

ANNUAL MONITORING REPORT

**ON THE COMPATIBILITY OF THE ENVIRONMENTAL EFFECTS
OF THE "INTERREG-IPA CBC BULGARIA-SERBIA" 2014-2020
PROGRAMME UNDER THE INSTRUMENT FOR PRE-ACCESSION
ASSISTANCE (IPA II) WITH THE STRATEGIC ENVIRONMENTAL
(SEA) REPORT**

2023

INTRODUCTION

The current Monitoring Report is prepared in accordance with:

SEA Report of the Interreg - IPA CBC Programme Bulgaria - Serbia

DIRECTIVE 2001/42/EC on the assessment of the effects of certain plans and programmes on the environment (referred to as the SEA Directive)

Relevant Bulgarian legislation:

- Environmental Protection Act
- Climate change mitigation Act
- Biological Diversity Act
- Protected Areas Act
- Water Act
- Soils Act
- Waste Management Act
- Tourism Act
- Bulgarian national rules on the terms and procedures for assessment of the compatibility of plans, programs, projects and investment proposals with the objectives and purposes of the preservation of the protected areas
- Environmental Assessment Statement ref. № 8-5/2014 issued by the Ministry of Environment and Water (MoEW) of the Republic of Bulgaria

Relevant Serbian legislation:

- Law on Air Protection
- Law on Waters
- Law for Environment Protection
- Energy Law
- Law on Energy Efficiency
- Law on Nature Protection
- Law for Environment Protection
- Law on Waste Management
- Law on Tourism
- Law on Heritage Protection

GENERAL INFORMATION ON THE PROGRESS OF THE PROGRAMME IMPLEMENTATION

The Programme was officially approved on 30th of July 2015 with EC Decision № C (2015) 5444.

During 2016 an amendment of the INTERREG - IPA CBC Programme Bulgaria - Serbia (the Programme) was performed concerning the establishment of baseline and target values of qualitative programme result indicators and does not influence the envisaged Programme priorities and activities, respectively does not require new SEA report and new Environmental statement by the MoEW.

Total of 41 subsidy contracts have been financed under the First Call for proposals of the Programme. Three subsidy contracts of which were terminated, due to high risk identified on their overall implementation. 2 projects have been completed in 2017, 29 of them in 2018, 7 were completed in 2019.

Second Call for project proposals was announced on the 22.01.2018. In total 69 subsidy contracts have been concluded and financed under the Second Call for project proposals of the Programme, out of which 8 projects from the reserve list have been concluded in 2022. 19 projects have been completed in 2020, 23 projects in 2021, 14 projects have ended in 2022, 1 project was terminated due to the withdrawal of the partners. In 2023, the last 12 projects under the Programme have been completed.

INFORMATION ON THE MEASURES AND REQUIREMENTS FOR PREVENTION, REDUCTION AND ELIMINATION AS COMPLETELY AS POSSIBLE OF POTENTIAL NEGATIVE CONSEQUENCES FROM THE PROGRAMME IMPLEMENTATION

According to item I “Measures and requirements for prevention, reduction and elimination as completely as possible of potential negative consequences from the Programme implementation” of the MOEW Environmental Statement, the following requirements shall be met:

1. Plans, programmes and projects, as well as investment proposals, subject of INTERREG-IPA CBC Programme Bulgaria-Serbia, which fall in the scope of the Bulgarian Environmental Protection Act or outside it, and under the provisions of Art. 31 of the Biological Diversity Act are a subject of compatibility assessment with the scope and purpose of the preservation of protected areas. The above interventions may be approved only after a positive decision/statement on the EIA/SEA/environmental compliance assessment, following the respective recommendations, as well as the conditions, requirements and measures set in the decision/statement;
2. The development of tourism should be in conformity with the recreation capacity of the territory and a proper waste water treatment and waste management are to be ensured.
3. Activities as "safari" hiking, "off-routes" tracking for monitoring of rare and endangered species” should not be included in the development of tourist packages under Priority Axis 1, since they lead to significant damages on the environment and in particular on Biodiversity.

Taking into consideration the above requirements, the Managing Authority TCM Directorate, MRDPW has included all of them in the Guidelines for applicants (GfA) under the Second Call for proposals, as follows:

- Every investment proposal envisaging construction works is required to present as an attachment to the application form (AF) a positive environmental impact assessment (EIA) required by the national legislation or a statement issued by the relevant body clearly stated that Environmental Impact Assessment is not necessary;
- All investment activities have to be in line with the relevant national legislation for the respective type of construction works (including those related to development of tourism);
- Activities as "safari" hiking, "off-routes" tracking for monitoring of rare and endangered species” are included in the lists of ineligible activities for all Priority axes (PA).

According to the provisions in GfA, in case of investment projects that envisage construction works, the applicants shall provide Annex B4.4, which includes:

- **Either** Positive Environmental Impact Assessment (positive opinion from the relevant body), required by the national legislation

- **Or** Statement issued by the relevant body clearly stated that Environmental Impact Assessment is not necessary (notary certified for Bulgarian partners and certified by the responsible administrative body - for Serbian partners).

During the assessment process the compatibility of the project proposals to the above requirements was duly checked by the assessors and only projects that met the above criteria were proposed and approved for financing.

After contracted, all approved projects performed a self-assessment on the expected environmental consequences of the envisaged project activities in regard to the six environmental issues (Air and climate; Biodiversity, Fauna and Flora; Water; Soil; Population and Human Health; Cultural/Natural Heritage and Landscape). For the purpose of the self-assessment the questionnaire in section 10.2 of the SEA Report was used and the results are compared to the expected consequences for respective Specific objective according to the SEA report.

The distribution of projects by Specific objectives (SO) under the second call for proposal is as follows:

- SO 1.1 “TOURIST ATTRACTIVENESS: Supporting the development of competitive tourist attractions achieved through cooperation, thus contributing to the diversification of tourist product(s) in the cross-border region” –2 projects;
- SO 1.2 “CROSS-BORDER TOURISTIC PRODUCT: Capturing economic benefits from development of natural and cultural heritage in the border area through creating common cross-border touristic destination(s)” – 2 projects;
- SO 1.3 “PEOPLE-TO-PEOPLE NETWORKING: Capitalizing the effect of cultural, historical and natural heritage tourism on border communities through common actions” – 1 project;
- SO 2.1 “SKILLS & ENTREPRENEURSHIP: Supporting the development of attractive environment for advancement of young people in the border region achieved through cooperation” – 0 projects;
- SO 2.2 “PEOPLE-TO-PEOPLE NETWORKING: Promote cooperation initiatives for and with young people, thus enhancing mobility of young people across borders” – 3 projects;
- SO 3.1 “JOINT RISK MANAGEMENT: To prevent and mitigate the consequences of natural and man-made cross-border disasters” – 0 projects
- SO 3.2 “3.2 NATURE PROTECTION: Promoting and enhancing the utilization of common natural resources, as well as stimulating nature protection in the programme area, through joint initiatives across the border” – 2 projects.

Based on the summarized information on the performed self-assessment by the project beneficiaries for those implemented in 2023 and contracted under the Second Call, below are presented the Expected Consequences on Six Environmental Issues, which are provided by the Lead partners in the Compatibility Check Sheets:

SUMMARY of the expected consequences on the six environmental issues based on the answers provided by the Lead partners in the Compatibility Check Sheets

TOTAL	Air and climate	Biodiversity, Fauna and Flora	Water	Soil	Population and Human Health	Cultural/Natural Heritage and Landscape
Very low impact	4	5	5	3	4	4
Neutral impact	8	7	7	9	8	8

GENERAL CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

From the results of the self-assessment conducted by the beneficiaries, it can be summarized that all projects have a positive or neutral impact on the components of the environment. Out of the 12 projects implemented in 2023, a total of 4 include investment activities. Most of the responses from the beneficiaries indicate that their projects will have a neutral effect on the environment.

The impact on the various components of the environment is expected to be achieved mainly through the following measures:

The most favorable impact on the **air and climate** component is expected to be achieved through the activities planned under Specific Objective (SO) 3.2 "Nature Conservation." These activities focus on the use of natural resources, promoting nature conservation in the cross-border region of the Program, implementing joint activities for the effective management of natural resources, for the restoration and conservation of habitats of various species found in protected areas; promoting responsible behavior among the public, as well as creating responsible behavior towards ecosystem conservation among youth in the cross-border region. Projects under SO 1.1 will also have a positive effect on air and climate, while the remaining projects will have a neutral effect.

Regarding the **biodiversity, fauna, and flora** component, projects under SO 1.1, SO 2.2, and SO 3.2 will contribute to achieving a positive effect. Most of the project activities have a neutral effect since they do not involve direct interventions in protected natural areas but mainly focus on promoting

responsible behavior through training courses for conservation and restoration of natural wealth. It is expected that activities under Priority Axis (PA) 3 will indirectly impact biodiversity conservation, habitats, and ecosystems through fire prevention and rescue measures, as well as activities related to waste management.

Concerning the **water** component, the projects implemented under SO 1.1, SO 2.2, and SO 3.2 have a positive effect on the ecological and chemical status of water resources by reducing water pollution caused by floods and deposition. Additionally, the planned activities for small-scale infrastructure investments, acquisition of modern equipment, and raising awareness and promoting responsible behavior among the public regarding the need for waste reduction and processing, as well as waste and water management, indirectly affect the responsible behavior of the population towards water resource conservation and their sustainable use.

Regarding the **soil** component, most projects will have a neutral effect on preserving soil resources. Projects under SO 2.2 and SO 3.2 include measures for better waste management in the cross-border region, which is expected to have a positive effect on soil functionality and effective control over illegal dumps. Furthermore, project activities to raise awareness of soil conservation will have a positive effect in the future.

The expected positive effect on **the population and human health** component is mainly related to the expected results of projects under SO 1.3, SO 2.2, and SO 3.2. The remaining projects have a neutral impact on the population and human health. Considering that floods, fires, and illegal dumps are conditions for the spread of diseases, projects under PA 3 will have a positive indirect effect on human health. They will encourage the creation of responsible behavior among the general public towards controlling environment-related risks and health hazards. Increasing responsibility through training local and regional institutions on environmental issues is important because a positive effect on health would contribute to the management of protected areas and waste facilities.

Most projects under the second call for project proposals have a significant impact **on cultural/natural heritage and landscapes**. Most projects in their project activities restore and conserve objects of cultural or natural heritage. Additionally, the planned soft measures, which popularize and promote cultural and natural heritage (such as training courses, cultural holidays or events, informational materials, etc.), will inform the public about possible ways to preserve and conserve cultural and natural heritage. Preserving natural and cultural heritage, such as the preservation and maintenance of objects of material and non-material natural, historical, and cultural heritage, also has a significant influence on the considered component.

Following the recommendations from the Environmental Assessment Opinion, no activities such as "safaris" or "off-road" tracking and monitoring of rare and endangered species are included in the projects implemented under the second call. Also, the approved activities are in accordance with national legislation for the respective type of construction activities (including those related to tourism development, conservation and restoration of natural and cultural objects, waste management, etc.) and in compliance with requirements for wastewater treatment.

In conclusion, it can be summarized that the projects under all Specific Objectives (SOs) of the second call for project proposals have a positive effect on the components of the environment. Projects under SO 1.1 and SO 3.2 influence all components for the environment from the questionnaire and show the most significant effect.

All recommendations outlined in the Environmental Assessment Opinion issued by the Ministry of Environment and Water of Bulgaria were strictly adhered to at every stage of project submission, evaluation, and selection for funding under the Interreg-IPA Cross-border Cooperation Programme Bulgaria-Serbia 2014-2020. It can be concluded at this point that there is no need for corrective measures, as all projects are in line with the expectations of the Environmental Assessment Opinion report.