



Albanian Development Fund

Non-Technical Summary

The proposed Zgosht to Cerenec Road Scheme; National Regional Roads Project, Albania

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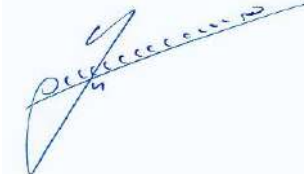
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1 INTRODUCTION

1.1 Introduction

The Albanian Development Fund (ADF) is seeking financial support from the European Bank for Reconstruction and Development (EBRD) for the improvement of the existing road from Zgosht to Cerenec Bridge (hereafter ‘the Project’). The ADF is a public agency whose mission is to encourage sustainable, balanced and cohesive socio-economic development at the local and regional levels. The proposed Project is located in East Albania, approximately 41 km from Tirana, within the municipalities of Bulqizë and Librazhd and the districts of Dibër and Elbasan. Approximately 13.5 km of the road traverses the western border of the Shebenik-Jabllanicë National Park, see Figure 1.1.

This preliminary Non-technical Summary (NTS) describes the key findings of the completed environmental and social studies in non-technical language and summarises what is known about other topics that will be addressed in the detailed design and Environmental and Social Impact Assessment (ESIA) that is being prepared for the project by ADF in line with national regulatory requirements.

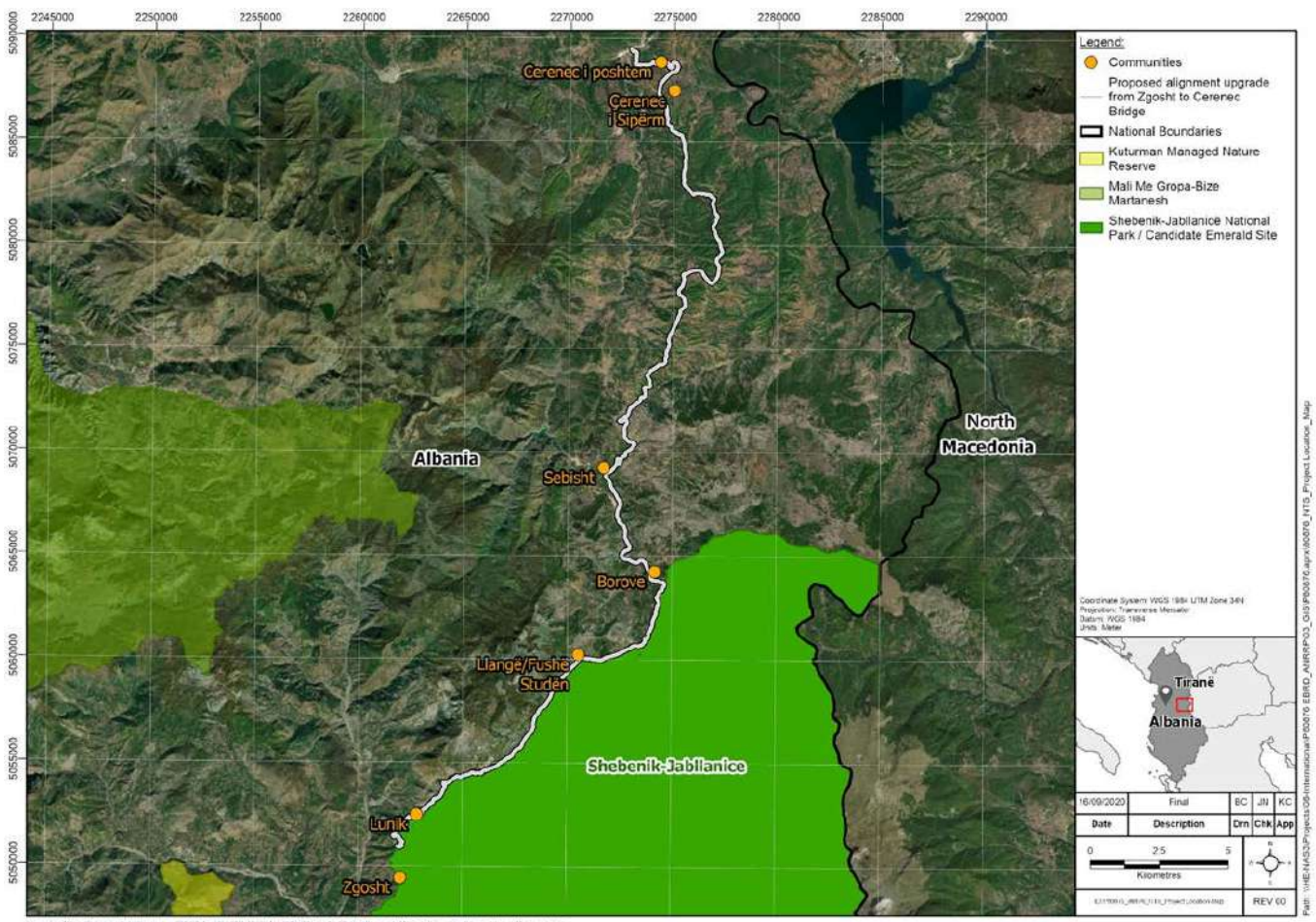


Figure 1.1: Project Location

1.2 Project rationale

The existing 46.5 km-long road connects Zgosht to Cerenec and is a mostly unsurfaced two-way road located in a rural, mountainous area (Figures 1.2a and 1.2b). The road supports approximately 108 vehicles per day and is expected to support 500 vehicles per days following completion of the Project.



Figure 1.2a: Existing Road



Figure 1.2b: Existing Road

According to the Feasibility Study for the Project, the road is currently considered to be of an inadequate standard to support existing and predicted levels of vehicles and to meet road safety requirements. Sections of the road have been heavily impacted by surface water runoff resulting in severe localised erosion due to the poor condition of the drainage system. The poor condition of the road limits vehicle movement and access across the districts of Dibër and Elbasan, which in turn is limiting economic development within these districts (ADF, February 2020).

The Feasibility Study predicts that the road's improvement will lead to economic, agriculture and tourism development by improving access improvement:

- for community, farmers and other economic enterprises
- for tourists to destinations in eastern Albania, including new touristic areas such as Parku Shebenik Jabllanicë in Librazhd and cultural, natural and historical areas in the Dibra region
- to Dibër and Elbasan regions with a specific focus on Librazhd, Bulqizë and Dibër municipalities
- between Dibër, Bulqizë and Librazhd and nearby urban centres.

The General Local Plans for Librazhd and Bulqizë (drafts in progress) highlight the importance of the Project.

1.3 Project description

1.3.1.1 The proposed road alignment

The improved road will follow the route of the existing road (Figure 1.1). Approximately 13.5 km of the road traverses the western border of the Shebenik-Jabllanicë National Park (IUCN Category 2; national park category 2).

1.3.1.2 Road improvement design

The proposed improvement works will result in a road comprising two asphalted traffic lanes each measuring 3.25 m and two gravel shoulders each measuring 0.75 m. Previous works have already widened the road to what is expected to be its final width of 8 m, see Section 1.3.1.3. A cross-section of a section of the road is illustrated in Figure 1.3.

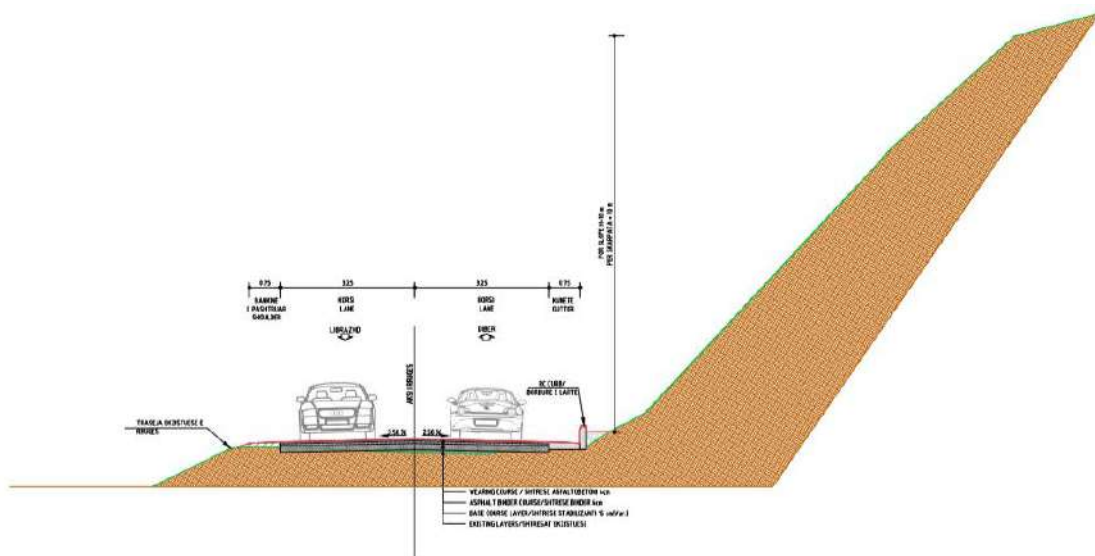


Figure 1.3: A cross-section of the proposed road

The following road pavement layers have been selected based on the forecast volume of traffic. The forecast number of heavy goods vehicles has been considered when determining the overall required pavement thickness as they have a greater damaging effect on the road surface.

- Surface layer: asphalt concrete 40 mm
- Binder layer: asphalt 60 mm
- Base layer: crushed stone base 150 mm
- Sub-base: granular material 150 mm
- Regulating layer: granular material 0-300 mm is already completed

The road crosses steep slopes with loose rockfaces. Concrete retaining walls will be constructed, where necessary. Where possible these will be stabilised using bio-engineering (terramesh that will support the establishment of vegetation), instead of concrete.

The Project is in the design phase so many details are not finalised. However, the engineers are considering the following improvement measures, and will be further guided by the findings of the EIA as it is developed:

- pedestrian safety – e.g. the inclusion of pavements / sidewalks, lighting, signage in urban environments
- road safety – e.g. traffic signage, retaining walls, stabilisation works
- engineering requirements to address erosion issues – e.g. maintenance and enhancement of the existing drainage system and stabilisation of escarpments
- climate resilience measures.

1.3.1.3 Construction

The detailed methods of construction have yet to be developed. It is hoped that all works will be contained within the existing disturbed right of way, however, for the purpose of impact assessment a precautionary approach to studies has been adopted as described in Sections 2.1 and 2.10.

It is expected that the Project is likely to involve:

- clearing vegetation and topsoil from some areas of the working width
- construction of the sub-base and base layers
- construction of the asphalt layers
- cleaning and improvement of the existing drainage system including concrete channels and culverts. Currently some culverts also serve as animal crossing
- construction of concrete retaining walls
- installation of road safety barriers
- bioengineering works to stabilise and protect escarpments
- installation of traffic signs (i.e. pedestrian and vehicle signage)
- road marking
- installation of streetlighting along sidewalks in urban areas
- upgrading existing areas of paving
- constructing new areas of paving in urban areas
- the installation of pipes for an optical fibre network in urban areas
- the improvement of several bridges

Works to widen the existing road were undertaken in 2012 (ADF, February 2020), and further road widening works are not expected to be required.

1.3.1.4 Operation

Maintenance road works will be undertaken each year or when required by the Albanian Road Authority, except for the first two years when the ADF will be responsible for monitoring and maintenance, as well as the establishment of the landscaping scheme. This responsibility for road maintenance works will then be devolved to the municipalities

(namely Librazhd and Bulqizë), noting that it is expected that ADF will retain a quality assurance role for monitoring the establishment of habitats and species as part of a Reinstatement and Landscaping Plan and Biodiversity Management Plan (BMP).

1.3.2 Consideration of project alternatives

When compared to a new road alignment, the use of the existing road alignment will greatly reduce the environmental and social impact of disturbing new areas, will continue to serve existing communities who rely on the road and will reduce construction costs. No alternative road alignments have therefore been considered.

As the design of the road improvement work progresses, alternative design options and construction techniques will be considered to determine the preferred option taking into account environmental, social, cumulative and cost impacts.

1.4 Legal aspects and compliance

1.4.1 National EIA and other requirements

Based on regulatory requirements, the Project is subjected to an EIA as part of the permitting procedure in Albania in accordance with the requirements of the Albanian Environmental Legal Acts, including Laws no.10440 and 10431. This involves the identification of significant environmental impacts (both positive and adverse) and risks that are likely to arise from the development of the Project. The EIA requires the Project proponent, in this case the ADF, to develop measures to reduce impacts to environmental receptors. Whilst the Albanian regulatory system requires an EIA, the Project is also voluntarily considering the socioeconomic characteristic and cultural heritage values of the Project area through the provision of an Environmental and Social Impact Assessment (ESIA). Also, the project is expected to comply with national health and safety laws, Decisions of the Council of Ministers (DCMs), Directives and EU requirement. This will enable the Project to meet international best practice and EBRD's Performance Requirements.

1.4.2 EBRD requirements

The EBRD is an international financial institution that uses investment as a tool to build market economies. Commitment to sustainable energy and safeguarding the environment are central to the EBRD's activities. The EBRD Performance Requirements (PR) were introduced to provide guidance for EBRD clients to manage and improve their environmental and social performance through a risk and outcomes-based approach. The Project will be prepared following EBRD's Performance Requirements (2014), which are as follows:

PR 1: Assessment and Management of Environmental and Social Impacts and Issues

PR 2: Labour and Working Conditions

PR 3: Resource Efficiency and Pollution Prevention and Control

PR 4: Health and Safety

PR 5: Land Acquisition, Involuntary Resettlement and Economic Displacement

PR 6: Biodiversity Conservation and Sustainable Management of Living Natural Resources

PR 7: Indigenous Peoples

PR 8: Cultural Heritage

PR 10: Information Disclosure and Stakeholder Engagement

The Project will include international best practice measures in accordance with the mitigation hierarchy to avoid, minimise and restore / rehabilitate any adverse changes in environmental and social conditions. For this Project, reducing impacts on biodiversity is a priority as the road is in an area of high nature conservation importance. The EIA package will also comply with international conventions and treaties on environmental and social issues, in particular biodiversity.

The Project has been classified by EBRD as a Category B project in accordance with the 2014 Environmental and Social Policy. This means they consider the Project's potential adverse future environmental and/or social impacts are typically site-specific, and / or readily identified and addressed through mitigation measures given that the project entails the upgrade of an existing road. An Environmental and Social Action Plan (ESAP) will be agreed with the ADF to structure the project to meet the Banks PRs.

1.4.3 Stakeholder consultation, engagement and disclosure

Stakeholders are individuals, groups or organisations (government and non-government organisations (NGOs)) that either affect, are affected by, or have an interest in the Project. Stakeholder consultation and support is important to the design and implementation of any project.

Albanian law does not require the public to be consulted at this stage of a project. However, some stakeholder engagement has been undertaken already with the following:

- the National Agency of Protected Areas and the Regional Administration of Protected Areas of Elbasan region
- local Government Authorities and key informants
- biodiversity-related stakeholders to inform the EIA, the Project's Habitat Regulations Assessment (RSK, 2020) and the BMP (RSK, 2020a).

1.4.3.1 Consultation with managers of the Shebenik-Jabllanicë National Park

The National Park is managed by the National Agency of Protected Areas and the Regional Administration of Protected Areas of Elbasan region. Management is undertaken in accordance with the Management Plan for Shebenik-Jabllanicë National Park 2015-2024 (PROGES and Sapienza University of Rome, 2015). ADF have consulted with the National Agency of Protected Areas who are keen to work with ADF to protect the area during design, construction and operation of the road improvements.

1.4.3.2 *Consultation with local Government Authorities and key informants*

Local Government Authorities and key informants were consulted during development of the Land and Resettlement Framework with seven formal meetings and seven key informant interviews held from 17-25 June 2020 (RSK, 2020b).

Stakeholders were positive about the Project, citing:

- positive impacts on the development of tourism
- improved access to nearby towns and countries (e.g. young people go to Greece for seasonal work)
- improved access for farmers to local markets and beyond, enabling a better price for local products
- reduction in migration away from the area
- potential job opportunities during construction
- decrease in dust (the current poor road condition generates dust)
- increase in availability of workers. Lack of workers is blamed for the lack of cultivation of some agricultural land
- reduction in construction costs of future projects.

However, outstanding land compensation issues relating to the road works undertaken by ARA on the Zgosht – Cerenec section of the road in 2012 were raised by municipality leaders and farmers.

1.4.3.3 *Consultation with biodiversity stakeholders*

Due to restrictions associated with the COVID-19 pandemic a questionnaire was prepared and sent to the following stakeholders in June 2020 by ADF:

- National Agency for Protected Areas
- AKZM (National Protected Areas Agency)
- Protection and Preservation of Natural Environment in Albania (PPNEA)
- Albanian Society for the Protection of Birds and Mammals (ASPBM)
- Albanian Ornithological Society (AOS)
- University of Tirana
- Institute of Nature Conservation
- Albaglobal
- EcoAlbania
- biodiversity specialists.

2 SUMMARY OF EXPECTED PROJECT IMPACTS, RISKS AND OPPORTUNITIES

2.1 Biodiversity and natural resources

2.1.1 Key Sensitivities

The Project is in an area of high biodiversity value as it falls within the Pindus Mountains mixed forests ecoregion, which is categorised by the World Wildlife Fund as Critical / Endangered and is in critical habitat. Approximately 13.5 km of the road crosses the western border of the Shebenik-Jabllanicë National Park (IUCN Category 2; national park category 2), which is also designated as a Candidate Emerald Site. This protected area has been identified as providing habitat for a number of rare and threatened species at the national and global scales including the Balkan lynx (*Lynx lynx ssp balcanicus*), which is Critically Endangered on the national and global scales and triggers critical habitat.

Part of the National Park is also a transboundary World Heritage Site, transboundary Important Plant Area (IPA) and a Key Biodiversity Area (KBA). The World Heritage Site, entitled Ancient and Primeval Beech Forests of the Carpathians and Other Regions of Europe, covers 12 countries and includes 82 areas of ancient and primeval beech forest. One of these areas, Rrajca, is in Shebenik-Jabllanicë National Park but is within the central zone away from the Project.

The existing Zgosht to Cereneç road is not considered to be a major barrier for large mammal species. This is primarily due to the poor condition of the road which limits the speed and volume of traffic. The road crosses some well-known habitats for medium to large mammals of national conservation importance including Eurasian otters (*Lutra lutra*), brown bears (*Ursus arctos*), wild cats (*Felis silvestris*) and grey wolves (*Canis lupus*). Habitats located along the verges of the road may also support plants bats, nesting birds, amphibians, reptiles and insects of national conservation importance.

2.1.2 Pre-construction / construction

It is planned that all construction works will be contained within the existing disturbed right of way, however, a precautionary approach has been adopted for the purpose of the biodiversity impact assessment to allow for works beyond the existing rights of way (e.g. the construction of pavements, retaining walls, bioengineering works, piping and caballing works and the installation of lighting etc). This assumes an additional 5 m of permanent habitat loss, and a further 5 m of temporary habitat disturbance will occur on each side, along the length of the road.

Key impacts to wildlife of conservation importance (priority biodiversity features and critical habitat-qualifying features) from construction activities, prior to mitigation (RSK, 2020d), are summarised as follows:

- the permanent loss of approximately 46.4 ha of natural (e.g. forests, woodlands, thickets) and modified (e.g. agro-pastoral land, bare ground and plantations) habitat from within the Project footprint including the permanent loss of 1.4 ha of forest woodland and thickets from within the Shebenik-Jabllanicë National Park (a critical habitat-qualifying feature)

- the potential clearance of plant species of high conservation importance
- habitat loss and disturbance to wildlife of conservation importance located in the Shebenik-Jabllanicë National Park and those species utilising habitats outside of the National Park
- the potential loss of nesting habitat for birds adjacent to the existing road including those that are of national conservation importance
- habitat clearance works present a risk of accidental wildlife collisions with vehicles and machinery resulting in injury or mortality to some individuals including nesting birds, roosting bats, Eurasian badgers (*Meles meles*) within their setts, sheltering amphibians, reptiles and invertebrates. Some of these vulnerable species are rare and threatened including badgers (Albanian Red List Endangered), Mediterranean horseshoe bat (*Rhinolophus Euryale*; Albanian Red List Vulnerable), the four-lined snake (*Elaphe quatuorlineata*; Albanian Red List Critically Endangered) and the stag beetle (*Lucanus cervus*; Near Threatened in Europe) and the great Capricorn beetle (*Cerambyx cerdo*; globally Vulnerable).

2.1.3 Operation

Key impacts during operation to wildlife of conservation importance, prior to mitigation, are summarised as follows:

- the structure of the proposed road (i.e. steep sided road embankments, safety barriers and concrete retaining walls) together with the increase in noise, vehicle movement and artificial lighting is expected to form a barrier to the movement of wildlife, in particular large ranging mammals such as brown bears, the Balkan lynx, grey wolves, otters, wildcats (Albania Red List Endangered) and badgers which are known to inhabit the National Park.
- increased road traffic speed and volume of cars is expected to increase the risk of collisions with wildlife which attempt to cross the road, particularly at night
- the expected increase in the vehicle traffic from 325 vehicle units per 3 days to 1500 vehicle units per 3 days is expected to generate increase air pollution which may adversely impact wildlife near the road, particularly species that are sensitive to pollutants (i.e. amphibians and fish)
- indirect Project-related impacts associated with facilitated access, the influx of visitors to the National Park and Project-related in-migration leading to unsustainable nature resource collection, illegal hunting and fishing, unauthorised agro-pastoral activities and poor waste management pose a risk to habitat and species diversity and abundance within the Protected Area and surrounding landscapes

2.1.4 Avoidance, mitigation and restoration

A key priority for the Project is the protection of the Shebenik-Jabllanicë National Park. Pre-clearance checks will be undertaken to avoid any disturbance and injury to bats, badgers, otters and breeding birds during construction. Checks will also be undertaken for plant species of conservation importance and any endemic, rare and threatened plant species will be moved to a suitable site away from the road. Dead wood from oak woodland in the working width will be moved to a suitable receptor site to minimise the

habitat loss and risk of mortality for the stag beetle and great Capricorn beetle which depend on dead and decaying wood for at least part of their lifecycle.

Existing culverts currently used by amphibians and reptiles to cross the road will be repaired and retained. The establishment of a wildlife crossing point for the Balkan lynx and other priority fauna will be integral to enable wildlife to cross the road and retain access to resources within their ranges.

A Reinstatement and Landscaping Plan will be prepared and implemented by the Contractor. This plan will provide a clear methodology for the reinstatement of the physical environment and the progressive rehabilitation and restoration of habitats through the implementation of a planting scheme. Bioengineering work to disturbed landscapes and escarpments will have a positive impact on the existing habitat quality in some areas. Areas of permanent natural habitat loss (11.87 ha) will be offset in accordance with the Biodiversity Management Plan (BMP (RSK, 2020)).

The Project will work with the National Agency for Protected Areas, the Regional Agency of Protected Areas, and key relevant NGOs operating in the area to minimise and monitor indirect Project-related impacts to biodiversity from facilitated access, the influx of visitors to the National Park and Project-related in-migration. This includes supporting the Shebenik-Jabllanicë National Park Management Committee to help them deliver their management objectives for sustainable tourism and economic development through activities such as regular meetings and data sharing. With these mitigation measures in place there will be no adverse effects on the integrity of this Candidate Emerald Site.

ADF are committed to implementing the BMP, Environmental Monitoring Programme and Environmental and Social Action Plan (ESAP) and will work with and direct their contractors to ensure full implementation and compliance.

2.2 Air quality

The existing ambient air quality within the project area has not been measured, however other than the hydropower system and fish farm located near the village of Borovë there appear to be no major sources of air pollution close to the project road.

2.2.1 Pre-construction / construction

The construction of the Project may lead to:

- local increases in air pollutants from vehicles
- dust from land clearance and earthworks
- cement dust emissions from concrete works
- smoke from the use of bitumen.

Prior to the implementation of mitigation measures, these air quality impacts may potentially have adverse impacts to human health and the biological fitness of animals and plants species in the Project area. Increased dust and combustion emissions are known to cause irritation and impairment of respiratory functions, skin irritation and vision impairment. Potential impacts may be cumulative in nature. Pollutants could also be ingested (for example when deposited on plants or fruit which is then consumed) which may then have an adverse impact to human and species health. The magnitude of

impacts to people and species of animals and plants arising from the inhalation of these dust emissions and air pollutants is dependent on the quantity, composition and respiratory rates and a persons' / species' health.

2.2.2 Operation

Air quality combustion emissions generated by vehicle activity using the improved road are expected to increase from current levels as a direct result of vehicles increases from the current 108 vehicle units to an expected 500 each day (ADF, Feasibility Study, February 2020). It is expected therefore that there will be a small and localised increase in all vehicle related emissions adjacent to the road corridor.

The SO₂ and particulate matter emissions increase are also linked to the issue that 90% of all passenger cars registered in Albania are equipped with diesel engines, a large proportion are old imported vehicles with high SO₂ and particulate matter emissions, and sulphur content in fuel is likely to be higher than European standards (Environmental Impact Assessment: Design of Road Shëngjin – Velipojë Project Ideas, December 2017).

2.2.3 Avoidance, mitigation and restoration

During the pre-construction / construction phase, staff and contractors will adhere to a Standard Operating Procedure for: Emission and Dust Control, Erosion and Suspended Sediment Control. This includes the use and maintenance of fuel-efficient vehicles, machinery and equipment that comply with industry standards and the use of catalytic converters / low emission engines. Dust control measures (i.e. watering, gravel application and wheel washes) will be implemented on unsealed access tracks and exposed surfaces heavily trafficked by machinery and vehicles (i.e. entry / exit points, vehicle routes and loading and unloading areas) during the summer months when conditions are dry, when excessive dust generation is evident and during periods of high risk (e.g. dry and windy conditions). Dust suppression water should be taken from suitable recycled water sources where possible. ADF will also undertake an air quality pre-construction assessment and will monitor levels throughout the construction phase.

The Project's grievance mechanism will also include a procedure for receiving and for ADF to address complaints during road construction.

2.3 Noise and vibration

Baseline noise monitoring has not yet been collected in support of the Project area, however it is noted that other than the hydropower system and fish farm located near the village of Borovë there appear to be no significant human emission point source (such as those associated with industrial activity or major roads) close to the Project, and the dominant noise sources are expected to be natural in character, or associated with infrequent traffic on the existing road.

2.3.1 Pre-construction / construction

Noise will be generated by vehicles, plant vehicles, pneumatic drills and jackhammers and machinery (i.e. drilling rigs, pile drivers, excavators / grader and vibratory rollers). The noise will be relatively local to where equipment is operating and

will be temporary. The construction noise will not be present in any one location for extended periods of time.

The impact from noise generated by Project construction could potentially be significant within 1 km of the construction site. This would be expected to cause disturbance to animals and birds near the Project footprint including that adjoining the north western boundary of the Shebenik-Jabllanicë National Park. Residents near the proposed road works will also be able to hear the construction noise and may experience this as nuisance.

Ground vibration generated during construction by vehicles, plant vehicles, pneumatic drills and jackhammers and machinery will not travel as far as noise and are unlikely to be experienced more than 200 m from the construction activity.

As the road will follow the existing alignment, and has already been widened to its final width, there will be no blasting and therefore no noise, vibration and air blast impacts.

2.3.2 Operation

Noise and vibration on the improved road are expected to increase from current levels as a direct result of vehicles increases from the current 108 vehicles to an expected 500 each day (ADF, Feasibility Study, February 2020).

It is expected therefore that there will be a small, and localised increase in all vehicle related noise adjacent to the road corridor. Although the frequency of vehicle noise is expected to increase, it is noted that the improved road surface may act to reduce the volume of noise generated by a vehicle using the road.

2.3.3 Avoidance, mitigation and restoration

Staff and contractors will adhere to a Standing Operating Procedure: Noise and Vibration Management throughout construction. This includes the use of silencers and sound barriers (natural and artificial), particularly within and near the Shebenik-Jabllanicë National Park, and settlements, and regular vehicle / machinery maintenance to reduce noise and vibration.

The Project's grievance mechanism will include a procedure for receiving and for ADF to address complaints during road construction.

2.4 Hydrology and water quality

The Project area is located within a mountainous landscape characterised by natural and artificial alpine lakes, springs, and alpine streams. The western end of the Project, that traverses the National park, is located within the catchment area of the Shkumbin River which originates in South-eastern Albania and flows westwards over 181 km to the Myzeqe Plain where it forms a small delta in Karavasta Lagoon. (RSK, 2020c).

There are several waterbodies located in close proximity to the Road (Figure 2.1). No water quality testing has been undertaken in support of this Project; however, the waterbodies are considered to provide habitat for aquatic biodiversity, and are described as follows (RSK, 2020c):

- An ephemeral small pond located approximately 5 km from Zgosht, and approximately 12 m from the Road. (Figure 2.1, point 1).

- An alpine stream crosses the Road, approximately 3 km south of Fushë Studë; Figure 2.1, point 2). This stream was considered to offer potentially suitable habitat to support trout (*Salmo trutta*).
- A large water reservoir located 311 m from the Road, approximately 1.8 km from Fushë Studë. A large beech forest is located immediately adjacent to the south-eastern banks of the reservoir within the Shebenik-Jabllanicë National Park (Figure 2.1 point 3). The lake is used for irrigation during the summer, so the water level is highly variable over the year.
- A small pond located approximately 110 m from the Road amongst agro-pastoral land, approximately 1.9 km from Fushë Studë, near the western border of the Shebenik-Jabllanicë National Park. This pond provides water for livestock (Figure 2.1, point 4).
- A cascade hydropower system located near the village of Borovë, which runs in parallel with the Zgosht to Cerenec road (Figure 2.1, point 5). The hydropower system uses the water from Okshtuni stream that runs toward the village of Moglicë. The stream has been channelled at this point which has affected how the water flows in the river and the surrounding landscape has been modified for the construction of the hydropower plant and ancillary buildings.
- The remaining Okshtuni stream runs in parallel with the Zgosht to Cerenec road and is characterised by emergent vegetation with good connectivity to surrounding agro-pastoral land (hydropower system located near the village of Borovë, Figure 2.1, point 6).

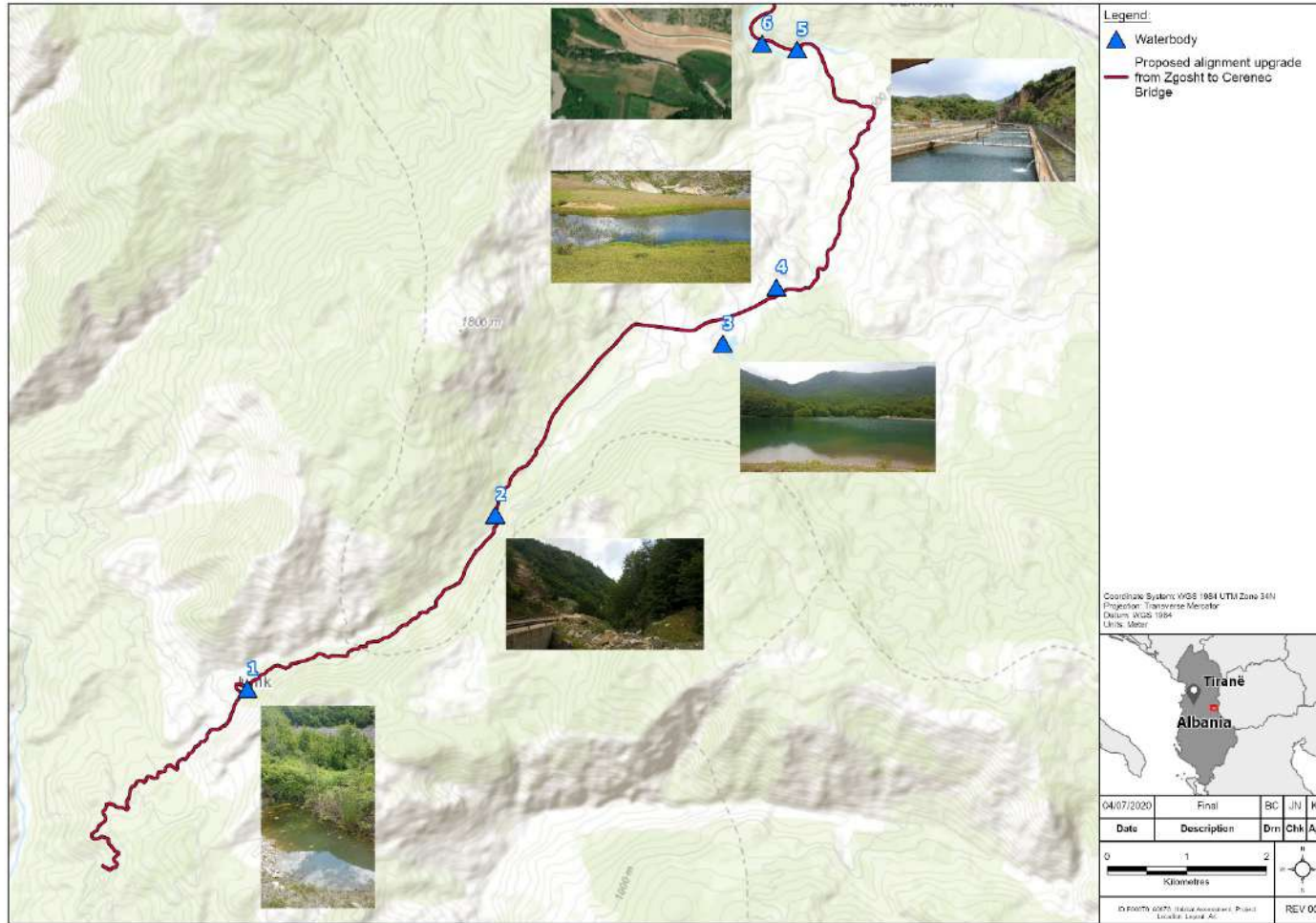


Figure 2.1: Waterbodies close to the Right of Way (Source: RSK, 2020c)

2.4.1 Pre-construction / construction

The works will not cause any significant changes to any of the identified water bodies. Furthermore, local residents and animals dependent on these habitats will be unaffected. The main risk to the water quality of aquatic receptors will be suspended sediments entering the water during construction activities. In high quantities, suspended sediments are harmful to the health of waterbodies and may impact the local water supply for residents.

The main way in which sediment can enter the water courses is expected to be water erosion of disturbed areas, stockpiles of excavated material, washout from concrete mixers during periods of rain and wind erosion during drier months. There is also risk of surface and groundwater contamination through accidental spills or seepages of hazardous substances (i.e. diesel fuel, oil, bitumen etc) or septic systems (i.e. portaloos) during construction. This could contaminate receiving aquatic habitats and reduce downstream water quality, affecting plants and animals in the water and the water supply. If water is taken directly from surface water bodies for Project purposes (e.g. for dust control, drilling, concrete mixing etc) water extraction will reduce the amount of water available for downstream users and may impact plants and animals at the point of extraction.

2.4.2 Operation

It is expected that inputs to surface water features from the improved road during normal conditions will be no greater than the existing inputs, and there may be the opportunity to reduce inputs through improving roadside drainage systems during the detailed design phase. The risk to surface and ground water resources associated with spills of non-hazardous compounds and vehicle fuel during accident scenarios will remain during operation.

2.4.3 Avoidance, mitigation and restoration

Staff and contractors will adhere to a Standard Operating Procedure for Emission and Dust Control, Erosion and Suspended Sediment Control. This will include the use of sediment control dams and traps during construction, particularly in the road sections traversing the Shebenik–Jabllanicë National Park, and along steep sided sections to reduce the risk of sediment entering the water. Where possible, water for construction will be supplied by water tankers..

Emergency response procedures will be developed for the Project to effectively manage any accidental spills and leakages of non-hazardous waste and hazardous compounds. Staff and contractors will receive training in spill events management. This will include the development of a spill, incident, accident and response and management plan by the contractor.

The design of the drainage system will prevent contaminated water from polluting water resources in the region, and the Project therefore is not expected to have any significant impacts on the local water quality.

2.5 Soils

No sampling or testing of soils for Project purposes has been carried out, however PROGES and Sapienza University of Rome (2015) identifies that there is a high level of variability in topography, geology and soil type within the Shebenik–Jabllanicë National Park, and a similar high level of variability is expected throughout the Project area.

2.5.1 Pre-construction / construction

Construction activities will result in the local loss of and disturbance of soil, soil compaction, and potential soil loss through erosion where vegetation is disturbed or removed, and contamination through accidental spills and leakages. No loss of agricultural land or National Park is anticipated.

2.5.2 Operation

The risk of soil contamination from accidental spills and leakages of hazardous compounds (i.e. vehicle fuel) will remain throughout operation.

2.5.3 Avoidance, mitigation and restoration

Pre-clearance soil sampling will be undertaken for the Project and a soil management plan will be prepared and implemented for the Project.

A Reinstatement and Landscaping Plan will be developed and implemented by the Project. This plan will provide a clear methodology for returning the site to its original condition.

Emergency response procedures will be developed for the Project to effectively manage any accidental spills and leakages during construction. All relevant staff and contractors will receive training in spill events management. This will include the development of a spill, incident, accident and response and management plan by the contractor.

2.6 Landscape and visual amenity

2.6.1 Pre-construction / construction

During construction, landscape and visual impacts will occur due to the presence of vehicles and machinery, security fencing, and office facilities. Changes will only be visible locally and will be temporary.

2.6.2 Operation

The Project will improve an existing road and will not result in the disturbance of ground which has not been disturbed before. Once construction has been completed, the landscape and visual amenity values of the area are not expected to be significantly changed from their existing condition.

2.6.3 Avoidance, mitigation and restoration

Following completion of construction, all temporary fencing, office facilities and any material stockpiles will be removed from the site, and any localised damage to vegetation or soils will be repaired and the damaged area will be returned to its original condition.

2.7 Waste management

2.7.1 Pre-construction / construction

Waste will be generated during construction. This includes non-hazardous waste materials (i.e. aggregate, concrete and other construction material) and grey water waste and hazardous waste compounds (i.e. bitumen, used oil containers, used fuel containers). Poor waste disposal can lead to a risk of pollution to the environment, and a risk to human health.

2.7.2 Avoidance, mitigation and restoration

To reduce the risk:

- all waste materials will be disposed in accordance with regulatory requirements and the approach will be approved by the local authorities
- waste permitting documentation / licences will be obtained
- emergency response procedures will be developed for the Project to effectively manage any accidental spills and leakages and staff and contractors will receive training in spill events management.

2.8 Natural hazards

Albania is located northeast of the Mediterranean Sea in the Western Balkan region. The entire Mediterranean basin, including both eastern and western shores, has a high risk of earthquakes.

The Project is also located in an area prone to rockfalls. There are areas of steep sided escarpment along the road and the scoping assessment identified evidence of rockfall events along the existing road.

The Management Plan for the Shebenik-Jabllanicë National Park (which the road traverses over a 13.5 km section) identifies that landslides, floods and soil erosion cause serious problems within the Shebenik-Jabllanicë National Park.

2.8.1 Pre-construction / construction

Vegetation clearance, grubbing and landscaping during construction may increase the risk of rockfalls. This could pose a threat to human health, livestock and property. Inappropriate management of surface water may compound this issue and further contribute to localised flooding.

2.8.2 Operation

Rockfalls and flooding will continue to pose a risk to road users and residents during operation.

2.8.3 Avoidance, mitigation and restoration

During construction, emergency response measures will be put in place for a wide range of hazards including landslides, rockfalls, earthquakes, mudflows and flooding.

Slope stabilisation works will be undertaken by engineers during construction which will reduce the risk of rockfalls and landslides.

It is anticipated that design measures will also be in place during the operation phase to minimise the risk of a rockfall collisions with vehicles. The design of the drainage system will also minimise the risk of local flooding events and provide effective management of high surface water levels and runoff.

2.9 Climate change vulnerability

The seasons in the Municipality of Librazhd (within which the northern end of the road is located) are characterised by cold and humid winters, and short, hot and dry summers. The average annual temperature is 13.4 °C, with a maximum recorded temperature of 40.7 °C recorded in September 1957, and a minimum recorded temperature of -15.7 °C recorded in 1968 (ADF, 2020).

The climate around the Municipality of Bulqizë (within which the southern end of the road is located) is a continental climate, being cold in winter, and dry in summer. The average annual temperature is 10 °C, with a typical range from -18 °C in winter to 35 °C in summer. The annual rainfall is 980 mm (ADF, 2020).

The climate of Albania is changing as a result of climate change. Analysis of the regional climate models suggests a continual increase in temperature by the end of the century across Albania. As a consequence, the number of hot days and tropical nights is expected to grow. Furthermore, the frequency, intensity and length of heat waves is expected to increase. Change of annual precipitation varies significantly with ranges from -10% to +20% under different scenarios and timeframes. Predicted seasonal changes are mainly larger than the annual change and the range (drier or wetter) again depends on the scenarios used. In addition, precipitation distribution is projected to change thorough the intensification of heavy precipitation followed by the increase of accumulated amount of water in such events. As a result, an increased risk of storms and flooding is expected. This could affect the Project in the following ways:

- increased damage to the Project assets such as damage to the road surface, bridges, concrete structures and surrounding landscape from higher temperatures and erosion
- increased risk of flooding and heavy rainfall events adding pressure on drainage systems
- increased risk of rockfalls and landslides damaging the Project assets as well as impacting on traffic disruption and road safety during operation
- increased dust.

2.9.1 Avoidance, mitigation and restoration

A flood risk assessment will be prepared for the Project as well as a climate risk assessment. Climate change resilience measures will be defined and adopted to ensure that the road is designed to cope with expected changes in climate, for example by ensuring sufficient capacity of the drainage system during intense rainfall events, or increasing the slope stabilisation structures to manage the risk of landslides and erosion.

2.10 Social

The total length of the road to be upgraded is 46.5 km. It is anticipated that all works will be contained within the existing disturbed right of way, however during preparation of the Land and Resettlement Framework (LARF) (RSK, 2020b) a precautionary approach was adopted which assumes that construction activity may take place up to 50 m from the centre of the existing road on either side. This corresponds to an extra 368 ha of land which may be affected by the road works and forms the basis for discussion within this section.

Based on the current understanding of the road design and construction methodology it is assumed that 90-95% of this 368 ha will be acquired temporarily. Some land (5-10%) may require permanent acquisition for the construction of additional concrete retaining walls and new areas of paving, and installation of road safety barriers.

It is expected that there will be no physical displacement (no requirement for people to move). However, we understand that access to new land alongside the road may be required, and that a Livelihood Restoration Plan (LRP) will need to be prepared to make sure that the owners of that land are fairly compensated in line with EBRD PR 5 (RSK, 2020b).

RSK (2020b) identifies that the two prefectures of Dibër and Elbasan will be affected by the Project. Within these prefectures, the communities potentially affected by the Project have been identified as being Çerenec i Sipërm and Çerenec i Poshtëm in the Dibër prefecture, and Lunik, Zgosht, Borovë, Llangë (Fushë Studen) and Sebisht in the Elbasan prefecture (Figure 2.2). The population in these villages varies between 213 and 1200 people (RSK, 2020b).

Consistent with the trend at the national level, the population in most villages has declined since 2018, with an average decline of -5.1%. Villages are characterised by high levels of out-migration to other areas of Albania, and seasonal economic migration (of the working age population) to countries such as Greece, Italy and Germany. In Stëblevë, however, there is a trend of some people who have migrated to urban areas such as Tirana and Durrës are coming back (for example to develop family businesses in the area).

Stakeholders consulted during key informant interviews supporting the development of the LARF believed that emigrants may return to villages in Librazhd and Bulqizë after the completion of road improvement works (RSK, 2020b).

The prefectures of Dibër and Elbasan are among the least economically developed prefectures in Albania, and unemployment rates are high. Both areas are heavily reliant on the agricultural sector and subsistence farming, however it is noted that a shortage of available labour is reported, and there are understood to be areas of agricultural land which is not being productively used as a result of this labour shortage (RSK, 2020b).

Around 70% of the arable land in Gjoricë is irrigated, particularly the land parcels lying in lower areas. The irrigation system supplying water passes under the road through culverts in different sections. In Zghost, Irrigation is secured from a source in Kotorishtarea and a 14-km line was constructed with local community funds.

A hydropower plant and fish farm are both located in Borovë, providing resources to the local community, and some local employment opportunities.

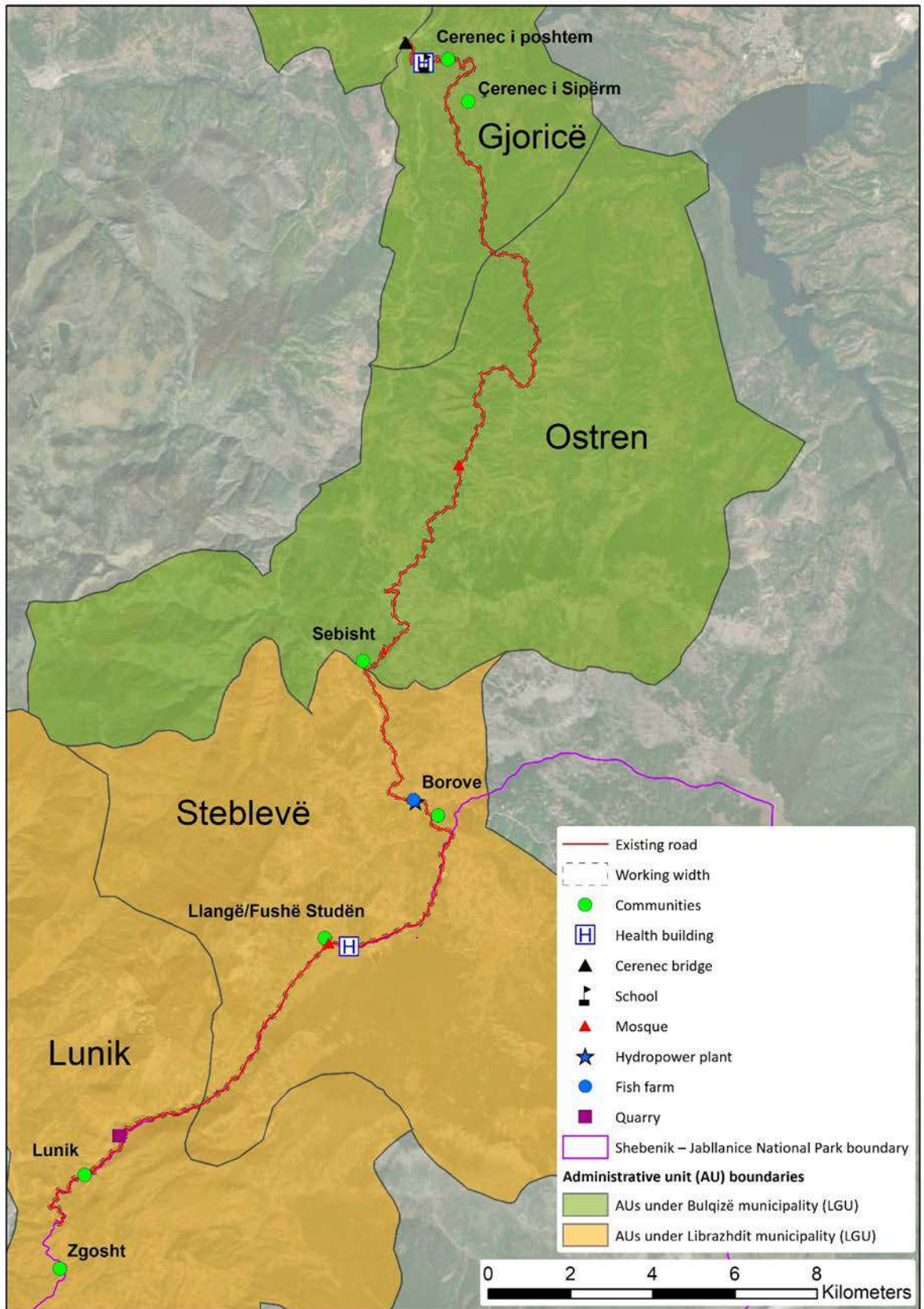


Figure 2.2: Project Affected villages

2.10.1 Pre-construction / construction

The Project may affect the local population during construction in the following ways:

- loss of land, fruit trees and crops due to project activities leading to decreased income, potential reduction in food security and increased vulnerability of vulnerable persons/groups
- disturbance or damage to utilities (including non-moveable structures and farm infrastructure) within the working width
- health and safety risks to community from increased traffic (e.g. accidental collisions with Project vehicles and machinery)
- increased travel times caused by traffic congestion and temporary lane closures which may lead to adverse economic/livelihood impacts for business owners and public transport providers and impacts on access to public services (e.g. schools)
- reduced air quality resulting in impacts to human health as a result of dust and vehicle emissions
- disturbance from noise and vibration generated by the use of machinery and vehicles during construction
- influx of construction workers and the potential for increased anti-social behaviour and conflict with residents.

Project construction will have a number of positive economic and employment benefits. During the construction period it is anticipated that short-term direct employment opportunities will be created for local residents.

The Project will also increase the demand for local services and goods. Unemployment is high in the Project area, therefore livelihood opportunities during Project construction represents a benefit.

2.10.2 Operation

The road will reduce travel time and make it easier to travel between Zgosht and Cernec. This is expected to positively contribute to the economy of the area through encouraging population retention, which in turn may increase agricultural productivity, and encouraging an increase in tourism. It is noted that although an increase in tourism is generally viewed as being positive, an increase in tourism would also place additional demands on existing infrastructure and could introduce increased threat of disturbance to the Shebenik–Jabllanicë National Park. The increased traffic volumes using the road may also increase the number of accidents on the road.

2.10.3 Avoidance, mitigation and restoration

Although stakeholder perceptions of the Project are very positive, recent experience in Albania suggests that the process of land acquisition can be controversial. Issues such as the variation in form and registration of legal title, inaccuracies in or lack of these documents, and the potential for overlap with customary and usage rights, can generate grievances. There also appear to be unresolved issues from the previous road construction works that may come to the fore (RSK, 2020b).

RSK (2020b) identifies that the final alignment and working width chosen will determine the extent of impact on existing structures, the amount of new land that needs to be accessed, and the potential for real or perceived damage to existing structures.

The impact assessment should therefore continue to be reviewed during detailed design with the objective of eliminating or minimising impact to structures, to the greatest extent possible, for example by reducing the construction working width in locations where existing structures are present.

The following control measures will be implemented by the Project:

- the steps outlined in the LARF (RSK, 2020b), and particularly in Sections 8 - 10 of that document will be followed to provide a structure to manage complex land issues in a fair manner
- the need for a community safety programme will be considered in the ESIA, with particular focus on children. This may take the form of a community risk assessment and an awareness program.
- the mitigation and compensation associated with water pipes crossing the road will be carefully managed
- the contractors will ensure employment and training of the local workforce and will ensure that recruitment is and open to all people locally of working age, ability, regardless of gender
- The contractor will develop a code of conduct (including grievance mechanism for sexual harassment) that reflects ADF gender-based violence and harassment (GBVH) policy and provides a set of standards of acceptable conduct and behaviour. GBVH training on the code of conduct will be provided to staff.
- a Resettlement and Livelihood Restoration Plan will be prepared by ADF in the event that the need to acquire privately owned land arises
- a Stakeholder Engagement Plan (SEP) and Grievance Mechanism will be in place
- the road will be regularly maintained during operation to minimise the risk of accident due to poor road condition.
- a Traffic and Road Safety Management Plan will be developed and implemented by the Project contractors, consulted and agreed with ADF and relevant authorities if needed, to minimise risk of accident during construction. It is expected that access along the road will be maintained at all times.

2.11 Cultural heritage

The Feasibility study (ADF, February 2020) identifies that there are no items of Cultural Heritage or locations of Cultural significance located along the Road.

The LARF (RSK, 2020b) identifies that the presence of cultural heritage is limited in the general area of the project, identifying the following sites of cultural heritage significance:

- religious buildings
- a cemetery in Lunik Administrative Unit (in the Botovë area)

- a graveyard in Gjoricë Administrative Unit (in the Cerenec I poshtem area) and a graveyard in Lllange. Graveyards are located in close proximity to the road.

The Management Plan for the Shebenik-Jabllanicë National Park (which the road traverses over a 13.5 km section) identifies the following important cultural values of the Shebenik-Jabllanicë National Park:

- historical sites, e.g. Scanderbeg's staircase and Scanderbeg's table
- natural caves some of which have paintings on the walls (i.e. Glacier, Christ's and the Eremite caves)
- the ancient village of Qutesi and the continued use of traditional skills used for carving of wood products, the manufacture of stone items such as mill stones, construction of stone houses, the manufacture of traditional costumes and the performance of traditional dances
- the Ethnographic Museum in Librazhd; although substantially damaged, this represents an important local repository of cultural history and knowledge
- an annual cultural fair that held in Stebleve.

2.11.1 Pre-construction / construction

The road upgrade will take place within the existing roadway, and it is unlikely that the road upgrade will disturb any areas of known or unknown cultural heritage. Checks have also been undertaken of the project area using the official website of the Agency of Archaeological Service, which have confirmed the likely absence of cultural heritage. However, a Chance Find Procedure will be established and implemented by the contractor as described below in accordance with best practice and legislative requirements.

2.11.2 Operation

No significant cultural heritage impacts are expected during operation.

2.11.3 Avoidance, mitigation and restoration

At locations where graveyards are located in close proximity to the road, extra precautions will be taken to ensure they remain undisturbed. If required, working areas will be restricted to ensure that they are avoided.

Although it is considered unlikely that unknown cultural heritage will be encountered, a Chance Find Procedure will be followed by contractors describing what to do if cultural heritage is unexpectedly identified, in accordance with the Albanian Law No. 27/ 2018 on Cultural heritage and EBRD's PR8. It is important to note that during the initial road improvement works in 2012, no chance findings were reported during the supervisor of works. Hence, it is unlikely that cultural heritage sites will be affected by the project.

2.12 Occupational and community health and safety

The impact to workers' and community health and safety will be taken into consideration in the construction activities for the upgrading of the roads.

During construction, the activities that can impact the workers' health and safety include excavations, lifting activities, working at height, confined space activities, use of scaffolding and transportation (including the transfer of materials). Some of these activities might impact the communities that are nearby and other road users.

2.12.1 Avoidance, mitigation and restoration

A Health and Safety Management Plan will be prepared and implemented which will include an assessment of risks, and development of appropriate management plans to manage risks associated but not limited with the following:

- occupational health and safety
- traffic using the roads by the members of the communities and project vehicles and machineries, in both the construction and operational phases
- emergency response plan (including medical evacuation plan and fire safety plan)
- road safety audits throughout the project cycle, including the design phase
- natural disasters, including earthquake, rockfall and flood.

The Project will be carried out in full compliance with all applicable national laws, regulations and EU directives regarding Occupational Health and Safety.

As part of the work sensitive receptors including educational and medical facilities will be identified, and community meetings will be held as appropriate to provide information on the Project and safety awareness.

3 ENVIRONMENTAL AND SOCIAL MANAGEMENT

3.1 Project management and delivery, and the ESMP

The Project team will prepare an Environmental and Social Management Plan (ESMP), to clearly describe how all the environmental and social impacts of the project will be reduced or controlled.

It is the responsibility of all ADF staff and Project contractors to comply with the requirements set out in the ESMP, and to provide appropriate staff, financial resources, equipment and support systems.

3.2 The ESMP will include several other documents as described below. Biodiversity Management Plan

A Biodiversity Management Plan (BMP) has been prepared for the Project, which meets EBRD's Performance Requirement 6. The BMP details the Project's biodiversity management initiatives, commitments and obligations. The aim of the BMP is to safeguard the important habitats, plants and animals in the area of the Project.

This BMP provides a framework for the implementation of the Project's biodiversity mitigation and management measures during construction and operation that will be followed by ADF and the Project contractors. An outline biodiversity monitoring and evaluation strategy has been included to measure the success of biodiversity management measures and to enable adjustments to be made if required.

3.3 A Reinstatement and Landscaping Plan

A Reinstatement and Landscaping Plan will be developed and implemented. This will describe how the environment within the Project Area will be returned to the current condition (or better) following completion of construction.

3.4 Environmental and Social Action Plan

An Environmental and Social Action Plan (ESAP) will be prepared for the Project to meet EBRD PRs. In general, the ESAP will require compliance with the ESMP and BMP and include specific requirements for many of the actions whose purpose is to avoid, reduce, or otherwise mitigate the most significant potential impacts.

3.5 Stakeholder Engagement Plan

A Stakeholder Engagement Plan (SEP) is being developed for the Project to meet EBRD requirements. This will build on the previous stakeholder engagement which has been undertaken.

The SEP will provide the framework for stakeholder consultation and engagement. The implementation of the plan will be important in order to build strong, constructive and responsive relationships with stakeholders.

3.6 Land and Resettlement Framework (LARF)

A Land and Resettlement Framework (LARF) has been prepared for the Project (RSK, 2020b). This document will be followed when managing all land access in support of the Project.

The LARF:

- describes the applicable legal and administrative framework
- establishes the compensation goals and principles for the Project
- defines the approach to be taken for compensation
- provides a socio-economic description of the Project Affected Peoples (PAPs)
- identifies categories of PAPs
- describes measures that will be taken during the design phase to minimise resettlement
- provides an estimate of displacement-related impacts
- defines criteria for eligibility for compensation of the different categories of PAPs, relocation and other forms of resettlement assistance
- develops a framework that defines the type of resettlement assistance to which the various categories of PAPs are entitled to, based on the type of loss they experience as a result of the Project
- identifies key stakeholder groups and provides a summary of the stakeholder engagement activities conducted to date
- describes the subsequent resettlement planning process
- sets out the relevant organisational arrangements and institutional responsibilities
- provides an indicative schedule for preparing a LRP
- provides budget considerations for planning and implementing the land acquisition process
- provides recommendations.

3.7 Livelihood Restoration Plan (LRP)

A Livelihood Restoration Plan (LRP) will be prepared and used by the Project in the next stage of the land acquisition process. It will incorporate the findings and recommendations of the LARF, see Section 3.6.

3.8 Occupational Health and Safety Management Plan

An Occupational Health and Safety Management Plan will be prepared and implemented by the Project to meet with Performance Requirement 4, and which will include considerations of (but not limited to):

- occupational health and safety management

- road safety audits
- natural disaster risk assessment
- traffic management plans
- emergency response plan (including medical evacuation plan and fire safety plan).

In addition, a road safety audit will take place and recommendations will need to be included by ADF into the detailed design.

3.9 Environmental Monitoring Plan (EMP)

The Project has also committed to establishing an Environmental Monitoring Plan (EMP) which will document the monitoring which will be undertaken to monitor the effectiveness of proposed mitigation measures, and where appropriate define thresholds at which additional actions are required.

The biodiversity monitoring requirements have been included within the Biodiversity Monitoring Plan described in Section 3.2.

3.10 Grievance Mechanism

A grievance mechanism will be established for the Project by ADF.

This will be open to all stakeholders and will facilitate resolution of stakeholder and community concerns and grievances, particularly regarding the Projects' environmental and social performance.

Through this process, all concerns, complaints, comments and suggestions will be provided to ADF who will manage an appropriate response to the grievance received in a timely manner.

3.11 Point of contact

The point of contact for this Project is:

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