

# Citizen's Summary of the 2019 Greece - Bulgaria Annual Implementation Report

**INTERREG V-A Cooperation Programme Greece -Bulgaria 2014-2020**  
**CCI 2014TC16RFCB022**

14/07/2020

## What is the Programme all about?

The Programme supports territorial cooperation in the cross-border area between Greece and Bulgaria in order to tackle with needs and challenges that are common for the two neighbouring countries.

The eligible Programme area is consisted of two Greek and two Bulgarian regional administrations, occupying a space of approximately 40.000 square km with a population of around 2.7 million people. The area is primarily rural, mountainous and sparsely populated. It includes 10 medium-large cities of more than 50.000 inhabitants that accumulate for 38.2% of the total population, as well as 25 small cities of a population from 10.000 to 50.000 inhabitants.



The Programme is co-financed by the European Regional Development Fund (ERDF) with €110,723,408.00. The total Programme budget is €130,262,835.00, including national contributions. The Programme's aim is to facilitate issues of cross-border nature that are addressed more efficiently on a bilateral basis. To this extent, it focuses on the thematic objectives of the EU2020 Strategy that have the greater value for the cross-border area.

The Programme's scope is consisted of following four Priority Axes:

### **Priority Axis 1 - A Competitive and Innovative Cross - Border Area**



Competitiveness of SMEs

Projects under Priority Axis 1 are focusing on the competitiveness and the innovative capacity of the local economy. Their aim is to support the ability of the area's economic actors to operate more efficiently and to expand their operations on national and international level.

### **Priority Axis 2 - A Sustainable and Climate Adjustable Cross - Border Area**



Environment and resource efficiency



Combating climate change

The Axis is aiming at the protection, the conservation and the promotion of the local natural and cultural heritage. Projects under Priority Axis 2 are focusing on integrated bilateral activities such as the protection of the local flora and fauna, the sustainable use of water resources, the management of natural hazards, the restoration and promotion of cultural sites and the enhancement of the area's attractiveness as a whole.

### **Priority Axis 3 - A Better Interconnected Cross-Border Area**



Sustainable transport

Priority Axis 3 is dedicated to the improvement the regional accessibility and mobility by connecting secondary and tertiary nodes of the area with international highways and Transnational European Transport Networks. This is achieved through the Strategic Project with the acronym CROSSBO which serves the operation of the TEN-T axis Plovdiv – Smolyan – Rudozem – Xanthi and of secondary local networks.

### **Priority Axis 4 - A socially inclusive Cross-border area**



Social inclusion

Priority Axis 4 is focusing on social inclusion, a core matter for the sustainable development of the cross-border area. With the aim to reduce regional disparities on the field of provided health services, projects under Priority Axis 4 indicatively invest on medical infrastructures, development of rural health care spots and establishment of telemedicine applications for people living in remote areas. The question of equal economic prospects is also addressed by the Axis, through projects aiming at the promotion of the social entrepreneurship and the creation of employment opportunities for people that belong to vulnerable groups of the population.

## What happened in 2019?

2019 was an intense but also fruitful year for the Program's implementation, during which the following key milestones took place:

- The 5th Call for Project Proposals concerning direct financial support to bilateral SME schemes closed on 15/07/2019. The total budget of the Call is €10,000,000.00 and the Joint Secretariat received fifty-five (55) submitted project proposals, on behalf of one hundred and ten (110) SMEs. The figure demonstrates the vivid interest of the local entrepreneurial community to engage in cross-border synergies as well its increased demand for direct financial assistance for investing purposes. The evaluation procedures for the 5<sup>th</sup> Call reached an advanced stage by the end of 2019, a fact that is expected to reflect upon the following year.
- The 6th Call for Project Proposals with total budget of € 7,000,000.00 was launched on 11/06/2019 and closed on 07/10/2019. The Call's specific objective is to improve entrepreneurship SME support systems; consequently, it is addressed to stakeholders who are functioning on the field of entrepreneurship with the aim provide support and facilitation. The Joint Secretariat received a total of forty-nine (49) submitted proposals on behalf of one hundred and sixty seven (167) potential beneficiaries from the field of entrepreneurship including chambers, development agencies, academic institutions and NGOs.
- The Strategic Project with the acronym CROSSBO and a total budget of €38,802,558.00 was under full implementation. By the end of the year, almost one third of the above budget (32.65%) was verified on cumulative basis. CROSSBO is consisted of the four sub-projects: (a) *Construction of the new road section Dimario - GR/BG Borders* (b) *Upgrading the Road II-86 – Srednogortsi - Rudozem and bypass of Rudozem* (c) *Construction of the new Border Crossing Check Point Dimario –Rudozem* and (d) *Road II\_59 Momchilgrad – Krumovgrad – Ivailovgrad*. It's improving significantly the connectivity of and the mobility within the affected border areas.
- Under Priority Axis 2 “A Sustainable and Climate adaptable Cross-Border area”, twelve (12) new projects were contracted from the reserve list of the 2nd Call. Their total budget is €13,079,346.12. Worth mentioning is the Strategic Project with the acronym FLOODGUARD (total budget of €4,482,557.86) which aims at an improved protection and response ability against floods and especially in high risk areas across the international river basins.

- An additional twenty six (26) projects under Priority Axis 2, contracted back in 2017, were at a stage of full implementation throughout the year. Their total budget amounts to €33,477,554.77.
- Twenty four (24) projects with a total contracted budget €19,566,248.75 being at the stage of full implementation and producing concrete results under Priority Axis 4 “A Socially Inclusive Cross-Border Area”.
- Four (4) Info Days were organized aiming at potential applicants of the 5<sup>th</sup> Call. The events were organized in Thessaloniki (Feb. 01), Blagoevgrad (Feb. 07), Alexandroupolis (Feb. 20) and Haskovo (Mar. 20). Additionally, short presentations of the Call took place a series of local Chambers of Commerce, after relevant invitation from their behalf.
- The Joint Secretariat has successfully organized an all-day event for the celebration of the European Cooperation Day 2019 (Thessaloniki, Sep. 22). The event, that attracted significant public attention, was organized in cooperation the three (3) Programme Beneficiaries and it was consisted of events such as sports games particularly for the children and adolescences, seminars on first aid and relevant medical issues, preventive medical exams (dental, pediatric, mammography etc.) provided by volunteering doctors, exhibitions and guided tours



### What about spending?

Until the end of 2019, the total certified expenditure amounts to €23,825,956.30 while the total eligible amount of expenditure paid by the project beneficiaries was €40,665,347.33.

## Spend by Whom?

By the end of 2019, sixty six (66) projects were contracted and being implemented within the framework of the Programme, aiming to contribute to the **smart, sustainable** and **inclusive growth** of the cross-border area. **Beneficiaries** in these projects are:

- 7 Ministries
- 6 Regional and District Administrations
- 56 Municipalities
- 50 Private Bodies, Associations and NGO's
- 22 Institutions of the Wider Public Sector
- 8 Hospitals and 4 Medical Care Units
- 10 Regional and Local Development Agencies
- 10 Universities and 4 Research Institutes
- 11 Chambers, Professional Associations and Societies

For further information, please consult our websites at <http://www.greece-bulgaria.eu> and <http://www.interreg.gr>