



Contracting authority:

The Government of the Republic of Serbia, Ministry of Finance,
Department for Contracting and Financing of EU Funded Programmes
(CFCU)

Cross-border programme Republic of Serbia – Montenegro,
for 2021-2027

under the Instrument of Pre-accession Assistance (IPA III),
allocations 2022 and 2024

**Guidelines
for grant applicants**

1st Call for Proposals

Budget line: 15.020300

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Deadline for submission of concept note: 26 January 2026

Notice

This is a restricted call for proposals. In the first instance, only concept notes (Part A of the grant application form) must be submitted for evaluation. Thereafter, lead applicants who have been pre-selected will be invited to submit a full application. After the evaluation of the full applications, an eligibility check will be performed for those which have been provisionally selected (including those placed on the reserve list). Eligibility will be checked on the basis of the supporting documents requested by the contracting authority and the signed 'declaration by the lead applicant' sent together with the full application.

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1. CROSS-BORDER COOPERATION PROGRAMME SERBIA - MONTENEGRO

1.1. BACKGROUND

These guidelines are intended to be used by those applying for grants under the 1st call for proposals of the 2021-2027 cross-border cooperation programme Serbia – Montenegro (hereinafter 'the programme'). The programme is implemented under the framework of the third instrument of pre-accession assistance (IPA III) and is the result of joint planning efforts made by the governments and other stakeholders of the two participating Beneficiaries. IPA III supports cross-border cooperation with a view to promoting good neighbourly relations, fostering Union integration and promoting socio-economic development through joint local and regional initiatives. The legal provisions for its implementation are stipulated in the following pieces of legislation:

- Regulation (EU) no 2021/1529 of the European Parliament and of the Council of 15 September 2021 establishing an Instrument for Pre-accession Assistance (IPA III);
- Commission Delegated Regulation (EU) no 2021/2128 of 1 October 2021 supplementing Regulation (EU) 2021/1529 of the European Parliament and of the Council, as regards setting out certain specific objectives and thematic priorities for assistance under the Instrument of Pre-accession Assistance (IPA III);
- Commission Implementing Decision C(2021)8914 of 10.12.2021 adopting the Instrument of Pre-accession Assistance (IPA III) Programming Framework for the period 2021-2027; and
- Commission Implementing Regulation (EU) no 2021/2236 of 15 December 2021 on the specific rules for implementing Regulation (EU) no 2021/1529 of the European Parliament and of the Council of 15 September 2021 establishing an Instrument for Pre-accession Assistance (IPA III).

Following a detailed analysis of the socio-economic situation of the border region, the programme sets out a common strategy for remedying problems identified and formulates joint thematic priorities for development. As specified in the programme document and in Article 71(2) of the Financial Framework Partnership Agreement between the Commission and the governments of the participating Beneficiaries, its implementation is carried out through calls for proposals such as this one. These calls will be launched at regular intervals to fund cross-border cooperation operations that will contribute to achieving the strategic objectives agreed upon by the participating Beneficiaries.

More details about this 2021-2027 IPA III cross-border cooperation programme can be found on the web page <https://cbcsrb-mne.org> and are available for download on the web page of the Ministry for European Integration of Republic of Serbia <https://www.mei.gov.rs>, and on the web page of the Ministry of European Affairs of Montenegro <https://www.eu.me>.

The programme is implemented jointly by both IPA III Beneficiaries. In the Republic of Serbia, the responsible institutions are:

- The Ministry of European Integration (MEI), in charge of the overall management of the programme, is part of the CBC structures of the lead Beneficiary as Managing Authority (MA) of the Programme;
- The Ministry of Finance, Department for Contracting and Financing of EU Funded Programmes (CFCU), responsible for all budget implementation tasks (procurement, contract and payment issues), is the contracting authority (CA)/Intermediate body for financial management (IBFM) of the Programme.

In Montenegro, the responsible institutions are:

- Ministry of European Affairs, responsible for the overall management of the programme, is the CBC structure in this Beneficiary.

- The Ministry of Finance, Directorate for Finance, Contracting and Implementation of EU Assistance Funds, as integral part of the management and control system (control body) in this Beneficiary.

Moreover, the implementation of the programme is overseen by a joint monitoring committee (JMC) composed of representatives of both participating Beneficiaries' institutions and civil society. The JMC will examine and provide an advisory opinion on the list of operations selected through this call for proposals before the grant award decision.

The Intermediate Body, the CBC structures, the Managing Authority and the JMC are assisted by the joint technical secretariat (JTS) with its head office in Prijepolje (Serbia), and staffed with experts from Serbia and Montenegro. The JTS is the administrative body responsible for the day-to-day management of the programme including support and advice to potential applicants as well as grant beneficiaries. The JTS has an antenna located in Bijelo Polje (Montenegro). The JTS will assist potential applicants in partner search and project development, organising information days and workshops; develop and maintain a network of stakeholders; advise grant beneficiaries in project implementation; and prepare, conduct and report on monitoring visits to cross-border cooperation operations.

1.2. OBJECTIVES OF THE PROGRAMME AND PRIORITY ISSUES

In line with the objectives specified in the programme document, the **global objective** of this call for proposals is: to promote good neighbourly relations, foster Union integration and contribute to social, economic and territorial development of the programme cross-border area by improving social and cultural inclusion and health and by developing sustainable tourism.

As a result of a decision made by the JMC of the programme on 28 November 2023, out of the two thematic priorities of the programme document.

- ☐ Priority 1: Employment, labour mobility and social and cultural inclusion across borders
- ☐ Priority 2: Encouraging tourism and cultural and natural heritage

the following are the specific objectives and the corresponding results that the applications submitted under this call will contribute to attaining:

SPECIFIC OBJECTIVES	RESULTS
1.1 To improve the quality of public health and social services for inclusion of marginalised groups in the programme area	1.1.1. Enhanced quality of and access to health services for marginalised groups
	1.1.2. Upgraded quality of social services for marginalised groups
2.1 To enhance and promote commonly coordinated cross-border tourism offer based on a protected cultural and natural heritage	2.1.1. Commonly developed touristic offers commercialised ¹
	2.1.2. Improved common protection and promotion of cultural and natural heritage
	2.1.3. Increased cooperation among tourist operators, service providers and organic agricultural producers to jointly contribute to further tourism development

¹In this context, the term “commercialised” means to develop, promote and put on the market a tourism product or service.

Mainstreaming of cross-cutting issues:

This call for proposals will consider the mainstreaming of cross-cutting issues at project level. When developing a project to address any of the specific objectives of the call, cross-cutting issues need to be mainstreamed in the following manner:

a) Improved capacity of local and regional authorities to tackle local challenges

To mainstream the thematic cluster 5 as stipulated in the Commission Implementing Decision C(2021)8914 of 10.12.2021 adopting the Instrument of Pre-accession Assistance (IPA III) Programming Framework for the period 2021-2027, every application should **demonstrate that regional and local authorities have been involved** in their development and their future implementation. Every operation should describe how it has been developed, how it is aligned to and contributes to local development plans or how its implementation will be monitored and evaluated.

b) Gender equality and promotion of equal opportunities.

Equality between sexes must be taken into consideration when setting the project objectives, defining activities (e.g., participation in capacity building activities) and expected results. Equal opportunity prevails when women and men have the same rights, obligations and opportunities.

c) Protection and promotion of ethnic minority rights, including their participation in decision making processes.

Enforcement of equal opportunities must be secured in the project design in order to promote the integration of ethnic minorities and ensure their participation in decision-making processes in line with project activities and expected results.

d) Integration of people with physical and mental disabilities.

Enforcement of equal opportunities must be secured in the project to promote integration of people affected by disabilities and in securing their participation in project activities (e.g. accessibility to buildings and project sites) and in decision-making processes in line with project activities and expected results.

e) Safeguard and promotion of children's rights and promotion of children's participation in decision-making processes.

The project should involve children as relevant stakeholders where and if appropriate (e.g. in case the specific project objective is in a sector mainly relating to children's needs, such as education, health, sports and culture, but also in sectors in which the project can indirectly influence their lives).

f) Democratic standards, anti-discriminatory practices and good governance.

Activities and operations cannot set up barriers in relation to religion or belief, age, gender, sexual orientation, political affiliation, racial or ethnic origin particularly regarding employment and HR policy pursued towards persons who will be employed within the projects implemented under this grant scheme. Actions must secure a wide public participation and consultation, where appropriate, throughout project activities. This may include setting up consultative processes in developing strategies/policies; executing infrastructural works; ensuring inclusion of target groups and a wide range of different stakeholders.

g) Protection of environment and preservation of natural resources and biodiversity.

The project needs to describe how it will contribute to a better environment or otherwise have a neutral impact on the environment. The concept of environment involves not only issues of pollution, but issues sustainable development (e.g., waste supply chain management and recycling), nature protection and biodiversity, renewable energy, etc.

As the IPA III CBC programmes must push forward the goals of the Economic and Investment Plan (EIP), the new Growth Plan and the Green Agenda (GA) for the Western Balkans, applicants are encouraged to embed in the design of their project such goals. This must be evident in their application, especially when describing its relevance to the objectives of the IPA III CBC programme Serbia - Montenegro.

Furthermore, in the framework of the smart specialisation strategies of the Western Balkans economies, IPA III CBC programmes could indirectly contribute, through regional collaboration, to bridging gaps between science and industry. A reference to these strategies, where relevant and opportune, should be made in applications.

Please note that mainstreaming cross-cutting issues will be scored in the evaluation methodology of this call as formulated in Section 2.3 below.

1.3. FINANCIAL ALLOCATION PROVIDED BY THE CONTRACTING AUTHORITY

The overall indicative amount made available under this call for proposals is EUR 5,400,000.00. The contracting authority reserves the right not to award all available funds.

Indicative EU-funded allocations of funds by thematic priority/specific objective:

Thematic priority/specific objective	Allocation
Thematic Priority 1: Employment, labour mobility and social and cultural inclusion across borders Specific objective 1.1: to improve the quality of public health and social services for inclusion of marginalised groups in the programme area	EUR 3,000,000.00
Thematic Priority 2: Encouraging tourism and cultural and natural heritage Specific objective 2.1: to enhance and promote commonly coordinated cross-border tourism offer based on a protected cultural and natural heritage	EUR 2,400,000.00
Total	EUR 5,400,000.00

The applications will compete for the financial resources available within each thematic priority separately. Please note that the terms 'thematic priority' and 'specific objective' are interchangeable.

When the remaining funds per thematic priority will not allow financing another application, the evaluation committee may recommend to the contracting authority to pool these funds and award a grant to the application or applications with the highest scores in the ranking of a sole reserve list irrespective of the thematic priority.

If the allocation indicated for a thematic priority cannot be used due to insufficient quality or number of proposals received, the contracting authority reserves the right to reallocate the remaining funds to that/those application/s being higher in the ranking of sole reserve list irrespective of the thematic priority.

Moreover, the contracting authority may increase the funds allocated to the call to fund all or part of those applications qualifying for funding.

Size of grants

Any grant requested under this call for proposals must fall between the following minimum and maximum amounts:

Specific objective	Minimum amount of EU-funded grant	Maximum amount of EU-funded grant
Specific objective 1.1: To improve the quality of public health and social services for inclusion of marginalised groups in the programme area	EUR 180,000.00	EUR 500,000.00
Specific objective 2.1: To enhance and promote commonly coordinated cross-border tourism offer based on a protected cultural and natural heritage	EUR 200,000.00	EUR 600,000.00

Any grant requested under this call for proposals must fall between the following minimum and maximum percentages of total eligible costs of the action:

- Minimum percentage: 60 % of the total eligible costs of the action.
- Maximum percentage: 85 % of the total eligible costs of the action (see also Section 2.1.4.).

The balance (i.e., the difference between the total cost of the action and the amount requested from the contracting authority) must be financed from sources other than the general budget of the Union.

Please note that for applicants which are non-governmental organisations effectively established in Montenegro, their Ministry of Public Administration may provide co-financing in accordance with the Regulation of the Government of Montenegro on the procedure for co-financing projects and programmes of non-governmental organizations supported by the European Union ("Službeni list Crne Gore", No. 064/18 of 04.10.2018), whose reference can be found on the website of the Government: <https://www.gov.me/en/mju> or at the address kofinansiranje@mju.gov.me. For the applicants effectively established in the Republic of Serbia, there is no information on existence of a similar co-financing possibility at the moment of the publication of the call.

2. RULES FOR THIS CALL FOR PROPOSALS

These guidelines set out the rules for the submission, selection and implementation of the actions financed under this call, in conformity with the practical guide (PRAG), which is applicable to the present call (available on the internet at this address:

<https://wikis.ec.europa.eu/display/ExactExternalWiki/ePRAG>).²

2.1 ELIGIBILITY CRITERIA

There are three sets of eligibility criteria, relating to:

² Note that a lead applicant (i.e. a coordinator) whose pillars have been positively assessed by the European Commission and who is awarded a grant will not sign the standard grant contract published with these guidelines but a contribution agreement based on the contribution agreement template. All references in these guidelines and other documents related to this call to the standard grant contract shall in this case be understood as referring to the relevant provisions of the contribution agreement template.

(1) the actors (2.1.1.):

- the '**lead applicant**', i.e. the entity submitting the application form;
- its **co-applicant(s)** (where it is not specified otherwise the lead applicant and its co-applicant(s) are hereinafter jointly referred as 'applicant(s)');
- and, if any, **affiliated entity(ies)** to the lead applicant and/or to a co-applicant(s);

(2) the actions (2.1.3.):

- actions for which a grant may be awarded;

(3) the eligible costs or results/conditions (2.1.4.):

- the eligible costs, the types of cost that may be taken into account in setting the amount of the grant.

2.1.1. Eligibility of applicants (i.e. lead applicant, co-applicant(s) and affiliated entities)
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Lead applicant

(1) In order to be eligible for a grant, the lead applicant must:

- be a legal person **and**
- be non-profit-making **and**
- be effectively established in³ either the Republic of Serbia, or Montenegro, **and**
- be directly responsible for the preparation and management of the action with the co-applicant(s) and affiliated entity(ies), not acting as an intermediary and
- not being in any of the situations listed in Section 2.4. of the practical guide⁴ **and**
- be one of the following institutions or organisations:

Under Specific objective 1.1: To improve the quality of public health and social services for inclusion of marginalised groups in the programme area

- Health care and social welfare institutions
- Civil society organizations representing interests of marginalized groups (youth, women, elderly, Roma)
- Organizations responsible for providing social and health services
- Institutions and organizations providing formal, non-formal and informal educational
- Public elderly homes
- Local self-governments
- Local and regional development organizations/agencies

³ To be determined on the basis of the organisation's statutes, which should demonstrate that it has been established by an instrument governed by the national law of the country concerned and that its head office is located in an eligible country. The effective establishment of applicants should be proved not only with the latest statutes but with the Extract from relevant official register or institution (not older than one year before submission deadline). In this respect, any legal entity whose statutes have been established in another country cannot be considered an eligible local organisation, even if the statutes are registered locally or a 'Memorandum of Understanding' has been concluded.

⁴ This will be checked in Step 2 (Full Application) only for provisionally selected applicants and those on the reserve list based on the Declaration of Honour.

- Organizations representing national or ethnic minorities
- Youth organizations
- Science and research institutions and organizations
- National authorities and institutions overseeing health and social welfare policies

Under Specific objective 2.1: To enhance and promote commonly coordinated cross-border tourism offer based on a protected cultural and natural heritage

- Tourism organizations at national/regional/local level
- Local and regional development organizations/agencies
- National authorities and institutes overseeing tourism and agriculture policies
- Local self-governments
- Chamber of commerce, crafts, business associations, clusters, cooperatives
- Association of farmers
- Nature/environment protection institutions
- Institutions in the field of cultural heritage
- CSOs active in tourism, nature, environment, cultural heritage, culture and other relevant fields.
- Science and research institutions and organizations
- Institutions and organizations providing formal, non-formal and/or informal education
- Youth organizations.

The lead applicant must act with co-applicant(s) as specified hereafter.

If awarded the grant contract, the lead applicant will become the beneficiary identified as the coordinator in Annex G (special conditions). The coordinator is the sole interlocutor of the contracting authority. It represents and acts on behalf of any other co-beneficiary (if any) and coordinate the design and implementation of the action. The lead beneficiary shall ensure the implementation of the entire operation, monitor that the operation is implemented in accordance with the conditions set out in the contract and lay down the arrangements with other beneficiaries to guarantee the sound financial management of the funds allocated to the operation, including the arrangements for recovering amounts unduly paid⁵.

Co-applicant(s)

The lead applicant must act with at least one co-applicant as specified hereafter.

If the applicant is established in the Republic of Serbia, at least one co-applicant must be established in Montenegro, and vice versa.

At least two legal entities in the partnership, one per each participating country, being the lead applicant or the co-applicant, must be public institutions that are effectively established and/or have territorial competence for the programme eligible area⁶.

NB. Each application must be submitted by a partnership which includes at least one public institution per country, one public institution from Serbia and another one from Montenegro. These two public institutions must be effectively established in the programme eligible area and/or have territorial competence over this area. The other applicants (if any) being public institutions, can be effectively established elsewhere either in the Republic of Serbia, or in Montenegro.

⁵ As stipulated in Article 72(2) of the FFPA.

⁶ For the programme eligible area, please refer to Section 2.1.3, Location

Public institutions for the purpose of these Guidelines for applicants encompasses universities, schools, museums, theatres, health centers, red cross organizations⁷, as well as ministries, national agencies, regional government units, agencies for local and/or regional development, and local self-government authorities, institutions, and public enterprises as well as other publicly owned or controlled institutions or enterprises.

The admissibility of these entities may be demonstrated through their establishment decision, statutes, or relevant legislation confirming their formation.

The maximum number of co-applicants that could be involved in the action is 3. However, CBC partners must carefully bear in mind the most appropriate conditions to ensure an intra-project efficient coordination when deciding on this. The number of partners and the composition of the partnership should be coherent with the envisaged objectives and activities of the action (see Section 2.1.4 below).

In genuine cross-border operations, the applicant and co-applicant(s) shall cooperate in the development and implementation of action. In addition, they shall cooperate in either the staffing or the financing of operation or both (see Section 2.1.3 below). The lead applicant and co-applicant(s) must represent different legal entities.

Co-applicants participate in designing and implementing the action, and the costs they incur are eligible in the same way as those incurred by the lead applicant.

Co-applicants must satisfy the eligibility criteria as applicable to the lead applicant himself⁸.

Co-applicants must sign the mandate in Part B Section 4 of the grant application form.

If awarded the grant contract, the co-applicant(s) (if any) will become beneficiary(ies) in the action (together with the coordinator).

If awarded a grant under this call for proposals, the partners shall agree to sign a partnership agreement respecting the template provided in the standard grant contract.

To mainstream the thematic cluster 5 as stipulated in the Commission Implementing Decision C(2021)8914 of 10.12.2021 adopting the Instrument of Pre-accession Assistance (IPA III) Programming Framework for the period 2021-2027, every application should demonstrate that regional and local authorities have been involved in their development and their future implementation capacities. Every operation should describe how it has been developed, how it is aligned to and contributes to local development plans, activities envisaged to be implemented or how its implementation will be monitored and evaluated. Please note that this part of mainstreaming the cross-cutting issues will be assessed and scored under this call as part of Design for the action (specified in the question 2.5 of the Concept Note evaluation grid).

Affiliated entities

The lead applicant and its co-applicant(s) may act with affiliated entity(ies).

Only the following entities may be considered as affiliated entities to the lead applicant and/or to co-applicant(s):

⁷ Law on the Red Cross of Serbia, "Official Gazette of the Republic of Serbia", No. 107/2005 of December 2, 2005, Article 1, The Red Cross of Serbia exercises public powers determined by law and performs other activities of public interest in accordance with ratified international treaties, laws, other regulations, and general enactments. In the exercise or performance of these powers and activities, it holds the status of an organization that assists the competent state authorities in the humanitarian field.

⁸ In line with the cross-border nature of the programme, please note that the nationality of the lead applicant (either Serbia or Montenegro) automatically determines the nationality of at least one co-applicant (country Montenegro, if the lead applicant is effectively established in country Serbia or country Serbia if the lead applicant is effectively established in Montenegro).

Only entities having a structural link with the applicants (i.e. the lead applicant or a co-applicant), in particular a legal or capital link.

This structural link encompasses mainly two notions:

- (i) Control, as defined in Directive 2013/34/EU on the annual financial statements, consolidated financial statements and related reports of certain types of undertakings:

Entities affiliated to an applicant may hence be:

- Entities directly or indirectly controlled by the applicant (daughter companies or first-tier subsidiaries). They may also be entities controlled by an entity controlled by the applicant (granddaughter companies or second-tier subsidiaries) and the same applies to further tiers of control;
- Entities directly or indirectly controlling the applicant (parent companies). Likewise, they may be entities controlling an entity controlling the applicant;
- Entities under the same direct or indirect control as the applicant (sister companies).

- (ii) Membership, i.e. the applicant is legally defined as a e.g. network, federation, association in which the proposed affiliated entities also participate, or the applicant participates in the same entity (e.g. network, federation, association...) as the proposed affiliated entities.

The structural link shall, as a general rule, be neither limited to the action nor established for the sole purpose of its implementation. This means that the link would exist independently of the award of the grant; it should exist before the call for proposals and remain valid after the end of the action.

By way of exception, an entity may be considered as affiliated to an applicant even if it has a structural link specifically established for the sole purpose of the implementation of the action in the case of so-called 'sole applicants' or 'sole beneficiaries'. A sole applicant or a sole beneficiary is a legal entity formed by several entities (a group of entities) which together comply with the criteria for being awarded the grant. For example, an association is formed by its members.

What is not an affiliated entity?

The following are not considered entities affiliated to an applicant:

- Entities that have entered into a (procurement) contract or subcontract with an applicant, act as concessionaires or delegates for public services for an applicant,
- Entities that receive financial support from the applicant,
- Entities that cooperate on a regular basis with an applicant on the basis of a memorandum of understanding or share some assets,
- Entities that have signed a consortium agreement under the grant contract (unless this consortium agreement leads to the creation of a 'sole applicant' as described above).

How to verify the existence of the required link with an applicant?

The affiliation resulting from control may in particular be proved on the basis of the consolidated accounts of the group of entities the applicant and its proposed affiliates belong to.

The affiliation resulting from membership may in particular be proved on the basis of the statutes or equivalent act establishing the entity (network, federation, association) which the applicant constitutes or in which the applicant participates.

If the applicants are awarded a grant contract, their affiliated entity(ies) will not become beneficiary(ies) of the action and signatory(ies) of the grant contract. However, they will participate in the design and in the

implementation of the action and the costs they incur (including those incurred for implementation contracts and financial support to third parties and subcontractors) may be accepted as eligible costs, provided they comply with all the relevant rules already applicable to the beneficiary(ies) under the grant contract.

Affiliated entity(ies) must satisfy the same eligibility criteria as the lead applicant and the co-applicant(s). They must sign the affiliated entity(ies) statement in Part B Section 5 of the grant application form.

2.1.2. *Associates, contractors, recipients of financial support*

The following entities are not applicants nor affiliated entities and do not have to sign the 'mandate for co-applicant(s)' or 'affiliated entities' statement:

- **Associates**

Other organisations or individuals may be involved in the action. Such associates play a real role in the action but may not receive funding from the grant, with the exception of per diem or travel costs. Associates do not have to meet the eligibility criteria referred to in Section 2.1.1. Associates must be mentioned in Part B Section 6 — 'Associates participating in the action' — of the grant application form.

- **Contractors**

The beneficiaries and their affiliated entities are permitted to award contracts (subcontracting or implementation contracts). Beneficiaries, affiliated entity(ies), recipients of financial support or associates cannot be also contractors in the project. Contractors are subject to the procurement rules set out in Annex IV to the standard grant contract.

2.1.3. *Eligible actions: actions for which an application may be made*

Definition:

An action is composed of a set of activities.

Duration:

The initial planned duration of an action or operation will meet the following requirements depending on the programme's specific objective addressed by the application, namely:

Specific objective	Minimum number of months	Maximum number of months
Specific objective 1.1 To improve the quality of public health and social services for inclusion of marginalised groups in the programme area	12	24
Specific objective 2.1 : To enhance and promote commonly coordinated cross-border tourism offer based on a protected cultural and natural heritage	18	30

Sectors or themes:

As stipulated in Section 1.2 above, actions or operations will fall under only one of the following specific objectives and will have to prove their contribution to attain one or more of their intended results:

SPECIFIC OBJECTIVES	RESULTS
1.1 To improve the quality of public health and social services for inclusion of marginalised groups in the programme area	Result 1.1.1. Enhanced quality of and access to health services for marginalised groups
	Result 1.1.2. Upgraded quality of social services for marginalised groups
2.1 To enhance and promote commonly coordinated cross-border tourism offer based on a protected cultural and natural heritage	Result 2.1.1. Commonly developed touristic offers commercialised
	Result 2.1.2. Improved common protection and promotion of cultural and natural heritage
	Result 2.1.3. Increased cooperation among tourist operators, service providers and organic agricultural producers to jointly contribute to further tourism development

In their application, the lead applicant and its co-applicant(s) will have to refer the programme's specific objective under which their action is meant to contribute, as well as the programme's result(-s) affected by the action, and the programme's core and specific indicators⁹ that will be instrumental to measure the action's success. For the sake of consistency and aggregation, applicants must have the same units to quantify their output, outcome and impact indicators in line with the programme output, outcome and impact indicators. The programme indicators should be prioritized within the long list of potential indicators (from the regional monitoring system) provided in annex M.

The following illustrates the list of indicators that the applicants will have to include, where appropriate, to estimate the project's contribution to the programme's objectives. Applicants should confine the choice of indicators in their operation to the list provided below and in annex M, and add exceptionally some other indicators that could be necessary under their operation:

Table of core indicators for all IPA III CBC programmes displayed in the Section 3.1 of the programme document:

IPA III strategic objective for CBC	Indicators
Reconciliation, confidence building and good neighbourly relations	Number of organisations participating in cross-border networks/partnerships formed, disaggregated by type of organisation (especial mention of women's associations)
	Number of cross-border networks/partnerships formed
	Number of organisations directly involved in the implementation of projects, disaggregated by type of

⁹ Please refer to the provisions stipulated on core and specific indicators in Section 3.2 of the relevant IPA III CBC programme document.

	organisation ¹⁰ (especial mention of women's associations)
Economic, social and territorial development of border areas	Number of new jobs resulting from programme activities, disaggregated by the sex and type of vulnerable group of the new employees
	Number of new businesses established, disaggregated by the sex and age of the owner
Capacity building at all levels	Number of organisations/institutions with increased capacities, disaggregated by the type of organisation (especial mention of women's associations)

Tables of indicators belonging to the 2021-2027 IPA III programme Serbia – Montenegro for 2021-2027, which are displayed in Section 3.2/ table 3.4 of the programme document are provided below for each specific objective and programme result:

Specific objective: 1.1. To improve the quality of public health and social services for inclusion of marginalised groups in the programme area

Result/output: 1.1.1. Enhanced quality of and access to health services for marginalised groups

IMPACT INDICATORS	Number of beneficiaries of the upgraded social and health services disaggregated by sex and age ¹¹
OUTCOME INDICATORS	Number of existing health services improved
	Number of new solutions (services, tools, programmes) developed in health care sector ¹²
OUTPUT INDICATORS	Number of people with increased capacities (by sex and age)
	Number of investments in existing public health services made
	Number of pilot initiatives implemented in health sector

Result/output: 1.1.2. Upgraded quality of social services for marginalised groups

IMPACT INDICATORS	Number of beneficiaries of the upgraded social and health services disaggregated by sex and age
	Number of existing social services improved

¹⁰ Common types of organisations are: local government units, regional or canton-level government units, entity-level government units, national government units (ministries, agencies, offices), non-governmental organisations (NGOs, CSOs, associations, particularly women's associations), business (particularly tour operators), regional development agencies, educational institutions, health institutions, cultural institutions, public institutions (particularly public enterprises), public utility companies, public services, national employment agencies, social welfare organisations, local employment offices, tourism organisations, local tourism organisations, regional tourism organisations, national tourism organisations, local communities, chambers of economy, management organisations of protected areas, national (nature) parks, research institutions, protection and rescue (emergency) services, other (please specify).

¹¹ Common age groups are: 0-15, 16-30, 31-50, 51-65, 65+

¹² To be disaggregated by type of solution: services, tools, programmes

OUTCOME INDICATORS	Number of new solutions (services, tools, programmes) developed in social care sector ¹³
OUTPUT INDICATORS	Number of investments in existing social services made
	Number of joint training curricula/courses developed
	Number of people with increased capacities, sex and age disaggregated
	Number of pilot initiatives implemented in social sector
	Number of local actors that exchange their experience in the field of social inclusion, disaggregated by sex, age, focus area, expertise

Programme specific objective: 2.1. To enhance and promote commonly coordinated cross-border tourism offer based on protected cultural and natural heritage

Result/output: 2.1.1. Commonly developed touristic offers commercialised¹⁴

IMPACT INDICATORS	Number of tourist arrivals to cross-border area, sex and age disaggregated
OUTCOME INDICATORS	Number of new/improved CB tourism products ¹⁵ commercialised
	Number of tourist providers with improved competences, disaggregated by sex
	Number of training curricula matching the needs of the labour market demand in the tourism sector implemented in (vocational) education institutions
	Number of new businesses established as a result of the operation (number of women-led businesses)
OUTPUT INDICATORS	Number of new/improved sites
	Number of investments in new exhibition and interpretation methods, including accessible digital solutions and interpretation
	Number of new itineraries developed
	Number of new/improved thematic products
	Number of new/improved services
	Number of training curricula matching the needs of the labour market demand developed

¹³ To be disaggregated by type of solution: services, tools, programmes

¹⁴ In this context, the term “commercialised” means to develop, promote and put on the market a tourism product or service

¹⁵ “A tourism product is a combination of tangible and intangible elements, such as natural, cultural and man-made resources, attractions, facilities, services and activities around a specific center of interest which represents the core of the destination marketing mix and creates an overall visitor experience including emotional aspects for the potential customers. A tourism product is priced and sold through distribution channels and it has a life-cycle”, Source: UNWTO.

In that respect as the new or improved CB tourist product should be considered any combination of tangible and intangible elements, such as natural, cultural and man-made resources, attractions, facilities, services and activities from the two sides of the border around a specific center of interest, developed or improved by beneficiaries of this programme and offered in the market.

	Number of people with increased capacity for provision of complementary services
	Number of people with increased capacities related to the management and provision of tourism services and products, sex and age disaggregated
	Number of participants in visibility and communication events organised to promote the new tourism products developed, sex and age disaggregated
	Number of enterprises/service providers in tourism that received support, sex and age disaggregated
	Number of people with increased capacities interested in creating/enhancing tourism business or developing a tourism product, sex and age disaggregated

Result/output: 2.1.2. Improved common protection and promotion of cultural and natural heritage

IMPACT INDICATORS	Number of tourist arrivals to cross-border area, sex and age disaggregated
OUTCOME INDICATORS	Number of newly established thematic routes
	Number of people living in the eligible area participating in cultural exchange activities, sex and age disaggregated
	Number of cultural and natural heritage sites covered by joint risk measures/management plans for prevention of risks and manmade hazards
OUTPUT INDICATORS	Number of knowledge bases established
	Number of cultural heritage places received support
	Number of natural heritage places received support
	Number of people with increased capacity for common cultural heritage preservation and management, sex and age disaggregated
	Number of cross-border intangible cultural/natural heritage coordination bodies established, number of women and members of vulnerable groups in those bodies
	Number of new inclusive cultural and sport events (tournaments, concerts, festivals, exhibitions, etc.-to be disaggregated) to connect people of the programme area organised
	Number of joint risk management plans developed
	Number of small-scale investments

Result/output: 2.1.3. Increased cooperation among tourist operators, service providers and organic agricultural producers to jointly contribute to further tourism development

IMPACT INDICATORS	Number of tourist arrivals to cross-border area, sex and age disaggregated
OUTCOME INDICATORS	Number of organic farms included in CB tourist products
	Number of CB networks (including clusters) related to organic agriculture formalised
OUTPUT INDICATORS	Number of organic food producers/farms supported, sex and age disaggregated
	Number of representatives of rural households benefiting from strengthening capacities for networking related to organic agriculture, sex and age disaggregated
	Number of businesses that produce organic products included in tourism supply chains

The contracting authority will discuss with the would-be beneficiaries the **indicators** included in their application form and eventually agree upon their revision preferably prior to the contract signature or otherwise in the very beginning of the period of implementation. This is meant to improve the quality of the project indicators to capture all results at the level of overall objective/impact, specific objective(s)/outcomes and outputs.

Applicants are advised that according to the provisions of the Article 4.3 of the special conditions of the grant contract they will quarterly have to report on the achievement of indicators through an information system. These reports will be submitted at regular intervals on 31 March, 30 June, 30 September and 31 December every year and then upon the submission of the final report. The Joint Technical Secretariat (JTS) of the programme will be available for technical support while using this information system and will carry out a sort of validation of the submitted data. Additionally, according to the provisions of the Article 4.3 of the special conditions of the grant contract, applicants will quarterly have to submit progress report to the Contracting Authority at regular intervals on 31 March, 30 June, 30 September and 31 December every year and then upon the submission of the final report.

Baseline data surveys: All applicants are advised to devote some time while preparing their application to collect statistics from relevant bodies or conduct surveys by their own to determine the baseline data of their indicators. Applicants are reminded that expenses such as these, related to the preparation of the application, are ineligible. However, during the period of implementation of the action, the expertise costs associated to the launch of surveys (particularly recommendable for qualitative indicators) and the collection and analysis of statistics to refine or amend the baseline data of the operation indicators may be eligible. The contracting authority strongly recommends that the applicants envisage an amount in the budget for this purpose.

Location:

Actions or operations must have as final beneficiaries the population of the programme area. Activities must take place in one or more of the following territorial units¹⁶:

1. For the Republic of Serbia:

- Zlatiborski District: the municipalities of Nova Varoš, Priboj, Prijepolje, and Sjenica;
- Raški District: the municipalities of Kraljevo, Vrnjačka Banja, Novi Pazar, Raška, and Tutin and
- Moravički District: the municipality of Ivanjica.

2. For Montenegro:

- The municipalities of Andrijevica, Berane, Bijelo Polje, Gusinje, Kolašin, Mojkovac, Nikšić, Petnjica, Plav, Plužine, Pljevlja, Rožaje, Šavnik, and Žabljak.

Types of action

Actions or operations selected under this cross-border cooperation programme shall deliver clear cross-border impacts and benefits, that is, they must:

- take place in the specific programme area of the Republic of Serbia, and Montenegro;
- have cross-border impacts and benefits in parts of the programme area of the Republic of Serbia and Montenegro;
- envisage cooperation of the cross-border applicant and co-applicant(s) in both:
 - joint development: applicant and co-applicant(s) cooperate in designing the action, filling in a joint application form and drawing up their respective budget;
 - joint implementation: grant beneficiaries coordinate, in the frame of the operation, their activities across the border, and carry out most of the project activities together and not as independent, unrelated, mechanically reproduced and country-bound initiatives;
- envisage cooperation of the cross-border applicant and co-applicant(s) in either:
 - joint staffing: staff on both sides of the border act as one project team (e.g., some staffers carry out their duties for all entities in the partnership: procurement, financial management, overall coordination, training planning, etc.); or
 - joint financing: activities are financed by the applicant's and co-applicant(s)'s own budget;
 - or both joint staffing and financing.

Briefly, following the joint development of an operation by at least two cross-border partners, **full cross-border cooperation would mean the joint implementation and financing of activities by the partners resulting in the intensification of neighbourly relations, sustainable partnerships for socio-economic development and/or the removal of obstacles to this development.**

¹⁶ Please note that some activities may take place outside the programme eligible area in exceptional, well justified circumstances, but always for the benefit of its population.

The following types of action are ineligible:

- actions concerned only or mainly with individual sponsorships for participation in workshops, seminars, conferences and congresses;
- actions concerned only or mainly with individual scholarships for studies or training courses or research;
- actions and measures that may result in violation of human rights in partner countries or causing significant adverse effects on the environment or the climate¹⁷;
- actions concerned only or mainly at the upgrading of infrastructure and equipment in privately owned facilities;
- actions containing preparatory studies or the preparation of preliminary design for works to be carried out as part of the operation;
- actions without genuine cross-border impacts and benefits¹⁸;
- actions linked to political parties;
- actions concerned only or mainly with commercial and profit-making activities¹⁹;
- actions exclusively confined to charitable donations;
- actions covered and financed by other EU funded programmes.

Types of activity:

Indicative types of activities which may be financed under this call for proposals are given below. The following list, extracted from the IPA III CBC programme document, is not exhaustive and appropriate innovative activities that are not mentioned below may also be considered for financing when they can clearly contribute to the achievement of the call's priorities. By way of illustration applications could contain a range of the following activities in relation to the programme's results targeted in the call:

Specific objective 1.1: To improve the quality of public health and social services for inclusion of marginalised groups in the programme area	
Result 1.1.1. Enhanced quality of and access to health services for marginalised groups	
Activities	▪ Activities aiming at improvement of existing health services and their accessibility, diversity, and inclusiveness • small scale investments in equipment and/or renovation/adaptation/accessibility of facilities for provision of services • joint capacity building of public service providers, based on needs assessment and professional learning and development plan • pilot initiatives focusing on the joint development of new solutions (services, tools, programmes, e.g. joint services delivery, strengthening of health care for vulnerable groups, inter-municipal approach, development and implementing ICT solutions beneficial to improve public health services), including, but not limited to: mobile teams, hot lines, intersectional approach; pilot initiatives encouraged to include relevant CSOs working directly with vulnerable groups.

¹⁷ Article 29 NDICI.

¹⁸ The cross-border partnership **must produce a tangible added value** (i.e., the problems of the target groups and final beneficiaries are solved more efficiently and effectively by utilizing the partnership than they would be solved if applicants and affiliated entity(ies) would have acted independently.

¹⁹ In case the project generates revenue, it shall be used to finance the operation, together with the other sources of funding. Revenue of an operation means cash in-flows directly paid by users for the goods and services provided by the operation, such as charges borne directly by users for the use of infrastructure, sale or rent of land or buildings, or payment for services incurred during the period of implementation of the operation.

Result 1.1.2. Upgraded quality of social services for marginalised groups	
Activities	• Activities aiming at improvement of existing or introducing new gender and diversity sensitive and inclusive social services and their accessibility • Youth-driven activities promoting social innovation related to social and active inclusion • Pilot initiatives focusing on the joint development of new solutions for social inclusion (services, tools, programmes, e.g. joint services delivery, strengthening of social care for vulnerable groups, intermunicipal approach, development and implementing ICT solutions beneficial to improve access to and quality of social care services, intersectional mobile teams, community-based services, hot lines); • Joint capacity building of service providers for delivering quality services for marginalised groups • Small scale investments in equipment and/or renovation/adaptation or accessibility of facilities for provision of services • Cross-border identification and exchange of good practices in the field of social/active inclusion • Exchanging knowledge, best practices, and information between participating institutions, CSOs and volunteers
Specific objective 2.1: To enhance and promote commonly coordinated cross-border tourism offer based on a protected cultural and natural heritage	
Result 2.1.1. Commonly developed touristic offers commercialised	
Activities	• Small scale investments in conservation of natural and cultural heritage sites, related to infrastructure for visitors and its accessibility (e.g. walking paths, equipping visitor centres, cycle routes, signing and lighting, health paths...), development of tourist attractions accessible to persons with disabilities (e.g. stairs, restrooms, access points...) • Investments in new exhibition and interpretation methods, including assessable digital solutions and interpretation • Creation, improvement and connection of local offers (food, crafts, accommodation and other services), especially exploring community-based forms of tourism/offers • Complementing specific thematic products (e.g. hiking, biking, culture, nature), with special focus to women-led product providers • Integration of local offers itineraries, packages • Skill development for raising quality of services, particularly focused on women and youth • Activities for developing and accrediting curricula for matching the needs of labour market demand in the tourism sector • Introducing of quality standards • Destination management and promotion • Establishment of common structures to coordinate and promote CB tourist products • Joint branding strategy, marketing actions, digital market • Support to innovative solutions in tourism and related sectors (e.g. introduction of a holistic approach for the development of rural areas, connecting everything that the area has to offer into one consolidated offer, green energy, ICT...) • Capacity building of employees
Result 2.1.2. Improved common protection and promotion of cultural and natural heritage	
Activities	• Activities related to set up cross-border platforms and networks, such as: cross-border mapping of common cultural heritage, identification of good practices in the conservation, protection and valorisation • Provision of capacity building on preservation, promotion and management of cultural and natural heritage • Preparation of joint programmes leading to qualifications in tourism and cultural and natural heritage

	• Investments in restorations, accessibility and revitalisation of cultural heritage • Investments in protection of natural heritage and value • Common management of cultural and natural heritage • Promotion of cultural and natural heritage • Developing and organising cultural co-operation activities in the border region – people to people actions (e.g. festivals, artistic manifestations and events/mobile exhibitions, sport programmes, knowledge transfer...) • Joint planning, awareness campaigns and other activities of risk management on cultural and natural sites of touristic relevance • Pilot small scale interventions (e.g. building flood defence canals, sanitations of riverbanks, afforestation) on cultural and natural sites of touristic relevance.
Result 2.1.3. Increased cooperation among tourist operators, service providers and organic agricultural producers to jointly contribute to further tourism development	
Activities	• Activities related to support for organic food producers/farms especially women and persons belonging to vulnerable groups • Integration of businesses in existing/new networks related to organic agriculture • Developing clusters of agricultural (organic) producers • Developing tourism supply chains for organic products.

Financial support to third parties²⁰

Applicants may not propose financial support to third parties.

Visibility

The applicants must take all necessary steps to ensure the visibility of the European Union as the funder or co-founder of the action, through the correct and prominent display of the EU emblem and relevant funding statement. Unless the European Commission agrees otherwise, actions that are wholly or partially funded by the European Union must ensure the visibility of EU financing by displaying the EU emblem in accordance with the guidelines set out in the Operational guidelines for recipients of EU funding, published by the European Commission. If applicable, communication activities may be undertaken to raise the awareness of specific or general audiences of the reasons for the action and the EU support for the action in the country or region concerned, as well as the results and the impact of this support.

All measures and activities relating to visibility and, if applicable, communication, must comply with the latest Communication and Visibility Requirements for EU-funded external action, laid down and published by the European Commission (Communication and Visibility Requirements for EU External Actions | International Partnerships (europa.eu)).

Derogation from contractual visibility obligations is permitted in exceptional situations, which may be required in the framework of this action due to security issues for the staff and beneficiaries, local political sensitivities, when this is in the interest of the beneficiary or the contracting authority. In such cases, visibility tools, products, and channels to be used in promoting a given action will be determined on a case-by-case basis, in consultation and agreement with the EU prior to limiting EU visibility. Requests for derogation from contractual visibility obligations should be included in Annex A.2 – Full application form and negotiated as part of the Special Conditions of the contract.

²⁰ These third parties are neither affiliated entity(ies) nor associates nor contractors.

OR

Number of applications and grants per applicants / affiliated entities²¹

The lead applicant may not submit more than 1 application per thematic priority under this call for proposals.

The lead applicant may not be awarded more than 1 grant under this call for proposals.

The lead applicant may not be a co-applicant or an affiliated entity in another application of the same thematic priority at the same time.

A co-applicant/affiliated entity may not be the co-applicant or affiliated entity in more than 1 application per thematic priority under this call for proposals.

A co-applicant/affiliated entity may not be awarded more than 1 grant under this call for proposals.

Failing to comply with all requirements related to the number of applications per applicants / affiliated entities will lead to rejection of all applications where the said lead applicant/co-applicant/affiliated entity appears.

In case when faculties/research centres within university are not separate legal entities, these limitations are applied to each faculty/research centre and not to university representing faculty as lead applicant, co-applicant or affiliated entity.

Form of the grant

The grants awarded under this call for proposals take the following form:

- Reimbursement of eligible costs that may be based on any or a combination of the following forms as per Section 2.1.4:
 - (i) actual costs incurred by the beneficiary(ies) and affiliated entity(ies);
 - (ii) one or more simplified cost options.

2.1.4. *Eligibility of costs and eligibility of results/conditions*

Reimbursement of costs

Where the grant takes the form of reimbursement of costs (entirely or partially), only 'eligible costs' can be covered by a grant. The categories of costs that are eligible and non-eligible are indicated below. The budget is both a cost estimate and an overall ceiling for 'eligible costs'.

Eligible costs can be reimbursed either as actual costs²² and/or as simplified cost options.

Simplified cost options may take the form of:

Single lump sum

²¹ In case that one legal entity, being lead applicant, co-applicant or affiliated entity, is placed on both lists for financing, the award criteria will be better overall score of the project proposal, regardless of the ranking position on the particular list for financing.

²² Please note that where volunteer costs are accepted as co-financing, it shall be determined on the basis of the unit cost per volunteer per day as defined and authorised by the European Commission at the following address: <https://ec.europa.eu/info/funding-tenders/opportunities/docs/2021-2027/common/guidance/unit-cost-decision>.

The grant may take the form of a single lump-sum covering the entire eligible costs of an action or a work programme.

Single lump sums may be determined on the basis of the estimated budget, which should comply with the principles of economy, efficiency and effectiveness. Compliance with these principles shall be verified ex ante at the time of evaluation of the grant application.

When using this form of financing, the description of the action shall include detailed information on the essential conditions triggering the payment, including, where applicable, the achievement of outputs and/or results.

This type of simplified cost option can be proposed by the applicants (no threshold is applicable) at proposal's stage (Grant application form – Full application). In case the evaluation committee and the contracting authority are not satisfied with the quality of the justification provided, reimbursement on the basis of actually incurred costs is always possible.

The methods used by the beneficiary(ies) to determine the amounts shall be clearly described and substantiated in the budget and shall ensure compliance with the principle of co-financing and no double funding. Only costs that are directly linked to the action implementation and can therefore be attributed to it are eligible, and can be included. They must not include any indirect costs (e.g. via cost drivers), ineligible costs or costs already declared under another costs item or heading of the budget of this contract.

Additionally, in Annex B, in the second column of worksheet no.2, 'Justification of the estimated costs' per each of the corresponding budget item or heading, applicants must describe the information and methods used to establish the amounts of lump sums, to which costs they refer.

The evaluation committee and the contracting authority decide whether to accept the proposed amounts on the basis of the provisional budget submitted by the applicants, by analysing factual data of grants carried out by the applicants or of similar actions. In case the evaluation committee and the contracting authority are not satisfied with the quality of the justification provided reimbursement on the basis of actually incurred costs is always possible.

No threshold is set ex-ante for the total amount of financing that can be authorised by the contracting authority on the basis of simplified cost options.

Eligible direct costs

To be eligible under this call for proposals, costs must comply with the provisions of Article 14 of the general conditions to the standard grant contract (see Annex G of the guidelines).

NOTE: The total costs for Human Resources (Budget Heading 1) and Local Office (Budget Heading 4) must not exceed the 30% of the total eligible costs of the action.

Salary costs of the personnel of national, regional or local administrations, as well as those of other publicly owned or controlled institutions or enterprises, may be eligible to the extent that they relate to the cost of activities which the relevant public authority would not carry out if the action or operation were not undertaken.

These personnel shall not receive for the engagement in the project activities any other remuneration than their standard, regular salaries in their respective institutions.

The total sum of the salaries of these personnel shall not exceed the amount of co-financing provided by the applicant, co-applicant(s) and affiliated entity(-ies).

Prior to the signature of a grant contract, the contracting authority may require from the relevant beneficiaries the appointment of these staffers by their authorised representative in writing (indicating their names, project function and gross salaries).

Please note that this does not apply to professional staff recruited by the national, regional or local administrations, as well as other publicly owned or controlled institutions or enterprises, for the sole purpose of managing the project resulting from the grant award.

Recommendations to award a grant are always subject to the condition that the checks preceding the signing of the grant contract do not reveal problems requiring changes to the budget (such as arithmetical errors, inaccuracies, and in case of reimbursement of costs, unrealistic costs and ineligible costs). The checks may give rise to requests for clarification and may lead the contracting authority to impose modifications or reductions to address such mistakes or inaccuracies. It is not possible to increase the grant or the percentage of EU co-financing as a result of these corrections.

It is therefore in the applicants' interest to provide a realistic and cost-effective budget.

Contingency reserve

The budget may include a contingency reserve not exceeding 5 % of the estimated direct eligible costs (in case of actions comprising also financing not linked to costs, to be calculated on the cost-based component). It can only be used with the prior written authorisation of the contracting authority.

Eligible indirect costs

The indirect costs incurred in carrying out the action may be eligible for flat rate funding, but the total must not exceed 7% of the estimated total eligible direct costs (except volunteer costs and project office costs). Indirect costs are eligible provided that they do not include costs assigned to another budget heading in the standard grant contract. The lead applicant may be asked to justify the percentage requested before the grant contract is signed. However, once the flat rate has been fixed in the special conditions of the grant contract, no supporting documents need to be provided.

If any of the applicants or affiliated entity(ies) is in receipt of an operating grant financed by the EU, it may not claim indirect costs on its incurred costs within the proposed budget for the action.

Contributions in kind

Contributions in kind mean the provision of goods or services to beneficiaries or affiliated entities free of charge by a third party. As contributions in kind do not involve any expenditure for beneficiaries or affiliated entities, they are not eligible costs (except for personnel costs for the work carried out by volunteers under an action or an operating grant if so authorised).

Contributions in kind may not be treated as co-financing.

However, if the description of the action as proposed includes contributions in kind, the contributions have to be made.

Other co-financing shall be based on estimates provided by the applicant.

Ineligible costs

Costs that do not comply with the conditions laid down in the contract are not eligible. The following costs are not eligible²³:

- debts and debt service charges (interest),
- provisions for losses, debts or potential future liabilities,
- costs declared by the beneficiary(ies) and financed by another action or work programme receiving a European Union (including through EDF) grant,

²³ The list encompasses the provisions of Section 2.1.5 of the standard PRAG June 2022 template for the guidelines for applicants, the provisions of Article 14.9 of the general conditions for grant contracts (PRAG version January 2025), the provisions of Article 6 of the annex II – general conditions of the IPA III financing agreement and the provisions of Article 29(3) of the FFPA for IPA III.

- purchases of land and existing buildings, except where justified by the nature of the programme in the financing decision, in which case ownership must be transferred in accordance with Article 7.5 of the general conditions of the standard grant contract, at the latest at the end of the action,
- currency exchange losses,
- in kind contributions (except for volunteers' work),
- bonuses included in costs of staff,
- negative interest charged by banks or other financial institutions,
- credit to third parties,
- bank charges, costs of guarantees and similar charges,
- fines and financial penalties,
- expenses of litigation,
- value added tax (VAT) except when it is non-recoverable under national VAT legislation,
- taxes, customs and import duties and levies and/or charges having equivalent effect.

2.1.5. Ethics and values

Absence of conflict of interest

The applicant must not be affected by any conflict of interest and must have no equivalent relation in that respect with other applicants or parties involved in the actions. Any attempt by an applicant to obtain confidential information, enter into unlawful agreements with competitors or influence the evaluation committee or the contracting authority during the process of examining, clarifying, evaluating and comparing applications will lead to the rejection of its application and may result in exclusion decisions for other award procedures and/or financial penalties according to the Financial Regulation in force.

Respect of environmental legislation and core labour standards

Applicants who are awarded a grant must comply with the environmental legislation including multilateral environmental agreements, and with the core labour standards as applicable and as defined in the relevant International Labour Organisation conventions (such as the conventions on freedom of association and collective bargaining; elimination of forced and compulsory labour; abolition of child labour).

Respect of EU values

Applicants who are awarded a grant must commit to and ensure the respect of basic EU values, such as respect for human dignity, freedom, democracy, equality, the rule of law and human rights, including the rights of minorities.

Zero tolerance for sexual exploitation, abuse and harassment

The European Commission applies a policy of 'zero tolerance' in relation to all wrongful conduct which has an impact on the professional credibility of the applicant.

Physical abuse or punishment, or threats of physical abuse, sexual abuse or exploitation, harassment and verbal abuse, as well as other forms of intimidation shall be prohibited.

Successful applicants (and affiliated entities) other than (i) natural persons, (ii) pillar-assessed entities and (iii) governments and other public bodies shall assess their internal policy against sexual exploitation, abuse and harassment (SEA-H) through a self-evaluation questionnaire (Annex L). For grants of EUR 60 000 or less no self-evaluation is required. Such self-evaluation questionnaire is not part of the evaluation of the full application by the contracting authority, but is an administrative requirement. See Section 6.2.10. of the practical guide.

Anti-corruption and anti-bribery

The applicant shall comply with all applicable laws, regulations and codes relating to anti-bribery and anti-corruption. The contracting authority reserves the right to suspend or cancel project financing if corrupt practices of any kind are discovered at any stage of the award process or during the execution of a contract and if the contracting authority fails to take all appropriate measures to remedy the situation. For the purposes of this provision, 'corrupt practices' are the offer of a bribe, gift, gratuity or commission to any person as an inducement or reward for performing or refraining from any act relating to the award of a contract or execution of a contract already concluded with the contracting authority.

Unusual commercial expenses

Applications will be rejected or contracts terminated if it emerges that the award or execution of a contract has given rise to unusual commercial expenses. Such unusual commercial expenses are commissions not mentioned in the main contract or not stemming from a properly concluded contract referring to the main contract, commissions not paid in return for any actual and legitimate service, commissions remitted to a tax haven, commissions paid to a payee who is not clearly identified or commissions paid to a company which has every appearance of being a front company.

Grant beneficiaries found to have paid unusual commercial expenses on projects funded by the European Union are liable, depending on the seriousness of the facts observed, to have their contracts terminated or to be excluded from receiving EU/EDF funds.

Breach of obligations, irregularities or fraud

The contracting authority reserves the right to suspend or cancel the procedure, where the award procedure proves to have been subject to breach of obligations, irregularities or fraud. If breach of obligations, irregularities or fraud are discovered after the award of the contract, the contracting authority may refrain from concluding the contract.

2.2 HOW TO APPLY AND THE PROCEDURES TO FOLLOW

Restricted call for proposals

2.2.1 Concept note content

Applications must be submitted in accordance with the concept note instructions in the grant application form annexed to these guidelines (Annex A). Lead applicants should then keep strictly to the format of the concept note and fill in the paragraphs and pages in order.

Applicants must apply in English.

WARNING

The title of your proposal will become, if selected, the subject matter of the grant contract that will be signed with your organisation.

On the [Europa](#) website, the field 'Public subject', using the title of the selected proposal, is used for publication in the Financial Transparency System (FTS) of all EU grants. This field, being intended for the general public, should provide general and clear information on the purpose of the expenditure.

We therefore recommend defining the subject matter of your proposal along the following indications.

An appropriate subject:

- refers to the content of the project or its objective;
- does not repeat information available in other fields such as the recipient's name, the programme, the year;
- is preferably written in English;
- may contain acronyms if relevant for the citizens;
- may contain the reference to the project or programme.

Please note that:

1. In the concept note, lead applicants must only provide an estimate of the requested EU contribution as well as an indicative percentage of that contribution in relation to the eligible costs of the action (the percentage only applicable, where the grant takes the form, entirely or partially, of reimbursement of costs).
2. A detailed budget is to be submitted only by the lead applicants invited to submit a full application in the second phase.
3. The elements outlined in the concept note may not be modified in the full application, except for the changes described below:
 - The EU contribution may not vary from the initial estimate by more than 20%. Lead applicants are free to adapt the percentage of co-financing required within the minimum and maximum amount and percentages of co-financing, as laid down in these guidelines in Section 1.3 (only applicable in the case of grants taking the form, totally or partially, of reimbursement of costs).
 - The lead applicant may add, remove or replace one or more co-applicant(s) or affiliated entity(ies) only in duly justified cases.
 - The lead applicant may adjust the duration of the action if unforeseen circumstances beyond the applicants' control have taken place following the submission of the concept note and require such adaptation (risk of action not being carried out). In such cases, the duration must remain within the limits imposed by the guidelines for applicants.
 - Own contributions by the applicants can be replaced by other donors' contributions at any time.

An explanation/justification of the relevant replacements/adjustments shall be included in the full application form (Section 2.1.1). Should the explanation/justification not be accepted by the evaluation committee, the proposal may be rejected on that sole basis.

4. Only the concept note form will be evaluated. It is therefore of utmost importance that this document contains all relevant information concerning the action. No additional annexes shall be sent apart from the Declaration by the Lead Applicant, latest Statute or Articles of association and Extract from relevant official register or institution (not older than one year before submission deadline) of the lead applicant, of each co-applicant and of each affiliated entity (if any).

Please complete the concept note form carefully and as clearly as possible so that it can be assessed properly.

Please note that incomplete concept notes may be rejected. Lead applicants are advised to verify that their concept note is complete using the checklist for concept note (Part A Section 2 of the grant application form).

Any error or major discrepancy related to the concept note instructions may lead to the rejection of the concept note.

Clarifications will only be requested when information provided is not sufficient to conduct an objective assessment.

2.2.2. Where and how to send concept notes

The concept note, declaration by the lead applicant (to be found in **Part A Section 3** of the grant application form) and latest Statute or Articles of association and Extract from relevant official register or institution (not older than one year before submission deadline) of the lead applicant, of each co-applicant and of each affiliated entity (if any) must be submitted in one original and 3 copies in A4 size, each bound. Hand-written concept notes will not be accepted.

An electronic version of the concept note must also be submitted. A CD-Rom or USB stick with the concept note in electronic format will be included, along with the paper version, in a sealed envelope as described below. The electronic file must contain **exactly the same** application as the paper version enclosed.

Where lead applicants send several different concept notes (if allowed to do so by the guidelines of the call), each one must be sent separately.

The envelope must bear the **reference number and the title of the call for proposals**, together with Thematic Priority, the full name and address of the lead applicant, and the words 'Not to be opened before the opening session' and 'Ne otvarati pre početka sastanka za otvaranje projektnih predloga'.

To reduce expense and waste, we strongly recommend that you do not use plastic folders or dividers. Please also use double-sided printing if possible.

Concept notes must be submitted in a sealed envelope by registered mail, private courier service or by hand-delivery (a signed and dated certificate of receipt will be given to the deliverer) to the address below:

Postal address

Ministry of Finance

Department for Contracting and Financing of EU Funded Programmes (CFCU)

Division for Tender Evaluation and Contracting

53 Balkanska Str, ground floor/ registry office

11000 Belgrade, Republic of Serbia

Address for hand delivery

Ministry of Finance

Department for Contracting and Financing of EU Funded Programmes (CFCU)

Division for Tender Evaluation and Contracting

53 Balkanska Str, ground floor/ registry office

11000 Belgrade, Republic of Serbia

Concept notes sent by any other means (e.g. by fax or by e-mail) or delivered to other addresses will be rejected.

2.2.3. Deadline for submission of concept notes

The applicants' attention is drawn to the fact that there are two different systems for sending concept notes: one is by post or private courier service, the other is by hand delivery.

In the first case, the concept note must be sent before the date for submission, as evidenced by the postmark or deposit slip²⁴, but in the second case it is the acknowledgment of receipt given at the time of the delivery of the concept note which will serve as proof.

The deadline for the submission of concept notes is 26 January 2026 as evidenced by the date of dispatch, the postmark or the date of the deposit slip. In the case of hand-deliveries, the deadline for receipt is at 26 January 2026, before 15:00 hours CET, as evidenced by the signed and dated receipt. Any concept note submitted after the deadline will be rejected.

The contracting authority may, for reasons of administrative efficiency, reject any concept note submitted on time to the postal service but received, for any reason beyond the contracting authority's control, after the effective date of approval of the concept note evaluation, if accepting concept notes that were submitted on time but arrived late would considerably delay the evaluation procedure) or jeopardise decisions already taken and notified (see indicative calendar under Section 2.7).

2.2.4. Further information about concept notes

Information sessions on this call for proposals will be held in the Republic of Serbia and Montenegro. The dates, time and location of these sessions will be announced within 15 days of the publication of this call for proposals, on:

- The programme website <http://cbcsrb-mne.org/>
- The website of the contracting authority <http://www.cfcu.gov.rs>
- The website of DG International Partnerships https://ec.europa.eu/international-partnerships/funding/looking-for-funding_en or Funding & Tender opportunities (F&T Portal) <https://ec.europa.eu/info/funding-tenders/opportunities/portal/screen/home>

Questions may be sent by e-mail no later than 21 days before the deadline for the submission of concept notes to the address(es) below, indicating clearly the reference of the call for proposals:

E-mail address: cfcu.questions@mfin.gov.rs

The contracting authority has no obligation to provide clarifications to questions received after this date.

Replies will be given no later than 11 days before the deadline for submission of concept notes.

To ensure equal treatment of applicants, the contracting authority cannot give a prior opinion on the eligibility of lead applicants, co-applicants, affiliated entity(ies), an action or specific activities.

No individual replies will be given to questions. All questions and answers as well as other important notices to applicants during the course of the evaluation procedure will be published on the website where the call was published: website of DG International Partnerships https://ec.europa.eu/international-partnerships/funding/looking-for-funding_en and/or Funding & Tender opportunities (F&T Portal) <https://ec.europa.eu/info/funding-tenders/opportunities/portal/screen/home> and the website of the contracting authority <http://www.cfcu.gov.rs> and that of the program <https://cbcsrb-mne.org/>, as the need arises. It is therefore advisable to consult the abovementioned website regularly in order to be informed of the questions and answers published.

Please note that the contracting authority may decide to cancel the call for proposals procedure at any stage according to the conditions set out in Section 6.5.9 of the practical guide.

2.2.5. Full applications

Lead applicants invited to submit a full application following pre-selection of their concept note must do so using Part B of the grant application form annexed to these guidelines (Annex A). Lead applicants should then keep strictly to the format of the grant application form and fill in the paragraphs and pages in order.

²⁴ It is recommended to use registered mail in case the postmark would not be readable.

Please note that the elements outlined in the concept note may not be modified in the full application except for the changes described below:

- The EU contribution may not vary from the initial estimate by more than 20 %. Lead applicants are free to adapt the percentage of co-financing required within the minimum and maximum amount and percentages of co-financing, as laid down in these guidelines in Section 1.3 (only applicable in the case of grants taking the form, totally or partially, of reimbursement of costs).
- The lead applicant may add, remove or replace one or more co-applicant(s) or affiliated entity(ies) only in duly justified cases.
- The lead applicant may adjust the duration of the action if unforeseen circumstances beyond the applicants control have taken place following the submission of the concept note and require such adaptation (risk of action not being carried out). In such cases, the duration must remain within the limits imposed by the guidelines for applicants.

An explanation/justification of the relevant replacements/adjustments shall be included in Section 2.1.1. of the full application form. Should the explanation/justification not be accepted by the evaluation committee, the proposal may be rejected on that sole basis.

The elements outlined in the concept note that cannot change in the full application are:

- The number and title of the thematic priority/specific objective of the call under which the concept note was submitted;
- the specific objective(s)/outcomes of the action;
- its intended outputs;
- its target groups and final beneficiaries.

Lead applicants must submit their full applications in the same language as their concept notes.

Please complete the full application form carefully and as clearly as possible so that it can be assessed properly.

Any error related to the points listed in the checklist (Part B, Section 7 of the grant application form) or any major inconsistency in the full application (e.g. if the amounts in the budget worksheets are inconsistent) may lead to the rejection of the application.

Clarifications will only be requested when information provided is unclear and thus prevents the contracting authority from conducting an objective assessment.

Please note that only the full application form and the published annexes which have to be filled in (budget, logical framework) will be transmitted to the evaluators (and assessors, if used). It is therefore of utmost importance that these documents contain all the relevant information concerning the action. **With the full application the lead applicant also has to submit completed the offline PADOR registration form (Annex F) for the lead applicant, each co-applicant (if any) and each affiliated entity²⁵ (if any).**

Please note that incomplete applications may be rejected. Lead Applicants are advised to verify that their application is complete using the checklist (Section 7 of Part B of the grant application form). Please note that the following documents should be submitted together with the offline PADOR registration form and the full application:

1. The statutes or articles of association of the lead applicant, of each co-applicant (if any) and of each affiliated entity (if any). Where the contracting authority has recognised the lead applicant's, or the co-applicant(s)'s, or their affiliated entity(ies)'s eligibility for another call for proposals under the same budget line within 2 years before the deadline for receipt of applications, it shall submit instead a copy of the document proving their eligibility in a former call (e.g. a copy of the special conditions of a grant contract received during the reference period), unless a change in legal status has occurred

²⁵ Natural persons who apply for a grant (if so allowed in the guidelines for applicants) do not have to provide an organisation data form. In this case, the information included in the grant application form is sufficient.

in the meantime. This obligation does not apply to international organisations that have been subject of a pillar assessment.

2. A completed identification form (see Annex D).
3. The declaration on honour (Annex H to these guidelines) signed by the lead applicant as well as all co-applicants and affiliated entities certifying that they are not in one of the exclusion situations (see Section 2.4.2 of the practical guide) where the amount of the grant exceeds EUR 15 000.
4. In addition, for the purpose of the evaluation of the financial capacity, the following documents should be submitted²⁶:

- a. For action grants exceeding EUR 750 000 and for operating grants above EUR 100 000, the lead applicant must provide an audit report produced by an approved external auditor where it is available, and always in cases where a statutory audit is required by EU or national law. That report shall certify the accounts of the lead applicant for up to the last three available financial years.

In all other cases, the applicant shall provide a self-declaration signed by its authorised representative certifying the validity of its accounts for up to the last three available financial years.

This requirement shall apply only to the first application made by a beneficiary the same contracting authority in any one financial year.

The external audit report is not required from the co-applicant(s) or affiliated entities (if any).

- b. A copy of the lead applicant's profit and loss account and the balance sheet for up to the last three financial years for which the accounts were closed²⁷. A copy of the latest account is neither required from the co-applicant(s) (if any) nor from affiliated entity(ies)(if any).

5. Please bear in mind when an operation contains the execution of works, the following supporting documents, submitted along with the full application form, will be necessary:

- a. Proof of ownership or long-term lease (at least for 10 years after the signature of the contract) of the land/assets where the works are to be executed;
- b. A positive decision on environmental impact assessment or otherwise a statement from the relevant public authority(ies) that the latter assessment(s) are/is not needed for the specific project activities;

6. Furthermore, when an operation contains the execution of works, the following supporting documents shall be submitted before the contract signature:

- a. All necessary legal authorisations (e.g.: location and construction permits).
- b. Approved/certified detailed work design or otherwise a statement by the relevant national institution(s) confirming that the national legislation(s) do/does not require the design's approval for this type of works;
- c. An indicative priced bill of quantities drawn not earlier than 2 years prior to the deadline for submission of full applications – calculated in euro.

²⁶ No supporting documents will be requested for applications for a grant not exceeding EUR 60 000, or the following categories of lead applicants: (i) natural persons in receipt of education support (ii) natural persons most in need, such as unemployed and refugees, and in receipt of direct support (iii) public bodies, including Member State organisations (iv) international organisations.

²⁷ This obligation does not apply to natural persons who have received education support or who are in most need or in receipt of direct support, nor to public bodies and to international organisations. It does not apply either when the accounts are in practice the same documents as the external audit report already provided pursuant to Section 2.2.5, point 1.

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7. Please bear in mind when an operation contains the procurement of equipment and supplies, the following supporting documents, submitted along with the full application form, will be necessary:

- a. Technical specifications of envisaged supplies (including exact quantities, presented in English, signed by representative partner.

These documents must be supplied in the form of originals, photocopies or scanned versions (i.e. showing legible stamps, signatures and dates) of the said originals. The declaration on honour on exclusion criteria shall be submitted in original. For the other documents, originals shall be kept on file for controls in accordance with the record keeping obligations laid down in Section 2.5.5. of the practical guide.

Where such documents are not in one of the official languages of the European Union or in the language of the country where the action is implemented, a translation into English language of the relevant parts of these documents proving the lead applicant's and, where applicable, co-applicants' and affiliated entity(ies)' eligibility, must be submitted for the purpose of analysing the application.

Where these documents are in an official language of the European Union other than English language, it is strongly recommended, in order to facilitate the evaluation, to provide a translation of the relevant parts of the documents, proving the lead applicant's and, where applicable, co-applicants' and affiliated entity(ies)' eligibility, into English.

If the abovementioned supporting documents are not provided by the deadline for the submission of the full application, the application may be rejected.

2.2.6. Where and how to send full applications

Full applications (i.e. the full application form, the offline PADOR registration form, the budget, the logical framework, the declaration on honour on exclusion criteria, supporting documents and the declaration by the lead applicant) must be submitted in a sealed envelope by registered mail, private courier service or by hand-delivery (a signed and dated certificate of receipt will be given to the deliverer) to the address below:

Postal address

Ministry of Finance
Department for Contracting and Financing of EU Funded Programmes (CFCU)
Division for Tender Evaluation and Contracting
53, Balkanska Str, ground floor / registry office
11000 Belgrade, Republic of Serbia

Address for hand delivery

Ministry of Finance
Department for Contracting and Financing of EU Funded Programmes (CFCU)
Division for Tender Evaluation and Contracting
53, Balkanska Str, ground floor / registry office
11000 Belgrade, Republic of Serbia

Applications sent by any other means (e.g. by fax or by e-mail) or delivered to other addresses will be rejected.

Applications must be submitted in one original and 3 copies in A4 size, each bound. The full application form, budget and logical framework and completed offline PADOR registration form, declaration on honour on exclusion criteria and the rest of supporting documents must also be supplied in electronic format (CD-ROM or USB stick) in a separate and single file (i.e. the full application must not be split into several

different files). The electronic file must contain **exactly the same** application as the paper version.²⁸ Hand-written applications will not be accepted.

The declaration by the lead applicant (Section 8 of Part B of the grant application form) and the Declaration on honour on exclusion criteria (Annex H) must be printed and stapled separately and enclosed in the envelope.

Where lead applicants send several different applications (if allowed to do so by the guidelines of the call), each one must be sent separately.

The envelope must bear the **reference number and the title of the call for proposals**, together with the number and title of the lot, the full name and address of the lead applicant, and the words 'Not to be opened before the opening session' and 'Ne otvarati pre početka zvaničnog sastanka za otvaranje predloga projekata'.

2.2.7. Deadline for submission of full applications

The applicants' attention is drawn to the fact that there are two different systems for sending full applications: one is by post or private courier service, the other is by hand delivery.

In the first case, the full application must be sent before the date for submission, as evidenced by the postmark or deposit slip, but in the second case it is the acknowledgment of receipt given at the time of the delivery of the full application that will serve as proof.

The deadline for the submission of full applications will be indicated in the letter sent to the lead applicants whose application has been pre-selected.

The contracting authority may, for reasons of administrative efficiency, reject any application submitted on time to the postal service but received, for any reason beyond the contracting authority's control, after the effective date of approval of the full application evaluation, if accepting applications that were submitted on time but arrived late would considerably delay the award procedure or jeopardise decisions already taken and notified (see indicative calendar under Section 2.7).

Any application submitted after the deadline will be rejected.

2.2.8. Further information about full applications

Questions may be sent by e-mail no later than 21 days before the deadline for the submission of full applications to the addresses listed below, indicating clearly the reference of the call for proposals:

E-mail address: cfcu.questions@mfin.gov.rs

The contracting authority has no obligation to provide clarifications to questions received after this date.

Replies will be given no later than 11 days before the deadline for the submission of full applications.

To ensure equal treatment of applicants, the contracting authority cannot give a prior opinion on the eligibility of lead applicants, co-applicants, affiliated entity(ies), or an action.

No individual replies will be given to questions. All questions and answers as well as other important notices to applicants during the course of the evaluation procedure, will be published on the website where the call was published: website of DG International Partnerships: https://ec.europa.eu/international-partnerships/funding/looking-for-funding_en and/or Funding & Tender opportunities (F&T Portal) <https://ec.europa.eu/info/funding-tenders/opportunities/portal/screen/home> and the website of the contracting authority <http://www.cfcu.gov.rs> and that of the program <https://cbcsrb-mne.org/>, as the need arises. It is therefore advisable to consult the abovementioned website regularly in order to be informed of the questions and answers published.

²⁸ Please note that Annex B (budget) and Annex C (logical framework) should be presented in the same electronic format as in their relevant templates which can be found in folder Documents to be completed (MS Excel for budget and MS Word for logical framework; not scanned PDF versions of the mentioned documents).

Please note that the contracting authority may decide to cancel the call for proposals procedure at any stage according to the conditions set out in Section 6.5.9 of the practical guide.

2.3. EVALUATION AND SELECTION OF APPLICATIONS

Applications will be examined and evaluated by the contracting authority with the possible assistance of external assessors. All applications will be assessed according to the following steps and criteria.

If the examination of the application reveals at any time that the proposed action does not meet the eligibility criteria stated in Section 2.1, the application will be rejected on this sole basis.

2.3.1. Step 1: Opening & administrative checks and concept note evaluation

During the opening and administrative check the following will be assessed:

- If the deadline has been met. Otherwise, the application will be automatically rejected.
- If the concept note satisfies all the criteria specified in the checklist in Section 2 of Part A of the grant application form. This includes also an assessment of the eligibility of the action. If any of the requested information is missing or is incorrect, the application may be rejected on that **sole** basis and the application will not be evaluated further.

The concept notes that pass this check will be evaluated on the relevance and design of the proposed action.

The concept notes will receive an overall score out of 50 using the breakdown in the evaluation grid below. The evaluation will also check on compliance with the instructions on how to complete the concept note, which can be found in Part A of the grant application form.

The evaluation criteria are divided into headings and subheadings. Each subheading will be given a score between 1 and 5 as follows: 1 = very poor; 2 = poor; 3 = adequate; 4 = good; 5 = very good.

Evaluation grid:

	Scores*	
1. Relevance of the action	Sub-score	20
1.1 Consistency with the objectives of the call: How relevant is the proposal to the objectives and priorities of the call for proposals and to the specific themes/sectors/areas or any other specific requirement stated in the guidelines for applicants? Are the expected results of the action aligned with the priorities defined in the guidelines for applicants (Section 1.2)?	5*	
1.2 Relevance to the country/region/sector needs: How relevant is the proposal to the particular needs and constraints of the eligible programme area and/or relevant sector (including synergy with other development initiatives, in particular with the goals of the Economic and Investment Plan, the new Growth Plan, the Green Agenda for the Western Balkans and the smart specialisation strategies of the Western Balkans economies, the EU Strategies for the Danube Region and the one for the Adriatic and Ionian Region, as well as avoidance of duplication)?	5	
1.3 Target groups and final beneficiaries: How clearly defined and strategically chosen are the target groups and final beneficiaries? Have their needs (as rights holders and/or duty bearers) and constraints been clearly defined? Does the proposal address them appropriately?	5	
1.4 Added value elements: Does the proposal contain particular added-value elements (e.g. innovation, best practices)?	5	
2. Design of the action	Sub-score	30
2.1 Intervention logic. Does the proposal indicate the expected results (outputs/outcomes/impacts) to be achieved by the action? Does the design of the proposed action identify explicitly the necessary sequence to achieve the desired	5x2**	

objectives beginning with inputs, moving through activities and outputs, and culminating in outcomes and impacts?		
2.2 Context analysis. Does the design of the action include a robust analysis of the needs to be addressed, including the capacities of the relevant stakeholders, especially those of the regional and local authorities? Are those also embedded adequately in the intervention logic?	5	
2.3 Risks and assumptions. Is the design based on clear assumptions (the necessary and positive conditions that allow for a successful cause-and-effect relationship between different levels of results)? Does it take into account also risks (the factors that might hinder the achievement of results)?	5	
2.4 Indicative Activities. Is the indicative list of activities linked to and consistent with the expected outputs?	5	
2.5 Cross-cutting issues: To which extent does the proposal integrate relevant cross-cutting elements such as improved capacity of local and regional authorities to tackle local challenges, environmental/climate change issues, promotion of gender equality and equal opportunities, needs of disabled people, rights of minorities and children, support to youth, democratic standards and good governance?	5	
TOTAL SCORE		50

* Note: A score of 5 (very good) will only be allocated if the concept note clearly demonstrates how it specifically addresses one of the specific objectives of the call as indicated in Section 1.2 (objectives of the programme) of these guidelines.

** This score is multiplied by 2 because of its importance

Once all concept notes have been assessed, a list will be drawn up with the proposed actions ranked according to their total score.

Firstly, only the concept notes with a score of at least 30 will be considered for pre-selection.

Secondly, the number of concept notes will be reduced, taking account of the ranking per thematic priority, to the number of concept notes whose total aggregate amount of requested contributions is equal to, at least 250% of the available budget for this call for proposals. The amount of requested contributions of each concept note will be based on the indicative financial envelopes for each thematic priority, where relevant.

After the evaluation of concept notes, the contracting authority will send letters to all lead applicants, indicating whether their application was submitted by the deadline, informing them of the reference number they have been allocated, whether the concept note was evaluated and the results of that evaluation. The pre-selected lead applicants will subsequently be invited to submit full applications.

2.3.2. Step 2: Opening & administrative checks and Evaluation of the full application

Firstly, the following will be assessed:

- If the submission deadline has been met. Otherwise, the application will automatically be rejected.]
- If the full application satisfies all the criteria specified in the checklist (Section 7 of Part B of the grant application form). This includes also an assessment of the eligibility of the action. If any of the requested information is missing or is incorrect, the application may be rejected on that **sole** basis and the application will not be evaluated further.

The full applications that pass this check: they will be further evaluated on their quality, including the proposed budget and capacity of the applicants and affiliated entity(ies). They will be evaluated using the evaluation criteria in the evaluation grid below. There are two types of evaluation criteria: selection and award criteria.

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The selection criteria help to evaluate the applicant(s)'s and affiliated entity(ies)'s operational capacity and the lead applicant's financial capacity and are used to verify that they:

- have stable and sufficient sources of finance to maintain their activity throughout the proposed action and, where appropriate, to participate in its funding (this only applies to lead applicants);
- have the management capacity, professional competencies and qualifications required to successfully complete the proposed action. This applies to applicants and any affiliated entity(ies).

The award criteria help to evaluate the quality of the applications in relation to the objectives and priorities set forth in the guidelines, and to award grants to projects which maximise the overall effectiveness of the call for proposals. They help to select applications which the contracting authority can be confident will comply with its objectives and priorities. They cover the relevance of the action, its consistency with the objectives of the call for proposals, quality, expected impact, sustainability and cost-effectiveness.

Scoring:

The evaluation grid is divided into Sections and subsections. Each subsection will be given a score between 1 and 5 as follows: 1 = very poor; 2 = poor; 3 = adequate; 4 = good; 5 = very good.

Evaluation grid

Section	Maximum Score
1. Financial and operational capacity	20
1.1 Do the applicants and, if applicable, their affiliated entity(ies) have sufficient in-house experience of project management?	5
1.2 Do the applicants and, if applicable, their affiliated entity(ies) have sufficient in-house technical expertise (especially knowledge of the issues to be addressed)?	5
1.3 Do the applicants and, if applicable, their affiliated entity(ies) have sufficient in-house management capacity (including staff, equipment and ability to handle the budget for the action)?	5
1.4 Does the lead applicant have stable and sufficient sources of finance?	5
2. Relevance	20
<i>Score transferred from the Concept Note evaluation</i>	
3. Design of the action	15
3.1 Intervention logic: Does the proposal indicate the expected results (outputs/outcomes/impacts) to be achieved by the action? Does the design of the proposed action identify explicitly the necessary sequence to achieve the desired objectives beginning with inputs, moving through activities and outputs, and culminating in outcomes and impacts? Is the indicative list of activities linked to and consistent with the expected outputs?	5
3.2 Logical Framework Matrix: Is the logical framework provided in Annex C complete? Does each result (output, outcome, impact) include an adequate number of indicators that are sufficient in scope to measure its achievement? Is each indicator RACER (Relevant, Accepted, Credible, Easy to monitor, Robust)? Does each indicator have a baseline value (with year), target value (with year), and a credible source of data? If baselines and targets are not available, this is to be justified and a study (or other relevant tools) to be foreseen and budgeted in the proposal? In the case of use of FNLC, are the FNLC results and indicators clearly marked?	5
3.3 Context analysis. Does the design of the action include a robust analysis of the needs to be addressed, including the capacities of the relevant stakeholders, especially those	5

of the regional and local authorities? Are those also embedded adequately in the intervention logic?	
4. Implementation approach	20
4.1 Action plan: Is the action plan for implementing the action clear and feasible? Are types of activities clearly clustered by output in the Activities Matrix? Is the timeline realistic?	5
4.2 Monitoring, reporting and evaluation: Does the proposal include an effective and efficient monitoring and reporting system? Is the system in place adequate to update the values of the indicators included in the Logical Framework Matrix - thus informing regularly on progress towards the achievement of impact, outcomes and outputs? Is there an evaluation planned and budgeted (previous, during or/and at the end of the implementation)? If relevant, is the role of third party assessor included?	5
4.3 Project management, partners' interaction and cross-border dimension: Do the co-applicant(s) and (if applicable) their affiliated entities have the necessary technical skills to attain the objectives of the action? Are the co-applicant(s)'s and affiliated entity(ies)'s adequately involved in the implementation (e.g. advocacy, research, capacity building, outreach related activities)? Has the proposal a genuine cross-border cooperation character (joint development, joint staffing, joint implementation, joint financing)? Are the activities proposed likely to have a clear cross-border benefit and impact?	5x2
5. Sustainability of the action	15
5.1 Long-lasting benefits: Is the action likely to ensure long lasting and transformative benefits to the target groups and the final beneficiaries?	5
5.2 Multiplier effects: Is the action likely to have multiplier effects, including scope for replication, extension, cross-fertilisation and capitalisation of experience and knowledge sharing?	5
5.3 Sustainability How likely the effects are to last after the intervention ends? - Financial sustainability: which financial resources are available to fund the continuation of the services provided by the intervention? How long are they likely to be available and from which sources?) - Institutional sustainability: which institutional arrangements allow for maintaining the benefits achieved? Is there any measure in place to ensure local ownership? - Policy level sustainability (if applicable): is there any expected policy related effect from the action, e.g. improved legislation, codes of conduct, methods - Environmental sustainability (if applicable): will the action have a negative/positive environmental impact? - Risk analysis and mitigation measures: will the action be accompanied by a good risk analysis (including physical, environmental, political, economic and social risks) and relevant mitigation measures?	5
6. Budget and efficiency of the action	10
6.1 Budget: Are the activities appropriately reflected in the budget? In the case of entire or partly use of financing not linked to costs, are the results and performance indicators adequately reflected in the budget?	5
6.2 Efficiency: Is the relation between the estimated amounts as per budget and the expected results adequate?	5
Maximum total score	100

If the total score for Section 1 (financial and operational capacity) is less than 12 points, the application will be rejected. If the score for at least one of the subsections under Section 1 is 1, the application will also be rejected.

Provisional selection

After the evaluation, a table will be drawn up listing the applications ranked according to their score. The highest scoring applications will be provisionally selected until the available budget for this call for proposals is reached. In addition, a reserve list will be drawn up following the same criteria. This list will be used if more funds become available during the validity period of the reserve list.

Applications which had obtained less than 70 points as score in the ranking list will not be recommended for funding by the Evaluation Committee.

2.3.3. Verification of eligibility of the applicants and affiliated entity(ies) and other supporting documents

The eligibility verification will be performed on the basis of the supporting documents requested by the contracting authority see Section 2.2. It will by default only be performed for the applications that have been provisionally selected (including those placed on the reserve list) according to their score and within the available budget for this call for proposals. In this case:

- The declaration by the lead applicant (Section 8 of Part B of the grant application form) and declaration of honour on selection and exclusion criteria will be cross-checked with the supporting documents provided by the lead applicant. Any missing supporting document or any incoherence between the declaration by the lead applicant and the supporting documents may lead to the rejection of the application on that sole basis.
- The eligibility of applicants and the affiliated entity(ies) will be verified according to the criteria set out in Section 2.1.1, including exclusion criteria.

Any rejected application will be replaced by the next best placed application on the reserve list that falls within the available budget for this call for proposals.

In the eventuality that the evaluation committee is not satisfied with the strength, solidity, and guarantee offered by the structural link between one of the applicants and its affiliated entity, it can require the submission of the missing documents allowing for its conversion into co-applicant. If all the missing documents for co-applicants are submitted, and provided all necessary eligibility criteria are fulfilled, the above-mentioned entity becomes a co-applicant for all purposes. The lead applicant has to submit the application form revised accordingly.

2.4. AWARD DECISION

After verifying the supporting documents, the evaluation committee will make a final recommendation to the contracting authority, which will decide on the award of grants.

The contracting authority may decide not to award any grants and cancel the call for proposals without having the applicants any right to compensation.

The award decision shall indicate the successful applicants, the names of the applicants rejected, and a reserve list (if any).

2.5. NOTIFICATION OF THE CONTRACTING AUTHORITY'S DECISION

The lead applicants will be informed in writing of the contracting authority's decision concerning their application. Please note that the lead applicant is the intermediary for all communications between applicants and the contracting authority during the procedure.

In case of rejection, they will be informed about the reasons for the negative decision. For the avoidance of doubt, please note that for applications rejected for reasons such as non-compliance with the admissibility requirements (for example, if the application was sent after the deadline), with the eligibility (the entity or person is not part of the predefined eligible population of entities or persons), the selection (the entity does not have financial capacity or professional or operational capacity) and the award criteria (the proposal does

not comply with the predefined requirements such as quality, cost/efficiency), no prior adversarial procedure is required.

Applicants placed on the reserve list will also be informed. The applicable terms to the reserve list are laid down in Section 6.5. of the practical guide.

The successful applicants shall also be informed, and will be requested to provide some information and documents, including (for grants exceeding EUR 60 000) the self-evaluation questionnaire on SEA-H. The lead applicant as well as all co-applicants and affiliated entities other than (i) natural persons (ii) pillar-assessed entities and (iii) governments and other public bodies shall fill in the self-evaluation questionnaire assessing the organisation's internal policy and procedures against sexual exploitation, abuse and harassment (SEA-H) (Annex L) (see Section 6.2.10 of the practical guide).

Successful applicants will also be informed if the first instalment of pre-financing is subject to the validation of a financial guarantee by the contracting authority. In this case, the applicant will be requested to send the guarantee in time to proceed to the payment of the first instalment in accordance with the payment provisions of the grant contract.

An applicant believing that it has been harmed by an error or irregularity during the award process may lodge a complaint. See Section 2.12 of the practical guide.

2.6. SIGNATURE OF THE GRANT CONTRACT

Following the decision to award a grant, the beneficiary(ies) will be offered a contract based on the standard grant contract (see Annex G of these guidelines). By signing the application form (Annex A of these guidelines), the applicants agree, if awarded a grant, to accept the contractual conditions of the standard grant contract. Where the coordinator is an organisation whose pillars have been positively assessed, it will sign a contribution agreement based on the contribution agreement template. In this case, references to provisions of the standard grant contract and its annexes shall not apply. References in these guidelines to the grant contract shall be understood as references to the relevant provisions of the contribution agreement.

The budget proposed for the action by the successful applicants at the call for proposals stage must be corrected to remove any obvious arithmetical errors or ineligible costs prior to signing the contract. The description of the action is corrected accordingly if need be.

The contracting authority may decide that other clarifications or minor corrections may be made to the description of the action, including the logical framework matrix as referred in Section 2.1.3 above, or to the budget in so far as they do not call into question the grant award decision, do not conflict with equal treatment of applicants, and:

- relate to matters clearly identified by the evaluation committee; or
- aim at taking into consideration changes that have occurred since the date of receipt of the proposal.

These amendments cannot lead to an increase in either the amount of the grant or the percentage of the European Union contribution as set in the guidelines of the call for proposals. In this respect, records of the contacts with the applicants must be kept on the file.

In no case the conditions announced in the guidelines can be altered at this stage. Apart from the above-mentioned clarifications and/or corrections, any other alteration of the initial proposal or deviation from the award conditions laid down in the guidelines is strictly prohibited.

Any other alteration to the successful applicant's proposal, or negotiation of it, is prohibited.

2.7. INDICATIVE TIMETABLE

	DATE	TIME
1. Information meeting (if any)	Will be published separately	Will be published separately
2. Deadline for requesting any clarifications from the contracting authority	05 January 2026	15:00

3. Last date on which clarifications are issued by the contracting authority	15 January 2026	-
4. Deadline for submission of concept notes	26 January 2026	15:00
5. Information to lead applicants on opening, administrative checks and concept note evaluation (Step 1) and invitations to submit full applications	March 2026	-
6. Deadline for submission of full applications	May 2026	-
6./7. Notification of the contracting authority decision	July 2026	-
7./8. Contract signature	August 2026	-

All times are in the time zone of the country of the contracting authority.

This indicative timetable refers to provisional dates (except for dates 2, 3, and 4) and may be updated by the contracting authority during the procedure. In such cases, the updated timetable will be published on the web site where the call was published: website of DG International Partnerships: https://ec.europa.eu/international-partnerships/home_fr and/or Funding & Tender opportunities (F&T Portal) <https://ec.europa.eu/info/funding-tenders/opportunities/portal/screen/home> and the websites of the programme <https://cbcsrb-mne.org/> and the contracting authority <http://www.cfcu.gov.rs>.

2.8. EARLY DETECTION AND EXCLUSION SYSTEM

Applicants and, if they are legal entities, persons who have powers of representation, decision-making or control over them, natural or legal person that assumes unlimited liability for the debts, natural or legal person who is essential for the award or for the implementation of the legal commitment, beneficial owner or any affiliate of the applicant, are informed that, should they be in one of the situations of early detection or exclusion, their personal details (name, given name if natural person, address, legal form) may be registered in the early detection and exclusion system, and communicated to the persons and entities concerned in relation to the award or the execution of a grant contract.

For more information, you may consult the privacy statement available on http://ec.europa.eu/budget/explained/management/protecting/protect_en.cfm

3. LIST OF ANNEXES

DOCUMENTS TO BE COMPLETED

Annex A	Grant application form (Word format)
Annex B	Budget (Excel format)
Annex C	Logical framework (Word format)
Annex D	Identification form
Annex F	Offline PADOR registration form
Annex H	Declaration on Honour on exclusion criteria
Annex L	Self-evaluation questionnaire on SEA-H

DOCUMENTS FOR INFORMATION

Annex G	Standard grant contract
- Annex II	General conditions
- Annex IV	Contract award rules
- Annex V	Standard request for payment
- Annex VI	Model narrative and financial report
- Annex VII-A	Model report of factual findings and terms of reference for an expenditure verification of an EU financed grant contract for external action
- Annex VIII	Model financial guarantee
- Annex IX	Standard template for transfer of ownership of assets
- Annex X	Template for a partnership agreement
Annex I	Daily allowance rates (per diem), available at the following address: https://international-partnerships.ec.europa.eu/funding/guidelines/managing-project/diem-rates_en
Annex J	Information on the tax regime applicable to grant contracts signed under the call
Annex M	List of potential indicators

USEFUL LINKS

PRAG	https://wikis.ec.europa.eu/display/ExactExternalWiki/ePRAG
Project Cycle Management Guidelines	https://ec.europa.eu/international-partnerships/funding/managing-project_en
The implementation of grant contracts, A Users' Guide	https://wikis.ec.europa.eu/pages/viewpage.action?pageId=48169235

Financial Toolkit²⁹

https://ec.europa.eu/international-partnerships/financial-management-toolkit_en

Early Detection and
Exclusion System
(EDES)

https://commission.europa.eu/strategy-and-policy/eu-budget/how-it-works/annual-lifecycle/implementation/anti-fraud-measures/edes_en#data-protection

²⁹ Please note that the toolkit is not part of the grant contract and has no legal value. It merely provides general guidance and may in some details differ from the signed grant contract. In order to ensure compliance with their contractual obligations beneficiaries should not exclusively rely on the toolkit but always consult their individual contract documents.