

PROJECT SELECTION METHODOLOGY INTERREG 2021-2027

1. SCOPE

The present methodology is applied for the evaluation, selection and approval of the project proposals (projects for funding) submitted under the calls for project proposals of the (Interreg VI-A) IPA III CBC Greece – North Macedonia

2. Institutional Framework

1. Regulation (EU) 2021/1060 of the European Parliament and of the Council of 24th of June 2021, "definition of the common provisions for the European Regional Development Fund, the European Social Fund+, the Cohesion Fund, the Just Transition Fund and the European Maritime, Fisheries and Aquaculture Fund, and fiscal rules for these Funds and for the Asylum, Migration and Integration Fund, the Internal Security Fund and the Instrument for the Financial Support of Border Management and Visa Policy".
2. Regulation (EU) 2021/1059 of the European Parliament and of the Council of 24th of June 2021, "on the specific provisions governing the 'European Territorial Cooperation' (Interreg) objective, which is supported by the European Regional Development Fund and the external financing mechanisms".
3. Delegated Regulation (EU) no. Commission Regulation 240/2014 of 7th of January 2014 on the European code of conduct for partnership under the European Structural and Investment Funds.
4. Regulation (EU) 2021/1529 of the European Parliament and of the Council of 15th of September 2021 establishing the Mechanism for Pre-Accession Assistance (IPA III/IPA III).
5. Commission Implementing Decision (EU) 2022/74 setting out the list of Interreg programmes and indicating the global amount of the total support from the European Regional Development Fund and from each external financing instrument of the Union for each programme and the list of the amounts transferred between strands under the European territorial cooperation goal for the period 2021 to 2027;
6. Commission Implementing Decision (EU) 2022/75 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;
7. Law 4914/2022 "Management, control and implementation of development interventions for the Programming Period 2021-2027, establishment of a Public Company "National Register of Startup Companies S.A." and other provisions" (Government Gazette 61/A/21.3.2022).
8. The Cooperation Programme "Interreg Greece – North Macedonia 2021-2027", as approved with the number C(2022) Decision no. 8646/ 23 Nov 2022 European Commission Implementing Decision for the approval of the support of the Cooperation Programme "Interreg VI-A IPA III CBC Greece – North Macedonia 2021-2027" from the European Regional Development Fund within the framework of the objective of European Territorial Cooperation (Interreg) in Greece and in North Macedonia.

3. Description

3.1. Stage A – Ex-ante Evaluation / Submission by the beneficiaries of a summary of their proposal with specific implementation data (Concept Note)

The potential Lead Partners submit a short paper (Concept Note) in which they briefly present i) the main idea of the proposal, ii) the partnership, iii) the proposed activities and the appropriate indicators iv) an indicative budget of activities, and v) information regarding the eligibility of the beneficiaries participating in the partnership.

The proposals are evaluated by the MA in collaboration with the National Authorities of the two countries if required, based on a targeted set of criteria and examining whether each proposal is consistent with the strategy, the intended targets, the indicators of the Programme etc.

The results of the evaluation are approved by the Monitoring Committee and are communicated to the Lead Beneficiaries of each partnership by the Managing Authority. Potential beneficiaries can file a complaint, appealing on the results of the Evaluation, which can be submitted within 7 working days from the day following notification of the Monitoring Committee's Decision.

The complaints are examined by the Joint Complaint Committee by its Rules of Procedures which are approved by the Monitoring Committee.

The result of the Joint Complaint Committee, in the event of acceptance and differentiation from the result of the initial evaluation is approved by the Monitoring Committee.

Note.: Stage A' will not be implemented in the case of a Targeted Call for Project Proposals.

3.2. Main evaluation of the proposals of the potential Beneficiaries

After the completion of procedure 3.1 and at a time specified by each Call for Project proposals, the potential Beneficiaries submit the proposals (Application Form with the attached mandatory documents, as specified in the Call) exclusively electronically through the MIS.

If the Monitoring Committee considers necessary, it may be requested from the Project Beneficiaries during the evaluation process, to submit specific documents in paper form. In addition, any attachments to the proposal that are not technically feasible to be submitted/attached electronically through the MIS, are sent to the MA/JS only in paper form within a deadline specified in the Call.

After the successful submission of the proposal, the beneficiary is respectively informed through the MIS.

All proposals [Application Form with all necessary documents attached] are archived/kept on the MIS.

3.2.1 Evaluation of Proposals

The evaluation of proposals is completed in 3 consecutive and distinct stages and more specifically:

- a) Stage B1': Check of proposal completeness & eligibility
- b) Stage B2': Evaluation of proposals per criterion/group of criteria
- c) Stage B3': Eligibility check of Beneficiaries who have been positively evaluated in stages B1 and B2

The evaluation is competitive for all type of Projects. During the evaluation the MA/JS may request at any stage of the evaluation the submission of additional data and clarifications.

Additional data are those which, while foreseen in the Call, were not submitted due to an omission (or a set of permitted errors) by the potential beneficiary and have been issued before the submission of the proposal. *Clarifications* are items requested by the assessor(s), in order to clarify the submitted information and better understand the content of the proposal. In the case of an external Assessor from

the Register of Assessors, clarifications can be requested exclusively through the Managing Authority provided that it consents.

The potential beneficiary should send the requested additional data within a specific deadline set by the MA. If the additional data is not submitted by the deadline, the proposal is rejected.

The non-submission of the requested clarifications by the beneficiary is not an exclusive reason for rejecting the proposal but, depending on the nature of the clarification, it may be taken into consideration during the evaluation of the proposal (e.g. in the grading of criteria related to completeness and clarity of the content of the proposal).

Communication with the beneficiary on the above matters (additional data, clarifications) is carried out through the MIS.

It is noted that during the selection and approval of projects, the principles and rights of the Charter of Fundamental Rights are taken into account, in accordance with what is mentioned in the "*Instructions for the evaluation of proposals*", paying particular attention to the relevant rights/principles of the Charter: protection of personal data, entrepreneurial freedom, property, equality before the law, non-discrimination, equality between men and women, inclusion of people with disabilities, family and professional life, environmental protection, access to services of economic interest, consumer protection, good administration, access to documents.

Stage B1': Check of proposal administrative compliance, eligibility and horizontal policies compliance

During the electronic submission of the proposal, the system (MIS) carries out an initial check of the administrative compliance and eligibility of the proposal, with data such as the date of submission of the proposal, the adequate completion of the Application Form, etc. , in order to allow or not the submission of the proposal.

The administrative compliance, eligibility and horizontal policies compliance of the proposal are then examined in terms of the criteria of Stage B1' based on the relevant *List of Criteria*.

Projects will be checked for their administrative compliance, eligibility criteria and compliance to horizontal policies, in order to ensure that they fulfil the administrative, eligibility and horizontal policies requirements of the Programme. This is an on-off procedure.

- Administrative compliance: It confirms that a proposal has been submitted within the deadline set; the Application Form has the official format specified by the MA, is complete and meets all the requirements set in the Call; all the required documents to be submitted along with the Application Form are properly completed, signed, stamped and attached to the Application Form.
- Eligibility criteria: These criteria examine whether the proposal fulfils the eligibility requirements under this Call. These requirements are, for instance, the structure of the cross-border partnership, the general compatibility with objectives and principles, the duration of the project, etc.
- Horizontal policies compliance: These criteria examine whether the proposal fulfils the horizontal policies requirements. Such requirements are for instance, compliance with the legislation of public contracts, sustainable development, fundamental rights e.t.c

The administrative compliance, eligibility and horizontal policies compliance of the proposal is carried out by the Joint Secretariats in collaboration with Unit A' of the Managing Authority.

Depending on the result of the Stage B1' examination, the proposal proceeds to further evaluation (Stage B2'), or it is rejected.

Stage B2': Evaluation of the proposal per criterion/group of criteria

The Projects that qualify for Phase B2 will be subject to Quality Assessment based on a scoring system using core selection criteria. This entails evaluating the nature of the proposed project, its relevance with and contribution to the achievement of the Specific Objectives, its viability, sustainability and expected results in the eligible territory, the cross border cooperation and capitalization, the quality of the cross-border partnership, as well as the maturity, the added value of the project, the structure of the budget e.t.c.

The core selection criteria are divided into:

- Project Quality (Content related criteria) (relevance of the proposal, quality of the results, impact and sustainability, innovation, cross border cooperation and capitalization) and
- Implementation related criteria (quality of the partnership, quality of the methodological approach, Project maturity, budget and finance criteria).

The evaluation of the proposals is performed by two Assessors from the Register of Assessors (one Assessor per country). The evaluation procedure is under the control and responsibility of Unit A of the MA.

The selection criteria will be taken into account by the Assessors to assess the projects. The purpose of the core selection criteria is to assess the quality of the eligible project proposals. The maximum total score that a project may obtain is 90 points. A minimum threshold of 25/40 points is set as "admissible score" for the content-related criteria and a minimum threshold of 35/50 points is set as "admissible score" to the Implementation-related criteria.

Quality criteria are closely linked to the nature and objectives of the Call. The obligatory requirements to be fulfilled by the project proposals per Investment Priority are stated in the first section of the second phase evaluation.

The submitted project proposals will be evaluated by two Assessors. The final score of the proposals will be defined as follows:

- for assessments with a difference up to 15 points in the total scores of the 2 Assessors, the average score will be calculated and hence will be defined as the final score obtained.
- for assessments with a difference higher than 15 points, the MA may appoint a re-evaluation with a third Assessor from the Register of Assessors. The third evaluation can be carried out where it is deemed required and by member / members of the MA or the JS.

The final score of the proposal is the average of the score of the third Assessor with its closest score from the first two Assessors.

A third assessment may also take place in the following cases:

- if the total score given by only one of the two assessors on the content-related criteria is below the defined threshold of 25 points.
- the total score given by only one of the two assessors on the implementation-related criteria is below the defined threshold of 35 points).

The final score given to the project, under the two cases mentioned above, will be the average of the scores given by the three assessors.

The final results of the evaluation are checked and finalized by Unit A' of the Managing Authority and submitted for approval to the Monitoring Committee.

The project proposals are ranked according to the scores (from highest to lowest) obtained in the evaluation procedure. Based on budget availability, they are divided into three categories:

- Project proposals to be accepted (i.e., proposals with high scores, fitting in the available programme budget).
- Project proposals to be further discussed at the MC (i.e., proposals that could be made acceptable under conditions, e.g., in case a budget surplus will be available, if provision of further necessary documents, licenses, permits is secured, etc.).
- Project proposals to be rejected.

In case of two or more project proposals receiving equal scores, while being last in the ranking list and the available budget is not enough to fund them all, the JS will present the advantages and disadvantages of each project proposal according to evaluation results to the members of the MC, who will decide on which proposal(s) to be funded.

The results of the evaluation are approved by the Monitoring Committee, and are communicated to the Lead Beneficiaries of each partnership by the Managing Authority

Potential beneficiaries can appeal on the above decision, which can be submitted within 7 working days from the day following notification of the Monitoring Committee's Decision.

The complaints are examined by the Joint Complaint Committee by its Rules of Procedures which are approved by the Monitoring Committee. The conclusion of the Complaint Panel is validated by the Monitoring Committee.

- For those proposals, whose evaluation is positive after the completion of stages B1 and B2, stage B3 follows:

Stage B3': Beneficiary eligibility check

The Beneficiaries who, during stage A'- Ex-ante evaluation, were declared as eligible, submit the necessary supporting documents as requested by the MA, in order to check their eligibility.

The relevant check is carried out by the Joint Secretariat.

The results of this stage are approved by the Monitoring Committee.

After the completion of the above procedure, a technical meeting is held, where the financial scope of each project is finalized, if required, and the subsidy contract is signed.