

**First evaluation of implementation and impact
of the Interreg IPA CBC Programme Greece –
Albania 2014-2020**

**5th Deliverable:
Final Evaluation Report**

Contracting Authority:

**MANAGING AUTHORITY OF EUROPEAN TERRITORIAL
COOPERATION PROGRAMMES**

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Executive Summary

The purpose of the “first evaluation” of the Interreg IPA CBC Programme “Greece – Albania” 2014-2020 is to assess the efficiency and effectiveness of the programme management system, as well as to set the ground for the future direction of the impact evaluations to be carried out after 2018.

Based on the outcomes of the evaluation and the recommendations of the evaluation team, the programme authorities should be able to correct/ improve/ modify/ develop the programme management and implementation in order to be more efficient, effective and capable of reaching the programme pursued results and objectives.

In this framework and in order to provide additional data, the External Evaluator, apart from the desk research to the relevant literature i.e. the interact Terms of References and guidelines, the Management and Control System of the Programme, the MIS and Evaluation studies of other Interreg Programmes, also conducted an online survey by using Google Docs forms (qualitative primary research).

The objective of the online survey was to produce and provide qualitative data about the implementation of the Interreg IPA CBC Programme “Greece - Albania 2014-2020”, by mapping and analyzing the perceptions, views and suggestions of the programme authorities as well as the beneficiaries involved in the actions and implementation of the Cooperation Programme.

The online survey was conducted during the period from 7/12/2018 to 16/1/2019. For the purposes of the online Survey tailored semi-structured questionnaires were developed through the “Google Docs Forms” online tool. The questionnaire addressed different groups of respondents i.e. (a) Applicants/Beneficiaries of approved and rejected project proposals of the Interreg IPA CBC Programme “Greece – Albania 2014-2020” and (b) Programme Authorities/JMC Members. The link for the online survey for group (a) was sent electronically to 162 Beneficiaries and potential Beneficiaries from which 104 are based in Greece and 58 are based in Albania. The link for the online survey for group (b) was sent electronically to 45 Programme Authorities and JMC Members from which 32 Greek and 13 Albanian. Continuously, follow up was done, both through telephone communication and reminder email sendings, in order to secure the collection of adequate responses. As a result, 65 responses from group (a) and 22 responses from group (b), have been received. The response rates for both groups can be considered representative, making the results of the survey as statistically reliable. The overall participation to the Survey, is summarized to the following table:

Survey Target Group	Total Number of Contacts Addressed	Responses	Response Rate
Applicants/Beneficiaries of approved and rejected project proposals	162	65	40%
Programme Authorities/JMC Members	45	22	48.88%

The Interreg IPA CBC Programme Greece – Albania 2014-2020 approval came with the Commission’s Implementing Decision C(2015) 5482 of 30th July 2015. The year 2016 was the first year of implementation, with the organization of two Launching Events one in Greece and one in Albania and the launching of two calls; one for strategic and one for ordinary project proposals. This fact in combination with the approval of the Programme in the second semester of 2015, had an influence in the Programme which can be described as a front-load programme.

The evaluation procedure for the first Call for Strategic projects was concluded within 2016 and four (4) Strategic Projects were approved.

The year 2017 was very significant in terms of the initiation of the projects, hence programme implementation. In 2017 the evaluation procedure for the second Call for Ordinary Projects was concluded and forty one (41) Ordinary Projects were approved during the 3rd Joint Monitoring Committee (JMC) Meeting, on 14/07/2017 in Korce. Moreover, 45 Technical Meetings took place during 2017, for the finalization of documents for the approved projects of both calls. Regarding Technical Assistance of the Programme, this will be implemented in the framework of two “projects”; one for the Greek part of the budget and one for the Albanian part.

At this point, we should highlight the issue that had arisen regarding the adaptation and implementation of the Practical Guide to Contract Procedures for EU External Actions (PRAG) by Greek Beneficiaries and the delays that it caused to the implementation of the approved projects. According to IPA II Commission Implementing Regulation 447/2014, EU External Action procurement rules (PRAG) are to be used in awarding of service, supply and works contracts from the CBC grant scheme financed projects for both participating countries. Given that Greece is a Member State, difficulties were raised and thorough discussions took place with the competent authorities for a solution to be found.

During 2018 two Calls were launched. The 3rd Targeted Call for Project Proposals was open from 02/08/2018 to 01/10/2018. One (1) Targeted Project proposal was unanimously approved by the JMC at its 4th meeting in Preveza on the 5th October 2018. The 4th Call for Ordinary Projects was launched on the 17th October, with a deadline of submission on the 28th of February 2019.

Concerning the effectiveness and the efficiency of submission procedures and forms, it should be mentioned that as a result of the survey, the almost 70% of group (a) respondents declared their satisfaction while almost an 8% declared as extremely satisfied.

Moreover, the document on Project Selection Criteria, gave a clear picture of the selection procedure, bodies involved, selection rules and selection criteria, so that beneficiaries were kept well informed about the assessment process and transparency was ensured.

Considering the project monitoring systems and mechanisms, it is important to remind that the Programme should apply the e-cohesion principles and in this framework to operate an electronic MS in order to collect all information on project and programme progress. The Management Information System (MIS) supports the performance of all the procedures including electronic data exchange among the relevant Authorities / bodies (Beneficiaries, Managing Authority / Joint Secretariat, National Authorities, Certifying Authority, Audit Authority, European Commission). The MIS for European Territorial Cooperation Programmes is considered adequate and in place. The decision-making process within the JMC is considered clear and transparent by almost the 81% of group (b) respondents.

It is no coincidence that the vast majority of respondents to the survey expressed their satisfaction with their cooperation with MA / JS executives.

This is supported by the fact that all the Authorities are sufficiently staffed and also, they have specialized experience and expertise to successfully manage the Programme.

Assessing communication strategy activities implemented so far, it seems that a positive effort has been made. As far as the communication actions are concerned, we should mention a contradiction between the quantitative data reviewed from the social media pages followers and traffic – which seemed to have been increased within 2018 - and the fact that the majority of the sample of group (a) prefers to be informed by the Programme’s website and referred the “info-days” and the “FAQs” as the most common method of communication during the call for proposals.

Regarding the implementation phase of the Programme, delays in the signing of subsidy contracts and the beginning of the projects of the 1st and 2nd Call were observed, as the majority of respondents declared that the projects started at least one year after the approval of the projects by the JMC. The delay was due to the issues regarding the adaptation and implementation of the Practical Guide to Contract Procedures for EU External Actions (PRAG) by Greek Beneficiaries. After the Decision was made, contracting procedures were completed in the set timeframes.

Furthermore, the selected projects seem to match with the integration and multi-perspective approach to the local development overall approach of the Cooperation Programme. Thus, given the size and the character of the approved projects, it is obvious that project outputs and results certainly contribute to the indicators and the objectives of the Programme.

Concerning the financial implementation of the programme until 31/12/2018, the available funding for approved projects amounts to 54.076.734,00 €. During the evaluation period, eligible costs of actions selected to be funded under the Cooperation Programme amount to 47.785.729,02€ which is 88,37% of the total funding.

Actions under Priority Axis 3 have already covered available funding with 4.231.203,00 € which is 100,00% of the allocated funds. Also, actions under Priority Axis 3 have the highest rate verified and certified costs, 13,98% and 9,52% respectively.

Priority Axis 1 has been allocated with the largest amount for funding by the Programme followed by Priority Axis 2. Both Axes show a very small rate in verified costs (0,74% for PA1 and 0,99% for PA2), while PA1 has 0.20% of certified costs and PA2 doesn’t have any certified costs at all.

In this frame it seems necessary to consider thoroughly the way of projects implementation and to identify possible bottlenecks, through the following **recommendations**.

- Better structuring and consistency of the applicant’s package – tools such as the application form and the Specification of Budget form¹.
- Reducing the administrative burden for project implementation - There are a number of suggestions for improvement, for example, with extensive administrative verifications (first level control) to be replaced by risk-based verifications on beneficiary’s expenditure.
- Harmonization of eligibility rules should be further strengthened.

¹ It should be mentioned that at the time of the drafting the present report the comments and proposals on the design of these tools/forms has been taken into account, as the submission procedure is done now through online through the MIS.

- 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. Concerning social media, an analysis of target groups could be done in order to understand their most preferred social media tools to keep informed.
- The MA/JS should organise Info Days more often in accordance with the recognised needs to efficiently and effectively address identified issues also in the programme implementation.

It is worth noting that the First evaluation of implementation and impact of the Interreg IPA CBC Programme Greece – Albania 2014-2020 despite the survey took place among Applicants/Beneficiaries of approved and rejected project proposals and JMC Members Programme Authorities, could focus only on a limited set of information, due to the initial stage of the implementation of the selected projects, even if the available data allow the consideration of some future perspectives. Naturally, the next evaluation reports will provide more information and recommendations.

Επιτελική Σύνοψη

Η σκοπιμότητα της «πρώτης αξιολόγησης» του Προγράμματος Interreg IPA CBC «Ελλάδα – Αλβανία» 2014-2020, έγκειται στην αξιολόγηση της αποδοτικότητας και της αποτελεσματικότητας του συστήματος διαχείρισης του Προγράμματος, καθώς και στον καθορισμό των βάσεων για τη μελλοντική αξιολόγηση που προγραμματίζεται να διεξαχθεί μετά το 2018.

Βασιζόμενες στα αποτελέσματα της αξιολόγησης και των συστάσεων της ομάδας αξιολόγησης, οι Αρχές του Προγράμματος θα πρέπει να είναι σε θέση να διορθώνουν / βελτιώνουν / τροποποιούν / αναπτύσσουν τη διαχείριση και την εφαρμογή του, προκειμένου να διασφαλισθεί η αποδοτικότητα και αποτελεσματικότητά του και να είναι δυνατή η επίτευξη των επιθυμητών στόχων.

Στο πλαίσιο αυτό ο εξωτερικός αξιολογητής προκειμένου να παρέχει πρόσθετα δεδομένα, εκτός από την έρευνα πεδίου: στη σχετική βιβλιογραφία και κατ' επέκταση στους όρους αναφοράς και τις κατευθυντήριες γραμμές, στο Σύστημα Διαχείρισης και Ελέγχου του Προγράμματος, στο Ολοκληρωμένο Πληροφοριακό Σύστημα (ΟΠΣ) και στις διάφορες μελέτες αξιολόγησης άλλων Προγραμμάτων Ευρωπαϊκής Εδαφικής Συνεργασίας, διεξήγαγε επίσης ηλεκτρονική έρευνα γνώμης με χρήση ερωτηματολογίων σε μορφή «Google docs» (ποιοτική πρωτογενής έρευνα).

Στόχος της ηλεκτρονικής έρευνας γνώμης ήταν η παραγωγή και η παροχή ποιοτικών δεδομένων σχετικά με την εφαρμογή του Προγράμματος, μέσω της χαρτογράφησης και ανάλυσης των αντιλήψεων, απόψεων και προτάσεων των εμπλεκόμενων αρχών, καθώς και των δικαιούχων και δυνητικών που συμμετέχουν στις πράξεις και στην εφαρμογή του Προγράμματος.

Η έρευνα γνώμης διεξήχθη κατά την περίοδο από 7/12/2018 έως 16/1/2019. Για τους σκοπούς της ηλεκτρονικής έρευνας, αναπτύχθηκαν ειδικά ημιδομημένα ερωτηματολόγια μέσω του ηλεκτρονικού εργαλείου "Google Docs". Το ερωτηματολόγιο απευθύνθηκε σε διαφορετικές ομάδες ερωτηθέντων και συγκεκριμένα α) στους αιτούντες / δικαιούχους των εγκεκριμένων και απορριφθεισών προτάσεων του προγράμματος Interreg IPA CBC «Ελλάδα - Αλβανία 2014-2020» και β) στις Αρχές του Προγράμματος και στα μέλη της Κοινής Επιτροπής Παρακολούθησης (JMC). Το μήνυμα ηλεκτρονικού ταχυδρομείου που αναφερόταν στους σκοπούς της Έρευνας και περιείχε τον ηλεκτρονικό σύνδεσμο (link) για το Ερωτηματολόγιο, εστάλη σε 162 δικαιούχους και δυνητικούς δικαιούχους της Ομάδας (α) από τους οποίους 104 εδρεύουν στην Ελλάδα και 58 εδρεύουν στην Αλβανία. Επίσης μήνυμα ηλεκτρονικού ταχυδρομείου εστάλη στην Ομάδα (β) και συγκεκριμένα σε 45 αποδέκτες – Αρχές του Προγράμματος και Μέλη της Κοινής Επιτροπής Παρακολούθησης, εκ των οποίων 32 εδρεύουν στην Ελλάδα και 13 στην Αλβανία. Στη συνέχεια, υπήρξε τηλεφωνική επικοινωνία και αποστολή e-mail υπενθύμισης, προκειμένου να διασφαλιστεί ο κατάλληλος αριθμός απαντημένων ερωτηματολογίων. Ως αποτέλεσμα, ελήφθησαν 65 απαντημένα ερωτηματολόγια από την ομάδα (α) και 22 από την ομάδα (β). Τα ποσοστά ανταπόκρισης και για τις δύο ομάδες μπορούν να θεωρηθούν αντιπροσωπευτικά, καθιστώντας τα αποτελέσματα της έρευνας στατιστικά αξιόπιστα. Η συμμετοχή στην Έρευνα αποτυπώνεται στον παρακάτω Πίνακα.

Ομάδα – Στόχος της έρευνας	Συνολικός αριθμός επαφών	Απαντήσεις	Ποσοστό απαντήσεων
Αιτούντες / δικαιούχοι των εγκεκριμένων και απορριφθέντων προτάσεων	162	65	40%
Μέλη της Κοινής Επιτροπής Παρακολούθησης (JMC)	45	22	48.88%

Το πρόγραμμα Interreg IPA CBC «Ελλάδα - Αλβανία 2014-2020» εγκρίθηκε με την Απόφαση C(2015) 5482 της Ευρωπαϊκής Επιτροπής, στις 30 Ιουλίου 2015. Το έτος 2016 ήταν το πρώτο έτος υλοποίησης του Προγράμματος, με τη διοργάνωση δύο Εναρκτήριων Εκδηλώσεων - μια στην Ελλάδα και μια στην Αλβανία - και τη δημοσίευση δύο Προσκλήσεων, μία για Στρατηγικά Έργα και μία για Κοινά Έργα. Το γεγονός αυτό, σε συνδυασμό με την έγκριση του Προγράμματος κατά το δεύτερο εξάμηνο του 2015, συνέβαλλαν στο να μπορεί να περιγραφεί ως εμπροσθοβαρές.

Η διαδικασία αξιολόγησης για την πρώτη Πρόσκληση για Στρατηγικά Έργα ολοκληρώθηκε εντός του 2016 και εγκρίθηκαν τέσσερα (4) Στρατηγικά Έργα.

Το έτος 2017 ήταν πολύ σημαντικό όσον αφορά στην έναρξη υλοποίησης των έργων και επομένως και του Προγράμματος. Το 2017 ολοκληρώθηκε η διαδικασία αξιολόγησης της δεύτερης Πρόσκλησης για τα κοινά έργα και εγκρίθηκαν σαράντα ένα (41) έργα κατά τη διάρκεια της τρίτης συνεδρίασης της Κοινής Επιτροπής Παρακολούθησης (JMC) στις 14/07/2017 στην Κορυτσά. Επιπλέον, πραγματοποιήθηκαν 45 τεχνικές συναντήσεις, για την οριστικοποίηση των εγγράφων για τα εγκεκριμένα έργα και των δύο Προσκλήσεων. Όσον αφορά στον Άξονα της Τεχνικής Βοήθειας του Προγράμματος, αυτός υλοποιείται στο πλαίσιο δύο εγκεκριμένων "έργων".

Σε αυτό το σημείο, θα πρέπει να επισημανθεί το θέμα που προέκυψε σχετικά με την προσαρμογή και την εφαρμογή του Πρακτικού Οδηγού για τις Διαδικασίες Σύναψης Συμβάσεων για τις Εξωτερικές Δράσεις της Ε.Ε. (PRAG) από τους Έλληνες δικαιούχους και τις καθυστερήσεις που προκάλεσε στην εφαρμογή των εγκεκριμένων έργων. Σύμφωνα με τον Εκτελεστικό Κανονισμό 447/2014 της Επιτροπής, οι κανόνες για τη Σύναψη Συμβάσεων για τις Εξωτερικές Δράσεις της Ε.Ε. (PRAG) πρέπει να χρησιμοποιούνται για την ανάθεση συμβάσεων σχετικών με υπηρεσίες, προμήθειες και έργα από τα σχέδια που χρηματοδοτούνται από τα προγράμματα διασυνοριακής συνεργασίας και για τις δύο συμμετέχουσες χώρες. Δεδομένου ότι η Ελλάδα είναι κράτος μέλος της Ε.Ε., θα δημιουργούνταν δυσκολίες στην εφαρμογή και διεξήχθησαν εις βάθος συζητήσεις με τις αρμόδιες αρχές για την εξεύρεση λύσης.

Κατά το έτος 2018 δημοσιεύθηκαν δύο Προσκλήσεις. Η 3^η Πρόσκληση για Υποβολή Στοχευμένων Προτάσεων ήταν ανοιχτή από τις 02/08/2018 έως 01/10/2018. Μια πρόταση (1) εγκρίθηκε από την Κοινή Επιτροπή Παρακολούθησης (JMC) κατά την 4η συνεδρίαση της, στην Πρέβεζα στις 5 Οκτωβρίου 2018. Η 4^η Πρόσκληση για Κοινά Έργα δημοσιεύθηκε στις 17 Οκτωβρίου 2018, με καταληκτική ημερομηνία υποβολής την 28^η Φεβρουαρίου 2019.

Όσον αφορά στην αποδοτικότητα και στην αποτελεσματικότητα των διαδικασιών υποβολής, πρέπει να αναφερθεί ότι, σύμφωνα με την πρωτογενή Έρευνα, σχεδόν το 70% των ερωτηθέντων της ομάδας (α) δήλωσαν την ικανοποίησή τους, ενώ σχεδόν το 8% δήλωσε εξαιρετικά ικανοποιημένο.

Επιπλέον, το έγγραφο σχετικά με τα Κριτήρια Επιλογής Έργων, αναφέρθηκε ότι δίνει σαφή εικόνα της διαδικασίας επιλογής, των εμπλεκόμενων φορέων, των κανόνων επιλογής και των κριτηρίων επιλογής, επομένως ήταν αναμενόμενη η σωστή ενημέρωση των δικαιούχων σχετικά με τη διαδικασία αξιολόγησης και η διασφάλιση της διαφάνειας.

Λαμβάνοντας υπόψη τα συστήματα και τους μηχανισμούς παρακολούθησης του έργου, είναι σημαντικό να υπενθυμίσουμε ότι το Πρόγραμμα θα πρέπει να εφαρμόζει τις αρχές της ηλεκτρονικής συνοχής και σε αυτό το πλαίσιο χρησιμοποιεί Πληροφοριακό Διαχειριστικό Σύστημα προκειμένου να συλλέξει όλες τις πληροφορίες σχετικά με την πρόοδο κάθε εγκεκριμένου έργου και του Προγράμματος. Το Πληροφοριακό Σύστημα Διαχείρισης (MIS) υποστηρίζει την λειτουργία όλων των διαδικασιών που περιγράφονται στο Σύστημα Διαχείρισης και Ελέγχου του Προγράμματος και είναι το εργαλείο που επιτρέπει την ανταλλαγή δεδομένων μεταξύ όλων των εμπλεκόμενων αρχών / φορέων. Το MIS είναι σε πλήρη λειτουργία.

Σε ότι αφορά τη διαδικασία λήψης αποφάσεων της Κοινής Επιτροπής Παρακολούθησης (JMC) αυτή θεωρείται σαφής και διαφανής από σχεδόν το 81% των ερωτηθέντων της ομάδας (β).

Δεν αποτελεί τυχαίο γεγονός άλλωστε ότι η συντριπτική πλειοψηφία των ερωτηθέντων στην έρευνα εξέφρασαν την ικανοποίησή τους για τη συνεργασία τους με τα στελέχη της Διαχειριστικής Αρχής/Κοινής Γραμματείας.

Αυτό υποστηρίζεται και από το γεγονός ότι όλες οι Αρχές του Προγράμματος είναι επαρκώς στελεχωμένες και διαθέτουν την εξειδικευμένη εμπειρία και γνώσεις που απαιτούνται για την επιτυχή διαχείριση του Προγράμματος.

Αξιολογώντας τις δραστηριότητες της στρατηγικής επικοινωνίας που έχουν εφαρμοστεί έως τώρα, οι δράσεις που έχουν γίνει κρίνονται θετικές. Όσον αφορά τις δράσεις επικοινωνίας, θα πρέπει να αναφέρουμε μια αντίφαση αναφορικά με τα ποσοτικά δεδομένα που εξάγονται σχετικά με τους "followers" στα κοινωνικά μέσα δικτύωσης του Προγράμματος. Αν και η κίνηση στα κοινωνικά μέσα δικτύωσης του Προγράμματος έχει αυξηθεί αρκετά μέσα στο 2018, είναι γεγονός ότι το μεγαλύτερο μέρος του δείγματος της ομάδας (α) δήλωσε την προτίμηση του στην ενημέρωση από την ιστοσελίδα του Προγράμματος, ενώ ανέφερε τις "ημέρες πληροφόρησης" (Info Days) και τις "Συχνές Ερωτήσεις" (FAQs) ως την πιο κοινή μέθοδο επικοινωνίας κατά την περίοδο μιας ανοιχτής πρόσκλησης υποβολής προτάσεων.

Όσον αφορά τη φάση υλοποίησης του Προγράμματος, παρατηρήθηκε καθυστέρηση στην υπογραφή της σύμβασης για την επιχορήγηση και στην έναρξη των έργων της 1^{ης} και της 2^{ης} Πρόσκλησης, καθώς η πλειοψηφία των ερωτηθέντων δήλωσε ότι τα έργα ξεκίνησαν τουλάχιστον ένα χρόνο μετά την έγκριση των έργων από την Επιτροπή Παρακολούθησης. Η καθυστέρηση οφείλεται στην εκκρεμότητα λήψης απόφασης για την εφαρμογή Διαδικασιών Σύναψης Συμβάσεων για τις Εξωτερικές Δράσεις της ΕΕ (PRAG Rules) από Έλληνες Δικαιούχους. Κατόπιν της λήψης της σχετικής απόφασης, οι διαδικασίες συμβασιοποίησης των έργων έγιναν εντός των προγραμματισμένων χρονοδιαγραμμάτων.

Επιπλέον, τα επιλεγμένα έργα φαίνεται να συνεισφέρουν στην πολύ-επίπεδη προσέγγιση για την τοπική ανάπτυξη, του Προγράμματος Συνεργασίας. Έτσι, δεδομένου του μεγέθους και του

χαρακτήρα των εγκεκριμένων έργων, είναι προφανές ότι τα αποτελέσματα του κάθε έργου συμβάλλουν καθαρά στους δείκτες και στους στόχους του Προγράμματος.

Όσον αφορά στην δημοσιονομική υλοποίηση του προγράμματος μέχρι τις 31/12/2018, η διαθέσιμη χρηματοδότηση για έργα ανέρχεται σε 54.076.734,00 €. Κατά τη διάρκεια της περιόδου αξιολόγησης, οι επιλέξιμες δαπάνες των δράσεων που επιλέχθηκαν για χρηματοδότηση στο πλαίσιο του προγράμματος συνεργασίας ανέρχονται σε 47.785.729,02 € (88,37% της συνολικής χρηματοδότησης).

Οι Δράσεις στο πλαίσιο του Άξονα Προτεραιότητας 3 έχουν ήδη καλύψει τη δημόσια χρηματοδότηση με ποσό 4.231.203,00 € που αντιστοιχεί στο 100,00% του προβλεπόμενου προϋπολογισμού. Επιπλέον, οι Δράσεις του Άξονα Προτεραιότητας 3 παρουσιάζουν το ψηλότερο ποσοστό επαληθευμένων και πιστοποιημένων δαπανών, 13,98% και 9,52% αντίστοιχα.

Στον Άξονα Προτεραιότητας 1 έχει κατανεμηθεί το υψηλότερο ποσό για χρηματοδότηση από το Πρόγραμμα και στη συνέχεια ακολουθεί ο Άξονας Προτεραιότητας 2. Και οι δύο Άξονες παρουσιάζουν χαμηλά ποσοστά επαληθευμένων δαπανών (0,74% για τον ΑΠ1 και 0,99% για τον ΑΠ2), ενώ ο ΑΠ1 έχει ποσοστό 0,20% σε πιστοποιημένες δαπάνες και ο ΑΠ2 δεν έχει καθόλου πιστοποιημένες δαπάνες.

Στο πλαίσιο αυτό, κρίνεται αναγκαίο να εξεταστεί λεπτομερώς ο τρόπος υλοποίησης των έργων και να προσδιοριστούν λεπτομερώς πιθανά εμπόδια, μέσω των ακόλουθων **προτάσεων**.

- Βελτίωση της δομής των εντύπων και προτύπων που χρησιμοποιούνται από τους δυνητικούς δικαιούχους κατά την υποβολή μιας πρότασης έργου όπως π.χ. το έντυπο αίτησης και το έντυπο ανάλυσης του Προϋπολογισμού².
- Μείωση του διοικητικού φόρτου για την υλοποίηση των έργων. Υπάρχουν διάφορες προτάσεις για απλούστευση των διαδικασιών, για παράδειγμα, οι εκτεταμένες διοικητικές επαληθεύσεις (πρωτοβάθμιος έλεγχος) να αντικατασταθούν από επαληθεύσεις βάσει κινδύνου στις δαπάνες του δικαιούχου.
- Η εναρμόνιση των κανόνων επιλεξιμότητας πρέπει να ενισχυθεί περαιτέρω.
- Θα πρέπει να διερευνηθούν περαιτέρω οι ανάγκες για τη χρήση και τα οφέλη από τη χρήση σύγχρονων εργαλείων επικοινωνίας (π.χ. λογισμικά Skype, Webinar), ηλεκτρονικά σεμινάρια που θα συμβουλευούν σε καθημερινή βάση τους αιτούντες με τρόπο αποτελεσματικό από πλευράς πόρων. Όσον αφορά τα κοινωνικά μέσα, θα μπορούσε να γίνει ανάλυση των ομάδων-στόχων προκειμένου να επισημανθούν τα πλέον προτιμώμενα εργαλεία μέσω κοινωνικής δικτύωσης.
- Η ΔΑ/ΚΓ θα πρέπει να διοργανώνει συχνότερα εκδηλώσεις όπως οι «Ημέρες Πληροφόρησης» (Info Days) βάσει των διαπιστωμένων αναγκών των δικαιούχων και δυνητικών δικαιούχων αναφορικά με την αποτελεσματική διαχείριση συγκεκριμένων ζητημάτων αλλά και για την εφαρμογή του Προγράμματος.

² Πρέπει να αναφερθεί ότι, κατά τη σύνταξη της παρούσας έκθεσης, έχουν ήδη ληφθεί υπόψη τα σχόλια και οι προτάσεις σχετικά με το σχεδιασμό αυτών των εργαλείων - προτύπων / εντύπων, καθώς η διαδικασία υποβολής γίνεται πλέον μέσω του MIS.

Αξίζει να σημειωθεί ότι η αναφορά για την Πρώτη αξιολόγηση της εφαρμογής του Προγράμματος Interreg IPA «Ελλάδα - Αλβανία 2014-2020», πέρα από την πρωτογενή Έρευνα που διεξήχθη μεταξύ των δικαιούχων και δυνητικών δικαιούχων των εγκεκριμένων και απορριφθεισών προτάσεων και των Αρχών του Προγράμματος, μπορεί να επικεντρωθεί μόνο σε έναν περιορισμένο όγκο πληροφοριών λόγω του αρχικού σταδίου υλοποίησης των εγκεκριμένων Έργων. Παρ, όλα αυτά, τα διαθέσιμα δεδομένα επέτρεψαν την εξέταση μελλοντικών προοπτικών και οι επόμενες εκθέσεις αξιολόγησης θα μπορούν να παρέχουν περισσότερες πληροφορίες και προτάσεις ή/και συστάσεις.

Përmbledhje Ekzekutive

Qëllimi i "vlerësimit të parë" të Programit Interreg IPA CBC "Greqi - Shqipëri" 2014-2020 është vlerësimi i efikasitetit dhe efektivitetit të sistemit të menaxhimit të programit, si dhe vendosja e terrenit për drejtimin e ardhshëm të vlerësimeve të ndikimit që do të kryhet pas vitit 2018. Bazuar në rezultatet e vlerësimit dhe rekomandimeve të ekipit vlerësues, autoritetet e programit duhet të jenë në gjendje të korrigjojnë / përmirësojnë / modifikojnë / zhvillojnë menaxhimin dhe zbatimin e programit në mënyrë që të jenë më efikas, efektiv dhe të aftë për të arritur programin ndjekur rezultate dhe objektiva.

Në këtë kuadër dhe për të siguruar të dhëna shtesë, Vlerësuesi i Jashtëm, përveç hulumtimit në literaturë të literaturës përkatëse, kështu ndërthuren Termat e Referencave dhe Udhëzimeve, Sistemin e Menaxhimit dhe Kontrollit të Programit, Studimet MIS dhe Vlerësimit të Interreg Programet gjithashtu kryen një studim online duke përdorur format e Google Docs (hulumtimi primar cilësor).

Qëllimi i hulumtimit në internet ishte prodhimi dhe sigurimi i kualifikimeve për zbatimin e Programit Interreg IPA CBC "Greqi - Shqipëri 2014-2020", duke hartuar dhe analizuar perceptimet, pikëpamjet dhe sugjerimet e autoriteteve të programit si dhe përfituesit e përfshirë në veprimet dhe zbatimin e Programit të Bashkëpunimit.

Sondazhi në internet është kryer gjatë periudhës nga data 7/12/2018 deri më 16/1/2019. Për qëllime të Pyetësorit në internet, pyetësorët gjysmë të strukturuar të përshtatura janë zhvilluar përmes mjetit "Formularët e Dosjeve të Google". Pyetësori iu drejtua grupeve të ndryshme të të anketuarve kështu (a) Aplikantët / Përfituesit e propozimeve të miratuara dhe të refuzuara të Projektit Interreg IPA CBC "Greqi - Shqipëri 2014-2020" dhe (b) Autoritetet e Programit / Anëtarët e KPM. Lidhshmëria për anketimin online për grupin (a) është dërguar në mënyrë elektronike në 162 Përfitues dhe Përfitues potencial nga të cilët 104 janë të bazuara në Greqi dhe 58 janë të bazuara në Shqipëri. Lidhja për anketën online për grupin (b) është dërguar në mënyrë elektronike në 45 Autoritetet Programore dhe Anëtarët e JMC nga të cilët 32 grekë dhe 13 shqiptarë. Vazhdimisht, është bërë vazhdimësia, si nëpërmjet komunikimit telefonik ashtu edhe me dërgimin e emailit përkujtues, në mënyrë që të sigurohet mbledhja e përgjigjeve adekuate. Si rezultat, janë pranuar 65 përgjigje nga grupi (a) dhe 22 përgjigje nga grupi (b). Shkalla e reagimit për të dy grupet mund të konsiderohet përfaqësuese, duke e bërë rezultatet e studimit si statistikisht të besueshme. Pjesëmarrja e përgjithshme në Anketë, është përmbledhur në tabelën vijuese:

Grupi i synuar	Numri total i kontakteve	Përgjigjet	Shkalla e reagimit
Aplikantët / përfituesit e propozimeve të miratuara dhe të refuzuara	162	65	40%
Anëtarët e Komitetit të Përbashkët të Monitorimit (JMC)	45	22	48.88%

Programi Interreg IPA CBC Greqi - Shqipëri 2014-2020 erdhi me Vendimin Implementues të Komisionit C (2015) 5482 të datës 30 korrik 2015. Viti 2016 ishte viti i parë i zbatimit, me organizimin e dy ngjarjeve lansuese në Greqi dhe një në Shqipëri dhe nisjen e dy thirrjeve; një për projektet strategjike dhe një për projektet e zakonshme. Ky fakt në kombinim me miratimin e Programit në gjysmën e dytë të vitit 2015, kishte një ndikim në Programin që mund të përshkruhet si një program i ngarkesës së përpame.

Procedura e vlerësimit për Thirrjen e Parë për Projektet Strategjike u përfundua brenda vitit 2016 dhe u miratuan katër (4) Projekte Strategjike.

Viti 2017 ishte shumë i rëndësishëm në lidhje me fillimin e projekteve, pra zbatimi i programit. Në vitin 2017 u përfundua procedura e vlerësimit për Thirrjen e dytë për Projektet e Zakonshme dhe katërdhjetë e një (41) Projekte të Zakonshme u miratuan gjatë Mbledhjes së 3-të të Komitetit të Përbashkët Monitorues (JMC), më 14/07/2017 në Korçë. Për më tepër, gjatë vitit 2017 janë mbajtur 45 takime teknike për finalizimin e dokumenteve për projektet e miratuara të të dyja thirrjeve. Sa i përket Asistencës Teknike të Programit, kjo do të zbatohet në kuadër të dy "projekteve"; një për pjesën greke të buxhetit dhe një për pjesën shqiptare.

Në këtë pikë, duhet të theksojmë çështjen që kishte lindur në lidhje me përshtatjen dhe zbatimin e Udhëzuesit Praktik për Procedurat e Kontratës për Veprimet e Jashtme të BE-së (PRAG) nga Përfituesit Grekë dhe vonesat që ajo shkaktoi për zbatimin e projekteve të miratuara. Sipas Rregullores Zbatuese të IPA II-së të IPA-s 447/2014, rregullat e prokurimit të BE-së për Veprim të Jashtëm (PRAG) do të përdoren në dhënien e kontratave të shërbimeve, furnizimeve dhe punëve nga projektet e financuara nga projekti CBC për të dy vendet pjesëmarrëse. Duke qenë se Greqia është një Shtet Anëtar, u ngritën vështirësi dhe u zhvilluan diskutime të hollësishme me autoritetet kompetente për gjetjen e një zgjidhjeje.

Gjatë vitit 2018 u bënë dy Thirrje. Thirrja e Thirrjeve të Posaçme për Propozime të Projektit u hap nga data 02/08/2018 deri më 01/10/2018. Një propozim i synuar i Projektit u miratua unanimisht nga KPM në mbledhjen e tij të katërt në Prevezë më 5 tetor 2018. Thirrja e katërt për projektet e zakonshme filloi më 17 tetor dhe aktualisht është e hapur, me afatin e dorëzimit më 28 tetor të shkurtit 2019.

Sa i përket efikasitetit dhe efikasitetit të procedurave dhe formave të paraqitjes, duhet të përmendet se si rezultat i anketës, pothuajse 70% e të anketuarve të grupit (a) shprehën kënaqësinë e tyre, ndërsa pothuajse 8% deklaruan si shumë të kënaqur.

Për më tepër, dokumenti mbi kriteret e përzgjedhjes së projektit, dha një pasqyrë të qartë të procedurës së përzgjedhjes, organeve të përfshira, rregullave të përzgjedhjes dhe kriterëve të përzgjedhjes, në mënyrë që përfituesit të jenë të informuar mirë për procesin e vlerësimit dhe transparenca është siguruar.

Duke marrë parasysh sistemet dhe mekanizmat e monitorimit të projektit, është e rëndësishme të kujtojmë se Programi duhet të zbatojë parimet e kohezionit elektronik dhe në këtë kuadër të operojë një MS elektronik me qëllim që të mbledhë të gjitha informatat mbi progresin e projektit dhe programit. Sistemi i Informacionit të Menaxhimit (MIS) mbështet performancën e të gjitha procedurave, duke përfshirë shkëmbimin elektronik të të dhënave ndërmjet Autoriteteve / organeve përkatëse (Përfituesit, Autoriteti Menaxhues / Sekretariati i Përbashkët, Autoritetet Kombëtare, Autoriteti Verifikues, Autoriteti i Auditimit, Komisioni European). Programet e Bashkëpunimit

Territorial European konsiderohen si të përshtatshme dhe në vend. Procesi i vendimmarrjes në kuadër të KPM konsiderohet i qartë dhe transparent nga pothuajse 81% e grupit (b) të anketuarve.

Nuk është rastësi që shumica dërrmuese e të anketuarve në anketë shprehën kënaqësinë e tyre me bashkëpunimin e tyre me drejtuesit e MA / JS.

Kjo mbështetet nga fakti që të gjitha autoritetet kanë mjaft staf dhe gjithashtu kanë eksperiencë dhe ekspertizë të specializuar për të menaxhuar me sukses Programin.

Vlerësimi i aktiviteteve të strategjisë së komunikimit të zbatuara deri më tani, duket se është bërë një përpjekje pozitive. Sa i përket veprimeve të komunikimit, duhet të përmendim një kontradiktë midis të dhënave sasiore të rishikuara nga pasuesit e faqeve të mediave sociale dhe trafikut - që duket se janë rritur brenda vitit 2018 - dhe fakti që shumica e mostrës së grupit) preferon të informohet nga uebfaqja e Programit dhe i ka referuar "ditët e informimit" dhe "FAQs" si metoda më e zakonshme e komunikimit gjatë thirrjes për propozime.

Sa i përket fazës së implementimit të Programit, vonohet vonesa në nënshkrimin e kontratave të subvencionimit dhe fillimi i projekteve të Thirrjes së Parë dhe të Dytë, pasi shumica e të anketuarve deklaruan se projektet kanë filluar të paktën një vit pas miratimit të projekteve nga KPM. Vonesa ishte për shkak të çështjeve në lidhje me përshtatjen dhe zbatimin e Udhëzuesit Praktik për Procedurat e Kontratës për Veprimet e Jashtme të BE-së (PRAG) nga Përfituesit Grekë. Pas marrjes së vendimit, procedurat e kontraktimit u përfunduan në afatet kohore të caktuara.

Lidhur me zbatimin financiar të programit deri më 31.12.2018, fondet në dispozicion për projektet e miratuara arrijnë në 54.076.734,00 €. Gjatë periudhës së vlerësimit, kostot e pranueshme të veprimeve të përzgjedhura për të financuar në kuadër të Programit të Bashkëpunimit arrijnë në 47.785.729,02 € që është 88,37% e totalit të financimit.

Aksionet në kuadër të Aksionit Prioritar 3 kanë mbuluar tashmë financimet në dispozicion me 4.231.203,00 € që është 100,00% e fondeve të alokuara. Gjithashtu, veprimet sipas Akset Prioritare 3 kanë normën më të lartë të verifikuar dhe të certifikuar shpenzimet, përkatësisht 13,98% dhe 9,52%.

Aksi prioritar 1 është alokuar me shumën më të madhe për financim nga Programi i ndjekur nga Aksi Prioritari 2. Të dy Akset tregojnë një shkallë shumë të vogël në shpenzimet e verifikuara (0,74% për PA1 dhe 0,99% për PA2), ndërsa PA1 0.20% e kostove të certifikuar dhe PA2 nuk kanë kurrfarë shpenzime të certifikuar.

Në këtë kuadër duket e nevojshme të shqyrtohet tërësisht mënyra e zbatimit të projekteve dhe të identifikohen pengesat e mundshme, përmes **rekomandimeve të mëposhtme**.

- Strukturimi dhe konsistenca më e mirë e paketës së aplikantit - mjete të tilla si formulari i aplikimit dhe formulari i Specifikimit të Buxhetit.
- Reduktimi i barrës administrative për zbatimin e projektit - Ka një numër sugjerimesh për përmirësim, për shembull, me verifikime të gjera administrative (kontrolli i nivelit të parë) që duhet të zëvendësohet nga verifikimet e bazuara në rrezik mbi shpenzimet e përfituesit.
- Harmonizimi i rregullave të përshtatshmërisë duhet të forcohet më tej.
- Nevojat dhe përfitimet për të përdorur mjete bashkëkohore të komunikimit (p.sh. Skype, softuer Webinar) duhet të hulumtohen më tej, Webinarë të drejtpërdrejtë për aplikantët më të mirë të këshillave në baza ditore në mënyrë efikase në burime. Lidhur me mediat sociale,

mund të bëhet një analizë e grupeve të synuara për të kuptuar mjetet e tyre më të preferuara të mediave sociale për t'u informuar.

- MA / JS duhet të organizojë më shpesh Ditët e Informacionit në përputhje me nevojat e njohura për të trajtuar në mënyrë efikase dhe efektive çështjet e identifikuara edhe në zbatimin e programit.

Vlen të theksohet se Vlerësimi i Parë i zbatimit dhe ndikimit të Programit Interreg IPA CBC Greqi - Shqipëri 2014-2020 pavarësisht nga anketa u zhvillua midis Aplikantëve / Përfituesve të propozimeve të miratuara dhe të refuzuara të projekteve dhe Autoriteteve Programore të Anëtarëve të JMC, mund të përqëndrohen vetëm në një grup i kufizuar i informacionit, për shkak të fazës fillestare të zbatimit të projekteve të përzgjedhura, edhe nëse të dhënat në dispozicion lejojnë shqyrtimin e disa perspektivave të ardhshme. Natyrisht, raportet e ardhshme të vlerësimit do të ofrojnë më shumë informata dhe rekomandime.

Introduction

The present issue is the fourth deliverable of the project “First evaluation of implementation and impact of the Interreg IPA CBC Programme Greece – Albania 2014-2020” of the European Territorial Cooperation Objective of the programming period 2014-2020.

Evaluation is a strategic tool for managing, correcting and reprogramming an intervention, as it is an operational text in the sense that it is a management tool and a roadmap of Programmed actions. It also has the required dynamic character. Even if it is detailed, it is general in nature, with the provision of future updates for the needs of the Programme. When used effectively, it promotes the culture of organizational learning and enhances accountability to achieve goals and results. However, in order to fully play this role, particular attention should be paid to the formulation of the findings and recommendations, as well as to the possible lessons to be drawn.

In particular, for the Interreg IPA CBC Programme "Greece-Albania 2014-2020" and according to the Article 54 of the Common Provision Regulation 1303/2013, evaluations are carried out to improve the design and implementation quality of the Programmes, as well as to assess effectiveness, efficiency and impact. Moreover, according to Article 56.3 of the same Regulation, during the programming period, the managing authority shall ensure that evaluations, including evaluations to assess effectiveness, efficiency and impact, are carried out for each Programme on the basis of the evaluation plan and that each evaluation is subject to appropriate follow-up in accordance with the EU rules. At least once during the programming period, an evaluation shall assess how support from the European Structural & Investment (ESI) Funds has contributed to the objectives for each priority.

In the past, evaluations focused more on implementation and absorption of resources. The emphasis is now on evaluating the achievement of the expected results and the impact assessment.

The overall tasks of the specific Evaluation are to:

- improve the quality of evaluations through proper planning, including identification and collection of necessary data (Article 54(2) CPR),
- enable informed Programme management and policy decisions on the basis of evaluation findings,
- provide a framework to plan impact evaluation (Article 56(3) CPR),
- ensure that evaluations provide inputs for annual implementation and progress reports,
- facilitate the synthesis of findings from different Participating States by the Commission and the exchange of available evidence.

The specific objectives as far as the impact evaluation is concerned are to evaluate:

- whether the Programme succeeded in achieving the objectives of each priority,
- whether the Programme contributed to the target of the IPA II objectives.

The purpose of the first type of evaluation is to assess effectiveness and efficiency of the Programme management system and Programme implementation. Effectiveness refers to the degree to which set

objectives and targets are achieved. Efficiency refers to the use of financial / administrative resources in relation to outputs and results. The aim of impact evaluations is to assess how the Interreg IPA CBC Programme “Greece-Albania 2014-2020” funding contributed to the objectives of each priority Axis of the Programme.

The impact of the Programme shall be evaluated and disentangled from any other trends and developments in the Programme area.

This assessment will be a tool to evaluate whether the Programme's specific objectives are already covered by a sufficient number of approved projects, but also to identify possible gaps that should be taken into account in the forthcoming calls for proposals. What is being evaluated is whether the Programme is in line with the planned goals. In addition, the External Evaluation can lead to important findings regarding the Programme administration and to propose measures in order weaknesses to be overcome.

The results of this evaluation will be included in the Annual Implementation Reports of 2018, 2021 and in the Final Implementation Report (CPR Art.50). All the findings of the 2014-2020 programming period will also be highlighted.

The First evaluation of implementation and impact of the Interreg IPA CBC Programme Greece – Albania 2014-2020 despite the survey took place among Programme Authorities and project beneficiaries, could focus only on a limited set of information, due to the initial stage of the implementation of the selected projects, even if the available data allow the consideration of some future perspectives. Naturally, the next evaluation reports will provide more information and recommendations.

1 The Interreg IPA CBC Programme "Greece-Albania 2014-2020"

Cross border cooperation policy is about establishing links across national boundaries to enable joint approaches to common problems and opportunities. The present Programme constitutes a set of proposals for the interventions envisaged under the terms of the cross border cooperation of European Territorial Cooperation for the period 2014-2020 and the IPA II specific objectives on the regional integration and territorial cooperation involving EU Member States and IPA II beneficiary countries. The Interreg IPA Cross-Border Cooperation Programme "Greece – Albania 2014-2020" has been approved by the European Commission decision C(2015) 5482 final of 30th July 2015.

As the successor to the IPA Cross-Border Programme "Greece – Albania 2007-2013" it will attempt to capitalize on the experience gained and the lessons learned by the participants and the implementing structures in order to bring cooperation to a new level.

The global objective of the Programme is "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 **eligible cross-border area** spreads from the Ionian Sea to the Prespa lakes, and includes:

- the Regional Units of Grevena, Kastoria, Florina, Arta, Thesprotia, Ioannina, Preveza, Zakynthos, Kerkyra, Kefallinia and Lefkada in Greece, and
- the Region of Vlorë, the Region of Gjirokastrë, the Region of Korçë and the Region of Berat in Albania.

The **eligible cross-border area** covers an area of 28,526 km² (17.445 km² for Greece cross-border area and 11.081 km² for Albania cross-border area) with a total population of 1,339,804 inhabitants (729.687 inhabitants for Greece cross-border area and 610.117 inhabitants for Albania cross-border area) (census data of 2011).

Programme Strategy-Selected Thematic Objectives and Specific Objectives

The strategy of the Cooperation Programme is served by the following three Priority Axes and the following individual thematic priorities:

- ✓ Priority Axis 1: Promotion of the environment, sustainable transport and public infrastructure
- ✓ Priority Axis 2: Boosting the local economy
- ✓ Priority Axis 3: Technical Assistance

Thematic Priorities:

c) Promoting sustainable transport, information and communication networks and services and investing in cross-border water, waste and energy systems and facilities (Priority Axis 1),

b) Protecting the environment & promoting climate change adaptation & mitigation, risk prevention & management (Priority Axis 1),

d) Encouraging tourism and cultural and natural heritage (Priority Axis 2),

g) Enhancing competitiveness, the business environment and the development of small and medium-sized enterprises (Priority Axis 2).

The following Table presents the Priority Axes, Thematic Priorities and Specific objectives of the Programme.

Table 1-1 – Priority Axes, Thematic Priorities and Specific objectives of the Programme

Priority axis	Thematic priority	Specific objective(s)
1	(c): Promoting sustainable transport, information and communications networks & services and investing in cross-border water, waste & energy systems and facilities	1.1: Increase the capacity of cross border infrastructure in transport, water & waste management
	(b): Protecting the environment & promoting climate change adaptation & mitigation, risk prevention & management	1.2: Increase the effectiveness of environmental protection & sustainable use of natural resources
		1.3: Increase energy-efficiency and the use of RES.
		1.4: Improve the effectiveness of risk prevention and disaster management with a focus on forest fires
2	(d): Encouraging tourism and cultural and natural heritage	2.1: Preserve cultural and natural resources as a prerequisite for tourism development of the cross border area.
	(g): Enhancing competitiveness the business environment and the development of small and medium-sized enterprises (SMEs), trade and investment	2.2: Improve cross-border capacity to support entrepreneurship, business survival and competitiveness

The specific objectives of each thematic priority and the main **expected results** of the Programme are expected to be:

SO 1.1 Increase the capacity of cross-border infrastructure in transport, water and waste management

- Increased share of water resources used sustainably.
- Increased capacity for wastewater treatment.
- Increased share of solid waste managed sustainably.
- Improved maturity of cross-border accessibility interventions

SO 1.2 Increase the effectiveness of environmental protection & sustainable use of natural resources

- Better management of natural-protected sites.
- Improved institutional capacity and coordinated policies in environmental protection and sustainable use of natural resources.

SO 1.3 Increase energy efficiency and the use of RES

- Reduced overall energy consumption in the public sector.
- Increased share of energy from RES in the public sector.
- Increased population awareness regarding energy efficiency.

SO 1.4 Improve the effectiveness of risk prevention and disaster management with a focus on forest fires

- Improved cross border preparedness for effective management of natural disasters.
- Coordinated decision making tools and early warning systems.
- Reduction of damages from forest fires.
- Improved Civil Protection – Better Informed Public.

SO 2.1 Preserve cultural and natural resources as a prerequisite for tourism development of the cross-border area

- Contribute to growth in the tourist business sector
- Improved capacity to sustainably use natural and cultural resources in the cross-border area.
- Preserved/protected/promoted cultural and natural assets

SO 2.2 Improve cross-border capacity to support entrepreneurship, business survival and competitiveness

- Improved capacities of regional actors/facilities to support the development/growth of businesses
- Improved cross-border business survival
- Collaborative schemes of businesses.
- Increase in exports of CB businesses.

2 Evaluation methodology

The purpose of the “first evaluation” of the Interreg IPA CBC Programme “Greece – Albania 2014-2020” is to assess the efficiency and effectiveness of the Programme management system, as well as to set the ground for the future direction of the impact evaluations to be carried out after 2018. Based on the outcomes of the evaluation and the recommendations of the evaluation team, the Programme authorities should be able to correct/ improve/ modify/ develop the Programme management and implementation in order to be more efficient, effective and capable of reaching the Programme results.

The First evaluation of implementation and impact of the Interreg IPA CBC Programme Greece – Albania 2014-2020 despite the survey took place among Programme Authorities and project beneficiaries, could focus only on a limited set of information, due to the initial stage of the implementation of the selected projects, even if the available data allow the consideration of some future perspectives. Naturally, the next evaluation reports will provide more information and recommendations.

In this framework and in order to provide additional data, the External Evaluator, apart from the desk research to the relevant literature thus the interact Terms of References and guidelines, the Management and Control System of the Programme, the MIS and Evaluation studies of other Interreg Programmes, also conducted an online survey by using Google Docs forms (qualitative primary research).

The objective of the online survey was to produce and provide qualitative data about the implementation of the Interreg IPA CBC Programme “Greece - Albania 2014-2020”, by mapping and analyzing the **perceptions, views** and **suggestions** of the Programme authorities as well as the beneficiaries involved in the actions and implementation of the CP.

The online survey was conducted during the period from 7/12/2018 to 16/1/2019 and the main research tool that was used was a semi-structured questionnaire. During the phase of the questionnaires’ development, particular attention was paid to:

- The need to cover all the issues raised by the survey.
- The completeness of the structure and the correctness of the questioning in order to minimize the loss of information due to the inability or refusal of respondents to give feedback.
- The sample meets the requirements of the statistical analysis for reliable results and conclusions.
- The average duration of the questionnaire due to the limited time available for respondents to complete.

The questionnaire consists mainly of close-ended questions and aimed at:

- Recording the challenges and any difficulties in Programme’s implementation
- Focus on the measures taken to meet the challenges, the progress made so far and possible proposals

In **7/12/2018** the External Evaluator’s team initially informed all the participants of the survey about the objectives of the online survey and invited them to fill in the online questionnaire by sending corresponding emails. Afterwards, External Evaluator’s team, with the assistance of the Joint Secretariat’s officers, contacted by telephone all participants in order to induce them to participate in the survey and provide them with additional information.

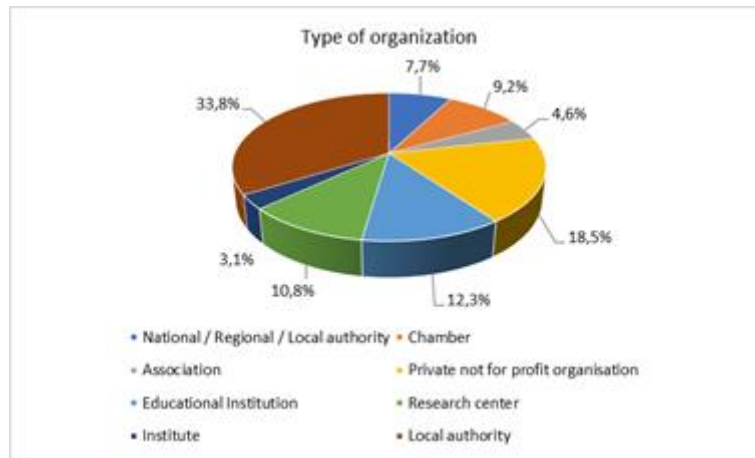
Specifically, the questionnaire was sent to **32** Greek authorities and **13** Albanian authorities and was answered by **13** Greek and **9** Albanian authorities.

The following authorities finally answered the online questionnaire:

1. The Joint Secretariat (Greece)
2. The Managing Authority (Greece) – *Head of the MA and Head of Unit B2 of the MA*
3. Ministry of Interior - Sector Macedonia and Thrace (Greece)
4. Special Secretariat for ERDF & CF funded sectoral Ops (Greece)
5. Ministry of Environment and Energy-Environment Sector (Greece)
6. Region of Vlore (Albania)
7. Agency for the Support of Civil Society (Albania)
8. First Level Control Office (Albania)
9. Regional Council Of Korçe (Albania)
10. Regional Authority of Western Macedonia (Greece)
11. Region of Epirus (Greece)
12. Ministry of Maritime Affairs and Insular Policy (Greece)
13. Special Service for the Tourism Sector (Greece)
14. Association of Greek Regions - EN.P.E. (Greece)
15. Ministry of Health (Greece)
16. Regional Council of Gjirokastra (Albania)
17. Albanian Development Fund (Albania)
18. ADF (Albania)
19. Ministry of infrastructure and energy (Albania)
20. National Coordination Authority (Greece)
21. Operating Structure (Albania)

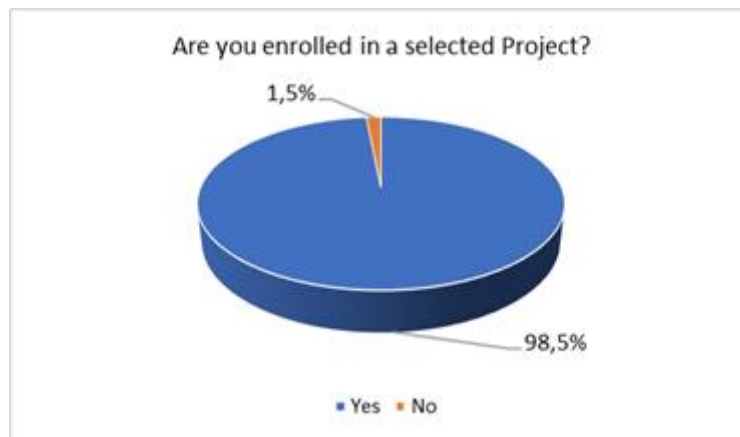
Moreover, the questionnaire was sent to **104** Greek and **58** Albanian beneficiaries and answered by **50** Greek beneficiaries and **15** Albanian beneficiaries, sample that corresponds to a number of 36 selected projects.

Figure 2.1 - Type of organization of beneficiaries participated in the research



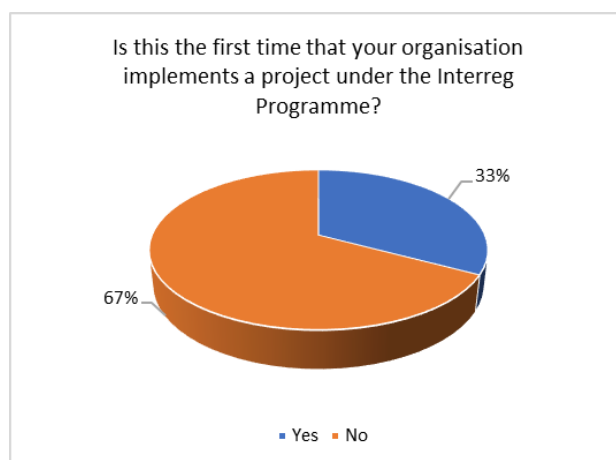
The sample of the research consists of various beneficiaries (Figure 2.1). Indicatively, there are **National / Regional / Local authorities** (7,7%), **Chambers** (9,2%), **Associations** (4,6%), **Private not for profit organizations** (18,5%), **Educational Institutions** (12,3%), **Research centers** (10,8%), **Institutes** (3,1%) and **Local authorities** (33,8%).

Figure 2.2 - Type of beneficiaries participated in the research



Sixty-five beneficiaries and potential beneficiaries of the Interreg IPA CBC Programme Greece – Albania 2014-2020 participated in the evaluation procedure of the Programme. According to Figure 2.2, the vast majority of beneficiaries (98,5%) are enrolled in a selected Project while only the 1,5% of them are not a part of an Interreg Programme.

Figure 2.3 - Participation in an Interreg Programme



According to the Figure 2.3, 67% of beneficiaries have participated in an Interreg Programme more than one time, while for 33% of them is the first time they are a part of an Interreg Programme.

3 Introduction to the CP management structure and status of CP implementation

3.1 Overall Programme management structure, stakeholders and instruments

The management and implementation of the cooperation Programme involves a wide range of actors and a complex and highly differentiated set of processes to achieve the stated results. The “ecosystem” of actors is described in a simplified way in the illustration below.

Figure 3.1 - Operational Correlation of the Entities that are engaged in the Management and Control System of the Interreg IPA II CBC Programme Greece – Albania 2014 – 2020

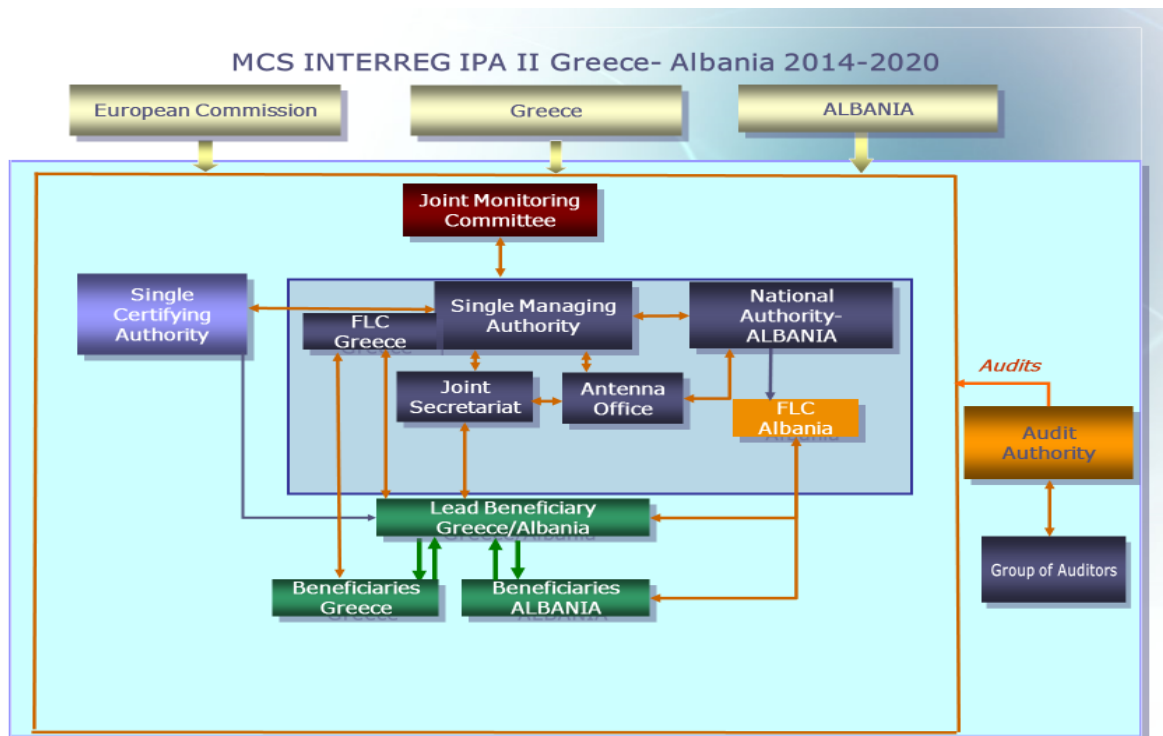


Figure 3.1 shows the operational correlation among the entities that are engaged in the Management and Control System:

- The Joint Monitoring Committee was established, both countries being equally represented complying with the partnership principle in managing, monitoring and evaluating the operations at all stages of the Programme implementation. The Committee comprises 18 members with voting right and 26 members without voting right.
- The Managing Authority is the responsible body for the sound management of the programme, which comes under the “Special Service for Managing the European

Territorial Cooperation Objective Programmes” within the Greek Ministry of Economy and Development as per Article 5, paragraph 1 (f) of Greek Law 4314/2014.

- The Joint Secretariat is based in Thessaloniki at the premises of the Managing Authority according to Article 43, paragraph 1 of Greek Law 4314/2014.
- Certifying Authority is the Special Service “Certifying and Verifications Authority of Co-funded Programmes” within the Greek Ministry of Economy and Development.
- Audit Authority is the Financial Audit Committee (EDEL), which comes under the General Secretariat for Financial Policy of Ministry of Finance, was established by Article 11 of Law The *Group of Auditors*, supports the Audit Authority to carry out its duties as provided for in Article 25(2) of Regulation (EC) No 1299/2013. The GoA is comprised of representatives from the relevant audit authorities of both cooperating countries. Thus, the GoA is independent from the national bodies responsible for first level control carried out under Article 23 (4) of Regulation (EC) No 1299/2013 and for the certification of expenditure and the Monitoring Committee of the Programme. The Albanian audit authority is the Audit Agency for the Accredited Assistance of European Programmes (Albanian Audit Authority), using its own resources.
- The First Level Controllers are the persons responsible for carrying out the verifications of expenditure (i.e. First level Control) in relation to beneficiaries located in its territory of Greece and Albania and designated by each country participating in the Programme, according to Article 23 paragraph (4) of Regulation (EU) 1299/2013. In Greece the Controllers shall be registered in the Registry of Controllers which has been set up with the Ministerial Decision for the “Establishment of a Register of First Level Controllers” of the Minister of Economy and Development according to article 43(3) of Law 4314/2014.
- The Beneficiaries are the bodies that are participating in an operation/project and are responsible for its implementation according to the Programme.

In the Albanian Territory, the relevant bodies involved in the management of the Programme are presented in a Bilateral Agreement concluded among Greece and Albania. More specifically:

- The Albanian National Authority is the Ministry for Europe and Foreign Affairs and is in charge for the overall management of the Programme, mainly on the Albanian side, and co-operates closely with the Managing Authority in the programming and implementation of the relevant cross-border Programmes establishing common co-ordination mechanisms. The Albanian National Authority is responsible for the implementation of the Programme according to provisions of Chapter III of Regulation (EC) 447/2014.
- The Albanian National IPA Coordinator (NIPAC) - this role is covered *ex-officio* by the Albanian Minister for Europe and Foreign Affairs. The tasks of the NIPAC are defined in Article 4 of the IPA II Implementing Regulation (447/2014). NIPAC ensures coordination within the IPA II beneficiary's administration and with other donors and a close link between the use of IPA II assistance and the general accession process. As regards "territorial cooperation" policy area, the NIPAC is supported by the Albanian Operating

Structure for Territorial Cooperation, known also as Albanian National Authority for Territorial cooperation.

- The Antenna office of the Joint Secretariat is based in Saranda (Albania). The Antenna Office has the same duties with the JS Office in Thessaloniki, related with the assistance and support of both the Managing Authority and the Albanian National Authority. It is composed of one person.
- The First Level Control Office (FLCO in Albania) - Albania has established a centralized verification of expenditure system at national level. The verifications of expenditures of the Albanian beneficiaries under this programme are carried out by the First Level Control (FLCO) Office, under the supervision of the Ministry for Europe and Foreign Affairs. The FLCO is responsible for performance of administrative verifications as well as on the spot checks to cover the additional verifications from financial, technical and physical aspects of projects co-financed from INTERREG IPA CBC Programme Greece – Albania. The office is staffed by the Head of the office and two First Level Controllers. The cost for the Albanian FLC staff is covered by the Technical Assistance project budget.

3.2 Status of implementation of the cooperation Programme

3.2.1. Calls for proposal

The **1st Call for Strategic Proposals** was launched on 12th of February 2016 and the deadline was the 15th of May 2016. The total budget of this call was 11.000.000,00 €. Both Priority Axes were activated, while only 2 out the 4 thematic priorities and 2 out of the 6 specific objectives were engaged for this specific call. A total of six project proposals were submitted. Four project proposals under Specific Objective 1.1 (Increase the capacity of CB infrastructure in transport, water & waste management) and two project proposals under Specific Objective 2.1 (Preserve cultural and natural resources as a prerequisite for tourism development of the cross border area). Four strategic project proposals were approved during the 2nd JMC Meeting in Igoumenitsa (Greece) on 24/11/2016. Three strategic project proposals under Specific Objective 1.1 with a total budget of € 9.065.553,03 and one project proposal under Specific Objective 2.1 with a budget of € 2.471.083.

The **2nd Call for Ordinary Project Proposals** was published on the 13th of April 2016 with a reference on the submission period starting from 17th of May 2016 until the 5th of September 2016. One month later, on the 16th of May 2016, the 2nd Call for Ordinary Project Proposals was officially launched. A first extension of the deadline, due to the great interest on the submission of project proposals, was approved by the JMC on the 29th of August 2016, moving the deadline to the 30th of September 2016, with the last proposals allowed to be received by the 7th of October 2016. On the 29th of September 2016, the JMC approved a second extension of the call's deadline, due to the great interest on the submission of project proposals, for up to the 14th of October 2016, with that being also the final date for the receipt of project proposals. The total

budget of the 2nd Call for Project Proposals was almost 14 million €. The total number of submitted project proposals was 200. 41 Projects were approved during the 3rd JMC Meeting, on 14/07/2017 in Korce (Albania). Eight project proposals under Specific Objective 1.1 with a total budget of €6.572.105.89; three project proposals under Specific Objective 1.2 with a total budget of €1.247.331.72; five project proposals under Specific Objective 1.3 with a total budget of €2.619.891.00; two project proposals under Specific Objective 1.4 with a total budget of €905.955.00; fourteen project proposals under Specific Objective 2.1 with a total budget of €8.304.409.59 and nine project proposals under Specific Objective 2.2 with a total budget of €5.145.876.98.

The 3rd Targeted Call for Project Proposals of the “Greece-Albania 2014-2020” Programme was open from 2/8/2018 to 1/10/2018. It was only for Specific Objective 1.1 under the Priority Axis 1, which is to increase the capacity of CB infrastructure in transport, water & waste management and with targeted interventions the studies on the vertical axis of Egnatia Motorway: Igoumenitsa – Sagiada -Mavromati and the update/ renewal of the current infrastructure in the border crossing point “Qafe Bote” as well as the improvement of the surrounding spaces. The project proposal COMOBILION was approved by the 4th JMC on the 23rd of November 2018 with a budget of €7.149.505.00.

The 4th Call for Ordinary Project Proposals was open (from 17/10/2018) and the deadline after one extension was set at the 28th/02/2019 (following the JMC decision via written procedure for the 1st extension of the 4th Call tat was set on 29/01/2019). Applicants are invited to submit their applications under both Priority Axes and for 2 related Specific Objectives:

- Priority Axis 1: Promotion of the environment sustainable transport & public infrastructure / Specific Objective 1.3 Increase energy-efficiency and the use of RES
- Priority Axis 2: Boosting the local economy / Specific Objective 2.1: Preserve cultural and natural resources as a prerequisite for tourism development of the cross border area

The following table provides an overview of launched calls.

Table 3-1 – Calls for Project Proposals Overview

Calls for Project Proposals Overview						
Call	Procedure	Submission period	No. of applicants	Selected projects	Timeframe of Selection	Max. project duration
1 st Call for Strategic Proposals	1st step Website application	12/02/2016 - 15/05/2016	6	4	~ 6 months (contr. Date: 24/11/2016)	36 months
2 nd Call for Ordinary Project Proposals	1st step Website application	17/5/2016 - 14/10/2016	200	41	9 months (contr. Date: 14/7/2017)	24 months
3 rd Call for Targeted Project Proposals	1st step Website application	2/8/2018 - 1/10/2018	1	1	~ 1 month (contr. Date: 23/11/2018)	30 months

Calls for Project Proposals Overview						
Call	Procedure	Submission period	No. of applicants	Selected projects	Timeframe of Selection	Max. project duration
4 th Call for Ordinary Project Proposals	1st step Website application	17/10/2018 - 28/02/2019	183	52 submitted projects	<i>the selection procedures are still in progress</i>	
						4 months

3.2.2. Events (call and non-call related)

The following events were conducted by the MA/JS at Programme level till 31/10/2018³:

Events

1. One Launching Event of the Programming Period 2014-2020 was organized in Thessaloniki, Greece in June 2015.
2. One Launching Event of the Programming Period 2014-2020 was organized in Korca, Albania in November 2015.
3. 6 Info-days were organised in total for the promotion of the 1st Call for Strategic Project Proposals in Feb-March 2016 in both countries
4. 5 Info-days were organised in total for the promotion of the 2nd Call for Ordinary Project Proposals in June-July 2016 in both countries
5. 1 Running Marathon (11 km running race from Krystallopigi in Greece, through the borders, to Bilisht in Albania) took place on 25/09/2016 as part of the EC day 2016 celebration. The event was co-organised with the IPA CB Programme “Greece-Albania 2007 - 2013”, the Interreg IPA CBC Programme “Greece-Albania 2014-2020” and the ‘Balkan – Mediterranean 2014-2020’ Transnational Programme.
6. 1 event on promoting the No-plastic Challenge was organized on 05/09/2017 at the Port of Argostoli, Kefalonia (GR) as part of the EC day 2017 celebration. The event was co-organised with the ‘Balkan – Mediterranean 2014-2020’ Transnational Programme.
7. 4 Info-days on project implementation of the 1st and 2nd Calls were organized (2 in Greece and 2 in Albania) in May-June 2018.
8. 1 EC Day 2018 event was organized in Konitsa, GR in September 2018, with the title ‘For a World full of Colours’.
9. 3 Info-days on the 4th call for project proposals were organized (1 in Arta, Gr on 7/12/2018 and 2 in Albania in Vlora and Korca on 20/11/2018 and 22/11/2018 respectively).

³ In section 7.1 (Evaluation questions D1) is presented the table of the Output indicators of the Communication Actions that have already been implemented.

10. 1 seminar on Management Information System (MIS) was organized in Thessaloniki, Gr on 27/11/2018 by the Managing Authority of ETC Programmes and the Special Service of MIS.
11. 1 communication seminar was organized in Ioannina, Gr on 28/03/2019.

JMC Meetings

- The 1st JMC meeting convened in Tirana (AL) on the 10/11/2015.
- The 2nd JMC meeting was organized in Igoumenitsa (24/11/2016) for the approval of the projects under the 1st Call for Strategic Project Proposals.
- The 3rd JMC Meeting was organised in Korce (AL) on 14/07/2017 for the approval of the projects submitted under the 2nd Call for Ordinary Project Proposals.
- The 4th JMC Meeting was organised in Preveza (GR) on 05/10/2018 for the approval of the project for funding under the 3rd Call and the approval of the 4th Call for Ordinary Project Proposals Package.

Technical Meetings

- 1 technical meeting took place at Tirana (AL) on the 10/11/2015 between the Managing Authority, the MEI, as well as representatives from Greek and Albanian Audit Authorities, in order to prepare the establishment of the Group of Auditors, as well as to discuss the status of the Description of Management and Control System documents.
- Six (6) technical meetings for the smooth implementation of the Programme took place:
 - The *1st Technical Meeting* concerned the implementation of the technical assistance and the recruitment of the staff for the 2014 – 2020 period, together with the documents for the two calls for proposals.
 - The *2nd and 3rd Technical Meetings* were between the MA, JS and relevant stakeholders of the Programme in the framework of consultations for a future call for project proposals and the achievement of specific indicators of the Programme.
 - The *4th Technical Meeting* was between the JS and potential beneficiaries in order to provide information on funding opportunities and support for the preparation of project proposals.
 - The *5th Technical Meeting* was between JS, MA and National Authority of the Programme, in order to discuss problems encountered during the implementation of the Programme, next steps to be taken and final arrangements for the organization of the EC Day in Krystalopigi.
 - The *6th Technical Meeting* concerned the evaluation procedure of the 2nd Call for Proposals, as well as preparatory activities for the JMC Meeting that followed.
- 45 Technical Meetings took place during 2017, concerning the smooth Programme implementation and the negotiation of the budget of the approved projects of the 1st and 2nd Calls.

Following the aforementioned activities, it is worth to mention that, despite the fact the years 2017 and 2018 can be characterized as years of implementation, it is obvious that the Programme was active in terms of communication (organization – participation to major events) during 2017-2018 period.

3.2.3 Financial implementation, fulfilment of performance framework targets

In this part, only the basic data was analysed, as the projects are still in the early phase of implementation.

Table 4-1 – Credits of priority Axis on the basis of the Cooperation Programme

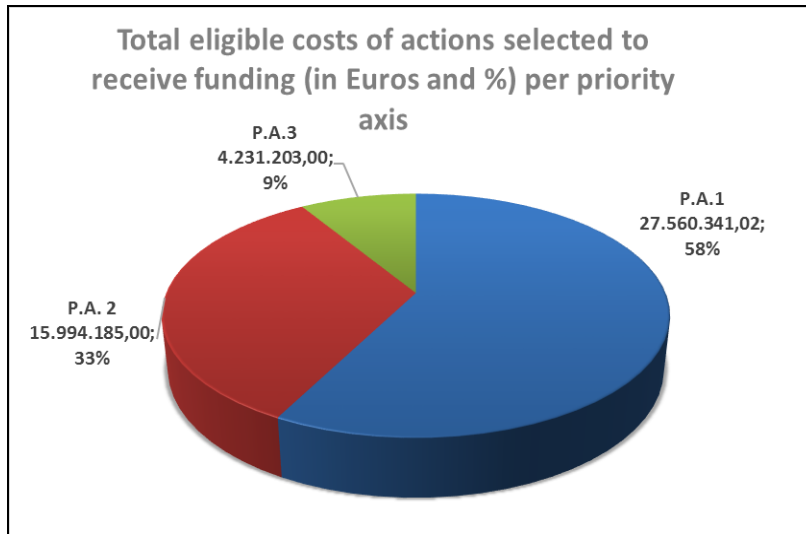
Credits of Priority Axis on the basis of the operational program					
Priority Axis	Fund	District Category	Basis for calculating EU support	Total Funding (in euros)	Funding rate
1	ERDF/IPA	Objective 3	Total Eligible cost	31.152.837,00	85,00%
2	ERDF/IPA	Objective 3	Total Eligible cost	18.692.694,00	85,00%
3	ERDF/IPA	Objective 3	Total Eligible cost	4.231.203,00	85,00%
Total	ERDF/IPA			54.076.734,00	
Overall Total				54.076.734,00	

At Table 3.2 is presented the allocation of the total funding per Priority Axis and Programme Level. The funding available for projects which amounts to 54.076.734,00€ has been distributed as follows: Priority Axis 1: 31.152.837,00€, Priority Axis 2: 18.692.694,00€ and Priority Axis 3: 4.231.203,00€.

Table 4-2 – Cumulative Data for the progress of the Cooperation Programme with a deadline 31/12/2018

Cumulative data for the economic progress of the operational Programme with a deadline of 31/12/2018						
Priority Axis	Total eligible costs of actions selected to receive funding (in euros and %)	Percentage of the total funding covered by the action selected (%)	Public eligible costs of the actions selected to be funded (in euros)	Total paid out expenditure declared by the beneficiaries	Total verified costs	Total certified costs
1	27.560.341,02	88,47%	27.560.341,02	523.009,35	204.058,68	54.973,14
2	15.994.185,00	85,56%	15.994.185,00	505.340,27	157.923,17	0,00
3	4.231.203,00	100,00%	4.231.203,00	671.650,38	591.404,01	402.823,53
Total	47.785.729,02	88,37%	47.785.729,02	1.700.000,00	953.385,86	457.796,67
Overall Total	47.785.729,02	88,37%	47.785.729,02	1.700.000,00	953.385,86	457.796,67

Figure 4.1 - Total eligible costs of actions selected to receive funding (in euros)

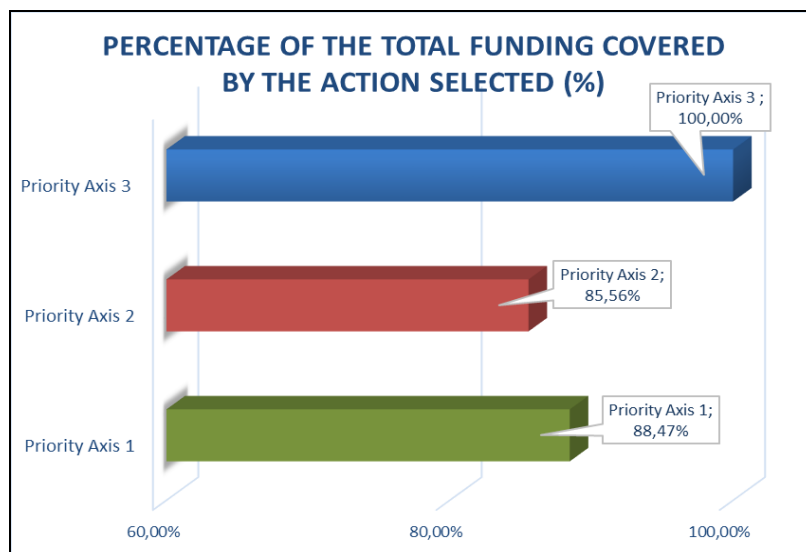


During the evaluation period, the **total funding committed to approved actions** that are implemented under the Cooperation Programme amounts to 47.785.729,02€ (Table 3.3).

The actions that are implemented under Priority Axis 1 had received the largest amount of the total reimbursement from the Programme funds (58%), which is 27.560.341.02€, while the actions of Priority Axis 2 had received about 15.994.185,00€, that correspond to the 33% of the total committed funding (Figure 3.2).

As far as Priority Axis 3 is concerned, although the actions that are implemented within its framework had received the lowest reimbursement (4.231.203,00€), they had already covered all the available selected funding (Figure 3.3).

Figure 4.2 - Percentage of the total funding covered by the action selected



On the other hand, the total funding covered by the selected actions under Priority Axis 2 amounts to 85,56%, while in Priority Axis 1 the selected actions have already covered about the 88,47% of the total available funds.

Furthermore, during the evaluation period, the total **paid out expenditures** declared by the beneficiaries is 1.700.000,00€. As it is shown in figure 3.4, the highest share of paid expenditures has been declared by partners implementing projects under Priority Axis 3 (671.560,38€ which is 39,51% of the total expenditure and 15,87% of the total eligible costs for PA3).

Priority Axis 3 is the one with the highest rate of **verified and certified costs**, as well, while for the projects that are being implemented under Priority Axis 2 there are no certified costs at all. Finally, as it is shown in table 3.3 and in figure 3.5, the total verified costs amount to 953.385,86€ (56,08% of the declared paid out expenditures) and the total certified costs amount to 457.796,67€ (26,93% of the declared paid out expenditures).

It is also worth mentioning that the **total amount of EU Funding** for the Programme is **7.822.680,17€**.

Figure 4.3 - Total paid out expenditures declared by the beneficiaries, per priority axis

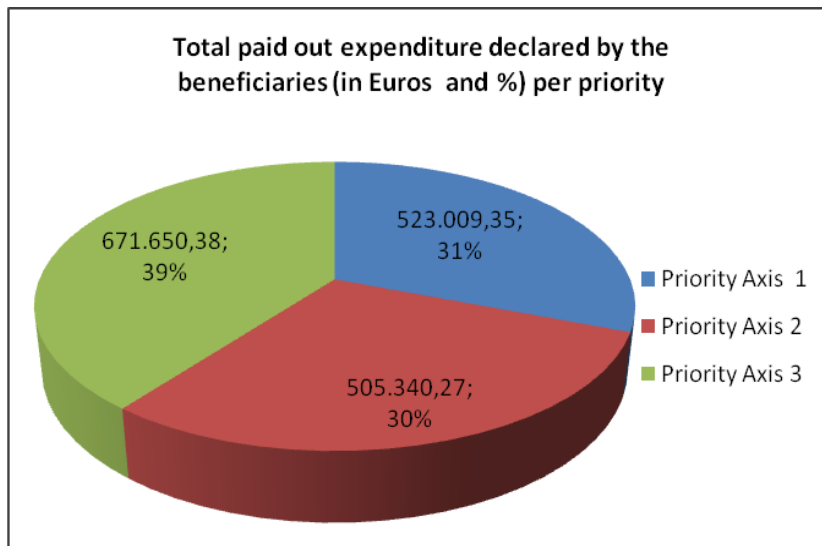


Figure 4.4 - Total verified and certified costs, in Euros

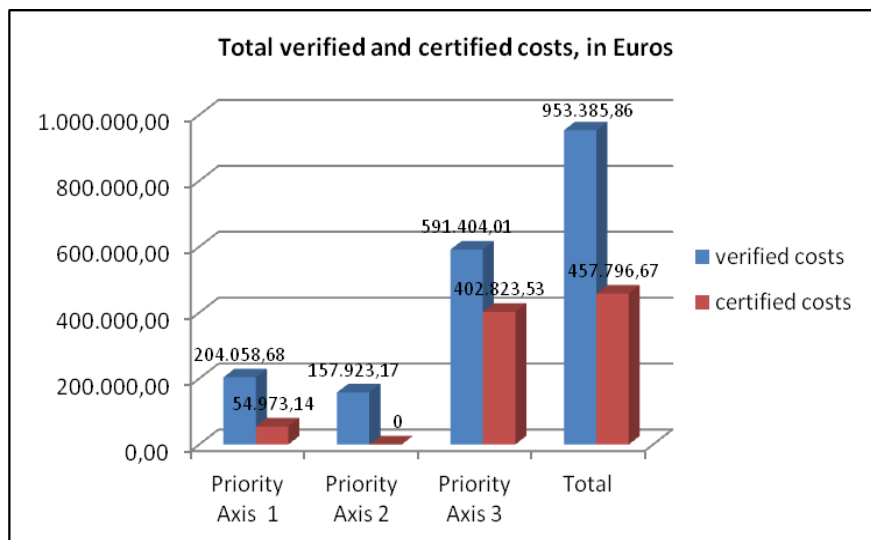
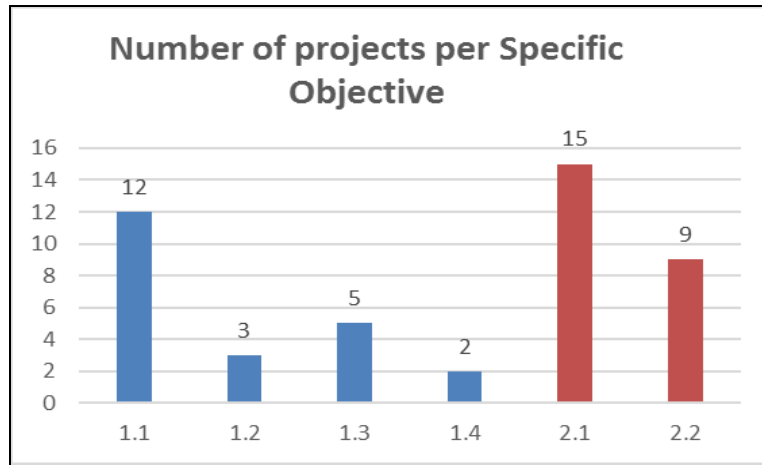
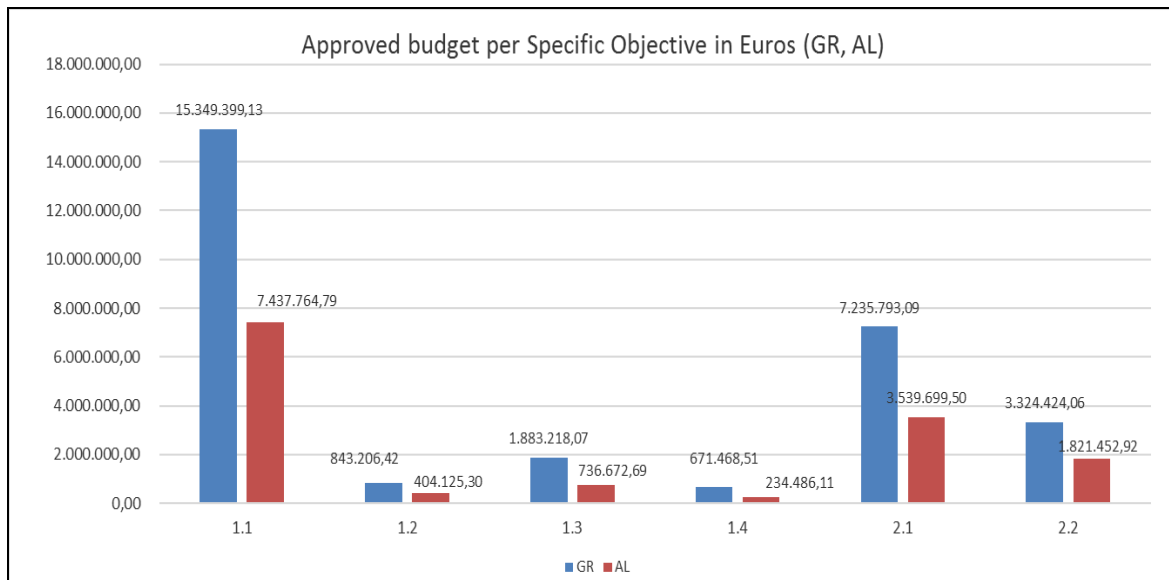


Figure 4.5 - Number of projects per Specific objective



So far, 46 projects have been approved under the Calls of the Interreg IPA CBC Programme Greece – Albania 2014 – 2020. As it is presented at Figure 3.6, the total number of the projects are almost equally allocated between Specific Objectives of Priority Axis 1 (22 projects) and Priority Axis 2 (24 projects). However, it has to be mentioned that the vast majority of the approved projects are implemented under S.O. 2.1 (15 projects), S.O. 1.1 (12 projects) and S.O. 2.2 (9 projects).

Figure 4.6 - Approved budget per Specific Objective in Euros (GR, AL)



Furthermore, as illustrated in Figure 3.7, in general the Greek beneficiaries have greater approved budgets than the Albanian beneficiaries that participate in the 46 projects.

As a result of the project allocation that was previously mentioned (Figure 3.7), the highest total projects budget of beneficiaries from both countries is observed in S.O. 1.1, S.O. 2.1, and S.O. 2.2., while the lowest approved budget is being implemented under S.O. 1.2 and S.O. 1.4.

Figure 4.7 - Number of partners per call (GR)

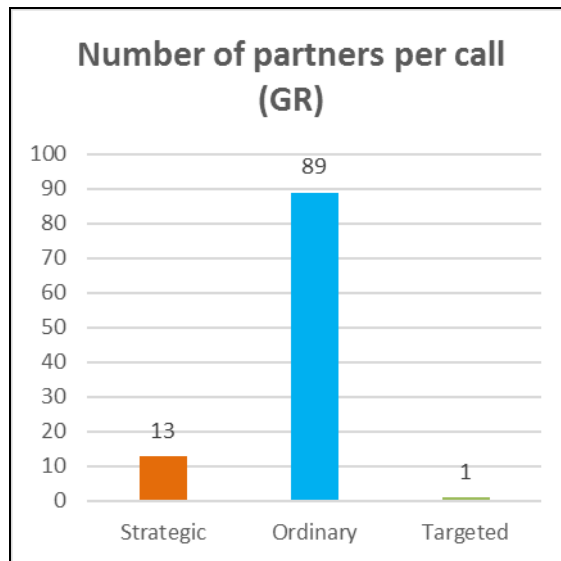
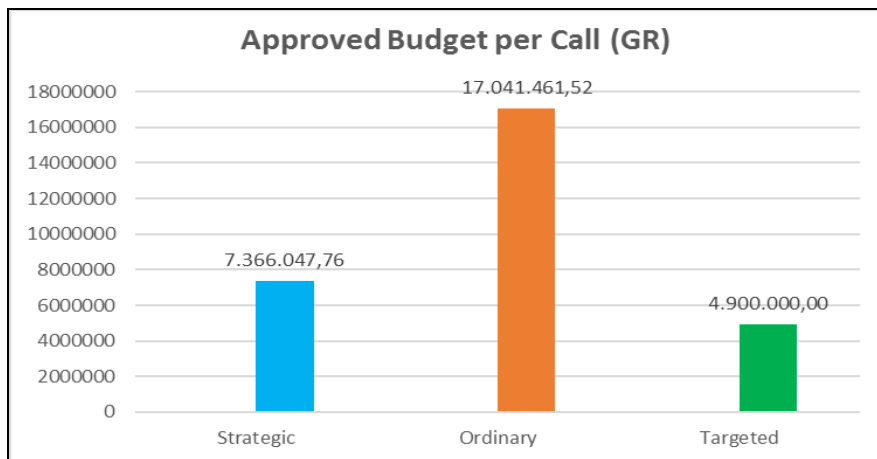


Figure 4.8 - Approved budget per call in Euros (GR)



103 Greek beneficiaries are participating in approved projects of the 3 Calls that are under implementation. The vast majority of the Greek beneficiaries are partners in projects that are implemented under the 2nd Call of Ordinary Project Proposals with total approved budget of 17.041.461,52€. On the contrary, 13 Greek partners are participating in approved projects on the 1st Call for Strategic Project Proposals, with total budget that amounts to 7.366.047,76€, and one beneficiary from Greece is participating as the LB to the approved targeted Project with a budget of 4.900.000,00€ (Figure 3.8, Figure 3.9).

Figure 4.9 - Number of partners per call (AL)

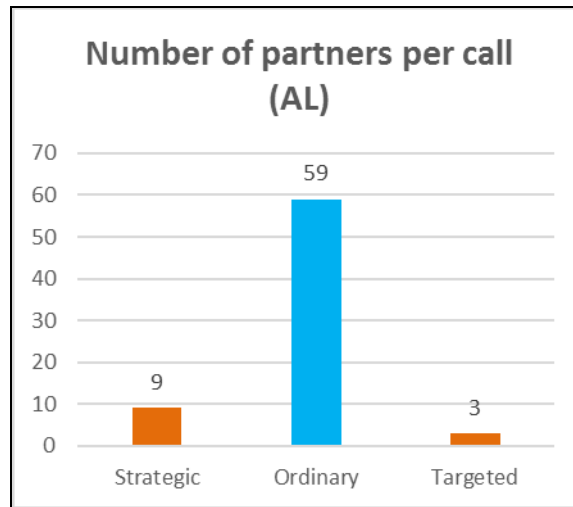
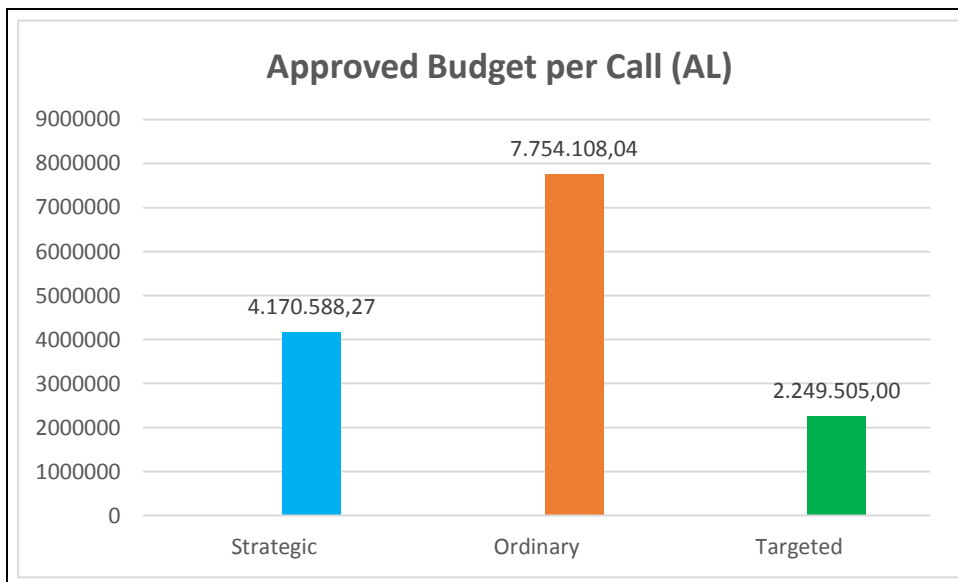


Figure 4.10 - Approved budget per call in Euros (AL)



At the same time, as it is shown at Figures 3.10 and 3.11, 59 Albanian beneficiaries are participating in approved Ordinary projects that are currently under implementation with total approved budget of 7.754.108,04€ and there are 13 Albanian beneficiaries in Strategic projects with total budget that amounts to 4.170.588,27€. Finally, 3 Albanian beneficiaries are participating in the approved Targeted project with a total budget of 2.249.505.00€.

4 Objective A. Analysis of the effectiveness and efficiency of the Programme management structures

4.1 Evaluation questions A1. Effectiveness of the co-operation of the Programme authorities (Managing Authority/ Joint Secretariat, Certifying Authority, Audit Authority, JMC and national authorities) to fulfil their Programme management tasks

This point addresses the interplay of the Programme authorities. Each authority has specific functions and responsibilities which are determined by the regulatory requirements and specified in the cooperation Programme (CP) and in the description of the management and control system. The designation of functions was already completed and is not subject of the evaluation. The main focus is on the effective workflow and information flow among the Programme authorities which is a key element of a successful Programme implementation.

This activity addresses the following evaluation questions:

- How the interactions between the Programme authorities are and are their functions and responsibilities clearly established?
- Are the Programme management system and related structures set up in an effective and efficient way?
- Have the MA and JS sufficient capacities for fulfilling their tasks?

Evaluation findings A1

The Managing Authority established an integrated management structure with separate functions within its organisation. The MA, as the central management hub, works closely together with the Certifying Authority and supports the Audit Authority and the Group of Auditors in their activities; and furthermore coordinates and supervises the Management and Control System of the Programme and control activities. MA is fully staffed and functional. Unit B2 of the MA is responsible for the Management and Monitoring of the Interreg IPA CBC Programme “Greece – Albania 2014-2020”.

The Certifying Authority is responsible for the drawing up and submission of the payment applications, certifications, payment requests and annual accounts to the EU Commission. CA cooperates with the MA.

The Joint Secretariat (JS) is the body set up by the MA after consultation with the Participating countries represented in the Programme, according to Article 23 (2) Regulation (EU) 1299/2013, to assist the Managing Authority and the Joint Monitoring Committee in carrying out their respective duties. The JS supports the MA for organising the meetings of the Monitoring Committee and provides all the necessary documentation in order to ensure the qualitative

implementation of the Cooperation Programme in the frame of its special objectives. Moreover, provides information to potential Beneficiaries regarding the funding opportunities through the Cooperation Programme and assists the Beneficiaries during the implementation phase of their projects.

The Joint Monitoring Committee (JMC) is the body set up by the participating countries to review the overall effectiveness, quality and coherence of the implementation of all actions towards meeting the objectives set out in the Interreg IPA CBC Programme “Greece – Albania 2014 – 2020”, the financing agreements and the relevant strategy papers, according to Article 38 of Regulation (EU) No 447/2014 and Articles 49 and 110 of Regulation (EU) No 1303/2013. The JMC and the managing authority shall carry out monitoring by reference to indicators laid down in the relevant cross-border cooperation Programme, in accordance with Article 16 of Regulation (EU) No 1299/2013. The Joint Monitoring Committee's overall task is to ensure the overall effectiveness, quality and coherence of implementation of all actions towards meeting the objectives set out in the Interreg IPA CBC Programme “Greece – Albania 2014 – 2020”, the financing agreements and the relevant strategy papers, according to articles 38 of the Commission Implementing Regulation (EU) 447/2014 and articles 49 and 110 of Regulation EU 1303/2013. The JMC examines and approves any proposal made by the Managing Authority in cooperation with the Albanian Operating Structure for any amendment to the operational Programme and propose, if appropriate, any revision or amendment of the cross border Programme in order to improve its performance in achieving its target. Also, it can make observations to the Managing Authority regarding implementation and evaluation of the Programme including actions related to the reduction of the administrative burden on beneficiaries. Finally, is the responsible Body for selecting the operations to be funded under the Interreg IPA II CBC Programme “Greece – Albania 2014 – 2020”, according to article 39 par.1 of the Commission Regulation 447/2014 and decide on complaints addressed to the Managing Authority regarding its decision on the selection of operations.

The Group of Auditors, supports the Audit Authority to carry out its duties as provided for in Article 25(2) of Regulation (EC) No 1299/2013. The GoA is comprised of representatives from the relevant audit authorities of both cooperating countries. Thus, the GoA is independent from the national bodies responsible for first level control carried out under Article 23 (4) of Regulation (EC) No 1299/2013 and for the certification of expenditure and the Monitoring Committee of the Programme. The Albanian audit authority is the Audit Agency for the Accredited Assistance of European Programmes (Albanian Audit Authority), using its own resources.

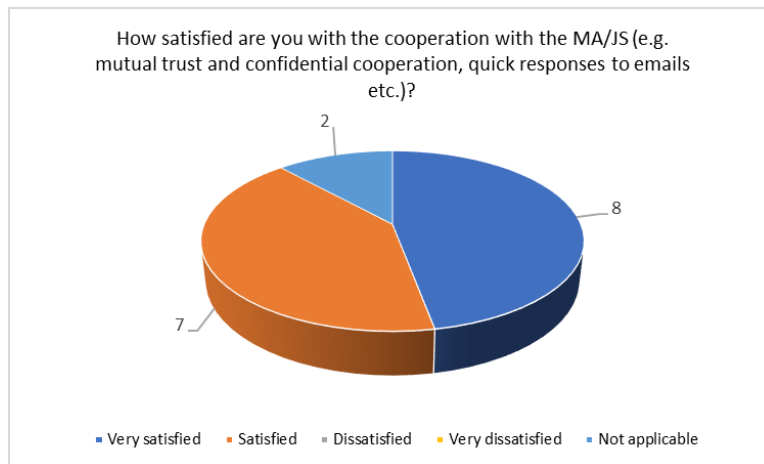
The single Audit Authority is the institution responsible for ensuring the effective functioning of the Management and Control system of the cooperation Programme. In this context, the AA shall be responsible for carrying out the functions envisaged in Article 37 of Regulation (EU) 447/2014, Article 127 of Regulation (EU) No 1303/2013 and Article 25 of Regulation (EU) No 1299/2013.

Generally all structures from the previous Programming period maintain their responsibilities for the current Programme. In this way the accumulated knowledge and experience will be providing for continuity and institutional sustainable capacity.

In addition, the above mentioned Authorities are fully staffed, which in combination with the acquired know-how gives them the ability to carry out their tasks effectively, fact that is also confirmed by the responses of the beneficiaries that participated in the online survey.

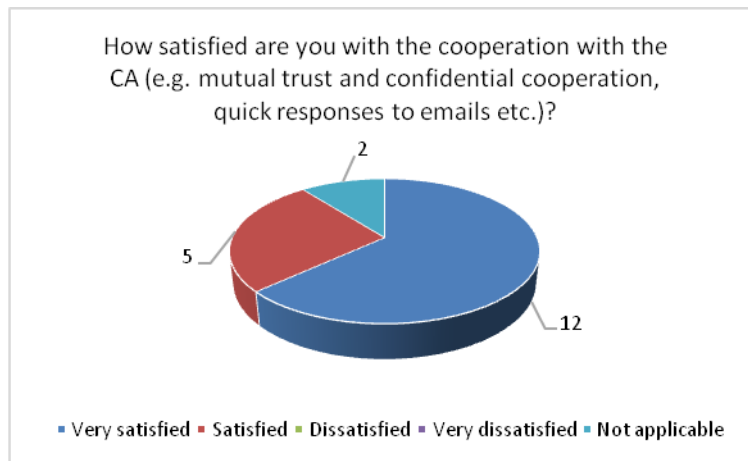
What is more, according the respondents, there is excellent cooperation among the JMC members and the MA/JS, which also contributes in high institutional sustainable capacity:

Figure 4.1 – Satisfaction with the cooperation with the MA/JS



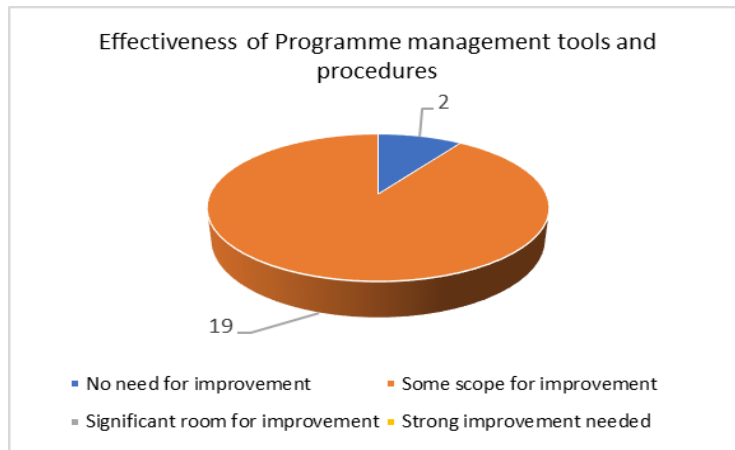
According to Figure 4.1, Special Service for Strategy, Planning and Evaluation and JMC members are very satisfied with the cooperation with the MA/JS (e.g. mutual trust and confidential cooperation, quick responses to emails etc.)

Figure 4.2 – Satisfaction level with their cooperation with CA



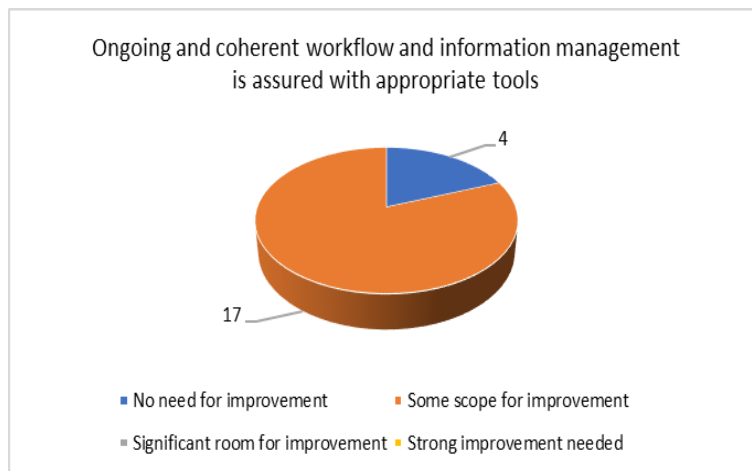
Regarding the respondents beneficiaries’ satisfaction with their cooperation with CA (e.g. mutual trust and confidential cooperation, quick responses to emails etc.), all of them declared that they are very satisfied or satisfied with the cooperation with the CA.

Figure 4.3 – Effectiveness of management tools and procedures of the Programme



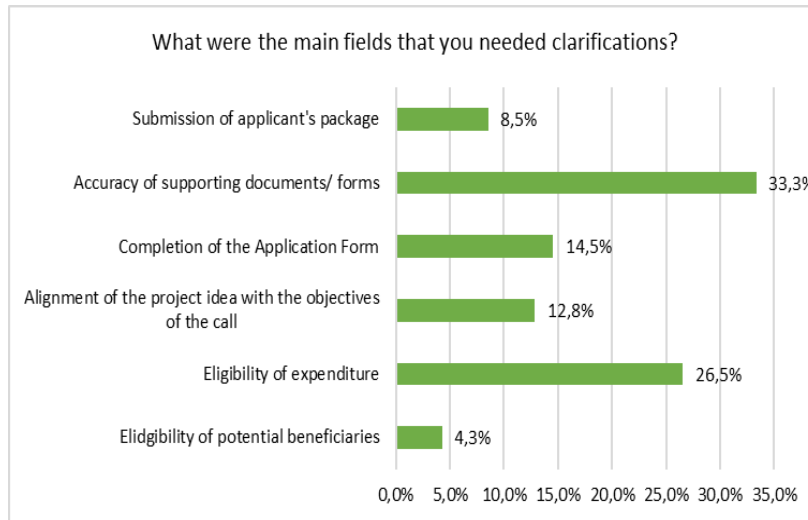
Regarding the effectiveness of Programme management tools and procedures, the vast majority of the respondents authorities (19) argued that there is some scope for improvement, while 2 of them stated that there is no need for improvement (Figure 4.3).

Figure 4.4 – Evaluation of tools for ongoing and coherent workflow and successful information management



According to the Figure 4.4 the majority of respondents authorities (17) agree that there is some space of improvement on the appropriate tools that can ensure ongoing and coherent workflow and successful information management, while 4 authorities are satisfied with these tools and stated that there is no need for improvement.

Figure 4.5 - Fields that need clarification



In this part of the study, it is interesting to mention the beneficiaries’ opinions regarding clarifications, related to the submission procedures and the supportive actions that beneficiaries used during the preparation of their proposals.

Figure 4.5 presents the main fields that the beneficiaries needed clarifications, related to the submission procedures, by the Managing Authority. **The main subject to be clarified is related to the accuracy of the supporting documents / forms (33,3%).** Other critical issues that beneficiaries needed clarifications are related to the eligibility of expenditure (26,5%), the completion of the application form (14,5), the alignment of the project idea with the objectives of the call (12,8%), the submission of applicant’s package (8,3%), and finally the eligibility of potential beneficiaries (4,3%).

Figure 4.6 - Supportive actions when preparing proposals

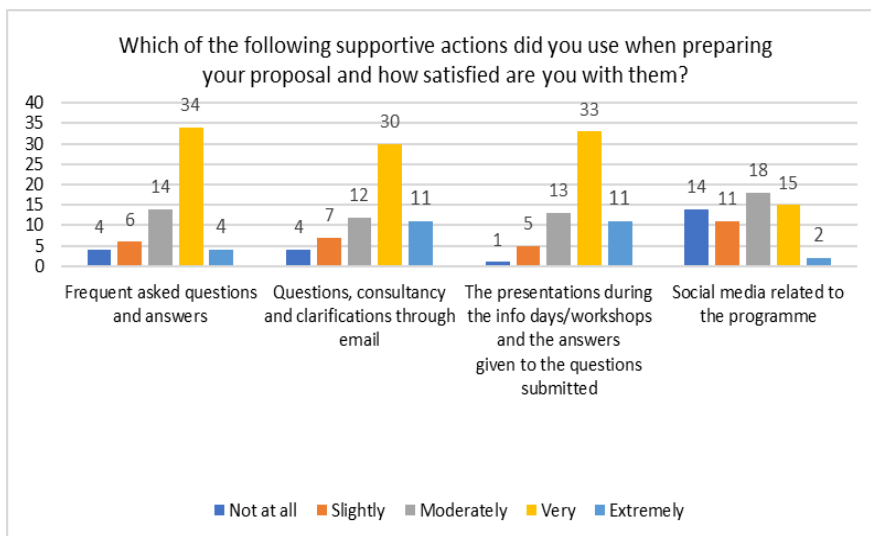


Figure 4.6 illustrates the supportive actions that come first when the beneficiaries prepare their proposals. The most common supportive actions are the “frequent asked questions and answers” and “the presentations during the info days/workshops and the answers given to the questions submitted”. In particular, **34 of respondents are very satisfied with the feedback they receive** from the questions they ask to the Managing Authority, and also **33 of respondents are very satisfied with the feedback that is given from the presentations during the info days / workshops**. There is an interest at the beneficiaries’ responses regarding their satisfaction from the Programme’s social media. Particularly, 14 respondents declared that they are not at all satisfied with the social media related to the Programme, while 15 respondents mentioned that they are very satisfied and 18 neither satisfied nor dissatisfied. Finally, almost half of the beneficiaries are very satisfied with the consultancy and clarifications they receive through email.

4.2 Evaluation questions A2. Effectiveness of the Joint Monitoring Committee (role, decisions)

This point assesses the provision of information to the JMC, discussion culture in the JMC, the effectiveness of decision making in relation to all JMC-tasks, leadership, and involvement of partner countries.

This activity addresses broadly the following evaluation questions:

- Are decision-making processes at Programme level clear and transparent?
- Is the implementation of the decisions on Programme level fast and efficient?

Evaluation findings A2

The Joint Monitoring Committee (JMC) is the body set up by the participating countries to review the overall effectiveness, quality and coherence of the implementation of all actions towards meeting the objectives set out in the Interreg IPA CBC Programme “Greece – Albania 2014 – 2020”, the financing agreements and the relevant strategy papers, according to Article 38 of Regulation (EU) No 447/2014 and Articles 49 and 110 of Regulation (EU) No 1303/2013. The Joint Monitoring Committee comprises of 18 members with voting right and 26 members without voting right.

So far, between 2015 and October 2018 four JMC meetings have been held:

- ☑ 2015: 1st JMC Meeting (10/11/2015, Tirana, Albania).
- ☑ 2016: 2nd JMC Meeting (24/11/2016, Igoumenitsa, Greece).
- ☑ 2017: 3rd JMC Meeting, (14/07/2017, Korce, Albania)
- ☑ 2018: 4th JMC Meeting, (05/10/2018, Preveza, Greece)

Specifically:

The Joint Monitoring Committee convened its **1st meeting** in Tirana, Albania on the 10th of November 2015. The meeting was attended by members of the Managing Authority, the Albanian National Authority, the Joint Secretariat, the European Commission - DG REGIO, Greek and Albanian Ministries, the Special Service of Institutional Support, the Single Paying Authority, the Audit Authority and regional stakeholders. During this Joint Monitoring Committee meeting, the two packages for the first two Calls for Project Proposals which had been prepared by the Managing Authority / Joint Secretariat were presented to the members of the Committee. During this meeting the following were approved:

- the Rules of Procedure of the Joint Monitoring Committee
- the launching of two written procedures on the application package of the 1st (Strategic) and 2nd Call for Projects Proposals
- the Communication Plan of the Interreg IPA Cross-border Cooperation Programme “Greece–Albania 2014–2020”
- the Technical Assistance Multiannual Budget Plan of the Interreg IPA Cross-border Cooperation Programme “Greece–Albania 2014–2020”
- an authorization to the JTS of the “Greece-Albania 2007-2013” to provide the necessary legal and administrative actions for the activation of the Interreg IPA II Cross–border Cooperation Programme “Greece - Albania 2014 - 2020”

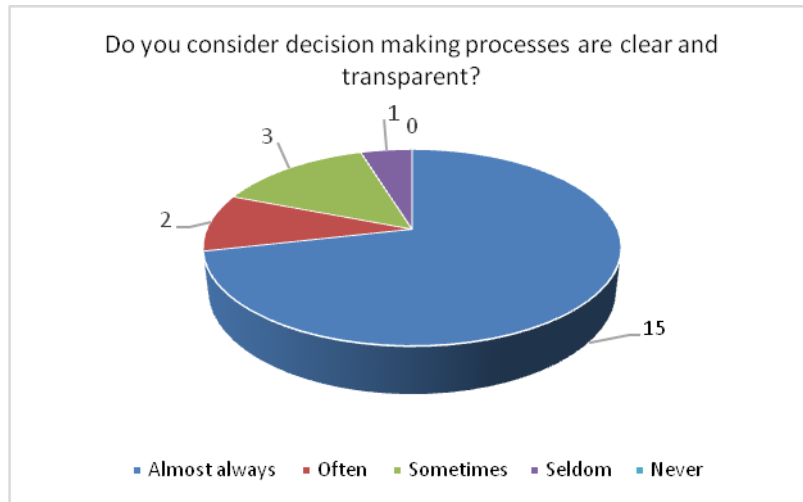
The 2nd JMC meeting was organized in Igoumenitsa on 24/11/2016, where the main issue in the agenda concerned the approval of the projects to be funded under the 1st Call for Strategic Project Proposals. Also, an evaluation plan has been prepared and approved by the JMC as well as the revised Communication Strategy of the Interreg IPA CBC Programme “Greece – Albania 2014 – 2020” was approved during the 2nd meeting. The evaluation plan has been developed according to the provisions of IPA Implementing Regulation (EU) 447/2014, article 41, par. 3 and Regulation (EU) No. 1303/2013, (CPR), Regulation (EU) No. 1299/2013 (ERDF Reg., article 14) and the Commission guidance documents on monitoring and evaluation and on evaluation plans.

The 3rd JMC meeting was organised in Korca on 14/07/2018 for the approval of the projects submitted under the 2nd Call for Ordinary Project Proposals.

The 4th JMC meeting was organized in Preveza on 05/10/2018 for the approval of the project for funding under the 3rd Call and the approval of the 4th Call for Ordinary Project Proposals Package.

At following figures is presented the authorities’ opinions about the clarity, transparency, adequacy and effectiveness level of decision-making process.

Figure 4.7 - Clarity and transparency of decision-making process



It is worth noting that **17 out of 21 respondents declared that almost always or often, decision making processes are clear and transparent.** Only one Authority is dissatisfied with the clarity and transparency of decision-making processes and three are neither satisfied nor dissatisfied.

Figure 4.8– Adequacy and effectiveness of decision-making process

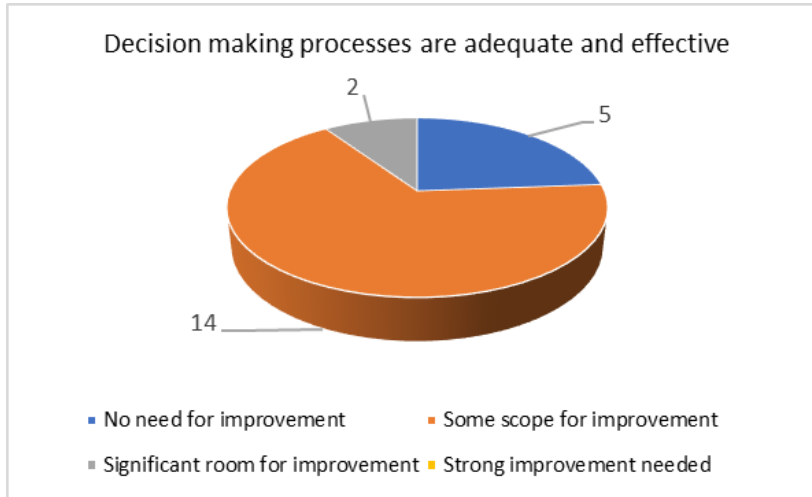


Figure 4.8 shows that the majority of respondents authorities (14) feel that there is some scope for improvement in order to increase the adequacy and effectiveness level of decision-making processes.

5 respondents stated that they are clearly satisfied with the effectiveness of decision-making processes, while 2 of them responded that there is significant room for improvement.

4.3 Evaluation questions A3. Effectiveness of the operation of the Albanian National Bodies

This point assesses if the National bodies in Albania provide adequate support to the Programme and have adequate resources to fulfil their main functions.

This activity addresses the following evaluation questions:

- Are the Programme management related structures set up in an effective and efficient way?

Evaluation findings A3

According to the Head of Operating Structure of Albania, the main problems that must be tackled are the difficulties that beneficiaries face during the preparation of the project proposals, due to their lack of experience and knowledge. What is more, the lack of experience of the institutions in Albania, that are involved in the implementation of the projects, as well as the differences between PRAG Rules and Albanian Law, are also main problems.

Furthermore, although the Head of Operating Structure considers that the decision- making processes are quite clear and transparent, she underlined that there is still some space of improvement in terms of adequacy and effectiveness. In addition, the management tools and procedures of Programme are not at the highest level of efficiency and also there still exist areas for continued development for the ongoing and coherent workflow and assured information management.

However, the Head of Operating Structure is quite satisfied with the cooperation with the MA / JS, regarding mutual trust and confidential cooperation, effective and efficient communication, etc.

Finally, as a member of JMC, she expressed high satisfaction to procedures for project selection or project rejection.

4.4 Evaluation questions A4. Effectiveness of the operation of the national first level control systems

This point assesses if the FLC system in each country is well established, operational; if controllers have adequate qualifications and resources to fulfil their main functions in a timely manner (administrative verifications of each application for reimbursement by beneficiaries and on-the-spot verifications of individual operations proportionate to the risk level) and if there is a procedure in force for checking the Controllers.

This activity addresses the following evaluation questions:

- Is the FLC system well established, operational and efficient in terms of human capacity compared to the number of beneficiaries and allows the validation of expenditures in time?
- Is there a procedure in force regarding the check of the Controllers?
- Is there a procedure in force regarding the supervision by the MA of the FLC systems?

Evaluation findings A4

According to Article 125 of the Regulation (EU) 1303/2013 and Article 23 of the Regulation (EU) 1299/2013 (ETC), the Managing Authority of European Territorial Cooperation Programmes bears the responsibility to carry out all necessary functions for the management verifications. This is to verify that the co-financed products and services have been delivered and that expenditure declared by the beneficiaries has been paid and that it complies with applicable law, the cooperation Programme and the conditions for support of the operation. To this end, the verifications shall include Administrative Verifications in respect of each application for reimbursement by beneficiaries and on-the-spot Verifications of operations.

Alternatively, according to Article 23 of the Regulation (EU) 1299/2013 (ETC), the Member States and third countries under certain conditions could bear responsibility for management verifications. In that case, each member state and third country shall set up a control system which will verify that the co-financed products and services have been delivered, the legality and regularity of the expenditure declared by beneficiaries for operations which are carried out in its territory and their compliance with the applicable EU and national law, the Cooperation Programme and the conditions for support of the operation.

The FLC System in Greece is decentralised. For the verification of expenditure made by Beneficiaries located in Greece and participating in operations of European Territorial Cooperation (ETC/INTERREG) Programmes with a Managing Authority based in Greece, the Unit C “Verification of Expenditure” of the Special Service for Managing ETC Programmes (which is the MA), has been designated responsible for the verification of expenditure (Ministerial Decree 109 283 / EYΘY 1012/4-11-2015).

The FLC System in Albania is centralised. For the verification of expenditure made by Beneficiaries located in Albania, the responsible structure is the First Level Control Office designated by the Albanian Operating Structure, within the Ministry for Europe and Foreign Affairs.

The First Level Control System of each cooperating country of the Programme is described below:

GREECE

For Greek Beneficiaries of ETC Programmes of which the MA located in Greece, the Unit C “Verification of Expenditure” of the MA has been designated as the body responsible to carry out the verification of expenditure (Ministerial Decree 109 283 / EYΘY 1012/4-11-2015).

The verifications are carried out by a Register of Controllers/ (“MEE” or “MEE INTERREG”) which was established at the MA following an “open call for expression of interest” to natural persons, Greek or EU citizens. A three-member Committee selects the Controllers. The enrolment to the

Register shall be made in accordance with a Decision of the Special Secretary for ERDF & CF Funded Sectoral Ops. Further information and details are described in the Ministerial Decree for the “Establishment of a Register of Controllers” of the Minister of Economy and Development according to article 43(3) of Law 4314/2014.

The MA of ETC Programmes, in order to carry out administrative and on the spot verifications. According to Paragraphs 4 and 5 of Article 125 of the Regulation (EU) 1303/2013 and paragraphs 4 and 5 of Article 23 of the Regulation (EU) 1299/2013, will select Controllers only from the Registry.

The selection of controllers was made taking into consideration the following indicative criteria:

- The type of project e.g. infrastructure projects, technical studies, environmental projects, cultural heritage projects, social orientation projects, touristic – business-oriented projects etc.
- Procurement type and procedures.
- Services (specialization according to the deliverables).
- Experience in financial management / monitoring / audit/controls of similar type and services.
- Specialized professional experience.

It is possible for the MA of ETC Programmes to set additional criteria taking into consideration the nature and importance of the project. The Controllers will carry out administrative and on-the-spot verifications according to Article 125 of the of the Regulation (EU)1303/2013.

The first time that a Beneficiary submits to the Unit C of the MA a Request for Verification of expenditure, the Unit C estimates the verification needs in terms of specialties, areas of expertise and professional experience of the Controllers, taking into account the nature and specificities of each project and identifies the categories of the members of the Register which will be activated. Then, the Controller is appointed on the basis of a random selection from the Register. Depending on the nature of the project and where deemed appropriate for the verifications of its physical and financial object, a group of controllers with different specialties may be appointed. In order to facilitate the conduction of the verifications (e.g. refusal/lack of ability of the Controller to undertake his/her duties), the Unit C proceeds preferably, with a random selection of at least three members of the Register. Then, the MA issues a Decision for the selection of controller/s, in which the framework of cooperation with the controllers is also described. This Decision is communicated to the Beneficiary, in order to proceed to the relevant award of the service contract with a Controller according with its legal framework. The remuneration of the Controller for the administrative and on-the-spot verifications shall be determined by a Ministerial Decree and shall be paid by the project’s budget.

The award of the service contract from the Beneficiary shall be copied to the Unit C of the MA. Then, the Unit C shall forward the electronic file to the Controller for verification (and/or shall inform him/her for the submission of the appropriate data to the MIS) and shall determine whether an administrative and/or an on – the – spot verification shall be carried out, keeping the Beneficiary always informed.

In order for the next verifications to be carried out, the Beneficiary shall forward the electronic file, directly to the Controller, putting always in copy the Unit C of the MA and the Unit C shall determine whether an administrative and/or an on – the – spot verification shall be carried out.

The procedure of the selection and contracting of a Controller(s) will be performed whenever a selection of a Controller is necessary (e.g. because of refusal of the selected Controller(s) to undertake his/her duties, force majeure, etc.).

For the verification of Technical Assistance’s expenditure, where the MA is the Beneficiary of such operations, the award of the service contract to the Controller shall be done by the MA, according to the procedures applicable to Technical Assistance operations and following a proposal on selected Controllers by the Unit C’ to the Unit D’ of the MA, copied to the Head of the MA.

A list of available and qualified auditors has been created for the beneficiaries to select.

Regarding the survey took place, shall be mentioned that Unit C “Verification of Expenditure” of the MA - body responsible to carry out the verification of expenditure, did not respond to the survey and no further information can be provided regarding the FLC procedure in Greece.

ALBANIA

Albania has established a centralized First level control system. The respective FLC Unit is staffed and is operating. The verifications of expenditures of the Albanian beneficiaries under this Programme are carried out by the First Level Control (FLCO) Office, under the supervision of the Ministry for Europe and Foreign Affairs.

The FLCO is responsible for performance of administrative verifications as well as on the spot checks to cover the additional verifications from financial, technical and physical aspects of the project co-financed from INTERREG IPA CBC Programme Greece – Albania.

The office is staffed by the Head of the office and two First Level Controllers. The cost for the Albanian FLC staff is covered by the Technical Assistance project budget.

The First Level Control function is ensured by the FLCO which examines the administrative and accounting documents in all **(100%) operations** with regard to the:

- principle of effectiveness: to ensure that the expenditure has actually been incurred by beneficiaries for the project implementation;
- principle of legitimacy: to ensure that the expenditure is in accordance with the EU and national legislation;
- principle of localization of the co-financed operation: to ensure that the expenditure has been paid for an operation realized in the eligibility area of the Programme. Otherwise for these activities realized outside the eligible area and in respect to article 20 of the Regulation (EU) 1299/2013, it must be demonstrated that the activities are of benefit for the Programme; e.g., justification is provided in the project application for support;
- principle of documentary evidence: to ensure that the expenditures paid has been proved by receipted invoices or accounting documents of equivalent probative value.

The First level control office shall ensure that the expenditure of a beneficiary can be verified within a period of three (3) months following the submission of the documents by the beneficiaries.

With regard to the specifics of the contract, checks will be performed on the results achieved - supplies delivered, services provided, works executed or project implemented from the point of view of scope, quantity, quality, time schedule, contract value, type, nature and aim.

Also, according the primary data that evaluator collected, the only authority responsible for first level control, that participated in the research was the Albanian Ministry for Europe and Foreign Affairs.

According to the responses of the Albanian Ministry for Europe and Foreign Affairs:

- There are **no changes** (e.g. legal, administrative etc) affecting any part of the FLC System as declared in the MCS,
- The Albanian Ministry is **fully functional** and **staffed**,
- There is **no need to update** the guidelines for the verifications,
- There were **no on the spot verification visits** till 31/10/2018 because beneficiaries have not started reporting yet.

5 Objective B. Analysis of the effectiveness and efficiency of the management of the entire project cycle (project generation, assessment, selection, monitoring, reporting, reimbursement)

5.1 Evaluation questions B1: Effectiveness of project generation, application procedure, project assessment and selection process in the different calls

This point addresses the first phase of project preparation, support and assesses the following aspects:

- Provision of tools to support project generation and applicants
- Satisfaction of the applicants with the tools according to the online survey
- Generated applications according to their geographical distribution
- Drafting and submission of project applications
- Assessment procedure and related complaints

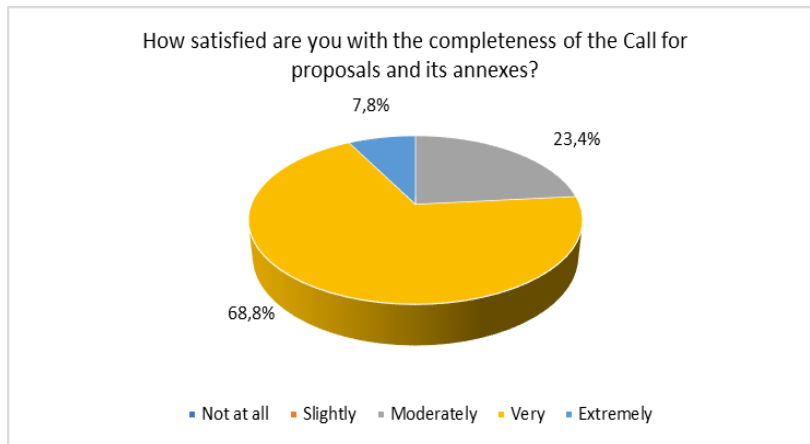
This activity addresses the following evaluation questions:

- Is the Programme using the right tools for reaching the applicants?
- How transparent and effective is the application process in terms call of procedures, tools provided and support to applicants?
- Are the project selection criteria and assessment procedure sound, transparent and fair, effectively supporting the selection of the best quality cross border projects?

Evaluation findings B1

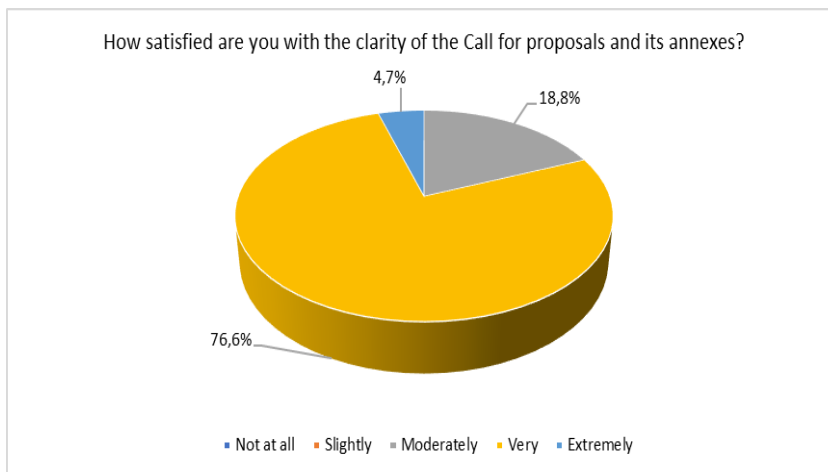
The next figures present the **beneficiaries’ opinions** related to project preparation and submission procedures.

Figure 5.1 - Completeness of the Call for proposals and its annexes



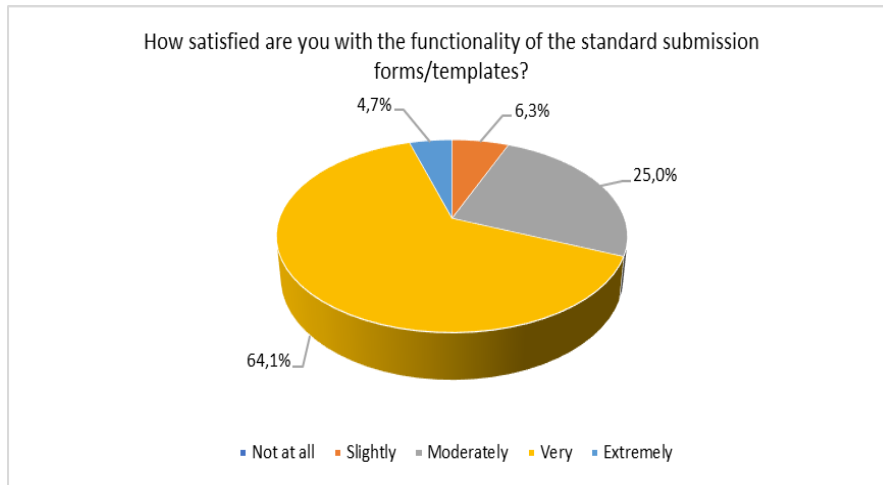
The Figure 5.1 refers to the beneficiaries’ satisfaction to the completeness of the Call for proposals and its annexes. Specifically, **68,8% of respondents declared satisfied with completeness of the Call for proposals**, while 23,4% of respondents are neither satisfied nor dissatisfied with it. Finally, 7,8% of beneficiaries are extremely satisfied with the IPA CBC Programme Greece – Albania call for proposals’ completeness.

Figure 5.2 - Clarity of the Call for proposals and its annexes



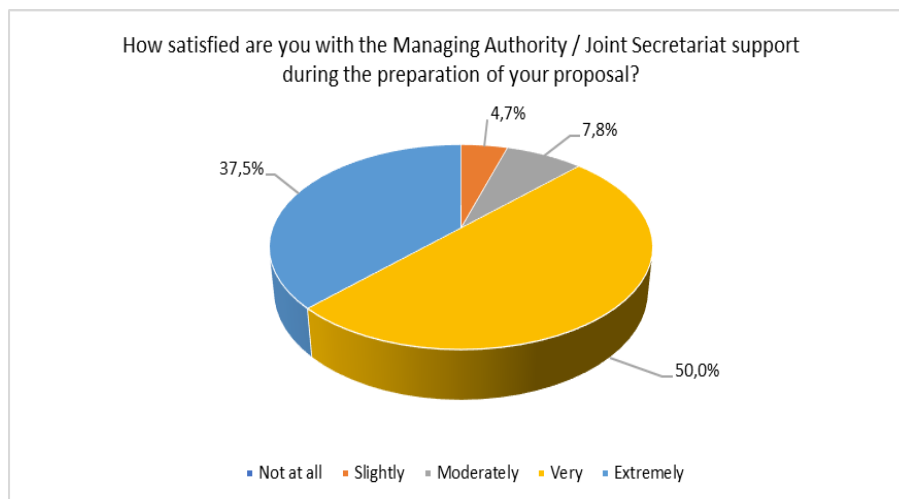
The figure 5.2 is relevant to the clarity of the Call for proposals and its annexes. **A significant percentage of respondents** beneficiaries (76,6%), declared that **they are very satisfied** with the clarity of the IPA CBC Programme Greece – Albania call for proposals, while 4,7% are extremely satisfied. In advance, 18,8% of beneficiaries referred that they are neither satisfied nor dissatisfied with the call for proposals’ clarity.

Figure 5.3 - Functionality of the submission forms/templates



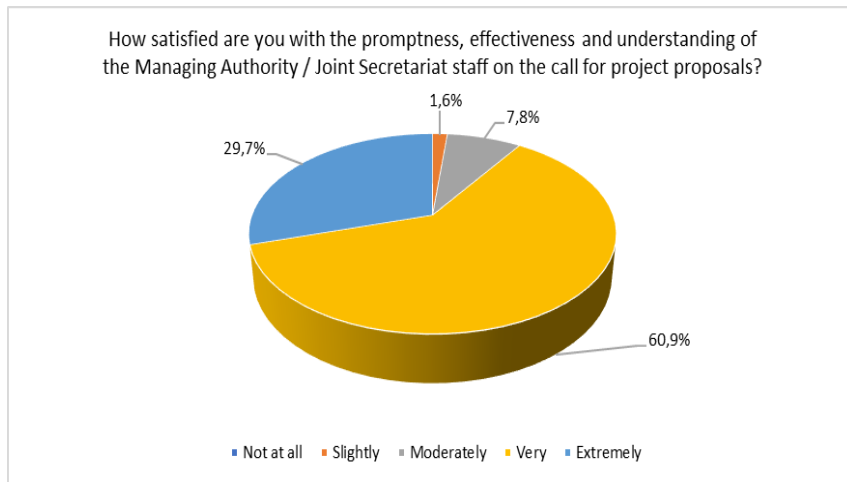
The Figure 5.3 refers to the functionality of the standard submission forms/templates according beneficiaries' opinion. 64,1% of respondents beneficiaries mentioned that the submission forms/templates are very functional, while only 6,3% of beneficiaries assumed that the submission forms/templates are slightly functional. 4,7% of respondents are extremely satisfied with the functionality of the submission forms/templates, while 25% of them are neither satisfied nor dissatisfied.

Figure 5.4 - Managing Authority / Joint Secretariat support during the preparation of proposals



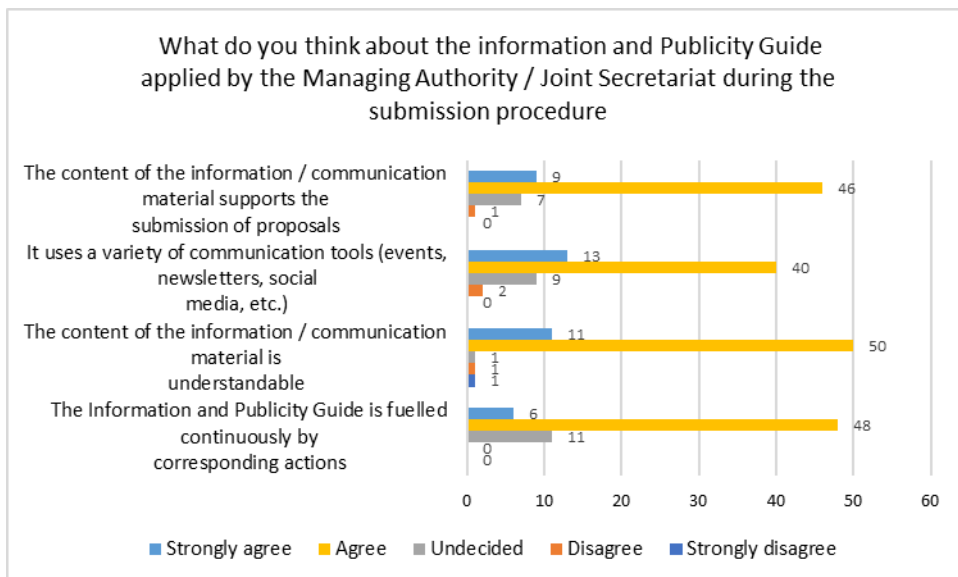
The Figure 5.4 presents the beneficiaries' opinion related to the Managing Authority / Joint Secretariat support during the preparation of their proposal. In particular, **almost half of them are very satisfied with the support of the Managing Authority (50%)**, while 37,5% of respondents are extremely satisfied. Moreover, 4,7% of them are slightly satisfied and 7,8% are neither satisfied nor dissatisfied.

Figure 5.5 - Promptness, effectiveness and understanding of the Managing Authority / Joint Secretariat staff on the call for project proposals



According to the Figure 5.5, **the vast majority of beneficiaries (90,6%)** are clearly satisfied with the promptness, effectiveness and understanding of the Managing Authority / Joint Secretariat staff on the call for project proposals. Specifically, 60,9% of respondents are very satisfied, 29,7% are extremely satisfied, while only 1,6% of beneficiaries declared slightly satisfied. Finally, 7,8% of respondents are neither satisfied nor dissatisfied.

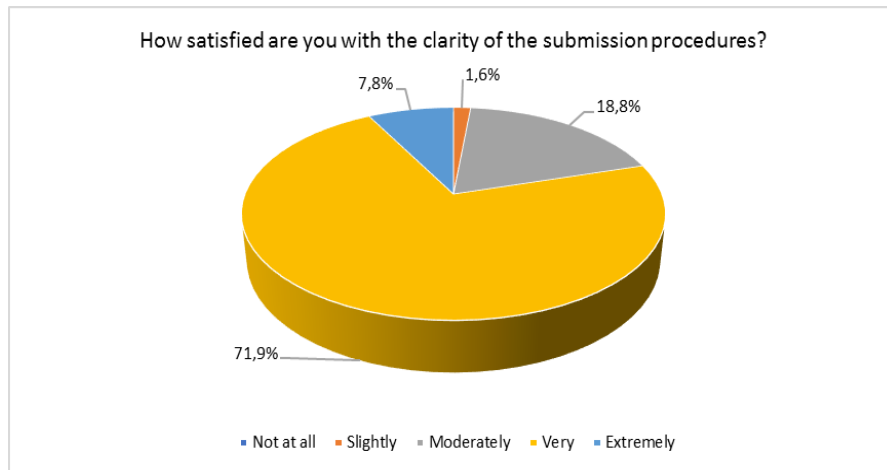
Figure 5.6 - Information and Publicity Guide applied by the Managing Authority / Joint Secretariat during the submission procedure



The Figure 5.6 shows the beneficiaries aspects about the Information and Publicity Guide applied by the Managing Authority / Joint Secretariat during the submission procedure. It is worth noting that **the vast majority of beneficiaries either agree or strongly agree** that the information

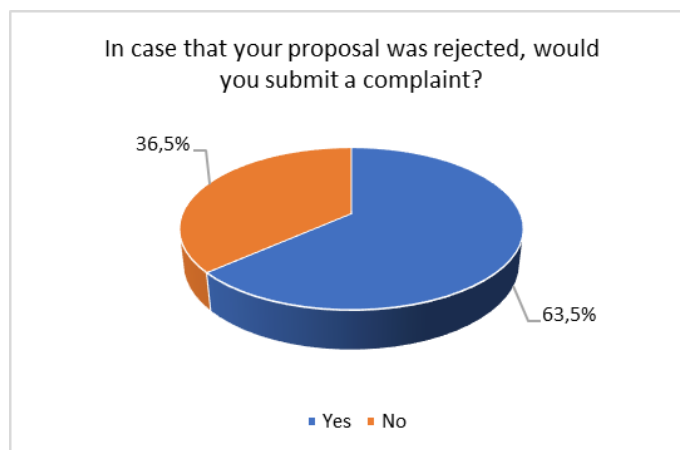
applied by the Managing Authority / Joint Secretariat is clearly **supportive, understandable, fueled by corresponding actions** and also **includes a variety of communication tools** (events, newsletters, social media). There are also few respondents who declared that the Information and Publicity Guide applied by the Managing Authority / Joint Secretariat is not supportive, but these beneficiaries are clearly **a minority**.

Figure 5.7 - Clarity of submission procedures



The Figure 5.7 illustrates the satisfaction of beneficiaries concerning the clarity of the submission procedures. 71,9% of beneficiaries are very satisfied with the clarity of the submission procedures, while 7,8% of respondents declared extremely satisfied. Only 1,6% of them are slightly satisfied and 18,8% are neither satisfied nor dissatisfied.

Figure 5.8 - Complaints in case of rejection



According to the Figure 5.8, the majority of beneficiaries (63,5%) would submit a complaint in case that their proposal was rejected, while 36,5% of them would accept the rejection. The most common justification for the acceptance of the rejection is that even if there is a complaint, **the**

possibilities for approval will not be changed. Some beneficiaries seem to be **satisfied with the process**, while other declared that they **respect the decision** of the authorities.

It is worth mention that concerning the 1st Call for Strategic Proposals of the Interreg IPA CBC Programme “Greece-Albania 2014-2020”, no official complaints were submitted by the potential beneficiaries.

Table 5-1 – Programme Authority

Official Complaints				
Specific Objective	Projects with submitted complaints	Number of Submitted Complaints	Number of Approved Complaints	Number of Rejected Complaints
1.1	5	5	2	3
1.2	3	4	0	4
1.3	3	3	1	2
1.4	3	3	1	2
2.1	12	16	5	11
2.2	9	14	3	11
TOTAL	35	45	12	33

On the contrary, during the 2nd Call for Ordinary Project Proposals 45 official complaints were submitted by the lead beneficiaries of 35 rejected project proposals (17.5% of the total project proposals submitted). Only 12 of 45 complaints were approved by the Complaint Committee members. Furthermore, it has to be mentioned that the majority of the complaints were submitted by LPs of rejected project proposals under S.O. 2.1. (16 complaints) and S.O. 2.2 (14 complaints).

Also beneficiaries were asked to provide suggestions on how to improve procedures for project proposals submission under the Calls of the Programme, and they expressed interesting opinions. Some of them asked for **external evaluators, shorter and transparent procedures, more detailed guides and manuals for applications submission**. Also, **close and thorough cooperation** among potential beneficiaries and the Programme's institutions, **different templates and transmission** and **more Info Days focused on indicative activities** were some of the opinions expressed for the **improvement of the procedures for submitting proposals**.

5.2 Evaluation questions B2: Effectiveness of support for the project implementation

This point addresses support for beneficiaries, monitoring and reporting, reimbursement, controls, payments. The following aspects will be assessed:

- Contracting
- Support in the start-up phase by MA/JS
- Reporting obligations
- Verification of expenditures, payments
- Monitoring visits by MA/JS
- Project changes
- Capitalisation of project results
- Management of complaints

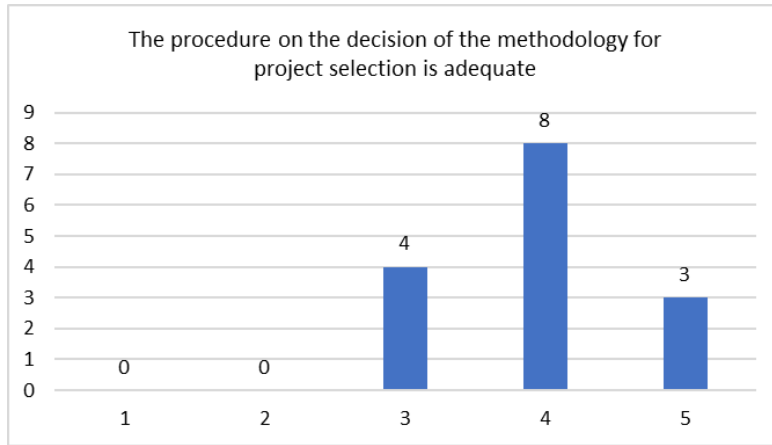
This activity addresses the following evaluation questions:

- How well is the Programme supporting the beneficiaries during the project implementation?
- Is the reporting and monitoring process set up in an efficient way? (e.g. allowing the qualitative monitoring of the outputs, verification of the project progress and achievements, reimbursement of the beneficiaries in due time, reducing the risk of de-commitment and financial corrections)?
- Has the Programme set adequate measures to reduce the administrative burden of beneficiaries?

Evaluation findings B2

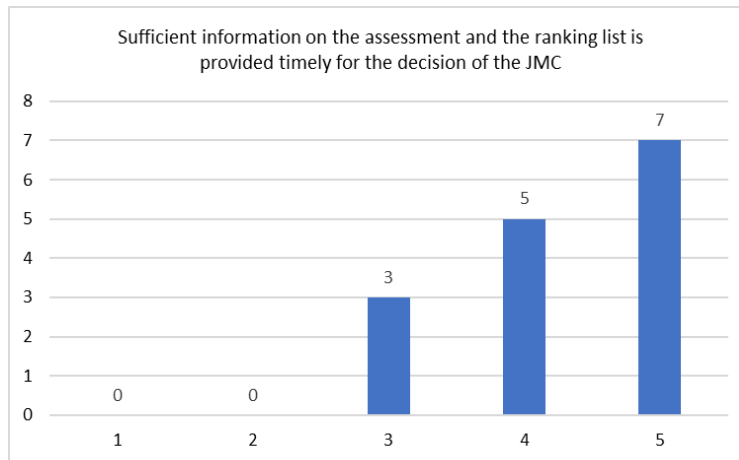
JMC members rated the following questions related to the Selection of projects procedure from 1 – 5, with 5 being the best score:

Figure 5.9 – Procedure on the decision of the methodology for project selection



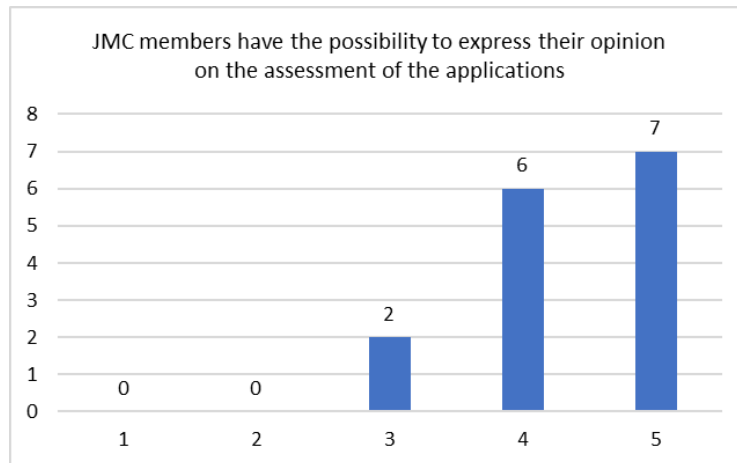
At Figure 5.9 the JMC members’ opinions related to the procedure on the decision of the methodology for project selection, are presented . **73.3% of the respondents stated that this procedure is adequate**, while 4 seem to be neither satisfied nor dissatisfied with the adequacy of the procedure.

Figure 5.10 – Information on the assessment and the ranking list



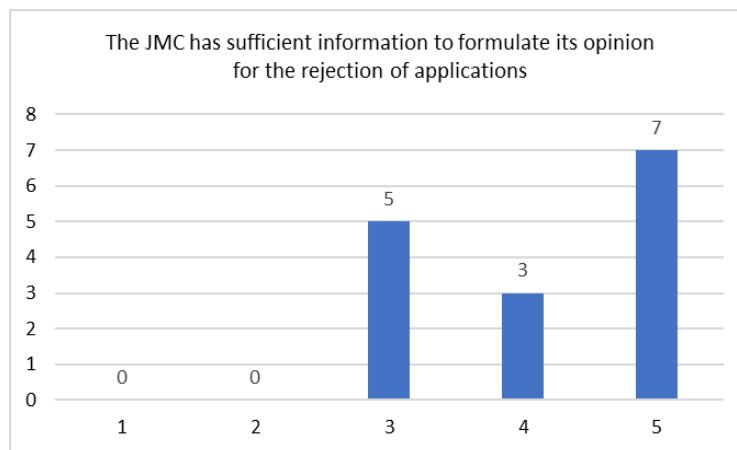
According to Figure 5.10, **12 out of 15 JMC members stated that the information on the assessment and the ranking list provided timely for the decision for project selection of the JMC**. On the other hand, 3 respondents stated that they are neither satisfied nor dissatisfied with the sufficiency of the information provided.

Figure 5.11 – Opinion expression on the assessment of the applications



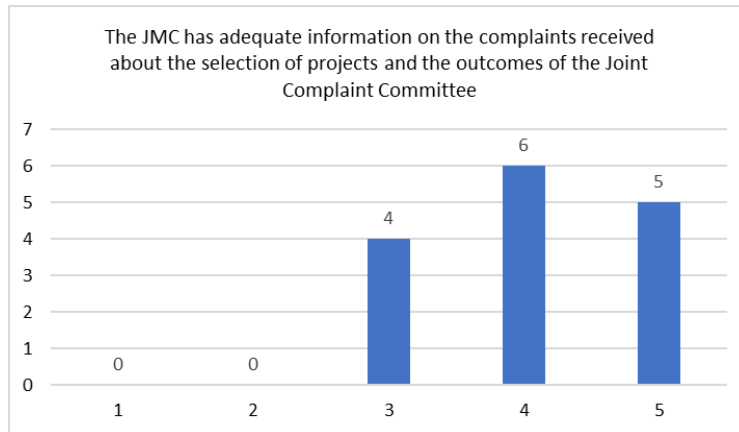
Moreover, the majority of the JMC members (13 out of 15) stated that they have the possibility to express their opinion on the assessment of the applications (Figure 5.11).

Figure 5.12 – Information for the rejection of applications



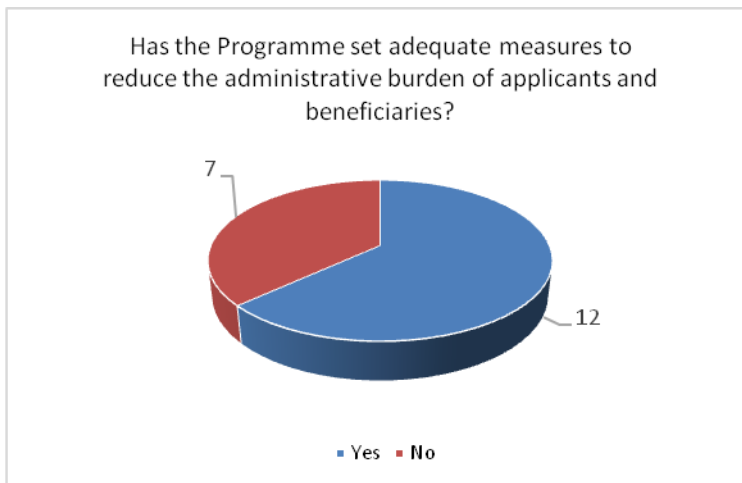
According to Figure 5.12, 10 out of 15 JMC members stated that the information provided by beneficiaries is sufficient to formulate their opinion for the rejection of applications. However, 5 respondents seem to be dissatisfied with the sufficiency level of the information provided to them.

Figure 5.13 – Information on the complaints received about the selection of projects and outcomes



Furthermore, 11 out of 15 JMC members mentioned that they have adequate information on the complaints received about the selection of projects and outcomes of the Joint Complaint Committee (Figure 5.13). However, 4 respondents seem to be uncertain about the adequacy of the information provided to them.

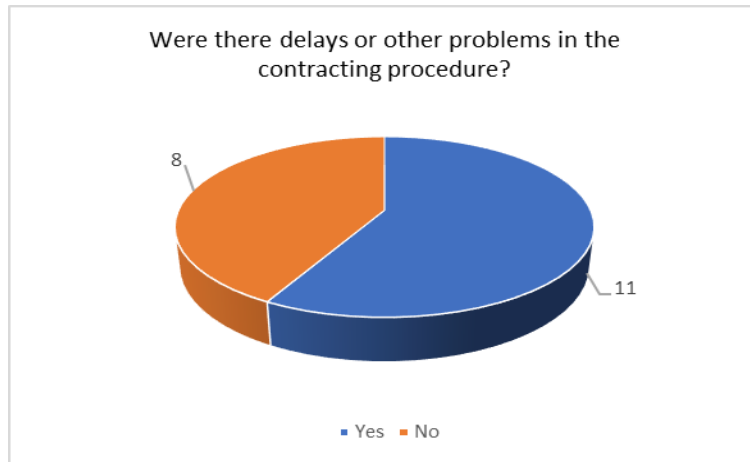
Figure 5.14 – Measures to reduce the administrative burden of applicants and beneficiaries



Specifically, according to Figure 5.14, 12 out of 19 respondents authorities stated that the Programme set adequate measures to reduce the administrative burden of applicants and beneficiaries, while 7 of them are dissatisfied with these measures.

The next figures present the **authorities' opinions** related to problems in the contracting and funding procedures.

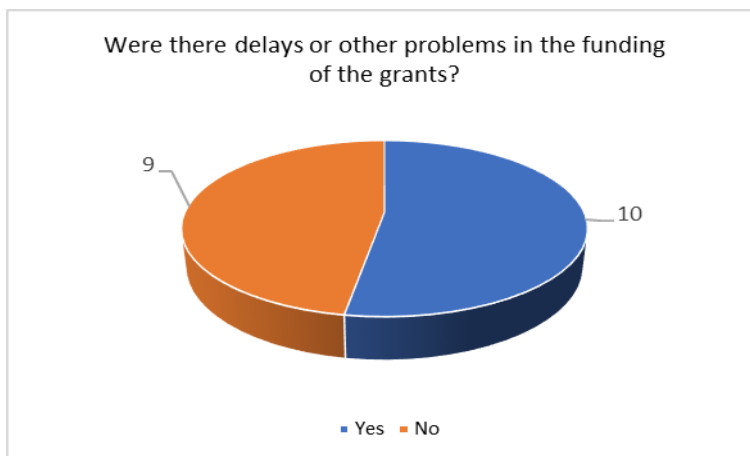
Figure 5.15 – Delays or other problems in the contracting procedure



Regarding the delays and other problems in the contracting procedure, 11 respondents stated that there were delays, while 8 of them said that everything was on time (Figure 5.15). The main delays that the respondents referred are the following:

- **Clarification of the procurement framework** that the Greek part had to follow
- **Completion** of administrative procedures
- **Clarification of legislative framework** for procurements
- **Absence of specific legal framework** on public procurement

Figure 5.16 – Delays or other problems in the funding procedure of grants

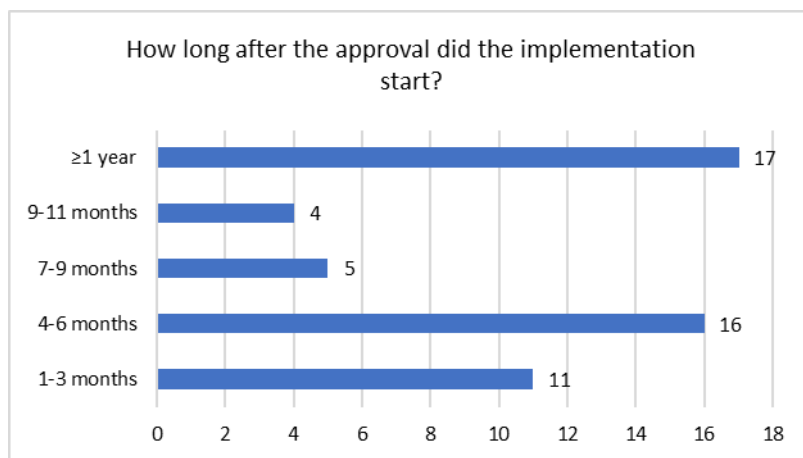


Concerning the delays and other problems in the funding procedure of grants, the Respondents' opinions are almost equally allocated. Specifically, 10 respondents argued that there were delays while 9 of them stated that everything was in time (Figure 5.16). The respondents mentioned that the main delays concerned:

- **Problems with the new MIS**
- The **pre-financing** of the projects
- **Clarification of the legislative framework** for procurements
- Procedures for **creating a bank account**
- The **dispatch of the guarantee letter** from the Albanian Ministry for the Albanian beneficiaries.

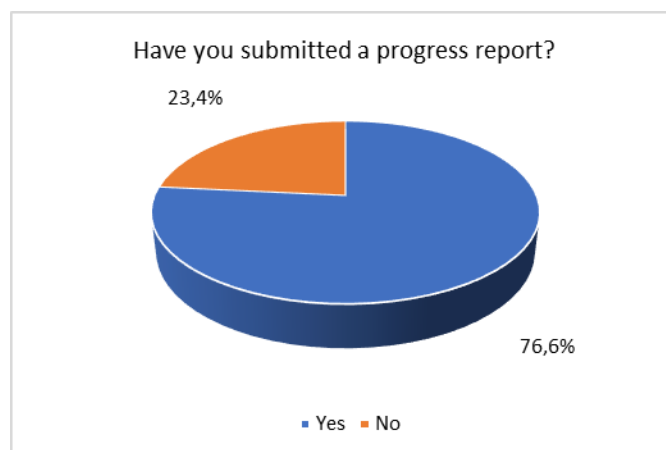
The problem regarding the delays in contracting, as well as the delays in the begging of the projects’ implementation phase, is also highlighted by the responses of the beneficiaries to questions concerning: the time taken to start the project, the submission of progress reports and the certification of expenditures, as it is shown in the following charts.

Figure 5.17 - Time needed to start the implementation phase of the project



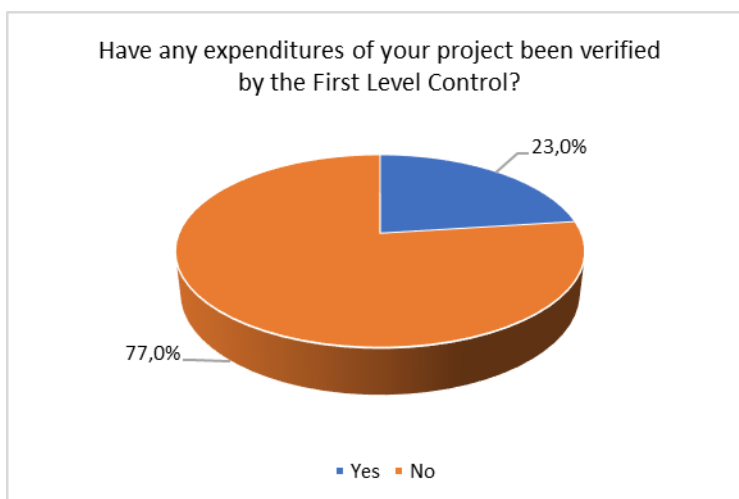
According to beneficiaries’ answers regarding the time needed to start the project implementation phase, after its approval (Figure 5.17), the majority of respondents referred that the project started after one year (17) or between 4 and 6 months (16). In advance, 11 respondents mentioned that the project started immediately after its approval, while 9 of them declared that it started between 7 and 11 months.

Figure 5.18 - Progress report



According to beneficiaries’ opinions, 76,6% of respondents have submitted a progress report, while 23,4% of them have not yet (Figure 5.18). Among the reasons for not submitting a progress report, are the **unreadiness** of the beneficiaries, the **delays** related to **administrative procedures**, and the **non-existence of an obligation for a progress report at the time of the response** according to the project’s time schedule.

Figure 5.19 - Verification by the First Level Control

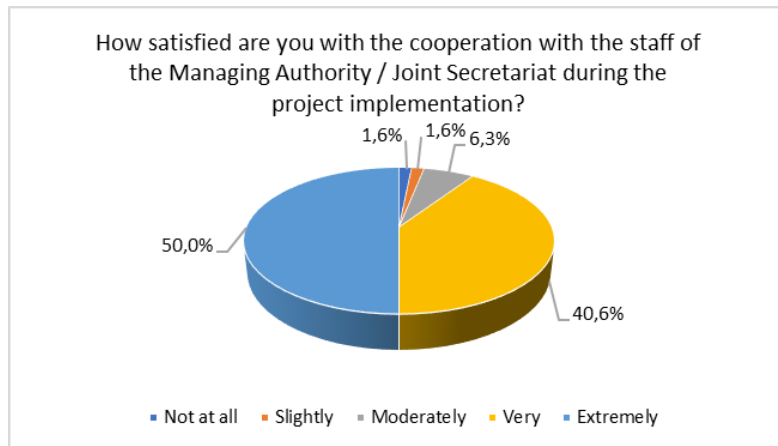


According to beneficiaries’ opinions, the percentage of beneficiaries that have the expenditures of their project verified by the First Level Control. Specifically, 77% of beneficiaries declared that the expenditures of their project have not been verified yet by the First Level Control, while 23% of them have the expenditure of their project verified.

The four main reasons for non-verification of expenditures are the following:

- **insufficient** expenses for verification,
- **poor** project progress,
- **time-consuming administrative** procedures,
- **complexing** procedures.

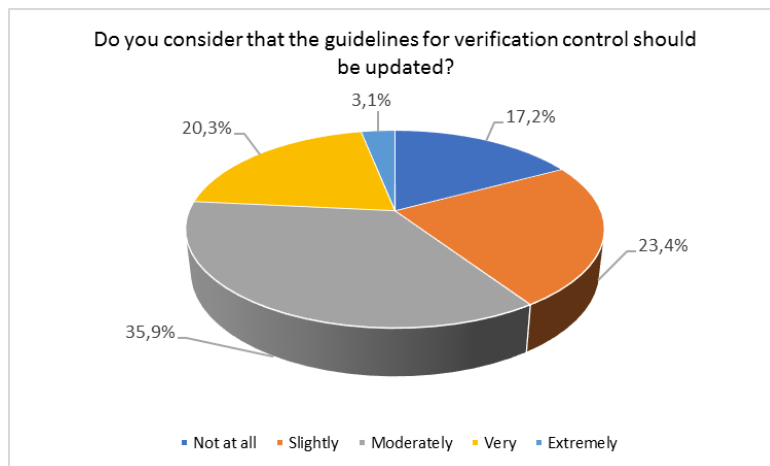
Figure 5.20 - Cooperation with the staff of the Managing Authority / Joint Secretariat during the project implementation



According to beneficiaries’ opinions, **the majority of beneficiaries (90,6%) are clearly satisfied with the cooperation** with the staff of the Managing Authority / Joint Secretariat during the project implementation (figure 5.20). It is worth noting that only 3,2% and 6,3% of respondents mentioned that they are dissatisfied or moderately satisfied respectively, with the cooperation offered by the staff of the Managing Authority / Joint Secretariat.

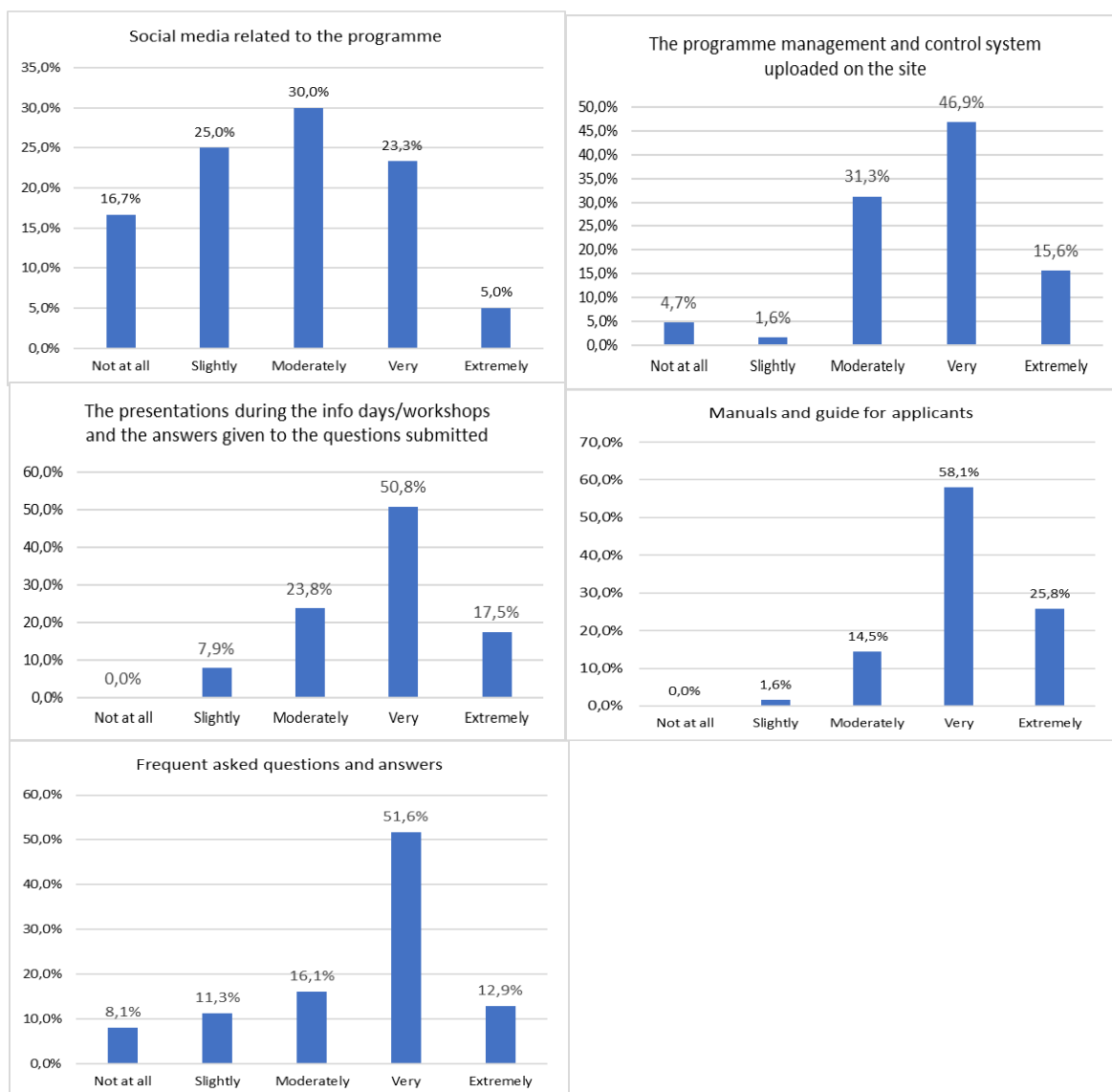
The next figures present the **beneficiaries’ opinions** related to project implementations’ procedures.

Figure 5.21 - Beneficiaries opinion about the guidelines for verification



The Figure 5.21 presents the beneficiaries opinion about the guidelines for verification. In particular, 23,4% of respondents declared that the guidelines for verification should be updated, while 40,6% of them does not ask for any change. Also, 35,9% of respondents have no preference for any change to the guidelines for verification control.

Figure 5.22 - Supportive actions that beneficiaries use, in order to manage their project



The Figure 5.22 presents the supportive actions that beneficiaries use, in order to manage their project and how satisfied are with them. In particular, a common supportive action is the use of Manuals and guide for applicants and almost 84% of beneficiaries are satisfied with the support that the manuals offer. Also, the presentations during the info days/workshops seem to be very helpful for the beneficiaries, that is why 68,3% of them are satisfied with this supportive action. 64,5% and 62,5% of beneficiaries, are satisfied with the support they receive from the tool of the Frequent Asked Questions of the Managing Authority and the Programme’s Management andControl System uploaded on the site, respectively. Finally, it seems that beneficiaries are not enough satisfied with the social media related to the Programme, that is why **41,7% of them are slightly or completely dissatisfied**. It is worth-noting that only 25,3% of respondents present a positive opinion for the social media of the Programme.

6 Objective C. Monitoring Information System: analysis of the functionality and effectiveness of the Programme monitoring information system

6.1 Evaluation questions C: Monitoring Information System: analysis of the functionality and effectiveness of the Programme MIS

This objective assesses the following aspects:

- Legal requirements
- Introduction of the system
- Capacity of MIS to support the management system of the Programme
- Access of relevant Programme bodies to the monitoring system
- Completeness and quality of the collected data including relevant data for evaluation and performance framework
- Collection of relevant information in the IT-system which can be used for communication activities at Programme level

This activity addresses the following evaluation questions:

- How is the Programme management system functioning? Is the monitoring system effectively supporting the management system of the Programme?
- How can the monitoring system support the information activity? How can it be improved?
- Have all important data been collected and included in the system?

Evaluation findings C

The Managing Authority (MA) of the European Territorial Cooperation Programmes (ETC) will use the Monitoring Information System (MIS) described analytically in the 4314/2014 Law, adjusted to the requirements of managing and monitoring Cooperation Programmes (CP).

The purpose of the MIS is:

- the managing of information from the highest level (Programme) to the lowest level (Project and expenditures),

- ❑ the conducting of management procedures in an electronic - automated way. The creation of the appropriate files for every stage of implementation and the management of a project and its legal commitments.
- ❑ the coverage of all dimensions of management, including economic and physical scope, time schedule, administrative and institutional framework,
- ❑ the coverage of all management stages in the scope of programming and implementing projects and Programmes,
- ❑ the creation and printing of reports with statistical data of selected projects (e.g. location of activities, economic statistical data of beneficiaries etc.),
- ❑ the electronic exchange of information with the European Commission (EC) Database “System for Fund Management in the EU” (SFC).

To this purpose, the operations and controls included in the MIS aim to:

- to ensure the relationships that must exist between the Programmes’ levels,
- to enable Managers/People in Charge to monitor if commitments are met effectively there is sufficient compliance to the commitments,
- to enable Managers/People in Charge to implement modifications, if needed, to the appropriate levels,
- to enable Managers/People in Charge to monitor the implementation progress,
- to enable Managers/People in Charge to assess efficiently results and impact of various actions undertaken.

The MIS, for the ETC Programmes (MIS-INTERREG), consists of a number of applications, complete and complementary with each other, which will ensure its proper functioning. The offered services are the following:

- Web Application for Management of the Application Form (e.g. Electronic Submission) for all Beneficiaries and Managing Authority/Joint Secretariat (MA/JS), Certifying Authority (CA) and Audit Authority (AA) as well as horizontal services for procedures related to the submission of reports by the Beneficiaries. The Application Forms draw data from the MIS and, in some cases, part or the whole of the report is pre-filled with existing data. In the new period, the environment will be integral with the advantage of providing more reliable information from all implicated bodies.
- Business Intelligence Application (Datamart)
- Training Applications [for (i) and (ii)]

MIS users will be all the involved Authorities/Bodies, National Authorities and specifically:

- Project Beneficiaries: Partners from both countries
- Management Bodies (Managing Authority, Joint Secretariat and National Authorities)
- First Level Control authorities
- Certifying Authority
- Audit Authority (EDEL) / Group of Auditors (GoA)
- Horizontal NSRF services
- European Union’s services

Access to the MIS is possible either directly through an interactive user interface (web application) or through a technical interface that allows data transmission.

The specific user roles are defined in accordance with the provisions of the Management and Control System and they follow the functions and responsibilities of the partnership in which they belong. So, for example users of Beneficiaries have entry rights in specific fields of the Application Forms of the MIS, while others (e.g. users of the Managing Authority) confirm the entries of beneficiaries and proceed to their own. In addition, some specific roles have “read-only” rights or access to executive reports, according to the existing requirements. Also, the total number of Beneficiaries involved in a project, and not only the Lead Beneficiary, shall have a “read-only access” of the submitted proposal, even in the stage prior to the submission.

More specifically, according to the user role, the following apply:

- Lead Beneficiaries have the right to fill in MIS forms regarding the following:
 - Application Form. The Lead Beneficiaries submit the Application Form for evaluation. Where the evaluation of the proposal to be funded is positive, then the Lead Beneficiaries re-submit a validated Application Form, according to the observations of the MA/JS/Monitoring Committee (MC). The version of the Application Form changes according to the initial and the final approved Application Form.
 - Progress Reports

All project beneficiaries will have the right to fill in the MIS forms regarding the Tables of Expenditure and the Expenditure Verification Requests.

- The MA/JS has the right to read and validate the following:
 - Application Form.
 - Progress Reports.
 - Tables of Expenditure/Certification of Expenditures/Verification Report (from Unit C).

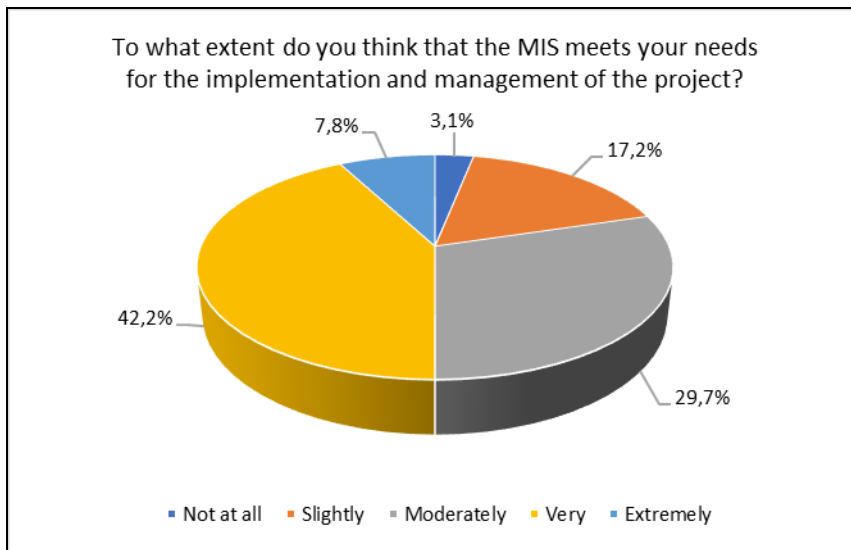
The users that have rights to fill in forms, enter data and documents to the MIS for which they have the authority, as well as any updates needed, and have the ability to attach documents.

Users have the responsibility for the timely submission and for the accuracy, quality and completeness of these data. The MIS supports data entry by performing a series of logical validation checks and by offering many tools and reports to users, in order to carry out their work.

Finally, the MIS screens, where the data will be inserted as well as printed, will be in the Programme’s official language (English).

The MIS for European Territorial Cooperation Programmes is adequate and in place.

Figure 6.1: Satisfaction of Beneficiaries with MIS



Regarding Beneficiaries’ responses on the Management Information System, **almost half of beneficiaries** are very or extremely satisfied with it (Figure 6.1) 17,2% of respondents declared that the MIS slightly meet their needs for the implementation and management of the project, while 3,1% of them are dissatisfied with it. Moreover, 29,7% of respondents are neither satisfied nor dissatisfied.

Figure 6.2: Overview of the MIS by Beneficiaries

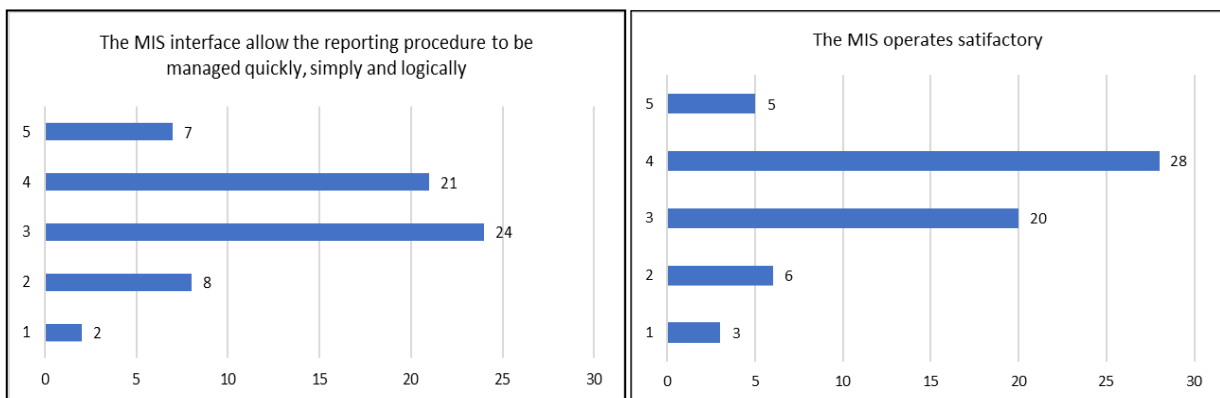


Figure 6.2 shows the beneficiaries’ overview of the Management Information System. In general, **more than the half** of respondents (33) are satisfied with the Interreg MIS and only 9 seem to be less satisfied with it. Concerning the MIS interface and its ease of management, 28 respondents are satisfied with it, 10 are not pleased and 24 expressed moderate opinion about it.

7 Objective D. Analysis of the implementation of the Communication Strategy

7.1 Evaluation questions D1: Quality and effectiveness of the Programme communication strategy

The evaluation assesses both the quality of the communication strategy and the effectiveness of its implementation:

- Outline of the communication strategy and resources for its implementation
- Operational planning of the communication activities by annual work plans
- Implementation status and effectiveness of the planned communication activities and communication tools to implement the communication strategy
- Achievement of communication result and impact indicator target values till 31/10/2018.

This activity addresses the following evaluation questions:

- Is the strategy for Programme communication and the yearly plans sound?
- Does communication contribute to reaching the specific Programme objectives?
- How effective are the approaches and activities for reaching the communication objectives (e.g. for involving competent partners)?
- Are all the indicators foreseen in the Communication Strategy fulfilled at this stage of the programming period?

Evaluation findings D1

2016 was the first year of actual implementation of the communication strategy, with the launch of two calls. Also one revision of the Communication Strategy was approved by the JMC, during the 2nd JMC Meeting in Igoumenitsa (11/2016) and it concerned:

- Additions according to the Commission’s guidelines
 - Inclusion on a chapter on Social Responsibility
 - Inclusion on a chapter on social media
 - Adjustment of the output and result indicators to the new Regulation/ Commission Guidelines
- Inclusion of the Regulation 1303/2013 where applicable
 - Chapters 1.1 & 3.3

- Changes in the format (so that all documents of the Programme look alike)
- Minor corrections
 - The reference to the Programme Manual was corrected to “Programme and Project Manual
 - Reference to the organization of EC Days was added to the Communication Strategy

During 2017, the Programme participated in the celebration of the European Cooperation Day (EC-DAY) for 2017. More than 400 people, were informed about the Programme and its environmental values. Following the launching of two calls in the previous year, and the respective info-days that followed, 2017 was also the year of evaluation. In this regard, the JS and MA opted for an in-house evaluation, aiming to self-assess the implementation of the Communication Strategy and to decide on the steps that will have to be taken. It’s worth to mention that No revision of the Communication Strategy was made during 2017.

According to the schedule for the implementation of Communication Actions, there are 3 stages of Communication Strategy:

1st stage (2015 – 2016): General Information about the Programme (inaugural event)

2nd Stage (2016 – 2020): Creation of an opinion about the Programme and its actions among the various target audiences, easy access to particular actions and to the opportunities that it offers, creation of a disposition to participate in the financing opportunities

3rd Stage (2020 – 2023): Dissemination of the results and benefits achieved

The Programme has successfully completed the 1st stage with the organization of the Programme’s launching event during 2015.

Towards the achievements set for the 2nd stage, most of the envisaged activities have been implemented during 2016:

- ↳ Hosting of the EU Flag on May 09
- ↳ Implementation of annual activities (EC-Day)
- ↳ Widespread use of the Internet (electronic registration, promotion of events, dissemination of presentations, etc)
- ↳ Publication and distribution of special information guides (Programme and Project Manual, Information and Publicity Guide)
- ↳ Systematic Organisation of thematic meetings and seminars with the potential beneficiaries (info-days for the application procedure and documents for the 2 calls for proposals)
- ↳ Utilisation of available information networks to approach potential beneficiaries (the events were announced in the website and local/ regional newspapers)

The goals of both the 1st and 2nd stage have been achieved mainly during the promotion of the 4 calls for project proposals that were launched in 2016 and 2018. The large number of info-days in

all participating regions covered all eligible areas of the Programme. Regarding the results of the 3 Calls for proposals (1st, 2nd and 3rd Call for Proposals), it can be said that they prove the achievement of the goals, thus:

- High number of proposals submitted
- Low number of proposals that did not pass the 1st phase evaluation; this shows that the information provided during the info-days was accurate and the message was passed.
- High number of new beneficiaries getting involved in projects (approximately 45% of the participants in the info-days were beneficiaries that were not activated during the previous programming period).

The JS/ MA evaluates the information and publicity actions that are expected to be organized in the framework of the Programme. The evaluation of these actions takes place based on their contribution to the achievement of the goals of the Communication Strategy and in accordance with qualitative and quantitative objectives, based on the nature of the actions.

Output indicators:

Table 7-1 – Output Indicators of the Communication Strategy 2015-2017 (A)

Output indicators of the Communication Strategy 2015-2017						
Indicator	Number of events (info-days, conferences, seminars, fairs, Programme annual events etc.)			Number of participants per event		
	2015	2016	2017	2015	2016	2017
Indicative target value						
Value achieved by 31/12/2017	2	14	1		770	400
Comments/ explanations	2 opening events took place, one in Thessaloniki during the launching of the 2014-2020 Programming Period of the ETC Programmes on the 22nd and 23rd of June 2015 and one in Vlore, Albania on the 20th November 2015.	1) 2 Launching Events; one in Greece and one in Albania (Korca) 2) 6 Info-days on the 1st Call for Strategic Project Proposals 3) 5 Info-days on the 2nd Call for Ordinary Project Proposals 4) 2016 -Running Marathon co-organised with the IPA CB Programme “Greece-Albania 2007 - 2013” Programme and the ‘Balkan – Mediterranean 2014-2020’ Transnational Programme.	2017 –EC-DAY “No Plastic Challenge”, co-organised with the ‘Balkan – Mediterranean 2014-2020’ Transnational Programme.		Info-days – 1st Call: 321 Info-days – 2nd Call: 369 EC-Day 2016: 80 runners	EC-Day 2017: 400 participants

Table 7-2 – Output Indicators of the Communication Strategy 2015-2017 (B)

Output indicators of the Communication Strategy 2015-2017												
Indicator	Number of news articles (including Programme’s website, articles developed for other media, press releases, press conferences, etc)			Number of social media posts			Website statistics			Types of communication material produced		
	2015	2016	2017	2015	2016	2017	2015	2016	2017	2015	2016	2017
Indicative target value												
Value achieved by 31/12/2017		59	14		51	51		23860 (www.interreg.gr) 42018 (www.greece-	www.greece-albania.eu Approximately 8000		7	2
Comments/ explanations		Website: 39 News (12 on the calls) 14 Events Article sent to newspapers/ news sites: 6	Website: 13 News 1 Events Article sent to newspapers/ news sites: 0		Facebook: 22/ followers 76 Twitter: 29 tweets/ followers 39 LinkedIn: 32 connections	Facebook: 33/ followers 137/ people reached (average) 220 Twitter: 27 tweets/ followers 102 LinkedIn: 85 connections		The number refers to the total number (not individual) of hits on the Programme’s website (www.greece-albania.eu), as well as on the news item related to the Programme in the Managing Authority’s website (www.interreg.gr)	The number refers to the total number (not individual) of hits on the Programme’s website (www.greece-albania.eu), as well as on the news item related to the Programme in the Managing Authority’s website (www.interreg.gr)		Paper Folders, pens, notepads, brochure, jigsaw puzzles, leather folders, banners.	Cotton bags, metallic re-usable glasses

7.2 Evaluation questions D2: Effectiveness of communication activities at Partner Country level and at project level

The evaluation assesses the following aspects:

- The capacity of Antenna Office and Albanian National Bodies to fulfil their communication tasks
- The effectiveness of support provided by the JS to Antenna Office and Albanian National Bodies in order to deliver their communication activities
- Availability of qualified project communication managers and sound communication plans (online-survey)
- The effectiveness of support provided by the JS to projects in order to deliver their communication tasks (online-survey)

This activity addresses the following evaluation questions:

- How does communication at national level contribute to the implementation of the overall communication strategy?
- How is it possible to improve the visibility of the Programme?
- How effectively is communication planned and carried out at project level for involving relevant target groups and achieving the planned project outputs and results as well as supporting their transfer and sustainability?

Evaluation findings D2

Communication activities should be properly planned in all Projects.

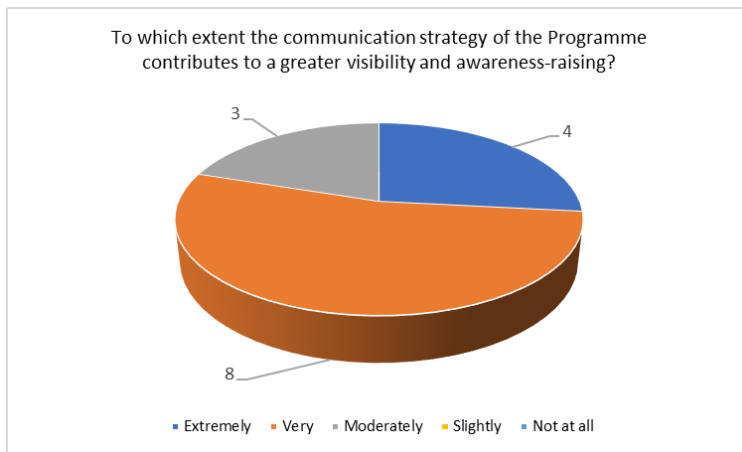
The implementation of the Information and Publicity Strategy should start as soon as the project has been approved. The project’s requirements for communication activities are indicated in detail in the Project Beneficiaries Guidebook for Information and Publicity. This Guidebook is prepared in order to help the beneficiaries, who deal with Projects funded by the Interreg IPA II Cross-border Cooperation Programme “Greece-Albania 2014-2020” to comply with EU Regulations and Guidelines and stay aligned with their responsibilities concerning information and publicity measures.

According to this Guidebook, communication should focus on highlighting the role of the EU as a beneficiary and on the achievements and impact of the action, not on administrative or procedural milestones. In order to maximise the impact of communication efforts, beneficiaries must keep in mind that:

- Activities need to be timely
- Information used must be accurate
- The right audience(s) should be targeted
- Messages should be interesting for target audience(s)
- Activities should be appropriate in terms of resources spent and expected impact

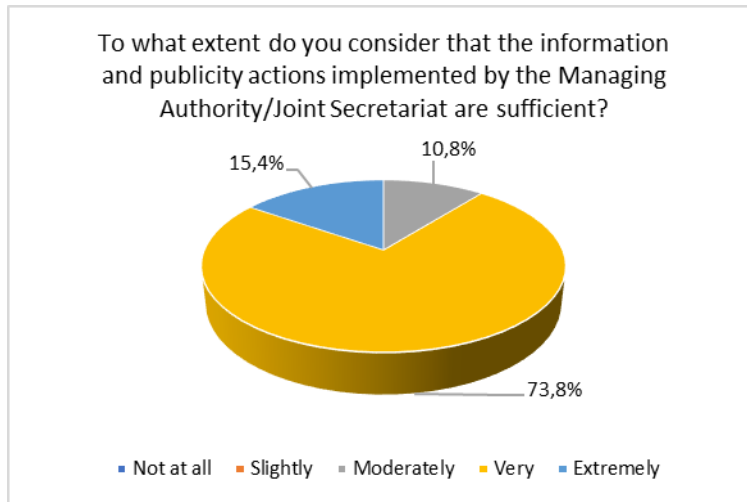
At the following pages are presented the results of the online survey, regarding the information and publicity actions, in accordance with the **responses of beneficiaries**.

Figure 7.1 – Contribution of communication strategy of the Programme to a greater visibility and awareness



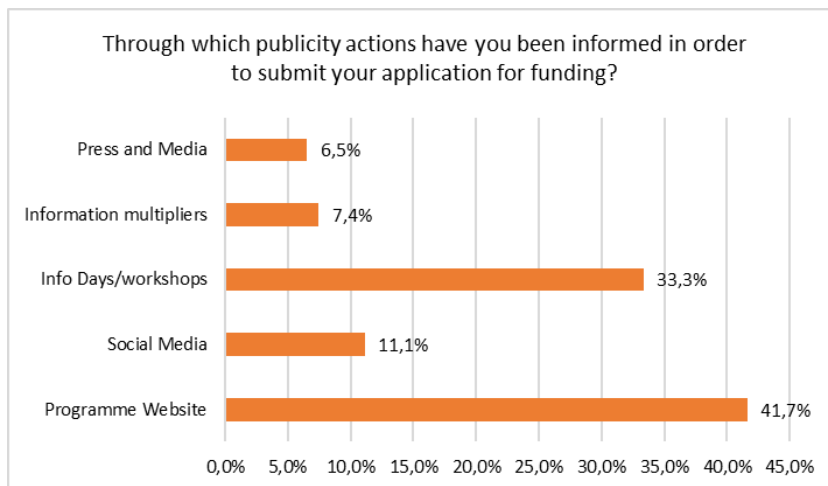
The majority of JMC members (12 out of 15) are extremely or very satisfied with the contribution of communication strategy of the Programme to a greater visibility and awareness (Figure 7.1).

Figure 7.2 - Information and publicity actions implemented by the Managing Authority/Joint Secretariat



According to beneficiaries’ opinions, as illustrated in Figure 7.2, **73,8% of correspondents declared that the information and publicity actions implemented by the Managing Authority/Joint Secretariat are very sufficient**, 15,4% of beneficiaries stated that the information and publicity actions are extremely sufficient, and only 10,8% of them have a moderate opinion for the sufficiency of the information and publicity actions.

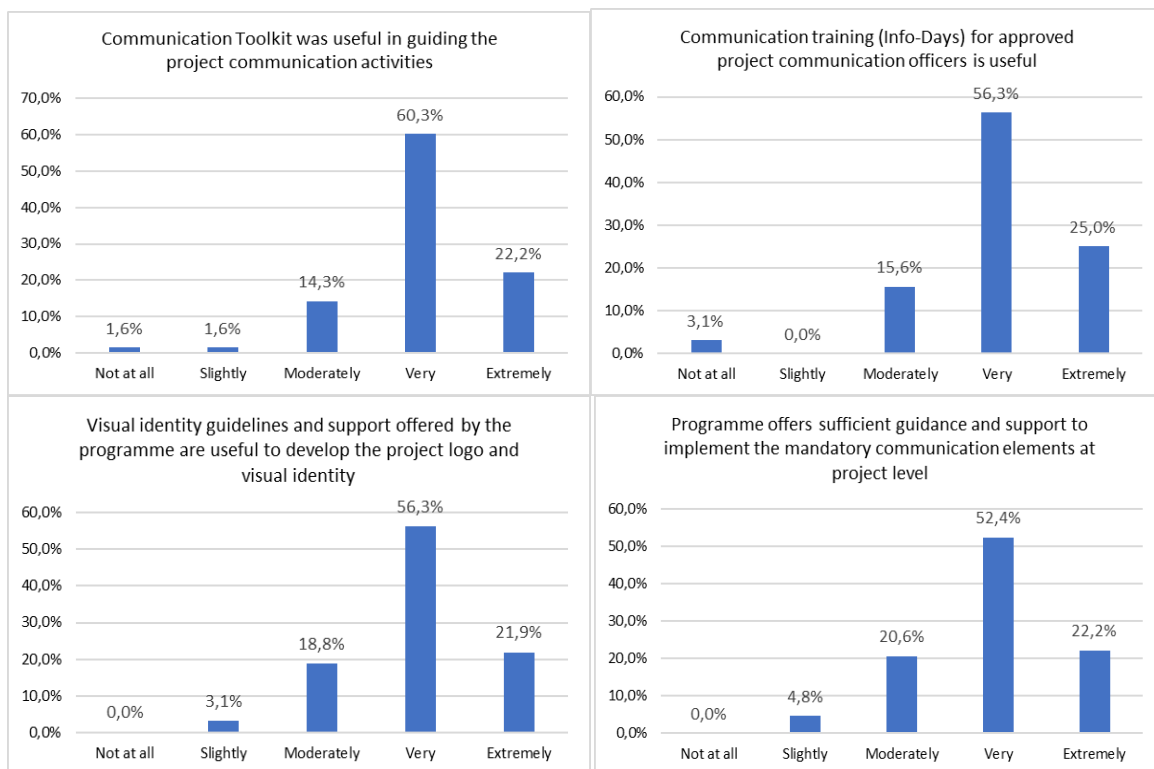
Figure 7.3 - Publicity actions through which beneficiaries are informed to submit application for funding



The Figure 7.3 shows the publicity actions that informed the beneficiaries to submit application for funding. **Programme website is the first source of information (41,7%)**, while participation in info days or workshops represents also a large share of the answers (33,3%). Moreover, 11,1% of respondents declared that social media is a useful way to be informed, 6,5% of respondents have been informed through press and media, and finally 7,4% of them mentioned that they were induced to submit application for funding by information multipliers, among other choices (relevant bodies to the Programme, managing authorities etc.). Apart from the above answers

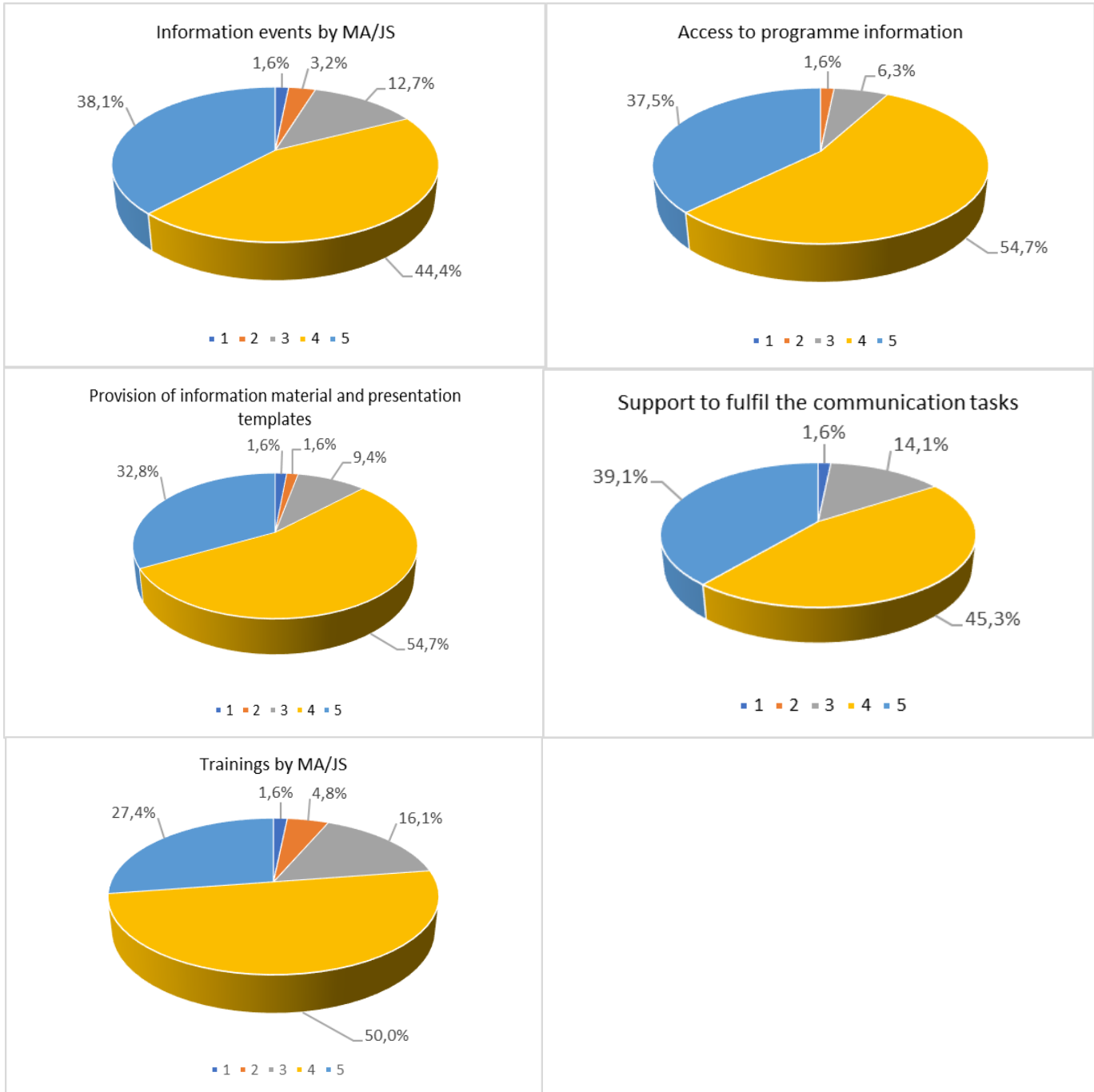
there were also beneficiaries that have been informed by the Joint Technical Secretariat of the IPA CBC Programme Greece – Albania through direct contact or email, by a relevant consultant of a private company or the relevant department of the ministry of Culture and Sports (mainly the Greek beneficiaries).

Figure 7.4 - Effectiveness of the support provided by the Joint Secretariat to Communication issues



The Figure 7.4 illustrate the effectiveness of the support provided by the Joint Secretariat to Communication issues. In general, **respondents seem to be satisfied with the support of the Joint Secretariat**. They mentioned that they are satisfied (with a percentage of around 80%) with the Communication Toolkit in guiding the project communication activities, with the guidance and support to implement the mandatory communication elements, with the communication training for approved projects and with the support to develop the project logo and visual identity as well. It is worth noting that the dissatisfied beneficiaries with the above supportive actions are a **significant minority** in the sample.

Figure 7.5 - Effectiveness of support by the Managing Authority/Joint Secretariat to fulfil the tasks of the Interreg Programme projects



The Figure 7.5 shows the effectiveness of support by the Managing Authority/Joint Secretariat to fulfil the tasks of the Interreg Programme projects. **Regarding the access to Programme information by the Managing Authority/Joint Secretariat, 92,2% of beneficiaries seem to be clearly satisfied**, while only 1,6% of them are dissatisfied. The majority of respondents are also satisfied with the information material and presentation templates given by the Managing Authority/Joint Secretariat to the beneficiaries, while only 3,2% of them seem to be dissatisfied. In advance, **82,5% of beneficiaries are very pleased with the information events organized by the Managing Authority/Joint Secretariat** while 4,8% are not satisfied. **77,45% of beneficiaries have received adequate training for the project implementation**, however 6,8% of beneficiaries have not been adequately trained. Finally, **84,4% of respondents declared that they are satisfied with the support of the Managing Authority/Joint Secretariat to fulfil the communication tasks**, while only 1,6% of them seem to be dissatisfied.

It is worth noting that the suggestions provided by beneficiaries on how to improve the project implementation and management procedures under the Interreg IPA CBC Programme “Greece-Albania 2014-2020” are very interesting. Indicatively, the most common suggestions of beneficiaries are the following:

- **More Info Days / Seminars** in order to tackle various problems related to the management of the projects,
- **more training events** on how to use the Management Information System,
- **improvement of the Management Information System** in order to be more user-friendly and easily accessible,
- **speed up of bureaucratic procedures**, especially for Albanian beneficiaries,
- **less bureaucratic procedures**, and a joint manual / guideline for administrative procedures for both countries

8 Objective E. Analysis of progress in achieving the results of each specific objective, including potential bottlenecks and capacity of each Specific Objective to generate projects

8.1 Evaluation questions E: Analysis of progress in achieving the results of each specific objective, including potential bottlenecks and capacity of each Specific Objective to generate projects

The evaluation assesses the level of achievement of the expected results by analyzing the first, second and third call projects and the achievements so far. The evaluation combines statistical analysis, which allows a first assessment, with a qualitative analysis. The assessment is carried out at the level of specific objectives and expected results.

The evaluation assesses the following aspects:

- Key figures on the 1st, 2nd, 3rd and 4th call Screening of approved projects
- Progress according to indicators
- Target groups
- Impact assessments

This activity addresses the following evaluation questions:

- What is the progress in achieving the overall Programme goal and the results of each specific objective?
- What is the progress of the Programme in relation to milestones and targets defined in the performance framework?
- What is the potential of each specific objective to generate projects?
- Are the relevant target groups of the Programme successfully involved as beneficiaries? How is the participation in terms of public and private actors as well as in relation to the geographical coverage of the Programme area?
- Have synergies been created between the projects and the EUSAIR?
- What is the contribution of the specific objectives to the CP based on the result indicators implementation progress, the actions implemented within the CP and the wider macroeconomic, social and environmental context?
- Is it possible to obtain the data required to prepare the Impact Assessments? Does any proposals made for the data collection assurance?

- Are there any new specific objectives to be incorporated into the CP in the context of the review. If yes, which are they?

Evaluation findings E

Key figures on the 1st, 2nd and 3rd call:

In the 1st and 2nd Calls for Proposals, 46 projects with an average funding of each project of **807 thousands euro** were selected and there is one Targeted Project that was selected under the 3rd Call for proposals with a total budget of €7.149.505.00.

The majority of projects are contributing to SO2.1 (15 out of 46), followed by SO1.1 (12 out of 46) and SO2.2 (9 out of 46).

Almost 174 beneficiaries were selected for funding from the first, second and third call. This is an average of 3.8 beneficiaries per project. First call projects counted 22 beneficiaries, second call counted 148 beneficiaries and third call 4 beneficiaries.

Regarding milestones, the performance framework of the Programme sets in total 4 milestones, two per each Priority Axis. Milestones regarding the number of approved projects have already achieved. Milestones regarding the certified expenditures due to delays in projects' implementation is not expected to be achieved for 2018.

Due to the early stage of the Programme's implementation and given that many of the approved projects in PA 1 & 2 are still in an early stage of their implementation, no specific values for indicators are available. Also, Technical Assistance has started implementation, but there are no respective indicators required. Nonetheless, given the size and the nature of the selected projects, it is obvious that project outputs and results will contribute to the indicators and objectives of the Programme.

Nonetheless, it is not possible to draw conclusions about the contribution of the Programme to the specific objectives based on the progress of the implementation of the result indicators, the actions implemented within the framework of the Cooperation Programme and the wider macroeconomic, social and environmental context.

However, concerning the preparation and selection procedure of the projects, it is worth noted that:

The issues of **equality between men and women and non-discrimination** (including accessibility for persons with disabilities) are very important for the Programme. This is justified through the following actions:

⇒ **Projects:** There is a distinctive field where the applicants have to state and justify the contribution of their projects towards these issues, for each case separately. This field is evaluated in the 1st phase of project evaluation and is an on-off criterion. This means that projects failing to justify how their projects will contribute to or respect the European Horizontal Principles, will be rejected and not further evaluated.

⇒ **Programme actions/ Information and Publicity:**

- First of all the Programme’s Communication Overall Strategy has been finalized after consultations with the National Federation for Disabled Persons (GR), in order to be proactive and to insist on the respect and application of the conditions foreseen. As stated in the strategy “The Member States will ensure that equality between men and women and the integration of the gender perspective is promoted during the various stages of implementation of the Funds and any discrimination based on sex, racial or ethnic origin, religion or belief, disability, age or sexual orientation will be avoided. Special attention will be given to providing women as well as people with disabilities living in the eligible border region with equal opportunity to access to information. In some cases special services may be needed to enable people with disabilities to access to information. For example deaf people may require interpretation, while blind or physically handicapped people may require personal assistance during events. The invitation for these events will include a question whether the participant needs any assistance and if yes, what kind of. Assistance to disabled people during information events will be organised and such support services will be financed under the TA budget”.
- The website was procured and assigned with respect to the protocols and technical specifications suggested by the National Federation for Disabled Persons (GR). As soon as the website will be finalized and operable, the National Federation for Disabled Persons (GR) will be requested to test it and suggest any corrections.
- All the info-days took place in locations with provisions for the accessibility of disabled persons.
- Through the implementation Information and Publicity Guide, the project beneficiaries will be obliged to respect the conditions not only on the accessibility of disabled persons, but also the respect of equality between men and women and non-discrimination on all aspects of project implementation; information and publicity actions, but also procurements, recruitment procedures, etc. All these obligations are explicitly stated in the ‘Information and Publicity Guide’ which states clearly: “The objective of non-discrimination refers to the prohibition of any discrimination based on any ground such as sex, race, colour, ethnic or social origin, genetic features, language, religion or belief, political or any other opinion, membership of a national minority, property, birth, disability, age or sexual orientation. Article 19 of the Treaty on the Functioning of the EU provides the legal base for EU legislation combating discrimination. Moreover, Article 7 of Regulation 1303/2013 refers to the promotion of equality between men and women and non-discrimination. Besides the legal obligations, there is a strong economic argument, also linked to the achievement of the Europe 2020 targets, to work towards a more equal and diverse society as demonstrated by a wide range of studies, including by the OECD. Hence, mainstreaming gender and non-discrimination on project level and particularly in communication strategy is a key factor in successful dissemination of project results.

Concerning the **sustainable development**, necessary steps have been taken to ensure that environmental protection requirements, resource efficiency, climate change mitigation and adaptation, biodiversity, disaster resilience. One of the main priorities of the INTERREG IPA Cross Border Cooperation Programme Greece-Albania 2014-2020 is to protect the environment. Based

on this priority the overall strategy of the cross-border area was set and the corresponding priority axes and thematic priorities were selected.

In addition, proposed activities of the submitted proposals are evaluated for the expected environmental consequences.

According to the **authorities’ opinions** related to measures of the Programme, in order to promote equal opportunities between men and women against discrimination, there were common responses among respondents:

- There are relevant evaluation criteria which gives **additional score** to the projects that **promote equal opportunities**
- The Programme promotes gender equality by **counting** the percentage of women participating in interventions and **calculating** the percentage of support allocated to women
- The Programme encourages **policies that promote equal opportunities**
- Equal opportunities is something that have been followed in **every activity**.

Regarding the planned measures of the Programme to promote **sustainable development**, respondents stated the following:

- It promotes two very important sectors - **agro-food industry** and **sustainable tourism**
- **“Environmental protection and sustainable development”** is one of the main Priority Axes of the Programme
- There are measures that ensure that interventions will not harm the environment and a solid **environmental impact analysis** is necessary for major interventions, as well

Finally, concerning the contribution of the Programme to promote sustainable development **horizontal principles**, respondents argued that:

- It promotes sustainable development through horizontal principals, by **giving priority** to **agro-food industry** and **sustainable tourism**
- It promotes sustainable development with the **selection of operations** which include contribution to **energy efficiency, renewable energy use, reduction of waste, recycling** etc.
- There are respective evaluation criteria which give **additional score** to the projects that contribute to the sustainable development horizontal principle.

The next figures present the **authorities’ opinions** related to the achievement of the Programme’s priorities, the relation of the selected projects with other EU Policies and special issues.

Figure 8.1 – Contribution of the selected projects to the achievement of Programme priorities

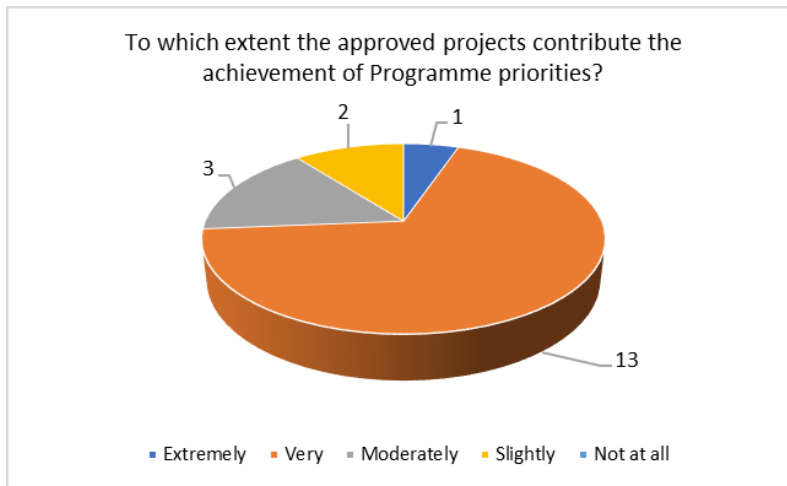


Figure 8.1 illustrates the contribution of the selected projects to the achievement of Programme priorities. Specifically, **14 respondents out of 19 are very or extremely satisfied with the contribution of the projects to the Programme priorities** while 2 of them are slightly satisfied and 3 of them are neither satisfied nor dissatisfied.

Figure 8.2– Relevance of Selected Projects with other EU Policies

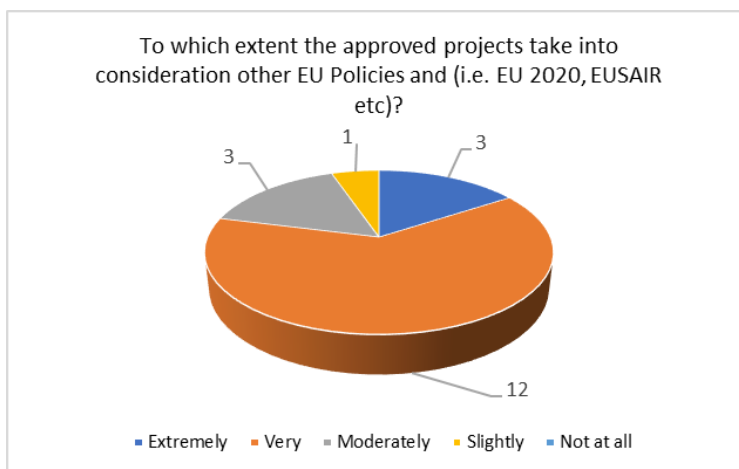
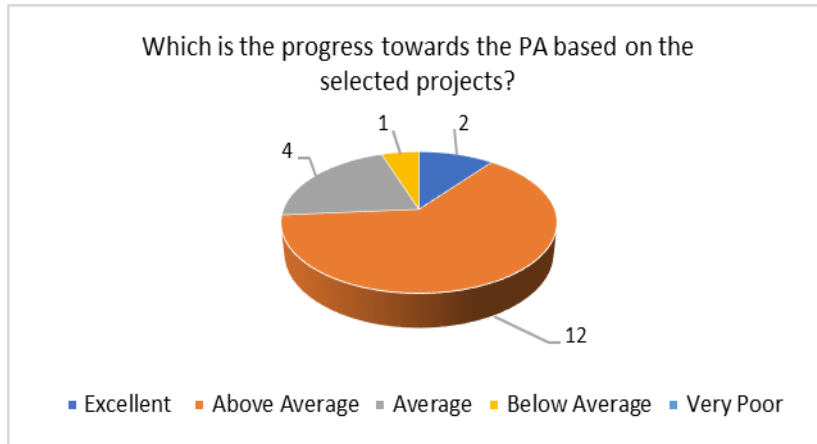


Figure 8.2 shows the respondents’ opinion regarding the relation of the selected projects with other EU Policies. In particular, **15 respondents out of 19 are clearly convinced that the selected projects take into consideration other EU Policies**, while only one Authority disagree with this statement.

At the following pages are presented the results of the online survey, regarding the progress of every P.A. and S.O., according to the Survey.

Priority Axis 1: Promotion of the environment, sustainable transport and public infrastructure

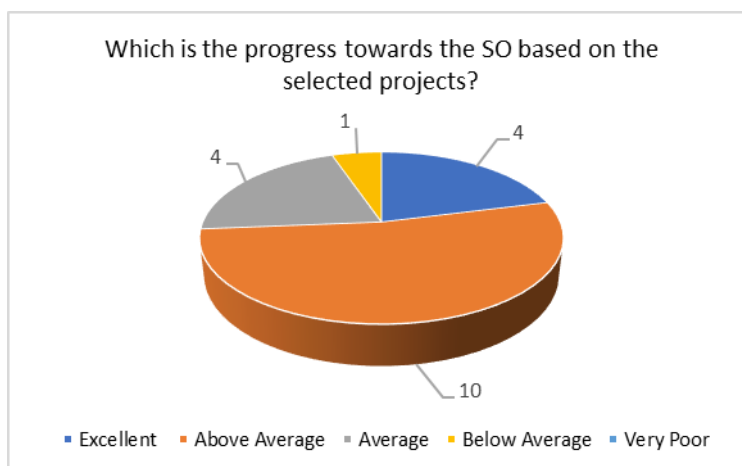
Figure 8.3 – Progress towards P.A. 1 based on selected projects



Regarding Priority Axis 1 which is related to the promotion of the environment, sustainable transport and public infrastructure, **the majority of respondents** (16) stated that the progress towards the PA 1, based on the selected projects, is above average or average (Figure 8.3). However, 2 respondents declared that the progress is below average, while only one considers it as excellent.

SO 1.1 Increase the capacity of cross-border infrastructure in transport, water and waste management

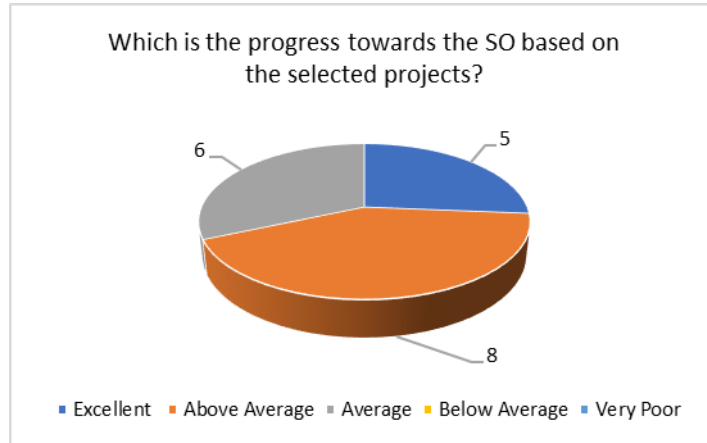
Figure 8.4 – Progress towards S.O. 1.1. based on selected projects



According to Figure 8.4 the progress towards the S.O. 1.1 is at a positive level, given that 14 out of 19 respondents stated that progress is above average or excellent. However, there is 1 respondent that seems to be dissatisfied with the existing progress.

SO 1.2 Increase the effectiveness of environmental protection and sustainable use of natural resources

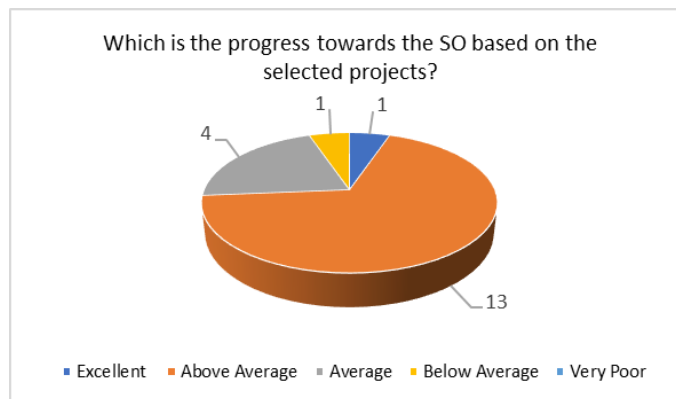
Figure 8.5 – Progress towards the S.O. 1.2



According to Figure 8.5 the progress towards the S.O. 1.2 is at a positive level, given that almost 69% of the respondents stated that the progress is above average or excellent. However, 6 respondents declared that they are neither satisfied nor dissatisfied with level of the progress.

S.O. 1.3 Increase energy efficiency and the use of RES

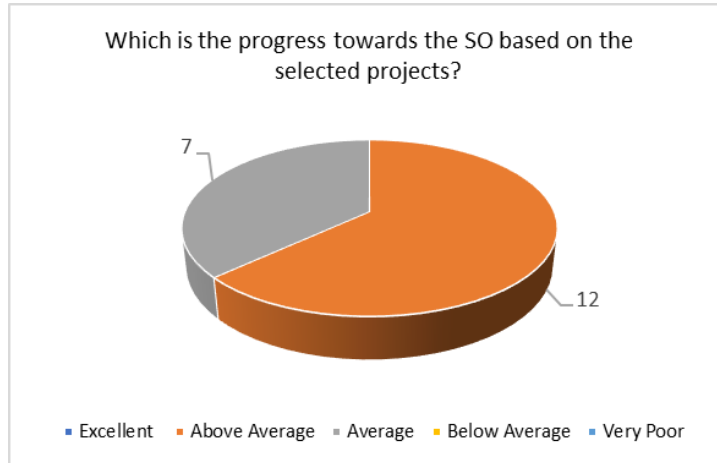
Figure 8.6 – Progress towards S.O. 1.3 based on selected projects



According to Figure 8.6 the progress towards the S.O. 1.3 is at a positive level, given that almost **74% of the respondents stated that progress is above average or excellent**. However, there is 1 respondent that expressed its dissatisfaction about the existing progress.

S.O. 1.4 Improve the effectiveness of risk prevention and disaster management with a focus on forest fires

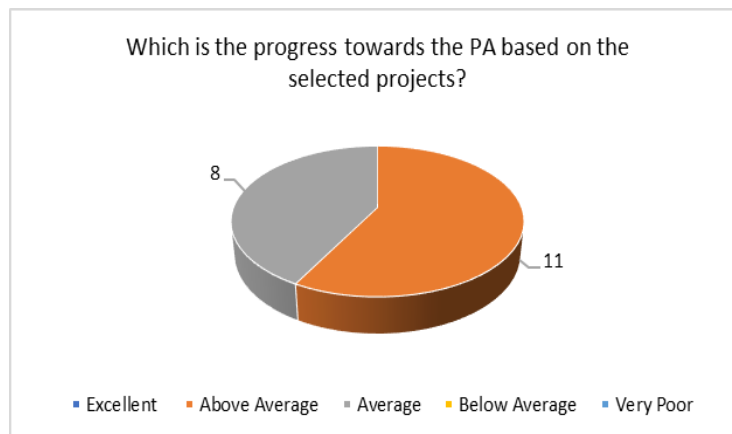
Figure 8.7 – Progress towards S.O. 1.4 based on selected projects



According to Figure 8.7 the progress towards the S.O. 1.4 is at a positive level, given that almost 63% of the respondents stated that progress is above average, while 7 Respondents seem to be neither satisfied nor dissatisfied with the existing progress.

Priority Axis 2: Boosting the local economy

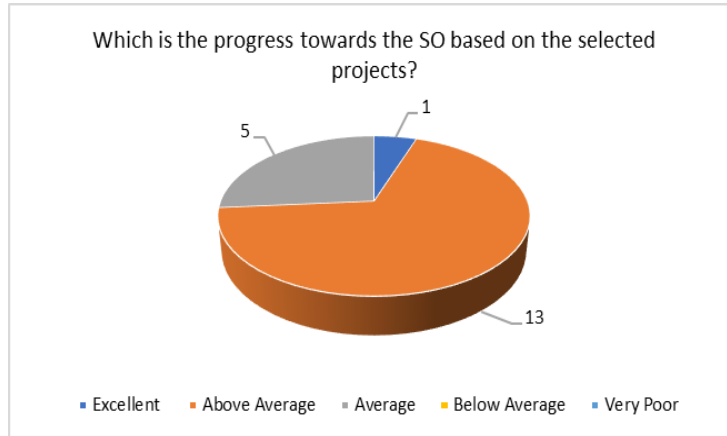
Figure 8.8 – Progress towards the PA based on selected projects



According to Figure 8.8, almost 58% of the respondents stated that progress is above average, while 8 respondents seem to be neither satisfied nor dissatisfied with the existing progress.

S.O. 2.1 Preserve cultural and natural resources as a prerequisite for tourism development of the cross-border area

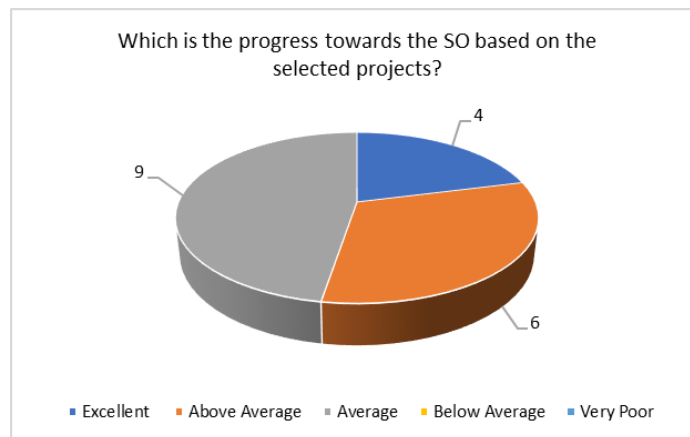
Figure 8.9 – Progress towards S.O. 2.1 based on selected projects



According to Figure 8.9, almost 74% of the respondents stated that existing progress is above average or excellent, while 5 respondents seem to be neither satisfied nor dissatisfied with it.

S.O. 2.2 Improve cross-border capacity to support entrepreneurship, business survival and competitiveness

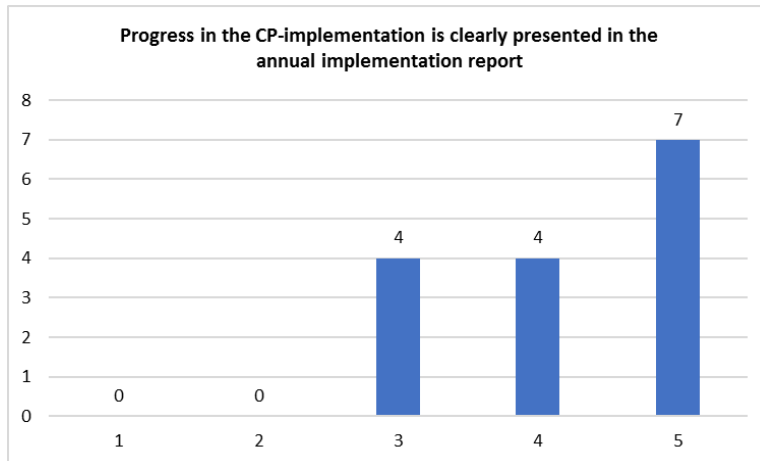
Figure 8.10 – Progress towards S.O. 2.2 based on selected projects



According to Figure 8.10, opinions among respondents referring to the progress towards the S.O. 2.2 are separated to average (9), above average (6) and excellent (4) level of progress.

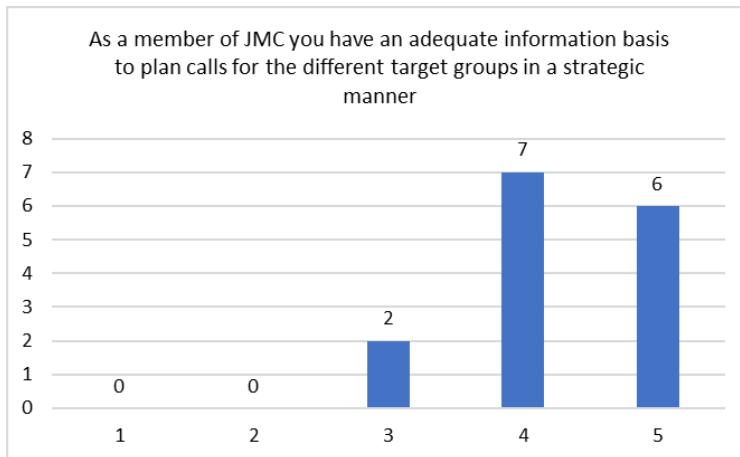
JMC members rated the following questions on Monitoring and Management of Programme implementation from 1 – 5, with 5 being the best score:

Figure 8.11 – Progress in the CP-implementation presented in the annual implementation report



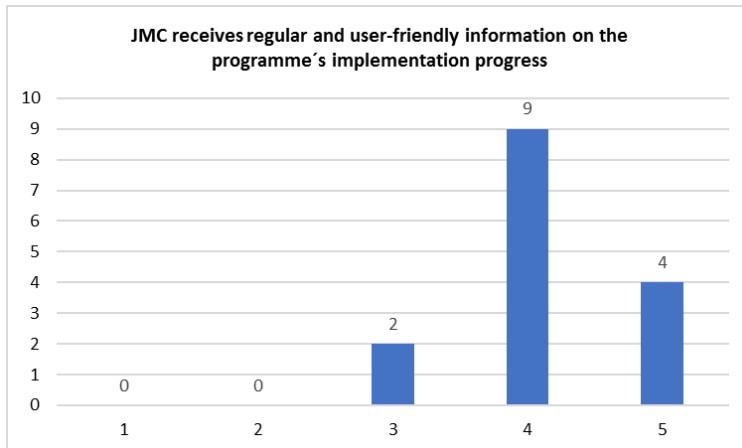
Regarding the satisfaction of JMC members with the progress in the CP-implementation presented in the annual implementation report, it seems that the majority of JMC members are clearly satisfied (73%) while almost 27% of them are neither satisfied nor dissatisfied (Figure 8.11).

Figure 8.12 – Adequate information basis to plan calls for the different target groups in a strategic manner



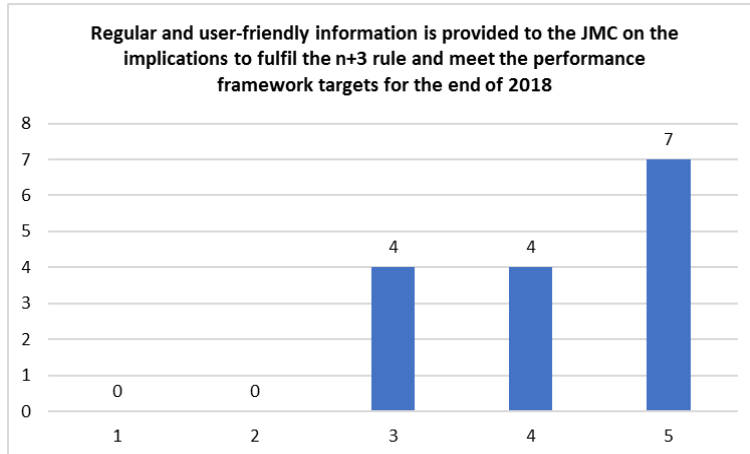
According to Figure 8.12, almost the 87% of the JMC members declared that they have an adequate information basis to plan calls for the different target groups in a strategic manner. Only two authorities seem to be neither satisfied nor dissatisfied with the information they have.

Figure 8.13 – Evaluation of information, about the Programme’s implementation progress



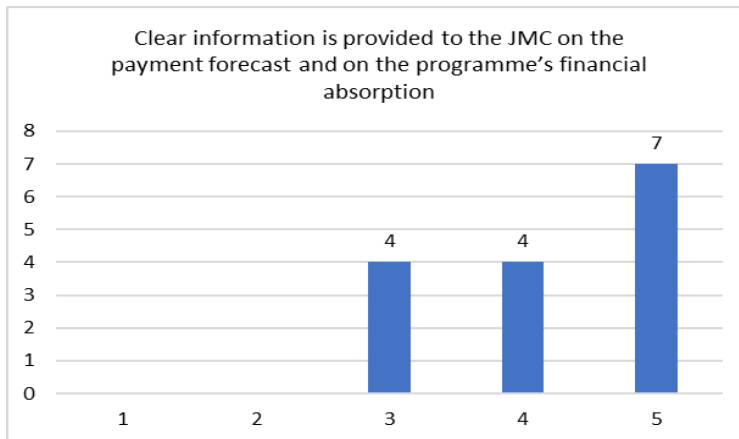
The majority of the respondents - JMC members (87%) stated that they receive regular and user-friendly information on the Programme’s implementation progress (Figure 8.12). Only two authorities seem to be neither satisfied nor dissatisfied with the information received, related to the Programme.

Figure 8.14 – Evaluation of information, about the implications to fulfil the n+3 rule and meet the performance framework targets for the end of 2018



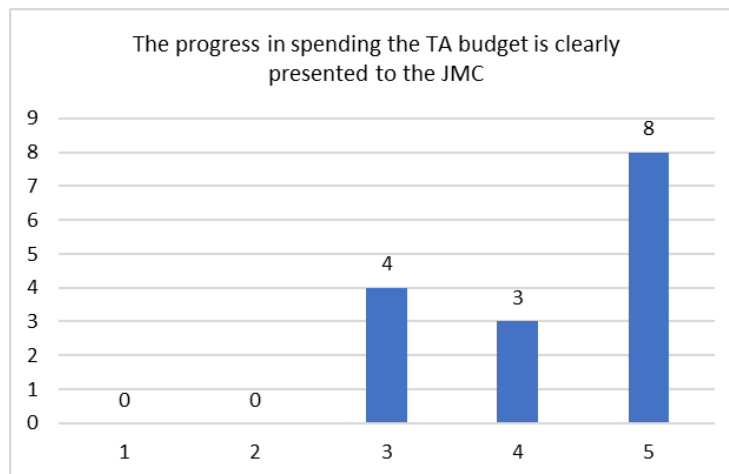
73% of the respondents- JMC members stated that they receive regular and user-friendly information on the implications to fulfil the n+3 rule and meet the performance framework targets for the end of 2018 (Figure 8.14). However, 4 respondents seem to be neither satisfied nor dissatisfied with the information provided to them.

Figure 8.15 – Evaluation of information, about the payment forecast and the Programme’s financial absorption.



According to Figure 8.15, 11 out of 15 of the respondents - JMC members declared that they are satisfied with the information provided to them about the payment forecast and the Programme’s financial absorption.

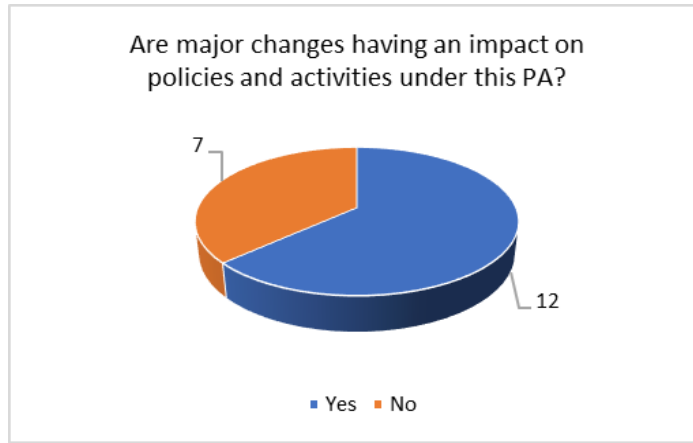
Figure 8.16 – Progress in spending the TA budget



Also, 11 out of 15 of the respondents - JMC members mentioned that the progress in spending the TA budget is clearly presented to them by the beneficiaries (Figure 8.16). However, 4 respondents seem to be neither satisfied nor dissatisfied with the information provided to them related to this issue.

At the following pages are presented the results of the online survey regarding the **existence of changes in socio-economic level** that could affect each P.A. and S.O., as well as the need to revise the Programme's priorities, according to the **respondents**.

Figure 8.17 – Major changes having an impact on the policies and activities under P.A. 1



According to Figure 8.17, 12 respondents declared that there are major changes having an impact on the policies and activities under Priority Axis 1. However, 7 of them stated that there are no changes with an impact on policies and activities for the promotion of the environment, sustainable transport and public infrastructure.

Figure 8.18 – Need to revise the Programme to address new / increased needs or priorities

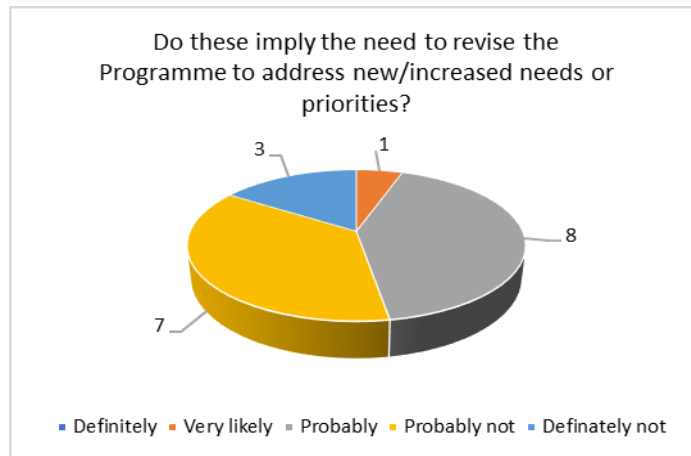


Figure 8.18 presents the results on the question if there is a need to review the Programme to address new / increased needs or priorities, provided that there are changes having an impact on the policies and activities of Priority Axis 1. Positive and negative opinions among Program Authorities are **almost equally allocated**, in particular, 9 respondents argued that maybe there is a need for revision, while 10 stated that there is no need.

Figure 8.19 – Major changes having an impact on policies and activities under S.O. 1.1

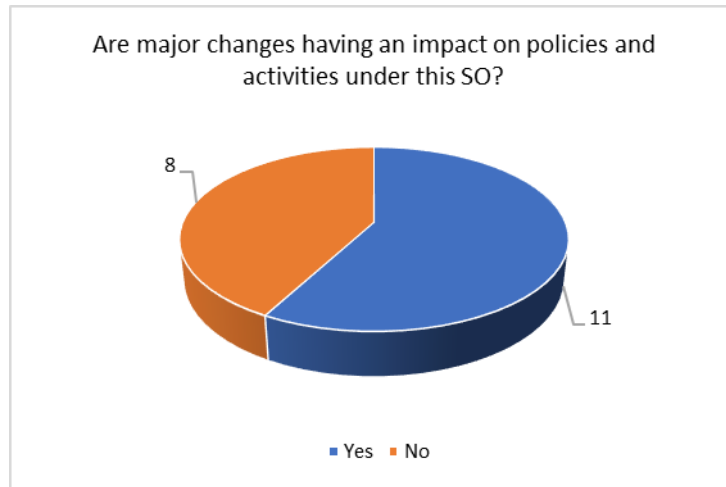


Figure 8.19 shows that 11 respondents declared that there are major changes having an impact on policies and activities under the S.O. 1.1, while 8 of them stated that there are no changes with an impact on policies and activities related to cross-border infrastructure in transport, water and waste management.

Figure 8.20 – Need to review the Programme in order to address new / increased needs or priorities

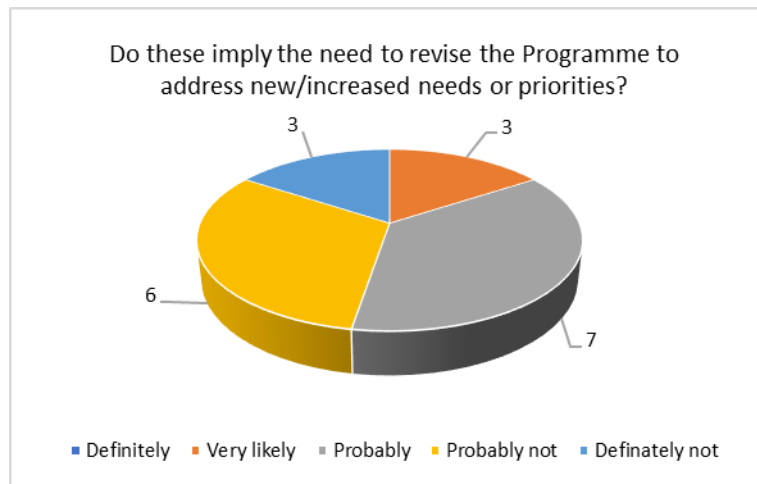


Figure 8.20 presents the results on the question if there is a need to review the Programme in order to address new / increased needs or priorities, provided that there are changes having an impact on the policies and activities of S.O. 1.1. 10 respondents argued that maybe there is a need for revision, while 9 stated that there is no need.

Figure 8.21 – Major changes having an impact on policies and activities under S.O. 1.2

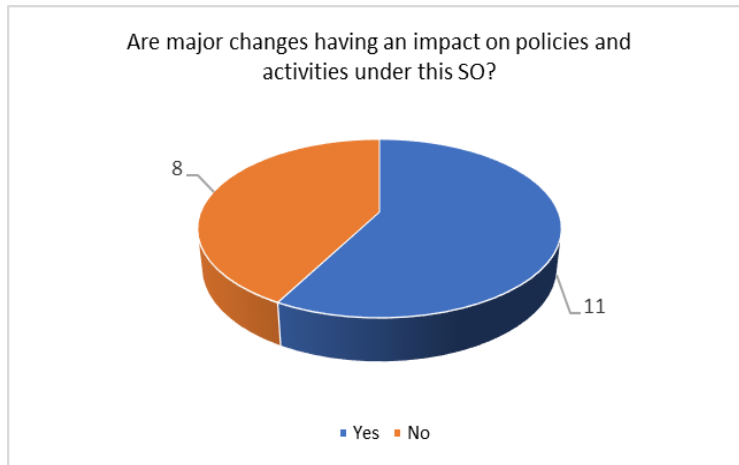
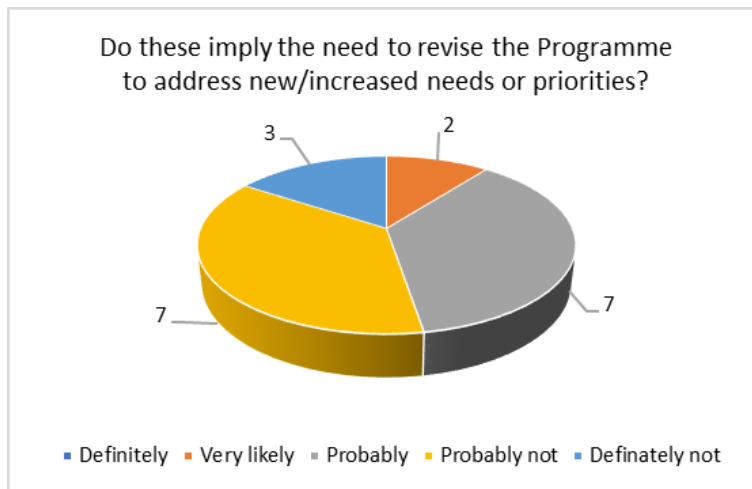


Figure 8.21 shows that 11 of respondents declared that there are major changes having an impact on policies and activities under the S.O. 1.2, while 8 of them stated that there are no changes with an impact on policies and activities related to environmental protection and sustainable use of natural resources.

Figure 8.22 – Need to revise the Programme to address new / increased needs or priorities



On the question if there is a need to revise the Programme to address new / increased needs or priorities, provided that there are changes having an impact on the policies and activities of S.O. 1.2., positive and negative responses are **almost equally allocated** (Figure 8.22).

Figure 8.23 – Major changes having an impact on policies and activities under S.O. 1.3

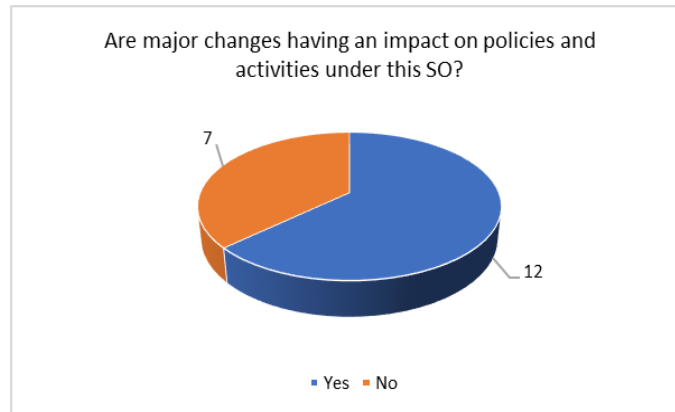
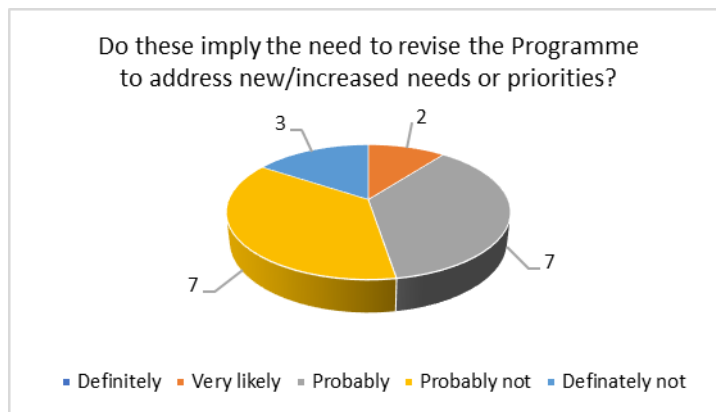


Figure 8.23 shows that 12 Respondents declared that there are major changes having an impact on policies and activities under the S.O. 1.3, while 7 of them stated that there are no changes with an impact on policies and activities related to the energy efficiency and the use of RES.

Figure 8.24 – Need to revise the Programme to address new / increased needs or priorities



Concerning the need to review the Programme to address new / increased needs or priorities, provided that there are changes having an impact on the policies and activities of this S.O., 9 respondents argued that maybe there is a need for revision, while 10 stated that there is no need.

Figure 8.25 – Major changes having an impact on policies and activities under S.O. 1.4

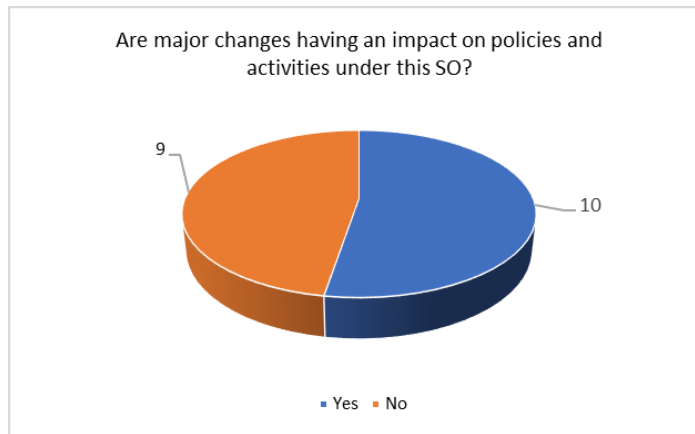
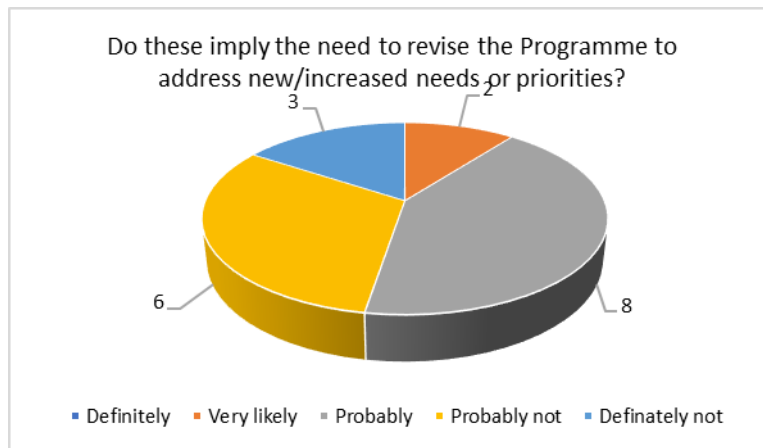


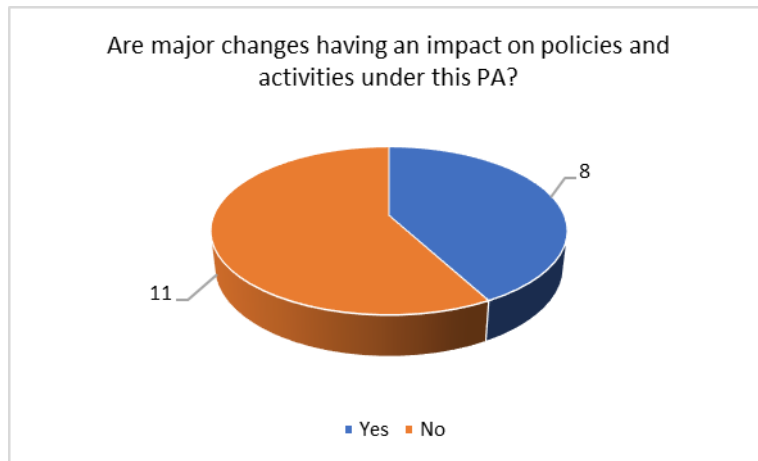
Figure 8.25 shows that 10 Respondents declared that there are major changes having an impact on policies and activities under the S.O. 1.4, while 9 stated that there are no changes with an impact on policies and activities related to prevention and disaster management with a focus on forest fires.

Figure 8.26 – Need to revise the Programme to address new / increased needs or priorities



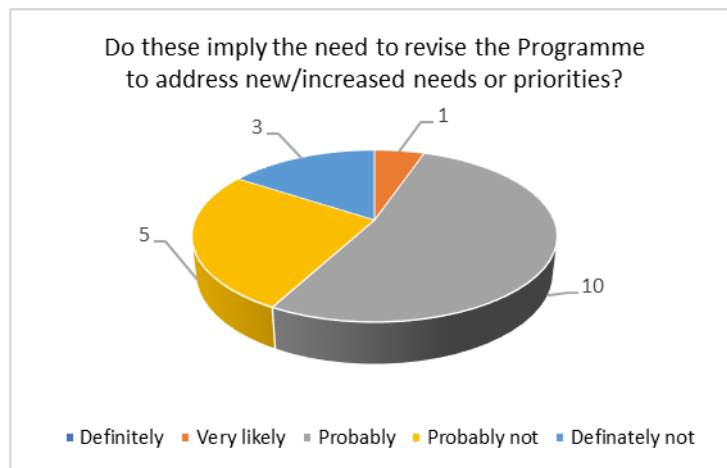
At Figure 8.26 are presented the answers on the question if there is a need to review the Program to address new / increased needs or priorities, provided that there are changes having an impact on the policies and activities of this S.O. 10 recipients argued that maybe there is a need for revision, while 9 of them stated that there is no need.

Figure 8.27 – Major changes having an impact on policies and activities under P.A. 2



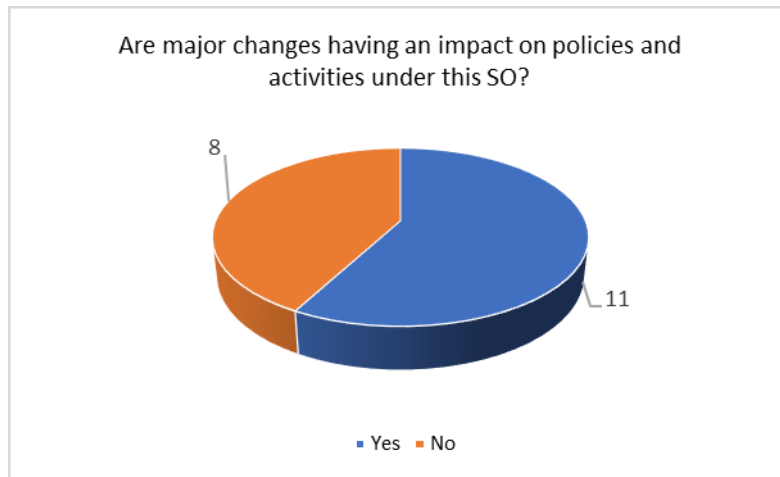
Moreover, 11 respondents declared that there are major changes having an impact on policies and activities under the Priority axis 2, while 8 of them stated that there are no changes with an impact on policies and activities related to the boosting of local economy (Figure 8.27).

Figure 8.28 – Need to revise the Programme to address new / increased needs or priorities



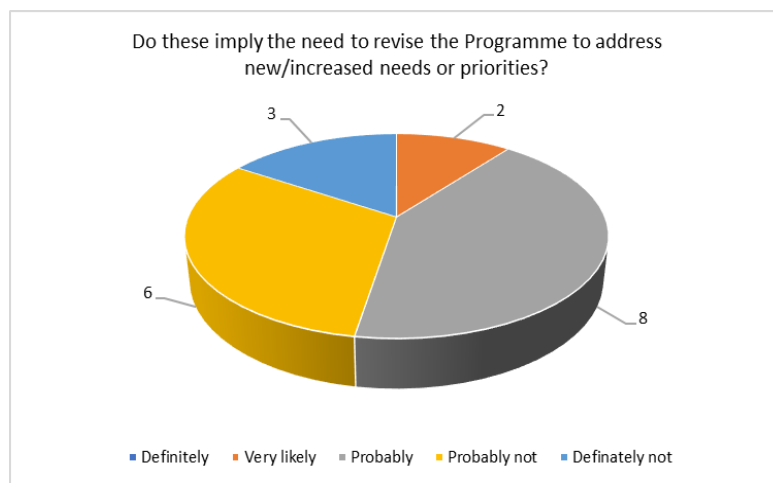
In addition, 11 respondents argued that, provided that there are changes having an impact on the policies and activities of Priority axis 2, maybe there is a need for revision, while 8 stated that there is no need.

Figure 8.29 – Major changes having an impact on policies and activities under S.O. 2.1



Furthermore, 11 of respondents declared that there are major changes having an impact on policies and activities under S.O. 2.1 , while 8 of them stated that there are no changes with an impact on policies and activities related to preserving cultural and natural resources, as a prerequisite for tourism development of the cross-border area (Figure 8.29).

Figure 8.30 – Need to revise the Programme to address new / increased needs or priorities



In addition, taking into consideration that there are changes having an impact on the policies and activities of this S.O., 10 Respondents argued that maybe there is a need for revision, while 9 stated that there is no need (Figure 8.30).

Figure 8.31 – Major changes having an impact on policies and activities under S.O. 2.2

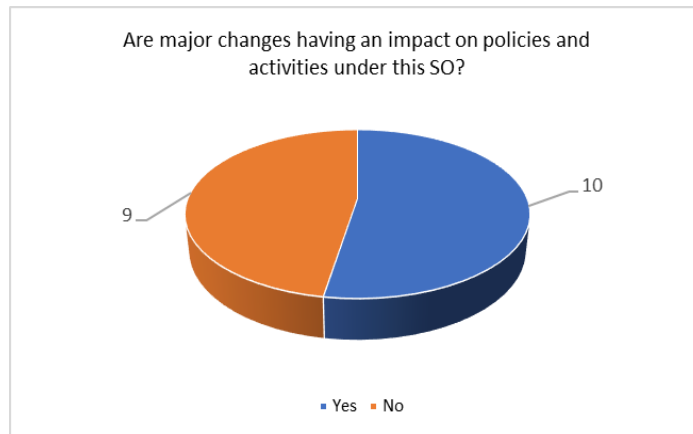
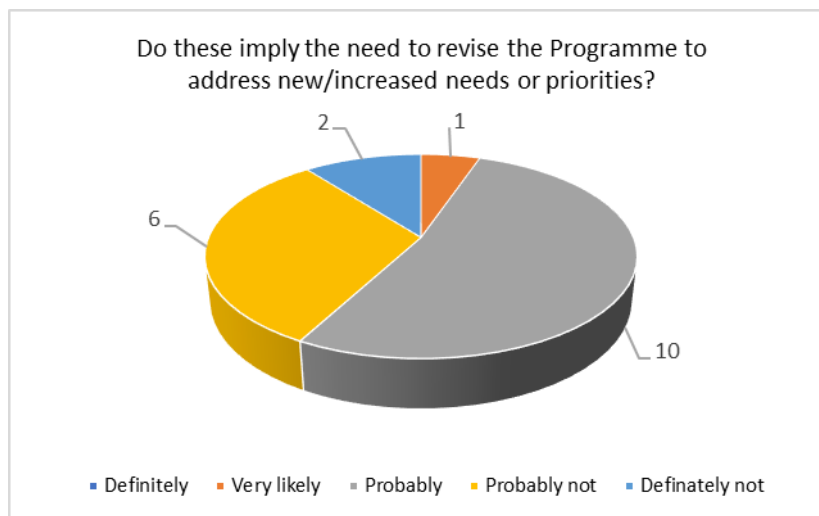


Figure 8.31 shows that 10 of the respondents declared that there are major changes having an impact on policies and activities under this S.O., while 9 of them argued that there are no changes that have an impact on policies and activities related to the support of entrepreneurship, business survival and competitiveness.

Figure 8.32 – Need to revise the Programme to address new / increased needs or priorities



Moreover, 11 respondents stated that maybe there is a need for revision, while 8 believe that there is no need.

In addition, according to the responses of the 19 JMC – MA/JS that participated in the online survey, the most critical potential risks that could affect the successful implementation of the Programme are:

- **Delays on the contracting and implementation** of projects
- **Delays on launching** of Planned calls

- **National or local elections**
- Lack of **beneficiaries training**

However, there are remarkable differences between each P.A. and each S.O., such as:

SO 1.1 Increase the capacity of cross-border infrastructure in transport, water and waste management:

- Intervention field 22 “Waste water treatment” presents low percentage of activation
- Complicated administrative procedures

SO 1.2 Increase the effectiveness of environmental protection and sustainable use of natural resources

- Lack of periodic reports on the projects’ outcomes in respect of the Programme objectives
- The final eligible budget may be lower than the Programme budget allocated to this S.O., due to significant discounts
- Unexpected social, economic and political changes
- Lack of national funding

S.O. 1.3 Increase energy efficiency and the use of RES

- Lack of periodic reports on the projects outcomes versus objectives of the Programme
- Poor national planning and imbalance in the use of natural resources

S.O. 1.4 Improve the effectiveness of risk prevention and disaster management with a focus on forest fires

- Poor infrastructure, insufficient equipment, poor level of cross-border cooperation
- Lack of sustainability and impact of this S.O.

Priority Axis 2: Boosting the local economy

- Barriers for cooperation from legal framework
- Time consuming administrative procedures

S.O. 2.1 Preserve cultural and natural resources as a prerequisite for tourism development of the cross-border area

- There is a risk that the final eligible budget may be lower than the Programme budget allocated to this S.O. due to significant discounts
- Unexpected social, economic and political changes
- Lack of sustainability of this S.O.
- Lack of awareness on cultural preservation

- Poor cooperation between local authorities and central government

S.O. 2.2 Improve cross-border capacity to support entrepreneurship, business survival and competitiveness

- There is a risk that the final eligible budget may be lower than the Programme budget allocated to this S.O. due to significant discounts
- Unexpected social, economic and political changes
- Poor cooperation between local authorities and central government

Concerning the participation in terms of public and private actors and relevant target groups, during 2017, partners/ beneficiaries participated in the technical meetings of the projects, in order to finalize budget and to initiate the project implementation. Also till 31/10/2018, there is yet no contribution of the partners to the evaluation of the Programme, as the evaluation started in December of 2018.

9 Conclusions - Recommendations

The main findings of the evaluation concern to the following:

Regarding the project cycle - as far as project application and selection procedures are concerned – implementation made some progresses, as till 31/10/2018 there had been no major programme implementation problems.

The first and second Call for Proposals have been published in 2016, with a prompt good response from the Programme area. Concerning the progress of the Cooperation Programme, the year 2016 was the first year of actual implementation, with the launch of two calls; one for strategic and one for ordinary project proposals, and the approval of four strategic project proposals. In the 1st and 2nd Calls for Proposals, 45 projects with an average funding of each project of 807 thousands euro were selected.

The year 2017 was very significant in terms of the initiation of the projects, hence programme implementation. In 2017 the evaluation procedure for the second Call for Ordinary Projects was concluded and 45 Technical Meetings took place for the finalization of documents for the approved projects of both calls. Regarding Technical Assistance of the Programme, this will be implemented in the framework of two “projects”; one for the Greek part of the budget and one for the Albanian part.

At this point, we should highlight the issue that had arisen regarding the adaptation and implementation of the Practical Guide to Contract Procedures for EU External Actions (PRAG) by Greek Beneficiaries and the delays that it caused to the implementation of the approved projects. According to IPA II Commission Implementing Regulation 447/2014, EU External Action procurement rules (PRAG) are to be used in awarding of service, supply and works contracts from the CBC grant scheme financed projects for both participating countries. Given that Greece is a Member State, difficulties were raised and thorough discussions took place with the competitive authorities for a solution to be found.

In August of 2018 the 3rd Targeted Call for Proposals and the 4th Call for Ordinary Proposals were launched and applicants were invited to submit their project proposals. The evaluation procedure of the 3rd Call was concluded in October 2018 and one Targeted Project was selected for funding while the 4th Call for Proposals is still open with a deadline after one extension given, to be 28/02/2019.

The vast majority of beneficiaries participated to the survey expressed their satisfaction with the submission procedures and forms, although there was a small percentage declared that there is still some room for improvement.

Moreover, the document on Project Selection Criteria, gave a clear picture of the selection procedure, bodies involved, selection rules and criteria, so that beneficiaries were kept well informed about the assessment process and transparency was ensured.

Considering the project monitoring systems and mechanisms, it is important to remind that the Programme should apply the e-cohesion principles and in this framework to set up an electronic

MS in order to collect all information on project and programme progress. The Management Information System (MIS) supports the performance of all the procedures including electronic data exchange among the relevant Authorities / bodies (Beneficiaries , Managing Authority / Joint Secretariat, National Authorities, Certifying Authority, Audit Authority, European Commission). The MIS for European Territorial Cooperation Programmes is considered adequate and in place.

It is no coincidence that the vast majority of respondents to the survey expressed their satisfaction with their cooperation with MA / JS executives.

MA and JS are fully functional and staffed. All units within MA/JS are operational and cooperative. Also they have specialized experience and know-how to successfully manage the Programme. MA/JS and its experienced staff have close and supporting working relations with all programme levels and authorities.

The Management and Control System of the Programme is fully set up and works. Overall the MCS maybe reviewed in case of major changes suggested by the competent Programme and National authorities.

The Interreg IPA CBC Programme “Greece – Albania 2014-2020” has developed and perform an Anti-Fraud Strategy which describes procedures for preventing, detecting and deterring fraud and corruption and to taking action where this is suspected or detected. This antifraud strategy is addressed at all institutions involved in the Programme and project implementation.

Risk Assessment and Management tool is in place and used by the MA taking into consideration all the factors that arise from the interior and exterior environment. Risk Assessment and Management guidelines adopt the respective findings/results so as to be in line with the Anti – Fraud Strategy.

The decision-making process within the JMC is considered clear and transparent however, some it has to be mentioned – while most of the JMC members are satisfied - there was just one JMC member declared its dissatisfaction.

Assessing communication strategy activities implemented so far, it seems that a positive effort has been made. As far as the communication actions are concerned, beneficiaries underlined the ineffective presence of the Programme in the social media and referred the “info-days” and the “FAQs” as the most common method of communication during the call for proposals.

Also positive can be considered the overlook on policy sectors targeted by the selected projects and types of participants, 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.

Due the delay in the signing of the subsidy contract and the beginning of the projects, it is evident, as the majority of respondents declared that their projects started at least one year after the approval of their project by the JMC, that there is no expectation to achieve the milestones the Programme set for result indicators within 2018. In this framework, it is difficult to conduct a meaningful impact evaluation as required by EC guidance and the evaluation plan. However, given the size and the character of the approved projects, it is obvious that project outputs and results certainly contribute to the indicators and the objectives of the Programme.

Moreover, concerning the preparation and selection procedure of the approved projects, it is noted that the selected projects seem to match with the integration and multi-perspective approach to the local development overall approach of the Cooperation Programme. Thus, given the size and the character of the approved projects, it is obvious that project outputs and results certainly contribute to the indicators and the objectives of the Programme.

Regarding the implementation phase of the Programme, the fact of the delays caused from the abovementioned reasons, is having also a clear impact on the progress of the Programme.

In this frame it seems necessary to consider thoroughly the way of projects implementation and to identify possible bottlenecks, through the following **recommendations**.

- Better structuring and consistency of the applicant’s package – tools such as the application form and the Specification of Budget form.
- Reducing the administrative burden for project implementation - There are a number of suggestions for improvement, for example, with extensive management verifications (first level control) to be replaced by risk-based verifications on beneficiary’s expenditure.
- 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 advice applicants on a daily basis in a resource-efficient manner. Concerning social media, an analysis of target groups could be done in order to understand their most preferred social media tools to keep informed.
- The MA/JS should organise Info Days more often in accordance with the recognised needs to efficiently and effectively address identified issues also in the programme implementation.