

# Interreg Greece-Bulgaria



## GR-BG BUSINESS PASSPORT

European Regional Development Fund

### **Deliverable 4.1.4**

#### **"Project Evaluation Report"**

Within the framework of the project "Greek Bulgarian Business Partnership by Assistance, Services, Solutions to Promote Open Regions Team" with the acronym "GR BG BUSINESS PASSPORT"  
INTERREG VA COOPERATION PROGRAMME  
GREECE – BULGARIA 2014 – 2020


The project is co-financed by the European Regional Development Fund (ERDF) and national resources of the countries participating in the Interreg VA Cooperation Program "Greece - Bulgaria 2014 - 2020"  
<https://businesspassport.eu>

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## Summary

The project "Greek Bulgarian Business Partnership by Assistance, Services, Solutions to Promote Open Regions Team" with the acronym "GR BG BUSINESS PASSPORT" INTERREG VA COOPERATION PROGRAMME GREECE – BULGARIA 2014 – 2020, aimed at creating an environment at a cross-border level, that promotes innovation and develops the formula for creation transfer technologies, by providing services for the dissemination of information, communication, education, etc., to local potential and existing entrepreneurs.

The goal of the activity 4.1.4 "Evaluation of the project" is an investigation of the degree of achievement of the ultimate goal of the project, ie the improvement of SME's entrepreneurship support systems.

In the evaluation of the project, the aim is to obtain an answer to the following questions:

1. To what extent has the project contributed to supporting innovative business ideas in the cross-border area?
2. Can the project have a multiplier effect?
3. Can the sustainability of the project be supported after the funding ends?

The evaluation follows the methodology as presented in the following chapters and uses the indicators defined in the Application Form, with clear and measurable evaluation criteria and suitable research tools for drawing conclusions.

The deliverable may be used among project partners to evaluate their project after its end, explore ways to ensure its sustainability and capitalize its results, as well as plan new projects, taking into consideration the lessons learned.

## The Program

The eligible cross-border cooperation area between Greece and Bulgaria for the programming period 2014-2020 is identical to the current European Territorial Cooperation program. It extends to 40,202 and has a total population of 2.7 million inhabitants. It covers four territorial units at the level (Regions) and 11 territorial units at the level (Regions). The eligible area stretches along the Greek-Bulgarian border and borders Turkey (east) and Macedonia (west), two countries that wish to have access to the European Union. It is part of the most south-eastern non-island area of the EU and lies between three seas: the Black Sea, the Mediterranean Sea and the Ionian-Adriatic Sea. Finally, it is at the crossroads of strategic fossil fuel pipelines that feed the EU market and trans-European transport network (TEN) axes. The residential structure of the region is characterized by the presence of 10 medium and large

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cities (>50,000 inhabitants) that gather 38.2% of the total population and 25 small cities (10,000-50,000 inhabitants). Despite the relatively small funds available, there is a long history of cooperation in the eligible area, which began with the Community initiative INTERREG I (1989-1993).

The eligible area of the INTERREG Cross-Border Program "Greece-Bulgaria 2014 – 2020" covers the following areas:

BG413 – Blagoevgrad

BG422 – Haskovo

BG424 – Smolyan

BG425 – Kardzhali

EL111 – Evros

EL112 – Xanthi

EL113 – Rhodope

EL114 – Drama

EL115 – Kavala

EL122 – Thessaloniki

EL126 – Serres

PRIORITY AXIS:

CA 1: Competitive and Innovative Cross-Border Area

CA 2: Sustainable Transboundary Area

CA 3: Interconnection of cross-border area

CA 4: A cross-border region without social exclusion

AP 5: Technical support

PROJECT BUDGET:

The total value (ETPA and the National contribution) for the European program Greece - Bulgaria 2014-2020 is: € 130,262,835.00.

The total funding of ETPA is: € 110,723,409.75 (85%) and the total funding of the National contribution is: € 19,539,425.25 (15%).

GENERAL LEVEL OF DEVELOPMENT:

The eligible area of the "Greece - Bulgaria" program is one of the poorest in the European Union, as the GDP per capita is below 50% of the EU28 (EU28) average. This has not changed

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significantly over the past 10 years, although short-term improvements were seen during 2002-2004 and then again in 2006-2009. The cross-border region is also characterized by large internal disparities, particularly regarding the division between Bulgarian and Greek territories. Bulgarian districts show a much lower level of economic development (below ¼) than their Greek counterparts, mainly due to the fact that Bulgaria has long been a transition economy. The period 2006-2009 was characterized by economic growth on both sides of the border, as was the general trend across Europe. After 2009, the effects of the global recession led to a slowdown in growth rates in the Bulgarian segment (0.25% p.a.) and negative growth rates in the Greek segment (-9% p.a.).

## ECONOMY:

Although the cross-border region is gradually transforming from an agricultural/industrial economy to an industrial/service economy, this transformation has been rather slow. Compared to the Europe of 28 (EU28), the economy remains significantly more agricultural, less industrial and more dependent on services. However, this is by no means homogeneous. The Greek cross-border area is significantly less agricultural and industrial than the corresponding part of Bulgaria, and more service-oriented. This heterogeneity is even more pronounced at the provincial level. We can distinguish 2 types of regions in the Bulgarian part and 3 types of regions in the Greek part:

Blagoevgrad / Haskovo: dominated by industry and commerce

Smolyan / Kardali: industry and agriculture dominate

Evros / Drama / Thessaloniki: public administration and industry dominate

Xanthi / Rodopi: public administration and agriculture dominate

Kavala / Serres: industry and public administration dominate

More than half of the Gross Value Added (GVA) generated in the cross-border region (59%) is generated in the Thessaloniki region. All other regions show low rates. Particularly low rates are observed in the Bulgarian regions of Haskovo, Smolyan and Kardalia (1-2%).

Some of the notable cross-regional structural developments that have taken place recently include;

Gradual conversion between the two parties in terms of the share of GPA attributable to the primary sector. Despite this, there remains a wide gap between the two sides, with the Bulgarian region being more heavily agricultural than the Greek cross-border region and even more heavily agricultural than Bulgaria's respective national rates.

Significant differentiation between the two parts of the secondary sector, mainly due to the significant losses of industrial activity that occurred in the Greek part after 2006 (mainly due to relocations of labor-intensive industries to cheaper neighboring countries).

The overall labor productivity in the cross-border region is significantly lower than in Europe of 28 (about 1/5) and shows large differences between the Greek (€32,800.00/employee) and the Bulgarian (€5,800.00/employee) side. The productivity of the cross-border region is also lower than the corresponding national averages for both parts:



- for the part of Bulgaria: ranging from 60% to 78% of the national average, and
- for the Greek part: it ranges from 60% to 84% of the national average

Tourism, and especially eco-tourism, has for many years emerged as a "development industry" of the cross-border region, as it includes a significant number of pristine areas of high ecological value. Nevertheless, it has a relatively small number of accommodations compared to its population (43 establishments/100,000 inhabitants, when the EU28 average is 111), which are unevenly distributed. The largest concentrations of accommodation and beds are found in the provinces of Kavala, Thessaloniki and Smolyan.

#### INNOVATION:

Both Greece and Bulgaria have outlined national or regional innovation strategies in the context of "smart specialization". However, Bulgaria lags far behind other EU countries and is listed as a "moderate innovator" in the Union's 2014 innovation scoreboard, while Greece, although in a somewhat better position, falls below the EU average and listed as "moderate innovation". However, the cross-border region has important research facilities that currently do not cooperate with each other or with the business community. It also has similar production systems, thus presenting significant opportunities for coupling entrepreneurship initiatives with innovation. The critical mass of research centers and other academic institutions is located in Thessaloniki with the following areas of excellence: biotechnology, advanced production systems for chemical processes, energy and environmental technologies, information processing, virtual reality, security services, etc. Research and innovation actions in Macedonia and Thrace are concentrated in the public sector and especially in the University of Thrace (with the unique Department of Genetics) and to a lesser extent in the Technological Educational Institute (TEI) of Kavala. In the Bulgarian part, the most important research infrastructure is located outside the cross-border area (mainly in Sofia and Plovdiv) and only Blagoevgrad seems to have significant research structures. The Southwestern University "Neofit Rilski" – with nine faculties offers PhD programs in many areas of liberal arts (Education and Pedagogy, Literature and Linguistics, History and Archaeology, Social Sciences, Choreography and Film majors). Of particular importance to the cross-border area are the programs in Economics (with specialization in Tourism), Geography and Environmental Sciences and IT. Also in Smolyan there are branches of "Paisii Hilendarski" University of Plovdiv with its Technical College and Varna Free University "Chernoets Hrabar".

#### CLIMATE CHANGE:

According to the ESPON-CLIMATE programme, the program area is significantly more vulnerable to climate change, both compared to the EU 28 and to the national levels of Greece and Bulgaria. The most vulnerable are Thessaloniki, Serres, Kardzali and Haskovo. Climate change will have significant negative impacts on the transboundary region. It is estimated to affect the majority of urban centres, increasing the number of heat wave days to over 50 over the period 2071-2100. Natural hazards in the area include flood risk areas (mainly near the Nestos and Evros rivers), fire risk areas (mainly in the mountain ranges) and erosion risk areas (especially on the coasts). Floods and fires can spread quickly across borders and for this



reason their effective management is of cross-border importance. Finally, the areas with the highest risk of landslides are located in the East Evros basin and the coal development area in the southwest region. The largest studied landslide is located in the Smolyan region at the "Smolyan Lakes" site. Furthermore, the cross-border region's combined adaptive capacity to climate change is similar to national levels and the lowest in Europe. On the Greek side, the region of Thessaloniki and on the Bulgarian side the region of Blagoevgrad show rather high adaptive capacity compared to national prices, but are still lower than the EU28 average.

#### ENVIRONMENT:

The cross-border area is characterized by many and important natural resources, including a large number of protected natural areas (86 Natura 2000 sites, 5 Ramsar wetlands, etc.), many of which are virgin. The landscape of the transboundary region consists of densely forested mountains, river straits, valleys, plains, lakes, coastal wetlands, beaches and river deltas. The area includes the Rila, Pirin and Rhodope mountain ranges, with excellent forests, the cross-border rivers Strymona, Nesto, Arda and Evros and more than 400 kilometers of coastline. These important natural resources have been underutilized for development purposes in the past. Regarding the state of the environment, industry is one of the major polluters on both sides of the border, and the main pollution spots are concentrated in southwestern Bulgaria and near the urban area of Kavala. Both transboundary rivers – Nestos and Evros – are polluted with urban and industrial waste. The main problems in urban wastewater management are due to the lack of wastewater treatment infrastructure in settlements between 2,000 – 10,000 inhabitants. The problem is more pronounced in the Bulgarian part of the cross-border area. In Bulgaria, only 46% of the population is covered by wastewater treatment systems and most of the treatment capacity (71%) is located in the Danube and Black Sea basins (located outside the transboundary area). In the Greek part, 88% of the population is covered by sewage treatment systems.

#### ACCESSIBILITY:

On the Greek side, the area has important transport infrastructure and is served by three ports of national / international importance (the port of Thessaloniki, the port of Kavala and the port of Alexandroupolis) and three main airports (the International Airport "Macedonia" in Thessaloniki, the "Megalos Alexandros" airport in Kavala and "Dimokritos" airport in Alexandroupolis).

The most important transport infrastructure is the road network and overall connectivity has improved significantly in the past:

- with the construction of the Egnatia motorway and many vertical axes connecting Greece with Bulgaria and
- with the construction of large sections of A3 and A4 motorways in Bulgaria

However, lower-level roads are in various stages of destruction (especially in the Bulgarian part), making connections difficult and reducing mobility, especially in the mountain ranges. At the same time, several vertical axes of Egnatia as agreed in the Interstate Agreement



between Greece and Bulgaria in 1998 are missing or under construction (such as the IJ-86 connection to the Greek transport system) and the highways in the Bulgarian part are incomplete. The region has insufficient rail and multimodal infrastructure, despite the presence of major ports and airports. Both Greece and Bulgaria have recently invested in the railway network of the cross-border area but significant investments are required which are beyond the financial possibilities of the Greece-Bulgaria programme. This heavy reliance on road transport also significantly increases the environmental footprint of transport activities in the region, especially at border crossing points (eg long truck lines) and especially during the tourist season. Finally, the region lacks accessible public transport for people with disabilities and cross-border public transport services.

#### LABOR MARKET, POVERTY AND SOCIAL INTEGRATION:

While in 2007 unemployment rates for cross-border regions were on average close to or below national rates and below the EU27 average, unemployment started to rise rapidly – especially in Greece – immediately after the financial crisis in 2008, reaching record levels in 2013. Bulgarian provinces managed to keep unemployment rates close to or below the EU27 average. At present, the large disparities between the regions of the cross-border region have not been dissolved. The latest figures show the following high unemployment rates (2013): Xanthi 37.5%, Drama 36.8%, Thessaloniki 32.1%, Serres 22.9%, Kavala 22.8%, Evros 22%, Smolyan 20, 3% and Rhodope 16.8%.

In addition, long-term unemployment rates increased strongly – especially for Greek regions – after 2009, which indicates a risk of high structural unemployment which in turn implies the existence of inefficient labor markets and a mismatch between labor market demand and available skills and locations of jobseekers. According to the ESPON DEMIFER project, the cross-border region shows significantly higher rates of long-term unemployed compared to the EU28. Youth unemployment rates show similar trends and are due to poor economic growth, a rigid labor market and a mismatch between workers' potential skills and employers' needs in Greece and Bulgaria.

In addition, the cross-border region has significantly higher rates of population at risk of poverty or social exclusion (3-4 times higher) than the EU28. The main reason for the large discrepancy is the relatively higher rates of long-term unemployment and the higher proportion of people living in areas with low work intensity and low income levels. Regarding the latter, the share of people living in areas with low labor intensity has been increasing since 2010 in both Bulgarian and Greek territories. The high number of people experiencing poverty and social exclusion in the cross-border area is also due to the presence of various vulnerable groups such as minorities, internal migrants, asylum seekers and foreigners receiving subsidiary protection. The higher risk of poverty and social exclusion among these groups is mainly linked to long-term unemployment and economic unemployment. The increasing incidence of poverty has many social consequences, one of which is worsening public health conditions. Although the cross-border region enjoys the availability of basic healthcare resources (e.g. hospitals and doctors) at levels close to or even better in several cases than the EU28 average, average life expectancy is lower than EU28 levels and epidemiological indicators present high rates. Overall, Greek regions have historically had higher life expectancy than Bulgarian regions, but since poverty forces more people to seek hospital care (over 20% increase documented in Greece after 2010), it seems that in the Greek regions





healthcare conditions will likely deteriorate in the near future, thus reducing the overall levels of public health in the cross-border region.

### **Program Structure**

The program "Greece - Bulgaria 2014-2020" is designed to address the main challenges identified in the cross-border area where cooperation is either necessary or expected to produce significant added value either by capitalizing on previous results or by being complementary to the program " smart specialisation" either by leveraging existing institutional capacities and/or the expressed demand. It contributes to the E2020 strategy as follows:

Regarding the "smart growth" objective:

It strengthens the business fabric of the cross-border region and in particular promotes productivity improvement, export orientation and the introduction of new products with particular emphasis on the sectors identified by the "smart specialization" strategies

promotes innovation at all levels,

promotes resource efficiency,

exploits the comparative advantages offered by rich natural and cultural resources to promote economic development (tourism), and

supports the integration and efficient use of transport systems in the cross-border region

Regarding the "sustainable development" goal:

Increases the transboundary region's capacity to adapt to climate change, reduces natural and anthropogenic hazards and strengthens the response capacity of local actors, preserves cultural and natural heritage, protects and restores biodiversity and ecosystem health, and reduces the environmental footprint of transport activities in the cross-border area.

Regarding the "inclusive growth" objective:

enhances connectivity and mobility of the cross-border region promotes 'access for all' to healthcare, supports employability, especially for the most vulnerable groups, and fosters the development of social entrepreneurship.

## **The GR BG BUSINESS PASSPORT Project**

The business environment in the cross-border region presents weaknesses in providing liquidity to SMEs, either at the stage of their creation or at the level of existing ones that require working capital. The constant changes and volatility of businesses combined with the introduction of new technologies, regulations and processes related to the development, production, marketing and availability of products require specialized and targeted support. The competitiveness of economies and businesses is judged by characteristics related to quality, originality of design and product innovation. These characteristics refer to the ability to identify, adopt and disseminate new, constantly evolving productive technological knowledge and are also the result of creative problem solving and strategic choices. Therefore,

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there is a need for an environment to promote innovation, the development of which depends on business cooperation, the creation of technology transfer networks, infrastructures that provide information transmission services, communication, education, etc. In this context, incubators provide a wide range of tools and support services to business groups by accelerating their development path.

BUSINESS PASSPORT attempted to address the need to create a cross-border environment that fosters innovation and develops the formula for creative transfer technologies by providing services for the dissemination of information, communication, education, etc.

The cooperation structure of the project are:

Lead Partner – Management and Administration Body of Technopolis Thessaloniki S.A

Partner 2 – Union of Maritza Regional Municipalities, Bulgaria

Partner 3 – International University of Greece Special Account

Partner 4 – Institute Of Robotics Bulgarian Academy of Sciences, Bulgaria

The objectives of the project, as formulated and approved by the programme, are focused on Program Priority 1 "A competitive and innovative cross-border region" and Specific objective 1 "Improving SME entrepreneurship support systems" and include the following:

- Linking research and innovation to economic development in new ways, such as business discovery,
- Development and creation of innovative products with features that will make them more competitive in international markets, will give even greater impetus to the selected business sectors and in general to the cross-border area,
- Creation and operation of specialized support structures for existing businesses and creation of new ones with a focus on cutting-edge technologies,
- Development of a new model of cross-border entrepreneurship based on start-ups, able to attract venture capital and investments that contribute to the development of the economy as a whole,
- Creation of a cross-border business network linked to international networks in the field of innovation and cutting-edge technologies;
- Improving the extroversion and competitiveness of products and services both in the domestic and foreign markets,
- Creation of direct and indirect new jobs.

The whole project is based on the operation of laboratories in incubators and is supported by research and educational institutions, ensuring that knowledge is directly linked to production, resulting in the continuous modernization of know-how and its transfer to stakeholders.

More specifically, the aim of the GR BG BUSINESS PASSPORT project was to create an integrated support framework for small and medium enterprises (SMEs) in the cross-border region, focusing on specific categories of enterprises (e.g. small and micro enterprises, start-ups) and important sectors according to the RIS3 strategies (e.g. Agri-food, Tourism, Social

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Enterprises), but also in ideas from young potential entrepreneurs. The framework was based on an approach that includes the following levels:

Level A: Providing support and assistance to existing small and micro-enterprises by developing tools to strengthen today's operational and financial capacity (digital marketing tools, ad-hoc business support from expert teams, workshops and seminars for new developments and preparation for future needs , cost analysis of the development and production of new products and services, etc.).

Level B: Development and promotion of entrepreneurship by facilitating the transition to new business models and the evaluation of new ideas (innovation, new technologies) while exploring their financing, using special financing tools and the participation of investment funds.

Level C: This level mainly consists of umbrella actions in the above two directions, which focused on the design and implementation of interventions to build the product identity as well as promotion and exposure activities. More specifically, the objective of this level was to make the most of efforts to create opportunities and prospects to enter new markets.

The expected results of the project include the following:

- Improving the business environment in the cross-border region,
- network development,
- Creating an integrated ecosystem for SMEs,
- Strengthening of SME support and development processes,
- Introducing innovation as a priority and connecting academic knowledge and research with the business world,
- Promoting innovations that lead to investment through assistance provided to start-ups;
- Establishment and activation of enterprises with innovative organizational structures, such as the creation of business opportunities through a network of self-managed enterprises,
- The creation of businesses by groups that do not have access to finance or specialized management.

## Project deliverables

Main beneficiary MANAGEMENT AND ADMINISTRATION BODY OF TECHNOPSIS THESSALONIKI S.A. Hellas	
	<b>Title of Deliverable</b>
<b>PE1</b>	<b>Project Management and Coordination</b>
Deliverable 1.1.1	Preparation Activities
Deliverable 1.1.2	Project Management
Deliverable 1.1.3	Project Meetings

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Deliverable 1.1.4	FLC
<b>PE2</b>	<b>Communication and Dissemination</b>
Deliverable 2.1.1	Communication Plan
Deliverable 2.1.2	Dissemination Material
Deliverable 2.1.3	Website
Deliverable 2.1.4	Social Media Marketing Tools
Deliverable 2.1.5	Closing Conference and Media Publications
<b>PE3</b>	<b>Robotics Lab</b>
Deliverable 3.1.1	Establishment of Robotics Lab
Deliverable 3.1.2	E-Library and database for supporting SMEs
<b>PE4</b>	<b>Supporting Innovative Business Ideas</b>
Deliverable 4.1.1	B2B events – Networking and Courses
Deliverable 4.1.2	Mentoring and Coaching
Deliverable 4.1.3	Cross Border Innovation Competition
Deliverable 4.1.4	Project Evaluation
Deliverable 4.1.5	Cross Border exchange of experience
<b>PE5</b>	<b>Exhibitions</b>
Deliverable 5.1.1	Participation in Exhibitions

P2 Regional Municipalities Association “Maritza” BULGARIA	
	<b>Title of Deliverable</b>
<b>PE1</b>	<b>Project Management and Coordination</b>
Deliverable 1.2.2	Project Management and Meetings
<b>PE2</b>	<b>Communication and Dissemination</b>
Deliverable 2.2.1	Dissemination Materials
Deliverable 2.2.2	Closing Conference and Media Publications
<b>PE3</b>	<b>Robotics Lab</b>
Deliverable 3.2.1	E-Library and database for supporting SMEs
Deliverable 3.2.2	Implementation of Business Passport
<b>PE4</b>	<b>Supporting Innovative Business Ideas</b>
Deliverable 4.2.1	B2B events – Networking and courses
Deliverable 4.2.2	Mentoring and Coaching

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Deliverable 4.2.3	Cross Border Exchange of Experience
<b>PE5</b>	<b>Exhibitions</b>
Deliverable 5.2.1	Participation in Exhibitions

P3 INTERNATIONAL UNIVERSITY GREECE SPECIAL ACCOUNT Hellas	
	<b>Title of Deliverable</b>
<b>PE1</b>	<b>Project Management and Coordination</b>
Deliverable 1.3.2	Project Management
Deliverable 1.3.3	Project Meetings
Deliverable 1.3.4	FLC
<b>PE2</b>	<b>Communication and Dissemination</b>
Deliverable 2.3.1	Communication Plan
Deliverable 2.3.2	Dissemination Material
Deliverable 2.3.3	Website
Deliverable 2.3.4	Closing Conference and Media Publications
<b>PE3</b>	<b>Robotics Lab</b>
Deliverable 3.3.1	Establishment of Robotics Lab
Deliverable 3.3.2	E-Library and database for supporting SMEs
<b>PE4</b>	<b>Supporting Innovative Business Ideas</b>
Deliverable 4.3.1	B2B events-Networking and courses
Deliverable 4.3.2	Entrepreneurship Education Methods
Deliverable 4.3.3	Evaluation of Proposals of Cross Border Innovation Competition
<b>PE5</b>	<b>Exhibitions</b>
Deliverable 5.3.1	Participation in Exhibitions

P4 INSTITUTE OF ROBOTICS-BULGARIAN ACADEMY OF SCIENCES BULGARIA	
	<b>Title of Deliverable</b>
<b>PE1</b>	<b>Project Management and Coordination</b>
Deliverable 1.4.2	Project Management
Deliverable 1.4.3	Project Meetings
<b>PE2</b>	<b>Communication and Dissemination</b>
Deliverable 2.4.1	Dissemination Material

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Deliverable 2.4.2	Closing Conference and Media Publications
<b>PE3</b>	<b>Robotics Lab</b>
Deliverable 3.4.1	Establishment of MobRoboLab
Deliverable 3.4.2	Educational Material
<b>PE4</b>	<b>Supporting Innovative Business Ideas</b>
Deliverable 4.4.1	B2B events – Networking and courses
Deliverable 4.4.2	Preparation and conducting of 5 courses
Deliverable 4.4.3	Cross Border Innovation Competition
Deliverable 4.4.4	Project Evaluation
Deliverable 4.4.5	Cross Border Exchange of Experience
<b>PE5</b>	<b>Exhibitions</b>
Deliverable 5.4.1	Participation in Exhibitions

## Evaluation methodology

Evaluation study refers to a systematic process of analyzing, assessing and evaluating data, information or systems, with the purpose of evaluating performance, highlighting strengths and weaknesses, and making decisions based on the results of this analysis. The goal of evaluation is usually to determine the effectiveness, performance, value, or importance of an effort, program, or system.

In this case, the feasibility of the evaluation study is to determine the effectiveness of the GR BG BUSINESS PASSPORT project and to identify the strengths and success factors, which will form the basis for the continuation of the project and the design of new projects.

Evaluating the results of a project is an important step that helps to understand the performance of its actions and to improve the design and implementation of future projects. The steps and the methodological approach to evaluate the results of the project are as follows:

1. Defining evaluation objectives: Before starting the evaluation process, it is necessary to define clear objectives and criteria for the evaluation and to formulate the quantities and qualities to be measured and evaluated.
2. Data collection: Depending on the nature of the project, various methods can be used to collect data, such as technical reports with predetermined questions, meetings, questionnaires, interviews, observations or analysis of existing data, etc.
3. Data analysis: In this phase the data collected during the previous step are analyzed and interpreted. Statistical methods, graphs and other tools are used to draw conclusions.
4. Evaluation of the results against the objectives: The results obtained from the analysis are compared with the predetermined objectives of the evaluation. At this point, it is determined whether the objectives have been achieved or whether specific conditions prevented its achievement.

5. Feedback and improvement: In cases where the evaluation is an ongoing process integrated into the other actions of the project, based on the results, recommendations are developed to improve practices. Recommendations may include reorganizing processes, strengthening resources, or developing new strategies.

6. Reporting results: The results of the evaluation are recorded in a document or report, which helps to disseminate the findings and inform stakeholders.

7. Continuous monitoring: The evaluation of results is ideally a process that develops alongside the main actions of the project, throughout its implementation.

The most appropriate methodology for each project varies and depends on the type and purpose of the project, as well as the available resources.

## Methodological issues

### Quantitative research

Quantitative research refers to the systematic empirical investigation into quantitative properties and phenomena and their relationships.

The goal of quantitative research is to develop and use mathematical models, theories and/or hypotheses about the phenomenon being examined.

The process of measurement is central to quantitative research because it provides the fundamental link between empirical observation and the mathematical expression of quantitative relationships.

Quantitative research is generally done using scientific methods, which can include:

- The production of models-standards, theories and hypotheses
- The development of instruments and methods for measurement
- Experimental controls and manipulations of variables
- Collection of empirical data
- Configuration and analysis of data
- Evaluation of the results

### Qualitative research

It does not use numbers and statistical methods.

- It studies one or a few cases.
- It is methodologically dialectical.
- Data are collected using unstructured survey instruments.
- Analyzes in depth.
- The results are more detailed and targeted at the level of behavior, attitudes and motivation.
- Epistemology: emphasis on interpretation, emphasis on meaning from the point of view of the individual.



- Ontology: constructionist tendency (the social world is "constructed" by the people who participate in it and is not something objective that transcends them).
- A "natural" conception of the social world is not adopted, but the latter is interpreted through an examination of how its members themselves understand it.

According to Earl Babbie (2012), three are the most common and useful purposes of research: investigation, description and interpretation.

### Investigation

The exploratory approach usually arises when the researcher examines a new subject. Relevant research is conducted through interviews, discussions, the use of focus groups or guided small group discussions. This technique is often used in market research.

Many times the reason for conducting research is not only the researcher's desire to better understand a topic, but also to identify the right method to gather the appropriate information for research.

For example, exploratory research may be carried out in order to test the possibility of conducting a more extensive study or in order to formulate the methods to be used in a subsequent study (a researcher, for example, goes to an area where hostilities have just ceased to examine living conditions, population composition, etc.).

In summary, we would say that exploratory empirical studies are used whenever a researcher faces a new topic.

The main disadvantage of exploratory studies is that they rarely provide scientifically proven answers to research questions, although they can indicate possible answers and can be used to select appropriate research methods that would be able to provide definitive answers.

The main reason that exploratory studies are rarely valid and reliable is that the sampling usually used is opportunistic.

### Description

Often the researcher is content with describing what he observed. Scientific descriptions are based on accurate data and are usually more accurate and valid than other types of research.

An example of a descriptive study is the census of the inhabitants of Greece, carried out by the Hellenic Statistical Authority (ELSTAT) in 2011. It started in February and ended in May. It had as its purpose the census of both the population and all kinds of buildings in the country. As in all censuses, it focused on recording the "permanent" population of Greece, and not the "real" one.

In other words, he registered the census takers in the table of the area, where they declared that they live permanently in the last twelve months, not in the place where they were on the day of the census. The disadvantage of descriptive studies is that they document and describe problems, but do not identify or analyze causal relationships.

### Interpretation

Interpretative studies look for the cause of results. Unlike the previous types of investigations, their object is not the recording, but the valid and documented interpretation of events.

For example the percentage of sales of two soft drinks is descriptive research, why sales of A exceed those of B is interpretive.





Subjects of interpretive research can be: 1) The search for the causes that cause the manifestations of violence in schools. 2) What are the reasons for the success of a rock band? 3) Why do women vote for male candidates during parliamentary elections? etc.

For the development of the methodology of this research, some basic principles have been formulated, which essentially formed the guides for the collection of material. These principles are defined as follows:

- Data analysis was pre-specified.
- The object of the research was formulated from the beginning.
- The research tools used were set from the beginning.
- The data collection methodology was linked to the research's theoretical framework, reflection, and research hypotheses.

The main sources of information for conducting any research are three:

- i. the reason (interview, questionnaire),
- ii. the facts (observation),
- iii. the "traces" (written, statistical).

The methodology, which the researcher chooses each time in order to conduct a research, plays a very important role in conducting the best results in it. Because it is only through this process that the maximum possible recording of research data is achieved in order to reach safe results.

The level of degree of validity of the measurements varies according to the various data collection techniques used. There are techniques of low and high precision as well as low and high validity. For the discovery of knowledge and truth, a set of actions in a certain order is likely to be involved in order for the researcher to accomplish his mission.

The writing of the methodology requires the detailed presentation of the methods used in the conduct of the present evaluation research, followed by the justification of choosing specific methods over some others. In addition, it determines the way the sample was selected, the way the researcher chose to analyze, evaluate and possibly group the results.

### Sampling

Sampling is a method that allows researchers to infer information about the population without having to investigate each person individually.

The representative subset, the sample, is nothing more than a "random subset" of the population, we must clarify that "random" does not coincide with what in everyday life we say "by chance".

Reducing the number of subjects in a study reduces costs and workload, and may make it easier to obtain high-quality information, but this must be weighed against a large enough sample size with enough power to detect a true connection.

If a sample is to be used, by whatever method is chosen, it is important that the individuals selected are representative of the population as a whole.

There are many different sampling techniques available.

- Simple random sampling



- Systematic sampling
- Stratified sampling
- Cluster sampling
- Quota Sampling
- Convenience Sampling
- Avalanche Sampling

The larger the sample, the better it represents the population. The large size, however, is not able to guarantee the reliability of the results.

The composition of the sample is important, i.e. that all characteristics of the population are represented in it. If there is heterogeneity in the population, we need a larger sample.

In small sample sizes, an improvement in accuracy is achieved with a relatively small increase in size (2% improvement in accuracy with an increase of 56 individuals). The opposite is true for large samples, where an improvement in accuracy is achieved with a large increase in size (0.5% improvement in accuracy with an increase of 900 individuals).

If the statistical analysis is complex, a larger sample is required. In each case, the sample size is estimated by statistical techniques. Many companies have limited their sample to 2,000 cases, believing that after this number there is no significant reduction in error.

## Material Collection Methods

Researchers use three basic methods in order to collect and process the material that will help them answer the research questions they have asked.

In this section, the main characteristics of these methods are developed with their advantages and disadvantages.

These three methods are: interview, observation, questionnaire.

### 1. The interview

It is one of the most well-known methods of collecting material, where the researcher asks the respondent a series of questions.

What interests the researcher is to find out what the respondent thinks about a subject and to compare the opinions and views of the respondents. The researcher is then interested in comparing and grouping the respondents' opinions. The types of interview are as follows: a) directed or structured, b) semi-directed and c) free interview.

### 2. The observation

Observation uses event recording and is subject to verification. The types of observation are as follows: a) direct, b) participatory and c) indirect or induced or experimental observation.

### 3. The questionnaire

It is a form, which includes a series of structured questions, to which the respondent is asked to answer in writing and in a specific order. Structured questionnaires were used to carry out the specific evaluation of the project.



Questionnaires collect data by asking people to answer the exact same set of questions. It is the main tool used in the context of the specific research strategy, in order to collect descriptive and explanatory data on opinions, behaviors, characteristics, attitudes, etc.

### Choice of evaluation methodology

In the case of the GR BG BUSINESS PASSPORT project, the objectives based on which the results will be evaluated have been predetermined from the project planning phase, before its submission and approval, as presented above. Also, the indicators are predetermined by the program, while for the project as a whole it is the number of businesses that receive support, with a price target of 9 businesses and the number of businesses that receive non-financial support, with a price target also of 9 businesses.

Observation is a key method of gathering material in the context of scientific research and conducting studies. It is a process of observing and inducing information from the environment or the object being examined, without the observer interfering with the natural flow of events.

The method followed for the evaluation, according to what was presented above, is observation. This method involves collecting data through observation of the environment, events, behaviors or processes without applying structured questions or interventions. Typically, the observer records the events and observations in the form of written notes, video, or other media. In this case, the comments of the editor during the implementation of the project's actions, the material from the project's deliverables, the minutes of the events and meetings as well as the publications of the project's partners were taken into account.

Observation as a method of gathering material offers the following advantages:

1. Naturalness: Allows observation of natural behaviors and processes without external influence.
2. Primary Data: It offers primary data, directly observed by the researcher.
3. Rich Information: Can provide rich, detailed data on a multitude of parameters or behaviors.

To compensate for the limitations associated with this method, such as e.g. the impossibility to record all information due to limited time or resources, minutes and photographic material from partner events and meetings, developed deliverables and publications were used as source material.

### The indicators of the project based on the Technical Bulletin

The following are the indicators established for the project within the INTERREG VA COOPERATION PROGRAM GREECE – BULGARIA 2014 – 2020 and based on which the results of the project will be evaluated at the program level, as well as the context in which they are included.



Priority Axis:	1 – A Competitive and Innovative Cross-Border Area
Thematic Objective:	03-Improving the competitiveness of small and medium enterprises including those in the agricultural sector (for the EAFRD) and the fishing and aquaculture sector (for the EMFF)
Investment Priority:	3a – Promoting entrepreneurship, in particular by facilitating the economic exploitation of new ideas and supporting the creation of new businesses, including through business incubators
Specific Objective:	1 – To Improve entrepreneurship SME support systems

Output indicators			
Code	Title	Measurement unit	Target
CO01	Productive investments: Number of businesses receiving support	ENT	9
CO04	Productive investments: Number of enterprises receiving non-financial support	ENT	9

## Implementation data

This section presents the collected implementation data of the deliverables, taking into account the sub-projects of all the project Partners.

### Work Package 1: Project Management and Coordination

The Partners worked together smoothly for the successful implementation of the project, maintaining regular communication and following the guidelines of the program as well as European and national legislation.

The Corporate Scheme held two online technical meetings and one face-to-face meeting, with the object of project management and the realization of physical and financial object.

### Work Package 2: Communication and Dissemination

At the beginning of the project, the D 2.1.1 Communication Plan was implemented by the Lead Partner, which was shared with the Partners. Based on this, the Partners proceeded to design the communication material, the website of the project D 2.1.3 (<https://businesspassport.eu/>) as well as the creation and updating of the project's social media accounts.

In the context of PE2, the D 2.1.5 Project closing conference and related publications were also implemented. The thematic areas of the conference were:

- The GR BG Business Passport Project: introduction, objectives, products and impact
- Best practices
- Sector focus and RIS3 strategies

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- Strengthening cross-border collaborations

2 social media accounts are active and updated, on Facebook (more than 80 followers) and LinkedIn (more than 50 followers), named "GR BG Business Passport". The content of the publications concerns announcements and developments of the project as well as available financial tools from European and national programs, business and human resource development opportunities, etc.

### **Work Package 3 - Robotics Lab**

The Lead Partner – Technopolis created the robotics laboratory of the project which was established in TECHNOPOLIS and is supported by research and educational institutions, namely PB3 and PB4 while more institutions are expected to participate in the future. The purpose of the laboratory is to ensure the direct interconnection of knowledge with production, the continuous modernization of know-how and its transfer to interested parties and entrepreneurs. For the equipment and operation of the Robotics Laboratory, Technopolis procured 4 Humanoid Wheeled Social Interaction Robots with their accompanying equipment, as well as 2 Humanoid Robotic Systems plus supporting equipment including smartphones, drones, office chairs, alarm system for security etc.

In the lab there are 4 Pepper Robots, 2 Ozzie Robots and other equipment accessible by the following target groups:

1) Businesses or potential businesses that want to develop an idea using robots. They can test it by having the necessary equipment and also the technical support from the educational institutions participating in the project (International University/A.M.A. Department and INSTITUTE OF ROBOTICS-BULGARIAN ACADEMY OF SCIENCES from Bulgaria.

2) Adults who want to acquire robotics skills, who are given the opportunity to learn basic coding principles with the opportunity to practice on lab equipment.

The laboratory aims at the interconnection of research and technology with entrepreneurship as well as the development of robotics skills in order to create new jobs and cover existing and future needs in the labor market.

The two-day guidance and training events of GR BG BUSINESS PASSPORT took place in the premises where the robotics laboratory is also located.

All those present in the D4.1.2 Mentoring and Coaching Event responded that it is very good that the robotics laboratory was created and they consider it very useful. While the majority of business attendees said they would visit in the future with partners as they are working on an idea that requires lab equipment to be tested. The students present said they would like to visit with fellow students to take basic coding courses.

Furthermore, the Electronic Library and Database was created for the support of Small and Medium Enterprises (deliverable 3.1.2), <https://app.businesspassport.eu>. The platform includes the following modules:

- Digital Business Plan Creation Tool. The creation of a business plan enables the user, by following easy and specific steps, to create a business plan for his business depending on the industry in which he operates and the needs he wishes to cover.
- Digital Marketing Plan Creation Tool. The plan includes a Sales Strategy and a Promotion and Communication Plan.



- Digital Financial Analysis Tool. The tool has capabilities to analyze financial data and generate basic financial statements such as: General Operating Expenses Budget, Start-up Budget, Table of Funding Sources, etc.
- Digital Office (Mobile Office). Entrepreneurs always have an electronic office at their disposal, which will include notes, a calendar of events and a schedule of tasks to be implemented.

Partner 2 Regional Municipalities Association "Maritza" supported businesses in the Haskovo region by conducting research on the state and needs of businesses both before and after the COVID restrictions, developing Interactive Business Maps (3.2.1) and completing the research on "European business financing in the region of Haskovo" (3.2.2).

The Interactive Business Maps of the Haskovo area can be accessed from the link [maritza.info/interactivemap](http://maritza.info/interactivemap). The maps give the option to visualize and compare data for all 11 municipalities of Haskovo Region regarding population, social development, labor market, economic activities, investments according to various selected indicators.

Also, indicators for social development are presented:

- Population per physician
- Population per dentist
- Number of beds in medical facilities for hospital care
- Number of kindergartens
- Positions in kindergartens
- Number of schools in Haskovo area
- Students of general education and vocational schools
- Share of illiterate persons in the population aged 9 and over
- Share of people with tertiary education in the population aged 7 and over
- Share of people with secondary education in the population aged 7 and over
- Coefficient of economic activity
- Employment rate

The Partners 3 Special Account of the International University of Greece and 4 Institute of Robotics - Bulgarian Academy of Sciences contributed to the creation of the Robotics Laboratories and the Electronic Library and Database for the support of Small and Medium Enterprises, by creating educational material about entrepreneurship, business administration and the applications of robotics in the business sector.

Partner 4 founded MobRoboLab, a mobile robotics lab, for which he procured 3 robots, the NAO robot, the KettyBot robot and the Double3 robot.

#### **Work Package 4 – Supporting Innovative Business Ideas**

The Lead Partner organized the two days of mentoring and training events, deliverable 4.1.2, in September 2023. LB mentioned the importance of a research and technology interconnection hub for the development of innovative business ideas and the role of the Robotics Lab GR-BG BUSINESS PASSPORT in this the direction. Good practices for using the lab and robots in existing businesses. On the 1st day of the events, 40 people and 11 businesses



participated, while on the 2nd day of the events, 23 people and 12 businesses participated, as well as students of the Aristotle University of Thessaloniki.

In the context of FP4, the Lead Partner organized the Cross-Border Innovation Competition, deliverable 4.1.3, in February 2023 at the Technopolis premises. The main purpose of the event held as part of the Business Passport project was to promote innovative solutions-ideas based on the use of robots in businesses. More specifically, participants were invited to design and submit business plans emphasizing new technologies and robotics. The total number of business plans submitted was nine (9) and all concerned the introduction of new robotics technologies in small family-based businesses in the border region. The winner of the competition participated in the Agrothessaly exhibition in Larissa in March 2023, as a representative of the project.

Partner 2 held 4 B2B meetings in Haskovo where companies from Greece and Bulgaria participated and participated in the events of the Greek partners within the project. The topics of the discussions were:

- Cross-border exchange of experiences and good practices
- Importance of cross-border cooperation between Greece and Bulgaria
- Challenges and opportunities in the cross-border region
- Policies, initiatives and practices from Greece and Bulgaria
- Successful economic development models and commercial strategies
- Common challenges – discussion and proposals

Also, Partner 2 develops and publishes the cross-border entrepreneurship e-Bulletin (4.2.2) on the project's social network accounts and others through publicity.

Partner 3 Special Account of the International University of Greece and in particular the Department of Computer Science, Faculty of Sciences in Kavala entrusted the delivery of Deliverable 4.3.1 B2B Events – Networking and courses, to an external specialist consultant, and specifically to the Institute for Development of Eastern Macedonia and Thrace, based in Xanthi. The meetings took place in the Central Amphitheater of the International University in Kavala, in June 2023. Businesses from Haskovo also participated in the meetings, which had taken part in the B2B meetings of Partner 2. A total of approximately 40 people and 10 businesses from Greece and Bulgaria.

Deliverable 4.3.2 "Entrepreneurship Education Methods" was also implemented, with its presentation taking place at the premises of the Human-MACHines Interaction Laboratory (HUMAIN-Lab) of the International Hellenic University of Kavala, in June 2023. The purpose of the event was to introduce the media and participants in the new technologies available in the field to further their work. In addition, it was an opportunity to meet and network with the partner research institution, which provides incentives for further collaboration on research issues and projects funded by the production promotion. In this respect, research institutes become business mentors to dynamic companies, so that cross-border cooperation evolves and develops. 28 people and 7 companies and research centers participated.

In September and October 2023, Partner 4 Institute of Robotics of the Bulgarian Academy of Sciences organized B2B meetings with local small and family businesses, as well as with local chambers of commerce and business organizations in the cross-border areas of Bulgaria with Greece: Blagoevgrad, Smolyan, Haskovo and Karjali.

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Representatives of the Partner and the local business community discussed the industry's pressing problems and the importance of technology in addressing them. Innovative solutions and best practices were reported, as well as key problems preventing small businesses from implementing automation and robotics solutions, highlighting the need for technical consultation.

The representatives of local businesses welcomed the demonstrations of social robots with great interest:

- Ketty Bot: a bot for service, delivery, marketing and customer interaction in the HoReCa business, retail, events and services.
- Double 3 for telepresentation
- NAO humanoid robot

Partner 4 also developed 5 courses in the Bulgarian language within the BUSINESS PASSPORT project. The courses cover the main topics related to robot applications in small and family businesses and aim to enhance their innovative potential through the exchange of knowledge and information resources:

- HUMAN-LIKE ROBOTS FOR BUSINESS
- 3D PRINTING TECHNOLOGY
- NON-HUMAN ROBOTS FOR BUSINESS
- COLLABORATIVE ROBOTS
- IMPACT OF ROBOTS ON THE ECONOMY

The educational material is freely available on the project website.

### **Work Package 5 – Exhibitions**

The GR BG BUSINESS PASSPORT project participated in the 13th Panhellenic Exhibition for Agriculture and Livestock "AgroThessaly" which took place from March 9 to March 12, 2023 in Larissa.

According to the technical annex of the project, the deliverable 5.1.1 - Participation in Exhibitions concerned the organization of the Exhibition and in particular: the Design of the stand, the Construction of the stand, the Equipment, the Transport and the Setup of the equipment. His work stand was in TENTA A' Stand C5.

In the context of "AgroThessaly", the project presented robotics solutions and applications as well as the program with its actions and the results so far. The main objective was the dissemination of the project and the results and above all the use of robotics as a tool in the development of innovative entrepreneurship.

The 13th AgroThessaly had 766 exhibitors (269 direct and 497 indirect) from 34 countries and an exhibition space of 25,000 sq.m. Visitors reached 46,234 marking a significant increase of 98% in the number of trade visitors. The foreign trade visitors came from Spain, Austria, Cyprus, Turkey, Bulgaria, Romania and North Macedonia.





## Conclusions – Evaluation

### Evaluation of the achievement of objectives

The objectives of the project are listed below, as they were captured during the project planning phase, and their achievement or non-achievement through the project's actions is justified.

- **Linking research and innovation to economic development in new ways, such as business discovery**

The interlinking of research and innovation with the business world is a key feature of most of the project's actions, as R&D partners collaborate with businesses through the establishment of the Robotics Lab in GR and BG, at events, meetings, training workshops, etc. At the same time, the action of the Cross Border Innovation Competition (Cross Border Innovation Competition) in PB4, is precisely in the context of business discovery, which is mentioned as an example of the fulfillment of the objective. Based on the above, it is judged that the project contributes to the achievement of the specific goal.

- **Development and creation of innovative products with features that will make them more competitive in international markets, will give even greater impetus to the selected business sectors and in general to the cross-border area**

No specific innovative product was developed through the project, however there was no corresponding clear provision in the project's Technical Bulletin. However, in the context of the Cross-Border Innovation Competition, 9 different business plans were presented, existing and potential businesses that use new innovative technologies and mainly robotics, in the fields of education, agriculture and animal husbandry, tourism, catering. Also, at the B2B events and the coaching and training events, business representatives from Greece and Bulgaria had the opportunity to learn about innovative applications of robotics and other new technologies in existing businesses and to draw inspiration. The creation of Robotic labs in the cross-border area, where companies and individuals can have free access to explore and strengthen their business idea, is a clear boost to the selected sectors of the economy. Based on the above, it is judged that the specific objective was partially achieved, as no specific innovative product was produced, but the conditions were created for the companies of the selected sectors of the region to be inspired and plan the integration of new technologies in their products and services.

- **Creation and operation of specialized support structures for existing businesses and creation of new ones with a focus on cutting-edge technologies**

As part of the project, Robotic Labs were established, one at the Technopolis premises in Thessaloniki, while the second is a mobile laboratory to serve businesses in the Bulgarian region. The workshops are freely accessible by the businesses of the cross-border area, with human resources from the partner side that can provide the necessary know-how to existing and potential entrepreneurs to develop and explore ideas that integrate robotics into processes, products and services, as well as corresponding equipment. In addition to this infrastructure, the "E-Library and database for supporting SMEs" platform provides entrepreneurship tools as well as informative and educational material. The specific goal has been achieved by the project for businesses in the cross-border area, while the continuity of informing businesses about the services offered is considered important.

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- **Development of a new model of cross-border entrepreneurship based on start-ups, able to attract venture capital and investments that contribute to the development of the economy as a whole.**

The cross-border nature of the project was achieved to a satisfactory extent, with the project Partners establishing an efficient cooperation to strengthen cross-border entrepreneurship. The participating agencies are already considering their next actions in order to maintain the results of the project and to design new projects in the same direction. Furthermore, the businesses that participated in the project's actions, as well as those that will take advantage of the offered material and services, are able to take advantage of funding opportunities and attract investments. The project contributes to the development of a new model of cross-border entrepreneurship, but it cannot be claimed that it has independently achieved this goal.

- **Creation of a cross-border business network linked to international networks in the field of innovation and cutting-edge technologies.**

The cross-border network was created, even from the formation of the corporate structure, between 3 research and innovation bodies, and a regional association of municipalities that promotes development in the region. In the business network, through the activities of the project, the businesses of the cross-border area also joined. To connect with international networks, a first step was participation in the international exhibition Agrothessaly, where the project was presented to foreign trade visitors from Spain, Austria, Cyprus, Turkey, Bulgaria, Romania and North Macedonia. The connection with international networks is expected to be strengthened by further actions of the corporate scheme and the new structures created (robotics laboratories), as well as through social networks. Overall, the specific objective was partially achieved, but the conditions for further developments in international interconnection have been created.

- **Improving the extroversion and competitiveness of products and services both in the domestic and foreign markets.**

The project contributed, on the one hand, to the improvement of the factors favoring the extroversion of products and services provided by businesses in the cross-border area:

- Quality of products/services: High quality is essential to gain customer trust and compete in the international market. Through the platform, coaching and training events, and educational materials, businesses can produce higher quality products and provide improved services.
- Innovation: Continuous innovation in products and services allows a company to stay current and competitive. Free access to robotics labs, their equipment, as well as specialized human resources, brings new innovative technologies to the direct access of entrepreneurs.
- Developing Networks and Partnerships: Collaboration between different businesses and the creation of international networks can help growth and extroversion. By participating in the project's actions, businesses and other entities from the cross-border region sharpen their extroversion and enter international communities of innovative businesses.

On the other hand, the new structures and infrastructures created, such as the robotics labs, the electronic library and platform, the freely available educational material, are the same extroverted, competitive and innovative products and services offered at an international level.

It is considered that the project has achieved this objective to a very satisfactory extent.



- **Creation of direct and indirect new jobs.**

The project seeks to strengthen businesses in the cross-border area. Apart from the jobs created directly by the creation of the new structures of the robotics laboratories, but also by the other actions of the project, it can be argued that businesses were given an impetus to expand their activity, an element that also means the creation of jobs. Furthermore, the potential entrepreneurs who welcomed the results of the project with interest are potentially self-employed or employers. Based on the above, it is estimated that the project contributes to the creation of direct and indirect jobs.

## Evaluation of achievement of programmatic output indicators

As presented in a previous chapter, the programmatic output indicators related to the project are as follows:

CO01 Productive investments: Number of businesses receiving support

CO04 Productive investments: Number of enterprises receiving non-financial support, targeting the 9 companies in each index.

It is estimated that the project has achieved this goal, as at least 26 companies participated in the actions of B2B meetings, mentoring and training events, cross-border exchange of experiences and participation in exhibitions. Of these, 9 companies, which participated in the Cross-Border Innovation Competition, were provided with business plan drafting and consulting services.

## Proliferative action and sustainability

An attempt was made in the context of this deliverable to answer the following questions:

1. To what extent has the project contributed to supporting innovative business ideas in the cross-border area?
2. Can the project have a multiplier effect?
3. Can the sustainability of the project be supported after the funding ends?

Support for innovative business ideas can come from various sources and through different means. The GR BG BUSINESS PASSPORT project attempted and succeeded, to a satisfactory degree, in supporting new existing businesses with innovative ideas as well as potential new entrepreneurs, through the following, proven effective practices, which were formulated accordingly for the cross-border area and its special characteristics.

- Networks and partnerships: Connecting innovators with industry experts, mentors and potential partners can provide guidance, advice and opportunities for growth.
- Education and Training: Offering workshops, seminars or training programs focused on entrepreneurship and innovation can equip people with the skills and knowledge necessary to develop their ideas.



- Technology transfer and research collaboration: Collaboration with research institutes or universities can help turn academic research or technological progress into viable business opportunities.
- Market access and validation: Providing market access, conducting market research and offering validation through pilot programs or early adoption can help validate and refine innovative business ideas.
- Co-working spaces and infrastructure: Providing shared workspaces and infrastructure at affordable prices (or even free, in this case) can facilitate collaboration and reduce operational costs for startups.
- Access to resources and tools: Offering access to tools, software and resources, such as prototyping facilities or specialized equipment, can help innovators turn their ideas into tangible products or services.
- Recognition and awards: Recognizing and rewarding innovative ideas through awards or competitions can provide visibility and validation, encouraging further development.

The combination of these different forms of support provided by the project creates an environment that favors the promotion and development of innovative business ideas, allowing them to grow into successful ventures.

The GR BG BUSINESS PASSPORT can have a multiplier effect, as its impact exceeds its initial limits and can continue to positively influence more entrepreneurs or potential entrepreneurs than those who initially participated and benefited from the project. The structures created will continue to operate, as they are framed by the stable operation of the research and business centers. They are expected to be a useful tool and resource for the business world of the cross-border region, but also for the operators themselves, in the continuation and development of their activities. The same applies to the entrepreneurship support platforms created and the educational materials.

With regard to the economic viability of the products produced by the project, its planning from the beginning had foreseen the possibility of the partners to maintain the new structures and infrastructures, integrating them into their daily operation. The sustainability of the project after the end of the funding is assured, however, the corporate scheme is exploring the design of new projects, capitalization and continuation of the GR BG BUSINESS PASSPORT.

