

SUMMARY

Draft INTERREG IPA Cross Border Cooperation Programme between Republic of Bulgaria and Republic of North Macedonia 2021-2027

Main characteristics of the programme area:

The programme area covers 2 districts from Republic of Bulgaria –Blagoevgrad and Kyustendil and 3 regions from Republic of North Macedonia - North-East, East and South-East. The border is 165 km long with three operating border crossings. The population of the CBC area is 948 564 inhabitants. The settlement structure of the area is characterized by presence of 5 medium-large cities: Blagoevgrad and Kyustendil from Republic of Bulgaria and Kumanovo, Stip and Strumica from Republic of North Macedonia. The border region is assessed as having a rich cultural and natural heritage and a high degree of environmental sensitivity to climate change.

The main joint challenge of the program area is to leave the group of lagging regions and take a more advanced course of development.

It still faces persistent problems at risk of poverty and income inequality due to negative demographic changes, underdeveloped regional value chains and entrepreneurship, low technological specialization, an unattractive and uncompetitive economic environment.

The identified joint investment needs reflect outlined territorial disparities, challenges and assets as well as objectives of the Territorial Agenda 2030 which seeks to reinforce solidarity in promotion convergence and reducing inequalities between better-off places and those with less prosperous prospects or that are lagging.

Total programme budget: EUR 31 152 400

Eligible types of action and beneficiaries by priorities:

Priority	Specific objective	Budget (EUR) ¹
P1. Greener border region	1.1. Enhancing protection and preservation of nature, biodiversity, and green infrastructure, including in urban areas, and reducing all forms of pollution	4 672 860
P2. More connected border region	2.1. Developing sustainable, climate resilient, intelligent and intermodal national, regional and local mobility, including improved access to TEN-T and cross-border mobility	9 345 720
P3. Integrated development of the cross-border region	3.1 Fostering the integrated social, economic and environmental development, cultural heritage and security in areas other than urban	14 018 580
Total budget		31 152 400

P1. Greener border region

Actions to be supported:

- **Investments in building greens** (green balconies, green walls, green roofs, atrium spaces, green pavements, green fences, noise barriers, etc.);
- **Investments in developing urban and peri-urban green areas, including improving connections between green spaces** (tree alley and street tree/hedge, street green and green verge, green playground/school ground, green and coloured squares, riverbank greens);
- **Investments in developing natural urban green areas** (urban park, historical park/garden, pocket park/parklet, neighbourhood green space, institutional green space, green sport facility, forest, scrubland, abandoned and derelict area with patches of wilderness);
- **Investments in developing green areas for water management** (swales, creek restoration and nature scaping, rain gardens or sustainable urban drainage systems (SUDS), naturalized storm water pond, bio- retention areas);
- **Support for joint strategies and action plans** for developing new tools, instruments, as well as transferring solutions between relevant stakeholders;

Beneficiaries:

- Local population and visitors
- Local authorities and regional structures of central administration

¹ According to Article 27 of the Interreg Regulation 10% of the financial allocation of each priority of the programme is allocated to Technical assistance.

- R&D, academic and scientific institutions
- NGOs

P2. More connected border region

Actions to be supported:

- Upgrade of the existing and construction of new BCCP facilities;
- Purchase of specialized technical equipment based on ICT solutions;
- Rehabilitation of existing and construction of new roads in both countries;
- Environmental and other project-related assessments

The investments will take the form of a project of strategic importance for opening new Border Crossing Check Points (BCCP) Strumyani – Berovo.

Beneficiaries:

- Residents, visitors and businesses in the CBC area

P3. Integrated development of the cross-border region

Actions to be supported:

- Actions aimed at increasing the productive capacity of the SMEs to become greener, more digital and more competitive (technological modernization);
- Actions aimed at improving the knowledge capacity of the SMEs to operate in a greener, more digital and more competitive environment (acquiring new knowledge and skills, incl. access to external finances);
- Actions aimed at building effective product development process (it encompasses all steps needed to take a product from concept to market availability) and reaching new markets (marketing, entrepreneurship, internationalization);
- Actions aimed at developing all-season, integrated and resilient tourist products, accompanied by competitive branding and marketing practices, with the aim to untap the cross-border tourism potential by increasing the economic benefits of the sustainable use of its resources while prioritizing the protection of the environment;
- Actions aimed at rationalizing the use of tourist resources in the region, incl. development of new integrated regional tourist products; investments in infrastructure and facilities to support tourists; strengthening the links between natural and cultural sites; training of staff of tourist attractions; improving marketing practices and brands;

- Actions aimed at improving the mobility and connectivity of the transport and engineering infrastructure by a system of alternative mobility, including a grid of bicycle lanes, 'dirt' forest and country roads, helipads, etc.;
- Actions aimed at elaborating and applying joint measures for reducing the vulnerability of services in the tourism sector to the effects of pandemic and epidemic situations.

Beneficiaries:

- Civil society
- Local/ regional bodies and authorities, regional structures of central public authorities
- NGOs
- R&D, academic and training institutions
- Social institutions
- MSME's
- Local population