

**INTERREG V – A**  
**COOPERATION PROGRAMME GREECE – BULGARIA 2014-2020**

**Market Changer (MIS Code: 5070788)**  
**MarCh**

**Assessment report**  
**on pilot application of BuSS Kardzhali**  
**D 6.5.1**



**Regional Industrial Association – Kardzhali**

The Project is co-funded by the European Regional Development Fund (ERDF) and by national funds of the countries participating in the Interreg V-A “Greece-Bulgaria 2014-2020” Cooperation Programme



**Contractor: Trainer Consult Ltd**

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## **Introduction:**

This assessment report provides a comprehensive overview of the business support project for the Greece-Bulgaria cross-border region, offering valuable insights and recommendations for stakeholders involved in regional economic development and cooperation efforts.

## **Preface:**

Project "Market Changer", acronym "MarCh", has started, under grant agreement No 5b.3d.10 (MIS code-00397291), funded under INVESTMENT PRIORITY 3a: "Promoting entrepreneurship, in particular by facilitating the economic exploitation of new ideas and fostering the creation of new firms, including through business incubators", at six call of Cooperation Programme "Interreg V –A Greece-Bulgaria", funded by the European Union, through the European Regional Development Fund and co-financed by the budget of the Republic of Greece and the Republic of Bulgaria.

Despite the great changes taken place in the recent decades at global level (concentration of trade in a small number of worldwide acting retail chains, penetration of local markets by international businesses etc.), with a direct impact on local economies, MarCh assumes that local businesses still provide critical potentials, which if properly deployed may lead local enterprises to success and growth: product quality in some cases, low pricing in others, along with long presence and tradition in local markets, proximity to customers etc. can make up the basis for local SMEs to survive and grow. However, what local businesses are missing is common strategies based on local advantages, diversification, adoption of innovation and know how, access to competences and skills, access to specialized experts, appropriate marketing strategies and schemes and access to other markets.

To meet above shortages MarCh designs local growth strategies and visions, locates strengths and weaknesses at the local business communities and builds up Business Support Structures in the application areas. A bundle of activities (strengths - weaknesses' diagnoses, business plans for existing businesses and startups, coaching and counselling along with training seminars) aim at upgrading business performance and competitiveness, while a series of tools at local and cross border level (e-market platform, digital data base for experienced professionals, labor market internet platform) improve the business environment in the two areas and enhance the Cross - Border aspect of the project. MarCh will be applied at a first stage for the enterprises of the Agri-Food sector as a pilot and results and achievements will be transferred to other sectors of the local economies as well as to other areas of the two participating countries.

BuSS Kardzhali is a business support structure, managed by Regional Industrial Association Kardzhali and situated in Kardzhali city, at address 99 “Bulgaria” blvd.

Scope of the BuSS Kardzhali is to provide continuously supporting of SMP of Kardzhali district, using the infrastructure and results obtained from the implementation of the MarCh project and carry out activities contributing to the competitiveness of the enterprises in the areas of the MarCh project and beyond.

**Period of assessment:**

BuSS Kardzhali start its activity at 01-th of July, 2023 and at the time of the evaluation there is a 5-month period of implementation of its activities.

- Main goal of the assessment

Elaborating on the results of the pilot application of the BuSS in the Kardzhali area.

**Evaluation criteria:**

**– Clear objectives:**

To assess the effective operation of BuSS Kardzhali within the project implementation period. To assess the adequacy of its organizational, infrastructure, financial and expert security To draw conclusions and recommendations for improving the performance of BuSS Kardzhali.

**– Key Performance Indicators (KPIs):**

- Quantitative indicators:

Number of entrepreneurs who have benefited from the services provided in Buss Kardzhali, including:

- Carrying out surveys to recording problems and challenges faced by the enterprises in the aforementioned areas
- Compiling studies on specific issues concerning the local business communities
- Formulating strategies towards strengthening the competitiveness of the local business communities
- Designing plans for the development of the areas envisaged by the undersigning parties

- Implementing actions for the development of the human resources in the areas of origin of the undersigning parties
- Utilizing the infrastructure developed in the context of MarCh
- Maintaining and expanding the digital infrastructure (digital portals) developed within MarCh project
- Implementing counseling interventions to businesses in the areas envisaged
- Designing business plans and offering guidance to young entrepreneurs and already operating businesses
- Carrying out diagnostic analyses for businesses in order to help them to strengthen their competitiveness
- Enhancing the cooperation between the business and the research community
- Enhancing the cross-border cooperation of enterprises and organizations between the two countries of origin of the here undersigning parties
- Cooperating with other Collective Bodies of Entrepreneurship and Professional Organizations
- Cooperating with Local and Regional Authorities and other public bodies and
- Carrying our any other activity contributing to the scope of the present.

Services:

- Provision of workspace equipped with furniture, computers, communications and office equipment on preferential terms for hourly use;
- the provision of common facilities (meeting rooms, meeting and training rooms, kitchen facilities, etc.);
- project expertise, assistance in drawing up a business plan;
- consultancy services on various aspects of business activity;
- external specialists and mentors, professional development and training services (thematic seminars and training);

- intellectual property protection and evaluation services, licensing and certification of innovative products;
- assistance in obtaining bank loans, providing guarantees to banks, attracting venture capital funds and business angels;
- project design for investors: design and preparation of presentation materials, organization of exhibitions and project presentations (pitches) and other services.
- Informing and advising on regulatory requirements for different types of activities and regimes in Bulgaria.
- marketing services, including SEO, online advertising, etc.
- Talent search;
- Publication of job advertisements;
- Publication of advertisements for the sale of goods.

#### Qualitative indicators:

- level of satisfaction of the users of the services in BuSS Kardzhali;
- Level of application of the potential of BuSS Kardzhali to the needs of the business.

#### Data collection and analysis:

##### - Data sources:

- Lists, reporting documents
- Register of services provided
- Surveys conducted

##### – Methods of data collection:

- Interviews, questionnaires, observations, documents and records, consultations.

##### – Data analysis techniques:

- Methods were used, such as:

- Secondary data analysis
- Surveys

### **Evaluation components:**

#### **a. Performance assessment:**

– Evaluate the progress of the activity, compliance with the Action plan, the quality of work and the use of resources.

Project MarCh has applied an integrated concept for enhancing business competitiveness & improving entrepreneurship in the project areas leading to the creation of local BuSSes & to the support of mainly new businesses & start-ups . To this end the areas' advantages & the strengths & weaknesses (S&W) of the local enterprises are taken over by the BuSSes & transmitted to action to helping local businesses in becoming capable of exploiting their strengths for success & growth. More in detail, situation analyses on the 2 areas help to formulating visions & growth strategies, while researches at the local enterprises aim to define their strengths & needs. Interventions, drawn upon the aforementioned analyses & carried out at the BuSSes, assist businesses & start-ups to improve performance, to access knowledge & innovation, enrich management competences & improve marketing practice. This is to succeed via business plans, coaching, counselling & training. Besides, 3 e-tools improve the business development.

In accordance with the above, we can state that BuSS Kardzhali is currently structured and has been operating for 5 months, and it is ensured:

Business Infrastructure: Premises of 3 offices and conference hall, equipped with work tables, chairs, 12 notebooks, multimedia with display, Video monitor, router, 20 training chairs and local network.

Management body and staff: Monitoring Structure, RIA chairman and 1 administrative staff for organization and coordination activities, 1 accountant and external contractors to provide events, online resources and info materials.

Experts: 1 Trainer, 1 IT experts and 1 Business consultant (as external services)

– Comparison of actual achievements with planned goals.

- The infrastructure, equipment, organizational body and team are secured according to the set out in the Action plan.
- Conducted under the project are all set activities, according to the attached timetable:

Table 1 Timetable of real implementation of activities (2023).

<b>WP 2</b>	<b>PROMOTION &amp; COMMUNICATION</b>	<b>02</b>	<b>03</b>	<b>04</b>	<b>05</b>	<b>06</b>	<b>07</b>	<b>08</b>	<b>09</b>	<b>10</b>	<b>11</b>
Action 2.3	Dissemination Material: Flyers, Brochures and usb sticks						X			X	
Action 2.4	Kick off and Closing Conferences										X
Action 2.5	Local Awareness Raising Seminars - 3				X						
<b>WP 3</b>	<b>Developing Strategies</b>										
Action 3.1	Mapping Areas		X	X							
Action 3.2	Elaborating Vision and Strategies with Local Stakeholders				X	X	X	X			
Action 3.3	Communicating Vision and Strategies to Local Communities							X	X		
Action 3.4	Semi Structured Research to Agri Food Businesses				X	X					
Action 3.5	Synthesis of Results and Definition on Intervention Axes									X	
<b>WP 4</b>	<b>Devising Business Support Structures' (BuSS) Infrastructure</b>										
Action 4.1	Action Plans for BuSSes					X					
Action 4.2	Operating BuSSes (Purchasing equipment+operational costs)						X	X	X	X	X
Action 4.3	Digital Data Base for Branch Professionals		X	X	X						
Action 4.4	Labor market digital platform		X	X	X						
Action 4.5	Digital market place with business' assessment tool						X	X	X		
<b>WP 5</b>	<b>Pilot Application</b>										

Action 5.1	Strengths' Weaknesses' Diagnoses for 2X50 enterprises		X	X	X	X	X	X	X		
Action 5.2	Designing and Coaching Business Plans for 2X20 businesses						X	X	X	X	X
Action 5.3	Counselling to 60 entrepreneurs each country	X	X	X	X	X			X	X	X
Action 5.4	Horizontal Support - Seminars on: innovation, e commerce, branding, and extroversion									X	X
Action 5.5	Networking actions (plenary and B2B sessions)									X	X
<b>WP 6</b>	<b>Valorizing Results - Securing Sustainability</b>										
Action 6.1	Assessment reports on pilot application of BuSSes										X
Action 6.2	Cross Border Lab on valorizing results and improving performane (1 lab Thessaloniki)										X
Action 6.3	Compiling Business Plans for BuSSes for the next 3 years										X
Action 6.4	Setting up Cross Border structure for Monitoring BuSSes										X

*Deviation from the plan in yellow color!*

- Direct services are provided for:
  - Use of office space and equipment – 14;
  - Use of areas for workshops – 71 (60 of them about project activities)
  - Assistance in obtaining bank loans to entrepreneurs - 2;
  - Publication of job advertisements – 3;
  - Publication of advertisements for the sale of goods – 29;



**b. Evaluation of results:**

– Assess the impact of the project on the desired outcomes and benefits.

➤ At this stage, we can report the following results:

- The functioning of BuSS Kardzhali has ensured to a large extent the successful implementation of the activities set under the project regarding research, information, consultation and development of business plans for local entrepreneurs who participated in the project, and thanks to this, they are 100% implemented.
- Users of the services, beyond those included in the project activities, are still insufficient number, 16 entrepreneurs for totally 61 services, but are a good prerequisite for real interest on the part of the business.
- In conversations with the participants, it was found that the majority of them (over 80%) are satisfied with the services received, wishing their action to continue sustainably in the future.
- Nearly 30% of the participants recommend expanding the services provided and better adapting them to their real needs – remote provision of services, operational assistance in negotiations and business meetings with foreign clients, etc.

**c. Stakeholder engagement:**

– Engage stakeholders during the evaluation process.

There is little engagement of stakeholders – representatives of local authorities, other NGOs and civil society – in view of the busy year with political and other public events.

**d. Impact assessment:**

– Identify the project's contribution to wider changes or impacts.

The MarCh project as a whole has a positive impact on local businesses, in view, on the one hand, of the studies and strategic documents prepared and, on the other, the assistance provided indirectly, in the form of various services to increase the business capacity and preparedness of entrepreneurs. This has largely made a positive contribution to improving entrepreneurs' readiness to do business, especially starts-ups. The expected accession of Bulgaria to the Schengen Area will further motivate local businesses to enter regional and central European markets, for which it is of utmost importance that they are ready. There is also an increased interest in traditional products on both sides of the border to be offered on local markets, which will require assistance in making business contacts and familiarization with regulatory requirements and specific market requirements.

**Reporting and recommendations:**

**a. Evaluation findings:**

- The existing of BuSS Kardzhali has ensured to a large extent the successful implementation of the project's activities;
- Users of the services, beyond those involved in the project activities, are still insufficient number, but are a good prerequisite for real interest on the part of the business.
- In conversations with participants, it was found that the majority of them were satisfied with the services received, wishing that their action would continue sustainably in the future.

**b. Recommendations:**

- Collect data on indicators before and after the intervention, analyze records and measure the impact of the project.
- Some of the participants recommend expanding the services provided and better adapting them to their real needs – remote provision of services, operational assistance in negotiations and business meetings with foreign clients, etc.

**c. Lessons:**

Improving the business environment requires joint efforts, both on the part of stakeholders at local level and on partnership between Bulgarian and Greek beneficiaries.

**d. Conclusion:**

The implementation of the action plan for the MarCh project demonstrates a comprehensive approach to enhancing entrepreneurship and business competitiveness in the project areas. The evaluation of the implemented activities will provide valuable insights for further improvements and sustainability of the project's outcomes.