

**Questions and Answers
under**

Guidelines for Applicants for Open Call for investment projects under Priority 1 "Greener Border Region" Specific Objective 1.1. Enhancing protection and preservation of nature, biodiversity, and green infrastructure, including in Urban Areas, and Reducing All Forms of Pollution (ref. No 2021TC16IPCB006 – 2023-3)

No	Question	Answer
1.	<p>With regard to the eligibility of the applicant, I would like to kindly ask whether water and sewage service providers meet eligibility criteria, considering that the sole owner of the capital is the Bulgarian Holding of water supply and sewage services, which is solely owned by the Ministry of regional development. Thus, Water supply and sewage services providers appear to be "public bodies" in legal definition.</p>	<p>According to the Guidelines for Applicants for Open Call for investment projects, point 2.5.1 Eligibility of Applicants (Lead Partner and Partners) (section Criteria for Eligibility of Partners), eligible partners are: legally established public organizations (legal entities) according to the national legislation of the state on whose territory they are located (exception is made for subsidiary structures of regional/national public organizations. In case a structure of regional/national public organizations is not and cannot act as a legal entity, its legally established central organization, shall be the project partner); NGO/non-profit making organizations with registration into sphere of ecology, environmental and biodiversity protection, education and other activities, relevant to the specific objective for enhancing protection and preservation of nature, biodiversity, and green infrastructure, including in urban areas, and reducing all forms of pollution, dated no later than two years before the launch of current call; university or other academic/educational/training institution; registered in the eligible Programme area (exception is made for national/regional public organizations whose area of competence, established by legal acts, extends to the eligible area of the programme, or subsidiary structures of regional/central public organizations located in the eligible cross border region which cannot be registered as legal entities – in this case the central authority is a project partner); directly responsible for the preparation and management of the action, not acting as an intermediary.</p> <p>When a project partner is established on the basis of art. 62 para 3 of the Commercial Law of Republic of Bulgaria, it may be considered eligible under the definition of regional/national public organization</p>

		<p>provided in the Guidelines for Applicants (GfA) for current call. However, observing the principle of transparency and equal treatment of all potential applicants the above mentioned criteria are subject of assessment at the stage of administrative compliance and eligibility check according to the Guidelines for Applicants for Open Call for investment projects.</p>
2.	<p>In connection with an invitation to collect conceptual projects under the Interreg Bulgaria-North Macedonia 2021- 2027 Programme, as well as in order to achieve correctness with regard to our potential partners from the State Enterprise "Macedoniashume", the Republic of North Macedonia, please provide us with your opinion on the eligibility of the candidates:</p> <p>Southwestern State Forest Enterprise (SWSFE) was established on the basis of Art. 163 of the Law on Forests in connection with Art. 62, para. 3 of the Commercial Law and Order No. RD 49-106 of 04/13/2011 and Order No. RD 49-210 of 06/04/2011 of the Minister of Agriculture and Food. Management bodies are the Minister of Agriculture and the Board of Directors. According to Art. 168 of the Law on Forests, the Minister of Agriculture exercises the property rights of the state in state enterprises; determines the headquarters of state-owned enterprises; appoints and dismisses the members of the management boards; approves regulations for the organization and operation of state-owned enterprises; approves the annual financial plans of state-owned enterprises; makes decisions on profit distribution and loss coverage; makes decisions on the spending of the funds under the funds created and managed by the state-owned enterprises; approves the annual financial statements and/or the annual reports on the activity of the state-owned enterprises; makes decisions on the establishment of property rights and mortgages and agrees requests for leasing properties that are not forest territories; makes decisions on the purchase, disposal, scrapping or liquidation of durable tangible assets with a balance sheet value of over BGN 30,000; approves requests of state-owned enterprises for the use of credits; on the proposal of the management board of the state-owned enterprise, makes decisions on the creation and closure of territorial divisions of the state-owned enterprises and on determining their area of activity and headquarters; exercises the powers given to him by law related to the activities of the state-owned enterprises.</p>	<p>According to the Guidelines for Applicants for Open Call for investment projects, point 2.5.1 Eligibility of Applicants (Lead Partner and Partners) (section Criteria for Eligibility of Partners), eligible partners are: legally established public organizations (legal entities) according to the national legislation of the state on whose territory they are located (exception is made for subsidiary structures of regional/national public organizations. In case a structure of regional/national public organizations is not and cannot act as a legal entity, its legally established central organization, shall be the project partner); NGO/non-profit making organizations with registration into sphere of ecology, environmental and biodiversity protection, education and other activities, relevant to the specific objective for enhancing protection and preservation of nature, biodiversity, and green infrastructure, including in urban areas, and reducing all forms of pollution, dated no later than two years before the launch of current call; university or other academic/educational/training institution; registered in the eligible Programme area (exception is made for national/regional public organizations whose area of competence, established by legal acts, extends to the eligible area of the programme, or subsidiary structures of regional/central public organizations located in the eligible cross border region which cannot be registered as legal entities – in this case the central authority is a project partner); directly responsible for the preparation and management of the action, not acting as an intermediary.</p> <p>When a project partner is established on the basis of art. 62 para 3 of the Commercial Law of Republic of Bulgaria, it may be considered eligible under the definition of regional/national public organization provided in the Guidelines for Applicants (GfA) for current call. However, observing the principle of transparency and equal treatment of all potential applicants the above mentioned criteria are subject of</p>

<p>The enterprise owns and manages the state forest territories within its territorial scope of activity, falling within the boundaries of eight administrative regions - all State Forest Units (SFU)/ State Hunting Units (SHU) from Blagoevgrad, Kyustendil, Pernik, Sofia City, Sofia - Region, as well as Forestries from Lovech, Pazardzhik and Plovdiv Region. The headquarters of the Company and the address of management are in the region Blagoevgrad, Blagoevgrad, 18 Zora Str.</p> <p>The enterprise has UIC 201627506.</p> <p>The main tasks of the enterprise are aimed at suistable management, maintenance of the diversity of ecosystems, protection of biological diversity and forest – state property.</p> <p>Having in mind the fact that Southwestern State Forest Enterprise - Blagoevgrad, although registered in accordance with Art. 62 of the Commercial Law, undoubtedly provides public services and manages forests - state property, for which appropriate financial guarantees have been provided by the competent public law bodies, would you please confirm that SWSFE is an eligible candidate under the Interreg Bulgaria-North Macedonia 2021 -2027 Programme and can participate with a conceptual project under the announced invitation under the Specific objective "Enhancing protection and preservation of nature, biodiversity, and green infrastructure, including in urban areas, and reducing all forms of pollution".</p>	<p>assessment at the stage of administrative compliance and eligibility check according to the Guidelines for Applicants for Open Call for investment projects.</p>
<p>3. In the Guidelines for applicants for open call for Invested project proposal Priority 1.Greener Border Region with Ref. No.02021TC16IPCB0006-2023-3, in point 6. Costs for infrastructure and works(on page 36) is stated that: The investment costs for infrastructure and works (BC6) must form at least 65 % of the total eligible costs of the project.</p> <p>Please confirm whether the expenditures for equipment are included in the costs for the infrastructure and works?</p> <p>Also, in point 5. Equipment costs in the Guidelines for applicants (page 36-37) it's not precisely determined the percentage's amount of the equipment costs that are strictly linked to the project and the project implementation. Can you please clarify what is the total amount of the equipment costs that shall be reimbursed from the total budget for this</p>	<p>According to the Guidelines for Applicants for Open Call for investment projects, point 2.5.2.1. Project duration, grant amount and De minimis aid “Investments have to be with predominant character of green infrastructure development and the value of the construction component - BC 6.Costs for infrastructure and works at least 65% of the total eligible costs of the project”.</p> <p>In p. 2.5.3.3 List and description of Eligible Expenditures per categories of costs, Point 6. Costs for infrastructure and works</p> <p>The expenditures for infrastructure and works shall be limited to the following elements:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - building permits; - building material; - labour;

call.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - specialised interventions (such as soil remediation, mine-clearing). - works; - supervision of works; - authors supervision; <p>According to the above listed eligible expenditures at least 65% of the total eligible costs of the project should be foreseen by the beneficiary in BC 6. "Costs for infrastructure and works" i.e. at least 65% ONLY for infrastructure and works (without expenditures for supply).</p> <p>IMPORTANT!!! In case of non-compliance with the required minimum percentage of 65% of the investment costs, the project proposal will be rejected!</p> <p>In p. 2.5.3.3 List and description of Eligible Expenditures per categories of costs, Point 5 Equipment costs</p> <p>Expenditures for equipment include costs on equipment purchased, rented, or leased by a partner and which is necessary to achieving the project's objectives.</p> <p>Equipment costs are limited to the following items:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - office equipment; - IT hardware and software; - furniture and fittings; - laboratory equipment; - machines and instruments; - tools or devices; - vehicles; - other specific equipment needed for operations <p>Percentage amount of the equipment costs is not determinate within the Guidelines for Applicants for Open Call for investment projects, but while planning the costs for equipment you should take into consideration the important notification that „The investment costs for infrastructure and works (BC6) must form at least 65 % of the total eligible costs of the project”. Also, while planning the costs for soft measures of the project take into consideration that “Soft measures” are primarily oriented towards conducting studies, developing concepts, developing materials and providing training, raising awareness on specific "green" topics and other eligible activities - demonstration and pilot models etc.</p>
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4.	<p>We kindly ask you to send us the presentations that were presented on the Information day and Partner Search Forum which was held in Kochani on 11.07.2023.</p>	<p>Presentations of the conducted Information days for potential applicants under Open Call for investment projects under Priority 1 "Greener Border Region" (ref. No 2021TC16IPCB006 – 2023-3) in Sandanski and Kochani as well as Partner Search Forum could be downloaded from the official web site of the programme on the following link: http://www.ipa-cbc-007.eu/2021-2027-news/information-campaign-information-days-and-partner-search-forum-potential-applicants</p>
5.	<p>I am writing to you in connection with the Open Call for Investment Project Proposals under Priority 1: Green Border Region. I am seeking further information and clarification regarding the supported investment components outlined in the technical project. The proposed investment component includes: 1. Incorporation of square paver elements, particularly in sandy substrates, to facilitate access to green areas. 2. Construction of park curbs using concrete substrates. 3. Installation of steel pergolas, covered with solar panels manufactured to industry standards. 4. Implementation of urban greenery lighting solutions. 5. Establishment of greenery irrigation systems. 6. Procurement of equipment necessary for green space maintenance, such as lawnmowers, trimmers, etc. 7. Placement of urban amenities, such as fountains, wooden bins, or benches, on concrete or metal bases. Thank you for your attention to this matter. I look forward to your prompt response and the opportunity to explore potential investment avenues that align with the objectives of Priority 1: Green Border Region.</p>	<p>According to the Guidelines for Applicants for Open Call for investment projects, regarding the investment components for the Priority 1: Green Border Region under the Open Call for Investment Project Proposals, please note that all projects funded under this priority must adhere to the established indicators outlined in the guidelines. These indicators, including both output and result indicators, are mandatory for consistent reporting and evaluation purposes. In this regard, the non-exhaustive list of actions to be supported under Specific objective: Enhancing protection and preservation of nature, biodiversity and green infrastructure, including in urban areas, and reducing all forms of pollution includes:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> -Support for joint strategies, action plans and concepts for developing new tools, instruments for enhancing protection and preservation of nature, biodiversity, and green infrastructure, including in urban areas, and reducing all forms of pollution, aimed at achieving the output indicators: Jointly developed solutions, Pilot actions developed jointly and implemented in projects; - Transferring solutions between relevant stakeholders, joint capacity buildings activities; - Investments in building greens - roofing and facade greening (green balconies, green walls, green roofs, atrium spaces, green pavements, green fences, noise barriers, etc.); - Investments in developing urban and peri-urban green areas, including improving connections between green spaces (tree alley and street tree/hedge, street green and green verge, green and coloured squares, permeable surfaces, infiltration trenches, storm water green streets/rain gardens, detention basins

		<p>naturalized storm water pond, bio-retention);</p> <p>- Investments in developing natural urban green areas (urban parks, parks/gardens that are unique examples of garden art and landscape architecture with the status of cultural and historical heritage, pocket parks/parklets, neighbourhood green spaces, institutional green spaces, forest, scrubland, abandoned and derelict area with patches of wilderness).</p> <p>The planned soft and investment activities of the projects should be focused on achieving the indicators (Please see Attachment 4 of the GfA). Please note that the all output and result indicators are mandatory for the project proposal.</p>
6.	<p>In connection with the preparation of a project proposal under the above procedure, we would like to ask if the following construction activities are eligible for funding:</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Reconstruction of the water cascade and the water mirror? 2. Construction of pump station and an automated irrigation system? 3. Renewal and construction of new park lighting? 4. Renewal of the park furniture - benches, decorative waste bins, etc.? <p>Thank you very much for your cooperation!</p>	<p>Please see the Answer of Question 5.</p> <p>Please note that the assessment of proposed investment components and their alignment with the objectives of Priority 1 will be carried out by the Assessment Working Group. Their evaluation will consider factors such as cross-border impact, contribution to green infrastructure development, and adherence to eligibility criteria. We recommend ensuring that your proposed components address the outlined guidelines and contribute to the specific objectives of Priority 1. The Assessment Working Group will make the final determination based on the project's potential to achieve the desired outcomes.</p>
7.	<p>Regarding the indicated list of exemplary eligible activities from the Guidelines for Applicants for the open call for gathering of investment projects under Specific objective 1.1 “Enhancing protection and preservation of nature, biodiversity, and green infrastructure, including in urban areas, and reducing all forms of pollution” under Programme Priority 1. Greener Border Region (№ 2021TC16IPCB006-2023-3) of the programme Interreg VI-A Bulgaria-North Macedonia 2021-2027, we would like to ask, are floorings of concrete paving-stones eligible and whether you could clarify what exactly you mean by the term “permeable floorings”. We ask these questions since:</p>	<p>Please consider that the expression "permeable floorings" is used for the indicative action “Investments in developing urban and peri-urban green areas, including improving connections between green spaces”. Therefore, all the actions in brackets – “(tree alley and street tree/hedge, street green and green verge, green and colored squares, permeable surfaces, infiltration trenches, storm water green streets/rain gardens, detention basins naturalized storm water pond, bio-retention)” are linked with the indicative action for development of green areas. Taking into account that the ecosystem-based approach</p>

	<p>1. In the practice, as well as in the educational materials, which are studied in the disciplines of Landscape Architecture, it is clearly defined which floorings are permeable and which not.</p> <p>2. The ability to permeate of water quantities depends on: the type of material, the size of the material, the base of the flooring and very often in the urban spaces, on the joints between the individual elements. Depending on the material, there is a large variety of floorings, but not all of them are suitable for the region of Bulgaria or for specific urban conditions.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - The usage of porous floorings and the speculation with them often times is not economically expedient and adequate as a solution for our latitudes and more concretely, for public urban spaces. - Another type of permeable floorings could be parking elements or materials similar to them, which are formed with wide openings and with a possibility of filling with soil and sprouting of grass, most often are used in parking areas, but are not suitable for pedestrian traffic for explicable reasons and therefore, they have not managed to impose themselves in the practice. As for parking places, even with them, their effectiveness is extremely weak in public spaces, and in many cases, there is also a negative effect, due to a number of reasons (lack of grass, muddy surfaces, waste products from cars- oils, gasoline, etc.). <p>In the context of the abovementioned, it has to taken into consideration and the following, that permeable floorings are all those floorings, which have the ability to provide water and air movement between the upper and the lower surface and most often this happens with paving (concrete, granite, of gneiss and other paving-stone) flooring, as the percentage of permeability is different.</p> <p>Paving floorings are widely used floorings in Bulgaria and the reason they are permeable is the fact that they are small in size, with more densely situated joints, as well as the fact that the base beneath them is completely permeable (fraction of crushed down stone and sand). The permeability of paving flooring from natural or concrete paving-stones is approximately the same.</p>	<p>and New European Bauhaus principle is essential to carrying out interventions under this specific objective, this means that nature-based solutions will be preferred, wherever possible, above hard or grey infrastructure. The use of other materials is not excluded, but nature-based solutions are recommended.</p> <p>In preparing their application, applicants should also properly assess the type of actions included in project proposal, by using the methodology for Carrying out a DNSH background assessment for the environmental objective, provided by Annex A5 DNSH assessment (part of the Applicant's Guide).</p> <p>Please note also that the assessment of proposed investment components and their alignment with the objectives of Priority 1 will be carried out by the Assessment Working Group. Their evaluation will consider factors such as cross-border impact, contribution to green infrastructure development, and adherence to eligibility criteria. We recommend ensuring that your proposed components address the outlined guidelines and contribute to the specific objectives of Priority 1. The Assessment Working Group will make the final determination based on the project's potential to achieve the desired outcomes.</p>
8.	<p>The project team from OOU „Boris Trajkovski“ Monospitovo, Municipality of Bosilovo, is interested in applying to the call for applications until 15.09.2023, however, since the municipality of Bosilovo also has a project ready for application, before applying we</p>	<p>Criteria for eligibility of applicant are defined in the Guidelines for Applicant, p.2.5.1 Eligibility of Applicants (Lead Partner and Partners), namely:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • be legally established public organizations (legal entities)

	<p>want to ask if our application will not jeopardized the application of the municipality, that is the Bosilovo municipality is a separate legal entity, however, the municipality is the founder of it. Will our application be considered separate or will they be considered as from the same applicant.</p>	<p>according to the national legislation of the state on whose territory they are located; OR be NGO/non-profit making organizations with registration into sphere of ecology, environmental and biodiversity protection, education and other activities, relevant to the specific objective for enhancing protection and preservation of nature, biodiversity, and green infrastructure, including in urban areas, and reducing all forms of pollution, dated no later than two years before the launch of current call; OR be university or other academic /educational/training institution</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • be registered in the eligible Programme area; • be directly responsible for the preparation and management of the action, not acting as an intermediary. <p>Please note that all the above criteria must be fulfilled together. The project candidates can apply with only one project proposal as a Lead partner or as a Project partner. In case the above criteria are fulfilled together, your organisations is eligible partner. Observing the principle of transparency and equal treatment of all potential applicants, the Managing Authority cannot give prior opinion on eligibility of specific applicants or specific activities, since those shall be subject to the assessment of the project proposal.</p>
9.	<p>Please clarify and provide examples on the document/s that is/are considered under the requirement "existing spatial plans of the territory"?</p>	<p>Into the GfA, Part C of AF – Project Description, C.2 Project relevance and context, C.2.5 How does the project contribute to wider strategies and policies?, on Page 46 is required „In addition project should be in compliance with the spatial plans of the territory, as well as national, regional and local strategic, planning and regulatory documents“ According to the Bulgarian legislation in sphere of spatial development (SDA, Закон за устройство на територията) are defined the follows documents:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Master plans/ Spatial development plans (общи устройствени планове); - Detailed urban/spatial development plan (подробни устройствени планове – планове за застрояване и регулация, планове за регулация, планове за застрояване, работни

		<p>устройствени планове и парцеларни планове);</p> <p>According to the Bulgarian legislation in sphere of regional development (RDA Закон за регионално развитие) is stated the system of strategic planning documents for regional and spatial development covers:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - National concept for regional and spatial development / Националната концепция за пространствено развитие/; - Integrated territorial development strategies for level 2 planning regions; - Integrated development plan of a municipality.
10.	Is the understanding that the funding is 100% for the beneficiaries correct (85% EU and 15% national contribution from the partnering countries' budgets)?	<p>According to the Guidelines for Applicants for Open Call for investment projects, this programme is co-financed by the European Union through the Instrument for Pre-accession Assistance III and co-financed by Bulgaria and North Macedonia through contributions from state budgets.</p> <p>"The total budget available for the present call is 4 561 091 Euro of which 3 876 927 Euro EU financial contribution (ERDF+IPA funds) and 684 164 Euro national contributions from national budgets of the partnering countries."</p>
12.	Is any partner Co-financing obligatory or the own contribution is allowed, depending on the partner's needs?	Co-financing by the partner is not obligatory, but as is stated on page 8 of the GfA, own co-financing by the project beneficiaries is allowed.
13.	Is JEMs' section named "Co-financing", row "Partner contribution" representing the amounts of the national co-financing?	<p>According to the Guidelines for Applicants for Open Call for investment projects, Point B.1.6 Partner motivation and contribution (page 43)</p> <p>Co-financing, (own contribution), this table can only be filled in once the partner budget options are selected and the partner budget is completed.</p> <p>This table displays the co-financing received by the programme and the partner contribution.</p> <p>The source of funding to be selected from the drop-down menu in the respective field. The ERDF + IPA funds co-financing rate is 85% for all partners and this has to be indicated in the percentage field. The fields</p>

		in partner contribution and the partner total eligible budget are then automatically calculated.
14.	Should NGO organizations from Bulgaria provide a B1. Documentary evidence on the most recent legal status?	According to the Guidelines for Applicants for Open Call for investment projects, 3.2 Supporting Documents (B), B1. Documentary evidence on the most recent legal status of all partners issued in the original language and English translation, stamped and signed/ verified with qualified electronic signature by respective organization as true copy) by respective organization and not older than 6 months prior to the date of submission of the application- only for partners from North Macedonia.
15.	Should partners from Macedonia provide signed A7. State aid declaration?	<p>According to the Guidelines for Applicants for Open Call for investment projects (GfA), p. 2.5.2.1 <i>Project duration, grant amount and De minimis aid</i> is stated that project partners registered in North Macedonia should also follow the applicable national regulations regarding State aid.</p> <p>Additional information regarding applicable de minimis rules is provided in Attachment 1.1 and Attachment 1.2.</p> <p>Into the part 3 ANNEXES (page 52) of GfA is clearly requires the partners should submit Annex A7. State aid declaration - signed, dated and stamped and provided by all partners.</p>
16.	Is the register at https://minimis.minfin.bg/ the source of information for the Bulgarian partners for filling the needed information in A7. State aid declaration?	<p>All partners have to complete a template A7. <i>State aid declaration</i> the required information on received state aid for the 3 years (the fiscal year in progress and in the two previous fiscal years the organisation).</p> <p>The Information system “De minimis register” (the Register/the system at https://minimis.minfin.bg/) aims to inform the stakeholders about the amount of the de minimis aid received by a given aid beneficiary as well as to assist the aid administrators in observing the aid thresholds laid down in the de minimis Regulations of the European Commission.</p> <p>The Managing Authority reserves the right to use other sources for official verification.</p>