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IPA Bulgaria - North Macedonia



(INTERREG VI-A) IPA BULGARIA NORTH MACEDONIA PROGRAMME

CCI 2021TC16IPCB006 GUIDELINES FOR PRE-DEFINED APPLICANT

Call for proposals

No 2021TC16IPCB006 – 2024 – 4

Restricted Call for Governance Project Proposal

under Priority 3 - Integrated development of the cross-border region

Deadline for submission of project proposal: 02 September 2024, 23:59 h. (EET).

Preface

These are the Guidelines for Applicants, which will serve as an essential reference document for the pre-defined applicant applying for funding under the Call for Project Proposal within the framework of the (INTERREG VI-A) IPA Bulgaria North Macedonia Programme.

The Guidelines for Applicants include the following integral parts, which must be considered in their entirety by the Applicant:

Attachments:

- Attachment 1 “Instruction for electronic submission of project proposal and filling the Application Form” - contains important information about access to the electronic system, filling the Application Form and submission of project proposal;
- Attachment 2 “Definitions of indicators” – contains important information about output and result indicators.

Application Form – to be filled in by the project partnership in Joint Electronic Monitoring System (Jems);

Annexes (A1-A4) to the Application form – contain templates of all declarations that must be submitted by the project partners together with the project proposal;

Legal Basis

In the elaboration of these Guidelines for Applicants the following legal provisions have been observed:

Basic EU legal acts:

- Regulation (EU) 2021/1529 of the European Parliament and of the Council of 15 September 2021 establishing the Instrument for Pre-Accession assistance (IPA III);
- Regulation (EU) 2021/1059 of the European Parliament and of the Council of 24 June 2021 on specific provisions for the European territorial cooperation goal (Interreg) supported by the European Regional Development Fund and external financing instruments;
- Regulation (EU) 2021/1060 of the European Parliament and of the Council of 24 June 2021 laying down common provisions on the European Regional Development Fund, the European Social Fund Plus, the Cohesion Fund, the Just Transition Fund and the European Maritime, Fisheries and Aquaculture Fund and financial rules for

those and for the Asylum, Migration and Integration Fund, the Internal Security Fund and the Instrument for Financial Support for Border Management and Visa Policy;

- Regulation (EU, Euratom) 2018/1046 of the European Parliament and of the Council of 18 July 2018 on the financial rules applicable to the general budget of the Union, amending Regulations (EU) No 1296/2013, (EU) No 1301/2013, (EU) No 1303/2013, (EU) No 1304/2013, (EU) No 1309/2013, (EU) No 1316/2013, (EU) No 223/2014, (EU) No 283/2014, and Decision No 541/2014/EU and repealing Regulation (EU, Euratom) No 966/2012;
- Regulation (EU) 2021/1058 of the European Parliament and of the Council of 24 June 2021 on the European Regional Development Fund and on the Cohesion Fund.

Basic programme documents:

- (INTERREG VI-A) IPA Bulgaria North Macedonia Programme approved by European Commission of 29.11.2022 by Decision C/2022/8880, with programme reference number CCI 2021TC16IPCB006;
- Territorial strategy under (INTERREG VI-A) IPA Bulgaria North Macedonia Programme.

National legislation

Besides EU rules and rules of the Programme, national legislation in force ruling specific fields such as environmental interventions, natural and cultural heritage, construction, human resources, public procurements, etc. has to be respected.

Please note that all these legal provisions must be observed by the applicant during both project preparation and implementation phases.

1 General Information

1.1. Overview of (INTERREG VI-A) IPA Bulgaria North Macedonia Programme

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. Own co-financing by the project beneficiaries is allowed.

The programme document drafted jointly by the two countries through a wide partnership with national, regional and local stakeholders was approved by the European Commission on

29.11.2022 (Decision C(2022)8880). It sets out the general framework of intervention of IPA III in the Programme cross-border area.

1.1.1 Programme area

The Programme area is determined in accordance with the Commission Implementing Decision (EU) 2022/75 of 17 January 2022 setting out the list of Interreg programme areas to receive support from the European Regional Development Fund and external financing instruments of the Union, broken down by strand and Interreg programme under the European territorial cooperation goal.

The Programme area includes the districts of **Blagoevgrad and Kyustendil** in Republic of Bulgaria and **North-East, the East and the South-East** statistical regions in Republic of North Macedonia.

1.1.2 The programme overall objective and priorities

The strategy, set out to address the specific needs of the border area both in the short and long term, supports the following overall objective:

To strengthen the territorial cohesion of Bulgaria - North Macedonia Cross-border region

In order to achieve the objectives set out in the programme document, the partnering countries have jointly agreed upon the main “Priorities” on which the projects under this programme should focus – “Greener border region”, “More connected border region” and “Integrated development of cross-border region”.

The current call is focused on Priority “Integrated development of the cross-border region”, Specific Objective “Fostering the integrated and inclusive social, economic and environmental local development, culture, natural heritage, sustainable tourism and security, in areas other than urban areas”.

1.1.3 Restricted call for governance project justification

Implementation of Priority 3 “Integrated development of the cross-border region”, Specific Objective “Fostering the integrated and inclusive social, economic and environmental local development, culture, natural heritage, sustainable tourism and security, in areas other than urban areas” is through a dedicated Territorial strategy (TS), applying integrated measures across different sectors. The TS is governed by permanently acting bilateral partnership structure, without legal personality - Strategy board (SB), set up in line with the provisions of

article 29 of Regulation (EU) 2021/1060, on 05.12.2022. The Strategy Board (SB) has the overall responsibility for implementing, monitoring and evaluating the Territorial Strategy for the development of Bulgaria- North Macedonia cross-border area (TS).

To assist the implementation of the TS under Programme Priority 3 “Integrated Development of the Cross-border Region” the members of the Strategy Board approved a decision to set up a Governance Project for the implementation of the TS (Decision 3 of Strategy Board meeting held on 28th of March 2023). The main goal of the Governance project will be to secure financial and knowledge capacity for the implementation of the TS. Territorial Cooperation Management Directorate at Ministry of Regional Development and Public Works of the Republic of Bulgaria and the Ministry of Local-Self Government of Republic of North Macedonia will be the project partners in the governance project and final beneficiaries will be the Strategy Board and Operational unit to the strategy board.

1.1.4 Programme Indicators

For the 2021-2027 period, a set of common indicators was defined in the ERDF Regulation, allowing easier and more consistent reporting across programmes. Among these are Interreg specific indicators, which are tailored to the types of outputs and results that Interreg projects typically produce, broad enough to capture most project actions, and allowing a good comparison and aggregation with other programmes.

The table below summarizes the Programme output and result indicators relevant for this Call:

Priority	Specific objective	ID	Indicator	Target Value
Output indicator				
Integrated development of the cross-border region	Fostering the integrated and inclusive social, economic and environmental local development, culture, natural heritage, sustainable tourism and security, in areas other than urban areas	RCO116	Jointly developed solutions	1
Integrated development	Fostering the integrated and inclusive social, economic and environmental local development,	RCO84	Pilot actions developed jointly	1

of the cross-border region	culture, natural heritage, sustainable tourism and security, in areas other than urban areas		and implemented in projects	
Result indicator				
Integrated development of the cross-border region	Fostering the integrated and inclusive social, economic and environmental local development, culture, natural heritage, sustainable tourism and security, in areas other than urban areas	RCR104	Solutions taken up or up-scaled by organisations	1

More information is available in Attachment 2 “Definitions of indicators”.

1.2. Programme Implementation Structures

According to the Interreg Regulations 2021/1059 from 24 June 2021, the two partnering countries have established the following main management and implementation bodies: Managing Authority (MA) – Territorial Cooperation Management Directorate at Ministry of Regional Development and Public Works of the Republic of Bulgaria is designated to perform the functions of Managing Authority under (Interreg-VI-A) IPA Bulgaria North Macedonia Programme (CCI 2021TC16IPCB006) as laid down in Articles 72, 74 and 75 of Regulation (EU) 2021/1060. The Managing Authority is responsible for managing and implementing the cross-border cooperation programme in accordance with the principle of sound financial management.

National Authority (NA) – Ministry of Local-Self Government of Republic of North Macedonia is the counterpart for the Managing Authority and is in charge of the coordination of Programme in North Macedonia. The National Authority supports the Managing Authority in the process of management and overall implementation of the programme.

Monitoring Committee (MC) is formed of representatives of MA, NA, the European Commission, as well as other relevant national, regional and local authorities and stakeholders. The MC shall supervise the overall effectiveness, quality and coherence of the implementation of all actions towards meeting the objectives set out in the Programme and the relevant strategy papers.

Joint Secretariat (JS) is a common structure that assists the programme management bodies in carrying out their respective functions and it is the main contact point between the programme and the potential beneficiaries/project partners. JS-main office is based in Kyustendil (Bulgaria), and JS-branch office is based in Strumica (North Macedonia).

1.3. Programme Financial Allocation for the Restricted Call for Governance Project Proposal

The total budget available for the present call is **410 944 Euro** of which 349 302 Euro EU financial contribution (ERDF+IPA funds) and 61 642 Euro national contributions from national budgets of the partnering countries.

2 Rules of the Call for Proposals

2.1 Cross-border impact

The project must deliver direct cross-border impact and benefits for the project partners, the main target groups and the Programme area. The partners should clearly demonstrate that the cross-border approach has been respected in the project proposal.

2.1.1 Cooperation criteria

Direct cross-border impact is understood in terms of respecting the following cooperation criteria:

Joint development (mandatory) means that the project must be designed in close cooperation of the partners from both sides of the border. This means that project proposals must clearly integrate the ideas, needs, priorities and contributions of stakeholders on both sides of the border. The Lead Partner is the coordinator of this process but should include other partners from the beginning of the development process;

Joint implementation (mandatory) means that activities must be carried out and coordinated among partners from both sides of the border. It is not enough that activities run in parallel. There must be clear content-based links between what is happening on either side of the border and regular contact between the two sides. The Lead Partner is responsible for ensuring that activities are properly coordinated, that schedules are kept and that the right quality levels are achieved;

Joint staffing means that there will be a single project team within the project. The project staff should not have duplicate functions on either side of the border and project team members

should work together on the project. The partners should not merely carry out activities in parallel without mutual coordination and exchange of information, but the project team will be responsible for project activities on both sides of the border.

Joint financing means that there will be only one contract per project and there must therefore be one joint project budget. The budget should be divided between partners according to the activities carried out. There is also only one project bank account for the EU contribution (held by the Lead Beneficiary) and payments representing EU support are made from the programme to this account. The Lead Beneficiary is responsible for administration and distribution of these funds and for reporting on their use. Funding should come from both sides of the border and illustrates the commitment by each partner to the joint project. The distribution of financial resources should reflect tasks and responsibilities of the partners. The rights and obligations of each partner in view of project implementation (including transfer of funds and payments) are included in the Partnership agreement.

🔔 IMPORTANT

The project partners from the two participating countries have to cooperate mandatory in both joint development and joint implementation and additionally in at least one of two other cooperation criteria: joint staffing or joint financing.

2.2 Horizontal principles

The (Interreg VI-A) IPA Bulgaria North Macedonia Programme places an important role to the inclusion of horizontal principles in the planning, implementation, monitoring, reporting and evaluation of the project activities. During the whole life cycle of the projects, beneficiaries are requested to consider transversal actions to the projects' activities, taking into account the horizontal principles of the EU.

More precisely, actions should be planned, implemented and reported considering the following horizontal principles:

1. Sustainable development as set out in Article 11 TFEU, taking into account the UN Sustainable Development Goals, the Paris Agreement, the "Do No Significant Harm" principle – specific actions addressed to a direct positive impact on sustainable development (environmental, social, ecological, cultural and economic), and to promotion of affordable and clean energy, decent and economic growth, industry, innovation and infrastructure, reduced

inequalities, responsible consumption and reduction and climate actions. Full respect of the Union environmental acquis should be ensured by the projects.

2. Equal opportunities and non-discrimination based on gender, racial or ethnic origin, religion or belief, disability, age or sexual orientation – specific actions to promote equal opportunities and prevent any discrimination based on gender, racial or ethnic origin, religion or belief, disability, age or sexual orientation during the preparation, design and implementation of the project, taking account of the needs of the various target groups at risk of such discrimination, and in particular, the requirements of ensuring accessibility for persons with disabilities.

3. Equality between men and women, gender mainstreaming and the integration of a gender perspective - promotion of equality between men and women and, where appropriate, the arrangements to ensure the integration of the gender main streaming perspective at programme and operation level.

2.3 Applicable law and public procurement

The beneficiaries have the possibility to award service, supply and works contracts to contractors. Contractors are neither partners nor associates. The award of contracts to them is subject to the procurement rules in accordance with Article 58 of Regulation (EU) 2021/1059 of the European Parliament and of the Council of 24 June 2021 on specific provisions for the European territorial cooperation goal (Interreg) supported by the European Regional Development Fund and external financing instruments for Bulgarian Partners and **Annex II of the Financing Agreement between North Macedonia and EC, using the guidelines and templates of “Procurement and Grants for European Union External Actions – a Practical Guide” document (PRAG).**

When the project partners are located in Bulgaria and is a contracting authority or a contracting entity within the meaning of the Union law applicable to public procurement procedures, it shall apply national laws, regulations and administrative provisions (Public procurement act (Закон за обществените поръчки), Government decree no. 160/2016 (Постановление ПМС №160/01.07.2016г. за определяне правилата за разглеждане и оценяване на оферти и сключването на договорите в процедурата за избор с публична покана от бенефициери на безвъзмездна финансова помощ от европейските структурни и инвестиционни фондове) or any other applicable Government decree concerning the Programme period.

For the award of goods, works or services in all cases other than those described above, the procurement procedures provided for in Articles 178 and 179 of the Regulation (EU, Euratom)

2018/1046 of the European Parliament and of the Council of 18 July 2018 on the financial rules applicable to the general budget of the Union and points 36 to 41 of Chapter 3 of Annex I to Regulation (EU) 2021/1059 shall apply. In this case the beneficiaries must refer to and use the guidelines and templates of the “Procurement and Grants for European Union External Actions – a Practical Guide” document (PRAG).

To this end, the following provisions shall be fulfilled by the project beneficiaries:

- When sub-contracting the activities in order to achieve the project objectives, the contracting must be done by a transparent tendering procedure, following the above rules.
- The project or any sub-contracting procedures must not create an economic advantage to an economic operator.
- All studies or other project results shall be made available for free to all interested individual or legal persons, in a non-discriminatory way. Making the studies available only for certain individual or legal persons is strictly forbidden.

2.4 Communication and Visibility

The information and publicity measures for the interventions of the (INTERREG VI-A) IPA Bulgaria North Macedonia Programme funds are aimed at publicizing the actions of the European Union, increasing transparency and creating a uniform image of the interventions throughout participating countries. Communication activities should be properly planned and should focus on the achievements and impact of the project actions.

In order to maximise the impact of communication efforts:

- ✓ Communication activities need to be timely;
- ✓ Communication activities should be appropriate in terms of resources spent and expected impact;
- ✓ Information used must be accurate;
- ✓ The right audience(s) should be targeted, etc.

Communication activities must be foreseen in the Application form and budgeted for by respecting the requirements of branding and communication established by the European regulations and the Programme. Before drafting the project proposal, it is essential to refer to the mandatory publicity and communication rules laid down in:

- ✓ Regulation (EU) 2021/1060 of the European Union and of the Council of 24 June 2021, articles 47 and 50;

- ✓ Regulation (EU) 2021/1059 of the European Parliament and of the Council of 24 June 2021, Article 36;
- ✓ Communication strategy of the (INTERREG VI-A) IPA Bulgaria North Macedonia Programme;
- ✓ the present Guidelines for Pre-defined Applicants.

Please be aware that expenditures which do not comply with the applicable rules in terms of communication cannot be claimed, even if they are included in the approved Application form.

More detailed practical guidelines (including templates) concerning the basic information and publicity measures are provided by the European Commission in the Communication and Visibility Manual for EU External Actions, published on the following EU website: https://ec.europa.eu/international-partnerships/system/files/communication-visibility-requirements-2018_en.pdf

More information about the new Interreg branding can be found on: https://ec.europa.eu/regional_policy/en/newsroom/news/2021/12/17-12-2021-new-interreg-branding-for-the-2021-2027-period and <https://www.interact-eu.net/library/interreg-brand-design-manual-2021-2027/pageflip>

2.5 Eligibility Criteria

The present call for proposal is open for Priority 3 “Integrated development of the cross-border region”, Specific objective “Fostering the integrated and inclusive social, economic and environmental local development, culture, natural heritage, sustainable tourism and security, in areas other than urban areas”.

In order to be eligible for funding under the programme, a project should meet three sets of eligibility criteria:

- eligibility of applicants (see section 2.5.1),
- eligibility of activities (see section 2.5.2) and
- eligibility of expenditures (see section 2.5.3).

2.5.1 *Eligibility of Applicants (Lead Partner and Partners)*

📌 IMPORTANT

The project must include at least one partner from each side of the border region.

2.5.1.1 Criteria for Eligibility of Applicants (Lead Partner and Partners)

For the present call the eligible Project Partners are as follows:

Priority/ Specific objective	Beneficiaries
Priority 3 “Integrated development of the cross-border region”, Specific objective “Fostering the integrated and inclusive social, economic and environmental local development, culture, natural heritage, sustainable tourism and security, in areas other than urban areas”	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Territorial Cooperation Management Directorate at Ministry of Regional Development and Public Works of the Republic of Bulgaria; ○ Ministry of Local-Self Government of Republic of North Macedonia.

2.5.1.2 Lead Partner Principle

The Lead Partner, as the applicant of the project proposal, will be responsible for the preparation and submission of the project proposal as well as for implementation of the project.

The lead partner shall carry out the following tasks:

- lay down the arrangements with other partners in an agreement comprising provisions that, inter alia, guarantee the sound financial management of the respective funds allocated to the operation, including the arrangements for recovering amounts unduly paid;
- assume responsibility for ensuring implementation of the entire operation;
- transfer the relevant budget amounts to the partners participating in the operation according to the Project Partnership Agreement and verified costs;
- ensure that expenditures presented by all partners has been paid in implementing the operation and corresponds to the activities agreed between all the partners;
- ensure that the expenditures presented by the partners participating in the operation have been verified by controller(s);

- collect and check the information from the project partners and submit reports on progress of the project to the JS;
- informing MA/JS about necessity of project modifications

More information about the role and tasks of the Lead Partner is provided in the Project Partnership Agreement template (Annex A1).

📌 IMPORTANT

A partner can never be a contractor and vice versa!

Please note that a “partner” involved in the project implementation as “Lead Partner” or “project partner” is excluded from any forms of contracting to other partners within the project.

2.5.1.3 Rules concerning partnership

All partners must sign a Project Partnership Agreement that stipulates their rights and duties. The Project Partnership Agreement should be enclosed to the application form. A Project Partnership Agreement template is annexed to the present Guidelines (Annex A1). The partners may decide to add additional provisions to the Project Partnership Agreement. All partners should ensure to comply with the Project Partnership Agreement requirements.

2.5.2 Eligibility of Activities

2.5.2.1 Project duration and grant amount

The eligible grant amounts for the project is 410 944 Euro and maximum project duration is 66 months.

In addition, no grant may exceed 85% EU financing of the total eligible costs of the project (see also section 2.5.3). The remaining grant amount (15%) is financed from the national budgets of the partnering countries as national co-financing.

2.5.2.2 Activities' location

The implementation of project activities under Priority 2 will cover the entire Programme area employing the provisions of the integrated territorial development as stated in art. 28 (c) of the CPR Regulation.

IMPORTANT

In accordance with Article 22 of Regulation (EU) 2021/1059 of the European Parliament and of the Council of 24 June 2021 on specific provisions for the European territorial cooperation goal (Interreg) supported by the European Regional Development Fund and external financing instruments “When all or part of an operation is implemented outside the Programme area inside or outside the Union, the selection of that operation shall require the explicit approval by the managing authority in the monitoring committee”.

2.5.2.3 Eligible Activities

The types of activities financed under the present call are under Priority 3 “Integrated development of the cross-border region” Specific objective “Fostering the integrated and inclusive social, economic and environmental local development, culture, natural heritage, sustainable tourism and security, in areas other than urban areas”. The activities must demonstrate a clear cross-border effect to the eligible programme area. The activities must be directed towards a better management by the Strategy Board of the Territorial Strategy, developed for the implementation of the Priority 3.

Description of the eligible type of activities under this call for proposal are given below. Please note that list of below activities is not exhaustive.

- Conducting Strategy board meetings;
- Measures for the enhancement the capacity of the Strategy board and Operational unit members, and such as trainings, exchange of experience and good practices, study visits, etc.;
- Organization of events related to the implementation of the Territorial strategy – info days, partnership forums, etc.;
- Measures related to monitor the implementation of the TS – e.g. mid-term evaluation, etc.;
- Delivery of equipment for facilitation of the work of the Strategy board and Operational unit;
- Support of the Strategy boards in the process of identifications of the project proposals contributing to the TS.

2.5.3 *Eligibility of Expenditures*

2.5.3.1 *General principles*

The hierarchy of rules applicable to (INTERREG VI-A) IPA Bulgaria North Macedonia Programme projects is as follows¹:

- European level - EU regulations;
- Programme level - specific rules decided for the (INTERREG VI-A) IPA Bulgaria North Macedonia Programme;
- National/regional level - rules applicable in each Member State and the partner country;
- Partner institutional level – internal rules applicable to each partner organization.

The partners should first consider EU regulations when budgeting/incurred expenditure. Where EU rules do not stipulate provisions, Programme rules apply. If neither the EU nor the Programme has a set rule, then national/regional legislation applies. Finally, the partners' internal rules should be followed if specific issues have not been covered by previous levels.

Only “eligible costs” can be taken into account for financial support. The budget is therefore both a cost estimate and a maximum ceiling for “eligible costs”. Note that the eligible costs must be based on real costs based on supporting documents with some exceptions for which the flat rates will be applied. The eligibility of expenditure applies to EU and national co-financing as well as beneficiaries' own contributions. The expenditures are generally eligible if they comply with the principles of sound financial management and with the relevant rules for public procurement stated in point 2.3.

To be eligible for financial support under the call for proposals, expenditures must:

- be necessary for carrying out the Governance project and must comply with the principles of sound financial management, in particular value for money and cost-effectiveness;
- be essential for the achievement of the Governance project activities and would not be incurred if the Governance project is not carried out (additionality principle);
- have been stipulated in the Governance project budget;
- have actually been incurred and paid by the Lead partner, its partners, the members of

¹ See in the part „Legal basis”

the Strategy Board and the Operational unit during the implementing period for the Governance project and in accordance with the provisions stipulated in the project partnership agreement;

- be registered in the project partner's accounts through a separate accounting system or an adequate accounting code set in place specifically for the project (with the exception of flat rates, unit costs and lump sums);
- be verified as eligible by the controllers designated by the Managing Authority and the National Authority respectively;
- be in line with the provisions of the European and national legislation, programme rules, including relevant procurement rules stated in point 2.3
- have not been and will not be subject to financing from any other public funds including TA funds of the programme;
- comply with the principles of efficiency, effectiveness and economy

2.5.3.2 Non-eligible costs

The list of non-eligible expenditure for the current call for proposal is as follows:

- Interest on debt;
- The purchase of land and existing buildings;
- Second hand equipment;
- Fines, financial penalties and expenditure on legal disputes and litigation;
- Costs of gifts;
- Costs related to fluctuation of foreign exchange rate.
- In-kind contributions (including unpaid voluntary work);
- Shared costs;
- Subcontracting between partners and/or associated partners of the same project for services, expertise, equipment and works carried out within the project;
- Charges for national financial transactions;
- Consultant fees between partners for services and work carried out within the project;
- Contracting of employees of the partner organizations as external experts, e.g. as freelancers;
- Other non-eligible expenditures according to EU and national legislation.

2.5.3.3 Forms of reimbursement

In order to minimize the administrative burden and to concentrate the efforts in quality implementation of the project activities and achieving the objective and indicators the Simplified Cost Options (SCO) shall be used for reimbursement/budgeting of some of categories of expenditures. Using SCO means also that the human resources and administrative efforts involved in collecting documents and reporting expenditures can be focused more on the achievement of objectives instead of being concentrated on collecting and verifying financial documents. SCO which shall be used in the current call for proposal are:

- Flat rates – % of the defined base costs.

2.5.3.4 List and description of Eligible Expenditures per categories of costs

The following section provides an overview of the eligibility principles for the different cost categories:

- BC 1 Staff costs;
- BC 2 Office and administrative costs;
- BC 3 Travel and accommodation costs;
- BC 4 External expertise and services costs
- BC 5 Equipment costs.

For each category of expenditures, a definition is provided as well as guidance for budgeting and reporting. Project partners are invited to review this information carefully when planning their budgets.

1. Staff costs

Staff costs include costs related to the staff to be involved in project management (Operational unit) and/or tasks related to the project content.

Staff costs must relate to activities which the partner organization would not carry out if the project was not undertaken.

The staff costs shall be limited to the following:

- Salary payments fixed in the employment document (contract, an appointment decision), or by law, relating to the responsibilities specified in the job description of the staff member of the Operational unit concerned.

- Any other costs directly linked to the salary such as taxes and social security payments including pensions and seniority and/or termination indemnity as long as they are fixed in the employment document or by law and they are in accordance with the legislation and standard practices in the country and/or organization and are not recoverable by the employer.

The appointment of the staff of the Operational unit by the beneficiaries has to be made in accordance with the European and national legislation.

Form of reimbursement:

Costs related to this budget category shall be reimbursed by the Programme on the basis of real costs and supporting documents proving the expenditures need to be presented at the verification stage.

2. Office and administrative costs

Office and administrative costs cover expenditures related indirectly to the implementation of the Governance project activities.

Office and administrative costs are limited to the following elements:

- a) office rent;
- b) insurance and taxes related to the buildings where the staff is located and to the equipment of the office (e.g. fire, theft insurances);
- c) utilities (e.g. electricity, heating, water);
- d) office supplies;
- e) accounting;
- f) archives;
- g) maintenance, cleaning and repairs;
- h) security;
- i) IT systems;
- j) communication (e.g. telephone, fax, internet, postal services, business cards);
- k) bank charges for opening and administering the account or accounts where the implementation of an operation requires a separate account to be opened;
- l) charges for transnational financial transactions.

Form of reimbursement:

Within the current call for proposal, office and administrative costs shall be reimbursed as a flat rate of 15 % of staff costs. The above list is exhaustive and all listed items are to be considered as covered by the flat rate and cannot be reported under any other budget line or

category of costs. If no staff costs are foreseen and reported, no office and administrative costs can be charged.

Please note that the flat rate is directly linked to the staff costs and will always be calculated based on eligible staff costs.

No supporting documents need to be presented at the reporting stage.

IMPORTANT

Partners cannot report costs covered by the flat rates in BC 2 in any other cost category.

3. Travel and accommodation costs

The category of expenditures covers travel and accommodation costs of the Operational unit in connection with the implementation of the TS under Programme, Priority 3 “Integrated Development of the Cross-border Region” shall be limited to the following cost elements:

- a) travel costs (e.g. tickets, travel and car insurance, fuel, car mileage, toll, and parking fees);
- b) the costs of meals;
- c) accommodation costs;
- d) visa costs;
- e) daily allowances.

Form of reimbursement:

Costs related to this budget category shall be reimbursed by the Programme on the basis of real costs and supporting documents proving the expenditures need to be presented at the verification stage.

4. External expertise and services costs

External expertise

The budget category corresponds to external expertise and services, provided by a public or private law body or a natural person other than the beneficiaries of the project, which is strictly linked to the project and be essential for its effective implementation. Project Partners and their employees shall not be contracted by another project partner within the same project as an external expert or a subcontractor. Public procurement rules stated in point 2.3 must be

respected in selection of the service providers. All costs must comply with other applicable EU and programme information and publicity rules. The costs of external expertise shall be paid on the basis of contracts or written agreements of equivalent value, supported by tangible and documented invoices or claims issued by the providers of goods/services.

Eligible expenditure under this category shall be limited to the following:

- Studies or surveys (e.g. evaluations, strategies, concept notes, design plans, handbooks);
- Translations;
- Development, modifications and updates to IT systems and website;
- Promotion, communication, publicity, promotional items and activities or information related to the project;
- Services related to the organization and implementation of events, trainings or meetings, including rent of venue; audio, translation and other equipment; catering (coffee breaks, refreshments, lunches and dinners for participants);
- Participation in events (such as registration fees);
- Intellectual property rights;
- Expenditures for external experts, lecturers, trainers, moderators, interpreters;
- Travel and accommodation for external experts, lecturers, trainers, moderators, interpreters, chairpersons of meetings and service providers (incl. rent of vehicle - car, van, minibus, bus, etc.);
- Expenses for purchase of consumables and materials for the participants in the events - paper, files, folders, cases, CDs etc. and printing of invitations, agenda, presentations.
- Other specific expertise and services needed for the Governance project.

IMPORTANT

All unit rates must be according to the market prices at the time of submission of the project proposals

Form of reimbursement:

Costs related to external expertise shall be reimbursed by the Programme on the basis of real costs and supporting documents proving the expenditures need to be presented at the verification stage.

5. Equipment costs

Expenditures for equipment includes costs on equipment purchased, rented, or leased by a partner and which is necessary to achieving the project's objectives.

Equipment costs is limited to the following items:

- office equipment;
- IT hardware and software;
- furniture and fittings;
- laboratory equipment;
- machines and instruments;
- tools or devices;
- vehicles;
- other specific equipment needed for operations.

Equipment should be clearly and strictly linked to the project and exclusively used for the Governance project implementation;

Equipment must be purchased in compliance with public procurement rules, described in point 2.3.

Depreciation costs - for equipment that will not be used by the project partners or the project target group after the project completion and if the economic lifetime of the equipment (respectively – the period of depreciation) is longer than the project duration, only the depreciation costs for the period of project duration are eligible. The depreciation rate has to be in line with national rules. Depreciation is charged proportionally for each relevant period for which a periodical report is required and prepared. The full value of depreciated costs on equipment in relation to the total project duration cannot be charged as total amount for one particular period. Only the proportionate sum of the depreciations costs according to the use of equipment for the project is eligible. The amount (percentage used and time duration) has to be properly clarified (auditable). The depreciation costs of equipment can never exceed the purchase price of the equipment.

📌 IMPORTANT

For equipment rented or leased for certain period during the project lifetime rental or leasing costs for the respective period are eligible.

Form of reimbursement:

Costs related to this budget category shall be reimbursed by the Programme on the basis of real costs and supporting documents proving the expenditures need to be presented at the verification stage.

📌 IMPORTANT

The activities which have already been covered by any other EU funds are not eligible.

The currency to be used to fill the budget tables is EUR.

2.5.3.5 Currency exchange at the verification stage

Expenditure incurred by project partners in a currency other than the EUR shall be converted into Euro by using the monthly accounting rate of the European Commission (http://ec.europa.eu/budget/contracts_grants/info_contracts/inforeuro/inforeuro_en.cfm) in the month during which expenditure was submitted for verification.

2.5.3.6 Eligible expenditures for VAT

The expenditures for VAT is eligible for operation the total cost of which is at least EUR 5 000 000 (including VAT) and where the VAT is non-recoverable under national VAT legislation. In the implementation phase of the project the project partners should be requested to provide the necessary documentation proving the VAT requested for reimbursement is non-recoverable under national VAT legislation.

Every beneficiary should comply with the national VAT legislation.

2.6 How to get the Applicants' Package and fill in the Application Form

Prior to preparation of the project proposal and electronic filling the application form in Jems, the potential applicant must carefully review the content of the Application Package, available on the following websites:

- Programme website: <https://ipa-bgmk.mrrb.bg/>
- MA website: www.mrrb.bg
- NA website: <http://www.mls.gov.mk>
- EU Structural Funds in Bulgaria website: www.eufunds.bg

The Application Form and Annexes must be filled in English. The supporting documents issued by national/local authorities or other bodies shall be attached in the original language accompanied by a translation in English.

🔔 IMPORTANT

Please complete all sections of the Application form in Jems and its Annexes carefully and as clearly as possible in order for your Application to be assessed properly.

Detailed information for the Application Form is provided in Attachment 1 “Instruction for electronic submission of project proposal and filling the Application Form”.

3 Annexes

🔔 IMPORTANT

The Application Form, all Annexes (A) and Supporting Documents (B) must be presented in scanned version (or signed with qualified electronic signatures) together with the filled Application Form in Jems System. The scanned (or signed with electronic signature) version of the Application Form must be signed and stamped by the Lead partner on each page by or signed with qualified electronic signature.

Each document from the lists below must be signed and dated (or dated and signed with qualified electronic signature) according to the requirements, and then scanned (or presented) and titled as a separate file.

In case of signed with electronic signature documents, the qualified electronic signature should be issued to the legal representative of the respective project partner as such and not as individuals.

3.1 Annexes (A)

The following Annexes should be filled in according to the template and submitted together with the Application form:

A1. Project Partnership Agreement – signed and dated by all partners

A2. Partnership and co-financing statement – signed, dated and provided by each partner

A3. Declaration of commitment – signed, dated and provided by each partner

A4. Declaration of e-mail address of the Lead Partner – signed and dated by the Lead partner

🔔 IMPORTANT

Please note that the e-mail address, provided by the Lead partner in Annex A4, shall be used by the Programme bodies as the only official communication channel with the Applicant

during the entire assessment and selection process in terms of requests for additional clarifications, notification for selection results, etc.

3.2 Supporting Documents (B)

The following Supporting documents should be provided and submitted together with the Application form:

B1. Decision of managing body or managing person (for each project partner) regarding the project development and implementation – issued in the original language and English translation **signed / signed with qualified electronic signature by respective organization as true copy**. This decision will indicate the legal representative of the partner.

B2. Legalized mandates of delegation from the legal representatives of partners (in case the application form and/or annexed declarations and/or partnership agreement are not signed by the legal representatives of the Lead Partner/partners) – **issued in the original language** and English translation **signed /signed with qualified electronic signature by respective organization as true copy**.

In case the signatures are of a deputy by rights, the act certifying the substitution by rights has to be presented together with the act for nomination of the person at the position of a deputy. When giving a mandate of delegation the legal representative has to present evidences that his/her rights for delegation are not limited by any means.

B3 In case of Supply of equipment the applicants should present:

- **Technical specification for supplies** (in English, signed/signed with qualified electronic signatures by the respective partner) – the detailed specification should be clear enough for determination of the seeking deliverables (if applicable);

IMPORTANT

Please note that in the technical specifications for supplies the trademarks and models must not be indicated!

Any other documents/permissions/authorizations/etc. concerning the project should be provided as Annexes.

4 How to Submit the Application

IMPORTANT

The project proposal must be submitted entirely in electronic form using the Jems System.














In case of signing of documents with detached electronic signature, the files should be uploaded in the Jems as single archived document.




The Annexes must be submitted using the forms included in the Application Package.

The Application Form must be filled in English. The Supporting documents issued by national/local authorities or other bodies shall be attached in the original language accompanied by a translation into English.

The documents issued by public authorities or other bodies should be scanned (when are issued on paper) or presented signed with qualified electronic signature of the respective authority/other bodies issued the document (in case are signed with electronic signature). The documents for the project partners should be uploaded in Jems, section Application annexes, in respective section for each project partner. The signed/ signed with qualified electronic signature final version of the AF should be uploaded in section Application annexes, Application attachments. The file formats of the appendixes (.doc, .pdf, etc.) has to be as stated in the pattern:

File Names and Formats of the Documents

	AF_ipacbcgtr_name.pdf	This should be a scanned document - signed by Lead partner on each page or signed with qualified electronic signature
	Annex_A.1_Project Partnership agreement.pdf	This should be a scanned document or signed with qualified electronic signatures
	Annex_A.2_Partnership and co-financing statement_PP1.pdf	This should be a scanned document or signed with qualified electronic signature
	Annex_A.2_Partnership and co-financing statement_PP2.pdf	This should be a scanned document or signed with qualified electronic signature
	Annex_A.3_Declaration of commitment_PP1.pdf	This should be a scanned document or signed with qualified electronic signature
	Annex_A.3_Declaration of commitment_PP2.pdf	This should be a scanned document or signed with qualified electronic signature
	Annex_A.4_Declaration of E-mail address of the Lead Partner.pdf	This should be a scanned document or signed with qualified electronic signature
	B1_Decision PP1_en.pdf	The Decision of Local Council/Board of Directors of PP1 in English
	B1_Decision PP1_bg.pdf	The Decision of Local Council/Board of Directors of PP1 in original
	B1_Decision of PP2.pdf	And so on for project partner 2
	B2_PP1_en.pdf	The Legalized mandates of delegation of PP1 in English
	B2_PP1_bg/tr.pdf	The Legalized mandates of delegation of PP1 in original
pdf	And so on for all partners

	B3_PP1_en.pdf	Detailed technical specification for supplies of PP1 in English. Offers for the supplies of PP1 in English
	B3_PP1_bg.pdf	Detailed technical specification for supplies of PP1 in original. Offers for the supplies of PP1 in original
pdf	And so on for all partners

5 Deadline for Receipt of Applications

IMPORTANT

The deadline for submission of the Project proposal in Jems system is 02 September 2024, 23:59 h. local time in Bulgaria (EET).

6 Assessment and Selection of Applications

The project assessment and selection criteria are approved by the Monitoring Committee (MC). The assessment of the project proposal is performed by Assessment Working Group (AWG). The AWG may request submission of additional documents / corrections of already submitted proposal / certified translation in English of any Supporting Document (in case the presented translation is considered as not convincing) during entire evaluation process. In case the proposal does not fulfill some criteria, the proposal will be returned for modification and/or additional clarification and a deadline for its re-submission will be set.

In order to be funded the project should fulfill all the conditions mentioned in the evaluation sheet.

ADMINISTRATIVE AND ELIGIBILITY COMPLIANCE CHECK

ADMINISTRATIVE PART (to be filled by Assessment Working Group member)	
Project No	
Lead Partner	
Project Partner 2	
Project title	

No	CRITERIA FOR ADMINISTRATIVE COMPLIANCE	YES	NO	N/A	COMMENTS
1.	The Application Form is duly completed according to the requirements. All sections of the Application Form are typed in English				

2.	The Annexes (1-4) are provided – duly completed, signed and dated /signed with qualified electronic signatures by both partners.				
3.	Decision of the managing body managing person of the each project partner regarding the project development and implementation (issued in original language and English translation signed/signed with qualified electronic signature by respective organization as true copy).				
4.	Legalized mandates of delegation from the legal representatives of partners (in case the application form and/or annexed declarations and/or partnership agreement are not signed by the legal representatives of the Lead Partner/partners) – issued in original language and English translation is/are presented				
5.	Detailed technical specifications (for supplies) with unit and total prices in Euro is presented (technical specification is not required for equipment, which will be used for management of the project). At least 3 official offers from different providers or market research for the envisaged supply are presented.				
CRITERIA FOR ELIGIBILITY COMPLIANCE					
6.	Both partners meet eligibility criteria defined in Section 2.5.1 of the Guidelines for Applicants.				
7.	At least 3 of the cooperation criteria are clearly fulfilled (mandatory cooperation in joint development and implementation of the project + one by choice from join staffing or financing) (AF Part C, section C.7.5).				
8.	The implementation period does not exceed the maximum project duration indicated in the Guidelines for Applicants. (AF Part A, sections A.1). The value of the financial support requested is in line with the limit indicated in Guidelines for Applicants. (AF Part A, section A.4)				
Project proposal satisfies all criteria for administrative and eligibility compliance					
Assessor's name:		Assessor's signature:		Date of evaluation:	

PART TECHNICAL AND QUALITY EVALUATION

TECHNICAL AND QUALITY EVALUATION PART (to be filled by external assessors)			
Project No			
Lead Partner			
Project Partner 2			
Project title			
No	SELECTION CRITERIA	Analysis	Reference/ comments
1.	Does the project overall objective clearly contribute to the achievement of the programme priority specific objective?	YES <input type="checkbox"/> NO <input type="checkbox"/>	Part C C.1
2.	Does the governance project bring real Cross-border impact?	YES <input type="checkbox"/> NO <input type="checkbox"/>	Part C C.2.3 C.4.1 Whole AF
3.	Does the governance project contribute to the achievement of programme's objectives, output and result indicators, and the contribution is realistic?	YES <input type="checkbox"/> NO <input type="checkbox"/>	Part C C.4 C.5
4.	Does the proposal demonstrate clearly contribution to a wider strategy on one or more policy levels (EU / national / regional)?	YES <input type="checkbox"/> NO <input type="checkbox"/>	Part C C.2.5
5.	Does the project demonstrate new solutions that go beyond the existing practice in the programme area?	YES <input type="checkbox"/> NO <input type="checkbox"/>	Part C C.2.2
6.	Are the target groups and beneficiaries relevant to project activities, clearly defined and quantified, and clearly benefiting from cooperation?	YES <input type="checkbox"/> NO <input type="checkbox"/>	Part C C.2.3 C.2.4
7.	Are the project work packages defined, realistic, achievable and necessary for achievement of the objectives?	YES <input type="checkbox"/> NO <input type="checkbox"/>	Part C C.4
8.	Does the project have clear and justified potential for durability and transferability of the project results?	YES <input type="checkbox"/> NO <input type="checkbox"/>	Part C C.8.2 C.8.3 C.4.1
9.	Are the communication and visibility activities appropriate and efficient?	YES <input type="checkbox"/> NO <input type="checkbox"/>	Part C C.4
10.	Is the project budget designed in accordance with the principles of economy, efficiency and effectiveness, and does it comply with the eligibility rules of expenditure? Are the estimated expenditures necessary for the implementation of the project?	YES <input type="checkbox"/> NO <input type="checkbox"/>	Part D D.2 Part E E.3
Assessor's name:		Assessor's signature:	Date of evaluation:

During the assessment of the project proposals the procedure for budget optimization and projects' content modifications will be conducted by the AWG members.

Following the evaluation the proposal will be presented to the Monitoring Committee for final decision.

7 State aid and de minimis provisions

The Governance project is entirely aimed to support the SB members in its responsibilities related to implementation, monitoring and evaluation of the Territorial Strategy for the development of Bulgaria-North Macedonia cross-border area. The envisaged activities have not potential to provide economic advantage or to distorts competition within the meaning of Article 107(1) TFEU. Any activities requiring external expertise will be award thru transparent public procurement procedure in compliance with the provisions of the respective legislation (please see p. 2.3 of this Guidelines for Pre-Defined Applicant).

Therefore within the current call of (INTERREG VI-A) IPA Bulgaria North Macedonia Programme no state aid or de minimis aid will be granted.