http://www.interreg-hr-ba-me2014-2020.eu/useful-documents/programme-documents/>

Evaluation research methodology





The methodology followed in drafting the report was presented in the inception report, the first deliverable of the evaluation of the Interreg IPA Cross-border Cooperation programme.

The evaluation of the effects of the Programme should assess how and to what extent, thanks to the EU (ERDF/IPA II), the programme funds have contributed to the objectives of the Programme, i.e. to the overall objective of the Programme and to the specific objectives of each priority axis of the Programme. The evaluation of the effects of the Programme should assess what the Programme has achieved through its implementation and identify which key challenges and which improvements are necessary for the programming period 2021-2027.

Elements evaluated according to the terms of reference:

- assessment of the results achieved and the impact of the Programme and their sustainability,
- assessment of the impact of communication according to planned objectives,
- assessment of the impact of Programme and projects financed under the Programme on the programme area, cross-border population, project partners and other target groups.

Consistently with the approach proposed in the inception report, the evaluation was carried out by referring to three main data sources:

-  • A desk review of all the Programme documents, including Annual Implementation reports and data on financial progress sent by the MA.
-  • A web-survey disseminated among beneficiaries and applicants in order to capture their perception on the quality of the Programme's management. The web-survey represented the key evaluation activity needed to thoroughly answer evaluation questions, with special regard to those related to SOs (i.e. EQ 17 to 30). However, due to a very low response rate, the findings presented below are not without certain limitations.
-  • A case study analysis carried out at the level of cross-border projects.
-  • Case studies consist of interviews with project partners and the analysis of project documents.

Programme's achievement of planned objectives

Evaluation question 2: Is the programme structure (e.g. priority axes and specific objectives, examples of activities, etc.) in line with the requirements and needs of potential beneficiaries?

Answer: Based on survey feedback, it can be summarised that programme structure, selected priorities and specific objectives, fully meet the needs of potential applicants in the targeted area.



The programme supports the implementation of joint projects and activities within four priority axes (PA) and five specific objectives (SO):

- PA 1 – Improving the quality of the services in public health and social care sector
 - *SO 1.1. To improve the quality of the services in public health and social care sector across the borders*
- PA 2 – Protecting the environment and nature, improving risk prevention and promoting sustainable energy and energy efficiency
 - *SO 2.1. To promote and improve environment and nature protection and management systems for risk prevention*
 - *SO 2.2. To promote utilization of renewable energy resources and energy efficiency*
- PA 3 – Contributing to the development of tourism and preserving cultural and natural heritage
 - *SO 3.1. To strengthen and diversify the tourism offer through cross border approaches and to enable better management and sustainable use of cultural and natural heritage*
- PA 4 – Enhancing competitiveness and developing business environment in the programme area
 - *SO 4.1. To enhance institutional infrastructure and services in order to accelerate the competitiveness and development of business environment in the programme area*

Potential beneficiaries positively perceive programme structure which they found is in line with their requirements and needs. A web-survey disseminated among beneficiaries and applicants in order to capture their perception on the quality of the programme structure (priority axes, specific objectives and indicative activities) show that all respondents who completed the survey confirm adequacy of programme structure. It is important to note that none of the respondents who replied to this survey question expressed a negative perception toward programme structure. In addition, participants within the survey did not propose any new objectives nor activities that the programme should support.

Evaluation question 3: Are the financial resources allocated for each priority axis in accordance with the requested funds of applicants for project proposals?

Answer: The interest of project applicants for both Calls from Proposals was higher than the programme financial allocation was able to cover. Only 20% of all project proposals submitted were selected for financing. Concerning each priority axis, PA1 has the highest percentage of approved projects (31%) and budget (29%), while the lowest percentage has been recorded under PA3 (14% of projects and 15% of requested budget).



This section compares the distribution of the financial resources as initially demanded by applicants in their project proposals to the distribution of the total financial resources approved per PA. The overall programme budget is EUR 67,249,460, of which EUR 57,155,316 is EU funded (ERDF/IPA II). The table below shows available funding per PA.

Table 1. Detailed indicative total programme budget breakdown per Priority Axes

PA	EU funding (ERDF/IPA II)	National funding	Total funding
1	€ 10.350.654	€ 1.828.019	€ 12.178.673
2	€ 13.483.899	€ 2.381.378	€ 15.865.277
3	€ 16.641.545	€ 2.939.047	€ 19.580.592
4	€ 10.963.687	€ 1.936.286	€ 12.899.973
5	€ 5.715.531	€ 1.009.414	€ 6.724.945
Total	€ 57.155.316	€ 10.094.144	€ 67.249.460

Source : www.interreg-hr-ba-me2014-2020.eu/about-programme/programme-facts/

The next table below shows that the most demanded priority axis was the PA3 – Contributing to the development of tourism and preserving cultural and natural heritage with the requested budget of € 132.106.325 and 103 submitted project proposals. However, only 14% of all project proposals were approved with 15% of requested budget approved.

The PA1 – Improving the quality of the services in public health and social care sector was the most successful PA due to the fact that 31% of project proposals were chosen for financing and 29% of the requested budget was approved. Even though PA1 had the lowest number of project proposals in comparison to all other PAs, it ended up being the PA with the most approved projects (17)*.

*It should be noted that in December 2020, a programme amendment was carried out, resulting in reallocation of saved amounts from PA2 and PA4 and a part of the saved amount from PA3 to PA1. (text from page 20) – JMC decision in line with COVID-19 regulation.

The table however shows that the interest of the public is higher than the programme was able to cover. If we look at the total numbers, only 20% of project proposals were chosen for the financing, which means the interest was 5 times greater than the programme was created for.


Table 2. Financial resources demanded and approved per PA for both published CFPs

PA	Number of project proposals	Total budget requested	Number of approved projects	Total budget approved	Approved projects / projects proposals	Approved / requested budget
1	54	€ 44.747.878	17	€ 13.000.450	31%	29%
2	72	€ 104.715.946	14	€ 16.266.885	19%	16%
3	103	€ 132.106.325	14	€ 19.850.753	14%	15%
4	64	€ 64.343.511	14	€ 13.063.085	22%	20%
Total	293	€ 345.913.659	59	€ 62.181.174	20%	18%

Source: HR-BA-ME_1stCfP – Ranking list per PA.xls, HR-BA-ME_2ndCfP – Ranking list per PA.xls, HR-BA-ME_contracted_projects.xls

Evaluation question 4: How successful and efficient is the implementation of the project?

Answer: Priority Axis 3 is the first Priority Axis most likely to reach all Programme targets for 2023, already having two fully achieved indicator targets in 2020 and four indicators with a level of achievement higher than 50%. Priority Axis 2 is the least likely to reach all Programme targets for 2023 due to low percentages of achievement for one indicator in 2020 – *Population benefiting from flood protection measures* (only 3%). Regarding financial progress, PA2 has the best results, reaching almost half of the target value in 2020, while PA1 seems to be the slowest in financial progress, reaching close to only one-third of the final target in 2020. As for the progress in absorbing the available financial resources at Programme level, the performance of the Interreg IPA CBC Croatia – Bosnia and Herzegovina – Montenegro Programme (34%) is below the average performance of all CBC programmes in 2020 (44%).


 The success and efficiency of programme implementation have been assessed by analysing the level of achievement compared to what was planned in the programming phase in terms of output and financial indicators. The analysis conducted in 2019 highlighted how, in general, the programme was performing well towards the final targets. Data reported in the AIR 2020 confirm ongoing good progress of Programme implementation and in more detail show that:

- Two indicators, one under PA 3 – *Number of sustainable management plans for cultural and natural heritage sites developed and/or implemented* – and one under PA 4 – *Number of business support institutions supported* – surpassed the 2023 final target (the level of achievement being 128% and 105% of final target, respectively);
- Two indicators, one under PA 2 – *Surface area of habitats supported in order to attain a better conservation status (ha)* and one under PA 3 – *Number of tourism providers with (international) certifications and standards*, have also reached the target for 2023;
- Seven indicators present a level of achievement higher than 60%;
- Three indicators are still below one half of their target values, with one indicator under PA2 showing very limited progress (*Population benefiting from flood protection measures - The vast majority of achievements and contribution to this indicator are planned within the 2nd CFP projects, i.e. this is the calculation based on the contribution of only one project from the 1st Call that was the only one to have this indicator selected.*).

It should be noted that in December 2020, a programme amendment was carried out, resulting in reallocation of saved amounts from PA2 and PA4 and a part of the saved amount from PA3 to PA1. Consequently, with the approval of the programme modification in February 2021, the target values of output indicators for 2023 were adjusted.

Table 3. Progress towards the 2023 targets

PA	Indicator	Values achieved 2020	Programme target – 2023	% of achievement of Programme target 2020
PA1	Number of jointly developed and/or implemented tools and services that enable better quality of health and/or social care services	10	13	73%
PA1	Number of participants in joint education and training schemes on health and/or social care	642	935	67%
PA1	Population covered with improved health and/or social care services (CI)	28.745	130.000	22%
PA2	Surface area of habitats supported in order to attain a better conservation status (ha) (CI)	11.401	11.400	100%

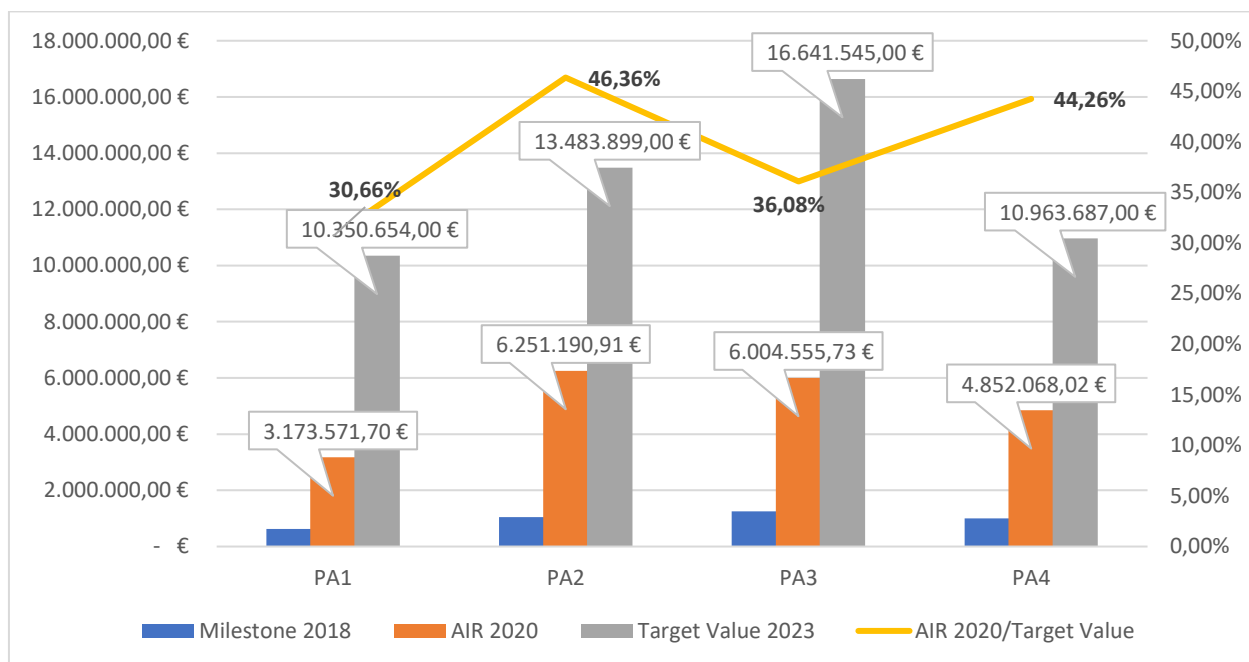
PA	Indicator	Values achieved 2020	Programme target – 2023	% of achievement of Programme target 2020
PA2	Area covered by improved emergency preparedness and risk prevention systems (km ²)	16.134	26.300	61%
PA2	Population benefiting from flood protection measures (CI)	4.791	150.000	3%
PA2	Additional capacity of renewable energy production (MW)	1,90	3,5	54%
PA3	Number of joint tourism offers/products developed and/or implemented and promoted	12	23	52%
PA3	Number of tourism providers with (international) certifications and standards	33	33	100%
PA3	Number of tourism supporting facilities and/or tourism infrastructure developed and/or improved	9	13	69%
PA3	Number of sustainable management plans for cultural and natural heritage sites developed and/or implemented	9	7	128%
PA3	Number of participants trained in quality assurance, standardisation on cultural and natural heritage and destination management	343	427	80%
PA3	Number of cultural and natural assets developed and/or improved	25	28	89%

PA	Indicator	Values achieved 2020	Programme target – 2023	% of achievement of Programme target 2020
PA4	Number of cross-border business clusters and/or networks developed and/or implemented	7	11	64%
PA4	Number of business support institutions supported	21	20	105%
PA4	Number of laboratories and/or competence centers jointly used by the entrepreneurs developed or improved	7	16	44%
PA4	Number of enterprises and business support institutions cooperating with research institutions	14	23	61%

Source: AIR 2020

Regarding financial progress, the chart below shows the level of financial absorption at the end of 2020. Compared to the financial plan (Annexes 1 – 4) 39% of expenditures was certified within the scope of the programme. PA2 has the best results reaching almost half of the target value for 2023, followed by PA4. PA1 seems to be the slowest in financial progress, reaching only close to one third of the final target for 2023.

Figure 2. Financial absorption per PA compared to 2023 final target

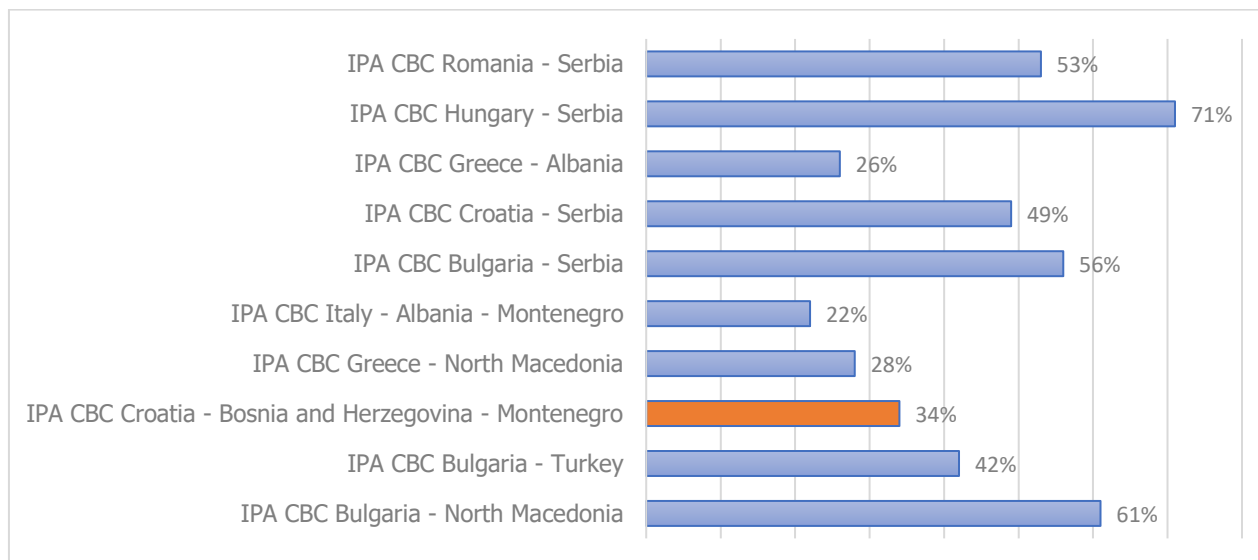


Source: AIR 2020


As for the progress in absorbing the available financial resources, data provided by the EC¹ facilitate a comparison of the progress made by the Programme with other Interreg and IPA-CBC programmes. The figure below is based on EC's data and depicts a comparison between the performance of all IPA-CBC programmes. The percentages represent the amount of eligible costs declared by the beneficiaries in 2020, out of the total Programme budget. The results of this analysis show that the performance of the Interreg IPA CBC Programme Croatia – Bosnia and Herzegovina – Montenegro (34%) is below the average performance of all CBC programmes in 2020 (44%).

¹ Source: cohesiondata.ec.europa.eu, accessed on (15.08.2021.)

Figure 3. Eligible expenditure declared by beneficiaries out of the total Programme budget – comparison among IPA programmes



Source: cohesiondata.ec.europa.eu


 Insights from the case studies further confirm the state of play of projects' implementation. Concerning project MELAdetect, all planned activities and results have been achieved, e.g., education was provided to 454 participants. Although results regarding the implementation of PA 1 show that achieved targets have not been entirely met, this project has achieved everything that as planned. When it comes to PA 2, all activities and results under project safeEARTH have been achieved, as well as project SMART SCHOOLS, under which all planned results have even been exceeded. Under PA 3, all activities of the project Fortress ReInvented have also been implemented and results achieved (e.g., four joint tourism offers have been developed) as well as in the case of project ADRIATIC CANYONING, whereby training of 42 people in quality assurance was conducted. Project competenceNET, implemented within the scope of PA 4, also achieved all planned results by implementing all the foreseen activities, for example by reconstructing and establishing 3 business competence centres.

Programme strategy's consistency with emerging results

Evaluation question 1: Do the programme effects and results cover the relevant project outcomes and achievements?

Evaluation question 5: What objectives of the programme have been undoubtedly achieved?

Evaluation question 9: Are there any changes in the programme area resulting from programme interventions that were not defined and foreseen by the Programme?

Evaluation question 10: Did the projects achieve the expected programme results?

Answer: The results of the web survey show that under all the specific objectives (SO) projects included have achieved expected programme results, except for one project under SO 2.2 (RMPPI), while some of them also produced results that had not been initially planned. All programme effects and results cover the relevant project outcomes and achievements. It can further be concluded that SOs 2.1 and 4.1. have been undoubtedly achieved since the projects covered within their scope yielded all the anticipated results, whereas only one result had not been foreseen at the very beginning. One of the projects under SO 4.1 (COMPETE PLAMET) that encompassed unplanned results had a notable impact on the programme area as it resulted in clearer connections between secondary education and the needs of the labour market.



The results of the web survey among lead partners, taking into account all the obtained answers (5 out of 5), have shown that under specific objective (SO) 1.1, projects implemented achieved the intended results, while there were no unexpected results. Furthermore, within the scope of this SO, the most notable results were **increased knowledge, skills and capacities of key stakeholders in the field of public health and social care sectors** as well as better governance of the public health and social care sectors.

Regarding SO 2.1, 2 out of 2 responses to the web survey have confirmed that all projects covered had achieved the intended results, while one of them (safEARTH) produced results that had not been originally planned. The most important results pertaining to this SO are **better governance in the field of nature protection and risk prevention and better capacity to respond to risks**.

Under SO 2.2, there was one answer (RMPPI) in the web survey (1 out of 4 responses), that pointed out that a project did not achieve initially planned results, although most of the other projects (3 out of 4) did achieve them. Also, all answers point out that there were no unplanned results achieved. According to the survey, within the scope of this SO the most important results were **increased capacity of policy makers in sustainable energy planning and better governance in energy planning**.

When it comes to SO 3.1, all answers within the survey (4 out of 4 responses) emphasize that projects implemented achieved all the planned results and that there were no additional results achieved. The most significant project results were **increased skills and competence of tourism actors in promoting sustainable and smart models**, more diversified tourism offer and sustainable valorization of less known touristic destinations.

The replies (4 out of 4) concerning SO 4.1 indicate that all of the projects achieved the intended results, while one of them (COMPETE PLAMET) also noted notable results that had not been initially planned, such as **successfully bringing together secondary education and the needs of the labor market**.

Finally, the findings from the web survey indicate that all programme effects and results cover the relevant project outcomes and achievements. It can further be concluded that SOs 2.1 and 4.1. have been undoubtedly achieved since the projects covered within their scope yielded all the anticipated results, whereas only one result had not been foreseen at the very beginning. One of the projects under SO 4.1 (COMPETE PLAMET) that encompassed unplanned results had a notable

impact on the programme area as it resulted in clearer connections between secondary education and the needs of the labour market.



Innovative Minds for Smart Schools - SMART SCHOOLS / SMART SCHOOLS II

Lead Partner - Association Centre for Development and Support (BA)

There were five expected results under this project: 1) annual 628,511.00 kWh energy saving in 75 schools and other public buildings, 2) at least 30 newly trained energy managers, employees of public institutions, 3) annual 16,542.00 kWh energy saving - achieved by 20 project area students (participants of IT/technological innovation contest) and students of two schools (winners of an energy-saving contest), 4) new technical facilities installed with a total of 661.50 kW renewable energy generation capacity, and 5) citizens educated and motivated to apply affordable measures and solutions for EE and RES increase in their households/workplaces. All project results, identified in the area of development of solutions or products, were exceeded and fully achieved.

The results of the case study have shown that projects SMART SCHOOLS and SMART SCHOOLS II did not have any difficulties nor obstacles that they had to face. Within the scope of the project Smart Schools there weren't any external factors that might have accelerated nor hindered the progress towards project results, since, as the lead partner stated, they ("project team") are: *"...masters of risk management, (they) know in which ways things can go wrong and then they always have not only a Plan A, but also a Plan B and a Plan C ready"*.

Linkages between financed interventions and results

Evaluation question 6: What changes have been made in the programme area in terms of the needs and challenges of the programme area?

Answer: Available Territorial analysis of the 2021-2027 IPA CBC HR-BA-ME shows that priority goals from 2014-2020 period remain relevant.



Available Territorial analysis of the 2021-2027 IPA CBC HR-BA-ME shows that priority goals from 2014-2020 period remain relevant, but additional *importance* must be given to:

- digitalisation and education of skilled workforce; SME competitiveness; research and innovation (Smarter Europe);

- energy potential for the use of renewable energy sources in all three countries; preservation of biodiversity; climate change adaption and disaster risk prevention; circular economy (Greener Europe);
- unemployment and poverty issues, brain drain and demographic trends, marginalised communities, health care and tourism and culture development using the potential of data driven decision making in order to ensure sustainability (Social Europe);
- overall development of the area and empowerment of the dialogue and interdisciplinarity of the governing approach which can have a multiplier effect on other policy areas in need of further democratization and more efficient public policies (A better cooperation governance);
- continuation of interregional cooperation of border police, assistance provided by Croatia and the EU to other countries in modernizing technology and infrastructure at borders and cooperation in improving the system for identification and registration of migrants (Interreg specific objective "A safer and more secure Europe").

The development needs *detected in the programme area* may be summarised in the following way:

Table 4. Development needs detected

1. SMARTER EUROPE	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Research and innovation • SME (Small and medium-sized enterprises) competitiveness
2. GREENER EUROPE	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Energy efficiency • Climate change adaption and disaster risk prevention • Circular economy • Nature protection and biodiversity
3. SOCIAL EUROPE	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Education and training infrastructure • Access to health care • Tourism and culture
4. Interreg specific objective - BETTER COOPERATION GOVERNANCE	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Local and regional governance


Source: Territorial analysis of the 2021-2027 IPA CBC HR-BA-ME



The survey answers show that the programme strategy is relevant for the 68% of respondents, while 32% of respondents provide further suggestions for additional adaptation of the programme strategy to the entrepreneurship needs, which are particularly relevant in the cooperation area. More in detail, respondents highlighted the importance to:

- implement digitalization and technology improvements in SMEs;


- to provide institutional support to entrepreneurship;
- to advance new services that entrepreneurs need;
- to invest in skilled staff within the Technology Parks who should transfer the knowledge, safety aspects in RES (renewable energy sources) modules development, etc.
- furthermore, respondents also pointed out that more education for target groups is needed.

 Based on the findings of the case studies, it can be concluded that projects did not report any unexpected challenges or needs that had negatively influenced overall project outcomes. No changes in the intervention context had occurred and all challenges detected in the implementation phase had been solved within cross-border partnership.

For instance, project competenceNET (PA4) reported as challenging the use of new smart technologies and approaches to perform tasks in their production processes, which had up to that point usually been done in a more traditional and less environmentally friendly way. That was a challenge which had been successfully anticipated during project implementation phase and then resolved within the partnership. Project Fortress ReInvented (PA3) reported challenges in implementation which are related to procurement of high-tech equipment. The lead partner was unfamiliar with such specific procurement processes and it took them more time than they expected to deal with it. Project SafEarth (PA2) also reported challenges related to incompatibility of public procurement rules in Bosnia and Herzegovina and the EU public procurement rules which were successfully overcome, even though some precious time was lost in the meantime.

Evaluation question 7: What programme interventions can be considered particularly successful in contributing to positive developments in the programme area?

Answer: The analysed projects within all four priority axes show a positive trend in reaching Programme goals. Implemented projects clearly contribute to the development of programme area in terms of health services availability, energy efficiency implementation models, preservation of nature, fostering cross-border tourism development and improving skills and competences in business environment.

 The results of the analysis based on the case studies point toward the success of programme interventions in the field of tourism, nature preservation, energy efficiency and access to health services. Project MELAdetect (PA1) demonstrated achievement of the main results that are new prevention and knowledge platform in the field of treatment of skin, ocular and mucosal melanoma, the implementation of educational and awareness raising activities contributed to increasing the knowledge and more up-to-date methods of melanoma treatment. Specifically targeted health care projects are very beneficial for the Programme area especially during the current health crisis. Project SMART SCHOOLS (PA2) exceeded all planned results. Alongside the creation of opportunities for exchange with cross-border partners, the key added

value of cross-border cooperation was the improvement and transfer of knowledge of a specific problem common to the relevant cross-border territories (solutions for EE (energy efficiency) and RES increase). Projects implemented within PA 2 significantly contribute to overall Programme achievements. Project Fortress ReInvented (PA3) and project ADRIATIC CANYONING (PA3) have also achieved all anticipated activities and results: e.g. three adventure parks were equipped and developed, Adventure Park Vrbanj (Herceg Novi, ME), Adventure Park Borak (Široki Brijeg, BA) and Adventure Park Peć Mlini (Grude, BA) and locations in Drniš and Obrovac (HR) were enriched with additional adventure content. Project *competenceNET* (PA4) contributed to the Programme with significant results such as: three transnational business competence centers developed for MSMEs (Micro, small and medium enterprises) in Zenica-Doboj county, Vukovar-Srijem county and Podgorica; improved business-related competences of unemployed young persons through training and practical mentoring programmes (more than 80 persons were trained); raised knowledge of MSMEs on introducing new technologies, and innovative solutions in business operations through Smart cooperation programme; developed cross border partnership model of public, private and research sector for access to and exchange of competences, experiences and know-how for favorable business environment.

Evaluation question 8: What are the conclusions given the project results and their expected impact? What are the key elements for achieving long-term cross-border impact?

Answer: Although projects have had an overall positive impact, sustainability of their activities is difficult to achieve due to the lack of key elements for achieving long-term cross-border impact such as other funding opportunities and uncertainty of circumstances as a result of the Covid-19 pandemic that has had a large impact on the continuation of project activities.



All of the projects that were a part of case studies had successfully achieved or exceeded all the anticipated results and thus fulfilled all the objectives. The expected impact of all these projects was achieved, although the impact of some projects has proved to be difficult to quantify, but it can still be assumed that the project activities had a positive impact in general.



ADRIATIC CANYONS ADVENTURE TOURS – ADRIATIC CANYONING (Lead Partner - City of Široki Brijeg (BA))

The Adriatic Canyoning project has had a very positive impact on tourism development in the whole Adriatic Hinterland region and it has achieved all the predicted results. A cross-border model for better management and sustainable use of natural heritage in the Adriatic Hinterland was developed, and it contributed to better management and sustainable use of natural heritage in Adriatic Hinterland through specific tourism offer. Selected canyons and locations were also equipped with specific tourism infrastructure. This result contributed to the diversification of tourism offer and extend the tourism offer from the coastline to the inland rural areas.



The web survey among the lead partners has shown that the key elements for achieving long-term cross-border impact and sustainability are: continued funding following the completion of the project, which was pointed out by 9 out of 16 respondents (56,25%), followed by better circumstances regarding Covid-19 crisis that was emphasized by 6 out of 16 respondents (37,5%). Most of the survey answers focus on the lack of funding opportunities after project completion as the biggest challenge regarding project sustainability, as well as variable Covid-19 situation that has had a large impact on the cross-border movements which complicates the cooperation and connection between the countries.

Conclusions for future interventions

Evaluation question 11: What are the links between activities and/or programme achievements and the overall EU framework for the post-2020 period?

Answer: Looking to the key results achieved under 2014-2020 the most relevant SO for the future programming period are:

- PO 1 SO (i) Developing and enhancing research and innovation capacities and the uptake of advanced technologies
- PO 1 SO (iii) Enhancing sustainable growth and competitiveness of SMEs and job creation in SMEs, including by productive investments
- PO 1 SO (iv) Developing skills for smart specialisation, industrial transition and entrepreneurship
- PO 2 SO (i) Promoting energy efficiency and reducing greenhouse gas emissions
- PO 2 SO (ii) Promoting renewable energy in accordance with Renewable Energy Directive

- PO 2 SO (iv) Promoting climate change adaptation and disaster risk prevention, resilience
- PO 4 SO (iv) Ensuring equal access to health care and fostering resilience of health systems, including primary care
- PO 4 SO (vi) Enhancing the role of culture and sustainable tourism in economic development, social inclusion and social innovation



This section aims at finding a link between the specific objectives set for the 2021-2027 programming period (CPR, ERDF and Interreg regulations and annexes) and the results emerging from interventions financed by the Programme in the current programming period.

The analysis was developed by:

1. aggregating the information collected from the survey and the case studies about the categories of results achieved by the projects financed by the 2014-2020 programme;
2. comparing the achieved results to the 2021-2027 strategic framework (i.e. list of policy objectives and specific objectives).

The match between the results achieved and the 2021-2027 policy framework is presented in **Error! Reference source not found.** below.

The key findings of the analysis are the following:

- Results achieved by the current programme under SO 1.1 *To improve the quality of the services in public health and social care sector across the borders* (i.e. increasing knowledges/skills/capacities of key stakeholders in the field of public health and social care sectors and improving access to health and social care services) are consistent with results targeted in 2021-2027 under PO 4, SO (v) "Ensuring equal access to health care and fostering resilience of health systems, including primary care".
- Results achieved by the current programme under SO 2.1 *To promote and improve environment and nature protection and management systems for risk prevention* are consistent with the results targeted under PO 2, SO (iv) "Promoting climate change adaptation and disaster risk prevention, resilience".
- Results achieved by the current programme under SO 2.2 *To promote utilization of renewable energy resources and energy efficiency* are consistent with what expected for the future programming period under PO 2 SO (i) "Promoting energy efficiency and reducing greenhouse gas emissions" and (ii) "Promoting renewable energy in accordance with Directive (EU) 2018/2001, including the sustainability criteria set out therein".
- Results achieved by the current programme under SO 3.1 *To strengthen and diversify the tourism offer through cross border approaches and to enable better management and sustainable use of cultural and natural heritage* are consistent with what expected for the future programming period under PO 4 SO (vi) "Enhancing the role of culture and sustainable tourism in economic development, social inclusion and social innovation".



- Results achieved by the current programme under SO 4.1 are consistent with what expected for the future programming period under PO 1 SO (i) "Developing and enhancing research and innovation capacities and the uptake of advanced technologies" SO (iii) "Enhancing sustainable growth and competitiveness of SMEs and job creation in SMEs, including by productive investments" and SO (iv) "Developing skills for smart specialisation, industrial transition and entrepreneurship".

		Programme's results 2014-2021													
		SO 1.1	SO 1.1	SO 2.1	SO 2.2	SO 2.2	SO 2.2	SO 3.1	SO 3.1	SO 3.1	SO 3.1	SO 3.1	SO 4.1	SO 4.1	SO 4.1
		Increased knowledges/skills/capacities in public health and social care sectors	Better access to health and social care services	Increased knowledges/skills/capacities in nature protection and risk prevention	Increased capacity of policy makers in sustainable energy planning	Better governance in energy planning	Reduction of energy consumption	Increased skills and competence in promoting sustainable and smart models	More diversified tourism offer	Sustainable valorisation of less known touristic destinations	Better governance to protect cultural and natural heritage	Increased attractiveness of the cooperation area	Testing capacity building and training schemes for SMEs	innovative clusters and networks between research and business	Increase of skills and competences of SMEs
PO 4	(v) Ensuring equal access to health care and fostering resilience of health systems, including primary care	X	X												
	(vi) Enhancing the role of culture and sustainable tourism in economic development, social inclusion and social innovation							X	X	X	X	X			



Evaluation question 12: Is there a gap between the realized and remaining/new needs of the programme area? What are the conclusions and recommendations for the post-2020 period?

Answer: the analysis shows that, during the 2014-2020 programming period, the funds provided by the Programme played a key role in responding to the needs of the territory (they were considered “essential” or “important” by more than 80% of respondents). Data also indicate that the capacity of beneficiaries to mobilise other funds is limited. All in all, the analysis suggests that the territory still has needs in terms of funding, for which the future programme is called to play a crucial role.

The analysis of the cross-border added value and of the possible capitalisation activities suggests that the future programme should pay particular attention to supporting actions aimed at improving the policy instruments of the area, e.g. creation of new policy instruments (plans, agreements) integrated across borders; introduction of new monitoring and evaluation systems on a local or regional scale; introduction of new monitoring and evaluation systems at cross-border level.

Moreover, the future programme should pay particular attention to the difficulties in ensuring the financial sustainability of the projects since the application phase, to guide future project partners in planning specific actions for ensuring synergies with other policy instruments and for consequently increasing the capacity of the projects to mobilise other funds.

The analysis of the presence of possible gaps between what was achieved by the Programme and the needs of the cooperation area is based on two different sources.

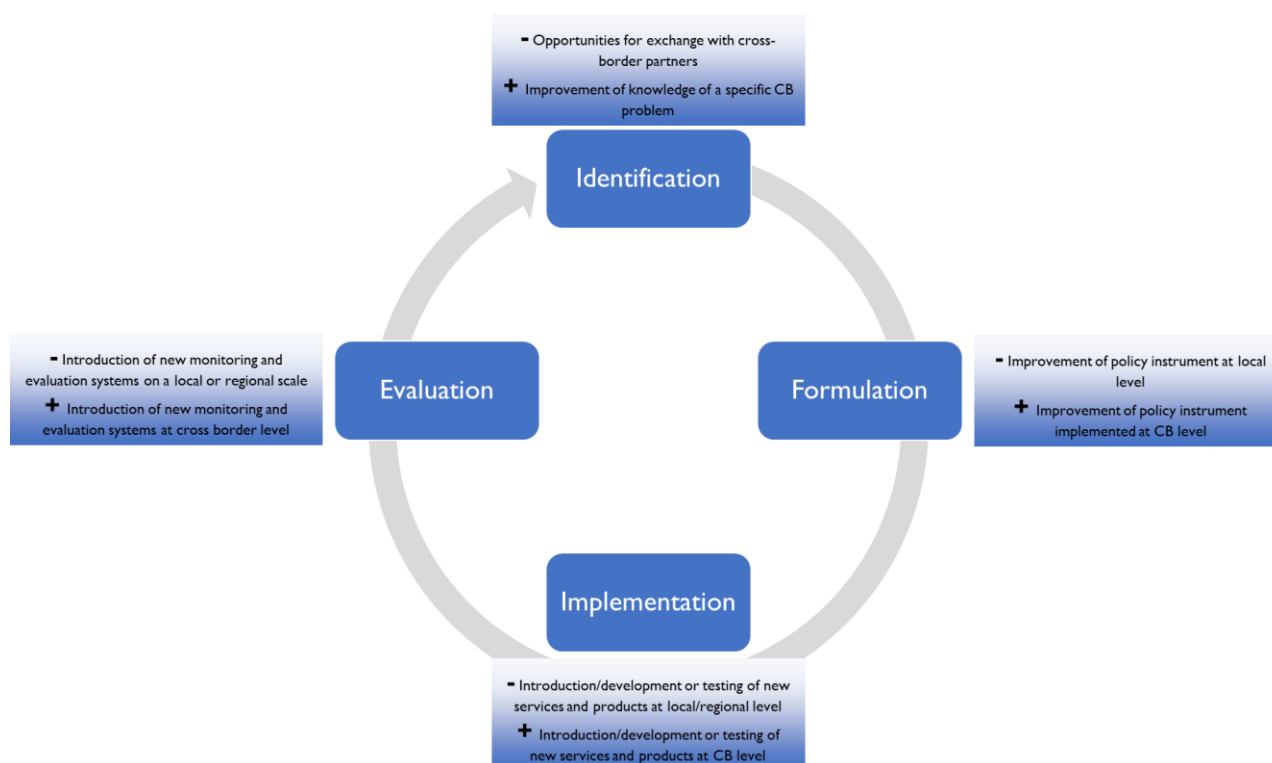
1. First, based on the data collected through the websurvey, we investigated the perceptions of beneficiaries regarding the cross border added value of their project and indirectly we identified possible gaps in terms of types of activities not yet implemented at cross border scale.
2. Second, based on the answers to the web-survey, we verified to what extent the beneficiaries trust in future interreg funds to follow up on the project activities.



Possible remaining/new needs in terms of types of activities to be implemented

A specific section of the web-survey was dedicated to investigating the cross-border added value of the operations financed. The options provided to the beneficiaries in the questionnaire correspond to different phases of the policy cycle and, for each phase, to different levels of ‘intensity’ of cross-border added value. The figure below summarises the logic underpinning this specific part of the questionnaire.

Figure 4. Logic underpinning the questions on the CB added value



The table below illustrates the results of the web-survey. The table shows that beneficiaries consider that the cross-border added value of their project mainly lie on the improvement of knowledge of a specific cross-border problem and on the creation of opportunities for exchange with cross-border partners (i.e. identification phase) and on the introduction/development or testing of new services and products at local/regional level (i.e. implementation phase). We can deduce that possible gaps in terms of activities not yet carried out at cross-border level are related to formulation and evaluation of policies. The future programme can consequently consider to pay particular attention to interventions aimed at improving the policy and the monitoring instruments at local and cross-border level.

Table 5. What is the key cross-border added value of the project?

Phase	Type of added-value	SO 1.1	SO 2.1	SO 2.2	SO 3.1	SO 4.1	TOT
Identification	Creation of opportunities for exchange with cross-border partners and for promotion of international networks	80%	0%	100%	75%	100%	71%
	Improvement or transfer of knowledge of a specific problem common to cross-border territories	80%	50%	100%	25%	100%	71%
Formulation	Improvement of policy instruments (plans, agreements) at local or regional level	40%	0%	50%	50%	0%	28%

	Creation of new policy instruments (plans, agreements) integrated across borders	60%	0%	0%	50%	50%	32%
Implementation	Introduction/development or testing of new services and products at local/regional level	40%	50%	25%	25%	75%	43%
	Introduction/development or testing of new services and products at cross border level	40%	0%	25%	25%	0%	18%
Evaluation	Introduction of new monitoring and evaluation systems on a local or regional scale	0%	50%	25%	0%	0%	15%
	Introduction of new monitoring and evaluation systems at cross border level	0%	0%	0%	25%	0%	5%

Source: Data survey



Possible remaining/new needs in terms of need for funds

A specific section of the web-survey was dedicated to investigating at which extent beneficiaries have relied and will in future rely on the programme funds to carry out their projects.

Key findings emerging from the web-survey:

- 49% consider that the funding opportunities provided by the Programme have been essential to carry out the planned activities, 31% declare that they have been "important" (see Table 6 below).
- 63% of respondents are mobilising and/or will mobilise other funds (than the co-financing) for supporting project activities.
- Synergies with other EU instruments are limited (see Table 7).
- 93% of respondents plan to continue project activities beyond the duration of the project and for more than half of them the potential lack of funding represents the key challenge for the sustainability over time of the projects.
- Almost 90% of respondents declare that they will apply for a new cross-border project in the 2021-2027 IPA CBC programme to capitalise on the results of their project

Table 6. Funding opportunities provided by the Programme

	SO 1.1	SO 2.1	SO 2.2	SO 3.1	SO 4.1	TOT
Essential	20%	100%	75%	0%	50%	49%
Important	80%	0%	0%	50%	25%	31%
Complementary to other funding sources	0%	0%	25%	50%	25%	20%

Table 7. Synergies with other policy instruments

	SO 1.1	SO 2.1	SO 2.2	SO 3.1	SO 4.1	TOT
S3 of the partners regions	40%	0%	0%	50%	25%	26%
Horizon 2020	20%	50%	75%	0%	25%	32%
COSME	0%	0%	0%	0%	25%	5%
Enterprise Europe Network	20%	0%	0%	0%	25%	11%
LIFE	0%	0%	0%	0%	0%	0%
Other	20%	0%	25%	50%	25%	26%

Source: Data survey

Evaluation question 13: Is there a more cost-effective and/or simple way to achieve the programme specific objectives? (to be answered separately for each specific objective)

Answer: The analysis of the financial absorption (i.e., total amount of expenditures certified by MA and CA out of the total budget of the project) and of the delays with respect to the project deadline initially established (i.e., difference between the initial end date and the new end date agreed with the MA/JS) of the projects financed under the first call shows no evidence about possible correlations between the size of the partnership and delays in the implementation of projects.

This evaluation question aims to investigate the efficiency and effectiveness of projects according to their partnership size, i.e. to verify if the presence of a larger partnership represents an added value or a risk in terms of achievement of the intended objectives (at project and programme level). This analysis is carried out through data analysis by verifying whether we can observe a correlation² between the partnership size and the efficiency of the projects in terms of meeting deadlines and progress in absorption of funds.

More precisely:

- as a first step, we have investigated possible correlation between the partnership size (i.e., the number of project partners) and the percentage of expenditures certified (i.e., total amount of expenditures certified by MA and CA out of the total budget of the project).
- secondly we have analysed possible correlation the partnership size (i.e., the number of project partners) and the number of delays in the project closure (i.e., difference between the initial end date and the new end date agreed with the MA/JS).

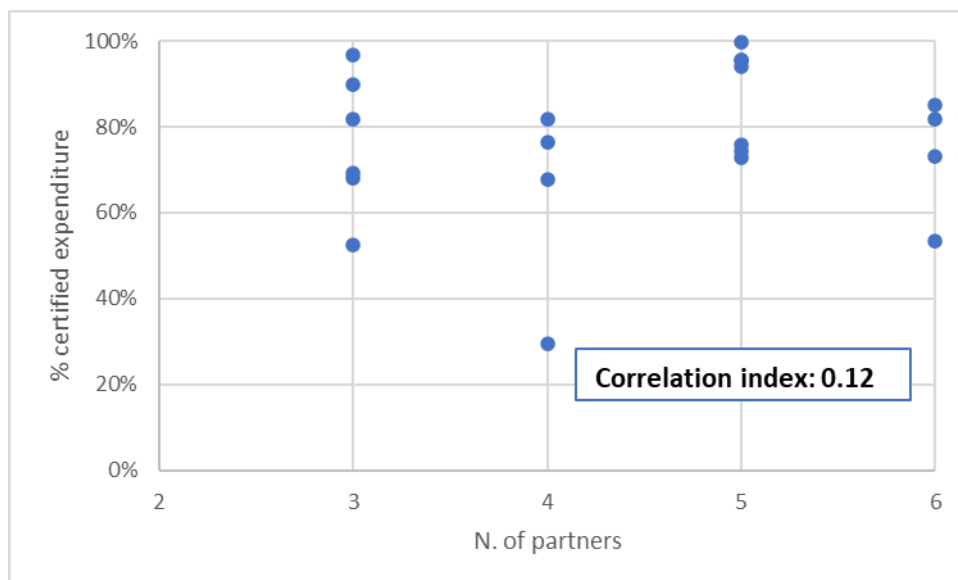
It is important to underline that, considering that projects financed under the second call are still in the early stage, both analysis were carried out by only considering projects financed under the first call.

² In statistics, correlation or dependence is any statistical relationship, whether causal or not, between two variables. In the broadest sense correlation it commonly refers to the degree to which a pair of variables are linearly related.

Correlation between size of the partnership and budget absorption

The statistical analysis of the data related to the projects financed under the first call shows that the correlation between the partnership size and the percentage of certified expenditure is extremely limited (i.e., the correlation index is 0.12, see figure below).

Figure 5. Analysis of correlation between size of the partnership and budget absorption

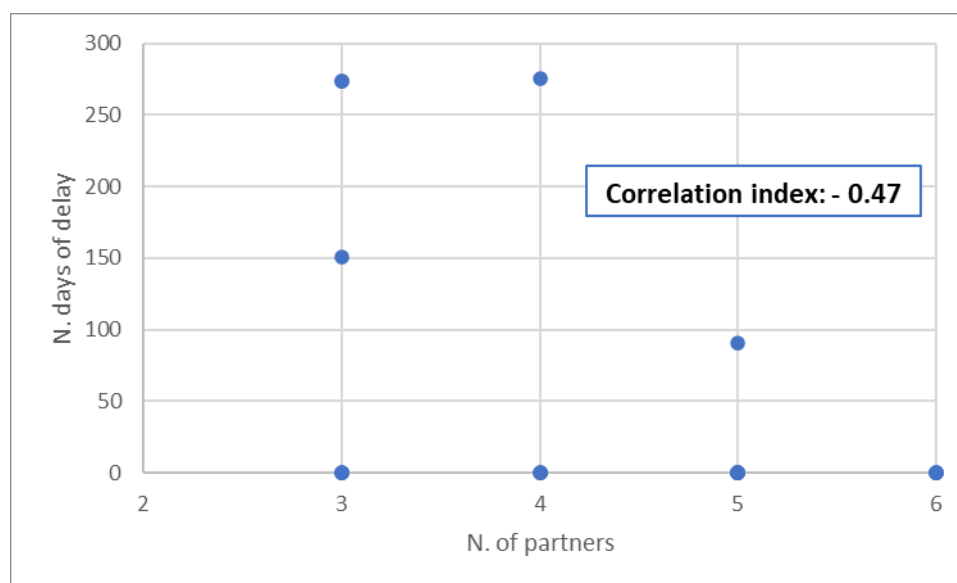


Source: own elaboration based on data provided by MA/JS

Correlation between size of the partnership and days of delay in project closure

The lack of evidence regarding possible inefficiencies characterising the large partnerships is also confirmed by the figure below which shows a negative correlation between the partnership size and the number of days of delays with respect to the project deadline initially established (i.e., difference between the initial end date and the new end date agreed with the MA/JS).

Figure 6. Analysis of correlation between size of the partnership and days of delay



Source: own elaboration based on data provided by MA/JS

Horizontal issues

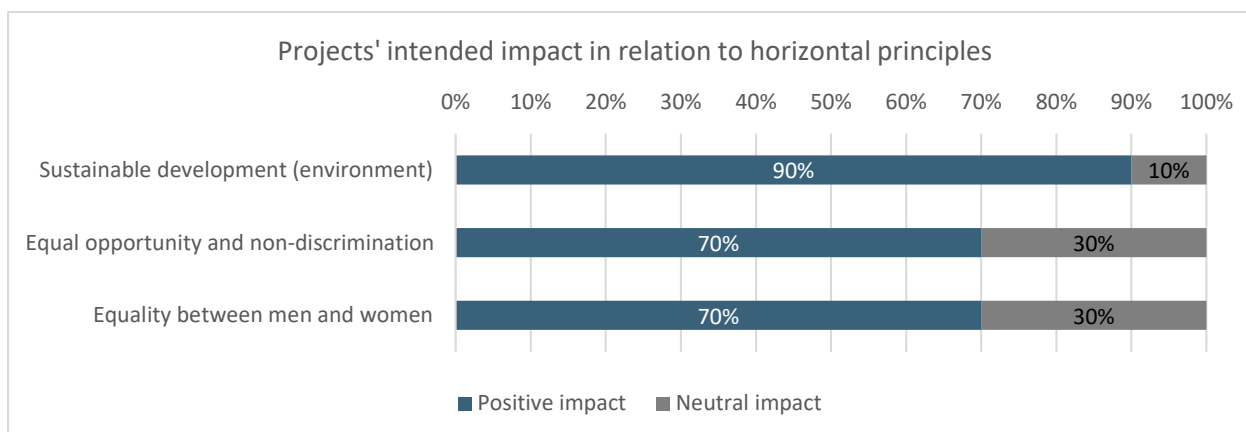
Evaluation question 14: Did the planned measures/projects successfully contribute to the horizontal programme principles?

Answer: The analysis based on the review of project application forms points to the overwhelmingly positive contribution to horizontal programme principles. Simultaneously, survey results – conducted after the projects were finalized – confirm that the projects had a positive net impact, albeit a more modest one.



Based on the analysis of programme documents, namely, application forms and project progress reports of projects examined in the form of case studies, it can be stated that the overall contribution to horizontal programme principles is largely positive. Most noticeable impact has been achieved in the area of minimizing environmental impact and achieving sustainable development (horizontal principle Sustainable development (environment)), with 90% of analysed projects including activities with intended net positive effect. The remaining 10% considered their contribution to the horizontal principle Sustainable development to be neutral. Horizontal principles concerning Equal opportunities and non-discrimination and Equality between men and women achieved a slightly lesser impact, with 70% of projects implementing project activities that had a net positive effect. The remaining 30% considered their contribution to the two remaining horizontal principles to be neutral.

Figure 7. Projects' intended impact in relation to horizontal principles



The results of the conducted online survey also point towards a largely net positive impact related to the projects' contribution to horizontal principles. Out of the total number of survey participants, 75,0% of them stated that their projects had a positive impact on the creation of equal opportunities and non-discrimination. Out of the same number of respondents, 62,5% considered their projects to be contributing to sustainable development and 56,2% to equality between men and women. In comparison to the results derived from desk analysis, the overall impact on the contribution to horizontal principles is still strong, but slightly more modest.

Horizontal principle	Share of projects that contributed to horizontal principle	Share of projects that didn't contribute to horizontal principle
Sustainable development	62,5%	37,5%
Equal opportunities and non-discrimination	75,0%	25,0%
Equality between men and women	56,2%	43,8%

Survey participants were given the opportunity to elaborate on how their projects contributed to horizontal principles.

Equal opportunities and non-discrimination

"Events were designed to give people with reduced mobility easy access. Premises of both Technology Parks are easily accessible for people with disabilities. Project events and meetings for target groups were not scheduled on religious holidays of any religious minority. The project ensured flexible working conditions to respect religious practices."

"Equal opportunity and non-discrimination were provided for all training participants (T1.2) as well as for participants of other targeted events. All participants had the same opportunities irrespective of gender, racial or ethnic origin, religion or belief, disability, age or sexual orientation."

Sustainable development

"Implementation of project activities directly contributes to various aspects of environmental protection. In particular, replacement of coal-burning heating systems with biomass (pellet) heating systems in schools, and energy saving achieved through energy-saving school competition and education of energy managers improves quality of air in project area, which in turn has positive effects on human health and directly contributes to climate change mitigation."

"Removing of asbestos roofs from three buildings on the business incubator in Šibenik has had a positive impact on environmental protection and human health, as asbestos is highly dangerous to health due to cancerous influences. Now the business incubator premises are safe for Technology Park users."

Equality between men and women

"During the entire implementation, the project specifically promoted equality between men and women, as seen through participation of both sexes in the composition of the project management team, participation in the program for development of business skills, and the inclusion of women business owners as users of common virtual incubator, organized trainings and international economic fairs."

"The project encouraged gender equality and equal opportunities for all genders. In all project activities equality between men and women was encouraged, and so far, the participation at every stage of the project was almost equal among men and women. Despite the efforts to motivate women as well as men in the activities regarding the trainings carried out in Grude and Široki Brijeg, women demonstrated less interest in participation. Interested parties were almost exclusively men. The above said comes as no surprise since the trainings were primarily targeted towards members of Mountain rescue stations in Grude and Široki Brijeg, due to their previous experience in difficult rescue operations, where men make up the majority of members."



Heating communities with renewable energy – RENEW HEAT (Lead partner - North-West Croatia Regional Energy Agency (HR))

The main objective of the project is to drive the regional energy transition based on sustainable use of a readily available RES - wood - leading to increased energy security, a cleaner environment, and a stronger economy of the cross-border region.

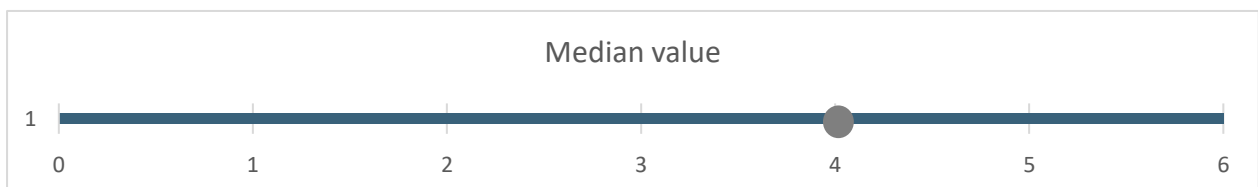
With regards to the contribution of RENEW HEAT to the horizontal principles of the programme, a positive impact can be observed in the field of sustainable development (environment). This project indeed has directly promoted the use of local renewable energy sources as a way to decrease dependency on fossil fuels and achieve better energy performance. Unlike solar or wind power, biomass is only conditionally a RES, thus the project was dedicated to emphasising the importance of sustainability and value chains. All stakeholders along the chain (suppliers, consumers, policy makers) were educated on environmental aspects and implications of their choices. RENEW HEAT also contributed to the reduction of carbon footprint through changing consumers'

Evaluation question 15: How much has the Programme contributed to the relevant macro-regional strategies?

Answer: A considerable share of the analysed projects was aligned with some of the EUSAIR's and EUSDR's Pillars. On the basis of self-assessment, their perceived contribution to the strategies can be deemed as average to high.



A certain level of synergy between the EU Strategy for the Adriatic and Ionian Region (EUSAIR) and Interreg trilateral cross-border cooperation programme can be confirmed on the basis of the survey results. Namely, out of the total number of respondents, 75% of them stated that their projects were aligned with EUSAIR's Pillars. Out of these, 50% of the projects were in line with EUSAIR's Pillar 4 (Sustainable tourism), 33% with Pillar 2 (Connecting the region) and 17% with Pillar 3 (Environmental Quality). When requested to assess the level of their contribution to EUSAIR on a scale of 1 to 5 (1= no contribution, 5= strong contribution), survey participants estimated their contribution to be 4 (median value).

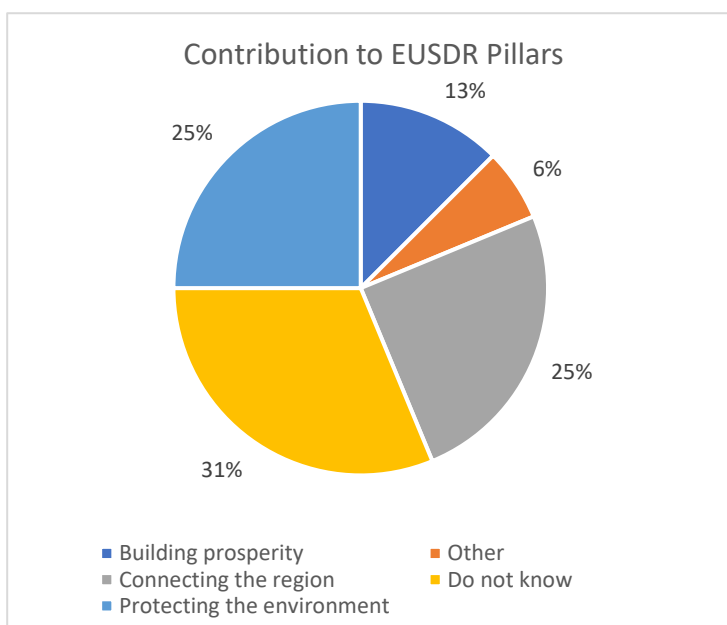


For example, the respondents stated that in the scope of EUSAIR's Pillar 4 their projects contributed to strengthening business knowledge and motivation through the establishment of three national clusters (creative industries, tourism and local food). The contribution to sustainable tourism can be observed in the internationalization of those clusters through joint

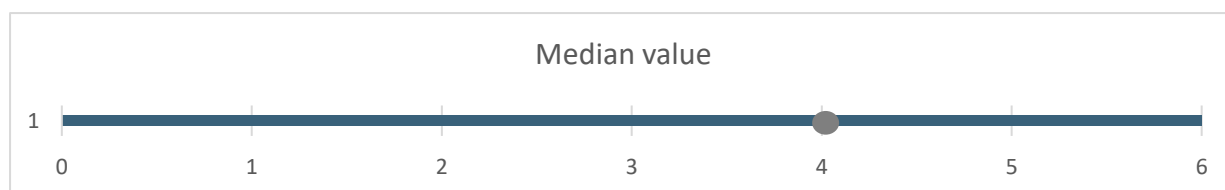
promotion in the Adriatic area. Likewise, the projects developed innovative cross-border models for better management and sustainable use of natural heritage in the Adriatic Hinterland. The project results improved the diversification of tourism offers and extended the tourist offer from the coastline to inland rural areas. These results contributed to the better and standardized quality of tourism services, in line with EUSAIR’s objectives. Under Pillar 2 (Connecting the region) the respondents most frequently emphasized extensive networking and the exchange of skills between actors in partner countries.

Figure 8. Contribution to EUSDR Pillars

Concerning the contribution of the analysed projects to the EUSDR Pillars, a significant share of the survey respondents (31%) did not know if there was any overlapping between their projects’ goals and EUSDR objectives. A quarter of the respondents (25%) recognized that the implemented projects correspond to EUSDR’s goal of Protecting the environment, and further 25% aligned their project close to EUSDR’s goal of Connecting the region. The results of the survey are presented in the chart.



When requested to assess the level of their contribution to EUSDR on a scale of 1 to 5 (1= no contribution, 5= strong contribution), survey participants estimated their contribution to be **4** (median value).



The respondents recognized their alignment with the EUSDR mostly in terms of promotion of innovation, information society, the competitiveness of enterprises, and education (EUSDR Pillar C: Building Prosperity in the Danube Region). By exchanging experiences and implementing a joint project, the respondents recognized a significant contribution to the prosperity of the Danube Region and a further need to strengthen transnational cooperation.



Transnational advanced management of land use risk through landslide susceptibility maps design – safeEARTH (Lead partner - Croatian Geological Survey (HR))

The project contributed to the EU Strategy for the Danube Region (EUSDR), more specifically to its Priority Axis 2: to improve preparedness for environmental risk management and mitigation of floods/landslides through proper land use management. The project added to the implementation of the EU Strategy for the Adriatic and Ionian Region (EUSAIR), by contributing to the knowledge on the Strategy's pillar regarding the environmental quality (Priority Area 3), in two ways: it supported the reduction of degradation of ecosystem services due to extreme events (floods, landslides), and helped restoring them through appropriate damage prevention/mitigation of climate hazards, and through climate change adaptation measures.

Evaluation question 16: Have the established communication goals been achieved and how have the target groups accepted the Programme?

Answer: Most of the Programme communication goals have been achieved, such as the goal to ensure successful external communication towards other relevant programmes and benefits of cross-border cooperation by disseminating the results to different stakeholder groups in the project and/or Programme area and/or to the general public. Target groups gained new knowledge and improved their capacities which were the initially expected impacts of the projects.



The document Communication Strategy of the Interreg IPA Cross-border Cooperation Programme Croatia-Bosnia and Herzegovina-Montenegro 2014-2020 is setting overall communication objectives that will be achieved by contributing to related specific communication objectives through using communication tools, measures and implementing communication activities.

Overall communication objective 1 (CO1):

To contribute to the generation and quality of the cross-border cooperation operations

- 1.1 To ensure successful communication between the programme bodies in order to implement the Programme and related Communication Strategy successfully
- 1.2 To raise awareness about Interreg IPA Cross-border Cooperation Programme Croatia -Bosnia and Herzegovina-Montenegro 2014-2020 and its funding opportunities
- 1.3 To support the beneficiaries during operation implementation in order to ensure successful implementation of operations

Overall communication objective 2 (CO2):

To raise awareness and disseminate the information about the Programme and benefits of cross-border cooperation and to ensure coordination with other relevant programmes

2.1 To raise awareness about the Programme and benefits of cross-border cooperation by disseminating the results to different stakeholder groups in the programme area and to the general public

2.2 To ensure successful external communication towards other relevant programmes (Interreg, mainstream, macro-regional strategies) and share of good practice with them in order to contribute to effective functioning of the Programme



According to the web survey, most of the Programme communication goals have been achieved, such as the goal to ensure successful external communication towards other relevant programmes (Interreg, mainstream, macro-regional strategies) that 7 out of 23 respondents (30,43%) highlighted and to raise awareness about the Programme and benefits of cross-border cooperation by disseminating the results to different stakeholder groups in the project and/or Programme area and/or to the general public, which was emphasized by 16 out of 23 respondents or 69,56%.



In all case studies it can be noticed that target groups gained new knowledge and improved their capacities which were the initially expected impacts of the projects. In most of the projects all target values were exceeded, which was not initially foreseen.



Innovative minds for smart schools - SMART SCHOOLS (Lead partner - Association Centre for Development and Support (BA))

Project Smart Schools contributed to the Programme communication objectives by increasing knowledge and changing the behaviour of students and their parents, and people employed in the educational sector.

Fortress ReInvented (Lead partner – Šibenik City Museum (HR))

Project Fortress ReInvented contributed to the Programme communication objectives by increasing knowledge and changing the behaviour not only of visitors and tourists but of people in cultural institutions and local authorities.

SO 1.1: Improve the quality of the services in public health and social care sector across the borders

Evaluation question 17: Have new services and skills in the public health and social care sectors been introduced thanks to the interventions of the Programme?

Evaluation question 18: To what extent has the availability of services in the public health and social care sectors improved thanks to activities financed by the programme?

Answer: Data from the survey indicate that new services and skills in the public health and social care sectors have been introduced mostly thanks to the interventions of the Programme such as developing, testing or adopting new solutions in the field of health care and social care services and improving competences/skills of key stakeholders. This suggests that the availability of services in the public health and social care sectors improved thanks to activities financed by the programme.



The conducted survey had a low response rate. Under PA1 and SO 1.1. seventeen projects were approved, but only five Lead Partners provided answers to the survey.

The results obtained from the survey suggest that 4 out of 5 projects (80%) are in line with the planned timeline or have been successfully finished and delivered, yielding results as initially set out. Only one survey answer suggests that the project is behind schedule, and that therefore there might be a risk of delivery. Additionally, all 5 respondents emphasize that their projects have achieved or are expecting to achieve the foreseen results, and none of them had unexpected results that had not been laid out beforehand.

Regarding Covid-19 pandemic, 3 out of 5 answers (60%) highlighted that they have been able to deliver all activities, with no substantial change of plans. However, two projects have had to cancel some activities, which meant that their intervention logic was jeopardized by such external circumstances.

The answers from the survey further suggested that all project activities focused on specific target groups (5 out of 5 responses), especially elderly persons (3 out of 7 answers, 42,85%) and disabled persons (2 out of 7 responses, 28,57%).

In addition, data from the survey indicate that new services and skills in the public health and social care sectors have been introduced, mostly owing to the interventions of the Programme:

- by developing, testing or adopting new solutions in the field of health care and social care services (3 out of 9 responses, 33,3%);
- by improving competences/skills of key stakeholders, e.g. medical staff, caregivers (3 out of 9 responses, 33,3%);
- through studies and research in the field of health care and social care services (1 out of 9 responses, 11,1%);
- by financing small-scale infrastructural interventions and/or the purchase of equipment (2 out of 9 responses, 22,2%).

As a result of the activities financed by the Programme, the availability of services in the public health and social care sectors were improved in terms of better access to health- and social care services, increased knowledges/skills/capacities of key stakeholders in the

field of public health and social care sectors as well as emergence of new services offered in the health and social care sector.



Early Detection of Skin, Mucosal and Ocular Melanoma - MELAdetect (Lead Partner - Institute of Public Health Zadar (HR))

Examples of project contribution to specific objective 1.1 Improving the quality of the services in public health and social care sector across the borders:

- New prevention and knowledge platform in the field of skin, ocular and mucosal melanoma
- Approximately 500 medical professionals improved their competences regarding the melanoma and on methods for early detection of skin, ocular, mucosal melanoma that will improve future prevention activities. Other target groups were beauticians, hairdressers, massage specialists and so on, and finally also additional groups within the general population - such as professors in high schools and at universities
- Improved conditions in partner institutions, hospitals, and at universities, through provision of additional medical equipment (such as a thermoscope, ophthalmoscope and similar medical equipment) for ensuring earlier and better detection of malignant skin changes.


SO 2.1: Promote and improve environment and nature protection and management systems for risk prevention

Evaluation question 19: How much has risk management been strengthened and improved through activities financed from the programme?

Evaluation question 20: How did the interventions of the programme affect the environment and biodiversity in the programme area?

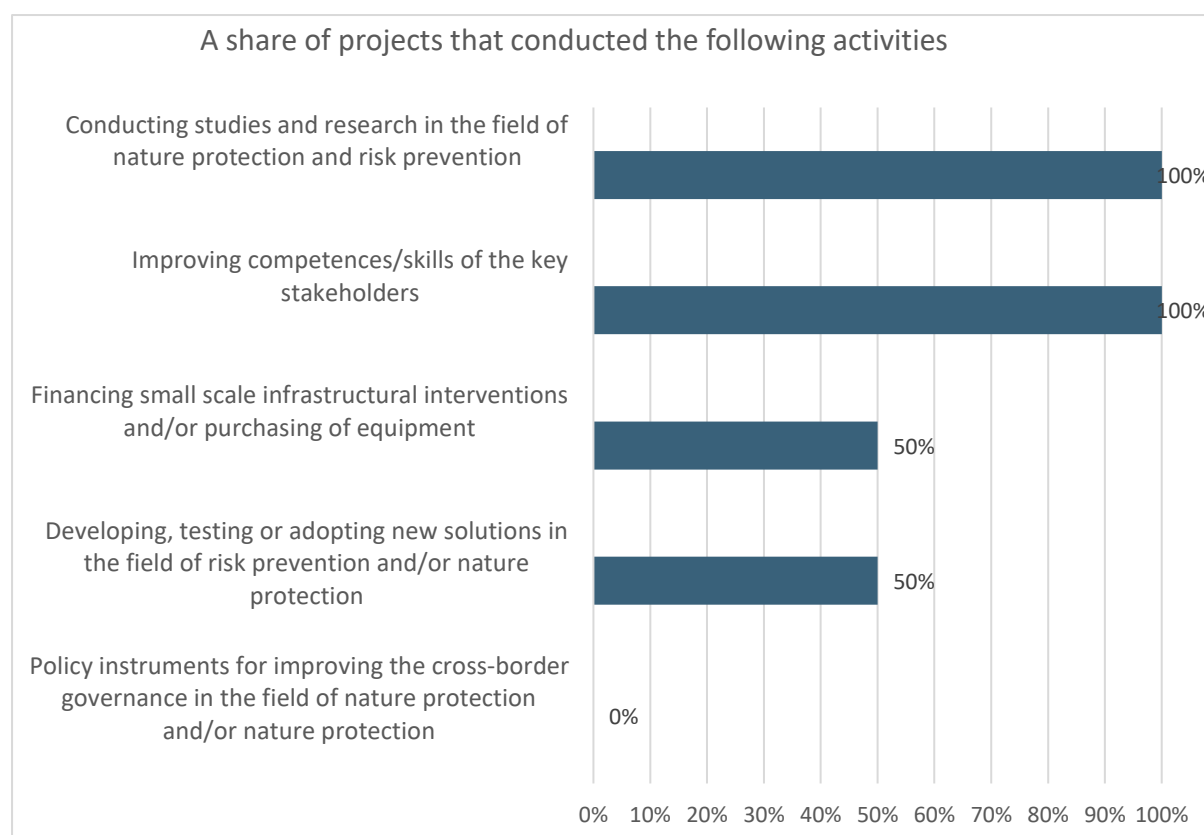
Evaluation question 21: Have the activities related to the importance of nature conservation been implemented, enhanced understanding of the conservation of biodiversity and ecosystems among the local population and visitors of the area?

Answer: Within projects in the scope of the Specific Objective 2.1. activities were conducted that resulted in a positive impact and strengthened risk management systems. That was achieved mostly through conducting studies and research in the field of nature protection and risk prevention and improving the competencies and skills of relevant stakeholders. Simultaneously, their impact was the weakest when it came to the development of policy instruments for improving cross-border governance in the field. Concerning the interventions that were intended to have an impact on biodiversity and awareness-raising, the evaluation team observed that the projects were successful in achieving their stated objectives.


 In the scope of the Priority Axis 2 "Protecting the environment and biodiversity, improving risk prevention and promoting sustainable energy and energy efficiency", one of the Specific Objectives is "To enforce integrated cross-border monitoring / management systems for key existing risks and environmental and biodiversity protection". The evaluation team conducted a web survey in order to estimate the level of impact the implemented projects had on strengthening risk management and biodiversity and environmental protection as well as raising awareness about the importance of biodiversity and ecosystem conservation efforts. However, due to a very low response rate, the findings presented below are not without certain limitations.

Concerning the goal of improving and strengthening risk management systems, survey respondents tackled the aforementioned issue most noticeably by conducting studies and research in the field of nature protection and risk prevention and improving the competencies and skills of relevant stakeholders. Risk management systems were also improved through the development and implementation of new solutions and financing small scale infrastructural interventions. None of the respondents stated that they focused on the development of policy instruments for improving cross-border governance in the field. The results of the survey are presented below.

Figure 9. A share of projects that conducted the following activities



Source: Data survey

The project achieved the stated objectives. Namely, it increased the knowledge, skills, and capacities of key stakeholders in the field of nature protection and risk prevention. Still, the project's impact on better governance in the field of nature protection and risk prevention and better capacity to respond to risks has not been observed.

Concerning the effect of the intervention on the environment and biodiversity of the Programme area as well as enhanced understanding of the conservation of biodiversity and ecosystems among the local population and visitors of the area, the survey results do not point towards a definitive answer to these questions, so a case study was further used as a primary method of analysis.



Protection and promotion of chestnut – Chestnut (Lead partner - Municipality of Velika Kladuša (BA))

The project "Protection and promotion of chestnut" tackles the problem of chestnut disease caused by chestnut gall wasps in Croatia and Bosnia and Herzegovina (BA). The disease itself is expanding rapidly, causing yield reduction, chestnut weakening and possible extinction of chestnut trees in the cross-border area. In order to reduce the existing damage and prevent any further, a joint action of the main stakeholders in the two countries was needed. Through detailed analyses, research and focused application of disease control steps to minimize the threat have been undertaken. The chosen approach included a method of combating the disease with the help of a biological parasite. Furthermore, the project relied on the transfer of knowledge from Croatia to Bosnia and Herzegovina as well as education of all involved partners. Through educational activities farmers, entrepreneurs and chestnut growers were educated on all phases of cultivation and protection from the diseases which will improve further cultivation and increase yield in the area.

The project's main objective was to "increase protection and risk management of chestnut trees in cross-border area Croatia – Bosnia and Herzegovina through joint activities and promotion". In its early stages in BA, the project contributed to the study and monitoring of the disease and the chestnut gall wasp, followed by activities during further project implementation, when its significant expansion and observation control in the border area is expected, along with the transfer of knowledge and experience from Croatia to Bosnia and Herzegovina. The project contributed to the protection of the chestnut forests and plantations which are in decline on both national levels. The main target groups the project identified were farmers, local governments and relevant institutions, experts in the field of agriculture who can benefit from project implementation and the general public.

The project succeeded in increasing chestnut trees' protection in cross-border area through joint activities, data collection tasks, analyses and a new GIS database. All the mentioned actions jointly had a strong impact on the overall improvement of risk management. Likewise, project implementation had a strong effect on increasing the knowledge of key actors and the general public when it comes to the issue in question, which was achieved by raising awareness and promoting biodiversity protection.

SO 2.2: To promote utilization of renewable energy resources and energy efficiency

Evaluation question 22: Did the projects develop new energy solutions?

Evaluation question 23: Can changes in public awareness be recognised as a result of the promotion of sustainable energy sources?

Evaluation question 24: How much did the implemented project activities contribute to the reduction of electricity consumption in public buildings in the programme area?

Answer: Under the specific objective 2.2. four interventions have been implemented within the 1st Call for Proposals. The outputs and results of these projects suggest that the cross-border area has experienced an increase in energy efficiency and use of renewable energy resources. The contribution to the PA2 indicator *Additional capacity of renewable energy production* consists of 1,91 MW renewable energy produced by the 4 implemented projects. Furthermore, implemented project activities led to increased capacity of policy makers in the sustainable energy planning, better governance in energy planning (tools, regulatory frameworks, standards), reduction of energy consumption and increased awareness of the benefits coming from the use of energy efficiency measures.



Data gathered through desk research and survey suggest that implemented projects did develop new energy solutions which were tested and approved within the project duration. Each of 4 implemented projects under the SO 2.2. can be categorized as joint pilot and demonstration projects on innovative technologies and solutions in the field of energy efficiency and renewable energy resources. Implemented projects resulted in the installation of:

- highly efficient biomass boilers,
- demo solar-power generating photovoltaic (PV) systems,
- new heating systems,
- demonstrative solar system and
- hybrid solar-wind power module for Micro power plants.



The conducted survey had a low response rate. Under PA2 and SO 2.2. eight projects were approved, but only three Lead Partners provided answers to the survey. Within these four projects implemented under SO 2.2. diverse educational and promotional activities were held and promotional material was developed aimed at awareness raising on the utilization of renewable energy resources and energy efficiency. Those activities were targeted at several groups, i.e. pupils, students, young innovators, school principals, decision-makers, energy managers, general public. According to the progress reports and survey results, aforementioned activities resulted in increase of knowledge about energy efficiency and the use of renewable energy sources in the cross-border region, in particular in the educational sector (i.e. energy saving school competition implemented as part on one project encompassed 105 primary and high schools with more than 38.000 students and

school

staff).



Data from the survey indicate that implemented project activities contribute to the reduction of electricity consumption in public buildings in the programme area, as the projects dealt with:

- financing small scale infrastructural interventions and purchasing of new equipment (50% of respondents)
- developing, testing or adopting new solutions in the field of renewable energies and energy efficiency (75% of respondents)
- improving competences/skills of the key stakeholders (25% of respondents)
- through feasibility studies and research for implementing sustainable energy action (25% of respondents).

Although the COVID 19 pandemic has impacted 2 out of 4 implemented projects causing delays, all projects have delivered planned outputs and results in full.



Example of project contribution to specific objective 2.2: Promote utilization of renewable energy resources and energy efficiency

Project	Contribution to SO 2.2
SMART SCHOOLS	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • annual 628,511.00 kWh energy saving in 75 schools and other public buildings
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • at least 30 newly trained energy managers, employees of public institutions
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • annual 16,542.00 kWh energy saving - achieved by 20 project area students (participants of IT/technological innovation contest) and students of two schools (winners of the energy-saving contest)
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • new technical facilities installed with a total of 661.50 kW renewable energy generation capacity
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • citizens educated and motivated to apply in their households/workplaces affordable measures and solutions for EE (energy efficiency) and RES (renewable energy sources) increase
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • improved and transferred knowledge of a specific problem common to cross-border territories



Innovative minds for smart schools - SMART SCHOOLS (Lead partner - Association Centre for Development and Support (BA))

„All project results, identified in the area of development of solutions or products, were exceeded and fully achieved.“

"Target groups, as individuals (students, teachers, energy managers) and institutions (authorities/utilities) gained new knowledge and improved their capacity for better energy management, which was the initially expected impact of this project. The interest of the public was greater than the project partners expected – e.g., there were 2,3 times more schools taking part in the cross-border energy-saving school competition, than initially planned."

"This project contributed to the programme communication objectives by increasing knowledge and changing the behaviour of students and their parents, and people employed in the educational sector. Students and teachers participated in the cross-border energy-saving contest to achieve planned energy savings, and during the contest, they increased their knowledge on behavioural zero-costs energy-saving methods, which they applied during the contest."

"In October 2020 the project SMART SCHOOLS 2 started, which represents a continuation of the project Smart Schools from the 1st Call for proposals. Furthermore, the lead partner plans to apply for a new project in the 2021-2027 IPA CBC programme to continue with good practices from the first two projects."

SO 3.1: To strengthen and diversify the tourism offer through cross border approaches and to enable better management and sustainable use of cultural and natural heritage

Evaluation question 25: Did the interventions of the programme contribute to the improvement and diversity of the tourist offer in the programme area?

Evaluation question 26: How much has programme interventions enabled better management of cultural and natural heritage?

Evaluation question 27: How much did the projects contribute to increasing the number of visitors and/or the number of overnight stays in the programme area?

Answer: Interventions of the programme had notable impact on the improvement and diversity of the tourist offer, which is evidenced by the results of several projects that managed to create new touristic content and make it more accessible and attractive for visitors in the programme area. Results of project activities indicate that the management of cultural and natural heritage was significantly improved, mostly through training sessions and seminars with relevant stakeholders. Even though some of the projects recorded increased numbers of visitors and/or overnight stays in those project areas, the overall figures for the whole

programme area are below the target value, whose fulfilment was further hampered by the COVID-19 pandemic.



The web survey provided some more insight into the following issues: what is the state of play of achieving projects' results, what was the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic on the projects' activities, what is the contribution of the projects to SO 3.1, what target groups and specific sectors did the projects address, what type of small-scale infrastructural interventions were made, and finally, what type of common strategies were developed. The conducted survey had a low response rate. Under PA3 and SO 3.1. fourteen projects were approved, but only three Lead Partners provided answers to the survey.

Out of three responses recorded in the survey, the first one indicated that project activities were finalised in time, without any significant delays (ADRIATIC CANYONING), the second one pointed out that their project is behind schedule (FORTITUDE), and the third one stated that the project is finalised, but with certain delays (RiTour). Two of the respondents stated that the COVID-19 pandemic did not have any impact on their project activities (ADRIATIC CANYONING, RiTour), while one indicated that they have been able to deliver all of the foreseen activities, but with some delays (FORTITUDE).

Data from the survey indicate that implemented project activities contribute to strengthening, diversifying and better integrating the cross-border tourist offer and the better management of cultural and natural heritage resources, by developing new tourism products/niches (all three projects), such as new digital content, tourist guides, new tourist routes and experiences. All three respondents also chose 'improving competences/skills of the key stakeholders', and 'Developing common strategies for better management and sustainable use of cultural and natural heritage' as one of their contributions. Two of the respondents (ADRIATIC CANYONING, FORTITUDE) saw 'addressing specific target groups', 'addressing specific sector', and 'financing small scale infrastructural interventions' as their project's contribution to SO 3.1. '

Regarding the specific target groups that were addressed, all three respondents pointed out organisations dealing with tourism and cultural and natural heritage, two of them selected general population as the addressed target group as well, while one respondent (ADRIATIC CANYONING) singled out enterprises and policy makers and planners as other specific target groups of their project.

Regarding the specific sectors, each respondent indicated one sector: sport (RiTour), adventure tourism (ADRIATIC CANYONING), and heritage (FORTITUDE).

When it comes to small-scale infrastructural interventions, two respondents (ADRIATIC CANYONING, FORTITUDE) used the projects to finance the purchase of new equipment. The same respondents selected installations as their answer, while all three of them indicated renovation of touristic spaces as an infrastructural intervention.

Finally, when it comes to common strategies, the three respondents each chose one of the following common strategies as their answer: 'common branding, promotional materials and advisory systems' (FORTITUDE), 'common touristic packages' (RiTour), 'cross-border action plans for sustainable tourism' (ADRIATIC CANYONING).



Looking at the overall contribution of the projects to SO 3.1, in terms of numbers of visitors, COVID-19 pandemic has significantly reduced the number of arrivals and overnight stays in the programme area, due to national and international travel restrictions. According to the Annual Implementation Report (2020), the tourist activity in 2020 was roughly three times lower (23.196.700 visitors in 2020) than the baseline value in 2014 (73.522.546 visitors). Nevertheless, in the upcoming years it is expected that the number of visitors will rise and eventually even surpass the target value set for 2023 (73.591.990).

Example of project contribution to SO 3.1: Strengthen and diversify the tourism offer through cross border approaches and to enable better management and sustainable use of cultural and natural heritage:

Project	Contribution to SO 3.1
Fortress ReInvented	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> increased and diversified tourist offer
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> development of digital contents in historical fortification monuments in Croatia, Bosnia and Herzegovina and Montenegro
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> enhanced knowledge of stakeholders involved in creation of tourist offer in management of cultural heritage sites with innovative perspectives
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> organised meetings, workshops and training sessions for different target groups

Source: Application form and progress reports



Innovative approach and digital contents in historical fortification monuments – Fortress ReInvented (Lead partner – Šibenik City Museum (HR))

“The key objective was to upgrade the content of four medieval fortresses in an innovative digital way in order to enhance the level of their attraction for visitors, but also to contribute to increasing sustainability and expansion of the tourist offer by using cultural heritage for tourism purposes through cross-border approach in order to stimulate faster growth in the Programme area.

All target values were fulfilled, but one exceeded far more than it had been initially planned. The interest of the public was greater than the project partners expected – e.g., 749.195 visits were recorded at all four sites in the project implementation period (01/07/2017-31/12/2019).”

SO 4.1: To enhance institutional infrastructure and services in order to accelerate the competitiveness and development of business environment in the programme area

Evaluation question 28: How much has institutional infrastructure and services in the business environment improved?

Evaluation question 29: Did the interventions of the programme strengthen competitiveness and the business environment in the programme area?

Evaluation question 30: Did programme interventions affect the development of innovations, new technologies and ICT solutions in the programming area?

Answer: Institutional infrastructure and services in the business environment improved in the following sectors: green economy, tourism and materials sector (use of metal and plastic) by testing capacity building and training schemes for SME and by creating innovative clusters and networks between research and business actors. Capacity to network was the dimension in which all projects increased the skills and competences of SMEs. Programme interventions affected the development of innovations, new technologies and ICT solutions in the programme area, which was seen in the project competenceNET where the project involved use of new, smart technologies and approaches to perform tasks of production, education or cooperation.



The Programme area had significant problems due to the low level of ICT solutions and lack of new technologies. Thus, the interventions under PA 4 and SO 4.1 addressed the main challenges and needs as regards enhancing competitiveness and the development of a business environment in the Programme area. The reported value for indicator "Range of cluster activities enhancing innovation, new technologies and ICT solutions" is only 5 in 2020, which is a significant decrease since 2015, when the value was 33. Since 2015, several existing clusters ceased to exist, due to the low interest of the members or due to decreased funding possibilities from the participating countries. The target value for 2023 is 49, which is expected to be reached, based on the information from relevant authorities, which was noted in the Annual Implementation Report 2020.



The web survey gave us an insight on different issues, like the state of play of achieving projects' results, the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic on the projects' activities and the contribution of the projects to the SO 4.1. The conducted survey, as mentioned before, had a low response rate. Under PA4 and SO 4.1. fourteen projects were approved, but only four Lead Partners provided answers to the survey.

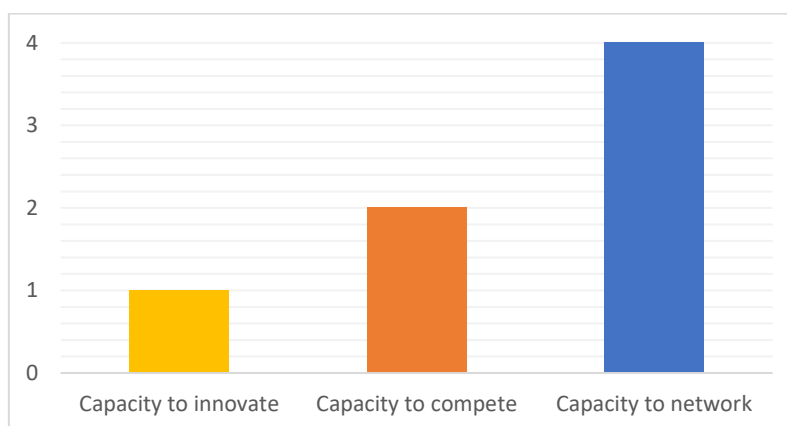
Survey was conducted among the Lead Partners, so it is not surprising that the COVID-19 pandemic had almost no impact on their project activities, as most of their projects were already completed by 2020 and the onset of the pandemic. Only one respondent stated that they had delivered the foreseen activities, although with some delays due to COVID-19. All projects were finalized by the end of 2019, while half of the respondents finalized their projects

in time (2 responses), and the other half with some delays (2 responses). According to responses collected within the survey, all projects achieved the intended results (4 responses), while only one project achieved results that were not initially planned (connecting secondary education with the needs of the labour market).

Responses recorded in the survey (3 responses) indicate that projects contributed to improving institutional infrastructure and services to accelerate the development of competitiveness and business environment in three sectors: green economy, tourism and materials sector (use of metal and plastic). Data from the survey (4 responses) also indicated that all projects contributed to improving institutional infrastructure and services to accelerate the development of competitiveness and business environment by testing capacity building and training schemes for SME (100%) and by creating innovative clusters and networks between research and business actors (100%).

Businesses/SMEs were involved as a target group of respondents' project activities and responses recorded (4 responses) indicate that the skills and competences of SMEs involved have increased as a result of project activities. The next figure shows dimensions in which skills and competences were increased, according to the survey.

Figure 10. Dimensions in which skills and competences were increased



Source: Data survey

Example of project contribution to SO 4.1 To enhance institutional infrastructure and services in order to accelerate the competitiveness and development of a business environment in the programme area

Project	Contribution to SO 4.1
BACAR	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> raised knowledge and motivation on clusterization and establishment of three clusters (creative industry, tourism and local food) planned mapping for each cluster and a created cross-border network
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> strengthened business capacities enhancement of innovations and transfer of new technologies
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> internationalized clusters

	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• developed competitive advantages of clusters and cross-border network
competenceNET	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• strengthened social, economic, and territorial development of the Programme area
	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• improved infrastructure, services and networks which will support businesses in a cross-border area
	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• accelerated competitiveness and development of a business environment in the Programme area



Improvement of transnational business environment through development of business competence centers and networks (Lead partner - Development Agency Žepče (BA))

One of project specific objectives, which was fully achieved, was enhancing institutional infrastructure and services for advanced training of workforce and access to new technologies for MSMEs (Micro-, Small and Medium-sized Enterprises) in Zenica-Doboj county, Vukovar-Srijem county and Podgorica. One of the main focuses of the project was to use ICT tools whenever and wherever possible.

"The main project results are: 1. developed three transnational business competence centers for MSMEs in Zenica-Doboj county, Vukovar-Srijem county and Podgorica, 2. improved business-related competences of unemployed young persons through training and practical mentoring programmes, 3. raised knowledge of MSMEs on introducing new technologies, and innovative solutions in business operations through Smart cooperation programme, and 4. developed cross border partnership model of public, private and research sector for access to and exchange of competences, experiences and know-how for favorable business environment."

„Sustainable economic development promoted in the project involves use of new, smart technologies and approaches to perform tasks of production, education or cooperation, usually done in a traditional and less environmentally friendly way."



Annex 1 – Case studies

Project Description	
Name	Early Detection of Skin, Mucosal and Ocular Melanoma
Acronym	MELAdetect
Total Budget	EUR 652,427.90
EU co-financing (IPA/IPAII)	EUR 554,563.70
Duration	01/07/2017 – 31/08/2019
SO	1.1 - To improve the quality of the services in public health and social care sector across the borders
Partners	
N. of Partners	5
Lead Partner	Institute of Public Health Zadar (HR)
Other Partners	University of Zadar (HR) Zadar County Development Agency ZADRA NOVA (HR) University of Mostar - Organisational Unit of Faculty of Medicine (BA) PHI General Hospital "Blažo Orlandić" Bar (ME)

1. Project summary

The project "EARLY DETECTION OF SKIN, MUCOSAL AND OCULAR MELANOMA - MELAdetect" started in July 2017 and finished in August 2019 (26 months implementation period). The lead partner organization was Institute of Public Health Zadar with additional partners from University of Zadar in Croatia, Zadar County Development Agency ZADRA NOVA in Croatia, University of Mostar - organizational Unit of Faculty of Medicine in Bosnia and Herzegovina and PHI General Hospital "Blažo Orlandić" Bar from Montenegro. Total eligible budget was EUR 652.427,90.

The main project objective was raising awareness for early detection of ocular, skin and mucosal melanoma. The MELAdetect project concerned melanoma, or malignant moles, prevention, early detection, essential prevention, meaning sun protection, etc. and education, primarily education of doctors and other non-medical, for example beauticians, hairdressers, masseurs, etc. This was primarily a medical project and key experts were also key target groups – doctors. Other target groups included cosmetics, hairdressers, masseurs, professors in high schools and universities and the general population.

The specific objective of the MELAdetect project was to improve the quality of the services in public health and social care sector across the borders. Major challenges of all partner countries concerning melanoma are: low public awareness of melanoma and importance of early detection; lack of knowledge of new methods of treatment of melanoma in health professionals; inadequate equipment for educational and medical activities; outdated treatment methods; absence of a register of melanoma patients. Project contributed to the minimization of the low public awareness of melanoma by organization of informative days and raising awareness campaigns by getting specialized education. The goal was to improve conditions in partner institutions, hospitals and universities with some additional equipment (such as thermoscope, ophthalmoscope and similar medical equipment) for earlier and better detection of malignant moles. Data gathered through e-health platform and check-ups via new medical equipment will add to research value and improve future treatment methods.

Cross-border cooperation was important to share experiences and transfer examples of good practice. Joint Action plan (educations, awareness campaign and new additional medical equipment) for early prevention and detection for cross-border area was created by combining experiences, firsthand insight and expertise from health care professionals of all partner institutions in region.

2. Progress of activities

Major development needs of all partner countries included improvement of the health care system by increasing the safety and quality of health services, empowering human resources in the health care system, and establishing prevention activities. Through implementing planned activities (education and workshops with the aim of prevention and early detection of skin alterations) project had impact on public health, reducing of melanoma incidence and mortality which is in line with the programme priority specific objective.

By the end of the Project, all project activities have been implemented without major delays or impediments to implementation.

3. Project results and impact

Project main results are new prevention and knowledge platform in the field of treatment of skin, ocular, and mucosal melanoma, implementation of educational and raising awareness activities which contributed to raising knowledge and up-to date methods of melanoma treatment. The impact of the project is difficult to quantify, it can be assumed that the project activities had an effect, but there are no measurable values or studies that would confirm this, because it is questionable how many people apply the information and guidelines they have heard through education and workshops. Initially, education of children was not included in the project activities, but through reallocation of saved funds during project implementation, it was decided to include additional cost "Production of Children's storybooks" to include children in the education on the sun and the harmful effects of the sun and sunbathing in the form of educational picture books.

4. Sustainability and capitalization

Action plan was created for period of 5 years and will be usable for future strategic operations in each region. By educating stakeholder in the field of melanoma and conducting promotional and awareness raising campaign, early detection levels will increase lowering melanoma occurrence. E-health application and its usage through implementation of pilot project will generate invaluable research data. It will enable continuous tracking of changes in skin, eyes and mucosa. It will be available to access at will to all interested parties, creating multiple benefits towards prevention of melanoma. Application is mobile friendly, free of charge, open source, and available to developers for further improvement. Established network of Health Experts will bring quality approach to tackling melanoma problem, enabling communication, experience and idea exchange between partner organizations and opportunities for future projects.

5. Horizontal issues

Stakeholders from targeted groups who received education and/or treatment through activities were not preselected by any religious, national, ethnic or other criteria, therefore education and melanoma detection was accessible to everyone equally. All activities within the project (education etc.) were organized in the premises which were accessible to disabled persons.

Stakeholders from targeted groups who received education and/or treatment through activities were not preselected by gender criteria. Strong collaboration between partners institutions, Project Management Team and health professionals created dialogue, exchange of experience, joint problem solving and empowerment that effected equality among all included no matter gender roles.

Regarding communication activities, website was established and updated on regular basis. The promotion of the project was also carried out through communication channels – TV (the movie was created in order to increase the level of knowledge of general public about melanoma), radio shows, promotion materials etc.

Project Description	
Name	Care management network for patients with pharmaco-resistant epilepsy and patients with late-stage Parkinson's disease
Acronym	NeurNet
Total Budget	EUR 865,763.92
EU co-financing (IPA/IPAII)	EUR 735,899.32
Duration	15/10/2017 – 14/07/2020
SO	1.1 - To improve the quality of the services in public health and social care sector across the borders
Partners	
N. of Partners	3
Lead Partner	The Federal Ministry of Health (BA)
Other Partners	Croatian Institute of Telemedicine (HR), later replaced by Institute for Emergency Medicine (HR) Ministry of Health of Montenegro (ME)

1. Project summary

The project 'Care management network for patients with pharmaco-resistant epilepsy and advanced stage Parkinson's disease' – NeurNet is the result of a cooperation among 3 partners from Croatia (HR), Bosnia and Herzegovina (BA) and Montenegro (ME) aimed at improving both the quality and availability of health care services for these patients in the cross-border region.

People diagnosed with epilepsy and Parkinson's disease in the Programme area are often referred to only two clinical hospitals in Croatia (Zagreb – for pharmaco-resistant epilepsy, and Rijeka - for late-stage Parkinson's disease) which have the technology and expertise to treat these conditions. Other clinics and hospitals in the cross-border area, especially in BA and ME, lack human resources, expertise and technical capacities (i.e. electroencephalograms (EEG)) to provide good quality health services. The diagnoses patients receive in clinics in these countries are often incorrect or incomplete leading to a massive flow of people to the Zagreb and Rijeka centres. This concentration of patients in only two clinics lead to the disruption of the efficiency of the two reference centres, as well as to their overloading and a consequent increased risk of incorrect diagnoses. Even though patients in Croatia are in much better position than in Bosnia and Herzegovina and Montenegro, lack of appropriate health services for patients suffering for above mentioned diseases is equally present in all three countries. This situation affects the quality of life of the citizens of the area, increasing their stress and health risks.

The project aimed to offer a solution to this problem by establishing an ICT-based network that will enable audio-visual communication, remote diagnosis, medical data exchange, second opinions, consultations and other medical services between reference centres and hospitals on a real-time basis. The initiative enabled the maximisation of the capacities of the reference centres, the multiplication of the availability of their services and the transfer of knowledge and good practices.

The project idea and partnership are the result of a previous collaboration among some of the project partners, which implemented the AdriHealth-Mob project under the IPA CBC Adriatic programme 2007-2013. Furthermore, many of the neurologists involved in the project already knew each other from trainings and medical conferences in the programme area and abroad. For NeurNet, the following partners were involved in the project: The Federal Ministry of Health (BA) as lead partner, the Croatian Institute of Telemedicine (HR) and the Ministry of Health of Montenegro (ME).

The project produced 3 main outputs:

- Developed ICT care management network for pharmaco-resistant epilepsy and late-stage Parkinson's patients
- Improved capacities, knowledge and skills of neurology specialists
- New healthcare services and medical expertise available and accessible to the public of the programme area

The main target groups the project addressed were patients with pharmaco-resistant epilepsy and late-stage Parkinson's disease; neurology departments and neurology specialists in public hospitals (at both local and national level depending on hospital clinic); and general public as

indirect beneficiaries of a newly developed healthcare service (patients' families, patient associations etc.)

2. Progress of activities

The project ended on 14 July 2020 and, during its realisation, all activities were jointly implemented by all project partners and finalised.

Some delays occurred during project implementation linked to the change of a partner. As a result of an administrative reform in Croatia, the partner 'Croatian Institute for Telemedicine' ceased to exist and its staff was transferred to the Ministry of Health or the Institute for Emergency Medicine. The latter became the new partner of NeurNet. This partner change created an additional administrative burden for the LP as well as initial difficulties related to working with a new partner who was not involved in the project from the beginning. However, this was solved and the collaboration with the new partner proved to be very positive.

As regards COVID-19, there was a final underspending related to the impossibility to spend the 'travel and accommodation budget' due to the travel restrictions and lockdowns. Furthermore, due to the pandemic, certain project events have not been implemented as initially planned, because of the gathering restrictions, but the optimal solution of the problem was found, and the activities /events were successfully implemented (via zoom meeting and other online tools).

3. Project results and impact

NeurNet managed to fully achieve all the set objectives. During the implementation of the project the following activities were finalised:

- The ICT care network was jointly developed and implemented.
- All hospitals in the cross-border region (targeted by the NeurNet project) have been equipped with modern medical ICT technology (EEG and neurology workstations). In particular, video EEGs have been installed in hospitals in 11 health institutions were equipped with modern ICT equipment - in Bosnia and Herzegovina: Hospital Mostar - Neurology Clinic and Pediatric Clinic; Hospital in Nova Bila, Neurology clinic in Tuzla; in Montenegro in Podgorica: Neurology Clinic and Pediatric clinic; and in Croatia: Hospitals in Split, Zadar, Slavonski Brod, Vukovar and Dubrovnik.
- An overall software network has been established between hospitals in Bosnia and Herzegovina, Montenegro and Croatia with the referral centre in Zagreb.
- Guidelines for NeurNet and software solutions were developed. Users guidelines have been created for several communication and information-transferring programmes which were also installed on workstations in all hospitals.
- International conferences for joint investment in health were held, one per country.

Also, 30 neurology specialists gained new knowledge and skills in managing patients with epilepsy and Parkinson's disease through trainings.

The project successfully achieved the intended results and is now providing the intended telemedicine services, provided by the network of referral centres and hospitals through the aforementioned ICT care network to patients from the project area, in particular from Bosnia and

Herzegovina and Montenegro. Furthermore, the created NeurNet network has allowed a wide and deep exchange of expertise among practitioners and is continuing its activities and exchanges beyond the project end. Due to its success, the project was also presented as a best practice at a cross-border health conference in Brussels in 2018.

According to the LP, the project has achieved more than what was initially planned. For instance, out of the 200 patients initially targeted for the telemedicine services provided through the platform, 241 were reached (229 with epilepsy and 12 with Parkinson's).

The cross-border dimension of the project is considered essential and allowed to overcome the challenges related to the lack of skills as well as human and technical capacities that hampered the provision of adequate healthcare services in Bosnia and Herzegovina and Montenegro and helped reduce the burden on the two involved hospital clinics in Croatia. It removed the borders of the countries for patients and offered them access to high-quality health services which they could not otherwise enjoy within their own borders.

In other words, since the capacities for providing adequate health care services to these patients are non-existent in the programme area except for the two reference centres in Croatia, cross-border cooperation played a crucial role in the achievement of concrete results. Advancing the human and technical capacities of hospitals and clinics in the cross-border region, even to a limited extent would require enormous time-consuming, infrastructural, and capacity building investments, which would have no immediate benefit for patients. However, adopting a cross-border approach using modern ICT technologies offers immediate benefits to target groups and an extremely cost-effective solution. The project multiplied the benefits of existing capacities of reference centers promoting transfer of knowledge, good practices and building capacities, it allowed to improve the quality of life, and the reduction of unnecessary transport and risks for patients.

4. Sustainability and capitalisation

Regarding the financial sustainability of the project, all the project outputs have continued working after the end of the project and can now be considered 'part of the system' (e.g. the telemedicine platform to provide diagnosis and treatment).

The partnership aimed to capitalise on the results of NeurNet by creating a similar project involving pediatricians. The proposal was presented during the second Call but was rejected.

5. Horizontal issues

Programme strategy

The programme structure and strategy (e.g. priority axes and specific objectives, types of eligible activities) are considered in line with the needs coming from the project area.

The project is harnessing modern ICT based digital technologies to connect hospitals in the programme area into a network, and as such the project directly contributes to the following priority areas of the EU Strategy for the Danube region:

- Priority Area 07 "To develop the Knowledge Society (research, education and ICT)", Priority Area 09 "To invest in people and skills".
- Priority Area 10 "To step up institutional capacity and cooperation".

The project is in line and contributes to enhancing the horizontal principles of the programme. With regard to Equality between men and women, the project focuses on public health care service establishment and provision, and offers equal opportunities to men and women, both as service providers and recipients. In the same way equal opportunity and non-discrimination are also ensured by the project. Finally, in line with sustainable development (environment principle), the project reduced unnecessary transportation of patients and pollution as well as improved resource efficiency by multiplying the benefits of existing capacities through the use of smart innovation, rather than building up infrastructure which is bound to become obsolete in due time.

Communication

Regarding communication activities, web pages and social networks were established and updated on regular basis. The promotion of the project was also carried out through billboards, TV and radio shows, promotion materials etc. Beyond the communication activities and programme obligations, the project was disseminated in many neurology conventions beyond the project area (e.g. in Germany).

Project Description	
Name	Protection and promotion of chestnut
Acronym	Chestnut
Total Budget	EUR 589 558.39
EU co-financing (IPA/IPAII)	EUR 501 124.61
Duration	01/07/2017 – 31/12/2019
SO	2.1 - To promote and improve environment and nature protection and management systems for risk prevention
Partners	
N. of Partners	6
Lead Partner	Municipality Velika Kladuša
Other Partners	Agricultural Institute of Una-Sana Canton (BA), Municipality of Bužim (BA), Municipality of Vojnić (HR), Centre for plum and chestnut (HR), City of Karlovac (HR)

1. Project summary

The project "Protection and promotion of chestnut" tackles the problem of chestnut disease caused by chestnut gall wasps in Croatia and Bosnia and Herzegovina. The disease itself is expanding rapidly, causing yield reduction, chestnut weakening and possible extinction of chestnut trees in the cross-border area. Likewise, the Municipality of Velika Kladuša identified the use of the existing advantages (such as natural advantages – rich forests of chestnut) in food industry. Since chestnuts represent a significant pillar of the economic development of the entire cross-border region, combating the chestnut gall wasp disease in this area has the potential of having significant positive consequences on the economic development of the cross-border area.

In order to reduce the existing damage and prevent further, a joint action of the main stakeholders in the two countries was needed. Through detailed analyses, research and focused application of disease control steps to minimize the threat have been undertaken. The chosen approach included a method of combating the disease via biological parasite. Furthermore, the project relied on the transfer of knowledge from Croatia to Bosnia and Herzegovina as well as education of all involved partners. Through educational activities farmers, entrepreneurs and chestnut growers were educated on all phases of cultivation and protection of the diseases which will improve further cultivation and increase yield. The project started in July 2017 and finished in December 2019 (30 months implementation period). The lead organisation was the Municipality of Velika Kladuša (Bosnia and Herzegovina) with two additional partners from Bosnia and Herzegovina (Municipality of Bužim and Agricultural institute of the Una-Sana Canton) and three from Croatia (Municipality of Vojnić, Centre for plum and chestnut and City of Karlovac). The total eligible budget was EUR 589,558.39.

The project's main objective was to "increase protection and risk management of chestnut trees in cross-border area Croatia – Bosnia and Herzegovina through joint activities and promotion. The project contributed to the study and monitoring of the chestnut gall wasp disease. Various data was collected in order to analyse the current situation in the chestnut habitats. The project intended to contribute to the protection of the chestnut forests and plantations which are in decline on national levels. Furthermore, due to the high speed of the disease expansion, the nature of the problem is inherently international and required EU assistance. Specific objectives include the following:

- To increase chestnuts protection in cross-border area through joint activities
- Joint activities on collecting data, perform analysis and made GIS database will contribute to the achievement of the 1. Project Specific Objective. These activities will provide information that will be crucial for conducting analysis of the current state
- To improve management of risks of expansion of disease
- To increase knowledge on protection, raising awareness, and promotion of chestnut

The main target groups the project identified were farmers, local governments and relevant institutions, experts in the field of agriculture that will benefit from the project implementation and the general public.

The cross-border partnership was essential for the successful attainment of the project aim because the chestnut forest belt stretches along the border of two countries. If only one country would have implemented an initiative to combat the disease and established an efficient protection system, the end results would not have been satisfactory. The composition of the project partners has been detrimental in order to ensure positive outcomes and the attainment of project results and objectives. The involved partners provided specific knowledge needed for the issue at hand, expertise, as well as territorial affiliation. A synergy between municipalities located in the disease-affected zone, leading institutions for education and research in the area and specialists in the field have all contributed to the successful finalization of the project. With joint area affected with this problem, project partners have decided to combine their forces in order to adequately implement the project and produce results in accordance with and contribute to the objectives set in the Interreg Cross-border Cooperation Programme –HR – BA – ME 2014. – 2020. The benefits for the involved parties are transfer of good practice experiences, establishing cross-border cooperation, combating disease spread, etc.

2. Progress of activities

The project "Protection and promotion of chestnut" ended in December 2019. The project activities included the following:

1. Conducting an analysis of chestnut forests
2. Making a Plan for protection of damaged chestnut trees
3. Planting of permanent crops of chestnuts in Municipalities Velika Kladuša and Vojnić, Bužim for experimental purposes
4. Developing a GIS database

By the end of the Project, all project activities have been implemented without major delays or impediments to implementation. All project activities were completed on schedule. As this project ended before the widespread of the COVID-19 pandemic in the programme area, these circumstances did not affect the project in any way.

3. Project results and impact

The project has successfully achieved all the anticipated results and thus fulfilled all the objectives. The project managed to increase chestnuts protection in cross-border area through joint activities, raise awareness about the issue, increase knowledge among the main stakeholders through conducting joint activities like collecting data, performing analyses and setting up a GIS database which contribute to the achievement of the Project Specific Objectives. These activities provided information that was crucial for conducting analysis of the current state. All collected data was referred to relevant institutions and experts to rely on them to act and bring further measures and strategies for further action at a higher level. Furthermore, the project increased knowledge on protection, raising awareness, and promotion of chestnut. In order to raise public awareness about the problem of spread of disease chestnut gall wasps, various educations were implemented. It was necessary to draw attention and educate about the problem this disease and also to encourage institutions and higher government levels to react and adopt proper measures.

4. Sustainability and capitalization

The Lead Partner continues with the project activities – the pilot chestnut plantations are sustainable, and the wasp problem has been resolved. Likewise, all research and analyses materials are continually in use.

5. Horizontal issues

Programme strategy

Regarding the programme structure and strategy, the lead partner believes that it mostly covers all the needs in the programme area. Likewise, all the needs in this project were successfully addressed, without any unforeseen challenges, except for the problem of public procurement rules in Bosnia and Herzegovina.

The project contributed to the horizontal principles in the following ways – it exerted a net positive impact on all three horizontal principles (Sustainable development, Equal opportunity and non-discrimination, Equality between men and women). Concerning Sustainable development, the core principles of the project were connected with the chestnut gall wasp disease reduction and the project had a positive impact on the mentioned environmental problem. Likewise, it positively contributed to the strengthening of environmental protection, disaster resilience and risk prevention and management. All of the project activities were aimed at environmental protection and thus had a positive effect on the horizontal principle. None of the project's activities had any negative impact on the environment. Concerning the principle Equal opportunity and non-discrimination, those were fully respected throughout the project implementation phase. All persons included in the project activities were treated equally, regardless of their sex, racial or ethnic origin, religion or belief, disability, age or sexual orientation, etc. Equality between men and women was respected by giving both men and women the same chances for employment, regardless of their sex, and ensuring them equal salary for equal work. Likewise, educations implemented under this project were equally accessible to all, regardless of their gender.

Contribution to macro-regional strategies

The project contributed to EUSAIR and EUSDR goals. This project contributed to the Pillar Protecting the Environment and Priority Area 6 of EU Strategy for the Danube Region. Targets of this priority area are to halt the deterioration in the status of all species and habitats covered by EU nature legislation and achieve a significant and measurable improvement, adapted to the special needs of the Danube region by 2020. Already identified invasive species, chestnut gall wasp is in focus of this cross-border project. Having in mind that EU Strategy for the Danube Region aims at controlling or eradicating Invasive Alien Species, this project fully contributes to this particular Strategy. Activities implemented through the project, such as analysis, research and application of disease control by parasites, making action plans and systems and measures for further suppression, significantly impacted the chestnut gall wasp problem and established the way of combating and eradicating the problem. Concerning the contribution to the EUSDR goals, the project contributed to the Pillar 3 of the EU Strategy for the Adriatic and Ionian Region named Environmental quality. As this project's main objective is to increase protection and risk management of chestnut trees in cross-border area of Croatia and Bosnia and Herzegovina, it contributed to the EU Strategy for the Adriatic and Ionian Region. Namely, EUSAIR states that

72

"joint action in shared eco-regions (mainly forest areas) to better withstand and contain catastrophes can also be the focus of such cooperation". This cross-border cooperation aims at reduction and minimization of the current threat to biodiversity that can also lead to the extinction of the chestnuts in HR-BA cross-border region but also in the rest of the EU and is thus in line with the above-mentioned Strategy.

Communication

Concerning the programme communication goals, at the beginning of the project the Lead partner defined the Communication plan. Communication plan was the basis for the implementation of all communication activities in the project. All communications materials made during project implementation had visibility elements in line with the Visibility guidelines. The project website was made in order to inform the public about the start of the project and implemented activities. Continuous publishing of materials on the project webpage was organised by the Lead partner.

Project Description	
Name	Transnational advanced management of land use risk through landslide susceptibility maps design
Acronym	safEarth
Total Budget	EUR 974,695.50
EU co-financing (IPA/IPAII)	EUR 828,491.17
Duration	01/06/2017 – 30/11/2019
SO	2.1 - To promote and improve environment and nature protection and management systems for risk prevention
Partners	
N. of Partners	4
Lead Partner	Croatian Geological Survey(HR)
Other Partners	Geological Survey of Montenegro (ME) Faculty of Mining, Geology and Civil Engineering (BA) Development Agency Žepče (BA)

1. Project summary

SafEarth project was initiated to address the issue of landslide hazards in the programme region. One of the consequences of climate change are weather extremes, which in turn can cause soil instabilities and endanger people and infrastructure in landslide zones. This project addresses the lack of information and knowledge, as well as the systemic prevention of hazardous landslides.

Three key objectives were identified in the project. Firstly, one of the goals was to operationalise best practice methodologies for design of Landslide susceptibility maps (LSM) for spatial planning and proper infrastructure construction. Secondly, this project's objective was to come up with strategies for the implementation of LSM management concepts for risk prevention. Lastly, the third objective was to build capacity for relevant stakeholders and administrations through discussions, workshops and dialogues.

According to the lead partner in the project (Croatian Geological Survey), cross-border cooperation with partners in Bosnia and Herzegovina (Faculty of Mining, Geology and Civil Engineering; Development Agency Žepče) and Montenegro (Geological Survey of Montenegro) was necessary as all three countries have certain similarities in geological characteristics, but they also share the same problems when it comes to lack of information and knowledge on landslide hazards, potential spots of new landslides and knowledge on their prevention.

2. Progress of activities

All project activities were completed on schedule and the project was terminated 30/11/2019. Some delays were detected regarding the public procurement in Bosnia and Herzegovina, which resulted in achieving less than planned with some of the deliverables. These problems stemmed from incompatibility of public procurement rules in Bosnia and Herzegovina and the EU public procurement rules. Eventually, these issues were overcome, even though some precious time was lost in the meantime. As this project ended before the widespread of the COVID-19 pandemic in the programme area, these circumstances did not affect the project in any way.

3. Project results and impact

The project has successfully achieved all the anticipated results and thus fulfilled all the objectives. Achievements were divided into thematic and communicational. Thematic achievements include: implementation of landslide susceptibility maps as part of a single disaster risk-prevention, development and application of appropriate measures derived from pilot studies to enforce risk-prevention and mitigation of landslides, preparation of legislative framework for integrated land-use management practices, development of integrated land-use management practices regarding optimization of the use of space and resources, long-term landslide protection through small-scale investment in infrastructure and equipment. Communicational achievements include: dialogues between national and transnational stakeholders (local authorities, interested communities, end users, etc.), cooperation through joint forecasting and warning, sharing of the obtained data with

other interested institutions; public communication of the data for wider use. One additional result which was not foreseen was a virtual database of landslide areas “Prijavi klizište”, where people can warn of new landslides. These results can mainly be categorised as Development of solutions or products’.

Seven different target groups were identified and reached in this project. Alongside local, regional and national public authorities, target groups consisted of infrastructure and (public) service providers, interest groups including NGOs, and other stakeholders, as well as the general public. The above-mentioned target groups participated in seminars and workshops about landslide areas, project outputs and landslide prevention.

This project has had several added values of cross-border cooperation. One added value was certainly creation of opportunities for exchange with cross-border partners, but the key added value was introduction or testing of new cross-border integrated services and products, i.e. implementation of landslide susceptibility maps across the programme area.

4.Sustainability and capitalisation

The lead partner continues with some project activities, such as dialogue with local and regional public authorities and dissemination of information acquired from LSM and other sources. What lies ahead is a new project that would create a national database of landslides. Also, talks are being held on how to include partners from other programme countries as well.

5.Horizontal issues

Programme strategy

Regarding the programme structure and strategy, the lead partner believes that it mostly covers all the needs in the programme area. Likewise, all the needs in this project were successfully addressed, without any unforeseen challenges, except for the already mentioned problem of public procurement rules in Bosnia and Herzegovina.

This project contributed positively to the sustainable development horizontal principle of the programme, and it had neutral contribution to the other two horizontal principles (equal opportunity and non-discrimination, and equality between men and women). This contribution was reflected in increased efficiency of land use management and in minimising negative environmental effects. Even though its contribution was assessed as neutral, this project strived to provide equal opportunities to all, regardless of gender, nationality, religion etc.

Contribution to macro-regional strategies

The project also contributed to the EU Strategy for the Danube Region (EUSDR), more specifically to its Priority Axis 2: to improve preparedness for environmental risk management and mitigation of floods/landslides through proper land use management. Moreover, this project added to the implementation of the EU Strategy for the Adriatic and Ionian Region (EUSAIR), by contributing the knowledge on the Strategy’s pillar regarding the environmental quality (Priority Area 3), in

two ways: it will support the reduction of degradation of ecosystem services due to extreme events (floods, landslides), and it will help to restore them through appropriate damage prevention/mitigation of climate hazards, and through climate change adaptation measures.

Communication

Finally, this project contributed to the programme communication objectives, mainly by increasing the level of knowledge about landslide danger, landslide prevention and the benefits of LSM. Project partners organised workshops and meetings with the stakeholders and promoted project activities to the general public.

Project Description	
Name	Innovative minds for smart schools
Acronym	SMART SCHOOLS
Total Budget	EUR 1,644,127.82
EU co-financing (IPA/IPAII)	EUR 1,395,864.49
Duration	01/06/2017 – 31/08/2019
SO	2.2 - To promote utilization of renewable energy resources and energy efficiency
Partners	
N. of Partners	5
Lead Partner	Association Centre for Development and Support (BA)
Other Partners	Green Action (HR) Brod-Posavina County (HR) Tuzla Canton (BA) Brod Ecological Society –BED (HR)

1. Project summary

Project “Innovative minds for smart schools”, or better known as SMART SCHOOLS, tackled many common cross-border issues: low renewable energy share, energy-inefficient public buildings, coal dominance in Bosnian energy sector polluting cross-border area environment, low share of green jobs. The key objective of the SMART SCHOOLS project was to contribute to sustainable growth in the cross-border project area by increasing energy efficiency (EE) measures and introducing renewable energy sources (RES).

A cross-border partnership was needed firstly because Croatia and Bosnia and Herzegovina share same several problems. The share of RES to total energy production is minimal in both countries, although there is great potential to use solar, biomass, geothermal, wind energy. Moreover, in both countries public, residential and commerce buildings are the largest energy-consuming sector. Being extremely energy inefficient, they use several times more energy than allowed by the EU Directives. None of the project partners alone had the capacity and expertise to implement all project components, but by joining forces through joint cross-border implementation and staffing, each partner' strengths was invested in project implementation, thus achieving strong synergy where the combined effect was much greater than the sum of individual effects would ever be.

2. Progress of activities

The project started on 1 June 2017 and lasted 27 months. All project activities were completed on schedule and by the 31 August 2019, the project was finished. Even though there was a slight delay in the commencement of the EE-renovation of one school building due to the cancellation of the contract, all project activities were timely completed. As this project ended before the widespread of the COVID-19 pandemic in the programme area, these circumstances did not affect the project in any way.

3. Project results and impact

There were five expected results in this project: 1) annual 628,511.00 kWh energy saving in 75 school and other public buildings, 2) at least 30 newly trained energy managers, employees of public institutions, 3) annual 16,542.00 kWh energy saving - achieved by 20 project area students (participants of IT/technological innovation contest) and students of two schools (winners of the energy-saving contest), 4) new technical facilities installed with a total of 661.50 kW renewable energy generation capacity, and 5) citizens educated and motivated to apply in their households/workplaces affordable measures and solutions for EE and RES increase. All project results, identified in the area of development of solutions or products, were exceeded and fully achieved.

This project has had several added values of cross-border cooperation. Alongside the creation of opportunities for exchange with cross-border partners, the key added value of cross-border

cooperation was the improvement and transfer of knowledge of a specific problem common to cross-border territories. There weren't any external factors that might have accelerated or hindered the progress towards project results, because, as the lead partner stated, they "are masters of risk, (they) know how things can go wrong and then always have not only a Plan A but a Plan B and a Plan C".

Target groups, as individuals (students, teachers, energy managers) and institutions (authorities/utilities), gained new knowledge and improved their capacity for better energy management, which was the initially expected impact of this project. All target values were exceeded, which was not initially foreseen. The interest of the public was greater than the project partners expected – e.g. there were 2-3 times more schools taking part in the cross-border energy-saving school competition, than was initially planned.

4. Sustainability and capitalisation

The project was implemented very successfully and thus was decided to continue with the implementation of project activities. In October 2020 the project SMART SCHOOLS 2 started, which represents a continuation of the project Smart Schools from the 1st Call for proposals. Furthermore, the lead partner plans to apply for a new project in the 2021-2027 IPA CBC programme to continue with good practices from the first two projects.

One of the recognized challenges for the sustainability of project activities was political will. Unstable governments and rapid changes of politicians in power can cause ceasing the provided support. Another challenge was the lack of funding, which they overcame by obtaining a loan from the government.

5. Horizontal issues

Programme strategy

Regarding the programme structure and strategy, the lead partner believes that it's in line with needs coming from their area and they are very supportive of the initiative to tackle the environmental issues. The project implementation ran smoothly, but there were some remarks aimed at the financial part of the project—the share of the co-financing burden which was carried by the partners was too high for them. Even the lead partner wouldn't have applied for this project, hadn't they got a loan from the government. One particular challenge that emerged during the implementation was the administrative burden. All partners had to spend a lot of time dealing with administrative tasks and complicated public procurement.

This project contributed positively to the three horizontal principles of the programme (sustainable development, equal opportunity and non-discrimination, and equality between men and women). This contribution was reflected in increasing energy efficiency of renovated schools and increasing

renewable energy share (by installing new solar-power generating photo-voltaic systems and replacing coal-based heating systems in renovated schools with zero-emission biomass-boilers), in providing equal and non-discriminatory opportunities for all to strengthen knowledge and employability, and in improving girls' and women's knowledge and capacity to start using benefits of EE and RES in their homes and businesses.

Contribution to macro-regional strategies

SMART SCHOOLS directly contributed to several Priority Areas of EU Strategy for the Danube Region (EUSDR): encouraging more sustainable energy, protecting the environment in the Danube Region, and building Region' prosperity through education, research and innovation. This project also made its contribution to the EU Strategy for the Adriatic and Ionian Region (EUSAIR), specifically addressing the identified challenge of "Natural and man-made hazards and risks entailed by climate change".

Communication

Finally, this project contributed to the programme communication objectives by increasing knowledge and changing the behaviour of students and their parents, and people employed in the educational sector. Students and teachers participated in the cross-border energy-saving contest to achieve planned energy savings, and during the contest, they increased their knowledge on behavioural zero-costs energy-saving methods, which they applied during the contest.

Project Description	
Name	Heating communities with renewable energy
Acronym	RENEW HEAT
Total Budget	EUR 698,681.14
EU co-financing (IPA/IPAII)	EUR 593,878.95
Duration	01/07/2017 – 31/12/2018
SO	2.2 - To promote utilization of renewable energy resources and energy efficiency
Partners	
N. of Partners	4
Lead Partner	North-West Croatia Regional Energy Agency (HR)
Other Partners	Development Agency of Una-Sana Canton Bihać (BA) Karlovac County (HR) Municipality of Cazin (BA)

1. Project summary

The project 'Heating communities with renewable energy' – RENEW HEAT is the result of a cooperation among 4 partners from Croatia (HR) and Bosnia and Herzegovina (BA) aimed at making the most out of the wood resources of the region to produce clean energy. The project aimed to show that the sustainable use of timber can not only reduce carbon footprint but also help the development of the local economy.

Forests are recognised as the most valuable natural resource in Croatia and Bosnia and Herzegovina, covering respectively 47% and 53% of the countries' surface. In both countries, timber is a traditional source of energy for heating and cooking, but it is used in an inefficient and environmentally unfriendly way, especially in rural areas. Moreover, the wood biomass produced by combustion remains unutilised, leading to large unfulfilled potential for the development of a local wood biomass market.

The transition to renewable energy sources (RES) is also hampered by several factors. The 2 countries are characterised by a lack of financing for investments, business models and capacities to support the transition to RES. In particular, Bosnia and Herzegovina does not have any statistics, accepted studies or strategic documents at cantonal/local level related to the use of biomass. Although the situation in Croatia is slightly better, the biomass market is highly informal, and data need to be updated. Finally, citizens of both countries are unaware of the technical information on the use of wood biomass energy but, since transition is a bottom-up process, they need to be informed on how to take action.

The main objective of the project is to drive the regional energy transition based on sustainable use of a readily available RES - wood - leading to increased energy security, a cleaner environment, and a stronger economy of the cross-border region.

The following partners were involved in the process: North-West Croatia Regional Energy Agency (HR), Karlovac County (HR), Development Agency of Una-Sana Canton Bihać (BA) and Municipality of Cazin (BA).

The overall objective has been achieved mainly through the realisations of the following actions:

- The installation of highly-efficient biomass boilers in public buildings;
- Organization of trainings for public officials and potential wood biomass suppliers on biomass value implementation of one innovative business model per country for occupants of at least 10 public buildings held by trained locals;
- Road Map on sustainable use of wood biomass in efficient heating applications presented to policy makers with the aim to integrate the recommendations into policy and financial programmes.

The main target groups the project addressed were local/regional/national public authorities, sectoral agencies, education/training centre and school, business support organisations and others.

The cross-border partnership for this initiative turned out to be an important added value. All the results have been built on exchanges of experiences and collaborative learning experiences between partners and local stakeholders using a multisector (public, business, citizens) and multi-level (local, regional, national) approach to achieve strong outputs, such as the Road Map (joint strategic plan).

2. Progress of activities

The project ended on 31 December 2018 and, during its realisation, all activities were finalised and all the results achieved.

No problems were detected during the implementation phase and no particular delays were experienced.

3. Project results and impact

RENEW HEAT was pursuing three main project specific objectives:

- To support sustainable use of wood biomass in targeted communities;
- To change the behaviour in favour of energy savings in public buildings;
- to capitalise on project results.

It also brought a positive change to the economy as it introduced two new business models based on best case practices from EU and one such model is implemented within project lifetime: heat contracting. Heat contracting is a market-oriented model for selling heat produced from biomass to users. It is a new opportunity with high added value appropriate for forest owners, farmers and other target groups in rural areas.

The project has managed to achieve all the expected results specifically:

- 430 people were reached through educational activities
- 1 joint strategic plan was developed
- 3 contracts for renewable heat concluded
- 3 0,875 MW boilers were installed

The project was implemented as planned, there was no external or internal factors that had a significant influence on the project implementation or results.

Heating with wood biomass is a labour-intensive process that created new jobs for private forest owners and existing companies in the field of biomass or wood processing who are at the heart of this project. The project had other positive impacts on the different target groups:

- Public building owners, Municipality of Cazin and Karlovac County, implemented the investment and received an efficient, environmentally friendly heating system where fossil fuels were used before, or there was no heating installed.
- The occupants of 3 public buildings (primarily students, teachers, staff, associations, clubs, citizens as visitors) have enjoyed better-quality air, first-hand demonstration of renewables in their building and heating.

- The biomass suppliers (private forest owners, companies in the field of biomass trade or wood processing industry) received trainings and indirectly benefited from heating contracts.
- Project partners exchanged experiences and gained new skills.
- Local teachers were trained as local advocates on energy savings and implemented trainings in their classes (benefiting 400 students/citizens).

The project has also achieved a result which was not initially foreseen, namely, for the first time a heating contract was included in the Croatian national document named “*Long-term reconstruction strategy of the national building fund until 2050.*”

The cross-border cooperation produced added value under several aspects. Firstly, the joint delivery of innovative aspects of the project, i.e. the implementation of a heat contracting model. As the innovative business model of heat contracting has been recently piloted in Croatia, the focus was on transferring lessons learned to BA partners during the Study Visit and Collaborative Lab. The lead partner’s staff supported the energy transition in BA through participation at local workshops where the heat contract model was elaborated. Secondly, the partnership was helpful for raising BA partners’ capacities. Finally, capitalisation activities were designed to use local experiences for drawing up joint conclusions and recommendations, setting the basis for benchmark and considering possible cross-border implications.

Figure 10. Study Visit and Collaborative Lab in a district heating plant in Pokupsko (HR)



Source: [https://www.interreg-hr-](https://www.interreg-hr-ba-me2014-2020.eu/novost/study-visit-within-the-renew-heat-project/)

[ba-me2014-2020.eu/novost/study-visit-within-the-renew-heat-project/](https://www.interreg-hr-ba-me2014-2020.eu/novost/study-visit-within-the-renew-heat-project/)

4. Sustainability and capitalisation

During the final phase of the project implementation, the project partners decided to apply to the second Call for proposals of Interreg IPA CBC Croatia-Bosnia and Herzegovina-Montenegro in order to continue project activities. The proposal was approved for and the “Wood Key” project was funded. The partnership was extended and the innovative component was taken to the upper level.

The lead partner is willing to apply for a new project in the 2021-2027 IPA CBC programme in order to capitalise on the results of the project through the following typologies of actions:

- Formulation of new policies/solutions to address a specific need (e.g. action plans, strategies etc.)
- Implementation of policies / solutions (e.g. testing, piloting).

5. Horizontal issues

Programme strategy

The interview confirmed that the programme structure and strategy were in line with the needs of the project area.

In the project application, the partners included a comprehensive approach to the needs of all relevant stakeholders and target groups. So, there was no unpredictable situations or needs that pop up during the project lifetime.

With regards to the contribution of RENEW HEAT to the horizontal principles of the programme, a positive impact can be observed in the field of sustainable development (environment). This project indeed has directly promoted the use of local renewable energy sources as a way to decrease dependency on fossil fuels and achieve better energy performance. Unlike solar or wind power, biomass is only conditionally a RES, thus the project was dedicated to emphasising the importance of sustainability and value chains. All stakeholders along the chain (suppliers, consumers, policy makers) were educated on environmental aspects and implications of their choices. RENEW HEAT also contributed to the reduction of carbon footprint through changing consumers' behaviour. On the other hand, the other 2 horizontal principles of the programme, equal opportunity and non-discrimination and equality between men and women, were respected by the project but not enhanced.

Contribution to macro-regional strategies

The EU Strategy for the Danube Region (EUSDR) has identified biomass as one of priorities within Priority area 2 Energy. As stated in the Danube Region Biomass Action Plan "energy from biomass has great importance for all countries in the Danube region ...(and)...the use of biomass as an energy source helps addressing climate change (sustainable and reduces CO₂ emissions), security of supply concerns (helps to cope with dependency on fossil fuels and on imported energy) and contributes to economic growth and job creation, particularly in rural areas". The plan recommends the improvement of cooperation between the countries of the Danube Region Strategy as well as extended sustainable use of biomass, which is precisely the purpose of this project.

With regards to the European Union Strategy for the Adriatic and Ionian Region (EUSAIR) RENEW HEAT is connected to pillar 3: Environment quality aimed to address environmental quality through cooperation in the region. Furthermore, EUSAIR recognizes climate change mitigation and adaptation as a horizontal issue.

Communication

All project activities were characterised by a strong communication part which was in line with programme goals. The activities of the Work Package Communication (WPC) directly targeted the communicative purpose and dissemination of the project results. That WPC activities included kick-off events in both partner countries and knowledge spreading through different publications (handbook, case study, brochure – road map). Likewise, the public events, such as community events or regional conferences on future of wood biomass performed a strong outreach and dissemination function. A final conference was held with over 100 participants from all sectors and at national, regional and EU level. By using partners social media and the project website, RENEW HEAT was able to reach wider groups of people.

Project Description	
Name	Innovative approach and digital contents in historical fortification monuments
Acronym	Fortress ReInvented
Total Budget	EUR 1.310.232,40
EU co-financing (IPA/IPAII)	EUR 1.113.697,53
Duration	01/07/2017 – 31/12/2019
SO	3.1 To strengthen and diversify the tourism offer through cross border approaches and to enable better management and sustainable use of cultural and natural heritage
Partners	
N. of Partners	4
Lead Partner	Šibenik City Museum (HR)
Other Partners	Municipality of Herceg Novi (ME) Municipality of Klis (HR) Public Institution City Museum of Zenica (BA)

1. Project summary

Project “Innovative approach and digital contents in historical fortification monuments”, or better known as Fortress ReInvented, aimed to enhance further development and diversification of the cross-border tourism offer. Fortress ReInvented project is a prime example of the Programme having a positive effect on the quality of tourist offerings and the increase of number of visitors. This project was managed by Šibenik City Museum, as the lead partner, and by Municipality of Klis, Municipality of Herceg Novi and Public Institution City Museum of Zenica, as the project partners.

The key objective was to upgrade the content of four medieval fortresses in an innovative digital way in order to enhance the level of their attraction for visitors, but also to contribute to increasing sustainability and expansion of the tourist offer by using cultural heritage for tourism purposes through cross-border approach in order to stimulate faster growth in the Programme area.

Two fortresses were in Croatia: St. Michael’s (Šibenik) and Klis Fortress (Klis), one in Bosnia and Herzegovina: Vranduk Fortress (Zenica) and one in Montenegro: Kanli Kula Fortress (Herceg Novi). By using cultural heritage for tourism purposes this project contributed to increasing sustainability and expansion of the tourist offer. Tourist offer of four historical fortification was enriched with new digital content, which resulted in admirable number of visitors. A cross-border partnership was needed to jointly work on developing and diversifying tourism offers in the Programme area, because, as the lead partner has stated, the most important thing was to exchange experience between the partners.

2. Progress of activities

The project started on 1 2017 and lasted 30 months. Even though there were some minor delays in project implementation, all project activities were completed on schedule and by the 31 December 2019, the project was finished. The cause of the above-mentioned delays was facing some new procurement procedures that required more time than it was expected to. As this project ended before the widespread of the COVID-19 pandemic in the Programme area, these circumstances did not affect the project in any way.

3. Project results and impact

The main expected result was to increase and diversify tourist offers, obtained in an innovative and unusual way. That included developing digital content in historical fortification monuments in three countries. Another result was to improve the knowledge of stakeholders involved directly in the creation of tourist offers in the management of cultural heritage sites with an innovative perspective. Both results were fully achieved and thus they positively impacted the increase in arrivals of non-residents staying in hotels and similar establishments. The key project result was identified in the category of “Identification of specific needs/issues in the project area”.

This project aimed at target groups as follows: local public authority, regional public authority, national public authority, sectoral agency, SMEs and the general public. The (expected) impact on target groups can be seen in the application of newly gained knowledge through the project and using this new knowledge to diversify the tourist offer in the future period. All target values were fulfilled, but one exceeded far more than it had been initially planned. The interest of the public was greater than the project partners expected – e.g., 749.195 visits were recorded at all four sites in the project implementation period (01/07/2017-31/12/2019).

This project has had several added values of cross-border cooperation. Alongside the creation of opportunities for exchange with cross-border partners, the key added value of cross-border cooperation was local or regional introduction/development or testing of new services and products. There weren't any external factors that might have accelerated or hindered the progress towards project results.

4. Sustainability and capitalisation

The project was implemented very successfully and thus was decided to continue with the implementation of similar project activities. In March 2020 the project Fortitude started, which represents a continuation of the project Fortress ReInvented from the 1st Call for proposals. In this new project, five fortresses' visitor centres will be improved (Croatia: Šibenik, Karlovac, Bosnia and Hercegovina: Banja Luka, Montenegro: Herceg Novi, Bar). Furthermore, the lead partner plans to apply for a new project in the 2021-2027 Interreg IPA Cross-border cooperation Programme to continue working on culture and heritage protection and tourism development.

One of the recognized challenges for the sustainability of project activities was funding opportunities. In this case, project activities depend on the good results of the tourist season. If fewer tourists are visiting, consequently there are also fewer fortresses' visitors, which affects the financing of the institution. According to the Lead Partner, the funding opportunities provided by the Programme have been only complementary to other fundings.

5. Horizontal issues

Programme strategy

Regarding the Programme structure and strategy, the lead partner believes that it's in line with needs coming from their area and they are very supportive of the Interreg Programme, emphasizing the great importance of sharing experiences with project partners. During the project implementation, a new challenge emerged that was not initially foreseen. The challenge appeared while conducting procurement for high-tech equipment.

This project contributed positively to the three horizontal principles of the Programme (sustainable development, equal opportunity and non-discrimination, and equality between men and women). This contribution was reflected in environmentally friendly solutions, ensuring access for people with disabilities, especially for people with visual impairment disability.

Contribution to macro-regional strategies

Fortress ReInvented directly contributed to one Priority Area of EU Strategy for the Danube Region (EUSDR) – promoting culture and tourism (people to people contacts). This project also made its contribution to the EU Strategy for the Adriatic and Ionian Region (EUSAIR), directly contributing to the fourth pillar of the EUSAIR – Sustainable tourism. This project is developing new tourism products, services that are diversifying the existing tourism offer; and improving cooperation between cultural heritage tourism stakeholders in the Programme area.

Communication

Finally, this project contributed to the Programme communication objectives by increasing knowledge and changing the behaviour not only of visitors and tourists but of people in cultural institutions and local authorities. In order to revitalize fortresses and increase the number of cultural visitors, Fortress ReInvented encouraged cultural institutions and local authorities to participate in the partnership to engage the widest possible number of regional stakeholders of the tourism value chain.

ProjectDescription	
Name	ADRIATIC CANYONS ADVENTURE TOURS
Acronym	ADRIATIC CANYONING
Total Budget	EUR 1,879, 251.27
EU co-financing (IPA/IPAII)	EUR 1,597, 363.54
Duration	01/07/2017 – 31/12/2019
SO	3.1 - To strengthen and diversify the tourism offer through cross border approaches and to enable better management and sustainable use of cultural and natural heritage
Partners	
N. of Partners	6
Lead Partner	City of Široki Brijeg (BA)
Other Partners	Municipality of Grude (BA) City of Obrovac (HR) City of Drniš (HR) Agency for Construction and Development of Herceg Novi d.o.o. (ME) Zadar County Development Agency ZADRA NOVA (HR)

1. Project summary

The project "ADRIATIC CANYONING - ADRIATIC CANYONS ADVENTURE TOURS" started in July 2017 and finished in December 2019 (30 months implementation period). The lead partner organization was city of Široki Brijeg (Western Herzegovina Canton in Bosnia and Herzegovina) and other project partners were City of Obrovac (Zadar County, Croatia), City of Drniš (Šibensko-Kninska County, Croatia), Municipality of Grude (Western Herzegovina Canton, Bosnia and Herzegovina), Agency for Construction and Development of Herceg Novi d.o.o from Montenegro and Zadar County Development Agency ZADRA NOVA from Croatia. Total eligible budget was EUR 1.879.251,27.

The specific objective of the "ADRIATIC CANYONING - ADRIATIC CANYONS ADVENTURE TOURS" project is to strengthen and diversify the tourism offer through cross border approaches and to enable better management and sustainable use of cultural and natural heritage. Adriatic is recognized as one of the main tourism regions especially during summer season in Europe and wider. However, Adriatic Hinterland, which is full of potentials for development of different tourism offer is still not fully integrated into this tourism offer. This is especially concerning the local communities which are far from Adriatic coastline and where is a lot of potential for development of active tourism (like rock climbing, zip line, adventure park etc.).

The main target groups the project identified were tourists and visitors wishing more active and adrenaline vacation, local population, local tourism and family business, young people in general and tourism agencies.

The cross-border partnership was essential because Adriatic Hinterland has the capacity to be one of the most attractive outdoor tourism destination and it was necessary to develop a cross-border model for better and sustainable management and promotion . In the same time it was important to integrate these inland municipalities into overall tourism offer with new and attractive tourism content. Tourism is not something that can be promoted locally only, especially if targeting international tourists and there is a need to develop and promote joint tourism offer and market it as such to the international markets. Tourists targeted by this tourism offer are coming from the whole Europe and any local community or region cannot reach the full effects acting alone. In that respect, there is a need to have a joint promotion of specific tourism offer rather than promote it on its own (locally).

Locations which are targeted by this project are from three different countries, but they are part of one tourism region – Adriatic destination.

Project partners have decided to combine their forces to adequately implement the project and produce results in accordance with and contribute to the objectives set in the Interreg IPA Cross-border Cooperation Programme HR – BA - ME 2014. – 2020. The benefits for the involved parties are transfer of good practice experiences, establishing cross-border cooperation, development of joint adrenaline tourist offer in the entire Adriatic Hinterland, etc.

2. Progress of activities

The project activities included the following: constructing new infrastructure for multiple adventure activities, developing a joint model of management of the locations, joint promotion and organizing specialized and thematic Adriatic Adventure Tourism events (shared events like adventure weeks etc.) The overall objective was to strengthen tourism offer in the Adriatic hinterland by integrating the whole area as one recognized outdoor destination.

By the end of the project, all project activities have been implemented without major delays or impediments to implementation.

3. Project results and impact

The ADRIATIC CANYONING project itself has a very positive impact on tourism development in the whole Adriatic Hinterland region and it has achieved all predicted results. Cross-border model for better management and sustainable use of natural heritage in the Adriatic Hinterland was developed. This result contributed to the better management and sustainable use of natural heritage in Adriatic Hinterland through specific tourism offer. Selected canyons and locations were equipped with specific tourism infrastructure. This result had notable impact on the improvement and diversity of the tourist offer and extend tourism offer from the coastline to the inland rural areas. Tourist services and offer in specific Adriatic Hinterland municipalities/cities were enhanced. This result contributed to the better and standardized quality of tourism services such as guides, safety measures, etc. Adriatic Hinterland is promoted as a great outdoor tourism destination. This result contributed to the joint promotion of Adriatic Hinterland to attract more tourists and visitors to visit and stay in the Adriatic Hinterland. The project ADRIATIC CANYONING fulfilled its main objective, strengthening and diversifying tourism offer in the Adriatic Hinterland through cross-border approach. Three adventure parks were equipped and developed: Adventure Park Vrbanj (Herceg Novi, ME), Adventure Park Borak (Široki Brijeg, BA) and Adventure Park Peć Mlini (Grude, BA), while locations in Drniš and Obrovac (HR) were enriched with additional adventure content.

Each partner had a specific role and responsibility for specific activities within the project while some activities were implemented by each partner individually. Individual activities referred mainly to small infrastructure investments at each location.

All the locations targeted by the ADRIATIC CANYONING project were not fully integrated into the tourism offer and all the identified target groups from these locations benefited from this project. Local authorities directly participated in the project implementation, while all other targeted groups were direct or final beneficiaries.

4. Sustainability and capitalization

Sustainability of the ADRIATIC CANYONING project is assured through the financial sustainability. Continuation of results and models established by the project was ensured directly by the partners and they continued to maintain these activities as part of their regular activities. The project will initiate Adriatic Adventure Weeks as a cross-border platform which will be organized by the partners annually. These events will ensure further improvement and joint promotion of Adriatic

Hinterland as outdoor tourism destination. This project had a positive environmental impact, and standardized management model will enable better and sustainable use of natural heritage of the selected locations.

5. Horizontal issues

ADRIATIC CANYONING project provides equal opportunities to everyone without any prejudice. This project aims to attract different people from different parts of the world and thus there is no room for any discrimination. Throughout the implementation, the project put strong effort in equal opportunities to everyone without any discrimination. The project encourages gender equality and provides equal opportunities to everyone. This was ensured through selection of beneficiaries and stakeholders. During the preparation and design of the project there was almost equal participation of men and woman in the design and in the consultation.

Contribution to macro-regional strategies

ADRIATIC CANYONING project fully contributes to the 4th Pillar of EUSAIR "Diversification of the macro-region's tourism products and services along with tackling seasonality of inland, coastal and maritime tourism demand". ADRIATIC CANYONING aims exactly the same as targeted by 4th Pillar of EUSAIR: tackling seasonality, diversification of tourism offer, development of tourism offer in inland areas, as well as raising a quality of tourism services and tourism offer.

The ADRIATIC CANYONING project is in line with the Priority Area 3 of the EUSDR "To promote culture and tourism, people to people contacts", which aims to properly valorize natural and cultural heritage through tourism where an effort is needed to for improving the management and of the sites in terms of preservation and in development of sustainable methods of exploitation.

It is necessary to raise awareness of different stakeholders on adventure tourism as a part of tourism which is nature responsible. This was implemented through meetings, public relations, conferences, promotional material, trainings and seminars.

Communication

Direct communication, promotion events and mediabwerebused as communication tools in order to increase knowledge of international visitors and tourists about this region and specific tourism offer.

Project Description	
Name	Better Access to Growth: Clusters and Competitiveness – Networking on Adriatic Region
Acronym	BACAR
Total Budget	EUR 1,019,843.87
EU co-financing (IPA/IPAII)	EUR 866,867.28
Duration	01/06/2017 – 30/11/2019
SO	4.1 - To enhance institutional infrastructure and services in order to accelerate the competitiveness and development of business environment in the programme area
Partners	
N. of Partners	5
Lead Partner	Municipality of Kotor (ME)
Other Partners	Chamber of Economy of Montenegro (ME) Public Institution RERA SD for Coordination and Development of Split Dalmatia County (HR) Ministry of Economy Herzegovina-Neretva Canton (BA) CCIRS-Chamber of Commerce and Industry of Trebinje Region (BA)

1. Project summary

The project 'Better Access to Growth: Clusters and Competitiveness–Networking on Adriatic Region' – BACAR is the result of a cooperation among 5 partners from Croatia, Bosnia and Herzegovina and Montenegro. BACAR is focused on strengthening the institutional structure and services supporting SMEs and their competitiveness through the establishment of networks and platforms for cooperation, and the creation of cross-border business clusters in priority sectors.

The main objective of the project is to improve the competencies of entrepreneurs by establishing three cross-border clusters in the following sectors: creative industry, tourism and rural development. Grouping or clustering of small and medium-sized enterprises aims to increase their negotiating power with government bodies, financial institutions and, horizontally, with customers and their products or services.

The targeted region has a tradition of performing this type of activities. However, a satisfactory level of cooperation has not been achieved yet as it used to lean on private initiatives of individual enterprises and public institutions on an ad-hoc base. Moreover, in Bosnia and Herzegovina and Montenegro, the concept of cluster support is at the initial stage, while in Croatia it is much more advanced.

The following partners were involved in the process: Municipality of Kotor (ME) as lead partner, Chamber of Economy of Montenegro (ME), Public Institution RERA SD for Coordination and Development of Split Dalmatia County (HR), Ministry of Economy Herzegovina-Neretva Canton (BA), CCIRS-Chamber of Commerce and Industry of Trebinje Region (BA).

The project pursued the following key objectives:

- The identification and the introduction of the cluster development concept;
- The identification of the main groups of actors within each of the three sectors identified (creative industry, tourism and rural development/local food) and the establishment of clusters;
- The establishment of cross border clusters networks;
- Enhancing Cluster support institutions equipped and trained to provide advice and trainings to Clusters;
- Increased business skills and knowledge of Clusters and their members;
- The development of an e-commerce platform/portal for Cluster promotion.

The main target groups addressed by the project activities were: public authorities, enterprises, SMEs, business support organisations, sectoral agencies, interest groups including NGOs, higher education and research, education/training centres and schools.

Through the clusterisation process, the cooperation was started or raised to a higher level. The cross-border clusters allowed the exchange of experiences and information and advice, the enterprises were given the opportunity to do their business in line with modern trends, raising their competitiveness level and enable their further development.

The entrepreneurs who joined these cross-border clusters got a completely new picture of business. They acquired new competences concerning the improvement of general business, but

also very specific knowledge related to the individual sectors. Thanks to the study visits to Serbia, Italy and Croatia, entrepreneurs were given the opportunity to see examples of best practices which go beyond regional significance, gather extremely valuable information and gain knowledge on how to apply this expertise in their field concretely, especially relying on the EU experience of Croatia. Furthermore, the clusters development strengthened the SMEs capacity to access new markets, and new commercial relations and agreements have been established at regional fairs.

2. Progress of activities

The project ended on 30 November 2019. From the interview it emerged that the project did not experience any delay during its implementation, except PP3 RERA SD had problems with definition of final location for Cluster support centre in Kaštela. Therefore, MA approved LP's major modification request for prolongation of project duration.

3. Project results and impact

The project managed to introduce the clustering concept through an action plan implemented by sectors. The following results were achieved:

- Creation of 3 clusters - creative industry, tourism and rural development / local food and processing by region / country.
- Creation of 3 cross-border cluster networks in the creative industry, tourism and rural development / local food.
- Cluster support institutions are equipped and technically improved.
- Improved general abilities of cluster members on business and knowledge of ways of functioning of EU funds.
- Improved specific business skills per cluster / sector over three clustering support centers.
- Three clustering support centers have been opened in the region (in Kotor, Mostar and Kaštel Sućurac) where advisors and experts provide support in the areas of best practice leadership, research and training. The centres were provided with IT equipment and office furniture.
- The Chamber of economy of Montenegro and the Chamber of Commerce of Republic of Srpska office in Trebinje (BA), were also provided with IT equipment, needed for work with business sector representatives involved in clustering processes.
- Procurement of equipment and furniture for secondary schools in Mostar, for:
 - o Secondary tourism and catering school (furniture for the cabinet, for children with special needs, and equipment for the kitchen cabinet);
 - o Secondary textile - agricultural school (greenhouse for agricultural cabinet was made, and equipment for textile and hairdressing cabinet was procured).
- On activity level the project delivered more than 43 workshops/events where more than 1210 people participated. In particular, 3 cross-border workshops were held on the topic: "Promotion and branding", with cross-border cluster forums for each sector, as follows:
 - o 30 and 31 January 2019 in Trebinje (BA) - for the tourism sector,
 - o 6 and 7 February 2019 in Kaštela (HR) - for the local food sector,
 - o 13 and 14 March 2019 in Kotor (ME) - for the sector of creative industries.

- 3 study trips were organised:
 - o Study trip around Istria and Northern Italy for 33 representatives of the tourism sector, local food and creative industry from HR, BA and ME.
 - o Study trip to Serbia (Belgrade, Novi Sad) for 15 representatives of the creative industry sector from HR, BA and ME.
 - o Study trip to Italy for 15 representatives of the local food sector from HR, BA and ME.
- Participation of over 60 representatives of cross-border cluster networks, from all three sectors, at the International Economy Fair in Mostar (2019).
- 3 workshops held in Podgorica, Trebinje and Kaštela, on the topic 'EU funds - funding opportunities'.

The main impact of BACAR on the project area target groups is its contribution to strengthening human resources in the public and SMEs sectors and to improve the market approach of cluster members in both the domestic and international domain. The project activities promoted entrepreneurship and it is expected that one of the added values will be the establishment of new enterprises and creation of new jobs. The cooperation among enterprises will lead to the specialization of suppliers, which will result in reduced operational costs, increased competitiveness and improved product and services based on innovation potentials that are rapidly commercialised on the market.

The joint fair presentation is one of the activities which produced most added value. The partners organised the participation of members of cross-border clusters at the International Trade Fair in Mostar from 9 to 13 March 2019. At the stand of over 300m² of the BACAR project, the visitors of the Fair had the opportunity to get acquainted with the products and services of exhibitors from Montenegro, Bosnia and Herzegovina and Croatia. Workshops, presentations, tastings of local specialties as well as activities intended for children were also organized at the stand. The diverse offer of members of the creative industry cluster, producers and processors of local specialties, and the wide range of tourist offer attracted many visitors to the stand, which resulted in the recognition of the BACAR initiative for best performance at the 22nd International Trade Fair Mostar 2019.

During the final implementation period the cooperation of the businesses was also formalised through three memorandums of cooperation (one for each sector).

Figure 11. BACAR Workshops



Source: <http://www.bacar-project.org>

4. Sustainability and capitalisation

Sustainability of the project results will be ensured through the 3 Cluster Support Centres located in Kotor (ME), Mostar (BA) and Kaštela (HR). The clusters' members will be in charge of keeping them operational. However, the COVID-19 pandemic has posed a main challenge for the sustainability of the project activities, since some entrepreneurs members of clusters were forced to close down their businesses due to the economic crisis.

The Municipality of Kotor would like to mobilise other EU funds in order to provide further services for citizens and the economy improving the cooperation with SMEs and offering stronger support than cluster organisations. Kotor is willing to support the local entrepreneurs in improving their business and becoming a significant pillar of economic development for the territory. The Municipality aims at being recognised as a key partner in connecting local entrepreneurs with the institutions at macro-regional level, but also with partners within the Adriatic-Ionian region, the Western Balkans and the EU. With regards to the EU funds the reference point is the Municipal office for preparation and implementation of EU funded projects.

The Municipality of Kotor is willing to apply for a new project in the 2021-2027 IPA CBC programme in order to capitalise on the results of the project through the formulation of new policies/solutions to address a specific need (e.g. action plans, strategies etc.).

5. Horizontal issues

Programme strategy

The programme structure and strategy were in line with the needs coming from the project area. There has been no unexpected needs and challenges emerged during the implementation of the project that the partners had not initially foreseen.

The project actively contributed to all the 3 horizontal principles of the programme: Sustainable development (environment), Equal opportunity and non-discrimination and Equality between men and women.

Contribution to macro-regional strategies

The project implementation directly contributes to the achievement EUSDR Priority Area 08 "To support the competitiveness of enterprises". Through clusters SMEs will extend the competitiveness of each county and the whole region. Networking between knowledge centers, companies and policy-makers will stimulate innovation development and fast commercialization on markets. On this base SMEs will use national and regional funds better, and whole region will benefit fully from the European funds, such as HORIZON 2020 and COSME.

The project implementation relies on EUSAIR pillars and priorities (cultural and natural heritage and biodiversity; tourism) and contributes to the realization of its strategic objectives. Cluster development is based on sustainable valorisation of natural beauty and rich cultural and historical heritage of the region, they allow to establish new products and services as well as innovative factors of economic growth. Moreover, the participation of small and medium enterprises from the three countries to the Trade Fair Mostar 2019 was an excellent opportunity to hold business meetings to expand and improve overall business cooperation in the cross-border area where the BACAR project is implemented and further contribute to the EUSAIR pillar of sustainable tourism in the Adriatic-Ionian area.

Communication

The project strongly contributed to the programme communication goals through the development of web platforms for all the clusters/network and for their efficient promotion which still are fully operational (<https://creativeadriatic.com/>; <https://adriactastes.com/>; <https://nativeadriatic.com/>). In the context of the Opening of the Cluster support centre, a local press conference has been organized in Kaštela on 28-29/11/2019. Furthermore, promotional videos of stakeholders (Cluster members) were produced (<https://www.youtube.com/channel/UCcOozF7FggoUHkuEhZ6VZNA>).

Project Description	
Name	Improvement of transnational business environment through development of business competence centers and networks
Acronym	competenceNET
Total Budget	EUR 670,619.24
EU co-financing (IPA/IPAII)	EUR 570,026.34
Duration	01/06/2017 – 30/11/2019
SO	4.1 - To enhance institutional infrastructure and services in order to accelerate the competitiveness and development of business environment in the programme area
Partners	
N. of Partners	4
Lead Partner	Development Agency Žepčeb(BA)
Other Partners	Municipality of Stari Jankovci (HR) Montenegrin Employers Federation (ME) Municipality of Tovarnik (HR)

1. Project summary

Project "competenceNET" was conducted 30 months, between 1 June 2017 and 30 November 2019. Lead partner of the project was Development Agency Žepče from Bosnia and Herzegovina, second was Municipality of Stari Jankovci from Croatia, third was Employers union of Montenegro and the last one was Municipality of Tovarnik from Croatia.

Low level of competitiveness and generally unfavorable business environment, in comparison to EU countries is a problem present in Bosnia and Herzegovina, Croatia and Montenegro. The shortage of skilled workers and lack of relevant competences in products design, export management, financial management, marketing, is the problem that this project addresses and that has implications on the competitiveness of enterprises, which export semi-products and low added-value products.

Main objective of the project is to enhance sustainable economic development in Zenica-Doboj canton (BA), Vukovar- Srijem county (HR) and Podgorica (ME) territory by applying innovative models and approaches in boosting competitiveness of local SMEs. The project is linked to Programme overall goal as it provided joint intervention of four partner organizations from three countries that contributed to strengthening of the social, economic and territorial development of the Programme area through improvement of infrastructure, services and networks which will support businesses in cross border area.

The scope of this project required a transnational approach, since they aimed to develop cross-border network and business competence centers which will share strategy and training programs, in order to reach wider target group in the whole Programme area.

2. Progress of activities

As project ended in November 2019, all project activities were conducted by the end date.

Furthermore, project did not have any delays in implementation, so all activities could be achieved as planned or more than planned.

3. Project results and impact

Although the project did not achieved results that were not initially foreseen, this project has managed to achieve all expected results. The main project results are: 1. developed three transnational business competence centers for MSMEs in Zenica-Doboj county, Vukovar-Srijem county and Podgorica, 2. improved business-related competences of unemployed young persons through training and practical mentoring programmes, 3. raised knowledge of MSMEs on introducing new technologies, and innovative solutions in business operations through Smart cooperation programme, and 4. developed cross-border partnership model of public, private and research sector for access to and exchange of competences, experiences and know-how for favorable business environment.

Target groups were set a little wider as they included export-oriented SMEs, unemployed young people, business support and research institutions, local self-governments and the general public. Expected impact on the target group was to raise the competence of the workforce and raise the competitiveness of companies at the local and regional level, which was achieved with project activities.

As a key cross-border and local added value of this project, the interviewed representative of the lead partner pointed out connection on a regional basis as the greatest contribution of INTERREG because they achieved much greater efficiency in solving problems by working with partners from different countries than they could ever do alone.

4. Sustainability and capitalization

The project outputs are self-sufficient and they can provide the necessary services for as long as needed if maintained properly. Joint Strategy of BCCs developed an action plan organizing the follow up activities that are going to keep the BCCs recognizable internationally (round tables, panel discussions, media coverage). The Cross-Border Network of Favorable Business Environment will also be maintained by the PPs and network members. The investment locations will be maintained by the PPs who are founded and financed by municipalities. The sustainability of the web portal and online webinars is being provided by the BCCs.

The representative of the lead partner was very interested about applying for a new project in the 2021-2027 Interreg IPA Cross-border cooperation Programme to capitalize on the results of this project.

5. Horizontal issues

Project has also contributed to the horizontal principles of the Programme such as equality between men and women, non-discrimination and sustainable development. All activities proposed in this project contributed to a sustainable development of the environment, with the aim to facilitate further cross-regional cooperation. Sustainable economic development promoted in the project involves use of new, smart technologies and approaches to perform tasks of production, education or cooperation, usually done in a traditional and less environmentally friendly way. Women and men had the same opportunity to equally participate in this project. During acquisition of new staff women had the same conditions, regarding references, working environment and salary, as men.

Contribution to macro-regional strategies

By focusing on innovation, information society, competitiveness of enterprises, education, labour market and marginalized communities, project contributed to EUSDR pillar C: Building Prosperity in the Danube Region. By exchanging experiences and implementing joint project, PPs are contributing with this action to improvement of the prosperity of the Danube Region. Project promoted co-operation both through activity of Business Competence Centers and through Cross Border Network establishment, thus achieving higher regional coherence and sustainable economic development.

Communication

This project had also contributed to the Programme communication goals with different measures of informing the public. Communication was made by each partner in their area through their websites of their local media.

Annex 2 – Web survey figures

Total number of projects included	Number of web survey responses	Web survey response rate
59	17	28,8

