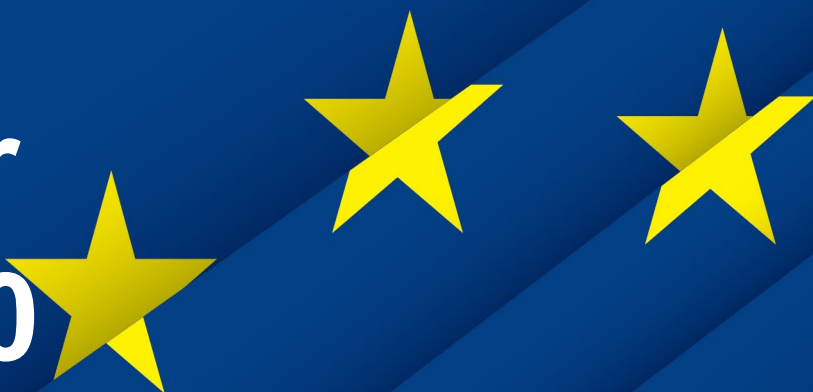


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2020 has changed the way we see the world, has dynamited our social behavior and mannerisms, as well as innovated the paradigms of work and performance. Whereas some of us were totally taken by surprise by the spread of COVID-19 pandemic and its effects on economy and personal space, as time goes by, we have to come to terms and accept the collective action needed and embrace the necessary sacrifices in order to solve this global problem.

Where is Romania – Ukraine programme now?

There is no doubt, COVID-19 pandemic challenged the ways we are implementing the programmes financed by the European Union. However, in spite of this, both the beneficiaries and the programmes managed to cope with the situation, finding alternatives and making steps further.

Thus, Romania – Ukraine 2014-2020 joined the efforts of the European Commission and of other territorial cooperation programmes across Europe to support the projects and their beneficiaries. To this end, a coordination meeting of all the programmes sharing Ukraine as partner country took place at the beginning of June 2020 and benefitted of the participation of the European Commission. This action aimed at identifying and setting forth unitary approaches regarding our similar challenges, sharing good practices, and acknowledging the newest national developments impacting on our projects. Everybody invested time, energy, and commitment to ensure that the funding available will continue to benefit the communities and people living in this large geographic area.

Since January 2020, our programme has been focused on finalizing evaluation and selection of projects having an infrastructure component of more than 1 MEUR that aim at improving transport infrastructure, health services and fight against organized crime, the so called „hard” projects. By July, the process was finalized and the awarding decision of the Joint Monitoring Committee is expected in the coming period.

Steady progress was also made to contract the selected projects and, to this day, 44 projects are on the roll, including 4 large infrastructure projects (LIP)¹, each of them seeking to improve the condition of communities in the program area, to solve common challenges through cross border partnerships. Hard projects are soon to start the contracting phase which we anticipate to be completed by the end of fall, 2020.



Compelled by the pandemic context, our approaches were adjusted, for instance, by requesting documents in electronic format, using electronic signature whenever possible, and organizing virtual meetings with project partners. The projects contracted by the programme up to now attracted over 30 MEUR to Romanian and Ukrainian regions. As they are progressing, their stories will follow.

Pandemic brought unexpected challenges to our beneficiaries, limited travels, meetings and live events. Some of them decided to temporarily suspend project activities, but the large majority followed through and creatively switched to online alternatives, where appropriate.

It has been noted a stronger connection with programme structures (joint technical secretariat, managing authority) as projects sought for our support, counselling and assistance more than ever. Meetings with partners took place on weekly basis via internet platforms, online sessions trainings,

¹ LIP projects have been selected through direct award and their implementation started in 2019.

partners were held to prepare them for crucial moments of implementation i.e. start-up, submission of the first reports.

There was a lot of work behind the scenes and the programme decided to support projects even further by putting at their disposal various tools and instruments, such as frequently asked questions following the trainings or a dedicated implementation manual. Beneficiaries will find here practicalities and answers to their questions, tips and good practices drawing attention on sensitive aspects and guide them to a better understanding of the process (see [www. ro-ua.net](http://www.ro-ua.net) for further information).

New payment requests are expected to be received from projects at the beginning of the fall, therefore training of auditors performing verification of expenditures incurred by the beneficiaries from Ukraine is planned to take place during the summer, most probably by using an online platform.



Covid Stories. Hope and resilience. Cross border projects in first line of combat

Even if the coronavirus pandemic seemed to have stopped the whole world, for some people this new virus and its rapid spread has put life as we know it on fast forward. The so called first line and red zones heroes carried the burden of keeping the world moving, implementing without delay new and strict measures, protocols and techniques never used before. While entire communities were cautiously staying home and putting their lives on hold, envisioning the progress of our future projects, the medical professionals were handling things for us, exposing themselves and their families to the unknown. Here are the stories of three of our beneficiaries, medical institutions that have faced the ordeal while still holding onto terms, deadlines and implementation pace of their ongoing projects.

Chernivtsi Regional Clinical Hospital is currently implementing the project *“Improving the quality of medical services on minimally invasive procedures in Romania-Ukraine cross-border area”* (2SOFT/4.1/93), and in the meantime has fought the virus in the first line of combat. Until recently, Chernivtsi region, the smallest region in Ukraine, topped the list by the number of patients with coronavirus. By the end of July, more than 5,600 cases of COVID-19 infection were recorded in the region. The main medical institution in which patients with moderate and severe coronavirus have been admitted since the beginning of the epidemic. There has never been a situation in the city where all hospitals were filled with patients. The critical situation has affected an already fragile medical system, as the public health system in the programme area faces a number of limitations generated by the low quality of the infrastructure, the accessibility to health services and the lack of access of

physicians to trainings and specializations.

As such, the project financed by Romania – Ukraine program is aiming at addressing, at least to a certain extent, these urgent needs. Therefore, the slogan “Common borders. Common solutions” sounds very accurate. The hospital is cooperating and will continue to work with colleagues on the other side of the border to improve the quality of medical services.



In mid-July, quarantine was scaled-down in the Chernivtsi region. “We are confident that thanks to the EU-funded project in the framework of the Romania-Ukraine 2014-2020 Programme, hospital staff will improve their skills to meet future challenges, and purchased medical equipment will make life easier for both doctors and patients” – stated Serhii Tsyntar, director of Chernivtsi Regional Clinical Hospital.

Central City Clinical Hospital of the Ivano-Frankivsk City Council has been also in the first line of combat during the recent events and spread of the pandemic. As life is sometimes ironic, this infectious crisis has become an unwanted and early exercise for the exact objective of their cross border collaboration - reducing epidemiological hazard in the Ivano-Frankivsk and Romanian homologues Sighetu Marmatiei municipalities through the implementation of infection prevention activities. The hospital implements CBC project “Infection-free hospitals” (2SOFT/ 4.1/11) envisaging to improve the capacity of medical entity to work effectively.



Ivano-Frankivsk Central City Clinical Hospital was one of the first to receive patients with COVID-19 in Ivano-Frankivsk region. In Ivano-Frankivsk, the city authorities reacted immediately. They listened to the advice of doctors and bought personal protective equipment, allocated funds for antibiotics, so that hospitals were at least provided with a minimum.

Volunteers joined the work - people organized themselves and started helping. This process continues even today. Volunteers help with personal protective equipment, medicines and disinfectants. Local businessmen, especially the construction business, also responded well.

Now the situation is already systematized. There are protocols, methods of protection and balanced treatment. Although, the hospital's specialists managed to adapt to the treatment of this pathology from the first days. Even in the absence of all the necessary medication, we showed good results.

Ideally, they will make the best out of this crisis, revamping the way they think, the way we care about our environment; and we'll produce something better and increasingly humane.



The pandemic caused by the SARS-CoV-2 (COVID-19) virus took its toll on another

medical team that was fighting to improve the response of the health local system to the real need of the area and generate significant cross border impact and added value. Măcin City Hospital is the beneficiary of a large medical infrastructure project implemented by the Tulcea County Council, Romania "Cross border health infrastructure". Their main objective is enhancing the access to health in the border area of Romania and Ukraine, more specific within the Lower Danube Euroregion, throughout improving the healthcare infrastructure and joint activities of rehabilitation and endowment of four hospitals: Măcin (Romania), Tulcea (Romania), the Danube Regional Hospital (Ukraine) and the Izmail City Hospital (Ukraine) and raising awareness among the cross-border community on the importance of permanent health monitoring in the early identification of medical conditions and on the prevention policies. The present crisis revealed that medical system had lots of limitations, but it also showed the devotion of the medical personal to battle the virus, to help the persons infected and to stop the spreading of the virus.



Măcin city hospital learned a lot from this pandemic, one of these things is that the rigorous organization can be the key to success. Of course, the reorganizations of the hospital took some time and it was made step by step: the circuits have been reorganized, additional sorting points have been set up, the disinfection of spaces and access roads, both medical personal, as well as the administrative one learned together how to properly wear the protection equipment, practicing long hours in order to do it correctly, to avoid contamination and to stop the spreading of the virus.

The Tulcea County Council faced the same challenges and the partnerships forged within the CBC Health project increased the collaboration between the management teams.

Everything had to be adapted to the new reality: the process, the regulations, the online environment was also involved in the new context. The hospitals used the online environment, different applications important to treat some of the patients from distance, as well as helping infected people and to treat them carefully as well, to isolate the virus.

It was important to stay connected to specialized doctors from other hospitals that were indented in treating the patients with the virus to know the new information regarding the virus and to know how to contain it better.

One positive thing is that there wasn't a single case of infection in the medical personnel. In the state of emergency period, March – June, they had patients hospitalized, all of them in serious conditions. Also, in the emergency room there were a number of 2,640 of patients that had to be treated. Depending on their conditions, they were hospitalized, transferred or they were released home with recommendations and treatment. In the ambulatory there were treated 2,487 patients after a serious sorting.

The virus still hasn't disappeared and it will be a long time until it does, so the hospital's battle continues. All medical teams faced the challenges of working remotely, the human connections being an important factor that was missed. It was a period from which coordinating teams were able to assess the organizations vulnerabilities and in the process, identify new opportunities (testing online platforms to choose the best suited scenario, increased the connection with colleagues, exchanging ideas and plans for not only surviving, but also being sustainable). Also the strategic approach of all project implementation (management, health strategy approach) and future development changed and remains to be seen how the resilience of human kind will rearrange the paradigm of life as we know it.





Silver linings and shift of mind. Testimonial puzzle.

When facing crucial emergencies, often we find that windows of opportunity open. And sometimes, these openings are purposefully utilized to change old and stiff approaches. Coronavirus is thus providing with a whole new opportunity.

COVID-19 will likely reshape a few thoughts and ideas on how we live our lives, but with proper guidelines in place, like taking on a new habit after discarding old ones, instead of recoiling to the pre-coronavirus days, a few changes may become permanent. And they, whatever they will be, will be a huge relief to our overworked, burdened environment. On the other hand, the crisis has also shown the incredible resourcefulness, ingenuity and solidarity between the peoples of Europe, proving once again that cross-border cooperation is not only wanted by Europe's citizens, but it is also essential for the livelihoods of many of them.

"We are facing times that we never thought we would experience. We had all been put in the position to adapt to this new reality, the population, business sector and public administration. For a programme whose specificity is cross-border cooperation, travel restrictions, difficulties in crossing the border have only made the contracting process and the development of projects more difficult. Fortunately, both the beneficiaries of the Joint Operational Programme Romania-Ukraine and the management structures have made every effort to find solutions not to block the system and reduce the potential negative consequences for those who have put their hope in it. We especially appreciate the speed with which the beneficiaries of the projects procured the necessary equipment to carry out their activity online and their willingness to find solutions for activities that initially required physical interaction, such as events, conferences, trainings and which have been moved to the virtual space, overall, the desire to carry on with the projects, despite these changes.

With the support of each of us, in compliance with the indications provided by the specialized institutions, we want to overcome this major challenge, to diminish the negative economic effects and to adapt as soon as possible to the new normality". (Iulia HERTZOG, Head of Managing Authority for ETC Programmes in Romania).

"As professionals, pandemic was and still is about our capacity to adapt and face the unexpected and disruptions without losing balance and the sense of purpose. To this end, pragmatism, enhanced communication and creativity are the new energies now required to move our programme forward and

farther.” (Ingrid Bucșa, Director of the Joint Technical Secretariat of Joint Operational Program Romania - Ukraine 2014-2020)

”COVID-19 has slowed down many projects and our office current tasks, but it generated a clear result for everyone: the digitalization. The digitalization did not count borders. Instead, it upgraded the connections between Romania and Ukraine at a next level. Each crisis has its own opportunities and the digitalization is the best till now. For our organization, this means working from home, electronic signature, video conferences. It displayed once more the need for implementing digital services for our employees and for all the projects beneficiaries from Romania and Ukraine. Pandemic crisis succeeded to force citizens’ digital skills and open new approaches for us. It confirmed the critical role of the digitalization of the public and private sector in creating resilient and adaptable societies in both countries.” (Cezar Grozavu, Executive Director of Regional Office for Cross Border Cooperation Suceava)

“COVID-19 has significantly changed the work style of many. For several months we learn to be creative, work remotely, keep in touch with our beneficiaries online and by phone and provide them with the maximum possible support from us in the difficult conditions they may face when implementing projects. We sincerely hope that the current restrictions will become the basis for even more fruitful cross-border cooperation and understanding of common challenges and opportunities.” (Olena Lavruk, Chernivtsi Branch Office of Joint Technical Secretariat of the Joint Operational Program Romania – Ukraine 2014-2020).

"Implementing a cross-border project that contains elements of social bonding during a pandemic is a real challenge. On the one hand, our efforts should bring members of society closer, make them more receptive and friendly. On the other hand, the recommendations indicate that social distance should be maintained. Online methods of coordinating events helped us a lot. This is a common challenge that needs to be overcome together. Only through cross-border solidarity will we be able to succeed." (Marin Herman, project coordinator of „Bucovinian Ethnic Special Treasure” 2SOFT/2.1/46)

"The year of 2020 has made its adjustments in the lives and plans of each of us. But it also gave us many new perspectives and benefits! Virtual communication with partners can also be interesting and opens new horizons. Conferences in "ZOOM" - we can, we do, we practice! The possibilities of the Internet are endless! The work can go on indefinitely... as long as there is electricity.” (Svitlana Skrykuliak, Mamaliga village council, project coordinator of “Common Solutions to Common Problems: Natural and Man-Made Disasters at the Romanian-Ukrainian Border” 2SOFT/4.2/160 and “Joint Actions for Preventing Natural and Man-Made Disasters at Romanian-Ukrainian Border” 2SOFT/4.2/179)

„After the initial uncertainty caused by COVID-19 restriction measures, activities under the RESFOR project have continued according to plans with insignificant delay. Partners have been united in performing a risk assessment and adaptive management. Scheduled physical meetings have successfully taken place online, and budget savings may actually lead to the maximization of project results via new opportunities.” (Monia Martini, project manager of “Promote deadwood for resilient forests in the Romanian-Ukrainian cross border region” RESFOR, 2SOFT/1.2/13)

"In life, you cannot predict all the threats and problems that await people, society. The main thing is that through working and learning something new, we gain new experience. This makes us more aware of the latest trends, more open to innovation. Thanks to the support of the Lead Beneficiary and Joint Technical Secretariat Suceava specialists, we accept any challenges in a balanced and calm manner and are aware of the tasks. During the project implementation period, including 5 months of work in

difficult conditions due to the spread of coronavirus infection COVID-19, we formed a team of like-minded people who care about children with special educational needs, gained practical knowledge about working on the Internet, effective use of remote forms of work communication. Practice has shown that we are ready for challenges, for successful completion of tasks, for self-improvement and finding new solutions. Even if we are lagging behind in something, we strive to catch up through efforts, gaining new experience and the help of others. Today we are beginning to feel the joy of the work process, and therefore the achievement of success. We are going all out, improving our experience." (Natalia Tkachuk, director of Chernivtsi special secondary boarding school №2, project coordinator of "Special Education in the cross-border area Suceava - Chernivtsi: modern, inclusive and adequate to labor market", 2SOFT/1.1/35)

We had the chance to implement our motto "We can transform challenges into opportunities" and the ACTEDJ team manages not only to successfully implement its projects, but also to contract new ones. We found new support systems and worked together in a cross-border context, growing together. (Natalia Budescu, Association of Cross-border Cooperation "Lower Danube Euroregion", LIP Cross – Border Health Infrastructure).

These testimonials show that in no way we have to put a hold on our projects and future plans, but adjust our methods in order to reach maximum productivity and of course check our day to day goals aiming towards each milestone. The current unprecedented crisis has put to test all aspects of our life, including cross-border cooperation which is facing its most challenging times in decades.



Recommendations on hosting online events

It's impossible to imagine the present day world without cutting-edge technologies, especially video conferencing, in a cross border context. Even if the present circumstances require considerable amounts of adjustment from our part regarding our planned events, we, as implementing teams of the Joint Operational Program Romania Ukraine 2014-2020, have to insure the proper visibility of our projects and of course, of the Program. Challenging as it may be, shifting from live events to virtual or hybrid happenings has become the new paradigm of life and event planning after the Coronavirus crisis.

We now have to choose the right event format, having in mind the main information that must be publicized and regarding the EU financing, the project title and the priority addressed, composition of the partnership, project objectives, results and main outputs etc., thus developing a secure, engaging virtual environment.

While readjusting and adapting to the situation, try to avoid mass gatherings and creatively organize other types of smaller events with a manageable audience. If one chooses the path of webinars and video conferencing, know that these instruments have been incorporated in delivering the messages of our projects worldwide and yet this process proceeds by leaps and bounds everywhere and involves almost every side of our communication.

Here are some of the advantages of organizing an online event:

- **Time & Cost Savings.** Virtual alternatives allow the event to accommodate more participants who are not able to travel, allow to comply with social distancing measures and ensure the prevention and health of participants who can follow it from all around the world.
- **Education & Collaboration.** Interactivity through live chat between the host and the attendees, as well as between the participants themselves, allows the webinar host to

interact with their audience, have an exchange and build a relationship, but also improve the webinar based on the feedback received. Interactivity is the key.

- **Accessibility.** Attendees can register themselves anytime, day or night. Participants can attend from the comfort of their homes or anywhere in the world on the go, as long as they have a computer or mobile device and Internet connectivity. Because virtual events are so easy to attend, the attendance rate can go up to over ten times higher than a physical event ever could.

Although there are many elements to running a great webinar, we have to stress again that one has to take into consideration the specifics of the project and the mandatory communication actions. As for public events, there has to be a minimum of 20 participants which are considered relevant for the objectives of the project and the organizer has to rely of the participation of local/regional media.

As mentioned above, a great webinar is an interactive one. Planning an interactive webinar really is the most important thing to focus on. Here's what makes an interactive webinar so important.



A proactive, coordinated and action-based webinar maintains audience attention. An effective webinar keeps your prospects engaged, interested, and focused on the content for far longer than any other medium. Did you know that the average shareholder will watch a webinar for an average of 42 minutes? That's surprisingly better time than we could get them to spend reading our whiteboard. This considerable attention rate for webinars is due mostly to

the large number of integrations for engagement tools that make an interactive experience. It's not difficult to make the webinar interactive by using some Q&A sessions, free to download resources, polls and surveys, and more tricks to attract and hold on to viewer attention.

Interactive webinars enable customization - and personalization is essential. That is not an easy task to accomplish when we are managing a bunch of stakeholders - but an interactive webinar offers us this opportunity.

A good webinar platform allows us to invite viewers to ask questions in advance or during the webinar. This way, our leads can bring up their own individual concerns, and give us the chance to turn our webinar into a personalized product demo that's tailored to every one of our viewers.









Here is a non-exhaustive list of most used digital communication tools, which help to improve communication between project partners, colleagues or stakeholders through direct messages, video/voice call, screen sharing, file sharing, etc.: Slack, Zoom, Workplace, Google Meet, Microsoft Teams.

For digital tools that help teams organize, track information, manage their workloads, making it easier to work on projects together, we should learn more about Trello, Asana or Jira.

ZOOM

GOOGLE MEET

MICROSOFT TEAMS

zoom		
<p></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Free account available• Access from all devices• Host up to 100 people (free plan) & 500 people (paid plan)• Up to 49 persons on screen• Screen sharing and co-annotation• Meeting participants can be placed in breakout rooms to hold small-group discussions.• Additional features <p></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Download the app• Time limit of 40 minutes• Security problems 'Zoom-bombing'• Purchase an audio conferencing plan for call ins	<p></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Collaboration tools• Send files through chat + instant messaging• Full integration with Google Apps• Host up to 250 persons for free until 30/09/2020• No additional fee for call-in participants• Access from all devices• Recordings (in the cloud), file and screen sharing• Automatic captioning is available• No time limit on calls <p></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none">• No waiting room for participants that join early• Only person at a time can share his screen.• Users Privacy can be improved	<p></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Collaboration tools• Full integration with Office 365• Video conferencing with background blur• Recordings (in the cloud), file and screen sharing• Instant messaging• Access from all devices• Tabs to make finding information easy• Automatic captioning is available• No time limit on calls <p></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none">• No waiting room for participants that join early• Users Privacy can be improved• No Grid view

Using digital communication tools saves time, increases communication, brings people together with no distance restriction, and keeps all our information in one place.

Of course, an interactive webinar, good networking and advertising aren't the beginning and end of a great webinar. The virtual event needs to be on a topic that's relevant to the target audience, to share high value content, and to be delivered in a way that's compelling and interesting. But while all those elements are important, it's when we capitalize our project's achievements and impact of our actions that we know for sure that our communication activities have succeeded.

The Joint Operational Programme Romania-Ukraine 2014-2020 is funded by the European Union through the European Neighbourhood Instrument (ENI) and co-financed by the participating countries in the Programme. The Programme is dedicated to the border areas between Romania and Ukraine and will contribute to the overall objective of the European Neighbourhood Instrument: progress towards an area of prosperity and good neighbourliness for the benefit of Member States and non-EU members through cross-border cooperation actions.

www.ro-ua.net/en/



This Programme is funded by the EUROPEAN UNION



Romania-Ukraine
ENI-CROSS BORDER COOPERATION

The European Union is made up of 27 Member States who have decided to gradually link together their knowhow, resources and destinies. Together, during a period of enlargement of 50 years, they have built a zone of stability, democracy and sustainable development whilst maintaining cultural diversity, tolerance and individual freedoms. The European Union is committed to sharing its achievements and its values with countries and peoples beyond its borders.