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MINISTRY OF DEVELOPMENT AND INVESTMENTS
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COOPERATION PROGRAMMES

CONTRACT

TECHNICAL CONSULTANCY SUPPORT : REPORT FOR THE STRATEGIC ENVIRONMENTAL ASSESSMENT OF INTERREG IPA III CROSS BORDER COOPERATION PROGRAMME "GREECE- ALBANIA 2021-2027"

Interreg – IPA CBC
Greece - Albania

DELIVERABLE:

«STRATEGIC ENVIRONMENTAL ASSESSMENT (SEA) OF THE INTERREG IPA III CROSS BORDER COOPERATION PROGRAMME 2021-2027 "GREECE-ALBANIA 2021-2027"»

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The present Strategic Environmental Assessment Report (SEA) of the Interreg IPA III Cross-Border Cooperation Programme Greece – Albania 2021-2027, is prepared in the context of the project "Technical Consultancy Support: Report for the Strategic Environmental Assessment of Interreg IPA III Cross-Border Cooperation Programme "Greece – Albania 2021-2027". The Managing Authority of the European Territorial Cooperation Programmes, part of MINISTRY OF DEVELOPMENT AND INVESTMENTS, assigned this project to EEO GROUP Independent consultancy, according to the contract signed by both on 12th October 2021.

PROJECT

Title:	**Technical Consultancy Support: Report for the strategic environmental assessment of INTERREG IPA III Cross-Border Cooperation Programme Greece – Albania 2021-2027**
Deliverable title:	**2nd Deliverable:** SEA of the INTERREG IPA III Cross-Border Cooperation Programme "Greece - Albania 2021-2027", according to Directive 2001/42/EC as it is adapted by the Greek Legislation, specifically the Joint Ministerial Decree JMD 107017/2006.
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3.0	07/01/2022	Third submission	11,31,54,69,71

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Acronyms

CF	Cohesion Fund
E.O.	Environmental Objective
EAP	Environment Action Programme
EC	European Council
EEA	European Environment Agency
EMFF	European Maritime and Fisheries Fund
EP	European Parliament
ERDF	European Regional Development Fund
ESB	European Social Fund
ESIF	European Structural Funds and Investment
ETC	European Territorial Cooperation
EU	European Union
EUSAIR	EU Strategy for the Adriatic – Ionian Region
GDP	Gross Domestic Product
GHG	Greenhouse gases
GR	Greece
IBAs	Important Bird Areas
ICT	Information and Communication Technologies
IUCN	International Union for Conservation of Nature
JMD	Joint Ministerial Decision
JPC	Joint Programming Committee
MA	Managing Authority
MED	Mediterranean Space
mIBAs	marine Important Bird Areas

MSFD	Maritime Strategy Framework Directive
NEETs	Not in Education, Employment, or Training
NSRF	National Strategic Reference Framework
OP	Operational Programme
PAF's	Prioritized Action Frameworks for Natura 2000
pcGDP	Gross Domestic Product per capita
PD	Presidential Decree
R & D	Research and Development
R & I	Research and Innovation
RAE	Regulatory Authority for Energy
RDP	Rural Development Programme
RES	Renewable Energy Sources
RIS	Research and Innovation Strategies for Smart Specialization
SO	Specific Objective
SAC	Special Area of Conservation
SCI	Sites of Community Importance
SEA	Strategic Environmental Assessment
SMEs	Small and Medium Enterprises
SPA	Special Protection Area
TEN-E	Trans-European Energy Networks
TEN-T	Trans-European Transport Network
UN 2030	United Nations 2030 Strategy
UNEP	United Nations Environment Programme
UNFCCC	United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change

1 NON TECHNICAL SUMMARY

The present Strategic Environmental Assessment Report (SEA) of the INTERREG IPA III Cross Border Cooperation Programme Greece - Albania 2021-2027, is prepared in the context of the project " Technical Consultancy Support: Report for the strategic environmental assessment of INTERREG IPA III Cross Border Cooperation Programme Greece – Albania 2021-2027" and is in accordance with the contents of Directive 2001/42/EC for the environmental assessment of certain plans and programs. The Managing Authority of the European Territorial Cooperation Programmes, part of MINISTRY OF DEVELOPMENT AND INVESTMENTS, assigned this project to EEO GROUP Independent consultancy.

The aim of this report is to ensure that the new programme would contribute positively to achieve a high level of environmental protection, by supporting the objectives of both Member State and the IPA country (Albania) and the UN goals for sustainable development.

The overall objective of the SEA, composed for the Territorial Cooperation Programme Greece- Albania 2021-2027 is formed by the following guidelines:

- setting environmental parameters under which the programme will operate.
- identifying, describing and evaluating the likely significant environmental effects arising from the implementation of the programme.
- taking into account reasonable alternatives.

1.1 The process of SEA

The Strategic Environmental Assessment (SEA) is an ex ante evaluation of the environmental effects of the Cooperation Programme INTERREG IPA III Cross Border Cooperation Programme Greece - Albania 2021-2027. The SEA process includes the preparation of the Strategic Environmental Assessment Report (SEA Report), its submission, consultation, with authorities (which by reason of their specific environmental responsibilities, are likely to be concerned by the environmental effects of the programme) and the public, its approval by the national authorities (after taking into account the environmental report and the results of the consultation) and the establishment of a monitoring and evaluation system during the implementation of the programme. It is an autonomous process in relation to the programme's design process and is performed in parallel, as a mandatory stage, according to Directive 2001/42/EC.

1.2 Aims and Objectives of the Programme

The Interreg IPA III CBC Programme Greece-Albania 2021-2027 aims in supporting the cross-border regions of Greece and Albania to achieve a smooth and integrated transition towards the development of more sustainable economies that can overcome disparities and establish a better cross-border governance.

In this new decade, EU is setting new goals and instruments in order to lay the foundations for a greener, more digital and more resilient Europe. Recovery and transition are the new concepts that prevail in the programming and preparation of the 2021-2027 period, as EU wishes to strengthen its structures and its economic, social and territorial resilience following the damage on growth, societies and businesses caused by the coronavirus pandemic. The EU is committed to deliver results via several strategies focusing on a) digital technology, b) sustainable growth, c) green economy and d) research and innovation.

1.3 Description of the programme

In order to achieve the objectives, the programme has chosen to intervene in three Priorities, with three Policy Objectives (PO):

PO2: A greener, low-carbon Europe by promoting clean and fair energy transition, green and blue investment, the circular economy, climate adaptation and risk prevention and management

PO3: A more Connected Europe, with strategic transport and digital networks

PO4: A more Social Europe, delivering on the European Pillar of Social Rights and supporting quality employment, education, skills, social inclusion and equal access to healthcare

For each policy objective, one or more Specific Objectives (SO) are selected that best approach the achievement of the stated objective and are based on the needs and the potentials of the eligible area. The Priorities, the Policy Objectives and the Specific Objectives are shown in a tabular form on the following Table 1.1.

Table 1-1: Interreg IPA III CBC Programme Greece- Albania 2021-2027

Priority Axis 1: Supporting transition to greener and more resilient cross-border regions				**Priority Axis 2: Improving accessibility in the cross-border area**	**Priority Axis 3: Fostering sustainable cross-border economic and social development**	
PO2: A greener, low-carbon Europe by promoting clean and fair energy transition, green and blue investment, the circular economy, climate adaptation and risk prevention and management				**PO3: A more Connected Europe, with strategic transport and digital networks**	**PO4: A more Social Europe, delivering on the European Pillar of Social Rights and supporting quality employment, education, skills, social inclusion and equal access to healthcare**	
SO 1.1: Enhancing biodiversity, green infrastructure in the urban environment and reducing pollution	SO 1.2: Promoting climate change adaptation and disaster risk prevention, resilience taking into account eco-system based approaches	SO 1.3: Promoting access to water and sustainable water management	SO 1.4: Promoting the transition to a circular and resource efficient economy	SO 2.1: Developing and enhancing sustainable, climate resilient, intelligent and intermodal national, regional and local mobility, including improved access to TEN-T and cross-border mobility.	SO 3.1: Enhancing the role of culture and sustainable tourism in economic development, social inclusion and social innovation.	SO 3.2: Ensuring equal access to health care and fostering resilience of health systems, including primary care and promoting the transition from institutional to family and community based care.

Overall, the **expected results** of the programme are (non-exhaustive list):

- Investments for the protection and enhancement of natural resources, ecosystems and biodiversity including the promotion of responsible tourism and eco-tourism.
- Promotion of the use of technologies for environmental protection and preservation.
- Actions for the restoration, protection and efficient management of natural protected areas (e.g. Natura sites), with a focus on endangered species.
- Investments for the promotion of green infrastructure mainly in urban areas (green streets, recycling systems, accessibility in nature, reducing flood risks, natural cooling of buildings, cisterns and rain barrels, etc.) and the rehabilitation of areas in industrial transition.
- Pilot actions for testing possible solutions in collecting and monitoring cross-border biodiversity data and threats for natural resources.
- Investments in the development of mechanisms and tools for the prevention and management of climate related risks, e.g. fires, storms, drought.
- Investments in the development of mechanisms and tools for the prevention and management of non-climate related risks (i.e. earthquakes) and risks connected to human activities (e.g. technological accidents).
- Increasing institutional and operational capacity of local communities for supporting the implementation of clean energy infrastructure.
- Development of infrastructure in rural areas, as well as the Ionian Islands for the improvement of water management and efficient water utilities coverage for local communities.
- Foster an efficient use of water resources by citizens, industry and agriculture, throughout the whole water cycle by promoting water saving and reuse, water-efficient technologies in all sectors, as well as by supporting ecosystem-based measures.
- Small-scale investments on wastewater treatment systems based on environmentally friendly processes.
- Raising awareness about water reuse and dealing with water scarcity in the cross-border regions.
- Planning, construction and rehabilitation of border crossings; planning, construction and rehabilitation of road network.
- Improving and expanding road infrastructure: studies regarding road traffic, awareness campaigns, connectivity/mobility studies for understanding freight and passenger flows, commuting etc.
- Support of smart transport systems and ICT applications in the transport and flow of people sector.

- Monitoring of the emissions from transport activities, such as shipping and the impact on the port cities and other shore areas.
- Reconstruction of rural and suburban roads in the cross-border area (rebuilding, resurfacing, realignment etc.).

1.4 Alternatives

Realistic alternatives are presented and evaluated, regarding their effects on the environment and sustainable development.

The selection of the suggested alternative is being done based on the environmental, economic and social criteria towards the Sustainable Development principles direction. The justification of the selection in being presented in chapter 5 of the present report. In accordance with the SEA Directive 2001/42/EC, the alternatives should be realistic, i.e they should be feasible and eligible based on the specific data and regulations of the programme framework.

The alternatives that are presented are:

- Zero alternative or "do nothing scenario", in which the non- implementation of the programme is being examined consisting the zero scenario.
- Suggested alternative, which best integrates the requirements consisting the proposed solution.

1.5 Description of the current state of the environment

The Programme Area is part of the wider region of the Adriatic-Ionian, spreading from the Ionian Islands in Greece up to the coasts of the Region of Fier in Albania. On the Greek mainland the Programme area includes the whole Region of Epirus and the Region of Western Macedonia, including the land borders with Albania, from Mavromati-Qafë Botë to Krystallopigi-Kapshticë, while in the insular part it includes the Region of Ionian Islands (4 regional units). The Albanian Programme Area on the west side spreads from the Region of Vlorë up to the Region of Fier and on the east side from the Region of Gjirokastër up to the Regions of Berat and Korçë. The eligiblle programme areas in Albania include: the Region of Berat, the Region of Gjirokastër, the Region of Korcë, the Region of Vlorë and the Region of Fier.

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

Due to its geographical position, the cross-border eligible area during the recent years has received a high level of influx of migrants and refugees. An increase is recorded since 2017 in the number of migrants in Albania. On the other hand, Greece has experienced an intensification of migrant inflows in 2019. Cross-border cooperation could set up respective priorities and measures for the border crossing management and mobility and migration management, including the protection of migrants and refugees, as well as

[1] Census data of 2011. https://www.statistics.gr/
[2] Data of 2020 by http://www.instat.gov.al/

the building of a safety net for the provision of the basic living conditions. Cross-border cooperation can contribute in adopting measures intended to address the needs of refugees, including sustainable accommodation in shelters or supported independent living and a guardianship system for unaccompanied minors.

One of the most competitive advantages of the cross-border programme area is its environment and its unique natural resources. The eligible cross-border area combines a variety of geomorphological features: high mountains, rolling hills and small plains, a long coastal line and a significant number of islands (small and large), rivers, lakes and lagoons.

Protected areas of international interest are included in the cross-border area that call for integrated and coordinated actions for their preservation and valorization. The Great Prespa Lake with a surface of 281.7 km^2 is shared between Albania, Greece and the Republic of North Macedonia, while the small Prespa Lake with a surface of 48.41 km^2 is shared between Greece and Albania. The river of Aoos, known also as Vjosa (and its tributary Drinos), which originates from the Northern Pindus Mountain range, flows through Greek and Albanian territory and finally flows out into the Adriatic Sea, north of the city of Vlorë. Sites of international interest include Little Prespa Lake in Greece, which is part of the Prespes National Park, the National Park of Butrint and the National Park of Karavasta Lagoon in Albania (all protected by the Ramsar convention). In Western Macedonia, 18 protected areas are situated. The Regions of Ionian Islands and Epirus are also characterized by rich biodiversity. In the Ionian Islands there are 22 areas included in the Natura 2000 network, while in Epirus the same areas are 27. The highest pressure on these areas is caused by human activity and climate change. Invasive alien species is also becoming a serious problem in the cross-border regions, as they are one of the most important direct drivers of biodiversity loss and ecosystem service changes, and they constitute the greatest threat to fragile ecosystems such as islands. Albania is considered a biodiversity hotspot in Europe. To protect the remarkable biodiversity and valuable natural resources, the government has placed under protection about 18% of the territory, including 58 protected areas covering a range of categories under IUCN –International Union for Conservation of Nature[3]. In the Programme area, 31 areas have been certified as protected, including National Parks and Monuments, Ramsar wetlands and protected landscapes. Cross-border lakes, such as that of Ohrid and Prespa represent the exchange points of the flora and fauna with neighboring countries. The large number of sub-endemic species related to Greece, and marine endemic species in the Adriatic Sea point out the importance of Albania regarding protection of biological diversity in the regions of the Balkans and the Mediterranean[4]. In Albania, the number of tourists in Protected Areas increased by 30%

[3] COVID-19 impact on the Western Balkans. Deep-dive in Albania and how the pandemic impacted the SDG's. Erik Gjermeni and Alban Lika in collaboration with the Albanian Institute of Statistics (INSTAT) as part of a project supported by the United Nations Economic Commission.
for Europe (UNECE) and the Office of the United Nations Resident Coordinator in Albania
[4] CBD Strategy and Action Plan- Albania.

in 2019 (916,660 visitors) compared to 2018 creating a need for more investments in human and eco-friendly infrastructure as well as enforcement of environmental regulations[5].

1.6 Assessment, Evaluation and Management of the environmental impacts of the Programme

The evaluation of the impacts is based on the environmental parameters that are suggested through the Directive 2001/42/EC of the European Parliament as adapted by the JMD 107017/2006 of Greek Legislation, on the assessment of the effects of certain plans and programmes on the environment. Through this examination, all possible effects that may arise during the programme's implementation, are detected, estimated and evaluated. A correct selection of these parameters is vital in order for the Strategic Environmental Assessment to be substantial.

The parameters that have been selected are the following:

1. Biodiversity
2. Population- Human health
3. Soil
4. Water
5. Air, Climate and climate change
6. Infrastructure
7. Cultural Heritage
8. Landscape
9. Noise
10. Sustainable development
11. Interrelationship

The evaluation of the environmental impacts is made according the methodology of guiding questions. According to this methodology, a network of evaluating questions is being formed, taking under consideration the environmental aims of the study, in order to determine all the possible environmental impacts for each environmental parameter. The questions are formed in a way to get a yes or no answer.

The environmental impacts on each parameter will be examined per Priority and its Specific Objectives (SOs) using some selected criteria such as the probability, the scale, the duration, the reversibility, the cross-border dimension, the sequence of an impact and the interaction.

The assessment and evaluation of the effects of the proposed actions resulted in the following:

- The majority of the actions of the Programme will have a positive impact on the state of the environment both locally-regionally and (where possible) in

[5] COVID-19 impact on the Western Balkans. Deep-dive in Albania and how the pandemic impacted the SDG's. Erik Gjermeni and Alban Lika in collaboration with the Albanian Institute of Statistics (INSTAT) as part of a project supported by the United Nations Economic Commission.

a cross-border level.

- A significant part of the actions cover the financing needs of joint actions for achieving objectives of regional, national and European policy on the Environment and Sustainable Development.
- The positive effects concern both the artificial, and the natural environment, in particular the promotion of sustainable development, the improvement of living conditions and environmental characteristics in urban centers, the water management, the management of protected areas, the achievement of climate change objectives and the promotion of blue and green growth.
- The integration of environmental dimension into the activities design is included in all the objectives of the programme and is not strictly limited to the measures (specific objectives) that are exclusively associated with protection.
- Any negative impacts, resulting from the project, are evaluated as local and of low impact. All negative impacts are associated with the construction phase of projects included in the programme area and have a short-term character. Overall, for all negative impacts of the programme there are appropriate measures for preventing or reducing their extent and intensity are proposed.

Based on the above-mentioned, it is estimated that the implementation of the programme will create a strong positive synergy with the objectives of environmental policy. In order, however, the degree of this synergy to be maximized and in order to avoid the identified negative impacts, some measures are taken to prevent, control and offset the environmental effects described below.

1.7 The "Do no significant harm (DNSH)" principle

The Programme has been evaluated according to the **"Do no significant harm (DNSH)" principle**.

According to the **Taxonomy regulation,** "*The Funds should support activities that would respect the climate and environmental standards and priorities of the Union and would do no significant harm to environmental objectives within the meaning of Article 17 of Regulation (EU) No 2020/852* ".

The evaluation of the programme following the "Do no significant harm" principle, is presented in detail in chapter 7.3 of the present report.

In order to implement the DNSH principle, the following environmental objectives have been examined, as defined in Article 17 of the Taxonomy Regulation 2020/852 (EU)..

1. Climate change mitigation
2. Climate change adaptation
3. Sustainable use and protection of water and marine resources
4. Circular economy
5. Pollution prevention and control

6. Protection and restoration of biodiversity and ecosystems

According to the above mentioned examination, the Programme:

- The Programme is not expected to lead in significant GHG emissions and as a result it will not affect the climate change mitigation.
- The Programme is not expected to lead to an increased adverse impact of the current climate and the expected future climate, on the activity itself or on people, nature and assets. As a result it will not act negatively to the climate change adaptation.
- The Programme is not going to be detrimental to the good status or the good ecological potential of bodies of water, including surface water and groundwater, or to the good environmental status of marine waters. Consequently, it will not affect the sustainable use and protection of water and marine ecosystems.
- The Programme is not expected to lead to significant inefficiencies in the use of materials or in the direct or indirect use of natural resources. In this way, it will not act against the principles of circular economy.
- The Programme does not significantly increase the generation, incineration or disposal of waste and the long-term disposal of waste does not cause significant and long-term environmental harm. The programme will not act against waste prevention and recycling.
- The Programme is not expected to lead to a significant increase in emissions of pollutants into air, water or land. Consequently, it will not act against the pollution prevention and control of the aforementioned environmental parameters.
- The Programme is not going to be significantly detrimental to the good condition and resilience of ecosystems, or detrimental to the conservation status of habitats and species, including those of Union interest. As a result, it will not act against the protection and restoration of biodiversity and ecosystems.

Consequently, the programme has been designed in order not to harm any of the above aforementioned environmental objectives; it is in line with the "do no significant harm" principle.

1.8 Mitigation measures

The prevention, reduction and mitigation of environmental impacts of the programme is realized through two main mechanisms: a) the environmental permitting of projects and activities as it is in force and b) the creation of special provisions and / or conditions that will be applied in the implementation of the programme and will be integrated in the management processes (projects approvals etc).

a) Environmental permitting of projects and activities.

The impacts of each project are controlled by the environmental permitting process as it is in

force in Europe acquis and is specialized on the implementation procedures of the institutional framework of the two countries. The approval of a project in the programme does not modify its requirements according to the Environmental Permitting, under which occur the specific terms and conditions of the execution. In relation to the main activities, through the relevant Environmental Impact Reports should be (not exclusively) referred the following issues:

- Compliance with the specific emission limit values of pollutant loads and concentrations for air, water and soil in accordance with the applicable provisions.
- The specific limit values of noise.
- Compliance with national or regional planning for the environment, such as waste management plan, the basin management plans of the WFD, etc.
- The suitability of locating in accordance with the approved land use plans and building restrictions.
- Taking into account all the necessary measures that are provided by the legislationin relation to the prevention and reduction of pollution of protected areas, sea and forest.
- Projects that are located in areas included in the Natura2000 network (as SCI or SPA), will have to comply with Article 6.3 of Habitats Directive 92/43/EEC, that is: *"Any plan or project not directly connected with or necessary to the management of the site but likely to have a significant effect on it, either individually or together with other projects, it is should be estimated regarding its impacts on the site by taking into account its conservation objectives''*.

b) Specific measures in order to protect the environment.

- Proposals that finance enterprises (innovation - entrepreneurship - competitiveness) and that include (in addition to the mandatory rules of the environmental law) investment in "green infrastructure and technologies", bioclimatic principles and/or promote the reduction and reuse of materials (according to the principles of circular economy and the hierarchy of waste management), would be highly desirable to be primed during the project selection process.
- In the process of specifying and selecting clusters, it should be considered to include enterprises that manage products or waste that are produced throughout the value chain.
- The actions of tourism development or enhancement of natural resources within Natura 2000 areas should be consistent with the management plans of the areas. In cases, where the projects are listed in areas with Management Agency, its opinion is necessary. In any case, it should be documented that the increase of visiting the protected ecosystems for tourism or other purposes does not have impact on the conservation status.

- Appropriate measures should be taken for technical projects that are implemented within the coastal marine area and may cause either a water quality pollution or a disruption of benthic substrate. Such measures should prevent and reduce the potential pollution of waters and the sediment.

More specifically, the aforementioned mitigation measures should address all the environmental parameters that might be affected by the projects of the Programme, according to the assessment of the environmental effects.
The proposed measures are selected and presented in a tabular form for each environmental parameter in chapter 8 of the present.

1.9 Monitoring System

According to Article 10 of Directive 2001/42/EC, the monitoring system of the significant environmental effects of the implementation of the Programme is necessary, in order to identify at an early stage unforeseen adverse effects, and to be able to undertake appropriate remedial action.

The present Report is a first attempt to identify the impact of a programme that has not yet been fully completed. The actions and the types of interventions that have been examined largely determine the nature of the expected impact, but may provide few opportunities for their intensity and therefore their acceptance or not. Thus, due to lack of specific data resulting from the gradual implementation and specialization of the programme, the Report primarily identifies in theory the impacts of the programme. The Report has so far identified the negative impacts and has proposed measures to minimize them.The monitoring system, therefore, should initially validate or correct the theoretical results of the assessment of Report compared with actual environmental impacts resulting from the implementation, and secondly should assess whether the proposed measures have been effectively implemented.
The proposed Monitoring System includes all the relevant environmental indicators per environmental parameter (e.g. biodiversity, air quality and climate change, soil, water, landscape and culture, etc.) and identifies the authorities that carry out the monitoring as well as the frequency of monitoring.

Finally, throughout the monitoring system the identification of the environmental footprint of the programme is achieved; for instance, actions promoting the reduction of GHGs emissions would reduce the carbon footprint of the programme.

2 GENERAL INFORMATION

2.1 The subject of SEA

This issue is the second deliverable of the Strategic Environmental Impact Assessment of the INTERREG IPA III Cross – Border Cooperation Programme "Greece-Albania 2021-2027". It is titled: "Technical Consultancy Support: Report for the Strategic Environmental Assessment of INTERREG IPA III Cross Border Cooperation Programme "Greece – Albania 2021-2027". It is prepared by EEO Group Independent Consultancy, in accordance to the contract signed between EEO Group and the Greek government; in particular the Managing Authority of European Territorial Cooperation Programmes of the Ministry of Development and Investments.

This SEA estimates the potential environmental impacts from the programme as it is described in the third Draft of the Interreg IPA III Cross-Border Cooperation Programme that will be submitted to the members of the Programming Committee for further comments, prior to the final submission to the EC. That deliverable presents an intermediate version, which includes all the chapters of the Cooperation Programme, is taking into consideration the results of the Public Consultations as well as the decisions taken by the Programming Committee and other processes.

The Strategic Environmental Impact Assessment was prepared in accordance to the provisions of Directive 2001/42/EC and the JMD (Joint Ministerial Decision) 107017/28.8.2006 (GG 1225/B/5-9-2006): "Assessment of the environmental effects of certain plans and programs, in compliance with the provisions of Directive 2001/42/EC " on the assessment of the effects of certain plans and programs on the environment " of the European Parliament and of the Council of 27th of June 2001."
The final SEA report will incorporate the answers by the authors of the SEA and relevant documentation needed on the issues and opinions raised during the public consultation by environmental and other relevant services and interested public as defined in Directive 2001/42/EC.

2.2 The contracting authority

According to Article 2 of JMD (Joint Ministerial Decision) 107017/28.8.2006 (GG 1225/B/5-9-2006), a Contracting Authority is the authority responsible for the preparation of the plan or program (Managing Authority of European Territorial Cooperation Programmes) and the Competent Authority is the Special Service of Environment, General Directorate of Environment, of the Ministry of Environment and Energy.

The Managing Authority of European Territorial Cooperation Programmes, manages and monitors INTERREG Programmes. Programme's aim is to address common cross-border and transnational challenges, support synergies through joint partnerships and establish strong partnerships with a view to balanced economic, social and special development at European level.

2.3 The contracting entities

The contracting entities of this SEA is the following:

- the Managing Authority of European Territorial Cooperation Programmes on behalf of Hellenic Ministry of Development and Investments, represented by the Special secretary for European Regional Development Fund and Cohesion Fund programmes (ERDF) hereinafter referred to as "Contract- Managing Authority"
- EEO group Independent Consultancy, which undertakes the assignment from the aforementioned authority and is carrying out the SEA of the proposed Programme.

2.3.1 Project team

For the preparation of this deliverable, the project team consisted of the following scientists:

	Name	Qualifications	Role in the project
1	Ioannis Frantzis	Environmental Engineer, MSc	General Coordinator
2	Dimitrios Argyropoulos	Civil Engineer, Sanitary Engineer	Coordinator of the SEA team
3	Martsela Katsanevaki	Environmental Engineer	Member of the SEA team
4	Konstantinos Pachygiannakis	Electrical Engineer, MSc	Member of the SEA team
5	Amani-Christiana Saint	Chemical Engineer, MSc, PhD	Member of the SEA team
6	Socrates Tsigardas	Environmental Engineer, MSc	Member of the SEA team
7	Angelos Tsakonas	Project Manager	Communications Support of the SEA team

3 AIMS AND OBJECTIVES OF THE PROGRAMME

In this Chapter, the aims of the programme and its wider objectives will be examined, as well as their connection and compatibility with the institutional framework and environmental objectives followed by the European countries. Finally, the relationship with other relevant programmes is going to be included. The following issues will be analyzed, amongst others:

3.1 Aims and objectives of the INTERREG IPA III Cross Border Cooperation Programme GREECE-ALBANIA 2021-2027

The Interreg IPA III CBC Programme Greece-Albania 2021-2027 aims in supporting the cross-border regions of Greece and Albania to achieve a smooth and integrated transition to more sustainable economies that can overcome disparities and establish a better cross-border governance.
In this new decade, EU is setting new goals and instruments in order to lay the foundations for **a greener, more digital and more resilient Europe**. Recovery and transition are the new concepts that prevail in the programming and preparation of the 2021-2027 period, as EU wishes to strengthen its structures and its economic, social and territorial resilience following the damage on growth, societies and businesses caused by the coronavirus pandemic.

The EU is committed to deliver results via several strategies focusing on:

a) Digital technology,

b) Sustainable growth,

c) Green economy and

d) Research and innovation.

To achieve the objectives, the programme has chosen to intervene in three Priorities:

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

Priority Axis 2: Improving accessibility in the cross-border area

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

Each priority consists of specific objectives, as it will be analysed in chapter 4.

The Programme area shares many challenges connected with economic growth, infrastructure, social and environmental issues. The main joint challenges of the Programme area are being analyzed, in chapter 6 of the present, regarding the following main fields: economic development, demography, environment and energy, accessibility and transport, social development and cultural heritage.

The aim of the review of the environmental objectives of other policies, strategies and plans in the context of SEA is to ensure that the requirements, commitments and obligations arising from them, have been considered and taken into account in planning process. In addition, its aim is to understand how the Operational Programme is included in the framework for implementation of policies to protect the environment and if it sufficiently contributes to the achievement of environmental protection objectives. In addition, this review aims to identify the SEA Environmental Objectives on which the identification of areas and thematics will be based in order to evaluate the impact of the programme, as it will be analyzed in Chapter 7.

3.2 Institutional framework and environmental objectives

EU has adopted the **European Green Deal** that provides an action plan for a more sustainable EU economy by boosting the efficient use of resources by moving to a clean, circular economy, restoring biodiversity and cutting pollution. The European Green Deal outlines the available tools and investments for achieving transition with the aim of an EU that will be climate neutral in 2050. Investing in environmentally friendly technologies, industry innovation, cleaner forms of transport, for a decarbonized energy sector and in energy efficiency are key priorities for the EU. **Blue Economy** is considered to offer many solutions to achieve the European Green Deal objectives. The blue economy can contribute to carbon neutrality by developing offshore renewable energy and by greening maritime transport and ports. Sustainable development is deeply rooted in the EU policies and the EU has fully committed itself to the implementation of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development (United Nations 2030 Agenda) and its 17 Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs).

The **EU's Territorial Agenda 2030** underlines the importance of inclusive and sustainable future for all places and people in Europe. It provides orientation for strategic spatial planning and calls for strengthening the territorial dimension of sector policies at all governance levels. The Agenda defines two overarching objectives, a **Just Europe** and a **Green Europe**, which have six priorities for developing the European territory as a whole, along with all its places. Achieving less inequality between regions, better territorial development, transition to climate-neutral and resilient regions, sustainable local economies and sustainable digital and physical connectivity are some of the main orientations provided for the new decade.

The **Just Transition Mechanism (JTM)** was adopted by the EU in the framework of the European Green Deal in the fight against climate change and for environmental protection. JTM focuses on those regions and sectors that are most affected by the transition given their dependence on fossil fuels, including coal, peat and oil shale or greenhouse gas-intensive industrial processes. Aim of the JTM is to ensure that the transition is accompanied by specific and integrated measures in order to support the economies of those regions and enhance employment. The **Just Transition Fund** is the first pillar of the Just Transition Mechanism, which is a key tool introduced by the EU for the transition towards a climate- neutral economy by ensuring that this transition is carried out in a fair way, leaving no one behind. In Greece the

two districts that fall under the JTF are the region of Western Macedonia (eligible area of the cooperation programme) and the Megalopolis city in the Peloponnese.

For Albania additional objectives are set by the EU enlargement policy and the strategy for 'A credible enlargement perspective for and enhanced EU engagement with the Western Balkans" [6], which sets the priorities and areas of joint reinforced cooperation, addressing the specific challenges, the Western Balkans face. Six flagship initiatives are proposed by the Western Balkan Strategy including strengthening the rule of law, reinforcing engagement on security and migration, enhancement support for socio-economic development, increase of connectivity, implementation of the Digital Agenda of the Western Balkans and support of reconciliation as well as good neighborly relations. The EU engagement on the Western Balkans is highlighted by the **"Economic and Investment Plan for the Western Balkans"[7],** which aims to spur the long-term recovery of the COVID-19 disrupting effects on the economies of the Western Balkans, backed by a **green and digital transition**. For the efficient support of the **European Green Deal,** the European Commission has presented a **Green Agenda for the Western Balkans** aiming at: decarbonisation, depollution of air, water and soil, circular economy, farming and food production, and protecting biodiversity

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

The policies that must be taken into account and contain objectives related to the programme, are presented in the following table, categorized by the issue.

Field	Title of Plan, programme and policy
Sustainable Development	The Agenda 2030 of UN and the 17 Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs)
	The EU Green Deal ("*Transforming the EU's economy for a sustainable future*")
Biodiversity	UN Conventions on Biological Diversity and its protocols
	EU Biodiversity Strategy for 2030 COM (2020) 280 final
	• *Directive 92/43/EEC on the conservation of natural habitats and wild flora and fauna*
	• *Directive 2009/147/EC on the conservation of wild birds*
	• *PAF's 2014-2020 – Prioritized Action Frameworks for NATURA 2000 (per MS)*
Climate Change	United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change – adaptation to climate change

[6] A credible enlargement perspective for and enhanced EU engagement with the Western Balkans, Strasbourg, 6.2.2018, COM (2018) 65 final.

[7] "An Economic and Investment Plan for the Western Balkan", COM (2020) 641 final, Brussels, 6.10.2020

Mitigation and Adaptation/ Energy	The Paris Agreement
	The Energy Roadmap 2050 (White Paper)
	Climate Target Plan, COM (2020) 562 final
	European Climate Law /Regulation (EU) 2021/1119
	EU Strategy on Adaptation to Climate Change, COM(2021)82 final
	National Energy and Climate Plan
	National Strategy for adaptation to Climate Change
	Just Transition Development Law (Law 4872/2021)
	National Climate Law (under preparation, the consultation has been completed in 24/12/21)
	National Legislation (eg for RES)
	• *Directive 2012/27/EU on Energy Efficiency* • *Directive 2009/28/EC on the promotion of the use of energy from renewable sources - National Action Plan for Renewable Energy*
Protection-Management of Marine and Coastal Zone	Maritime Strategy Framework Directive (MSFD) 2008/56 / EC
	• *Maritime Strategy for the Adriatic and Ionian Seas (COM(2012) 713*
	Integrated Coastal Zone Management (ICZM)
	Protocol on Integrated Coastal Zone Management in the Mediterranean (2008).
Territorial and urban development	Leipzig Charter on Sustainable Urban Development
Water	Water Framework Directive (WFD) 2000/60/EC
	Directive 2007/60/EC on the assessment and management of flood risks
Air Pollution-Noise	Directive 2008/50/EC on ambient air quality and cleaner air for Europe
	Directive 2002/49/EC relating on the assessment and management of environmental noise
Soil	Commission Communication entitled “Thematic Strategy for Soil Protection” (COM (2006) 231).
	Directive 2008/98/EC on waste management (N. 4072/12)

Circular Economy/ Waste	EU action plan for the Circular Economy, COM(2020)98 final
	National Action Plan for Circular Economy
	National legislation (eg Law 4042/2012, etc)
	National Waste Management Plan (in preparation)
	National Waste Prevention Plan
Cultural heritage and landscape	European Landscape Convention (2004)

3.3 Relationship with other programmes

The Interreg IPA III CBC Programme Greece-Albania 2021-2027 could develop synergies with other cooperation programmes that include external partners and involve the participation of other countries, considering also that the Interreg IPA III CBC Programme Greece-Albania 2021-2027 participates in the network created by the INTERACT with a scope to look for synergies in the Mediterranean Sea. Complementarity shall be pursued with other cross-border programmes namely: IPA CBC Greece-Republic of North Macedonia in promoting joints actions in the Prespes area in line with the Prespa Lake Agreement and Interreg Greece - Italy in supporting joint actions for improved cross-border maritime connectivity. Complementarities can be pursued with other IPA III funding programmes such as the Interreg IPA CBC Italy-Albania-Montenegro, the IPA Programme Republic of North Macedonia-Republic of Albania, as well as with transnational programmes such as the ADRION and the Euro-MED Programme. Synergy and coordination with the cross-border and transnational cooperation programmes will be pursued through: a) thematic networks including the organization of joint meetings or working groups on complementary topics between the Programmes, b) actions including organization of information seminars for potential beneficiaries on similar themes covered by the programmes and organization of conferences/events to showcase examples of complementary projects. Coordination is also important as the cross-border programmes present thematic similarities especially concerning the themes of tourism, cultural and natural heritage and environment.

The cross-border eligible area is part of the Adriatic-Ionian corridor and the operations of the programme are expected to contribute to the pillars of the EUSAIR macro-regional strategy. Specifically, the cooperation programme is expected to contribute to: a) Pillar 2 “Connecting the Region” in the topics of intermodal connections to the hinterland, as well as maritime transport, b) Pillar 3 “Environmental Quality” in the topics of transnational terrestrial habitats and biodiversity and c) Pillar 4” Sustainable Tourism” and the topics of diversified tourism and sustainable and responsible tourism management. Therefore, cooperation should be also be promoted between the IPA III CBC Programme Greece-Albania 2021-2027 and the future ADRION Programme which is expected to contribute in enhancing mobility in the Adriatic- Ionian regions and support transition to greener economies. Euro-MED Programme 2021-

2027 is another programme with which the cross-border programme can pursue cooperation, particularly in the field of climate change and mitigating risks and innovative sustainable economy (and tourism).

The Interreg IPA III CBC Programme Greece-Albania 2021-2027 Programme can strengthen and capture synergies with other sectoral programmes in the cross-border area. Complementarities can be pursued for green issues (renewable energy resources, green infrastructure, reduction of pollution, climate change adaptation, protection of biodiversity, water management and circular economy) with the Programme "Environment, Energy and Climate Change 2021-2027" implemented in Greece, as it is mentioned in the respective programming document. Synergies can be developed with Greece's "Transport Infrastructure Programme 2021-2027" which foresees actions for enhancing cross-border connectivity (upgrade of road networks, improvement of cross-border mobility) and supporting connectivity with the islands (improving the port infrastructure of island regions, interconnection of island regions with the mainland).

4 DESCRIPTION OF THE PROGRAMME

This chapter contains the description of the programme with a particular reference to its geographical scope, its contents and the projects and activities that may arise from its implementation.

4.1 Map of the Programme Area

Figure 4-1: Map of the programme area

The Programme Area is part of the wider region of the Adriatic-Ionian, spreading from the Ionian Islands in Greece up to the coasts of the Region of Fier in Albania. On the Greek mainland the Programme area includes the whole Region of Epirus and the Region of Western Macedonia, including the land borders with Albania, from Mavromati-Qafë Botë to Krystallopigi-Kapshticë, while in the insular part it includes the Region of Ionian Islands. The Albanian Programme Area on the west side spreads from the Region of Vlorë up to the Region of Fier and on the east side from the Region of Gjirokastër up to the Regions of Berat and Korçë. The eligiblle programme areas in Albania include: the Region of Berat, the Region of Gjirokastër, the Region of Korcë, the Region of Vlorë and the Region of Fier.

Greece

- Region of Epirus: EL541 (Arta, Preveza), EL542 (Thersprotia), EL543 (Ioannina)
- Region of Western Macedonia: EL531 (Grevena, Kozani), EL532 (Kastoria), EL533 (Florina)
- Region of Ionian Islands: EL621 (Zakynthos), EL622 (Kerkyra), EL623 (Kefallinia, Ithaki), EL624 (Lefkada)

Albania

- Region of Gjirokastër
- Region of Berat
- Region of Korçë
- Region of Vlorë
- Region of Fier

In comparison to the previous programming period 2014-2020, the eligible cross-border area of IPA III CBC Greece-Albania 2021-2027 incorporates the Regional Unit of Kozani from Greece and the Region of Fier from Albania. The inclusion of all four regional units of the Region of Western Macedonia in the eligible area contributes to the EU objectives in relation to the establishment of a Just Transition Fund and the Just Transition Plan for the Region of Western Macedonia offering additional supporting tools for transition to a climate-neutral economy and investment in sustainable economic activities. The Region of Fier withholds an important position in the socio-economic development of Albania, covering ¼ of the western region and 6.6% of the general area of the country. It includes the important street arteries of Albania and is located in the crossroad of the north-south corridor and west-east corridor of the country, including as well the railway corridor of Tiranë-Vlorë. The inclusion of the Region of Fier in the eligible programme area is considered important due to its strategic position in the Adriatic-Ionian corridor, its contribution to the economic activity rates of Albania, its strong historical and cultural presence in the cross-border area.

The eligible cross-border area covers an area of 33.932 km² (20.961 km2 for Greece cross- border area and 12.971 km2 for Albania cross-border area), with a total population of 1.801.496 inhabitants (936.4702 inhabitants in the Greek cross-border area and 865.0263 inhabitants in the Albanian cross border area). The Programme area combines a wide variety of geomorphological features. The main characteristics are the extensive coasts, reaching from the north side of Fier to the south of the Regional Unit of Preveza, the insular area of the Ionian Islands and the mountain areas in the mainland of the cross-border area.

4.2 Programme Strategy

In the frame of the policy orientations of the new Cohesion Policy, the analysis indicates the persisting challenges that the Programme area faces in several areas (economic, environmental and social) that further hinder its potential for smart economic transformation, green transition (including carbon

footprint, circularity, biodiversity preservation) and social inclusion also due to high level of unemployment and the pandemic.

The Interreg IPA CBC Programme Greece-Albania 2021-2027 aims to promote integrated regional development. Through cross-border cooperation, communities located in border areas seek to promote the socioeconomic development of the border area, develop economies of scale and overcome their peripheral positioning.
The Programme Strategy emphasizes on specific objectives that can contribute in bridging the gap of regional, social and economic disparities in the cross-border area and promoting sustainable development. According to the joint development needs of the cross-border area the three policy objectives of the Cohesion Policy that the Strategy involves are:

Policy Objective 2: a greener, low-carbon Europe by promoting clean and fair energy transition, green and blue investment, the circular economy, climate adaptation and risk prevention and management

Policy Objective 3: a more Connected Europe, with strategic transport and digital networks

Policy Objective 4: a more social and inclusive Europe implementing the European Pillar of Social Rights.

4.3 Priorities

The Policy Objectives, the corresponding Priorities, the Specific Objectives and the forms of support are presented in the Final Version of the Cooperation Programme Greece- Albania 2021-2027.

In general, the programme, in order to achieve the above objectives, has chosen to intervene in three Priorities, each one including Specific objectives (SO) for each Priority:

4.3.1 Priority Axis 1: Supporting transition to greener and more resilient cross-border regions

SO 1.1: Enhancing biodiversity, green infrastructure in the urban environment and reducing pollution

- Investments for the protection and enhancement of natural resources, ecosystems and biodiversity including the promotion of responsible tourism and eco-tourism.

- Measures for monitoring of biodiversity, genetic sources and protected ecosystems.

- Promotion of the use of technologies for environmental protection and preservation.

- Actions for the restoration, protection and efficient management of natural protected areas (e.g. Natura sites), with a focus on endangered species.

Support data on natural resources preservation (natural parks, protected areas, Natura 2000 etc.)

- Joint actions for the protection of nature and biodiversity (protection of wetlands, mountainous natural reserves, rivers)

- Develop the capacity of environmental authorities and NGO to exploit their common heritage.

- Promotion of measures for reducing pollution (waste collection and management, recycling and reuse, prevention of sea pollution in coastal areas, rivers soils and air pollution and raising awareness for reducing the use of plastic).

- Investments for the promotion of green infrastructure mainly in urban areas (green streets, recycling systems, accessibility in nature, reducing flood risks, etc.) and the rehabilitation of areas in industrial transition.

- Development of joint strategies and action plans for tackling pollution, protection of cross-border shared natural resources and biodiversity.

- Pilot actions for testing possible solutions in collecting and monitoring cross-border biodiversity data and threats for natural resources.

SO 1.2: Promoting climate change adaptation and disaster risk prevention, resilience taking into account eco- system based approaches

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

- Investments in the development of mechanisms and tools for the prevention and management of climate related risks, e.g. fires, storms, drought.

- Investments in the development of mechanisms and tools for the prevention and management of non-climate related risks (i.e. earthquakes) and risks connected to human activities (e.g. technological accidents).

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

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

- Actions for the promotion of measures and investments aiming at reducing greenhouse gas emissions, including the promotion of energy efficiency and the use of renewable energy.

- Increasing institutional and operational capacity of local communities for supporting the implementation of clean energy infrastructure.

- Pilot actions in cross-border communities for reducing greenhouse gas emissions.

- Development of joint action plans and strategies for climate change related risks.

SO 1.3: Promoting access to water and sustainable water management

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

- Foster an efficient use of water resources by citizens, industry and agriculture, throughout the whole water cycle by promoting water saving and reuse, water-efficient technologies in all sectors, as well as by supporting ecosystem-based measures.

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

- Introduction of smart technologies to increase resource efficiency in the water sector.

- Monitoring systems for controlling water supply networks.

- Investment into measures at source to counteract pollution (e.g. in industry, agriculture).

- Design and implement coherent and tailored-made wastewater management plans.

- Development of studies and exchange of know-how and technology for wastewater management plants.

- Raising awareness about water reuse and dealing with water scarcity in the cross-border regions.

- Small-scale investments on wastewater treatment systems based on environmentally friendly processes.

SO 1.4: Promoting the transition to a circular and resource efficient economy

- Joint knowledge development and planning of circular economy solutions

- Joint knowledge development and planning of circular economy solutions and joint awareness-raising campaigns at large geographical scale for reducing waste production and promoting recycling and reuse.

- Investment in infrastructure for the separate sorting, storage and treatment of hazardous waste and bio-waste.

- Development of circular economy hubs for creating new regional value chains, connecting relevant actors.

4.3.2 Priority Axis 2: Improving accessibility in the cross-border area

SO 2.1: Developing and enhancing sustainable, climate resilient, intelligent and intermodal national, regional and local mobility, including improved access to TEN-T and cross-border mobility.

- Identifying and addressing the missing links in road and rail infrastructure: studies, strategies, joint solutions.

- Planning, construction and rehabilitation of border crossings; planning, construction and rehabilitation of road network.

- Improving and expanding road infrastructure: studies regarding road traffic, awareness campaigns, connectivity/mobility studies for understanding freight and passenger flows, commuting etc.

- Studies, equipment and IT solutions for increasing predictability, reliability and efficiency of available transport (road, maritime, rail) in the cross-border area.

- Development of cross-border transportation plan for facilitating remote and sparsely populated areas population, focusing on improving access of vulnerable social groups from remote areas to health services, markets and public services located in urban and sub-urban areas.

- Improving and expanding road infrastructure - Works for road infrastructure modernization, safety measures (equipment/signaling).

- Improving access to port and ferries through modernization and upgrade of port infrastructure and facilities.

- Development of cross-border information platform for land and maritime transport, overcoming linguistic barriers and fostering multimodality.

- Improvement of ferry connectivity between the island communities of the cross-border regions.

- Support of smart transport systems and ICT applications in the transport and flow of people sector.

- Monitoring of the emissions from transport activities, such as shipping and the impact on the port cities and other shore areas.

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

SO 3.1: Enhancing the role of culture and sustainable tourism in economic development, social inclusion and social innovation.

- Support to diversification of the tourism by investing in lesser-known destinations and diverse forms of tourism (cultural, rural, agro-tourism, sport, health/medical tourism); consequently, contributing to the livelihoods of local and regional communities.

- Valorization of historical centers, villages and sites, such as: castles, fortresses, churches, monasteries, palaces, etc.

- Improvement of accessibility in historical monuments and sites of cultural heritage.

- Support the capacity of local and regional stakeholders to valorize potentially valuable touristic objectives /sites / experiences, by creating sustainable tourism trails, or developing quality labels for excellence in services, promoting and marketing the touristic offer etc.

- Natural sites: definition of trails / paths, waste disposal, security, signaling etc.

- Interconnection between cultural and creative industry with tourism and agriculture through development and implementation of measures to protect, develop and promote cultural heritage and cultural services.

- Support for both public and private organizations to reinforce the resilience of these sectors through training and employment support, digitalization, social innovation and transition to circular business models.

- Support for SMEs, including social enterprises (such as social cooperatives) and social innovation in tourism and culture - development of existing or new tourism and culture businesses.

- Development of innovative solutions and new business models in culture and tourism.

- Development of new tourism products models based on the social distancing (incl. quality tourism and remote micro destinations – mountains, islands, sparsely and rural areas).

- Development of joint recovery plans and solutions in the fields of tourism and culture, minimizing the spill-over effects of the COVID-19 crisis.

- Enhancement of the valorization of technology and digital tools for the promotion of tourism destinations, natural and cultural resources of the cross-border area.

- Development of cooperation networks in the cultural and creative industry, support of the development of creative hubs and incubators in order to foster creativity and cultural expression.

- Support of capacity building in the tourism sector, promoting social innovation, improvement of working skills in the sector and social inclusion.

- Promotion of responsible tourism models for preventing and minimizing the impact on the environment and local communities (use of natural resources and tourism waste production).

- Supporting the capacity of the stakeholders involved in the local cultural and creative industries for the valorization of technology and digital tools

SO 3.2: Ensuring equal access to health care and fostering resilience of health systems, including primary care, and promoting the transition from institutional to family and community-based care

- Implementation of joint measures and tools for improving accessibility and effectiveness of healthcare and long-term social care services across borders.

- Support of the digitalization in healthcare and health mobile assets.

- Investments in building/renovation/endowment of healthcare facilities (including laboratories).

- Supply of new and improved medical equipment for supporting health care facilities and telemedicince services.

- Actions for improving health care and long-term services for the elderly.

- Enhancement of telemedicine services and accessibility to health care services for inhabitants of remote and rural areas.

- Elaboration of joint working procedures, joint platforms, joint strategies for tackling cross-border medical threats.

- Know-how exchange and capacity building activities (joint trainings, conferences, workshops).

5 ALTERNATIVES

According to Article 5 of the Directive 2001/42/EC, where an environmental assessment is required, an environmental report shall be prepared in which the likely significant effects on the environment of implementing the plan or programme, and reasonable alternatives taking into account the objectives and the geographical scope of the plan or programme, are identified, described and evaluated.

Alternatives - possibilities can be formulated by considering, whether or not combined, solutions at various levels, which meet the development objectives and the priorities and they are related to the proposed measures and actions.

In accordance with the SEA Directive, the alternatives should be realistic, i.e they should be feasible and eligible based on the specific data and regulations of the programme framework. The territorial cooperation Programme is not offered for an exhaustive study of alternatives mainly because it does not include any primary projects of large scale with significant potential environmental impacts. So, two (2) realistic alternatives have been considered:

- Zero alternative ("do nothing scenario"), in which the non- implementation of the programme is being examined consisting the zero scenario
- The suggested alternative, which best integrates the requirements consisting the proposed solution

For these two alternatives the effects on the environment and sustainable development are presented and evaluated, as follows.

5.1 Zero alternative: Zero solution (no plan or programme)

The zero scenario or the "do nothing scenario", i.e the non-implementation of the programme, will impede the real convergence with the developed regions of each country and the EU, with a negative impact on the economy, on the improvement of the living standards in the eligible areas, on the protection and enhancement of the natural and cultural wealth and on the improvement and protection of natural resources. More specifically it would result in the immediate cancellation of the funding of several million euros which should be directed towards actions with positive environmental impact. In this case, however, the expected environmental effect that will be lost is estimated to be much higher. The main element that will lead to the loss of this added value is the absence of the same programming framework that will allow coordination of actions for the joint protection and management of natural and cultural resources that require special support. Furthermore the cooperation and contact between two neighboring countries will be diminished. In addition, the non-implementation of the Programme, is opposed to the general principle of the EU for the cohesion and balancing of inequalities in governmental and regional level.

5.2 Suggested alternative: Preparing the Development Programme for the Period 2021-2027 based on a Centralized Strategic Planning (Planned Growth)

The proposed solution, which was presented in Chapter 4, is considered to best integrate the requirements of actual environmental policy in the area and contribute to the pursuit of sustainable development not only in the cross-border area, but also in the wider regional area of the Ionian - Adriatic.
The present alternative solution aims to address deficiencies and problems that haven't been adequately addressed in the previous programming period and to give greater emphasis on actions relating to sustainable development and quality of life. In this way, the strategy will ensure the coherence and continuity with the present programming period in order to improve the effectiveness of the programme in the cross border area.
The new planned growth aims to exploit the strengths and the advantages of the cross border area, to address the weaknesses, to create new opportunities for socio – economic and regional development and to face the risks.
The Programme aim at the exchange, testing and spreading of good practices and policies. The Development Strategy of the programme, as specified in priorities and specific objectives, in the INTERREG IPA III CBC Programme Greece-Albania 2021-2027, is consistent with the development needs of the Cross Border Area and includes the need for:

- Environmental protection and sustainable use of natural sources and the renewable energy as well.
- Risk Prevention and Natural Disaster Management.
- Promotion of sustainable transport infrastructures, information and communications network, water and waste management and energy efficiency.
- Improvement of the cross border capacity to support entrepreneurship, business sustainability and competiveness.
- Conservation of cultural and natural resources as a precondition for the development of tourism.

Regarding the Zero Solution, the non-implementation of the Programme will impede the real convergence with the developed regions of each country, with a negative impact on the economy, the living standards of the eligible areas, the protection and enhancement of the natural and cultural wealth and the protection of natural resources.
The Suggested Alternative is selected, since it is going to improve natural and human environment and natural resources, building on and highlighting the strengths and reducing or/and eliminating the weaknesses, thereby reaching the goal of Sustainable Development.

Consequently, the evaluation of the alternatives for the implementation and non implementation of the CBC Programme (zero solution), for the programming period 2021- 2027,is based on criteria, which are related to the priorities of the EU in favor of sustainable development, protection and improvement of environmental quality, enhancement of economic growth, competitiveness and employment and social inclusion.

6 DESCRIPTION OF THE CURRENT STATE OF THE ENVIRONMENT

This section provides valuable information about the current situation of the environment by highlighting the key environmental issues and identifying the environmental characteristics of areas likely to be significantly affected within the study area.

6.1 Abiotic environment

6.1.1 Atmospheric Environment

The major sources of air pollution, found in the eligible area, are the industrial activities, vehicles and general traffic volumes as well as the heating facilities of buildings.

In Dytiki Makedonia, industrial activity is a major source of air pollution. Note that in the region, thermal power plants of Public Power Cooperation SA are operating. In the Region of Ipeiros, pollution comes mainly from the transport network of roads, airports and ports, but also from industry. In the Region of Ionia Nisia, the transport sector has a significant effect on the atmosphere, while the building sector (households, trade, services) also contributes to air pollution.

Regarding Albania, historically the main sources of air pollution were the industries involved in the smelting of chromium, copper, iron and steel, metallurgy, and thermoelectric power generation. Today, the main sources of air pollution is the uncontrolled burning of waste, oil extraction and refining, cement production and road traffic.

Air quality in the study area is monitored through three air quality-monitoring stations; in Florina, Vevi and Ioannina. The first two stations monitor the impact of emissions from the operation of the power plants and the third one monitors the levels of urban pollution.

Measurements in Kastoria, Grevena and Florina showed that PM10 levels are quite high and it is estimated that there is an annual maximum excess in the 24-hour limit that thereby constitutes PM10 the most important pollutant for the Region of Dytiki Makedonia.

Data on air quality in urban centers on the Albanian side of the eligible area of the program, is not sufficient to form a clear picture. The main air pollutants are SO_2 and NO_2 derived mainly from the transport sector, due to the high utilization of used vehicles, while the main motor fuel is oil.

6.1.2 Climate

The climatic conditions in Ipeiros differ from place to place as it occupies a large geographic area, from the mountains of Pindos to the coastal regions. The mountainous areas of Ipeiros are characterized by winters with very heavy snowfall, very frequent rainfall and low temperatures. The summers are cool in the highlands, while summer showers are very common. On the contrary, summers are hot in lowlands and coastal areas, and the climate is generally Mediterranean, with rare rainfalls and the sun shining on most days of the summer. In Dytiki Macedonia the climate is temperate, with heavy winters and mild summers, in contrast to the Mediterranean climate of coastal areas of the country. In Ionia Nisia, the climate conditions have typical characteristics of the Mediterranean climate.

Albania is located between two climatic zones of the Mediterranean coastal zones and the continental inland zone. The climatic conditions vary greatly and are divided into four zones depending on their location:

- The southern part of the coastal plain
- The central and northern parts of the coastal plain
- The hilly zone
- The mountainous zone

6.1.3 Water resources

The eligible border area is rich in water resources. The abundance of water resources has made the area an important source of hydroelectric power for both countries. The potential of Micro-Hydropower and Renewable Energy sources has not been fully exploited. Moreover, the potential for recreational mountainous and water landscape activities are a dominant attraction of the area combined with an attractive and relatively unaffected coastal zone.
The main rivers and lakes of the Greek eligible area are:

Table 6-1: Rivers and lakes of the Greek eligible area

Regional Unity	Lakes	Rivers
Kastoria	Orestiada (known as Kastoria lake)	Aliakmonas, Sarantaporos
Florina	Small Prespa, Great Prespa, Zazari, Chimaditida, Petron, Vegoritida (or Ostrovou)	Sakoulevas (known as Florina river)
Kozani	Artificial lake Polifitou	
Grevena		Venetikos (or Veronas)
Ioannina	Pamvotida (Known as lake of Ioannina), Pogoniou, Drakolimni	Arachthos, Aoos, Acherontas, Voidomatis (or Vikos river), Sarantaporos, Louros, Thyamis (or Kalamas)
Thesprotia	Flega lakes (Drakolimnes)	Acherontas, Thyamis (or Kalamas)
Preveza	Zirou	Louros, Acherontas
Arta	Pournariou artificial lake, Arta artificial lake	Arachtos, Louros, Acheloos
Kerkyra	Korissia (or Korission), Antigioti (or St Aikaterini)	Megalopotamos, Tiflopontikas, Nimphon and Gastourioy (streams and small rivers)
Kefalonia	Koutavos lagoon	St. Irini stream
Lefkada		Karouchas

On the Albanian side, the main lakes are Narta and Orikumi in Vlora, Orhot, Small Prespa and Great Prespa in Korca. The main rivers that either spring or pass through the area are as follows: Devolli, Osumi, Vjosa, Dino, Bistica and Pavila.

Regarding cross border waters, the main river of the region is Aoos / Vjose. It springs from the Pindos mountain range and flows to NW direction through Albania, and flows into the Adriatic. The total length of the river is about 260 km, where the first 80 kilometers are found on the Greek area. The average flow of the river at the border (not counting the flow Sarantaporos) is 52 m^3/s. The main tributaries of Aoos are Sarantaporos and Boidomatis. The basin has a total area of 6.519km², of which the Greek sub-basin covers approximately 2.154km^2. The average amount of precipitation in the region is about 850mm and the flow rate ranges between 8 and 130 m^3/s.
The second cross-border river is Drinos, which springs in the west of the mountain Kasidiaris and Nemertskas, flowing a length of 40km in Greek territory, and when entering the territory of Albania it is discharged into the river Aoos / Vjosa with an average flow at the border of 9 m^3/s. The basin has an area of 254 km^2.

The significant Prespa lakes are located on the eastern edge of the eligible area. The lakes Little and Great Prespa cover an area of 190km² and are found between three neighboring countries (Greece, Republic of North Macedonia and Albania). The Small Prespa is shared between Greece (138km² catchment area and surface area 43.5 km²) and Albania (51km² catchment area and surface area 3.9 km²). The area was declared as a Transnational Park in 2000, ushering in numerous CBC programs. Protected by the Greek and European legislation and international conventions, and Lake Small Prespa is also protected by the Ramsar Convention as a unique wetland.

6.1.4 Morphology - Soil

The main characteristics of the eligible border area are the mountain ranges, which are part of the Dinaric Alps. The altitude ranges from sea level in the western coastal areas, to the higher peaks over 2.600m (Smolikas Mount) in the east. The area is predominantly forestland with some agricultural activity (forestry, grazing, dry and irrigated agriculture) in smaller valleys.

The geotectonic structure of the Greek eligible area consists of the following main zones: the Ionian zone, the zone of Pindos, the zone Gavrovo and Pelagoniki zone. On the Albanian side, the following zones are distinguished: Molasse sediments and Neogene - Quaternary sediments zones, the Zone of Interior Albanians (Pelagonian Zone), the zone of Outer Albanian (Greek zone, Ionian zone, Dinarides, pre-Apulia zone) and Ophiolitic zone.

6.2 Biodiversity – Flora - Fauna

The natural habitats as well as the flora and fauna of the study areas have been significantly reduced both qualitatively and quantitatively. More and more species and habitats are under threat at various degrees. The major negative changes occur in habitats farmlands, forests and coastal areas. Most pressure is exerted on biodiversity especially in areas where the use of land for human activity is intense.

The flora of Greece is one of the richest ones in Europe, always in relation to its size, with the abundance of 6,300 species and subspecies of plants. The great flora diversity is the result of both paleogeographical and ecological factors as well as historical, in the sense of the long traditional and harmonious relationship between man and his natural environment. However, in the 20th century, the balance has been disturbed by overexploitation of natural resources and the abandonment of the countryside, counterbalancing procedures, but affecting the conservation of species and habitats. From the already known numbers of species, the total number of species is estimated to be approximately 50,000. The majority of them belong to insect species. In the best-known groups of animals (vertebrates, echinoderms, molluscs and orthoptera) about 1,500 endemic species in total 5500 (25% endemism) have been recorded.

Albania is well known for its high diversity of ecosystems and habitats. Within its territory there are maritime ecosystems, coastal zones, lakes, rivers, evergreen and broadleaf bushes, broadleaf forests, pine forests, alpine and sub-alpine pastures and meadows, and high mountain ecosystems.
Albania is rich in forest and pasture resources. The forests cover 1,030,000 ha or 36% of the country's territory, and the pastures about 400,000 ha or 15%. Approximately 60% (244,000 ha) of the pastures are alpine and sub-alpine pastures and meadows. The forests and the pastures have a diversity of types, formations as well as plant and animal communities.

Although, it is a small country, Albania is distinguished for its rich biological diversity. The variation of geomorphology, climate and terrain create favorable conditions for a number of endemic and sub-endemic species with 27 endemic and 160 subendemic vascular plants present in the country. There are over 3,250 species of plants, approximately 30% of the entire flora species found in Europe.

6.2.1 Protected Areas

The Greek eligible area has a significant number of protected areas, national parks etc., protected by European and / or national legislation. The Natura 2000 network of the eligible area is shown on the following figure 6-1.
Natura 2000 is a European ecological network of areas that host natural habitats, with great importance at a European level. It consists of two types of areas: Special Protection Areas - SPA, for the Birds, as defined in Directive 79/409/EK, and Sites of Conservation – SAC, as defined in Directive 92/43/EEC. Greece

comprises **239 Sites of Conservation** (SAC's) in accordance with Directive 92/43/EEC and has declared **181 Special Protection Areas** for birds (SPA) in accordance with Directive 79/409/EEC.

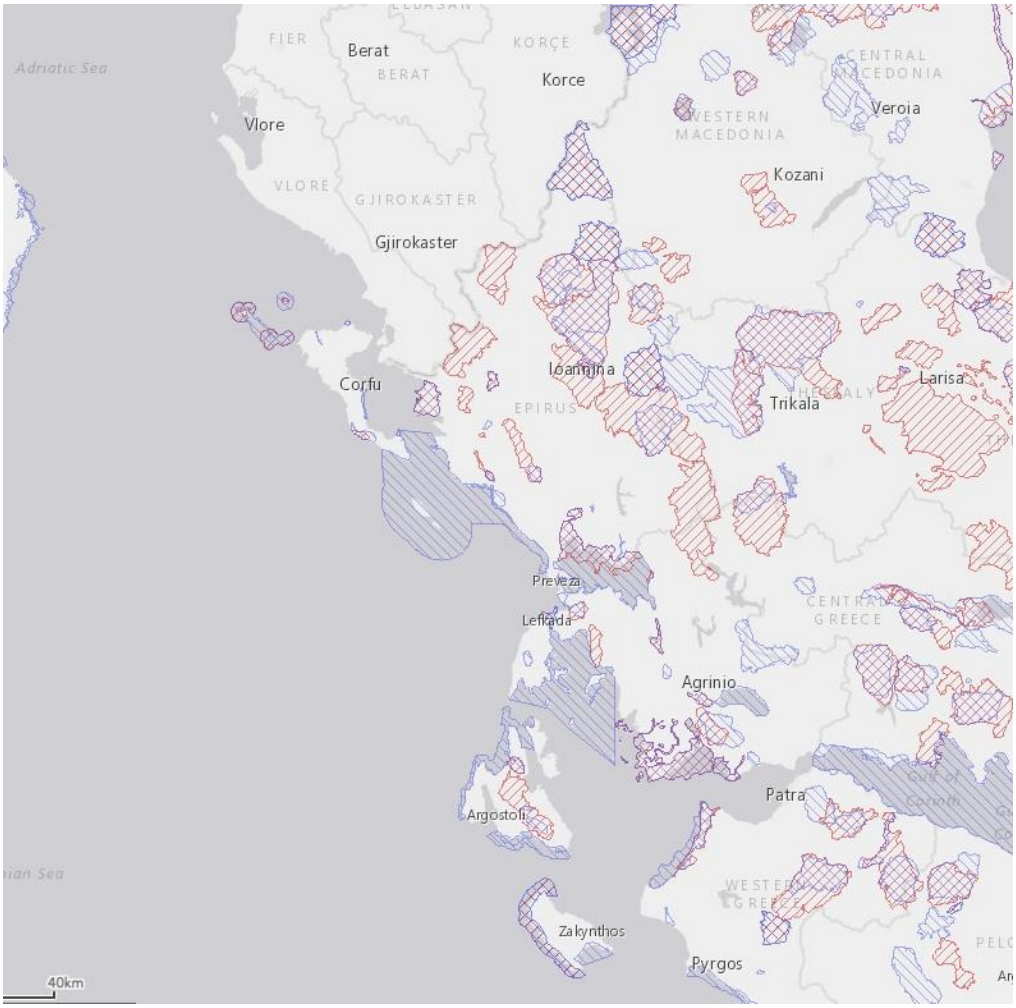

Figure 6-1: NATURA 2000 sites in the eligible area (Source: Natura network viewer)

Protected areas of international interest are included in the cross-border area that call for integrated and coordinated actions for their preservation and valorization. Sites of international interest include Little Prespa Lake in Greece, which is part of the Prespes National Park, the National Park of Butrint and the National Park of Karavasta Lagoon in Albania (all protected by the **Ramsar convention**). In Western Macedonia, 18 protected areas are situated. The Regions of Ionian Islands and Epirus are also characterized by rich biodiversity. In the Ionian Islands there are 22 areas included in the Natura 2000 network, while in Epirus the same areas are 27[8]. The highest pressure on these areas is caused by human activity and climate change. Invasive alien species is also becoming a serious problem in the cross-border

[8] https://www.ekby.gr/ekby/el/natura_tables_el_Dec2017.pdf

regions, as they are one of the most important direct drivers of biodiversity loss and ecosystem service changes, and they constitute the greatest threat to fragile ecosystems such as the islands.

Albania is considered a biodiversity hotspot in Europe. To protect the remarkable biodiversity and valuable natural resources, the government has placed under protection about 18% of the territory, including 58 protected areas covering a range of categories under IUCN –International Union for Conservation of Nature[9]. In the Programme area, are listed five (5) main sites, like Tomorri mountain National Park, Divjaka-Karavasta National Park, Llogara National Park, and Vjosa-Narta Protected Landscape. Cross-border lakes, such as that of Ohrid and Prespa represent the exchange points of the flora and fauna with neighboring countries.

The positive trend is particularly visible for the legal designation of protected areas corresponding to IUCN category:

IUCN I: Strictly natural reserve/scientific reserve

IUCN II: National Park

IUCN III: Monument of nature

IUCN IV: Natural managed reserve

IUCN V: Protected landscape/seascape

IUCN VI: Reserve of managed resources.

The ratification of the Prespa Park Agreement is an important step forward by the countries that shows their commitment to address joint challenges in the field of biodiversity protection and preservation. The Agreement contributes in the creation of permanent multinational structures that include authorities and stakeholders from Greece, Albania and North Macedonia as well the European Commission. It also creates an area of possible territorial focus in the cross-border for the support of environmentally friendly local economies, the promotion of protected areas and networks with tourism in the Adriatic-Ionian region in line with the objectives of the EUSAIR for the establishment of protection measures for natural terrestrial habitats and ecosystems.

The large number of sub-endemic species related to Greece, and marine endemic species in the Adriatic Sea point out the importance of Albania regarding protection of biological diversity in the regions of the Balkans and the Mediterranean. In Albania, the number of tourists in Protected Areas increased by 30% in 2019 (916,660 visitors) compared to 2018 creating a need for more investments in human and eco-friendly infrastructure as well as enforcement of environmental regulations.

In the Greek eligible area, a significant number of areas protected by national legislation is found; more specifically nine (9) National Parks and Forests, two (2) Aesthetic Forests, two (2) Natural Monuments, five (5) Areas of Nature Conservation, two (2) Strictly Natural Reserve areas and one (1) area of Eco-

[9] COVID-19 impact on the Western Balkans. Deep-dive in Albania and how the pandemic impacted the SDG's. Erik Gjermeni and Alban Lika in collaboration with the Albanian Institute of Statistics (INSTAT) as part of a project supported by the United Nations Economic Commission.

development. In the eligible area are found two **Ramsar wetlands** of Amvrakikos Gulf and Lake Mikri Prespa.

6.3 Population – Demography - Economy

6.3.1 Population

The eligible cross-border area covers an area of 33.932 km² (20.961 km² for Greece cross- border area and 12.971 km² for Albania cross-border area), with a total population of 1.801.496 inhabitants (936.470 inhabitants in the Greek cross-border area and 865.026 inhabitants in the Albanian cross-border area).

6.3.2 Demography

Demographic trends remain an issue for the Programme area, since both countries are facing a decrease in their population, while a severe aging problem is also detected, especially for the southern part of Albania. Greece's population is declining, with more than 100,000 people leaving the country every year. The total population decreased by almost 400,000 between 2010 and 2019 due to the combined effect of net emigration and a negative natural population change. Annual emigration flows have risen, from about 40,000 people before 2010, to above 100,000 in 2012-2017. In 2016 and 2017, the overall migration balance turned positive due to large inflows of non-EU citizens, mostly refugees. However, the net emigration of Greek citizens continued and people who left the country exceeded those who returned by 22,000 in 2017, although this trend has slowed since 2013. The high number of people leaving the country has led to further decreases in fertility rates and a worsening of the pressure of population ageing. The population of Albania in 2019 has experienced a decrease with 1.06% compared to 2015. Due to its geographical position, the cross-border eligible area during the recent years has received a high level of influx of migrants and refugees. An increase is being recorded since 2017 in the number of migrants in Albania.

6.3.3 Economy

In terms of economic development, the total gross labor productivity in the cross-border area is significantly lower than the EU27 avg. (approximately 25%). Albania's real GDP per capita is less than one third of the EU average and less than half of that of the new EU member states. In Albania GDP growth slowed considerably in 2019 due to lower hydro-electricity production, a drop in investment and the fallout from the earthquake of November 2019. Additionally, the completion of some large infrastructure projects caused a contraction in investment. Household consumption continued to be the main growth driver in Albania. In Greece, following the return to economic growth in 2017, the growth rate has stabilized at around 2%, largely backed by consumer spending and net exports.

The Greek economy revolves around the tertiary sector of the economy (services) (80.6%) and the secondary sector of the economy (industry) (16%), while primary sector of the economy (agriculture) made up an estimated 3.4%. Agriculture is an important economic sector for the Albanian economy. It contributes 18.5% of the GDP and employs 36.1% of the workforce (World Bank, 2020). However, the agricultural sector suffers from a lack of modern equipment, highly fragmented land ownership and limited area of cultivation, all of which lead to a relatively low productivity. Trade, transport and hospitality services, are important branches of the Albanian economy. Tourism has the potential as one of the key drivers for growth, job creation and investments – both foreign and domestic and has experienced a rapid increase in annual tourist arrivals but it still needs to convert this to a sustainable increase in value added and employment.

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

6.4 Environmental Infrastructure

6.4.1 Wastewater management

Albania is a country, whose water surface and ground water resources far exceed their usage. Most of economic activities relay on utilization of water resources, where over 90% of energy production comes from Hydropower Plants (HPPs), and agriculture fully depends on irrigation. In addition, other sectors of economy like mining, industrial sector and tourism are also relied on clean and sufficient fresh water resources. In Albania, some progress is made in water management through performance contracts signed with utilities, the regularization of illegal connections, a revised subsidy scheme, and the adoption of a staff certification scheme. However, greater efforts are needed to strengthen the capacity, performance and sustainability of utilities. Albania needs to increase capacity in the wastewater sector as well. Wastewater treatment plants cater for only about 15% of the population, they still face key concerns such as lack of licensing and tariffing for wastewater treatment, insufficient operation and maintenance and limited environment impact due to underdeveloped networks and connections.

Greece has adopted and reported the second generation of River Basin Management Plans under the Water Framework Directive. In Greece, the main user/consumer of water is agriculture. For irrigation purposes 80-85% of the total water consumption is used. Water imbalance is often experienced, especially in the coastal regions, due to temporal and spatial variations of the precipitation, the increased water

demand during the summer months. In Greece, investments are needed to improve water treatment, also with a view to respecting the guidelines of the Urban Waste Water Treatment Directive.

Waste management remains a concern for Albania as separate collection of waste streams and economic instruments to promote recycling and reuse and to prevent waste generation remain limited. However, for the successful management of solid waste additional support is required by local government units for sorting, collection, transport and disposal of solid waste in the available sanitary landfill of the cross-border regions. Greece disposes the majority of its municipal waste in landfills (80 %, vs EU average of 24 %), with only 17% being recycled (EU average 46 %). Additional efforts and actions are required for the increase of recycling rates in Greece, in line with the EU standards. The use of financial instruments to incentivize prevention, reuse and recycling is insufficient and the existing schemes are performing poorly.

6.4.2 Energy – Renewable resources

Cross-border cooperation has brought some positive results in this field during the previous and current programming period, contributing in the implementation of interventions for the improvement of energy efficiency. It is acknowledged though that both countries still perform low in energy efficiency and use of renewable energy sources. In Albania, there is no wide-reaching progress in the field of renewable energy sources, as well as in the field of energy saving in buildings. In Greece, during the past years, there have been funding initiatives on national and regional level for promoting energy-saving actions for public building, businesses and private housing. The Region of Western Macedonia has already adapted a strategy for the improvement of public building energy efficiency including provisions and targets for public schools, health care buildings, administrative and other public buildings. Resource efficiency is also becoming a priority due to the rapid growth in demand for resources. The Region of Ionian Islands has also incorporated in its regional operational programme priorities for improving energy efficiency in public buildings as well as the Region of Epirus.

Cross-border cooperation can contribute in strengthening measures for the promotion of energy efficient models in public spaces, transport and business sectors by enhancing exchange of know-how, capacity-building, transfer of technology and development of joint solutions and pilot actions. Waste and water management still remains an issue for the cross-border regions, affecting them on different levels according to their geographical characteristics, climate change vulnerability, economic activity and infrastructure capacity. Knowledge transfer and raise of awareness in these fields could be supported by cross-border cooperation.

6.4.3 Accessibility and transport

The cross-border area is covered by maritime transport and road network, but the current infrastructure in both transport sectors does not have sufficient density or proper quality. Poor road network in remote and isolated areas and inadequate infrastructure are not ensuring a good connectivity across the border.

All airport infrastructure is located on the Greek side of the cross-border area (Ioannina, Kerkyra, Kefallinia, Zakynthos, Kozani and Kastoria), and cater to both domestic and international flights (regular and charter). Albania's international airports are located in Tirana and in the city of Kukës, while the construction of one more international airport is being planned, which will be located in the Region of Vlorë. The inclusion of the Region of Fier in the eligible cross-border is creating new potential for the development of better connection networks in Albania since the region holds a strategic location in the polycentric system of national roads networks in the country, being also part of the Tirana–Vlorë railway connection. In light of recent developments in railway infrastructure, the IPA II programme is supporting the strategic project of constructing the Krystallopigi - Pogradec railway line, which will serve as a cross-border communication facility and a better connection within programme area.

The Greek programme area includes strategic ports (port of Corfu, Igoumenitsa, Vlora and Saranda) important for tourism and commerce and the Albanian programme area includes the ports of Vlora, Himara and Saranda. Some of the main challenges in maritime transport of the programme area are the delays in the completion of infrastructure projects in port areas and facilities, which could improve mobility, transfer of goods and people in the cross-border area and thus economic growth especially for developing regions.

6.4.4 Health services

The main urban centers have adequate health infrastructure, including public hospitals, health centers and infirmaries. Ioannina is the main area where health facilities provide university level services, making them the most important center in the region for the provision of health care. The University Hospital of Ioannina plays the key role. Existing infrastructure of the Greek side is used by the population on both sides of the border, since hospitals in Albania face significant equipment shortages. However, these cross-border relationships are treated on an ad-hoc basis leaving room for further cooperation.
While urban centers are served satisfactorily, primary health care in rural areas and social protection services, especially for women, mothers and the elderly population are rudimentary. Given the expected growth in the tourism sector, these sectors should be strengthened further. Moreover parallel initiatives of preventive medicine should also be introduced.
The Albanian health system is one of the most unequal in Europe and Asia, according to a World Bank report (2013). According to this Albanians spend, in total, approximately 750 million annually in medical care, but out of this amount, only 40% is covered by the government and they pay themselves the remaining 60%. These figures rank Albania in the 5th position in Europe and Central Asia. The World Bank points out that for 17% of Albanian families, the cost of medical care is devastating, because it exceeds by 10% their total income.

6.4.5 Cultural heritage

Cultural and natural heritage is another territorial asset of the cross-border region, presenting similarities and common challenges when it comes to protection measures, valorization and effective promotion with

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

7 ASSESSMENT, EVALUATION AND MANAGEMENT OF ENVIRONMENTAL EFFECTS OF THE PROGRAMME

7.1 Introduction

The evaluation of the impacts will be based on the environmental parameters that are suggested through the Directive 2001/42/EC of the European Parliament as adapted by the JMD 107017/2006 of Greek Legislation, on the assessment of the effects of certain plans and programmes on the environment. These parameters will examine and reveal the possible effects that may arise through the programme's implementation. A considerable selection of these parameters is vital in order for the Strategic Environmental Assessment to be substantial.

The selection of the parameters is following:

1. Biodiversity
2. Population- Human health
3. Soil
4. Water
5. Air, Climate and climate change
6. Infrastructure
7. Cultural Heritage
8. Landscape
9. Noise
10. Sustainable development
11. Interrelationship

The selection of the above parameters is in accordance with the appendix 3 of the JMD 107017/2006; with an addition of noise and sustainable development. The connection between the above parameters, is a factor which estimates the interaction and interrelationship of the above parameters with regards to the expected impact of them.

7.2 Methodology

For the evaluation of the environmental impacts, the methodology of **guiding questions** is being followed. This is a widely spread methodology, being introduced amongst others in «*Handbook on SEA for Cohesion Policy 2007 - 2013»* of the Greening Regional Development Programmes Network. According to this methodology, a network of evaluating questions is being formed, taking under consideration the environmental aims of the SEA, in order to determine all the possible environmental impacts for each environmental parameter. The questions are formed in a way to get a yes or no answer.

The guiding questions which will be used in this SEA report are demonstrated in the following table.

Environmental Parameters	Guiding Questions
1. Biodiversity-flora and fauna	**Is the implementation of the SO expected to affect:** B1: **The extent and consistency (internal) of protected areas?** B2: **the conservation of habitats and protected species of flora and fauna?** B3: **The extent and consistency (internal) of forest ecosystems?** B4 **The maintenance of racial or genetic diversity, richness and composition of populations of wildlife species?**
2. Population, public health	**Is the implementation of the SO expected to affect:** P1: **the population demographics?** P2: **the population employment?** P3: **the population education level?** P4: **the level of public health services and the public health protection?** P5: **The exposure of individuals to new or increased sources of pollutants, radiations or other substances or energy that may be harmful to human?**
3. Soil	**Is the implementation of the SO expected to affect:** G1: **ground stability and geomorphology?** G2: **soil quality against pollution from waste and wastewater?** G3: **Effective waste management and compliance with the European obligations**
4. Water	**Is the implementation of the SO expected to affect:** W1: **inland and coastal waters hydromorphology?** W2: **water resources efficiency;** W3: **waters quality against pollution from waste and wastewater?**
5. Air, climate and climate change	**Is the implementation of the SO expected to affect:** AC1: **Air Quality?** AC2: **Climate change adaptation** AC3: **Climate change mitigation by the reduction of GHGs emissions and increase of CO2 absorption?** AC4: **The achievement of the targets for renewable energy and energy efficiency?**
6. Material Assets-Infrastructure	**Is the implementation of the SO expected to affect:** M1: **The value of land, the public character and access to public goods?** M2: **The balanced territorial development (retaining population and income) and relationships of town - countryside?** M3: **the infrastructure**
7. Cultural Heritage	**Is the implementation of the SO expected to affect:** H1: **the protection and enhancement of cultural sites - monuments?**
8. Landscape	**Is the implementation of the SO expected to affect:** L1: **The existing character of the landscape,** L2: **the enhancement of natural landscape quality** L3: **The commitments of protection of the coastal zone?**
9. Noise	**Is the implementation of the SO expected to affect:** N1: **Noise levels** N2: **protection of people from noise pollution?**
10. Sustainable Development	**Is the implementation of the SO expected to affect:** S1: **the increase of the GDP while keeping low carbon footprint?** S2: **promoting the SDGs of UN 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development?**

11. Interrelationship	Is the implementation of the SO expected to affect the interrelationship of the above parameters?

The environmental impact assessment of each Priority or Specific Objective element is evaluated using the following criteria:

1. **Probability:** It expresses how much expected or not, an impact may be. The evaluation is primarily based on the consideration of:
   (a) The impacts which are highly expected from an action, a type of project or an activity according to the experience on similar projects and
   (b) The uniqueness of the conditions in which the programme is implemented, such as those identified in the current state of the environment.
2. **Scale-Direction of Impact:** Each action can have zero, positive or negative direction impacts, which may have different Scale, being strong or weak regarding the degree of intensity. The variation of the intensity is associated with the main scale of the project, the perception of the changes that are expected to bring about in critical factors, and the importance of the parameter that affects the type of area.

   It is noted that, besides clear negative or positive impacts, ambiguous or mixed impacts may be identified and have one or both of the following characteristics:

   a) Have a positive effect on one environmental parameter, but negative on another. This case occurs often in actions involving different impacts direction during construction and operation phase (+/-).

   b) The scale and the direction of the impact depends on certain conditions which will be primarily determined by the specificity of actions. In these cases, beyond the identification of actions, those conditions will be investigated in order to be proposed as measures to improve the environmental performance of the programme (see Chapter 8)
3. **Duration:** It refers to the amount of time that the impact will last. Short term duration usually happens during construction phase (eg, noise from machinery, dust, etc.), while Long term duration mostly happens in some cases during the operation phase.. As medium-term impacts are the impacts that occur after a critical concentration of a factor that creates disturbance.
4. **Reversibility:** It refers to the ability of the Priority or Specific Objective elements to prevent, reduce or offset or restore to the previous state of the environmental objective in the case either that the related action ends/ stops functioning or suitable mitigation measures are implemented. This criterion is not used for positive impacts.
5. **Cross- border dimension:** Refers to the spatial extent of the impacts, whether they affect both countries areas or one country only (local impact).

6. **Sequence**: It refers to the type of expected impacts, whether they are primary or secondary impacts. Primary impacts happen near the Programme implementation area and concurrently with it. Secondary impacts of the Programme may occur because of the Programme implementation but in a distant geographical area or at another time.
7. **Interaction:** Refers to the cumulative or synergistic nature of the impact and the cumulative effects that may arise by the implementation and coexistence of two or more impacts and how their scale is affected.

The above criteria, their rating and the symbols that will be used to assess the environmental impact of the IPA III Programme "Greece – Albania 2021-2027", are illustrated in Table 7-1.

The assessment and evaluation of the impacts occurring by the programme's implementation, will take into consideration the content of the IPA III Programme "Greece-Albania 2021-2027" and the environmental status of the eligible area, as it's described in Chapter 6. The relevant analysis will result in a number of environmental parameters, identified to have a negative or positive impact. These findings will be presented in Table 7-2.

Table 7-1: Impact Assessment Symbols

Criterion		Abbreviation	Evaluation rank	Symbol
1	Probability	**Prob**	Very Probable	**+ +**
			Probable	**+**
			Non Probable	**0**
2	Scale-Direction	**Scale**	Large scale Negative impact	**- -**
			Small scale Negative impact	**-**
			No impact	**0**
			Large scale Positive impact	**+ +**
			Small scale Positive impact	**+**
3	Duration	**Dur**	Long term or permanent impact	**> >**
			Short term or temporal impact	**>**
			No impact	**0**
4	Reversibility	**Rev**	Reversible	**+**
			Irreversible	**-**
			No impact	**0**
5	Cross Border dimension	**Cross**	Cross border impact	**B**
			Non Cross border impact-Local	**L**
			No impact	**0**

6	Sequence	**Seq**	Primary	**P**
			Secondary	**S**
			No impact	**0**
7	Interaction	**Int**	Cumulative	**CU**
			Synergistic	**SY**
			No interaction	**n-I**
			No impact	**0**

7.3 Do no significant harm (DNSH)

Before the strategic environmental impact assessment which will follow, the Programme will be first evaluated according to the **"Do no significant harm (DNSH)" principle**.

According to the **Taxonomy regulation** "The Funds should support activities that would respect the climate and environmental standards and priorities of the Union and would do no significant harm to environmental objectives within the meaning of Article 17 of Regulation (EU) No 2020/852 "().

In order to implement the DNSH principle, the following environmental objectives will be examined, as defined in Article 17 of the Taxonomy Regulation.

1. Climate change mitigation
2. Climate change adaptation
3. Sustainable use and protection of water and marine resources
4. Circular economy
5. Pollution prevention and control
6. Protection and restoration of biodiversity and ecosystems

The DNSH principle evaluation is presented in the next table. As it is shown, the evaluation is based on the answer given on a specialized question which is addressed to each environmental objective.

Table 7-2: Environmental Assessment of the Programme using DNSH objectives

Questions		Answer	Documentation of DO NO SIGNIFICANT HARM
Climate change mitigation	Is the Programme expected to lead in significant GHG emissions?	NO	The energy sector is a key factor for the development of 2030 energy and climate policies, for both countries. Greece has the National plan for Energy and Climate (NPEC) until 2030 which includes targets to reduce its GHG emissions as well as saving energy and improving energy efficiency performance. Albania does not have a NPEC published yet. The implementation of the programme is in line with the above guidelines and it will not lead to significant GHG emissions.

Climate change adaptation	Is the Programme expected to lead to an increased adverse impact of the current climate and the expected future climate, on the activity itself or on people, nature and assets?	NO	In the context of climate adaptation, prevention and preparedness measures, awareness campaigns for disaster risk management, flood protection and the development of early warning systems, constitute significant challenges in the eligible area. The programme is in line with the above guidelines.
Sustainable use and protection of water and marine resources	Is the Programme going to be detrimental to the good status or the good ecological potential of bodies of water, including surface water and groundwater, or to the good environmental status of marine waters?	NO	In the cross-border area, investment needs should be identified, enhancing the sustainable water management. Investments and interventions are considered very important for the development of green infrastructure for the management of wastewater; including surface water and groundwater. Through the programme, cooperation actions may implement for the elimination of soil, air and water pollution.
Circular economy	Is the Programme expected to lead to significant inefficiencies in the use of materials or in the direct or indirect use of natural resources, or if it significantly increases the generation, incineration or disposal of waste, or if the long-term disposal of waste may cause significant and long-term environmental harm?	NO	The environmental resources protection, is a key factor for the overall development of the eligible area. The transition to a circular economy can be strengthen by the cooperation of the two members in the specific fields for example of sustainable production and consumption of products, less waste with greater value, etc.; which is vital for the environmental sustainability of the Region.
Pollution prevention and control	Is the Programme expected to lead to a significant increase in emissions of pollutants into air, water or land?	NO	The cooperation actions for the reduction of the air, soil, noise and water pollution are expected to fulfil the eligible area's needs.
Protection and restoration of biodiversity and ecosystems	Is the Programme going to be significantly detrimental to the good condition and resilience of ecosystems, or detrimental to the conservation status of habitats and species, including those of Union interest?	NO	The protection of the natural environment and biodiversity, is the baseline priority of both countries, which is brought in alignment with the EU Biodiversity Strategy and the EU Forest Strategy. Cooperation actions and exchange of good practices should be implemented in the frame of protection and prevention of the natural environment e.g. in the forest environment; In particular, significant attention should be given to the raise of social awareness and the involvement of the society in the above issues.

7.4 Environmental Impact Assessment

The evaluation which is performed in the following table illustrates that the programme demonstrates a clear compatibility with the objectives of the Europe 2030 Strategy and the proposed Eighth EU Environmental Action Programme. Moreover, the programme has adopted environmental sustainability as a horizontal principle.
The analysis of the Policy Objectives followed by the environmental Impact assessment evaluation in tabular form, are following.

PO2: A greener, low-carbon Europe by promoting clean and fair energy transition, green and blue investment, the circular economy, climate adaptation and risk prevention and management

- SO1.1: Enhancing biodiversity, green infrastructure in the urban environment, and reducing pollution
- SO1.2**:** Promoting climate change adaptation and disaster risk prevention, resilience taking into account eco-system based approaches
- SO1.3: Promoting access to water and sustainable water management
- SO 1.4: Promoting the transition to a circular and resource efficient economy

Potential actions are likely to have large-scale positive effects on biodiversity, flora-and fauna. The actions promoted in the programme, contain investments for the protection and enhancement of natural resources, which will effect positively air, soil and water resources. For instance, actions for the restoration, protection and efficient management of natural protected areas, including Natura sites, with a focus on endangered species and the promotion of measures for reducing pollution (waste collection, recycling, waste separation and reuse) are strongly supporting the preservation of the natural environment. As a result, these actions will have cumulative positive effects in the preservation of protected species and forest ecosystems. Programme's area includes protected areas with rich natural resources and biodiversity (e.g cross-border areas of Prespa Lakes), less-Known ecosystems, areas for which appropriate measures are needed in order to improve the air quality, industrial areas with lignite extraction activities, etc. Programme's actions in such areas promote eco-tourism, enhance investments of green infrastructure and as a result create new jobs and contribute to the sustainable development of the regions. Positive long-term effects are expected for the protection of biodiversity, the reduction of GHGs and air pollutants, the reduction of flood risks, the adaptation to climate change, the improvement of despoiled landscapes and the governance of the areas by the means of the cooperation of all involved stakeholders of both countries in local and regional level.

In the field of green infrastructure, "Circular Economy Parks-Smart Cities" is a project idea of strategic importance that could have a broader impact on the cross-border area is the development of both circular economy parks and the implementation of intelligent solutions for supporting smart cities. Such a project can offer to the population of the cross-border area access to new and improved green infrastructure and subsequently supporting the reduction of pollution in the cross-border regions. Furthermore, the actions promoted in the programme are expected to introduce climate-friendly, resource-efficient and

economically viable waste management. In this frame, positive impacts will arise promoting sustainable development with actions that keep the carbon footprint low.

Both countries have adopted ambitious climate objectives. The programme is going to support synergies in order to adapt climate charge measures as well as prevent and manage related risks that the area faces. These actions will lead to a primarily positive impact regarding climate change and protection of natural ecosystems. The preservation of protected species will be strengthen, consisting a positive impact, which is indirect though significant for the protection of the biodiversity. The extent and consistency of forest ecosystems which are vulnerable to wildfires will be effected positively and the multi-functional role of forests will be strengthened. These actions will have a strongly positive impact in raising the awareness and education regarding civil protection and disaster management, as well as, the implementation of early warning systems, will have a positive impact in the natural environment in the aspects of air, ground and water quality preservation and enhancement.

Programme includes actions related to the effective utilization of water resources and water quality which will lead to primary or secondary positive impacts regarding all socio-economic and environmental factors. Redistribution, storage, saving and reuse water is of high importance for citizens, for natural ecosystems and for sectors depended on water's quantities like industry, agriculture, tourism. Water's quality and prevention of water pollution from all human activities are also common challenges, so actions like the implementation of wastewater treatment plans in order to prevent the disposal of wastewater directly into rivers or the sea, the investment into sectoral measures at source, raising awareness will effect positively to all environmental parameters.

Actions are also included for more efficient use of resources focusing on the recovery, more recycling and waste separation in the concept of circular economy. The creation of the "Circular Economy Park" supports the "Just Transition Development plan" for the region of Western Macedonia. Actions like these, promote a climate friendly, resource efficient and economically viable waste management and in the same time contribute in the sustainable growth of the cooperation area by the creation of new jobs.

Table 7-3: Environmental Impact Evaluation for PO2

Impact Evaluation of SO 1.1 , SO 1.2, SO 1.3 and SO 1.4								
Environmental parameter	**Environmental Objective-Question**	**Prob**	**Scale**	**Dur**	**Rev**	**Cross**	**Seq**	**Int**
Is the implementation of the SO expected to affect:								
Biodiversity - flora- fauna	**B1**: The extent and consistency (internal) of protected areas?	++	++	>>	0	B	P	CU
	B2: the conservation of habitats and protected species of flora and fauna?	++	++	>>	0	B	P	CU

Impact Evaluation of SO 1.1 , SO 1.2, SO 1.3 and SO 1.4								
Environmental parameter	**Environmental Objective-Question**	**Prob**	**Scale**	**Dur**	**Rev**	**Cross**	**Seq**	**Int**
Is the implementation of the SO expected to affect:								
	B3: The extent and consistency (internal) of forest ecosystems?	++	++	>>	0	B	P	CU
	B4 : The maintenance of racial or genetic diversity, richness and composition of populations of wildlife species?	++	++	>>	0	B	P	CU
Population - Public Health	**P1**: the population demographics?	+	+	>>	0	L	S	SY
	P2: the population employment?	++	++	>>	0	L	P	CU
	P3: the population education level?	++	++	>>	0	L	S	CU
	P4: The level of public health services and the public health protection?	++	++	>>	0	L	S	CU
	P5: The exposure of individuals to new or increased sources of pollutants, radiations or other substances or energy that may be harmful to human?	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
Soil	**G1**: ground stability and geomorphology?	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
	G2: ground quality against pollution from waste and wastewater?	++	++	>>	0	B	P	CU
	G3: Effective waste management and compliance with the European obligations	++	++	>>	0	L	P	CU
Waters	**W1**: inland and coastal waters hydromorphology?	+	+	>>	0	B	S	n-l
	W2: water resources efficiency?	++	++	>>	0	B	P	CU
	W3: waters quality against pollution from waste and wastewater?	++	++	>>	0	B	P	CU

Impact Evaluation of SO 1.1 , SO 1.2, SO 1.3 and SO 1.4								
Environmental parameter	**Environmental Objective-Question**	**Prob**	**Scale**	**Dur**	**Rev**	**Cross**	**Seq**	**Int**
Is the implementation of the SO expected to affect:								
Air, climate and climate change	**AC1**: the air quality?	+	++	>>	0	B	S	n-I
	AC2: the climate change adaptation?	++	++	>>	0	B	P	SY
	AC3: the climate change mitigation?	++	++	>>	0	B	P	SY
	AC4: The achievement of the targets for renewable energy and energy efficiency?	++	++	>>	0	L	S	SY
Material Assets - Infrastructure	**M1:** The value of land, the public character and access to public goods?	+	++	>>	0	B	S	CU
	M2: The balanced territorial development (retaining population and income) and relationships of town - countryside?	++	++	>>	0	B	S	CU
	M3: the infrastructure?	+	++	>>	0	L	S	n-I
Cultural Heritage	**H1**: the protection and enhancement of cultural sites - monuments?	+	++	>>	0	L	S	n-I
Landscape	**L1**: The existing character of the landscape?	+	+	>	0	L	S	n-I
	L2: the enhancement of natural landscape quality?	+	+	>	0	L	S	n-I
	L3: The commitments of protection of the coastal zone?	+	++	>>	0	B	P	CU
Noise	**N1**: the noise levels?	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
	N2: the protection of people from noise pollution?	+	+	>>	0	L	S	n-I
	S1: the increase of the GDP while keeping low carbon footprint?	++	++	>>	0	B	P	CU

Impact Evaluation of SO 1.1 , SO 1.2, SO 1.3 and SO 1.4								
Environmental parameter	**Environmental Objective-Question**	**Prob**	**Scale**	**Dur**	**Rev**	**Cross**	**Seq**	**Int**
Is the implementation of the SO expected to affect:								
Sustainable Development	**S2**: promoting the SDGs of UN 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development?	++	++	>>	0	B	P	CU
Interrelationship	The interrelationship of the above parameters?	+	+	>>	0	B	P	CU

PO3: A more Connected Europe, with strategic transport and digital networks

- SO2.1: Developing sustainable, climate resilient, intelligent and intermodal national, regional and local mobility, including improved access to TEN-T and cross-border mobility

The accessibility to the main nodes and transport corridors is still limited especially for rural and peripheral regions, including those that cross borders. The development of transport services shall have a positive effect on the population considering safety conditions, demographics and employment; promoting a balanced territorial development and relationship of town-countryside. The development of smart and sustainable transport services will create connections and will remove bottlenecks in order to ensure good accessibility. In line with the EU Green Deal directions which define a 90% reduction of transport emissions until 2050, these actions will have a positive impact in CO2 reduction and long-time enhancing air quality.

Slightly negative impacts may arise in the construction or modernization face of the included infrastructures for the development of the transport network. These projects may have temporal negative impacts in some environmental parameters like emissions of air pollutants and noise levels and will last only during the construction face.

Actions supporting and promoting “smart” maritime and road transport systems will improve the accessibility of isolated areas, will provide opportunities for the development of tourism, the improvement of business environment and mainly safe access for the area’s residents. Sharing good practices and developing sustainable solutions for improvement of regional mobility services, will increase the public interest and the resilience in times of emergency circumstances.

Table 7-4: Environmental Impact Assessment of PO3

Impact Evaluation of SO2.1

Environmental parameter	Environmental Objective-Question	Prob	Scale	Dur	Rev	Cross	Seq	Int
Is the implementation of the SO expected to affect:								
Biodiversity - flora- fauna	**B1**: The extent and consistency (internal) of protected areas?	+	-/+	>	+	B	S	n-I
	B2: the consertation of habitats and protected species of flora and fauna?	+	+	>	0	B	S	n-I
	B3: The extent and consistency (internal) of forest ecosystems?	+	-/+	>	0	B	S	n-I0
	B4: The maintenance of racial or genetic diversity, richness and composition of populations of wildlife species?	+	+	>	0	B	S	n-I
Population - Public Health	**P1**: the population demographics?	++	++	>>	0	B	S	CU
	P2: the population employment?	++	++	>>	0	B	S	CU
	P3: the population education level?	+	+	>>	0	B	S	CU
	P4: The level of public health services and the public health protection?	+	+	>>	0	B	S	CU
	P5: The exposure of individuals to new or increased sources of pollutants, radiations or other substances or energy that may be harmful to human?	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
Soil	**G1**: ground stability and geomorphology?	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
	G2: ground quality against pollution from waste and wastewater?	+	-/+	>	+	L	S	n-I
	G3: Effective waste management and compliance with the European obligations	+	++	>>	0	L	S	CU
Waters	**W1**: inland and coastal waters hydromorphology?	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
	W2: water resources efficiency?	+	+	>>	0	B	S	n-I
	W3: waters quality against pollution from waste and wastewater?	+	+	>>	0	L	S	CU
Air, climate and climate change	**AC1**: the air quality?	+	-/+	>	+	B	S	n-I
	AC2: the climate change adaptation?	++	++	>>	0	B	P	n-i
	AC3: Climate change mitigation by the reduction of GHGs emissions and the increase of CO2 absorption?	++	-/++	>>	+	B	P	CUI

	AC4: The achievement of the targets for renewable energy and energy efficiency?	+	++	>>	0	L	S	n-I
Material Assets - Infrastructure	**M1:** The value of land, the public character and access to public goods?	++	++	>>	0	B	S	CU
	M2: The balanced territorial development (retaining population and income) and relationships of town - countryside?	++	++	>>	0	B	S	CU
	M3: the infrastructure?	+	++	>>	0	L	S	CU
Cultural Heritage	**H1**: the protection and enhancement of cultural sites - monuments?	+	+	>>	0	L	S	n-I
Landscape	**L1**: The existing character of the landscape?	+	-/+	>	+	L	S	n-I
	L2: the enhancement of natural landscape quality?	+	+	>>	0	L	S	n-I
	L3: The commitments of protection of the coastal zone?	+	++	>>	0	B	P	n-I
Noise	**N1**: the noise levels?	+	-/+	>	+	L	S	n-I
	N2: the protection of people from noise pollution?	+	+	>>	0	L	S	n-I
Sustainable Development	**S1**: the increase of the GDP while keeping low carbon footprint?	++	++	>>	0	B	P	CU
	S2: promoting the SDGs of UN 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development?	++	++	>>	0	B	S	CU
Interrelationship	The interrelationship of the above parameters?	+	+	>>	0	B	P	CU

PO4: A more social and inclusive Europe implementing the European Pillar of Social Rights

- SO3.1: Enhancing the role of culture and sustainable tourism in economic development, social inclusion and social innovation
- SO3.2: Ensuring equal access to health care and fostering resilience of health systems, including primary care, and promoting the transition from institutional to family and community-based care

Tourism sector is linked to economic, social and environmental aspects. The implementation of innovative technologies in the tourism sector, and the development of eco-tourism will support the creation of new jobs and new green infrastructures. It wiil possibly increase the number of visitors in the eligible area, which can lead to relatively environmental negative impacts in the protection of the natural environment and sensitive ecosystems. These are indirect impacts which can be avoided or limited, by the implementation of the appropriate measures. Especially eco-tourism can support the conservation of protected areas by the implementation and adoption of revenues for these areas.

The programme is going to enhance the role of culture and tourism with a focus to sustainable tourism taking into account advanced technologies and the potential offered in the frame of the new reality that has occurred since the pandemic outbreak. The proposed actions will aim in this frame to promote sustainable and thematic cultural routes at regional as well as macro-regional level by further distributing tourism flows. The implementation of these objectives will be aligned with the goals of UN 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development, leaving a strongly positive impact in this parameter.

The promotion of sustainable tourism and social innovation in the cultural heritage sectors is achieved by actions to support youth and unemployed, aiming at gaining skills and professional qualifications in the field of tourism market and cultural tourism, as one of the fastest growing segments of the tourism industry. Against this background, the workforce that is employed in the sectors of tourism and culture will need to have the necessary capacities and enhanced skills. This will have a positive impact in the population in terms of education and improvement of skills. In addition, these actions will lead as well to the protection and enhancement of cultural sites- monuments.

The programme is going to support joint synergies for the reinforcement the health sector and services in order to ensure better access to such systems in the Greece-Albania area. The Programme's strategy promotes the use of technology that will allow the provision of better and affordable health services, mainly at the level of prevention and monitoring. The integration of ICT also in the health systems, which are lagging behind in terms of the application of digital technologies will have a positive and great in scale impact in public health. In this frame, the programme will support the increase of the number of services of general interest (for example hospitals, primary schools and train stations) that are also located in disadvantageous areas. In this way, the transition to a more social and inclusive GR-AL area is going to be promoted, and the programme will have positive impacts in the sector of infrastructure by enhancing the public character and access to public goods.

Table 7-5: Environmental Impact Assessment of PO4

Impact Evaluation of SO 3.1 and SO 3.2								
Environmental parameter	**Environmental Objective-Question**	**Prob**	**Scale**	**Dur**	**Rev**	**Cross**	**Seq**	**Int**
Is the implementation of the SO expected to affect:								
Biodiversity - flora- fauna	**B1**: The extent and consistency (internal) of protected areas?	+	-/+	>	+	B	S	n-l
	B2: the conservation of habitats and protected species of flora and fauna?	+	-/+	>	+	B	S	n-l
	B3: The extent and consistency (internal) of forest ecosystems?	+	-/+	>	+	B	S	n-l

	B4: The maintenance of racial or genetic diversity, richness and composition of populations of wildlife species?	+	-/+	>	+	B	S	n-l
Population - Public Health	**P1**: the population demographics?	+	+	>>	0	L	S	SY
	P2: the population employment?	+	++	>>	0	B	S	SY
	P3: the population education level?	+	++	>>	0	B	S	SY
	P4: The level of public health services and the public health protection?	++	++	>>	0	B	P	SY
	P5: The exposure of individuals to new or increased sources of pollutants, radiations or other substances or energy that may be harmful to human?	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
Soil	**G1**: ground stability and geomorphology?	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
	G2: ground quality against pollution from waste and wastewater?	+	++	>>	0	L	S	n-l
	G3: Effective waste management and compliance with the European obligations	+	++	>>	0	L	S	n-l
Waters	**W1**: inland and coastal waters hydromorphology?	+	+	>	0	L	S	n-l
	W2: water resources efficiency?	+	+	>>	0	B	S	CU
	W3: waters quality against pollution from waste and wastewater?	+	+	>>	0	B	S	CU
Air, climate and climate change	**AC1**: the air quality?	+	-/+	>	+	L	S	n-l
	AC2: the climate change adaptation?	+	+	>>	0	B	S	CU
	AC3: Climate change mitigation by the reduction of GHGs emissions and the increase of CO2 absorption?	+	+	>>	0	B	S	CU
	AC4: The achievement of the targets for renewable energy and energy efficiency?	+	+	>>	0	L	S	CU
Material Assets - Infrastructure	**M1**: The value of land, the public character and access to public goods?	+	++	>>	0	L	S	CU
	M2: The balanced territorial development (retaining population and income) and relationships of town - countryside?	++	++	>>	0	L	S	CU
	M3: the infrastructure?	++	++	>>	0	L	P	CU

Cultural Heritage	**H1**: the protection and enhancement of cultural sites - monuments?	++	++	>>	0	B	P	n-l
Landscape	**L1**: The existing character of the landscape?	+	-/+	>	+	L	S	n-l
	L2: the enhancement of natural landscape quality?	+	+	>	0	L	S	n-l
	L3: The commitments of protection of the coastal zone?	+	+	>	0	L	S	n-l
Noise	**N1**: the noise levels?	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
	N2: the protection of people from noise pollution?	+	+	>>	0	L	S	n-l
Sustainable Development	**S1**: the increase of the GDP while keeping low carbon footprint?	++	++	>>	0	B	P	CU
	S2: promoting the SDGs of UN 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development?	++	++	>>	0	B	P	CU
Interrelationship	The interrelationship of the above parameters?	+	+	>>	0	B	P	CU

In order to protect the environment and the quality of life, projects under the Interreg Cross-Border Cooperation Programme Greece-Albania 2021-2027, which are listed in Annex I (or Annex II) of Directive 2011/92/EU (EIA Directive) shall be made subject to an assessment in accordance with Articles 5-10 of the above mentioned Directive. The effects of such a project on the environment should be assessed in order to take account of concerns to protect human health, to contribute by means of a better environment to the quality of life, to ensure maintenance of the diversity of species, to maintain the reproductive capacity of the ecosystem as a basic resource for life and to achieve the Climate objectives of Paris Agreement both on mitigation and adaptation fields. For such projects, the evaluation of an Environmental Impact Assessment Study (provided by the developer of the project) is needed and the competent authority or authorities in Greece and Albania shall adopt for such projects all appropriate and necessary measures in national or/and transboundary level in order to ensure the implementation of the prevention and precautionary principle.

8 MITIGATION MEASURES AND MONITORING

8.1 MITIGATION MEASURES

The prevention, reduction and mitigation of environmental impacts of the Programme is realized through two main mechanisms: a) the environmental permitting of projects and activities as it is in force and b) the creation of special provisions and / or conditions that will be applied in the implementation of the programme and will be integrated in the management processes (projects approvals etc).

a) Environmental permitting of projects and activities.

The impacts of each project are controlled by the environmental permitting process as it is in force in Europe acquis and is specialized on the implementation procedures of the institutional framework of the two countries. The approval of a project in the programme does not modify its obligations according to the Environmental Permitting, under which specific terms and conditions of its implementation are imposed. The relevant Environmental Impact Assessment Reports (EIA) should (not exclusively) include the following issues:

- Compliance with the specific emission limit values of pollutant loads and concentrations for air, water and soil in accordance with the applicable provisions.
- Compliance with the specific limit values of noise.
- Compliance with national or regional planning for the environment, such as waste management plan, the basin management plans of the WFD, etc.
- The suitability of locating in accordance with the approved land use plans and building restrictions.
- Taking into account all the necessary measures that are provided by the legislation in relation to the prevention and reduction of pollution of protected areas, sea and forest.
- Projects that are located in areas included in the Natura2000 network (as SCI or SPA), will have to comply with Article 6.3 of Habitats Directive 92/43/EEC, that is: *"Any plan or project not directly connected with or necessary to the management of the site but likely to have a significant effect on it, either individually or together with other projects, it is should be estimated regarding its impacts on the site by taking into account its conservation objectives*''.

b) Specific measures in order to protect the environment.

- Proposals that finance enterprises (innovation - entrepreneurship - competitiveness) and that include (in addition to the mandatory rules of the environmental law) investment in "green infrastructure and technologies" (eg, use of geothermal energy etc), bioclimatic principles and/or promote the reduction and reuse of materials (according to the hierarchy of waste management), would be highly desirable to be primed during the project selection process.
- In the process of specifying and selecting clusters, it should be considered to include enterprises that manage products or waste that are produced throughout the value chain.

- The actions of tourism development or enhancement of natural resources within Natura 2000 areas should be consistent with the management plan areas. In cases, where the projects are listed in areas with Management Agency, its opinion is necessary. In any case, it should be documented that the increase of visiting the protected ecosystems for tourism or other purposes does not have impact on the conservation status.
- Appropriate measures should be taken for technical projects that are implemented within the coastal marine area and may cause either a water quality pollution or a disruption of benthic substrate. Such measures should prevent and reduce the potential pollution of waters and the sediment.

More specifically, the aforementioned mitigation measures should address all the environmental parameters that might be affected by the projects of the Programme, according to the assessments of chapter 7.

Table 8-1 Proposed measures to mitigate environmental impacts

1	Biodiversity	• Utilization of EIA procedures to avoid damages to natural areas, NATURA 2000 and habitats • Integrate biodiversity protection criteria in the selection process of proposals for inclusion in the INTERREG Programme Greece-Albania 2021-2027 (e.g planting native species, actions on the promotion of the environment, environmental awareness and education, information material on protected species) • Provide advice to stakeholders to improve their proposals in terms of biodiversity protection • Integrate ecodesign criteria, environmental management and sustainable natural resource management in the selection of proposals for inclusion in the INTERREG Programme Greece-Albania (e.g bioclimatic design, implementation of Environmental Management Systems, reuse of excavated material, installation of energy and water saving systems) • Provide advice to stakeholders in terms of achieving the above objectives
2	Population-Human health	• reduce dust emissions and dispersion during construction • promote projects that enhance human physical activities (sports, cycling, running, walking)
3	Soil	• Encourage the use of clean technologies, practices to reduce waste and avoid toxic waste disposal, oily substances or salts in the soil. • Promoting entrepreneurship in introducing innovation in solid waste management in developing R & D and specialized services in the sector • Measures to protect soils from desertification • Reuse of excavation soils for backfilling
4	Water	• Encourage the use of clean technologies, practices to reduce wastewater and avoid waste disposal in the aquatic environment. • Encourage the introduction of technologies for reuse and saving water • Encouraging entrepreneurship in the sector of environmental management and protection of water resources

5	Air, Climate and climate change	• Encourage the use of clean technologies, replacement with cleaner fuels, installing pollution filters etc. • Encourage the use of RES • Encourage the use of public transport • Inclusion criteria for energy saving and reducing greenhouse gas production in the selection process of proposals for inclusion in the INTERREG Programme Greece-Albania 2021-2027 (eg RES, use or replacement of equipment with energy-saving devices, actions for raising awareness and education for the public and business on climate change) • Provide advice to stakeholders in terms of achieving the above objectives and the need to reduce traffic volumes in relation to the movement of work force, raw materials and products
6	Infrastructure-Tangible Assets	• Encourage the use of local population workers in construction phase
7	Cultural Heritage	• Avoid installation of disturbing activities within or crossing areas of cultural interest • Use features that provide actions for the development of the tourism sector for the promotion and protection of monuments and sites of cultural interest • Take measures so that the improved accessibility to sites and cultural events areas will not have a negative impact to the cultural environment
8	Landscape	• The INTERREG Programme Greece-Albania should introduce selection criteria of proposals for the establishment of enterprises in statutory or degraded areas, protection of rural and urban landscape and the development of green infrastructure (eg installation of plants at industrial or business parks, regeneration or creating of green areas, use of clean technologies, use of energy and water-saving technologies, waste and waste-water management) • Advising stakeholders to protect the landscape from degradation
9	Noise	• Use of noise reduction techniques during construction and operation phases
10	Sustainable development	• Promotion of projects which combine development with environmental friendly features

8.2 MONITORING

The Monitoring System includes all the relevant environmental indicators per environmental parameter (e.g. biodiversity, air quality and climate change, soil, water, landscape and culture, etc) and identifies the authorities that carry out the monitoring as well as the frequency of monitoring.

Data collection is suggested to be based on two sources: **(a)** primary data resulted from measuring environmental parameters and **(b)** assessment of environmental indicators.

The process of finding data through measuring is possible to involve the Regional Authorities (Regions), but also the State Authorities (e.g. Ministry of Environment), Local Authorities, scientific and professional bodies and utilities (e.g. landfills, wastewater treatment plants). Measuring environmental indicators is a complex process; either it is a regular or, even more, a continuous process.

The Regional Directorates should have a key role in regard with the data management and dissemination. In this context, the respective Departments must plan and act as a hub for the collection, analysis and dissemination of information. In particular, the role of the Regional Departments should include the following:

- Data collection from measurements performed by the Regional Services, either on a permanent or a temporary basis.
- Primary data collection performed by regional utilities (e.g. landfills, wastewater treatment plants, Municipal Enterprises for Water Supply and Sewerage, Public Power Corporation, Management bodies of protected areas).
- Primary data collection performed by public administration (e.g. National Monitoring System for the surface water quality, etc.)
- Primary data collection performed by scientific and other bodies.
- Analysis and synthesis of data in order to draw conclusions on the environmental state within the Region.
- Data storage and development of time series in order to monitor environmental status over time.
- Data dissemination through appropriate reports, according to the current legislation or/and Regional decisions. These reports are intended to **(a)** meet the relevant requirements of legislation, **(b)** inform those that participate to the planning and monitoring process of the INTERREG Programme Greece-Albania 2021 - 2027 implementation (decision makers) and **(c)** inform the public affected by the INTERREG Programme.

It is noted that, as mentioned before, the impact monitoring of INTERREG Programme Greece-Albania 2021 - 2027 will be carried out, where possible, using data derived from:

- The existing network for monitoring environmental parameters of the Ministry of Environment of the two countries or other bodies. Some indicative monitoring networks are:
  - Air pollution quality,
  - Water quality (surface waters, ground waters, coastal bathing waters).
- Separate and independent studies for identifying the impact of the overall program or part of it.
- Reports provided by contractors, either primary or based on data included in the EIA of the projects funded by the INTERREG Programme Greece-Albania 2021-2027.

The environmental indicators for each environmental parameter, the monitoring body and the monitoring frequency are provided in the next table. All indicators values should be measured or estimated **before the project** included in the Programme **- during construction** (if the project has a construction phase) **- during operation** (or implementation).

Table 8-2 Monitoring Indicators

No	ENVIROMENTAL PARAMETER	ENVIRONMENTAL INDICATOR	MONITORING AUTHORITY	MONITORING FREQUENCY
01	Biodiversity - fauna- flora	• satisfactory condition of habitats in the area of a project • satisfactory condition of important species population in the area of a project • Area covered by forests	• Management bodies of protected areas • Competent Directorates of Regions	According to the Management Plan (if exists) Annually
02	Population – human health	• Years of healthy life expectancy • Number of occupational accidents • Percentage of people living below the poverty line	• Competent Directorates of Regions	Annually
03	Soils	• Percentage of degraded land • Quantities of waste disposed in landfills • Development of per capita and total waste generation • recycling (paper, glass, BMW14, aluminium)	• Competent Directorates of Regions • Landfill Management Bodies	Annually
	Waters	• Surface Water Quality (N, P, BOD5, COD, SS, TDS, Conductivity, Feacal Colliforms) • Groundwater quality (Nitrate, Phosphate, Conductivity, Heavy Metals) • Bathing waters Quality (Feacal Colliforms, transparency) • Percentage of water recycling or reuse	• Competent Directorates of Regions • WWTP Management Bodies • Ministry of Environment	Sampling and measurements in accordance to the environmental terms of each WWTP. National System of Surface Water Quality Monitoring for Greece According to the Monitoring Programme of bathing water quality on beaches for Greece
05	Air Climatic factors	• Days of exceedance of air quality limits (CO, SOx, NOx, PM10) • Emissions by Source • Greenhouse Gas Emissions • Development of energy demand • Percentage of RES (%) • Evolution of number of passenger vehicles	• Ministry of Environment • Competent Directorates of Regions	Annually
06	Cultural Heritage (including architectural and archaeological heritage)- Landscape	• Number of preserved buildings restored • Number of visitors • Urban green per inhabitant	• Competent Directorates of Regions	Annually

8.3 ASSESSMENT OF THE PROPOSED MONITORING SYSTEM BY THE SEA TEAM

The above basic arrangements provide a sufficient framework for monitoring the Programme implementation in order to identify at an early stage un-foreseen adverse effects and to be able to

undertake appropriate remedial action. They can be used for meeting the requirements of the Article 10 of the SEA Directive. No further monitoring system is proposed in order to avoid potential duplicities in the monitoring.

9 REGULATORY ACT

According to the JMD 107017 of Greek Legislation the issuance of a regulatory act for the environmental approval of the Programme is needed.

This act will contain all the measures and monitoring activities described in chapter 8.

10 DIFFICULTIES DURING THE CONDUCT OF SEA

During the preparation of the Strategic Environmental Assessment (SEA) of the INTERREG PROGRAMME Greece-Albania 2021-2027 the following major difficulties were encountered by the authors of this report:

- the extremely tight time-schedule in relation to the required highly detailed, multi-level and in-depth analysis of strategic planning in a cross-border region and the different cultures, languages and development, environmental policies and legislation, etc.
- the different levels of digital convergence and e-government applications between the two countries which made difficult the direct access to information regarding the application of environmental policies and legislation.

However, the study focused on issues that were considered to have significant effects on the environment of the eligible cross border area and which were analyzed using the most appropriate methodologies and comparative tables. So, all difficulties were finally faced sufficiently and satisfactorily by the authors of this study and according to the Legislation.

11 BASIC STUDIES AND RESEARCHES

This chapter refers to the main studies and research that should be elaborated before the approval of the projects and actions described in the INTERREG Programme Greece- Albania 2021-2027. In this framework, the following studies are recognized not as a prerequisite for the application of the programme but as supportive to the general environmental protection framework and as environmental studies of high priority to set an environmental baseline inventory. Although for few projects of the Program (like the ones that include constructions like infrastructure projects) an Environmental Impact Assessment (EIA) study might be mandatory:

- Special Environmental Studies for all NATURA sites and other areas under national protection regime and the establishment of appropriate five-year management plans.
- Ecological Studies for projects at areas that are included in NATURA network and other protected areas.
- Environmental Impact Assessment studies for all infrastructure projects in the cross-border area of cooperation which may precede or follow the mild measures proposed by the Program.
- Selection and evaluation of environmental indicators to establish a baseline environmental database which would enable benchmarking and ex post evaluation of the program results in specific fields such as water management, conservation status of biodiversity, etc.
- geotechnical studies and surveys,
- surveys mapping the atmospheric and the meteorological environment,
- noise level studies
- systematic recording of protected species of flora and fauna habitats (ecological baseline studies) especially if the region of study is characterized as of high environmental interesting (sites included in the Lists of NATURA 2000, CORINE, Convention Ramsar, SPA, National Forest, etc.).

12 CONSULTATION OUTCOMES

This chapter will be analyzed after the public and services consultation phase.

13 ANNEXES

13.1 BIBLIOGRAPHY

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13.2 MAPS

1. REGIONS COVERED BY THE PROGRAMME
2. CORINE LAND COVER
3. PROTECTED AREAS.

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