

Interreg - IPA CBC



Bulgaria - the former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia IPA Cross-Border Programme



COMMUNICATION STRATEGY

for the period 2014 - 2020

version 2.0

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List of Abbreviations

BG	Bulgaria
fYRoM	the former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia
CoS	Communication Strategy
CBC	Cross Border Cooperation
DG REGIO	General Directorate for Regional Policy (EC)
EC	European Commission
ETC	European Territorial Cooperation
IPA	Instrument for Pre-Accession Assistance
EU	European Union
Funds	Structural Funds and Cohesion Fund
JMC	Joint Monitoring Committee
JS	Joint Secretariat (including branch Strumica)
MA	Managing Authority
MRDPW	Ministry of Regional Development and Public Works (MA)
NA	National Authority
MLS	Ministry for Local Self Government (NA)
OP	Operational Programme

CHAPTER I CONTEXT

Section 1 - Introduction

Section 2 - Priority axes of the Programme

Section 1 Introduction

Communication has gained a vital role in cross-border cooperation programmes throughout the past years. Effective communication is the basis of cooperation. In addition, it is a prerequisite for the Programme to deliver meaningful results not only to project partners but also to audiences outside the project communities. Communication is thus an integral part of the working procedures at all levels throughout the project and Programme cycles. Communication takes place, for example, between project partners, between project partners and their audiences outside the project community, between projects and the Programme, between the different Programme bodies.

In recent years, the significance of information and communication has become widely recognized by all the actors managing European funded programmes. There is increased consciousness of the need to stimulate awareness of the general public about the impact of the European policies at national level.

Good communication is also crucial for the technical assistance and programme implementation. It is vital to work with stakeholders, applicants, general public and mass media in order to raise awareness for the programme and the development opportunities it brings.

Thus, the communication strategy will focus on increasing the awareness about the new Bulgaria - the former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia IPA Cross-Border Programme for 2014-2020, its priorities and financing opportunities, on creating communication tools to assist the beneficiaries, as well as promoting the programme results.

The strategy will outline the global aim/s and specific objectives of the communication measures, the key target groups, the key messages to be conveyed and the strategic approach, together with the roles and responsibilities for the information and publicity activities, the evaluation criteria, indicators and measures, the financial overview, the timeframe and the necessary administrative support.

Legal framework

According to the Regulation 1303/2013 of the European Parliament and of the Council for the implementation of the ESI Funds, chapter II, Art.113-117 and Annex XII, communication is a core task of the MA, as strategically important for the programme, as the financial management or any other management activity. It is a tool that helps ensure the success of the programme. Article 116 requires that the communication strategy shall be submitted to the Joint Monitoring Committee for approval no later than six months after the adoption of the Programme.

The Managing Authority for Bulgaria - the former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia IPA Cross-Border Programme will ensure that the implementation of the programme will

follow the information and publicity requirements and will be regularly reported to the Joint Monitoring Committees.

The Regulation (EC) № 1303/2013 states that communication measures should be programmed, structured and evaluated, with regular reporting to the Joint Monitoring Committees. In compliance with Art. 116, each programme must develop a communication strategy in pursuit of the following aims.

- informing potential beneficiaries about funding opportunities under operational programme;
- publicising to citizens the role and achievements of cohesion policy and of the Funds through information and communication actions on the results and impact of programme and its operations.

Content of the strategy

In compliance with Annex XII from *Regulation (EC) No 1303/2013*, the communication strategy shall include:

- a description of the approach taken, including the main information and communication measures that will be taken by the MA, aimed at potential beneficiaries, beneficiaries, multipliers and the wider public;
- a description of information materials that will be made available in formats accessible for people with disabilities;
- a description of how beneficiaries will be supported in their communication activities;
- the indicative budget for the implementation of the strategy;
- a description of the administrative bodies, including the staff resources, responsible for implementing the information and communication measures;
- the arrangements for the information and communication measures for the public, including the website where or website portal at where such data may be found;
- an indication of how the information and communication measures shall be assessed in terms of visibility and awareness of policy, operational programmes and operations, and of the role played by the Funds and the Union;
- an annual update setting out the information and communication activities to be carried out in the following year.

In accordance with the communication strategy, the MA shall ensure that the programme is disseminated widely, with details of the financial contributions from the IPA funds, and that it is made available to all interested parties.

According to the proportionality principle, the means used for implementing, monitoring and evaluating the CoS shall be proportional to the information and publicity measures identified in the communication strategy. The MA shall, in accordance with the communication strategy, ensure that the programme is disseminated widely, with details of the financial contributions from the IPA funds, and that it is made available to all interested parties.

The horizontal dimensions

In accordance with the horizontal principles referred to in Annex I, Art. 5 of Regulation 1303/2013, all communication and information activities carried out within the Bulgaria - the former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia IPA Cross-Border Programme will take into consideration the principles of:

1. Partnership and multi-level governance: *conceiving and carrying out actions between different levels of governance, in accordance with the principles of subsidiarity and proportionality, including by means of operational and institutional cooperation.*

2. Sustainable development: *ensuring that the chosen information and communication measures are the most resource-efficient and sustainable options; avoiding measures and tools that may have a significant negative environmental or climate impact; increasing the use of green public procurement.*

3. Promoting equality between men and women and non-discrimination: *prevent any discrimination during the preparation, implementation, monitoring and evaluation of the communication strategy - also by carrying out gender analyses and specific targeted actions.*

4. Accessibility: *ensuring equal access to the information and communication measures and tools to all citizens, including persons with special needs and aging persons.*

5. Addressing demographic changes: *proposing information and communication measures and tools that stimulate employability, productivity and economic performance, through education, TIC, research and innovation; focusing on the adequacy and quality of training provided to the potential beneficiaries.*

6. Climate change mitigation and adaptation: *ensuring that information and communication measures are resilient to the impact of climate change and natural disasters such as increased risks of flooding, droughts, heat waves, forest fires and extreme weather events. According to Regulation (EC) № 1303/2013, the **Managing Authority** shall ensure that potential beneficiaries have access to the relevant information, including updated information where necessary, and taking into account the accessibility of electronic or other communication services for certain potential beneficiaries, on at least the following:*

- the funding opportunities and the launching of application calls;
- the eligibility of expenditure conditions to be met in order to qualify for support under an operational programme;
- a description of the procedures for examining applications for funding and of the time periods involved;
- the criteria for selecting the operations to be supported;
- the contacts at national, regional or local level that are able to provide information on the operational programmes;
- the responsibility of potential beneficiaries to inform the public about the aim of the operation and the support from the Funds to the operation.

The following bodies that can widely disseminate clear and detailed information will be involved in information and publicity measures:

- national, regional and local authorities and development agencies;
- trade and professional associations;
- economic and social partners, including environmental partners;
- non-governmental organisations;
- information centres on Europe, Commission representation offices and information offices of the European Parliament in the Member States;
- European information multiplier network, local and national media;
- other relevant bodies representing civil society bodies responsible for promoting social inclusion, gender equality and non-discrimination.

A special role in disseminating relevant information about the programme implementation will be played by the **Joint Monitoring Committee**, which includes members from both countries.

The information and publicity measures will be implemented in accordance with the CoS aiming at the widest possible media coverage using suitable forms and methods of communication at the appropriate territorial level.

The CoS shall include the following measures, as the MA responsibility:

- organising a major information activity publicising the launch of the operational programme;
- organising one major information activity a year which promotes the funding opportunities and the strategies pursued and presents the achievements of the programme;
- displaying the Union emblem at the premises of Managing Authority and Joint Secretariat;
- publishing electronically the list of operations in accordance with Section 1 of Annex XII of Regulation 1303/2013;
- giving examples of operations on the programme's website;
- updating information about the programme's implementation, including, when appropriate, its main achievements.

The programme is managed by the Bulgarian Ministry of Regional Development and Public Works, acting as Managing Authority and the Ministry for Local Self Government from the former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia, acting as National Authority. The MA holds the overall responsibility for the information and publicity activities comprised in the current Communication Strategy.

According to the national Bulgarian law (the Act adopted by the Parliament and published in its latest form in the State Gazette No 57 of 13 July 2007) and to the national Macedonian law (Law on Free Access to Public Information published in Official Gazette of RM No.13/06 on 01 February 2006), citizens have free access to any public information, defined like this by the legislative documents. This represents one of the fundamental principles of the relations between persons and public authorities, observing the national Constitutions and the international documents ratified by the two Parliaments.

Section 2 - Priority axes of the Programme

The actions planned within the Communication Strategy for the Bulgaria - the former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia IPA Cross-Border Programme will aim to fulfil the programme priorities, as presented below:

Priority axis 1: Environment

Thematic Priorities

- TP (b): Protecting the environment, promoting climate change adaptation and mitigation, risk prevention and management.

Specific objective: **SO 1.1** Environmental protection and sustainable use of the common natural resources of the CBC area.
SO 1.2 Prevention and mitigation the consequences of natural and man-caused disasters of cross-border dimension and impact

Priority axis 2: Tourism

Thematic Priorities

- TP (d): Encouraging tourism and cultural and natural heritage.

Specific objective: **SO 2.1** Enhancing the tourism potential of the region through cooperation initiatives in better preservation and sustainable utilization of natural and cultural heritage.
SO 2.2 Raising the competitiveness of the CBC region's tourist offer.
SO 2.3 Promoting cooperation among regional actors in the area of sustainable tourism.

Priority axis 3: Competitiveness

Thematic Priorities

- TP (g): Enhancing competitiveness, business environment and the development of small and medium-sized enterprises, trade and investment.

Specific objective: **SO 3.1** Improving the competitiveness of regional businesses.

Priority axis 4: Technical Assistance

Specific objective: **SO 4.1** **PROGRAMME'S ADMINISTRATION**
To maximize the effectiveness and efficiency of the management and implementation of the IPA CBC Programme Bulgaria - the former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia (2014-2020)

CHAPTER II STRATEGY

Section 1 - Purpose and objectives

Section 2 - Target audience

Section 3 - Communication themes and Key messages

Section 1 - Purpose and objectives

Purpose

The Communication Strategy is channelled on two main directions: awareness-raising and absorption capacity. Therefore, the purpose of the Communication Strategy can be defined as follows:

- To highlight the role of the EU and to ensure that assistance from the Funds is transparent by proactively disseminating information and providing platforms that stimulate exchanges of experience in order to raise the awareness with the general public;
- To create the premises for a high absorption capacity in the eligible area of Bulgaria - the former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia IPA Cross-Border Programme of the EU funds by ensuring that all relevant information reaches the beneficiaries.

In this respect, all the information and communication materials mentioning one of the Programme structures will mention the role in the Programme (eg. MA/NA/JS/JMC etc.) and if the space allows it/if the information is still comprehensible the title of the body hosting (MRDPW- Ministry of Regional Development and Public Works, Ministry for Local Self Government).

Objectives

In order to achieve its purpose, the strategy sets out the following specific objectives:

General objectives

- **To support the successful implementation** of the programme by ensuring an effective communication system (measures, channels, targeted messages to all identified targets);
- **To increase public awareness** concerning the programme aims, priorities, financial support provided, estimated economic and social impact on regional development;
- **To increase the knowledge** of the potential beneficiaries on the financing opportunities offered by the programme, eligibility criteria and selection mechanism for the applications submitted;
- **To ensure transparency** in the use of the Funds and thus increase the level of trust of the general public in the institutions managing the Bulgaria - the former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia IPA Cross-Border Programme;

- **To increase the visibility** of the Bulgaria - the former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia IPA Cross-Border Programme and of the MA, NA and JS, at national and regional level;

Specific objectives

- **To ensure the good use of the EU funds**, by conveying information on the domains financed and the financing conditions to all target groups;
- **To clearly explain all the requirements, eligibility conditions and procedures** that potential beneficiaries need to follow in order to obtain financing;
- **To ensure that all potential beneficiaries know and include the horizontal dimensions** in the projects submitted for financing: partnership and multi-level governance, sustainable development, promoting equality between men and women and non-discrimination, accessibility, addressing demographic changes, climate change mitigation and adaptation;
- **To inform and train the implementing bodies;**
- **To ensure the visibility of the programme**, at local and national level:
 - **create the visual identity of the Programme** and make sure all information and publicity activities of the direct beneficiaries comply to the Visual Identity Manual;
 - **identify and disseminate success projects and good practices** examples;
- **To develop and maintain effective press relations**, in order to ensure the dissemination of the programme requirements, estimated impact and transparency;
- **To develop cooperation and partnership relations** with the implementing authorities and all relevant institutions, at national and European level, in order to realise the objectives included in the strategy;
- **To ensure the visibility of the MA** as the managing body of the Programme;
- **To ensure the visibility of the NA** as the counterpart for the Managing Authority with the coordination role on the territory of the former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia;
- **To report to the general public, and annually to the Joint Monitoring Committee and to the European Commission;**
- **To ensure exchange of knowledge and good practices in communication**, by actively participating in the network of the national communicators team and the DG Regio Information Team (INFORM).

Section 2 Target audience

Communication activities primarily should be directed to:

- a) potential applicants to ensure that they are properly and in time informed about the opportunities of funding, about calls for proposals and simultaneously to make sure that they understand the administrative process and implementation mechanism.
- b) Beneficiaries to ensure that all the relevant and necessary information in the implementation process are known.

Information about the programme and the projects results will also be provided to institutions involved in policy-making in fields related to priorities of the programme, stakeholders.

The geographical area of the programme is located in the South-Central part of the Balkan Peninsula. It covers a territory of 18 087 km² and has a population of 980 375 people (cf. BG NAT STAT, 2012; MK STATE STAT, 2012). The border line is 165 km of land border.

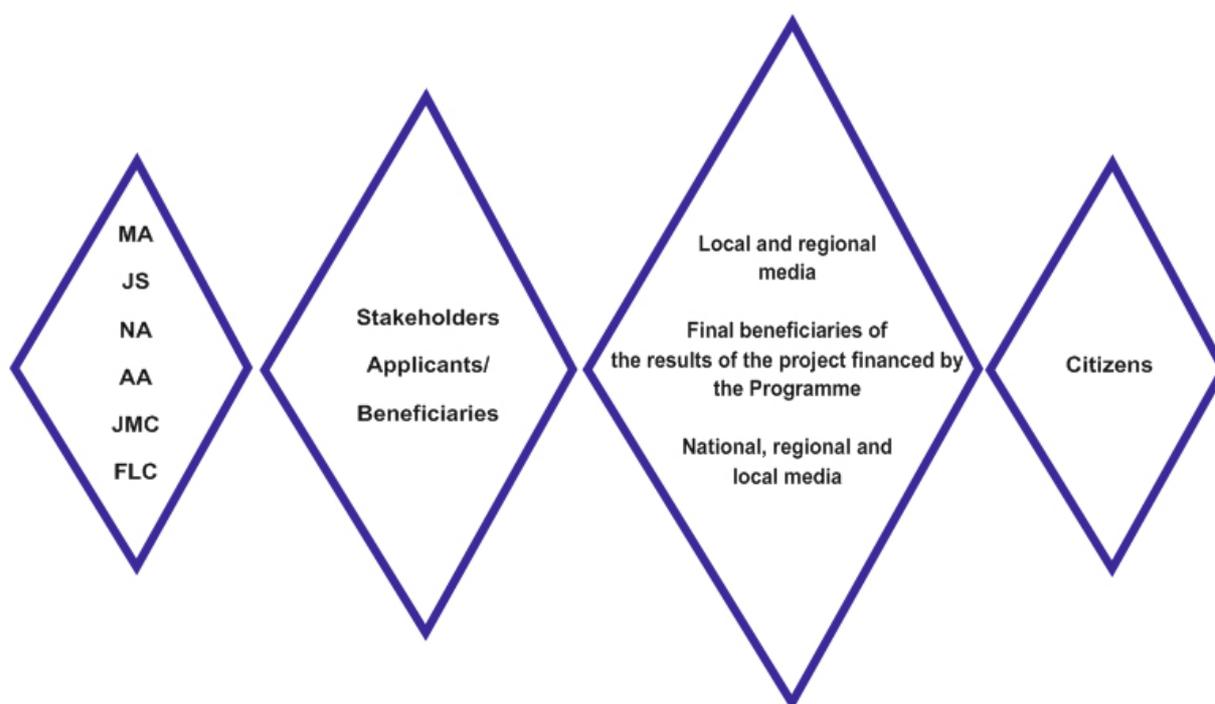
The eligible territory under the programme includes on Bulgarian side two NUTS III districts - **Blagoevgrad and Kyustendil** (52,5% of the CBC programme area), comprising of 23 municipalities, 462 settlements and a population of 452 973 people (46.2% of the total programme area population, 6,2% of the country population).

The eligible territory under the programme on side of the former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia comprises of the **North-East, the East and the South-East** NUTS III statistical regions (47,5% of the programme area, 33,4% of the country area), consisting of 27 municipalities, 597 settlements and a population of 527 402 people (53,8% of the total programme area population, 25.6 % of the country population).

The target groups of the Communication Strategy are as follows:

- **Potential and direct beneficiaries:** public authorities and institutions, NGOs, public sector and community institutions and organizations, etc. throughout the Programme area.
- **Other stakeholders - governmental/ non-governmental actors:** decentralized bodies in Bulgaria and the former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia relevant to the bordering regions, national, regional and local authorities and administrations, Municipalities, District Administrations, NGOs active at border level, Trade associations of the border regions, Women and youth organizations, Cross-border associations, Cultural, research and scientific organizations, Organizations representing economic and social interests, Stakeholders of mainstream programmes.
- **European Union's institutions and bodies:** European Commission (DG REGIO), European Economic and Social Committee, Committee of the Regions, European Court of Auditors, Representation of the European Commission in Bulgaria and the former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia, European Parliament.
- **National/ regional/local media from both countries,**
- **General public (citizens),**
- **Internal public:** the staff of the management bodies of the programme (Managing Authority, Joint Secretariat, National Authority, Audit Authority, First Level Control Unit), the members and observers of the Joint Monitoring Committee and the support services within the Ministry of Regional Development and Public Works and Ministry for Local Self Government.

TARGET GROUPS



Section 3 – Communication themes and Key messages

The **communication themes** have been established following each target group:

- **Potential beneficiaries:** funding opportunities available through the Programme in both countries, information on completing and submitting the applications, criteria for evaluation and selection of projects, project preparation, transparent allocation, horizontal dimensions;
- **Direct beneficiaries:** the next steps in the implementation of a project, the rights and obligations of the beneficiaries, compliance to information and publicity requirements in accordance with the Visual Identity Manual of the Programme, horizontal dimensions;
- **Other stakeholders - governmental/non-governmental actors:** funding opportunities available through the Programme in both countries, information on completing and submitting the applications, criteria for evaluation and selection of projects, project preparation, transparent allocation, horizontal dimensions;
- **European Union's institutions and bodies:** the evolution of the Programme implementation: launching, contracting, payments, modifications needs, evaluation, impact on the social and economic development of the eligible areas;
- **National/ regional/local media from both countries:** the potential and real impact of the funding allocated to the eligible areas of the Programme - economic and social development, reducing disparities in development compared to other regions, the transparency of the allocation of funds, evaluation and selection criteria, the results of projects implementation, success stories, the horizontal dimensions, people are the final beneficiaries of investments financed from the Programme;

- **General public:** territorial and cross border cooperation in the context of regional development policy, the role of the European Union and the impact of the financial support offered through the programme, the eligible area and priorities, transparency in the allocation of the funds, the economic impact of the projects and the role of the programme in job creation, the horizontal dimensions of the programme;
- **Internal public:** see European Union's institutions and bodies + changes in the programme (budget, procedures etc.) + changes in the MA and the European institutions (personnel, configuration etc.);
- **Support groups:** see Potential and Direct beneficiaries.

Key messages:

I. The European Union and the governments of Bulgaria and the former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia support the development of cross border areas in order to reduce disparities in these areas and to promote good relations between neighbouring countries. The areas eligible for the Programme will benefit from real opportunities for rapid development.

II. The Programme is an important factor for economic and social development of both countries.

III. The Programme is managed in an efficient and transparent way.

CHAPTER III OPERATIONAL PLAN

Section 1 - General principles

Flexibility

The programme potential applicants/beneficiaries and addressees belong to different typologies and are quite heterogeneous; therefore, a wide variety of means of communication and communication channels will be used in order to inform a public as large as possible.

Synergy with other programmes

The information and communication activities will be carried out, whenever possible, in synergy and collaboration with other programmes and initiatives concerning the same area, in order to amplify their effects and foster a united image of interventions.

Important elements

The elements of the highest importance, which have been taken into consideration for the programming and implementation of the strategic communication measures, are:

1. The use of the key messages tailored to draw attention so that target audience will remember them.

2. The use of various communication channels, adapted to the needs of each target group - see below.
3. The use of the communication tools developed by the Ministry for Regional Development and Public Works: website, newsletter, social media channels, publications, annual report etc. - in synergy with the communication measures included in this Strategy, to convey information to a larger audience beside the target groups of the Programme.
4. The constant repetition of messages over a sustained period of time, maintaining the interest of the target group.
5. The development of key messages, in order to inform and motivate potential beneficiaries to take action.
6. The permanent monitoring and the periodic evaluation of the information and publicity measures.
7. The administration of the effort by a team led by a single manager.

Steps shall be taken, at the time of the launch of the Programme and of the main phases of implementation, to alert the regional and local media as appropriate; this will include press conferences, press releases, articles, supplements in the most suitable newspapers and site visits. Other means of information and communication will also be used such as the programme website, publications describing successful projects and project competitions to identify best practice, workshops, launching/closing event.

The cross cutting themes (**equal opportunities - for women and disadvantaged, disabled, ethnic or minority groups, sustainable development, climate change, partnership**) have a defining role in developing and implementing the CoS. In all communication and information activities, the following principles must be taken into consideration:

1. Partnership and multi-level governance: conceiving and carrying out actions between different levels of governance, in accordance with the principles of subsidiarity and proportionality, including by means of operational and institutional cooperation,

2. Sustainable development: ensuring that the chosen information and communication measures are the most resource-efficient and sustainable options; avoiding measures and tools that may have a significant negative environmental or climate impact; increasing the use of green public procurement.

- The communication strategy will encourage the use of electronic services for the delivery of the information and promotional materials to increase access to information and reduce printing costs.
- Publications will be printed preferably on recycled paper, and the promotional materials will be made by promoting usage of a reduced plastic packaging wrapping.

3. Promoting equality between men and women and non-discrimination: prevent any discrimination during the preparation, implementation, monitoring and evaluation of the communication strategy - also by carrying out gender analyses and specific targeted actions.

Materials produced will observe the sound equal opportunities rules by taking into consideration the needs of people with disabilities.

4. Accessibility: ensuring equal access to the information and communication measures and tools to all citizens, including persons with special needs and aging persons.

All publicity and promotion events organised by the Programme bodies will be developed by taking into consideration the needs of people with disabilities

5. Addressing demographic changes: proposing information and communication measures and tools that stimulate employability, productivity and economic performance, through education, TIC, research and innovation; focusing on the adequacy and quality of training provided to the potential beneficiaries.

6. Climate change mitigation and adaptation: ensuring that information and communication measures are resilient to the impact of climate change and natural disasters such as increased risks of flooding, droughts, heat waves, forest fires and extreme weather events.

MATRIX: Target groups/ Communication channels/Info and publicity measures

Target group	Communication Channels / Information and communication measures								
	Events	Help desk	Information network	Signalling	Institutional partnerships	Publications	Online	Mass-media	Promotional campaigns
	Meetings Workshops Conferences Seminars Training sessions Press conferences Press visits			Plates with the Programme logo at the headquarters of the MA, NA, JS (at the building entrance and in the offices) Flying the EU flag each 9 May		Letters Press releases Manuals Guides	Brochures Email Mailing lists Website Social media Press review	Interviews Shows, Short movies, Press articles	radio and online campaigns Press ads Outdoor Campaigns Promotional items
Potential and direct beneficiaries	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●
Other stakeholders - governmental/ non-governmental actors	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●
European Union institutions and bodies	●			●	●	●	●		●
National/ regional /local media from both countries	●		●	●	●	●	●	●	●
General public	●	●		●	●	●	●	●	●
Internal public	●			●		●	●		●
Support groups	●		●	●	●	●	●	●	●

Section 2 - Information and communication measures				
No	Measure	Action	Responsible Body	Target audience
1	Information	<p>1.1 Website</p> <p>The website shall be developed based on the Bulgaria - the former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia IPA Cross-Border Programme 2007-2013. This site is available in three languages - English, Bulgarian and Macedonian. The website will be developed as to be accessible to people with disabilities.</p> <p>The Programme's dedicated internet website will:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Provide general information on the Programme: regulations, institutional framework, official documents, programme management institutions, implementation system and procedures etc., including a glossary of terms • Provide complete information on the financing opportunities, format and content of the applications, evaluation and selection criteria, procedures to follow (incl. publicity guidelines) etc. • Contacts, in the MA, NA, JS and other relevant bodies • Partner search facility • Include a projects database with project fiches: names of beneficiaries, names of the operations, amount of public funding allocated to the operations etc., according to Regulation № 1303/2013 • Present in detail a number of success projects financed by the 2007-2013 programme • Provide information on the activity of the Joint Monitoring Committee and other relevant committees as soon as they become available to public • Provide information for mass media - press releases, announcements, news, events, awareness campaigns, photo and video gallery, contact person • Provide documentary archives and best-practice advice and information on 	MA, JS,NA	All target groups

Section 2 - Information and communication measures				
No	Measure	Action	Responsible Body	Target audience
		<p>how to access and utilize the financial assistance</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Provide communication materials, i.e. all the materials edited in hard copy and materials edited only in electronic format (the visual identity manual of the programme, a communication guidelines, a glossary of terms, brochures, newsletters etc.). <p>MRDPW website www.mrrb.government.bg and MLS website www.mls.gov.mk: the programme website shall continue to be linked to the website of the Ministry of Regional Development and Public Works (MRDPW) of Bulgaria www.mrrb.government.bg and to the website of the Ministry for Local Self Government (MLS) of the former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia www.mls.gov.mk, where the main information on the Programme will also be presented.</p> <p><u>1.2. Social media</u></p> <p>The Facebook page, Twitter and YouTube channel of Bulgaria - the former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia IPA Cross-Border Programme 2007-2013 shall be maintained for the 2014-2020 Programme. The pages and channels shall ensure connection with the beneficiaries of the programme and with all other target groups. As well, it shall be analysed the opportunity to use other social media tools, like: , , Instagram etc.</p>		

Section 2 - Information and communication measures				
No	Measure	Action	Responsible Body	Target audience
		<p>1.3 Publications</p> <p>1.3.1. Brochures Two types of brochures will be developed. One at the beginning of the Programme, presenting the opportunities of financing and the other one presenting the main results. The brochure will be available in electronic format and distributed through the programme website, e-mail and social media.</p> <p>1.3.2. Guidelines for applicants The Applicants Guideline provides guidelines to potential beneficiaries on submitting the application form This document contains information regarding the process of application, project management stages, templates etc. The guides will include the objectives of the programme and the priority issues, the financial allocation provided by the Programme, the eligibility criteria and information on how to apply and the procedures to follow, the evaluation and selection of applications, the submission of supporting documents for provisionally selected proposals, the notification of the Managing Authority's decision, the conditions applicable etc.</p> <p>1.3.3. Visual Identity Manual: MA and JS will adapt the Visual Identity Manual to the new programme, in order to reinforce the Programme brand and make it more simple and accessible to beneficiaries of projects and publish it on the website. In order to assist the beneficiaries with their communication activities, the manual will include templates with the graphic lay-out of the logo, slogan, promotional items as well as templates for temporary billboard, permanent plaque or billboard and</p>	MA, JS	All target groups

Section 2 - Information and communication measures				
No	Measure	Action	Responsible Body	Target audience
		posters and the requirements for their use.		
		<p>1.4 Mailing lists</p> <p>This activity will be strictly connected to measure 1.1, whereas the website will provide for the option for subscription to periodical electronic bulletins. Contact data will be collected after each event organised by the MA and the JS. Additional mailing will be made by the JS as described above.</p>	MA, JS	Applicants/ beneficiaries/ stakeholders
		<p>1.5 Information network</p> <p>Partnerships with organizations in the public sector (acting locally in the border regions) and local NGOs are essential for the communication activities of the programme. The members of the network will act as intermediaries for getting messages into the local communities in which they operate, acting as information multipliers.</p>	JS	All target groups
		<p>1.7 List of contracted projects</p> <p>The list will include all funded projects financed by the Bulgaria - the former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia IPA II Cross-Border Programme. This list shall be</p>	MA, JS	All target groups

Section 2 - Information and communication measures				
No	Measure	Action	Responsible Body	Target audience
		<p>developed in accordance with the provisions of Article 115 (2) and Annex XII of EU Regulation no 1303/2013 and it shall be updated on weekly bases.</p> <p>This list will be publicly available on the programme website, which not only makes the information easier accessible, but also improves the transparency of the programme and the actions it supports. The list of contracted projects contains the beneficiary name, project name, project summary, project start date and end date, total eligible expenditure allocated to the project, EU co-financing rate, project postcode, country, name of category of intervention in accordance with point (b)(vi) of the first subparagraph of Article 96(2) of Regulation 1303/2013, project partners, etc.</p>		
2	Promotion			
		<p>2.1 <u>Launching events</u></p> <p>According to Regulation no 1303/2013, Annex XII, the Managing authority shall organise at least one major information activity publicising the launch of the programme. The events will be organized in the eligible area and the participants will represent the target groups of the programme. The events will be closed with press conferences.</p> <p>2.2 <u>Publicity and promotion campaign</u></p> <p>At least one major information activity a year (presenting the achievements of the programme) will be held, drawing as much attention on it as possible. As the level of interest in communicating with potential applicants is higher at the local level, most of print media material will be developed for and published in the local newspapers. The articles should appear in the press of district/region where the event took place, and, additionally, in other district/region. Both the text and location of publication shall be consulted with MA and NA if the case.</p>	<p>MA, JS</p> <p>MA, NA, JS</p>	<p>All target groups</p>

Section 2 - Information and communication measures				
No	Measure	Action	Responsible Body	Target audience
		<p>This major event could be a media campaign that will concentrate on promoting the Programme and disseminating information and news concerning the financing opportunities, availability of the financial assistance and ways to access it, in order to attract potential beneficiaries towards the more in-depth information sources available.</p> <p>Print/Online media campaign (press ads, advertorials/promotional articles)</p> <p>The MA, NA and JS will initiate and maintain close relations with the press, especially in terms of news feeding. The website will contain a section dedicated to journalists (but also the large public), with facts and events in a publishable form. This “Newsroom” will include a <i>news database</i>, a <i>last period synopsis</i>, a <i>calendar of events</i> for the upcoming period, the <i>public agenda of the Joint Monitoring Committee</i> and of the MA, NA and JS and <i>contact information</i> for journalists.</p> <p>Press conference (alternatively in Bulgaria and in the former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia) will be held to mark and bring into mass media’s attention the programme and the calls for proposals.</p> <p>Press releases will be regularly sent to national, regional and local media, whenever there is newsworthy information. A communication officer at JS will coordinate the information offered to the national press and will organise interviews with key staff of the MA and NA. At local level the JS will coordinate with the assistance of the communication officer the regular feeding of local press with newsworthy information.</p> <p>Press advertisements: every call for proposals will be advertised in national/regional and local media. All press advertisements will carry the Programme logo.</p>		

Section 2 - Information and communication measures				
No	Measure	Action	Responsible Body	Target audience
		<p>Programme bodies shall monitor the press after one media campaign is released (possibly via a press monitoring service) or after a press add is released (google alerts or other similar service, collecting print press). A Press review will be presented at the JMC where the AIR is approved.</p> <p><u>Poster / Billboard campaign</u></p> <p>A poster campaign is an effective advertising tool, with a strong impact on the targeted groups. The posters/billboards will be displayed during the programming period in the eligible area. The communication campaign will make use of:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Posters on public local transportation, train, buses etc. or any other usable kind of outdoor support - Indoor posters inside stakeholders' offices <p><u>Radio spots in Bulgarian and Macedonian languages</u></p> <p>The radio spot will be aired in both languages, Bulgarian and Macedonian, on local and regional radio stations (and, if necessary, national-see above) to promote the programme. Radio is a very cost effective tool that can be used locally and regionally. The radio campaign will mainly serve the secondary target groups and will inform the general public of the bordering region about the programme.</p> <p>At least once a year on site visit at project/projects for mass media, decision-makers, the civil society and academia will be organized (according to the type of project). The events will be organized alternatively in Bulgaria and the former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia.</p> <p>Meetings with decision-makers at national, regional and local level could be</p>		

Section 2 - Information and communication measures				
No	Measure	Action	Responsible Body	Target audience
		<p>organized, if the Programme bodies so decide. These meetings aim at promoting the programme information among the potential beneficiaries in order to stimulate them to conceive and submit projects to be financed within the Bulgaria - the former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia IPA Cross-Border Cooperation Programme.</p> <p>Road show in the border counties and districts (info-days in the two districts in Bulgaria and three statistical regions in the former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia). During the events the experts communicate with potential beneficiaries regarding the steps that must be taken when applying for financing. The road show has as objectives: <i>Programme promotion, information</i> (general and specific information regarding the call will be disseminated), <i>identification of project ideas</i> and <i>creating the framework for searching for partners</i>.</p> <p>Closing event</p> <p>At the end of the programming period, a closing event, similar to the launching event, will be organized. The event will present the programme conclusion, the achievements, the number of projects concluded/contracted/finalized, the social and economic impact of the programme in the eligible area, considerations on cross-cutting themes.</p> <p><u>2.3 Promotional materials</u></p> <p>A wide range of promotional materials will also be purchased and/or inscribed with the visual elements of the programme, in order to complement the above actions (e.g. pens, notebooks, files, calendars, USB sticks, stickers, laptop handbag, flags, banners with the programme logo, etc).</p> <p><u>2.4. Signaling</u></p>		

Section 2 - Information and communication measures				
No	Measure	Action	Responsible Body	Target audience
		Plates with the Programme logo will be installed at the headquarters of the MA, NA, JS (at the building entrance and in the offices).		
3	Training			
		<p>3.1 Thematic meetings for the potential beneficiaries/ beneficiaries</p> <p>The meetings for potential beneficiaries will focus on addressing the information needs of the potential beneficiaries according to the applicant guide, on priority axes and key areas of intervention: how to generate projects, how to find partners and how to develop eligible projects by taking into consideration the IPA specific rules.</p> <p>The meetings organized for the beneficiaries will take place approximately one month after the approval of the projects submitted within the framework of each call for proposals and are intended to provide the Lead beneficiary with information on how to manage a CBC project, what are the procedures to follow, what are the best practices from previous calls for proposals etc.</p>	MA, NA, JS	potential beneficiaries,
		<p>3.2 Trainings for the representatives of MA,NA,JS</p> <p>Seminars and training sessions organized for the management and implementation bodies in which the staff is told how and what information must be given to the potential beneficiaries/beneficiaries, general public and mass media regarding the programme.</p>	MA/NA/JS	The staff of MA,NA,JS
			MA/NA/JS	MA, JS, NA

Section 2 - Information and communication measures				
No	Measure	Action	Responsible Body	Target audience
4	Monitoring and evaluation of the Communication Strategy			
		<p>The quantitative and qualitative evaluation of the CoS will be carried out through different types of evaluation methods, such as polls, focus groups, studies based on questionnaires, analyses etc.</p> <p>This evaluation shall take place at least twice throughout the lifetime of the Programme (mandatory in 2024).</p> <p>The results obtained after the application of these methods will be analysed and the information received will be used to adapt the next communication actions.</p>	MA, JS	All target groups

Section 3 Budget

In accordance with the Programme, all measures for the Communication Strategy implementation are covered by Technical Assistance budget. For the Programme period 2014-2020 the total TA budget amounts to EUR 1 946 169. The indicative amount foreseen for implementation of the information and publicity measures is EUR 241 177.

Section 4 Responsibilities

Managing Authority

The **Managing Authority** will ensure that the programme is going to be widely disseminated and made available to all interested parties. Also, the managing authority shall ensure that, in accordance with the communication strategy, the programme's strategy and objectives and the funding opportunities offered through joint support from the European Union and the Member State and candidate country, are disseminated widely to potential beneficiaries and all interested parties, with details of the financial support from the Funds concerned.

The MA shall delegate some of the responsibilities and activities to the **Joint Secretariat** and its Branch Strumica. In practice, the Managing Authority, the Joint Secretariat will carry out information and publicity actions.

The specific objectives that the MA must achieve are the following:

- to promote the benefits of being a EU Member State within the public opinion;
- to develop an overall system for public relations connected to the programme and to elaborate a common corporate identity for the programme to be used in all means of communication;
- to promote the existence of the programme (according to the brand strategy and to the brand management plan - visual identity elements, activities promoting the brand of the programme);
- to increase the public information level on the programme (its priorities, objectives, eligibility area, eligibility criteria and management and control system);
- to draw up a visual identity manual in accordance with EU regulations;
- to create and manage the Internet homepage of the programme;
- to organize a major information campaign publicizing the programme;
- to organize at least one major information activity a year, presenting the achievements of the programme including, where relevant, major projects;
- to inform potential beneficiaries on the eligibility conditions for financing through IPA funds, the procedures examining the applications for financing and

the time period established, the selection criteria of the operations that will be financed;

- to give examples of operations on the website and to foster dissemination of information on successful projects and good practice;
- to create and improve continuously a communication mechanism for the information of the management and implementation organisms, through an efficient information system;
- to disseminate information regarding the stage of development of the programmes and projects during the programming period;
- to monitor and evaluate information and publicity activities to ensure they achieve the above objectives and comply with the rules set out in the EU regulations;
- to publish the electronic list of operations in accordance with the provisions of Regulating 1303/2013, Section 1 of Annex XII;
- to display the Union emblem at its premises.

The Managing Authority is responsible for the implementation of the information and publicity measures according to the communication strategy, including:

- Developing and disseminating publications (electronic brochures, manuals, guide for applicants, glossary of terms);
- Ensuring that the provisions of the Programme's Visual Identity Manual are observed in any action related to the Programme;
- Ensuring that the Programme's website is properly designed, maintained and updated with relevant information (e.g. news, useful documents, list of funded projects and beneficiaries etc.);
- Coordinating the media campaign at national and regional level;
- Organizing briefings, information sessions, seminars and conferences both for media representatives, applicants and beneficiaries and ensuring that EU requirements are complied with;
- Using adequate channels for disseminating information and communicating, according to the specificities of the target groups;
- Informing the JMC about the progress in implementing the CoS, about the information and publicity measures carried out and about the means of communication used.
- Ensuring that the evaluation of the communication and brand activities take place properly;
- Shall designate one person to be responsible for information and communication at programme level and shall inform the Commission of those designated.

National Authority

The National Authority, being a national counterpart of the Managing Authority is responsible for supporting on Macedonian side the implementation of the information and publicity measures according to the communication strategy, including:

- Publishing on the website of the Ministry for Local Self Government (MLS) of the former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia all necessary information and documents for supporting the Macedonian projects partners (Instructions and templates for contracting the national co-financing and requesting FLC);
- Co-organizing and participating in joint information and promotional events - workshops, press conferences, road-show, meetings, on-site visits;
- Contracting the national and regional media in the former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia for the Programme promotion through **press releases**, articles and dissemination of Radio spots;
- Co-organizing media campaign at national and regional level;
- Co-organizing and participating in thematic meetings for the applicants and beneficiaries, trainings for the representatives of MA,NA,JS;
- Sending regularly press releases to national, regional and local media, whenever there is newsworthy information
- Organizing in the former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia polls, focus groups, studies, interviews based on questionnaires, exhibitions and others

Information measures for potential beneficiaries and beneficiaries

The Managing authority shall ensure that potential beneficiaries and the beneficiaries have access to the relevant information, including updated information where necessary, and taking into account the accessibility of electronic or other communication services for certain potential beneficiaries, on at least the following:

- the funding opportunities and the launching of application calls;
- the eligibility of expenditure conditions to be met in order to qualify for support under an operational programme;
- a description of the procedures for examining applications for funding and of the time periods involved;
- the criteria for selecting the operations to be supported;
- the contacts at national, regional or local level that are able to provide information on the programme.
- the responsibility of potential beneficiaries to inform the public about the aim of the operation and the support from the Funds to the operation in accordance with provisions of Annex XII, point 2.2. The Managing authority may

request potential beneficiaries to propose indicative communication activities, proportional to the size of the operation, in the applications.

- shall inform beneficiaries that acceptance of funding constitutes an acceptance of their inclusion in the list of operations published in accordance with Article 115(2).
- shall provide information and communication tools, including templates in electronic format, to help beneficiaries to meet their obligations set out in Annex XII, point 2.2 of Regulation 1303/2013.

Joint Secretariat

The **Joint Secretariat (IPA Cross Border Cooperation Programme Office in Kyustendil and the Branch Strumica)** will carry out promotion activities related to the Programme, in coordination with the MA, by direct contacts with the eligible organizations in the area covered by the programme (events organized for potential beneficiaries and for mass media, evaluations); it will also organize workshops addressed to applicants and beneficiaries with the view to provide additional information and clarifications regarding the requests for financing. The Joint Secretariat will delegate part of the communication tasks to the **Branch Strumica (the former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia) of the Joint Secretariat**, which was established and will act as a direct interface with the Macedonian beneficiaries.

The specific objectives that the JS must achieve are the following:

- to present and represent the programme at regional and local level so that partners are able to collect information necessary for developing the projects;
- to contribute to the elaboration of informational material for dissemination;
- to inform the applicants about the funding opportunities and the launching of application calls, the eligibility of expenditure conditions to be met in order to qualify for support under an operational programme, a description of the procedures for examining applications for funding and of the time periods involved, the criteria for selecting the operations to be supported, the contacts at national, regional or local level that are able to provide information on the programme.
- to inform the beneficiaries about their responsibilities to inform the public about the aim of the operation and the support from the Funds to the operation in accordance with provisions of Annex XII, point 2.2.
- to inform beneficiaries that acceptance of funding constitutes an acceptance of their inclusion in the list of operations published in accordance with Article 115(2) and to provide them information and communication tools, including templates in electronic format;
- to update the Internet homepage with information regarding the implementation of the programme;

- to carry out promotion activities related to the operational programme by direct contacts with the eligible organizations in the area covered by the programme (info days, brochures and any other type of information material), in collaboration with the MA;
- to organize workshops addressed to applicants and beneficiaries with the view to provide additional information and clarifications regarding the requests for financing;
- to support project generation and development (organization of information seminars, other proactive measures);
- to maintain necessary public relations with the local media, by answering to their questions regarding the stage of the programme;
- to be responsive to any request of information;
- to update and publish the electronic list of operations in accordance with the provisions of Regulating 1303/2013, Section 1 of Annex XII. The list of operations shall be updated at least every six months.

There are also certain activities that the secretariat will develop, through delegation from the MA, as it follows:

- Participating in disseminating the *Applicant Guide*;
- Disseminating publications edited by the MA;
- Elaborating and disseminating information electronically, via mailing and electronic bulletin;
- Establishing an information network at regional and local level;
- Ensuring monitoring of the programme in mass media.

Beneficiaries

The responsibilities of the **beneficiaries** related to information and publicity measures for the public are laid down in Annex XII of the Council Regulation (EC) № 1303/2013. Therefore, the acceptance of funding is also an acceptance of the beneficiaries' inclusion in the list of beneficiaries published in accordance with point 2 of Article 115 and Annex XII of the Regulation 1303/2013. Hence:

- Beneficiaries are responsible for the implementation of the information and publicity activities related to the non-reimbursable financial assistance received through Bulgaria - the former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia IPA Cross-Border Programme, according to the commitments they took in the submitted application form. Beneficiaries will have to comply with the Visual Identity Manual of the Programme.
- All information and communication measures provided by the beneficiary shall acknowledge support from the Funds to the operation by displaying:
 - the European Union emblem in accordance with the technical characteristics laid down in the implementing act adopted by the

Commission under Article 115(4), together with a reference to the Union;

- a reference to the European Union funds supporting the operation.
- During implementation of an operation, the beneficiary shall inform the public about the support obtained from the European Union Funds by:
 - providing on the its website, where such a website exists, a short description of the operation, proportionate to the level of support, including its aims and results, and highlighting the financial support from the European Union;
 - placing, at least one poster with information about the project (minimum size A3), including the financial support from the European Union, at a location readily visible to the public, such as the entrance area of a building.
 - shall put up, at a location readily visible to the public, a temporary billboard of a significant size for each operation consisting of the financing of infrastructure or construction operations.
- No later than three months after completion of an operation, the beneficiary shall put up a permanent plaque or billboard of significant size at a location readily visible to the public for each operation consists of the purchase of a physical object or of the financing of infrastructure or of construction operations.

The plaque or billboard shall state the name and the main objective of the operation. It shall be prepared in accordance with the technical characteristics adopted by the Commission in accordance with Article 115(4).

- The Lead Beneficiary will ensure that all the beneficiaries taking part in the project have been informed of that funding, where an operation receives funding under the operational programme.
- The Lead Beneficiary offers information regarding the information and publicity measures taken to promote the project financed under European Union Funds.

Furthermore, beneficiaries will provide clear notice to the effect that the project being implemented has been selected under an operational programme co-financed by the European Union.

Section 5 Monitoring and evaluation

In line with Article 116 (3) of the Council Regulation (EC) No 1303/2013, the MA/JS shall inform the Joint Monitoring Committee at least once a year on the progress in the implementation of the communication strategy and on its analysis of the results.

The communication and information measures will be subject to ongoing and ex-post evaluations, based on the indicators and evaluation criteria defined in advance. To carry out the evaluation stage the MA will establish a plan containing the provisions necessary for collecting and interpreting information regarding the level of Programme's awareness/knowledge.

MEASURE	ACTIVITY	TIMING	INDICATOR	QUANTITY (per year)
Website	General information	Permanently on the web-site and updated when necessary	Number of web-site visits	min. 2000 per year
	Partners' search facility	Permanently on the web-site and updated for every call for proposals	Number of web-site visits	min. 2000 per year
			Number of new potential PPs in the database	min.20 per Call
	Contact details	Permanently on the web-site and updated when necessary	Number of web-site visits	min. 2000 per year
	Information for mass media	After official events	Number of press releases	min.2 per year
Promotional materials	Brochures (electronic)	Two types For duration of the Programme	Number of electronic brochures produced	
	Posters & banners	For official events	Number of official events	min. 2 for duration of the Programme
	Other promotional materials (gadgets)	Permanently	Number of materials prepared for promotion of the programme	min. 200 per call
			Number of promotional materials disseminated	min.80% of the materials produced
Information seminars	Info-days	Before every Call for Proposals	Number of organizations/bodies represented	min. 30 per Call

			Number of persons attended	min.40 per Call
			Increase in the number of proposals submitted	min. 3% compared to previous Call
	Partner Search Forum	Minimum 1 per Call for Proposals	Number of organizations / bodies represented	min. 20 per event
			Number of people attended	min.30 per event
Publicity campaign	Press conferences	After official events	Number of press conferences held	min. 2 for the duration of the Programme
	Press releases	After official events	Number of press releases	min. 1 per year
	Press Advertisements	For every Call for proposals	Number of advertisement published	min. 2 per Call
	Internet media	Minimum 2 per for the duration of the Programme	Number of advertisement / eBanners	min. 2 per for the duration of the Programme
	Publications in regional initiatives	Minimum 1 per year	Number of events	min.1 per year
	Short Promo movie with best practices (5-7 minutes)	upon decision by the MA and the available financial resources	Number of internet promotion . and number of DVD discs	min. 1 for the duration of the programme
	Radio Campaigns	During every call	Number of radio advertisement aired	min. 1 per country for each Call
Active training	Training for beneficiaries	After completion of grant awarding procedure	Number of participants	min. 20
			Number of trainings	min.1
	Training of MA/NA/JTS staff	Depending on INTERACT events and other initiatives	Number of participants	min. 50 % out of the total staff