Enhancing **Cooperation** -Newsletter

of the IPA CBC Programmes Montenegro-Albania and Montenegro-Kosovo 2014-2020 and 2021-2027

April 2024

PHOTO CREDIT: PROJECT SKADAR/SHKODER LAKE WATERSHED - A TRANSBOUNDARY **BIOSPHERE RESERVE**

The nineteenth issue of the newsletter brings you information on activities and events implemented within both IPA Cross-border Cooperation (CBC) Programmes Montenegro - Albania and Montenegro - Kosovo* 2014-2020 and 2021-2027. Programmes and project activities are funded by the European Union.

Please find below more information on the programmes.

IPA III CBC Programme Montenegro - Albania

2021-2027

The global objective of the programme is to promote good neighbourly relations, foster Union integration and contribute to social, economic and territorial development by improving the quality of life of the population in the programme cross-border area by tourism development based on cultural/natural heritage and by protecting the environment.

Click here for more information.

IPA III CBC Programme Montenegro - Kosovo

2021-2027

The global objective of the programme is to promote good neighbourly relations, foster Union integration and contribute to social, economic and territorial development of the programme cross-border area by improving employment, labour mobility and social and cultural inclusion across borders; and developing sustainable tourism.

Click here for more information.

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Montenegro – Albania

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Cross-Border Cooperation



Montenegro – Kosovo

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Final conference celebrates cross-border cooperation achievements between Montenegro and Kosovo

In Prishtina, on 29 March 2024, the Ministry of Local Government Administration of Kosovo, in collaboration with the Ministry of European Affairs of Montenegro, hosted the Final Conference of the IPA II Cross-Border Cooperation Programme Montenegro - Kosovo 2014-2020. The event celebrated the programme's successes and introduced the forthcoming IPA III Programme for 2021-2027.

In his opening remarks, Kosovo's Minister of Local Government Administration, **Elbert Krasniqi**, praised the cooperation between Montenegro and Kosovo as a success story in good neighbourly relations. He highlighted how the programme has improved living

standards through sustainable economic, ecological, and social development while respecting cultural and natural heritage. **Krasniqi** expressed gratitude to all partners and urged continued collaboration for even greater impact in the future.

Montenegrin Minister of European Affairs, **Maida Gorčević**, echoed these sentiments, emphasizing that cross-border cooperation has effectively addressed common challenges. She noted that the IPA II programme supported 24 projects worth over 9 million euros, covering areas such as employment, social inclusion, environmental protection, climate change adaptation, disaster risk management, and tourism development. **Gorčević** expressed confidence in even stronger future cooperation and enhanced use of European funds.

Alessandro Biancardi, Deputy Head of Cooperation Section in the EU Office in Kosovo, praised the programme as a testament to the European Union's commitment to fostering unity, prosperity and peace in Europe. He stressed the tangible benefits of investing in employment, the environment, tourism and cultural heritage.

Cooperation

After this, **Sanja Todorović**, Head of the Joint Technical Secretariat, presented comprehensive statistics and achievements of the IPA II Programme. She presented in detail the number of calls for proposals published, support provided to applicants and project beneficiaries, and the involvement of institutions and direct beneficiaries. Todorović also showcased the most successful projects, highlighting their positive









Enhancing

The conference featured an engaging panel discussion with project beneficiaries moderated by **Gazmir Raci**, Antenna Project Officer.

Jelena Krivčević from the Regional Development Agency for Bjelasica, Komovi, and Prokletije in Montenegro shared her experience in rural and active tourism projects. She emphasized how EU funds helped transform agricultural holdings into rural tourism facilities, enhancing local capacities and income through sustainable tourism activities. Blerta Begolli from the Municipality of Peja discussed cultural heritage projects that boosted tourism and economic development. She highlighted the positive feedback from tourists and the increased income for rural families involved in cultural heritage routes. Xhevahire Gusturanaj, a direct beneficiary, shared how small investments like solar panels improved agricultural production and facilitated rural tourism services, enhancing the quality of life in remote areas. Moreover, Arta Gorani from the NGO Community Development Fund discussed the TIME TRAVEL project, which aims to develop a new cultural and historical tourism trail connecting Kosovo and Montenegro.

In the concluding session, **Todorović** outlined the new IPA III CBC

Programme Montenegro - Kosovo 2021-2027, detailing its priorities, financial envelope and eligible entities. She announced that the first call for proposals will be launched in 2024 and invited attendees to participate in upcoming capacity-building events. The conference, attended by 102 participants, underscored the enduring value of cross-border cooperation and set the stage for future collaborative efforts, ensuring continued progress and development for both Montenegro and Kosovo.



IPA II cross-border cooperation programme Montenegro-Albania 2014-2020 celebrates achievements in Podgorica

The Ministry of European Affairs of Montenegro, in collaboration with the State Agency for Strategic Programming and Assistance Coordination (SASPAC) of Albania, hosted the Final Conference for the IPA II Cross-Border Cooperation Programme Montenegro - Albania 2014-2020 in Podgorica on 2 April 2024. This event highlighted the successes of implemented projects, shared best practices, and introduced the upcoming IPA III Programme for 2021-2027.

Bojan Božović, State Secretary at the Ministry of European Affairs and National IPA Coordinator of Montenegro, praised the cooperative efforts that have strengthened ties between Montenegro and Albania, addressing employment, labour mobility, social and cultural inclusion, environmental protection, and climate change adaptation. "Good



neighbourly relations and regional cooperation are crucial for joining the EU," he emphasized.



Jona Suli, General Director of SASPAC and National IPA Coordinator of Albania, underlined the commitment of both countries to a shared European future. She noted the significant interest and achievements of project beneficiaries, acknowledging the lessons learned and the potential for improved performance in the next programme phase.



Sanja Bečanović, Acting Director General at the Directorate for Finance, Contracting, and Implementation of EU Assistance Funds in Montenegro, thanked participants for their dedication to cross-border



highlighted the programme's role in fostering

socioeconomic development and good neighbourly relations, while stressing the need for ongoing cooperation and process optimization.



Addressing the participants, **Liselotte Isaksson**, Deputy Head of Cooperation at the EU Delegation to Montenegro, commended the initiative for its effectiveness in addressing common challenges and seizing growth opportunities. She announced that the EU will provide close to 12 million euros in grants for the new IPA III programme.



After this, **Nersada Mandija**, Antenna JTS Project Officer in Shkodra, presented detailed statistics on the IPA II Programme, including the number of calls for proposals, support provided to applicants, and the involvement of institutions and beneficiaries. **Sanja Todorović**, Head of the Joint Technical Secretariat, shared the main achievements of all

projects, focusing on their impact on the respective implementation areas.

The conference included a panel discussion on environmental protection, climate change adaptation, and risk management, moderated by Nikola Đonović. Project Officer at the Joint Technical Secretariat. Panellists included Veselin Šturanović from FORS Montenegro and Andris Tufi from the Prefecture of Shkodra, who discussed the Disasters do not know borders projects. They highlighted the projects' contributions to disaster risk reduction, emergency preparedness, and the creation of a Common Warning System for Lake Skadar/Shkodra. Danijela Šuković from the Center for Ecotoxicological Research Montenegro presented the SOLUTION project, which measured water quality in Skadar Lake, and data extracted from the project show which that fish is safe for consumption. Ermelinda Mahmutaj from EDEN Center Albania and Ana Katnić from EnvPro Center Montenegro discussed the Skadar/Shkodra Lake Watershed - a Transboundary Biosphere Reserve project, emphasizing the collaboration aimed at UNESCO designation and

sustainable ecosystem management. The panel underscored the importance of cross-border cooperation, scientific monitoring, and proactive planning for environmental sustainability.



In the concluding session, **Sanja Todorović** reviewed lessons learned from the IPA II Programme and introduced the IPA III CBC Programme Montenegro - Albania 2021-2027 to the participants and presented the programme's priorities, financial structure, eligible entities, and planned activities, inviting participants to engage in future capacity-building events. The conference, which gathered 60 participants including officials from both countries' operating structures, EU delegations, local governments, and civil society, underscored the importance of crossborder cooperation and laid the groundwork for ongoing collaborative efforts to boost regional development and integration.



News on projects financed under the 3rd CfP IPA CBC Programme Montenegro - Albania

Training sessions for unemployed persons held in Cetinje and consultations in Fushe Arrez

During April 2024, training sessions were held for unemployed persons within the project *No Borders for Work*. For Montenegrin beneficiaries, the first part of the theoretical training for unemployed persons within the project was held in the Cetinje Business Center. The trainings were dedicated to communication skills and improving self-confidence, motivation and overcoming conflicts. After theoretical training for all selected candidates, practical training will be organised at the selected employer.



In Albania, representatives from local businesses, private and state institutions and agencies gathered and gave inputs for the Action plan for employment in the Municipality of Fushe Arrez and Malesi e Madhe. Participants were involved in discussions, providing ideas and recommendations for appropriate training for marginalized groups in the area.



The project *No borders for work!* is implemented by a partner consortium led by the Old Royal Capital Cetinje, ProAct Hub, Institute for Sustainable Policies and Fushe Arrez Municipality and aims to improve the socially inclusive economic development of the border regions of Fushe Arrez, Malesi e Madhe and the areas of Cetinje and Podgorica.



New equipment for Utility Companies in Gusinje and Puka

In Gusinje, nine sets of protective clothing for staff, including jackets, pants, working shoes, and raincoats, exceeding the initial plan of five sets were purchased and delivered as part of JEPA project. Additionally, five containers for paper and 16 bins for separate waste disposal have been installed. Future improvements in Gusinje include the procurement of mobile communication units, digital radio stations, and a solar bench, planned for installation on the main street currently under reconstruction. In Puka, a garbage truck has been delivered and is now in use by the municipal waste management company. The project also enabled the procurement of eight garbage containers and 16 bins for separate waste disposal. In Puka, upcoming enhancements include the procurement of mobile communication units, digital radio stations, and protective clothing for communal company staff. As in Gusinje, a solar bench will also be procured and installed near the frequently visited Puka Lake to ensure extensive usage by locals and tourists.



Municipality of Gusinje and Municipality of Puka are implementing the project *Joint Environmental Protection Action – JEPA*.



Support in starting businesses for young people

During this period, partners of the project *Skills for Jobs Albania* – *Montenegro* continued with capacity building activities. The Albanian Investment Development Agency (AIDA) published the call for applications for the selection of young people (age 15-29) and unemployed women for support in starting their business in the area of Muncipality of Shkodra, Municipality of Vau i Dejes and Municipality of Malesi e Madhe.



The project is being implemented by Foundation Business Start-Up Centre Bar, Chamber of Economy of Montenegro and Albanian Investment Development Agency.

New Reality of the Heritage Sites

The project *New Reality of Heritage Sites* aims to contribute to the development of tourism, culture and heritage in Montenegro and Albania and is implemented by the Municipality of Bar in cooperation with Albanian partners, the Municipality of Tropoja and the Foundation for Local Autonomy and Governance (FLAG). The project partners are

currently in the procurement phase and preparatory phase for the execution of work in the Old City of Bar and Tropoja Museum.

Building Smart Forests

Partners of the project *Building Smart Forests* continued with social media awareness raising activities and preparation of procedures for valuable equipment that will enable the timely detection of fires in the cross-border area.



The project *Building smart forests* is implemented by the Foundation for Local Autonomy and Governance (FLAG) from Albania, in partnership with the municipalities of Bar and Shkodra.

National workshop on natural values, ecosystem services and human benefits held

In April 2024 in Montenegro the 1st National workshop was held where participants had the opportunity to discuss the functional elements of biosphere reserves – *Exploring Natural values, ecosystem services, and human benefits.*



In particular, the workshop brought together 30 stakeholders from Montenegro, igniting dynamic exchanges and cementing agreements to steer the biosphere reserve journey.



The project *Skadar/Shkoder Lake Watershed - a Transboundary Biosphere Reserve* is being implemented by Development, Education and Networking (EDEN centre), Environment Programme - EnvPro, National agency of protected areas in Albania and Public Enterprise of National Parks of Montenegro.

News on projects financed under the 3rd CfP IPA CBC Programme Montenegro - Kosovo

Series of activities implemented in the municipalities of Tuzi and Peja

The municipality of Tuzi, in partnership with the municipality of Peja, is implementing the project *New Environment Revitalization Approach* – *NERA* that will contribute to environmental protection through a strategically oriented approach in local communities in Montenegro and Kosovo. This initiative aims to protect and revitalize the environment through strategic community actions and capacity-building activities.



One of the key highlights of the NERA project was the *Zero Waste Management* training. Representatives from public utility companies in Peja and Tuzi were given the opportunity to visit two pioneering companies at the forefront of recycling innovation. They observed the intricate processes involved in recycling glass, plastic, and paper, and saw first-hand how these materials are transformed into valuable products.

During March and April 2024, four workshops were held targeting pupils in the seventh, eighth, and ninth grades at elementary schools in Tuzi. The workshops, which included participation from both pupils and school staff, focused on critical topics such as waste pollution, special types of waste, waste separation, and recycling. These educational sessions



to foster strong environmental consciousness in the younger generation.



As part of the project, biodegradable plastic bags were handed over to *K.R.M Ambienti* to be distributed to 840 households in Peja. The bags, designed in different colours, are intended to encourage proper waste separation, simplifying the recycling process for residents.



In addition to educational and awareness-raising activities, NERA also provided essential cleaning and maintenance tools to local organizations. *EKO-SIG* received wheelbarrows, hedge scissors, and shovels to support their ongoing efforts in maintaining clean and beautiful community spaces.

The project also addressed the significant issue of illegal landfills. Coordination meetings with various stakeholders were held to develop strategies for tackling this challenge. The collective effort aims to transform these polluted sites into vibrant green spaces, enhancing the beauty of the municipalities and contributing to a healthier, more sustainable future.



Follow the project <u>page</u> for more information.

UNEETED project unveils research findings on NEET youth in Mojkovac

On 22 February 2024 the Institute for Strategic Studies and Prognoses, the Institute for Development Policy (INDEP), the Chamber of Economy of Montenegro, and the Municipality of Mojkovac presented their latest research as part of the Young NEETs: New Opportunities for Work and Increased Employability – UNEETED project. The presentation, held in Mojkovac, focused on the NEET (Not in Education, Employment, or Training) population across five Montenegrin municipalities: Bijelo Polje, Gusinje, Mojkovac, Plav, and Rožaje. The research aims to identify the challenges faced by NEET youth and to explore new opportunities for improving their employability and integrating them into the workforce.



The UNEETED project is dedicated to creating new employment opportunities and enhancing the skills of young people in Montenegro who are currently out of the education and employment systems. By addressing the specific needs of the NEET population, the project seeks to foster economic growth and reduce unemployment rates among the youth in these regions. This activity marked a significant step in understanding and addressing the issues faced by NEET youth, paving the way for targeted interventions and support programme to help them transition into the labour market.

Skills for Sustainable Employment in the Cross-Border Region of Montenegro and the Republic of Kosovo - No Borders!

The project *Skills for Sustainable Employment in the Cross-Border Region of Montenegro and the Republic of Kosovo – No Borders!* aims to contribute to increasing the professional skills and competence of unemployed youth and women in the cross-border region in order to meet the needs for employment in the tourism and hospitality sector. The project is being implemented by Chamber of Economy of Montenegro, Chamber of Commerce of the Republic of Kosovo, Regional Business Centre Berane and Education, Training and Research Institute – ETRI. Project partners started with capacity building activities. Namely, nine young individuals from Berane, Bijelo Polje and Rožaje had the opportunity to acquire basic knowledge about entrepreneurship in the coming period, which can help them achieve their goals.



In April, in the premises of the Regional Business Center, certificates were handed out to participants who completed on-the-job training. During the three-month training, participants had the opportunity to learn from their mentors and gain valuable experience and knowledge in the tourism and hospitality sectors.



The participants pointed out that they improved their knowledge, learned a lot from their mentors, and that they are now ready for new challenges and opportunities that await them in the labor market. Their success is the result of dedicated work and motivation, as well as the support they received from mentors and partner organizations.

CDF hosted training workshop in Peja to support vulnerable groups

On 22 February 2024, the Community Development Fund (CDF) launched a two-day training workshop as part of the *Cultural Renaissance from Skadar Lake to Kosovo - Time Travel* project. The event brought together representatives from social and employment policy institutions to discuss activation policies aimed at supporting vulnerable groups. The workshop, held in collaboration with the Centre for Sustainable Tourism Initiatives (CSTI) Montenegro, the National Tourism Organization (NTO) Montenegro, and Klina Municipality in Kosovo, aimed to enhance the capacity of these institutions to implement effective activation policies. These policies are crucial for improving the social and economic inclusion of marginalized populations.



Participants engaged in comprehensive discussions and interactive sessions, focusing on best practices and innovative strategies to empower vulnerable groups through employment and social integration initiatives. The workshop provided a platform for sharing knowledge and experiences, fostering a collaborative approach to addressing the challenges faced by these communities.



The Cultural Renaissance from Skadar Lake to Kosovo - Time Travel project underscores the importance of cultural and social initiatives in promoting sustainable development and enhancing the quality of life for all citizens. By focusing on activation policies, the project aims to create more inclusive and resilient communities across the region.

Evocation and Attraction of Cultural Heritage -Christian Antiquity and Turkish Bath for Cultural Tourism

The project *Evocation and Attraction of Cultural Heritage – Christian Antiquity and Turkish Bath for Cultural Tourism* will contribute to increasing the economic competitiveness of the area by increasing the cultural tourism potential of the area. This project is being carried out by PI Polimski Museum Berane and Marimangat e Pejës - Rock climbing Association from the Kosovo side.



As part of the project activities, the expert team of the Museum of Polimje in Berane conducted systematic archaeological research of the Tumbarica site.



Based on the discovered and preserved parts of architecture and a large number of rare museum objects, excavated after works funded by previous project under the IPA CBC Programme Montenegro – Albania, the Museum of Polimje decided to continue further work on this site.

Through education to improve solid waste management

On 14 April 2024, a two-day training on improving the solid waste management system was held in Berane, organised by FORS Montenegro and the Municipality of Berane, as part of the *Cross-border Green Deal* project. The training was organised for representatives of institutions responsible for environmental protection, communal and inspection services in order to strengthen their capacities and develop cross-border cooperation in this area.

The training was attended by 30 representatives of the mentioned institutions who had the opportunity to hear from the professor of the Faculty of Technical Sciences of the University of Novi Sad, **prof. dr Bojan Batinić** and **prof. dr Dejan Ubavin**, listen to the possibilities of improving waste management through familiarization with modern standards and practices in this area, the importance of circular economy in waste management, designing and planning landfills, measures for their rehabilitation, etc.



The *Cross-border Green Deal* project implemented by FORS Montenegro, ECMI Kosovo and Municipality of Berane aims to improve the quality of services in the environmental protection and waste management sector and raise the level of awareness of the population about the importance of environmentally responsible behaviour in preserving the environment and natural resources.

Tourism for the Future

The two-year project Tourism for the Future is implemented by the NGO Prishtina REA as a leading partner in partnership with the Mountaineering Association "Deravica" from Kosovo and Montenegrin partners, the Municipality of Kolašin and the Institute for Entrepreneurship and Economic Development.



During the first quarter of 2024, a series of promotional videos were produced. One of them was the story of Elite Apartments Kolašin where guests can enjoy cozy apartments and scenic terraces. Check out the story <u>here</u>.

Meanwhile, in Peja, Kosovo, the story and legacy of traditional craftsmanship continues through **Blerim Gorani**, heir to a long line of skilled artisans dating back to the 19th century. **Blerim** offers authentic scissors and razors made from ram's horn, rich in history and tradition. His shop attracts both local and international tourists, eager to

experience and purchase these unique local products. For a glimpse into this tradition, check out the promotional video <u>here</u>.



As part of capacity building activities, in Kolašin, the training on Ecofriendly international standards, cultural heritage, nature and environment as eco-tourism value was held. Moreover, thirteen awardees signed Grant Agreements to implement and achieve internationally recognized Eco-Label Standard Certifications. The ceremony highlighted the importance of eco-friendly practices in tourism. A video from the event is available <u>here</u>, and a summary of the training participation statistics can be viewed <u>here</u>.

Looking ahead, preparations for the <u>Peja Outdoor Tourism Festival</u>, set to be organised in May, have already begun. This festival promises to showcase the beauty and adventure that Peja has to offer, further promoting sustainable tourism and local traditions.

C.L.O.S.E.R. - Culture-Led Opportunities for Sustainable Economic Revitalisation

The Kosovo Foundation for Cultural Heritage Without Borders, in partnership with the Municipality of Bar is implementing a two-year project C.L.O.S.E.R. – Culture-Led Opportunities for Sustainable Economic Revitalisation.

The second workshop aimed at "Developing the Management Plan of the Creative Hub West" has successfully concluded, marking a significant milestone in shaping the future of the region's creative community.



During January 2024, the second workshop for "*Developing the Management Plan of the Creative Hub West* was organised, marking a significant milestone in shaping the future of the CBC creative community.

The workshop, held under the *C.L.O.S.E.R - Culture-Led Opportunities for Sustainable Economic Revitalization* project, saw the participation from representatives of civil society across the western region of Kosovo, including Peja, Gjakova, Decan, Klina, Istog, and Junik, alongside key institution officials. This collaborative effort underscores the commitment to making the Creative Hub West not just a space, but a dynamic and inclusive community-driven initiative.



The discussions were extensive and detailed, focusing on the structural framework of the HUB and identifying crucial roles in its managerial process. Participants shared insights and perspectives, ensuring that the HUB reflects the diverse needs and aspirations of the local communities it aims to serve.

Workshop on Cultural Heritage on Rural Tourism held in Peja

As part of the project *Turning our villages into tourism destinations*, RDA-West with the support of Peja Municipality organised a workshop on 31 January 2024, on the topic Role of Cultural Heritage on Rural Tourism. The objective of the workshop was initiating the process of developing capacities in rural communities on the utilisation of cultural heritage in providing tourism services, as well as the preservation and presentation of these values by businesses and households which will provide services in rural tourism in the future.



During the workshop, the lessons learned from the study visits conducted in Montenegro at locations where rural tourism services are provided, were also considered. The project *Turning our villages into tourism destinations* is implemented by Peja Municipality, RDA-West, and RDA-BKP in Montenegro.



In Employment, Education, Training - IN EET

In order to contribute to the social inclusion of vulnerable population groups, as well as their access to the labour market, NGO Juventas from Montenegro and NGO Labyrint from Kosovo are implementing the project *In Employment, Education, Training - IN EET*.



On 22 and 23 February 2024, a joint meeting was held in the framework of the project. Official guests of the relevant institutions of social affairs and employment from Montenegro and Kosovo were invited to this meeting.



The research produced as part of the project was also presented, and it contained information on the situation in Kosovo and Montenegro for social and employment opportunities for marginalized groups. The participants had the opportunity to discuss the research findings and

offer solutions and recommendation on how to improve the situation in Kosovo and Montenegro.



Bilateral meeting held in Prishtina

On 18 March 2024, a bilateral meeting between structures of the IPA CBC Programme Montenegro – Kosovo was organised in Prishtina in order to discuss the upcoming IPA III and current activities of the Programme.



During the meeting, various aspects of the future steps regarding the publication of the 1^{st} CfP within IPA III Programme were discussed, as well the organisation of the final events within IPA II.



Meeting of structures of the programmes held in Tirana

On 26 January 2024, in Tirana, hosted by the State Agency of Strategic Programming and Aid Coordination of the Republic of Albania (SASPAC), operating structures of the programmes gathered to discuss upcoming activities.



Namely, SASPAC and representatives of Ministry of European Affairs Montenegro and Ministry of Local Government Administration of Kosovo organised a meeting to discuss and agree on the proposal of activities of the technical assistance under IPA III and other ongoing activities related to IPA II.





Operating structures of the programmes (click on the icon to visit the website)



Ministry of European Affairs







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Ministria e Administrimit të Pushtetit Lokal Ministarstvo Administracije Lokalne Samouprave Ministry of Local Government Administration



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This project is funded by the European Union