



*FROM SHARED RESOURCES
TO JOINT SOLUTIONS*

**INTERREG V A ITALY CROATIA CBC PROGRAMME 2014-2020
EVALUATION SERVICE
CIG 8411073D01 CUP H79B17000030007**

**Executive Summary
Impact Evaluation Report 2023**

Rome, June 2023

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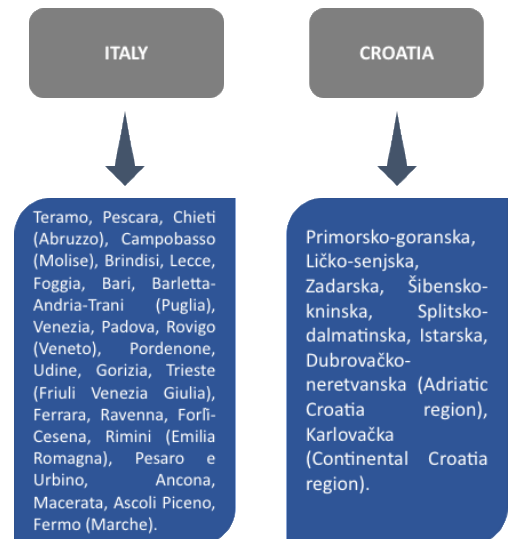
1. The INTERREG Italy-Croatia Programme

The cooperation between Italy and Croatia takes shape with the accession of the latter to the European Union and the resulting Programme of cross-border cooperation INTERREG V - A approved in January 2014, which aims at increasing prosperity, well-being and growth in the whole Adriatic Sea area.

INTERREG V A Cross-border Cooperation Programme Italy – Croatia 2014-2020 has its foundations in the European Regional Development Fund (ERDF) and in the Instrument for Pre-Accession Assistance IPA and is designed within the framework of the European strategy for smart, inclusive and sustainable growth and its Country and Regional Strategy Papers (Europe 2020 Strategy).

The **overall aim** of the Programme is to increase the prosperity and the blue growth potential of the area by stimulating cross-border partnerships able to achieve tangible changes. The Programme cooperation area covers the administrative units at the NUTS III level, as shown in the figure 1, of the two countries, Italy and Croatia, with an area of more than 85,500 km² and a population of more than 12.4 million inhabitants. Therefore, the cross-border cooperation area is presently composed by 33 statistical NUTS III territories (25 provinces in Italy and 8 counties in Croatia).

Figure 1: Italy-Croatia cooperation area 14-20



In order to enable regional and local stakeholders in both countries to exchange knowledge and experience, develop and implement pilot actions, test the feasibility of new policies, products and services and support investment, the Programme has presently funded **83 projects under three calls for proposals**:

- i) "Standard+" projects ► 22 projects;
- ii) "Standard" projects ► 50 projects;
- iii) "Strategic" projects ► 11 projects.

The projects are implemented by wide partnerships composed by different actors including regions and counties, municipalities and cities, universities, research centres and foundations, private institutions.

In addition to the above-mentioned funded projects, on 20th October 2021, the Programme has launched a **Restricted Cluster Call for Proposals** dedicated to the funding of IT-HR cluster projects in 5 different thematic areas in order to maximize experiences and results achieved by the Programme through the implementation of Standard+ and Standard Projects. The call has been closed on 14th December 2021 and the Programme financed 9 cluster projects:

- 2 under SO 1.1;
- 2 under SO 2.1;
- 2 under SO 3.1;
- 2 under SO 3.3; and
- 1 under SO 4.1.

2. Context and methodology

In accordance with the Managing Authority (MA), the Impact Evaluation has been split into two steps with the delivery of two different Impact Evaluation Reports. One was delivered in 2022 and the second in 2023. This choice was taken considering the level of progress of the Programme. The 2022 impact evaluation tackled the SOs, namely 1.1, 2.1 and 3.2. The 2023 impact evaluation covered the rest of the SOs 2.2, 3.1, 3.2 and 4.1. In the following paragraph, the Independent Evaluator (IE) describes the overall approach undertaken to carry out the two Evaluation Reports.

Within the impact evaluation’s path, the IE adopted a **hybrid approach**, combining techniques for quantitative, qualitative, participatory and visual (tables and graphics) analysis based on direct (primary) and secondary data. This approach is able to offer a **rich explanatory potential** and a high degree of reliability in providing evaluative responses to complex issues, as:

- the need to support decision-making processes which are implemented in the context of the territorial cooperation (which involves a plurality of actors, institutional levels, different territories and network of cities) both for the ongoing and the next programming period;
- the peculiar nature of the actions to be evaluated (integrated and multidimensional policies).

In particular, the impact evaluation is carried out with reference to **participatory approach** (e.g. surveys, semi-structured interviews, focus group), which are particularly useful for the analysis of the partnership since they allow to enhance the different perspectives of the actors and the territories involved. They allow to interpret the cause-effect dynamics and the complex relationships which have been implemented in the frame of the Programme; at the same time, they trigger learning processes and develop visions and shared practices which may involve the management bodies, stakeholders and beneficiaries.

The impact evaluation has benefited from the constant coordination with the MA staff which provided support to the Evaluator in order to identify the crucial information and contacts.

The methodological tools, involving a mix of different data gathering and analytical methods, include:

- **Desk analysis** of data extracted from the SIU, concerning the partnerships created with specific focus on type of bodies, legal seat country and implementing unit locations.
 - The desk analysis allows for the creation of graphs and tables to assess a) the geographical distribution of the partnerships, and of the lead partners in particular and b) the partnership composition. The information obtained thanks to the desk analysis have been used by the Evaluator to answer the evaluation questions.
- **Online Survey to Beneficiaries of the Programme**, both Lead Partners and Project Partners of all funded projects. The survey was conducted both in 2022 and 2023, the first year it was sent to the beneficiaries of SOs 1.1, 2.1 and 3.2 while in 2023 it was addressed to the project partners of SOs 2.2, 3.1, 3.3 and 4.1. The survey consisted of a mix of multiple-choice and open-ended questions. The IE created different questionnaires for each SO. The survey generated quantitative data about the perceptions of the beneficiaries and some qualitative data thanks to the answers to open-ended questions.

Table 1 - Number of respondents for the survey

SO	Respondents
1.1	18

SO	Respondents
2.1	27
2.2	11
3.1	34
3.2	7
3.3	11
4.1	23
Total	131

- **Semi-structured interviews with national and managing authorities and a sample of lead partners of projects.** The interviews were carried out during 2022 for the first impact evaluation report. In order to go more in-depth and further explore the results of the survey, semi-structured online interviews are conducted by the Evaluator. The interviews are preceded by the analysis of the application dossiers of the projects selected for the sample to deepen the levels of coherence and relevance of the project objectives with respect to the strategy of the Programme. The interviews generated qualitative information from the perspective of the selected beneficiaries that have been used by the Evaluator to answer to the Evaluation Questions. The interviews that will be conducted are 7, one with the MA, one with the JS, one with each National Authority involved and 3 with a sample of Lead Partners. This last category will be essential to double check the results emerged with the survey.

Table 2 – Semi structured interviews

Semi structured interviews	n°
Managing Authority	1
Joint Secretariat	1
National Authorities	2
Lead Partners	3
Totale	7

Evaluation questions

The evaluation questions (EQs) have been classified by the MA into seven subgroups (see the following table). For each of the questions, the MA has also specified the type of evaluation required in relation to two categories: operational and impact.

A - Effectiveness and efficiency of the Programme management system	15 Evaluation Questions	All Operational
B - Focus on the indicators system	6 Evaluation Questions	All Operational
C - Effectiveness and efficiency of the Programme implementation	15 Evaluation Questions	9 Impact
D - Relevance, consistency and complementarity of the Programme objectives	4 Evaluation Questions	2 Impact
E - Cross-border cooperation added value and networking	5 Evaluation Questions	1 Impact
F - Effectiveness and efficiency of the communication strategy	10 Evaluation Questions	4 Impact

G - Thematic and territorial impacts of Programme implementation as well as contribution to macro-regional strategies and EU 2020 targets	11 Evaluation Questions	All Impact
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The EQs that have a direct reference to the analysis of the impact of the CBC Programme can also be distinguished into two further sub-categories that we define as:

- referring to the thematic and territorial *sectoral* dimensions of impact, and
- referring to the *cross-sectoral* dimension of impact (e.g. the added value of Italy-Croatia Programme, contribution to macro-regional strategies).

The first category concerns EQs that clearly refer to the specific objectives of the CBC Programme and the sectoral areas to which they relate (blue economy, climate change, natural and man-made disaster, cultural heritage, biodiversity, environmental quality, marine and coastal transport). The EQs which are related to the *sectoral* dimension of the implementation can also be analysed with reference to quantified output and result indicators. The level of achievement of the targets is one way of analysing the impact of the CBC Programme, but, in any case, these type of EQs should be analysed at a stage when most of the funded projects have completed their activities and, consequently, output and result indicators have reached almost definitive levels of progress - this condition makes it possible to perform analysis based also on quantitative data. In addition, it is important to stress the fact that impact evaluation should not be conducted too close to the end of projects. This is because potential results take time to manifest, and it would not be methodologically fair to measure the impact of projects that are just concluded. This is the rationale that guided the Evaluator through the construction of the methodological approach regarding the impact evaluation.

Sectoral impacts can be measured on the basis of statistical data that are made available through the program's monitoring system in terms of result indicators (e.g., Number of EPO applications, Inhabitants benefiting from planning of adaptation measures, Seasonality in tourism in the Programme area, etc.).

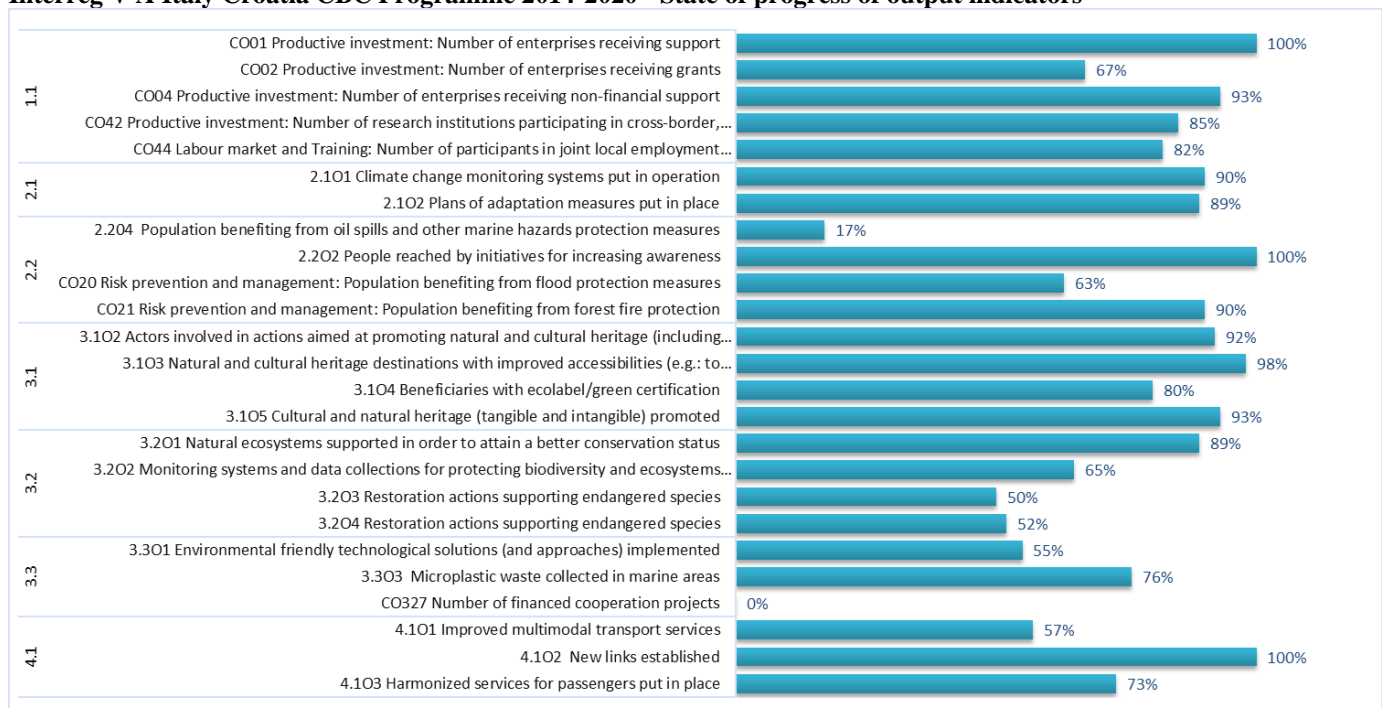
3. Effectiveness and efficiency of the Programme implementation

The following paragraphs refer to the overall achievements of the Programme. The analyses consider several sources of information:

- the Programme monitoring system, which provides information on the projects and partners involved,
- the output indicators,
- the project documents that are of particular interest for the impact evaluation, e.g., the Final Activity Reports, the Final assessment made by the Project Manager of the JS.
- There are also other direct sources, such as interviews conducted by the evaluation team with
 - the MA,
 - the JS,
 - the National Representatives,
 - the LPs of a sample of the completed projects,
- the survey addressed to the partners of the completed projects.

Regarding the monitoring data of output indicators, as is well known, there are evident differences between the targets defined at the time of planning and those emerging from implementation. In some cases, the targets were lower or much lower than the project outputs. The final targets correspond to the sum of the targets that emerged during implementation for each type of Call and for each SO. It is therefore to the latter value that we refer throughout this document. The graph below shows the percentage progress of the output indicators of the Specific Objectives. The progress shown in the graph is aggregated from the advances recorded by all the four types of projects. However, it should be considered that while the progress of Standard and Standard+ projects is overall complete, that of Strategic projects is still partial, and that of Cluster projects is still largely incomplete.

Interreg V A Italy Croatia CBC Programme 2014-2020 - State of progress of output indicators



There are many output indicators that have reached the target or have an advanced level of achievement, pending the completion of strategic projects and clusters, in particular the Specific Objectives that have reached the highest level of progress are:

- 3.1 "Make natural and cultural heritage a leverage for sustainable and more balanced territorial development," whose indicators have all reached levels of progress between 80% and 98%;
- 2.1 "Improve the climate change monitoring and planning of adaptation measures tackling specific effects, in the cooperation area", whose two output indicators stands both at 90%;
- 1.1 "Enhance the framework conditions for innovation in the relevant sectors of the blue economy within the cooperation area", of the five indicators in this O.S., 4 are between 82% and 100%, only one indicator ("number of enterprises receiving financial support") is placed below, at 67%;
- 2.2 "Increase the safety of the Programme area from natural and man-made disaster", with one indicator, "People reached by initiatives for increasing awareness", which reached 100%; and another, concerning population benefiting from risk prevention and management related to forest fire protection, which reached 90%, while the other two indicators shows a less advanced progress, in particular "Population benefiting from oil spills and other marine hazards protection measures" which stands at 17% and is still waiting for the realizations of the Strategic projects which did not register any progress so far.

There are, however, a few indicators that still show little progress, most notably: the indicator CO327 Number of financed cooperation projects whose realizations, however, depend on the two Cluster projects ("Hatch" and "Resistance") that have not produced the expected realizations by the monitoring deadline used for this report (April 2023). Even in the case of indicators reporting intermediate progress, the reasons for the delay are mainly related to the weight of the achievements of Strategic projects and in some cases Cluster projects.

All result indicators were achieved and in some cases the targets have been well exceeded. In particular:

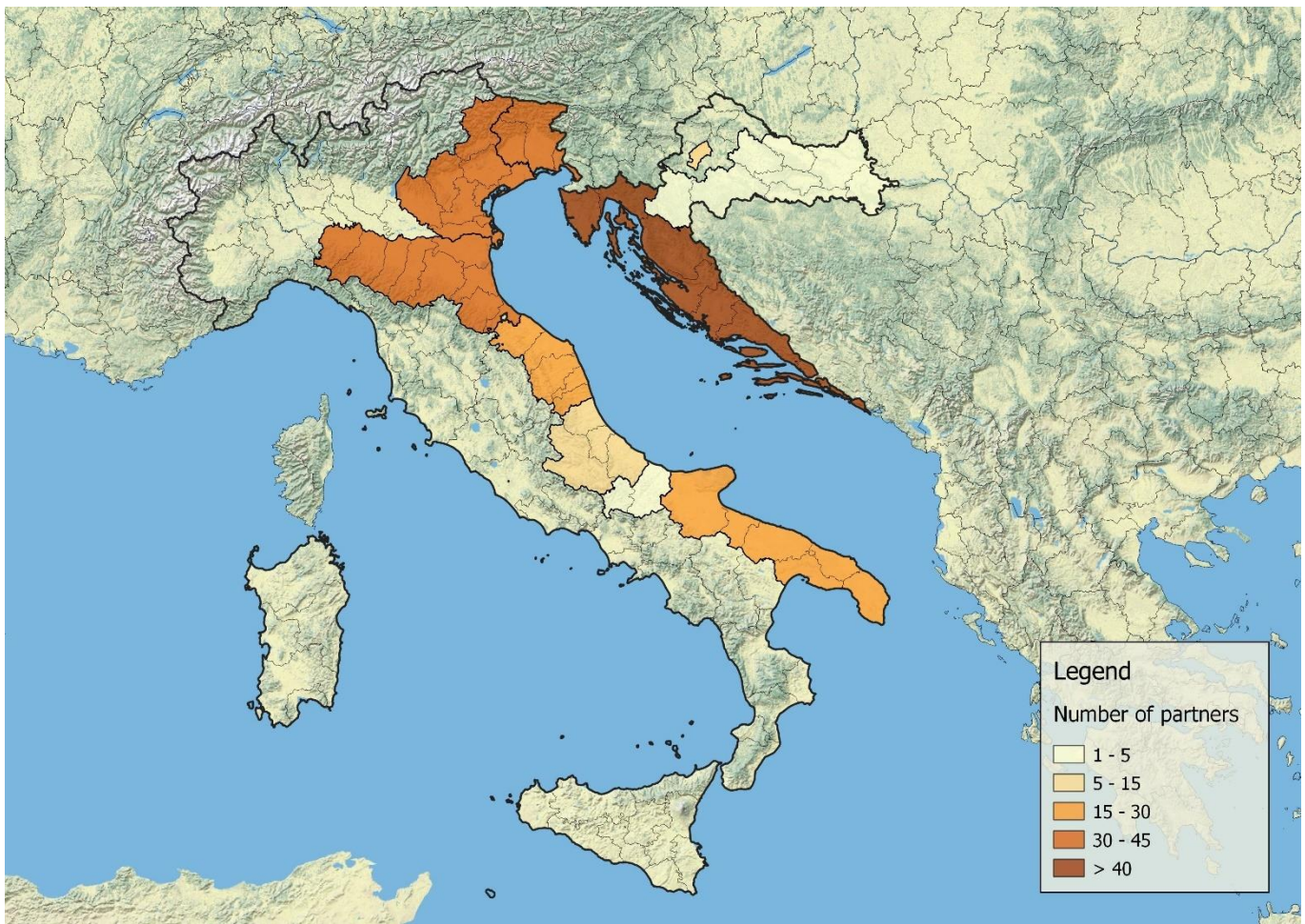
- the indicator for the Specific Objective 2.1 "Number of inhabitants benefiting from adaptation measures planning," which achieved a very broad coverage of territories with planning instruments. The baseline value was set at 7.050.052 at the year 2015, while the target value at 2023 was 8.000.000. The recent update for the year 2022 confirms that the population covered by the planning activities is over 12 million inhabitants. The baseline value was set at 8,366,317 at the year 2015. Thanks to the last two "flood risk area management plans", concerning the two Italian provinces of Ravenna and Forlì-Cesena, the whole population of the Programme area is now covered by flood risk coordinated measures, achieving the number of 12,101,109 inhabitants
- Similarly, the result indicator for the Specific Objective 2.2 "Number of inhabitants benefiting from coordinated risk management measures," which refers to territories that have a hydraulic risk management plan, or hydrogeological risk mitigation plan, also far exceeded the target.
- The outcome indicator for Specific Objective 3.3 is defined as "Level of coastal bathing water quality" also exceeded the target in both coasts of the cooperation area, with higher levels for the Croatian coast. The baseline was set at 2.87 (2014), the same value as the target: 2.87. The last available value recorded in 2021 is 2.93. According to the MA the quality of coastal bathing waters continues to perform at high level in the area of Program. The value is higher for the Croatian coasts (2,99) compared to the Italian coasts, which also have a good performance (2,89).

4. Participation and project implementation

The following analysis shows the extent of the partnerships activated by the closed projects funded by the Programme within the four SOs which are the focus of this Impact Evaluation Draft. The projects considered are those that were approved in implementation of the different calls for proposals for Standard and Standard+ projects and that are closed (none of the projects is reporting in closure). The research has been based on secondary data stemming from the MA's informative system (SIU) and projects' database that have represented the main sources of information.

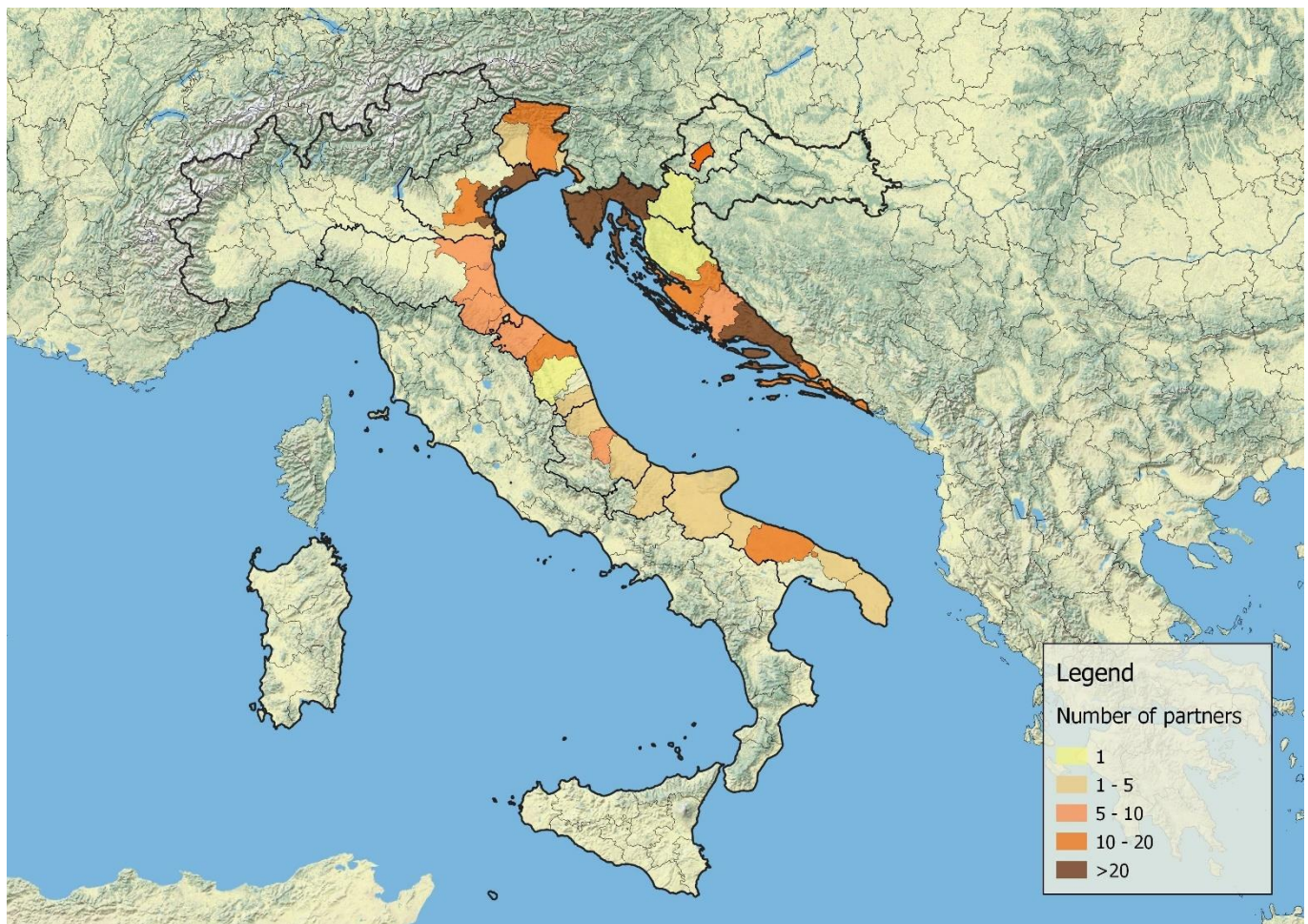
In the following maps the territorial distribution of partners NUTS 2 and NUTS3 is reported.

Figure 2 – All SOs – Territorial distribution of partners (NUTS2)



The actual **number of partners** involved in projects is **288** for all the four SOs concerned, with different typology of subjects such as Regions, University, Research Centers, Agencies of development, etc. It is interesting to notice that **Croatia has the highest concentration of partners in absolute terms**, both at NUTS2 and NUTS3 level, while **Southern Italy has the lowest number of subjects/partners**, especially at NUTS3 level. Looking at the partners' typology, it is also significant to notice **that public bodies represent the majority of the participants**: only **61** out of 288 are private bodies, coming mainly from Italy.

Figure 3 – All SOs – Territorial distribution of project partners (NUTS3)



It is interesting to stress that **out of a total of 288 partners, 33% joined more than one project** (a total of 95 subjects/partners).

Thanks to the Evaluator's exercise on the secondary data provided by the MA and regarding the composition of the partnerships it is possible to draw up a **list of comments** concerning both the general context and each specific objective.

- The already known **high participation of public partners** such as universities and other public bodies is hereby confirmed by the analysis of partners taking part in more than one project. They are **almost all public or public equivalent bodies, except for 6 Italian and 4 Croatian private partners**.
- **Looking closely at the objectives, SO 3.1 registers the highest number of partners present in several projects (25 partners)**. A similar trend of **high participation** is also shown by **SO 4.1, with 21 partners** taking part in more than one project. It is worth noting **the high participation of local public authorities** in the context of both SOs, 3.1 and 4.1. 24 out of 46 partners who joined more than one project are indeed local public authorities.
- For what concerns **SOs 2.2 and 3.3**, the number of partners present in more than one project is significantly lower if compared to SOs 3.1 and 4.1 (respectively **5 and 8 partners present in more than one co-financed operation**). It is interesting to stress the **relatively high number of Research Institutes** who joined more than one project in **S.O. 3.2** (6 out of 8 partners).
- Over 57% of partners participating in more than one project are Italian. However, none of them participates in more than 4 projects in the same SO with the sole exception of Regione del Veneto, who simultaneously joined 5 projects. It is possible to detect the same trend in relation to Croatian partners.

The chart reported below highlights the framework of partners' legal form type divided per SOs. As a **premise**, it should be emphasized that the **data may be conditioned by some key elements** such as the greater number of partners in some objectives (e.g. SO 3.1) or the type of activity which by nature can, for example, attract more private partners (e.g. SO 3.3).

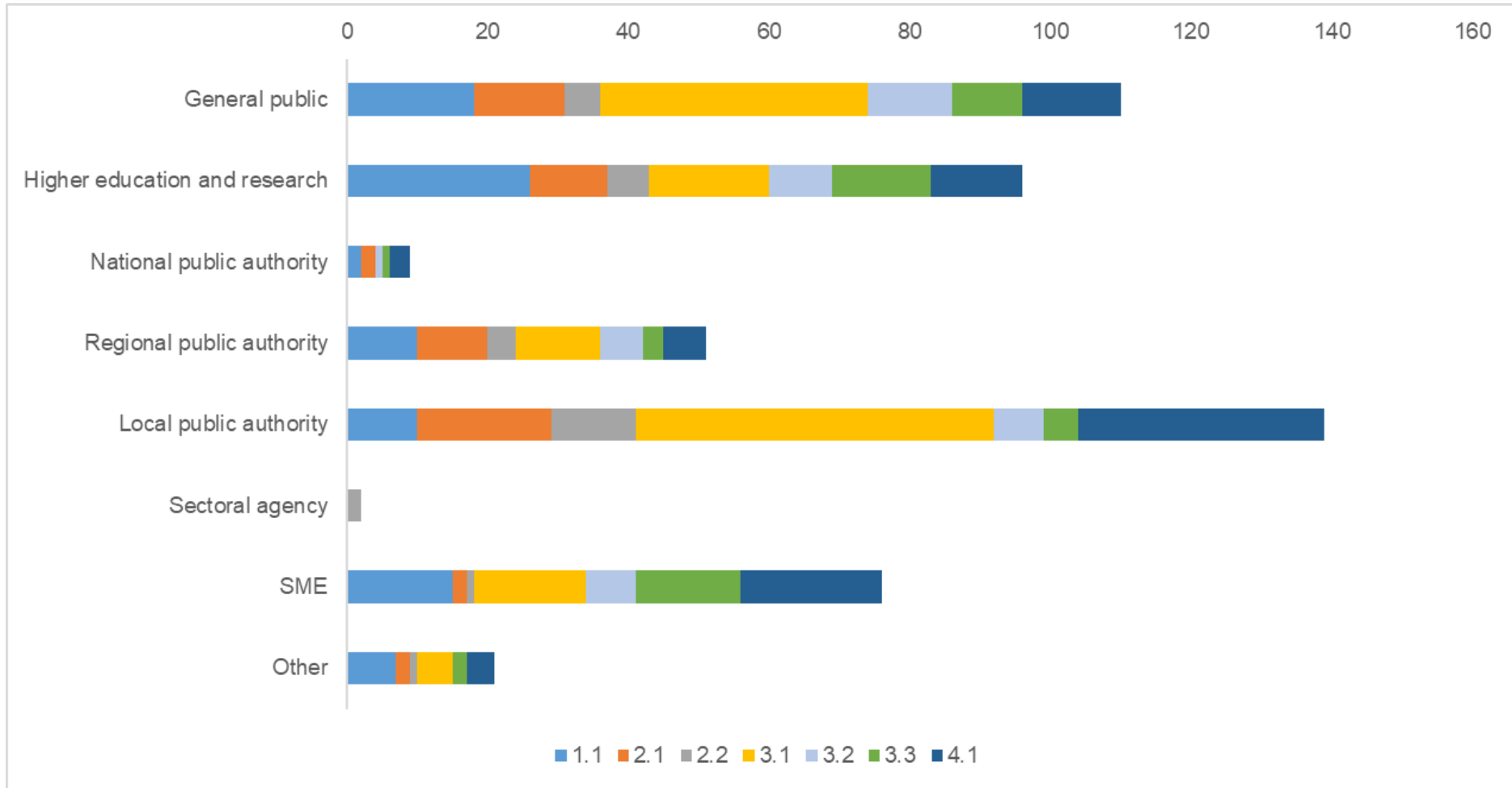
Notwithstanding the abovementioned issues, the elaboration of data has permitted to point out the following issues:

- The **high presence of private partners (SME) for the SO 1.1, 3.3 and 4.1** and, thus, the capacity of some major themes like environmental friendly technology and transport services to be an attractor of private partners and to develop multi-actors' partnerships.
- In six out of seven objectives (1.1, 2.1, 2.2, 3.1, 3.2 4.1) there is a **high presence of regional public authorities** who have always been the key subject of partnerships considering the importance of involving the institutional level for the development of CBC joint actions.
- Within the **SOs 2.1 and 3.1. local public authority and general public** are very represented in the partnerships. This is very important with regard to territorial development measures.
- The results stemming from the Evaluator's exercise are completely in line with the **intervention logic of Italy Croatia Programme Priority Axis 1, 2, 3 and 4**. The achievement of these results would not be possible without the **active involvement of key target groups already identified in the Programme strategy** (see also 7.6 "Focus on target group") such as local public authorities and general public partners for SOs 1.1, 2.2 and 3.1, SMEs and research centers for SO 2.1., local authorities and general public together with SMEs for the SO 4.1, local, regional and national public authorities together with research centers for the SO 3.2.

The evaluation desk analysis highlights the general ability in promoting **vertical partnerships** through central and local bodies. This actually enhances the effectiveness of interventions and their sustainability. As a consequence of the above-mentioned issues, the Programme focus on fostering cross-border partnerships is quite clear, even if, as detected by the Programme itself (Paper 1 from JS – Final version), *"there are some examples of the projects were countries implemented activities "individually" (apart of the study visits) where it can be clearly seen the missing links representing an obvious obstacle and burden in cross-border cooperation and where the cross-border aspect is not satisfied"*. This surely has to be improved especially for the forthcoming programming period.

In addition, and as already highlighted during the evaluation path (e.g. the Operational Evaluation 2021), it has to be remembered that **indicators could be a suitable tool for improving cross-border dimension** (see Chapter 3 with Focus on indicators, Operational Evaluation 2021), with particular reference to indicators including cross-border issues. Looking at the indicators' qualitative analysis at standard project level that have the implementation closed, included in the Paper 1, some interesting concerns can be shared as examples of cross-border dimension: there are some indicators that are particular significant for capturing and measuring the cross-border dimension (such as the ones including joint actions etc.).

Figure 4 - Distribution of partners per SOs and legal form type



5. Evaluation questions, answers and recommendations

Theme	EQs' answers
C - Effectiveness and efficiency of the Programme implementation	
<p><i>To what extent has the Programme contributed to enhancing the framework conditions for innovation in the relevant sectors of the blue economy within the cooperation area (S:O: 1.1)?</i></p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The output indicators show an advanced level of implementation; the lowest achievements are related to the indicator recording the number of enterprises that received financial support, which is 4 out of 6 for a progress of 67%. These enterprises can all be traced back to the partnership of the AdriAquaNet Standard project. However, it is possible that this indicator may have an increase in value following the completion of the Strategic Project activities. • The number of companies that have benefited from the activities of the projects is quite significant and amounts to 966 companies. The largely prevalent support received concerns the specific knowledge and relationships that have been created in the field of training, research and development and in market relations which have been created thanks to the participation in the project activities. • An important contribution that the Programme has made in the field of strengthening the framework conditions for innovation in the relevant sectors of the blue economy within the cooperation area consists in the strong presence of research institutions participating in the funded projects (as many as 87 research institutions). • The presence of research institutions within the partnerships has fostered the dissemination of innovative techniques and practices also through a series of training and information activities that in the various projects have taken different forms, from advanced schools (Fairsea project), to technical meetings and seminars (AdriAquaNet), to cross-border training events (PrizeFish) and so on. The training activities reached almost 2,000 people. • According to the beneficiaries the main enabling factors of the innovation processes were the activities focused on the development of human capital and in particular in the promotion of specialised skills in the new technologies. Projects aimed at the “joint development and testing of eco-innovative tools and processes” and those promoting “links and synergies between companies, R&D centres, education and the public sector” also appear crucial for the consolidation of innovation processes. • The participation in the Program activities has also produced significant spillovers to beneficiaries' organizations, particularly in terms of expanding their network of relationships and developing technical and specialized knowledge. • The result indicator related to this S.O. is defined as the number of EPO applications. The baseline value was set at 673.28 at the year 2012, while the target value at 2023 was 680.00. Using the official European Patent Office database, the average figure for the five-year period 2016-2019 is equal to 1.132, a little bit higher than the last detection and much higher than the target.
<p><i>To what extent has the Programme contributed to improving the climate change monitoring and planning of adaptation measures tackling specific effects in the cooperation area (S.O. 2.1)?</i></p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The output indicators of this specific objective show how the realisations, although very advanced (89-90%), have not yet reached the targets and substantially lack the contribution that will be brought by the strategic and cluster project.

Theme	EQs' answers
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The main achievements of the projects financed under O.S. 2. 1 were: the monitoring systems related to the planning and implementation of interventions aimed at improving territories' adaptive capacity to climate change; the local action plans aimed at preventing or minimising the negative effects of climate change on, e.g., water resources, urban environment, agriculture. These outputs are closely related to each other. Monitoring systems are often linked to the climate change adaptation plans. Each case of implementation of a plan was accompanied by a report based on the monitoring system data. • The majority of the beneficiaries agreed that the actions focused on strategic and local planning support tools had the greatest impact in terms of strengthening the capacity to govern and manage the policies aimed at coping with the effects of climate change in the cooperation area. The adoption of downscaled climate data for the Italy-Croatia area was also of substantial importance. The result indicator is defined as the number of inhabitants benefiting from planning of adaptation measures. The baseline value was set at 7.050.052 at the year 2015, while the target value at 2023 was 8.000.000. The recent update for the year 2022 confirms that the population covered by the planning activities is over 12 million inhabitants, well above the target value. • There were many more adaptation plans than originally planned and each of them was developed in relation to the specific needs of the partner territories. • The analysis of the completed projects revealed that the working method developed in this particular policy context required the design of important support activities for local administrations to manage stakeholder and citizen participation processes, e.g., in the case of the Standard+ project iDeal ("Decision Support System"), or in the case of the Standard project JointSecap ("Support Platform"). • The participation of regional public authorities is considered crucial by the beneficiaries in order to consolidate the governance and management framework for climate adaptation measures in the cooperation area, along with the involvement of associations or nongovernmental organizations and national public bodies. • The main spillover effect of the participation in project activities, indicated by partners, is the increase of the specific knowledge possessed by their organization, resulting also in the expansion of their networks.
<p><i>To what extent has the Programme contributed to Increase the safety of the Programme area from natural and man-made disaster (S.O. 2.2)?</i></p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The output indicators of this specific objective show how the realisations, although very advanced, with one indicator, "People reached by initiatives for increasing awareness", which reached 100%, and another, concerning population benefiting from risk prevention and management related to forest fire protection, which reached 90%, while the other two indicators shows a less advanced progress, in particular "Population benefiting from oil spills and other marine hazards protection measures" which stands at 17% and is still waiting for the realizations of the Strategic projects which did not register any progress so far, while the other indicator, "Risk prevention and management: Population benefiting from flood protection measures" recorded a progress of 63% of the target.

Theme	EQs' answers
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The result indicator is defined as the number of inhabitants benefiting from risk management coordinated measures. The indicator is defined on the basis of the administrative territories that have a hydraulic risk management plan, or hydrogeological risk mitigation, calculating the population that consequently benefits from the planned actions. The baseline value was set at 8,366,317 at the year 2015. Thanks to the last two "flood risk area management plans", concerning the two Italian provinces of Ravenna and Forlì-Cesena, the whole population of the Programme area is now covered by flood risk coordinated measures, thereby exceeding the target defined by the Programme and achieving the number of 12,101,109 inhabitants. • Despite the advancement of output indicators, the survey results show that the surveyed project partners believe that the highest effectiveness in relation to the Program's contribution to improving the framework conditions for increasing safety from natural and man-made disasters in the focus areas was achieved in relation to cooperation in actions related to the analysis and testing of common risk management tools and models related to flood-related risks, water management, and prevention techniques related to this type of risk (80 percent); an intermediate level of effectiveness (43 percent) is expressed in relation to other types of marine risks and those related to oil spills at sea. A lower level of effectiveness emerges in relation to fire hazards (17 percent).
<p><i>To what extent has the Programme contributed to Make natural and cultural heritage a leverage for sustainable and more balanced territorial development (S.O. 3.1)?</i></p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Output indicators show a very advanced level of implementation despite still missing some of the realizations of the strategic and cluster projects. The number of actors involved in actions aimed at promoting cultural and natural heritage is substantial (about 2,700), and the accessibility of sites of cultural and natural interest has been improved in almost 300 cases, facilitating virtual visits (as in the case of Arca Adriatica) and access for people with disabilities. • The result indicator is defined as "Seasonality in tourism in the Programme area". Seasonality is a measurable feature with significant economic and social impacts. Sources of data are the World Tourism Organization (UNWTO) as well as Eurostat which also publish the online publications "Tourism trips of Europeans". The baseline was set at 0.62 (2014), the same value as the target value at 2023. The data reached at 2022 is in line with the target, 0.62, decreasing compared to the two past years. According to the MA this may suggest that the pandemic externalities have been subsided and the value is back in line with the target. • The Program intervention has been oriented mainly in the coastal and rural areas, with less emphasis on the heritage concentrated in urban areas. This finding is consistent with the programming and finds a clear relationship with the goal of reducing the seasonality of tourist flows by enhancing heritage that can be the subject of sustainable forms of tourism. The partners who responded to the survey also highlighted this trend: respondents believe that the greatest effectiveness was achieved in relation to cultural heritage in coastal area (71%), followed by the cultural assets outside the urban areas (64,5%), and natural assets outside urban areas (57%).

Theme	EQs' answers
<p><i>To what extent has the Programme contributed to protecting and restoring the biodiversity (S.O. 3.2)?</i></p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The progress of output indicators is still on intermediate values for three out of 4 indicators. The highest level of advancement corresponds to the indicator (3.201) “Natural ecosystems supported in order to attain a better conservation status”. The value of the indicator corresponds to the realisations of the Standard and Standard+ projects which has reached about 89% of the target. The implementation of the other indicators is more dependent on the achievements of the two strategic projects. • Monitoring and data collection systems directed toward the protection of biodiversity are powered by systematic ecosystem observations and biodiversity data collections that aim to measure qualitative and quantitative changes in the variety and variability of living organisms and, consequently, to support concrete measures for their conservation and/or protection. • The result indicator is defined as the number of habitats with excellent conservation status and of types of habitat and species in Natura 2000 sites of the Programme area. The baseline value at 2014 was set at 3.538, while the target value at 2023 was set up at 3.555. The MA measure the number of habitats and species in Natura 2000 sites with conservation status “A” (or excellent). In Croatia, Natura 2000 sites have 780 habitat types or species preserved at A level (of which 304 habitat types and 476 species). In Italy there are 2,809 types of habitat or species preserved at A level (of which 797 types of habitats and 2012 species). The value of the indicator is therefore equal to 3,589 habitats / species preserved at an excellent level (the latest data update refers to 2021), above the target. • The implementation of integrated natural resource management systems for wetlands and marine areas requires a particularly complex and time-consuming process. In spite of the fact that these realisations are typical of strategic projects that can rely on solid governance and usually on a broader time frame, one standard project (Crew) has promoted the signing of 7 "Wetland Contracts" supporting the coordination between different levels of spatial planning and authorities in charge for wetlands management, whilst limiting conflicts between preservation issues and economic activities. • The beneficiaries agree on the high relevance assumed by the actions aimed at the development of innovative models for the study and monitoring of the marine environment, along with those focused on feasibility analysis for setting up CB protected marine areas. Another crucial area of activity is the development of tools for integrated management of the sea, coastal and river environment and of cross-border natural resources (i.e., coordinated Maritime Spatial Planning and Integrated Coastal Management). • The importance of the role played by universities/research institutions, along with that of local and regional public authorities in strengthening the management and the cooperation between public actors of the protected ecosystems of the cooperation area was recognized by all the partners. • Also, for SO 3.2 beneficiaries, the main effects of participation in Program-funded projects were an increase in the knowledge capital and networks of their organizations.

Theme	EQs' answers
<p><i>To what extent has the Programme contributed to improve the environmental quality conditions of the sea and coastal area by use of sustainable and innovative technologies and approaches (S.O. 3.3)?</i></p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The progress of output indicators is still on intermediate values. The highest level of advancement corresponds to the indicator “Microplastic waste collected in marine areas”, which stands at 76%; the full implementation relies on the realizations of the strategic project. In this direction the NETWAP project promoted the establishment of action plans for the implementation of sustainable organic and plastic waste with the following objectives: reduction of residual organic waste in mixed municipal waste; reduction of plastic from beach and marine waste. The expected results are defined as: to encourage the introduction of small-scale composting schemes (self-composting, community composting, and local composting) as a form of source recycling of organic waste; to introduce a collection of plastic waste from marine litter to be directed to actual recycling and not to landfill. • The result indicator is defined as “Quality level of coastal bathing waters” (according to the dir. 2006/7/CE). The EU Bathing Waters Directive monitor indicators of microbiological pollution (and other substances) throughout the bathing season which runs from May to September. According to the European Agency the quality of Europe's bathing water has greatly improved over past decades due to systematic monitoring and management introduced under the EU's Bathing Water Directive. The baseline was set at 2.87 (2014), the same value as the target: 2.87. The last available value recorded in 2021 (on data which refer to the year 2021 which has been updated in April 2022) is 2.93. According to the MA the quality of coastal bathing waters continues to perform at high level in the area of Program. The value is higher for the Croatian coasts (2,99) compared to the Italian coasts, which also have a good performance (2,89). • The kind of tangible impact which has been promoted in this area concerns the reduction of environmental impacts. The project AdSWiM, for example, has made it possible to establish greater cooperation between partners, their knowledge and expertise. Among the findings, the alternative technologies evaluated to reduce microbial contamination from sewage treatment plants have been considered not mature enough to be applied with general protocols (e.g., scrubbers) and as a result specific development projects need to be further undertaken; the use of molecular tools for monitoring the microbial component from sewage treatment plants is needed to profile the microbial population and possibly to map certain characteristics such as antibiotic resistance for the benefit of consolidating and improving the control of the marine environment.
<p><i>To what extent has the Programme contributed to improve the quality, safety and environmental sustainability of marine and coastal transport services and nodes by promoting multimodality in the Programme area” (S.O. 4.1)?</i></p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The progress of output indicators is still on intermediate values. In particular, the indicator 4.101 represents the number of improved multimodal transport services and has reached the 57% of the target. An interesting case that highlights what the relationship is between the outputs produced by projects and the kind of impacts they can create comes from the Icarus Standard project. The project was based on three pillars: ICT solutions, multimodality, and behavioral change. An important tangible impact of the project was connected to the realization of a platform to foster multimodality and sustainable mobility. The web platform, called ICARUS Mobility, was developed by the Intermodal Transportation Cluster (KIP) and

Theme	EQs' answers
	<p>launched in November 2020. Other tangible impact in the improvement of the accessibility to the services emerges from organizational innovations and small infrastructures realized in the pilot projects, e.g., in the area of the Metropolitan city of Venice, with the provision of two fixed bike trailers improved the accessibility to the bus connections for the bikers; another realization was supported in Friuli Venezia Giulia, where the Region in agreement with Rete Ferroviaria Italiana, equipped with 28 wheeling rumps installed 10 railway stations. The wheeling ramps are made of corrugated aluminum and are placed in the access stairs to the platforms of the different stations; in this way cyclists can easily access the train by sliding their bicycle along the ramp and avoid carrying bikes.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Despite what has been achieved or is still being achieved, partners consider multimodality to be a complex issue that requires further joint planning efforts; their opinion of the extent to which the Program has helped to promote multimodality in the cooperation area is moderately good. The action which has been judged as the most effective concerns the promotion of approaches based on the development of new kinds of passenger services, i.e., e-mobility, soft mobility. Immediately after is the improvement of multimodal (rail, road, sea) transport systems through innovative solutions including the promotion of pilot rail services in connection with ports. • The result indicator is defined as “Goods transported by maritime mode”, the measurement unit is thousand tons. The baseline was set at 2,445 (2014) while the target value at 2,690 (2023). The level reached in 2022 records a value equal to 2,839 tons, above the final target

Theme	EQs' answers
D - Relevance, consistency and complementarity of the Programme objectives	
<i>Are there any stringent uncovered needs that could be tackled under this or future cross-border Programme?</i>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Overall, the projects are satisfied with their scope of action and there is no evidence for needs that have been left out. • The Programme managed to achieve all the expected results and it fell short only in a few cases: the ecolabel/green certification indicator and the maritime transport. The first was not fully achieved but the managing bodies know that it was a very ambitious indicator. Even though is out of topic, the managing bodies and the national authorities all agreed on the fact that the development of the maritime infrastructure is the axe that falls behind. This is because Interreg Programmes might not be the most suitable tool to work on this topic.
<i>Which are the main lessons learned relating the elaboration of Programme strategy during this programming period? What can be improved to better address development needs in the next future?</i>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Some of the projects have highlighted that they faced some impediments. Availability of data is a problem that science-based projects have to deal with regularly and including data providers in the partnership was vital. • Time availability can also represent an issue for those projects that aim at building communities. They have to work on social relations and this kind of intervention might need more time to reveal its results in the long term. This impediment is difficult to overcome and the program should think of practical solutions to allow LPs to provide long term support in these cases.

Theme	EQs' answers
E - Cross-border cooperation added value and networking	
<p><i>To what extent has the Programme contributed to improve partners' administrative competences/ skills at Programme and project levels?</i></p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The Italy-Croatia Programme 2014-2020 is a completely new Programme. This is an added value for direct contacts between Italian and Croatian bodies establishing new relationships via Italy-Croatia projects. • It has to be stressed the impact of COVID-19 pandemic that has been one of the biggest setbacks for cross-border cooperation. • Due to the COVID-19 pandemic face-to-face meetings, actions have been cancelled and this has had a high impact on the building of new partnerships/occasion for new projects. • out of a total of 120 recorded responses, only 1 Lead Partner and 5 Partners consider there has been a little support from the Programme. • Respectively 15 and 74 respondents out of 120 consider that the level of support from the Programme has been high (large or great extent). • exchange of knowledge, cooperation between partners and training courses are the main actions/tools that have enriched partners with additional competences both at the Programme and project level. • bureaucracy, public administrations rules and procedures (e.g. public procurement timing) and the restrictions due to the pandemic are the main hinders (exogenous nature). • The positive support and the great work carried out by the Programme has been appreciated in terms of actions of support for the beneficiaries from projects' submission to management and expenses reporting.
<p><i>Do involved partners efficiently contribute to achieving Programme/project expected results?</i></p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Standard and Standard+ have foreseen generally a wide variety of relevant tools and activities to effectively address cross-border dimension. • The ability in promoting vertical partnerships through central and local bodies cooperation enhances the effectiveness of cross-border interventions and their sustainability. • There is a high presence of regional public authorities who have always been the key subject of partnerships considering the importance of involving the institutional level for the development of CBC joint actions. • Within the SOs 2.1 and 3.1 local public authority is very represented in the partnerships. This is very important with regard to adaptation and territorial development measures. • With reference to SO 1.1, 2.1, 3.2 and 4.1 the Croatian counties are at the top of the list in terms of weight of administrative units by number of partners organizations; regarding the SO 2.2, 3.1 and 3.3 the localization of partners between the two eligible countries is more balanced. Regarding the legal form type, the most represented groups is constituted by general public and local public. A significant concentration of SMEs is located in Croatia for SO 1.1; it is also interesting to notice a rather high presence of SMEs from both countries in SO 3.3 and of Italian SMEs in SO 4.1. Local PA concentration is also high in both Italy and Croatia for SOs 2.1 and 3.1. Moreover, for SO 3.2. it has to be noted the high presence of research bodies in Italy. • The high presence of private partners (SME) for the SOs 1.1, 3.3 and 4.1 shows the capacity of some major themes like blue economy, environmental-friendly technology and improving connectivity in

Theme	EQs' answers
	<p>transport services to be an attractor of private partners and to develop multi-actors 'partnerships.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Learning opportunities and generating critical mass seem to be the most popular types of CBC added value among standard and standard + projects closed. • for almost the majority of the respondents (106 out of a total of 120) the level of partners contribution for reaching project's results has been high (large or great extent). At the level of projects, it means that all lead and project partners demonstrated how their project complies with and contributed to achieving results and, thus, the project's overall success. • The concreteness of the projects was underlined, particularly on certain topics such as civil protection, biodiversity and climate change, and the authority of the technical partners. In general, it was also observed that the verification of the achievement of the CBC added value by the Programme as a whole could be maybe premature considering also that the strategic projects are still on-going. The achievement of the CBC added value are very much related to strategic projects' success (National Authorities).
F - Effectiveness and efficiency of the communication strategy	
<p>Has the Programme raised awareness about its activities and achievements?</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The results emerged from primary data collection show that all different stakeholders are satisfied with the capacity of the program to disseminate information related to its activities and achievements. One point that has been brought up in the semi structured interviews is the time that the program took to externalize the communication services. This had a negative impact in the beginning of the program considering that communication activities were carried out internally without much support.
<p>To what extent the communication strategy has contributed to improve the knowledge on EU funds and the CBC Programme objectives and opportunities in the cooperation area? Were communication tools effective in increasing awareness on Programme objectives and offered opportunities? Which tools were most successful?</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Considering the fact that this program was at its first experience, its existence is already a great result in terms of spreading knowledge regarding EU funds and CBC programs. Furthermore, all interviewees mentioned the fact that sharing results is a key element to making people understand what the program does, and it gives them a concrete example on how EU funds work and are implemented. This type of activity is necessary to shorten the space between EU initiatives and the general public. • According to LPs and PPs the most effective tools to increase knowledge regarding program objectives and opportunities are two: in person events and social media/websites. These two are complementary considering that the latter has the ability to reach a much wider public with less effort while the first can provide more insightful information and notions, but it is often limited to a smaller number of people. • Although the website is assessed as an effective tool, all stakeholders involved in the program are quite annoyed by the fact that its structure (website with mini websites for each project) clouded the projects. The consequence was that many projects decided to create their own website which created confusion and information were scattered and not always easy to reach.
<p>Has the Programme contributed to increase the capacity of projects to communicate their own achievements?</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • According to LPs and PPs, the support given by the program to increase the capacity of the projects to communicate their achievements has been successful. The communication strategy included 3 different types of support: communication kits, templates and training courses. The

Theme	EQs' answers
	<p>first two were quite a handful for everyone and they provided standard guidelines. The latter went more in the specifics and tackled particular topics, such as public speaking and communication tools.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • However, during the interviews with the LPs, it emerged that the program did not only support them through these activities, but they felt that innovative tools and creative communication were key aspects to develop. This was spurred by the program which insisted quite a lot on this, and the LPs received the message.
<p>Does the impact vary by subgroup within the main target group?</p>	<p>Within the main target groups the Evaluation's exercise has been detected some subgroups that have been actively participated to the projects' activities/events as follows:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Local, regional and national public authorities <p>Subgroups: environmental agencies, development agencies, chambers of commerce, innovation agencies, NGOs, business incubators, cluster management bodies and networks.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Enterprises, SMEs <p>Subgroups: transport's operator including operators of multimodal logistics hubs, infrastructure providers that were reached by the means of regular communication and dissemination activities.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Universities, research institutions, technology transfer institutions, Centers of Excellence <p>Subgroups: students, teachers, pupils were involved in events.</p> <p>It is important to note that of all the target value (41.519.469 units) 99,94% is composed by general public. Given the importance of the general public, the analysis highlights that the most significant actors, in terms of expected involvement, are SMEs (60,4%).</p>
<p>Did the Programme succeed in achieving the expected impacts on the different target groups?</p>	<p>The Italy-Croatia Programme has mainly involved the following target group:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • General public • Local, regional and national public authorities • Enterprises, SMEs • Universities, research institutions, technology transfer institutions, Centers of Excellence. <p>The most common ways of target group involvement have been the following:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Communication and dissemination activities • Social media • Workshops, events at local, regional, national and international level • Newsletters, publication at project level • Training session. <p>Overall, the total target value exceeded expectations by 60%. In absolute values, the most significant increase is given by the general public but in relative terms the subtotal (excluding the general public) is what exceeded expectations the most – target reached 3,47 times the target value. This increase is given mainly by the great involvement of SMEs that exceeded the target value by 5 times.</p>
<p>G - Thematic and territorial impacts of Programme implementation as well as contribution to macro-regional strategies and EU 2020 targets</p>	

Theme	EQs' answers
<p>To what extent has Italy-Croatia CBC Programme contributed to EUSAIR macroregional strategy?</p> <p>The solutions adopted by the Programme in order to support the implementation of the EUSAIR through the projects have been effective?</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Pillar 1 and Pillar 3 are the two EUSAIR themes with the highest level of % within the projects' contribution. This is quite clear considering the SOs concerned. It is of outermost importance the contribution of Italy-Croatia projects to key theme of the EUSAIR macroregional strategy such as sustainable tourism, environmental quality, connecting the regions and Blue Growth. • It has to be underlined that the forthcoming programming period is strongly oriented to implement synergies already from the programming phase. • A networking among of Interreg Adriatic programmes' MA will allow to concretely activate synergies among them. • The results of the survey highlight that the majority of respondents (73 out of 119 replies to this question) consider that the projects' contribution has been effective (large or great extent).
<p>Has the Italy-Croatia CBC Programme contributed also to other macroregional strategies (EUSALP, EUSDR) involving the cooperation area?</p> <p>Which kind of synergies with other Interreg and mainstream programmes involving the cooperation area have been activated?</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Attempts to coordinate with other Programmes have already been tested in this programming period and they will be certainly strengthened in the forthcoming programming period considering the high awareness of the Programmes managers of the importance and strategic nature of the theme and the strong commitment from the European Commission. • The INTERACT Programme played a strategic role on the synergies and connection among the various INTERREG Programmes. • Within the INTERREG Annual Event of October 2022 three selected Italy-Croatia's projects will take part to the five on-site "Experience Rooms" showcasing some of Interreg's innovative projects in diverse fields. • In the 2014-2020 programming period the focus of synergies with other Interreg programmes is at project level (e.g. Call for Clusters). • From the Evaluator' desk analysis on the call for clusters' application forms "multipliers of synergies" can be detected: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Cross-border inventory of projects results. ○ Thematic seminar with other initiatives/EU Programmes. ○ Cross-border Observatory (CBO) upgrading to achieve a more coordinated management of themes concerned. ○ Virtual reality platform. ○ Study visits involving also external stakeholders. ○ Multi stakeholder events. ○ Joint actions with others Programme/EU initiatives. • Regarding other macro-regional strategies, the results of the survey demonstrate how in most cases the projects provide an insufficient contribution to other regional macro strategies. Although this is not the result of an inefficiency of the projects but a natural consequence of the indirect connection with the other macro regional strategies. • In addition, and in line with the evaluation results, the events/seminars involving stakeholders at various levels, and which produce connections between actors are able to create synergy and added value of CBC cooperation. • In particular, the study visit tool is appreciated by Focus Group's participants (Operational Evaluation 2023) as activator of exchange of experience, sharing of knowledge and competencies, precious opportunity to gather ideas and capitalise projects' results.

Theme	Recommendations
<p>C - Effectiveness and efficiency of the Programme implementation</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The analysis of the main impacts generated by the completed projects reveals some interesting trends - some of them not entirely expected, as, for example, the importance of the training activities. The importance of the training activities, which were particularly developed during the pandemic, has been characteristic of all of the three S.O. analysed and it is also linked to another important result, namely the consolidation of cooperation relations between companies and other stakeholders, which then fostered the establishment of clusters between the companies of the cooperation area, new thematic networks and collaboration platforms. • Training activities can play an important role in consolidating CBC. It is recommended that the design of training activities as well as the involvement of schools, universities and specialized training agencies be promoted in the next programming period. • As has been pointed out by the Croatian national authority, it is important that in the next programming period the participation in project partnerships is broader and succeeds in reaching actors who have not participated in programming to date. Broadening participation can also be promoted from the inclusion of schools, universities and specialized training agencies • The realisation of monitoring systems related to the projects field of interventions has been particularly developed in relation to the environmental issues (S.O. 2.1 and 3.2), e.g.: the groundwater quality in relation to agricultural production, the state of art of coastal wetlands, or the geographic distribution of the risk of coast salinization. In several cases the utilization of the monitoring systems has continued also after the end of the project activities. • Special attention should be paid in the next programming period to promoting real implementations of the monitoring systems realized at this stage in order to improve their quality and scope.
<p>D - Relevance, consistency and complementarity of the Programme objectives</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Be aware of the limitations of the Programme and of the cooperation area and do not overestimate the potential results. Make results proportional to the scope of action of the Programme to avoid disillusionment (expected and real impact of SO 4.1). • Create an environment that facilitates and promotes the exchange of information between beneficiaries and with institutions at all levels to make projects even more effective. Networks that go beyond the project partnership have a crucial role to disseminate results and exchange best practices. • Some projects might need to provide long term support to their communities to keep their initiative running, the program should think of a solution for this. The possibility to allow follow ups or something similar should be considered to concretize positive effects. • It is also recommended that the MA provides all beneficiaries with clear and shared instructions on how to fill in the progress and final reports and with clear templates (e.g. progress and final reports) with specific sections useful for monitoring and evaluations tasks.
<p>E - Cross-border cooperation added value and networking</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • In the Final Report grid, the CBC added value is included as a single question within the Partnership cooperation section. In the future would be better to dedicate a specific section to this element considering its strategic importance. Collecting data, even qualitative at project level, on this issue would facilitate the management, monitoring, and evaluation of the Programme.

Theme	Recommendations
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The participation of Southern Italian NUTS 3 could be improved. • The participation of private partners could be improved (only 61 out of 288 are private bodies, coming mainly from Italy). Furthermore, private partners do not often participate in more than one project, this aspect could be further explored and stimulated in the next programming period. • Private partners, academic/research partners and policymakers bring clear and diverse benefits to projects. Therefore, a balanced mix of partners is expected to be of added value to a project. Currently, many projects include different types of stakeholders benefit from their contributions. The number of public partnerships is still very high. The involvement of different type of partners is an added value especially for cross-border cooperation Programmes; this element can be improved for the future. • Indicators could be a suitable tool for improving cross-border dimension, with particular reference to indicators including cross-border issues that are particular significant for capturing and measuring the cross-border dimension (such as the ones including joint actions etc.). • The Partners' participation to the different phases of the stakeholders' involvement (e.g. Ecosystem project) can be identified as a good practice to be transferred. • Some tools such as exchange of best practices, study visit, IT platforms emerged as "CBC added value tools". It is recommended to value and capitalize the use of these tools within CBC projects. • It is recommended to strengthen the stakeholders' involvement at project level from the very beginning of the project implementation. This could be considered as an asset. • More than one project has been implemented CBC steering committee or management board (e.g. Bloutourism system, Zero Waste Blue). This is of outermost importance for CBC project and to manage the partnership in a valuable way. • The development of unforeseen sustainable networks that survive even beyond the conclusion of the project is a result of the experience and a precious added value of the CBC that should be valorised at the Programme level too. Spreading evaluation results among stakeholders at different levels could be a valid tool.
<p>F - Effectiveness and efficiency of the communication strategy</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Improved website for next programming period • Issuing the tender for the externalization of the communication services as soon as the program starts • Introducing more specialized training for beneficiaries (mainly related to social media) • Programming more frequent events (diverse in relation to target groups and contents) and promo materials directed to general public (i.e billboards) • Promoting higher levels of participation and coordination between LPs, PPs and other actors involved • Introducing and planning events where projects can present their initiatives and results to institutions at all levels
<p>G - Thematic and territorial impacts of Programme implementation as well as contribution to macro-regional strategies and EU 2020 targets</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Improving synergies and complementarities among Interreg and mainstream Programmes both at programme and project level is a challenging issue. Actually, the forthcoming 2021-2027 programming period will be based on a strategic approach which shows a strong emphasis on synergies with other tools and policies development. • Coordination at Programme level but also on the tools to avoid overlapping between projects as much as possible (even of different Programmes such

Theme	Recommendations
	<p>as Adrion and Italy-Croatia for example) which represented a critical issue in this programming period.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The call for cluster of Italy-Croatia Programme is an example of good practice to be replicated in the future: when requests to partners are specific and well structured, the consequence is the success of the call; in the call for clusters, all the project proposals obtained funding as proof of the above mentioned.