



EUROPEAN UNION



PRACTICAL OUTLINE OF THE MECHANISMS THROUGH WHICH THE
CITIZENS CAN ENGAGE IN THE DESIGN AND FUTURE IMPLEMENTATION
OF THE OPERATIONAL PROGRAMMES AT THE REGIONAL AND LOCAL
LEVEL IN BULGARIA AND ROMANIA

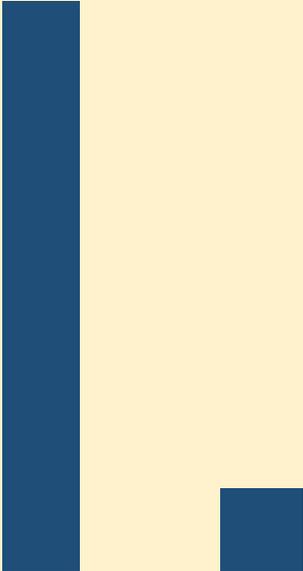
RoBulUs: „Tools for enhancing youth engagement in Romania - Bulgaria cross-
border cooperation “

BUILDING UP OUR REGION!





**PREREQUISITES FOR THE
DEVELOPMENT OF THIS
DOCUMENT AND REFERENCE
POINTS**



I. Prerequisites for the development of this document and reference points

Civic participation is the foundation of good governance. It lays the foundation for the application of the principles of transparency, openness and efficiency in the planning and implementation of state policy. Civic participation at national and local level leads to more trust in institutions with less administrative effort.¹

The active involvement of citizens (especially young people) in decision-making and action at local and regional level **is essential for the sustainable development of a more democratic, inclusive and prosperous society in which they will live and develop.** Cooperation with people should become an integral part of the processes for determining the development priorities of the region or the country, as well as of the procedures for decision-making and implementation of policies aimed at meeting important public needs. This requires the formation and use of inclusion mechanisms through which to ensure sustainable results on truly important topics, the problems of everyday life of the average citizen.

In this regard, this document has two objectives. First of all, it seeks to identify and present in a synthesized form the normatively provided mechanisms for involvement of citizens and their organizations in the processes of planning, decision-making and their implementation to ensure sustainable local and regional development. Next - by providing the necessary knowledge to encourage civic activism for inclusion in the implementation of the Cohesion Policy 2021 - 2027 and the use of its funding opportunities.

The development of this Outlines is part of the activities of the project **RoBulUs: Tools for enhancing youth engagement in Romania – Bulgaria cross-border cooperation**, which is implemented with the financial support of the European Union. The initiative aims to encourage the participation of young people in the planning and implementation of EU Cohesion Policy 2021-2027 by focusing on the opportunities provided by the Romania-Bulgaria Cross-Border Cooperation Program (INTERREG VA Romania - Bulgaria). Therefore, the topics that will find a place in the practical outlines generally relate to:

- Nature, purpose and objectives of the EU Cohesion Policy;
- Romania-Bulgaria Cross-Border Cooperation Program;
- Procedure, order and content of the processes for development of (operational and cross-border) program;
- Legislation and road maps to involve citizens in the planning and management of regional development using funding opportunities under the operational programs, and such for cross-border cooperation between Romania and Bulgaria

This Handbook should be considered as a fundamental but not exhaustive document. It will be complemented by other products developed within the project.

We hope that in the long run the handbook will help to improve communication and cooperation between citizens and local administrations, increase the sustainability of regional public policies and investments, as well as enrich the culture of participation of young people from Bulgaria and Romania.

¹ BNCP, 2011, European Practices and Models for Participation in Local Decision-Making, p. 50

CONTENTS

I. Prerequisites for the development of this document and reference points	3
II. Strategy for the development of the regions of the European Union.....	6
1. EU cohesion policy - the founder of development.....	6
1.1. Territorial cooperation	8
1.2. How does Cohesion Policy change people's lives?	9
2. Romania-Bulgaria Cross-Border Cooperation Program	11
2.1. Overview	11
2.3. The forthcoming cooperation for joint development of the region.....	15
III. National and cross-border programs to implement the objectives of Cohesion Policy	17
1. Nature and stages of the program development process	17
III.	20
IV. Citizen participation in the programming and implementation of EU-funded programs	21
1. Civic participation as a necessity	21

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**STRATEGY FOR THE
DEVELOPMENT OF THE
REGIONS OF THE
EUROPEAN UNION**



II. Strategy for the development of the regions of the European Union

1. EU cohesion policy - the founder of development

The Cohesion Policy is related to the European Union's solidarity policy framework. It embodies the EU's strategy to promote the "overall harmonious development" of its Member States and regions.

The aim of EU Cohesion Policy is to support and accelerate economic and social cohesion, which is enshrined in the Single Community Act of 1986 and which aims to "reduce disparities between regions and the lag behind the most disadvantaged of them". Cohesion policy focuses on key areas whose strengthening and growth will help the European Union meet the challenges of the 21st century and remain globally competitive.

To implement this policy, the European Union allocates a large resource allocated in the form of various financial instruments. They are managed jointly by the European Commission, Member States and regional and local stakeholders. Their total budget is significant - for example, for the period 2014-2020, it accounts for around 37% of the EU budget (equivalent to approximately EUR 355 billion).

Cohesion policy is about the most important challenges facing European citizens today, from climate to innovation, from social inclusion and skills to connectivity. It is therefore important for them to have a greater influence on the implementation of this policy. Both public authorities and civil society organizations will benefit from the benefits of more direct civic participation.

Elisa Ferreira European commissioner for cohesion and reforms

Actions on the implementation of the Cohesion Policy have been implemented since 1989. The financing has increased significantly from the very beginning, but since the period 2007-2013 it is relatively constant². A brief summary of the development of funding and cohesion priorities is given in Table 13.

Cohesion policy for the period 2021-2027 and its "modernization" was subject of extensive discussions and long-term planning. As a result, important reforms have been introduced in terms of the focus of investment priorities, the criteria for allocating funds, the administrative burden of implementation and many others. A much more structured and clear view of the priority objectives was also adopted:

✓ A more competitive and smarter Europe (through innovation, digitalization, economic change)	✓ A more connected Europe by enhancing mobility
✓ A greener, low carbon transitioning towards a net zero carbon economy	✓ A more social and inclusive Europe
✓ Europe closer to citizens	

² European Court of Auditors, Focus on Cohesion Outcomes, Fact Sheet, June 2019, page 8

³ Ibid, Excerpt, page 10

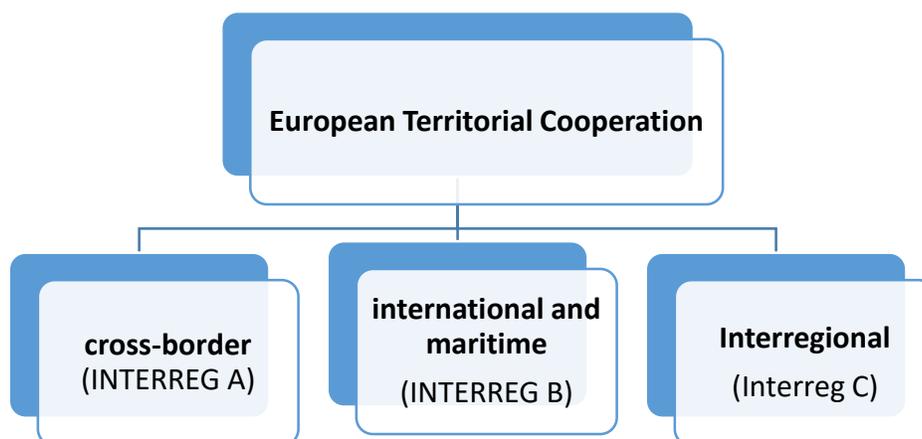
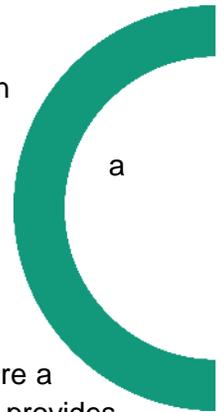
Programme period	1989 - 1993	1994 - 1999	2000 - 2006	2007 - 2013	2014 - 2020	2021 – 2027
Budget (% from the total budget) Funds	69 bill. ECU* (20 %) ERDF, ESF, EAGGF	168 bill. ECU* (30 %) ERDF, ESF, EAGGF Guidance Section, FIFG	235 bill. EUR (33 %) ERDF, ESF, EAGGF, FIFG, CF	347 bill. EUR (36 %) ERDF, ESF, CF	355 bill. EUR (37 %) ERDF, ESF, CF	330 bill. EUR (34 %) ERDF, ESF, CF
Investment priorities	5 priority objectives: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ✓ promoting the development and structural adjustment of the regions; ✓ measures related to declining industry; ✓ fight against long-term unemployment; ✓ professional integration of young people; ✓ CAP reform and promotion of rural development. 	6 priority objectives: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ✓ promoting the development and structural adjustment of the regions; ✓ measures related to declining industry; ✓ fight against long-term unemployment and professional integration of young people; ✓ adaptation of workers to industrial change; ✓ promoting rural development; ✓ regions with extremely low population density. 	3 priority objectives: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ✓ promoting the development and structural adjustment of regions whose development is lagging behind.; ✓ converting the regions or parts of regions seriously affected by industrial decline; ✓ modernisation of education, training and employment systems; 	3 priority objectives: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ✓ Convergence Regions; ✓ Regional Competitiveness and Employment; ✓ Territorial cooperation. 	11 thematic objectives: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ✓ Strengthening research, technological development and innovation; ✓ Information and Communication Technologies (ICT); ✓ Competitiveness of SMEs; ✓ Low carbon economy; ✓ Climate change adaptation, risk prevention and management; ✓ Preserving and protecting the environment and promoting resource efficiency; ✓ Sustainable transport; ✓ Promoting sustainable and quality employment and supporting labour mobility; ✓ Social inclusion; ✓ Education and training; ✓ Improving the efficiency of public administration 	5 policy objectives, <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ✓ innovative and intelligent economic transition; ✓ a greener, low carbon Europe ✓ mobility and ICT; ✓ European Pillar of Social Rights; ✓ fostering the sustainable and integrated development of rural and coastal territories, local incentives

Table. 1. Development of cohesion funding and priorities in Europe

1.1. Territorial cooperation

European Territorial Cooperation (ETC) became part of the toolkit of Cohesion Policy in 1990. Its main objective is to promote the harmonious economic, social and territorial development of the Union as a whole. This instrument is important for the construction of common European space and is the basis of European integration. Its added value for Europe is significant: it prevents borders from becoming barriers, brings European citizens closer together, helps to solve common challenges, facilitates the exchange of ideas and assets and encourages strategic efforts to achieve common goals⁴.

The ETC is designed to: (a) address problems that transcend national borders and require a common solution, and (b) work together to develop the potential of different territories⁵. It provides a framework for the implementation of joint initiatives and policy exchange between national, regional and local authorities in our various countries - members. For its implementation "the Union develops and implements its own initiatives that lead to the strengthening of its economic, social and territorial cohesion"⁶, included and funded through interregional and cross-border cooperation programs (so-called " **INTERREG** ").



In 1990 INTERREG was developed as a Community initiative with a budget of just € 1 billion, covering exclusively cross-border cooperation. Later, INTERREG was expanded to cover transnational and interregional cooperation.

Currently (after the reforms of Cohesion Policy in 2020), INTERREG is building around three areas of cooperation:

- cross-border (Interreg A);
- international and maritime (Interreg B)
- Interregional (Interreg C).

Fig. 1. Programs Interreg

⁴ Ibid

⁵ European parliament

⁶ According to Art. 174 of the Treaty on the Functioning of the EU

	INTERREG I 1990-1993	INTERREG II 1994-1999	INTERREG III 2000-2006	INTERREG IV 2007-2013	INTERREG V 2014-2020
LEGAL STATUS	COMMUNITY INITITIVE		INTEGRATED INTO STRUCTURAL FNDS REGULATION		OWN REGULATION
BENEFITING MEMBER STATES (INTERNAL BORDERS)	11	11 -THEN- 15	15 -THEN- 25	27 -THEN- 28	28
COMMITMENT BUDGET (IN CURRENT PRCES)	ECU 1.1 BN	ECU 3.8 BN	EUR 5.8 BN	EUR 8.7 BN	EUR 10.1 BN

 Fig. 2. Evolution of Interreg⁷

1.2. How does Cohesion Policy change people's lives?

Cohesion policy (CP) provides an impetus for the development of national territories or parts of them. The policy funds provide funding for national operational programs, as well as for the implementation of the objectives of interregional and cross-border cooperation programs. A series of challenges or priorities for development of a high or lower rank, but always of great importance for people's lives, are affected. It is a powerful engine for the development of some (more backward) economies due to the huge amount of investment (up to 4% of GDP in individual countries).

Among the results achieved from the implementation of the policy in the period 2007-2013 are⁸:

Increase in GDP per capita in the so-called "Convergence" regions range from 60.5% to 62.7% of the EU-27 average.

More than 600,000 additional jobs created, at least one third of which are in small and medium-sized enterprises (SMEs).

Build or upgraded 25 000 km of roads and 1800 km of railways, which help create an efficient trans-European transport network (TEN-T).

Provided financial support to more than 200 000 SMEs, out of which 77 800 start-ups have started or continue their activities.

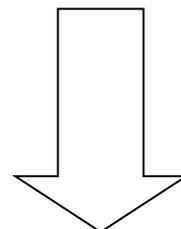
Supported more than 60 000 research projects.

Provided access to broadband internet for over 1.9 million people.

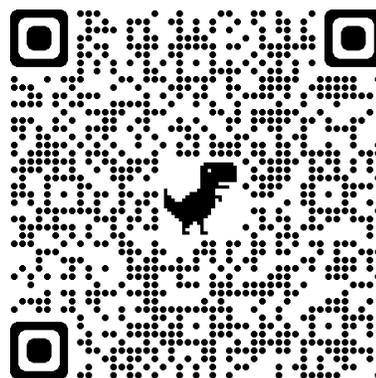
⁷ https://ec.europa.eu/regional_policy/en/policy/cooperation/european-territorial/

⁸ https://ec.europa.eu/regional_policy/bg/faq/#10

The achievements of the CP for the period 2014 - 2020 are still being measured⁹ but [dynamic data on the progress of countries](#) indicate tangible contribution to building **Intelligent, sustainable and inclusive Europe**.



[Check what Europe has done
in your region](#)



⁹ As of the date of creation of this document - March, 2021

2. Romania-Bulgaria Cross-Border Cooperation Program

2.1. Overview

The Romania-Bulgaria Cross-Border Cooperation Program is part of the INTERREG A "family", which provides ETC support for harmonious and balanced integration throughout the EU. This program aims to develop the border area between the two partner countries. Its main strategic goal is *to bring together the people, communities and economies of the cross-border region between Romania and Bulgaria, and to ensure their participation in the joint development of cooperation, using the available human, natural and environmental resources and benefits in a sustainable way.*

The target region of the program consists of **7 counties from Romania** (Mehedinti, Dolj, Olt, Teleorman, Giurgiu, Calarasi, Constanta) and **8 districts in Bulgaria** (Vidin, Vratsa, Montana, Plevna, Veliko Tarnovo, Ruse, Silistra, Dobrich). Therefore, the program covers 19.8% of the territory of the two countries (69,285 km²), of which 57.75% belongs to Romania and 43.25% to Bulgaria.

The cross-border area shares a number of challenges in the areas of transport connectivity, available public infrastructure, the fight against climate change, demography and education, economic and social cohesion. At the same time, the area is rich in natural, cultural and historical values, which remain underdeveloped and popularized. Lack of capacity and insufficient cooperation between authorities and stakeholders at local, regional as well as cross-border level hinders the effective development and exploitation of existing capital and its transformation into an attractive factor for attracting investment and growth.

The Romania-Bulgaria Cross-Border Cooperation Program has been operating successfully in this format since 2007. here. It generates tangible progress in the development of the region in many of the problem areas by successfully investing in the field of public works, environmental protection, qualification and integration of human resources, increasing the capacity for cooperation and exchange of experience between public and civil society organizations.

INTERREG Romania - Bulgaria 2014 - 2020 has the following performance indicators¹⁰:

215.745.513,00 euro	855	199	172 (275.025.271,02 euro)
ERDF funds	Submitted projects	Approved projects	Number and value of agreed projects



Specific generated results and achievements (sample)¹¹ clearly outline the contribution of the program to the development of the region:

¹⁰ According to Impact assessment report, prepared in the period 08.10.2019 - 08.11.2020

¹¹ The same

Impact on transport

- More than 120 km of roads built through modernization projects and more than 600,000 people have benefited from an improved road network that connects to the TEN-T network.
- The indicator for safety of river Danube navigability ("Total length of new or improved inland waterways") has reached 100%, covering the entire length of the Danube in the Romania-Bulgaria cross-border area (470 km).
- Improved transport connectivity has ensured greater internal mobility and thus helped to create new business initiatives.

Impact on heritage and the environment

- The number of tourists has increased compared to the previous programming period.
- The total number of accommodation units in the eligible area increased between 2015 and 2019 by 1.74%. Silistra, Dobrich, Constanta and Dolj report the most significant increase.
- The development of the 34 new tourism products, as well as the implementation of applications and websites have provided citizens with quick access to information on tourism activities.
- The projects have significantly helped to improve the management and protection of NATURA 2000 sites in the cross-border area, incl. through innovative products and approaches (ranging from collaborative solutions, pilot actions, virtual applications and tools to promote NATURA 2000 sites).

Impact on risk management

- Inter-institutional communication at the level of Romanian and Bulgarian authorities has improved; partnerships for rapid alert and response to emergencies have been established;
- The capacity of the specialized units for providing joint emergency interventions has been increased, as the available equipment has been secured and / or modernized.

Impact on employment

- The program has made significant progress in strengthening labor market competitiveness.
- The impact of the Program is also felt in terms of the development of cooperation relations at the level of business environment in the eligible area. This has contributed favourably to employment, quality of life, flexibility - mobility in the workplace and readiness for training, tailored to real needs and requirements.

The Romania-Bulgaria Cross-Border Cooperation Program 2014-2020 managed to maximize synergies between the two sides of the border. It has created opportunities for the exchange of experience and good practices, for labor mobility, getting to know people and the territory and for improving the quality of life. Funded areas of intervention have covered some of the most pressing needs of the cross-border area, allowing for further development. In fact, one of the key strengths of the programs is the established continuity and sustainability of the initiatives - many projects emerge as a continuation or complement to those of the previous programming period.

2.2. Good practices for civic participation to support the development of the region

Danube on 2 wheels



Programme:
INTERREG V-A Romania Bulgaria
Specific objective

2.1: Improving the sustainable use of natural resources and cultural heritage

Implementation period
09.08.2018– 08.02.2020

Priority axis:
2 „Green Region“

Partners:
Association AISSER, Calarasi (Romania)
Sports for you and me -
a sports club in canoe-kayak, boxing and
powerlifting (Bulgaria)
Association Sport Club ACTIS (Romania)

SHORT DESCRIPTION OF THE PROJECT:

"Danube on 2 wheels" is a pilot project for the creation of cycling-touring packages. The project is designed to set the foundations for future development by organizing mass cycling-touring events of a permanent nature for those who love sports and leisure events, in order to sustainably promote the natural heritage in the cross-border area Romania - Bulgaria, through ecotourism.

The main goal of the project is to create a new integrated tourist product for adventure tourism enthusiasts - a cycling-route in order to make better use of the general tourist potential.

The new tourism products support the sustainable development of the region from an economic, cultural and social point of view.

ACHIEVED RESULTS:

The project was finalised in early 2020, taking into account the following results:

- Created 2 points for bicycle-touring information - one in Calarasi (Romania) and one in Belogradchik (Bulgaria), which are equipped with touring and mountain bikes, bicycle trailers with a stroller for babies and children over 4 years, bicycles with a stroller for people with disabilities.
- Developed 3 new integrated tourist products: adventure expeditions on asphalt, off-road and leisure trips for families with children and for people with disabilities;
- Elaborated 2 common strategies "Common strategy for identifying cycling routes for bike-riding and exploring the natural and cultural heritage" and "Common strategy for promoting integrated tourism products, including raising awareness of the natural and cultural heritage of the region";
- Prepared interactive map with the tourist routes;
- Proposed mobile application with different routes;
- 12 pilot actions organized (3 days each) in the cross-border region: 4 experimental road expeditions, 4 experimental off-road expeditions, 2 experimental trips for families with children and 2 experimental trips for people with disabilities and their personal care companions;
- - 784 nights were spent.

More about the project
<https://www.danubeon2wheels.eu>

Active employment measures in the region of border cooperation Drobeta Turnu Severin - Vidin

Programme:

INTERREG V-A Romania Bulgaria

Specific objective

2.1: Creating an integrated cross-border area for employment and labor mobility

Implementation period

29.06.2017 – 28.12.2018

Priority axis:

4 „Qualified and inclusive region”

Partners:

Territorial Administrative Unit -

Vânju Mare (Romania)

Association “Active Society” (Bulgaria)

SHORT DESCRIPTION OF THE PROJECT:

The project aims to develop the employment capacity of the unemployed and inactive people from the region Drobeta Turnu Severin - Vidin.

The implementation of the project is organized in a process of 7 consecutive steps for creation of infrastructure (Regional Centers) for promotion of active employment measures in the target region, providing information, consultancy and assistance for professional and geographical mobility of the workforce; inclusion in trainings and courses for the formation of new skills and promotion of entrepreneurship, support for finding new jobs or starting own business.

ACHIEVED RESULTS:

The project is finalized taking into account the following results and effects:

- 2 Regional Resource Centers established, one in Vidin (Bulgaria) and one in Vânju Mare (Romania). The centers promote the active employment measures in the Drobeta Turnu Severin-Vidin region by providing information, advice and assistance for occupational and geographical mobility of the workforce.
- 1 study was conducted to identify measures for a better link between individual skills, education, employment potential and labor market opportunities in the region Drobeta Turnu Severin - Vidin.
- A total of 150 people (75 people from Bulgaria and 75 people from Romania) have benefited from IT, entrepreneurship and English language training services (50 people in IT, 50 people in entrepreneurship and 50 people in English). All 150 people received recognised diplomas (certificates).
- 100 people (50 people from Bulgaria and 50 people from Romania) used training services in the field of commercial worker (25 people from Romania), food worker (25 people from Romania), small and medium business associate (25 people from Bulgaria) and supplier consultant (25 people from Bulgaria).
- Two job fairs organised, one in October 2018 in Drobeta Turnu Severin and one in November 2018 in Vidin.

More about the project

<https://www.danubejobs.eu>

2.3. The forthcoming cooperation for joint development of the region

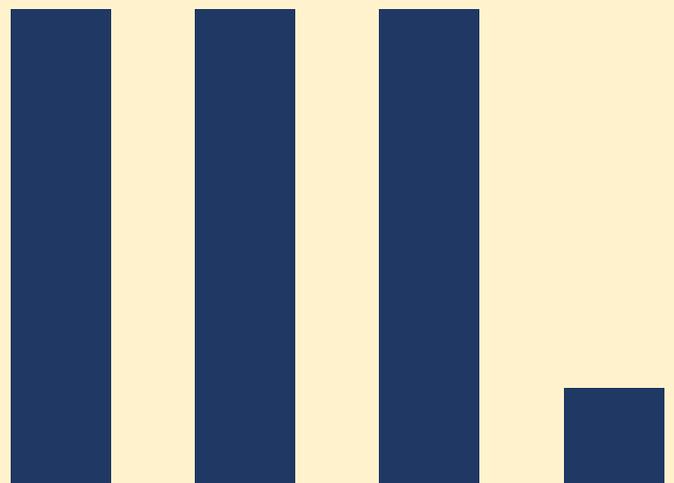
Naturally, the next Cross-Border Cooperation Program will seek continuation and expansion of the already achieved good results, but will remain oriented towards achieving (part of) the objectives of the Cohesion Policy. According to the working version¹² of the INTERREG VI-A Program, Romania Bulgaria will be focused on 'PO 3' - A more connected Europe by enhancing mobility and regional ICT connectivity and "PO 5" - A Europe closer to citizens by fostering the sustainable and integrated development of urban, rural and coastal areas and local initiatives.



Figure 5. Priorities of the Romania-Bulgaria cross-border cooperation program period 2021 - 2027 according to working version as of February, 2021

¹² Editor's note as of February, 2021

**NATIONAL AND CROSS-
BORDER PROGRAMS TO
IMPLEMENT THE
OBJECTIVES OF
COHESION POLICY**



III. National and cross-border programs to implement the objectives of Cohesion Policy

1. Nature and stages of the program development process

In its most general form, the political decision-making process is a cycle of six stages¹³. The main actors are the authorities, but some stages not only provide an opportunity but also require the involvement of other stakeholders - such as citizens or their organizations.

(a) setting an agenda	The agenda for policy making is agreed between the parliament and the government. It is often built on a longer-term vision on an annual basis. Campaigns or lobbying concerning current issues, needs and worries by citizens or NGOs may highlight the need for new policy initiatives or reforms.
(b) policy making	Public authorities usually have well established policy-making procedures. These procedures or parts of them involve stakeholders, including citizens or NGOs, with the help of which data are collected or problems or potential solutions are identified.
(c) making a decision	The forms of political decision-making vary depending on the national context and legislation. The standard practice is the issuance of an ordinance by the relevant ministry or the adoption of a law by parliamentary vote. The drafting of laws and proposals is becoming increasingly open for the contribution and participation of citizens and their associations, but the final choice is performed by the public authorities (with some exceptions).
(d) implementation	This is a stage at which the citizens and organizations take the most active part, such as offering services and working on projects. This stage is extremely important to ensure that the set goals will be achieved. The access to clear and transparent information on expectations and opportunities is an essential part of the implementation.
(e) tracking	At this stage, the results of the implemented policies are monitored, controlled and evaluated. It is important to have an effective and transparent monitoring system through which to achieve the intended results of the respective policy/program.
(f) reformulation	The information from the evaluation of policy implementation, as well as the changing needs of society often require policy reformulation. This reformulation allows for a new decision-making cycle.

In the specifics of developing national and cross-border programs to meet the objectives of the Cohesion Policy, this process looks like this:

¹³ Code of good practice on civic participation

1) In the course of implementation of the programs it is possible to create a new task of much greater importance or to trace the possibility of redirecting funds between priorities. Then, the new circumstances are presented, the need of reformulation is justified, the programs are revised and re-agreed with the Commission.

Reformulation

Setting an agenda

- 1) The European Council and the European Parliament, on the basis of a proposal from the Commission take decision on the budget for the policy and the rules for its spending;
- 2) The principles and priorities of the Cohesion Policy are clarified through: a) analysis of the state of the regions; (b) the achievements of previous periods; (c) consultations between the Commission and the EU Member States; d) conducting public consultations in which all interested parties can take part, incl. individual citizens.

- 1) The responsible agency (Managing Authority) monitors the implementation of the projects on the basis of reports received from the beneficiaries. The achievements of the projects are summarized in the Ministry's progress report on the relevant program, which is sent to the Commission. This is done regularly throughout the programming period.
- 2) The Commission summarises the achievements of the individual countries in its report to the European Parliament and the Council on the **progress of the Cohesion Policy**

Monitoring

Policy making

- 1) Each Member State shall draw up a draft partnership agreement outlining its development strategy and proposing a list of programs;
- 2) Draft operational programs (OPs) for development and elimination of challenges at the state level are prepared; draft cross-border / transnational programs are drawn up jointly between the cooperating countries (their scope may only cover part of a regions of a specific country);
- 3) The programs are drawn up by the responsible public authorities. Associations of workers, employers, and civil society organizations can take part in the process. The working versions of the programs are subject to public discussion, in which the individual citizen can also take part.

The programs are implemented through the successful execution of individual project initiatives. The projects are prepared within the so-called procedures or calls for projects that have a budget and defined priorities. Their final version (usually) is adopted after a public consultation with all stakeholders.

Implementation

Making a decision

- 1) The Commission shall agree with the national authorities the final content of the partnership agreement as well as the text of each (operational or trans-national) program.

The programming process as it became clear is a cycle that has a two-way pattern: "top-down" for goal setting and "bottom-up" for reporting and evaluating the results. The Cohesion policy is the strategic framework that defines the development interests at EU level. It outlines the general objectives to be achieved by the Community over a period of 7 years. On this basis, each Member State should draw up a development strategy that meets its individual needs but also contributes to the overall progress sought. This strategy is written in the form of a single national or joint international document - a strategic framework for development¹⁴. The omission of this type of document is in fact part of the reforms to the administrative modernization of the Cohesion Policy.

Further, the national strategy is differentiated by scope and areas of impact and finds expression in the complex of the so-called. "Operational programs", the total number of which varies. Each of these programs sets general and specific goals, as well as seeks the generation of specific results and effects, the total achievement of which will contribute to the realization of the national ones.

“The operational programs are detailed plans in which the Member States determine in which areas the European Structural and Investment Funds will be spent during the programming period (7 years). They can be prepared for a specific region or for a specific thematic purpose (eg. environment, human resources, etc.). For the instrument "European Territorial Cooperation" cross-border and interregional operational programs are being prepared.

Dictionary of the European Commission”

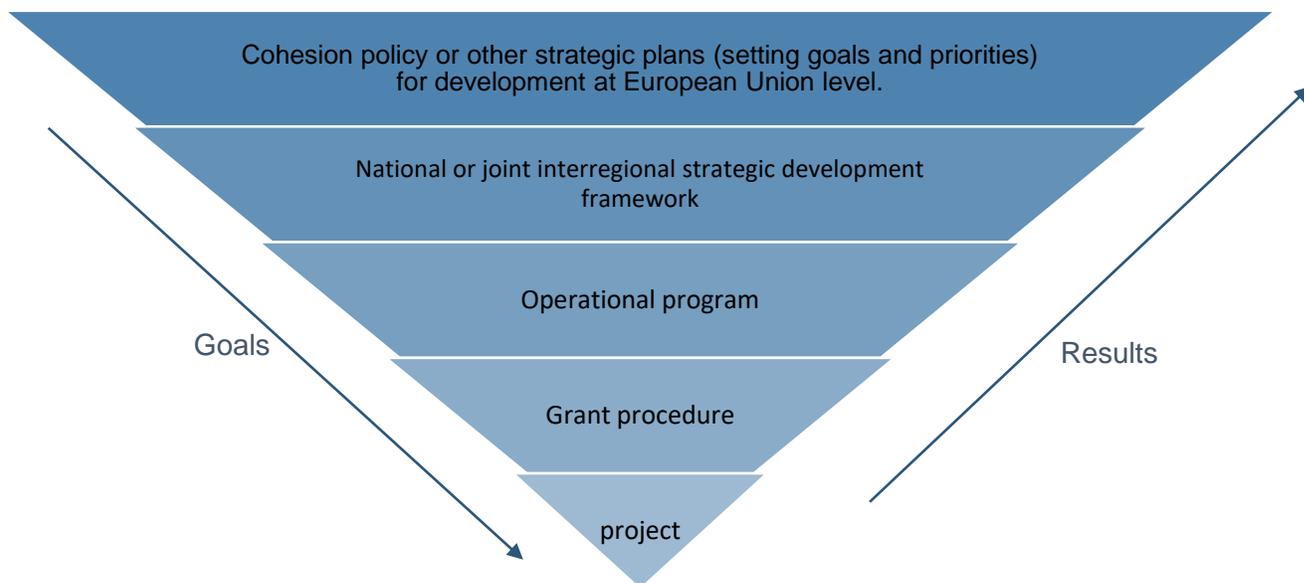


Fig. 5. Hierarchical subordination in structuring of the goals and results

¹⁴ Editor's note: The Development Strategy of Bulgaria for the period 2007-2013 was set out in the so-called The National Strategic Reference Framework, and for 2014 - 2020 in the Innovation Strategy for Smart Specialization



**CITIZEN PARTICIPATION
IN THE PROGRAMMING
AND IMPLEMENTATION
OF EU-FUNDED
PROGRAMS**

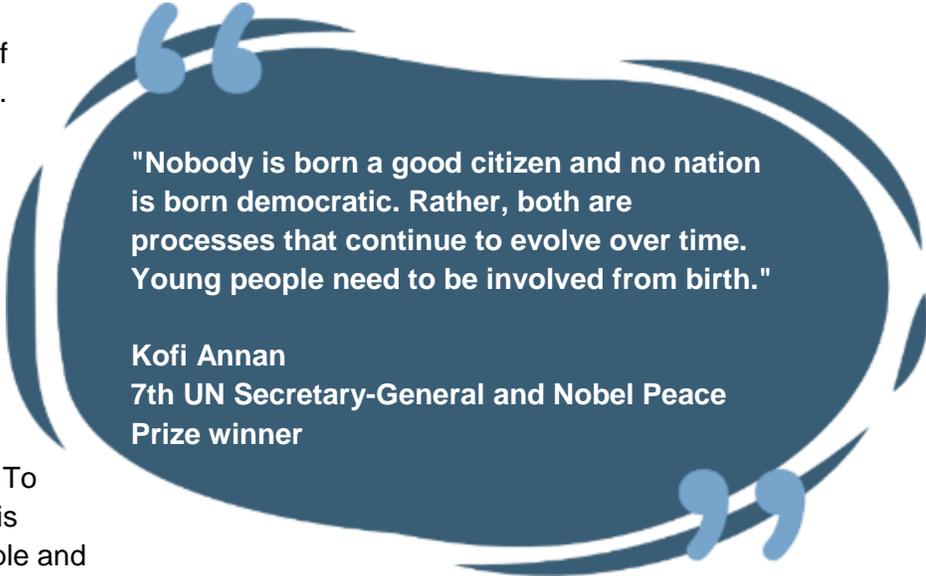


IV.

IV. Citizen participation in the programming and implementation of EU-funded programs

1. Civic participation as a necessity

The understanding of the inclusion of people in democratic life is still ambiguous. There is no single definition, but practice clearly shows that it is more than voting and running for election. The civic participation is essentially about "having the right, the means, the space and the opportunity, and when support is needed, to participate and influence in the decision-making process"¹⁵. And that means engaging in actions and activities that contribute to building a better society. To ensure sustainable change and growth, this activity must be recognised by young people and must become an integral part of their behavioral values.



"Nobody is born a good citizen and no nation is born democratic. Rather, both are processes that continue to evolve over time. Young people need to be involved from birth."

Kofi Annan
7th UN Secretary-General and Nobel Peace Prize winner

The civic participation is a necessity. It ensures real involvement of people in solving problems of their daily lives and therefore - provides adequate solutions. Through its various forms, the principle of good governance is implemented, in which the governments "become more transparent, more accountable, gain greater legitimacy, improve the quality and effectiveness of the decisions taken."¹⁶ Human intervention or the so-called "democratic participation" provides greater transparency and accountability of institutions and accumulates many positive effects, including:

- helps to know the way of decision-making and the predictability of the developed norms;
- creates an opportunity for the ideas of the citizens to be directly realized;
- leads to the restoration of trust;
- offers different points of view and improves the quality of the decisions;
- ensures readiness for implementation of the adopted decisions;
- provides an opportunity for periodic civil monitoring of the actions, decisions and policies pursued by the country.

The concept of active civic participation has become increasingly important over the years. A series of documents at international and European level emphasize on the realisation of this right of citizens and focus on its important role. As part of the legal family of the European Union, Bulgaria and Romania are also dynamically developing their legislation in order to be able to provide adequate mechanisms for civic participation and democracy in decision-making processes today. An in-depth analysis of the current legislation indicates that there is an opportunity to exercise direct democracy and involvement in decision-making processes both by the citizen himself as an individual and through the mediation of civil society organizations (NGO) – representative of public positions and accumulating the interests of large groups of people other than political formations.

The legal order provides various mechanisms and pathways. In their most general form, they offer the opportunity to involve citizens at several levels: information, consultation, dialogue and partnership. They

¹⁵ Practical manual for mechanisms for stimulating the participation of young people in public life at the local level, Comtrade Company EOOD commissioned by the Ministry of Regional Development and Public Works, Sofia, 2009

¹⁶ Participation of NGOs in the processes of policy and law development, Comparative analysis, Bulgarian Center for Non-Profit Law

can be applied at any stage of the decision-making process, but are often particularly relevant at certain points in the process. Each subsequent level includes and upgrades the previous one.

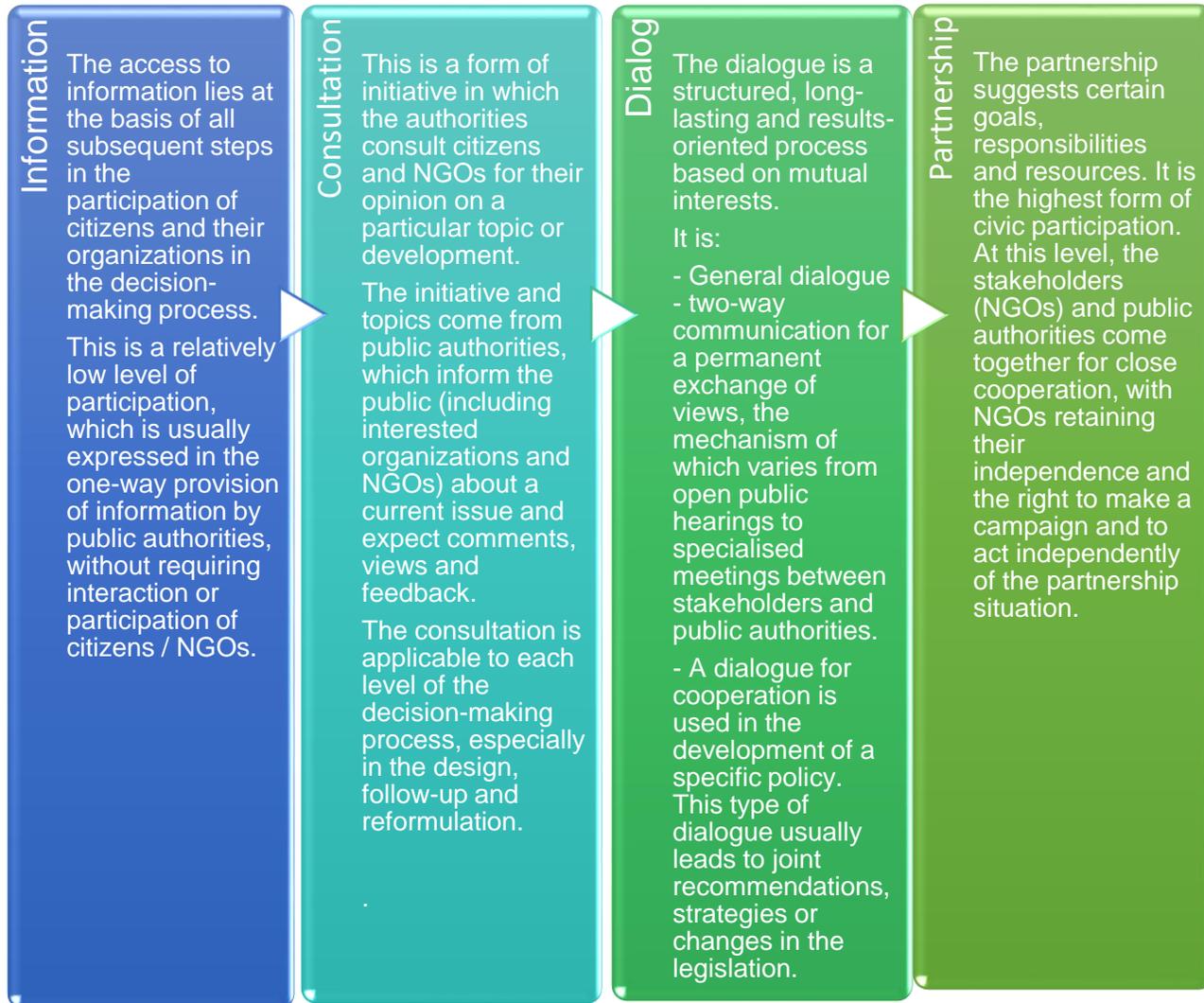


Fig. 6. Levels of civic participation

In particular, legally secured actions of citizens for each of these levels are:



INFORMING

Obtaining timely and accurate information is a key prerequisite for democratic participation in planning and decision-making processes.

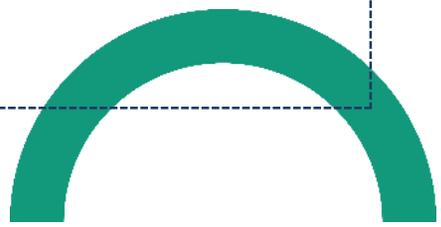
The Constitution of the Republic of Bulgaria and the Republic of Romania provides the right of citizens to seek, receive and impart information. The legislation of these countries implements the relevant conditions for the exercise of this right. The current Law on Access to Public Information imposes obligations on public authorities to regularly disclose information about their work, as well as to provide easy access to documents of public interest.

In addition, the legislation provides for the relevant conditions under which any natural or legal person may request access to information relating to public affairs or personal interests. This shall be provided on the basis of an oral request or a written request addressed to the designated departments.

A written application can be submitted on paper or electronically. In the general case, it must contain:

1. The three names, respectively - the name and the seat of the applicant;
2. Description of the requested information;
3. Address for correspondence with the applicant.

Any information on personal data, as well as classified information on national defense, public order, discussions of public authorities and national political and economic interests, falls outside the scope of the law. An exception may also be made in respect of commercial information if its disclosure would infringe intellectual property rights and the principle of fair competition.



PARTICIPATION IN PUBLIC CONSULTATIONS AND DISCUSSIONS

The right of people to participate in the elaboration of normative acts is confirmed both in international documents and in the national legislation of the Republic of Bulgaria and the Republic of Romania. A widespread and practically applicable tool for ensuring this right and active involvement of citizens in the legislative process (and not only in it) is public consultation (also commonly discussed).

Consulting with the general public helps managers at national, regional and local levels to develop policies that lead to better results at lower costs. The process has a double meaning. On the one hand, it provides all stakeholders with a better understanding of the problem, the options, the risks, as well as the benefits and costs associated with the individual alternatives. On the other hand - it offers the ruling constructive opinions and various points of view.

Specifically, the Law on Normative Acts in the Republic of Bulgaria and the Law on Transparency of Decisions of the Public Administration of the Republic of Romania introduce a requirement for the public institutions to discuss with the people every project for enrichment of the legal framework from its process of elaboration. Although there are some differences in the organisation and period of consultation, both Bulgarian and Romanian institutions are obliged to provide wide access to draft normative or strategic documents that are being drafted or edited so that all stakeholders can to get acquainted with them and to make constructive proposals for their improvement. Proposals received shall be evaluated and may be reflected in the final version of the document submitted for voting.

PARTICIPATION IN MEETINGS AND DISCUSSIONS

Citizens and interested organizations can also participate in decision-making processes by making proposals directly to the responsible institutions. The most effective way to do this is to participate in the meetings of the responsible institutions and to hold the relevant discussions.

The body of local self-government in Bulgaria is the Municipal Council, and in Romania - the Local Council. Both bodies act on behalf of and in the interest of the community they represent. To ensure their work, they hold regular meetings, which are public (open). In limited cases, closed meetings may be held. The decisions taken are recorded and announced to the general public. Councils can form specialized, thematic, commissions to

The legislations of both countries provide an opportunity for all citizens to attend and speak during the meetings of the formed Municipal or local council and their auxiliary commissions. There is also an opportunity to submit questions, suggestions and opinions.

PARTICIPATION THROUGH the so-called DIRECT DEMOCRACY

Citizens participate in the management of the municipality / region both through the bodies elected by them and directly - through a referendum, local citizens' initiative and others.

- **Referendum** is a direct consultation of the people, who must vote to express their opinion on an important issue of local or national importance..

In Romania, a local referendum can be held at the suggestion of the mayor or part of the municipal councillors, while in Bulgaria a group of citizens can be the initiator.

The poll is conducted through ballots containing a question, to which voters answer "YES" or "NO". The questions are tested in common language, short, precise and clear.

The proposal shall be adopted by a majority of the votes of the citizens with the right to vote and residence on the territory of the respective territorial-administrative unit.

- **In a Local Citizens' Initiative**, citizens send proposals to a municipal council, the mayor of a municipality, district or town hall, or to district or regional executive bodies to address issues of local importance.

The local citizens' initiative is implemented through a subscription organized by an initiative committee on the territory of the respective municipality, region, town hall or settlement, as the order and conditions of the organization differ for the two considered countries.

- **A general assembly of the population** is an opportunity provided in the Bulgarian legislation, applicable for settlements and neighbourhoods with a population of up to 10,000 inhabitants. The decisions of this meeting are taken by a majority and are certified by the signature of those present.

The petition is the regulated possibility of Romanian citizens and their organizations to send in writing or by e-mail a request, complaint, notification or proposal to address to central or local public bodies and institutions, decentralized public services of ministries, etc.

PARTNERSHIP

PARTICIPATION IN SPECIALIZED LOCAL COMMISSIONS

The specialized commissions are bodies that assist the local government in the processes of planning, coordination and implementation of the policy on issues important for the local community. Their form of organization is different in both countries depending on their goals and purpose.

Specialized local commissions are usually formed by thematic areas, the most common being on issues of tourism, culture, youth, economic development and others.

The nomination and election of members of these bodies must be as transparent as possible, subject to clearly defined rules and criteria. This also applies to the work of the commission, which must be as open and public as possible.

In the activity of these bodies it is possible and recommended to involve citizens and organizations, which are not part of their permanent membership. A report on the activity is periodically prepared, which is presented to the local community and the municipality.

CIVIC PARTICIPATION THROUGH NGOs

Citizens' associations, known as civil society organizations or NGOs, play an important role in democratic participation. These are "voluntary self-governing organizations that pursue mainly non-profit goals of their organizers or members". (Code of Good Practice for Civic Participation). They engage a large number of people and have the ability to catalyze knowledge and expertise in the decision-making process. In addition, they can support the process of planning and making management decisions with knowledge and independent expertise.

NGOs enjoy a positive image among citizens, which is a sign of increasing trust in them, as well as seeking their assistance in addressing important socio-economic or life issues, including through the use of forms of civic participation.

Civic organizations have the right to benefit from all the mechanisms provided to the people, but they can also:

- To take part in the collective bodies for planning and monitoring of programs financed by European funds;
- Participate in the decision-making process by joining working groups
- To develop and successfully implement projects in support of local and regional development

The initiation and implementation of projects with different orientations is one of the most widely used and effective mechanisms for citizen

participation in local and regional development. Through it, citizens are actively involved in solving a local problem by realizing their idea (relatively) independently, in their own way and with their own efforts. Often, this is organized and implemented through non-profit (civic) organizations

The specific funding opportunities are provided through the so-called project selection procedures. Each procedure has its own objectives, budget and desired results (which correspond to those set in the respective operational program). These conditions, together with the requirements to the candidates, the eligible activities and costs, as well as the evaluation criteria are formulated in the so-called Conditions (Guidelines) for application and appendices to them. The drafts of these documents are published on the website of the respective program or in the electronic application system. In this way, the Managing Authority provides the interested parties with the opportunity to submit written objections and proposals within a reasonable time. Accordingly, any interested natural or legal person may submit in writing the proposals for improving the texts of the conditions or expanding / reducing their scope. It is important that the proposals made do not lead to changes that could violate the principles of equality and fair competition, discrimination or equal opportunities. They may not lead to deviations in the objectives of the procedure and the results sought, insofar as they are "dropped" from the respective operational program.

After the expiration of the term for public discussion, all submitted proposals are considered. Some of them are reflected in the application conditions, respectively the annexes to them, and others are rejected with reasons.

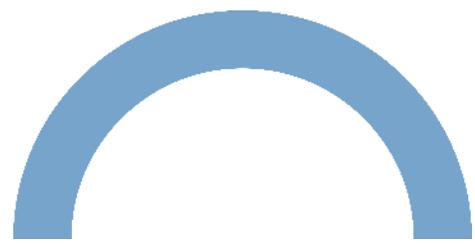
The approved documentation for the procedure is published on the website of the respective program, as well as in the unified electronic system. All interested persons who meet the criteria set out in the procedure have the right to submit their project proposals, respectively to apply for a grant. Project proposals can be submitted mainly by organizations. Individual support for individuals can be obtained in certain cases, which are significantly limited in number and capabilities.

The project idea must also meet the objectives and eligible activities set by the procedure, and be limited to the set minimum and maximum values of the budget and time frame. Some procedures require co-financing from the applicant, which can vary from 2 to 25% of the budget value. The project is submitted in writing to the approved structure in the form of an application form and budget, accompanied by a set of documents, the exhaustive list of which is also set out in the Application Conditions.

The project proposals received within the set deadline are considered and evaluated according to pre-set criteria. A funding contract is concluded with the organizations with the highest score and the project should be implemented as described in the application. The implementation, administration and accounting of the project is subject to the order and rules explicitly specified by the Managing Authority. They cannot violate legal provisions.

The implementation of the project generates certain results. In the first place, they are an indication of the implementation of the project idea, as conceived by citizens and their organizations, in order to fulfill their goals for solving a social, economic or other problem at the local or regional level. Next - they support the implementation of the objectives of the program, including create effects for balanced development of the country as an EU member state.

The effective use of this mechanism for civic participation is also important. Even in cases where projects do not receive funding, they provide those in power with an insight into public issues that may be reflected in other funding procedures or in subsequent programming.



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