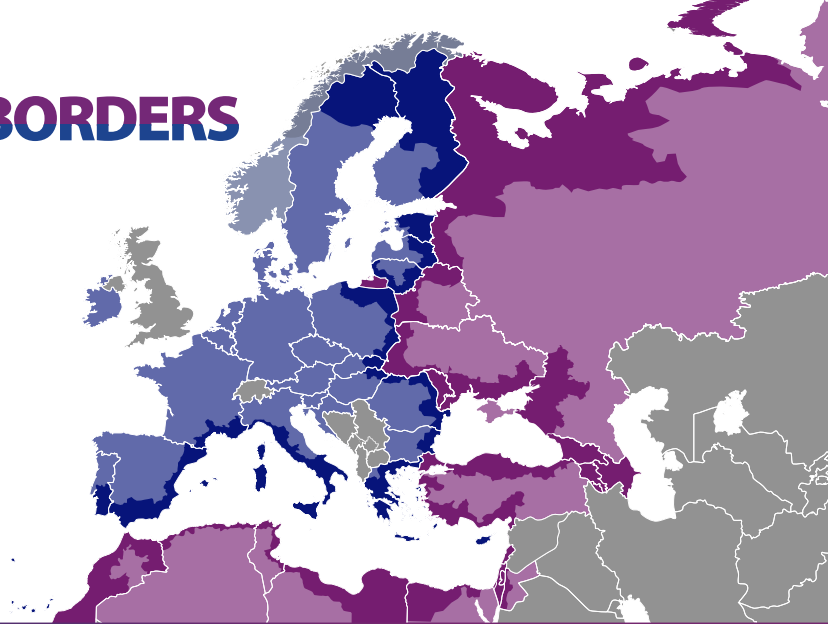


COOPERATION ACROSS BORDERS



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COVID-19 EMERGENCY RESPONSES FROM THE ENI CBC COMMUNITY

On February 11, the World Health Organization declared the Covid-19 outbreak a global pandemic. In Europe, the virus has spread exponentially, causing the greatest public health emergency since World War II and paving the way for a quickly-developing economic recession.

Member States and their neighbouring countries have taken measures within their national borders to address these two aspects. At the same time, the European Union – under the coordination of the European Commission – is working on all fronts to contain the spread of the disease, support national health systems, protect and save lives, and counter the socioeconomic impacts of the pandemic with historically unprecedented measures at both national and EU level.

In this challenging context, how is the ENI CBC community responding to the Covid-19 outbreak?

In this paper, we have tried to highlight those practices adopted both at programme and project level to respond in a short-term perspective to the Covid-19 emergency. The facts and figures herewith presented have been gathered through the analysis of the pro-gramme and project websites and social media, and – where existing – the official documents approved by the Joint Monitoring Committees of the 15 ENI CBC programmes.

PROGRAMMES KEEP IT UP!

The first immediate impact at programme level was represented by the lockdown and the subsequent travel limitations. In order not to delay neither the implementation of current programmes nor the launching of the post-2020 programming process, all the scheduled meetings of the different committees have been moved to an online scenario and, even if not in always in the originally planned dates, they are all taking place.

Changes to the rules of procedure of the different committees have been made to recognise the legal validity of decisions taken during online meetings, opening the door to a use of this means of communication and decision-making also in the future.

• **1**
• Project Selection Committee

• **7**
• Joint Programming Committees



• **1**
• Joint Monitoring Committee

A LONGER IMPLEMENTATION PERIOD MAY BE POSSIBLE

Despite all the immediate solutions put in place, the halt to many activities at project level, in particular those with a stronger cross-border dimension, has already caused implementation delays and the solution to this problem cannot rely on simply catching up time.

A new implementation framework will be needed!

This convincement has led 12 out of the 15 ENI CBC programmes to submit an official request to the European Commission in order to modify the ENI CBC Implementing Rules and postpone the deadline for completion of project implementation from 2022 to 2023.

The European Commission has acknowledged this need and the fact that ENI CBC programmes are further impacted by delays due to the COVID crisis. To that, the Commission launched regulatory changes to enable the regions on both sides of EU external borders to benefit from the same opportunities as internal EU border regions. These changes are foreseen to align further the legal rules of ENI CBC and Interreg and to enter into force in the shortest deadlines.

PROJECTS ARE PROVIDED WITH FLEXIBILITY

While waiting for the regulatory change to intervene, a wide range of both remedy and flexibility solutions have been granted by the programmes to their projects.

On the remedy side, twelve programmes have recognised the eligibility of the expenditures already incurred and related to those meetings and events that the projects had to cancel only at certain conditions though.

With the prolongation of the lockdown in several countries continuing without a clear end date, eight programmes have decided to allow the partial or full suspension of project activities.

Concerning the flexibility solutions, three programmes (Mediterranean Sea Basin, Poland-Russia and Poland-Belarus-Ukraine) foresee a fast-track

procedure for project modification due to changes deriving from the consequences of the outbreak as well as a retroactive approval for Covid-related activities. Moreover, these three programmes foresee the eligibility of future costs related to the Covid-19 impact.

As a first measure, all projects in all priority axes can purchase equipment and tools for project staff who works from home, or for online conferencing and streaming.

Other possibilities include using the outputs delivered by the project to support Covid related needs or extending the scope of the planned or ongoing activities to cover also Covid-related needs, provided they remain within the original objectives of the project.



PROJECTS IMPLEMENT SOLUTIONS IN THE FIELD

ENI CBC projects have started adapting to the current reality and some of them have re-oriented their activities to provide solutions to the many emerging challenges.

The **TEX-MED ALLIANCES project**, implemented in the framework of the Mediterranean Sea Basin Programme had as original aims to create cross-border alliances between private companies of the textile sector, to find new partners and explore new business lines. The outbreak of the Covid-19 pandemic has forced activities into a new path. A "who-is-doing-what" catalogue has been created to put in touch those who offer the production of an item or a service, with those who are looking for it.

The project is today mapping the industrial capacities of the area (Italy, Greece, Spain,

Jordan, Tunisia, Palestine and Egypt) in terms of production of self-filtering masks, protective gloves, clothes for medical use, etc. "For the moment, each of our partner countries is gathering information about health sanitary materials at country level, – explains Monica Olmos, project manager. – Only in Spain, in two weeks we have received 90 applications and orders have already been filed for some companies. Every week the information is shared, but before the end of April we will put together all data from all countries, to identify possible cross-border matching". But the plan stretches beyond the horizon of a survey: knowing where yarns, textiles or garments are supplied, it allows to map the different actors according to what they do best.

Thanks to the **RESCUE project**, financed under the ENI CBC Poland-Belarus-Ukraine programme, emergency medical services are already functioning in the cross-border areas linking Poland, Belarus and Ukraine. Ambulances and respirators are available in the hospitals

to help doctors fight against the Covid-19 pandemic: the equipment delivered through the RESCUE project is serving its purpose to help border communities to face emergencies across the European frontier.

Part of this equipment has already been purchased: specialised ambulances and respirators are available to treat patients infected with Covid-19. But it is not only a matter of equipment: the project offers specialized training courses for 69 physicians, 48 rescuers and 137 nurses, and the trained medical personnel will be then included in other courses implemented in individual hospitals, following a "train-of-trainers" approach. Among the objectives of the trainings, the establishment of joint principles and mechanisms of cooperation between the different emergency medical services is of major importance not only now, but also for future emergency situations along these borders.