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1. Joint programme strategy: main development challenges and policy responses

1.1. Programme area (not required for Interreg C programmes)

Reference: point (a) of Article 17(3), point (a) of Article 17(9)

The eligible cross-border area of the Interreg VI-A IPA Greece Albania spreads from the Ionian Sea until the Prespa lakes and includes:

in Greece, the regional units of (NUTS 3 units):

- EL531 (Grevena, Kozani)
- EL532 (Kastoria)
- EL533 (Florina)
- EL541 (Arta, Preveza)
- EL542 (Thesprotia)
- EL543 (Ioannina)
- EL621 (Zakynthos)
- EL622 (Kerkyra)
- EL623 (Kefallinia, Ithaki)
- EL624 (Lefkada)

in Albania, the regions of (NUTS 3 units):

- AL031 (Berat)
- AL033 (Gjirokastrë)
- AL034 (Korçë)
- AL035 (Vlorë)
- AL032 (Fier)

The Programme Area is part of the wider region of the Adriatic-Ionian, spreading from the Ionian Islands in Greece up to the coasts of the Region of Fier in Albania. In comparison to the previous programming period 2014-2020, the eligible cross-border area of the Interreg VI-A IPA Greece Albania incorporates the Regional Unit of Kozani from Greece and the Region of Fier from Albania. The inclusion of all four regional units of the Region of Western Macedonia in the eligible area contributes to the EU objectives in relation to the establishment of a Just Transition Fund and the Just Transition Plan for the Region of Western Macedonia offering additional supporting tools for transition to a climate-neutral economy and investment in sustainable economic activities. The inclusion of the Region of Fier in the eligible programme area is considered important due to its strategic position in the Adriatic-Ionian corridor, its contribution to the economic activity rates of Albania, its strong historical and cultural presence in the cross-border area.

The eligible cross-border area covers an area of 33.932 km² (20.961 km² for Greece cross-border area and 12.971 km² for Albania cross-border area), with a total population of 1.801.496 inhabitants (936.470[1]inhabitants in the Greek cross-border area and 865.026[2] inhabitants in the Albanian cross-border area). The Programme area combines a wide variety of geomorphological features. The main characteristics are the extensive coasts, reaching from the north side of Fier to the south of the Regional Unit of Preveza, the insular area of the Ionian islands and the mountain areas in the mainland of the cross-border area.



1.2 Joint programme strategy: Summary of main joint challenges, taking into account economic, social and territorial disparities as well as inequalities, joint investment needs and complimentary and synergies with other funding programmes and instruments, lessons-learned from past experience and macro-regional strategies and sea-basin strategies where the programme area as a whole or partially is covered by one or more strategies.

Reference: point (b) of Article 17(3), point (b) of Article 17(9)

1.2.1 Context of the Programme and EU strategic orientations

The Interreg VI-A IPA Greece Albania aims in supporting the cross-border regions of Greece and Albania to achieve a smooth and integrated transition to more sustainable economies that can overcome disparities and establish a better cross-border governance.

In this new decade EU is setting new goals and instruments in order to lay the foundations for a greener, more digital and more resilient Europe. Recovery and transition are the new concepts that prevail in the programming and preparation of the 2021-2027 period, as EU wishes to strengthen its structures and its economic, social and territorial resilience following the damage on growth, societies and businesses caused by the coronavirus pandemic.

The European Green Deal that provides an action plan for a more sustainable EU economy by boosting the efficient use of resources by moving to a clean, circular economy, restoring biodiversity and cutting pollution. Investing in environmentally friendly technologies, industry innovation, cleaner forms of transport, for a decarbonized energy sector and in energy efficiency are key priorities for the EU. Blue Economy is considered to offer many solutions to achieve the European Green Deal objectives. Sustainable development is deeply rooted in the EU policies and the EU has fully committed itself to the implementation of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development (United Nations 2030 Agenda) and its 17 Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs).

The EU's Territorial Agenda 2030 underlines the importance of inclusive and sustainable future for all places and people in Europe. Achieving less inequality between regions, better territorial development, transition to climate-neutral and resilient regions, sustainable local economies and sustainable digital and physical connectivity are some of the main orientations provided for the new decade.

EU cohesion policy remains the main European policy that supports the economic and social recovery in all EU regions. In the new Cohesion Policy, there are five Policy Objectives, which aim at:

a Smarter Europe

a Greener, carbon free Europe

a more Connected Europe

a more Social Europe

a Europe closer to citizens.

Another specific objective is also created by the establishment of the Just Transition Mechanism and the Just Transition Fund. The Just Transition Mechanism was adopted by the EU in the framework of the European Green Deal in the fight against climate change and for environmental protection. The Just Transition Mechanism (JTM) focuses on those regions and sectors that are most affected by the transition given their dependence on fossil fuels, including coal, peat and oil shale or greenhouse gas-intensive industrial processes. Aim of the JTM is to ensure that the transition is accompanied by specific and integrated measures in order to support the economies of those regions and enhance employment. .

For Albania additional objectives are set by the EU enlargement policy and the strategy for 'A credible enlargement perspective for and enhanced EU engagement with the Western Balkans', which sets the priorities and areas of joint reinforced cooperation, addressing the specific challenges, the Western Balkans face. The IPA III Programming Framework builds on the EU enlargement policy and the priorities set for the Western Balkans by setting the five thematic windows for making the

enlargement process more credible. The five windows identified by the IPAlII framework are: The rule of law, fundamental rights and democracy; Good governance EU acquis alignment, good neighbourly relations and strategic communication; Green agenda and sustainable connectivity; Competitiveness and inclusive growth; Territorial and cross-border cooperation. Climate change, environmental protection, civil society, gender equality, rights-based approach will be the cross-cutting themes mainstreamed through the five windows.

The EU engagement on the Western Balkans is highlighted by the “Economic and Investment Plan for the Western Balkans”, which aims to spur the long-term recovery of the COVID-19 disrupting effects on the economies of the Western Balkans, backed by a green and digital transition. For the efficient support of the European Green Deal, the European Commission has presented a Green Agenda for the Western Balkans aiming at: decarbonisation, depollution of air, water and soil, circular economy, farming and food production, and protecting biodiversity. The Connectivity Agenda for the Western Balkans is in the heart of the new Economic and Investment Plan for the Western Balkans focusing on key investment areas such as transport, energy and the twin green and digital transitions. The Commission Communication on “Enhancing the accession process-A credible EU perspective for the Western Balkans” is forming the basis for the EU enlargement process and sets the clear criteria and commitments to be examined in the accession negotiations. The European Council has acknowledged the progress made by Albania towards justice reform, fight against corruption, fundamental rights and public administration reform and opened the accession negotiations with Albania in March 2020.

The EU Strategy for the Adriatic and Ionian Region (EUSAIR) a macro-regional dimension that reconnects the Western Balkans to the EU and supports a convergence of interests on the enlargement between EU member and IPA countries, while promoting the strengths of the area building on the common challenges. This aspect of the EUSAIR can be enhanced by putting emphasis on territorial cooperation and cohesion.

1.2.2 Summary of main joint challenges, taking into account economic, social and territorial disparities, joint investment needs

1.2.2.1 Demographic trends

Demographic trends remain an issue for the Programme area, since both countries are facing a decrease in their population. Greece’s population is declining, with more than 100,000 people leaving the country every year. The total population decreased by almost 400,000 between 2010 and 2019 due to the combined effect of net emigration and a negative natural population change. The high number of people leaving the country has led to further decreases in fertility rates and a worsening of the pressure of population ageing. The population of Albania in 2019 has experienced a decrease with 1.06% compared to 2015. The Region of Fier occupies 10.3% of the total population in Albania, while the Region of Gjirokastër occupies only 2.1% of the country’s population, presenting also the highest old dependency ratio (21.3%) among the Albanian regions.

1.2.2.2 Economy, research and innovation

Economy

In terms of economic development, the total gross labour productivity in the cross-border area is significantly lower than the EU27 avg. (approximately 25%). Albania’s real GDP per capita is less than one third of the EU average and less than half of that of the new EU member states. In Albania GDP growth slowed considerably in 2019 due to lower hydro-electricity production, a drop in investment and the fallout from the earthquake of November 2019. In order to speed up convergence to the EU income

levels, Albania needs to increase productivity, shifting the growth model away from consumption to investments and exports. In Greece, following the return to economic growth in 2017, the growth rate has stabilized at around 2%, largely backed by consumer spending and net exports. Export performance has been positive in recent years backed by cost competitiveness gains. Despite the economic upturn, large accumulated imbalances remain as a legacy of the crisis. These imbalances concern the high public debt, the negative net international investment position, the high share of non-performing loans on banks' balance sheets and the still high unemployment rate.

The Greek economy revolves around the tertiary sector of the economy (services) (80.6%) and the secondary sector of the economy (industry) (16%), while primary sector of the economy (agriculture) made up an estimated 3.4%. For Western Macedonia the productive model of the Region was traditionally characterized by the emphasis on the primary sector and the utilization of some of its natural advantages, but over time it evolved into the development of some prominent economic activities, such as the lignite-energy sector and the fur production sector. The dominance of these two sectors in the region's economic activity has limited efforts to develop other development activities. In the Region of Ionian Islands, the participation of the tertiary sector in the total gross added value of the Region amounts to 89%, while the secondary and primary sectors participate by 8.6% and 2.6% respectively. In the Region of Epirus the primary sector has a significant weight in the economic development of the Region: In Epirus 7% of the gross added value belongs to the primary sector, while the corresponding Nationwide is 3.3% (provisional data 2011).

Agriculture is an important economic sector for the Albanian economy. It contributes 18.5% of the GDP and employs 36.1% of the workforce (World Bank, 2020). However, the agricultural sector suffers from a lack of modern equipment, highly fragmented land ownership and limited area of cultivation, all of which lead to a relatively low productivity. The industrial sector accounts for 20.2% of the country's GDP and employs 20.2% of the active population. The services sector represents 48.6% of the GDP, employing 43.7% of the workforce. Trade, transport and hospitality services, are important branches of the Albanian economy. Tourism has the potential as one of the key drivers for growth, job creation and investments – both foreign and domestic and has experienced a rapid increase in annual tourist arrivals but it still needs to convert this to a sustainable increase in value added and employment.

Research and innovation

In the fields of research and innovation the Programme area presents low performance levels. Despite the presence and operation of important institutions that could be accelerators for development of synergies for innovation in the business sector, the cross-border area has not yet fully adapted and implemented the necessary policies that can support smart specialization. Albania has recently completed the mapping phase of the Smart Specialization Strategy, while Greek regions have recently developed “smart specialization” strategies, but only 3 out of the 13 Regions established a Smart Specialization Technical Office and only one is operating. According to the European Regional Innovation Scoreboard (data of 2019), the regions of Western Macedonia, Epirus and Ionian Islands in Greece are characterized as moderate innovators. Among the three regions the Region of Western Macedonia presents the highest increase in innovation performance over time (23.1%), while the respective rate for Epirus is at 12.5% and for the Ionian Islands at 22.8%. Albania provides small-scale financial instruments for innovation of SMEs, provided by the Innovation Fund administered by the Albanian Investments Development Agency (AIDA), which is responsible for overseeing the innovation policy implementation in the country.

Opportunities in research and innovation arise for the Greek regions by the presence and operation of the three main Academic institutions, the University of Western Macedonia, the University of Epirus and the Ionian University (including the merged Technical Education Institutions). On the Albanian side there are four Universities, the University of Gjirokastrë (Eqrem Çabej), the University of Korça (Fan S. Noli), the University of Vlora (Ismail Qemali) and, the University of Tirana, Saranda's branch.

Connectivity and digitalization

IT network and connectivity are still weak in the cross-border area, especially for rural areas.

Development of the IT network and connectivity is an important factor for supporting economic activities especially in the tourism sector. In Albania there is a considerable gap in fixed internet-broadband penetration between urban and rural areas. Rural areas in Albania account for 40% of the population, but only 5% are connected to the internet. In Greece, the transition to fast and ultrafast broadband is much slower than in the rest of the EU. Although the national broadband plan has been updated, there are considerable delays in project implementation and the absorption of allocated funds remains low. Moreover, regional disparities in terms of access to internet are particularly high. The spread of the COVID-19 pandemic has increased the efforts and the need for transition to digital services, especially in public services.

The measures that have been applied in both countries to confront the pandemic, have caused uncertainty for the progress of the economic development. Increased uncertainty and reduced demand for products led to an increase in borrowing for almost all sectors. The sectors that received the most funding in October 2020 were manufacture & industry, commerce and tourism. In Albania the economy was projected to contract by about 7.5% in 2020 (vs. 2.2% in 2019) reflecting its dependence on tourism and remittances. Trade, transport and hospitality services, important branches of Albania's economy, greatly contributed to the recession with a 27% decrease.

1.2.2.3 Environment, climate change and energy

Environment and natural resources

The eligible cross-border area combines a variety of geomorphological features: high mountains, rolling hills and small plains, a long coastal line and a significant number of islands (small and large), rivers, lakes and lagoons.

Protected areas of international interest are included in the cross-border area that call for integrated and coordinated actions for their preservation and valorization. The Great Prespa Lake with a surface of 281.7 km² is shared between Albania (18%), Greece (14%) and North Macedonia(68%), while the small Prespa Lake with a surface of 48.41 km² is shared between Greece (90%) and Albania (10%). The river of Aoös, known also as Vjosa (and its tributary Drinos), which originates from the Northern Pindus Mountain range, flows for 70 kms through Greek territory and for 190 kms through Albanian territory and flows out into the Adriatic Sea, north of the city of Vlorë. Sites of international interest include Little Prespa Lake in Greece, which is part of the Prespes National Park, the National Park of Butrint and the National Park of Karavasta Lagoon in Albania (all protected by the Ramsar convention). In Western Macedonia 24 protected areas are situated, whereas the areas included in the Natura 2000 network in the area represent the 3,62% of the protected areas of the country. The Regions of Ionian Islands and Epirus are also characterized by rich biodiversity. In the Ionian Islands there are 19 areas included in the Natura 2000 network, while in Epirus the same areas are 31. The highest pressure on these areas is caused by human activity and climate change. Invasive alien species is also becoming a serious problem in the cross-border regions, as they are one of the most important direct drivers of biodiversity loss and ecosystem service changes, and they constitute the greatest threat to fragile ecosystems such as islands. Albania is considered a biodiversity hotspot in Europe. To protect the remarkable biodiversity and valuable natural resources, the government has placed under protection about 18% of the territory, including 58 protected areas covering a range of categories under IUCN –International Union for Conservation of Nature. In the Programme area, within Natura 2000, are listed 5 main sites, like Tomorri mountain National Park, Divjaka-Karavasta National Park, Llogara National Park, and Vjosa-Narta Protected Landscape. Cross-border lakes, such as that of Ohrid and Prespa represent the exchange points of the flora and fauna with neighboring countries.

The ratification of the Prespa Park Agreement is an important step forward by the countries that shows their commitment to address joint challenges in the field of biodiversity protection and preservation. The Agreement contributes in the creation of permanent multinational structures that include authorities and stakeholders from Greece, Albania and North Macedonia as well the European Commission. It also

creates an area of possible territorial focus in the cross-border for the support of environmentally friendly local economies, the promotion of protected areas and networks with tourism in the Adriatic-Ionian region in line with the objectives of the EUSAIR for the establishment of protection measures for natural terrestrial habitats and ecosystems.

Climate change and air quality

Regions of the cross-border area are highly vulnerable to the climate change risks, which can also affect their economic activities (agriculture, forestry, tourism). Albania is a small country with a fragile economy reliant on the services, industrial and agriculture sectors, and faces a range of challenges in addressing climate change risks. The vulnerability of Albania's energy supply and agriculture sector to climatic changes, combined with a series of recent heavy floods and landslides, are elevating climate change preparedness as a priority within Albania's development planning. The National Adaptation Strategy of Greece that was published in 2016 categorizes the Greek regions within the cross-border areas as highly vulnerable, especially in the sectors of mining industry (Western Macedonia), agriculture, fisheries and forestry (Region of Epirus) and tourism (Region of Ionian Islands). Impacts of the climate change in the Programme Area are expected to be heatwaves, recessionary or cyclonic rains, floods, wildfires, landslides and erosion. The cross-border area is also showing high vulnerability to natural disasters, especially: floods, droughts, extreme temperatures, fires and earthquakes.

Greece's National Energy and Climate Plan has been set as one of the main strategic documents for the country. A key objective for the climate strategy of Greece is reducing the share of lignite in power generation and putting a complete end to the use of lignite for power generation in Greece by 2028. Regarding climate change Greece has also developed and adopted by means of Law 4414/20 the National Strategy for Adaptation to Climate Change. Regions of Greece are also set to prepare their plans for adaptation to climate change by defining the immediate adaptation priorities at regional/local level. An important step towards adaptation to climate change for Albania has been the ratification of the Kigali Amendment to the Montreal Protocol on Substances that Deplete the Ozone Layer. In 2019 the Albanian government endorsed the National Climate Change Strategy, representing the country's low carbon-development strategy towards the implementation of the Paris Agreement. The strategy focuses on energy, transport, agriculture, land use and forestry, with a 32% renewable energy target.

The main sources of air pollution in Albania are oil extraction, mobile sources, heating of homes, and the production of cement. The main source of urban air pollution is transport. The biggest cities of the eligible area (Fier, Vlore) present a moderate air quality. The increasing number of vehicles and emissions of gases from vehicles (including PM10) contributes to a large extent to air pollution. In recent years, Albania has adopted laws for environmental and air protection. Steps have been taken to improve the implementation of the legal framework and to increase the frequency of air quality monitoring. In the Greek eligible area, the main challenges for air quality are detected in the urban areas. Air quality is more affected in touristic cities of the eligible Greek area (e.g. Corfu). According to the annual reports on air quality and the data collected by the established stations for the measurement of air pollution, exceedances are mainly detected in particulate matter (PM10 and PM 2.5).

Energy and renewable resources

Energy efficiency is another common challenge of the Programme area. Disparities in this area are also an issue. In Greece funding programmes for promoting energy efficiency in private and public buildings during the last years have been welcomed by final stakeholders, but the need for more such measures and programmes is highlighted. Cross-border cooperation has brought some positive results in this field during the previous and current programming period, contributing in the implementation of interventions for the improvement of energy efficiency. It is acknowledged though that both countries still perform low in energy efficiency and use of renewable energy sources. In Albania there is no wide-reaching progress in the field of renewable energy sources, as well as in the field of energy-saving in buildings. In Greece during the past years there have been funding initiatives on national and regional level for promoting energy-saving actions for public building, businesses and private housing. The Region of Western Macedonia has already adapted a strategy for the improvement of public building energy efficiency

including provisions and targets for public schools, health care buildings, administrative and other public buildings. The Region of Ionian Islands has also incorporated in its regional operational programme priorities for improving energy efficiency in public buildings, while the Region of Epirus is also funding projects for improvement of energy efficiency in public buildings.

Water and waste management

Albania is a country, whose water surface and ground water resources far exceed their usage. There are about 250 natural lakes, the three largest being transboundary: Lake Ohrid (estimated volume approximately 55 billion m³), Lake Prespa (estimated volume approximately 5 billion m³) and Lake Shkodër (estimated volume approximately 2 billion m³). Along the Adriatic-Ionian coastline there are several lagoons, including Karavasta Lagoon, Narta Lagoon and Butrint Lagoon. Most of economic activities rely on utilization of water resources, where over 90% of energy production comes from Hydropower Plants (HPPs), and agriculture fully depends on irrigation. Also, other sectors of economy like mining, industrial sector and tourism are also relied on clean and sufficient fresh water resources. In Albania some progress was made in water management through performance contracts signed with utilities, the regularization of illegal connections, a revised subsidy scheme, and the adoption of a staff certification scheme. However, greater efforts are needed to strengthen the capacity, performance and sustainability of utilities. Waste-water treatment plants cater for only about 15% of the population, they still face key concerns such as lack of licensing and tariffing for waste-water treatment, insufficient operation and maintenance and limited environment impact due to underdeveloped networks and connections.

Greece has adopted and reported the second generation of River Basin Management Plans under the Water Framework Directive. In Greece the main user/consumer of water is agriculture. For irrigation purposes 80-85% of the total water consumption is used. Water imbalance is often experienced, especially in the coastal regions, due to temporal and spatial variations of the precipitation, the increased water demand during the summer months. In Greece investments are needed to improve water treatment, also with a view to respecting the guidelines of the Urban Waste Water Treatment Directive. Over the past decades Greece has given priority to the construction of wastewater collection and treatment facilities in medium and large urban centers and about 90% of the generated load is connected to collecting systems, representing slightly more than half of the Greek agglomerations. In 2014, all agglomerations larger than 2000 inhabitants complied with the requirements of sewerage collection, with 89.6% of the generated load connected to collecting systems and 10.4% was collected through individual or appropriate systems (Office International de l'Eau (2017)). Reuse of waste waters is expected to be adopted increasingly in the coming years.

Waste management remains a concern for Albania as separate collection of waste streams and economic instruments to promote recycling and reuse and to prevent waste generation remain limited. The completion of the sanitary landfill in Maliq can provide safer solid waste management for the areas of Korçë and Pogradec, allowing other local government units to transport their solid waste to this sanitary landfill as well. However, for the successful management of solid waste additional support is required by local government units for sorting, collection, transport and disposal of solid waste in the available sanitary landfill of the cross-border regions. Greece disposes the majority of its municipal waste in landfills (80 %, vs EU average of 24 %), with only 17% being recycled (EU average 46 %). Additional efforts and actions are required for the increase of recycling rates in Greece, in line with the EU standards. The use of financial instruments to incentivize prevention, reuse and recycling is insufficient and the existing schemes are performing poorly. A resource-efficient circular economy is not yet being implemented in Albania, hence the indicators that associated with it cannot yet be monitored. The Strategic Policy Document for Albania presents the need for a gradual transition from a linear economy to a circular economy, aiming, among else, for a prolonged lifecycle, collection through source separation and large-scale recycling. Circular economy in Greece remains under-developed. However, the country is strengthening its efforts towards the promotion of a circular economy and has developed a National Circular Economy Strategy. Regional development policies of Ionian Islands, Western Macedonia and Epirus are all incorporating actions for transition to circular economy.

1.2.2.4 Accessibility and transport

The main challenges for the cross-border area in the fields of transport and connecting the area arise from a) the insular complex of the Region of Ionian Islands, b) the remote, mountainous and sparsely populated areas of Albanian regions and c) the extensive coastline of the cross-border area. The geographical features of the cross-border region create challenges arising from territorial fragmentation and discontinuity, as well as difficulties in accessibility.

The cross-border area is covered by maritime transport and road network, but the current infrastructure in both transport sectors does not have sufficient density or proper quality. Poor road network in remote and isolated areas and inadequate infrastructure are not ensuring a good connectivity across the border. All airport infrastructure is located on the Greek side of the cross-border area (Ioannina, Kerkyra, Kefallinia, Zakynthos, Kozani and Kastoria), and cater to both domestic and international flights (regular and charter). Albania's international airports are located in Tirana and in the city of Kukës. The inclusion of the Region of Fier in the eligible cross-border is creating new potential for the development of better connection networks in Albania since the region holds a strategic location in the polycentric system of national roads networks in the country, being also part of the Tirana–Vlorë railway connection.

Some progress is being recorded in Albania's transport networks, as it continued to harmonize its legal and institutional framework with the EU Trans-European Transport Networks (TEN-T) Regulation and the Transport Community Treaty (TCT). Progress is also made in the preparation of road, rail and port infrastructure projects, especially along the Adriatic-Ionian corridor and corridor VIII (Varna–Durrës). Road safety issues though are still a concern for Albania, pointing out that interventions are needed in order to eliminate “blackspots” and reduce road fatalities. Greece presents low performance rates as well, in the fields of road safety and service quality. Road fatalities are still high in Greece comparing to the EU average, as 64 fatalities per million inhabitants were recorded in 2018, against an EU average of 49. The Greek Road vehicle fleet is also highly dependent on oil with low use of renewables, resulting to low score in carbon emissions performance. Greece and the European Investment Bank, have prepared a National Transport Master Plan for Greece. The main goals for Greece include increase of multi-modality for freight transport by improving rail connections to Trans-European Networks ports and redesign of the coastal shipping network to create regional nodes that will allow faster transfer to smaller ports and islands.

The Programme area includes strategic ports (port of Corfu, Igoumenitsa, Vlorë and Saranda) important for tourism and commerce. The highest number of passengers disembarked is recorded from March until August (602.487 passenger in Igoumenitsa and 519.119 passengers in Corfu) and is connected with tourism. The Albanian programme area includes the ports of Vlorë, Himara and Saranda. In the Greek programme area and specifically in the Region of Ionian Islands connectivity within the insular complex is inadequate. Ferry connectivity between the Ionian Islands is a major issue for the Region and it is also affected by seasonality. A ferry connectivity is available between the islands of Kefalonia, Lefkada and Zakynthos. The port of Corfu is the only one connected with the Diapontia Islands, but frequency of routes is higher only during summer. The port of Corfu is also the only one connected with the Albania, as there is a ferry connectivity with the port of Saranda. However, frequency of routes and passenger's capacity load are low.

Transport has been one of the main sectors that was hit hard due to the COVID-19 pandemic. Cross-border mobility was highly affected by the travel restriction measures applied by both countries. The main border stations (Krystallopigi- Kapshticë, Sagiada-Qafë Botë, Ktismata-Kakavijë) remained closed from April to May 2020, while in December 2020 only the border station of Ktismata-Kakavijë was available for limited cross-border transportation and exchange. Sea transport between Greece and Albania (ferry connection from Corfu port to Saranda port) remained unavailable since the travel restrictions forced in March 2020 and throughout the same year.

1.2.2.5 Social development (labour market, health and education)

Employment and labour market

The Programme area faces high unemployment rates both on total active population and on youths. Progress in promoting investment in education skills and employability is limited. According to the latest regional statistics about unemployment, the total unemployment rate in the Greek and Albanian border regions is around 20%. In Greece, large disparities are recorded at regional level. The unemployment rate is highest in Western Macedonia (27.0% in 2018), a matter that creates great concern as the country is preparing for the implementation of its Just Transition Plan that involves the aforementioned region. Unemployment rates in Albania are also high, while a significant difference is being recorded in the unemployment rates between men and women. The exchange of seasonal laborers is one of the main characteristics of the labour market in the cross-border area. About 10.000 seasonal workers are required every year from Greece to be employed in agriculture.

Health services

Health services are also a field of common challenges and needs. The COVID-19 crisis has surfaced the importance of health infrastructure and services. Improving access to health services especially in remote areas is very important for the cross-border area. Despite the fact that Greece had adopted the 2016-2020 national health strategy, it still presents a limited progress in investment in the health sector, keeping in 2017 one of the lowest percentages in the euro area (0.1% of GDP as opposed to 0.2% of GDP in the euro area). Financing from the European Social Fund, has however contributed to the reform of primary health care and the rolling out of a network of local healthcare units to strengthen access to primary healthcare. Public spending on long term care is very low, as it amounts for 2% of total healthcare spending. Considering the high rate of aged people (+65) who face serious difficulties in personal care and/or household activities this record creates great concern for Greece. The operation of the General University Hospital of Ioannina is an important factor for the cross-border area as it facilitates the population from both countries.

Education and vocational training

The Greek regions exhibit relatively higher educational levels than the areas in Albania. The Adult Education Survey (AES), which measures participation in formal or informal education over a longer time span of one year, also shows a significant gap between Albania (9.2%) and the EU-28 average (45.1%). In Albania a positive record is that the secondary school and university enrolments and outcomes have improved steadily over the past decade. However, public spending on education remains low. A new Agency has also been established for the employment and vocational education and training (VET) structure, which could contribute to the efforts for alignment of education and training to the needs of the labour market. In Greece, progress in promoting investment in education skills and employability is also limited. Public expenditure on education accounted for 3.9% of GDP in 2017, among the lowest in the EU (EU average: 4.6%). The proportion of upper secondary students enrolled in vocational education and training was far below the EU average (28.8% compared with an EU average of 47.8% in 2017) and has been decreasing since 2013. However, challenges are still identified in the field of vocational education and training.

The COVID-19 crisis has affected nearly every aspect of social development. Governments in both countries have applied subsequent measures for mitigating the socio-economic effects of the restrictions taken for preventing the spread of the pandemic. The outbreak of the COVID-19 in Greece has highlighted the deficiencies of the health care system, as well as the limited healthcare services available to the refugee population currently living in Greece. In Albania key measurements consisted of additional funding for the health sector, paying minimum salaries supporting small businesses and self-employed, funding for companies to access in overdrafts for paying employee wages.

Economic disruption and, consequently, large job losses are expected to increase the already high unemployment rates in both countries. The number of people in need of social protection will increase calling for a need to strengthen protection policies as to respond effectively to the ever-increasing pressure on the system and to cushion effectively both the short-term and the potential long-lasting socioeconomic impact of the pandemic.

1.2.2.6 Tourism and Cultural Heritage

Tourism

For the Programme, area tourism is one of the most important economic sectors. In Albania, tourism is growing steadily and investments in this area are increasing. In 2019, Albania adopted a national strategy for the sustainable development and tourism and an action plan. In the period 2014-2018, the arrivals of foreign citizens coming in Albania were approximately 23.6 million persons. Only during 2018, the arrival of foreign citizens is 15.8% more than 2017. Activities related directly with tourism (2 digit NACE Rev.2: 55, 56, 77, 79) generated 45 ALL billion value added in 2018 with a contribution by 2.8 % in GDP. Cultural tourism seems to be important for the country as in the period 2014-2018, the number of visitors in archaeological parks, museums, castles and other monuments was approximately 3 million persons with an increase by 49.4 % for the year 2018. In the eligible Programme area, the higher percentage of trips for holidays preferred by Albanian citizens in 2017 was registered in the Region of Vlorë. In Albania 80% of its hotels are located in coastal areas (Velipoja, Shëngjin, Durrës, Kavaja, Vlora, Saranda, or Pogradec). Most accommodation facilities are family businesses rather than large professionally managed groups. Thus, there is a need for supporting development of skills through vocational training and stimulating innovation, know-how transfer and the provision of business advice. Tourism is a big force for the Greek economy. Tourism GDP accounted for 6.8% of total GVA in 2017. The sector directly employed 381. 800 people in 2018, accounting for 10.0% of total employment in the country. In the Greek programme area, the Region of Ionian Islands and Epirus are those with the highest number of visitors, while the Region of Western Macedonia has the lowest number at national level. The Region of Ionian Islands ranks fourth in the list of the Greek regions with the highest rates of international airport arrivals and concentrates more than 80% of the accommodation establishments of the Greek cross border area. Cruise tourism in the Region of Ionian Islands has been growing steadily from 2013 to 2019, being an important economic industry for the region. In 2019, a total of 1.044.160 cruise passengers arrived in the ports of Corfu, Kefalonia and Zakynthos. Tourism, which accounts for more than 20% of Albania's GDP, was one of the most affected sectors by the pandemic. In July 2020, the number of foreign tourists was found to have decreased by 61.5% compared to last year. The Greek tourist product is characterized by massiveness and seasonality as tourist flows are particularly dense at certain period of the year. The outbreak of the COVID-19 pandemic has affected Greece's most profitable sector. A need to upgrade the tourism product by investing in less seasonal and more qualitative forms of tourism has emerged (e.g., conference, medical tourism).

Cultural Heritage

Cultural and natural heritage is another territorial asset of the cross-border region, presenting similarities and common challenges when it comes to protection measures, valorization and effective promotion with the scope to strengthen tourism destination branding. The eligible cross border area is characterized by unique and diverse cultural heritage that could form the basis for tourist development. On the Albanian eligible part there are three sites on the UNESCO World Heritage Site register, the historic centers of Berat and Gjirokastër, the Butrint Archaeological Site, the natural and cultural heritage of the Ohrid Region and two on the tentative list (the Ancient city of Apollonia in the region of Fier and the Royal Tombs of Selca e Poshtme in Korçë). On the Greek eligible area there is one site on the UNESCO World Heritage Site register, the Old Town of Corfu and three on the tentative list (Archaeological site of Nikopolis and Zagorochoria – North Pindos National Park in Epirus and the area of the Prespa Lakes: Great Prespa Lake and Small Prespa Lake in Western Macedonia). The natural heritage of the cross-

border area includes national parks and other protected areas, lagoons, forests, mountainous areas, as well as thermal springs (Amarandos, Kavasila and Preveza in Epirus, Ammoudara, Akriton and Kivotos in Western Macedonia, Bënjë thermal springs in Korçë).

Culture has been affected by the restrictions applied due to the COVID-19 pandemic. Visits in archaeological sites and museums, as well as organization of theatre performances and cultural events were suspended during the lockdown. Several cultural institutions turned to new technological means and digitalization for producing cultural products. However, additional measures are required for supporting culture to recover from the COVID-19 crisis and acquire alternative tools for cultural production.

1.2.3 Lessons Learnt from past experience

Cross-border cooperation in the eligible area during the previous and the current programming period has brought important achievements mainly in the areas of tourism and environment, supporting the development of tools for the better exploitation of the tourist areas and the cultural heritage. The implementation of the cross-border cooperation Programme Greece-Albania 2007-2013 and the current implementation of the Interreg IPA II CBC Programme Greece-Albania 2014-2020 has contributed to the creation of more experienced beneficiaries.

The Interreg IPA II CBC Programme Greece-Albania 2014-2020 aimed to “*find the balance between sustainable regional development and enhancement of cross-border cooperation among local population & regional institutions, in accordance with EU & national policies, in order to address common challenges through joint interventions*”.

The Programme launched in total five Calls for proposals (two calls for ordinary projects, one call for strategic projects and two calls for targeted projects). A total of 68 projects were selected for funding. The projects intervened mainly in the following fields: a) waste water treatment, b) solid waste management, c) road network, d) protection of biodiversity, e) nature protection, f) energy efficiency and RES, g) risk prevention and management, h) protection, development and promotion of public cultural and heritage assets and i) actions supporting SME's. All projects had to justify their compliance in respect to equality between men and women and non-discrimination and their contribution to sustainable development.

According to the results of the evaluation report on the implementation of the Interreg IPA II CBC Programme Greece-Albania 2014-2020 and the authorities' opinions on the achievement of the Programme's priorities, the relation of the selected projects with other EU Policies and special issues, the selected projects seem to have contributed at a very satisfying level at the Programme's priorities and specific objectives.

The assessment by authorities has also considered the overlook on policy sectors targeted by the selected projects and types of participants, to be positive in term of coherence and consistency with the Programme priorities and with the common and Programme specific results and outputs indicators. Furthermore, the selected projects seem to match with the integration and multi-perspective approach to the local development overall approach of the Cooperation Programme.

Operational aspect of the cross-border programme

At operational level the programme evaluation report has confirmed the efficient and effective programme support to projects and the related satisfaction of beneficiaries.

The use of the Management Information System (MIS) has improved application and monitoring process and is considered adequate and in place. Still the administrative burden of the programme is deemed to be heavy for the final beneficiaries (especially with respect to administrative procedures followed for tendering and contracting). The institutional capacity has also been recognized as an important difficulty in project implementation as institutions are still reporting lack of staff. Supportive actions and tools such

as the presentations used during info-days, the Frequent Asked Questions and the Programme's Management and Control System uploaded in the programme site, are considered by beneficiaries to be very helpful in the management of their projects. Beneficiaries are also suggesting for simplification of verifications procedures is also being suggested by beneficiaries as well as training sessions for enhanced cooperation and exchange of experience.

A very big issue that arose during the beginning of the 2014-2020 programming period was the need for alignment with the Practical Guide to Contract Procedures for EU External Actions (PRAG) by both Greek and Albanian Beneficiaries and the delays that this caused to the signing of contracts and the implementation of the approved projects. Other implementation issues include:

1. Delays in the opening of bank accounts for Albanian beneficiaries
2. The liquidity of Albanian beneficiaries and the time-consuming procedure for the transfer of the pre-financing and the next reimbursements.
3. The fact that all Albanian beneficiaries have to cover by their own sources the 15% of national contribution and the 20% of VAT.
4. The unrealistic assessment of the time needed for the preparation and implementation of the tendering procedures.
5. The first years of the programme implementation, the unavailability of First Level Controllers in Greece, due to the limited number of controllers.
6. Insufficient cooperation between beneficiaries leading to the delays in the submission of payment claims.
7. Delays in the tendering procedures and the signing of the respective contracts leading to delays in project implementation by both Albanian and Greek Beneficiaries.
8. The impact of the COVID-19 crisis leading to the change in the time plan and additional modification in order to ensure implementation of the project activities.
9. Inexperienced staff and under staffed organizations.

The main recommendations of the evaluation suggest:

- Better structuring and consistency of the applicant's package for project proposals.
- Reducing the administrative burden for project implementation.
- Harmonization of eligibility rules should be further strengthened.
- Needs and benefits to use modern communication tools (e.g. Skype, Webinar software) should be further explored, live Webinars to better advise applicants on a daily basis in a resource-efficient manner.
- The MA/JS should organize Info Days more often in accordance with the recognized needs in order to efficiently and effectively address identified issues also in the programme implementation.

1.2.4 Complementarities and synergies with other forms of support

The complementarity of Interreg VI-A IPA Greece Albania with other forms of support focuses on the added value of this cooperation programme along with other sources of financing. In some cases, the complementarity may lead to coordination and synergy actions. Complementarity is pursued in terms of coordination and synergy actions. The mechanisms that will be applied for enabling coordination with other forms of support in the eligible area and specifically with other co-operation Programmes will be based on: a) the use of tools (online tools or publications) for identification of similar projects for synergies, sharing of best project practices and outcomes from thematic and territorial perspective, b) the

organization of joint activities (e.g., events, stakeholder involvement) for promoting synergies between projects and common stakeholders among programmes, c) working groups for knowledge sharing and common learning in the development of calls, assessment of applications and monitoring. The complementarity and connections that can be established by Interreg VI-A IPA Greece Albania refer to the following sources of financing in the eligible area:

a) Complementarities with the Just Transition Fund

The Just Transition Fund is the first pillar of the Just Transition Mechanism, which is a key tool introduced by the EU for the transition towards a climate- neutral economy by ensuring that this transition is carried out in a fair way, leaving no one behind. Greece has already identified the transition areas and has developed a Just Transition Plan for the Region of Western Macedonia and the city of Megalopolis (Peloponnese) which are among the EU regions with the greatest dependence on fossil fuels. A distinctive programme to be supported by the JTM is set for Greece. Some of the main investment areas according to the approved Just Transition Programme for Greece, involving the Region of Western Greece, are clean energy, land use adaptation and circular economy. The Interreg VI-A IPA Programme Greece-Albania can develop complementarities and synergies with the Just Transition Programme in the field of circular economy and the actions towards the development of an innovation zone for the area.

b) Complementarities to other Programmes

Complementarity shall be pursued with other cross-border programmes namely: (Interreg VI-A) IPA Greece North Macedonia in promoting joint actions in the Prespes area in line with the Prespa Lake Agreement and (Interreg VI-A) Greece-Italy in supporting joint actions for improved cross-border maritime connectivity. Complementarities can be pursued with other IPA funding programmes such as the Interreg VI-A IPA Italy Albania Montenegro (South Adriatic), the cross-border cooperation programme North Macedonia – Albania, the cross-border Albania – Kosovo* and the cross-border cooperation programme Montenegro – Albania, as well as with transnational programmes such as the (Interreg VI-B) Adriatic-Ionian and the (Interreg VI-B) EURO MEDITERRANEAN (EURO MED) Programme. Complementarity and synergies can be pursued in the “EU for Prespa programme” in the fields of biodiversity protection, control and reducing of pollution, sustainable tourism, improvement of water and waste water management.

The cross-border eligible area is part of the Adriatic-Ionian corridor. Therefore, cooperation should also be promoted between the Interreg VI-A IPA Greece Albania and the future (Interreg VI-B) Adriatic-Ionian Programme which is expected to contribute in enhancing mobility in the Adriatic- Ionian regions and support transition to greener economies. EURO MED Programme is another programme with which the cross-border programme can pursue cooperation, particularly in the field of biodiversity, climate change and promotion of circular economy.

The Interreg VI-A IPA Greece Albania Programme can strengthen and capture synergies with other sectoral programmes in the cross-border area, such as the Programme “Environment, Energy and Climate Change 2021-2027” implemented in Greece and with Greece’s “Transport Infrastructure Programme 2021-2027” which foresees actions for enhancing cross-border connectivity (upgrade of road networks, improvement of cross-border mobility).

It is also important that the Managing Authority keeps close contact with the EU Delegation in Albania in order to seek efficiency, effectiveness and complementarity of the activities with other EU support. Close coordination between the Managing Authority and the EU Delegation in Albania will be maintained in order to maximise the effect of the assistance with other EU activities in the overlapping areas of support. The Managing Authority has already an establishing mechanism in order to ensure avoidance of double funding, in accordance with Article 191 regarding Principle of non-cumulative award and prohibition of double funding of the Financial Regulation, as beneficiaries are obliged to submit a declaration of non-

double funding for their proposals to be assessed during project calls.

c) Contribution to Horizontal Principles

The specific objectives of the Programme Strategy shall also be pursued in line with the principles for promoting sustainable development and the "do no significant harm" principle. Taking into account the UN Sustainable Development Goals the specific objectives of the future Programme are expected to contribute in the protection, restoration and sustainable use of the terrestrial ecosystems (SDG 15), the sustainable management of water (SDG 6) and to compat the impacts of climate change (SDG 13).

The selected intervention fields of the Programme are focused on addressing substantial needs that the cross-border area is still facing, especially in the fields of water supply, health services, transport and economic development. Investments such as improving the road network, ensuring modern and efficient water supply networks for the inhabitants of remote and disadvantaged areas, but also strengthening the development prospects in the eligible regions are important and a prerequisite for an integrated transition to green development. In addition, such investments contribute to reducing the development gap between the regions of the participating countries, so that they are able to pursue an enhanced cooperation that will effectively contribute to the achievement of higher indicators in actions focused on climate change in the future. Considering the absolute financial figures of the Programme the allocation of 30% of the budget to the climate change objectives would as a consequence lead to the allocation of significantly small amounts for the Programmes' objectives with limited budget apportionments. A more balanced approach between promotion of climate change adaptation and addressing the main development needs of the cross border area has been pursued. Thus, the climate related expenditure reaches at 19,48% of the financial allocation of the programme. The Programme Strategy is also expected to address the ambition set in recital 11 CPR, for tackling the loss of biodiversity. Considering the type of investments supported by the programme specific objectives and the absolute financial figures of the Programme, 13,09% of the EU financial allocation of the Programme is dedicated to interventions for the protection of biodiversity and natural heritage. It is expected that under the same special objective that supports biodiversity actions, strategic investments for the reduction of air and noise pollution, will also be supported.

Actions supported by the Programme shall safeguard the protection of fundamental rights, complying with the European Charter of Fundamental Rights and ensuring gender equality, non-discrimination (based on sex, racial or ethnic origin, religion or belief, disability, age or sexual orientation), and accessibility as per article 9 of CPR as well as access and opportunities for all, including removing barriers to healthcare, tourism and culture. The respect of these fundamental rights will be assessed during the selection of project and will be evaluated throughout the monitoring of their implementation.. The New European Bauhaus[1], shall guide actions supported by the Programme into embedding elements such as: reconnecting with nature, supporting connection and social interaction through cutlural assets and promoting re-use and circularity as the new normal.

[1] https://europa.eu/new-european-bauhaus/index_en

1.2.5 Complementarity with Macro-regional Strategies

Greece and Albania are included in the nine countries of the European Strategy for the Adriatic and Ionian Region (EUSAIR). The general objective of the EUSAIR is to promote the economic and social prosperity and growth in the region by improving its attractiveness, competitiveness and connectivity, while safeguarding environmental protection. EUSAIR is also expected to contribute at the further

European integration of the Western Balkans. Macro-regional strategies (MRS) have become an integral part of EU regional policy, designed and implemented in a defined geographical area in order to jointly address challenges and develop opportunities they have in common through setting shared, long-term objectives for the macro region in question. The collaboration and the synergies between Managing Authorities in this defined geographical area is becoming a necessity.

Within the national strategic documents, as well as the regional ones, the emblematic priorities of the EUSAIR strategy have been incorporated so that they can lead to the implementation of projects of macro-regional added value. The same principals apply for the Interreg VI-A IPA Greece-Albania', which is invited to promote the EUSAIR macro-regional strategy, both at the level of the programme architecture and priority axes, as well as through implementation mechanisms: specific selection criteria (ex. bonus points if the project contributes to a macro-regional strategy); earmarking of a specific budget by a targeted call.

The cooperation programme is expected to tackle challenges in the areas of environmental protection, climate change adaptation and mitigation of natural risks connected with pillar 3 "Environmental quality" of the EUSAIR. Considering the stakeholder consultation outcomes, it is expected that cross-border cooperation will be pursued in the field of "Sustainable tourism" contributing to pillar 4 of the EUSAIR, especially with the aim to create and promote thematic touristic routes. Among the high priority needs of the programme area that are expected to be tackled through the cooperation programme is the improvement of cross-border connectivity in line with pillar 2 of the EUSAIR "Connecting the Region". Capitalization of the Interreg VI-A IPA Greece Albania investments for improving inland border connection of Greece and Albania is expected to be pursued in the new cooperation programme strategy contributing to the EUSAIR overall goals for the creation of multimodal corridors in the Adriatic-Ionian Region, alongside the TEN-T network, reducing infrastructural, technological and legislative gaps.

1.3 Justification for the selection of policy objectives

The Interreg VI-A IPA Greece Albania Programme aims to promote integrated regional development. Through cross-border cooperation, communities located in border areas seek to promote the socioeconomic development of the border area, develop economies of scale and overcome their peripheral positioning. The Programme Strategy emphasizes on specific objectives that can contribute in bridging the gap of regional, social and economic disparities in the cross-border area and promoting sustainable development. According to the joint development needs of the cross-border area the three policy objectives of the Cohesion Policy that the Strategy involves are:

- Policy Objective 2 (a greener, low-carbon Europe by promoting clean and...)
- Policy Objective 3 (a more Connected Europe, with strategic transport and digital networks)
- Policy Objective 4 (a more social and inclusive Europe implementing the European Pillar of Social Rights)

On this basis three Priority Axes are formed:

- Priority Axis 1: Supporting transition to greener and more resilient cross-border regions
- Priority Axis 2: Improving accessibility in the cross-border area

·Priority Axis 3: Fostering sustainable cross-border economic and social development

The form of support used by the Programme includes only grants because of the nature of the operations and the relatively small scale does not really allows the efficient deployment of financial instruments.

1.3. Justification for the selection of policy objectives and the Interreg-specific objectives, corresponding priorities, specific objectives and the forms of support, addressing, where appropriate, missing links in cross-border infrastructure

Reference: point (c) of Article 17(3)

Table 1

Selected policy objective or selected Interreg specific objective	Selected specific objective	Priority	Justification for selection
<p>2. A greener, low-carbon transitioning towards a net zero carbon economy and resilient Europe by promoting clean and fair energy transition, green and blue investment, the circular economy, climate change mitigation and adaptation risk prevention and management, and sustainable urban mobility</p>	<p>RSO2.4. Promoting climate change adaptation and disaster risk prevention, resilience taking into account eco-system based approaches</p>	<p>1. Supporting transition to greener and more resilient cross-border regions</p>	<p>The regions of the cross-border area present high vulnerability to climate change. Economic sectors such as agriculture, forestry, fishery and tourism are the main sectors affected by climate change in the cross-border area. Albania is reliant on electricity production by hydro sources. This can make energy production sector highly vulnerable to climate change, since droughts can result in less electricity produced by the hydro power plants. The extensive coastal areas, as well as the remote and less developed areas are exposed to several risks arising from climate change. Natural risks (earthquakes, fires, severe weather and floods) can become major cross-border issues. The development of joint measures for monitoring, prevention and preparedness to such risks is important. Interventions for the mitigation of climate change risks is a priority for the cross-border area which every year suffers from wildfires, floods causing severe disasters in the natural environment, on road networks and build-up environment, affecting local communities and economies as well. More investments are needed in energy efficiency and renewable energy sources in order to slow down air pollution (by reducing greenhouse gas emission which results in less ozone layer depletion) and fight climate change. Deployment of technology and infrastructures for</p>

Selected policy objective or selected Interreg specific objective	Selected specific objective	Priority	Justification for selection
			affordable clean energy can support transition to an improved quality of environment and mitigation of climate change risks.
2. A greener, low-carbon transitioning towards a net zero carbon economy and resilient Europe by promoting clean and fair energy transition, green and blue investment, the circular economy, climate change mitigation and adaptation risk prevention and management, and sustainable urban mobility	RSO2.5. Promoting access to water and sustainable water management	1. Supporting transition to greener and more resilient cross-border regions	Sustainable water management is common need for the programme area. In Albania most economic activities rely on utilization of water resources, where over 90% of energy production comes from Hydropower Plants (HPPs). Water supply and sewerage in Albania still faces major problems such as lack of adequate infrastructure in water and waste water management & treatment and the need to increase the water utilities efficiency, especially in rural areas. Waste water treatment plants In Albania cater for only about 15% of the population, while discharges of treated and untreated wastewater pose a threat for rivers and water quality. Uncontrolled and not recorded interventions in the water regimes, deterioration of the water quality and increase of pollution from waste water discharges specifically in coastal areas of Albania create a considerable pressure for water management in Albania. Enhancement of water monitoring (water quality and quantity) is important for the effective implementation of water management measures and programmes. Furthermore, water management measures and action plans will need to take into account flood protection and climate change risks. Greece has adopted and reported the second generation of River Basin Management Plans under the Water Framework Directive. Greece is mainly dependent on groundwater resources for its water supply. Water imbalance is often experienced, especially in the coastal regions, due to temporal and

Selected policy objective or selected Interreg specific objective	Selected specific objective	Priority	Justification for selection
			<p>spatial variations of the precipitation, the increased water demand during the summer months. The Region of Epirus includes some of the most important rivers of Greece (Aoos, Arachthos, Kalamas, Louros, Acheron), while the Region of Western Macedonia holds 65% of the country's surface waters with an important number of lakes, river network and underground water resources. In the Region of Ionian Islands there are 5 rivers, 22 coastal and 5 transitional surface water bodies. Water uses are distinguished in water supply and tourism, related to drinking water, irrigation, livestock and industry. Human economic activities and water demand, especially in cross-border communities with intense agricultural and tourism activity pose a need for investing in measures for preventing water pollution and improving waste water treatment methods.</p>
<p>2. A greener, low-carbon transitioning towards a net zero carbon economy and resilient Europe by promoting clean and fair energy transition, green and blue investment, the circular economy, climate change mitigation and adaptation risk prevention and management, and sustainable urban mobility</p>	<p>RSO2.6. Promoting the transition to a circular and resource efficient economy</p>	<p>1. Supporting transition to greener and more resilient cross-border regions</p>	<p>The cross-border regions present limited progress in waste management and recycling. In Albania separate collection of waste streams and economic instruments to promote recycling and reuse and to prevent waste generation remain limited. Albanias' National Strategy 2020-2035 for integrated waste management aims at incorporating circular economy principles in the national waste management system. The concept of the polluter-pays principle is not currently well developed in Albania and the costs of providing a basic minimum standard of waste disposal are recovered in only a few cities. Greece has yet to advance in terms of integrated waste management compared to the rest of EU27. Municipal solid waste (MSW) management still</p>

Selected policy objective or selected Interreg specific objective	Selected specific objective	Priority	Justification for selection
			relies mainly on disposal in landfills (80%). Around 15% of the collected MSW are being recycled, while 4.1% is composted. As a result, the country ranks very low in EU27 in terms of circularity of the economy. Greece has adopted the National Strategy for Circular Economy, aiming at the increasing circularity and reducing waste landfilled. Cross-border regions need to invest in the support reuse, storage, and treatment.
2. A greener, low-carbon transitioning towards a net zero carbon economy and resilient Europe by promoting clean and fair energy transition, green and blue investment, the circular economy, climate change mitigation and adaptation risk prevention and management, and sustainable urban mobility	RSO2.7. Enhancing protection and preservation of nature, biodiversity and green infrastructure, including in urban areas, and reducing all forms of pollution	1. Supporting transition to greener and more resilient cross-border regions	The cross-border area presents a rich biodiversity and an important number of protected areas of international interest including lakes, wetlands, mountain ranges and coastal areas (and the most important the last wild river in EU, Vjosa (Aoös) River). The Great Prespa Lake with a surface of 281.7 km ² is shared between Albania (18%), Greece (14%) and North Macedonia (68%). The river of Aaos- Vjosa (and its tributary Drinos), which originates from the Northern Pindus Mountain range, flows for 70 kms through Greek territory and for 190 kms through Albanian territory and flows out into the Adriatic Sea, north of the city of Vlorë. The Ionian Islands include 19 areas of the Natura 2000 network, while in Epirus the same areas are 31. Areas of Natura 2000 in Western Macedonia represent 3,62% of the protected areas of Greece. Albania includes 58 protected areas covering 18% of its territory. Investments for enhancing protection and preservation of these areas and measures for reducing all forms of pollution and impact from human activity will alleviate the risks regarding loss of ecosystems, endangered biodiversity, protection from invasive species and better valorization of

Selected policy objective or selected Interreg specific objective	Selected specific objective	Priority	Justification for selection
			<p>natural assets. The National Park of Prespa has been declared as a cross-border Park with international interest. The ratification of the Prespa Lake Agreement between the two countries is an important step for the valorization and protection of natural resources that can be furtherly supported by cross-border cooperation. The development networks in the cross-border area for the protection of habitats and common ecosystems is also important for the promotion of the emblematic priorities of the EUSAIR and the creation of Green and Blue corridors in the Adriatic-Ionian region. Investment in green infrastructure can improve the urban environment and contribute in the reduction of air pollution.</p>
<p>3. A more connected Europe by enhancing mobility</p>	<p>RSO3.2. Developing and enhancing sustainable, climate resilient, intelligent and intermodal national, regional and local mobility, including improved access to TEN-T and cross-border mobility</p>	<p>2. Improving accessibility in the cross-border area</p>	<p>Connectivity and accessibility in the cross-border area remains one of the main structural needs. Road network in rural and isolated areas, especially in the Albanian cross-border regions is still inadequate. The main challenges of the programme area include poor road network in remote and isolated areas and inadequate infrastructure. Road safety is an important concern for both countries, as road fatalities rates remain high. Investment in actions for eliminating “blackspots” and improving road infrastructure is considered essential for the cross-border area. One of the main advantages of the cross-border area is the operation of important ports (Igoumenitsa, Corfu, Saranda, Vlora). Tourism growth in the coastal areas of the cross-border regions is creating additional needs in the services provided by ports. Investments for the improvement of port logistics, including information systems and</p>

Selected policy objective or selected Interreg specific objective	Selected specific objective	Priority	Justification for selection
			<p>the rehabilitation of port infrastructure, particularly of the maritime ports of Vlorë and Saranda are considered important for the upgrade of maritime transport in the cross-border area. Actions for supporting the transition of ports to climate neutral practices and services will contribute to the EUSAIR priorities, specifically in the EUSAIR flagship for the “Adriatic-Ionian multi-modal corridors” in line with the Alternative Fuels Infrastructure Directive (Directive 2014/94/EU) is prioritizing the Onshore Power Supply in TEN-T ports by the end of 2025. In the Region of Ionian Islands connectivity within the insular complex remains inadequate. Actions for the improvement of connectivity between islands, including actions for support of multimodal transport will enhance local economies and improve accessibility in the cross-border regions. Development of intermodal services is important for promotion of sustainable tourism. A future railway connection in the cross-border area and the improvement of sea and road connection could contribute in identifying multimodal corridors in the eligible area in line with the EUSAIR priorities. Mobility plans for the cross-border area could facilitate the local population, especially residents of remote areas that need to commute regularly in larger urban and suburban areas, ensuring better access to health care and other services.</p>
<p>4. A more social and inclusive Europe implementing the European Pillar of Social Rights</p>	<p>RSO4.5. Ensuring equal access to health care and fostering resilience of health systems, including primary care, and promoting the transition from institutional to</p>	<p>3. Fostering sustainable cross-border economic and social development</p>	<p>Both countries are still presenting very low percentages of public spending on health, with rates below the EU average. In Albania, public spending on health remains low at 2.9 % of GDP with disproportionately low resource allocations to</p>

Selected policy objective or selected Interreg specific objective	Selected specific objective	Priority	Justification for selection
	family- and community-based care		primary health care. Greece still presents a limited progress in investment in the health sector, keeping in 2017 one of the lowest percentages in the euro area (0.1% of GDP as opposed to 0.2% of GDP in the euro area). The unbalanced distribution of health care resources and personnel across both countries is also a concern, especially for inhabitants of remote and sparsely populated areas. Access to health services, especially for remote rural areas of the border area, is a main concern taking into account that these areas are also facing a severe aging problem. The operation of the General University Hospital of Ioannina is an important factor for the cross-border area as it facilitates the population from both countries. However, further investments are required for ensuring equal access to health care services, especially for the more vulnerable social groups of the cross-border area. Better coordination and joint solutions for facilitating the population near borders are considered important for the improvement of the quality of life in the cross-border area.
4. A more social and inclusive Europe implementing the European Pillar of Social Rights	RSO4.6. Enhancing the role of culture and sustainable tourism in economic development, social inclusion and social innovation	3. Fostering sustainable cross-border economic and social development	Tourism holds an important role in the economies of the cross-border area. It accounts for 18% of Greece's GDP and employs more than 900,000 people, accounting for one fifth of the workforce. In Albania tourism has been growing steadily. In Albania tourism's contribution to the country's GDP rose by 8.5% in 2019, and that tourism contributed 21.2% of the total economy. However, the tourism sector seems to be one of the main sectors affected by the COVID-19 crisis. Improvement of tourism branding and promotion of alternative types of

Selected policy objective or selected Interreg specific objective	Selected specific objective	Priority	Justification for selection
			<p>tourism (including health tourism, agro-tourism, conference tourism, hiking tourism, enotourism, etc.) will help local communities to boost their competitiveness, especially for regions in economic transition such as the Region of Western Greece. Investing in sustainable tourism models, promoting resource-efficient and low carbon tourism. Preserving natural resources and promoting sustainable tourism is essential for the stabilization of the tourism sector. The cross-border eligible areas presents a rich cultural heritage, a common asset that could be used to support economic development across the region. Investments in the cultural and creative sector can help the local economies to recover from the COVID-19 crisis impact and support the preservation of cultural heritage. The cross-border area includes sites listed in the UNESCO World Heritage monuments (Corfu Old Town, the historic centers of Berat and Gjirokastra, the Butrint Archaeological Site). The valorization of cultural heritage through new technological tools for improving accessibility, supporting cultural expression and creativity through digital channels will enhance the promotion of cross-border cultural heritage. Investments in cultural heritage and creativity shall put emphasis on social inclusion and promotion of equality. Investments under this specific objective aiming at the diversification of the cross-border tourism offer and promotion of sustainable tourism shall contribute to the EUSAIR flagships: “AIR CULTURAL ROUTES/ Development of sustainable and thematic cultural routes/ connecting cultural routes in EUSAIR”, “DesAir- Training and skills in the field of tourism</p>

Selected policy objective or selected Interreg specific objective	Selected specific objective	Priority	Justification for selection
			businesses (vocational and entrepreneurial skills)” and “CRUISAIR -Expanding the tourist season to all-year round”.

2. Priorities

Reference: points (d) and (e) of Article 17(3)

2.1. Priority: 1 - Supporting transition to greener and more resilient cross-border regions

Reference: point (d) of Article 17(3)

2.1.1. Specific objective: RSO2.4. Promoting climate change adaptation and disaster risk prevention, resilience taking into account eco-system based approaches

Reference: point (e) of Article 17(3)

Promoting climate change adaptation and disaster risk prevention, resilience taking into account eco-system based approaches

2.1.1.1 Related types of action, and their expected contribution to those specific objectives and to macro-regional strategies and sea-basin strategies, where appropriate

Reference: point (e)(i) of Article 17(3), point (c)(ii) of Article 17(9)

Climate change is a main challenge for the cross-border area and is connected not only with environmental policy but also with all sectors of the economy. The energy sector in particular is one which requires substantial transformation. Greece has set a goal of withdrawing all lignite plants by 2028, with the majority of units - representing over 80% of current installed capacity - being withdrawn by 2023. The goal of complete decarbonization of the country, by 2028, is reflected in the forecasts of Greece's National Energy and Climate Plan, which ensures the stability of the electrical system and the energy security of the country in line with the European Climate Neutrality Strategy. The Just Transition Development Plan of lignite areas concerns directly the eligible Region of Western Macedonia. Supporting the promotion of clean energy infrastructure for regions in transition can contribute in their efforts to achieve climate neutrality. Albania has achieved some level of preparation for tackling climate change. It made progress by ratifying the Kigali Amendment to the Montreal Protocol. In July 2019, Albania adopted a national strategy on climate change for 2019-2030, with objectives for 2050. The strategy focuses on energy, transport, agriculture, land use and forestry, with a 32% renewable energy target. Fighting climate change is connected with reducing greenhouse gas emissions as much as possible. Achieving energy efficiency is necessary for shifting towards a net-zero emissions society and it requires action on all fronts. In the cross-border area climate change is expected to increasingly impact the quality of life and pose challenges in tourism, agriculture and forestry. Taking into consideration that the programme area is extremely prone to natural disasters including wild fires and floods, climate change adaptation and decrease of risk vulnerability is a priority for the cross-border regions. Coastal erosion is a major challenge in the eligible areas that can have a negative impact on local communities and their economies.

The Programme can play an important role in supporting risk prevention efforts to adapt to the impacts of climate change and it can support adaptation measures and disaster resilience at local, regional and cross-border level. The development of joint action plans and tools for risk management in the cross-border area shall be accompanied with initiatives for shared technological means and enhancement of the institutional capacity of public authorities and stakeholders in the implementation of the national strategies on climate change and risk prevention measures, including the upgrade of green and blue infrastructure for supporting adaptation to climate change.

In the framework of the (Interreg VI-A) IPA Greece-Albania Programme, a Strategic Environmental Assessment (SEA) has been carried out, as the objectives of the programme take into account the "do no significant harm" principle. Nature-based solutions shall be promoted for adaptation to climate change taking into account the sustainable development.

Type of actions (non-exhaustive list)

-Joint actions and development of strategies for supporting adaptation to climate change and preventing natural risks.

-Investments in the development of mechanisms and tools for the prevention and management of climate

related risks, e.g. fires, storms, drought.

-Measures for the enhancement of cross-border civil protection policies and disaster management systems and infrastructures.

-Development of prevention measures, including joint management of cross-border forests, rivers, coastal zones.

-Joint raising awareness activities in the field of climate change adaptation and mitigation, as well as emergency preparedness.

-Joint knowledge development and planning, including joint monitoring, forecasts, alignment of climate change adaptation strategies.

-Increasing institutional and operational capacity of local communities for supporting the prevention and management of climate change related risks.

-Enhancing preparedness, including cross-border early warning systems, interoperability of civil protection units, facilitation of sharing of assets for management of climate related risks, e.g. fires, floods.

-Pilot actions in cross-border communities for monitoring and management of climate change related risks, including coordination of flood risk management practices in shared river basins.

-Upgrade of green and blue infrastructure for adaptation to climate change (efficient use of scarce water resources, restoration of flood defenses, promotion of forestry practices less vulnerable to storms and fires etc.).

Type of actions contributing to the EUSAIR

The type of actions supported by specific objective 2.4 “Promoting climate change adaptation, risk prevention and disaster resilience” can contribute to Pillar III “Environmental Quality” of the EUSAIR. Actions implemented under this specific objective can be complementary to the EUSAIR flagship for “Promotion of sustainable growth of the Adriatic-Ionian Region by implementing Integrated Coastal Zone Management (ICZM) and Maritime Spatial Planning (MSP) also to contribute to Common Regional Framework (CRF) on ICZM of Barcelona convention and the monitoring and management of marine protected area” supporting climate change adaptation and risk prevention.

2.1.1.1b. Definition of a single beneficiary or a limited list of beneficiaries and the granting procedure

Reference: point (c)(i) of Article 17(9)

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2.1.1.2. Indicators

Reference: point (e)(ii) of Article 17(3), point (c)(iii) of Article 17(9)

Table 2 - Output indicators

Priority	Specific objective	ID	Indicator	Measurement unit	Milestone (2024)	Target (2029)
1	RSO2.4	RCO83	Strategies and action plans jointly developed	strategy/action plan	0	4
1	RSO2.4	RCO84	Pilot actions developed jointly and implemented in projects	pilot actions	0	3

Table 3 - Result indicators

Priority	Specific objective	ID	Indicator	Measurement unit	Baseline	Reference year	Target (2029)	Source of data	Comments
1	RSO2.4	RCR79	Joint strategies and action plans taken up by organisations	joint strategy/action plan	0.00	2021	4.00	Supported projects	

2.1.1.3. Main target groups

Reference: point (e)(iii) of Article 17(3), point (c)(iv) of Article 17(9)

The main target groups of specific objective 2.4 “Promoting climate change adaptation and disaster risk prevention, resilience taking into account eco-system based approaches” are:

- The local population and the local communities of the cross-border eligible area.
- National, regional and local authorities of the cross-border eligible area.
- Public and private authorities impacted by climate change adaptation, risk prevention and disaster resilience.
- Environmental educators, environmental organisations, researchers and scientists.

2.1.1.4. Indication of the specific territories targeted, including the planned use of ITI, CLLD or other territorial tools

Reference: Article point (e)(iv) of 17(3)

The entire programme area is targeted

2.1.1.5. Planned use of financial instruments

Reference: point (e)(v) of Article 17(3)

The form of support used by the Programme includes grants because of the nature of the operations and the relatively small scale does not really allows the efficient deployment of financial instruments.

2.1.1.6. Indicative breakdown of the EU programme resources by type of intervention

Reference: point (e)(vi) of Article 17(3), point (c)(v) of Article 17(9)

Table 4 - Dimension 1 – intervention field

Priority	Specific objective	Fund	Code	Amount (EUR)
1	RSO2.4	IPA III	058. Adaptation to climate change measures and prevention and management of climate related risks: floods and landslides (including awareness raising, civil protection and disaster management systems, infrastructures and ecosystem based approaches)	799,499.70
1	RSO2.4	IPA III	059. Adaptation to climate change measures and prevention and management of climate related risks: fires (including awareness raising, civil protection and disaster management systems, infrastructures and ecosystem based approaches)	799,499.70
1	RSO2.4	IPA III	060. Adaptation to climate change measures and prevention and management of climate related risks: others, e.g. storms and drought (including awareness raising, civil protection and disaster management systems, infrastructures and ecosystem based approaches)	799,499.70

Table 5 - Dimension 2 – form of financing

Priority	Specific objective	Fund	Code	Amount (EUR)
1	RSO2.4	IPA III	01. Grant	2,398,499.10

Table 6 - Dimension 3 – territorial delivery mechanism and territorial focus

Priority	Specific objective	Fund	Code	Amount (EUR)
1	RSO2.4	IPA III	33. Other approaches - No territorial targeting	2,398,499.10

2.1.1. Specific objective: RSO2.5. Promoting access to water and sustainable water management

Reference: point (e) of Article 17(3)

Promoting access to water and sustainable water management

2.1.1.1 Related types of action, and their expected contribution to those specific objectives and to macro-regional strategies and sea-basin strategies, where appropriate

Reference: point (e)(i) of Article 17(3), point (c)(ii) of Article 17(9)

Water management is still a concern for the cross-border area. Effective utilization of water resources and water quality are a common need for cross-border regions. For rural areas in Albania there is an increased need for investments in water supply and sewerage as there is a weak service coverage offered to citizens. Ensuring water quality and prevention of water pollution from human activity is a common challenge for the programme area. The development of studies and exchange of know-how through cooperation can support the implementation of wastewater treatment plants in order to prevent the disposal of wastewater directly into rivers or the sea. Operations under this specific objective take into consideration the “do not significant harm” principle and will be monitored throughout their implementation for their compliance with this principle.

Water redistribution, storage and saving and a sound demand side management are some of the main priorities for water policy in Greece. Additional pressures in water quality arise from agricultural activity, while surface run-offs and wastewater discharges create intense pressures on the quality of water resources. Operations for the prevention and improvement of water quality are considered important for the programme area. Climate change is another factor that can impact the water cycle, affecting the most vulnerable regions, including the coastal areas and islands. Investments for enhancing water sustainability and responsible use of water resources can address the challenges that arise from increased water demand, especially during the summer season when agricultural activity and tourism create additional pressure on local communities. Avoiding negative environmental impacts and ensuring climate proofing and “energy efficiency first” shall be taken into account for operations supported under this specific objective with a view to promoting sustainable development.

Type of actions (non-exhaustive list)

-Development of joint solutions in cross-border rural areas, as well as the Ionian Islands for the improvement of water management and efficient water utilities coverage for local communities.

-Foster an efficient use of water resources by citizens, throughout the whole water cycle by promoting water saving and reuse, water-efficient technologies in all sectors, as well as by supporting ecosystem-based measures (desalination infrastructure are not foreseen under this specific objective).

-Enhanced addressing of water quantity issues especially in areas dealing with water scarcity (insular complex of Ionian Islands, rural areas with inadequate water supply coverage), e.g. by supporting hazards prevention and climate-change adaptation measures based on an ecosystem restoration approach in a cross-border context.

-Introduction of smart technologies to increase resource efficiency in the water sector and development of cross-border monitoring systems for controlling water supply networks.

- Development of joint innovative methodologies and tools for quality monitoring of drinking water and risk prevention in cross-border area (including exchange of know-how and technology).
- Design and implement coherent and tailored-made wastewater management plans for improving wastewater treatment in cross-border regions.
- Development of cross-border studies and exchange of know-how and technology for wastewater management plants.
- Development of joint solutions for water reuse and dealing with water scarcity in the cross-border regions and prevention of water pollution.
- Pilot actions on wastewater treatment systems based on environmentally friendly processes.
- Integrating climate change aspects into water management strategies on local, regional and cross-border level.
- Development of solutions for promoting waste-water re-use for irrigation and measures to increase the water retention capacity of soils and safe water reuse, addressing the challenges caused in sharing of water resources due to climate change.

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Type of actions contributing to the EUSAIR

The type of actions supported by specific objective 2.5 “Promoting access to water and sustainable water” can contribute to Pillar III “Environmental Quality” of the EUSAIR. Actions implemented under this specific objective can be complementary to the EUSAIR flagship for “Promotion of sustainable growth of the Adriatic-Ionian Region by implementing Integrated Coastal Zone Management (ICZM) and Maritime Spatial Planning (MSP) also to contribute to Common Regional Framework (CRF) on ICZM of Barcelona convention and the monitoring and management of marine protected area” by implementing actions for improving water quality and reducing water pollution.

2.1.1.1b. Definition of a single beneficiary or a limited list of beneficiaries and the granting procedure

Reference: point (c)(i) of Article 17(9)

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2.1.1.2. Indicators

Reference: point (e)(ii) of Article 17(3), point (c)(iii) of Article 17(9)

Table 2 - Output indicators

Priority	Specific objective	ID	Indicator	Measurement unit	Milestone (2024)	Target (2029)
1	RSO2.5	RCO116	Jointly developed solutions	solutions	0	3
1	RSO2.5	RCO84	Pilot actions developed jointly and implemented in projects	pilot actions	0	3

Table 3 - Result indicators

Priority	Specific objective	ID	Indicator	Measurement unit	Baseline	Reference year	Target (2029)	Source of data	Comments
1	RSO2.5	RCR104	Solutions taken up or up-scaled by organisations	solutions	0.00	2021	2.00	MA monitoring system / Survey	

2.1.1.3. Main target groups

Reference: point (e)(iii) of Article 17(3), point (c)(iv) of Article 17(9)

The main target groups of specific objective 2.5: “Promoting access to water and sustainable water management” are:

- The local population and the local communities of the cross-border eligible area.
- National, regional and local authorities of the cross-border eligible area.
- Public and private organizations involved in public water supply and management.

2.1.1.4. Indication of the specific territories targeted, including the planned use of ITI, CLLD or other territorial tools

Reference: Article point (e)(iv) of 17(3)

The entire programme area is targeted

2.1.1.5. Planned use of financial instruments

Reference: point (e)(v) of Article 17(3)

The form of support used by the Programme includes grants because of the nature of the operations and the relatively small scale does not really allows the efficient deployment of financial instruments.

2.1.1.6. Indicative breakdown of the EU programme resources by type of intervention

Reference: point (e)(vi) of Article 17(3), point (c)(v) of Article 17(9)

Table 4 - Dimension 1 – intervention field

Priority	Specific objective	Fund	Code	Amount (EUR)
1	RSO2.5	IPA III	062. Provision of water for human consumption (extraction, treatment, storage and distribution infrastructure, efficiency measures, drinking water supply)	1,199,250.00
1	RSO2.5	IPA III	065. Waste water collection and treatment	1,199,250.00

Table 5 - Dimension 2 – form of financing

Priority	Specific objective	Fund	Code	Amount (EUR)
1	RSO2.5	IPA III	01. Grant	2,398,500.00

Table 6 - Dimension 3 – territorial delivery mechanism and territorial focus

Priority	Specific objective	Fund	Code	Amount (EUR)
1	RSO2.5	IPA III	33. Other approaches - No territorial targeting	2,398,500.00

2.1.1. Specific objective: RSO2.6. Promoting the transition to a circular and resource efficient economy

Reference: point (e) of Article 17(3)

Promoting the transition to a circular and resource efficient economy

2.1.1.1 Related types of action, and their expected contribution to those specific objectives and to macro-regional strategies and sea-basin strategies, where appropriate

Reference: point (e)(i) of Article 17(3), point (c)(ii) of Article 17(9)

The concept of circular economy is still at an early stage for the cross-border regions. However, both Albania and Greece have incorporated in their national strategies the objectives in order to be in line with the EU Circular Economy approach. Aim of the specific objective is to support the effort of cross-border regions for more efficient use of resources, focusing on recovery, more recycling and waste separation. Investments in the development of infrastructure and solutions for the support of separate waste collection and management and reuse. The actions envisioned to be implemented under this specific objective are expected to introduce climate-friendly, resource-efficient and economically viable waste management. Investments in circular economy in the cross-border regions are expected to contribute in the sustainable growth and the creation of new job positions, supporting especially regions in economic transitions such as the Region of Western Macedonia. Aim of the investments under this specific objective shall be the transformation of the industrial ecosystems towards more sustainable practices, as well as building on participatory processes involving relevant communities in the sense of providing local solutions to waste management challenges in line with the New European Bauhaus, providing solutions for waste prevention and preparation for reuse.

The development of concrete solutions in circular economy in the cross-border area could reduce pressure on ecosystems by minimizing resource extraction and waste. Two strategic project ideas are expected to be supported under this specific objective. The “Circular Economy Park” project aims at investing in the development of infrastructure for the installation of waste treatment and utilization units, including the creation of a circular innovation centre which envisages the creation of a multi-space (hub) that will connect innovation, education and entrepreneurship, supporting research, education and technological support of high technology & quality and will also function as an incubator for innovative enterprises in the field of circular economy. The “Circular Economy Park” project idea can also offer synergies and present complementarities with investments supported in the framework of the Just Transition Development Plan for the Region of Western Macedonia. Synergies can particularly be achieved with and part of the investment can be financed by the new (Interreg VI-A) IPA Greece North Macedonia. The project idea is clearly oriented towards circular economy purposes and does not include investments for increasing the capacity of facilities for the treatment of residual waste. The second strategic project idea “Introducing digital tools for monitoring pollution in urban areas” aims at the development and testing of digital tools for monitoring municipal solid waste, contributing to the reducing of pollution.

Operations under this specific objective take into consideration the “do not significant harm” principle. Operations under this S.O. will be monitored throughout their implementation for their compliance with the “do no significant harm” principle. Lifecycle costing criteria and measures climate proofing and “energy efficiency first principle” shall be taken into account with a view to promoting sustainable development.

Type of actions (non-exhaustive list)

- Joint knowledge development and planning of circular economy solutions
- Building cross-border cooperation networks aimed at waste re-use.

- Joint knowledge development and planning of circular economy solutions and joint awareness-raising campaigns at large geographical scale for reducing waste production and promoting recycling and reuse.
- Investment in the development and testing of solutions for the separate sorting, storage and treatment of hazardous waste and bio-waste.
- Development of circular economy hubs for creating new regional value chains, connecting relevant actors.
- Support the promotion of the use of recycled materials as raw materials compliant with the efficiency criteria, compliant with climate change adaptation.

2.1.1.1b. Definition of a single beneficiary or a limited list of beneficiaries and the granting procedure

Reference: point (c)(i) of Article 17(9)

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2.1.1.2. Indicators

Reference: point (e)(ii) of Article 17(3), point (c)(iii) of Article 17(9)

Table 2 - Output indicators

Priority	Specific objective	ID	Indicator	Measurement unit	Milestone (2024)	Target (2029)
1	RSO2.6	RCO84	Pilot actions developed jointly and implemented in projects	pilot actions	0	4
1	RSO2.6	RCO116	Jointly developed solutions	solutions	0	4

Table 3 - Result indicators

Priority	Specific objective	ID	Indicator	Measurement unit	Baseline	Reference year	Target (2029)	Source of data	Comments
1	RSO2.6	RCR104	Solutions taken up or up-scaled by organisations	solutions	0.00	2021	2.00	MA monitoring system / Survey	

2.1.1.3. Main target groups

Reference: point (e)(iii) of Article 17(3), point (c)(iv) of Article 17(9)

The main target groups of specific objective 2.6: “Promoting the transition to a circular and resource efficient economy” are:

- The local population and the local communities of the cross-border eligible area.
- National, regional and local authorities of the cross-border eligible area.
- Organizations involved in waste sorting, storage and treatment in the cross-border area.

2.1.1.4. Indication of the specific territories targeted, including the planned use of ITI, CLLD or other territorial tools

Reference: Article point (e)(iv) of 17(3)

The entire programme area is targeted

2.1.1.5. Planned use of financial instruments

Reference: point (e)(v) of Article 17(3)

The form of support used by the Programme includes grants because of the nature of the operations and the relatively small scale does not really allows the efficient deployment of financial instruments.

2.1.1.6. Indicative breakdown of the EU programme resources by type of intervention

Reference: point (e)(vi) of Article 17(3), point (c)(v) of Article 17(9)

Table 4 - Dimension 1 – intervention field

Priority	Specific objective	Fund	Code	Amount (EUR)
1	RSO2.6	IPA III	069. Commercial, industrial waste management: prevention, minimisation, sorting, reuse, recycling measures	1,440,000.00
1	RSO2.6	IPA III	067. Household waste management: prevention, minimisation, sorting, reuse, recycling measures	2,049,750.00

Table 5 - Dimension 2 – form of financing

Priority	Specific objective	Fund	Code	Amount (EUR)
1	RSO2.6	IPA III	01. Grant	3,489,750.00

Table 6 - Dimension 3 – territorial delivery mechanism and territorial focus

Priority	Specific objective	Fund	Code	Amount (EUR)
1	RSO2.6	IPA III	33. Other approaches - No territorial targeting	3,489,750.00

2.1.1. Specific objective: RSO2.7. Enhancing protection and preservation of nature, biodiversity and green infrastructure, including in urban areas, and reducing all forms of pollution

Reference: point (e) of Article 17(3)

Enhancing protection and preservation of nature, biodiversity and green infrastructure, including in urban areas, and reducing all forms of pollution

2.1.1.1 Related types of action, and their expected contribution to those specific objectives and to macro-regional strategies and sea-basin strategies, where appropriate

Reference: point (e)(i) of Article 17(3), point (c)(ii) of Article 17(9)

The programme area is characterized by rich natural resources and biodiversity, including an important number of protected areas. Cross-border shared ecosystems, especially around the Prespa Lakes (Great Prespa Lake and Small Prespa Lake) and river Aoös (Vjosa) are a field of cooperation in the Programme Area for the enhancement of their environmental and touristic value. Special attention needs to be paid in the management and protection of designated areas and the biodiversity of the cross-border regions in line with the EU objectives for a greener Europe. The operations supported under this specific objective take into consideration the “do no significant harm” principle, as well as the promotion of sustainable development by avoiding negative environmental impacts. Operations under this S.O. will be monitored throughout their implementation for their compliance with the “do no significant harm” principle.

Pollution remains an important challenge for the cross-border area. In the Region of Fier, the area of Mallakastra suffers from high level of pollution as a result of the exploitation of the oilfield. The pollution from the extractive and processing industry of hydrocarbons are affecting the air and soils. There are needed measures to be taken regarding the improvement of air quality through the increase of the green areas and green infrastructures, and measures to be taken for protecting the environment. Transition of the Region of Western Macedonia in Greece from the lignite activity creates a need to invest in measures for rehabilitation and promotion of clean energy in the affected areas.

Renewable energy resources and energy efficiency measures can be promoted through the promotion of green infrastructure in urban areas of the cross-border regions, contributing to the reduction of CO2 emissions. Green infrastructure is a concept that can support rehabilitation activities for cities and areas in transition from industrial activities by investing in parks, green streets and smart conservation measures. Green infrastructure can be multifunctional, enabling different types of benefits and services for local communities including measures for the protection of biodiversity, accessibility in nature, recreation and social interaction, reducing flood risks and improving despoiled landscapes. These types of operations shall aim to bring individuals and communities closer to nature, contribute to regenerate natural ecosystems and prevent loss of biodiversity in line with the New European Bauhaus.

Cross-border cooperation governance in the field of environmental protection is another important theme expected to be addressed by this specific objective. The goal is to support public authorities and stakeholders to work on common understanding of cross-border environmental issues. Actions for improving cross-border cooperation governance may include the development of joint solutions for monitoring and collecting data on cross-border shared biodiversity. Such initiatives shall be complemented by actions for the development of the institutional capacity of public and environmental authorities, as well as NGOs in supporting the exploitation of common natural heritage and improving cross-border coordination for the prevention of risks and monitoring of threats on natural habitats.

Type of actions (indicative)

- Investments for the protection and enhancement of natural capital, ecosystems and biodiversity.
- Measures for monitoring of biodiversity, genetic sources and protected ecosystems.
- Promotion of the use of technologies for environmental protection and preservation.
- Actions for the restoration, protection and efficient management of natural protected areas, with a focus on endangered species.
- Support data on natural capital preservation (natural parks, protected and designated areas, etc.)
- Joint actions for the protection of nature and biodiversity (protection of wetlands, mountainous natural reserves, rivers, etc.)
- Develop the capacity of environmental authorities and NGO in the joint management of natural sites and protection of cross-border ecosystems.
- Investments for the promotion of green infrastructure mainly in urban areas (green streets, green walls and roofs, accessibility in nature, reducing flood risks and storm-water management, cisterns and rain barrels, etc.) and the rehabilitation of areas in industrial transition.
- Development of measures and pilot actions for tackling and prevention of pollution on the natural environment, protection of cross-border shared natural capital and biodiversity.
- Pilot actions for testing possible solutions in collecting and monitoring cross-border biodiversity data and threats for natural resources.
- Investments for improving air quality in urban areas, control and monitoring of air pollution (e.g. development of solutions for monitoring air pollution).
- Measures to maintain or increase the resilience of forest and wetland ecosystems to disturbances and pressures, including those caused by climate change (e.g., by increasing the connectivity between habitats, preventing unsustainable use, and protecting known refugia for species at the edge of their climatic range).
- Promotion of practices and solutions for eliminating subsidies that support local and national activities harmful to biodiversity, such as deforestation, over-fertilization and over-fishing.
- Investments in the restoration of carbon- and species-rich ecosystems, thus enhancing resilience of biodiversity in the face of climate change, with many other benefits such as flood regulation, coastal protection, enhanced water quality, reduced soil erosion.

Specific Objective 2.7 is expected to support one project idea (subject to be finalized) of strategic importance in the field of green infrastructure, improvement of air quality and monitoring of pollution. “Ai SMART cities” aims at introducing intelligent solutions for supporting control and reducing of air pollution in the cross-border area (SMART Mobility -Intelligent Traffic Management, Intelligent Parking, SMART environment -Intelligent Urban Waste Management, Air Quality Monitoring, Intelligent Public Lighting). Such actions could contribute significantly to the indicators of S.O.2.7, by offering to the population of the cross-border area access to new and improved green infrastructure and solutions in protection of the environment, supporting subsequently the reduction of air pollution in the cross-border regions.

Type of actions contributing to the EUSAIR

Investments under this specific objective can contribute to Pillar III of the “Environmental Quality” of the EUSAIR and particularly in the flagship for:

- “Protection and enhancement of natural terrestrial habitats and ecosystems”, by implementing actions aiming the improved management and monitoring of

natural terrestrial habitats and ecosystems, particularly in cross-border protected areas and Natura 2000 areas.

-“Development and implementation of Adriatic-Ionian sub/regional oil spill contingency plan”, by implementing actions for improving the capability of reaction at possible accidents and better prevention of risks for possible accidents, as well as actions for raising awareness on pollution prevention.

2.1.1.1b. Definition of a single beneficiary or a limited list of beneficiaries and the granting procedure

Reference: point (c)(i) of Article 17(9)

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2.1.1.2. Indicators

Reference: point (e)(ii) of Article 17(3), point (c)(iii) of Article 17(9)

Table 2 - Output indicators

Priority	Specific objective	ID	Indicator	Measurement unit	Milestone (2024)	Target (2029)
1	RSO2.7	RCO116	Jointly developed solutions	solutions	1	5
1	RSO2.7	RCO84	Pilot actions developed jointly and implemented in projects	pilot actions	1	5
1	RSO2.7	RCO36	Green infrastructure supported for other purposes than adaptation to climate change	hectares	0	2

Table 3 - Result indicators

Priority	Specific objective	ID	Indicator	Measurement unit	Baseline	Reference year	Target (2029)	Source of data	Comments
1	RSO2.7	RCR104	Solutions taken up or up-scaled by organisations	solutions	0.00	2021	2.00	MA monitoring system / Survey	
1	RSO2.7	RCR95	Population having access to new or improved green infrastructure	persons	0.00	2021	5,784.00	Upon completion of output in the supported project	

2.1.1.3. Main target groups

Reference: point (e)(iii) of Article 17(3), point (c)(iv) of Article 17(9)

The main target groups of specific objective 2.7 “Enhancing protection and preservation of nature, biodiversity and green infrastructure, including in urban areas, and reducing all forms of pollution” are:

- The local population and the local communities of the cross-border eligible area.
- Environmental management and protection organizations, environmental educators.
- Scientists and researchers.
- National, regional and local authorities of the cross-border eligible area.

2.1.1.4. Indication of the specific territories targeted, including the planned use of ITI, CLLD or other territorial tools

Reference: Article point (e)(iv) of 17(3)

The entire programme area is targeted

2.1.1.5. Planned use of financial instruments

Reference: point (e)(v) of Article 17(3)

The form of support used by the Programme includes grants because of the nature of the operations and the relatively small scale does not really allows the efficient deployment of financial instruments.

2.1.1.6. Indicative breakdown of the EU programme resources by type of intervention

Reference: point (e)(vi) of Article 17(3), point (c)(v) of Article 17(9)

Table 4 - Dimension 1 – intervention field

Priority	Specific objective	Fund	Code	Amount (EUR)
1	RSO2.7	IPA III	077. Air quality and noise reduction measures	1,440,000.00
1	RSO2.7	IPA III	079. Nature and biodiversity protection, natural heritage and resources, green and blue infrastructure	2,049,750.90

Table 5 - Dimension 2 – form of financing

Priority	Specific objective	Fund	Code	Amount (EUR)
1	RSO2.7	IPA III	01. Grant	3,489,750.90

Table 6 - Dimension 3 – territorial delivery mechanism and territorial focus

Priority	Specific objective	Fund	Code	Amount (EUR)
1	RSO2.7	IPA III	33. Other approaches - No territorial targeting	3,489,750.90

2.1. Priority: 2 - Improving accessibility in the cross-border area

Reference: point (d) of Article 17(3)

2.1.1. Specific objective: RSO3.2. Developing and enhancing sustainable, climate resilient, intelligent and intermodal national, regional and local mobility, including improved access to TEN-T and cross-border mobility

Reference: point (e) of Article 17(3)

Developing and enhancing sustainable, climate resilient, intelligent and intermodal national, regional and local mobility, including improved access to TEN-T and cross-border mobility

2.1.1.1 Related types of action, and their expected contribution to those specific objectives and to macro-regional strategies and sea-basin strategies, where appropriate

Reference: point (e)(i) of Article 17(3), point (c)(ii) of Article 17(9)

The cross-border area is covered by maritime transport and road networks and it presents a low quality and density of infrastructure, while there is no optimized system of connections between the available modes of transportation. Accessibility is mainly provided by the regional road network, which follows the topography of river valleys and mountain passes, hence leaving smaller inner regions relatively isolated. The availability of the road network is also problematic with certain connections closing on a seasonal basis, due to weather conditions.

Investments for the improvement of road networks, focusing on a better road connectivity and road safety measures are necessary for overcoming significant gaps between rural and urban areas. Improvement of transportation is essential for inhabitants of cross-border remoted and sparsely populated areas, as it can improve quality of life, facilitating also accessibility to health services especially for vulnerable social groups. Investments for the improvement of quality connection across the borders of Greece and Albania (Ioannina-Kakavia and Igoumenitsa-Sagiada-Mavromati) shall be combined with investments for the improvement of cross-border cooperation and the enhancement of the institutional capacity of public authorities and stakeholders in the transport sector.

Currently multimodality between the available transport means of the cross-border area (ferry, rail, airport, intercity bus and urban transport) is limited. The cross-border area includes important international gates such as the ports of Corfu and Igoumenitsa in Greece and the ports of Vlorë and Saranda in Albania, as well as international airports. Reconstruction of the road network connection and strengthening of the road safety measures in the cross-border area could contribute in the improvement of accessibility to and from the prominent entrance gates of both countries, paving also the path for an enhanced multimodality promotion. During the 2014-2020 programming period the development of a strategic investment plan for the rail connection of the two countries, through the construction of the railway section “Pogradec -Krystallopigi/Ieropigi”, of a total length of approximately 130 km in both Greek and Albanian territory was supported. Reconstruction of rural and suburban roads in the surrounding cross-border area of the strategic investment plan will enhance the efforts for improving cross-border connection, leading to upgraded transport infrastructure for local communities. .

Operations under this specific objective take into consideration the “do not significant harm” principle. Operations will be monitored throughout their implementation for their compliance with the “do no significant harm” principle.

Type of actions (non-exhaustive list)

- Reconstruction of rural and suburban roads in the cross-border area (rebuilding, resurfacing, realignment etc.).
- Investments in road safety measures in cross-border urban and rural networks, for improving cross-border mobility and reducing accidents rates.
- Measures to manage safety risks created in the cross-border road network due to weather conditions and the special geomorphological characteristics of the cross-border area
- Investments for the modernization of the road network in the cross-border area, with an emphasis on reduction of black spots
- Actions for realignment of urban and rural roads in the cross-border area, with the aim to improve accessibility in remoted or mountainous areas.
- Investments in the implementation of climate proofed standards in road reconstruction in order to increase the resilience of cross-border road transport infrastructure to weather extremes and climate change (adjustment of road pavements, adaptation of road drainage systems as response to high temperatures or extreme rainfall events that affect road connectivity in the cross-border area).
- Investments in road refurbishment and road safety will also include the realization of cycling/walking paths to safeguard the safety of weak users (i.e. along the E86, the E853, on the border crossing the Sarantaporos river, refurbishments will take into consideration the sustainable mobility for ensuring the safety of possible commuters by (e)bike).

Type of actions contributing to the EUSAIR

Actions of specific objective 3.2 “Developing and enhancing sustainable, climate resilient, intelligent and intermodal national, regional and local mobility, including improved access to TEN-T and cross-border mobility” can contribute to Pillar II “Connecting the Region” of the EUSAIR. Investments for the improvement of cross-border connectivity and mobility can contribute to the EUSAIR flagship of the “Adriatic-Ionian Multi-modal corridors”, supporting the identification of multimodal corridors alongside the TEN-T network..

2.1.1.1b. Definition of a single beneficiary or a limited list of beneficiaries and the granting procedure

Reference: point (c)(i) of Article 17(9)

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2.1.1.2. Indicators

Reference: point (e)(ii) of Article 17(3), point (c)(iii) of Article 17(9)

Table 2 - Output indicators

Priority	Specific objective	ID	Indicator	Measurement unit	Milestone (2024)	Target (2029)
2	RSO3.2	RCO46	Length of roads reconstructed or modernised - non-TENT	km	2	10.5

Table 3 - Result indicators

Priority	Specific objective	ID	Indicator	Measurement unit	Baseline	Reference year	Target (2029)	Source of data	Comments
2	RSO3.2	RCR56	Time savings due to improved road infrastructures	man-days/year	0.00	2021	306.60	Supported projects	

2.1.1.3. Main target groups

Reference: point (e)(iii) of Article 17(3), point (c)(iv) of Article 17(9)

The main target groups of specific objective 3.2 “Developing and enhancing sustainable, climate resilient, intelligent and intermodal national, regional and local mobility, including improved access to TEN-T and cross-border mobility” are:

- The local population and the local communities of the cross-border eligible area.
- Commuters and visitors of the eligible cross-border area.
- Enterprises transporting passengers/freight

2.1.1.4. Indication of the specific territories targeted, including the planned use of ITI, CLLD or other territorial tools

Reference: Article point (e)(iv) of 17(3)

The entire programme area is targeted

2.1.1.5. Planned use of financial instruments

Reference: point (e)(v) of Article 17(3)

The form of support used by the Programme includes grants because of the nature of the operations and the relatively small scale does not really allows the efficient deployment of financial instruments.

2.1.1.6. Indicative breakdown of the EU programme resources by type of intervention

Reference: point (e)(vi) of Article 17(3), point (c)(v) of Article 17(9)

Table 4 - Dimension 1 – intervention field

Priority	Specific objective	Fund	Code	Amount (EUR)
2	RSO3.2	IPA III	093. Other reconstructed or modernised roads (motorway, national, regional or local)	2,758,500.00

Table 5 - Dimension 2 – form of financing

Priority	Specific objective	Fund	Code	Amount (EUR)
2	RSO3.2	IPA III	01. Grant	2,758,500.00

Table 6 - Dimension 3 – territorial delivery mechanism and territorial focus

Priority	Specific objective	Fund	Code	Amount (EUR)
2	RSO3.2	IPA III	33. Other approaches - No territorial targeting	2,758,500.00

2.1. Priority: 3 - Fostering sustainable cross-border economic and social development

Reference: point (d) of Article 17(3)

2.1.1. Specific objective: RSO4.5. Ensuring equal access to health care and fostering resilience of health systems, including primary care, and promoting the transition from institutional to family- and community-based care

Reference: point (e) of Article 17(3)

Ensuring equal access to health care and fostering resilience of health systems, including primary care, and promoting the transition from institutional to family and community-based care

2.1.1.1 Related types of action, and their expected contribution to those specific objectives and to macro-regional strategies and sea-basin strategies, where appropriate

Reference: point (e)(i) of Article 17(3), point (c)(ii) of Article 17(9)

Ensuring equal access to health care and improving the provided services is considered an important need in the programme area. Accessibility to adequate health care services and resources has been a main concern for the population of the cross-border area, especially for those living in remote, mountainous and rural areas. An important gap between the eligible areas of Albania and Greece is being noted, in terms of access to health care services (number of health care facilities provided, access to specialized doctors and nursing staff, quality of provided health care services and health care equipment).. The number of positions for doctors in primary health centers of Albania is in accordance with the population served. For small rural areas this means that access to specialized doctors is limited, waiting time for appointments with the local general practitioners are longer, while distances and conditions of road and public transport may influence the accessibility to primary health care services. A total of ten public district hospitals operates in the eligible Albanian and five regional hospitals. However, the limited specialized health departments provided in local and regional public hospitals and the medical equipment, in many cases are not enough to meet the needs of the population or cannot respond to the treatment of certain diseases, offering the required medical care to patients. As a result, an important number of Albanian inhabitants choose to cross the border in order to be served by the hospital institutions in the Greek cross-border regions, in which the operation of the University Hospital of Ioannina is of significant importance. Greece on the other hand with its many islands and remote regions, has an established eHealth (telemedicine) programme. However, Greece still presents the second highest rate of unmet needs for medical care in the EU, particularly for low-income groups. Furthermore, imbalances in the availability of health care affect access in rural areas.

Better coordination among organizations and authorities in the cross-border area could contribute in overcoming linguistic and legal barriers in order to ensure that citizens of the cross-border regions are provided with access to efficient health care services. Shifting focus from hospitals to the development of community-based services and person-centered approaches, could contribute in improving accessibility to health care, especially for the population of remote areas and vulnerable groups (the elderly, low-income groups, people with disabilities, roma, etc.) in line with the deinstitutionalization principles. Investment for the enhancement of telemedicine with the use of high-tech equipment and training in the use of digital services could improve accessibility especially for vulnerable groups, as well as for the population of remote areas that have to face long distances from health services or lack of transportation. Supporting health care facilities with new and improved medical equipment, as well as promotion of joint training for health care professionals and authorities in the cross-border area and creation of cooperation networks could contribute in the development of community-based care models.

The COVID-19 pandemic has highlighted the importance of a strong and efficient health care system, as well as the interdependency that the cross-border

area presents in this field. Crossing the borders for ensuring access to improved and efficient health care is very common for citizens of the border regions. The health crisis has pointed out the inefficiencies and missing links that need to be addressed in order to ensure better management and preparedness against health threats and ensure better living conditions for the local population.

All activities supported under this specific objective will be evaluated for their commitment to respect gender equality, non-discrimination and accessibility principles in accordance to article 9 of the CPR. In line with the Charter of Fundamental Rights and the European Pillar of Social Rights and Strategy for the Rights of Persons with Disabilities 2021-2030, the involvement and participation of representatives of national organizations supporting the rights of persons with disabilities and organizations for the promotion of social inclusion was ensured during the programming procedures. The involvement of independent fundamental rights bodies and human rights organizations will be encouraged during the implementation, monitoring and evaluation of investments in health care services in order to ensure compliance with gender equality, non-discrimination and accessibility principles and respect of human rights. Synergies and complementarities are expected to be pursued by supported investments with projects supported by other funding resources and programmes, with a view to prevent overlapping of actions and double founding.

Type of actions (non-exhaustive list)

-Implementation of joint measures and tools (soft actions), including development of cooperation networks for improving accessibility and effectiveness of healthcare and long-term social care services across borders with a focus on vulnerable groups (elderly persons, people with disabilities, population of remote areas, roma, etc.).

-Support of the digitalization in healthcare, including the supply of new and improved equipment for supporting telemedicine services, with a focus on remote and sparsely populated communities of the cross-border area. Efforts towards digitalization of health care services will be based in exchange of know-how and joint training in order to ensure cross-border dimension and impact.

-Investments in modernization and supply of medical equipment of healthcare facilities (including laboratories) with a focus on remote and sparsely populated areas of the cross-border regions, considering also the gaps between the eligible regions of Albania and Greece in access to upgraded health care services and equipment.

-Development of information platforms, databases and tools for identifying missing links in health care services of the cross-border area, putting emphasis of the development and improvement of community-based services.

-Elaboration of joint working procedures and joint strategies for tackling cross-border medical threats, for mapping health care services and needs in the cross-border area and promotion of deinstitutionalisation

-Know-how exchange and capacity building activities (joint trainings, conferences, workshops) in the fields of health promotion and prevention, social inclusion and reducing of health inequalities, development of community-based health care models.

2.1.1.1b. Definition of a single beneficiary or a limited list of beneficiaries and the granting procedure

Reference: point (c)(i) of Article 17(9)

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2.1.1.2. Indicators

Reference: point (e)(ii) of Article 17(3), point (c)(iii) of Article 17(9)

Table 2 - Output indicators

Priority	Specific objective	ID	Indicator	Measurement unit	Milestone (2024)	Target (2029)
3	RSO4.5	RCO84	Pilot actions developed jointly and implemented in projects	pilot actions	0	3
3	RSO4.5	RCO87	Organisations cooperating across borders	organisations	0	15

Table 3 - Result indicators

Priority	Specific objective	ID	Indicator	Measurement unit	Baseline	Reference year	Target (2029)	Source of data	Comments
3	RSO4.5	RCR84	Organisations cooperating across borders after project completion	organisations	0.00	2021	7.00	MA monitoring system/ Survey	

2.1.1.3. Main target groups

Reference: point (e)(iii) of Article 17(3), point (c)(iv) of Article 17(9)

The main target groups of specific objectives 4.5- Ensuring equal access to health care and fostering resilience of health systems, including primary care, and promoting the transition from institutional to family and community-based care are:

- The local population and the local communities of the cross-border eligible area.
- Public authorities and private entities dealing with healthcare and long-term care services.
- Hospitals, clinics and other healthcare and long-term care facilities.
- Scientists and researchers in the field of health care.

2.1.1.4. Indication of the specific territories targeted, including the planned use of ITI, CLLD or other territorial tools

Reference: Article point (e)(iv) of 17(3)

The entire programme area is targeted

2.1.1.5. Planned use of financial instruments

Reference: point (e)(v) of Article 17(3)

The form of support used by the Programme includes grants because of the nature of the operations and the relatively small scale does not really allows the efficient deployment of financial instruments.

2.1.1.6. Indicative breakdown of the EU programme resources by type of intervention

Reference: point (e)(vi) of Article 17(3), point (c)(v) of Article 17(9)

Table 4 - Dimension 1 – intervention field

Priority	Specific objective	Fund	Code	Amount (EUR)
3	RSO4.5	IPA III	129. Health equipment	959,400.00
3	RSO4.5	IPA III	160. Measures to improve the accessibility, effectiveness and resilience of healthcare systems (excluding infrastructure)	1,439,100.00

Table 5 - Dimension 2 – form of financing

Priority	Specific objective	Fund	Code	Amount (EUR)
3	RSO4.5	IPA III	01. Grant	2,398,500.00

Table 6 - Dimension 3 – territorial delivery mechanism and territorial focus

Priority	Specific objective	Fund	Code	Amount (EUR)
3	RSO4.5	IPA III	33. Other approaches - No territorial targeting	2,398,500.00

2.1.1. Specific objective: RSO4.6. Enhancing the role of culture and sustainable tourism in economic development, social inclusion and social innovation

Reference: point (e) of Article 17(3)

Enhancing the role of culture and sustainable tourism in economic development, social inclusion and social innovation.

2.1.1.1 Related types of action, and their expected contribution to those specific objectives and to macro-regional strategies and sea-basin strategies, where appropriate

Reference: point (e)(i) of Article 17(3), point (c)(ii) of Article 17(9)

Tourism is a key sector for the cross-border area, providing a stimulus for the creation of small-scale businesses, offering potential for creation of a larger number of tourism-related SMEs and thus, providing a broader-based and potentially more sustainable source of employment in the border area. Tourism holds great potential for the programme area, thus investing in the improvement and expansion of the cross-border tourism branding can contribute towards the extension of the tourist areas and seasons, benefiting rural and less-known destinations as well.

The cross-border area includes regions in economic transition, which need to develop sustainable economic activities, supporting the creation of new job positions, the enhancement of working skills and social innovation. Long-term sustainability requires a balance between economic, socio-cultural, and environmental sustainability.

Innovation and digitalization are the two concepts that need to be supported through cross-border cooperation. Strengthening efforts for the digital transformation of the tourism sector will provide innovation capabilities for better organization, management and destination marketing. Although the programme area presents a rich cultural and natural heritage, little progress has been recorded in the digitalization of information on natural, cultural and historical heritage, which hampers the access of the general public and tourists. The development of innovative digital tools that provide accessibility to integrated cultural and tourism information will improve experience for visitors and contribute in better branding of destinations in the cross-border area.

The common cultural and historical assets of the cross-border eligible area are interlinked with tourism, which is identified as one of the main sectors expected to foster economic growth. Cultural heritage is a valuable cross-border asset which is in need of proper conservation, preservation and restoration. The support of the cultural and creative industry in the programme area is important for the integrated promotion of cultural heritage. Supporting creativity and cultural expression through the development of creative hubs, cultural networks and incubators will contribute in the efforts of the cultural industry to recover from the impact of the COVID-19 crisis and help cross-border communities in regaining a sense of belonging. Investments in cultural assets (heritage, arts, local craft, etc.) and cultural expression shall take into account the New European Bauhaus and be based on what makes the cross-border area unique, such as promoting actions for the preserving and promoting traditions, local know-how and crafts. Strengthening the capacity of cultural organizations in the valorization of new technological means and digital tools will make them more resilient and adjust to the new digital era. An important aspect that actions for the preservation and promotion of cultural sites are expected to consider is self-sustainability. Foreseeing of a long-term strategy that will ensure that the supported cultural sites will be able to maintain the activities developed is considered important for the effective sustainability of the investments. The envisioned actions for ensuring sustainability of the investments in cultural sites will be assessed during selection, implementation, reporting and evaluation of projects.

Tourism and cultural heritage in the framework of this specific objective are supported with a view to foster social and economic development in the cross-border area. Emphasis is being put on diversifying the touristic destinations in the Programme area, while increasing accessibility and visibility of less

developed tourist areas in the cross-border regions. Supporting tourism activities, connected sectors and industries as a means for economic diversification and job creation in the programme area is considered important, especially for regions in transition such as the Region of Western Macedonia. The development of cultural and historical, leisure, religious, agro-tourism, eco-tourism, culinary and wine tourism and sport tourism, could create new areas of economic activity for local communities.

Enhancement of cross-border cooperation by investing in the development of joint recovery plans and solutions in the fields of tourism and culture, minimizing the spill-over effects of the COVID-19 crisis can be supported under specific-objective 4.6. Respect of gender equality, non-discrimination and accessibility are the horizontal principles that will be evaluated for all types of investments in the tourism and cultural sector, from its selection until implementation, reporting and evaluation. Operations will be also evaluated on the basis of the viable, long-term and socio-economic benefits they can provide to the programme area in line with sustainable development. Interventions under this specific objective will also be evaluated on their compliance with the do no significant harm principle during their selection

Type of actions (non-exhaustive list)

- Improvement of physical and/or digital accessibility in historical monuments and sites of cultural heritage in the cross-border area, including for remote sites.
- Preservation and promotion of cultural heritage, protection and reconstruction of fortresses, museums, archaeological/cultural sites.
- Promotion of cross-border cultural initiatives (joint actions for common cultural identity, cultural events, digitalization of cultural content and cultural routes).
- Enhancement and promotion of cultural and creative industry (capacity building, training, promotion of cultural services, support of cultural and creative industry clusters, support of upskilling and reskilling for digital transformation of CCI).
- Support to diversification of the tourism by investing in lesser-known destinations and diverse forms of tourism (cultural, rural, agro-tourism, sport, health/medical tourism); consequently, contributing to the livelihoods of local and regional communities.
- Interconnection between cultural and creative industry with tourism sector (identification of potential contribution of CCIs for the development of creative and cultural tourism products/business models).
- Development of new tourism models based on the social distancing (incl. quality tourism and remote micro destinations – mountains, islands, sparsely and rural areas), supporting the adjustment of existing tourist products with a view to enable recovery and resilience of the tourism sector.
- Support of capacity building in the tourism sector, promoting social innovation, improvement of working skills in the sector and social inclusion (reskilling and upskilling for the green and digital transformation of the tourism sector, promotion of accessible and inclusive tourism, compliance with sustainability principles).
- Support the promotion of circular and climate friendly approaches in tourism sector in order to reduce the impact of tourism activities on environment.

In the framework of specific objective 4.6, one strategic idea is included aiming at the development of thematic routes in the cross-border area. The project will contribute in the preservation of prominent cultural monuments of the cross-border area and the development of digital tools for the promotion of thematic cultural routes based on a strategic promotional plan.

Type of actions contributing to the EUSAIR

The type of actions supported by specific objective 4.6 “Fostering the integrated and inclusive social, economic and environmental local development, culture, natural heritage, sustainable tourism and security, in areas other than urban areas” are expected to contribute to Pillar IV of the EUSAIR. Investments for the development of touristic routes in the cross-border area can contribute in the EUSAIR flagship:

-“AIR Cultural Routes”

-“CRUISAIR -Expanding the tourist season to all-year round”

-“DesAir- Training and skills in the field of tourism businesses (vocational and entrepreneurial skills)”

2.1.1.1b. Definition of a single beneficiary or a limited list of beneficiaries and the granting procedure

Reference: point (c)(i) of Article 17(9)

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2.1.1.2. Indicators

Reference: point (e)(ii) of Article 17(3), point (c)(iii) of Article 17(9)

Table 2 - Output indicators

Priority	Specific objective	ID	Indicator	Measurement unit	Milestone (2024)	Target (2029)
3	RSO4.6	RCO77	Number of cultural and tourism sites supported	cultural and tourism sites	7	25

Table 3 - Result indicators

Priority	Specific objective	ID	Indicator	Measurement unit	Baseline	Reference year	Target (2029)	Source of data	Comments
3	RSO4.6	RCR77	Visitors of cultural and tourism sites supported	visitors/year	5,865.94	2020	20,133.00	Supported projects	

2.1.1.3. Main target groups

Reference: point (e)(iii) of Article 17(3), point (c)(iv) of Article 17(9)

The main target groups of specific objective 4.6: Enhancing the role of culture and sustainable tourism in economic development, social inclusion and social innovation are:

- The local population and the local communities of the cross-border eligible area.
- Visitors of the eligible cross-border area.
- Public authorities and local stakeholders representing the public and private sector.
- Public and private authorities involved with the protection of cultural heritage and tourism.

2.1.1.4. Indication of the specific territories targeted, including the planned use of ITI, CLLD or other territorial tools

Reference: Article point (e)(iv) of 17(3)

The entire programme area is targeted

2.1.1.5. Planned use of financial instruments

Reference: point (e)(v) of Article 17(3)

The form of support used by the Programme includes grants because of the nature of the operations and the relatively small scale does not really allows the efficient deployment of financial instruments.

2.1.1.6. Indicative breakdown of the EU programme resources by type of intervention

Reference: point (e)(vi) of Article 17(3), point (c)(v) of Article 17(9)

Table 4 - Dimension 1 – intervention field

Priority	Specific objective	Fund	Code	Amount (EUR)
3	RSO4.6	IPA III	165. Protection, development and promotion of public tourism assets and tourism services	2,820,600.00
3	RSO4.6	IPA III	166. Protection, development and promotion of cultural heritage and cultural services	4,230,900.00

Table 5 - Dimension 2 – form of financing

Priority	Specific objective	Fund	Code	Amount (EUR)
3	RSO4.6	IPA III	01. Grant	7,051,500.00

Table 6 - Dimension 3 – territorial delivery mechanism and territorial focus

Priority	Specific objective	Fund	Code	Amount (EUR)
3	RSO4.6	IPA III	33. Other approaches - No territorial targeting	7,051,500.00

3. Financing plan

Reference: point (f) of Article 17(3)

3.1. Financial appropriations by year

Table 7

Reference: point (g)(i) of Article 17(3), points (a) to (d) of Article 17(4)

Fund	2021	2022	2023	2024	2025	2026	2027	Total
IPA III CBC	0.00	4,511,353.00	4,609,044.00	4,676,779.00	4,761,599.00	4,005,520.00	4,085,705.00	26,650,000.00
Total	0.00	4,511,353.00	4,609,044.00	4,676,779.00	4,761,599.00	4,005,520.00	4,085,705.00	26,650,000.00

3.2.Total financial appropriations by fund and national co-financing

Reference: point (f)(ii) of Article 17(3), points (a) to (d) of Article 17(4)

Table 8

Policy objective	Priority	Fund	Basis for calculation EU support (total eligible cost or public contribution)	EU contribution (a)=(a1)+(a2)	Indicative breakdown of the EU contribution		National contribution (b)=(c)+(d)	Indicative breakdown of the national counterpart		Total (e)=(a)+(b)	Co-financing rate (f)=(a)/(e)	Contributions from the third countries
					without TA pursuant to Article 27(1) (a1)	for TA pursuant to Article 27(1) (a2)		National public (c)	National private (d)			
2	1	IPA III CBC	Total	13,085,000.00	11,776,500.00	1,308,500.00	3,271,253.00	3,271,253.00	0.00	16,356,253.00	79.9999853267%	0.00
3	2	IPA III CBC	Total	3,065,000.00	2,758,500.00	306,500.00	766,250.00	766,250.00	0.00	3,831,250.00	80.0000000000%	0.00
4	3	IPA III CBC	Total	10,500,000.00	9,450,000.00	1,050,000.00	2,625,000.00	2,625,000.00	0.00	13,125,000.00	80.0000000000%	0.00
	Total	IPA III CBC		26,650,000.00	23,985,000.00	2,665,000.00	6,662,503.00	6,662,503.00	0.00	33,312,503.00	79.9999927955%	0.00
	Grand total			26,650,000.00	23,985,000.00	2,665,000.00	6,662,503.00	6,662,503.00	0.00	33,312,503.00	79.9999927955%	0.00

4. Action taken to involve the relevant programme partners in the preparation of the Interreg programme and the role of those programme partners in the implementation, monitoring and evaluation

Reference: point (g) of Article 17(3)

Programming Committee

The setup of the Programming Committee (PC) of the Interreg VI-A IPA Greece Albania was approved in July 2020 with a task to prepare the new cross-border cooperation programme for the 2021-2027 period. Representatives of the Programming Committee come from both national and regional authorities.

The Programming Committee met several times during the preparation process to discuss and decide on the progress of the programming process. The meetings due to the COVID-19 restrictions were organized online. During the first meeting held on June 2020, the Programming Committee discussed the programme area and the need to include the Regional Unit of Kozani in the eligible area. In the second Programming Committee meeting, held on March 2021, the territorial analysis of the programme area and the proposed Programme Strategy were presented. Taking into consideration the analysis, it was stressed out that PO 2 (A greener Europe) and PO 3 (A more connected Europe) are important for addressing the needs of the programme area. The inclusion of the Region of Fier in the eligible Programme area was discussed. During the 3rd Programming Committee meeting the results of the second public consultation phase were presented along with the first chapters of the (Interreg VI-A) IPA Greece Albania. The selected Policy Objectives were discussed with a view to confirm the specific objectives. Issues regarding the requirements for the implementation of Policy Objective 5 “A Europe closer to its citizens” and the ways in which culture and tourism actions can benefit from funding under specific objective 4.5 of Policy Objective 4 “A more social Europe” were discussed. During the 4th and 5th Programming Committee meetings discussions were focused on the proposed indicators, the operations of strategic importance, as well as the financial allocation per Priority Axis and Specific Objective.

In the framework of the drafting of the Cooperation Programme three public consultation phases were conducted. The consultations involved stakeholders from the programme area with the aim to get feedback from relevant national and regional key players.

Public consultation

Partners that took part in the consultation process were selected with a bottom-up approach, as stakeholders of the cross-border area were mapped, starting from local communities and reaching to regional and national authorities. The first wide consultation phase with stakeholders was launched in December 2020 and closed on January 2021. An online survey was designed and distributed to approximately 500 partners of the Programme area, including economic and social partners, relevant bodies representative civil society, research institutions and universities, through e-mail and the programme website. The online public consultation survey was completed by 123 individuals and organizations from Greece and Albania. The majority of the organizations that participated were NGOs (20,33%), Regional and local governance authorities of the Programme area (19,51%), central government authorities (15,45%), national or regional representatives of higher educational institutions, education, training and advisory services (9,76%). Participants came from different thematic fields and sectors (culture and arts, tourism, water and waste management, social services, education, business sector, civil protection, etc.) During the first consultation phase, stakeholders identified the main needs and challenges of the cross-border area and provided a first estimation for the priorities and specific objectives for the Programme Strategy. The main needs identified by the stakeholders regarding the programme area were connected with Policy Objective 2 “a greener, low-carbon Europe by promoting clean and fair energy transition, green and blue investment, the circular economy, climate adaptation and risk prevention and management” and Policy Objective 4 “a more social and inclusive Europe implementing the European

Pillar of Social Rights”.

The second phase of public consultation was organized in April 2021 and included dedicated online workshops and targeted interviews with stakeholders from the programme area. Stakeholders included representatives of regional and local governance authorities, as well as central government representatives. Participants covered all thematic fields of the discussions (environmental protection, civil society, social services, health care, education, culture and tourism, transport, business sector, etc.). Along with the workshops online polls were prepared for stakeholders to provide according to their identified needs and challenges of the cross-border area indicative type of interventions and their main objectives. Targeted interviews were also carried out with decision-making stakeholders. The workshops contributed to a bottom-up approach for the identification of the Cooperation Programme strategy, as participants reviewed the proposed programme strategy and provided their feedback on the key priorities according to their intervention area and field of activity. Among the main actions identified by stakeholders according to the needs of their operation area were: a) creation of cultural routes, promotion of cultural heritage and eco-tourism, b) promotion of recycling and improvement of waste management, c) improvement of water management and d) improvement of connectivity and accessibility of road transport networks of South Albania and Northern Greece.

The third phase of consultation was launched on the 20th of July 2021 and lasted until the 3rd of September 2021. The 3rd phase of public consultation aimed to the active participation of economic and social partners, relevant bodies representative civil society, research institutions and universities of the Programme area, so as to contribute to the finalization of the Programme. More than 500 organizations involved in the Programme area were invited to participate in the online survey, including regional and local authorities, central government organizations, other economic and social partners, civil society representatives, research and educational institutions, etc. Through the online survey stakeholders were asked to evaluate the intervention fields, the output and result indicators according to the needs of the cross-border area, indicating the most relevant to the investments supported by the Programme. The second draft of the Programme document was made available at the Programme website so as all interested stakeholders to be adequately informed. In regards to Policy Objective 4 “A more social Europe”, the addition of another specific objective was evaluated according to the needs of the Programme area by stakeholders. The 3rd consultation phase aimed at contributing to the identification and evaluation of operations of strategic importance as well. The feedback received by stakeholders pointed out that the main areas of interest for strategic projects were environment and biodiversity, tourism and culture and the transport sector. However, the majority of the answers provided by stakeholders included general project ideas, providing limited information regarding the partnership scheme, the budget and the timeline of implementation. A more thorough examination of the proposed project ideas was carried out in order to identify the operations able to provide a significant contribution to the achievement of the programme objectives and indicators. Two main project ideas of strategic importance were identified at this stage. Three technical online meetings were held in order to evaluate the proposed strategic ideas. The feedback received by stakeholders of the programme area was taken into account, leading to four strategic ideas. One strategic idea proposed under specific objective 2.7 “Enhancing protection and preservation of nature, biodiversity and green infrastructure, including in urban areas, and reducing all forms of pollution”, two strategic projects under 2.6 “Promoting the transition to a circular and resource efficient economy” and one strategic idea under specific objective 4.6 “Enhancing the role of culture and sustainable tourism in economic development, social inclusion and social innovation”. These strategic projects ideas are listed in Appendix 3a: ‘List of planned operations of strategic importance’ of the Programme document. The consultation process was essential for the identification of the Programme strategy and the allocation of the resources among the expected type of investments. Tourism, water and waste management and circular economy were some of the main needs that were continuously pointed out as important demands during the consultation process with stakeholders. The results of all consultations phases with Programme partners have become available in the programme website.

Role of programme partners in the implementation, monitoring and evaluation

For the monitoring of the implementation of the (Interreg VI-A) IPA Greece-Albania, the two countries within a period of three months (3) from the day of the notification for the approval of the Programme by the European Commission (pursuant to article 28 of the ETC Regulation), will establish the “Monitoring Committee”. The composition of the Monitoring Committee is approved by the two participating countries and ensures a balanced representation of the relevant authorities and intermediate bodies of the partners states and the regional authorities of the eligible programme area. Nationally recognized professional organizations and chambers may also be represented in the Programme Monitoring Committee. States may ensure the involvement of partners in the preparatory consultations of the Monitoring Committee, in particular through their participation in the work of the national coordination committees organized in the participating states of the Programme. The rules of procedures adopted by the Monitoring Committee provide a detailed description of the measures and rules applied for preventing conflict of interest during selection of operations, provisions of voting rights and rules for attending meetings. Decisions by the Monitoring Committee are taken in a spirit of consensus among the members with voting rights and are being made public upon validation of the meeting minutes.

The Managing Authority of the Programme is responsible for publishing a list of the members of the Monitoring Committee on the programme website. The main tasks of the Monitoring Committee include the examination of the progress of the programme implementation and any issues that affect its performance. Among the responsibilities of the Monitoring Committee is to examine the progress of programme evaluations, the implementation of communication and visibility actions and the progress in the implementation of the programmes’ strategic projects. The Monitoring Committee selects the programmes’ projects according to its strategy and objectives, ensuring that non-discriminatory and transparent criteria and procedures are applied. The Monitoring Committee will approve the evaluation plan for the programme, as well as the final performance report. Partners of the Programme area will be involved in the evaluation of the Programme. Consultation procedures will be used, providing programme partners the required time to evaluate the Programme during and after implementation. Consultation processes and results of the evaluation reports will be made available on the Programme website by the Managing Authority.

5. Approach to communication and visibility for the Interreg programme (objectives, target audiences, communication channels, including social media outreach, where appropriate, planned budget and relevant indicators for monitoring and evaluation)

Reference: point (h) of Article 17(3)

5.1 Programme communication and visibility objectives

Communication and visibility actions will be implemented in order to ensure that the objectives of the Programme, activities, available funding opportunities and achievements are adequately communicated to the public and the target groups identified by the cooperation programme.

The main communication objectives include:

- Increasing the awareness about the priorities and specific objectives to potential applicants in all the eligible regions.
- Supporting beneficiaries in implementing and communicating their project activities and results, as well as the positive impact of the EU to their target audiences.
- Particular attention is given for the communication of strategic operations and dissemination of the project results outside the eligible programme area. The Communication strategy of the Programme will define the expected communication activities for operations of strategic importance.
- Highlight the positive impact of Interreg projects on the quality of life of the citizens residing in the eligible areas

5.2 Target audiences

The audience of the communication activities will include:

- (Potential) beneficiaries of the eligible area, both geographically and thematically.
- General public and stakeholders of the programme area, other than those participating as beneficiaries.
- EUSAIR national coordinators and pillar coordinators, EUSAIR Facility Point project partners from Greece and Albania, other related Interreg Programmes involved stakeholders
- EU bodies, as well as Europe Direct Information Centres and other relevant networks, educational and research institutions.
- Regional, local and nationwide mass media and social media multipliers.

5.3 Communication Channels

The programme website: The website will include the presentation of the priority axes and specific objectives and dedicated sections for calls of proposals and projects, as well as other activities. The website features a main link to the national website portal and vice versa.

Social media: The programme will feature accounts on main social media, namely Facebook, Instagram, Twitter, LinkedIn and YouTube.

Public relations: Networking activities in order to foster relations and build synergies with partner states in the same geographical area and their points of contact, the European Commission and the European Parliament, national networks, other Interreg Programmes.

Events: Online, hybrid and in-person events will be organised by the programme authorities in order to inform the targeted audience, engage potential beneficiaries or train relevant stakeholders.

Publications: For the effective communication of programme activities, publications (online/print) will be used. Audio-visual material may as well be produced.

Promotional material: Design and production of eco-friendly promotional material of the Programme.

Mass media: the positive impact of the projects could be disseminated by local, and potentially nationwide media.

5.4 Planned budget

A total planned budget for communication and visibility purposes, from 2021 until 2029, will be at least 0,45% of the programme's total budget. Annual communication budgets will follow the programme's developments (calls, results), allocating funds to each communication channel indicatively as follows: up to 23% website, at least 2% social media, 15% public relations, 55% events, and 5% publications.

5.5 Monitoring and evaluation of communication activities

Specific indicators for the monitoring and evaluation of communication activities will be defined in the Communication Strategy of the programme. Milestones will be set for 2024 and targets for 2029. A Monitoring Committee will be established and be held responsible for examining the progress of the communication and visibility actions in line with Articles 28, 29 and 30 (1) of the Regulation. At the request of the EC, the Managing Authority and the Joint Secretariat will inform in writing during the review phase on the progress in the implementation of the communication and visibility actions. The evaluation plan will be compiled by the Managing Authority, which will also be responsible for collecting the relevant data, and will be reviewed by the Monitoring Committee. A toolkit of indicators will be developed for the communication channels. An annual internal review will be prepared by the Managing Authority in order to assess the achievement of the communication indicators and the measures taken.

Specific indicators will be defined in the Communication Strategy of the Programme, for the following communication channels:

- Programme website
- Social Media of the programme
- Mass media and Public Relations
- Events

Communication indicators will have a baseline, a target value to describe where the indicator should be at the end of the given time and definition of data type and sources for monitoring the achievement of indicators.

6. Indication of support to small-scale projects, including small projects within small project funds

Reference: point (i) of Article 17(3), Article 24

In the context of the Programme, projects of limited financial volume pursuant to Article 24 (ETC) will be supported. The purpose and the target groups for the limited financial projects shall therefore correspond to the indicators and to the target groups identified for each specific objective. The Interreg VI-A IPA Greece Albania will finance projects of limited financial volume outside of the small project fund, under specific objectives “2.7- Enhancing protection and preservation of nature, biodiversity and green infrastructure, including in urban areas, and reducing all forms of pollution” and “4.6- Enhancing the role of culture and sustainable tourism in economic development, social inclusion and social innovation”. The size of finance of the small-scale projects per specific objective is presented in the table below:

Specific Objective

1. S.O. 2.7- Enhancing protection and preservation of nature, biodiversity and green infrastructure, including in urban areas, and reducing all forms of pollution
2. S.O. 4.6- Enhancing the role of culture and sustainable tourism in economic development, social inclusion and social innovation

Financial volume of small projects

300.000€-500.000€ (total budget size for the operations of limited financial volume)

Type of actions (indicative)

- Small-scale interventions for the preservation of nature and biodiversity (green interventions in urban areas such as tree alleys, green pavements, etc.)
- Raising awareness activities for reducing all forms of pollution (campaigns, exchanges)
- Soft actions for the promotion of cultural sites (digitalization of cultural information for promotion, events, etc.)
- Organization of joint initiatives (cultural events, exhibitions, workshops, campaigns) for the promotion of cultural and touristic sites in the cross-border area
- Networking activities of cultural and creative industry of the cross-border area.

Projects of limited financial volume will be supported under the above Specific objectives in the framework of regular calls. At least two beneficiaries, one from each country, will have to participate in the partnership scheme of the small-projects. All type of eligible beneficiaries of the programme will be able to participate in small-projects, but special focus will be given to encouraging the participation of smaller organizations- local communities, non-governmental organizations, civil organizations and associations.

7. Implementing provisions

7.1. Programme authorities

Reference: point (a) of Article 17(6)

Table 9

Programme authorities	Name of the institution	Contact name	Position	E-mail
Managing authority	Managing Authority of European Territorial Cooperation Programmes / Ministry of Development & Investments	Ms Bouziani Angeliki	Head of the Managing Authority of European Territorial Cooperation Programmes	interreg@mou.gr
Audit authority	Financial Control Committee (EDEL) Ministry of Finance – General Accounting Office of the State, Greece	Ms Tourkolia Athinais	Head of Financial Control Committee	grammateia_edel@edel.gr
Body to which the payments are to be made by the Commission	Special Service Certifying and Verifying Authority of co-financed Programmes / Ministry of Development and Investments	Ms Alesta Vassiliki	Head of Certifying Authority	spa@m nec.gr

7.2. Procedure for setting up the joint secretariat

Reference: point (b) of Article 17(6)

7.2. Procedure for setting up the joint secretariat

The JS undertakes the day-to-day implementation of the Programme and assists the MA and the MC carrying out their duties. The functions and role of JS are determined its RoPs. Arrangements for the Joint Secretariat of the Programme are already in place since they are kept from the 2014-2020 programming period. The location of the Joint Secretariat is in Thessaloniki, Greece. The Joint Secretariat is set up by the Managing Authority after consultation with the Partner States. The JS recruitment is activated by a joint recruitment committee and on the basis of the principles of transparency, equal opportunity and gender equality and non-discrimination. The staff of the Joint Secretariat were selected and recruited by the MA according to the European and Greek public procurement rules. The daily function of all JS structures is set up in agreement with and under the supervision and guidance of the MA. The JS supports the MA and reports to it.

The Managing Authority is responsible for managing the programme. It supports the work of the Monitoring Committee by providing the necessary information to carry out its tasks and ensuring the follow-up of the decisions and recommendations made by the Monitoring Committee. Management verifications will be done through the identification by each Partner State of a body or person responsible for this verification on its territory (the ‘controller’) according to Article 46 (4) of the ETC. The audit authority of the Cooperation Programme will be responsible for carrying out system audits and audits on operations in order to provide assurance to the Commission about the legality and regularity of the expenditure included in the accounts submitted to the Commission and the effective functioning of the management and control system. The group of auditors is composed of a representative from each Partner State and is chaired by the audit authority of the programme.

Technical assistance

According to Article 27 (2) of the ETC Regulation, Technical Assistance of the Interreg VI-A IPA Greece Albania will be reimbursed as a flat rate of 10% to the eligible expenditure included in each payment application pursuant to [points (a) or (c) of Article 85(3)] of Regulation (EU) [new CPR] as appropriate.

Aim of the technical assistance is to provide effective administration and programme management, including the support of communication and visibility actions. The activities of the technical assistance shall support the operation of the Joint Secretariat of the cooperation programme and the Managing Authority activities for the development, monitoring and evaluation of the programme implementation. Technical assistance will cover the actions related to the effective implementation of the communication and visibility of the programme according to the measures and tools that will be applied for the dissemination of the objectives, activities, funding opportunities and implementation of the cooperation programme.

7.3. Apportionment of liabilities among participating Member States and where applicable, the third or partner countries and OCTs, in the event of financial corrections imposed by the managing authority or the Commission

Reference: point (c) of Article 17(6)

The Partner States shall ensure the legality and regularity of expenditure included in the accounts submitted to the EC, taking all the required actions to prevent, detect, correct and report irregularities and fraud. In line with the E-cohesion principles (Article 69, CPR), the programme has an established Monitoring Information System, that will ensure that the exchanges between beneficiaries and all the programme authorities are carried out by means of electronic data exchange. The Monitoring Information System is fully operational, providing functionalities such as the use of prefilled or interactive forms on the basis of the data stored at consecutive steps of the procedures used in the system, automatic calculations and controls of provided data, as well as online status tracking allowing beneficiaries to monitor the progress and status of projects.

During the implementation of the Programme the Managing Authority will promote the strategic use of public procurement to support Policy Objectives (including professionalization efforts to address capacity gaps). Beneficiaries should be encouraged to use more quality-related and lifecycle cost criteria. When feasible, environmental (e.g., green public procurement criteria) and social considerations as well as innovation incentives should be incorporated into public procurement procedures. The management and control system will ensure that the principle of separation of functions (segregation of tasks/duties) is adequately implemented, in line with the Commission Notice on Guidance on the avoidance and management of conflicts of interest under the Financial Regulation (2021/C 121/01).

If the managing authority/joint secretariat, the audit authority, any Partner State becomes aware of the irregularities, it shall without any delay inform the liable partner state, audit authority or the managing authority/joint secretariat. Each Partner State shall investigate irregularities committed by the beneficiaries located on its territory. The partner State shall make the financial corrections in connection with individual or systemic irregularities detected in operations or operational programme.

Financial correction shall consist of cancelling all or part of the public contribution to an operation or to the operational programme. Financial corrections shall be recorded in the annual accounts by the managing authority for the accounting year in which the cancellation is decided.

The managing authority shall ensure that any amount paid as a result of an irregularity is recovered from the project via the lead partner. Project partners shall repay the lead partner any amounts unduly paid. The managing authority shall also recover funds from the lead partner (and the lead partner from the project partner) following a termination of the subsidy contract in full or in part based on the conditions defined in the subsidy contract.

If the lead beneficiary does not succeed in securing repayment from other beneficiaries or if the managing authority does not succeed in securing repayment from the lead beneficiary, the partner State on whose territory the beneficiary concerned is located shall reimburse the managing authority the amount unduly paid to that beneficiary. Once the Partner State reimburses the managing authority the unduly paid amounts to a beneficiary, it can continue or start the recovery procedure against the beneficiary under its national law. The Managing Authority in accordance to Article 52 of the ETC Regulation, is responsible for reimbursing the amounts concerned to the general budget of the Union.

8. Use of unit costs, lump sums, flat rates and financing not linked to costs

Reference: Articles 94 and 95 of Regulation (EU) 2021/1060 (CPR)

Table 10: Use of unit costs, lump sums, flat rates and financing not linked to costs

Intended use of Articles 94 and 95 CPR	Yes	No
From the adoption, the programme will make use of reimbursement of the Union contribution based on unit costs, lump sums and flat rates under the priority according to Article 94 CPR	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>
From the adoption, the programme will make use of reimbursement of the Union contribution based on financing not linked to costs according to Article 95 CPR	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>

Appendix 1

A. Summary of the main elements

Priority	Fund	Specific objective	Estimated proportion of the total financial allocation within the priority to which the simplified cost option will be applied in %	Type(s) of operation covered		Indicator triggering reimbursement		Unit of measurement for the indicator triggering reimbursement	Type of simplified cost option (standard scale of unit costs, lump sums or flat rates)	Amount (in EUR) or percentage (in case of flat rates) of the simplified cost option
				Code(1)	Description	Code(2)	Description			

(1) This refers to the code for the intervention field dimension in Table 1 of Annex 1 CPR

(2) This refers to the code of a common indicator, if applicable

Appendix 1

B. Details by type of operation

C. Calculation of the standard scale of unit costs, lump sums or flat rates

1. Source of data used to calculate the standard scale of unit costs, lump sums or flat rates (who produced, collected and recorded the data, where the data is stored, cut-off dates, validation, etc):

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2. Please specify why the proposed method and calculation based on Article 94(2) is relevant to the type of operation:

3. Please specify how the calculations were made, in particular including any assumptions made in terms of quality or quantities. Where relevant, statistical evidence and benchmarks should be used and, if requested, provided in a format that is usable by the Commission:

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4. Please explain how you have ensured that only eligible expenditure was included in the calculation of the standard scale of unit cost, lump sum or flat rate:

5. Assessment of the audit authority or authorities of the calculation methodology and amounts and the arrangements to ensure the verification, quality, collection and storage of data:

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Appendix 2

A. Summary of the main elements

Priority	Fund	Specific objective	The amount covered by the financing not linked to costs	Type(s) of operation covered		Conditions to be fulfilled/results to be achieved triggering reimbursement by the Commission	Indicator		Unit of measurement for the conditions to be fulfilled/results to be achieved triggering reimbursement by the Commission	Envisaged type of reimbursement method used to reimburse the beneficiary or beneficiaries
				Code(1)	Description		Code(2)	Description		

(1) This refers to the code for the intervention field dimension in Table 1 of Annex 1 to the CPR and Annex IV to the EMFAF Regulation.

(2) This refers to the code of a common indicator, if applicable.

B. Details by type of operation

1. **“Circular Economy Park”** - The project aims at the development and implementation of solutions for the promotion of circular economy in the cross-border area. The proposal includes the development of the facilities that will support the separate treatment of specific categories of municipal solid waste with the aim to support their preparation for reuse and recycling. Partners from both countries will cooperate in order to support the development of a circular economy model, based on knowledge transfer for a more effective way of waste management.
2. **“Smart Cities”** - The project aims at the development of smart solutions in public services such as intelligent parking and traffic management, air quality monitoring and intelligent public lighting. The main objective of the project will be to support cities in the implementation of pilot actions, including the development of tools and systems for monitoring air pollution and mitigating the impact on the environment from human activities and guarantee sustainable development of local communities.
3. **“Thematic Touristic Routes”** - The key idea of the strategic project is the development of thematic touristic routes focusing on the cultural and natural heritage (including thermal sources) of the cross-border area. The creation of thematic tourist destination with the use of digital tools will contribute the development of up-to-date “smart” cross border destination is able to attract more visitors and increase touristic flows all year. The project will include interventions such as restoration of important cultural heritage and monuments, development of strategic promotional plan, development of digital and other tools for the promotion of thematic routes.
4. **“Introducing digital tools for monitoring waste management in urban areas”** - The main objective of the project is the development and testing of digital tools for monitoring municipal solid waste. The purpose of the developed instruments and tools will be to record-in real- time the waste thrown by households with the aim to introduce to local communities a new and innovative method of waste collection, in order to help citizens, understand the dynamics of waste production and support transition to more sustainable-smart cities that improve the environment and well-being of the local population.

DOCUMENTS

Document title	Document type	Document date	Local reference	Commission reference	Files	Sent date	Sent by
Programme snapshot 2021TC16IPCB010 1.2	Snapshot of data before send	27 Sept 2022		Ares(2022)6654750	Programme_snapshot_2021TC16IPCB010_1.2_en.pdf	27 Sept 2022	Κωστοπούλου, Μαρία