

COMMUNICATION STRATEGY 2021-2027



September 2022

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Section 1 - Purpose and objectives

The purpose of the Communication Strategy is *to highlight the positive impact of the EU financial contribution and to ensure that assistance from the Funds is transparent by proactively disseminating information and providing platforms that stimulate exchanges of experience in order to raise the awareness with the general public.*

COMMUNICATION OBJECTIVES

The Communication Strategy is an important instrument which aims to promote Interreg brand and Romania-Serbia Programme contribution on the cross border area and to assist the management structures of the programme to disseminate the benefits of EU financial intervention in the cross-border region. Also, the Communication Strategy will create the premises for a high absorption capacity in the area of Romanian - Republic of Serbia Programme of the IPA III funds by ensuring that all relevant information reaches the potential beneficiaries. Our communication messages will address mainly to the citizens living in the Romanian-Serbian border regions, potential beneficiaries and beneficiaries, citizens living in the villages and cities where projects were implemented, end-users of the projects results, stakeholders from regional institutions and local public administrations, journalists and other opinion leaders.

The programme appointed a communication officer who will coordinate the successful and harmonised implementation and work together with all the programme bodies, the national communication coordinator in Romania and the INFORM EU network of communication officers. The communication officer will establish an internal network with contact points from JS, JS Antenna and NA to improve communication and visibility actions.

In order to reach the desired impact, the communication objectives are designed by the management bodies of the Programme by taking into consideration the *communication needs specific for each stage of Programme life cycle* and the *communication needs of each target group*, thus leading to the best possible outcome of Programme implementation.

Taking into consideration the each stage of Programme life cycle (launching of calls for proposals, capitalisation of projects results), specific communication needs for each target group and recommendations from impact evaluation report from previous programme, the management bodies of the programme developed the suitable general communication objectives for achieving the programme indicators.

Following the logical frame of intervention (see the section 5), each general communication objective is linked with some specific objectives to be achieved through *specific communication activities*, defined, annually, in the communication plan. A list of communication activities and their timing will be discussed with the national communication coordinator, and will be available for other MAs to consult. This measure is part of the drafting of a calendar that will include all communication activities of all MAs, throughout the

year and may result in further collaboration between various institutions. Each year, the Managing Authority, together with the Joint Secretariat, Joint Secretariat Antenna and the Serbian National Authority will assess the implementation status of the specific communication activities fulfilled on previous year and will propose new activities for the following year, as well as an estimated calendar for implementation of the activities and the responsible structure.

All communication activities and materials developed by the project's partners and implementing bodies will respect specific Interreg visibility rules, stipulated in EU regulations and Interreg Branding Manual. In addition, the Managing Authority will develop the specific Visual Identity Manual, with logos and templates of communication and information materials and these will be available for project's partners, ready to use, on the programme website.

The communication activities will focus on the following directions:

- increasing the awareness about the new programme, its priority axes and financing opportunities for general public, newcomers and existing beneficiaries as potential applicants;
- assist beneficiaries on promoting and capitalise the projects results providing useful communication online templates, tools and guidelines (ex. guidelines for organising online meetings elaborated in previous period will be updated and available on the programme website), tailored workshops for using social media platforms.

General objectives

- ✚ **GO1-To support the successful implementation** of the programme by ensuring an effective communication system (result indicators, channels, targeted messages to all identified target groups), especially addressing the specific need for cross border projects;
- ✚ **GO2-To increase the knowledge** of the potential beneficiaries on the financing opportunities offered by the programme, eligibility criteria and selection mechanism for the applications submitted;
- ✚ **GO3-To support beneficiaries in project implementation in a way that enforces result-orientation and ensures efficiency;**
- ✚ **GO4 -To increase public awareness** regarding the specific need for cross-border projects, the programme axes and specific objectives and the positive impact of EU financial support for the citizens from the Programme area;
- ✚ **GO5-To ensure transparency** in the use of the Interreg IPA funds and **increase the visibility** of the RO-RS Programme in order to ensure a higher level of trust of the general public (including the community living on the other side of the border) in the implementing bodies of the programme and EU positive impact in the region and to reduce mental borders.

Specific objectives

- SO1-To make the programme known, attractive and easily approachable to potential applicants of all Priorities/specific objectives of the programme and in all regions of the programme area;
- SO2-To create a cooperation community with the beneficiaries to deliver encouraging support during project implementation ensuring efficient implementation, including communication and capitalisation of results;
- SO3-To promote the benefits of cross border cooperation and positive impact of EU funds widely in the programme area and beyond.

Section 2 - Target groups

The geographical area of the programme is *the extended border region between Romania and Serbia largely demarcated by the course of the River Danube*.

The programme area comprises:

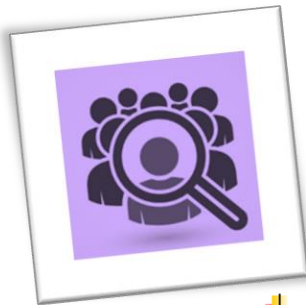
Romania:

- ✚ Mehedinti county- part of the Romanian South-West Development Region Oltenia;
- ✚ Caraş Severin and Timiș counties - parts of the Romanian West Development Region;

Serbia:

- ✚ Severnobanatski, Srednjobanatski, Južnjobanatski, Braničevski, Borski, Podunavski districts.

The Programme identified the following **TARGET GROUPS** from both countries:



- ✚ **Potential and direct beneficiaries:** local and regional public authorities and institutions, NGOs, etc. throughout the Programme area.

- ✚ **European Union's institutions and bodies:** European Commission (DG Regio, DG NEAR), EEAS, EU Delegation in Serbia, European Economic and Social Committee, Committee of Regions, European Court of Auditors, European Parliament.

- ✚ **National/ regional/local media from both countries,**

- ✚ **Other stakeholders - governmental/ non-governmental actors:** decentralized bodies in Serbia and Romania relevant to the bordering regions, national, regional and local authorities and administrations, Municipalities, County Councils, District Administrations, NGOs active at border level, Trade associations of the border regions, Women and youth organizations, Cross-border associations, Cultural, research and scientific organizations, Organizations representing economic and social interests, Stakeholders of mainstream programmes.

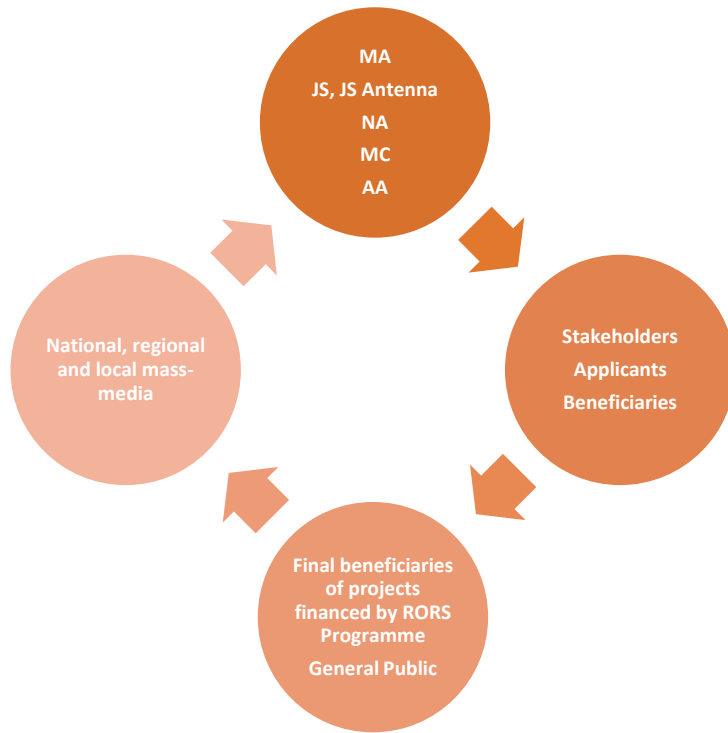
- ✚ **General public,**

Internal public: the staff of the management and audit bodies of the programme (Managing Authority, National Authority, Joint Secretariat, JS Antenna, Audit Authority, RO and RS First Level Control Units), the members and observers of the Monitoring Committee.

Support groups (communication partners)

- The Information Centres EUROPE DIRECT in Romania;
- The network of communicators on European funds in Romania;
- The Interact network of communicators on Interreg programmes for both countries;
- The information bureau of the European Parliament in Romania
- EU Info Centre Serbia- Headquarter in Belgrade and the network of EU Info Points

TARGET GROUPS



Section 4 - Communication channels

Based on previous experience and recommendations from impact evaluation report and Interact workshops experts, the programme bodies are committed to use a various range of communication tools, tailored to the specific target groups needs for each phase of the programme implementation: preparation of projects proposals and launching of the calls for proposals, promotion and capitalisation of projects results, closure of the programme etc.

1. Programme website

According to the conclusions of impact Programme evaluation, the programme website was the main communication channel for beneficiaries for receiving the useful information regarding the financial opportunities and, in the same time, the main tool for promoting the projects results to the general public. Therefore, the website will remain the main tool of communication. A modernised and user-friendly Programme website dedicated to 2021-2027 programming period is being developed under the existing website address: <http://www.romania-serbia.net/>



All the information mandatory by the Regulations in force (such as applicant guide, calls for proposals calendar, list of operations financed by the programme, MC decisions, and so on) but also additional of information (e.g.: status of the Programme in real time, projects presentation fiches, useful communication templates, contact details will be presented in the user-friendly manner and applying all principles of transparency and reusability of data.

As requested by Article 46(b) of the CPR, a single national website portal providing access to all programmes of the Member State (Romania) is available, <https://www.fonduri-ue.ro/>. Also, this national portal includes all the information and will respect all the obligations for MA requested by Article 49 of the CPR. The programme has the dedicated section on this portal and it will be updated periodically.

2. Social media platforms

In promoting our Programme in social media, our intention is to use the following platforms:



Facebook was the most common social media platform used during 2014-2020 period and the most popular social media platform in Romania and Serbia for our potential beneficiaries, according with their responses from questionnaires filled in during the impact evaluation of communication activities from previous period. Therefore, the programme bodies plan to use it as well as the main communication platform for all our target groups.

Every relevant post published on Interreg IPA Romania-Serbia Programme Facebook page will contain a link to the official Programme website.

In general, the posts published on the Programme Facebook page, will be informational connected with the Romanian-Serbian cross-border activities and projects, presenting to the audience different results of our Programme, or connections with other EU activities, including other European Union promoted activities, Interreg or Interreg IPA results, etc. (When possible, there should be link connections between Facebook, other social communication tools and the programme website. Having in mind the technical characteristics of the social media, the posts should include images, graphical designs, links and hashtags, but also attractive and plain language texts.

Beneficiaries, relevant stakeholders and institutions will be strongly encouraged to follow and subscribe to the Interreg IPA CBC Romania-Serbia Programme Facebook page and regularly share the posts in order to increase the awareness and improve its visibility.

The communicators representing MA, NA, JS or JS Antenna will encourage all beneficiaries to share on Facebook relevant information and interesting photos and videos about the stages of implementation of their project. Reposting posts between Facebook accounts is suitable to increase the awareness and engagement of the viewers.

We are currently using **Twitter and Instagram** for our programme to cover as much as is possible from the audiences involved in social media communication. All social media have unique characteristics, being chosen by the users for their unique characteristics in spreading messages. We



will adapt our messages to these instruments, multiplying our communication using specific messages, attractive images and catchy videos, when available.

On the social media platforms above, between 2-15 posts monthly will be distributed in order to increase our reach and to keep the communities engaged. The programme authorities will encourage the projects partners to update periodically their websites and social media pages with relevant information regarding the achievements during the entire lifecycle of the project.

Links and hashtags will be included, but no more than 2 or 3 so that the message to be simple and easy to read. For content that is longer than the admitted limit, we will use the Programme webpage and links to other social media platforms (Facebook, etc).



YouTube is another platform that we intend to use as well in the future because it is easily accessed by general public and our specific target audience. We will use it to upload videos produced by projects and programme on previous period for capitalisation of the projects results, new short movies for promoting the positive impact of the projects financed by new programme and also to ensure live streaming of our organised events open to public, such as conferences.

Short video clips about the programme and projects' deliverables and results in the form of highlights, as often as possible (e.g. showing the progress if something is being built, reconstructed or renovated) and publish them on YouTube under the Interreg IPA Romania-Serbia Programme account. Videos will be max. 3 minutes long, and uploaded on YouTube along with the catchy titles. The link to the newest video will, at the same time be published on social media pages as well as on the website, for promotional purposes.

As for the frequency of uploading videos, a regularity of posting will be established as once the followers are used to watching published materials (e.g. once a week, twice a month), they expect the pace to be kept.

Another way of reaching people will be to advertise via non-skippable video ads or bumper ads on YouTube, depending on the TA budget as charges are applied for this kind of advertising. These advertisements will contain information about the programme, or a call to apply for the projects, etc. (depending on the stage of the programme) and will be used periodically.

3. Events



The Programme impact evaluation report of the communication activities carried out during 2014-2020 period underlines the important role of the events organised by the management bodies of the programme for beneficiaries and stakeholders from eligible area of the programme.

The evaluation reports and interviews with stakeholders revealed a great interest of potential applicants in the events organised by the management structures of the programme and that the information and promotion activities have been effective, taking into consideration the great number of projects proposals submitted.

The programme bodies will continue to organise events in the current programming period, events that will involve physical presence of the participants as well as **on-line** and/or hybrid events, observing the legal provisions related to the safety of participants and organizers.

We will keep all type of events dedicated to the promotion of our programme that has proven to be very useful to our target groups, as follows:

➤ **Promotion events dedicated to general public (conferences and promotion events)**

Promotion events will be public events which will involve a great number of participants, addressing to all target groups mentioned in the strategy, but in special to the general public. In this category are included the launching/closure conference of the Programme, the communication events of SIP/LIP, whose budget exceeds 5 million EUR etc. They can be organized in person, online or in a hybrid format.

These promotion events will be a good opportunity for the programme bodies to promote the positive impact of the projects financed in the context of a large European celebration event (as European Cooperation Day, Europe Day, Danube Day), sports events, local fairs, festivals etc.

Also, the programme bodies will actively support the SIP/LIP projects in organising communication events, with logistical and promotion materials (videos, presentations, testimonials etc.) and publicity campaigns on our website and social media networks.

For increasing the awareness and visibility of these events, the live transmission will be available on the different social platforms and offline videos archive will be published on the programme webpage. Also, press conferences will be organised with local and regional mass-media and national/ EU officials and relevant stakeholders may be invited as speakers.

This dedicated communication approach is expected to have a multiplier effect on the general public, through subsequent dissemination of information by participants to other stakeholders from the region.

➤ **Events dedicated to potential beneficiaries**

During 2014-2020 programming period, these types of events were considered to be very useful for potential applicants in launching phase of the call for proposals of the Programme.

The programme bodies will organise a series of events dedicated to potential applicants with the purpose of offering support to potential beneficiaries in preparing their project idea and application, including whenever possible, workshops with the aim of informing and educating potential beneficiaries with no experience with the projects, about the Programme and the way it works before launching Call for proposals.



These events (for e.g. info days, caravans, trainings, partner search and thematic seminars etc.) will have an interactive format and represent an opportunity for a direct dialog between potential applicants and programme management bodies.

They may take the form of an event organised in different locations in Romania and Serbia, involving physical presence or may consist of webinars, tutorials or on-line meetings, depending on the situation.

As well, for further dissemination, following the consent of participants, these events may be registered or transmitted live and promoted on the website and the social media platforms of the programme.

➤ **Events dedicated to the beneficiaries of projects**

The managing bodies of the programme will provide beneficiaries of projects continuous support, during the entire life cycle of the project implementation, by organising different thematic seminars and trainings covering different aspects related to the implementation of the project, project visits, on-line meetings etc. The calendar and agenda of these events will be promoted on the programme website and social media networks.

At the same time, with the purpose of helping beneficiaries to increase the visibility of projects and to capitalise the project results, and also to alert them regarding the new requirements on EU visibility rules, the programme bodies will elaborate specific guidelines and specific section on the programme webpage for visibility and promotion of results. Also,

the programme bodies will provide assistance on using the online generator, developed by Interact.

➤ **Communicating operations of strategic importance & large infrastructure projects**

Operations of strategic importance are emblematic projects which aim to tell the story of the Programme and bring more awareness about the importance of the positive effects of EU support, for the citizens living in the Programme area.

Communicating operations of strategic importance require particular attention and involves Programme authorities and beneficiaries altogether, in order to reach higher visibility.

Thus, dedicated communication actions/events will be strongly supported by the Programme bodies and beneficiaries and can include the following measures, but not limited to these:

- ✚ Organization of dedicated events by the MA/NA/JS, with the participation of beneficiaries, in order to ensure visibility and support achievements of operations of strategic importance and large infrastructure projects;
- ✚ Organization of webinars/trainings for beneficiaries of operations of strategic importance and large infrastructure projects, including topics such as communication and visibility tools and actions to be used in the implementation phase of the projects;
- ✚ Creation and use of communication and visibility materials for operations of strategic importance and large infrastructure projects, available at all times for relevant actors (programme authorities, beneficiaries, EC);
- ✚ Organization of dedicated events, by the beneficiaries, with the support of the MA/NA/JS, in order to showcase the projects' achievements for both countries and citizens in the programme area;
- ✚ The programme bodies will use all communication means, including social media channels, collaboration with media, press opportunities, to promote the achievements of the operations of strategic importance, during all stages of implementation;
- ✚ The programme bodies will make sure to link the projects' achievements and positive effects to the specific objectives of the programme and enhance the impact of development at all levels (national, regional, local) for the programme area and also, the contribution to EU priorities;
- ✚ Communication officer and coordinators will maintain the relations between the Programme bodies, beneficiaries and partners of the operations of strategic importance, in all actions/events which involve these;
- ✚ Any other activities/events that the programme considers appropriate can be organized, in order to communicate about operations of strategic importance and ensure their visibility and the EU support

Close coordination with beneficiaries of SIP and LIP in order to achieve optimum organization of mandatory visibility activities i.e. all SIP and LIP beneficiaries should organize a communication event or activity, and involve the Commission and managing authority, while ensuring that the Commission is timely informed about the communication event or activity (2 or 3 months in advance).

4. Videos



As visual content plays a very important role in communication, we intend to design short videos for presentation of the new programme, for the launching of calls for proposals and for different stages of the life cycle of the programme or events, which will be posted on social media and website of the programme. All audio-video materials will be shared with EC, for simultaneously publication, in order to increase the general audience.

Specific provisions regarding the elaboration of videos for promoting the results and achievements of the projects will be available for beneficiaries in the *dedicated section for visibility on the programme website*.

5. Digital Publications

Taking into consideration the need for reducing the carbon footprint at the level of programme implementation and the desire of programme bodies to promote the green communication, the producing of publications in hard copy will be reduced drastically. Moreover, on a short-medium term, it will be difficult to distribute these materials to the general public because of health concerns after Covid-19 pandemic crisis.



The programme bodies and beneficiaries will be encouraged to use mainly digital publications and publish online in order to be widely disseminated by social media platforms. As well communication platforms and networks (INFORM EU network, Interreg EU network, Interreg communication group, IPA communication group) will be used, for exchanging information and best practices in developing attractive and suitable materials for promotion of projects results.

6. Press advertisements and releases

Taking into consideration the same reasons mentioned above, all press advertisements and releases will be distributed mainly online and the programme bodies will ensure their publication and dissemination through all online communication channels of the programme. Programme bodies will monitor the mass-media after releasing these materials and could develop press monitoring reports, at the MC or EC request. Also, after a media paid campaign is released (google alerts or other similar on-line services). Moreover, the Programme bodies aim to encourage more journalists to come to our events in order to have more coverage in the media and more news about the Programme/ projects.

Section 5 - Logical framework of communication

The Programme structures approach on communication may be synthetized in the following logical framework:

Programme phase	General Objectives	Indicative communication activities/actions	Target group	Responsible body
<i>Preparation and official launching of the programme</i>	GO1,GO2	events (launching conferences in Romanian and Serbian side of the border, etc.	General public Potential beneficiaries Governmental and non/governmental actors national and regional National/regional/local media EU institutions and bodies	MA JS, JS Antenna
		website promotion		
		social media campaigns		
		publications		
		press releases	Potential beneficiaries/ Stakeholders	NA
<i>Launching of calls of proposals</i>	GO2	Information events (info-days, conferences, partner search and thematic seminars, newcomers' workshops etc.)	Potential eligible beneficiaries National/regional/local media	MA JS, JS Antenna NA
		website promotion		
		social media campaigns		
		publications		
		press releases		
on line meetings				
<i>Implementation of projects</i>	GO3,GO4	events (thematic seminars and trainings for beneficiaries, project visits, conferences and other info and communication events including SIP & LIP communication events.)	Project beneficiaries	MA JS, JS Antenna NA

		<p>website promotion, tutorials</p> <p>Visual Identity Manual elaborated and disseminated to the project beneficiaries</p> <p>social media campaigns, tutorials</p> <p>on line meetings, webinars</p> <p>direct email</p> <p>publications</p> <p>press articles</p> <p>capitalisation section on the programme website to share best practices and project results</p> <p>other info and communication activities that may increase the visibility of the project and its results</p>		
Programme closure	G04,G05	<p>events (closure conferences, seminars etc.)</p>	<p>General public Project beneficiaries Governmental and non/governmental actors national and regional National/regional/local media EU institutions and bodies, National/regional/local media</p>	<p>MA</p> <p>JS, JS Antenna</p> <p>NA</p>
		<p>website promotion</p>		
		<p>social media posts</p>		
		<p>publications</p> <p>press releases</p>		
All life stages of the Programme	To exchange information and best	<p>events (conferences and seminars, trainings)</p>	<p>Staff of management bodies (MA, JS, NA, JS Antenna)</p>	<p>MA</p> <p>JS, JS</p>
		<p>staff experience exchange</p>		
		<p>Online tutorials</p>	<p>Members and observers</p>	

	practices		of MC	Antenna
	G01,G03	on line meetings, webinars, projects visits	Interact, other Interreg programmes, INFORM EU communication network, influencers, bloggers	NA

Section 6 - Monitoring and evaluation

In line with *article 29 and 30* of Interreg Regulation, the Monitoring Committee shall examine the implementation of communication and visibility actions.

In this respect, in accordance with the provisions of the communication strategy, annually, the Monitoring Committee will examine the communication activities carried out by the programme bodies. Also, during the annual review process led by EC, the MA will provide concise information related with progress registered in the implementation of communication action, based on the most recent data available.



The communication and information measures will be subject to evaluations as part of the Programme evaluations, based on the indicators and evaluation criteria defined in advance.

The evaluation will be performed on the basis of the following logical framework of intervention:

<i>Communication activity</i>	<i>Type of indicator</i>	<i>Indicator</i>	<i>Finding method</i>	<i>Baseline 2020</i>	<i>Intermediate target value 2024</i>	<i>Target value 2027</i>
Events	Output	No of events (<i>cumulative values</i>)	sum of own data	66	87	90
		No of participants in the events	sum of own data	1980	20/event*	20/event*
	Result	Overall usefulness of the event for the participants	survey	75%	80% positive feedback from the surveys received	82% positive feedback from the surveys received
Website	Output	Number of sessions (<i>cumulative values</i>)	web analytics	180.771	186.000	189.000
		Average time per session	web analytics	3 min.16 sec	3 min. 18 sec.	3 min. 18 sec.
		Number of page views per session	web analytics	2.88	2.5	2.5
	Result	Number of page views (<i>cumulative values</i>)	web analytics	520.465	530.000	540.000
	Output	No. of reach Facebook	social media metrics	350,000	500,000	650,000
		Engagement rate Twitter		3,7%	5%	7%

Social media		No. of followers/ subscribers Facebook		1,035	1,500	1,800	
		No. of followers/ Twitter	social media metrics	50	100	150	
		No. of followers/Instagram		86	150	300	
		<i>(cumulative values)</i>					
	Result		No. of engagements: shares, likes, click- through, comments Facebook	social media metrics	953	2,300	5,500
			Impressions Twitter		2,300	4,500	7,500
			No. of likes/ Instagram		100	400	800
			<i>(cumulative values)</i>				
	YouTube	Output	No. of subscribers YouTube	YouTube Analytics	40	60	100
		Result	No. of views	YouTube Analytics	5000	6000	7000
Publications	Output	No of publications issued (including online versions) <i>(cumulative values)</i>	sum of own data	19	24	34	
	Result	No. of readers <i>(cumulative values)</i>	survey social media metrics web analytics	1000	1500	2000	
Media relations	Output	No of press releases, adds, interviews in all media, including on line <i>(cumulative values)</i>	sum of own data media monitoring	54	64	80	
	Result	Number of media items mentioning the programme in the analysed sample of EU funds related articles <i>(cumulative values)</i>	media monitoring	1400	1850	2300	

* the average number per event will be 20 persons but the number of participants for outdoor events (European Cooperation Day) or special communication events (SIP/LIP events) will be higher.

Section 7 - Green communication principles

Having regard to the measures for reducing the negative impact of Covid-19 pandemic crisis and the self-commitment on reducing the carbon footprint of the Programme taken by the bodies involved in implementation of the programme (MA, NA, JS, JS Antenna) and projects beneficiaries, the following principles are recommended, when possible, for all communication activities and materials :

- ✓ Online communication - reducing physical events with a large number of participants and switching to more online or hybrid events (online format and small number of participants in physical format);
- ✓ Paperless and digitalization - storing documents in digital archives and encouraging the deletion of "non-essential" emails (large amount of emails on servers leads to high energy consumption), using the electronic signature;
- ✓ Go local! - promoting local products/small food local business;
- ✓ 0% plastic waste and drastic reduction of promotional materials on hard copy; all materials: brochures, guidelines for applicants, training materials and Q&A to be posted in digital format on the programme website. Project promotion templates will be available for use by projects beneficiaries on the programme website and could be tailored for different events.

Section 8 - Budget



The activities financed under the communication strategy will be financed from the Technical Assistance budget of the Programme.

The total estimated budget foreseen for publicity and information activities to be implemented at programme level is 5% of the IPA funds dedicated to the Technical Assistance.

The budget foreseen for Technical Assistance is 6,778,802 Euro (IPA funds).