

# Ex post Evaluation of The South-East Finland - Russia CBC 2014-2020



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## ABSTRACT

During the last decades, EU regional and cohesion policy has encouraged regions in the European Union member states to work together and engage in horizontal learning processes. The South-East Finland - Russia CBC 2014-2020 (later the abbreviation used: SEFR CBC) continued the programme-based co-operation between the regions of Kymenlaakso, South Karelia and South Savo in Finland and the Leningrad region and the City of Saint Petersburg in Russia. The adjacent regions included the regions of Uusimaa, Päijät-Häme, North Savo, North Karelia in Finland and the Republic of Karelia in Russia. The overall objective of SEFR CBC was to contribute to economic and social development, mitigate common challenges and promote mobility among actors of regional relevance to further improve cross-border co-operation and the sustainable prerequisites of programme area.

The evaluation report provides an ex-post evaluation of SEFR CBC, which has been implemented on the Finnish-Russian border during the EU's 2014-2020 Programme period. TK-Eval was commissioned by the Managing Authority of Programme in November 2023 to carry out the evaluation and produce the report. The evaluation team included special researchers Tommi Ålander and Keimo Sillanpää from TK-Eval.

The evaluation questions set for the evaluation were answered by evaluating the existing documentation and by carrying out data collection and analysis. Evaluation methods provided knowledge on the benefit that SEFR CBC delivered to the project partners, project beneficiaries, and Programme regions.

SEFR CBC mainly achieved the set target values set in Joint Operational Programme (JOP), and often exceeded these targets. This is a success for Programme. This occurred in priorities 1-3, but in priority 4 the set targets were not achieved completely. The biggest exceeding of the target were seen in numbers of persons and enterprises participating in priorities 1-3. The biggest shortfalls were found in priority 4 where the set target of reconstructed or upgraded roads in the vicinity of BCPs was left in 13% and the set target of improved border-crossing points was left in 75%.

Programme targets that included number of persons and organisations were met and exceeded. However, it can be inferred to some extent that the JOP indicator targets were somewhat modest. When realization of the projects was examined against the set indicator target values set by the projects themselves, the targets that included number of persons and organisations were mainly met, but other types of indicators than number of persons and organisations, fell short of the target values set by the projects. A significant reason for this can be found on the difficulties caused to project implementation first by COVID-19 and then by the suspension of project activities in Russia because of the Russian military aggression against Ukraine. The termination of co-operation affected therefore heavily on the ability to attain set priority level indicator and in that sense, the basis for examining them was taken away. Particularly indicators of priorities 1 (increase in the number of SMEs operating cross-border) and 4 (reduced waiting time on border crossing points) suffered totally in this changed situation. Regarding the set indicators of priorities 2 (increase in knowledge intensive educational level) and 3 (improved living environments + increased number of recreational areas) it was hard to discover any evidence based on comparable indicators or statistics. Therefore, the matter was examined with qualitative material gathered from the project beneficiaries.

Based on Programme project beneficiaries' view priority level indicators were realised only at a fairly moderate level. Clearly the best realisation was in increase in knowledge intensive educational level. Successes were clearly fewer in the priority 3 and 4 indicators. The lowest realisation was found on the priority 1. The success was quite seldom seen in the number of SMEs operating across the border and new business investments due to the challenges raised above. The comparisons were made in the evaluation between the projects that were still underway when the Russian military aggression against Ukraine started and the projects where implementation of the projects had ended before the start of the military aggression. The projects implemented before the start of the Russian military aggression against Ukraine achieved planned project results better.

The most important themes were covered in Programme. In general, there were some topics omitted by Programme according to the interest groups, but there is no common theme missing, and in this respect only individual themes would have been needed in Programme. Overall, Programme managed to cover the themes considered important. This was affected by the fact that there is a long history of co-operation across the border reflecting in the strong actor networks and partnerships that have emerged and implemented projects over several programme periods. This has also resulted in a strong knowledge on what the missing parts and important topics are for co-operation. High levels of trust among the actors involved have resulted in strong co-operation within Programme structures (between partners and with the Managing Authority).

The most lasting results of the projects were seen in 1) improvements and solutions related to studying and learning. In this context, we noticed issues like (that are in use now) developed online courses, learning environments, curriculums, as well as more concrete developed materials to support learning like games, videos, podcasts etc. 2) investments made through the projects. These were often investments on infrastructure for example in various equipment, buildings, traffic arrangements, roads, hiking infrastructure, etc. In addition, there were investments for nature restoration and nature tourism. Investments were often seen as effects of more permanent nature among the actors. 3) the emergence and utilisation of co-operation networks among Finnish actors involved in the project. This was something that can now be benefitted only partly due to current situation in Ukraine, provoked by the Russian aggression, almost entirely only between Finnish partners. Benefits highlighted on the Finnish side are, for example, co-operation between educational institutions and companies, and in best cases it has led to further development of ideas and tested things.

Results and impacts were examined also from the point of view of participating organisations themselves. Here results and benefits can be grouped followingly: 1) growth of competence and experience, 2) investments made through the projects and 3) the emergence and utilisation of co-operation networks among Finnish actors. In overall, the benefits experienced by the organisations were thus very similar to the long-term benefits of the projects.

A closer look through the evaluation case projects also revealed results and impacts. In priority 1 the results can be summed up in two categories: 1) created functional spaces and related activities and 2) increased knowledge and improved conditions for tourism. For example, in Green Belt project two Green Belt information centres were established and the one in Finland still operates for sure. In priority 2, the case projects particularly improved the know-how and knowledge of the participants and stakeholders, for example through educational actions, developing platform, making analyses, testing methods, creating alliances etc. Another factor that united case projects in this priority was the involvement of teachers and students in the project/development work. The main results identified through case studies can be

summarised: 1) increase in knowledge and skills, 2) developed training programmes/curriculars that are now in use and 3) experience and accumulated knowledge now used in further projects.

In priority 3, the main results of the case projects can be summed up in two categories: 1) infrastructure, developed and piloted “things” and 2) increased knowledge. For example, in SIMREC project the joint report compiled the key results of the project, synthesising them in a form of a road map. The work done in the project also led to development of training activities related to simulators. It was recognised that trainings for authorities have been developed further. Development work done in the project also reflected in teaching e.g. by using material in teaching and so that things have been standardised. In priority 4, the main results of the case projects were related to investments. Of the selected two case projects, one was the large infrastructure project to improve border crossing fluency (Vainikkala). It can be said that the Vainikkala project improved the theoretical capacity of the border crossing, but now there is simply not enough traffic to get reliable information about its actual capacity.

In general, involvement of Finnish educational and research organisations was very significant for Programme operations. These organisations were often lead partners and partners in the projects. Different public actors also played a rather important role in the projects. The lead partnership focused on South Karelia on the Finnish side. The lack of private sector actors as partners of Programme projects was also noticeable.

Complementarity was one of the issues emphasised in case study interviews. The principle of complementarity aims to prevent duplicate actions and encourage collaboration between EU programmes. The results did not provide any evidence of double funding, which refers to the use of different EU funds to finance the same measures. This was a result of learning and experience, and the effective division of labour between EU programmes. Regarding synergies, the most positive examples were related to cases where initial development or experimentation in a CBC project continued in other EU programmes.

There were two negative influences that came up in several contexts in the analysis of the evaluation data: the impact of COVID-19 on Programme implementation and the impact of the termination of cross-border co-operation. The projects saw particularly COVID-19 making co-operation difficult. 94% of projects strongly agreed or somewhat agreed with this view. Vast majority of the projects also saw that current situation in Ukraine, provoked by the Russian aggression, had a negative impact on the project implementation.

COVID-19 affected the project activities in a concrete way. The main influence categories were 1) the impossibility of visits and direct face-to-face interaction and 2) slowing down of project activities and progress. These were strongly related. Negative effects were minimised by utilising remote connections and developing remote solutions.

Another main challenge for the projects was the impact of the cut-off in cross-border co-operation caused by the Russian unjustified military aggression against Ukraine. This cut off all co-operation with the Russian partners and actors. The effect largely depended on what stage the projects were in at the time. In the worst cases, the projects were practically left unfinished. But however, generally, the projects adapted to the situation and changed their project plans and operations in such a way that the projects could be completed on the Finnish side. In those projects that were nearing the end at the time of cut-off, the effects of the termination of the collaboration provoked by the Russian aggression remained the least. The termination of the collaboration provoked by the Russian aggression made it impossible to

reach the project goals for most of Programme projects (ongoing projects at the time). Only 22% of respondents saw that it had no affection. The termination of cross-border co-operation resulted in damages for the Finnish beneficiaries according to 38% of respondents. In almost half of the cases caused damages from the termination of cross-border co-operation were minimised successfully according to the project beneficiaries.

Although operations were hindered by the challenges discussed above, there were practices, results and lessons attained in SEFR CBC project work that are considered useful in possible future co-operation. It was emphasised that the focus must be directed geographically elsewhere now, for example to Nordic and European regional co-operation, and utilise what has been learned in SEFR CBC elsewhere. Programme was an important element supporting the vitality of the region on the Finnish side. In Finland, programme area needs new replacement activities that increase regions' vitality. In this way, the know-how gained in Programme could be promoted and utilised by the beneficiaries.

## TIIVISTELMÄ

Viime vuosikymmeninä EU:n alue- ja koheesiopolitiikalla on rohkaistu Euroopan unionin jäsenvaltioiden alueita tekemään yhteistyötä ja osallistumaan horisontaalisiin oppimisprosesseihin. Kaakkois-Suomi – Venäjä ENI CBC 2014-2020 -ohjelma on jatkanut Suomen puolella Etelä-Karjalan, Etelä-Savon ja Kymenlaakson sekä Venäjän puolella Leningradin alueen ja Pietarin ohjelmajohdosta yhteistyötä. Ohjelman liittämissä alueita ovat Suomessa Pohjois-Karjala, Pohjois-Savo, Päijät-Häme ja Uusimaa sekä Venäjällä Karjalan tasavalta. Ohjelman yleisenä tavoitteena on edistää taloudellista ja sosiaalista kehitystä, lieventää yhteisiä haasteita ja edistää alueellisesti merkittävien toimijoiden liikkuvuutta rajat ylittävän yhteistyön ja ohjelma-alueen kestävien edellytysten edelleen parantamiseksi.

Arviointiraportti sisältää jälkiarvioinnin ohjelmasta, jota on toteutettu Suomen ja Venäjän rajalla EU:n ohjelmakaudella 2014–2020. Ulkoisen arvioinnin painopiste on ohjelman saavutusten ja tulosten arvioinnissa. Tämä yhteenveto perustuu arvioinnin tärkeimpiin havaintoihin. Arvioinnin toteutti TK-Eval ohjelman hallintoviranomaisen toimeksiannosta marraskuun 2023 ja toukokuun 2024 välisenä aikana. Arviointiryhmään kuuluivat TK-Evalin erikoistutkijat Tommi Ålander ja Keimo Sillanpää.

Arviointiin asetettuihin arviointikysymyksiin vastattiin tarkastelemalla olemassa olevaa dokumentoitua aineistoa sekä suorittamalla oma tiedonkeruu ja -analyysi. Käytössä olleiden arviointimenetelmien avulla saatiin tietoa hyödyistä, joita ohjelma on tuonut hankekumppaneille, hankkeen edunsaajille ja ohjelma-alueille.

Kaakkois-Suomi – Venäjä ENI CBC 2014-2020 -ohjelmalla saavutettiin pääosin ohjelmadokumentissa asetetut tavoitearvot ja usein ylitettiin ne. Tätä voidaan pitää ohjelmalla onnistumisena. Tavoitteet saavutettiin toimintalinjoissa 1–3, mutta toimintalinjassa 4 asetettuja tavoitteita ei saavutettu kokonaan. Suurimmat tavoitteiden ylittämiset nähtiin toimintalinjoissa 1–3 osallistuvien henkilöiden ja yritysten määrässä. Suurimmat puutteet tavoitteiden saavuttamisessa havaittiin toimintalinjassa 4, jossa rajanylityspisteiden läheisyydessä sijaitsevien uusien tai kunnostettujen teiden tavoitteen osalta jäätiin 13 % tavoitellusta ja rajanylityspaikkojen parantamisen tavoitteen osalta 75 %.

Ohjelman tavoitteista saavutettiin ja ylitettiin henkilö- ja organisaatiomääriä sisältäneet tavoitteet. Voidaan kuitenkin havaita, että ohjelmalle asetetut määrälliset tavoitteet olivat jossain määrin vaatimattomia. Kun hankkeiden toteutumista tarkasteltiin hankkeiden itsensä hankkeille asettamiin tavoitearvoihin nähden, tällöinkin henkilö- ja organisaatiomääriä sisältäneet tavoitteet täyttyivät pääosin, mutta muun tyyppisten indikaattoreiden osalta jäätiin tavoitearvoista. Merkittävät syyt tähän löytyivät koronapandemiasta ja Venäjän Ukrainaa vastaan aloittamasta sodasta johtuneesta venäläisten osapuolten sulkemisesta pois ohjelmasta. Yhteistyön päättyminen vaikutti voimakkaasti mahdollisuuteen saavuttaa asetetut tavoitearvot, ja näin ollen lopulta niiden tarkastelulle ei löytynyt enää perusteita. Erityisesti toimintalinjan 1 (rajan yli toimivien pk-yritysten määrän kasvu) ja 4 (jonotusajan lyheneminen rajanylityspaikoilla) indikaattorit olivat epärelevantteja täysin muuttuneesta tilanteesta. Toimintalinjojen 2 (tietointensiivisen koulutustason nousu) ja 3 (parantuneet asuin ympäristöt + virkistysalueiden lisääntynyt määrä) indikaattoreihin oli mahdotonta löytää vertailukelpoista indikaattoreihin tai tilastoihin perustuvaa näyttöä. Näistä syistä asiaa tarkasteltiin hankkeen edunsaajilta kerätyn laadullisen aineiston avulla.

Hankkeiden edunsaajien näkemysten mukaan toimintalinjatason indikaattorit toteutuivat vain melko kohtuullisella tasolla. Toteuma oli selvästi parhain tietointensiivisen koulutustason

nousussa. Onnistumisia nähtiin selvästi vähemmän toimintalinjojen 3 ja 4 indikaattoreissa. Heikoin toteuma oli toimintalinjassa 1. Rajan yli toimivien pk-yritysten määrä ja uudet yritysinvestoinnit olivat tavoitteita, joissa harvemmin syntyi tulosta aiemmin esille tulleiden haasteiden vuoksi. Arvioinnissa tehtiin lisäksi vertailuja hankkeiden osalta. Tarkastelussa vertailtiin niitä hankkeita, jotka olivat vielä käynnissä Venäjän aloittaessa sodan Ukrainaa vastaan niihin hankkeisiin, joissa hankkeiden toteutus oli päättynyt ennen sodan alkua. Ennen sodan alkua toteutetut hankkeet saavuttivat suunniteltuja tavoitteita paremmin.

Kaikki tärkeiksi koetut teemat oli saatu mukaan ohjelmaan. Sidosryhmien näkemyksen mukaan joitakin yksittäisiä teemoja jäi pois ohjelmasta, mutta mitään isoa ja tärkeää teemaa ei ohjelmasta puuttunut. Tähän vaikutti omalta osaltaan se, että rajat ylittävällä yhteistyöllä on pitkä historia, mikä näkyi vahvoina toimijaverkostoina ja kumppanuuksina, ja hankkeita on toteutettu useiden ohjelmakausien aikana. Tämä näkyi myös siinä, että toimijat tiedostavat hyvin sen, mitkä ovat puuttuvat palat ja tärkeät aiheet rajanylittävässä yhteistyössä. Mukana olevien toimijoiden korkea keskinäinen luottamus edesauttoi myös vahvan yhteistyön toteutumista ohjelmatoimijoiden sisällä (niin kumppanien välillä kuin hallintoviranomaisen kanssa).

Projektien pitkän aikavälin hyödyt voitiin jakaa pääsääntöisesti kolmeen ryhmään. 1) Parannukset ja ratkaisut opiskeluun ja oppimiseen liittyvissä asioissa. Tässä kontekstissa oli havaittavissa asioita (jotka ovat nyt käytössä hankkeiden päättymisen jälkeen) kuten, kehitetyt verkkokurssit, oppimisympäristöt, opetussuunnitelmat sekä konkreettiset kehitetyt oppimista tukevat materiaalit, kuten pelit, videot, podcastit jne. 2) Hankkeiden avustuksella tehdyt investoinnit. Nämä olivat usein infra-investointeja esimerkiksi liittyen erilaisiin laitteisiin, rakennuksiin, liikennejärjestelyihin, teihin, retkeilyinfraan jne. Lisäksi investointeja tehtiin luonnon ennallistamiseen ja luontomatkailuun. Investoinnit nähtiin usein toimijoiden keskuudessa pysyvämpinä vaikutuksina. 3) Yhteistyöverkoston syntyminen ja hyödyntäminen hankkeissa mukana olevien suomalaisten tahojen kesken. Korostettuja etuja olivat esimerkiksi oppilaitosten ja yritysten välinen yhteistyö ja parhaissa tapauksissa yhteistyö on johtanut ideoiden ja testattujen asioiden edelleen kehittämiseen.

Tuloksia ja vaikutuksia tarkasteltiin myös hanketoimintaan osallistuneiden organisaatioiden oman hyödyn näkökulmasta. Tästä näkökulmasta tulokset ja hyödyt voitiin ryhmitellä seuraavasti: 1) osaamisen ja kokemuksen kasvu, 2) hankkeiden avustuksella tehdyt investoinnit ja 3) yhteistyöverkoston syntyminen ja hyödyntäminen suomalaisten toimijoiden kesken. Organisaatioiden kokemat hyödyt olivat siten hyvin samansuuntaisia kuin projektien pitkän aikavälin hyödyt.

Case-hankkeiden avulla toteutetussa lähemmässä tarkastelussa tuli esille myös projektitoiminnan tuloksia ja vaikutuksia. Toimintalinjassa 1 tulokset voidaan tiivistää kahteen kategoriaan: 1) luodut toiminnalliset tilat ja niihin liittyvät toiminnot ja 2) lisääntynyt tietämys ja paremmat olosuhteet matkailulle. Esimerkiksi Green Belt -hankkeessa perustettiin kaksi Green Belt -keskusta ja joista ainakin suomeen perustettu keskus toimii edelleen. Toimintalinjan 2 case-hankkeet lisäsivät erityisesti osallistujien ja sidosryhmien osaamista ja tietämystä esimerkiksi koulutustoimien, digitaalisen alustan kehittämisen, analyysien, testausmenetelmien, liittoutumien luomisen jne. avulla. Toinen asia, joka yhdisti tämän toimintalinjan case-hankkeet, oli opettajien ja opiskelijoiden osallistuminen hankkeisiin ja sitä kautta kehitystyöhön. Tapaustutkimusten avulla tunnistetut tärkeimmät tulokset voitiin tiivistää: 1) tiedon ja taitojen lisääntyminen, 2) kehitetyt koulutusohjelmat/opetussuunnitelmat, jotka ovat nyt käytössä ja 3) kokemus ja kertynyt tieto, jota käytetään jatkohankkeissa.

Toimintalinjassa 3 case-hankkeiden päätulokset voitiin tiivistää seuraavasti: 1) infrastruktuuri sekä kehitetyt ja pilotoidut "asiat" ja 2) lisääntynyt tietämys. Esimerkiksi SIMREC-projektissa koottiin hankkeen keskeiset tulokset tiekartan muotoon. Hankkeessa tehty työ johti myös simulaattoreihin liittyvän koulutustoiminnan kehittämiseen. Tuloksina nähtiin, että viranomaiskoulutuksia on kehitetty edelleen. Tulokset näkyivät myös opetuksessa. Hankkeessa kehitettyä materiaalia käytetään nyt opetuksessa ja hanke vaikutti siihen, että asioita on standardoitu. Toimintalinjassa 4 case-hankkeiden päätulokset liittyivät investointeihin. Valituista kahdesta tapaushankkeesta toinen oli suuri rajanylityksen sujuvuutta parantava infrastruktuurihanke (Vainikkala). Vainikkala-hanke paransi rajanylityspaikan teoreettista kapasiteettia, mutta nyt liikennettä ei yksinkertaisesti ole tarpeeksi, jotta rajanylityspaikan parantuneesta kapasiteetista saataisiin luotettavaa käytännön tason tietoa.

Suomalaisten koulutus- ja tutkimusorganisaatioiden osallistuminen hanketoimintaan oli erittäin merkittävää ohjelman toiminnan kannalta. Nämä organisaatiot olivat usein hankkeiden pääpartnereita ja partnereita. Myös erilaiset julkiset toimijat olivat varsin tärkeässä roolissa ohjelman hanketoiminnassa. Pääpartnerius keskittyi Suomen puolella Etelä-Karjalaan. Yksi havaittava piirre ohjelmatoimijoissa oli myös se, että yksityisen sektorin toimijat puuttuivat pääsääntöisesti ohjelman hankkeiden partnereista.

Täydentävyys oli yksi tapaustutkimushaastatteluissa käsitellyistä kysymyksistä. Täydentävyyden periaatteella pyritään estämään päällekkäiset toimet ja kannustamaan EU:n ohjelmien välistä yhteistyötä. Tulokset eivät antaneet näyttöä päällekkäisyyksistä, mikä viittaisi eri EU-varojen käyttöön samojen toimenpiteiden rahoittamiseen. Täydentävyyden toteutumisessa näkyi kokemus sekä EU-ohjelmien välinen tehokas työnjako. Synergioiden osalta positiivisimmat esimerkit liittyivät tapauksiin, joissa ohjelmasta rahoitettujen projektien kehityskaaret ovat jatkuneet muiden EU-ohjelmien avulla.

Arvioinnissa ilmeni useissa yhteyksissä kaksi ohjelmaan negatiivisesti vaikuttanutta asiaa: koronapandemian vaikutus ohjelman toteuttamiseen ja rajat ylittävän yhteistyön lopettamisen vaikutus Venäjän Ukrainaa vastaan aloittaman sodan seurauksena. Erityisesti koronapandemia vaikeutti hankkeissa yhteistyötä. 94 % hankkeista oli vahvasti tai jossain määrin tämän näkemyksen kannalla. Suurin osa hankkeista ilmaisi myös geopoliittisen tilanteen kielteisen vaikutuksen hankkeen toteutukseen.

Koronapandemia vaikutti hankkeen toimintaan konkreettisella tavalla. Tärkeimmät vaikutukset olivat 1) vierailujen ja suoran kasvokkaisen vuorovaikutuksen mahdottomuus ja 2) projektitoiminnan ja ylipäänsä edistymisen hidastuminen. Nämä liittyivät vahvasti toisiinsa. Kielteisiä vaikutuksia minimoitiin onnistuneesti hyödyntämällä etäyhteyksiä ja kehittämällä etäratkaisuja, jotka ovat menneet paljon eteenpäin tästä syystä.

Toinen suuri haaste hanketoiminnalle oli Venäjän perusteettomasti aloittaman sodan Ukrainaa vastaan aiheuttaman rajat ylittävän yhteistyön katkeamisen vaikutus ohjelman toteutukseen. Ukrainan sota katkaisi kaiken yhteistyön venäläisten kumppaneiden ja toimijoiden kanssa. Vaikutuksen taso on pitkälti riippuvainen siitä, missä vaiheessa projektit sodan alkamishetkellä olivat. Pahimmassa tapauksessa projektit jäivät käytännössä kesken. Mutta yleisesti ottaen hankkeet sopeutuivat hyvin tilanteeseen ja muuttivat hankesuunnitelmiaan ja toimintaansa siten, että hankkeet saatiin päätökseen Suomen puolella. Sodan aiheuttama yhteistyön katkeaminen teki mahdottomaksi suurimmalle osalle ohjelman hankkeista (tuolloin käynnissä olleet hankkeet) saavuttaa täysin hankkeen tavoitteita. Vain noin 22 % hanketoimijoista näki, ettei sillä ollut vaikutusta heidän toimintaansa. Rajat ylittävän yhteistyön lopettaminen aiheutti

vahinkoja suomalaisille edunsaajille noin 38 % tapauksista. Lähes puolessa tapauksista rajat ylittävän yhteistyön lopettamisesta aiheutuneet vahingot minimoitiin onnistuneesti hanketoteuttajien mukaan.

Vaikka yllä mainitut haasteet haittasivatkin vahvasti hanketoimintaa, hankkeissa saatiin aikaan käytäntöjä, tuloksia ja oppeja, jotka nähtiin hyödyllisiksi mahdollisessa tulevassa yhteistyössä. Toimijat korostivat, että painopiste on nyt suunnattava muualle kansainvälisessä yhteistyössä, esimerkiksi pohjoismaiseen ja eurooppalaiseen alueyhteistyöhön. Ja näin ollen hankkeissa testattua ja opittua voidaan hyödyntää muualla. Ohjelman voidaan sanoa olleen tärkeä osa ohjelma-alueen elinvoimaisuutta Suomen puolella. Suomessa ohjelma-alue tarvitsee uusia alueen elinvoimaisuutta lisääviä korvaavia toimia. Tällä tavoin ohjelman hyödynsaajien hankkima osaaminen voitaisiin edelleen hyödyntää.

## 1. INTRODUCTION

This report provides an ex-post evaluation of the South-East Finland - Russia CBC 2014-2020 (SEFR CBC), which has been implemented on the Finnish-Russian border during the EU's 2014-2020 Programme period. TK-Eval was commissioned by the Managing Authority of Programme in November 2023 to carry out the evaluation and produce the report. The main purpose of this exercise is to provide an overall independent assessment of the effectiveness and impacts of the implementation of Programme. The assessment, and this report, thus, aim to help the key programme stakeholders on both national and regional levels to further improve the implementation of future CBC programmes. The sources of information utilised by the evaluators in their analysis included written documents and reports, indicator data, surveys among the project participants and the members of the JMC/JSC and interest groups of Programme as well as in-depth, semi-structured interviews with beneficiaries and partners of Programme.

### 1.1. Background

#### European Territorial co-operation

During the last 30 years, EU regional and cohesion policy has encouraged regions in the European Union member states to work together and engage in horizontal learning processes. The main idea underpinning the launching of the first Interreg initiative in 1990, initially a Community Initiative that has since been mainstreamed into Cohesion Policy, underlined the common conviction that borders between states should not hinder the balanced development and integration of the European territory. The underlying argument is that peripherality and isolation of border regions is mainly the result of borders artificially cutting off border communities economically, socially and culturally, thereby hampering balanced and harmonious development. Sometimes border areas are also neglected in national policymaking. Territorial co-operation, facilitating direct and inter-regional contacts can provide significant stimulus for synergies and develop impulses through co-operation, networking, joint problem-solving and region-building; all contributing to effective harnessing of existing and potential development opportunities and integrating formerly disconnected borderlands. Cross-border, transnational and interregional co-operation takes place under European Territorial Co-operation (ETC) that is an established strand of the EU Cohesion Policy framework, being financed by the European Regional Development Fund (ERDF).

Territorial co-operation and macro-regional initiatives are seen as specific ways in which to achieve territorial cohesion within a new policy space, also across the external borders of the EU. The scope for reinforcing cross-border co-operation has developed even more as an item of importance after the enlargements of the EU in 2004 and 2007, as the number of both internal and external borders has increased. Cross-border co-operation across the Finnish-Russian border has a relatively long tradition and has evolved since the early 1990s under different framework conditions and in parallel with important political and socio-economic developments on both sides of the border. After the collapse of the Soviet Union, Finland initiated its own CBC instrument in form of the so-called Neighbouring Area Co-operation (Lähialueyhteistyö), which started in 1992 and ran until 2012. The EU entered the picture in 1995 when Finland's accession qualified the country for the Interreg Community Initiative. The northern sparsely populated areas also increasingly presented their territorial specificities and resultant aims jointly towards the EC, for example by drawing attention to the problems

for service provision and economic activity brought about by ‘sparsity’, i.e. the lack of people within a certain amount of distance and remoteness from economic centres.

A major step towards CBC on this first EU-Russia land border was when a CBC component was added to the Tacis programme for which Russia had been eligible since 1991 (Technical Assistance for the Commonwealth of Independent States). This, however, involved a rather awkward combination of an internal Community Initiative (Interreg) with EU external policy principles and funding, which also entailed difficulties in the concrete application of these tools for the purpose of CBC in this region. Driven by these experienced difficulties, the EU Neighbourhood Programme (2004-2006), ENPI Programme instrument (2007-2013) and ENI Programme instrument (2014-2020) have progressively simplified the cross-border dimension of co-operation through successive administrative reforms which have brought the governance of CBC Programmes on the external borders closer to the practices at the internal borders of the EU.

However, in recent years CBC across the Finnish-Russian border has experienced a number of challenges. In 2014, after the Russian annexation of Crimea, the inclusion of the CBC Programmes with Russia into the sanctions was discussed. The COVID pandemic starting in 2020 posed a challenge to collaborative work within the projects with much of the interaction moving online. Finally, following the Russian unjustified military aggression against Ukraine in February 2022, the European Commission decided to suspend co-operation with Russia and Belarus, although EU beneficiaries were able to continue project work as long as activities and financial flows on the Russian and Belarusian were ceased.

### **The South-East Finland - Russia CBC 2014-2020**

There are 15 ENI CBC Programmes in existence along the EU’s eastern and southern external borders. The South-East Finland – Russia CBC 2014-2020 is one of three ENI CBC Programmes operating between Finland and Russia, the other two being Karelia ENI CBC and Kolarctic ENI CBC. The South-East Finland – Russia CBC 2014-2020 eligible programme area includes the regions of Kymenlaakso, South Karelia and South Savo in Finland and the Leningrad region and the City of Saint Petersburg in Russia. The adjacent regions include the regions of Uusimaa, Päijät-Häme, North Savo, North Karelia in Finland and the Republic of Karelia in Russia. In addition to these, partners located in the cities of Turku and Moscow may participate to the projects with some limitations in the use of financial frame and roles of partnership. Starting from March 2022, the participation of Republic of Karelia, Leningrad Region and Saint-Petersburg is suspended.

The total population of programme area is more than seven million inhabitants. On the Finnish side, core programme area has approx. 466 000 inhabitants and on the Russian side 6,9 million inhabitants. In programme area, Finland and Russia share approximately 200 km of land and 130 km of sea border. The South-East Finland – Russia CBC 2014-2020 core area covers 117 538 km<sup>2</sup>. The total coverage is 85 900 km<sup>2</sup> on the Russian side and 32 000 km<sup>2</sup> on the Finnish side. Programme total funding frame is 77 509 964 euros including 36 146 782 from the EC. The Finnish national co-financing amounts to 23 289 791 euros, and the Russian national funding for Programme is 18 073 391 euros. The number of contracted projects is 71, nine of which are Large Infrastructure Projects (LIPs) and 62 standard projects. As a response to the pandemic restrictions, the European Commission made changes to the Implementing Regulation in 2020. Among these adjustments was an extension of Programme's implementation period by one year, now reaching until the close of 2023.

Consequently, all Programme closure activities are required to conclude by the end of September 2024.



**Figure 1.** The South-East Finland - Russia CBC 2014-2020 programme area (sefrcbc.fi).

The Regional Council of South Karelia in Finland has been designated by the participating countries to serve as the Managing Authority (MA) for Programme. The MA assumes the responsibility for the daily oversight of Programme, which encompasses tasks such as managing project selection procedures and entering Grant Contracts with the Lead Partners of projects. Furthermore, the MA's role includes vigilant tracking and monitoring of project implementation, overseeing financial management and payment processes, as well as managing communication and information dissemination activities. The Managing Authority has also established a Branch Office in Saint Petersburg, Russia. The Russian Branch Office was closed at the end of March 2022 due to the Russian military aggression against Ukraine.

At the top of Programme's decision-making structure is the Joint Monitoring Committee, responsible for supervising Programme implementation, reviewing plans and reports from the Managing Authority, approving project selection criteria, and making final decisions on project selection. To ensure thorough evaluation of project proposals, the Committee has formed Regional Assessment Groups within participating countries. The Joint Monitoring Committee includes representatives from central governments and regional entities in each participating country and region. The Russian members were suspended from the Committee's work since February 2022.

The overall objective of SEFR CBC is *to contribute to economic and social development, mitigate common challenges and promote mobility among actors of regional relevance to further improve cross-border co-operation and the sustainable prerequisites of the programme area.* The overall objective will be achieved with improved competitiveness, increased economic activity, knowledge-based economy, skilled labour force, high-level cultural events and tourism, pure nature and waters, easy mobility, good transport corridors, smooth and modern border crossing points. These are also the principal regional needs identified in the regional strategies.

Four themes chosen for Programme:

- 1. Business and SME development** (Strategic objective A), TO1
- 2. Support to education, research, technological development and innovation** (Strategic objective A), TO2
- 3. Environmental protection, and climate change mitigation and adaptation** (Strategic objective B), TO6
- 4. Promotion of border management and border security, mobility, and migration management** (Strategic objective C), TO10

The common focus of any action carried out with the support of Programme is on cross-border co-operation, environmental sustainability, and gender equality.

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## 2. BACKGROUND FOR EVALUATION

### 2.1. The evaluation team

TK-Eval (Kuopio, Finland) was selected to provide an independent assessment of the effectiveness and impacts of Programme implementation. The evaluation team includes Tommi Ålander (responsible evaluator) and Keimo Sillanpää from TK-Eval. The evaluation was conducted between December 2023 and May 2024.

### 2.2. Overall aims and objectives

According to Terms of Reference specifications, Programme evaluation must provide an overall independent assessment about the **effectiveness** and **impacts** of the implementation of Programme to serve the decision makers on both national and regional level in the implementation of future CBC Programmes. It is essential to acknowledge that the operating landscape of SEFR CBC has undergone significant shifts. Russia's invasion of Ukraine led to substantial changes. In response, the European Commission, in early March 2022, suspended the Financing Agreements that had been established for the CBC programmes between the European Union and the Russian Federation. Consequently, this suspension halted the participation of Russian beneficiaries in project implementation and the involvement of Russian Federation representatives in Programme execution. This disruption was compounded by the prior impact of the COVID-19 pandemic on Programme implementation. While the primary focus of the evaluation remains on **Programme's performance**, it is imperative to adjust the perspective to account for the influence of these global crises on Programme execution. The findings of this evaluation inform policy development and strategy formulation, as they offer insights into what has worked well and what areas require attention. This data can guide the creation of more effective (co-)financing mechanisms and financing instruments.

The purpose of the evaluation is described in more detail as follows:

The main objective of the evaluation is to independently assess Programme implementation, effectiveness, and impacts **in the Finnish parts of Programme area**. During the evaluation of Programme impact, attention will be centred on the Finnish parts of programme area. However, when appraising aspects like project selection, the assessment shall encompass the entire programme area. This broader perspective will gauge how project selection aligns with the objectives outlined in the Joint Operational Programme and whether it ensures equitable representation across all participating regions. The evaluation is expected to primarily examine **achievements and results**, seeking evidence of their connection to Programme implementation and identifying factors driving or hindering progress.

As such, Programme can be viewed as having **two phases of implementation**:

- 1) The CBC phase, dictated by the Joint Operational Programme, and
- 2) Programme implementation disruption phase, when the Financing Agreements between the EU and its Member States and the Russian Federation was suspended, and Programme started operating under the updated legal framework (specific provisions).

The shift between these two phases can be considered to have occurred on 24 February 2022, even though the Financing Agreements were officially suspended on 10 March 2022. The new

regulation, which entered into force in November 2022, has been written by the Commission to support the implementation of the programmes during the second phase.

According to the Tor, the evaluation should take into account both phases of the implementation. From this perspective, the evaluation of the first phase should look for evidence of relevance and alignment with the Joint Operational Programme, as well as the the pandemic's impact on performance and the attainment of planned Programme results. Coming to the second phase, the evaluation extends beyond risk reduction to examine Programme's resilience, relevance, and its impact for Finland, taking into account the evolving needs in this new context.

The evaluation shall cover SEFR CBC and its implementation during the programme period. It is structured around key issues and additional themes that constitute the thematic scope of the evaluation, divided into two main parts: **Below is a list of key issues and certain additional themes that form the thematic scope of the evaluation. The thematic frame of the evaluation can be divided into two parts: 1) assessment of Programme performance and outcomes, and 2) broader context and external factors.**

Assessment of Programme Performance and Outcomes:

- Assessing how well Programme activities and achieved outcomes align with the priority axes and thematic objectives stipulated in the Joint Operational Programme.
- Evaluating the pertinence of Programme activities and realised results concerning the horizontal modalities and cross-cutting issues delineated in the Joint Operational Programme.
- Scrutinising the efficiency of activities and the durability of outcomes and their effects within the programme area in Finland.
- Examining the regional influence: Understanding how Programme activities' effects materialise in various regions within Finland. This stage involves reviewing and computing Programme result indicators specified for each priority axis. It's worth noting that due to Programme disruption, a direct comparison with predetermined target values may not be feasible, but a comprehensive analysis remains essential.

Wider circumstances:

- Examining how the Russian invasion of Ukraine, which led to the suspension of cross-border co-operation, has affected the implementation of Programme.
- Assessing Programme's alignment with other EU regional development instruments and its compatibility with the goals of international co-operation forums.

The finalised set of evaluation questions are:

- What enduring advantages have the participating regions in Finland gained from Programme, considering the current pause in EU-Russia territorial collaboration?
- How effectively has Programme adhered to the horizontal principles outlined in the Joint Operational Programme?
- In retrospect, which Programme objectives remained unattained, and were these failures attributed to implementation disruptions or other causes?
- Considering Programme's conclusion, what enduring impact and lessons can be discerned for future regional initiatives and interregional co-operation?
- To what degree has Programme succeeded in realizing its goals, while accounting for any distractions during implementation?

- In the light of the changed circumstances, what may the future landscape of the Finnish regions look like?
- What insights and experiences can be extracted from this Programme to inform the development of novel funding mechanisms and co-operative strategies?
- Have there been any unforeseen positive outcomes or unintended consequences that have emerged as a result of Programme?
- What challenges did Programme encounter in its execution, and how were these obstacles effectively addressed?
- How has the community's perception of Programme evolved over time, and how has it influenced Programme's overall success?
- Can the valuable practices and lessons learned from this Programme be translated into practical applications for other cross-border collaboration initiatives?
- What key recommendations can be proposed to enhance the design and implementation of future cross-border co-operation endeavors?

### 2.3. Methodological approach

The evaluation of Programme was an interactive process between the client and the external evaluators. Quantitative (structured questionnaires) and qualitative (semi-structured interviews) research methods were applied and obtained data was analysed with the help of triangulation (i.e. cross-checking of findings on the basis of different sources of information). Triangulation allowed the evaluators to identify and verify highly significant data on background factors and territorial aspects of Programme's implementation.

The evaluation methods were based on a customer-oriented approach that provides knowledge on the benefit that SEFR CBC has delivered to the final beneficiaries, the project partners and the programme regions. A customer-oriented approach was emphasised throughout the evaluation process. In order to obtain useful information on project process, successes and failures, the customers and other participants should be closely involved in the evaluation process. The evaluation will not only include the tangible and measurable results of activities with regard to projects, but if possible, also their spill-over benefits that may improve the customers' economic, social and human development. The intention is to allow different groups to identify changes resulting from the projects. The key question was whether they have benefited and also what the projects' strengths and weaknesses were. Triangulation (see figure 3) was used to compare the group information.

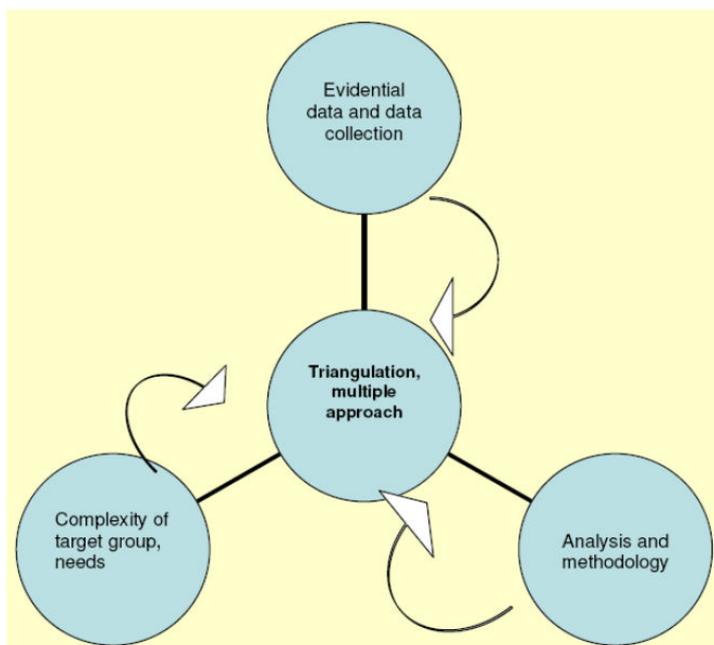
There was a variety of concepts applied to differentiate between various types of stakeholders, beneficiaries, or customers. In this evaluation, the evaluators applied the following terminology based on a customer-oriented evaluation approach:

1. Stakeholders: Individuals or institutions that may, directly or indirectly, positively or negatively, affect or be affected by a project or programme
2. Beneficiaries: Those who benefit in whatever way from the implementation of the project. Distinction may be made between:
  - a. Target group(s): The group/entity who will be directly positively affected by the project at the Project Purpose level. This may include the staff from partner organisations
  - b. Final beneficiaries: Those who benefit from the project in the long term at the level of the society or sector at large, e.g. consumers because of improved agricultural production and marketing.

3. Project partners: Those who implement the projects (who are also stakeholders and may be a target group)
4. Regions: Those regions that are defined as belonging to SEFR CBC programme area

Programme's capability and capacity to support different customers at the project level was a guiding principle in the evaluation methodology. A strong emphasis in the evaluation process was on the learning process, which will be informed by interviews and questionnaires targeted at customers at all levels in both participating countries. A strong overall theme was the importance of interaction in both learning and codifying; as well as generating new knowledge. Learning is not only important at the individual level, but also at the institutional level. Therefore, the findings of the evaluation at Programme and the project level will not only contribute meeting the objective of accountability, but also feed into learning processes and policy choices.

When approaching the evaluation process at the project implementation level, we should bear in mind the mutual nature of development policies. On the one hand, development policies deal with quantifiable effects, and, on the other hand, with the explanations of emerged effects. Particular methods help to explain and understand the intended and unintended effects of various interventions. Other methods help to establish explanations for the intervention that possibly has generated acquired change. It is of utmost importance to identify and estimate the causal effects between these two strands. In the evaluation process, causality is an important dimension in order to determine what is taken to be an intervention and what is taken to be the outcome produced by the intervention, i.e. its impacts or effects. Therefore, the evaluators were convinced that the approach to successful impact analysis is a triangulation of methods that allows grasping all the above-described dimensions successfully. This principle is called triangulation because it allows the usage of more than two approaches and combines different research methods to give a range of perspectives (figure below).



**Figure 2.** The Triangulation Evaluation Method.

The triangulation of methods applies quantitative and qualitative procedures for data collection. This procedure allows highly significant data with respect to the generality of the findings to be emphasised, and also of gaining more sensitive information, delivering general statements about background factors and also territorial aspects. Another advantage of the combination of quantitative and qualitative methods is that there is a real added value because the information from both data collecting procedures is not compiled in separation. This process also generates cross-references between datasets, thus validating each other. In the evaluation process of SEFR CBC, questionnaires and interviews are specifically structured as quantitative and qualitative data collecting instruments, so that identical aspects regarding contents can be commented from different perspectives. In this manner, comparisons can be applied using data interpretation. Connections or discrepancies between the different perspectives of those questioned can be determined and discussed.

Methodologically the evaluation process needs first to draw on the critical review of the annual reports of Programme in order to capture perspectives on the specific features of SEFR CBC. This is necessary in order to broaden access to actual intrinsic performance of Programme. Generally, this will be the starting point for the more specific evaluation process. The approach chosen in this evaluation task was both realistic and pragmatic. Evaluators' intention was to deliver an accurate evaluation based on quantitative and qualitative evidence collected at levels as close as possible to the final beneficiaries of Programme. At the same time, findings were expected to be robust thanks to the mobilisation of a methodology as rigorous and sound as possible.

The specific methodology for evaluation of programme implementation and operationalisation is comprised of:

1. Desk based research concentrated on programme documents, annual reports and other relevant programme sources.
2. A survey was carried out to differentiate a) programme demand and supply and b) actors who are involved in the coordination and management of programme. There are direct and indirect beneficiaries (policy makers, practitioners) as regards to programme implementation and impact. This method also forms base for the case studies.
3. Semi-structured interviews employed with the most relevant stakeholders at both programme and project level to validate the results of two previous steps. Interviews were used making the case studies in the evaluation.

## 2.4. Conducting the evaluation

The following table shows the concrete phases done in the evaluation, including the applied methods and produced output. In addition, short descriptions of how each phase was done is provided.

**Table 1.** The Phases of the evaluation process.

| Phases of the Evaluation |   |
|--------------------------|---|
| Phase 1                  | Inception discussion  |
| <b>Method</b>            | Kick-off meeting with the client online.  |
| <b>Output</b>            | Detailed work plan for the evaluation and for the analysis of reference documents, indicating specific outputs and briefing papers. Inception report after the meeting.   |
| Phase 2                  | Strategic analysis of reference documents   |
| <b>Method</b>            | Desk analysis (Analysis using e.g. classifying, cross-tabulation, ratio calculations (frequency analysis), comparative analysis, qualitative analysis utilising interpretation).  |
| <b>Output</b>            | Preliminary analysis of the evaluation questions in the light of various documents.   |
| Phase 3                  | Desk analysis according to the evaluation questions   |
| <b>Method</b>            | Desk analysis (Analysis using e.g. classifying, cross-tabulation, comparative analysis, qualitative analysis utilising interpretation).   |
| <b>Output</b>            | Preliminary analysis feeding information to data collection of evaluation   |
| Phase 4                  | Elaboration of data collection  |
| <b>Method</b>            | Desk analysis and consultation with the client. This analysis provided a possibility for the detailed preparation of questionnaires and interview questionnaires and agreement with the client on the specific list of persons and institutions to be interviewed. The analysis was also a preparatory stage for selecting the case studies for deeper analysis.  |
| <b>Output</b>            | Proposal of interviewees including the selection of projects to case studies and final beneficiary interviews. Interview questions and questionnaires.  |
| Phase 5                  | Conducting the data collection  |
| <b>Method</b>            | Interviews, case studies and web-based questionnaires.<br><br>The web-based questionnaires were sent to (a) representatives of the projects (lead partners and partners) and (b) the members of JMC and JSC, and the external group persons representing policy makers and bodies involved in Programme. The questionnaire was sent only to Finnish groups. The questionnaire was conducted in Finnish.<br><br>Case studies were conducted by interviewing project lead partners and projects' final beneficiaries. This data collection was targeted only to Finnish actors. |
| <b>Output</b>            | Database of questionnaires and interviews, case studies   |
| Phase 6                  | Analysis of the collected data  |
| <b>Method</b>            | The results of the questionnaires and interviews were analysed by using both quantitative and qualitative approach. Quantifications were made from the questions when applicable. Qualitative methods were used especially in analysing the open answers.   |

|               |   |
|---------------|---|
| <b>Output</b> | Preliminary analysis to evaluation questions, Case studies giving deeper information about the results and impacts from the projects' partners and beneficiary point of view.   |
| Phase 7       | Synthesising Programme and project level analysis   |
| <b>Method</b> | Analysis of the project level in the evaluation sheds light on significant issues on relevance, consistency, results and impacts of Programme priorities as well as sustainability and durability of Programme. Utilising the methods used in the earlier phases. |
| <b>Output</b> | Analysis feeding input to the evaluation report   |
| Phase 8       | The evaluation report   |
| <b>Method</b> | The evaluation report is based on gathered and analysed material. Summarising all results of previous activities  |
| <b>Output</b> | Final evaluation report in English including summaries in English and Finnish.  |

## 2.5. Database of the evaluation

The data collection of the evaluation was directed at three target groups: 1) representatives of the projects (lead partners and partners), 2) the members of the Joint Selection Committee (JSC) and the Joint Monitoring Committee (JMC) and some interest groups of Programme and 3) beneficiaries of the projects funded by Programme. The evaluation survey for the project representatives was carried out in Finnish. The questionnaire was sent only to Finnish partners. The survey was sent by e-mail to 109 project respondents. Some of the e-mail addresses were incorrect and altogether 73 recipients were reached from Finland. This gave a response rate of 71%. The questionnaire was also sent to associates and interest groups. This group included the members of the Joint Selection Committee and Joint Monitoring Committee as well as and the external group persons representing policy makers and bodies involved in Programme. It was sent to 36 persons. Answers were received from 16 recipients. This gave a response rate of 44%.

Background information of the project questionnaire respondents can be found in the appendix/annex 1.

In addition to desk study, case studies were conducted through a review of the Final Reports (where available) of the case projects and interviews. Interviews were made online or by phone and were targeted especially at lead partners and projects' final beneficiaries. Selection criteria for the sample of beneficiaries as well as selection of the case projects were elaborated in close co-operation with the MA. Through the interviews we particularly aimed at collecting information about the results and sustainability of the selected projects at the organisational level. The sample of cases included projects from different thematic objectives/priorities, projects of different size and content, and managed by different kind of organisations. The sample was extended to the whole programme area in Finnish side. The sample included:

- Priority 1: 4 projects
- Priority 2: 3 projects
- Priority 3: 3 projects
- Priority 4: 2 projects.

This means that for altogether 12 projects (case studies) interviews were conducted. On average, 2 interviews were conducted per case, which result in a total number of 24 interviews.

Russian parties involved in the projects were not interviewed. In some of the case projects, it was not possible to reach other interviewees than the representative of the lead partners, but there was enough information gathered through the lead partner interview and relevant documented material. Not a single case project had to be changed due to accessibility challenges. Altogether 113 persons involved in Programme implementation were reached and their opinions were collected. This number of recipients provided a good background for analysis.

The following table summarises the data collection of the evaluation:

**Table 2.** The data collection of the evaluation.

| The summary of the evaluation data collection |                    |                 |
|---|--------------------|-----------------|
| Data source                                   | Recipients, number | Response rate % |
| The project questionnaire                     | 73                 | 71              |
| The JMC/JSC/interest group questionnaire      | 16                 | 44              |
| Beneficiary interviews (case studies)         | 24                 |                 |
| TOTAL   | 113                |                 |

### 3. FINDINGS OF THE EVALUATION

#### 3.1. Programme performance and outcomes

##### 3.1.1. Results and impacts

Programme total budget for the operating years 2014–2020 was in total ca. 77,5 M€. A total of 71 projects were contracted from Programme. In the situation of December 2023 all final reports were received, and 65 final reports were approved (6 final reports in process -> 2 standard and 4 LIPs). In the following there is some further information about the funding and payments (December 2023, co-financing of project partners is not included in the numbers):

- Committed: 63 209 799 €, uncommitted 7 069 769 €
- Paid: 50 523 064 €
- Approved expenditure: 44 010 567 €

The continuous call for proposals of the South-East Finland – Russia CBC 2014-2020 was closed at the end of 2020 after six rounds of the call were completed and Programme's total funding committed. In total 224 project applications with 932 partners were submitted to six rounds of the call of which 63 projects were approved to be awarded, and of which 62 were finally contracted. In addition, there were 9 Large Infrastructure Projects (LIPs) funded through direct award. The following table shows the projects by calls.

**Table 3.** Projects by calls (Annual Report 2023 Draft, Annex 6) There were a total of 71 contracted projects, so the above mentioned 9 LIPs (funded through the direct award) are missing from the table.

| Projects by calls |           |         |            |
|-------------------|-----------|---------|------------|
|                   | Submitted | Awarded | Contracted |
| Call number 1     | 29        | 10      | 10         |
| Call number 2     | 51        | 10      | 10         |
| Call number 3     | 32        | 10      | 9          |
| Call number 4     | 34        | 11      | 11         |
| Call number 5     | 42        | 13      | 13         |
| Call number 6     | 36        | 9       | 9          |
| Total             | 224       | 63      | 62         |

The following also contains information on the number of funded projects by Programme priorities:

- In the priority 1: 22 standard projects and one LIP have been awarded.
- In the priority 2: 17 standard projects have been awarded.
- In the priority 3: 19 standard projects and two LIPs have been awarded.
- In the priority 4: 4 standard projects and 6 LIPs have been awarded.

In order to monitor the implementation of Programme, output indicators were formed by priorities. The following table summarises the output indicators with target values and realizations (results). The table shows both target values set in the Joint Operational Programme (JOP) and target values set by the projects. Verified value shows the percentage of results in relation to JOP target values.

**Table 4.** Target values and results of Programme Output Indicators (23.11.2023).

| Priorities and Output Indicators  | Result (reported by 23.11.2023) | Verified value vs. JOP, % | Target value JOP | Target value projects |
|---|---------------------------------|---------------------------|------------------|-----------------------|
| <b>Priority 1: Lively, active and competitive economy</b>   |                                 |                           |                  |                       |
| Number of enterprises participating in CB business events   | 1 900                           | 543%                      | 350              | 1 062                 |
| Number of business organisations receiving support for new business opportunities and/or modernizations of businesses | 624                             | 416%                      | 150              | 388                   |
| Number of created structures for regional SME support   | 25                              | 100%                      | 25               | 53                    |
| Number of cross-border economic clusters created  | 13                              | 130%                      | 10               | 27                    |
| <b>Priority 2: Innovative, skilled and well-educated area</b>   |                                 |                           |                  |                       |
| Number of enterprises using Programme support for co-operation with research institutions                             | 172                             | 344%                      | 50               | 199                   |
| Number of persons under 24 years and over 45 years participating in educational events                                | 6 728                           | 673%                      | 1 000            | 4 897                 |
| Number of cross-border curricula created  | 45                              | 225%                      | 20               | 56                    |
| <b>Priority 3: Attractive, clean environment and region</b>   |                                 |                           |                  |                       |
| Number of persons participating in environmental awareness raising activities   | 13 206                          | 426%                      | 3 100            | 14 405                |
| Number of improved systems on water and waste management created  | 59                              | 197%                      | 30               | 81                    |
| <b>Priority 4: Well-connected region</b>  |                                 |                           |                  |                       |
| Total length of reconstructed or upgraded roads in the vicinity of BCPs   | 4                               | 13%                       | 30               | 32                    |
| Number of improved border-crossing points   | 6                               | 75%                       | 8                | 15                    |

SEFR CBC mainly achieved the set target values (set in JOP), and often exceeded these targets. This is what happened in priorities 1-3, but in priority 4 the set targets are not achieved completely. The biggest exceeding of the target were seen in numbers of persons and enterprises participating in priorities 1-3. In priority 1 number of cross-border economic clusters created was 130% in relation to the set target. In priority 2 number of cross-border curricula created was 225% in relation to the set target and in priority 3 number of improved systems on water and waste management created was 197% in relation to the set target. The biggest shortfalls were found in priority 4 where the set target of reconstructed or upgraded roads in the vicinity of BCPs was left in 13% and the set target of improved border-crossing points was left in 75%. In overall, the targets that include number of persons and organisations were met and exceeded. It can be noticed that Programme has thus managed to reach the target group well.

The review of the achievement of goals takes on a slightly different tone when the review was carried out in relation to the goals set by the projects themselves. Actually, this revealed the fact that The JOP indicator targets were somewhat modest. In some indicators it can be seen that project target values were up to five times higher than the target values set in JOP. When the results of the project activity were compared to these project target values, the targets that include number of persons and organisations were met, except for one goal (priority 3, number of persons participating in environmental awareness raising activities), where it was indeed close to the goal. This review showed that other types of indicators, than number of persons and organisations, were fallen short of the target values set by the projects.

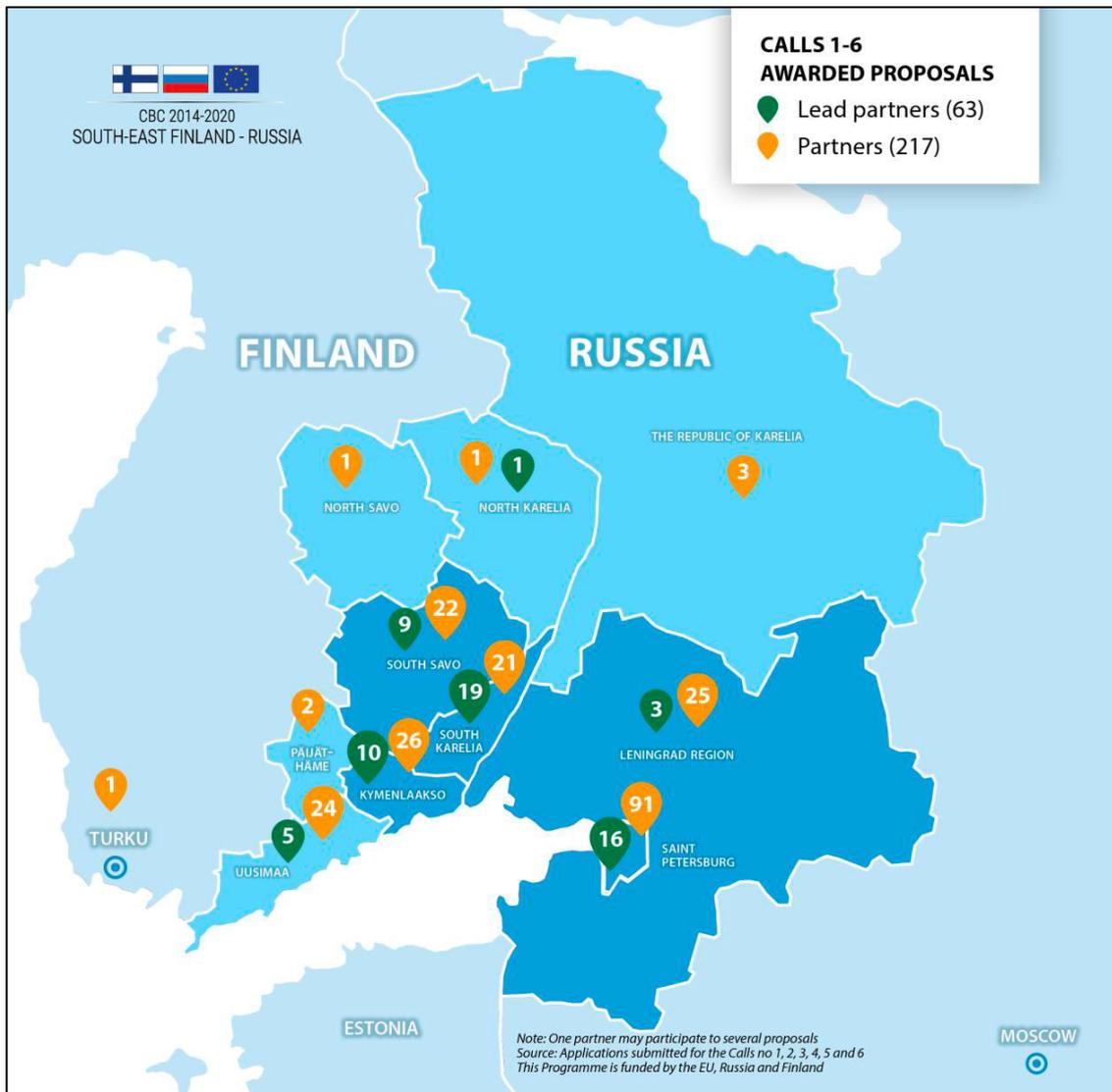
This can be said to be much due to difficulties caused to project implementation by COVID-19 and the suspension of project activities in Russia. Achieving the JOP target values was seen as a potential risk in project reporting. These obstacles had a strong impact on the realization of the projects and on the possibilities of achieving the set goals. These main obstacles are discussed later in this report.

Programme also set purposes/indicators at the priority level (logical framework of Programme):

- Priority 1: Increase in the number of SMEs operating cross-border and number of new business investments
- Priority 2: Increase in knowledge intensive educational level
- Priority 3: Improved living environment + Increased number of recreational areas
- Priority 4: Reduced waiting time on border crossing points

These indicators describe goals on a slightly more general level and their verification is clearly more difficult. Especially the verification of the indicators with the help of statistics, which was the intention, seems impossible, very far due to this situation where the co-operation across the border is suspended. The termination of co-operation affected heavily on these indicators and in that sense, the basis for examining them was already taken away. Particularly indicators in priorities 1 and 4 suffered totally in this situation. In general, in verifying these four indicators, there were also the challenge that the effect that Programme may have is so small that it would actually show up in the possible statistics. The best opportunities for visibility in the statistics would be in priority 4, but when the borders are closed/traffic decreases due to the current situation in Ukraine, provoked by the Russian aggression, it took away this opportunity. However, the activity described by these indicators and its implementation were examined later in this evaluation report with the help of our own data gathering. In particular, the beneficiaries of the projects were asked about the implementation of these issues.

The regional distribution of the organisations involved in SEFR CBC projects (selected for funding) is seen in the following figure. On the Finnish side, especially the lead partners of the projects were often found in South Karelia. The next largest number of lead partners were found in Kymenlaakso and South Savo. It is worth noting that Kymenlaakso and South Savo had an equal number of project partners with South Karelia. Therefore, only the lead partnership focused on South Karelia in Finnish side. On the Russian side, the lead partners and partners were clearly focused on St. Petersburg.



**Figure 3.** Organisations involved in projects selected for funding (Annual Report 2023).

When looking at the partners of the Programme it is noticeable that there was a fairly wide variety of different organisations. Involvement of Finnish educational and research organisations was very significant for the Programme operations. In the lead partners operating in Finland, these clearly made up a significant part. A reasonable large part of the partners in Finland were also municipalities and in general, different public actors also played a rather large role in the operations of Programme.

The JMC/JSC members and interest groups were asked **in the questionnaire** how well was SEFR CBC able to develop the chosen priorities of Programme. The question got mainly rather positive responses particularly regarding the priorities 1-3. Priorities 2 and 3 got the best reviews (about 85 % of the respondents rated at least “good”). Priority 4 was seen to be realised a little more modestly: about 70% of the respondents saw Programme being successful in promoting these priorities only moderately.

The JMC/JSC members and interest groups were asked to name **the priorities that succeeded the most in achieving concrete results** in Finland and to name what were these concrete results. The answers followed what was seen in the previous answer distribution

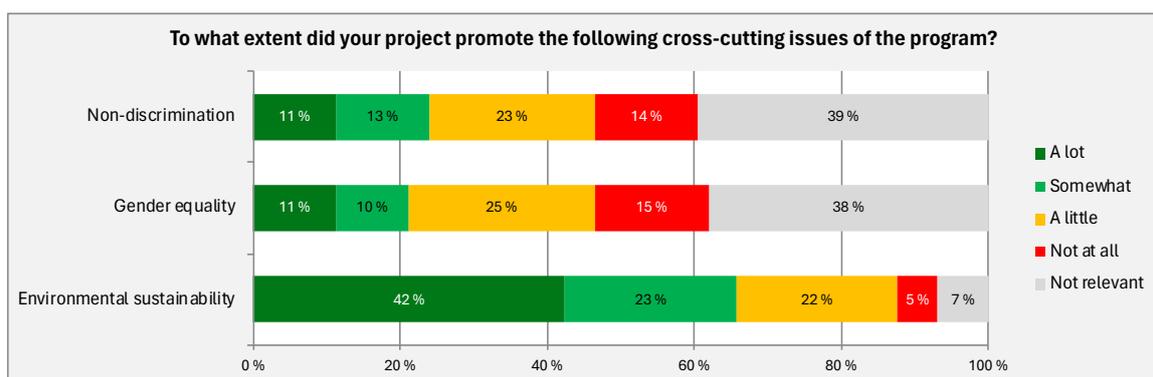
although the results of priority 4 were emphasised more than just noticed. It was mentioned that one of the most tangible effects have been the improvements made to the operation of border crossing points. However, it was acknowledged that the benefit will remain in the future. Concrete results were noticed “investments” or “infrastructure projects”. It was also emphasised that based on the indicator data, priorities 1-3 were implemented well. Effects were achieved, for example, in promoting economic and social development on both sides of the border, responding to common environmental, health and safety challenges, and increasing the mobility of people, goods and capital.

The JMC/JSC members and interest groups were asked to assess how well SEFR CBC managed to **contribute to EU’s three overarching strategic objectives**. These strategic objectives are:

- promotion of economic and social development in regions on both sides of the common border
- addressing common challenges in environment, public health, safety and security
- promotion of better conditions and modalities for ensuring the mobility of persons, goods and capital

According to the answers Programme was best at promoting better conditions and modalities for ensuring the mobility of persons, goods and capital. About 75% of respondents saw this positively. At this point, it is worth noting that the views were somewhat divided between positive and negative, but positive views clearly prevailed. This also applied to the overarching objective of promotion of economic and social development in regions on both sides of the common border. However, about 70% of respondents saw this positively. Regarding the objective of addressing common challenges in environment, public health, safety and security opinions were more divided, but still mostly positive (appr. 62% on positive side).

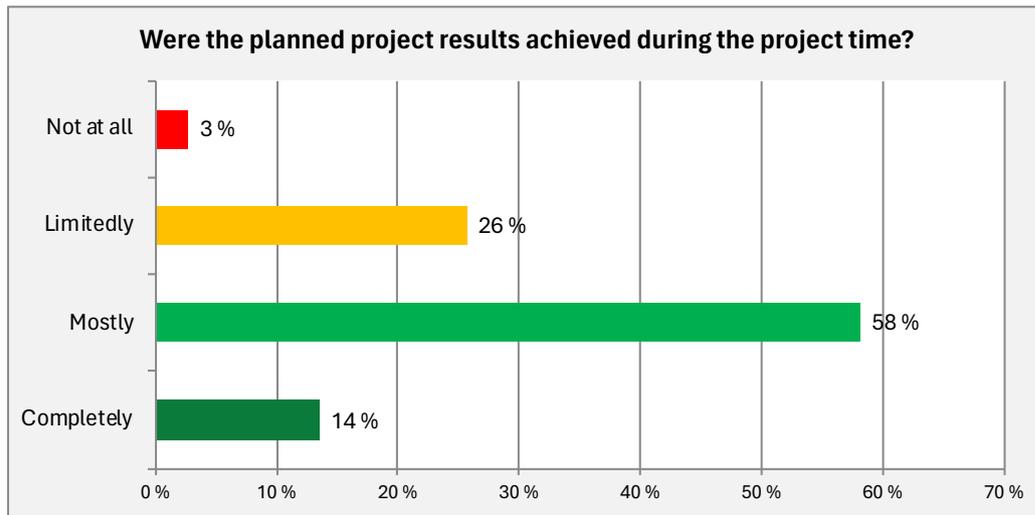
**The project beneficiaries** were asked in the questionnaire to what extent did their projects promote the cross-cutting issues of Programme? The overall picture here was very variable. Projects promoted quite well environmental sustainability, even though one third of respondents did not agree with this view. Regarding the other two cross-cutting issues, quite a lot of respondents did not see their projects promoting these issues. Non-discrimination and gender equality were also issues that quite a many kept not relevant for their projects.



**Figure 4.** To what extent did your project promote the following cross-cutting issues of Programme? (Project questionnaire, n=73).

The project beneficiaries were asked in the questionnaire **whether the planned project results were achieved** during the project time. Overall, the planned project results seem to be achieved quite well. 14% of the respondents were of the opinion that planned project

results were achieved completely and 58% thought that results were achieved mostly (see next figure). 26% of respondents thought that this has happened only limitedly and just 3% said “not at all”. Some comparisons were made in this question regarding the opinions of the project beneficiaries. The comparisons were made between the projects that were still underway when the Russian military aggression against Ukraine started and the projects where implementation of the projects has ended before the start of the military aggression. There was a difference in the answers regarding the issue. The projects implemented before the Russian military aggression against Ukraine started responded to this question more positively. They answered more often either “completely” or “mostly”.



**Figure 5.** Answers to the question: Were the planned project results achieved during the project time? (Project questionnaire, n=74).

An interesting question to examine is **what kind of results** the project beneficiaries saw as having been created. This was examined by how many times certain project results were raised by the project respondents. The most common project result was the creation of new networks and modes of collaboration based on this examination. The second often respondents mentioned increased awareness regarding the operating environment. Finding new and innovative modes of action regarding the project’s objectives, finding solution to commonly defined problem with the help of the project and development of new approaches to networked learning came next. Not so often, but still quite many respondents raised also better co-ordination between the actors participating in the project and making needed investments.

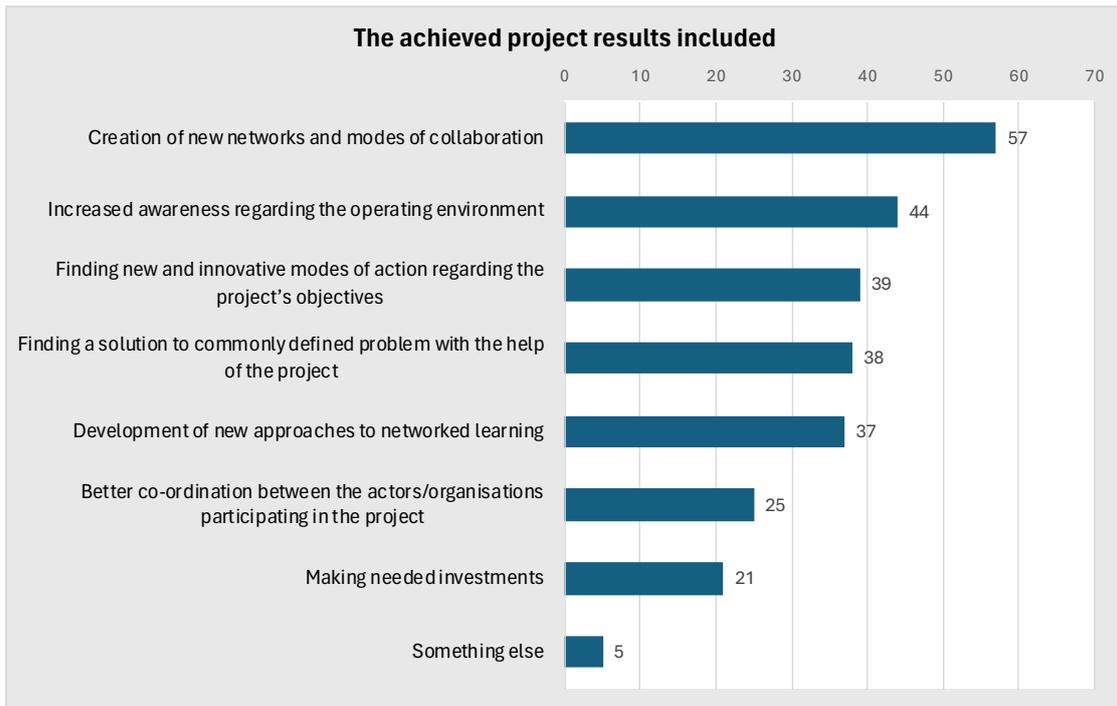


Figure 6. The achieved project results included: (Project questionnaire, n=266).

Project beneficiaries were asked to give their opinion about the benefits their project produced to certain issues. The overall picture was quite negative at this point, i.e. the projects produced quite a few benefits of the requested kind. The most, project added a higher level of knowledge-intensive education (about half of project on the positive side). The following came the issues like improving the living environment and increasing the number of recreation areas. Least impact on the issues asked was targeted on increasing the number of new business investments.

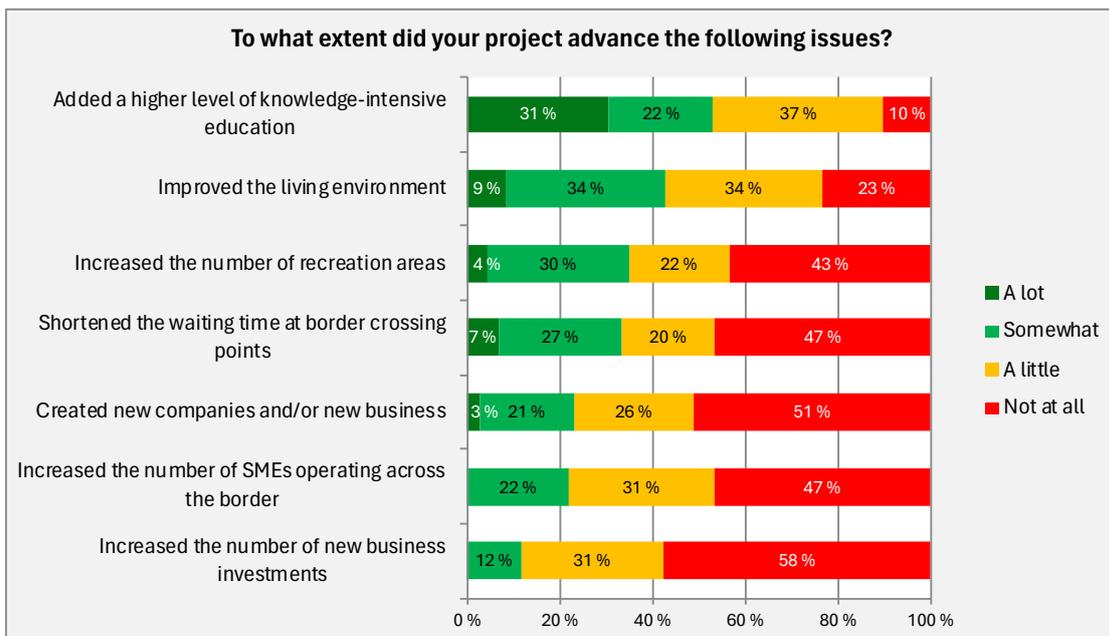


Figure 7. To what extent did your project advance the following issues? (Project questionnaire, n per statement=15-49. Not relevant/targeted answers removed from the figure).

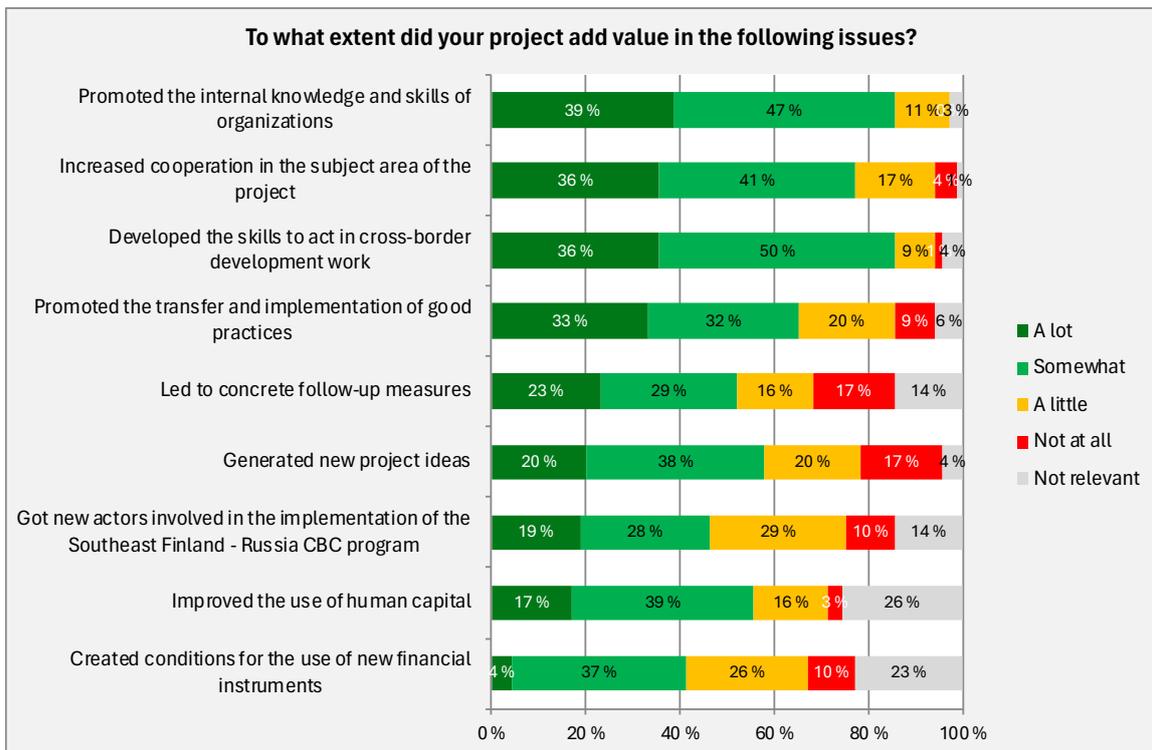
The comparisons were made in this question between the projects that were still underway when the Russian military aggression against Ukraine started and the projects where implementation of the projects has ended before the start of the military aggression. There were some minor differences in the answers regarding the issue. The projects that were still underway when the Russian military aggression against Ukraine started responded to statements “added a higher level of knowledge-intensive education” and “increased the number of recreational areas” somewhat positively.

The project beneficiaries were asked **how lasting results the projects achieved**. At this point, the respondents were initially divided into two camps regarding whether they brought up the impact of the end of co-operation with the Russians or not. However, the respondents who felt that the end of the co-operation affected the permanence of the results were in the minority. Achieved project results were basically dropping into some groups. These appeared as fairly equal groups according to the respondents. The first one was **improvements and solutions related to studying and learning**. In this context, respondents raised issues like (that are in use now) developed online courses, learning environments, curriculums, as well as more concrete developed materials to support learning like games, videos, podcasts etc. The second one was **investments** made through the projects. These were often investments on infrastructure for example in various equipment, buildings, traffic arrangements, roads, hiking infrastructure, etc. In addition, there were investments for nature restoration and nature tourism. Investments were often seen as effects of more permanent nature. The third one was **the emergence and utilisation of co-operation networks among Finnish actors involved in the project**. This was something that can now be benefitted only partly due to current situation in Ukraine, provoked by the Russian aggression, almost entirely only between Finnish partners. Benefits highlighted on the Finnish side were, for example, co-operation between educational institutions and companies and in best cases it has led to further development of ideas and tested things. Other highlighted results (in addition to these three categories) were e.g. developed concepts, platforms, development plans, services and products.

One important question from the point of view of the achieved benefits was a question of the **most important results or benefits for organisations** themselves. The answers here were very much in the same line with the question of project results. The first group of answers can be named **growth of competence and experience**. In this context, respondents raised results like new information, experience in cross-border operations, additional skills, increase in personnel skills, knowledge of new practices in use etc. In some of the cases, it was raised that the know-how gained through the project has become a permanent part of the organisation’s own operations. The second group was also in here **investments** made through the projects. The investments were (on the Finnish side) in use and benefitted the participants for example residents of the area, students, authorities etc. Some examples of the benefits are new technology in use, increasing use of digital tools, improvement of traffic safety and traffic flow etc. The third group in the answers was **the emergence and utilisation of co-operation networks among Finnish actors**. Networks were created and developed, co-operation increased e.g. in such a way that co-operation is carried out with new operators, contacts were opened in the business world, co-operation models introduced, etc. In some cases, it was also emphasised that the results, knowledge and developments are used now in different EU projects.

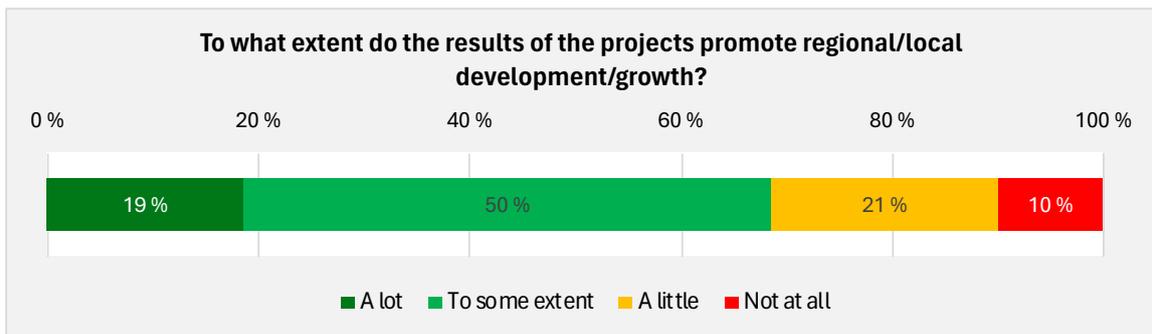
To what extent did projects **add value** in the region? This is one of the key questions in the evaluation and we approached it for example by providing some statements concerning the

possible impacts of projects. According to the project respondents, one of the greatest added value of projects was that the projects promoted the internal knowledge and skills of organisations and developed skill to act in cross-border development work. It also increased co-operation in the subject area of the project quite often. In addition, projects were seen generating new project ideas, helped to promote the transfer and implementation of good practices and improved the use of human capital rather well. About half of the respondents stated that project results led to concrete follow-up measures and got new actors involved in the implementation of Programme. The comparisons were made in this question between the projects that were still underway when the Russian military aggression against Ukraine started and the projects where implementation of the projects has ended before the start of military aggression. There was one minor difference in the answers regarding the issue. The projects that were still underway when the Russian military aggression against Ukraine started responded to statement “generated new project ideas” somewhat positively.



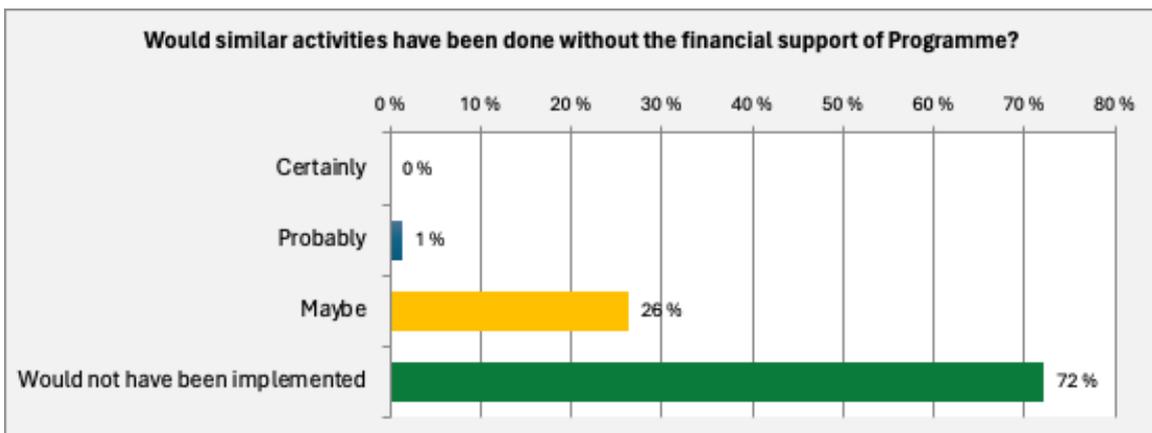
**Figure 8.** To what extent did your project add value in the following issues? (Project questionnaire, n per statement=26-70.)

In the next figure, the shares of the project respondents' answers regarding **the project results' promotion of regional or local development and growth** are presented. The respondents mostly believed their projects 'to some extent' have had regional or local development effects. The comparisons were made in this question between the projects that were still underway when the Russian military aggression against Ukraine started and the projects where implementation of the projects has ended before the start of military aggression. There were some differences in the answers regarding the issue. The projects that were still underway when the Russian military aggression against Ukraine started responded to this question more positively. This is somewhat unexpected, but the reason behind this could be found in the changed focus: after the CBC was suspended, the focus probably turned to the target group of the project on the Finnish side of programme area and thus promoted regional/local development better than before.



**Figure 9.** Answers to the question: To what extent do your project's results promote regional/local development/growth? (Project questionnaire, n=70).

The project beneficiaries were asked one fundamental question about **the importance of the funding** received from Programme: would similar activities (that now have been implemented in your project) have been done without the financial support of SEFR CBC? 72% of respondents mentioned that Programme's funding was crucial, in other words their projects would certainly not have been carried out. 26% were of the opinion that it could have maybe been possible.



**Figure 10.** Answers to the question: Would similar activities have been done without the financial support of Programme? (Project questionnaire, n=72).

### 3.1.2. Relevance and consistency

Relevance refers to the question whether actual programme activities have corresponded to the objectives identified in the Programme document and to the actual regional needs. The overall objective of Programme was *to make Programme area attractive for the people to live and work and businesses to locate and operate*. This overall objective was operationalised through three overarching objectives, i.e. (A) promote economic and social development in regions on both sides of common borders, (B) address common challenges in environment, public health, safety and security and (C) promotion of better conditions and modalities for ensuring the mobility of persons, goods and capital. SEFR CBC must contribute to at least one of the above-mentioned strategic objectives. In addition, there were four chosen thematic objectives for SEFR CBC: Business and SME development (1), support to education, research, technological development and innovation (2), environmental protection, climate change mitigation and adaptation (6) and promotion of border management, and border security (10).

Priorities were created on the basis of the selected thematic objectives (one priority for each thematic objective). Considering the evaluation question of “the relevance and consistency of the selected priorities compared to the Joint Operational Programme”, it is obvious that there was a good relevance and consistency due to this programme logic. Selected priorities were well in line with to the JOP, because thematic objectives are derived from overarching objectives and from overall objective and thematic objectives form (are same as) formed Programme priorities.

The questionnaire that was sent out to members of the JMC/JSC and some interest groups of Programme provided, as a result of their overall overview and knowledge of Programme activities, some important information with regard to Programme’s relevance and sensitivity to regional needs. The respondents were asked how they see some statements concerning SEFR CBC and its implementation. According to the answers SEFR CBC clearly resulted in positive development in the programme area. Programme was seen succeeded in increasing cross-border development activities in the programme area. Programme also expedited the implementation of regionally important development projects and particularly took into consideration the needs and specificities of different sectors of economic activity. It was also seen that Programme played an important role in international co-operation in the programme area on the Finnish side and it was compatible with other EU regional development instruments. In these views, however, the main line was “somewhat agree”. What comes to Programme’s role in the overall developing of SEFR CBC programme area, the respondents saw the issue in two ways, which means that the negative views on the matter also increased.

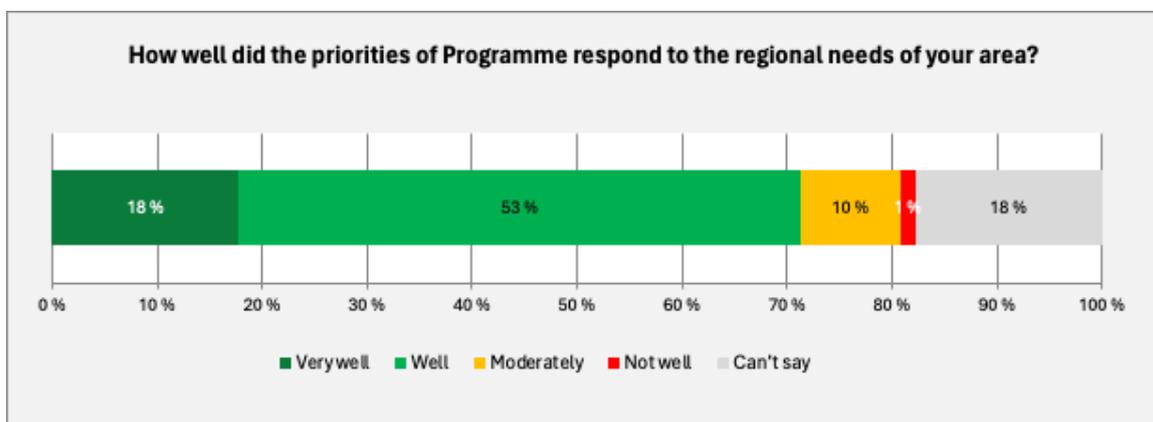
Clarifications to the answers in this section provided more detailed information about Programme relevancy. Regarding Programme’s role in the development of SEFR CBC programme area, it was clarified for example that co-operation across the border started to become established and Programme also played a role in regional development. However, the main role in the development of the region was played by the private sector and municipalities, not by EU instruments. It was mentioned that Programme significantly increased development activities in the border areas on the Finnish side and across the border and it was well tailored to the needs of the region. It was also mentioned that in Programme, it was possible to focus on those border area problems for which there was a need to seek solutions. From the point of view of regional development, it was mentioned that Programme was financially the largest of the three ENI CBC programmes between Finland and Russia. Its importance in the development of South-East Finland was emphasised because, for example, the funding of the national EU regional and structural policy programme was less available in the region than in the other two ENI CBC programme areas (Sustainable growth and work 2014-2020 programme).

It is apparent that the cross-border component of regional development is not necessarily the most important one in regions with diverse intra-regional, national and wider international connections and linkages. What is important to consider is that the respondents also broadly agreed that Programme took properly into account the needs and characteristics of the different branches of the economy, as this provides some indication for accomplishment of regional relevance. However, the fact that only a relatively small number of the JMC/JSC members ‘agreed completely’ with this statement could mean that there is still room for improvement with regard to this topic.

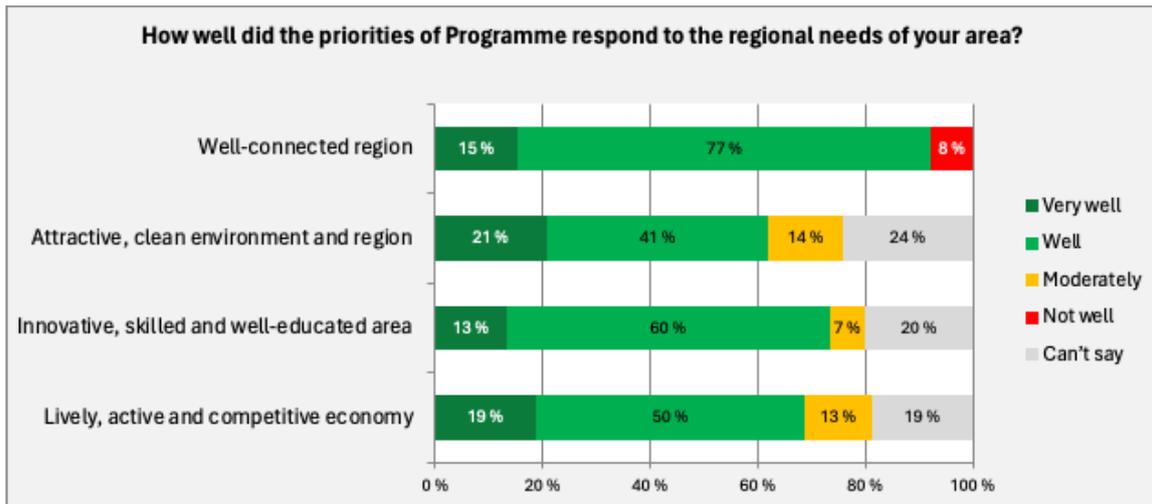
Some statements were also asked regarding the project activity of Programme. The projects were mainly seen successful considering the available resources. In addition, the projects mainly based on the development needs of individual organisations implementing the projects.

On the other hand, attitudes were quite divided what comes to statement that the projects were based on the goals of the Regional Programmes. Among the respondents there was also conviction that the projects were clearly aimed at the needs of the programme area and corresponded well to the needs of the programme area. For example, large infrastructure projects were raised as important and most impressive. These projects were said to be not possible to fund for example in Central Baltic Programme. In addition, there was some kind of conviction, that the projects were based more on the needs of the project beneficiaries than on Regional Programmes. In reality, that resulting projects are a combination of the two: needs of the project beneficiaries and the needs of the region. And the best situation is that organisations and programme areas development needs are common and in the same direction. Besides, there are not too many organisations in the programme area in Finland that have the opportunity to act as project implementers. So, it is important that Programme should serve both perspectives. Moreover, the projects were mentioned to strengthen the co-operation between the actors, but we were still quite far from the positive development of the programme area. It was also brought up in this context that even though cross-border co-operation appeared positive during Programme, the development effects have since watered down due to current situation in Ukraine, provoked by the Russian aggression.

It is good to summarise the perspective of regional needs in the following distribution of answers from **the project respondents' point of view**. The priorities of Programme have responded mainly well to **the regional needs of the areas** according to project beneficiaries (project survey). Almost  $\frac{3}{4}$  of the project beneficiaries were quite strongly of that opinion. 10% considered priorities responding only moderately and 1% not well to the regional needs of their areas. The respondents of the priority 4 (well-connected region) saw the priority their project belonged to responding particularly well to the regional needs of the area. The responses given from the other three priorities were following fairly the average distribution of answers.



**Figure 11.** How well did the priorities of Programme respond to the regional needs of your area? Only answer from the perspective of the priority your project belonged to (Project questionnaire, n=73).

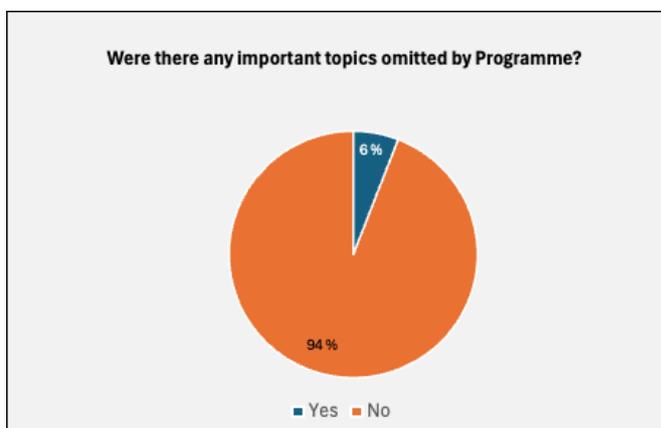


**Figure 12.** How well did the priorities of Programme respond to the regional needs of your area? Only answer from the perspective of the priority your project belonged to. **Answers by priorities.** (Project questionnaire, n=73).

JMC/JSC members and interest groups were asked how they see **some potential problems** in the implementation of SEFR CBC. They were presented with the following statement: Programme did not respond to regional needs. Almost half of the respondents strongly disagreed, and more than half disagreed to some extent. According to this distribution of answers, it can be said that Programme seemed to respond well to regional needs.

JMC/JSC members and interest groups were more critical towards the statement that most important themes were covered in Programme. About a third of the respondents thought that there were some important themes missing from Programme. The project beneficiaries, on the other hand, were clearly happier with the selected themes. About a third of JMC/JSC members and interest groups and only a small portion (6%) of the project respondents felt that some important themes were left out (see next figure). Some thematic areas that were mentioned as being not represented very well were:

- *Climate change (2x)*
- *Environmental diversity issues more broadly.*
- *Safety, climate and biodiversity could have been dealt with more comprehensively.*
- *Enhancing forest protection.*
- *The goals listed as important in the Regional Programmes were not sufficiently included in the projects*
- *Safety and security goal.*
- *Culture should have been raised more.*



**Figure 13.** Were any important omitted by Programme? (Project questionnaire, n=68).

### 3.1.3. Case studies perspective

The project level aspect was further examined in the evaluation by having a closer look at selected projects. The evaluators selected the case projects, a total number of 12. The chosen case study projects are presented in the following table.

**Table 5.** The projects chosen for the case study.

| Priority and Projects   | Lead partner   | Budget      |
|---|--|-------------|
| <b>Priority 1: Lively, active and competitive economy</b>   |  |             |
| 1) LIP KS1444 Russian-Finnish Life Science Park (RFLSP)   | St. Petersburg Technopark JSC                        | 3 500 000 € |
| 2) KS1792, Suvorov Canals - from forgetness to tourism fortress (Suvorov)   | Foundation for Recreation Areas in South Karelia     | 1 359 455 € |
| 3) KS1338, Green Belt Connecting People (GB)  | Municipality of Virolahti                            | 699 753 €   |
| 4) KS11135, King's Road Renascence: new dimension and digital tools (King's Renascence)   | South-Eastern Finland University of Applied Sciences | 573 877 €   |
| <b>Priority 2: Innovative, skilled and well-educated area</b>   |  |             |
| 5) KS1054, Energy-efficient systems based on renewable energy for Arctic conditions (EFREA)   | Lappeenranta-Lahti University of Technology LUT      | 1 350 000 € |
| 6) KS1716, Multi-level Education Towards Advanced Forestry (METAFFor)   | Natural Resources Institute Finland                  | 776 601 €   |
| 7) KS1678, EDU-creating new customer value through cross-border (EDUCRO)  | LAB University of Applied Sciences                   | 641 250 €   |
| <b>Priority 3: Attractive, clean environment and region</b>   |  |             |
| 8) LIP KS1441 Introduction of the ecological system of agriculture is the basis for sustainable development of border rural area (EcoAgRAS) | Natural Resources Institute Finland                  | 3 150 000 € |
| 9) KS1703, Simulators for improving cross-border oil spill response in extreme conditions (SIMREC)  | Kotka Maritime Research Association                  | 1 467 266 € |
| 10) KS11157, Prevention and utilisation of Invasive Alien Species (PURE)  | South-Eastern Finland University of Applied Sciences | 473 268 €   |
| <b>Priority 4: Well-connected region</b>  |  |             |
| 11) LIP KS1405, Vainikkala railway station border crossing point (Vainikkala)   | Finnish Transport Infrastructure Agency              | 6 292 000 € |
| 12) KS11043, Cross-Border Safety; accident prevention and risk management (CB-SAFE)   | LAB University of Applied Sciences                   | 871 000 €   |

A short case study was made of all the above projects. These case studies can be found in the appendix of this evaluation report. Case studies are discussed in this chapter per priority. The case studies were therefore compiled into priority-specific compilations and the findings were examined by priorities.

#### Priority 1: Lively, active and competitive economy

Priority 1 was dedicated on activities which are related to business and SME development. The awarded projects were targeted to, for example, development of tourism and travel

services, opening new business opportunities for growth of the green economy and in the fields of cultural and historical heritage, supporting start-up entrepreneurship, development of mechanism for the regional and local business and entrepreneurship potential, and facilitation of innovations and their commercialisation in fast-developing high technology industries.

A total of 23 projects were awarded from the priority 1. One of them was LIP. Most of the projects in this priority had Finnish lead partners (15 out of 23), so the priority was strongly based on Finnish lead partners. Another observation in this priority was that all lead partners of Russian-led projects came from St. Petersburg. On the Finnish side, there was a clear regional distribution in the lead partnership. Programme funding received by the projects was 754 800 € on average, with total costs rising to almost 951 800 €/project. Priority projects were therefore rather large projects on average. Four priority 1 projects were selected in case study. Beneficiary interviews were carried out first with Finnish lead partners and then with other beneficiaries on these selected projects (where Finnish beneficiaries were available).

All case projects of the priority achieved most of the set target values in the light of the indicators. Of course, there were differences between the projects. However, none of the case projects achieved all the goals set for the project. One of the case projects (King's Road) achieved and in some parts exceeded its set values in the light of indicators except for one goal. Green Belt project achieved and, in some parts, exceeded its set values in four of its goals (out of six). The remaining two case projects (RFLSP and Suvorov) achieved half of the set goals. On the other hand, this examination brought up something about numerical target (indicator) setting. The targets of the projects were now mainly tried to pursue separately on both sides of the border due to challenges caused by the suspension of cross-border co-operation, the targets/set values lacked real numerical targets that describe precisely cross-border co-operation. Target values mainly included the values that has been counted together from both side of the border.

The following can also be considered as general observations about case projects of the priority: current situation in Ukraine, provoked by the Russian aggression made it difficult for project beneficiaries to utilise the results of the project. Termination of the cross-border co-operation strongly influenced the possibilities of utilising the results of the project as well as the achievement of the results. In three of the four case projects, the goal was to promote and benefit from tourism in some form. It was about promoting cultural tourism and environmentally focused tourism. Plans and concrete actions were made to promote cultural tourism, e.g. by boat route, establishing Green Belt information centres and creating a digital platform including digital material. The Russian military aggression against Ukraine has watered down all intentions based on tourism flows coming across the Eastern border. The fourth case project (RFLSP) also suffered a lot from the situation. Main activities of the project included infrastructural component to establish modern and equipped research and industrial life science park in Saint Petersburg, and creation of fully operational education centres and laboratories. The end of the cross-border co-operation basically put the project on hold and the benefits did not come to the Finnish side. There were only some minor results from the project, but due to the situation, the project did not have any major impact. Covid-19 was also brought up as a challenge for the case projects. Covid-19 situation made co-operation during the project difficult. Especially in projects based on the development of tourism, getting to the destination on the spot would have been decisive.

Another general observation can be made regarding to the availability of results and impacts from the Russian side. When this was asked from Finnish parties, the information was mostly

limited to the last information that was available at the cut off time or at the end of the project (if this was before that). There was not much information what has happened after that.

The results identified by the respondents/beneficiaries were quite few, due to the situation. As mentioned above, the results achieved in the case projects were either different created functional spaces and related activities or different plans etc. Below is a summary of what the respondent brought up as the main results (incl. benefit or added value) of the project from their organisation: a) created functional spaces and related activities. For example, in Green Belt project two Green Belt information centres were established (in Virolahti Finland and Sovetsky Russia). The centre on the Finnish side (as part of the Bunker Museum) still operates and offers an exhibition and 360-virtual presentations. In RFLSP project the Life Science Park was opened on the Russian side with infrastructure equipment, but there is no information if it still operates. The main result of that project in Finland was related to the testing station located in Kotka. As a result of the project, a training device for strength training was acquired there and is still in use there.

b) increased knowledge and improved conditions for tourism. In all case projects of this priority, it was presented in some form that increased knowledge belongs to the one of the main results of the project. This can be seen in outputs like developed 3D models, virtual presentations, digital platforms, plans etc. This material produced in the projects is said to be useful. For example, in Suvorov Canals project many plans were prepared (but now mainly only for possible future purpose) such as feasibility study about the canal locks, boat route plan and bridge plan. All accumulated experience is said to be utilised by the Finnish lead partners of the projects. It was mentioned that into some extent organisations can utilise the best practices and knowledge accumulated in the project. This can be seen particularly in planning new projects. The learning included both project learning and accumulated knowledge from the subject areas. Since several projects focused on the development of tourism, due to the situation, the main benefit can be seen mainly as an improvement of the conditions. For example, King's Road Renaissance projects' digital platform ([visitkingsroad.fi](http://visitkingsroad.fi)) improved the visibility and findability of tourist destinations along the King's Road. In addition, digital materials produced in the project are used, for example virtual reality ensemble of Kymi Castle is in use at the Kymenlaakso Museum in Finland. The conditions for the growth of tourist flows are therefore better. Although there is increased interest in travelling business, the tourism business is very vulnerable for any kind of crises, and current situation in Ukraine, provoked by the Russian aggression may restrain cross-border and international travelling for many years.

Continuation of the co-operation was also one important indicator in the partner/beneficiary interviews to show sustainability. Every Finnish respondent interviewed said that they have not continued co-operation with Russians (and it is not allowed within the scope of the project either). Instead, almost all case project respondents mentioned that they have continued co-operation somehow with some projects' Finnish partners. In two out of four case projects, the activities created in the project has led to some kind of continuation plans. In one case this can be considered as a direct continuation on what has been created in the project.

## **Priority 2. Innovative, skilled and well-educated area**

The objective of the priority 2 was to support education, research, technological development and innovation. A total of 17 standard projects was awarded from the priority 2. The projects covered, for example, increasing the skills and competence of future workforce in the forest

sector, increasing the level of knowledge and intensive education amongst the youth as well as co-operation of educational facilities in themes of sustainable development, robotics and innovative technologies as well as vocational competence, improvement of cross-border institutional framework with the increased level of knowledge, innovative potential and lifelong learning in renewable energy production in the Arctic, improvement of work safety competence in the construction industry as well as building capacity on professional development and level of education in the field of sustainable use of shores and coastal management. Programme funding received by the projects was 559 000 € on average, with total costs rising to almost 699 000 €/project.

Three projects were selected in case study. Beneficiary interviews were carried out first with Finnish lead partners and then with other Finnish beneficiaries on these selected projects (where beneficiaries were available). Originally, of all priority 2 projects, only three had a Russian lead partner, while there were 14 Finnish lead partners. It can be stated that this priority was heavily based on Finnish lead partners from the beginning. All selected case projects were led by Finnish lead partners. All these three case projects were still underway when the Russian military aggression against Ukraine started. Of the selected case projects, all of them focused to increase know-how and knowledge somehow. Two of case projects focused much on the educational improvements such as curriculars and courses created and one on the research increasing the level of knowledge, innovative potential and lifelong learning in renewable energy production.

On a general level, it can be seen from the case projects that there were a lot of differences in achieving the target values set for them. One of the case projects (METAFor) achieved and in some parts exceeded its set values in the light of indicators. One of the case projects (EDUCRO) achieved only few of the set target values and the third case project (EFREA) had enormous difficulties to achieve set target values ending up with none of the set goals being fully achieved. All projects faced vast challenges due to the COVID-19 and termination of co-operation with Russia. These challenges were met by adjusting the work plans and by finding new ways of co-operation mainly because of the COVID situation.

Although the selected case projects were from the same priority, they did not promote exactly same themes or issues. One common factor that united the projects is seen in the development of expertise. The projects improved the know-how and knowledge of the participants and stakeholders, for example through educational actions, developing platform, making analyses, testing methods, creating alliances etc. Another factor that united the case projects is the involvement of teachers and students in the project/development work. All case projects had educational institutions involved in the project.

The results identified were actually more of output-nature than results of the project implementation. These “results” and commonly identified issues mainly included things like organised seminars, courses and trainings, publications and guidelines made, curriculars created, number of theses, collaboration models created etc. Below is a summary of what the respondents brought up as the main results (incl. benefit or added value) of the project from their organisation: 1) increase in knowledge and skills: professionals and students gained information, and their level of education and expertise increased into some extent. It was discussed in the interviews that this can be utilised now in their work (making research, in teaching activities, working as an expert etc.). 2) developed training programmes/curriculars that are now in use. For example, it was mentioned that one of the developed training courses is still ongoing in LAB and there were nine Master students enrolled in the first implementation. 3) Experience and accumulated knowledge are in use in further projects, for

example in LIFE project. Both Finnish and Russian companies involved in the projects had expectations to enter the market across the border, but Covid and later the termination of cross-border co-operation due to the Russian military aggression against Ukraine watered down these intentions. Therefore, from the business point of view, the benefit gained from the participation is mainly the experience/knowledge and the possible further utilisation of this knowledge elsewhere.

Continuation of the co-operation was also one important indicator in the partner/beneficiary interviews to show sustainability. Every Finnish respondent interviewed said that they have not continued co-operation with Russians (and it is not allowed within the scope of the project either). In one of the case projects respondents mentioned that they have continued co-operation somehow with the projects' Finnish partners. The activities created in the project have continued in such a way that the know-how developed is now in use in other project.

### **Priority 3. Attractive, clean environment and region**

Priority 3 was dedicated to the environmental protection, climate change mitigation and disaster prevention/management. A total of 21 projects was financed from the priority (19 standard projects and 2 LIPs awarded). Programme funding received by the projects was 828 800 € on average, with total costs being about 1 041 700 € per project. The projects of this priority were therefore rather large projects on average. Originally, of all priority 2 projects, 10 had a Russian lead partner, while there were 11 Finnish lead partners. The lead partnership was therefore initially very evenly distributed between the countries. The projects concerned, for example, promotion of preservation of biodiversity and nature values on different sites on both sides of the border, development of environmental awareness and international interaction of target groups in Russian and Finnish pilot areas involving wastewater treatment in rural territories, e.g. agriculture and storm waters, assessment and modelling of the tools of environmental state review of rivers and coastal area, increasing general awareness and mapping improvement options and recommendations as well as studying, designing and developing a mobile water purification plant-based methodology for ecologically safe and economic solution on water treatment. In addition, two LIPs focused on improvement of the rural territories' environment through design, technical, technological, and managerial solutions, and infrastructure development as well as reduction of harmful emissions into the waters of the Gulf of Finland by reconstruction of existing networks.

Three projects funded under this priority were selected for closer inspection. Interviews were made with lead partners, some selected partners and final beneficiaries of the projects (where available). The case study selection included projects on developing manure utilisation, strengthening co-operation network between authorities and research institutes to reduce risks related to increase maritime traffic and oil spills in extreme conditions and securing natural biodiversity, safe, pure and clean environment by preventing the spreading of the invasive alien species.

All case projects of the priority achieved most of the set target values in the light of the indicators. There were some differences also here between the projects. None of the case projects achieved all the goals set for the project. One of the case projects (EcoAgRAS) achieved and in some parts exceeded its set values in the light of indicators except for one goal. SIMREC project achieved and, in some parts, exceeded its set values in six of its goals (out of eight). The third case project (PURE) achieved about half of the set goals.

On a general level, it can be seen from the case projects that Covid-19 and particularly later the termination of cross-border co-operation due to the Russian military aggression against Ukraine greatly influenced the implementation of the project. For example, EcoAgRAS project was built in such a way that on-site visits were supposed to be the main tools to be applied. The termination of cross-border co-operation had anyway somewhat stronger effect and the projects were then implemented only on the Finnish side. On a general level, the results identified by the respondents/beneficiaries were quite few, due to the situation. Below is a summary of what the respondent brought up as the project main results. These were roughly grouped into infrastructure, developed and piloted “things” and increased knowledge.

Infrastructure and developed/piloted things can be recognised for example in EcoAgRAS, as Pervomaisky (Rus) infrastructure facility for manure processing was build up in the project. This result of the project clearly focused on the Russian side. In PURE they studied possibilities to develop and pilot new ways to mow down, collect, sort and store hogweed safely and tried to find out methods and technologies for hogweed utilisation and processing. The usability of hogweed as a source for useful oils and extracts was found rather good, but there was no evidence that these results were put into practice or used concretely. One effect is also the pilot areas themselves from which hogweed was removed. At least in one pilot area the prevention and elimination work continued after the end of the project by the beneficiaries themselves.

Increased knowledge can be seen for example in made publications, guides, instructions etc. For example, in SIMREC the joint report compiled the key results of the project, synthesising them in a form of a road map. The road map provided concrete recommendations to support the design and organisation of effective simulator-based oil spill response trainings. There were no signs that these recommendations in the road map have been used directly anywhere, but it has brought useful additional information around the topic for the actors. The work done in the project has resulted in a lot of different types of project content related to preparedness and risk assessment and management - not necessarily related to oil, but topically things related to cyber security and security of supply. In addition, the work done in the project led to further development work and new projects or project ideas. There are several project preparations underway, and some new projects are already underway which utilise the information received. The work done in the project also led to development of training activities related to simulators. It was recognised that trainings for authorities have been developed further. This also reflected in teaching e.g. by using material in teaching and so that things have been standardised.

Increased knowledge can be seen for example, in PURE, where they made the guide made for the teachers and the online course. This guide was made from the material gathered during the events organised in schools, which is aimed at primary school teachers. The guide is available online. In the online course of Invasive Alien Species, IAS are discussed in more detail. Open university students (in Finland) can complete the course as part of optional studies, and it is freely available to everyone. The online study course is two credits in scope, and it will be maintained and updated by the South-Eastern Finland University of Applied Sciences.

Continuation of the co-operation was also one important indicator in the partner/beneficiary interviews to show sustainability. Every Finnish respondent interviewed said that they have not continued co-operation with Russians. Instead, almost all case project respondents mentioned that they continued co-operation somehow with some projects' Finnish partners. In one of the case projects, there were no other Finnish partners involved in the project. It

was mentioned that the threshold to start implementing international projects has lowered even further. In many cases there is a much stronger focus now on Central Europe in cooperative efforts.

#### **Priority 4. Well-connected region**

Overall objective of priority 4 was to guarantee safe, secure, smooth, and efficient border-crossings and easy mobility. With the efforts put to reach the set objective, Programme tried to improve traffic safety on cross-border roads, make improvements of the vicinity of border crossing points and improvements of border crossing points (land, water, rail) with increased throughput capacity.

A total of 10 projects was financed from the priority 4. Programme funding received by the projects was 2,6 M€ on average, with total costs rising to almost 3,27 M€/project. The four border crossing point development projects were the largest projects in this priority. The total budget of each of them was from just under 5 M€ to almost 6.4 M€. Eight out of ten projects were still underway when the Russian unjustified military aggression against Ukraine started. Originally, of all priority 4 projects, seven had Finnish lead partner, while there were three Russian lead partners. Two of these projects with Russian lead partners ended before Russia was excluded from Programme.

Two projects were selected into case study. They were both ongoing at the start of the Russian military aggression against Ukraine. Beneficiary interviews were carried out with Finnish lead partners and partners.

Of the selected two case projects, one was the large infrastructure project to improve border crossing fluency (Vainikkala), the other focused on the cross-border safety (CB-SAFE). The Vainikkala project fell into the category of Large Infrastructure Projects (LIP). The selection of the project was made through a LIP-specific direct award process, including a lengthy identification, selection and contracting process.

Both case projects of this priority achieved most of the planned outputs and outcomes. It is good to note that due to the restrictions on the cross-border movement of people and goods, the throughput capacity and reduced waiting time indicators were not relevant in terms of evaluating the success of the project. However, by investing in cross-border infrastructure, the Vainikkala project has a long-lasting cross-border effect, although this positive effect is weakened by the fact that travel restrictions have reduced the need to cross borders and the increased capacity has not been fully used. It can be said that the Vainikkala project improved the theoretical capacity of the border crossing, but now there is simply not enough traffic to get reliable information about its actual capacity.

The investment made in another case project, CB-SAFE, in a virtual training platform, on the other hand, gives the rescue services the opportunity to simulate and practice accident situations that would otherwise be risky or dangerous to practice. Training is also no longer tied to place and time. In the CB-SAFE project one original goal was to create safety information including safety applications for cross-border passenger traffic, but that wasn't achieved because of the suspension of the Russian partner.

### 3.1.4 Programme's contribution to the European level overall objectives

The document 'Programming of the European Neighbourhood Instrument (ENI) - 2014-2020' outlines the strategic direction for EU support for cross-border co-operation on the external borders of the European Union, under the European Neighbourhood Instrument (ENI), for the period 2014 – 2020. The document is based on the core objectives set by the European Commission for cross-border co-operation, which aim to support sustainable development across the EU's external borders. The document emphasises the need to support<sup>1</sup>:

- the economic and social development of regions on both sides of common borders
- the common challenges in environment, public health, safety, and security
- the better conditions and modalities for ensuring the mobility of persons, goods, and capital.

Each programme will contribute to at least one of these strategic objectives. Moreover, each programme will focus on a maximum of 4 thematic objectives that are broadly aligned to the European Territorial Co-operation goal, to increase the impact and efficiency of the programme. The programme partners, at the local, regional, and national level, will be responsible for the detailed programming within these thematic objectives, taking into account the specific circumstances and requirements of their particular area. The Joint Operational Programme will include a specific set of thematic objectives and priorities, which will reflect the strategic objectives, but also the national ENP Action Plans that have to be coherent and complementary with the ENI CBC programmes. The coherence and complementarity will be ensured through the programming process.

The Document also defines further expected results (chapter 6.4). Given the decentralised nature of the programming and implementation process for ENI CBC, it will be the responsibility of the programme partners to specify in detail the expected results of the specific programme which they will propose. The expected results should be defined and measured in the following areas (not exhaustive):

- the efficient and timely implementation of joint CBC programmes.
- addressing effectively the general objectives set out here, meeting the specific priorities of local partners in each border region and allowing for increased ownership by the local stakeholders.
- providing means for improved co-ordination between local, regional and national level development plans.
- providing for the implementation of relevant and effective CBC projects of benefit to both sides of the EU's external borders.
- contributing in the medium and long-term to enhanced prosperity, stability and security along the external borders of the Union through strengthened co-operation and contacts across borders.

The South-East Finland - Russia CBC 2014-2020 followed all the strategic objectives presented in the ENI Strategy Paper. The emphasis in Programme's operation was to some extent put on to the strategic objective of the economic and social development of regions on both sides of common borders. Programme developed four priorities. As such, Programme embraced economic and social development, common challenges and mobility objectives that have been set out in the ENI Strategy Paper. The first priority of Programme focused on

<sup>1</sup> Programming document for EU support to ENI Cross-border Co-operation (2014-2020).

economic development, which was supported by the second priority (education, research, technological development and innovation). The social dimension was covered much lighter by the third priority, in which the environmental aspect was strong. The third priority of Programme focused on environmental protection and climate change adaptation, in which the common challenge's objective was included. The fourth priority focused on removing the bottlenecks and improving the safety of Programme area's international border crossing points and this way to lower the barriers to people travel and goods transport across the border and hence improve the better conditions and modalities for ensuring the mobility of persons, goods, and capital.

SEFR CBC has been striving towards the above mentioned expected results. Some of these expected result areas were strongly influenced by COVID-19 and of the termination of cross-border co-operation because of Russian attack on Ukraine. For example, in the area of "contributing in the medium and long-term to enhanced prosperity, stability and security along the external borders of the Union through strengthened co-operation and contacts across borders", progress is no longer seen, but the opposite. In the other areas defined there has been at least some progress through the project activity.

## 3.2 Cross-border aspect

A key underlying aim of SEFR CBC is to strengthen co-operation between Finnish and Russian regions and the actors and organisations therein. Regarding co-operation, SEFR CBC could build on a strong foundation for its activities and project implementation. This foundation has been created over the course of several CBC programmes that have been implemented for long time. A succession of EU co-funded CBC programmes started with a combination of Interreg A (Finnish side) and TACIS (Russian side). Over several programme periods, CBC was increasingly integrated (joint selection of projects for both sides of the border and pooling of financial resources) and mainstreamed into a dedicated CBC Programme for the external borders of the EU (ENPI, ENP). Starting with the South-East Finland – Russia ENPI CBC 2007-2013, Russia also provided funding to the CBC activities. Overall, CBC has over the years become an institutionalised and integral element of cross-border relations between Finland and Russia. The following sections gauge the impact of SEFR CBC and its projects on co-operation between Russia and Finland in general and the cross-border dimension of implemented projects.

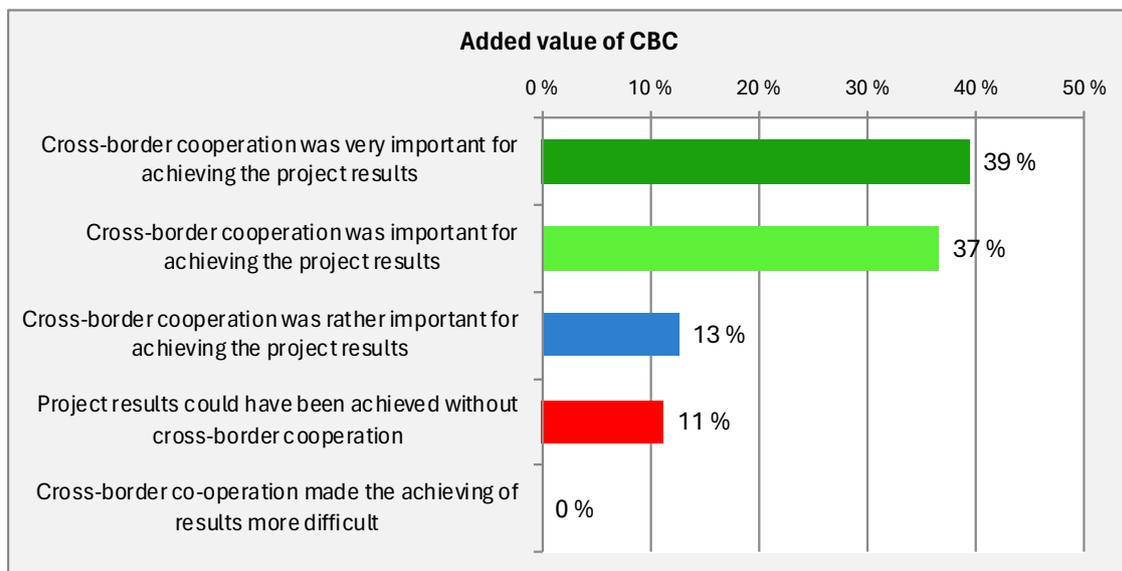
### 3.2.1 Impact of Programme on Finnish-Russian co-operation, cross-border dimension of implemented projects and complementarity

The Joint Operational Programme emphasise that the South-East Finland – Russia CBC 2014–2020 will complement the overall EU - Russia relations, focusing on the eligible border regions on both sides of the border. Programme contribute to regional development with activities that have a cross-border dimension and co-operation nature. Activities are targeted to benefit regions and stakeholders on both sides of the border.

Achieving a collaborative environment, genuine cross-border integration and cohesion of project activities with mutual and even benefits, is therefore of utmost importance for the success of SEFR CBC. The need for a basic collaborative environment for CBC activities appears to be shared by the people who have implemented the projects, as 76% of the

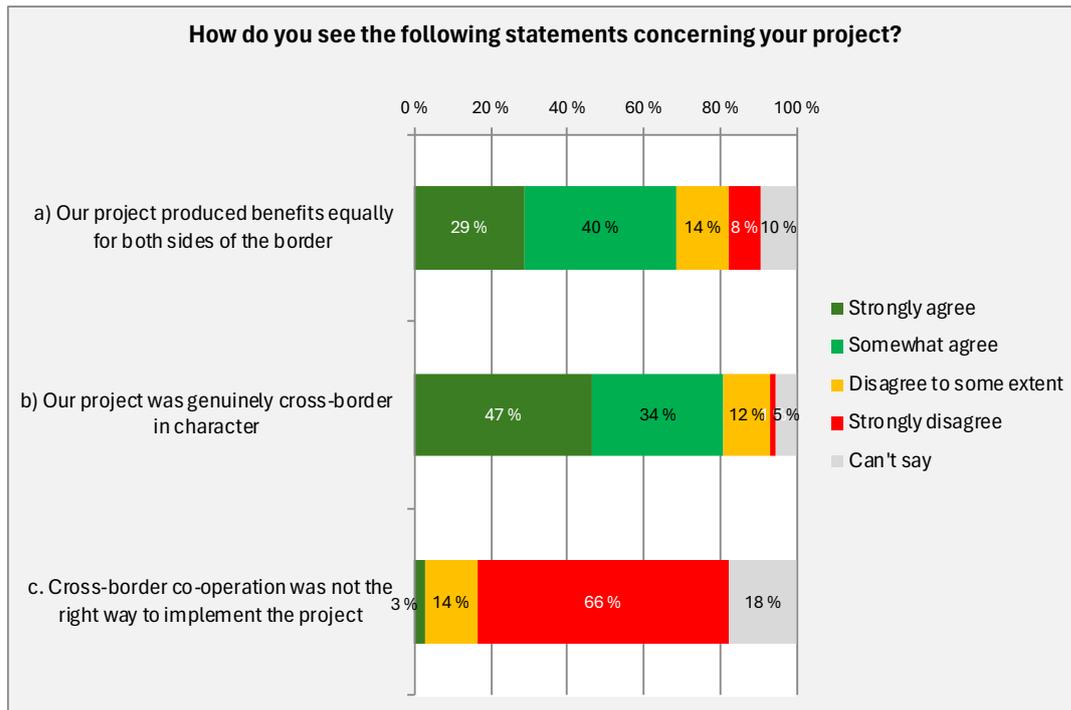
respondents to the project questionnaire were of the opinion that cross-border co-operation was either very important or important for achieving the results of the project. 10% stated that project results could have been achieved without cross-border co-operation. None of the respondents saw that cross-border co-operation made achieving the results more difficult (see figure below). The comparisons regarding this question were made between the projects that were still underway when the Russian military aggression against Ukraine started and the projects where implementation of the projects has ended before the start of the military aggression. Pretty much as unexpected, there was a difference in the answers. The projects that were still underway when the Russian military aggression against Ukraine started emphasised more the importance of CBC for achieving the project results. It is very likely that the breakdown of co-operation across the border in these projects has specifically highlighted the importance of co-operation for achieving the results of the projects.

Available funding played a key role in achieving this cross-border dimension as 72% of the respondents also stated that that similar activities would not have been implemented without the financial support of Programme. The added value of SEFR CBC, additional to the value that would have been provided by regional or national funding instruments, was thus clearly evident.



**Figure 14.** Answers to the question: How important was the cross-border dimension for achieving projects' results (added value of CBC)? (Project questionnaire, N=71).

The project questionnaire revealed an overall positive perception of the cross-border nature of the implemented projects. 69% of the respondents either strongly or somewhat agreed with the statement that their project produced benefits equally for both sides of the border (see figure below). The respondents were slightly more positive about the statement that the project was genuinely cross-border in character (81% either strongly or somewhat agreed). The comparisons were made in this question between the projects that were still underway when the Russian military aggression against Ukraine started and the projects where implementation of the projects has ended before the start of the military aggression. The projects that had ended before the start of the Russian military aggression against Ukraine started responded to statement "our project produced benefits equally for both sides of the border" somewhat more positively.



**Figure 15.** How do you see the following statements concerning your project? (Project questionnaire, n=73).

In the clarifications, the effects of Covid and the Russian military aggression against Ukraine were strongly emphasised. In particular, these factors contributed to the fact that in the end, the projects could not fully produce the benefits that could have been obtained from them. Most of the time, the projects seemed to have a genuine shared goals that supported projects' cross-border character. Added value was derived from the learning from differences terms of socio-economic, legislative or cultural aspects in the two countries. Another underlying driver was the perceived need to address current phenomena and challenges that do not adhere to borders, for example with regard to oil accident prevention or wastewater management. A somewhat traditional transfer of technological solutions or socio-administrative practices from Finland to Russia also appeared to remain on the agenda. Regarding this, the still existing different levels of development in the two countries create a tendency for interventions to be monodirectional. This results in a traditional diffusion of innovations effect, where impact in terms of investments, technology transfer and adoption of good practices can be expected to be skewed towards the Russian side of the border.

**The concept of complementarity** is fundamental to EU financial instruments in two ways. Firstly, it refers to minimising the risk of funding duplication. Secondly, it emphasises the opportunities to synergies between EU programmes. Both aspects were examined in the audit report on the EU support to cross-border co-operation with neighboring countries prepared by the European Court of Auditors in 2022. The report highlights the greater need for more coordination and complementarity between the EU cross-border co-operation and other EU instruments. This is not supported by the evidence found in this evaluation context. 88% of the respondents to the JMC/JSC and interest groups questionnaire stated that they agree partly or fully with the statement “Programme was compatible with other EU regional development instruments”.

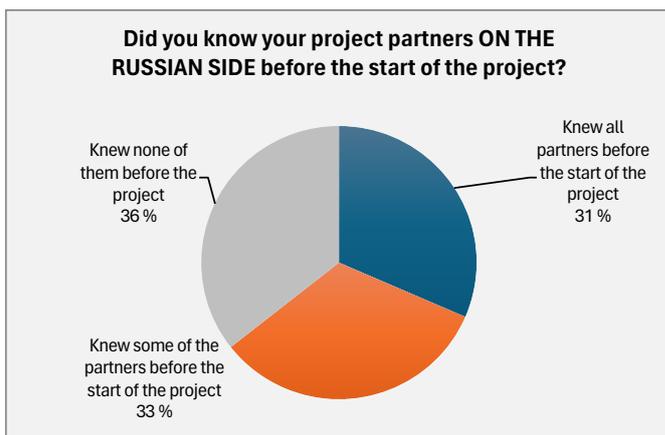
Among the case projects, the most positive findings on complementarity were related to the continuation of the development theme in question. These cases, where initial development or experimentation in a CBC project continued in other EU programmes (e.g. The Central

Baltic Programme, The LIFE programme), can be highlighted as good examples of complementarity and co-operation with EU policy instruments.

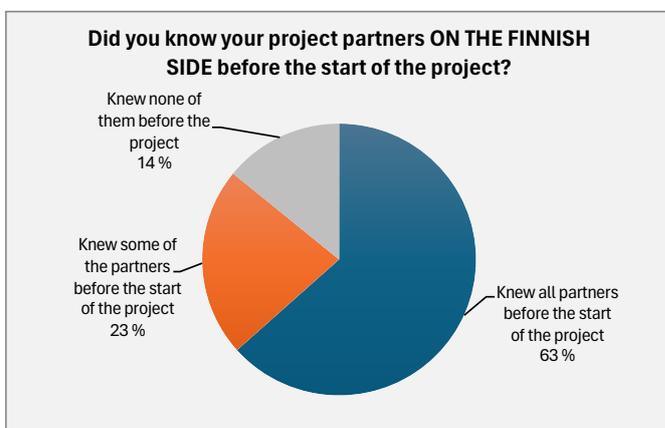
### 3.2.2 Cross-border co-operation networks

The long history of cross-border co-operation, its strong foundations and existing networks in SEFR CBC area is well visible in the composition of the actors/organisations implementing the projects. From the total respondents to the project questionnaire, only six (out of 72) stated that his/her organisation participated in EU-funded transnational co-operation for the first time. The resulting experience and general awareness of the functioning of cross-border collaboration can be deemed to have had a positive effect on the nature of co-operation.

In addition to the previous knowledge of EU-funded transnational co-operation principles and practice, programme actors also appear to have widely benefitted from previous knowledge of their project partners. As can be seen from Figures below, 63% of the (Finnish) respondents to the questionnaire knew all partners from the Finnish side of the project consortium before implementation, and 31% of the Russian partners. Assuming that knowledge between partners was similarly widespread on the Russian side of the border, it can be stated that the project consortia were based on strong, pre-existing partnerships, which in turn reduced the risk for project failure. This indicates that Programme was heavily built on established contacts and collaborations rather than boosted its appeal to new entrants.



**Figure 16.** Did you know your project partners before the start of the project? On the Russian side: (Project questionnaire, n=71).



**Figure 17.** Did you know your project partners before the start of the project? On the Finnish side: (Project questionnaire, n=71).

These findings are supported by the interviews that were carried out as part of the evaluation. Several interviewees stated that they had been involved in previous rounds of SEFR CBC and that the partners were chosen on the basis of previous collaborative relations or on known expertise in a certain field relevant to the project focus and objectives. The results of the questionnaire also indicate that the respondents were generally happy with the composition of their project consortia as around 70% of respondents stated that they would not have needed other actors/organisations in order to reach the project goals or to implement the project more effectively. Organisations that were most frequently identified as potentially having been useful for the project implementation were private sector organisations/businesses (15% of respondents). Also, regional level authorities (11%) and local authorities (7%) would have been needed to get involved in the project into some extent.

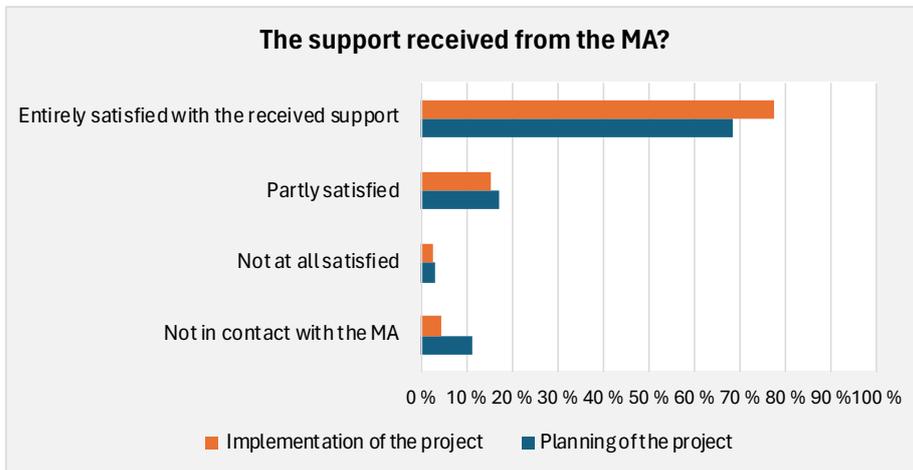
The aspect of trust is also important in this context. It was also mentioned on several occasions, having been fostered among project participants through involvement in several programming periods of the CBC programmes and contributing to stable co-operation structures across the borders. Personal relationships that have been built over years are viewed as crucial in strengthening the actual cross-border dimension of CBC. With the Russian military aggression against Ukraine and the subsequent suspension of Programme, collaborative links that have been built over years have been cut. It remains to be seen, whether these relationships of trust can be revived in the event of a geopolitical and, in some cases also personal, thaw in relations between the EU and Russia.

When dealing with a pre-suspension situation, the ability to build partnerships on the basis of previous knowledge of partners does not only imply a more unproblematic project implementation, but also for better targeting of doing. Many interviewees stated that as a result of their long-term engagement in CBC and their resultant knowledge of cross-border state of affairs and established collaborative networks, they knew what needed to be done and what was useful for both sides. Linked to this, several interviewees stated **they would not have been able to fund their project activities from other funding sources**. All the above provides an indication that a certain regional development and funding ‘niche’ has been found and carved out for the cross-border co-operation programmes, facilitated by the of several CBC programme periods. Again, the suspension of Programme forces the established beneficiaries of Programme on the Finnish side to look for other opportunities. Interviewees pondered that the end of Finnish-Russian cross-border co-operation will result in a re-orientation towards the Nordic Countries (Interreg Aurora), Europe, as well as, building on the Russian-language experience, towards Eastern Europe, Central Asia and Ukraine.

### 3.2.3 Co-operation within Programme structures

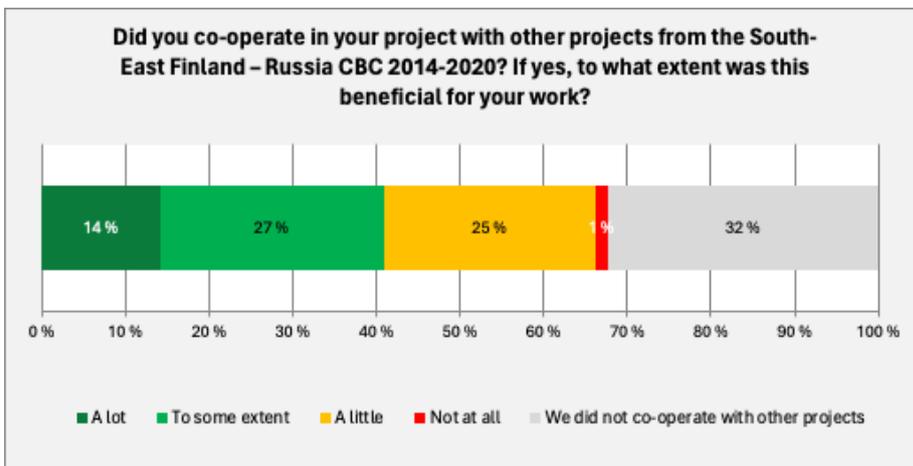
In the questionnaire and the interviews, the evaluation team also assessed the co-operation between the project partners and the Managing Authority. In the project questionnaire it was asked how the project beneficiaries perceived the support they received from the MA during the planning and the implementation of the project. The results did not vary significantly regarding the phases (planning/implementation) of the projects. The vast majority of the respondents (about 70-80%) were entirely satisfied with the support they received from the MA during the implementation and planning of the project. About 15% of the respondents were partly satisfied. Dissatisfaction with the MA support was at a negligible level.

Respondents to the questionnaire commented that responsiveness to questions was excellent and that they felt that they were supported in their work by the Managing Authority, particularly with regard to the challenges posed by the COVID-19 pandemic and the suspension of Programme as a result of the Russian military aggression against Ukraine, and their effects on project work, which required some flexibility. MA was considered easy to contact and co-operation was considered smooth. It was mentioned for example that there was “a feeling that we were working for a common goal”.



**Figure 18.** How would you rate the support received from the Managing Authority during the following phases of the project? (Project questionnaire, n=71).

A stronger cross-border dimension in specific topics and improved impact can also be expected from collaboration between projects, particularly if they worked on similar topics. As can be seen from figure below, about 40% of the respondents to the project questionnaire stated that their project co-operated with other projects at least to some extent.



**Figure 19.** Did you co-operate in your project with other projects funded from the South-East Finland - Russia CBC 2014-2020? If yes, to what extent was this beneficial for your work? (Project questionnaire, n=71).

### 3.3 Broader context and external factors

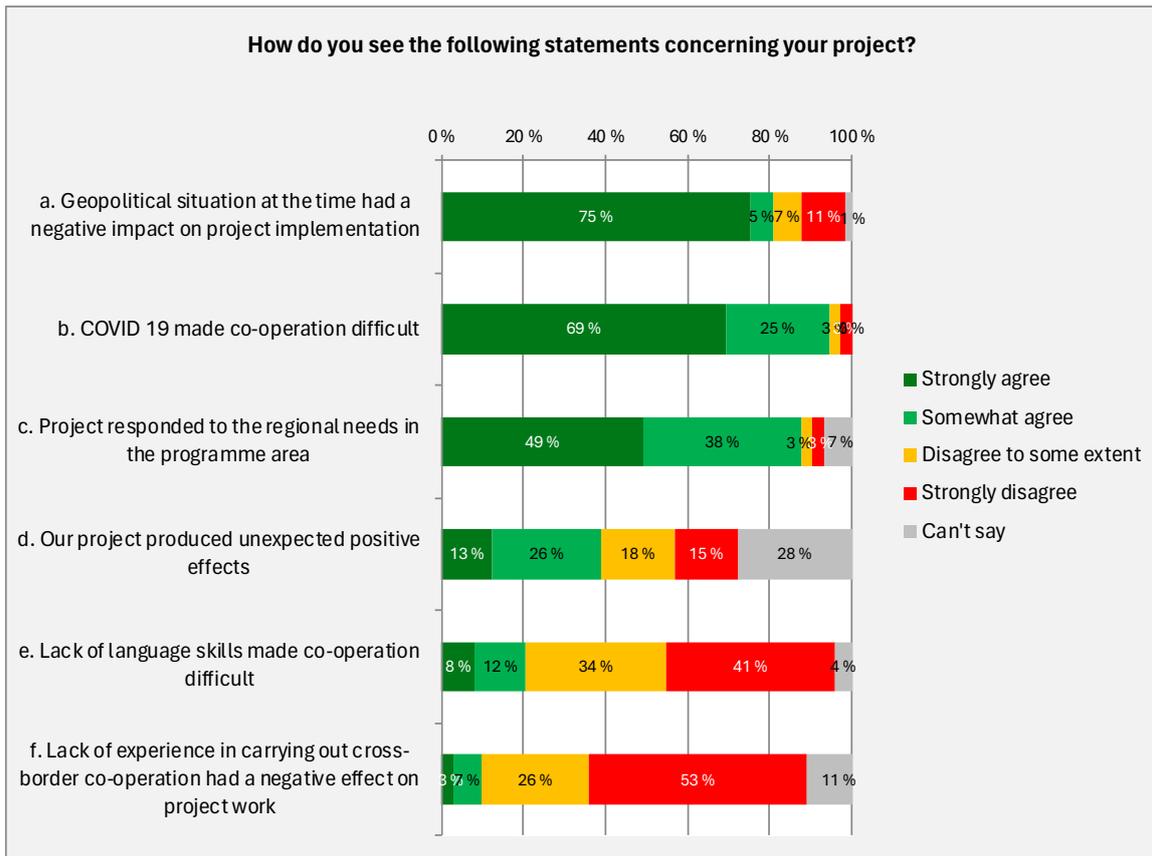
The COVID-19 pandemic started in 2020 posed a challenge to collaborative work within the projects with much of the interaction moving online. The COVID-19 pandemic forced people home from work and school, which naturally also had a big impact on project activities. The pandemic also led to modification of the ENI CBC implementing rules.

Due to the Russian military aggression against Ukraine, the European Commission decided to suspend co-operation with Russia and Belarus in March 2022, although EU beneficiaries were able to continue project work as long as activities and financial flows on the Russian and Belarusian were ceased. Suspension of the financing agreements and cessation of CBC activities changed the overall situation dramatically. In the evaluation questions, special focus is therefore drawn on programme performance, but the perspective is adjusted to take into account the impact of these global crises on programme implementation.

#### 3.3.1 Impacts on Programme implementation

The impact of COVID-19 on Programme implementation and the impact of the cut-off in cross-border co-operation with Russia are things that have come up many times already in the analysis of the evaluation data. These two challenges of the operational environment were also placed as questions in the project questionnaire (see next figure). The project respondents saw particularly COVID-19 making co-operation difficult. 94% of respondents strongly agreed or somewhat agreed with this view. Vast majority of the respondents also saw that the Russian military aggression against Ukraine had a negative impact on the project implementation. The comparisons were made between the projects that were still underway when the Russian military aggression against Ukraine started and the projects where implementation of the projects has ended before the start of military aggression. Pretty much as expected, there was a huge difference in the answers regarding the negative impact of current situation in Ukraine, provoked by the Russian aggression. The projects that were still underway when the Russian military aggression against Ukraine started felt that current situation in Ukraine, provoked by the Russian aggression, had a clearly more negative effect on the project implementation.

There were also some other statements put under the project respondent assessment. Projects seem to have responded well to the regional needs in the programme area. Language skills have mainly not been a major obstacle for project beneficiaries, because about one-fifth of the respondents thought that lack of language skills has made co-operation difficult. Moreover, lack of experience in carrying out cross-border co-operation has not been affecting on project work according to respondents. Almost 40% of respondents thought that projects produced unexpected positive effects. When comparing these project beneficiaries' point of views to the results of JMC/JSC and interest groups questionnaire, the observations were mainly in the same direction. Some differences were seen in the attitude towards the impact of COVID-19. The project beneficiaries saw COVID-19 as a clearly bigger challenge for operations.



**Figure 20.** How do you see the following statements concerning the implementation of your project? (Project questionnaire, n=73).

The project beneficiaries were asked how these challenges affected the operation of the project in a concrete way. Most of the comments were related to COVID-19 and to current situation in Ukraine, provoked by the Russian aggression/suspension of cross-border co-operation. Regarding **the effect of COVID-19** the themes of the answers practically moved within two subject areas which were 1) the impossibility of visits and direct face-to-face interaction and 2) slowing down of project activities and progress. These were strongly related. In the following there are some aspects raised regarding these two subject areas.

- 1) the impossibility of visits and direct face-to-face interaction, which caused effects such as:
  - Prevented travelling across the border.
  - Field visits, events, etc. could not be carried out.
  - Meetings, courses, etc. had to be changed to virtual ones.
  - No face-to-face interactions, spontaneous conversations were not possible with remote connections. Interaction suffered.
  - Better results would have required interactive meetings.
  - Activities had to be cancelled/postponed.
  - Benchmarking to good targets did not take place efficiently or at all.
  
- 2) slowing down of project activities and progress.
  - Postponed and cancelled many activities.
  - International component shortage slowed down operations.
  - The closing of the border affected to logistics and prevented the movement of foreign workers to Finland, which had an effect on the delay in operations.

- Delays in delivery of the results.
- Prevented the implementation of the original project plan: the need to make changes slowed down also operations.
- Caused significant additional work for the lead partners and partners in the constant redesign of the project in order to achieve the project's goals.

Another main challenge that the project beneficiaries raised was **the impact of the cut-off in cross-border co-operation** caused by the Russian unjustified military aggression against Ukraine on Programme implementation. Respondents mostly talked about this with the term “war in Ukraine”. Regarding the effect of the Russian military aggression against Ukraine to Programme implementation, respondents considered it to be a turning point. The Russian military aggression against Ukraine cut off all co-operation with the Russian partners and actors. The effect largely depended on what stage the projects were in at the time. In the worst cases, the projects were practically left unfinished. More generally, the projects adapted to the situation and changed their project plans in such a way that the projects could be completed on the Finnish side. It was mentioned for example that if the Russian military aggression against Ukraine had not started, the project would have benefited equally on both sides of the border - now there was no chance of that. In these cases, there was no information about the results of the project on the Russian side and certainly some of the results have not been realised on the Russian side. In those projects that were nearing the end at the time of cut-off, the effects of the Russian military aggression against Ukraine remained the least. It was mentioned that it mainly affected to the final reporting of the project and prevented the development of established relationships and further plans. For example, the companies were not able to make further use of the connections that had been created.

The third, but clearly less highlighted, challenge was the lack of language skills of the Russian partners. It was mentioned for example that the lack of language skills significantly limited spontaneous communication and conversations.

Respondents were also asked to comment **how were the negative effects (of the above) minimised in the project implementation**. The themes of the answers followed the themes brought up above and intertwined with each other. We could say that the projects minimised the negative effects of COVID-19 by utilising remote connections and developing remote solutions. The projects minimised the negative effects of the cut-off in cross-border co-operation caused by the Russian unjustified military aggression against Ukraine and COVID-19 by making changes to plans and operations. In the following there are some examples of the answers/details in these themes.

Utilising remote connections and developing remote solutions (responding to the challenges brought by COVID-19):

- By organising remote meetings and searching for virtual alternatives for implementation
- By reorganising work, online working

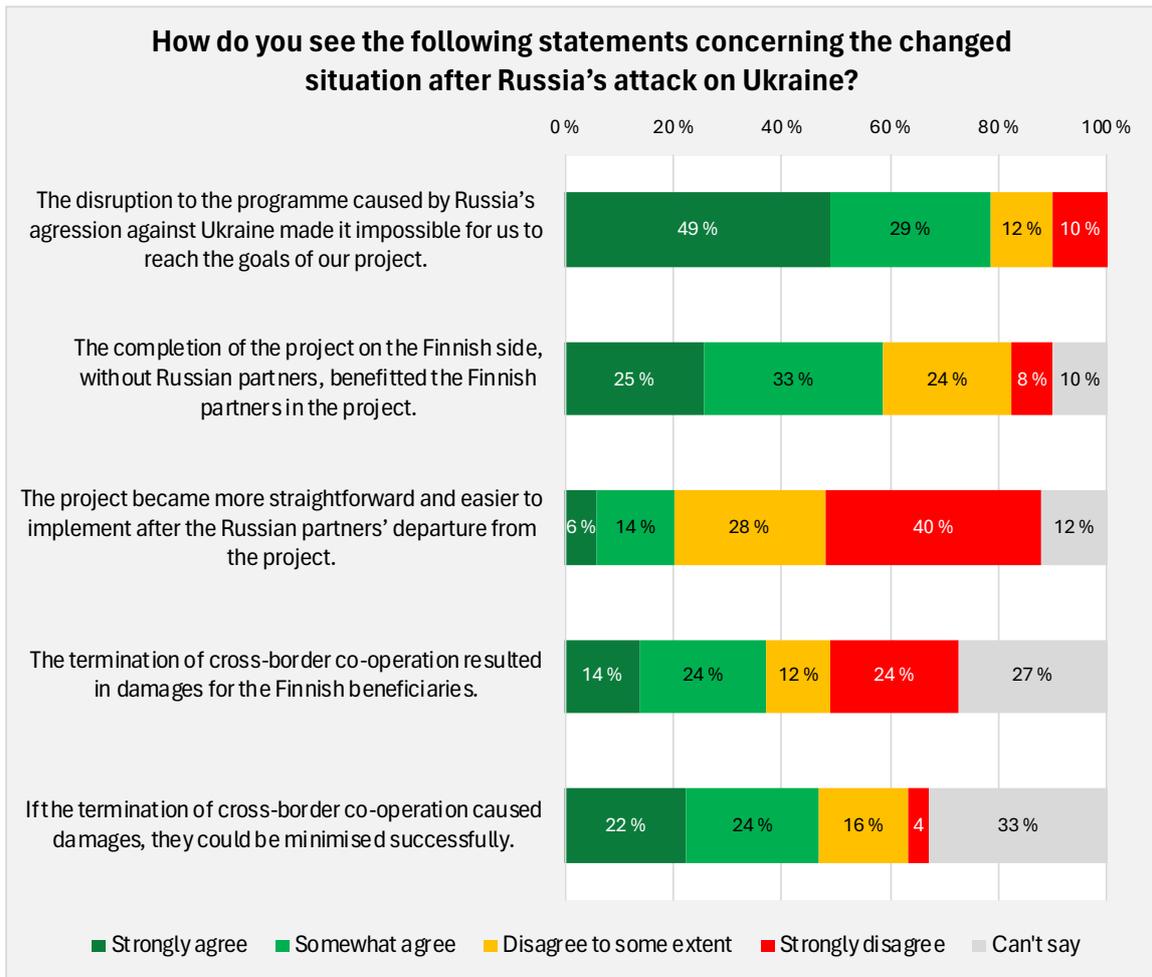
Making changes to plans and operations (COVID-19 and cut-off in CBC):

- The project plan was modified (incl. prolongations in project time).
- The Finnish partners completed the projects (on Finnish side only)
- By directing the project's goals differently.
- Alternative methods of operation were invented.
- Measures aimed at one's own area were added, which were simultaneously implemented on both sides of the border (Covid).

- Travel and cross-border activities were postponed until after the pandemic.
- International co-operation was redirected towards other countries (cut-off in CBC).

On a very small scale, other types of minimisations were also carried out. One of them was responding to rising prices. It was mentioned that the drastic increase in the price of raw materials was at least partly covered by own funds. In part, the road construction contracts were reduced from the initial intention. The lack of language skills was tried to be minimised by using interpreters and eventually, these problems disappeared after the collaboration was suspended.

The points of view presented above were further confirmed by following results (see next figure). The disruption to Programme caused by the Russian military aggression against Ukraine has made it impossible to reach the project goals for most of Programme projects (ongoing projects at the time). 22% of respondents saw that it had no affection. It was quite widely seen that the completion of the project on the Finnish side, without Russian partners, did benefit the Finnish partners in the project (58% of respondents). In addition, 20% of respondents saw that projects became more straightforward and easier to implement after the Russian partners' departure from the project. The termination of cross-border co-operation resulted in damages for the Finnish beneficiaries according to 38% of respondents. In almost half of the cases caused damages from the termination of cross-border co-operation were minimised successfully according to the project beneficiaries. When comparing these project beneficiaries' point of views to the results of JMC/JSC and interest group questionnaire, the views were mostly the same. There was some difference in the question of the damages caused by the termination of CBC. JMC/JSC members and interest groups saw more strongly that the termination of cross-border co-operation resulted in damages for the Finnish beneficiaries.



**Figure 21.** How do you see the following statements concerning the changed situation after Russia's attack on Ukraine? (Project questionnaire, n=51).

Project beneficiaries were asked to motivate their answers regarding the changed situation. The following answers give good examples of the project beneficiaries opinions:

- *The measures could be implemented on the Finnish side independently of the Russian partners.*
- *After the co-operation ended, the parts of the goals that were supposed to be implemented together with St. Petersburg partners or exclusively in St. Petersburg were not realised.*
- *The war made the final reporting difficult, and, for example, the Russian partner was unable to do an audit because they did not receive compensation for the work done when the funds were frozen. At the beginning of the war, everything was unclear, and all co-operation was forbidden by the ministry, which made joint reporting difficult but did not in itself affect the implementation of the project.*
- *Even before the offensive war, there were challenges with the coordinator due to administrative changes. It was easier to complete the project with Finnish partners.*
- *Did not affect being a partner.*
- *All measures of the project were implemented before the start of the war. However, the implementation of the operation into a permanent co-operation was not completed.*
- *The most important results of all were completed and put in use.*
- *Our part of the project was realised, but the main part of the project remained inadequate.*
- *Fortunately, the project plan was structured in such a way that the work packages could be implemented on the Finnish side as planned. It was unfortunate that the good results obtained on the Russian side did not fully benefit the Finnish parties or the programme area.*
- *The war ended the project, which was entirely on the Russian side.*
- *Renovated structures and equipment are underutilised due to reduced traffic.*
- *The goal was to increase export activity to Russia. It was not possible at the end of the project.*

Project beneficiaries were also asked, what were the most important problems/barriers that they faced in project's implementation? At this point, the challenges presented above were repeated. By far the most problems for project implementation were caused by COVID-19 and the termination of the co-operation because of the Russian military aggression against Ukraine. Some of the more individual and rather rarely brought up problems were:

- Different operating cultures and prejudices between actors.
- Challenges related to the collection of materials within the project.
- The motivation and inexperience of the beneficiaries/operators in international co-operation patterns.
- Partially negative attitude of Finnish companies.
- Russians' English skills were weak, which made communication difficult.
- Financial management of Russian partners.
- Action of the Russian partners so that they act according to the project plan.
- Keeping Finnish partners in the loop when it comes to schedules.
- The Russian side's lack of progress in permit issues.
- Staff illnesses and staff changes.

Another interesting question to be examined in the evaluation was the disadvantages and damages that the termination of territorial and cross-border co-operation between EU and Russia has produced for the programme area. This question was asked both from project beneficiaries and JMC/JSC and interest groups. The project beneficiaries raised several disadvantages:

- All previous work was voided.
- Academic co-operation was lively and strong. Research and education co-operation has slowed down.
- One important financial instrument is gone, it is now more difficult to get funding for projects.
- The end of official co-operation makes it difficult to handle environmental issues that cross borders. The challenges related to environmental protection occurring on both sides of the border in the programme area must now be answered nationally.
- It will be difficult to maintain clean environment in Finland, considering that both countries share the Baltic Sea.
- Cultural and environmental differences are growing.
- The security of the Baltic Sea region has weakened.
- The follow-up plans created during the project were frozen, and it remains to be seen whether the functional research co-operation built during the project will be restored.
- Problems for companies in the region regarding export; the end of old co-operation contacts.
- Financial harm to companies and the economy. Attempts are being made to revive companies' exports and to get new exports from other countries.
- Problems with the mobility of the workforce and students.
- Economy of the regions weakens with the end of business co-operation and tourism.
- Tourism and the companies that make their living from it suffer from the situation.
- It is a huge inconvenience for South-Eastern Finland, we lose €1 million a day because the borders are closed. The entire tourism and trade sector in the region has had to rethink plans and target groups.
- The opportunities for infrastructure development have weakened.
- Social relationships suffer.
- Both countries are disadvantaged in all aspects of life.
- Hope that the border region will not lag behind in development, as funding would be very important for the region.

In the answers of JMC/JSC members and interest groups it was highlighted that the end of the co-operation will slow down the development and weaken the economic development in the region. It was mentioned that the interruption of all co-operation and economic and social interaction is a particularly hard blow in Southeastern Finland. The opportunities of the St. Petersburg area's 8 million inhabitants economic area turned into risks for this area. It was said that the main co-operation direction of the programme area has disappeared, and this can even have permanent adverse effects on the vitality of the areas. However, the aim is to minimise these adverse effects, also by utilising EU funding. Mainly, the respondents brought up the same issues as the project beneficiaries. These were especially the ending of cross-border tourism and trade, which has an impact on the regional economy, employment and the profitability of companies. The increase in environmental risks was also mentioned.

**The project beneficiaries were asked which practices and results or lessons they see as useful in possible future co-operation.** Useful practices and results were roughly dropping into two groups. These appeared as fairly equal groups according to the respondents. The first one was the **experience of implementing a cross-border project to be used in the future.** This included for example experience in management, leading the project, learning about different ways of working, reacting to changing situations etc. The following examples were raised in this group:

- *Experience in management of cross-border projects, including cultural and bureaucratic elements.*
- *Expertise in managing and leading the project*
- *Good planning, project management and risk management*
- *Much more time has to be reserved for many things than just dealing with Finns. Clear common rules of the game that are adhered to.*
- *Learning about different ways of working and using them.*
- *Taking into account the differences in different operational cultures, preparing alternative action plans in special situations (when the originally planned things cannot be implemented)*
- *It is necessary to prepare for the fact that the partners on the Finnish side also have Russian language skills, in order to find a common understanding in challenging situations.*

**Utilising the outputs and results and contacts gained in the projects** can be considered as a second group. This included the know-how in general and the utilisation of individual developed issues like teaching materials and developed methods. Online collaboration methods including remote working etc. In addition, it was mentioned that it is possible to further utilise networks gained in the project. The following examples were brought up in connection with this theme:

- *It is possible to further utilise the know-how and networks gained in the project.*
- *All the outputs/results of the project are still usable even in international co-operation.*
- *The methods will continue to be usable and can be developed and integrated in international operations directed elsewhere.*
- *With the experience, the skills improved for co-operation with various actors. The transition of the working culture to the web (with the Covid19 pandemic) enables more efficient and closer co-operation with international partners.*
- *Contacts are useful in the future.*
- *Online collaboration methods will also be usable in the future.*
- *New working methods and remote working.*
- *Teaching materials.*
- *Study units still in use.*
- *The co-operation model can be scaled to higher education co-operation with other countries.*
- *We learned about international procurement of expert services.*
- *Research-enterprise co-operation.*
- *Finding common subject areas and ideas, their further utilisation*

## 4. CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

Conclusions and recommendations of the external evaluation were summarised in this chapter. The evaluation covered the South-East Finland - Russia CBC 2014-2020 and its implementation during the programme period. The following conclusions and recommendations were gathered under the given thematic frame of the evaluation. The thematic frame of the evaluation was divided into two parts: 1) assessment of Programme performance and outcomes, and 2) broader context and external factors.

### **Programme performance and outcomes**

#### *Results and impacts (also compared to the set targets)*

SEFR CBC mainly achieved the set target values (set in JOP), and often exceeded these targets. This is what occurred in priorities 1-3, but in priority 4 the set targets are not achieved completely. The biggest exceeding of the target were seen in numbers of persons and enterprises participating in priorities 1-3. The biggest shortfalls were found in priority 4 where the set target of reconstructed or upgraded roads in the vicinity of BCPs was left in 13% and the set target of improved border-crossing points was left in 75%.

As observed above, in overall, the targets that included number of persons and organisations were met and exceeded in Programme. However, it can be inferred to some extent that the JOP indicator targets were somewhat modest. When realization of the projects was examined against the set indicator target values set by the projects themselves, the targets that include number of persons and organisations were met, except for one goal, but other types of indicators than number of persons and organisations, fell short of the target values set by the projects. A significant reason for this can be found on the difficulties caused to project implementation first by COVID-19 and then by the suspension of project activities in Russia.

However, according to the project beneficiaries themselves the planned project results were achieved quite well during the project time. The comparisons were made between the projects that were still underway when the Russian military aggression against Ukraine started and the projects where implementation of the projects had ended before the start of the military aggression. There were differences in the issue. The projects implemented before the Russian military aggression against Ukraine started achieved planned project results better.

The termination of co-operation because of the Russian military aggression against Ukraine affected also heavily on the ability to attain set priority level indicator and in that sense, the basis for examining them was taken away. Particularly indicators of priorities 1 (increase in the number of SMEs operating cross-border) and 4 (reduced waiting time on border crossing points) suffered totally in this changed situation. In addition, regarding the set indicators of priorities 2 (increase in knowledge intensive educational level) and 3 (improved living environments + increased number of recreational areas) it was hard to discover any evidence based on comparable indicators or statistics. Therefore, the matter was examined with qualitative material gathered from the project beneficiaries.

Based on Programme project beneficiaries' view above mentioned priority level indicators were realised only at a fairly moderate level. Clearly the best realisation was seen in increase in knowledge intensive educational level. Successes were clearly fewer in the priority 3 and 4 indicators. The lowest realisation was found on the priority 1. The success was quite seldom

seen in the number of SMEs operating across the border and new business investments due to the challenges raised earlier.

- The end of co-operation with Russian partners and actors also contributed to the fact that the outputs and results of the projects could not necessarily be collected comprehensively - information from the Russian side was missing. Even if these challenges had not arisen, it is hard to capture the outputs and results of the cross-border nature of Programme. In SEFR CBC, as well as in some other programmes, Programme lacked real numerical indicators describing precisely cross-border co-operation. Now indicators were more of collection of separate outputs on both sides of the border.

In general, Programme was seen developing the chosen priorities of Programme rather well, particularly in the priorities 1-3. When dealing with the achievement of concrete results, it was mentioned that one of the most tangible effects were the improvements made to the operation of border crossing points. However, it was acknowledged that the benefit will remain in the future.

When project results were categorised the most common project result was the creation of new networks and modes of collaboration. The second often projects increased awareness regarding the operating environment. Quite often SEFR CBC projects also helped in finding new and innovative modes of action regarding the project's objectives, in finding solution to commonly defined problem and in development of new approaches to networked learning.

Results and impacts can be examined also from the point of view of the most important results or benefits for participating organisations themselves. Results and benefits can be grouped followingly: 1) ***growth of competence and experience***. In this context, results like new information, experience in cross-border operations, additional skills, increase in personnel skills, knowledge of new practices in use were seen. In some of the cases, it was detected that the know-how gained through the project has become a permanent part of the organisation's own operations. 2) ***investments*** made through the projects. The investments were (on the Finnish side) in use and benefitted the participants, for example residents of the area, students, authorities etc. Some examples of the benefits were new technology in use, increasing use of digital tools, improvement of traffic safety and traffic flow. 3) ***the emergence and utilisation of co-operation networks*** among Finnish actors. Networks were created and developed, co-operation increased e.g. in such a way that co-operation is carried out with new operators, contacts were opened in the business world, co-operation models were introduced, etc. In some cases, it was also emphasised that the results, knowledge and developments are used now in different EU projects.

Involvement of Finnish educational and research organisations was very significant for Programme operations. These organisations were often lead partners and partners in the projects. Different public actors also played a rather important role in the operations of Programme. The lead partnership focused on South Karelia in Finnish side. The lack of private sector actors as partners of Programme projects was also noticeable.

Case studies made in the evaluation provided some further information on the outputs and results of the funded projects. In overall, COVID-19 and the Russian unjustified military aggression against Ukraine weakened the possibilities to attain intended results and particularly the possibilities to utilise them. The results were therefore quite few in the case study projects. In priority 1, the main results of the case projects can be summarised: they 1) created

functional spaces and related activities and 2) increased knowledge and improved conditions for tourism. For example, in Green Belt project two Green Belt information centres were established and the one in Finland still operates. In RFLSP project the Life Science Park was opened on the Russian side with infrastructure equipment, but there is no information if it still operates. In priority 2, the case projects particularly improved the know-how and knowledge of the participants and stakeholders, for example through educational actions, developing platform, making analyses, testing methods, creating alliances etc. Another factor that united case projects in this priority was the involvement of teachers and students in the project/development work. The main results identified through case studies can be summarised: 1) increase in knowledge and skills, 2) developed training programmes/curriculars that are now in use and 3) experience and accumulated knowledge now used in further projects.

In priority 3, the main results of the case projects can also be summarised: 1) infrastructure, developed and piloted “things” and 2) increased knowledge. Infrastructure and developed/piloted things can be recognised for example in EcoAgRAS project, as Pervomaisky (Rus) infrastructure facility for manure processing was build up in the project. This result of the project clearly focused on the Russian side. Increased knowledge can be seen for example in made publications, guides, instructions etc. For example, in SIMREC project the joint report compiled the key results of the project, synthesising them in a form of a road map. The work done in the project also led to development of training activities related to simulators. It was recognised that trainings for authorities have been developed further. This also reflected in teaching e.g. by using material in teaching and so that things have been standardised. In priority 4, the main results of the case projects were related to investments. Of the selected two case projects, one was the large infrastructure project to improve border crossing fluency (Vainikkala). It can be said that the Vainikkala project improved the theoretical capacity of the border crossing, but now there is simply not enough traffic to get reliable information about its actual capacity. The investment made in another case project, CB-SAFE, in a virtual training platform, on the other hand, gives the rescue services the opportunity to simulate and practice accident situations that would otherwise be risky or dangerous to practice.

Monitoring data of Programme shows that Programme managed to reach the target groups well, particularly taking into account the challenges caused by COVID-19.

#### Consistency/pertinence

The most important themes were covered in Programme particularly from the project beneficiaries’ point of view. In general, there were some topics omitted by Programme according to the interest groups, but there is no common theme missing, and in this respect only individual themes would be needed in Programme. Overall, Programme managed to cover the themes considered important.

The relevance and consistency of the selected priorities compared to the JOP were very good largely due to programme logic (which JOP also follows) in which the priorities were derived from overarching objectives, overall objectives and from thematic objectives. In addition, thematic objectives were same as formed Programme priorities. The implementation of the JOP was based on the implementation of these selected priorities and the projects fell well in these priorities. Actual programme activities corresponded well to the objectives identified in Programme document.

According to the project beneficiaries the projects were able to promote cross-cutting issues delineated in JOP rather variably. The pertinence of activities and results was best in relation to environmental sustainability. Over 2/3 of the projects promoted this issue rather well. Non-discrimination and gender equality were cross-cutting issues that were promoted by projects in very two parts: and in fact, most of the projects did not consider having promoted these issues. In the light of the cross-cutting issues the best consistency of Programme results was seen in relation to environmental issues.

*The efficiency and the durability of outcomes and their effects within the programme area in Finland including the regional influence*

The projects were divided into two camps regarding whether the end of co-operation with the Russians affected to achieving lasting results or not. The projects considering that the end of the co-operation affected the permanence of the results were in the minority.

The most lasting results of the projects can be grouped: 1) ***improvements and solutions related to studying and learning***. In this context, we noticed issues like (that are in use now) developed online courses, learning environments, curriculums, as well as more concrete developed materials to support learning like games, videos, podcasts etc. 2) ***investments*** made through the projects. These were often investments on infrastructure for example in various equipment, buildings, traffic arrangements, roads, hiking infrastructure, etc. In addition, there were investments for nature restoration and nature tourism. Investments were often seen as effects of more permanent nature among the actors. 3) ***the emergence and utilisation of co-operation networks*** among Finnish actors involved in the project. This was something that can now be benefitted only partly due to current situation in Ukraine, provoked by the Russian aggression, almost entirely only between Finnish partners. Benefits highlighted on the Finnish side are, for example, co-operation between educational institutions and companies and in best cases it has led to further development of ideas and tested things.

One of the greatest added value of projects was that the projects promoted the internal knowledge and skills of organisations and developed skill to act in cross-border development work. It also increased co-operation in the subject area of the project quite often. In addition, projects were generating new project ideas, helped to promote the transfer and implementation of good practices and improved the use of human capital rather well. About in half of the cases project results led to some kind concrete follow-up measures and got new actors involved in the implementation of Programme.

Based on project beneficiaries' views projects have produced mainly 'to some extent' regional or local development effects. In addition, the priorities of Programme responded mainly well to the regional needs of the areas.

The importance of the funding received from Programme was evident. The projects were inquired would similar activities (that now have been implemented in your project) been done without the financial support of the South-East Finland - Russia CBC 2014–2020. 72% of projects mentioned that Programme's funding was crucial, in other words their projects would certainly not have been carried out without Programme funding.

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*Cross-border aspect*

Despite the termination of the collaboration in March 2022 the cross-border co-operation was important for achieving the project results for most of the projects. Only every tenth project would have achieved project results without cross-border co-operation. The results of the evaluation data gathering indicated that Programme was perceived to be of added value to regional development as a result of its focus on cross-border aspects of development. A clear majority of the projects also considered that their project was genuinely cross-border in character and CBC was the right way to implement the project. Instead, in the question of benefits produced equally for both sides of the border, there were some more projects who were skeptical about it. The effects of Covid and the Russian military aggression against Ukraine were strongly emphasised in this context.

The long history of co-operation across the border was reflected in the strong actor networks and partnerships that have emerged and implemented projects over several programme periods. This has also resulted in a strong knowledge on what the missing parts and important topics are for co-operation. High levels of trust among the actors involved have resulted in strong co-operation within Programme structures (between partners and with the Managing Authority).

Complementarity was one of the issues emphasised in case study interviews. The principle of complementarity aims to prevent duplicate actions and encourage collaboration between EU programmes. The results did not provide any evidence of double funding, which refers to the use of different EU funds to finance the same measures. This was a result of learning and experience, and the effective division of labour between EU programmes. Regarding synergies, the most positive examples were related to cases where initial development or experimentation in a CBC project continued in other EU programmes.

The projects were generally happy with the composition of their project consortia as around 70% of respondents stated that they would not have needed other actors/organisations in order to reach the project goals or to implement the project more effectively. Organisations that were most frequently identified as potentially having been useful for the project implementation were private sector organisations/businesses (15% of projects). Also, regional level authorities (11%) and local authorities (7%) would have been needed to get involved in the project into some extent.

**Broader context and external factors**

There were two negative influences that came up in several contexts in the analysis of the evaluation data: the impact of COVID-19 on Programme implementation and the impact of the termination of cross-border co-operation. The projects saw particularly COVID-19 making co-operation difficult. 94% of projects strongly agreed or somewhat agreed with this view. Vast majority of the projects also saw that current situation in Ukraine, provoked by the Russian aggression had a negative impact on the project implementation.

COVID-19 affected the project activities in a concrete way. The main influence categories were 1) the impossibility of visits and direct face-to-face interaction and 2) slowing down of project activities and progress. These were strongly related. Negative effects were minimised by utilising remote connections and developing remote solutions.

Another main challenge for the projects was the impact of the cut-off in cross-border co-operation caused by the Russian unjustified military aggression against Ukraine on Programme implementation. The Russian military aggression against Ukraine cut off all co-operation with the Russian partners and actors. The effect largely depended on what stage the projects were in at the time. In the worst cases, the projects were practically left unfinished. But however, generally, the projects adapted to the situation and changed their project plans and operations in such a way that the projects could be completed on the Finnish side. In these cases, there was no information about the results of the project on the Russian side and certainly some of the results were not realised on the Russian side. In those projects that were nearing the end at the time of cut-off, the effects of the Russian military aggression against Ukraine remained the least.

The third, but clearly less highlighted, challenge was the lack of language skills of the Russian partners. It was mentioned that the lack of language skills significantly limited spontaneous communication and conversations. This was tried to be minimised by using interpreters, but it rarely raised the conversations to the desired level.

The termination of the collaboration caused by the Russian unjustified military aggression against Ukraine made it impossible to reach the project goals for most of Programme projects (ongoing projects at the time). About 22% of respondents saw that it had no affection.

It was also widely seen that the completion of the project on the Finnish side, without Russian partners, benefitted the Finnish partners in the project (58%). Still, only 20% of project Finnish beneficiaries saw that projects became more straightforward and easier to implement after the Russian partners' departure from the project. The termination of cross-border co-operation resulted in damages for the Finnish beneficiaries according to 38% of respondents. In almost half of the cases caused damages from the termination of cross-border co-operation were minimised successfully according to the project beneficiaries. Hence, the termination of cross-border co-operation was not exclusively a bad thing to Finnish project beneficiaries, although it narrowed the scope of the act of cross-border co-operation. In some cases, it made focusing the project work better and thus promoted efficiency in work.

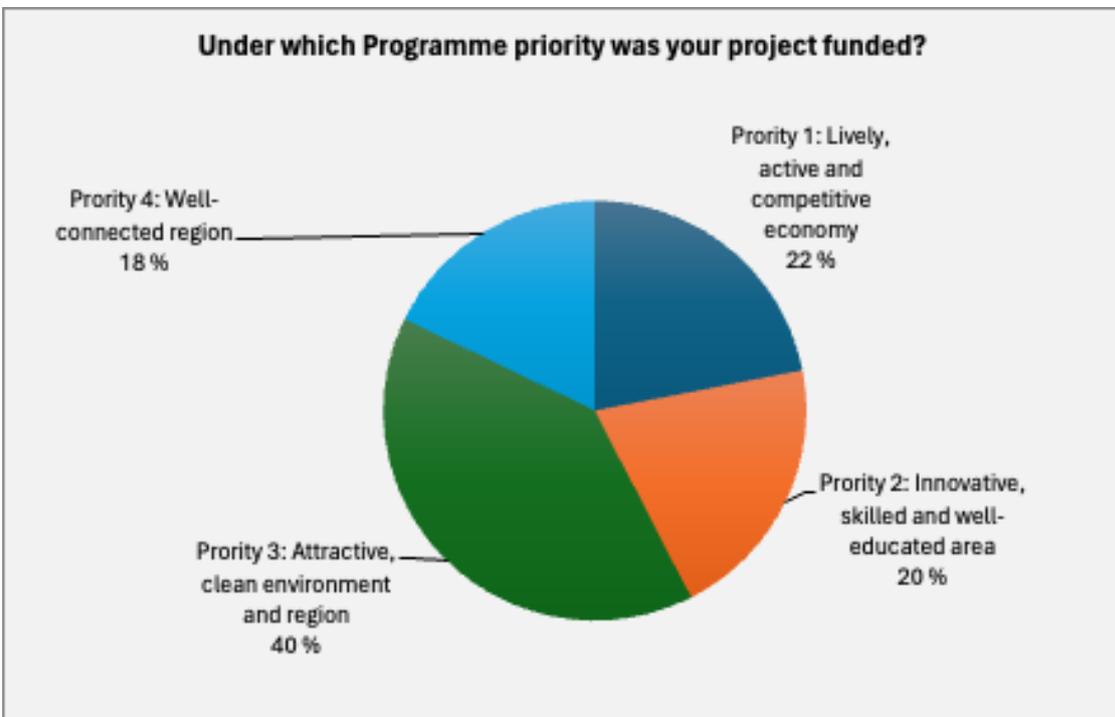
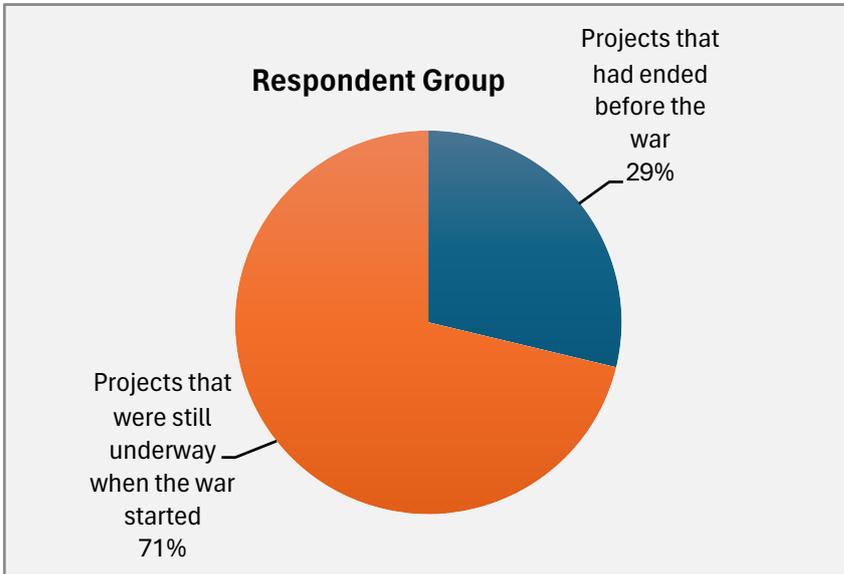
Disadvantages or damages that the termination of territorial and cross-border co-operation between EU and Russia produced for the programme area varied into some extent. In general level, it was highlighted that the end of the co-operation will slow down the development and weaken the economic development in the region. It was mentioned that the interruption of all co-operation and economic and social interaction was a particularly hard blow in Southeastern Finland. From the project beneficiary point of view, it was considered bad that now one important financial instrument is gone, and it is more difficult to get funding for projects. Depending on the nature of projects, the following disadvantages were emphasised: the opportunities created by the co-operation are lost, tourism and trade sector suffer, the end of official co-operation makes it difficult to handle environmental issues that cross borders, differences are growing, financial harm to companies and the economy, problems with mobility of the workforce and students etc. The concern was also that the border region and Southeastern Finland will lag behind in development.

Although operations were hindered by the challenges discussed above, there were practices, results and lessons attained in SEFR CBC project work that are considered useful in possible future co-operation. It was emphasised that the focus must be directed geographically elsewhere now, for example to Nordic and European regional co-operation. And utilise what has been learned in SEFR CBC elsewhere. Useful practices and results emphasised by the

project beneficiaries were roughly dropping into two groups: a) the experience of implementing a cross-border project to be used in the future. This included for example experience in management, leading the project, learning about different ways of working, reacting to changing situations etc. b) the utilisation of the outputs and results and contacts gained in the projects. This included the know-how in general and the utilisation of individual developed issues like teaching materials and developed methods, online collaboration methods including remote working etc. In addition, it is possible to further utilise Finnish networks gained in the project.

- Programme was an important element supporting the vitality of the programme area on the Finnish side. In Finland, the programme area needs new replacement activities that increase regions' vitality. In this way, the know-how gained in Programme by the beneficiaries of Programme could be promoted and utilised in another geographical direction.

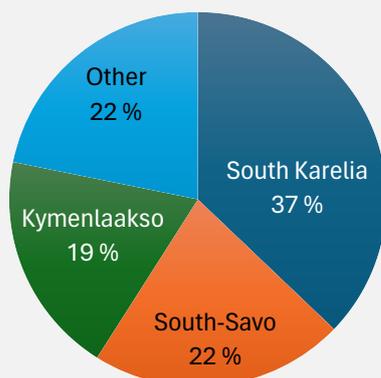
**Annex 1. Background information of the project questionnaire respondents**



**What was your role in the project?**



**Which region do you represent?**



## Annex 2. Case Studies by priorities

### Priority 1: Lively, active and competitive economy

#### 1. Russian-Finnish Life Science Park (RFLSP, LIP KS1444)

##### Basic information

|   |  |  |
|---|--|--|
| <b>Implementation period of the project</b><br>1.7.2019 – 30.6.2022 | <b>Total cost / Programme funding</b><br>3 500 000 € / 2 800 000 € | Priority 1: Lively, active and competitive economy |
| <b>Lead partner:</b> St. Petersburg Technopark JSC                  | <b>Project partners:</b><br>City of Kotka                          |  |

##### Objectives and Key actions

RFLSP was a large infrastructure project. The objective of the project was to develop the life science SME's access to the modern life science research and production capacities by internationalization and commercialization of related solutions. Main activities included infrastructural component to establish modern and equipped research and industrial life science park in Saint Petersburg, and creation of fully operational education centre and laboratories. As the operational component the project was about to establish and strengthen the co-operation and business capacity of cross-border life science cluster for SMEs and large enterprises and R&D communities. Key actions of the project included the creation of laboratory with infrastructure equipment, preparation of a set of laboratory premises, implementation of the whole complex of measures for creating the Russian-Finnish Life Science Park infrastructure, creating infrastructure for the educational centre audience and creation of a continuous microreactor synthesis laboratory with infrastructure equipment.

##### Results and Impacts

The Russian military aggression against Ukraine changed everything from the project point of view. All the contacts with Russian lead Partner had to be terminated. The city of Kotka was obliged to put the project also aside. The project was planned to finish on 30th June but after the 24th of February no further efforts were made to finalise the project. All the events and meetings were cancelled. In September 2023 the Lead Partner sent the Notification on termination Partnership Agreement. The project main results discussed here are produced therefore before the termination of co-operation. The opening of Life science park can be considered as the main result of the project. It contained the planning of new infrastructure for Life Science R&D project, preparation and partial equipment in St.Petersburg in the field of molecular analysis and high-yield syntheses. The premises were officially opened and put into use. The utilisation rate of the premises, etc., was not available for the evaluation and there's no information if the premises are still in use.

The project in the light of the Indicators:

|   | Target value | Realised value |
|---|--------------|----------------|
| Number of enterprises participating in cross-border business events | 10           | 15             |

|   |    |    |
|---|----|----|
| Number of business organisations receiving support for new business opportunities and/or modernization of businesses  | 5  | 5  |
| Number of created structures for regional SME support   | 1  | 0  |
| Number of new cross-border economic clusters created  | 1  | 0  |
| Number of enterprises with access to modern scientific and research infrastructure, research opportunities in the field of life sciences. Including 5 companies listed in the thematic indicators. Baseline - 0 | 10 | 0  |
| Number of enterprises receiving support for export activities of their products. Including 5 companies listed in the thematic indicators. Baseline - 0  | 10 | 10 |
| Number of joint research projects of Russian and Finnish scientists, university teams, companies & other actors. Baseline - 0   | 2  | 0  |
| Number of enterprises taking part in Life Science Acceleration & Training Programme. Baseline - 0   | 10 | 10 |

What results did the project bring to Finnish partner? Intention was that project partner on Finnish side, City of Kotka will benefit from the received experience, collected information, established new contacts and new possibilities for Life Science companies for international co-operation. The main result was related to the testing station located in Kotka. As a result of the project, a training device for strength training was acquired there. With this device, it is also possible to study the effects of food and nutrition on muscle condition. The testing station is one where residents of the city can go to test their fitness and physical characteristics. It is open to everyone; it can be used by companies and individuals. The training device was acquired through the project and is still in use there. In the evaluation, it was found out to what extent this training device has been used. In 2023, the training device has had a total of about 50 uses.

Current situation in Ukraine, provoked by the Russian aggression, made it difficult to utilise the results of the project. Kotka was supposed to establish an exhibition place for what Life Science Park is in St. Petersburg, but it never got to that point. In the project, e.g. a survey of the interest of companies in the area to participate in developing the issue was made, but the interest turned out to be weak. There are no signs that the results of the project are currently being utilised in any other way (than that training device). However, it can be mentioned that the project has brought project learning, which can now be used e.g. in the future project activities of the city of Kotka.

## 2. Suvorov Canals - from forgetness to tourism fortress (Suvorov, KS1792)

### Basic information

|  |  |  |
|--|--|--|
| <b>Implementation period of the project</b><br>1.2.2020 – 31.10.2022     | <b>Total cost / Programme funding</b><br>1 359 455 € / 1 087 508 €   | Priority 1: Lively, active and competitive economy |
| <b>Lead partner:</b><br>Foundation for Recreation Areas in South Karelia | <b>Project partners:</b><br>Non-commercial “Vyborg centre of business support”<br>Saint Petersburg National Research University of Information Technologies, Mechanics and Optics<br>Leningrad region “Information tourist centre” |  |

|  |  |
|--|--|
|  | Museum Agency of Leningrad Region, State Budgetary Institution of Culture<br>Puumala Municipality<br>Finnish Transport Infrastructure Agency<br>Southeast Finland Centre for Economic Development, Transport and the Environment |
|--|--|

### Objectives and Key actions

The Suvorov project's objective was to increase the awareness of Russian general Alexander Suvorov's event-based tourism among the companies and end users. The main goal of the project was to create a cultural tourism route and tourism products around it, which will be implemented by tourism entrepreneurs and cultural producers in the joint network of actors emerging in Southeast Finland and the Leningrad region. In addition, the goals were to promote the accessibility of objects related to the theme by preparing reports and plans for routes and road infrastructure.

Main activities included planning and marketing of the Suvorov route, common product and services based on the content created on both sides of the border. The project also included small-scale repair of the objects and feasibility study of the Vuoksi boating connection to Lake Saimaa and plans for permanent event-site and piers of the fortress Kärnäkoski.

### Results and Impacts

During the project, workshops and test trips were organised for tourism entrepreneurs to design the tourism products that would be available during the project. The project itself implemented several Suvorov-themed cultural events and participated in cultural tourism events organised by others by bringing Suvorov information to them.

As a result of the Suvorov project, the participating Finnish companies got content to implement new tourism products, gathered experience from test trips and networked with other operators. Restaurant companies were able to use new food products to offer to customers. At Suvorov's sites in the Saimaa area, two boat piers were renewed and picnic tables were built on the canals. Documentary series "Suvorov in Finland", videos were also produced.

The prepared plans for the boat route through historical canals and the new bridge on main road, as well as the feasibility plans for the Vuoksi canal, enable the preparation of investments that improve public tourism and the accessibility of these destinations.

When the project was prepared and funding was obtained, the world situation was completely different than it is now. There were good prospects that this would become a new and interesting tourist theme that would truly unite Finns and Russians.

The project in the light of the indicators:

|  | Target value | Realised value |
|--|--------------|----------------|
| Number of enterprises participating in cross-border business events  | 10           | 0              |
| Number of business organisations receiving support for new business opportunities and/or modernization of businesses | 5            | 46             |
| Number of new cross-border economic clusters created   | 1            | 0              |
| Cultural tourism events organised during the project   | 10           | 14             |
| Touring exhibitions  | 2            | 1              |
| Design and content production of the Suvorov tourism route   | 1            | 1              |
| Traveller's Guide and Map of 'Suvorov route'   | 1            | 0              |
| Planned package travel product packages  | 5            | 6              |
| Websites in three languages  | 1            | 0              |

|   |   |   |
|---|---|---|
| Multimedia and virtual technology implementation from Suworov, Documentary series from Suworov. | 2 | 1 |
| Object renovation and road signs  | 5 | 3 |
| Bridge plan documents and road plan in Käyhkä   | 1 | 1 |
| Boat route plan through Käyhkä and Kukonharju canals  | 1 | 1 |
| Boating Route master plan from the Lake Saimaa to river Vuoksi                                  | 1 | 1 |
| Planning the event shelter of the Kärnäkoski fortress   | 1 | 1 |

Results and impacts of the project were discussed in the interview of the lead partner of the project. The corona pandemic started almost at the same time as the project. The people responsible for the project had time to visit St. Petersburg and meet the Russian partners at the beginning of the project, but after that no visits could be organised. All the events in 2020 were moved forward, which is why an extension was requested for the project. In March 2022, the Russians were excluded from the project due to the Russian military aggression against Ukraine. After that, the Finns implemented the project on the Finnish side according to the plan.

In order to promote tourism, the project increased tourism operators' awareness of Suworov, but the topic became very uninteresting in the final phase of the project. After all, Suworov was a Russian warlord. However, the project tried to emphasise that it is our region's own history, because South-Eastern Finland has been a border region between Sweden-Finland and Russia, and Suworov's activities here were related to defending the region and fortifying against Sweden.

In addition to increasing awareness, some plans were made in the project, which have the most tangible benefits when viewed after the end of the project.

- A feasibility study was done for Imatra about the canal locks, which would allow Saimaa to pass Tainionkoski and lower down Vuoksi to Imatrankoski.
- Boat route plan through the Suworov canals. The route is very interesting, 30 km long, and it straightens the route from Lappeenranta in the direction of Savonlinna so that it does not go around through Puumalansalmi.
- Bridge plan for Puumala road. The Suworov canal route goes right under that bridge, and the bridge, if realised, would improve the safety of the Puumala road. This project will probably be realised within a few years.

The fact that tourism companies would make use of this theme did not happen now. The world situation zeroed out its interest. The potential would have been especially with Russian tourists. Suworov is also well known in, for example, Switzerland, and the idea was to make an international tourism complex that would have destinations in Switzerland as well. It might also have increased the interest of European history buffs.

### 3. Green Belt Connecting People (GB, KS1338)

#### Basic information

|  |   |  |
|--|---|--|
| <b>Implementation period of the project</b><br>1.5.2019 – 31.10.2021 | <b>Total cost / Programme funding</b><br>699 753 € / 559 802 €  | Priority 1: Lively, active and competitive economy |
| <b>Lead partner:</b> Municipality of Virolahti                       | <b>Project partners:</b><br>Administration of municipal formation Sovetskoe<br>Kehittämisyhdistys Sepra ry<br>Metsähallitus, Parks and Wildlife Finland<br>Municipality of Virolahti<br>Union "Leningrad Region Chamber of Commerce and Industry" |  |

### Objectives and Key actions

The overall objective of the project was to contribute to development of the programme area by using the advantages and benefits of Green Belt, one of the most significant ecological networks in Europe. This network knows no borders and has an impact on the regions' vitality and the wellbeing of its inhabitants.

Key actions of the project included the creation of two Green Belt info centres. Info point on the Finnish side has been designed and constructed from the scratch in co-operation with Aalto university and local construction company. The form of the building is inspired by Finnish traditional wood architecture and is also a modern interpretation of Finnish laavu. The exhibition has been planned and implemented by the project team and local graphic designer. All the necessary equipment is purchased and digital materials presenting the natural and cultural sites of Green Belt uploaded.

The Russian party has built the information point consisting of two facilities: the summer and winter information centres. The summer information centre is designed as a landscaped pier with benches, trees, and an information stand. The winter information centre is equipped with furniture, technical equipment and information materials about the project and local sights.

There were also 12 workshops and training events organised in Finland and Russia with total number of participants 203 and 45 companies receiving support for new business opportunities and/or modernisation of businesses.

### Results and Impacts

The main results of the projects were:

- Two Green Belt information centres have been established (in Virolahti Finland and Sovetsky Russia). Both centres are operated as an integral part of tourism services of municipalities. Content for centres usage of Green Belt zone was created, both digital and traditional.
- 360-virtual presentations about seven national parks/nature reserves and 15 destinations in them in Finland; new brochures for Green Belt destinations in three languages and trail information of Green Belt destinations was improved.
- In addition to the centres, two Green Belt pop-up info points were produced. Project disseminated widely information about Green Belt in the region, promoted cultural exchange and nature tourism and built SME-NGO networks around the theme of Green Belt.

In the light of the Indicators:

|   | Target value | Realised value |
|---|--------------|----------------|
| New Green Belt informational centres  | 2            | 2              |
| Workshops and study tours for improving skills  | 12           | 12             |
| Participants of workshops and trainings (NGOs, companies, associations, third sector) | 200          | 173            |
| Target group covered by internet campaign   | 10 000       | 25 883         |
| Number of brochures for promotion of Green Belt centres and GB concept                | 5 000        | 551            |
| Number of dissemination events  | 3            | 4              |

Results and impacts of the project were discussed in the interviews of the lead partner and beneficiaries of the project. The most significant impacts of the project can be seen in created

Green Belt centre. The centre in Virolahti is operating as a part of Bunker Museum, financed by Virolahti (Finland) municipality. Green Belt Info centre in Sovetsky (Russia) is functioning in frames of Tourism Development activities of the municipality. Both centres are operated by Virolahti and Sovetsky as an integral part of tourism services of municipalities. It was mentioned that thanks to the project, two small municipalities have gain international visibility by becoming a part of European Green Belt network.

There was no certain information as to whether the centre is still operating today on the Russian side. And if it does, there's no information about the extent to which it operates. But the centre on the Finnish side still operates and it has been possible to plan other activities around it. The bunker museum has about 11,000 annual visitors, of which about 4,000 also visit the Green Belt Centre. There is no entrance fee to the Green Belt Centre. It was discussed in the interviews that the Centre has been utilised for example by some local entrepreneurs and companies for their business purposes. The Centre also increased the number of visitors interested in nature. The project created 360-virtual presentations about seven national parks/nature reserves in Finland. With the help of 3D virtual glasses, three-dimensional world of nature experiences opens up in the nature destinations of the eastern border and Virolahti. That way travelers will receive nature related information about destinations and 3D virtual glasses are still in use.

Current situation in Ukraine, provoked by the Russian aggression, made it difficult to utilise the results of the project as well as Covid-19 situation made co-operation during the project difficult. Because it is a question of touristic destinations these challenges have weakened the chances of benefiting from the project's results. It was expected that the created Centres will boost travel business opportunities and networks around them. However, no major impact on this can be seen in the current situation. The conditions have been created for this, and in the future, tourists must be attracted to the Centre created from other directions than beyond the eastern border. The lead partner of the project has been able to utilise the best practices and knowledge accumulated in the project and currently a new project is being planned (which is not directly a continuation project).

#### 4. King's Road Renaissance (KS11135)

##### Basic information

|  |   |  |
|--|---|--|
| <b>Implementation period of the project</b><br>1.1.2021 – 31.3.2023              | <b>Total cost / Programme funding</b><br>573 877 € / 459 102 €  | Priority 1: Lively, active and competitive economy |
| <b>Lead partner:</b> South-Eastern Finland University of Applied Sciences (XAMK) | <b>Project partners:</b><br>Metropolia University of Applied Sciences<br>Non-commercial Partnership "European-Russian InnoPartnership"<br>Peter the Great Saint-Petersburg Polytechnic University |  |

##### Objectives and Key actions

King's Road is an ancient road connecting the Nordic countries Norway, Sweden and Finland to Russia. The road itself has changed through history but there still are many signs left of the historic events and traditions along the road.

The objective of the King's Renaissance project was to improve competitiveness, capability, and competence of new business possibilities for SMEs in the programme area. Project had a focus on increasing the attraction and awareness among companies, tourism sector and users of the

services. Main activities included analysis of joint historical heritage objects in the King's Road route in Finland and Russia, and development of a virtual interactive King's Road platform with the latest VR/AR technologies for businesses and tourists of the border area. Awareness raising, capacity-building and networking events were also important activities in promoting cross-regional co-operation between business society, local authorities, historical and culture associations.

### Results and Impacts

The project's results were grouped in four categories:

1. King's Road ecosystem was developed: the project improved existing co-operation between regional stakeholders (local authorities, business society, historical and culture associations) to some extent on international level and significantly between stakeholders on the Finnish side to a new effective level.
2. Awareness and attractiveness of King's Road was increased by a) organising project's own events (9 events with total participant number 303 persons) b) participating in 7 events to promote King's Road route during them; c) by implementing plenty of marketing activities and producing digital and printed materials.
3. The project offered business development opportunities for 14 companies by organising training sessions on Virtual guided tour planning and implementation.
4. Economical and historical value of the King's Road region was promoted by combining cultural history of King's Road with modern high-end technological solutions. Plenty of digital materials and tools were produced to serve the needs of municipalities, companies and third sector:
  - 360-degree virtual tour of King's Road
  - AR mobile King's Road application
  - Reusable 360-degree material for 24 locations
  - Reusable 3D models of 10 locations
  - Kymnlinna 1800 VR Museum
  - 360-degree virtual tour in modern Kymnlinna
  - visitkingsroad.fi digital platform

The project in the light of the indicators:

|   | Target value | Realised value |
|---|--------------|----------------|
| Number of joint events for regional authorities, experts and other relevant stockholders  | 5            | 9              |
| Number of modernized businesses in co-operated regions created with the project support   | 10           | 7              |
| Number of participants in project events  | 200          | 303            |
| Number of participants in intensive training sessions and hackathons  | 50           | 62             |
| Number of expert organisations/ stakeholders involved in further development and evaluation of the model of King's Road ecosystem | 10           | 19             |
| Number of ecosystems' participants increased capacity and competence during the project   | 10           | 18             |
| Number of digital objects created for virtual interactive King's Road Platform  | 15           | 36             |
| Number of users of virtual interactive King's Road Platform   | 20           | 25             |

Results and impacts of the project were discussed in the interviews of available partners and beneficiaries of the project. From this point of view, the most significant benefits of the project

were seen in created visitkingsroad.fi digital platform. It was mentioned that before creation of platform, there was no place where people could get information about the King's Road on the Finnish side. In the previous situation, there were only small-format King's Road Association's (Finland) information pages, which only contained text about what King's Road is and contact information. Now there is a clear tourist portal from which travelers can view the route and the destinations along it. King's Road Association is organisation which has been responsible for developing and promoting of the King's Road route on the Finnish side. The project outputs have been utilised and promoted further by Association. Also, Association is operating and managing the digital platform (updating, contacting registered users, approving new users and their contents).

In the interview of representative of Association some further information about the use of digital platform was gathered. The digital platform has 66 user organisations now. Some users have more than one tourist attraction in platform. When talking about the number of visitkingsroad.fi digital platform end users (customers), there has been around 10,000 users last year and the number of monthly visitors has been around 500 this year. During the summer, the number of visitors is expected to increase this year as well. Feedback has been collected from users of the platform. This feedback has been good. Proven benefits have been e.g. increasing visibility and activity. Increasing visibility will be further emphasised by new signage plan. There is now an effort to get funding for this plan. In the interview, the project was considered a good example of the continuity of the results of the project thought out in advance: there was ready executor, which sets out to implement and maintain the results of the project.

Another significant result of the project also emerged in the interviews. The digital materials produced during the project are now available to all municipalities and tourism operators along the route. These materials include all the material mentioned above. It was seen that this material can be used in a very versatile way in tourism. One of the materials made was highlighted. The work package, which created a virtual reality ensemble of Kymi Castle, is in use at the Kymenlaakso museum. It was first demoed at Wellamo and as a result it ended up as part of the museum's exhibition. This is a clear continuation of the work done in the project. Current situation in Ukraine, provoked by the Russian aggression, has made it difficult to utilise the results of the project. Covid-19 situation has calmed down, and people have started to travel indicating a growing tourism interest. Although there is increased interest in travelling business, the tourism business is very vulnerable for any kind of crisis, and current situation in Ukraine, provoked by the Russian aggression, may restrain cross-border and international travelling for many years.

## Priority 2: Innovative, skilled and well-educated area

### 5. Energy-efficient systems based on renewable energy for Arctic conditions (EFREA, KS1054)

#### Basic information

|   |   |  |
|---|---|--|
| <b>Implementation period of the project</b><br>1.11.2018 – 30.4.2022    | <b>Total cost / Programme funding</b><br>1 350 000 € / 1 080 000 €  | Priority 2: Innovative, skilled and well-educated area |
| <b>Lead partner:</b><br>Lappeenranta-Lahti University of Technology LUT | <b>Project partners:</b><br>Federal State Unitary Enterprise Central Research Institute of Structural Materials Prometey<br>Peter the Great St. Petersburg Polytechnic University |  |

#### Objectives and Key actions

Objective of EFREA project was to improve cross-border institutional framework with the increased level of knowledge, innovative potential, and lifelong learning in renewable energy production in the Arctic.

Main activities consisted of the following works: scientific and technical analysis and evaluation, structural design and material selection for the arctic conditions and development of fabrication and testing methods, utilisation of big data collected from welding operations to ensure welding quality and productivity, metallic and non-metallic materials, and wind turbine operations.

#### Results and Impacts

The originally aimed results were not achieved completely in EFREA project. However, considering the changed circumstances and situations during the project, several significant results related to themes and topics in question were obtained. Research results and information were obtained especially related on the following topics:

- Quality control and management of welding production by utilising automation and sensors.
- Control of the factors that affect the durability (static and dynamic loads) of welded joints, including arctic conditions.
- Technical developments related to the materials and manufacturing of wind turbines operating in arctic conditions.
- Tentative guidelines and recommendations for the design and manufacturing of wind turbine structures operating in arctic conditions.
- Development and enhancement of the teaching environments and tools related to materials and welding technology.

The project in the light of the indicators:

|   | Target value | Realised value |
|---|--------------|----------------|
| Number of enterprises using Programme support for co-operation with research institutions     | 10           | 1              |
| Number of persons under age of 24 years and over 45 years participating in educational events | 300          | 26             |
| Number of new cross-border curricula created  | 10           | 0              |
| Number of seminars organised  | 9            | 3              |
| Number of academic papers published   | 30           | 11             |
| Number of Bachelor' theses  | 10           | 7              |

|  |    |   |
|--|----|---|
| Number of Masters' theses  | 20 | 5 |
| Number of Doctoral theses  | 7  | 1 |
| Number of students taking internship abroad  | 15 | 0 |
| Interactive map of the Arctic area, which shows possible placements for wind energy generators | 1  | 0 |
| Online system from blended learning  | 1  | 0 |
| System for material selection and utilisation  | 1  | 0 |
| Established joint laboratory of Underwater welding of LUT and SPbPU                            | 1  | 0 |
| New welding consumables (including underwater welding)   | 3  | 0 |
| International conferences attendance   | 5  | 4 |

In the interview with the lead partner of the project, it was revealed that, on a general level, it can be considered a good result that such an international project could be implemented at all in the challenging world situation in which it was during the project. There were both the COVID 19 pandemic and changes to the project plan due to EU sanctions on Russia. At the end of the project, the Russian military aggression against Ukraine also began, which cut off all communication with the Russian project partners. These lessons learned during project implementation can be used in the future in any international project or collaboration.

In terms of the content of the project, results related to substance were also achieved, the most important of which was an increase in know-how on matters related to welding quality management, as well as research results and knowledge related to wind turbines in wind power plants. This know-how and these research results can be utilised at LUT. Accumulated know-how is used, for example, in the form of continuous project activities and in direct order studies. Among the project staff, those working in teaching roles can pass on this know-how also in teaching situations and materials.

The project had a website where information was shared. There were found e.g. various research results and theses obtained within the project. A seminar was also held during the project, in which Finnish welding companies participated.

## 6. Multi-level Education Towards Advanced Forestry (METAFor, KS1716)

### Basic information

|   |  |  |
|---|--|--|
| <b>Implementation period of the project</b><br>1.9.2019 – 30.6.2023 | <b>Total cost / Programme funding</b><br>776 601 € / 621 280 €   | Priority 2: Innovative, skilled and well-educated area |
| <b>Lead partner:</b> Natural Resources Institute Finland LUKE       | <b>Project partners:</b><br>Forest Research Institute, Karelian Research Centre, Russian Academy of Science, Russia<br>Saint-Petersburg Forest Technical University, Russia<br>Lappeenranta University of Technology (LUT)<br>University of Helsinki |  |

### Objectives and Key actions

METAFor project's objective was to develop and apply an innovative multi-level cross-border educational platform with new digital applications in the field of the sustainable forest management in the region. Specific objectives of the project were 1) to reveal potentials and obstacles for sustainable forest use in the region and find the ways to solve the problems through

providing cross-border information exchange and co-operation by using the expertise of the project group, steering committee and other experts, 2) improve practical and theoretical skills of forestry practitioners and students and thus improve forestry practices already during the project implementation and in the long run and 3) disseminate the project results on various levels: local, national and international, aiming at increased cross-border information exchange and co-operation. Project activities included a) the survey analyzing the current situation in education related to forestry and environment, b) training to develop study curricula and organising a set of courses and c) communicating the results and developing study curricula and guidelines for end-users.

### Results and Impacts

The main project results included:

1. One organised cross-border seminar for exchanging of expertise and formulating problems in sustainable forest management with the involvement of stakeholders and end-users.
2. 15 organised university courses, three trainings for foresters and two trainings for school students, as well as six study curricula.
3. The eight communication outputs were delivered. They include publications, press-releases, project website and additional educational actions: lectures and seminars at universities, presenting the project results on national and international conferences, communication with media.

The project in the light of the Indicators:

|   | Target value | Realised value |
|---|--------------|----------------|
| Number of enterprises using Programme support for co-operation with research institutions   | 5            | 11             |
| Number of persons under age of 24 years and over 45 years participating in educational events   | 200          | 214            |
| Number of new cross-border curricula created  | 4            | 6              |
| Number of cross-border information exchange and co-operation seminars with SC on sustainable forest management organised by the project | 2            | 1              |
| Number of participants in the seminars from both sides of the border  | 60           | 25             |
| Total number of educational actions organised by the project (2 trainings, 12 university courses and 3 events for school students)      | 17           | 15             |
| Number of the students' bachelor and master theses performed within the project   | 6            | 3              |
| Number of press-releases and other communication outputs  | 15           | 8              |

Results and impacts of the project were discussed in the interviews of the lead partner of the project. Current situation in Ukraine, provoked by the Russian aggression, has made it difficult to utilise the results of the project as well as Covid-19 situation made co-operation during the project difficult. The most significant benefits of the project seem to focus on the increase in knowledge and skills of the project beneficiaries and stakeholders. Students and forestry professionals have gained information, and their level of education and expertise has increased to some extent. Another benefit is that the work of the project influenced the curricula. The impact on the curricula has only been on the Finnish side, and the goal of a curricula with a cross-border

dimension has not been achieved in practice. According to the feedback collected in the project some students have found the educational actions (courses) significant and have pointed out that they have been able to utilise the knowledge gained in their careers afterwards. In addition, three master thesis has been performed within the project.

The lead partner of the project was able to utilise the know-how and knowledge accumulated in the project in teaching activities and in the new projects. The lead partner is involved in Metsähallitus' LIFE Project, in which Luke is involved particularly in education network. The duration of the project is eight years, and it is called Priodiversity LIFE. However, this project is not actually a follow-up project for METAFOR, but it utilises the teaching materials and inventory materials created in the project to some extent. Within this LIFE project, university-level trainings and courses are organised on the long-term impact of restoration on diversity. Another project in which the lead partner has been able to utilise into some extent the know-how and knowledge accumulated in the project is Nordic Guidance on Nature-based solutions project commissioned by the Nordic Council of Ministers.

## 7. EDU-creating new customer value through cross-border (EDUCRO, KS1678)

### Basic information

|   |   |  |
|---|---|--|
| <b>Implementation period of the project</b><br>1.10.2019 – 31.12.2022 | <b>Total cost / Programme funding</b><br>641 250 € / 513 000 €  | Priority 2: Innovative, skilled and well-educated area |
| <b>Lead partner:</b> LAB University of Applied Sciences               | <b>Project partners:</b><br>Finnish University of Applied Sciences and Arts Ltd.<br>St. Petersburg State Budgetary Institution of Continuing Professional Education "Institute for Cultural Programs" |  |

### Objectives and Key actions

Project's objective was to promote skilled, well-educated and connected entrepreneurs, workforce and organisations to produce new customer-oriented and internationally competent cultural products and services in the digital age. Main activities included interactive co-creation of cross-border alliance with partner education institutions and their partners, and with businesses and institutions in a creative culture and hospitality industries. Project involved companies and organisations in the culture and tourism sector from South Karelia and Uusimaa in Finland, St. Petersburg, and the Leningrad region in Russia. Over 20 companies and organisations joined the project: theatres, museums, cultural spaces, art galleries, libraries, and event producers from Finland and Russia. The project also actively collaborated with the outsourced experts to bring cutting-edge knowledge.

### Results and Impacts

The results of the project can be divided into groups:

- 1) Creation of collaboration model
- 2) Creation of curricula and training programme
- 3) Creation of new business ideas

One of the main results of the project is the training programme including six educational modules. Each module consisted of webinars, online workshops, and individual mentoring sessions for companies. The modules' themes were related to event management, future trends, customer experience, service design, fundraising, marketing, and networking. The results also included organised seminars, webinars and study visits. Altogether over 600 people participated

in the project trainings. The online courses were anticipated to be available for Master programme students in LAB and for continuous education via Open University in Humak.

The project in the light of the Indicators:

|   | Target value | Realised value |
|---|--------------|----------------|
| Number of enterprises using Programme support for co-operation with research institutions     | 10           | 13             |
| Number of persons under age of 24 years and over 45 years participating in educational events | 220          | 285            |
| Number of new cross-border curricula created  | 2            | 2              |
| New customer-oriented cultural service concepts, created in cross-border collaboration        | 6            | 17             |
| Collaborative education methods   | 6            | 6              |
| New work-life relevant courses based on international collaboration                           | 2            | 2              |
| Exchanges   | 4            | 7              |
| Virtual courses   | 2            | 2              |
| Co-creation experiments   | 8            | 11             |
| Publications (business models, customer-oriented product development)                         | 2            | 5              |

Results and impacts of the project were discussed in the interview of the lead partner of the project. Moreover, some documented results are used in topic. One of the main results is the organised training programme. It was a six-module online training for both Finnish and Russian companies and also students were invited. The main topics of training were related to service design creating new business ideas, anticipating trends and also to trying to cope with the Covid situation. The opportunities Covid situation creates through digitalization was one of the most popular topics among the participants. During the last year of the project, a master degree course was created (by using the recording of the events). This course was held by LAB and Humak. This course is still ongoing in LAB, and there were nine Master students enrolled in the first implementation, and 12 for the current academic year. The course is online and offered to the students of the Master's Degree Programme in Business Administration, International Tourism and Event Management. The course is 100% based on the materials created in the EDUCRO project (videos, presentations, quizzes). One of the activities organised by the project was networking events. Many ways of co-operation (how to collaborate online) were tested in the project. There's an article about it and that model is one of the outputs of the project. For one customer company of the project it included writing the thesis.

According to the feedback collected in the project regarding the masterclasses/events, participants found some important takeaways from these events. These were ideas (of partnerships, how to use social media to promote events, fund raising, working with Zoom etc.) and new contacts. Some of the project customer also raised issues such as starting to work on a new strategy and publishing a few projects online. According to the feedback project customers weren't agreed on the co-operation with other customers/companies involved in the projects, even though there were some plans regarding the issue. Both Finnish and Russian companies involved in the project had expectations to enter the market across the border, but Covid and later the termination of cross-border co-operation due to the Russian military aggression against Ukraine watered down these intentions. Therefore, from the business point of view, the benefit gained from the participation is mainly the experience/knowledge and the possible further utilisation of this knowledge elsewhere. Before the Russian military aggression against Ukraine started there were also plans for continuing co-operation with new project. LAB as a lead partner

is planning to leave funding application for Central Baltic Program in the theme of this project. As it is shown in the table, the project also produced five publications.

### Priority 3: Attractive, clean environment and region

#### 8. Introduction of the ecological system of agriculture is the basis for sustainable development of border rural area (EcoAgRAS, LIP KS1441)

##### Basic information

|   |   |  |
|---|---|--|
| <b>Implementation period of the project</b><br>1.4.2019 – 31.3.2022 | <b>Total cost / Programme funding</b><br>3 150 000 € / 2 520 000 €  | Priority 3: Attractive, clean environment and region |
| <b>Lead partner:</b> Natural Resources Institute Finland LUKE       | <b>Project partners:</b><br>Administration of Priozerskij District<br>Leningrad Region Government, Committee for Agroindustry and Fishery Complex<br>The Institute for Engineering and Environmental Problems in Agricultural Production – branch of Federal State Budgetary Scientific Institution “Federal Scientific Agri engineering Centre VIM”- IEEP - branch of FSBSI FSAC VIM (original lead partner) |  |

##### Objectives and Key actions

The objective of the EcoAgRAS large infrastructure project was to improve the rural territories' environment through design, technical, technological and managerial solutions and infrastructure development. Project key actions included demonstration of best available techniques for manure utilisation in one cattle breeding farm “Plemkhoz Pervomaskoje” (In Russia) as the pilot facility to increasing recycled and used livestock/poultry waste and reduction of negative environmental impacts. Another key action was to develop interactive tools and technical re-equipment for use of agricultural enterprises and to provide training of specialists and officials in the Leningrad region in the field of ecological safety of agriculture, waste utilisation and international regulatory frameworks.

##### Results and Impacts

As a main object of the project the Pervomaisky infrastructure facility for manure processing was build up. Besides Terms of Reference for elaboration of an interactive tool for monitoring of animal waste management and coordination of organic fertilizers use was prepared and commented by the Finnish partner. That interactive tool was finding farms and their location in the map of the Leningrad region territory. The Finnish partner Luke was discussing and giving impact of environmental issues concerning manure, its value and efficient use with Russian partner. Comments on planning papers and documents were given by Luke's research scientists. In the project, the scientific research results and the practical manure management issues were facing each other. The knowledge and information were exchanged between Finland and Russia. The work was fulfilling also in the webinars of Farmers school and International Days. Research scientists, authorities, farmers, students, teachers, advisory people met by webinars. Awareness of environmental aspects was enhanced.

The project in the light of the Indicators:

|   | Target value | Realised value<br>(Interim phase) |
|---|--------------|-----------------------------------|
| Number of persons participating in environmental awareness raising activities   | 150          | 227                               |
| Number of improved systems on water and waste management created  | 1            | 1                                 |
| % manure produced on the farm are processed   | 80           | 80                                |
| A system has been established for accounting of organic fertilisers used  | 1            | 1                                 |
| The Plan of technical and technological re-equipment of the enterprises of agro-industrial complex is taken as a basis \ used by the Committee in its activity              | 1            | 1                                 |
| The monitoring system has been established  | 1            | 1                                 |
| An operating pilot facility has been created and is available to final beneficiaries  | 1            | 1                                 |
| 2 seminars organised for stakeholders to demonstrate the facility, with no less than 150 participants   | 1            | 0                                 |
| The interactive tool for monitoring of animal/poultry waste management and coordination of organic fertilizers has taken as a basis \ used by the Committee in its activity | 1            | 1                                 |

Results and impacts of the project were discussed in the interviews of the lead partner representatives of the project. It was mentioned that particularly Covid-19 hampered the operation of the project. The project was built in such a way that on-site visits were supposed to be made being the main tools to be applied. When visits could not be made due to Covid-19, genuine interaction was missing from the project. Before that, a genuine connection between operators was achieved. In that sense the best outcome was that the communication could be opened between the actors across the border in general, and it was not a rigid communication in nature. After that, communication was based on remote connections, and operators on the Russian side quickly put these systems based on remote connections into use.

The most significant result of the project is the previously mentioned buildup infrastructure facility for manure processing in Russia. This result of the project is thus clearly focused on the Russian side. It was mentioned that before the current geopolitical situation escalated, on the Russian side, from the point of view of nutrient management, things were going in the right direction, at least in the participating unit and area. Actions were taken and the idea that we have common responsibility for the state of the environment progressed. Russian partner had mapped all the farms in the area on a map with a geographic information system. Together with buildup infrastructure facility It was said to have an indirect effect on the Finnish side. It will produce benefits in the Finnish side if the load can be reduced in the Gulf of Finland. However, all this co-operation has ended, and the state of the environment has not improved in this regard. On the Finnish side, there are no benefits/impacts currently seen from the perspective of the interviewees. Naturally, the work done in the project has been a continuation of the expertise in the theme, and the accumulated knowledge and experience will be utilised in the future. A more specific target of utilisation was not revealed or known, but at least the use of drones in the mapping work done in project could be utilised in the future.

## 9. Simulators for improving cross-border oil spill response in extreme conditions (SIMREC, KS1703)

### Basic information

|  |   |  |
|--|---|--|
| <b>Implementation period of the project</b><br>9.1.2019 – 30.11.2022 | <b>Total cost / Programme funding</b><br>1 467 266 € / 1 173 813 €  | Priority 3: Attractive, clean environment and region |
| <b>Lead partner:</b> Kotka Maritime Research Association             | <b>Project partners:</b><br>Aalto University Foundation sr<br>Admiral Makarov State University of Maritime and Inland Shipping<br>Finnish Environment Institute SYKE<br>South-Eastern Finland University of Applied Sciences XAMK<br>State Marine Technical University of Saint-Petersburg SMTU<br>University of Helsinki |  |

### Objectives and Key actions

SIMREC project objective was to strengthen co-operation network between authorities and research institutes to reduce risks related to increase maritime traffic and oil spills in extreme conditions. Key actions of the project included development of the scenario and recommendations for the preparedness in connection to the future maritime traffic based on a combination of analysis of the past traffic data and expert knowledge. The results were incorporated into an open-access test-bed tool providing information about the vessels (types, dimensions, cargo), in a format suitable for accidental oil spill analysis. The project also executed technical development of simulators ensuring the software connectivity between simulator centres in Russia and Finland.

### Results and Impacts

SIMREC project focused on mitigating the environmental risk arising from the oil transportations in the Eastern Gulf of Finland by developing tools to improve the inter-organisational and international oil spill management preparedness. The key output of the project is a joint report, titled as “Designing effective simulator-based oil spill response trainings for improved performance, preparedness, and societal resilience”<sup>2</sup>. The report compiles the key results of the project, synthesizing them in the form of a road map for the effective utilisation of simulator environments in the context of oil spill management rehearsals. The developed tools and ideas were tested in practical simulator exercises involving search and rescue authorities and operative personnel. The road map provides concrete recommendations to support the design and organisation of effective simulator-based oil spill response trainings. Its key target audience consists of those parties that intend to plan and organise simulator-based rehearsals, particularly in the context of oil spill management, but also other environmental disasters.

The project in the light of the Indicators:

|   | Target value | Realised value |
|---|--------------|----------------|
| Number of persons participating in environmental awareness raising activities | 0            | 308            |
| Number of improved systems on water and waste management created              | 0            | 2              |
| Number of written reports, reviewed articles and recommendations              | 6            | 13             |

<sup>2</sup> [https://www.merikotka.fi/wp-content/uploads/2022/11/SIMREC\\_roadmap-1.pdf](https://www.merikotka.fi/wp-content/uploads/2022/11/SIMREC_roadmap-1.pdf)

|   |    |   |
|---|----|---|
| Number of written simulator instructor's guidelines on technical specifications | 1  | 2 |
| Number of stakeholder meetings and expert workshops                             | 10 | 9 |
| Number of exercises/trainings   | 5  | 4 |
| Number of dissemination events  | 3  | 5 |
| Number of presentation of results in professional seminars and conferences      | 2  | 8 |

Results and impacts of the project were discussed in the interviews of some selected available partners of the project. Moreover, some documented results are used in topic. From the partner's point of view, the road map may not be the main result, although it is an important result of the project's operation. Roadmap document was produced and published, summarising the results, and synthesising them to a set of practical recommendations. Part of the results were also published in two peer-reviewed scientific articles. There were no signs that these recommendations in the road map have been used directly anywhere, but at least it has brought useful additional information around the topic for the actors. It was mentioned that the work done in the project has resulted in a lot of different types of project content related to preparedness and risk assessment and management - not necessarily related to oil, but now topically things related to cyber security and security of supply. In addition, the work done in the project has led to further development work and new projects or project ideas. There are several project preparations underway, and some new projects are already underway which utilise the information received. In other words, the know-how is chained together creating something new, and the need for further investigation come to the fore.

Part of the project's activities was the development of training activities related to simulators. The simulator update (oil spill prevention) was done in the project by XAMK. It was recognised that oil spill prevention trainings for authorities have been developed further in the project. Also, there have been more trainings in the initial phase of the project (but did not increase after this because of the changed regulations) meaning that awareness and preparedness in the theme has improved among actors. It was said that this also led to closer co-operation between the actors resulting in co-operation practices that are still in use today. In addition, covering the annual fees of simulator network by the project opened up the opportunity to participate in the European simulator network. The technical connection of the simulators to the European network was possible for the duration of the project. It gave the possibility to organise concrete joint training events and brought a lot of learning. It also came up in the interviews that this has been reflected in teaching, e.g. by using material in teaching and so that things have been standardized. In addition, It was mentioned that the research material has been utilised in daily use.

SIMREC final seminar, targeted to authorities, educators, and RDI actors working on the related topics, generated lively discussion among its international audience. The event led to concrete ideas and plans concerning the future implementation and development of the SIMREC results in the Baltic Sea area. This means that there is a strong focus on Central Europe now. The European dimension has thus been strengthened and particularly towards Germany because Germans run the European simulator network.

## 10. Prevention and utilisation of Invasive Alien Species (PURE, KS11157)

### Basic information

|  |   |  |
|--|---|--|
| <b>Implementation period of the project</b><br>1.1.2021 – 30.4.2023              | <b>Total cost / Programme funding</b><br>473 268 € / 378 614 €  | Priority 3: Attractive, clean environment and region |
| <b>Lead partner:</b> South-Eastern Finland University of Applied Sciences (XAMK) | <b>Project partners:</b><br>Federal State Budgetary Educational Institution of Higher Education "Saint-Petersburg State Forest Technical University" (RUS)<br>Institute of Agricultural Engineering and Environmental Problems of Agricultural Production (RUS)<br>ITMO University (RUS)<br>Natural Resources Institute Finland |  |

### Objectives and Key actions

The overall objective of the project was to secure natural biodiversity, safe, pure, and clean environment by preventing the spreading of the Invasive Alien Species (IAS) in the programme area. To fight Invasive Alien Species requires common effort from the local communities, property owners, local and government administration, and non-governmental organisations etc. The main question was how to recognize IAS and how to fight them in eco-friendly and effective ways. The PURE project target was to answer these questions by organising awareness raising events in local communities and schools in the City of St. Petersburg, Leningrad Region, and South-Eastern Finland. In Finland the training events were organised for elementary school students in Mikkeli and Savonlinna, for local residents in the Mikkeli region and professional for elementary school students in Mikkeli. In these events the focus was to disseminate information about Invasive Alien Plant Species such as Himalayan Balsam, Lupin and Hogweed. The objective of the project was also to search for different utilisation possibilities for the Hogweed. The Hogweed was studied, among other things, as an energy source, and its suitability as a material for the biogas process was investigated. The chemical compounds available from Hogweed were also the subject of research.

### Results and Impacts

The main outputs and results of the project can be divided into groups:

- 1) Increase recognition of the IAH
- 2) New technologies to collect, harvest, sort, store and eliminate hogweed in a safe way
- 3) Methods and approbation of usable ingredients' composition of hogweed and its utilisation in the biogas process

One of the main results of the project was increased recognition of the IAS among the local citizens and school pupils and college students in the target area. They have the knowledge to apply safe ways to prevent the spreading of IAS and know-how to eliminate them, especially hogweed. These results were reported reached at least partly. Luke and Xamk organised several bees and dissemination events. Number of awareness rising events was in South Savo 5 (target indicator value 3). For the Xamk forestry students was organised a lecture about invasive alien species and the threats they represent for the Finnish forest. The lecturer was a specialist from Luke. In the lecture participated 26 students. The number of participants in South-Eastern Finland was 76 (target indicator value 45). The Finnish partners co-operated with two different schools, which are in Mikkeli (2021) and Savonlinna (2022). Both schools were visited twice. Altogether during the project 230 schoolchildren participated in project lessons organised in schools (target indicator value 120).

New technologies to collect, harvest, sort, store and eliminate hogweed in a safe way have been examined in experimental areas in Pushkino (RUS). Information about these results is not available. Methods and approbation of usable ingredients' composition of hogweed and its utilisation in the biogas process have been implemented too. During the first year of project implementation ITMO, FTU and Xamk were all carrying out the laboratory scale tests for the utilisation of the hogweed. Later Xamk carried out the laboratory tests and both the distillation test and biogas test carried out second time. This was done in order to validate the test results. The results of both of these tests were presented in project webinar and they are also published in the project publication.

The project in the light of the Indicators:

|  | Target value | Realised value |
|--|--------------|----------------|
| Number of persons participating in environmental awareness raising activities  | 400          | 740            |
| Number of improved systems on water and waste management created   | 0            | 0              |
| Number of awareness raising 1-day events in rural territories in St. Petersburg, Leningrad Region by Sept. 2022                          | 4            | 3              |
| Number of participants in awareness rising events in St. Petersburg, Leningrad Region by Sept. 2022.                                     | 60           | 500            |
| Participants' feedback in Russia by Sept. 2022. (scale 1-5).   | 3            | 0              |
| Number of awareness raising 1-day events in South Savo and South Karelia by Sept. 2022.  | 3            | 5              |
| Number of participants in awareness rising events in South Savo and South Karelia by Sept. 2022.   | 45           | 76             |
| Participants' feedback in Finland by Sept. 2022. (scale 1-5).  | 3            | 5              |
| Number of schools/colleges visited in STP and LR by Sept. 2022   | 6            | 3              |
| Number of school/college visits in STP and in LR by Sept. 2022.  | 12           | 4              |
| Number of participants in the visits in STP and LR by Sept. 2022   | 240          | 169            |
| Self-evaluation of the pupils and students in Russia about increase in knowledge and action taken with IASs by Sept. 2022. (scale 1-5).  | 3            | 4              |
| Number of schools/colleges visited in South-East Finland by Sept. 2022.  | 3            | 2              |
| Number of school/college visits in South-East Finland by Sept. 2022.   | 6            | 5              |
| Number of school/college visits in South-East Finland by Sept. 2022.   | 120          | 230            |
| Self-evaluation of the pupils and students in Finland about increase in knowledge and action taken with IASs by Sept. 2022. (scale 1-5). | 3            | 4              |
| Number of new ways for collecting, sorting and storing hogweed safely by Sept. 2022.   | 3            | 0              |
| Size of the area is pure from hogweed in Leningrad region by Sept. 2022. (hectares)  | 3            | 0              |
| Size of the experimental area grows substituting plants in Leningrad Region by Sept. 2022. (hectares)                                    | 1            | 0              |

|   |   |   |
|---|---|---|
| Number of technologies for bioethanol, cellulose and pectin production at a laboratory scale by Oct. 2022.                              | 3 | 3 |
| Number of tests of hogweed's calorific value and the proportion of methane by Oct. 2022.  | 2 | 2 |
| Number of usable chemical compounds found in hogweed by Oct. 2022.  | 2 | 8 |
| Number of extracts analyzed from hogweed by Oct. 2022.  | 2 | 8 |
| Number of educational material packets for hogweed recognition, prevention and elimination in Russian for local citizens by Sept 2022   | 1 | 0 |
| Number of educational material packets for hogweed recognition, prevention, and elimination in Finnish for local citizens by Sept 2022. | 1 | 1 |
| Feedback of project participants about the project implementation by Oct 2022 (scale 1-5)   | 3 | 0 |

Results and impacts of the project were discussed in the interviews of the lead partner and beneficiaries of the project. Moreover, some documented results are used in this case study. The project managed to educate a notable number of people from the different age groups. The youngest participant of these various events was 3 years old and the oldest over 70 years.

The project also studied possibilities to develop and pilot new ways to mow down, collect, sort and store hogweed safely and tried to find out methods and technologies for hogweed utilisation and processing. The studies of possibilities to utilise and process Hogweed material in laboratory scale produced some interesting results. The Hogweed material was studied as a source for useful oils and extracts and as a feedstock material for the biogas process. It was discovered that hogweed contains chemical compounds which are widely used in cosmetics, in foodstuff etc. It seems also possible to produce energy from hogweed using biogas process. However, there is no information that these results have been put into practice/used concretely.

One of the main results of the project was the guide for teachers. This guide was made from the material gathered during the events organised in schools, which is aimed at primary school teachers. The guide is available online. Another main result is the online course developed during the project. In this online course of Invasive Alien Species, IAS are discussed in more detail. It will be published through an open university of applied sciences soon. Students can complete the course as part of optional studies and it is freely available to everyone. The online study course is two credits in scope. Practically this means about 50 hours of work for the student. The goal of the course is that the after completion of the course, the student recognizes the most current alien species, knows their adverse effects knowledge of Finnish nature and how to control species. The online course will be maintained and updated by the South-Eastern Finland University of Applied Sciences. All the publications made in the project will be further available online. Results of the project can be further utilised also by researchers, nature protection organisations etc.

One effect is also the pilot areas from which hogweed was removed. In the interview of beneficiaries, it was verified that at least in one of the pilot areas the prevention and elimination work has continued after the end of the project by the beneficiaries themselves. It was emphasised that the help offered by the project was greatly needed and starting the prevention ja elimination work would have been much more challenging without it.

Covid-19 and particularly later the termination of cross-border co-operation due to the Russian military aggression against Ukraine greatly influenced the implementation of the project. During

the covid time it was not possible to meet physically with the project team even once. All the meetings were held in Teams, but however the co-operation was going well. The termination of co-operation, on the other hand, had a stronger effect, and the project was then implemented only on the Finnish side. The termination of co-operation meant that higher-class laboratory research was cut off the project (done in Russia) and so the benefits and possibilities in the topic were not studied as much as it was intended. However, from the point of view of the Finnish project partners, it was stated that international know-how and experience were gained from the project. The threshold to start implementing international projects has lowered even further. A partial effect of the project is also the fact that one of the partners is now participating in the application for the Interreg Central Baltic program.

## Priority 4: Well-connected region

### 11. Vainikkala railway station border crossing point (LIP KS1405)

#### Basic information

|   |   |                                   |
|---|---|-----------------------------------|
| <b>Implementation period of the project</b><br>1.3.2019 – 30.6.2023 | <b>Total cost / Programme funding</b><br>6 292 000 € / 5 113 600 €  | Priority 4: Well-connected region |
| <b>Lead partner:</b><br>Finnish Transport Infrastructure Agency     | <b>Project partners:</b><br>Directorate for Development of the St. Petersburg and Leningrad region transport system<br>Finnish Border Guard<br>Finnish Customs<br>Senate Properties |                                   |

#### Objectives and Key actions

The objective of Vainikkala large infrastructure project was to improve border crossing fluency of legal transports and passengers in Vainikkala border-crossing point and increase safety on both sides of the border area.

Main activities included construction and equipping of a new border-check station next to existing railway station and improving of CCTV surveillance system and lighting along the track section and in the vicinity of the borderline. Train x-ray scanner was also updated to meet current requirements.

#### Results and Impacts

As a result of the project, a new border check station was completed for use by the Finnish Border Guard. The new border check station replaces the old guard station building that will be decommissioned. The works were completed according to the schedule within the cost frame and technically the building meets the requirements set for it.

The train's x-ray scanner system, updated in the project, was commissioned and put into operational use. The new x-ray system is easier to use, and occupational safety is at a better level compared to the previous system. The update has extended the operational use of the facilities with about 10 years.

With the support of the project funding, the area was also fenced, and the CCTV system renewed so that the Vainikkala border crossing meets the requirements of the Schengen Borders Code.

New devices used in border checks were also purchased: document inspection device, mobile document checking devices, fingerprint scanners and facial cameras.

Due to first the covid-19 pandemic and then the Russian military aggression against Ukraine, the border crossing points are practically all closed. Since the indicators are based on traffic at BCPs, they cannot be properly used now to assess how the projects have improved the cross-border traffic.

The project in the light of the indicators ((with the limitations noted above):

|   | Target value | Realised value |
|---|--------------|----------------|
| Number of improved border-crossing points   | 1            | 1              |
| Increased throughput capacity of persons on land border crossing points. Baseline value, year 2017; 1507. Target value:                   | 1 800        | 1 800          |
| Reduced waiting time on border crossing points. Baseline value; 6.4 min (2016). Target value: max min.                                    | 10           | 10             |
| Cross border value. The new location of border guard facilities optimally side by side with the railway station and border control point. | 1            | 1              |

The project would not have been implemented without funding from SEFR CBC. The budgets of the Finnish Border Guard and Finnish Customs would not have been able to afford to implement such things, and the Senate Properties does not build houses if there is no order for them.

Based on the discussions with the project beneficiaries, the most important benefit of the project is that a new, properly equipped border check station was provided in Vainikkala. Now, when the border is closed for passenger traffic and only freight traffic operates through the border crossing point, the station is also used as a support space for other personnel of the Southeastern Finland Border Guard in handling operational tasks. The occupancy rate of the facilities is estimated to be around 90-95%, which is high.

The new premises are modern, safe and practical. The facilities are perfectly suited for passenger train traffic, the functions related to which were one of the starting points in the design of the facilities. The changing rooms, social facilities and storage facilities have also been sufficient. The location of the station is also better than before and the reaction time in the direction of e.g. the railway yard is now shorter.

The facilities have also proven to be quite adaptable to different needs, and around the station, inside the fences, there is enough space for adding functions, storage and changing situations. In Vainikkala, heating and electricity use is more environmentally friendly than before, as solar cells and geothermal heat are used.

From the point of view of facility security and regional security, the project also brought a significant improvement, which guarantees the safety of those working at the station and prevents the movement of unauthorised persons in the area.

## 12. Cross-Border Safety; accident prevention and risk management (CB-SAFE, KS11043)

### Basic information

|  |   |                                   |
|--|---|-----------------------------------|
| <b>Implementation period of the project</b><br>1.1.2021 – 30.11.2022 | <b>Total cost / Programme funding</b><br>871 000 € / 696 800 €  | Priority 4: Well-connected region |
| <b>Lead partner:</b><br>LAB University of Applied Sciences           | <b>Project partners:</b><br>Kymenlaakso Rescue Department<br>South Karelia Rescue Department<br>Saint-Petersburg University of State Fire Service of the Ministry of Russian Federation for Civil Defense, Emergencies and Elimination of Consequences of Natural Disasters |                                   |

### Objectives and Key actions

CB-SAFE project's main objectives were to enhance skills, safety knowledge and safety attitudes of individuals crossing the border, produce safety information material, create a virtual learning platform for rescue services, and deepen the co-operation between the Finnish authorities in the border area.

The project activities were conducted in three work packages: WP1. Safety information, WP2. Risk management by digital tools and WP3. Co-operation in border areas and result sharing.

### Results and Impacts

In WP1 the original goal was to create safety information including safety applications for cross-border passenger traffic. Due to the suspension of the Russian partner, the goals were not fully achieved in this work package. Some of the background material was gathered and workshops were held before the suspension. The Finnish partners of the project also created four publicly available videos related to passenger safety.

The goal of WP2 was to create a virtual training platform for rescue services, which was also realised in the project. The platform was named VR-HYPO (virtual training environment for operational decision-making of rescue services). The platform simulates risk and accident situations in the Saimaa canal and its surroundings. The virtual training environment is based on accident scripts, where decision-making related to risk and accident situations and the use of resources can be practiced with the help of gamification. The virtual platform is used to develop the performance and competence of rescue authorities.

WP3 promoted the creation of co-operational network between officials. The interviews and seminars were executed according to the original plan. Dissemination seminar was also organised. Rescue Departments participated and organised numerous seminars and events. The networking was implemented in the context of Finnish Rescue Act and in South Karelia and Kymenlaakso regions. Information was shared to other areas via social media and other communication practices such as newsletter.

The project in the light of the indicators:

|  | Target value | Realised value |
|--|--------------|----------------|
| Number of improved border-crossing points                        | 5            | 5              |
| WP1: Number of new, tested safety applications (different media) | 4            | 1              |

|  |      |     |
|--|------|-----|
| WP1: Number of passengers testing the applications, verified   | 1000 | 0   |
| WP2: Number of risk simulation cases using the virtual environment, including information modelling            | 3    | 3   |
| WP2: Number of trained incident commanders for cross-border incidents and evaluating risk level on target area | 100  | 61  |
| WP2: Number of trained personnel for ROV-tools and RPAS-tools  | 20   | 29  |
| WP3: Co-operational network between officials  | 1    | 1   |
| WP3: Number of benchmark areas for new information   | 2    | 2   |
| WP3: Number of dissemination and networking seminars for authorities   | 3    | 1   |
| WP3: Number of participants in seminars  | 100  | 352 |

Results and impacts of the project were discussed in the interviews of the lead partner and partner of the project. The interviewees consider the project's greatest benefit to be the virtual training platform produced in it for use by the rescue authorities. It is used by rescue services and can be used to safely simulate and practice accident situations that would otherwise be risky or dangerous to practice. Training is also no longer tied to place and time. The question may be, for example, a traffic accident that occurred in a water environment with several participants, and the accident situation must be managed from both land and water. The ROV (Remotely Operated Vehicle) and RPAS (Remotely Piloted Aircraft System) drones acquired in the project have also increased the performance to produce situational information during accidents and the training of competence development.

In addition, information and instructions are seen as a benefit of the project, which can proactively improve the knowledge of tourists about safe travel. This includes careful travel planning, preparation for departure (information about routes, destination, and preparation for possible deviations from travel planning) and the stages of travel itself. From the rescue authority's point of view, it is useful for passengers to be able to anticipate and adequately prepare for possible safety risks related to travel, so that the risks and threats of accidents are reduced, and accidents and their adverse effects are avoided. The joint development of the Border Guard and rescue authorities also further strengthened the authorities' mutual recognition and co-operation in the work done for the benefit of tourists.