



Communication Evaluation Report

Interreg-IPA CBC Romania-Serbia Programme Implementation
Evaluation

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Acronyms

AA	Audit Authority
CU	Certifying Unit
CBC	Cross-border Cooperation
EC	European Commission
EP	Evaluation plan
EQ	Evaluation question
ESIF	European Structural and Investment Funds
ETC	European Territorial Cooperation
EU	European Union
ICT	Information and Communication Technology
IPA	Instrument for Pre-Accession Assistance
JMC	Joint Monitoring Committee
JS	Joint Secretariat
MA	Managing Authority
MRDPA	Ministry of Regional Development and Public Administration
MS	Member States
NA	National Authority
NGO	Non – Governmental Organization
OP	Operational Programme
Programme	Interreg - IPA CBC Romania – Serbia Programme
SO	Specific Objective
RO CBC	Regional Office for Cross Border Cooperation for Romania – Republic of Serbia Border
SWOT	Strengths, Weaknesses, Opportunities, Threats
ToR	Terms of References

Executive summary

This report assesses the communication strategy of the Interreg IPA CBC Romania-Serbia Programme. To carry out the analysis the following sources have been used: programme documents, interviews with the programme bodies, case studies and the outcome emerged by the web-survey to beneficiaries and applicants.

The main findings of the evaluation are the following:

- The communication activities implemented by the programme are in line with the general and specific objectives set in the communication strategy document and in the communication plans. Actually in some case they go beyond the targets.
- The Programme Communication activity support the beneficiaries in the communication activities through a set of tools and initiatives which are perceived by beneficiaries as very useful. The responsivity of the programme authorities is also well appreciated.
- The Programme Communication activity is contributing in increasing the visibility of the programme opportunities among beneficiaries, potential beneficiaries and also the general public. Analysis reveals also the effectiveness of the communication channels adopted by the programme, being the web site and the training sessions the most used ones. However, the programme should focus also on the Facebook page, as it was expressed as a more accessible channel.
- The Programme Communication activity contributes to promote the visibility of the European Union at a good extent.

Prezentul raport vizează evaluarea strategiei de comunicare a Programului Interreg - IPA de Cooperare Transfrontalieră România-Serbia. Pentru elaborarea analizei au fost utilizate următoarele instrumente metodologice: documente de programare, interviuri cu autoritățile programului, studii de caz și rezultatele sondajului online adresat beneficiarilor și aplicanților.

Principalele constatări rezultate din evaluare sunt evidențiate în continuare:

- Activitățile de comunicare implementate la nivelul programului sunt în conformitate cu obiectivele generale și specifice stabilite în strategia de comunicare și în planurile de comunicare. În anumite cazuri, țintele propuse inițial au fost depășite.
- Programul sprijină beneficiarii inclusiv în implementarea activităților de comunicare de la nivel de proiect, printr-un set de instrumente și inițiative care sunt percepute de aceștia ca fiind foarte utile. Capacitatea de răspuns a autorităților programului este bine apreciată.
- Activitatea de comunicare a programului contribuie la creșterea vizibilității privind oportunitățile programului, atât în rândul beneficiarilor, potențialilor beneficiari, cât și în rândul publicului larg. De asemenea, analiza relevă eficiența canalelor de comunicare adoptate de program, cele mai utilizate instrumente fiind site-ul web și sesiunile de instruire. Cu toate acestea, programul ar trebui să-și concentreze atenția inclusiv pe pagina de Facebook, aceasta fiind considerată un canal mai accesibil.

- Activitatea de comunicare a programului contribuie, într-o bună măsură, la promovarea vizibilității Uniunii Europene.

Ovaj izveštaj ima za cilj da proceni komunikacionu strategiju Interreg programa - IPA prekogranične saradnje Rumunja i Srbija. Za izradu analize korišteni su sledeći metodološki alati: programski dokumenti, intervjui sa programskim vlastima, studije slučaja i rezultati internetskog istraživanja upućeni korisnicima i podnosiocima zahteva.

Glavni nalazi evaluacije su navedeni u nastavku:

- Komunikacijske aktivnosti koje se sprovode na nivou programa u skladu su sa opštim i posebnim ciljevima utvrđenim u komunikacijskoj strategiji i u komunikacijskim planovima. U određenim slučajevima, ciljevi prvobitno predloženi bili su prekoračeni.
- Program podržava korisnike, uključujući u sprovođenju komunikacionih aktivnosti na nivou projekta, kroz skup alata i inicijativa koje su po njima shvaćene kao vrlo korisne. Sposobnost na odgovoru programskih vlasti je veoma cenjena.
- Komunikaciona aktivnost programa doprinosi povećanju vidljivosti o mogućnostima programa, kako među korisnicima, potencijalnim korisnicima i široj javnosti. Takođe, analiza otkriva efikasnost komunikacionih kanala usvojenih od strane programa, a najčešće korišćeni alati su web stranica i obučavanja / treninzi. Međutim, program bi trebao usmeriti svoju pažnju čak i na Facebook stranicu koja se smatra pristupačnijim kanalom.
- Komunikaciona aktivnost programa doprinosi, u velikoj meri, da promoviše vidljivost Evropske unije.

Introduction

The *Interreg-IPA CBC Romania-Serbia Programme 2014-2020 implementation evaluation* has been carried out by the independent evaluator ACZ Consulting SRL&t33 SRL, selected following a public tender procedure, launched by the Romanian Ministry of Regional Development and Public Administration. The evaluation contract was signed on 13th of June 2019, having an overall implementation period of 6 months and a total budget of 226.560 lei.

The terms of reference for the present contract defined the objectives of the evaluation and its related evaluation questions. This document is the interim report and it is part of the interim implementation evaluation of the Interreg-IPA CBC Romania-Serbia Programme. Its specific aim is to evaluate the efficiency and effectiveness of the communication strategy and multi-annual communication plans. More specifically, the report's scope is to reply the following evaluation questions:

- 2.1.1. Do the communication activities carried out by the programme authorities lead to the achievement of the general and specific objectives set out in the Communication Strategy?
- 2.1.2. Could more effect be achieved by using different instruments or actions?
- 2.1.3. How effective was the programme in supporting project communication activities?
- 2.1.4. Do communication activities have sufficient impact on the awareness of the beneficiaries/potential beneficiaries of the programme/general public?
- 2.1.5. What could be improved to highlight the EU contribution?

In parallel, the same consortium (ACZ Consulting and t33) is in charge of evaluating the implementation of the Interreg-IPA CBC Romania-Serbia Programme and already an inception report has been delivered covering both topics: implementation and communication.

Since the new programming period 2021-2027 is approaching, the “formative” nature of the evaluation is crucial. In other words, beyond assessing the overall “effectiveness” of the programme, this evaluation identifies lessons and provides useful recommendations for shaping the new CBC programme.

The evaluation implemented the methodologies as defined in the technical offer and in the interim report which provide already a detailed description of the proposed tools. The activity performed for the communication evaluation and the result are described in the following pages.

The communication evaluation exercise covers all the actions undertaken under the Interreg-IPA CBC Romania-Serbia Programme, related to the programming period 2014-2020, until the cut-off date **30th of June 2019**.

2. Methodology

As illustrated by the Table below, and in order to investigate the evaluation of the communication strategy, the evaluator proposed a set of the main methodological tools to use in answering the proposed list of evaluation questions for collecting and analysing information: desk research, interviews, questionnaire, case study and survey. Evaluation findings formulated based on the above-mentioned instruments will be complemented and validated by one focus group with programme management key stakeholders.

Evaluation questions	As apprehended by the evaluator	Desk research	Interviews	Questionnaire survey	Case study
2.1.1. Do the communication activities carried out by the programme authorities lead to the achievement of the general and specific objectives set out in the Communication Strategy?	This question will investigate the communication activities conducted by the programme authorities and whether (and how) these have led to the achievement of the general and specific objectives established in the Communication Strategy.	●	●	●	●
2.1.2. Could more effect be achieved by using different instruments or actions?	This question will investigate whether more effect can be achieved if different instruments and actions are used.	●	●		●
2.1.3. How effective was the programme in supporting project communication activities?	The question aims to identify the effectiveness of the programme in supporting project communication activities.	●	●	●	●
2.1.4. Do communication activities have sufficient impact on the awareness of the beneficiaries/potential beneficiaries of the programme/general public?	This question will evaluate whether the communication activities have a sufficient impact on awareness of the beneficiaries/potential beneficiaries of the Programme. Furthermore, the experts will evaluate the extent to which the objectives of visibility of the programme have been achieved.	●	●	●	●
2.1.5. What could be improved to highlight the EU contribution?	Based on the findings regarding the awareness of the beneficiaries/potential beneficiaries in what concerns the Programme, its interventions and impact on the territory, the evaluators will make proposals for improving the visibility of the Programme.	●	●		●

For administrative matters an interim activity report was submitted containing the activities performed and next steps.

3. Key finding of the analysis

The analysis was articulated in three different activities:

- Screening of the administrative documents and more specifically the Communication Strategy, and the two action plans. Moreover, the main achievements are analyzed along the target set by the strategy.
- Analyzing the result of the interviews with the Programme Authorities and case studies;
- Analyzing the findings of the survey to project beneficiaries and applicants.

3.1 Documental analysis

3.1.a Analysis of the Communication strategy and action plans

General and specific objectives

The main general and specific objectives were explicitly highlighted in the 2019 Communication Strategy for Interreg-IPA CBC Romania-Serbia Programme document, and can be viewed in the table below:

General objective	To support the successful implementation
	To increase public awareness
	To increase potential beneficiary financial / selection understanding
	To ensure transparency in Funds / ensure level of trust of the general public
	To increase the visibility of the Programme
Specific objectives	To ensure the good use of IPA II funds, explaining domains financed and conditions
	To explain all the requirements for beneficiaries
	To ensure that all potential beneficiaries understand horizontal principles aspect
	To inform and train the implementing bodies
	To ensure the visibility of the Programme
	To develop and maintain effective press relations
	To develop effective relations with implementing authorities / relevant institutions
	To ensure visibility of MA, and NA as counterpart
	To report to general public, and annually to the JMC
	To ensure exchange of knowledge and good practices in communication

Source: Communication Strategy for INTERREG – IPA CBC Romania-Serbia Programme

Background

As background to these objectives, there has been newfound appreciation for the importance of information and communication activity in recent years by all of the stakeholders involved in managing EU-funded programmes, and as such a specific plan was needed to ensure appropriate

premises were set for best-practice delivery in this area in the Interreg-IPA CBC RO-RS 2014-2020 Programme.

There is new awareness of the requirement in this area to inform the public about European policy effects at country-level, and to tailor communication around this. Moreover, appropriate and tailored communication is an absolute requirement in the area of technical assistance and programme implementation.

In sum, the Programme communication activity plans needed to involve a range of general and targeted interaction and work with stakeholders, applicants, the broader public and the common media system, towards the ends of building an appreciation in understanding for the programme, and its concomitant support of opportunities.

More specifically, the strategy for communications had to focus on raising cognizance of the new Programme, its PAs, financing mechanisms, and therefore on the development of communication tools to support beneficiaries in understanding these aspects and to relay Programme results.

Each of the objectives must align with the following horizontal principles:

- Sustainable development: Resource-efficient, non-harmful to environment
- Promoting equality: between men and women
- Accessible: To all, including ageing and those with disabilities/special needs
- Generally demographically conscious in economic terms: proposing comms which catalyse employability, productivity, etc.
- Address climate change: Ensuring communications in the face of adverse climate conditions.

Key MA Responsibilities

Specifically, in terms of MA responsibility, required communications activities/objectives (displaying EU emblem at MA and JS premises) were to include:

- arranging a major information function for the operational programme kick-off;
- arranging large annual function highlighting programme funding options, strategies & successes;
- online enumeration of operations in line with Section 1 of Annex XII of Regulation 1303/2013;
- online publication of operations on programme's webpage;
- updating programme's implementation news, including main achievements when appropriate.

Instruments and actions

A multitude of instruments were proposed to provide effective communications. These were listed as follows:

Instruments	
Events	- Meetings - Workshops - Conferences - Seminars - Training sessions - Forums - ECD event - Press conferences - Press visits
Help desk	- Providing general help desk support
Information network	- From multiple sources
Signalling	- Plates with the Programme logo at the headquarters of the beneficiary
Institutional partnerships	- Between relevant institutions
Publications	- Press releases - Leaflets Brochures Manuals Guides
Online	- Email Mailing lists Website Newsletter Social media - Press review
Mass-media	- Interviews - Shows - Press articles
Promotional campaigns	- TV, radio and online campaigns - Press ads - Outdoor Campaigns - Promotional items

Action can be considered in three main types: ICT/General info dissemination actions; Events and promotional; and Meetings and Training. The main actions highlighted which were proposed to be undertaken are as follows:

Actions	
ICT/General Information Dissemination	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Develop website: www.romania-serbia.net
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Social Media connection with relevant target groups: Facebook, YouTube, Twitter, Instagram, Pinterest, SlideShare
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Social media use generally to spread information: Facebook, YouTube, Twitter, Instagram, Pinterest, SlideShare
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Publications: Leaflets, Guidelines, Visual Identity Manual
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Mailing lists
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • E-Bulletin – Newsletters
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Information network
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • List of contracted projects
Events and Promotional	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Launching events
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Publicity and promotion campaign
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Promotional materials
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Signaling
Meetings and Training	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Thematic meetings for potential beneficiaries/ beneficiaries
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Trainings for the representatives of MA, NA, JS, JS Antenna, AA, FLC units / support services within the RO CBC TM

Coherence between the strategy and action plan

There is strong coherence between the two documents. Following from the strategy plan, the action plan sets out the following activities as those which could be supported / accommodated within the priority axis:

- Development of online information ecosystem for the Programme, including promotional and EU visibility materials described in the Strategy:
 - official Programme documents
 - brochures
 - posters
 - objects with EU logo and Programme logo
 - Project implementation information and programming for post-2020
- Posting on the Programme`s website, as per Strategy document.
- Organizing meetings, conferences, workshops, capitalization / other introductory events, as per Strategy document.

Specific objectives from within the action plan are also aligned with the Strategy plan, and surround:

- Ensuring transparency and accuracy of information presented to the public as regards EU project selection / financing and national level financial support to be provided through Programme
- The promotion to the public of the socio-economic effects derived by Programme support
- To highlight to target groups information sources as related to the Programme
- Increasing information target groups receive about funding benefits from previous programme

The indicative measures mentioned in the plan align with the strategy, with the following measures outlined, and the plan assigns responsible bodies to complete the actions:

Objective	Responsible Body
Weekly measurement of website mentioned in Strategy, update of website, collaboration regarding website	MA, JS
Newsletter mentioned in Strategy	MA, JS
Major communications, information, and workshop events to be organized, as per Strategy intention	MA, JS, NA
Promotional/Printed information materials, as considered in Strategy	MA, JS, NA

Support to project communication

Communications support has been outlined in the Communication Strategy for Interreg-IPA CBC Romania-Serbia Programme, where it is noted that the MA must ensure access to appropriate information for all beneficiaries and prospective beneficiaries. This includes recent information, in appreciation of accessibility of digital and other means of communication for potential beneficiaries. This communication support will involve, at minimum:

- Information about funding availabilities and calls for proposals
- Expenditure conditions related to eligibility to qualify for Programme support
- Details on how applications for funding are examined and timelines to expect, and the measures for choosing the operations to be supported
- Contacts at national, regional, and local levels which can provide Programme information
- Potential beneficiaries responsibilities to the public
- Legal implications of accepting funding
- ICT tools provision and support in line with obligations of Annex XII, point 2.2 of Regulation 1303/2013.

Support to EU visibility

The Communications Strategy and the Communications Plan both support EU visibility. The Strategy notes in two separate sections that signage with the Programme logo will be attached at the HQ of each beneficiary office. The Plan mentions how the Programme logo needs to be a key part of the online framework, and makes reference to the fact that as a condition for a consistent publicity, the Programme uses the Visual Identity Manual framework.

3.1.b Analysis of the accomplishments related to communication activities

The following table illustrates the indicators to be achieved through the communication strategy for 2019 and 2023. Until 2018, all output and result indicators for 2019 were achieved, with the indicator “Number of participants in the events” achieving the target for 2023 as well.

Type of indicator	Indicator	2015-2016	2017-2018	Total	Achievement rate 2019	Target value 2019	Target value 2023
Output	No of events for potential applicants / beneficiaries / stakeholders	18 events	30 events	48	120%	40	55
Output	Number of publications issued	1 flyer, 1 poster; 1 Applicants Guide	1 Applicants Guide; 2 types of roll-ups; 1 Brochure; 1 Flyer; 1 Agenda; 1 Notebook.	10	125%	8	16
Output	Number of press releases, interviews, advertisements in all kinds of mass-media	13 press-releases 3 interviews	11 press-releases 3 interviews	24	120%	20	40
Result	Website traffic on programme Internet page www.romaniaserbia.net (page views)	121.959	185.935	307.894	128,3%	240.000	480.000
Result	Number of participants in the events	1.279	1.661	2.940	367,5%	800	1.100

The overachievement of the communication indicators is due to the several activities that were undertaken within the communication strategy. A new website www.romania-serbia.net is dedicated to the Interreg-IPA CBC Romania – Serbia Programme, with a flexible, user-friendly structure for the people from the eligible area. The information is being provided in the three working languages of the programme, Romanian, Serbian and English, and the website is constantly updated with information of high interest for the potential beneficiaries: opportunities for financing, contact

details of the Programmes' managing structures, list of operations, composition of the JMC, Q&As, calendar of the events, legislation modifications, information regarding tender procedures, implementation procedures and instructions useful for beneficiaries, public information etc. Among the relevant and important information that was distributed on the website of the Programme is the Guidelines for Applicants. Two documents were published in 2018 in the Facts and figures section of the Programme website: an electronic newsletter in October 2018 and the brochure published in both electronic and paper format, launched in December 2018. As well, upon request the potential applicants could have received additional information website on all three calls for project proposals by using the contact details from the website.

The website played an important role in promoting the programme, as according to Google Analytics, the web site was accessed by 13.000 visitors. The Facebook page of the programme plays a complementary role to the website, as useful news and information is shared and posted on the social media channel in order to increase the reach of the website.

Email was used to send relevant information towards the media representatives. The result was the generation of approximately 172 articles published in 2017 and 155 journalistic materials published in 2018 on the cross-border cooperation between Romania and Serbia funded by the Programme. Monitoring of the press articles in the central and local media as well as those with online coverage is done constantly. From the statistical analysis, most press articles were published in the first part of 2018 when the promotion of the second call for proposals was at its height and in September, around the EC Day event.

Event organization was another strong pillar of the communication strategy. The Annual Conferences regarding the progress registered in the implementation of the Interreg-IPA CBC Romania – Serbiawere included in each of the annual European Cooperation Day events organized by the Interreg IPA CBC Romania-Serbia Programme bodies. In 2017, EC Day was held in Kikinda, Serbia, with over 1.000 participants, while in 2018, the EC Day event was held in Oravița and was attended by over 500 participants from the eligible area. Meetings with potential applicants were held both at the headquarters of the Joint Secretariat (Helpdesk) and at their locations in order to present the information referring to the calls for proposals launched under the Programme. The promotion of the second call for proposals launched on the 27.11.2017 was carried out by organizing various events in the eligible counties in Romania and districts in Serbia. In total, there were 12 events for the call: 2 Launch events, 2 Partner Search Forums, 8 Workshops, at which 752 potential beneficiaries participated. There were 176 projects submitted for the second call of the programme

Additional information:

- The implementation of VIM was approved through JMC Decision no. 26/4.02.2016 and modified through JMC Decision no. 78/29.05.2018 in order to increase the visibility of the EU flag on promotional and information materials.
- Information and promotion materials for the Interreg-IPA CBC Romania – Serbia Programme were produced and distributed to potential beneficiaries, general public during the events organised. The following items were personalized in 2018:
 - 500 brochures, leaflets, power banks, retractable multi-chargers, weather stations, raincoats,
 - backpacks, cycling reflective tapes, mp3 players, mini Bluetooth speakers;

- 20 posters;
- 10 roll-ups;
- 1000 block-notes USB Memory Sticks gift bags agendas;

3.2 Interviews and case studies

The communication strategy has been evaluated by conducting several interviews with:

- The Joint Secretariat (JS) for the Romania - Serbia IPA Cross-border Cooperation Programme (16/09/2019)
- Managing Authority for the Interreg IPA Cross-border Cooperation Programme Romania-Serbia (09/08/2019 - 13/08/2019);
- Serbian National Authority, represented by the Ministry of European Integration (29/08/2019).

The interviews were articulated at two levels:

- At programme level, by interviewing the stakeholders in charge of implementing communication activities;
- At project level, by collecting information on the perception of the final users (i.e. the beneficiaries).

At programme level, the interviews with the programme bodies allowed to collect the following information:

- The **communication strategy** of the programme has undergone changes regarding the financial allocation. Specifically, in the first version of the strategy, MA had a large budget allocated for communication activities, but during the programme implementation, some difficulties were encountered with the selection of contractors and preparation of related documents, therefore being decided that a significant part of the budget should be directed to JS.

The JS prepares each year, for the JMC reunion, a presentation regarding the evaluation of communication strategy, summarizing the outputs and results and the main communication and promotional activities.

The **communication plan** is prepared for a period of 3 years.

- The programme performed well in **rising interest in the programme financing opportunities**. This fact is substantiated by the impressive number of participants to all the communication events and also by the large number of applications submitted on the 1st and 2nd call for proposals. Thus, the communication and information activities carried out for potential beneficiaries/beneficiaries can be considered adequate and sufficient to support applicants in submitting and implementing the projects.

Communication activities to inform the general public about the programme results were also organised. Press conferences are held periodically and the related outcomes are posted on the ministry and on the programme's official websites. Promotional activities were also carried out during the European Cooperation Day, organised on an annual basis.

- With regard to the application phase, relevant stakeholders were involved starting from the moment when the application guideline was elaborated. Once published in the programme

official web site, a public consultation process was opened where MA, JS and NA bodies answered the questions posed by potential beneficiaries by phone and e-mail.

Thus, all efforts have been taken to ensure that potential beneficiaries were informed in real time. Within the second call for proposals, a series of specific and technical questions were received about the way of downloading the application documents in eMS. In that sense, the MA has prepared some specific topics regarding the use of eMS, the budget structure, the working packages and use of simplified cost option. A special helpdesk service was also activated during the submission of applications within the 1st and 2nd call for proposals. There were also organized different types of seminars (both in Romania and Serbia), workshops and forums for identifying partners, which in the end generated lots of partnerships that were built during these events.

- **Communication channels** used to disseminate information about the programme financing opportunities were the newsletters sent to potential beneficiaries via e-mail. Currently, a series of trainings are being conducted with the persons involved in the programme management/implementation, regarding the EU General Data Protection Regulation (GDPR). Taking into account the norms imposed by this regulation, for the future it is taken into account the option of publishing these newsletters on the programme website, instead of sending them by e-mail. The Facebook social network of the Programme has an important role in promoting not only the Programme's opportunities, but also the results of the projects considered as most performing. The website of the Programme continues to be the most accessed and accessible method of promoting the Programme.
- Concerning the actions to promote the **visibility of the programme**, the MA members help beneficiaries to promote their press releases on the programme's official Facebook page and by facilitating the contact with mass media stakeholders, ensuring a better promotion for their communication and dissemination events. The main body responsible for verifying the elements of visual identity of the projects is the JS. The communication activities carried out by the programme authorities lead to the achievement of the general and specific objectives set out in the Communication Strategy.

At project level, what emerged from the interviews with the beneficiaries in the framework of the case studies analysis is:

- No indicators are foreseen at project level, thus sometimes it was hard to assess the level of achievement of the communication activities.
- Overall, the perception of the beneficiaries on the support of the programme bodies is positive. Only one beneficiary expressed some difficulties encountered to find an appropriate partner for its project and concluded that the programme should emphasize target events to create the proper partnerships.

3.3 On-line survey

The survey targeted project beneficiaries and applicants who have not been successful in order to have a wide spectrum of opinion. In this section, the main findings are synthesised, while in the annex the full analysis is displayed.

In total the respondents were 102. The only applicants were 78 while the beneficiaries were 24, 17 from the first call for proposals, 5 from the second call and 2 from the strategic call. Eventually, all the specific objectives were covered.

Table 1 *Details on respondents, beneficiaries and applicants*

Beneficiaries	N.	%	Applicants	N.	%
Romania	15	63%	Romania	37	47%
Serbia	9	38%	Serbia	41	53%
Total	24		Total	78	

Table 2 *Details on respondents, Calls*

First Call	17	71%
Romania	10	
Serbia	7	
Second Call	5	21%
Romania	3	
Serbia	2	
Call for strategic projects proposals	2	8%
Romania	2	
Serbia	0	

Table 3 *Details on respondents, Specific objectives*

OS	N.	%
1. Employment and labour mobility	2	8%
2. Health and social infrastructure	2	8%
3. Social and cultural inclusion	5	21%
4. Environmental protection and sustainable use of natural resources	4	17%
5. Environmental risks management and emergency preparedness	2	8%
6. Mobility and transport infrastructure and services	3	13%
7. Public utilities infrastructure	2	8%
8. Investments for the growth of the demand of local tourism networks and promotion of innovative tourism activities	3	13%
9. Capacity building initiatives for the improvement of quality and innovation of tourism services and products	4	17%

About the **communication strategy** the key results emerged are

Effectiveness in supporting communication activities

Beneficiaries consider that the **communication activities** implemented by the programme are very efficient in:

- Capitalising project outcome/result (50%);
- Promoting the opportunities offered by the programme (50%);
- Supporting the creation of appropriate partnership (46%)

The contribution in helping the generation of the project idea is a bit weaker (29%).

Room for improvements:

Respondents would like to receive more information on:

State aid issues (29%), control and financial management (17%), monitoring and evaluation (13%) and result dissemination and capitalisation (13%).

The **programme web site** is the channel that both beneficiaries and applicants use most to get informed about the financing opportunities of the programme and it is considered as the most effective among the communication instruments.

Information and training sessions are also highly used: 67% of beneficiaries and 77% of applicants attended them and think they are very effective.

Beneficiaries and applicants highly appreciate the **level of details of the information** for promoting the Interreg Romania-Serbia programme. In particular, 63% of beneficiaries and 54% of applicants consider the information easily accessible and the language used user friendly.

Respondents expressed that the information provided through promotion activities support them to define and implement projects with high impact to a great extent (26% of the applicants and 42% of the beneficiaries).

38 % of applicants that had access to information or communication from the programme authorities related to the use of the eMS platform, considered highly clear and accessible the information communicated.

Concerning **the responsivity of the programme**, beneficiaries and applicants are very satisfied of all the bodies (JS, MA and NA in Serbia). Higher satisfaction was expressed in particular for the JS members (83% of beneficiaries and 72% of applicants).

Applicants consider that **the following subjects should be useful to be approached** during the workshops/session: budget constructions, public procurement and eMS functioning. Beneficiaries instead expressed the need to face the issues regarding state aid and the tender procedures.

Programme visibility and attractiveness

In general, the information provided by the programme is highly appreciated for promoting the programme opportunities. The **promotion materials** (infographics, flyer, catalogues, agenda)

created by the programme is considered very attractive by 54% of beneficiaries and by 44% of applicants.

3.3 Focus groups

The focus groups represented the last stage of the evaluation, the validation. The purpose of the focus groups was for the evaluator to express the key findings from its examination of the programme and to receive feedback from the MA, NA, and other relevant public stakeholders. The first focus group touched on the findings of the evaluation reports, while the second emphasized the overall effectiveness of the programme and proposed recommendations for the next programming period.

During the focus groups, general consensus was reached on the following recommendations:

- The programme structures should mainly focus on the communication channels that proved effective
- The programme bodies should focus more on distributing information through social media as the beneficiaries and potential applicants expressed interest in receiving information through this channel
- To take into account for the next programming period the **introduction of communication indicators at project level**, in order to facilitate the monitoring and evaluation processes
- The need to organise some thematic training sessions on the state aid and the control and financial management

Although it was recommended by the evaluation team that radio, newspaper, and television can highly contribute to promote the visibility of the programme, the programme structures disagreed. The MA implemented communication campaigns at national level but they were not successful as expected. The reaction from the media was very slow and this did not offset the high costs to finance them. In addition to the communication indicators, it does not seem efficient to introduce, at this stage of the programme, new indicators for the beneficiaries.

When organised at local level, the events are more effective, i.e. people are very aware on what the programme is doing. At regional level this awareness is weaker.

Having communication indicators at the level of projects facilitates understanding of what happens at the ground level in terms of dissemination and communications, which are probably the most pervasive capitalisation activities of the programme. Hence, an investigation into “how the project communicates” can be an “evaluation question” to the ex-post evaluator. The results of the evaluation can be re-used to design a specific set of communication indicators for the next programming period.

4. Evaluation Questions

4.1. Level of achievement toward Communication objectives

EQ 2.1.1	Do the communication activities carried out by the programme authorities lead to the achievement of the general and specific objectives set out in the Communication Strategy?
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Desk research

The analysis of the realisation (see section 3.1) shows that until 2018, all output and result indicators for 2019 were achieved, with the indicator *“Number of participants in the events”* achieving the target for 2023 as well.

Interviews

- With regards to the communication activities carried out at programme level, the managing structure stated that relevant stakeholders were involved from the moment when the application guideline was elaborated. A draft version was published on the programme’s official website for public consultations and during the process, MA, JS and NA bodies answered the questions posed by potential beneficiaries by phone and e-mail. Thus, all efforts have been taken to ensure that potential beneficiaries were informed in real time. Within the second call for proposals, a series of specific and technical questions were received about the way of downloading the application documents in eMS. In that sense, the MA has prepared some specific topics regarding the use of eMS and also about other aspects such as budget structure, use of working packages, use of simplified cost option etc.
- The managing structures argued that most of the applicants were familiarized with the application form and the budget. Some improvements were noticed in this regard, from one call to another, as budgets presented by applicants were better structured and connected to the proposed activities, with only rare situations in which costs were overestimated or underestimated.
- JS was also responsible of organizing different types of events for potential applicants and beneficiaries, such as courses or training seminars, both in the phase of launching the calls for proposals or later on, for instructing the beneficiaries on specific technical topics related to the implementation of the projects.
- The Facebook social network of the Programme has an important role in promoting not only the Programme’s opportunities, but also the results of the projects considered as most performing. The website of the Programme continues to be the most accessed and accessible method of promoting the Programme.
- For promoting the Programme, there were also organized different types of seminars (both in Romania and Serbia), workshops and forums for identifying partners, which in the end generated lots of partnerships that were built during these events.

Survey inputs

Most of the beneficiaries and potential applicants had information or communication from the Programme authorities related to the use of the eMS Platform, while the main sources that the beneficiaries used in order to get informed about the financing opportunities provided by the programme were the **official website, information/training sessions, newsletters**. Concerning the level of accessibility to the information on the communication channels used, the beneficiaries and the potential applicants stated that the information is easily accessible, and the language used is user friendly, however somehow technical. Referring to the attractiveness of the promotion materials, the beneficiaries and potential applicants believe that the promotional materials are attractive.

Conclusion

- C.C.1. Until 2018, all output and result indicators for 2019 were achieved, with the indicator *“Number of participants in the events”* achieving the target value for 2023 as well;
- C.C.2. The website of the programme and the events organized, information/training sessions, proved to be the most effective in reaching the potential beneficiaries;

Recommendation

- R.C.1. As the achievement rate for the indicators is very high, the target value for 2023 should be increased.

EQ 2.1.2	Could more effect be achieved by using different instruments or actions?
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Desk research

In general, programme communication activities proved to have a high level of effectiveness in what concerns the achievement of 2019 milestones. Thus, it is highly recommended to keep using the same communication platforms as used between 2015-2019, as they proved to be the most effective and efficient in achieving their targets. As the following section, survey inputs, will show, social media could be emphasized more in the communication strategy.

Survey inputs:

The beneficiaries and potential beneficiaries prefer the same main channels of communication to be informed about the financing opportunities offered by the programme as the ones already used: **official website, information/ training sessions, newsletters**. The potential beneficiaries appreciated the communication channels that the programme used as the following. Although many beneficiaries and potential applicants selected Facebook as one of preferred communication channel, few received information through this channel.

	Training sessions	Official web site	Facebook	Youtube	Events	Newsletters	Television	Newspapers	Radio
Effective	81.69%	81.69%	42.25%	19.72%	61.97%	53.52%	26.76%	33.80%	22.54%
Ineffective	12.68%	9.86%	12.68%	21.13%	15.49%	12.68%	22.54%	19.72%	32.39%

When asked what types of information, in addition to those already available, would the potential beneficiaries wish to receive about the programme and which is consider useful, the following answers were given, among others:

- Technical and administrative information;
- Relevant information about possible eligible partners;
- More information on supporting small and medium-sized NGOs in projects implementation;
- Implementation related issues, best practice cases;
- More details about the public procurement’s procedures;
- Contractual modifications;
- Regarding the preparation of project reports and the eligibility of expenses;
- A more detailed guideline.

Focus group:

The programme authorities validated the suggestions forwarded by the evaluation team.

Conclusions

- C.C.3. Although Facebook was indicated as a preferred communication channel by the beneficiaries and potential applicants, few actually received information about the programme through this channel.

Recommendations

- R.C.2. As the programme communication activities proved to have a high level of effectiveness in what concerns the achievement of 2019 milestones, and even 2023 targets, the programme structures should mainly focus on the communication channels that already proved to be effective;
- R.C.3. The programme bodies should focus more on distributing information through social media as the beneficiaries and potential applicants expressed interest in receiving information through this channel;

4.2. Effectiveness of the programme in supporting beneficiaries

EQ 2.1.3

How effective was the programme in supporting project communication activities?

Desk research

The IPA CBC Romania-Serbia programme, through the eMS platform, imposes that all projects include the Working Package Communication, aimed at raising awareness about project and programme activities. As a result, all beneficiaries must allocate a specific budget and dedicate their attention to fulfilling the activities within this working package.

Among the activities that are included in the working package of communication, projects focus on: Events and conferences; Press releases and press articles; Dissemination materials (leaflets, brochures, flyers, other presentation materials); Websites, etc.

However, apart from the fact that the communication activities of each project are reported in the implementation reports of the projects (including the budget expenditure), there are no specific indicators foreseen at project level – making the assessment harder in terms of results achievement.

In order to support beneficiaries in implementing the communication working package, the programme bodies had prepared and made available, on the programme's website, specific templates ready to be used by beneficiaries – in relation to all communication activities, especially advertising materials produced at project level. Those templates include the following:

1. Visual Identity Manual (VIM) of the Interreg-IPA Cross-border Cooperation Romania-Serbia Programme – elaborated with detailed information for each category of communication materials – example: photographs, brochures, leaflets, billboards, etc.
2. Visual identity elements in .doc, .jpg, .cnd and .png formats, such as: European Union flag (RO, SRB; ENG); Programme logo (RO, SRB; ENG); Recommended fonts and header and footers for documents; Logo Europa 2020;
3. Dissemination materials models, such as: press release model, presence list model, power point presentation model; temporary/ permanent billboard; Poster A3 model; self-adhesives for public procurement; vehicle self-adhesive; video-frames.
4. Section with "*get inspired from other beneficiaries*": the section includes examples (viewed as best practices) of dissemination materials – in terms of visual aspects - elaborated by other beneficiaries.

All in all, the manual and the templates included on the programme website provide sufficient support so that dissemination materials are elaborated accordingly, effectively contributing to projects fulfilment of communication activities.

However, beneficiaries also require support on how to implement communication activities. In this regard, the visual identity manual informs beneficiaries on how to actually implement communication activities – in relation to audio-video materials, public speaking, photographs, press conferences, advertisements, etc. Moreover, the helpdesk platform provides the framework for raising questions to the joint secretariat about any particular issue (including communication

activities), while the programme has also provided trainings to potential beneficiaries, before the application phases, on how to develop communication activities.

Survey inputs:

In general, beneficiaries and applicants highly appreciate the level of details of the information included in the dissemination materials about the programme, while also considering that the information help them to define and implement projects with high impact.

More importantly, concerning the responsiveness of the programme, beneficiaries and applicants are very satisfied of all the responsible bodies (JS, MA and NA in Serbia). The highest satisfaction was expressed for the JS members, who do have a direct contact with the beneficiaries.

Focus group:

Although the introduction of communication indicators for the next programming period was validated at the focus group, the programme structures argued that it does not seem efficient to introduce, at this stage of the programme, communication indicators for beneficiaries.

Conclusions

- C.C.4. The **Visual Identity Manual**, together with the specific **Templates** for communication materials provide sufficient know-how on how to utilise communication tools. In addition, the responsible bodies provide support in relation to the communication activities before the submission of the project - through **trainings** – and during project implementation – through **help desk support**.
- C.C.5. The beneficiaries highly appreciate the responsiveness of the programme bodies, being particularly satisfied by the support provided and involvement of the joint secretariat.
- C.C.6. As no indicators related to the communication activities are foreseen at project level, the programme bodies cannot clearly monitor the implementation status of communication activities. Thus, apart from specific questions raised by beneficiaries, it is not clear whether projects need additional support or not. Moreover, by having a clearer picture of the implementation status of all communication activities (of all projects), the programme bodies would benefit from having identified the real needs for improvement in this regard.

Recommendations

- R.C.4. It is recommended to introduce **communication indicators at project level** (such as number of promoting conferences, number of persons informed about the project's activities, number of informative materials distributed, etc.), in order to facilitate the monitoring and evaluation processes, while keeping in mind that no additional burden should be imposed to beneficiaries.

4.3. Programme visibility and attractiveness

EQ 2.1.4	Do communication activities have sufficient impact on the awareness of the beneficiaries/potential beneficiaries of the programme/general public?
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Survey

The opinion from applicants and beneficiaries involved in the survey indicates a general high interest in the funding opportunities of the programme and consider the communication activities very efficient in promoting the visibility of the programme.

The tools and communications channels used by the programme are considered very detailed, accessible and effective in all the phases of the programme life cycle: from the promotion of the opportunities offered by the programme to the capitalisation of the project outcomes and results. Predominantly beneficiaries consult the programme website to get relevant information but also the participation to the training sessions is considered very effective to collect information on project creation and implementation.

Conclusion

C.C.7. All in all, the analysis of the communication activities reveals that the capacity of the programme to mobilise potential beneficiaries and beneficiaries is good as well as to inform the general public about the opportunity offered by the programme. This evidence comes from the number of project proposals received within the two calls for proposals: 194 in the first call, 176 in the second call.

C.C.8. Opinions from beneficiaries reveal the need to organise some thematic training sessions on the state aid and the control and financial management. As well, during the focus group, general consensus was reached on the need to organise some thematic training sessions on the state aid and the control and financial management

Recommendation:

- R.C.5. It is recommended to organise some thematic training sessions on the state aid and the control and financial management.

EQ 2.1.5	What could be improved to highlight the EU contribution?
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As reported in the evaluation question above, the programme performed very well in increasing the awareness on the opportunities offered in the cooperation area, thus resulting consequently in a greater visibility to the EU contribution.

Furthermore, documental analysis on the communication strategy reveals that the programme planned specific actions to support the EU visibility in compliance with the relevant regulation. There are not specific conclusion or suggestions.

Annexes

Annex 1 Data collected by the on-line survey

Figure 1 To what extent the communication activities implemented by the programme are efficient in:

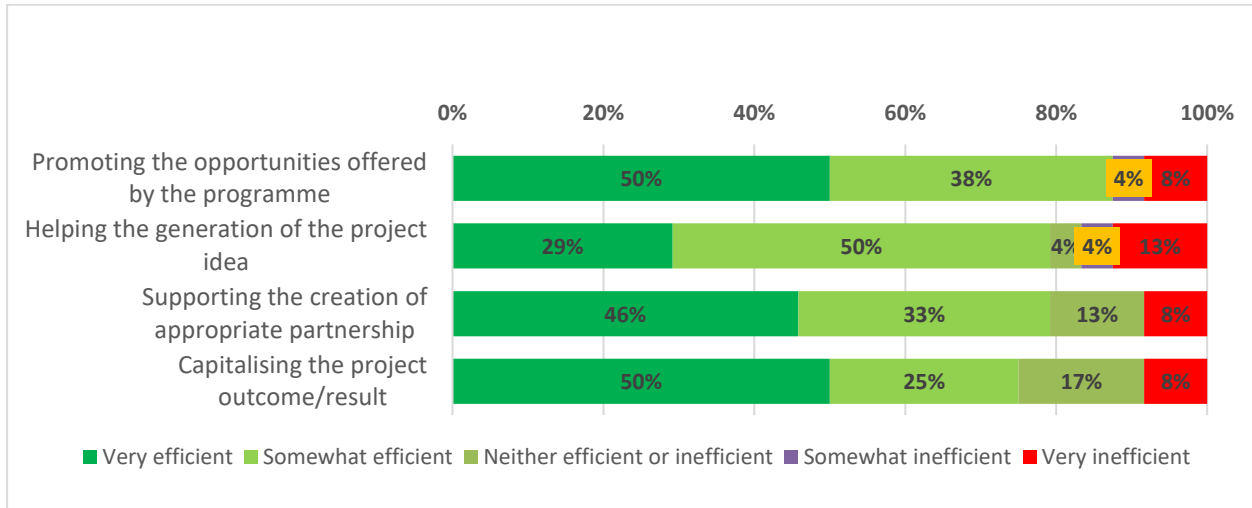


Figure 2 What types of information, in addition to those already available, would you like to receive about the programme?

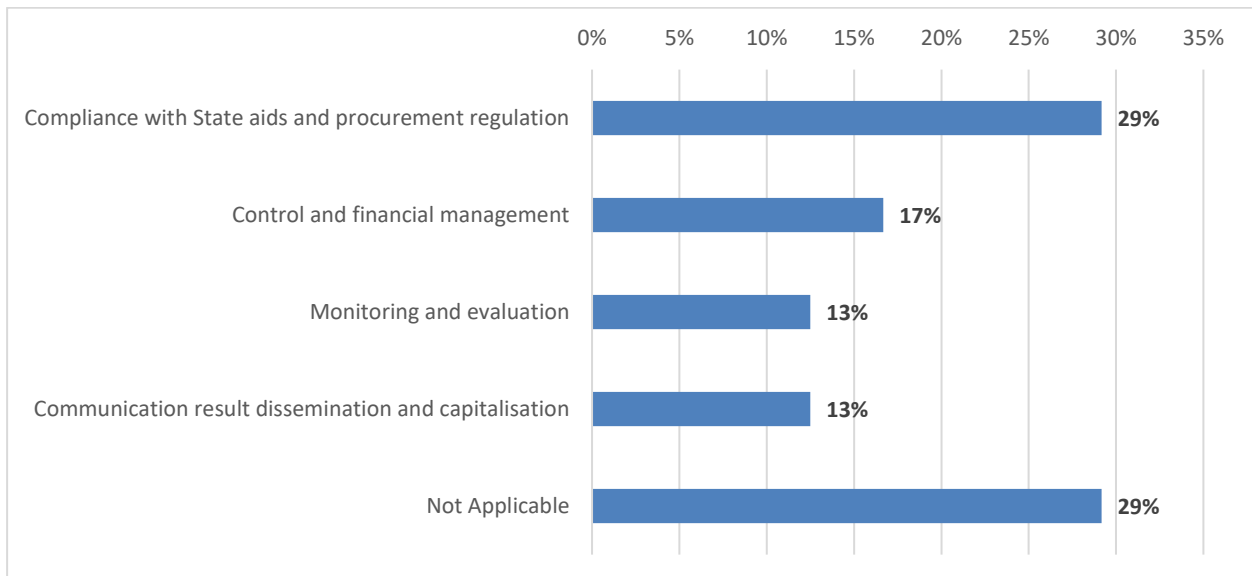


Figure 3 What were the main sources that you used in order to get informed about the financing opportunities provided by the Interreg – IPA CBC Romania – Serbia Programme?

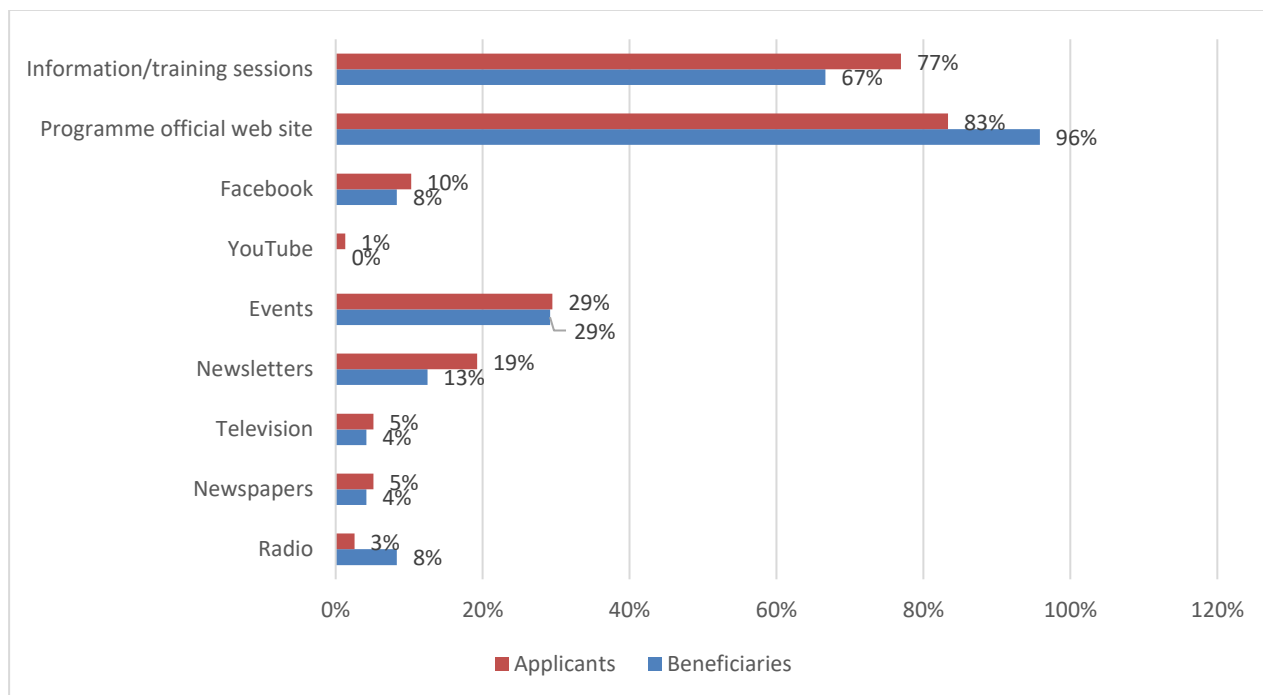


Figure 4 What are the main channels of communication through which you would prefer to be informed about the financing opportunities offered by the Interreg – IPC CBC Romani – Serbia Programme ?

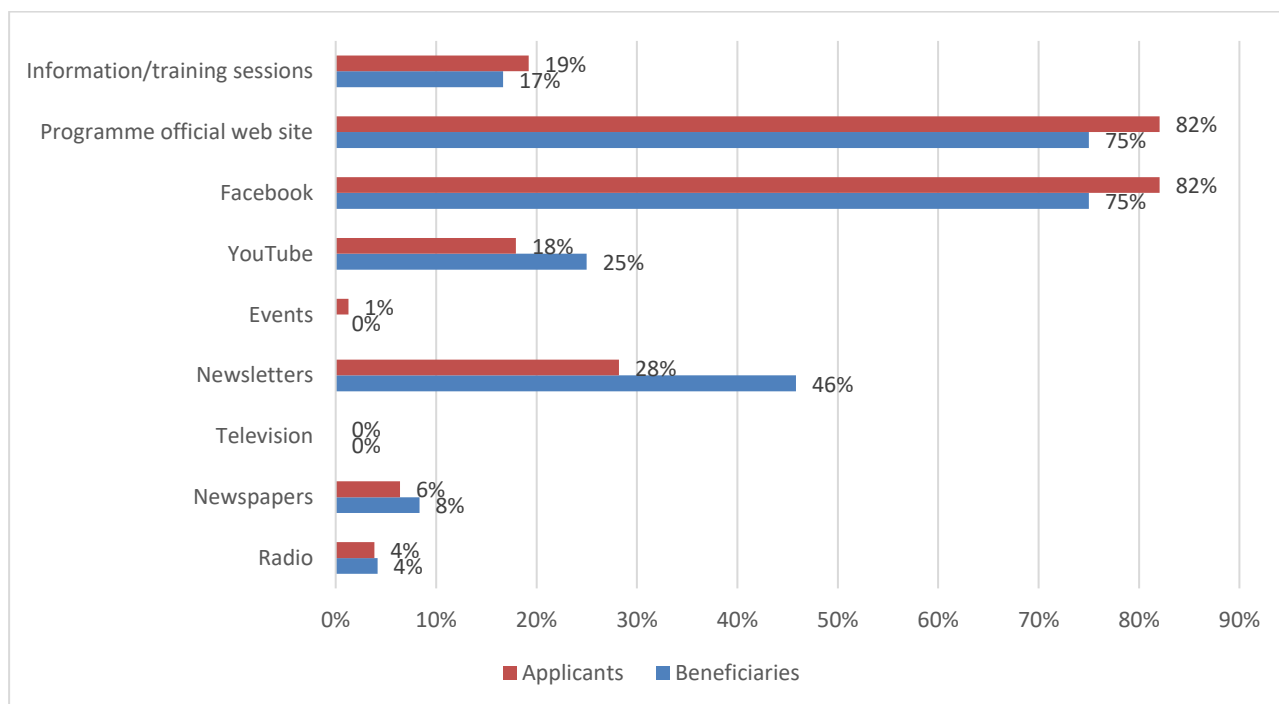


Figure 5 How would you rate the effectiveness of the following communication channels

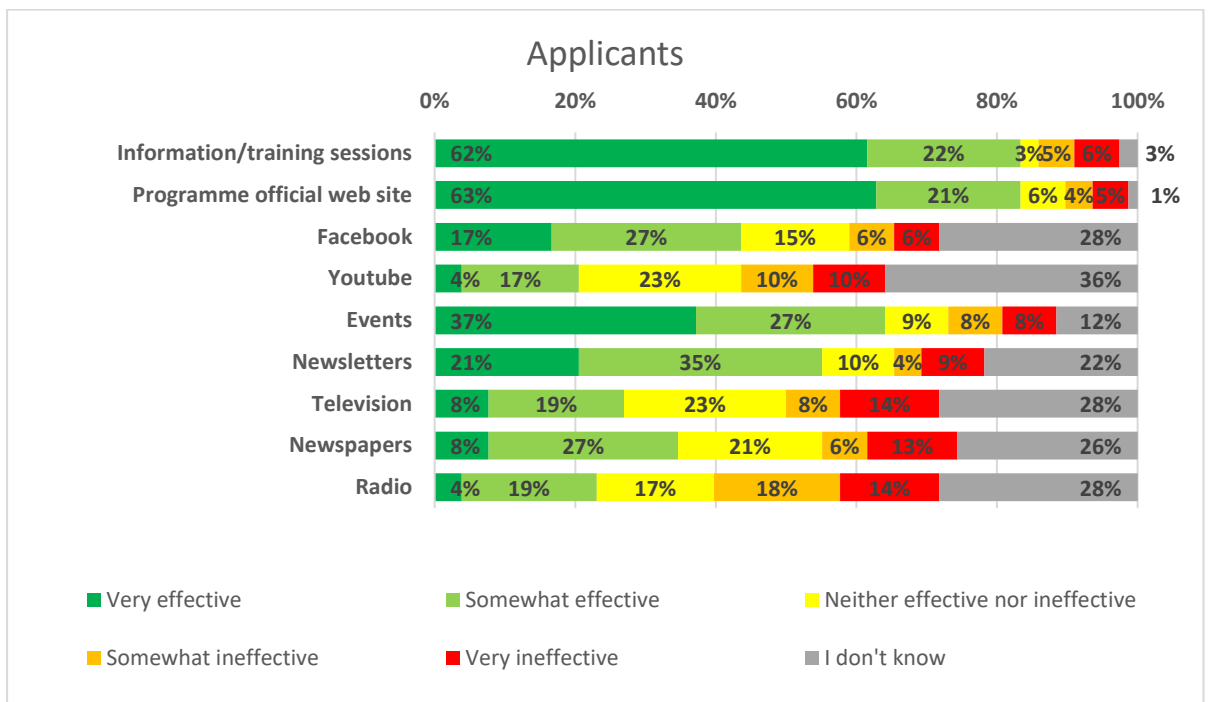
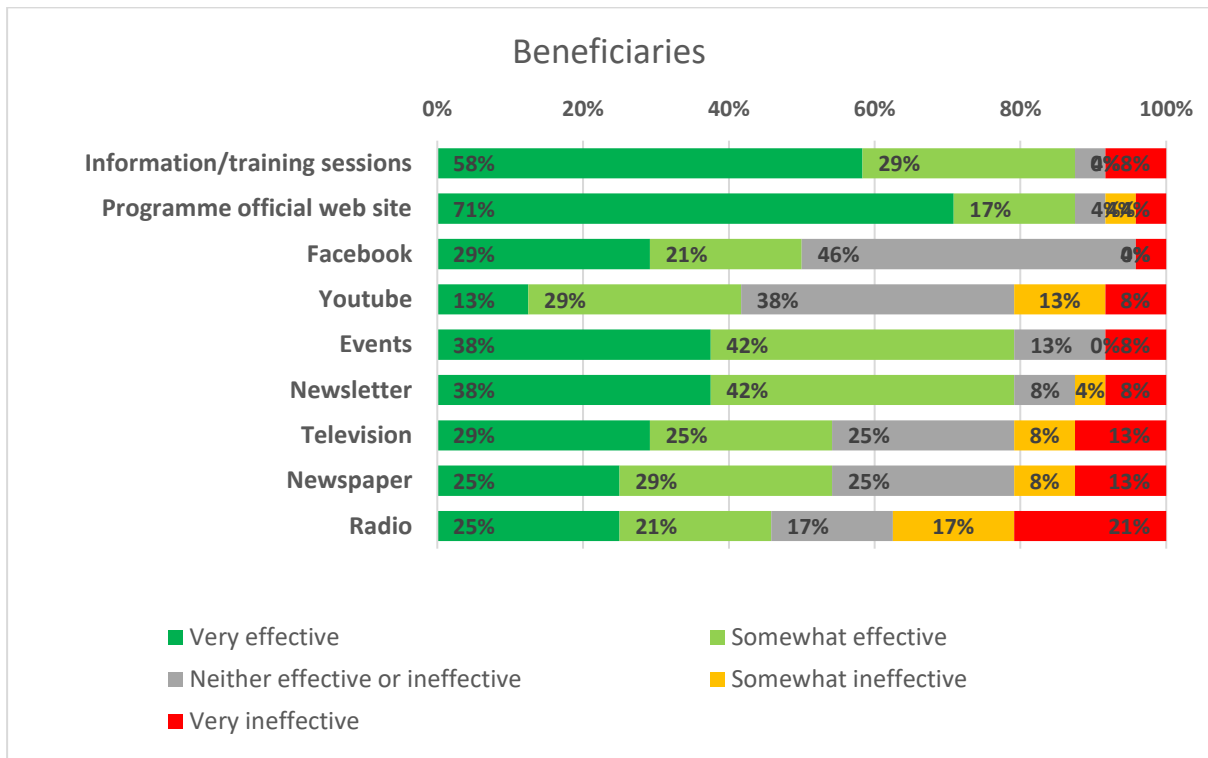


Figure 6 How do you appreciate the level of details of the information provided by the Programme Authorities for promoting the Interreg CBC Romania-Serbia Programme?

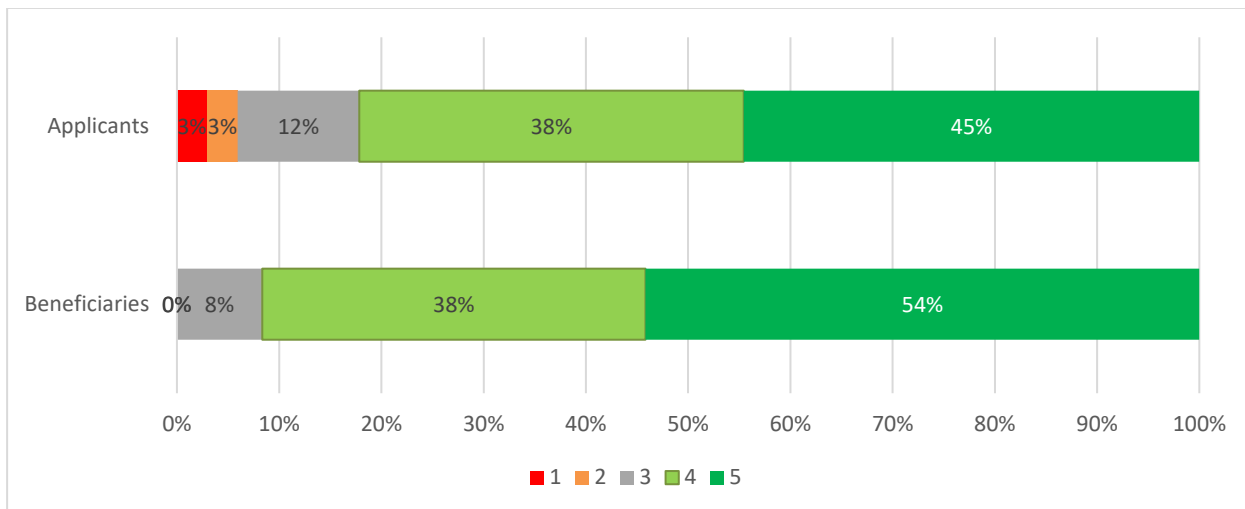


Figure 7 How do you appreciate the level of accessibility to the information concerning the Interreg CBC Romania-Serbia Programme?

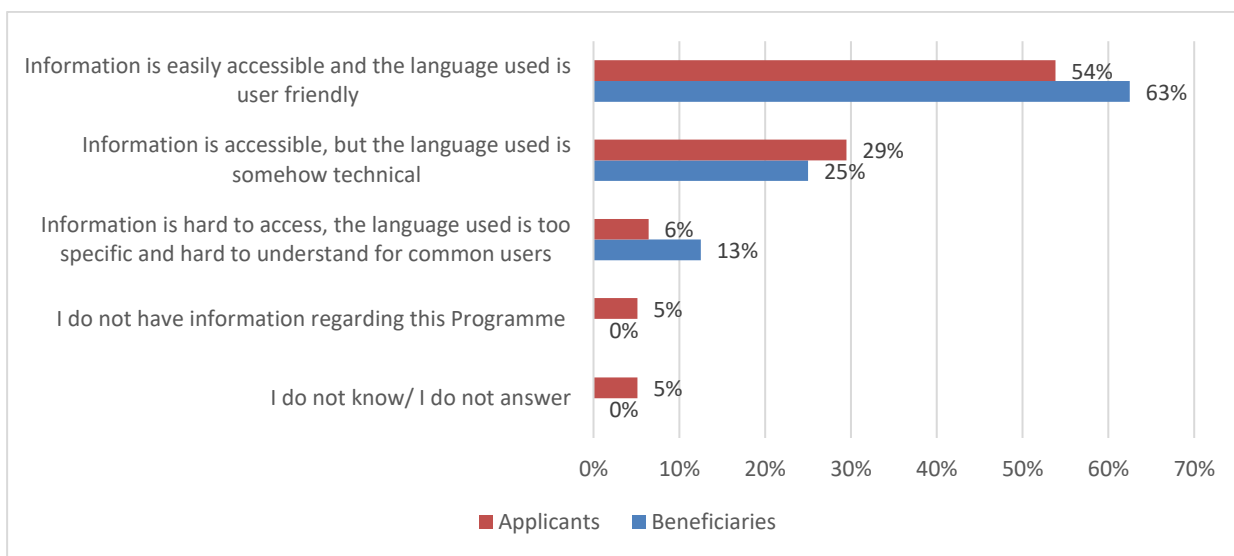


Figure 8 To what extent do you consider that the information about the Programme, provided through the information and promotion activities, support the potential beneficiaries to define and ultimately implement projects with high impact?

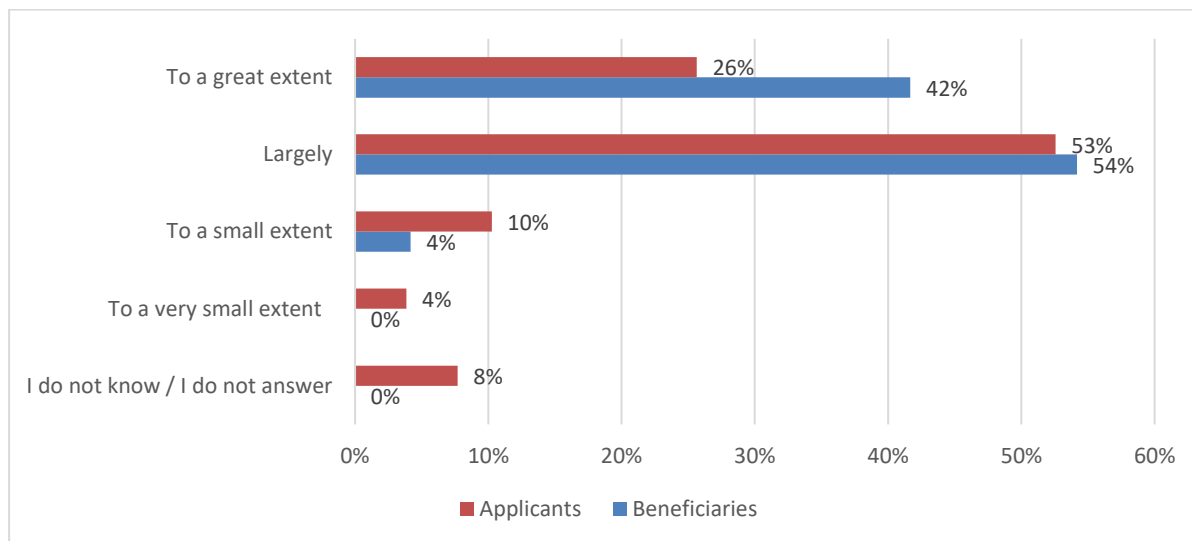
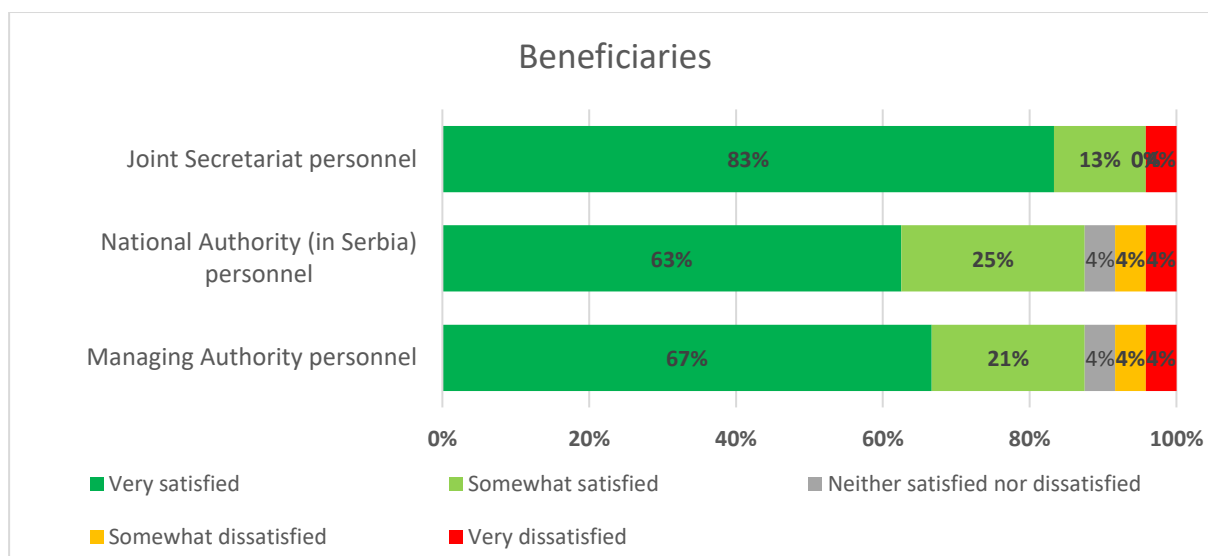


Figure 9 How satisfied you are about the responsivity of the Programme?



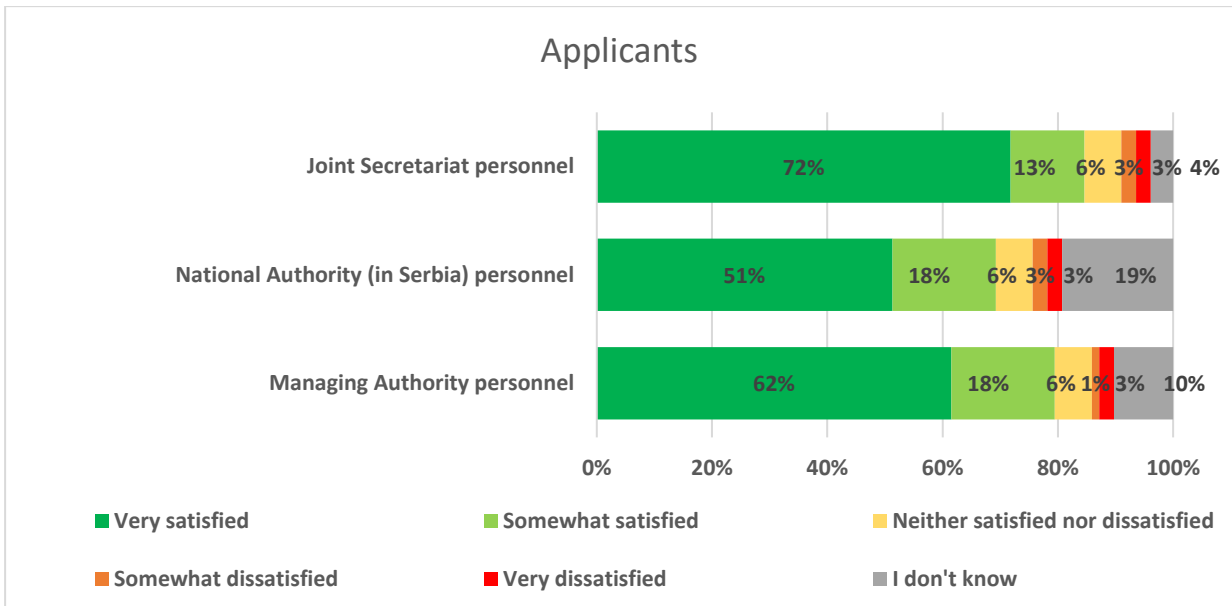


Figure 10 How do you appreciate the level of attractiveness of the promotion materials (infographics, flyers, catalogues, agenda) for promoting the Interreg CBC Romania-Serbia Programme?

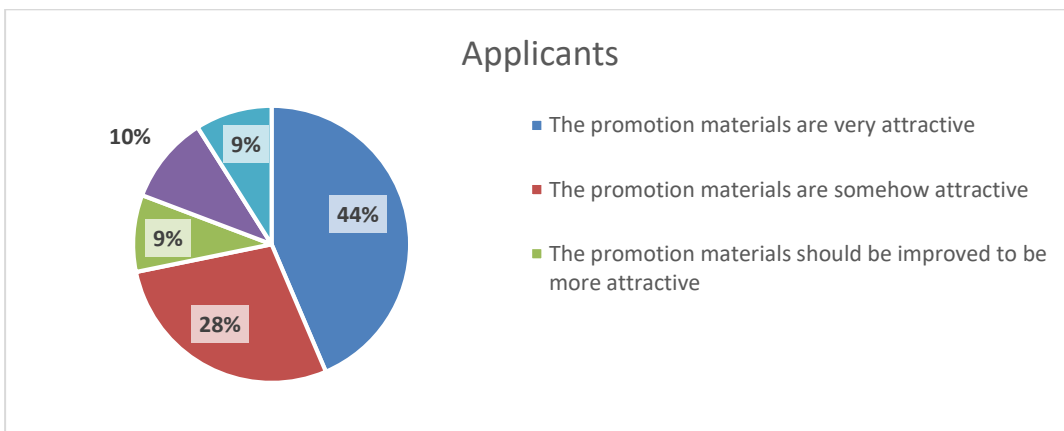
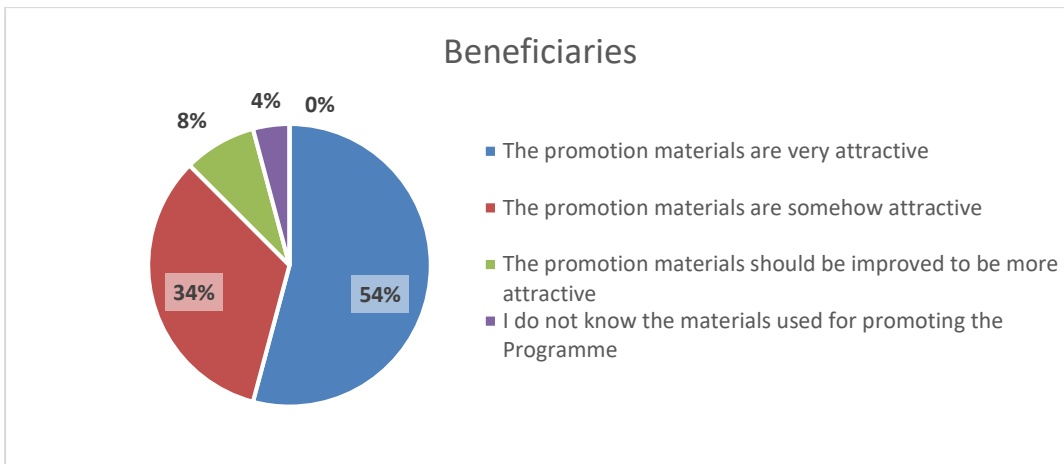


Figure 11 Have you had access to information or communication from the Programme Authorities related to the use of the eMS Platform (Electronic Monitoring system), the section used for online submission of funding applications?

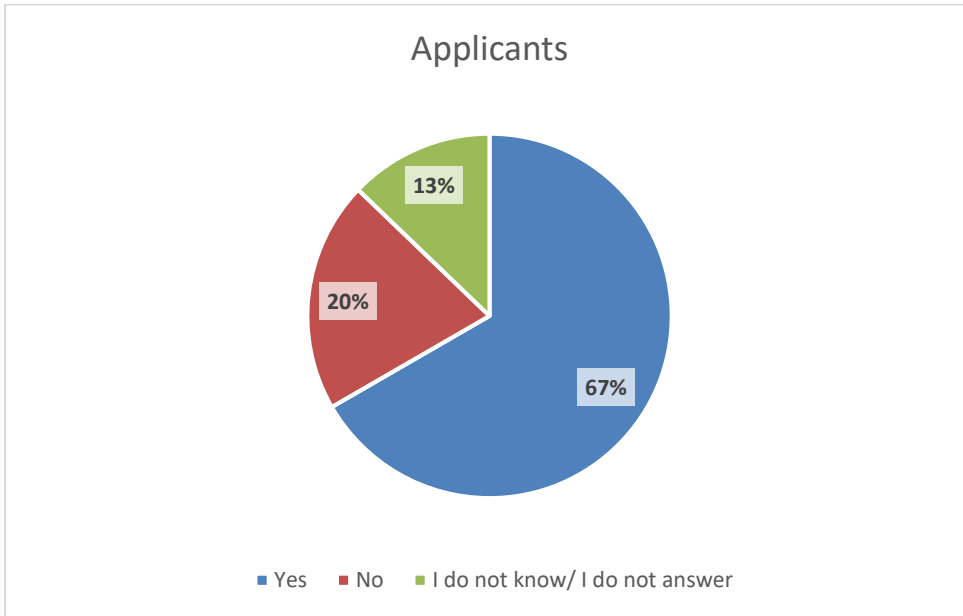
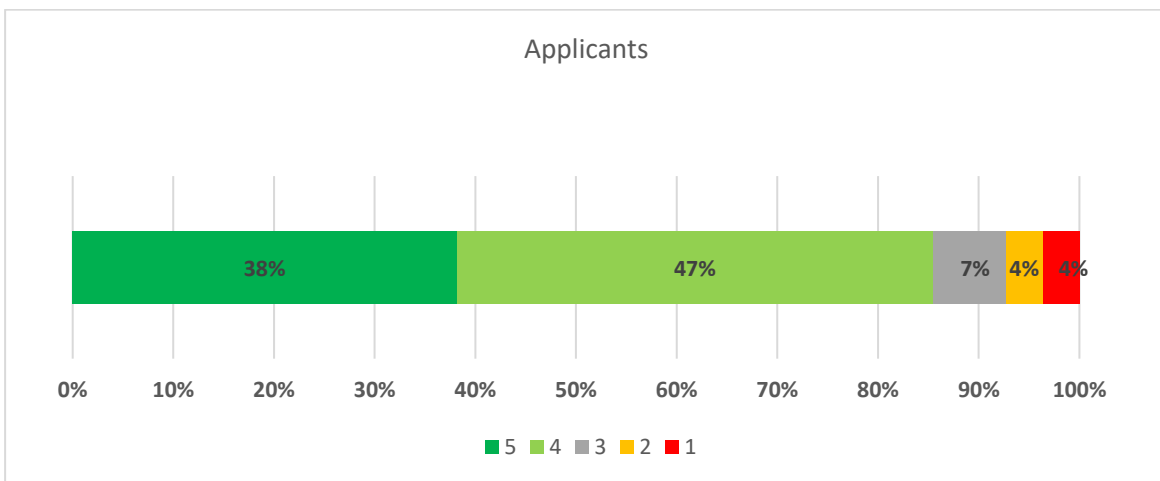


Figure 12 How do you appreciate the clarity and accessibility (the terminology used) of the information communicated?



Annex 2 Interviews with programme authorities

Interviewees: Catalin Radu, Regional Office for Cross-border Cooperation Timisoara (RO CBC Timisoara)
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Date: 16/09/2019

Topics: communication activities

Main aspects highlighted during the interview:

- JS had an active role since the programming phase, being also member in the Monitoring Committee of the Program. Thus, JS was involved in all the phases of the Programme design, implementation, monitoring and evaluation, in the elaboration of the guidelines for the applicants, promotion and dissemination of the information related to the Programme and in providing all types of support for the potential applicants and beneficiaries.
- The two calls for proposals had a high interest among the applicants (for the first one there were more financing applications registered). For the second call for proposals a new element was introduced – the eMS online platform – which at the beginning created some difficulties especially among the small institutions that applied, which did not have the necessary know-how about how to approach the submission. The Programme’s structures offered to potential beneficiaries support and preparation on how to submit the applications online.
- The HelpDesk service works very well and provides potential applicants/beneficiaries with all the information needed for the submission and implementation phases.
- JS was also responsible of organizing different types of events for potential applicants and beneficiaries, such as courses or training seminars, both in the phase of launching the calls for proposals or later on, for instructing the beneficiaries on specific technical topics related to the implementation of the projects.
- The Facebook social network of the Programme has an important role in promoting not only the Programme’s opportunities, but also the results of the projects considered as most performing. The website of the Programme continues to be the most accessed and accessible method of promoting the Programme.
- For promoting the Programme, there were also organized different types of seminar (both in Romania and Serbia), workshops and forums for identifying partners, which in the end generated lots of partnerships that were built during these events.
- For the future, it will be relevant to capitalize upon the good results obtained so far, for example considering the creation of clusters (medicine can be a domain) that will generate projects with higher impact and added value.

Interviewees: Mr. Petre Rusescu
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Date: 13/08/2019

Topics: Communication activities, antifraud measures

Main aspects highlighted during the interview:

- With regards to the communication activities carried out at programme level, it was stated the fact that relevant stakeholders were involved starting from the moment when the application guideline was elaborated. A draft version was published on the programme's official website for public consultations and during the process, MA, JS and NA bodies answered the questions posed by potential beneficiaries by phone and e-mail. Thus, all efforts have been taken to ensure that potential beneficiaries were informed in real time. Within the second call for proposals, a series specific and technical questions were received about the way of downloading the application documents in eMS. In that sense, the MA has prepared some specific topics regarding the use of eMS and also about other aspects such as budget structure, use of working packages, use of simplified cost option etc.
- Other channels used to disseminate information about the programme financing opportunities were the newsletters sent to potential beneficiaries via e-mail. Currently, a series of trainings are being conducted with the persons involved in the programme management/implementation, regarding the EU General Data Protection Regulation (GDPR). Taking into account the norms imposed by this regulation, for the future it is taken into account the option of publishing these newsletters on the programme website, instead of sending them by e-mail.
- According to the interviewees' opinion, all the communication and information activities carried out for potential beneficiaries/beneficiaries were adequate and sufficient to support them in submitting and implementing the projects. This fact was substantiated by the impressive number of communication events and participants and also by the large number of applications submitted on the 1st and 2nd call for proposals.
- Regarding the communication activities and materials produced at project level, it was mentioned the fact that programme bodies had prepared and made available, on the programme's website, specific templates ready to be used by beneficiaries. Also for supporting beneficiaries, a visual identity manual was elaborated with detailed information for each category of communication materials – photographs, brochures, leaflets, billboards etc.
- The main body responsible for verifying the elements of visual identity of the projects is the JS.
- MA provides additional support to beneficiaries by helping them to promote their press releases on the programme's official facebook page and by facilitating the contact with mass media stakeholders, ensuring a better promotion for their communication and dissemination events.
- From version 1 to version 3, the communication strategy of the programme has undergone changes regarding the financial allocation. Specifically, in the first version of the strategy, MA had a large budget allocated for communication activities, but during the programme implementation, some difficulties were encountered with the selection of contractors and

preparation of related documents, therefore being decided that a significant part of the budget should be directed to JS.

- The communication plan is prepared for a period of 3 years; the one planned for 2019 will be drafted taking also into account the recommendations made by evaluators.
- The JS prepares each year, for the JMC reunion, a presentation regarding the evaluation of communication strategy, summarizing the outputs and results and the main communication and promotional activities.
- In order to inform the general public about the programme results, press conferences were organized periodically and information was also posted on the ministry and the programme's official websites. Promotional activities were also carried out during the European Cooperation Day, organized on an annual basis.
- Best practice examples are promoted and selected based on criteria such as results, impact of communication activities, lack of financial corrections, proper implementation etc.
- So far, no communication materials have been made available in formats accessible for persons with disabilities, but this option is taken into account in the upcoming period. After the interview, related with this topic, there was inserted in the programme website one tool for increasing the fonts of our content and helping the persons with poor eyesight.
- According to the respondent's opinion, potential beneficiaries had at their disposal sufficient sources of information needed to prepare the applications, noting their active participation in events, where they had the opportunity to ask questions and discuss about possible unclarities.

A special helpdesk service was also activated during the submission of applications within the 1st and 2nd call for proposals.

- No indicators were foreseen for quantifying communication activities at project level.
- Related to antifraud, preventive measures were adopted for each operational procedure (application, evaluation, selection etc.) at the level of both MA and JS. Moreover, it was developed a sound verification system which ensures the avoidance of any suspicion or tentative of fraud. So far, there hasn't been registered any case of confirmed fraud.
- The training sessions conducted with beneficiaries represented an opportunity to raise awareness about the risk of fraud, including by addressing the topics regarding the risk of errors occurring in the preparation of payment documents.
- The programme management structures have set in 2016 a self fraud risk assessment team, responsible with carrying out the fraud assessment risk at programme level. After the recommendations of the Audit Authority, in the structure of this team were included representatives of Joint Secretariat and National Authority. Following the 3 self-assessment analyzes carried out so far, it was decided that the risks and measures set out in the anti-fraud strategy should remain unchanged.
- According to the interviewee's perception, the whistle blower instrument proved to be a very useful one for beneficiaries who wanted to transmit/report fraud suspicions.
- Currently, simplification steps are taken, both in terms of using the simplified cost option and in eliminating the unnecessary documents submitted in the application stage.
- The events organized in the eligible cross-border areas were held in English, Romanian and Serbian, with the provision of translation services, where necessary.

- Up to this moment, no specific events / seminars have been organized to capitalize project results. Nevertheless, there is an intention to develop a capitalization plan and currently it is conducted the phase of identifying the results of the projects eligible to be replicated/capitalized in the next programming period. In terms of methodology, for capitalization, the results are clustered on domains – so far, 3 major domains of interest have been identified: medical, emergency situations and healthcare.

Interviewees: Mrs. Valentina Vidović, Serbian Ministry of European Integration

Date: 29/08/2019

Topics: communication activities

Main aspects highlighted during the interview:

- National Authority, represented by the Ministry of European Integration - Serbia, carries out the following functions: i) Provides support to the MA in the preparation, implementation, monitoring, evaluation, reporting and closure of programmes; ii) Organizes the work on the preparation of programmes and ensures the participation of relevant institutions from Serbia to the programme preparation process; iii) Participates in establishing procedures and ensures that the management and control system functions within the Serbian territory; iv) Provides funds to the national budget of Serbia for national co-financing and pre-financing of activities carried out under the priority axis – technical assistance and transfers all or part of the funds to the managing authority, where applicable; v) Participates in the preparation of technical assistance project proposals and supervises the implementation of technical assistance projects in cooperation with the competent institutions of the partner country; vi) Ensures the establishment of a control system (first level control) for the verification of projects expenditures implemented under the cross-border and transnational cooperation programmes with EU Member States, that have been incurred within the Serbian territory; vii) Ensures that expenditures are verified in accordance with programme rules, national legislation and EU regulations through the establishment of a control system and supervision of its operation; viii) Ensures that in case of insufficient number of controllers, additional controllers from technical assistance funds at the individual programme level are being engaged; ix) Establishes the Joint Secretariat Antenna office and programme offices within the territory of Serbia covered by the programme, in accordance with the rules established by the programme; x) Establishes the NA office in Bor as additional support to MA, NA and JS; xi) Participating in the process of selecting and contracting NA (located in Belgrade and in Bor), FLC and JS Antennae (on the territory of Serbian) staff financed from NA TA funds; xii) Determines the institutional composition of Serbian representatives to the joint monitoring committee and notifies the MA about appointed representatives from Serbia in the aforementioned committee; xiii) Ensures participation to the joint monitoring committee meetings; xiv) Ensures the complaints examination against the Control Body's decisions in accordance with applicable National Authority procedures and Programme rules; xiv) Ensures that prior actions are taken and appropriate procedures are initiated in the event of unduly paid or unspent funds so that competent institutions may recover funds from beneficiaries in

accordance with national legislation; xvi) Supports MA and JS in drafting the selection procedures and criteria; xvii) Ensures access to information and relevant documents for the MA and AA in order to fulfil their respective tasks; xviii) Participates in the procedures set-up so as to ensure the proper functioning of management and control systems, including ensuring an adequate audit trail for the system concerning programme implementation in Serbia; xix) Preventing, detecting and correcting the irregularities identified on the territory of Serbia; xx) Reporting to the MA about any detected irregularity which happened on the territory of Serbia and about the activities undertaken in order to resolve it; xxi) Initiating the recovery process for the amounts unduly paid from the Serbian project partners (in the event that such amounts cannot be recovered from the project partners concerned) in close cooperation with the MA; xxii) Introducing and updating information about any irregularities and frauds, made by Serbian beneficiaries, in Corrections and Audits section of e-MS; xxiii) Participates in drafting appropriate selection procedures and criteria with MA and JS; xxiv) Co-sign subsidy contracts for IPA II funds with the lead beneficiaries and MA;

- Potential beneficiaries were informed about funding opportunities through the programme and MEI web sites, through participation in organization and holding of Kick-off conference, Info-days and Partner Search Forums and by sending invitations to wide mailing list for the respective events.

- The communication activities carried out by the programme authorities lead to the achievement of the general and specific objectives set out in the Communication Strategy.

General objectives attained:

i) support provided to the successful implementation of the programme by ensuring an effective communication system (measures, channels, targeted messages to all identified targets);

ii) increased public awareness concerning the programme aims, priorities axes and objectives, financial support provided, estimated economic and social impact on regional development;

iii) increased knowledge of the potential beneficiaries on the financing opportunities offered by the programme, eligibility criteria and selection mechanism for the applications submitted;

iv) increased transparency in the use of Funds and thus an increased level of trust of the general public in the institutions managing the RO-SB Programme;

v) increased visibility of RO-RS Programme and of the MA, NA and JS, at national and regional level;

Specific objectives achieved:

i) ensured the good use of the IPA II funds, by conveying information on the domains financed and the financing conditions to all target groups;

ii) clearly explained all the requirements, eligibility conditions and procedures that potential beneficiaries need to follow in order to obtain financing;

iii) ensured that all potential beneficiaries know and include the horizontal principles in the projects submitted for financing: sustainable development, promoting equality between men and women and non-discrimination, accessibility, addressing demographic changes, climate change mitigation and adaptation;

iv) informed and trained the implementing bodies;

- v) ensured the visibility of the programme, at local and national level:
 - create the visual identity of the Programme and make sure all information and publicity activities of the direct beneficiaries comply to the Visual Identity Manual;
 - identify and disseminate success projects and good practices examples;
- vi) developed and maintained effective press relations, in order to ensure the dissemination of the programme requirements, estimated impact and transparency;
- vii) developed cooperation and partnership relations with the implementing authorities and all relevant institutions, at national and European level, in order to realise the objectives included in the strategy;
- viii) ensured the visibility of the MA as the managing body of the Programme;
- ix) ensured the visibility of the NA as the counterpart for the Managing Authority with the coordination role on the territory of Republic of Serbia
- x) ensured exchange of knowledge and good practices in communication, by actively participating in the network of the national communicators group (coordinated by Romanian Ministry of European Funds) and INTERREG communicators group (coordinated by Interact).

Annex 3 Focus groups

Minutes from Focus Group (26/11/2019)

Interreg-IPA CBC Romania-Serbia Programme Implementation Evaluation

Purpose

The focus group is the last stage of the evaluation, the validation. The purpose of the focus group day was for the evaluator to express the key findings from its examination of the programme and to receive feedback from the MA, NA, and other relevant public stakeholders.

Outline

This event comprised of two focus groups (FG), FG1 and FG2

- *FG1 was the longer of the two and was subdivided into the following sections:*
 1. Programme implementation: status of play (11.15 – 12.00)
 2. Programme Management (12.00 – 12.30)
 3. Project and Program Results (12.30-13.00)
 4. Communication Strategy (13.00-13.30)
- *FG2 presented the overall effectiveness of the Programme and suggested some hints for the future.*

Attendees

The attendees for this focus group day were:

No.	Name	Institution
1	Gabriel Burada	ADR SV Oltenia
2	Serban Tupa	Romanian Ministry of Transport
3	Catalina Radu	JS (Regional Office CBC Timisoara)
4	Stana Babic	JS Antenna – Serbia
5	Vasilija Stanic	NA
6	Carmen Petre	Competition Council
7	Raluca Parlog	Competition Council
8	Simona Vasile	MA
9	Oana Cristea	MA
10	Cristina Ciobotaru	MA
11	Rusescu Petre	MA
12	Cristina Cojoaca	ACZ Consulting
13	Paul Hickey	T33 SRL
14	Caterina Casamassima	T33 SRL
15	Alessandro Valenza	T33 SRL
16	Rebeca Nistor	ACZ Consulting
17	Tiberiu Nitu	ACZ Consulting

Focus Group 1

[Alessandro](#) introduced FG1, presenting the agenda, scope, and methodological activities in the evaluation. Alessandro also stressed that the overall judgement on the programme is positive, and that especially the implementation mechanisms seem to be well tested and working well. Therefore any changes to the administrative “machine” need to be taken with caution assessing the possible unintended effects and transition cost. The attention of the Programme should focus on the capitalisation of the results paving the way to the new programme 2021-2027.

Programme Implementation

[Tiberiu](#) discussed the state of play in some detail regarding programme performance on:

Financial and physical aspects. In general, projects do achieve the targeted objectives. The main factors limiting the capacity to achieve the objectives are possible overestimation of the initial targets, delays in the implementation of the public procurement procedures, lack of adequate human resources, or lack of financing capacity (see the slides below). The following assessments were made regarding these financial and physical aspects, and programme implementation in general as a forecast:

- ▶ **Financial Performance:** All milestones set for 2018 have been reached and even overly achieved. Based on the trend of the data on output and financial performance framework indicators, the targets are likely to be achieved by 2023.
- ▶ **Physical Performance:** In general, projects do achieve the targeted objectives. Main factors limiting the capacity to achieve the objectives are possible overestimation of the initial

targets, delays in the implementation of the public procurement procedures, lack of adequate human resources or lack of financing capacity.

- ▶ Forecast: Estimates based on the planned objectives of the contracted projects suggests that there are high chances of reaching the target for most indicators.

JS member: eMS doesn't allow to generate aggregate data on overall projects' performance at programme level – also, there is no aggregation of data (outputs of projects) based on interim and final implementation reports. As a result, in order to evaluate the programme performance, the monitoring bodies have to aggregate all information provided at project level and analyse the information project by project.

Programme Management

Rebeca expressed analysis outcomes and assessments regarding project preparation and selection elements, monitoring, horizontal/partnership principles, anti-fraud/TA, and measures to reduce administrative burdens.

Specifically, the following assessments were made regarding these aspects:

- ▶ Support in the preparation phase and project selection: The applicant guidance is useful and tailored around the needs of the applicants.
- ▶ Monitoring: The eMS system appears to have a high level of accessibility and user friendliness for programme beneficiaries and potential applicants.
- ▶ Horizontal and Partnership principle: We recommend the Programme authorities to revise the implementation procedures for the next programming period to better emphasize horizontal principles.
- ▶ Antifraud and Technical assistance funds:
 - ▶ TA funds play an important role in contributing to the achievement of programme's objectives;
 - ▶ The anti-fraud activities carried out by the programme bodies led to the achievement of the objectives set out in the Anti-fraud Strategy.
 - ▶ Measure to reduce administrative burden: The introduction of **eMS** and **simplified cost options** (SCO), the main simplification measures, represent a significant step forward in reducing administrative burden.

Recommendations: At this point **Alessandro** made some recommendations. Recommendations broadly encompassed those around

- Simplification of SCO aspects: identify possible SCOs to be used, consult with stakeholder on possible advantages of SCO, assessing the transition cost, defining the appropriate methodology, etc.
- Finding Partners: organize an information campaign; Implement the thematic workshop using the capitalisation activities as opportunities, for the beneficiaries and more generally for the stakeholders, to meet and share contacts; set up LinkedIn "thematic club".

- Capitalisation of remaining resources: Use the remaining resources only for an horizontal call for capitalization aiming in clustering and capitalise the results of the project.
- Horizontal Principles compliance: Organise a specific webinar with applicants/beneficiaries to inform them about the new approach for monitoring the respect of horizontal principles. Revise the applicant's guide and introduce concrete examples of compliance with: a) sustainable development principle; b) equal opportunities principle. These best practices shall be possibly identified within the Programme to stimulate emulation among the other projects.
- Aspects to do with JMC composition: Propose a formulation to modify the current composition of the JMC by including representatives of social partners, NGOs and other relevant stakeholders.

MA: agrees with all the suggestions and are already working on the possibility to introduce off the shelf SCOs, are thinking about capitalisation and follow up activities, through cluster consultations and joint working group.

Programme achievements

Tiberiu discussed the Programme achievements in relation to results by PA and indicators; on anti-fraud indicators and anti-fraud successes; and assessment of no major likely problems for achievement of programme goals. Assessments made were:

- ▶ Achievements in terms of results: The analysis of the result indicators found mix outcomes. As some indicator overperformed while other decreased compared with the baseline.
- ▶ Anti-fraud and Technical assistance funds: The anti-fraud activities carried out by the programme bodies led to the achievement of the objectives set out in the Anti-fraud Strategy.
- ▶ Assessment of the quality of the indicator: the result indicators have been assessed through the RACER matrix (from Better EU Regulation package). The results are that at least 4 indicators are not totally adequate since the phenomena they measure are not directly linked to the changes the project can actually make (e.g. the indicator of S.O. 3.1 "Vehicles crossing the border. Traffic across the border for social, commercial and touristic activities and exchanges"). The risk is that the actual results of the Programme are not captured or underestimated.

Recommendations: **Tiberiu** also presented on a recommendation around revising result indicators which was to:

- Formulate the new indicator,
- SET-UP survey to the population (or relevant actor) living in the area or to service providers in the cross-border area. Use for tourism Trip-advisor methodology.
- Implement the survey.

MA: notices that at this stage the re-design of the indicators will be burdensome and partially difficult to implement due to the current revision of the programme.

Alessandro recommend then that the work of re-design, collect and analysed the result could be included in the ex-post evaluation. Alessandro also suggest that the ex-post evaluator should propose a taxonomy of new result indicators and investigate the result at the level of project.

Communications

[Cristina](#) presented on the communication strategy's progress towards its goals, on the effectiveness of the communication strategy and which elements proved most effective, and on the capacity to mobilise potential beneficiaries. She made the following assessments:

- ▶ Progresses towards goals: Until 2018, all output and result indicators for 2019 were achieved, with the indicator "*Number of participants in the events*" achieving the target value for 2023 as well.
- ▶ Effectiveness of communication activities: The website of the programme and the events organized, information/training sessions, proved to be the most effective in reaching the potential beneficiaries
- ▶ Capacity to rise interest: The capacity of the programme to mobilize potential beneficiaries and beneficiaries is high as well as to inform the general public about the opportunity offered by the programme.

Recommendations: [Cristina](#) and [Alessandro](#) discussed recommendations on how to best distribute information and the introduction of communications indicators at project level, as well as potential training elements. These were:

- The programme structures should mainly focus on the communication channels that prove effective
- The programme bodies should focus more on distributing information through social media as the beneficiaries and potential applicants expressed interest in receiving information through this channel
- To impose the **introduction of communication indicators at project level**, in order to facilitate the monitoring and evaluation processes
- The need to organise some thematic training sessions on the state aid and the control and financial management
- That as radio, newspaper, and television can highly contribute to promote the visibility of the programme, it is recommended to better use the potentiality of these communication channel reach a wider public.

[MA communication manager](#): MA implemented communication campaigns at national level but they were not successful as expected. The reaction from the media was very slow and this did not off-set the high costs to finance them. In addition to the communication indicators, it does not seem efficient to introduce, at this stage of the programme, new indicators for the beneficiaries.

[NA Serbia](#): noticed that events when organised at local level are more effective, i.e. people are very aware on what the programme is doing. At regional level this awareness is weaker.

[Alessandro](#) points out that having communication indicators at the level of projects facilitates understanding of what happens at the ground level in terms of dissemination and communications, which are probably the most pervasive capitalisation activities of the programme. Hence, an investigation into "how the project communicates" can be an "evaluation question" to the ex-post evaluator. The results of the evaluation can be re-used to design a specific set of communication indicators for the next programming period.

Focus Group 2

Programme Relevance

Paul discussed the method of Programme evaluation with respect to Theory of Change and whether the Programme remains relevant, by reviewing current indicators with respect to baseline data found in the Territorial Analysis. The basic information presented but further elaborated by specific indicators and visual representation was as follows:

Specific Objective		Relevance
1.1	Employment and labour mobility	High
1.2	Health and social infrastructure	High
1.3	Social and cultural inclusion	High
2.1	Environmental protection and sustainable use of natural resources"	High
2.2	Environmental risks management and emergency preparedness"	High
3.1	Mobility and transport infrastructure and services	High
3.2	Public utilities infrastructure	High
4.1	Investments for the growth of the demand of local tourism networks and promotion of innovative tourism activities	Medium
4.2	Capacity building initiatives for the improvement of quality and innovation of tourism services and products"	High

Hints for the Future

Alessandro presented the hints for future programmes, before concluding the evaluator's presentation overall.

First, he noted that the Programme specific objectives (as results from the above table) are still relevant.

Second, the survey asked to the beneficiaries and applicants about their future intentions. The great majority responded that a) they are very interested b) already preparing projects and partnerships c) interested in the areas of education, health, environment, cross border management, energy.

Third, he pointed out that the case studies show that the main results of the Programme are:

- ▶ Rise awareness
- ▶ Create knowledge (pilot test)
- ▶ Boost innovation
- ▶ Provide services -> increase quality of life
- ▶ Improve light infrastructure to Provide services.

These results are mainly affecting the "intangible assets" of the territory and improve concretely the life conditions of people.

Fourth, in the same cooperation area, there are different CBC Programmes (e.g. Romania-Hungary, Romania-Bulgaria, Croatia-Serbia, etc). There is a risk of not coordination, crowding out, unintended competition.

Fifth, therefore is important to capitalise the Programme results to make the programme more specific and building on hitherto achievement. Also it will be important to see how to follow up financially specific projects presenting, for example, feasibility studies or testing innovative solutions exploring the possibility offered by financial instruments also at level of EU (i.e. INVESTEU).

Final conclusions [Alessandro](#) presented on were the following:



On this conclusions there was a general consensus.

[MA](#) has several reflections:

- 1) Also, tourism was identified as important by beneficiaries in consultation. So, this also shall be taken in account in the context of the new objective "Europe closer to citizens".
- 2) Regarding the Capitalisation phase the MA asked the question of how it might be stressed to the projects to take it into account the possible financial aspects of possible follow up? In the selection phase we already ask to demonstrate how the project can actually be capitalised and sustainable.

[Alessandro](#) answered that the latter question can be specified in the applicant guide so that beneficiaries know from the very beginning they also have to think about a follow-up phase. For instance, beneficiaries should detect the relevant stakeholders (e.g. the policy makers in the relevant field) to be involved to ensure project results can be refinanced and capitalised.

Annex 4 Link between findings, conclusions and recommendations

Topic	EQ	Findings	Conclusions	Recommendations
<p>Level of achievement toward Communication objectives</p>	2.1.1	<p>Until 2018, all output and result indicators for 2019 were achieved, with the indicator “<i>Number of participants in the events</i>” achieving the target for 2023 as well.</p> <p>The overachievement of the communication indicators is due to the several activities that were undertaken within the communication strategy.</p> <p>Relevant stakeholders were involved from the moment when the application guideline was elaborated. A draft version was published on the programme’s official website for public consultations and during the process, MA, JS and NA bodies answered the questions posed by potential beneficiaries by phone and e-mail. Thus, all efforts have been taken to ensure that potential beneficiaries were informed in real time. Within the second call for proposals, a series of specific and technical questions were received about the way of downloading the application documents in eMS. In that sense, the MA has prepared some specific topics regarding the use of eMS and also about other aspects such as budget structure, use of working packages, use of simplified cost option etc.</p> <p>JS was responsible of organizing different types of events for potential applicants and beneficiaries, such as courses or training seminars, both in the phase of launching the calls for proposals or later on, for instructing the beneficiaries on specific technical topics related to the implementation of the projects.</p> <p>The Facebook social network of the Programme had an important role in promoting not only the Programme’s opportunities, but also the results of the projects considered as most performing. The website of the Programme continues to be the most accessed and accessible method of promoting the Programme.</p> <p>For promoting the Programme, there were also organized different types of seminars (both in Romania and Serbia), workshops and forums for identifying partners, which in the end generated lots of partnerships that were built during these events.</p> <p>Concerning the level of accessibility to the information on the communication channels used, the beneficiaries and the potential applicants stated that the information is easily accessible, and the language used is user friendly, however</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • C.C.1. Until 2018, all output and result indicators for 2019 were achieved, with the indicator “<i>Number of participants in the events</i>” achieving the target value for 2023 as well. • C.C.2. The website of the programme and the events organized, information/training sessions, proved to be the most effective in reaching the potential beneficiaries 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • R.C.1. As the achievement rate for the indicators is very high, the target value for 2023 should be increased.

Topic	EQ	Findings	Conclusions	Recommendations
		<p>somehow technical.</p> <p>2.1.2 In general, programme communication activities proved to have a high level of effectiveness in what concerns the achievement of 2019 milestones. Thus, it is highly recommended to keep using the same communication platforms as used between 2015-2019, as they proved to be the most effective and efficient in achieving their targets. As the following section, survey inputs, will show, social media could be emphasized more in the communication strategy.</p> <p>The beneficiaries and potential beneficiaries prefer the same main channels of communication to be informed about the financing opportunities offered by the programme as the ones already used: official website, information/ training sessions, newsletters. The potential beneficiaries appreciated the communication channels that the programme used as the following. Although many beneficiaries and potential applicants selected Facebook as one of preferred communication channel, few received information through this channel.</p> <p>When asked what types of information, in addition to those already available, would the potential beneficiaries wish to receive about the programme and which is consider useful, the following answers were given, among others: Technical and administrative information; Relevant information about possible eligible partners; More information on supporting small and medium-sized NGOs in projects implementation; Implementation related issues, best practice cases; More details about the public procurement’s procedures; Contractual modifications; Regarding the preparation of project reports and the eligibility of expenses; A more detailed guideline.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • C.C.3. Although Facebook was indicated as a preferred communication channel by the beneficiaries and potential applicants, few actually received information about the programme through this channel. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • R.C.2. As the programme communication activities proved to have a high level of effectiveness in what concerns the achievement of 2019 milestones, and even 2023 targets, the programme structures should mainly focus on the communication channels that already proved to be effective. • R.C.3. The programme bodies should focus more on distributing information through social media as the beneficiaries and potential applicants expressed interest in receiving information through this channel.

Topic	EQ	Findings	Conclusions	Recommendations
Effectiveness of the programme in supporting beneficiaries	2.1.3	<p>The IPA CBC Romania-Serbia programme, through the eMS platform, imposes that all projects include the Working Package Communication, aimed at raising awareness about project and programme activities. As a result, all beneficiaries must allocate a specific budget and dedicate their attention to fulfilling the activities within this working package.</p> <p>Among the activities that are included in the working package of communication, projects focus on: Events and conferences; Press releases and press articles; Dissemination materials (leaflets, brochures, flyers, other presentation materials); Websites, etc.</p> <p>However, apart from the fact that the communication activities of each project are reported in the implementation reports of the projects (including the budget expenditure), there are no specific indicators foreseen at project level – making the assessment harder in terms of results achievement.</p> <p>In order to support beneficiaries in implementing the communication working package, the programme bodies had prepared and made available, on the programme’s website, specific templates ready to be used by beneficiaries – in relation to all communication activities, especially advertising materials produced at project level.</p> <p>All in all, the manual and the templates included on the programme website provide sufficient support so that dissemination materials are elaborated accordingly, effectively contributing to projects fulfilment of communication activities.</p> <p>In general, beneficiaries and applicants highly appreciate the level of details of the information included in the dissemination materials about the programme, while also considering that the information help them to define and implement projects with high impact.</p> <p>More importantly, concerning the responsivity of the programme, beneficiaries and applicants are very satisfied of all the responsible bodies (JS, MA and NA in Serbia). The highest satisfaction was expressed for the JS members, who do have a</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • C.C.4. The Visual Identity Manual, together with the specific Templates for communication materials provide sufficient know-how on how to utilise communication tools. In addition, the responsible bodies provide support in relation to the communication activities before the submission of the project - through trainings – and during project implementation – through help desk support. • C.C.5. The beneficiaries highly appreciate the responsiveness of the programme bodies, being particularly satisfied by the support provided and involvement of the joint secretariat. • C.C.6. As no indicators related to the 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • R.C.4. It is recommended to introduce communication indicators at project level (such as number of promoting conferences, number of persons informed about the project’s activities, number of informative materials distributed, etc.), in order to facilitate the monitoring and evaluation processes, while keeping in mind that no additional burden should be imposed to beneficiaries.

Topic	EQ	Findings	Conclusions	Recommendations
		direct contact with the beneficiaries.	communication activities are foreseen at project level, the programme bodies cannot clearly monitor the implementation status of communication activities. Thus, apart from specific questions raised by beneficiaries, it is not clear whether projects need additional support or not. Moreover, by having a clearer picture of the implementation status of all communication activities (of all projects), the programme bodies would benefit from having identified the real needs for improvement in this regard.	
Programme visibility and attractiveness	2.1.4	<p>The opinion from applicants and beneficiaries involved in the survey indicates a general high interest in the funding opportunities of the programme and consider the communication activities very efficient in promoting the visibility of the programme.</p> <p>The tools and communications channels used by the programme are considered very detailed, accessible and effective in all the phases of the programme life cycle: from the promotion of the opportunities offered by the programme to the capitalisation of the project outcomes and results. Predominantly beneficiaries consult the programme website to get relevant information but also the participation to the training sessions is considered very effective to collect information on project</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • C.C.7. All in all, the analysis of the communication activities reveals that the capacity of the programme to mobilise potential beneficiaries and beneficiaries is good as well as to inform the general public about the opportunity offered by 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • R.C.5. It is recommended to organise some thematic training sessions on the state aid and the control and financial management.

Topic	EQ	Findings	Conclusions	Recommendations
		creation and implementation.	<p>the programme. This evidence comes from the number of project proposals received within the two calls for proposals: 194 in the first call, 176 in the second call.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • C.C.8. Opinions from beneficiaries reveal the need to organise some thematic training sessions on the state aid and the control and financial management. As well, during the focus group, general consensus was reached on the need to organise some thematic training sessions on the state aid and the control and financial management. 	
	2.1.5	As reported in the evaluation question above, the programme performed very well in increasing the awareness on the opportunities offered in the cooperation area, thus resulting consequently in a greater visibility to the EU contribution. Furthermore, documental analysis on the communication strategy reveals that the programme planned specific actions to support the EU visibility in compliance with the relevant regulation.		There are no specific recommendations.

Annex 5 Indicative Action plan

EQ 2.1.1	Do the communication activities carried out by the programme authorities lead to the achievement of the general and specific objectives set out in the Communication Strategy?
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Recommendation: As the achievement rate for the indicators is very high, the target value for 2023 should be increased

STEP		Who	When	How much
1	Begin holding consultations with all programme authorities involved in the programme's management and the communication team. The consultations will involve a round table discussion where each participant will express his/her opinion regarding the increase of the targets;	MA/JS/ Communication team	2020	1 working day
2	Draft a proposal on the increase of each indicator. The proposal should be based on the findings from the consultation with the programme authorities and on the reporting and evaluation documents on the communication activities (<i>The Annual Implementation Reports, The Communication Strategy, Annual Communication Reports Annual Information regarding the progress of Communication Strategy and planned activities, Communication Evaluation Report</i> etc).	MA/ JS/ Communication team	2020	1 month
3	Hold a second consultation round with all programme authorities involved in the programme's management, in order to validate the proposed increases. If need it, modifications will be made to the proposed indicators	MA/ JS/ Communication team	2020	1 working day

EQ 2.1.2 Could more effect be achieved by using different instruments or actions?

Recommendations

- As the programme communication activities proved to have a high level of effectiveness in what concerns the achievement of 2019 milestones, and even 2023 targets, the programme structures should mainly focus on the communication channels that already proved to be effective.
- The programme bodies should focus more on distributing information through social media as the beneficiaries and potential applicants expressed interest in receiving information through this channel.

STEP		Who	When	How much
1	The programme bodies allocate more resources to the communication channels that proved to be the most effective in reaching the beneficiaries and potential beneficiaries; The allocation is agreed after a meeting with the communication team;	MA/JS/ Communication team	2020	10 working days
2	The programme structures assign the communication team in drafting a strategy for communication on social media;	MA/ JS	2020	1 working days
3	<p>The communication team drafts a strategy for communication on social media; The strategy must include the following aspects:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Communication objectives • Audience analysis • The platforms that will be used for disseminating information • Type of information to be distributed <p>The following documents should be consulted when the communication strategy is drafted: <i>The Annual Implementation Reports, The Communication Strategy, Annual Communication Reports, Annual Information regarding the progress of Communication Strategy and planned activities, Communication Evaluation Report.</i></p>	Communication team	2020	3-4 months

STEP	Who	When	How much
4	MA/ JS	2020	1 working day

EQ 2.1.3	How effective was the programme in supporting project communication activities?
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- Recommendations:** It is recommended to introduce **communication indicators at project level** (such as number of promoting conferences, number of persons informed about the project's activities, number of informative materials distributed, etc.), in order to facilitate the monitoring and evaluation processes, while keeping in mind that no additional burden should be imposed to beneficiaries. Although the introduction of communication indicators for the next programming period was validated at the focus group, the programme structures argued that it does not seem efficient to introduce, at this stage of the programme, communication indicators for beneficiaries.

STEP	Who	When	How much
1	MA/JS	2020	2 months
2	MA/ NA/JS/ Communication Team	2020	1 working days
3	MA/ NA/JS/ Communication Team	2020	2 months

Relevant - ensuring appropriate thematic

STEP		Who	When	How much
	<p>coverage and a direct and close link to the objective it is measuring and monitoring;</p> <p>Accepted - when there are no substantial difficulties with data collection;</p> <p>Credible - when the definition is unambiguous and clear;</p> <p>Easy to monitor - when data collection is feasible in terms of costs and time for those in charge of the activity;</p> <p>Robust - when it is clearly defined and not subject to manipulation;</p>			
4	The MA presents the draft list of communication indicators to the other programme bodies and to the communication team in order to collect feedback. If need it, modifications will be made according to the feedback received during the consultations.	MA/ NA/JS/ Communication Team	2020	1 working day

EQ 2.1.4	Do communication activities have sufficient impact on the awareness of the beneficiaries/potential beneficiaries of the programme/general public?
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Recommendation:

- Opinion from beneficiaries reveal the need to organise some thematic training sessions on the state aid and the control and financial management. As well, during the focus group, general consensus was reached on the need to organise some thematic training sessions on the state aid and the control and financial management

STEP		Who	When	How much
1	Establish the best time to hold the training sessions, according to the availability of the potential beneficiaries;	MA/ NA/JS	2020 - 2021	10 working days

STEP		Who	When	How much
2	The MA/ NA/JS must draft the material and the content of the training sessions in an accessible and practical approach, in order to deliver to the participants, the most relevant information to be employed during project implementation;	MA/ NA/JS	2020 - 2021	2 months
3	Promote the trainings sessions, using the most effective communication tools identified in the communication evaluation report, namely official website, information sessions, newsletters, and social media, as many beneficiaries expressed interest in receiving information through this communication channel;	JS	2020 - 2021	2 months
4	Conduct the trainings sessions, on both sides of the border.	MA/ NA/JS	2020 - 2021	4 working days

Annex 6 List of documents and literature reviewed

- The Interreg IPA CBC Romania – Serbia Programme, November 2018
- The Applicant’s guideline, Call for proposals no.1, Call for proposals no.2, Call for strategic projects proposals for Interreg IPA CBC Romania – Serbia Programme;
- The Annual Implementation Report for 2018;
- Multi-annual Communication Plan 2019-2023, INTERREG - IPA Cross-border Cooperation Romania - Serbia Programme, February 2019;
- Communication Strategy for Interreg - IPA CBC Romania - Serbia Programme, February 2019, revision 2;
- Visual Identity Manual of the Interreg - IPA Cross-border Cooperation Romania - Serbia Programme, Third edition, February 2019, Revision 2;
- Annual information regarding the progress of Communication Strategy and planned activities for 2019, Timsoara, Romania.

Annex 7 List of the Evaluation Steering Committee members

The Evaluation Steering Committee convened for this evaluation exercise included:

- A designate of the Head of the Managing Authority;
- A representative of the Serbian National Authority of the programme;
- The Evaluation Unit staff;
- A representative of the European Commission;
- A representative of the Evaluation Central Unit with coordination role (Ministry of European Funds).