Ministry of European Integration
REPUBLIC OF SERBIA

#ЕУ ЗА ТЕБЕ

EU PRO+

QUARTERLY STATUS REPORT

Jan - Mar 2026

UNOPS Implementing partner in 99 cities and municipalities in Serbia

Overall objective:	To contribute to socio-economic development, prosperity and social cohesion of Serbian society
Purpose:	To decrease socio-economic disparities in two regions within Serbia
Budget:	40 million Euros
Donor:	The European Union
Start date:	1 January 2021
End date:	31 December 2026
Programme area:	The Regions of Šumadija and Western Serbia and the Southern and Eastern Serbia
Implementing partner:	United Nations Office for Project Services (UNOPS)
Report date:	30 April 2026
Period covered:	1 January – 31 March 2026
Prepared by:	UNOPS

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Acronyms

BSO	Business Support Organisation
CLLD	Community LED Local Development territorial development instrument
CFP	Call for Proposals
CSO	Civil Society Organisation
DEU	Delegation of the European Union
EU	European Union
GAP	Gender Action Plan
GAU	Grant Administration Unit
GG	Good Governance
GMT	Grant Management Team
GSA	Grant Support Agreement
HOC	Head of Cooperation of the EU delegation
ITI	Integrated Territorial Investment
ISTD	Integrated Sustainable Territorial Development
LAG	Local Action Group
LSG	Local Self-Government
MLEVSA	Ministry of Labour, Employment, Veteran and Social Affairs
MPALSG	Ministry of Public Administration and Local Self Government
MoE	Ministry of Economy
MoU	Memorandum of Understanding
MEI	Ministry of European Integration
PSC	Programme Steering Committee
RDA	Regional Development Agency
SCTM	Standing Conference of Towns and Municipalities
SME	Small and Medium Sized Enterprises
SUD	Sustainable Urban Development
URBACT	Urban Development Network Programme

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1. EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

During the first quarter of 2026, the **European Union for Local Development - EU PRO Plus Programme** maintained a strong implementation pace with completion of eight more projects, contributing to a total of 293 (or 96.1%) out of the 305 supported.

The Programme contributed to **improved development planning and the introduction of the Integrated Territorial Investment (ITI) concept** by finalising two integrated projects in Kruševac and Leskovac, which increased the readiness for strategic project implementation in these urban territories. This completion includes a Study in Kruševac that established conditions for revitalizing the medieval town heritage site, and a Previous Study in Leskovac focused on converting the 'Brst' landfill into a usable green space.

To support the implementation of developed territorial strategies, the Programme continued to develop integrated investment plans for Niš, Pirot, and Kruševac, providing Project Coordination Units (PCUs) with defined investment packages and prioritized strategic projects. Furthermore, the Programme encouraged territories to apply for relevant external funding calls, specifically the IMPACT -"Interreg Mechanism for Promoting Active Communities and Territories" project and the URBACT call for Action Networks.

The EU PRO Plus support for **enhanced economic growth** saw the finalization of four more economic infrastructure projects during the quarter, bringing the total to nineteen completed out of twenty supported projects. This completion included technical documentation for the sports centre facility "Vodeničište" in Surdulica and the "Roman Emperors" theme park in Zaječar, concluding all seven projects in that specific LOT, all securing construction permits, and establishing a cumulative project pipeline value of 42 million Euros. Additionally, the reconstruction and rehabilitation of the "Kobos" factory in Bosilegrad and the reconstruction of the Water Tower in Užice were completed. Overall, the nineteen completed economic infrastructure projects have generated 2,084 new jobs and secured 235 million Euros in investments across six new production facilities. The Municipality of Bosilegrad is actively working to obtain the usage permit for the "Kobos" factory to formalize the agreement with the investor, "Put Slobode" from Požega, which intends to employ 250 workers.

With completion of the last two local infrastructure projects, all Programme activities related to the **improved infrastructure and social cohesion** are concluded. Reconstruction of the primary school "Gornja Jablanica" in Medveđa contributed to improved learning conditions while improved healthcare conditions were secured for over 20,000 patients and 136 medical workers employed in Raška Health Centre with its reconstruction. Further, at the start of the year, provision of newly licensed social service - daycare for children with special needs, has commenced in Lebane in the reconstructed facilities. Overall, the 39 local infrastructure projects have provided benefits for over 280,000 people in 36 local self-governments (LSGs) through improvement of services of their local administrations.

The Programme proactively managed risks related to integrated and remaining economic infrastructure projects during the quarter. Significant implementation delays persist in Zaječar, where the late establishment of the temporary government and subsequent budget adoption in March 2026 created a risk that pending tenders would not be completed timely. Furthermore, procurement processes led by the local administrations continue to present risks, such as the tender for the Youth Centre in Loznica, where a high volume of bidder questions postponed the submission deadline, opening the possibility of a bidder complaint and a resulting delay of at least two months. The Programme is closely monitoring developments with public procurement processes and preparing mitigation plans in case these processes are not finalised timely.

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Project completion activities also face challenges, including in Šabac, where a slow decrease of moisture in the cement screed may impact the scheduled placement of the sports floor, requiring joint monitoring to avoid compromising the quality of the works. Finally, the announced parliamentary elections pose an external risk, as the increased involvement and shifting priorities of government officials may slow down Programme activities and lead to visibility being perceived as politically motivated. The Programme intends to mitigate this by ensuring balanced engagement, following clear communication guidelines, and adjusting timelines as needed.

The Programme ensures long-term sustainability by monitoring success indicators, with visible social, economic, and environmental impacts across all completed projects. Key achievements in the quarter include the Lebane day care centre becoming fully operational for 48 beneficiaries with disabilities, and finalized local infrastructure projects in Medveđa and Raška proving immediately sustainable by improving health and education conditions for over 20,000 people and contributing to environmental sustainability via increased building energy efficiency.

Economically, the Knjaževac rehabilitation centre became operational under tourist organisation management, and Kragujevac secured a use permit for the FAS zone pedestrian bridge, ensuring safe commuting for 4,000 workers. However, the Programme is still supporting Sjenica, Bujanovac, and Bosilegrad, which are struggling to commence operations due to issues such as lack of funds for specialised vehicles, capacity constraints for technical commissioning, and dependence on future landfill finalisation.

EU PRO Plus maintained its focus on promoting cross-cutting themes, particularly good governance and social inclusion, through strong participatory processes during the implementation of integrated projects related to development of studies. This approach delivered additional results and improved the quality of developed studies and proposed solutions. Examples of engagement include involving residents and schools in Leskovac through a public forum and an art competition to raise awareness about converting the 'Brst' landfill into an ecologically acceptable area. Furthermore, the Urban Identity study for ITI Užice utilized an extensive participatory approach, featuring 15 citizens' assemblies and nine thematic workshops involving architects, CSOs, and residential building managers. Similarly, the Pre-investment feasibility study in Pirot and the Lazarev Grad project in Kruševac actively involved various stakeholders, including local students and citizens, to ensure comprehensive input on project direction and design.

Communications and visibility efforts during the quarter were robust, highlighted by two high-level visits, to Novi Pazar and Raška, showcasing Programme progress. These activities, supported by five press releases, generated significant media attention with 345 positive reports, 128 of which were in national media. The Programme published three newsletters focusing on International Education Day, Global Tourism Resilience Day, and International Women's Day. Digital platforms remained stable, recording 56,922 website visits from 41,944 unique visitors, alongside updates to the YouTube channel and website with success stories and media content.

This Report provides review of progress and performance, update on management and coordination issues, review of assumptions and risks, quality and sustainability considerations, insight into the key outputs for the next reporting period, and lessons learned. A number of annexes give the readers opportunity to get in depth knowledge of some specific actions taken by the Programme.

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2. QUARTERLY STATUS REPORT

2.1 Review of project progress

2.1.1 Policy and Programme Context

The Government of the Republic of Serbia approved the Law on the Establishment and Functioning of the Cohesion Policy Management System on 6 February 2026, which establishes the legal basis for building a system for efficient and effective management of cohesion policy funds. The Law, above all, implies the establishment of an institutional framework and the strengthening of capacities for the implementation of cohesion policy funds, as well as the preparation of planning and programme documents that direct the funds to priority areas and investments.

An initiative of the European Commission's Directorate-General for Regional and Urban Policy (DG REGIO) in co-operation with the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD) - IMPACT -"Interreg Mechanism for Promoting Active Communities and Territories", was advertised on 17 February 2026. IMPACT will support up to 30 pilot cross-border regions in developing and implementing community-led local development (CLLD) strategies. Applications may come from European Union border regions plus Andorra, Liechtenstein, Norway, Switzerland, IPA countries, Moldova and Ukraine. Selected pilot regions will benefit from tailored expert support, peer learning and exchanges with other border regions, and knowledge-exchange and networking opportunities to engage with Interreg managing authorities. The Call is open to regional and local institutions and organisations with a legal entity located in a border region, and may include regional and local authorities, non-governmental organisations/civil society organisations, Local Action Groups (LAGs), Fisheries Local Action Groups (FLAGs), Tourism offices, European Groupings of Territorial Co-operation (EGTCs), Euroregions or other cross-border co-operation structures. The first application round closes on 10 April 2026, while additional rounds may be opened thereafter, subject to availability. In the context of EU PRO Plus, these CLLD strategies may represent a supporting governance and implementation mechanisms for particular territories within wider area coverage of the territorial strategies supported by the Programme.

The URBACT call for Action Networks, open from 17 March to 17 June 2026, aims to create partnerships of cities willing to put their city strategies in motion and implement concrete actions in their local contexts. Cities from European Union's 27 Member States and Partner States (Norway, Switzerland, Albania, Bosnia and Herzegovina, Montenegro, North Macedonia and Serbia, Moldova and Ukraine) are eligible to apply. It is the first call for proposals for Action Networks under URBACT IV. Action Networks allow cities to work together to identify, shape and implement solutions to common urban challenges. Through this collaboration, they have the space to carry out concrete actions at the local level. Using the URBACT Method of transnational exchange, integrated and participatory approach and co-creation, the cities will develop a bespoke Actions Playbook at the network level and at local level they will implement concrete actions documented in an Action Portfolio. Ultimately, the cities will improve their integrated urban policies and the delivery of these policies on the ground. In the context of EU PRO Plus, this is a complementary mechanism to territorial strategies supported by the Programme, and represents a continuation of capacity building activities and more detailed elaboration of particular activities envisaged in the strategies.

2.1.2 Progress towards achieving objectives

While the regions of Šumadija and Western Serbia and South and East Serbia showed growth in 2024, they still maintain smaller shares of the national economy compared to the northern regions of Belgrade and Vojvodina. According to the Statistical Office of the Republic of Serbia, the Belgrade Region remains

the dominant economic driver, holding a 43.2% share of the national GDP as of late 2024. Its GDP per capita reached RSD 2,501,000, which is nearly 1.7 times the national average.

GDP contribution for Šumadija and Western Serbia region remained at 17.4% share of national GDP while South and East Serbia contributed 15.3% to the national total. The labor market in 2025 was characterised by stability despite a slight national increase in the unemployment rate toward the end of the year.

According to 2025 data, the average unemployment rate in Šumadija and Western Serbia at the end of the year was 8.4% and in South and East Serbia region 12.1%.

2.1.3 Results and Activities

Result 1: Improved development planning in targeted municipalities and introduction of the ITI concept

The two integrated projects finalised during the quarter contributed to the increased level of maturity and readiness for implementation of strategic projects in two urban territories - Kruševac and Leskovac. The Study for the protection, presentation and revitalization of the medieval town of Kruševac created the conditions for the revitalisation of the heritage site, enabling transformation of this area of significant importance for the region. Likewise, in Leskovac, the development of a Previous Study for recultivation of the 'Brst' landfill creates conditions for converting the landfill into a green, usable space, emphasizing efficient use of resources and community participation.

For the purpose of creating supporting mechanisms for implementation of developed territorial strategies, the Programme continues with development of integrated investment plans, by developing plans for Niš, Pirot and Kruševac urban areas. With these documents, the territories obtained an instrument with developed investment packages - clusters and prioritised strategic projects, that should enable the Project Coordination Units (PCUs) a clearer path for the implementation of their strategies.

The Programme also continued with supporting and encouraging territories to apply for the calls relevant for implementation of territorial strategies, namely for IMPACT -"Interreg Mechanism for Promoting Active Communities and Territories" project, an initiative of the European Commission's Directorate-General for Regional and Urban Policy (DG REGIO) in co-operation with the OECD and for URBACT call for Action Networks.

Activity 1.1 Enhancing national capacity to introduce integrated territorial development

There were no activities during the reporting period.

Activity 1.2 Improving capacities of municipalities and regional development agencies to introduce concepts of integrated territorial planning

The development of integrated investment plans for supported territories continued during the quarter with development of plans in Niš, Pirot and Kruševac through six workshops conducted for each of the three territories. Sixty people participated in workshops related to the development of the investment plan for the Niš territory, of which 26 (or 43%) were female. Development of the investment plan for Pirot territory included 46 people, of which 19 (or 41%) were female, while in Kruševac 57 people participated in total, of which 35 (or 61%) were female.

Activity 1.3 Implementing activities contributing to socio-economic growth deriving from integrated territorial planning strategies

Two more projects awarded under the Call for integrated projects were completed during the quarter,

adding to completion of seven out of the 18 supported projects. The overall implementation reached 83% completion with an additional twelve procurements finalised during the quarter, adding up to a total of 206 completed procurement processes. The construction works have concluded on one more site during the quarter, bringing the total number of completed construction sites to 22, and nine underway. The sites in Knić within the CREST project and Užice within the Green and Energy Transition project are still in the procurement process, facing so far manageable implementation delays. Throughout this quarter, the Programme team facilitated over 25 meetings and site visits to support the implementation of these complex infrastructure components.

Out of the eleven projects with infrastructure works supported under the LOT1 of the Call, following the completion of two in 2025, during the quarter nine projects were in implementation with notable progress on each.

The major development during the quarter related to the project **Active protection of the cultural heritage "Tabula Peutingeriana"** implemented by the City of Niš. Namely, following the delays in implementation of activities, in agreement with the donor and the key national counterpart, Ministry of European Integration, the planned support for reconstruction of ateliers in Niš fortress was excluded from the project. The City is focused on putting into function the other construction site in the fortress, the casemates whose reconstruction was completed in August 2025, and damages mostly unrelated to the conducted works noted later in the year. The scope for additional works on casemates has been confirmed, and the City is to conduct a new procurement process to ensure its completion. The remaining soft activities are in progress, as the finalisation of the digital solutions is anticipated by the end of April 2026. A portion of the promotional activities has been completed and local promotional events in Svrljig and Gadžin Han are planned for May 2026.

Implementation of the **Cultural Revival for an Enriched Šumadija Tourism (CREST)** project, managed by the Regional Economic Development Agency for Šumadija and Pomoravlje (REDASP) is progressing with the completion of the construction works in Petrovi Dvori in Rača Municipality, nearing completion of works in the King's Vinery in Topola and the "Risovača Cave" Visitor-Educational Centre in Aranđelovac. Additionally, following the setback with the contractor for the reconstruction of the House of Culture in Borač in Knić, technical documentation is being revised to re-tender the remaining construction works. REDASP is also finalising the remaining activities of the project, including procurement of equipment and furniture for the supported sites. The project is planned to be completed by mid-September 2026.

The other project implemented by REDASP, Šumadija CONNECT, relates to the **reconstruction of the "Knez Aleksandar Karađorđević" high school building and courtyard.** The construction works initiated in December 2025 are progressing in accordance with the plan, with the works on the facade expected to be completed during the second quarter of the year. The interior works are also progressing well with challenges related to the utility connection conditions (electricity, heating, telecom, water/sewer) resolved during the reporting quarter. REDASP is finalising tender documentation for the procurement of furniture in consultation with the future user of the space, the Faculty of Philology and Arts. Furthermore, as part of the soft measure activities, a successful workshop on the circular economy was conducted on 19 March 2026. The workshop was attended by 30 participants, out of which 24 (or 80%) were women.

Construction works on the construction of the gym within the **Fair Play for Inclusion in Šabac** are almost completed, pending installation of the sports floor in April 2026. The constructed building received an energy passport, certifying it is within energy efficiency class B. The City secured additional funds to include landscaping works around the building which are planned to be executed in April 2026. Šabac is organising a number of soft activities, including tree planting, a sports precision day, a school basketball tournament, an exhibition match in Baskin, the event "Let's Support Sport and Healthy Lifestyle," and an opening ceremony, in the equipped and ready-for-use gym.

Likewise, in Loznica, the rehabilitation works on the **Institution for sports and culture Lagator** reached 95% completion rate. Progress was slowed by continuous leakage into the youth space from the upper

level. The leak was initially suspected to be from the reconstructed roof, but in February it was determined to stem from the old water and sewage installation on the upper floor, which is outside the Contractor's scope. Loznica immediately assumed responsibility for repairing the damaged installation. Due to justified delays, the Programme approved an extension of the grant for Loznica until the end of April, to allow additional time to finalise the works and procure equipment for the youth space. The City of Loznica published the decision to award the contract for equipping the youth space on 31 March 2026, after extending the offer deadline due to bidder questions and evaluation of the submitted two offers. The contract signing is conditioned on no complaints being raised within 10 days.

Zaječar, holder of the **Magic of Eastern Serbia** project on behalf of Boljevac, Sokobanja and Knjaževac, established the temporary government, which managed to adopt a budget for 2026 only in March 2026, ensuring remaining project activities could be implemented and payments processed. The Programme approved Zaječar's request for a budget revision to cover unforeseen works at the youth camp in Zaječar, facilitating its certification as a camp in accordance with legal requirements. Zaječar also met the conditions for the third milestone payment, with all financial records reviewed and approved by the Programme. Although all infrastructure works have been completed across all five locations, the project progress reached 82%, as Zaječar still needs to complete the remaining soft measures, including the contracted marketing plan, additional work on power supply for Catamaranes on Bovan Lake, and technical commissioning services for the Youth Camp. Zaječar also needs to re-tender the district tourist card and procure the equipment for Zaječars Youth Camp, for which the Programme approved the extension to Zaječar by the end of June 2026.

All activities within the realisation of the **Improvement of the waste management system in the urban area of Leskovac with more advanced and innovative environmentally friendly solutions - PRO WASTE INNOVATIVE SOLUTIONS** were completed by mid December 2025. The grant implementation subsequently submitted all relevant financial documentation for final verification which is now pending the review of the Programme audit team. Further to this final narrative reporting has also been completed.

During the reporting period, within the implementation of the **Improving Educational Ecosystem in the Urban Area of the City of Pirot and Municipalities of Dimitrovgrad, Babušnica and Bela Palanka,** the procurement of works on the fencing of the primary school "Ljupče Španac" in Bela Palanka was completed and the contract with the most favourable contractor signed on 13 March 2026. The preparation of the advance payment, as per the signed subject contract, is ongoing, following which the contractor would access the site and begin implementation of works. Also, according to the signed contract, the implementation of the works on the fencing of the school facility would last 45 calendar days. Further to this, the works are ongoing on the reconstruction of the Grammar school in Pirot with a 70% completion rate. The remaining works entail completion of the facade, the improvement of the outdoor lightning and the fencing of the subject building. Given the specificity of the works and the intention of putting those in full function, additional quantities of works have been identified, and the City of Pirot has requested a budget revision. Namely, at its Municipal Assembly session held on 16 March 2026, Pirot adopted the budget rebalance that included allocation of additional funding for works on the Grammar school to compensate for the additional quantities of works within the project. The budget revision request is currently reviewed by the Programme.

In the City of Bor, infrastructure works and all associated soft activities have been successfully completed. The only remaining item is the procurement of additional IT equipment, to be funded from project savings. This procurement is anticipated to be contracted within the two weeks. The expected date for final closures is after 20 April 2026, though official confirmation has yet to be received by the Programme.

The implementation of the **Green and Energy Transition project in the Užice ITI territory** is moving toward the key milestones with some procedural challenges. National Theatre roof reconstruction tender has closed, receiving a single bid that exceeded the estimated value; a decision to suspend the procedure is anticipated, which will initiate a negotiation phase after a ten-day period, following the submission of

qualitative selection criteria evidence by the bidder. Works at the agricultural school in Požega are complete, with the nursery, fence, and irrigation system finalized and technical commissioning currently underway. Furthermore, the installation of the solar power plant at the Regional Training Centre for Dual Education in Uzice is progressing, as workers have begun replacing the roof tiles in preparation for panel installation.

Concerning **LOT2** projects, four grants - **Urban identity study for ITI Užice, Pre-investment feasibility study for the establishment of a higher education institution in Pirot, Lazarev Grad in Kruševac and Leskovac Previous study of recultivation of the closed solid waste landfill at the location "Brst" into an ecologically acceptable area of public use** are in the administrative closure phase, as well as **Viskoza factory Master plan in Loznica,** following mutual agreement on grant termination.

The grant for development of the **traffic study and related strategic environmental impact assessment (SEIA) in Novi Pazar** was additionally extended until 30 April 2026 due to the additional time needed to organise the final event including a donor conference and to prepare the English version of the brochure with the list of key measures, in order to promote and support implementation of the study.

The duration of the grant for the **Prefeasibility study for the revitalisation of the Mechanical Workshop at the Military Technical Institute (MTI), Kragujevac** was additionally extended until 30 April 2026, as the Study was once again returned to the service provider for correction, as per the request of the City of Kragujevac requiring additional space for the youth within the MTI. The remaining two public procurements for preparation of 3D model and organisation of international conferences are completed and contracted.

Result 2: Enhanced economic growth in targeted municipalities

Four more economic infrastructure projects were finalised during the quarter, bringing the total number of projects supported through the Call for Economic Infrastructure Projects to nineteen completed out of the twenty.

With the completion of the technical documentation for the construction of the Sports centre facility "Vodeničište" Vlasina Rid in Surdulica, and the theme park “Roman Emperors” in Zaječar, all seven projects awarded under the related LOT within the Call for Economic Infrastructure projects are completed. The construction permits have been secured for all seven locations, with a cumulative project pipeline value of 42 million Euros. Thus far, Paraćin received 530 million RSD from the Ministry of Economy for the infrastructure equipping of the part of the Zmič industrial zone, based on the developed technical documentation. The Municipality of Surdulica is actively looking for funds for the construction of the first phase of the sports complex Vodeničište on Vlasina Rid, after failing to secure support from the Cross-Border Cooperation (CBC) Call with Bulgaria.

The impact of the two other projects completed during the quarter - the reconstruction and rehabilitation of the “Kobos” factory in Bosilegrad and the reconstruction of the Water Tower at the medieval Old Town fortress in Užice is expected in a five-year period. Specifically in Užice, the full utilisation of the area's tourist potential, including a projected increase in tourist numbers, also relates to the realisation of several other investments planned in accordance with the Detailed Regulation Plan of the Old Town Fortress. In Bosilegrad, the Municipality is working to secure the use permit to formalise the agreement with the interested investor, the textile company “Put Slobode” from Požega, which expressed interest in August 2024 in doing business in Bosilegrad and employing 250 workers over the next five years.

Overall, the impact of 19 completed economic infrastructure projects remained unchanged throughout the quarter, totalling 235 million Euros in investments across six new production facilities, which generated 2,084 new jobs.

Activity 2.1 Developing economic infrastructure and business related services at the local level

The works on the **reconstruction and rehabilitation of the "Kobos" factory in Bosilegrad** were completed in January 2026, with the reinforcement of the roof structure over the storage and the fire detection works. The municipality is facilitating the issuance of the usage permit, which is a prerequisite for enabling the operational capacity of the facility.

Two projects related to the development of technical documentation were completed in February 2026, having secured construction permits as the final step in the awarded grant agreements: documentation for the **construction of the Sports centre facility "Vodeničište" Vlasina Rid in Surdulica**, and the documentation for the **theme park "Roman Emperors" in Zaječar**.

Finally, the additional works on the **reconstruction of the Water Tower at the medieval Old Town fortress in Užice**, which included the stabilisation of the supporting wall and the provision of a new set of staircases with appropriate handrails, were completed in March 2026, marking completion of this project.

The only remaining economic infrastructure project relates to the **infrastructure equipping of the industrial zone Čukarka in Preševo**. While the construction works were completed in 2025, the municipality dealt with the finalisation of soft measure activities related to marketing, branding and governance for the zone. In February 2026, the service provider drafted the study for the management model for the industrial zone to which the Programme provided comments, which are being addressed. The proposed management model addresses the need related to the conditions for leasing the land in the zone to increase the interest of the potential investors and ensure the long-term sustainability of the Čukarka zone. The project is planned to be completed by the end of April 2026.

Activity 2.2 Enhancing competitiveness and sustainability of enterprises contributing to economic stability of local communities

The activity is completed in earlier reporting periods.

Result 3: Improved social infrastructure and social cohesion in targeted municipalities

Both projects from the reserve list under the Call for Local Infrastructure Projects awarded in June 2025 were completed during the quarter, bringing the total number of local infrastructure projects to 39.

Enhancing the overall impact from 37 implemented LIP projects, which have brought benefits to over 280,000 citizens across 35 local self-governments, during the quarter, improved learning conditions were ensured for 400 pupils and teachers in the primary school "Gornja Jablanica" in Medveđa, and improved healthcare conditions were secured for over 20,000 patients and 136 medical workers employed in Raška Health Centre.

As part of monitoring activities of the completed local infrastructure projects where new services are being introduced, a positive step forward is evident in the case of Lebane, where the facility for the day care for children with special needs, Sunce, commenced to provide services to 18 children and 30 young people with disabilities, from this town.

Activity 3.1 Developing and improving infrastructure which contributes to enhanced quality of life

Upon completion of the works on the replacement of joinery at the **Primary school "Gornja Jablanica" in Medveđa** in December 2025, the Municipality adopted a budget rebalance to enable the processing of the final payment to the contractor and the financial closure of the project.

Likewise, the interior works at **Raška Health Centre** were completed during this quarter, with the final payments made. The Municipality also completed the planned soft measures, with implemented training for medical doctors in cardiopulmonary resuscitation and for nurses and medical technicians in professional patient care communication, attended by 106 medical workers in total.

Activity 3.2 Supporting public institutions, including the social protection institutions, to enhance social services and preparedness for emergencies

The activity is completed in earlier reporting periods.

Activity 3.3 Support to COVID-19 related prevention and response activities

The activity is completed in earlier reporting periods.

Activity 3.4 Support in rehabilitation of the flood-caused damages

The activity is completed in earlier reporting periods.

2.2 Management

2.2.1 Governance

The Programme Steering Committee (PSC) is kept informed about the Programme developments throughout the quarter. With the approaching completion of the Programme implementation period and rescoping of the project awarded to the City of Niš, the Programme has approached the donor and the key national counterpart - the Ministry of European Integration, with a motion to reallocate these and savings from other Programme activities to support projects from the available reserve lists of projects.

Two reserve lists were consulted in particular - the reserve list of Local Infrastructure Projects and the Economic Infrastructure Projects, with interventions feasible for completion by the end of the year.

2.2.2 Coordination

During this quarter, MEI organised initial coordination meeting with "EU Support to the Republic of Serbia for Effective Implementation of Cohesion Policy (COHPOL 2)", aimed at further strengthening the administrative and institutional capacities of the Republic of Serbia for the implementation of the European Union's Cohesion Policy. The planned duration of the project, implemented by GIZ, in consortium with ARCHIDATA, WYG, and EPPCO, is 36 months.

The Programme also held an initial meeting with the Resilience Cities in Serbia project, implemented by GIZ. The project is focused on the improvement of planning practice by incorporating resilience measures in three pilot cities in Serbia. The cooperation will be particularly emphasised if some of the selected pilot cities are also supported by the Programme.

Coordination and consultation with DEU representatives were also required to organise the DEU HoC visit to the field. This visit also included collaboration with other EU-funded projects, i.e, the EU Resource Centre implemented by Belgrade Open School and the UNOPS EU SHAI programme.

2.2.3 Human Resources

The next stage of the EU PRO Plus Human Resources Closure Plan has been implemented during the quarter. As of 1 April 2026, two positions with limited changes to the Terms of Reference were reassigned to the EU INTEGRA Project, while contracts for other Programme personnel involved in supporting implementation of the remaining Programme activities have been converted to retainer contracts. This enables efficient resource use while retaining the capacity needed for the successful implementation of the remaining activities.

2.2.4 Procurement and Grants

During the first quarter of 2026, ten amendments to the Grant Support Agreements (GSAs) were processed, including time extensions, budget revisions, and revisions to the GSA provisions concerning the dedicated project bank account. Additionally, five payment requests were processed, in line with the GSA implementation dynamics. Currently, 12 GSAs are under implementation.

A small value procurement process for the provision of design review services for the execution of works on ateliers building in Nis fortress, supported through a GSA awarded under the Call for integrated projects, was conducted during the quarter. The services were delivered in accordance with the contract. There were no other major procurement activities during the quarter.

2.2.5. Finance

The following are the main financial indicators[1]:

- The total delivery of the EU PRO Plus as of 31 March 2026 was 37,188,042.99 Euros or 92.97% of the Programme budget.
- The forecast delivery for the next reporting period is 1,298,769.47 Euros.

3. RISKS AND ISSUES

During the quarter, the Programme proactively managed risks and issues related to the implementation of integrated and remaining economic infrastructure projects.

Prolonged decision-making for reallocation of available Programme funds may jeopardise the feasibility of proposed interventions. Following the rescoping of the GSA awarded to the City of Niš, funds of over 700,000 USD became available for reprogramming. The Programme proposed triggering of the two reserve lists for Local Infrastructure and Economic Infrastructure Projects on 13 March 2026. The donor confirmed their support. However, feedback from the key national counterpart - the Ministry of European Integration has not yet been provided.

Exchange rate differences lead to a lack of available funds for tax exemption within individual projects. Although project activities are carried out within the funds foreseen in the project budgets, fluctuations in the USD/EUR/RSD exchange rates often lead to a shortfall in the amount available for tax exemption in dinars. If not monitored and timely addressed, and a request is not made to the tax administration to acknowledge these differences, the tax administration may not respond in a timely manner, risking delays to the project and project payments. In this regard, the Programme regularly monitors all tax exemptions against different exchange rates and checks available funds one month before closure to anticipate and mitigate potential risks.

In Zaječar, the late establishment of the temporary government in December 2025 continues to affect the timeline of project activities within the "Magic of Eastern Serbia" project. Namely, the temporary authority only adopted the 2026 budget in March 2026. Thus, the two pending tenders for the tourist card and the equipping of the youth camp in Zaječar were published only in March, creating a significant risk that they will not be implemented within the duration of this project.

A large number of questions received for the tender for equipping the Centre for Youth in Lagator, Loznica ISTD, led to the postponement of the deadline for submitting offers, thereby triggering the risk of potential delays. Namely, although the decision on contract award was made on 31 March 2026, there

[1] While these figures provide quality insight into the Programme's spending, the final figures are only provided in the Programme's financial reports. As of 2026, UNOPS transitioned its financial reporting to align with the new International Public Sector Accounting Standards (IPSAS) 47 on revenue and IPSAS 48 on transfer expenses.

is a risk of a complaint from the second-placed bidder against the decision, within the legally prescribed period of 10 days, which entails a cumulative delay of a minimum of two months until the decision of the Republic Commission for Protection of Bidders' Rights is made, to allow contracting.

In Šabac, the slow decrease in the moisture in the cement screed may impact the scheduled placement of the sports floor in the gym, thus delaying the subsequent project activities in the finalised building, including the opening ceremony. The Programme and the City of Šabac will jointly monitor the status of the works and will postpone the soft activities until all conditions for placement of the sports floor are met, to avoid compromising the quality of the works.

The announced parliamentary elections and increased involvement of government officials may slow down programme activities due to shifting priorities and limited availability of stakeholders. There is also a risk that programme activities and visibility could be perceived as politically motivated during this period. The Programme will follow clear communication guidelines, ensure balanced engagement, and adjust timelines where needed.

4. SUSTAINABILITY: Social, Environmental, Economic, National Capacity

The Programme monitors the success indicators set out in the logical framework matrix for individual projects, thereby providing support to beneficiary local self-governments to ensure the long-term sustainability of the supported interventions.

The social, economic and environmental impacts are visible across all 39 local infrastructure projects, where more than 280,000 beneficiaries now have improved working and living conditions due to infrastructure interventions that reduced environmental impact and generated savings through energy efficiency measures and/or the use of renewable energy sources. The programme is continuously monitoring post-implementation impact and challenges that some of the local self-government units have to address to reach the full sustainability of the completed projects.

During this quarter, Lebane day care centre, reconstructed under support to local infrastructure, became fully operational to host 18 children and 30 young people with disabilities from this town. In addition, two finalised LIPs in Medveđa and Raška have immediately proven sustainable, as rehabilitated institutions have improved health and education conditions for over 20,000 beneficiaries and contributed to environmental sustainability by increasing building energy efficiency after the intervention.

Knjaževac rehabilitation centre (https://banjicaspa.rs/), funded through the EIP call, also became operational in this quarter after transferring governance rights to the tourist organisation, which commenced promotional and management activities to strengthen the tourist potential of this location. In parallel, the landscaping arrangement with the construction of the sports terrains of the Banjica complex, funded through the ISTD call within the Magic of Eastern Serbia project, obtained a positive technical commissioning report recommending the finalised works for the use permit. Knjaževac continues to develop this location, securing 67.7 million RSD for the construction of an aqua park near the pool in the Banjica complex.

Kragujevac also managed to secure the permit for the use of the road pedestrian bridge over the Lepenica River in the FAS zone, ensuring the safe transport of goods and 4,000 workers from 17 companies who use this bridge to commute to work.

The Programme is still following three infrastructure projects, struggling to commence operations, mainly due to the introduction of a new service. **Sjenica, Bujanovac, and Bosilegrad** are at various stages in the process of obtaining use permits and are investing efforts to meet all conditions to become fully operational. While Sjenica reported a lack of funds for the provision of specialise vehicle for ABP collection, and Bosilegrad lack the capacities to organise technical commissioning of the facility for hosting people

from socially endangered groups and victims of domestic violence, the operation of Bujanovac transfer station fully depends on the Vranje Meteris landfill, due to be finalised by 2030.

5. CROSS-CUTTING THEMES: Good governance, Gender equality, Social inclusion, Environment and climate change and Digitalisation

The Programme has maintained its momentum in championing good governance, social inclusion, gender equality, and digitalisation across all initiatives, yielding significant additional results.

Regarding the good governance and social inclusion principles within integrated projects, intensive consultations with diverse stakeholders and robust participatory processes were central to project implementation. For instance, the *Leskovac Previous Study for the Recultivation of the Closed Solid Waste Landfill at 'Brst'* engaged residents of Podrimce and nearby settlements through public forums to raise awareness about repurposing the site into a safe, ecologically sound public space. Secondary and primary schools also participated through student workshops and an art competition.

Similarly, the *Lazarev Grad* project in Kruševac involved elementary students in a logo design competition, while broader public engagement was fostered through expert roundtables and public presentations.

The *Urban Identity Study for ITI Užice* employed a particularly strong participatory model, collecting project ideas via 15 mini-citizens' assemblies and nine thematic workshops involving architects, urban planners, CSOs, and residential managers. This extensive collaboration significantly enhanced the quality of the final study and its proposed solutions. Finally, for the *Pre-investment Feasibility Study for a Higher Education Institution in Pirot*, representatives from partner municipalities, schools, NGOs, and the general public were invited to contribute suggestions and feedback through dedicated consultative events.

6. COMMUNICATIONS AND VISIBILITY

Two visits were organised, one for the Head of Operations II and a MEI representative to mark the completion of the local infrastructure project in Raška, and a two-day visit for the DEU Head of Cooperation to Novi Pazar and Raška. The latter included site visits to eight EU-funded projects, of which four were EU PRO Plus projects. Five press releases were prepared to cover the aforementioned visits, completion of the Raška local infrastructure and start of the construction works with the integrated project Connect in Kragujevac. These efforts, along with other project activities, generated 345 positive media reports, of which 128 (almost 37%) in national media.

Three Programme newsletters were produced to mark the International Education Day Education edition: Brilliant Minds, Brilliant Futures (27 January), Global Tourism Resilience Day (17 February) Welcoming Spring: How we are building sustainable and resilient tourism in Serbia with EU Support, and International Women Day on 8 March From Idea to Success: Women in Business with EU Support.

The Programme, as per DEU request, prepared briefing notes for the two field visits, the Friends of South Serbia meeting, and the list of projects for potential visits. Overviews of projects in Aranđelovac, Bajina Bašta, Bor, Knjažavac, Zaječar, and Pirot were also prepared upon the MEI request. In addition the Progress monitoring report was prepared for the MEI.

The Programme YouTube channel was updated with four media stories and one success story, while the website was populated with ten success stories. The website recorded 56,922 visits from 41,944 unique visitors, and social media engagement remains stable with Facebook reaching 18,768 followers, Instagram 3,542, and Twitter 1,158.

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7. LESSONS LEARNED

During the quarter, the Programme noted several lessons learned, the following being the most important:

The importance of clearly communicating the expected due diligence requirements during the grantee orientation phase. Though the GSA are issued with the understanding that the grantees have sufficient capacities to manage implementation of the agreed activities, a more thorough orientation and the set requirements for standardised operating procedures at the beginning of implementation of a GSA would be beneficial. For example, the falsified bank guarantees provided by the contract for construction intervention in Knić would have been completely avoided if the grantee had a standardised practice to confirm validity of the bank guarantee with the bank prior to contract signing. Likewise, some financial requirements should be standardised for all procurement processes for suppliers and contractors, such as a mandatory financial threshold of the expected contract value.

Time tolerances should be strictly set and mechanisms for their stricter enforcement should be established. Though implementation of each project is monitored with regards to the implementation plan set with its approval, extension of the project implementation period is granted for various reasons, which are in many cases out of the control of the grantee, but there are also situations where the delays are encountered for less justifiable reasons. Though the limited time extensions are granted in the interest of all parties that a project is successfully completed for projects with higher risks, tolerances should be set more strictly, especially in the final phases of the Programme implementation. The situation with the grant implemented by the City of Niš is a good example of a project which rescoping in the earlier stage would be more beneficial for the Programme in two ways. Firstly, Programme resources would be used more efficiently and secondly, there would be more options for reprogramming of funds.

8. NEXT REPORTING PERIOD[2]

The following are the key milestones for the upcoming period:

Result 1. Improved development planning in targeted municipalities and introduction of the ITI concept

- Provide follow up consultations on the proposed Study on National model for ISTD upon proposed EU Cohesion Policy 2028-2034
- Finalise integrated investment plans for Niš, Pirot and Kruševac
- Completion of remaining LOT 2 projects in Novi Pazar and Kragujevac
- Provide follow up consultations on the proposed Study on National model for ISTD upon proposed EU Cohesion Policy 2028-2034
- Completion of infrastructure works in Kings Winery in Topola
- Completion of infrastructure works in Visitors Centre Risovača in Aranđelovac
- Delivery of furniture for Visitors Centre Risovača in Aranđelovac
- Opening ceremony of Start Up Centre in Bor
- Finalisation of works in ISTDs Šabac and Loznica
- Equipping the Youth Centre in Loznica
- Publishing the tenders for district card and for equipping the youth camp in Zajčear ISTD project
- Completion of remaining LOT 2 projects in Novi Pazar and Kragujevac and administrative closure of all LOT 2 grants

Result 2. Enhanced economic growth in targeted municipalities

- Closure of six completed projects
- Finalisation of soft measures in Preševo GSA

Result 3. Improved social infrastructure and social cohesion in targeted municipalities

[2] EU PRO Plus Work Plan for the period from 1 April to 30 June 2023 is available in Annex V, Attachment 5.1.

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- Award the LIP projects from the reserve list

Programme Communications

- Promotion of the completed ISTD projects
- Publishing newsletter to mark Labour Day

LFM – progress against indicators

Legend

	Activity completed, outputs delivered in accordance with the set targets
	Activity progressing in accordance with the plan
	Activity progresses with manageable delay
	Activity is critical

Objectively verifiable indicators	Objectively Verifiable Indicators - Target	Progress during the reporting period
Overall Objective: To contribute to socio-economic development, prosperity and social cohesion of Serbian society	WB Doing Business Report score 74	The WB replaced the Doing Business report with Business Ready (B-READY) report that evaluates the business and investment climate worldwide. As of 2025, Serbia is included in the report. The World Bank's Business Ready (B-READY) 2025 report indicates that Serbia is enhancing its regulatory framework and digital public services to improve competitiveness, while facing challenges regarding operational efficiency, workforce skills, and the green energy transition. B-READY 2025 Pillar scores for Serbia are as follows: (I) Regulatory Framework 76.23 (average for assessed countries is 66.32), (II) Public Services 61.53 (average for assessed countries is 53.97) and (III) Operational Efficiency 69.07 (average for assessed countries is 60.03).
	Global Competitiveness Index Rank 69	The World Economic Forum has not continued comparative country rankings on the Global Competitiveness Index after the COVID-19 pandemic in 2020.
	Šumadija and Western Serbia Region GDP and number of	The available data shows that the nominal GDP of Šumadija and

SO1. To decrease socio-economic disparities of two regions within Serbia	unemployed - 20% / 101,760	Western Serbia Region in 2024 increased by 12.9%. Also, the share of this Region in the national GDP increased by 0.4% to 17.4% in 2024 compared to 2023. The number of unemployed in the Western Serbia Region in the Q4 2025 was 69,000 which is a decrease of 14.6% compared to 66,100 in the Q4 2024.
	South-East Serbia Region GDP and number of unemployed - 14.2% / 83,712	The available data shows that the nominal GDP of South and East Serbia Region Region in 2024 increased by 12.3%. The share of the same Region in the national GDP also increased by 0,2 % to 15.3% in 2024 compared to 2023. The number of unemployed in the South-East Serbia Region in the Q4 2025 was 77,700 which is an increase of 5.6% compared to 73,600 in the Q4 2024, but still significantly below the maximum target value for this indicator.
RESULT 1 **Improved development planning in targeted municipalities and introduction of the ITI concept**		
Result 1. Improved development planning in targeted municipalities and introduction of the Integrated and Sustainable Territorial Development (ISTD) concept	**OC 1.1** The number of adopted Integrated Territorial Investment (ITI) and Sustainable Urban Development (SUD) strategies and the number of LSGs covered with these Strategies (Corresponds with IPA PF 2.11) - At least 15 strategies which include at least 35 LSGs	All 12 supported strategies including 31 LSGs are adopted by all 31 local assemblies
	OC 1.2 Implementation of at least 80 percent adopted SUD and ITI Strategies initiated with at least three different funding sources - at least 12 (mid 2024)	Implementation of 92% (11 out of 12) territorial strategies initiated with at least three projects with different funding sources
Result 2 Enhanced economic growth in targeted municipalities	**OC 2.1** Number of jobs created or facilitated - At least 300 (2023)	A total of 338 new jobs have been created directly by supported business entities, out of which 178 (53%) are occupied by women. Of that, a total of 274 new jobs have been created by supported MSEs grantees, out of which 142 (52%) new jobs are occupied by women and a total of 64 new jobs have

		been created by supported Women and Youth Startups, out of which 36 (56%) new jobs are occupied by women. Additionally, 2,084 jobs have been created as a result of 235 million new investments generated after infrastructure equipping of the industrial and tourist zones
	OC 2.2 Number of start-ups and MSEs that benefited - 500 (2023)	A total of 512 MSEs are supported through activities implemented by 16 BSOs. A total of 113 MSEs have been supported by direct grants. Further, 42 grants have been implemented by Women and Youth startups in extremely underdeveloped municipalities.
	OC 2.3 Number and financial value of initiated investments in industry and services facilitated - At least six investments valued at least 25 million euros (mid of 2024)	19 of 20 awarded EIP completed. Six new investments valued over 235 million Euros were realised in supported zones/tourist destinations, subject to equipping through the project
Result 3: Improved social infrastructure and social cohesion in targeted municipalities	**OC 3.1** Number of persons benefiting from improved public facilities/ services - at least 65,000 (2023)	**The activity was successfully completed in 2024.** Over 280,000 persons benefited from the improved conditions in cultural, educational, sports and health infrastructure in 37 completed projects. Implementation of two new grants awarded in Q12025 completed in Q1 2026 improving conditions for 20,400 beneficiaries
	OC 3.2 Number of introduced or improved social services provided by CSOs and/or LSGs - at least 15	**The activity is successfully completed.** A total of 28 social services have been established or improved in 22 LSG facilitating better access to education, health and social care services for over 7,700 disadvantaged citizens.
	OC 3.3 Number of persons benefiting from enhanced health care services related to COVID-19 prevention and recovery - at least 300,000 (2022)	**The activity is successfully completed.** Supported 23 medical centres to enhance services related to COVID-19 prevention and recovery, facilitating provision of over 2,645,000 medical services related to COVID-19. Additionally, 5000 disinfection devices, 60,000 L disinfection liquid and 41 triage containers were delivered.

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Activity 1.1 Enhancing national capacity to introduce integrated territorial development	Number of persons at the national level trained - 40 (middle 2023)	50 persons at the national level trained to date, out of which 24 from MEI
	Proposals for regulators and procedural framework to enable preparation of the EU model for territorial planning - in place (end of 2024)	The Comparative Study on EU member states prepared. The draft Study on the National Model for ISTD prepared
	Monitoring, reporting and evaluation approaches related to ISTD model - in place (2022)	The objectives framework indicator set for monitoring, reporting and evaluation of territorial strategies developed and agreed with the Public Policy Secretariat.
	Number of tools developed or enhanced - at least one (2022)	Initial ISTD networking platform is established.
Activity 1.2 Improving capacities of municipalities and regional development agencies to introduce concepts of integrated territorial planning	Number of LSGs and RDAs benefiting from interventions - at least 80 percent (middle 2023)	85,9 percent of the LSGs and RDAs benefiting from the capacity building process (85 LSGs and 11 RDAs participated in the training activities within Module I, II, III and IV of Capacity Building Programme - 1,449 persons in total)
	Population covered by SUD and ITI Strategies - at least 2 million (end of 2022)	The territories supported for development of territorial strategies are inhabited by approximately 1,6 million people.
Activity 1.3 Implementing activities contributing to socio-economic growth deriving from integrated territorial planning strategies	Number of integrated projects deriving from the ISTD strategies, whose implementation is supported - at least 15 (mid 2024)	A total of 18 integrated projects deriving from ISTD strategies are supported.
RESULT 2 **Enhanced economic growth in targeted municipalities**		
Activity 2.1 Developing economic infrastructure and businesses related services at the local level	Number of supported economic infrastructure projects - 20 (2024)	Of 20 awarded LSGs in support of economic development, 19 finalised activities, and one is still under implementation
Activity 2.2 Enhancing competitiveness and sustainability of enterprises contributing to economic stability of local communities	Number of supported start-ups, entrepreneurs and enterprises - 100 (2022)	**The activity is successfully completed.** 113 MSEs were supported to procure new equipment and services.
	Number of supported youth and women entrepreneurs - at least 50 (2022)	A total of 42 startup projects are successfully implemented of which 23 grantees also received mentoring support for development of their business.
	Number of supported BSO projects - 10 (2022)	**The activity is successfully completed.** Sixteen BSO projects were supported, and activities

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		implemented by them completed.
RESULT 3 **Improved social infrastructure and social cohesion in targeted municipalities**		
Activity 3.1 Developing and improving infrastructure which contributes to enhanced quality of life	Number of social infrastructure projects implemented -at least 30 (2022)	**The activity is successfully completed.** A total of 39 local infrastructure projects were completed, including the 37 initially awarded and an additional two from the reserve list to which the support was extended in 2025.
Activity 3.2 Supporting public institutions, including the social protection institutions, to enhance social services and preparedness for emergencies	Number of CSO projects related to social services supported - 20 (2023)	**The activity is successfully completed.** All 20 projects for strengthening social services successfully completed implementation.
Activity 3.3 Support to COVID-19 related prevention and response activities	Number of medical centres supported to enhance services related to COVID-19 prevention and recovery - at least 20 (2022)	**The activity is successfully completed.** Supported 23 medical centres to enhance services related to COVID-19 prevention and recovery.
Activity 3.4 Support in rehabilitation of flood-caused damage	Number of infrastructure projects related to rehabilitation of flood-caused damages implemented - up to 3 (2024)	Works on both bridges (Vrnjačka Banja and Rača) are fully completed and handed over. Both bridges obtained permits for use. DNP expired for both contracts and performance warranties returned.

ANNEXES

Annex IV Communications

Annex IV_ Attn 1 Overview of Media Coverage for Q1 2026

Annex V Programme Management

Annex V_ Attn 1 EU PRO Plus Work Plan for Q2 of 2026

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