

GUIDE FOR APPLICATION WITH CONCEPT NOTES

(Call 1 for Concept Notes)

Under the Territorial Strategy of the (Interreg VI-A)
IPA Bulgaria Serbia Programme 2021-2027

Specific objective 2 *"To enhance regional
competitiveness, incl. in the area of tourism"*
(with a focus on tourism)

June 2023

DEADLINE FOR SUBMISSION OF THE PROJECT PROPOSALS IN JEMS

15 August 2023, 17:00 EEST (16:00 CEST)

CONTENTS

Call for Concept Notes in a nutshell	3
1. Introduction	4
2. Objectives and Focus of the Call	7
3. Budget of the Call	9
3.1 De minimis aid	9
3.2 No-profit principle	10
4. General requirements of the Call	10
4.1 Contribution to the objectives of the Territorial Strategy	10
4.2 Contribution to Strategy indicators	11
4.3. Cross-border effect of the project idea	13
4.4. Cooperation criteria	14
4.5. Project partnership	14
4.6. Scope of project activities	15
4.7. Scope of project costs	18
4.8. Horizontal principles	21
5. Application process	23
6. Project ideas identification process	24
6.1. Timeline	30
7. Request for clarification from applicants	31

Call for Concept Notes in a nutshell

- **Territorial focus of the Call** – the entire cross-border region of the (Interreg VI-A) IPA Bulgaria Serbia Programme (districts of Vidin, Montana, Vratsa, Sofia-district, Pernik and Kyustendil in Bulgaria, and districts Bor, Zaječar, Toplica, Nišava, Pirot, Jablanica and Pčinja in Serbia)
- **Objective of the Call** – support project ideas that streamline the utilization of the tourism resources and improve cross-border tourism marketing and branding practices in alignment within Measure 2.2 “*Streamline the utilization of the CBC region’s tourist resources, incl. ensuring faster, equitable and environmentally friendly access to and conditions for networking of cultural heritage and tourist sites in the CBC region*” and Measure 2.3 “*Improving CBC tourism marketing and branding practices*” under Specific objective 2 of the Programme’s Territorial Strategy;
- **Focus of the Call** - broad range of actions related to tourism development –development of new integrated regional tourism products; restoration, preservation, exposition of cultural heritage sites; support for natural tourism sites; investments in tourist support infrastructure and facilities; strengthening the links between natural and cultural sites, including their connecting and mobility network; training of staff of tourism attractions; improving CBC tourism marketing and branding practices.
- **Application process** – takes place in the Joint electronic Monitoring System (Jems - <https://jems-bgrs.mrrb.bg/>), where applicants need to register and create a new project application. Applicants attach the application form of the concept note (Annex 1), along with the budget forecast (Annex 1.1), a Letter of Commitment (Annex 2) and Project Maturity Development Plan (Annex 3) to the Jems application of their project idea. Full project proposals are submitted upon invitation (please see section **Error! Reference source not found.**).
- **Key features of the project idea/concept note** – it is expected that multi-sectoral partnerships between stakeholders from Bulgaria and Serbia will bring in solutions to boost tourism potential of the border area on a larger territorial scope, where cross-border impact plays central role.
- **Project actions** – compulsory combination of investment (works and/or supply) and soft type of actions (e.g. services); the thematic focus of the actions needs to be fully and logically aligned with the objective/s of the project idea and with the output and results indicator of the Call. Make sure you select all Interreg indicators, covering mainly soft measures, and at least one of the two pairs of ERDF indicators to cover the investment measures.
- **Project participants (Lead partner and project partners)** – local/regional bodies and authorities (incl. regional structures of central public authorities and statutory bodies);

regional and sector development agencies; business support organization; NGOs; academic, research, training, education, social and cultural institutions. All project partners need to be non-profit, and registered and to operate in the programme area for at least 3 years prior to the application. The project partnership should consist of at least one partner from each side of the border region.

- **Project costs** – when applying with a concept note it is not required to present a detailed budget of the project idea. What is needed during the project idea identification process is an overall budget estimation of expenditures per cost category and per project partner.
- **Financial aspects** – min € 500 000 and max € 1 000 000 of a project idea. Grant intensity is 100%, however de minimis provisions apply. The project idea should include investment and soft measures. The investment component should be no less than 60% of the total eligible costs.
- **Project duration** – minimum 12 months and maximum 24 months
- **Deadline for submission of concept notes** – two months from the date of launching the call

IMPORTANT

Please, read carefully the entire Guide before you start developing your project idea!

1. Introduction

This guide will take you through the process of applying with a project idea to contribute to the achievement of

Specific objective 2 *"To enhance regional competitiveness, incl. in the area of tourism"*

(with a focus on tourism, i.e. measures 2.2 and 2.3 of the Territorial Strategy of the Programme)

of the Territorial Strategy (Strategy) of the (Interreg VI-A) IPA Bulgaria Serbia Programme 2021-2027 (Programme). The Strategy underpins the implementation of the programme priority "Integrated development of the border region" in accordance with Article 28 (c) of the Regulation (EU) 2021/1060 of 24 June 2021 (Interreg Regulation). The Strategy falls within and reflects the strategic framework of the Policy Objective 5 "Europe closer to citizens"¹. For the 2021-2027 programming period, Interreg IPA programmes are ruled by the [Interreg Regulation](#) (EU)

¹ Regulation (EU) 2021/1060 of 24 June 2021:
<https://eur-lex.europa.eu/legalcontent/EN/TXT/?uri=CELEX%3A32021R1060>

2021/1059, the [Common Provisions Regulation](#) (EU) 2021/1060 and the [IPA III Regulation](#) (EU) 2021/1529.

Bodies involved in the Strategy and the Programme management:

According to the Interreg Regulation, the two partnering countries have established the following main management and implementation bodies:

- **Strategy Board (SB)** – the SB is a permanently acting bilateral partnership structure, without legal personality, set up in line with the provisions of Article 29 of the Interreg Regulation. The main task of the SB is to participate in the selection of projects funded under the Strategy. In addition to that, the SB has the overall responsibility for implementing, monitoring and evaluating the Strategy. The SB composes of members, chair and co-chair who are local experts from each of the partner country, representing different territorial stakeholders, who have participated in the development of the Strategy and currently operate in the programme area, such as public authorities, NGOs, enterprises, academic institutions. A list of SB members is published on the programme website.
- **Operational Unit (OU) to the SB** - The OU carries out administrative tasks related to the work of the SB. The Joint Secretariat of the Programme assumes the functions of the OU.
- **Managing Authority (MA)** – Territorial Cooperation Management Directorate at the Ministry of Regional Development and Public Works of the Republic of Bulgaria is designated to perform the functions of the MA under (Interreg VI-A) IPA Bulgaria Serbia Programme. The MA is responsible for managing and implementing the Programme in accordance with the principle of sound financial management.
- **National Authority (NA)** – The Ministry of European Integration of Serbia is the counterpart for the MA and is in charge of the coordination of the Programme in Serbia. The NA supports the MA in the process of management and overall implementation of the programme.
- **Monitoring Committee (MC)** is formed of representatives of relevant national, regional and local authorities and stakeholders, including representatives of the MA, the NA and the European Commission. The MC supervises the overall effectiveness, quality and coherence of the implementation of all actions towards meeting the objectives set out in the Programme.

About the Guide

This Guide explains the practical steps that are needed from planning to submitting a project idea (hereinafter also referred to as concept note).

The document is part of the “Application Package for the Call for Concept Notes”, which is available at: <http://www.ipacbc-bgrs.eu/2020-news/first-call-project-ideas-territorial-strategy-set>. The application package consists of:

- Guide for application under the call (this document);
- Annex 1. Off-line application form of the concept note signed by all partners;
- Annex 1.1 Budget forecast of the concept note signed by all partners;
- Annex 2. Template of a Letter of Commitment signed by all partners;
- Annex 3. Template of a Project Maturity Development Plan signed by all partners;
- Annex 4. Indicators fiches
- Annex 5. Technical guidance for Jems

Annexes 1, 1.1, 2 and 3 need to be attached to the project application in Jems!

The first thing project partners need to do is to get acquainted with the [Programme document](#), the [Strategy](#) and the [Territorial Agenda 2030](#). Reaching a good level of knowledge and understanding of the three documents is essential for developing and submitting a project idea. The Territorial Agenda 2030 provides an action-oriented framework to promote territorial cohesion in Europe that is built on the fundamentals of the integrated territorial development (ITD). The concept of ITD is central for the Strategy. The Strategy has own budget, thematic focus and ITD objectives whose achievement is set to be supported under an identification and selection process of projects for funding. Under the identification process, an applicant submits concept note of their project idea within announced open call for proposals with a set deadline for application. All applicants that have successfully passed the identification process will be invited to apply with full project proposals of their concept notes.

What is a concept note?

A concept note is the shortest expression of a project idea, as well as a basic layout of your project plan. The layout will form the foundation to develop a full-fledged proposal soon after your concept note is approved and you are invited to submit the full project proposal.

Key steps in the development of a project idea (*a guidance note*)

First step you need to take is to identify the territorial challenge that your project idea will seek to address. It is very important to think of that challenge as a potential and not an obstacle to the development of the cross-border region. The ultimate objective of your project idea should not be the overcoming of impediments, but the need to strengthen and expand something (practice, model, solution) that have a potential for territorial cohesion of the border region. Then, you may sketch a list of organizations whose expertise contribute to the addressing of this challenge from multiple perspectives and discuss together ideas how to approach that challenge and how to

jointly develop solutions for unleashing its territorial potentials. Furthermore, the organization of meetings with project stakeholders and target groups (the ones that are affected the most by the project) to discuss the project idea in its early stage of development may help refine the concept of the project and increases its public recognition and territorial impact.

2. Objectives and Focus of the Call

The Territorial Strategy of the Programme pursues common Strategic objective supported by two main specific objectives and related to them four measures, as follows:

Strategic objective - "To enhance growth in all its aspects"

Specific objective 1 - "To expand and improve service provision"

Measure 1.1. - Expand accessibility and improve quality of services of general interest in support of social and economic growth

Specific objective 2 – "To enhance regional competitiveness, incl. in the area of tourism"

Measure 2.1 - "Development and provision of framework support to local businesses to grow, expand and perform better in a greener and smarter competitive global market"

Measure 2.2 - "Streamline the utilization of the CBC region's tourist resources, incl. ensuring faster, equitable and environmentally friendly access to and conditions for networking of cultural heritage and tourist sites in the CBC region"

Measure 2.3 - "Improving CBC tourism marketing and branding practices"

The objective of the present call (Call for Concept Notes) is to facilitate the identification of project ideas that contribute the most to the achievement of Specific objective 2 "To enhance regional competitiveness, incl. in the area of tourism" only from the perspectives of measures 2.2 and 2.3 of the Programme's Territorial Strategy.

The support of the present Call targets only project interventions from the tourism sector. Therefore, the focus of the call is spread over the following types of intervention:

- development of new integrated regional tourism products;
- restoration, preservation, exposition of cultural heritage sites;
- support for natural tourism sites;
- set-up of natural sites for economic use;
- investments in tourist support infrastructure and facilities;
- strengthening the links between natural and cultural sites, including through enhancing the cycling network, road infrastructure, border crossing points infrastructure;
- training of staff of tourism attractions;

- improving CBC tourism marketing and branding practices

Each concept note needs to propose solutions to unleash and develop territorial potentials of the cross-border area to at least one of the fields of intervention listed above. The contribution of the concept note to more than one fields of intervention would increase chances for its approval if also other important criteria are equally met (please, see section 6 “Project idea identification process”). You may wish to consult the Strategy for more detailed description and justification of each specific objective/type of intervention, where exemplary actions are also provided. However, please do not limit your project idea to these exemplary actions. They serve only as indication about the types of solutions that the Strategy seeks to identify and support. What matters the most is the outcome of your project idea which should contribute to the accomplishment of Specific objective 2, measured by output and result indicators (for more information and definition about the indicators, please see section 4.2 Contribution to strategy indicators, as well as Attachment 2 “Definition of indicators”).

Each concept note should also comply with the definition of the European Commission of an integrated project. A project within the strategy is considered integrated itself if it fulfils at least one of the following conditions:

- a) the project involves different sectors (such as social, economic and environmental sectors);
- b) the project involves different administrative territories (ex: municipalities);
- c) the project involves several types of stakeholders (public authorities, NGOs, and etc.).

Integrated territorial development (ITD) designates development that is spatially integrated (beyond administrative boundaries), leverages the contribution of actors operating at multiple scales and brings incremental value to cross-border development efforts. There are few important characteristics of the ITD which applicants are advised to consider when developing their project ideas, as follows:

- Strengthen territorial potentials and existent cross-border linkages instead of overcoming territorial obstacles;
- Include interlinked multi-sectoral actions (e.g., in the fields of environment, transport, skills development, employment) in addressing tourism development challenge/s;
- The concept of ITD implies for larger territorial scale of investments and broader partnerships. This is so because it focuses territorial strategies at a coherent scale, beyond administrative boundaries. Also, ITD takes into account co-dependencies or interdependencies with other sectors as well as vertical and horizontal multi-level and multi-stakeholder cooperation;

The Territorial Strategy of the INTERREG VI-A IPA Bulgaria Serbia Programme 2021-2027 has identified challenges in the fields of tourism, SMEs competitiveness and services of general interest to be tackled through the ITD approach due to their high importance for the socio-economic

development and the territorial cohesion of the programme area. The focus of the current call is on tourism, whose support is expected to increase the tourism attractiveness of the cross-border area which incrementally would increase the territorial capacity for economic growth. It is well-known that tourism entails a collection of goods and services, as well as usage of cultural/tourism assets that are provided specifically for visitors and would not have been provided otherwise. Therefore, the indicators of the Territorial Strategy (please, see section 4.2 Contribution to Strategy indicators) cover the entire scope of tourism interventions which includes the support to the development of goods and services (Interreg indicators) and socializing cultural/tourism sites (ERDF indicators). Please, pay attention that you need to think of your tourism project ideas as an integrated effort to simultaneously improve the tourism infrastructure (sites, accessibility) and related services and products in a wider thematic and territorial perspective.

3. Budget of the Call

The total budget available for the present call is 8 529 412 Euro of which 7 250 000,00 Euro EU financial contribution (ERDF+IPA funds) and 1 279 412 Euro national contributions.

The ERDF/IPA co-financing rate is 85%, while the National contribution is 15%. **In case of Bulgaria, the share of the national contribution comes from the national budget, while in case of Serbia – the national contribution is provided by the Serbian project partners.**

Applicants may provide own additional co-financing, which should be reflected in the project budget and it will be a subject to verification.

The intensity support to full project proposals submitted under Call 1 (Targeted call) will be 100%. However, the financial amount granted to successful applicants may be reduced in case of de minimis relevance of project activities. Although detailed information about the project activities is requested in the full project proposal, it is important for the project partners to consider the de minimis provisions at the development stage of their project idea. For more information about the de minimis, please see section 3.1.

3.1 De minimis aid

Text of interest for project partners registered in Bulgaria:

Financial support given to undertakings in the framework of the (Interreg VI-A) IPA Bulgaria Serbia Programme is granted under the de minimis provisions, in accordance with Regulation (EU) 1407/2013 on the application of Articles 107 and 108 of the Treaty on the Functioning of the European Union to de minimis aid.

The use of the de minimis framework, implies that undertakings can receive grants from the Programme, respectively from the Strategy, only if they have not received public aid under the

de minimis rule totalling more than € 200 000 within three fiscal years from the date of granting the aid.

Although, applicants under the present Call for Concept Notes will not be checked for de minimis eligibility, they must be aware that activities of economic character could be financed only under the de minimis rule. Project partners will need to declare compliance with the de minimis rules when submitting a full project proposal, if invited to do so. Compliance of the activities with the state aid rules will be made at stage of full project proposal.

Text of interest for project partners registered in Serbia:

Project partners registered in Serbia should follow the applicable national regulations regarding State aid.

3.2 No-profit principle

The definition of the no-profit principle is regulated in the Article 192 of [Regulation \(EU\) 2018/1046](#). It means that the grant awarded shall not have the purpose or effect of producing a profit within the framework of the action or the work programme of the project partners. A profit is defined (Article 192 (2)) as a surplus, calculated at the payment of the balance, of receipts over the eligible costs of the action or work programme, where receipts are limited to the Union grant and the revenue generated by that project action/s.

This is of principle importance for candidates who generates profits in their usual field of operation. They must carefully consider their project idea so that it does not conflict with the no-profit principle.

4. General requirements of the Call

4.1 Contribution to the objectives of the Territorial Strategy

All concept notes must contribute to the achievement of Measures 2.2 and 2.3 under the Specific objective 2 “To enhance regional competitiveness, incl. in the area of tourism” of the Territorial Strategy. This means that the project idea (*listed features are not exhausted*):

- falls within the thematic coverage of the strategic objective;
- has justified and aligned its need for support with the strategic objective;
- is based on and fully exploits the territorial approach (please, consult the Territorial Agenda 2030), as well as meets the definition of an integrated project;
- is built on a clear link between needs, expected results and target groups;
- has partners with competences and expertise in the selected types of intervention and envisages project actions containing investment component (works and/or supply) and soft type component (e.g. services).

- contains the mandatory pair/s of indicators, including at least one of the two pairs of ERDF indicators (investment indicators)

The degree of contribution of each concept note to Specific objective 2 of the Territorial Strategy is subject to assessment by the Strategy Board within the stage of eligibility check. For more information, please see section 6 “Project ideas identification process”.

4.2 Contribution to Strategy indicators

In the 2021-2027 programme period there has been a shift from a focus on result indicators, reflecting impacts, to a focus on result indicators measuring outcomes (the desired effects that beneficiaries pursue). The European Commission has developed a more complete list of common output and a new list of common result indicators (Annex “Common output and result indicators for ERDF and the Cohesion Fund” to the CPR Regulation) to support the comprehension of this new approach by all concerned. Basically, there are two groups of policy indicators that the Programme’s Territorial Strategy uses:

1. ERDF indicators which are sector-focused and measure the outputs and the results of investments;
2. INTERREG indicators which are cooperation-focused and measure the outputs and the results of jointly developed and implemented actions/solutions/events.

The output indicators measure the specific deliverables from the action chosen for support, while the result indicators measure the outcomes, e.g. the effects of the interventions supported, with particular reference to the direct addressees, population targeted or users of infrastructure.

In the intervention logic of the Programme (respectively the Territorial Strategy) the indicators are linked with project activities, meaning that the achievement of indicators targets is only possible by implementing concrete projects actions. The submission of the concept note does not require detailed work plan. However, it is critically important for the project partners to align their project idea, at this early development stage, with the set of indicators that contribute to the Specific objective 2 of the Territorial Strategy. This would ensure consistent and Programme compliant development of the project idea from concept note to full project proposal.

These are the pairs of indicators that project partners need to consider. The given pairing of the indicators cannot be modified.

Table 1 Pairing of output and result indicators

Output indicator	Result indicator
RCO84 Pilot actions developed jointly and implemented in projects	RCR104 Solutions taken up or up-scaled by organisations

RCO116 Jointly developed solutions <i>(mandatory, both go hand in hand)</i>	
RCO58 Dedicated cycling infrastructure supported	RCR64 Annual users of dedicated cycling infrastructure
RCO77 Number of cultural and tourism sites supported	RCR77 Visitors of cultural and tourism sites supported
RCO74 Population covered by projects in the framework of strategies for integrated territorial development <i>(mandatory)</i>	There is no paired indicator. Project partners need to approximate the number of people from the targeted territories that would benefit from the achievement of project objectives. Please, note that the end value of this indicator cannot be lesser from the end value of either RCR64 or RCR77 result indicator

At minimum, each project idea must contribute to the achievement of the targets of the mandatory indicators (RCO84+RCO116/RCR104 + RCO74), including the targets of at least one of the two pairs of ERDF indicators (RCO58/RCR64 + RCO77/RCR77).

The table below describes the linkages among Specific objective, types of interventions and indicators. In general, under the Territorial Strategy new knowledge, approaches, tools, experiments (RCO84), solutions (RCO116) and strong cooperative mode of work (RCO84+RCO116) need to be jointly developed, promoted and implemented in order to urge forward the ITD policies and practices in the tourism domain. On the other hand, there is a recognised need to improve tourist accessibility and infrastructure. Therefore, the indicators pair RCO77 and RCR77 is selected to measure project outcomes and results within the tourism area giving great attention to the improvement of the tourist infrastructure as a precondition to improve quality and increase attractiveness of the tourist offer. Furthermore, a pair of output (RCO58)-result (RCR64) indicator is additionally selected to measure the uptake of sustainable mobile solutions as a way to increase the overall attractiveness of the cross-border as a travel destination for all types of tourists.

Table 2 Links between Specific objective 2 “To enhance regional competitiveness, incl. in the area of tourism” of the Territorial Strategy, types of interventions and indicators

Type of intervention	Indicators				Short explanation (for more information, please
	ERDF		Interreg		
	Output	Result	Output	Result	

					see "Definition of indicators")
Joint actions for streamlining the utilization of the CBC region's tourist resources, including ensuring faster, equitable and environmentally friendly access to and conditions for networking of cultural heritage and tourist sites in the CBC region	RCO58	RCR64	RCO84 + RCO116 <i>(mandatory, both go hand in hand)</i>	RCR104	The end values of RCO84/RCO116 and RCR104 must be set at 1 (one), meaning that one project generates 1 pilot action and produces 1 solution The end value of RCO58 and RCR64 should be determined based on the exact length of cycling infrastructure supported and annual users of that infrastructure
	RCO77	RCR77			The end value of RCO77 and RCR77 should be determined based on the exact number of the cultural and tourism sites supported and its visitors.

RCO74 Population covered by projects in the framework of strategies for integrated territorial development is mandatory indicator for all project ideas irrespectively of their thematic focus

4.3. Cross-border effect of the project idea

A cross-border effect is achieved when proposed project solutions lead to positive, tangible and sustainable results in the addressed intervention field/s and territories **in both countries**. An important precondition for achieving a cross-border effect is when project partners tackle common challenges identified jointly in the border region and exploit its untapped growth potential, while enhancing the cooperation process for the purposes of the territorial cohesion of the border area. This means that when developing the project idea, all partners need to think about the impact of the project not only for their own organisations and the target groups, but also for the Programme area.

An example of a mimic cross-border effect is when project partners produce identical outputs in both sides of the border without considering their impact on the target groups and the territories.

The cross-border effect of a concept note is subject to quality assessment of the proposed project idea (for more information, please see section 6 “Project idea identification process”).

4.4. Cooperation criteria

Although meeting the regulatory required (Interreg Regulation) cooperation criteria is not subject to eligibility and quality assessment of the concept notes, it is an important eligibility criterion of the full project proposals. Therefore, project partners are strongly encouraged to consider cooperation in the development and implementation of their project idea, or in the staffing and financing, or both, thereof.

4.5. Project partnership

The “lead partner principle” applies, meaning that one partner takes the lead in the project. It supervises the administrative and financial management of the project and bears legal responsibility and liability for it. The lead partner should also have financial capacity to ensure the smooth implementation of the project and to cover the non-eligible expenditures corresponding to its activities incurred during project implementation. In case a final project proposal amount is higher than the maximum amount of the grant, the project partners may provide own co-financing. The project partners need to pre-finance the project expenditures, which upon verification are reimbursed. Therefore, it is very important that all project partners have the financial capacity to perform their corresponding project actions. This is going to be subject to operational assessment when submitting full project proposal, if the applicant is invited to do so.

4.5.1 Eligible lead and project partners are legally established:

- Local/regional bodies, and authorities (incl. regional structures of central public authorities and statutory bodies);
- Regional and sectoral development agencies, and business support structures;
- NGOs and other socio-economic partners;
- Academic, research, training, education, social and cultural institutions.

All project partners, including lead partners, must be non-profit, registered and operate in the Programme area at least 3 years prior to the application. In case a structure of local/regional/national authority is not and cannot act as a legal entity, its legally established central organisation, if such exists, shall be the project partner. Project partners located outside the programme area but within Bulgaria and Serbia can also be eligible, however such partners shall bring a clear benefit to the programme area and their project actions shall be explicitly implemented on the cross-border area. However, their involvement is considered as exceptional and must be duly justified. Their adequacy and relevance is subject to appraisal under the Partnership criterion of the Quality assessment. For more information, please see section 6. Project ideas identification process.

The development and the implementation of the project idea must include **at least one partner from each side of the border region**. Maximum number of partners is not set, however, the relevancy of the proposed partnership is subject to quality assessment at this stage (please see section 6 "Project idea identification process"). Therefore, interested organisations to apply are advised to carefully consider and rationalise the setup of the project partnership to make sure there is no partner who lacks expertise needed to address the identified challenge of the project idea. Potential applicants should also be aware that changes in the composition of the project partnership from concept note to full project proposal (FPP) is allowed only in exceptional cases and must be duly justified when submitting FPP. Change in the FPP of the Lead partner and the other project partners who bears the project investments will not be permitted.

👉 IMPORTANT

Each applicant may participate:

- **as a lead partner in only one project idea;**
- **as a project partner in up to two project ideas;**
- **as a lead partner in only one project idea and in one more project idea as a project partner;**
- **as a project partner who bears the investment component in only one project idea + one more project idea as a project partner who implements only soft measures.**

In case there are only 2 project partners, participating in 2 projects as the only partners (even though with different roles), this is not to be accepted.

Each project partner, incl. the lead partner, must sign the Letter of Commitment (Annex 2) and the Project Maturity Development Plan (Annex 3) together with the concept note.

All partners are directly responsible for the project implementation and cannot act as intermediaries, nor can they get in any form of contracting between each other.

4.6. Scope of project activities

The application form (AF) of a concept note does not require thorough description of project activities. A detailed work plan is part of the AF of a full project proposal. However, certain knowledge on how the project idea is going to be implemented needs to be demonstrated in the concept note. This is particularly important when it comes to planning and implementation of works and supply activities, which if not planned accurately and with due attention to their legal aspects, this may jeopardise the project success, as well as may weaken its justification for grant awarding.

The project partners are advised to consider the following aspects of the project activities:

- The project idea is advised to be developed based on and in the scope of the indicative types of actions included in the Territorial Strategy (Specific objective 2, Measures 2.2 and 2.3) and the Programme (Priority 2 “Integrated development of the border region”);
- The thematic focus of the actions needs to be fully and logically aligned with the objective/s of the project idea;
- The scope of the project activities should include actions that involve development and employment of adequate, feasible and sustainable solutions leading to positive change (in terms of target groups and territorial developments) in the addressed types of intervention;
- The cross-border effect of the project idea needs to be clearly reflected in the scope of the project activities;
- The implementation of the project activities should take place in the Programme area. By exception (however excluding activities related to works and supply), activities outside the Programme area can be implemented in duly justified cases;
- The scope of the project activities includes mandatory combination of investment (works and supply) and soft type of actions (e.g. services). At minimum, each project idea must contribute to the achievement of the targets of the mandatory pairs of indicators, including the targets of one of the two pairs of ERDF indicators;
- If the project envisages investment activities in the form of building new or rehabilitating existing infrastructure, those activities should be carried out exclusively on state-owned or municipal property. Only the owner of the respective property rights, or the legal body that has acquired the management rights of that particular property, is entitled to contract the implementation of those activities, i.e. it should be a project partner. Exemption from that rule, i.e. when elements of the core infrastructure² that pass through private properties are subject to project interventions, is allowed only when there is no alternative technical/engineering solution or the available alternative is economically unreasonable, i.e. when the cost of the investment outweighs the benefit to the community. In this case, however, the project partner that wants to make a project investment on a private property, should have acquired a legal easement (a private right of way), authorized by a notary, to act on the respective private property. The legality of these circumstances is checked at the process of eligibility assessment of the full project proposal. Nevertheless, the applicants with concept notes should be aware of the steps that they need to take from the project development to the submission of the full project proposal and make sure these steps are in full compliance with the respective national legislation and are clearly identified in the Project Maturity Development Plan (Annex 3) under the present call.

² Roads, cycle lines, pedestrian paths, electrical networks, water supply and sewage networks, gas distribution networks, low-current communication networks, optical cable networks, etc.

- The scope of the envisaged investments should be broader than the usual local investments in benefit only to the respective organisation or locality concerned;
- At the stage of application with full project proposal the partners should present all legally required documents for implementation of the envisaged investment activity;
- Project partners need to develop the scope of their project activities in full accord with the European, national and regional environmental legislation, including its secondary acts. This consideration is also central for the development of the Project maturity plan (please, see Annex 2), which needs to be submitted along with the concept note. It is assumed that all project actions related to works and building new or rehabilitating existing infrastructure would need to obtain environmental impact (EI) screening decisions and/or other EI assessments. Furthermore, project partners are strongly advised to consider the need for compliance of their project idea with the “Do no significant harm” principle (DNSH principle, please see the [Taxonomy Regulation](#) and the [Technical guidance on the application of DNSH principle](#)) and the ‘climate resilience’ pillar of the climate proofing of infrastructure³ ([Technical guidance on the climate proofing of infrastructure](#)).
- It remains the full applicants’ responsibility to make sure that their project ideas and their consequent full project proposals meet all environmental provisions that stems from the respective European, national and regional environmental legislation and its secondary acts.
- In accordance with Article 22 (i) of the Interreg Regulation, in order to be eligible for support, Interreg operations must not be directly affected by a reasoned opinion by the Commission in respect of an infringement within the scope of Article 258 TFEU that puts at risk the legality and regularity of expenditure or the performance of operations. In this respect, before developing the project idea, the partners are encouraged to check if any reasoned opinion affects the project idea at the level of Bulgaria. This [link](#) can be used to find the active reasoned opinions. If there is a reasoned opinion, the project partners are not advised to continue with the development of the project idea, except where there are reasons to believe that the infringement will be lifted within the deadline for the project submission set by this Guide.

Please, note that the green and the digital policy is integral part of the integrated territorial development and it is a key instrument to promote the new cohesion policy. This policy is deeply rooted in the Programme’s Territorial Strategy and therefore each supported project under the Strategy needs to contribute to the protection of the environment and/or provides green and digital solutions to boost cross-border territorial potentials.

³ Climate proofing is a process that integrates climate change mitigation and adaptation measures into the development of infrastructure projects. It enables European institutional and private investors to make informed decisions on projects that qualify as compatible with the Paris Agreement.

4.7. Scope of project costs

The eligible and ineligible costs are set out in the Regulation (EU, Euratom) 2018/1046 of 18 July 2018 ([Financial Regulation](#)), the Regulation (EU) 2021/1058 of 24 June 2021([ERDF Regulation](#)), the CPR Regulation and the Interreg Regulation.

The development and submission of concept note does not entail presentation of a thorough budget plan. Instead, only an overall budget estimation of expenditures per cost category and project partner is needed.

Nevertheless, at this stage, it is important for all project partners to get acquainted with the Programme's approach to financial management. It refers to the application of a methodology named Simplified Cost Options (SCOs). SCOs are an EU innovative way to reimburse grants and repay assistance. Instead of reimbursing "real costs", SCOs allow the reimbursement of expenditures according to predefined methods based on process, outputs or results. SCOs allow the tracing of financed expenditures without the need to provide individual supporting documents. Furthermore, SCOs allow administrations to shift the focus from collecting and verifying financial documents to achieving policy objectives (i.e. concentrating on achieving concrete outputs and results instead of verification and control of actually incurred costs).

SCOs may take the form of:

- **Flat rate** – specific categories of eligible costs which are expressed as a percentage of other eligible costs;
- **Lump sums** – fixed amount for certain activity;
- **Unit Costs** – cover certain specific categories of eligible costs which are expressed in maximum amounts per unit (e.g. maximum prices of certain goods, items, etc).

The budget categories (BC) of a concept idea, respectively full project proposal, are the following:

BC 1 Staff costs – these are costs related to remuneration of people involved in the management of the project implementation, i.e. members of the project team (normally, these are manager, coordinator, accountant, assistant, etc.) as well as in its implementation (staff already employed by project partners, in charge of, for example, specific tasks and activities, with specific expertise needed for the project). For more information, please see Art. 39 of the Interreg Regulation. For project management and implementation purposes, staff costs shall be reimbursed either as a flat rate or on the basis of real costs. Each project partner should choose one of the two provided options. For project management and implementation purposes, staff costs shall be reimbursed either as a flat rate or on the basis of real costs. Irrespectively of the selected option, the total maximum rate of the staff costs is up to 20 % of the eligible costs under BC 4, BC 5 and BC 6 of the total project budget of the respective project partner. Expenditures made on the basis of real

costs are proved with relevant supporting documents. Before being reimbursed, these costs are subject to verification.

BC 2 Office and administrative costs – all eligible types of office and administrative costs are set out in Article 41 of the Interreg Regulation. These costs will be reimbursed as a flat rate up to 15 % of staff costs.

BC 3 Travel and accommodation costs – this budget category covers costs related to travel and accommodation of the project staff only, i.e. those who are involved in the management and the implementation of the project. All eligible types of travel and accommodation costs are set out in Article 41 of the Interreg Regulation. These costs will be reimbursed as a flat rate up to 5 % of the staff costs.

BC 4 External expertise and services costs – this BC includes expertise and services provided by a public or private law body or a natural person, other than the project partners, which are strictly linked to the project and are essential for its successful implementation. The scope of this external support may vary significantly due to different project needs and objectives. All eligible types of costs are set out in Article 42 of the Interreg Regulation. Experts employed in the project partners cannot be engaged as external experts under this budget category due to a conflict of interest.

Costs related to external expertise shall be reimbursed by the Programme on the basis of real costs proved with relevant supporting documents. Before being reimbursed, these costs are subject to verification.

Services costs for organisation of events shall be reimbursed either on the basis of a unit cost or on the basis of real costs. The unit costs are defined according to the duration of the event and number of participants. The unit costs for event organisations is the following:

- 18,00 EURO per participant in one day events;
- 73,00 EURO per participant in multi-day events;

The unit costs includes the following types of expenditures:

- Expenses for rent of hall for meetings, trainings, conferences, etc.
- Expenses for rent of equipment - translation equipment, audio equipment, etc.
- The expenditure for rent of vehicle for participants in the events (car, van, minibus, bus, etc.)
- Expenses for coffee breaks, refreshments, lunches and dinners for participants in the events;
- Accommodation costs;
- Expenses for purchase of consumables and materials for the participants in the events - paper, files, folders, cases, CDs etc. and printing of invitations, agenda, presentations.

Examples:

*** Example for calculation of the amount for 1 day event per 20 participants:**

1 day * 20 participants = 20 units

20 units * unit costs EUR 18 = total costs EUR 360

*** Example for calculation of the amount for 2 days event per 20 participants:**

2 days * 20 participants = 40 units

40 units * unit costs EUR 73 = total costs EUR 2 920

In case of Bulgaria, national public procurement rules should be duly respected and fully applied. In case of Serbia, it is the PRAG provisions that should be duly respected and fully applied.

BC 5 Equipment costs – all eligible types of equipment costs are set out in Article 43 of the Interreg Regulation. Equipment should be clearly and strictly linked to the achievement of project objectives. Equipment must be purchased in compliance with the respective national public procurement rules. Costs related to purchase of equipment shall be reimbursed by the Programme on the basis of real costs proved with relevant supporting documents. Before being reimbursed, these costs are subject to verification.

BC 6 Costs for infrastructure and works - all eligible types of costs for infrastructure and works are set out in Art. 44 of the Interreg Regulation. **Purchase of land and buildings is not eligible.** Costs related to infrastructure and works shall be reimbursed by the Programme on the basis of real costs proved with relevant supporting documents. Before being reimbursed, these costs are subject to verification. In case of Bulgaria, national public procurement rules should be duly respected and fully applied. In case of Serbia, it is the PRAG provisions that should be duly respected and fully applied.

- BC 7 Project Preparation costs (PPC) – these costs are not eligible under the present Call. They may be incurred only when submitting full project proposals for an amount up to 12 000 euro (lump sum) per project proposal. The project partners will need to agree on the share of the PPC per partner in their Partnership Agreement, which will be mandatory to submit along with the full project proposal. PPC are limited to the following services:

- ✓ consultancy, elaboration of technical documentation (incl. feasibility studies, detailed design, technical drawings, etc.);
- ✓ elaboration of project proposal and application form, translation of documents, taxes and other charges);
- ✓ other costs necessary to submit a valid application form

More to consider:

- As a general rule, sub-contracting between project partners and their employees for project implementation purposes is not allowed.
- When applicants submit full project proposals, if invited to do so, they will need to present and duly justify a detailed budget of the project based on provided guidance for that.
- The expenditures for VAT is eligible for project ideas the total cost of which is below EUR 5 000 000 (including VAT).

4.8. Horizontal principles

All EU funded projects need to adhere to certain horizontal principles which underpin the integrity of the EU. These horizontal principles need to be fully reflected in the project activities, outputs and results, thus ensuring that the project goes in full compliance with them. At a concept note level a detailed description of how the project is aligned with the horizontal principles is not required. Nevertheless, when developing the project idea partners need to consider the following horizontal principles:

- **Sustainable Development**

It has three dimensions that interrelate:

- *environmental sustainability* – ensuring that natural environment is used in a way that will preserve resources for future generation;
- *economic sustainability* – capacity of future generation to earn an income and allow for economic growth;
- *social sustainability* – future generation having the same or improved access to social resources such as human rights, political stability.

All project idea should follow an “environmental sustainability by design” approach. This means that environmental or broader sustainability considerations effects shall be integrated from the very start the project idea drafting.

Project shall fully respect the Union environmental acquis and national legislation on the matter and they shall be in line with the objective of promoting sustainable development, taking into account the UN Sustainable Development Goals, the Paris Agreement and the DNSH principle.

- **Do No Significant Harm (DNSH)**

The implementation of the project idea should cause no harm to any of the following six environmental objectives, as defined in Article 17 of the Taxonomy Regulation:

- *Climate change mitigation* – no increase of greenhouse gas (GHG) emissions;

- *Climate change adaptation* – no adverse impact of the current climate and the expected future climate;
- *Sustainable use & protection of water & marine resources* – no detrimental effects to the good status or the good ecological potential of bodies of water;
- *Pollution prevention & control* – no increase in emissions of pollutants into air, water or land
- *Transition to a circular economy* – prevent inefficiencies in the use of materials or in the direct or indirect use of natural resources, as well as no increase of the generation, the incineration or the disposal of waste;
- *Protection and restoration of biodiversity & ecosystems* – no detrimental effects to the good condition and resilience of ecosystems, as well as to the conservation status of habitats and species.

➤ **Green Public Procurement**

Green Public Procurement (GPP) is defined as *"a process whereby public authorities seek to procure goods, services and works with a reduced environmental impact throughout their life cycle when compared to goods, services and works with the same primary function that would otherwise be procured"*.

The Strategy Board encourages sustainable measures and supports the inclusion of additional "green" criteria in tendering whenever legally possible.

➤ **Equal opportunities and non-discrimination**

The development of the project idea should exclude any forms of discrimination that is based on sex, racial or ethnic origin, religion or belief, disability, age or sexual orientation.

➤ **Equality between men and women**

The development of the project idea should exclude considerations in favour of gender inequality.

➤ **New European Bauhaus**

The New European Bauhaus⁵ initiative promotes a new lifestyle where sustainability matches style, thus accelerating the green transition in various sectors of the economy such as construction, furniture, fashion and in the society as well as other areas of our daily life. The aim is to provide all citizens with access to goods that are circular and less carbon-intensive, that support the regeneration of nature and protect biodiversity.

Three core inseparable values guide the New European Bauhaus:

⁴ For more details regarding green procurement, you can check the European Union site: https://ec.europa.eu/environment/gpp/index_en.htm

⁵ For more details regarding the New European Bauhaus you can check The EU'S site: https://europa.eu/new-european-bauhaus/index_en

- sustainability⁶, from climate goals, to circularity, zero pollution, and biodiversity,
- aesthetics, quality of experience and style, beyond functionality,
- inclusion, valorizing diversity, equality for all, accessibility and affordability.

5. Application process

The deadline for submission of concept notes in Jems is **15 August 2023, 17:00 EEST (16:00 CEST)**

Applicants need to register in Jems and open a project application form in Jems. The following annexes (annexes 1, 1.1, 2 and 3) must be attached to the Jems project application form:

- **ANNEX 1: Off-line application form of a concept note, signed by all project partners;**
- **ANNEX 1.1: Budget forecast of the concept note, signed by all project partners;**
- **ANNEX 2: Scanned Letter of Commitment, filled in by all project partners (incl. the lead partner) and signed by the legal representative of the respective project partner;**
- **ANNEX 3: Scanned Project Maturity Development Plan, filled in by all project partners (incl. the lead partner) and signed by the legal representative of the respective project partner**

Annexes 4 and 5 are only for information purposes, as follows:

Annex 4 - Indicators fishes. Applicants are strongly encouraged to get acquainted with the indicators and their definitions before starting developing their project ideas.

Annex 5 - Technical guidance for Jems. The document provides instructions, accompanied by screen shots, for registration, generation of an application and its submission in Jems.

Valid e-signatures are acceptable if accompanied by the respective signature certificate.

Applicants may submit questions in writing in regard to their application up to 10 calendar days prior to the deadline for submission of concept notes. The OU will reply no later than 5 calendar days prior to the deadline for the submission of concept notes.

⁶ “Sustainability” in the context of the New European Bauhaus initiative is understood as “environmental sustainability”.

Questions may be sent to the e-mail provided below, indicating clearly the reference of the Call for Concept Notes:

E-mail: js_sofia@mrrb.government.bg

6. Project ideas identification process

The project ideas identification process starts upon the end of the deadline for application, which in will be automatically closed in JeMS. It is called “identification process” because it does not end with project selection and funding decisions. It ends with an overall list of all scored concept notes ranked in descending order (from the highest to the lowest score) with a knock-out threshold set at 60 points out of 100. Applicants with concept notes, which are ranked below the threshold, will not be invited to develop and submit a full project proposal of their concept notes.

Upon the deadline for application, an eligibility assessment (EA) of all received concept notes follows. The EA consists of 2 consecutive steps. Step 1 is an eligibility check performed by the Operational Unit (please, see section “Introduction”), while Step 2 is an assessment of the contribution of each concept note to the achievement of selected Strategy’s objective (it becomes objective of the announced Call). Step 1 will be performed based on the eligibility grid as follows:

№	CRITERIA FOR ELIGIBILITY CHECK	YES	NO or N/A	Comments
1	Annex 1 (off-line application form of a concept note) is attached to the Jems project application; it is duly completed with no missing parts, and it is signed by all project partners			
1.1	Annex 1.1 (budget forecast of the concept note) is attached to the Jems project application; it is duly completed with no missing parts, and it is signed by all project partners.			
2	All sections of Annexes 1-3 are filled out in English			
3	The implementation of the project idea takes place in the Programme area			
4	The project partnership consists of minimum two partners where each is registered in either of the two eligible partner countries			
5	The project partners meet all the following eligibility conditions for participation: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - the lead partner participates in only one project idea as such; - project partners participate in up to two project ideas as such; 			

	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - the lead partner participates in only one project idea as such and in up to one more project idea as a project partner; - the project partner who bears the investment component participates in only one project ideas with the same role + one more project idea as a project partner who implements only soft measures. 			
6	Project partners from the programme area are registered in the Programme area for at least 3 years prior to the application and meet the eligibility criteria set out in section 4.5.1 of the present Guide			
7	If there is a project partner outside the programme area, its project actions are planned to be explicitly implemented on the cross-border area			
8	The budget of the concept note ranges from EUR 500 000 to EUR 1 000 000			
9	The duration of the project ideas does not go below 12 months and does not exceed 24 months			
10	The concept idea contains compulsory combination of investment (works and/or supply) and soft type of actions (e.g. services). The investment component is minimum 60% of the total eligible costs.			
11	The project idea contains the mandatory pair/s of indicators, including at least one of the two pairs of ERDF indicators (investment indicators)			
12	Duly filled in and signed by all project partners Annex 2 (Letter of Commitment (LC)) and Annex 3 (Project Maturity Development Plan (PMDP)) are attached to the Jems application form. No changes of the templates of the LC and the PMDP have been made.			

In case a concept note does not meet one or more criteria from the grid above that is linked with the submission of 2 and 3 (criterion 12), the applicant will be given a possibility to present the missing or the correct documents up to 5 calendar days after the notification letter. When a concept note does not meet other criteria from the eligibility grid (criteria 1 to 11), that concept note will not proceed with the identification process.

Step 2 of the eligibility assessment is an evaluation of the contribution of each concept note to the achievement of Territorial Strategy’s objective 2 “To enhance regional competitiveness, incl. in the area of tourism” (Measures 2.2. and 2.3). The reason this assessment is part of the eligibility

check is that the contribution of each proposal to the Territorial Strategy is a compulsory requirement in order for the project to be suggested for funding. Step 2 is performed by the Strategy Board’s members who put a coefficient from 0 to 1 to each concept note, which has successfully passed Step 1, against the degree of contribution of the respective project idea to the Territorial Strategy’s objective 2.

<p>Description of coefficients under eligibility step 2 of the project ideas identification process</p>
<p>0 - No contribution of the concept note. It addresses issues that are not of relevance to the Territorial strategy and/or the information requested is missing (either not filled in or not provided in the text). For example, the need for the project is not justified; the project idea does not exploit territorial approach⁷ and does not meet the EU definition of an integrated project; the link between needs, expected results and Strategy objective is not developed; the project idea does not bear characteristics of the integrated territorial development.</p>
<p>0.5 - Weak contribution. The information (as specified under coefficient 0) provided has minimum relevance. The contribution is inadequately addressed or there are several weaknesses (e.g. insufficient justification and/or argumentation). For example – the same as above, however assessment conclusions should state that relevant information and evidence-based arguments are present, but they are inadequate or insufficient.</p>
<p>0.75 – Medium contribution. The overall information (as specified under coefficient 0) provided is adequate, however some aspects are not clearly or sufficiently outlined. For example – the same as above, however assessment conclusions should state that relevant information is present, it is adequate, but evidence-based arguments are not sufficient or there is a small number of shortcomings.</p>
<p>1 – Strong contribution. The information (as specified under coefficient 0) provided is adequate with sufficiently outlined details and evidence-based arguments. Full compliance with the Territorial Strategy having beneficial impact and influence on the cross-border region beyond purely local interventions</p>

Concept notes who have received coefficient 0 for contribution to the Territorial Strategy’s objective 2 “To enhance regional competitiveness, incl. in the area of tourism” (Measures 2.2. and 2.3) will not proceed with the identification process. The Operational Unit calculates the coefficient mean for a concept note given by the Strategy Board. Eligibility assessment of the projects ideas

⁷ https://territorialagenda.eu/wp-content/uploads/TerritorialAgenda_OngoingExamples_201109.pdf

identification process ends with a summary report of the Operational Unit about the final coefficients of the concept notes who meet the call’s principle requirements.

Upon the end of the eligibility assessment, a quality assessment of eligible project ideas begins. The Operational Unit together with internal/external assessors composes an Assessment working group (AWG) to perform the evaluation in the quality assessment step. It takes place on the basis of a matrix consisting of the criteria below, defined in full accordance with the questions asked in the application form. Every concept note is assessed by two assessors – one per partner country. There are two scenarios when a third (arbitrary) assessor steps in. Scenario 1: where there is difference (between the scores of the two assessors) of 10 points, which are at or above the final knock-out threshold of 60 points. Scenario 2: where one of the assessors scores the concept note below the threshold, and the other one – above the threshold. The total quality assessment score of the concept note is calculated as a mean of the two or three (when there is arbitrary score) scores.

For ranking purposes, when two or more concept notes are scored equally at or above the threshold of 60 points, the project idea which includes the two pairs of ERDF indicators will be ranked first. That approach will be also considered when there is a large number of equally scored concept notes at or above the threshold (e.g. when they exceed two times the Call’s budget). If, however, the project ideas who have included the two pairs of ERDF indicators are not enough to support the ranking of the remaining equally scored concept notes, the latter will be ranked according to the obtained score on the criteria ‘Maturity of the project idea’, i.e. project ideas with higher score on the Maturity criteria will be ranked first.

NO	QUALITY CRITERIA FOR STRATEGIC ASSESSMENT OF CONCEPT NOTES	SCORE
1	Relevance of the project idea with the programme	Max 55
1.1	<p><i>To what extent is the project idea compliant with the programme objectives?</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - it has a strong potential to enhance territorial cohesion in the CBC area, e.g. the project idea builds new or strengthens existing connectivity networks (condition 1) that are regional (supra-municipal level) in scope (condition 2), and involve cross-border synergies, incl. synergies with regional/national/local strategies (condition 3); - it has moderate potential to enhance territorial cohesion in the CBC area, e.g. one of the conditions is not met; 	<p>20</p> <p>10</p> <p>5</p>

	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - the capitalization potential of the project idea is limited, because the existing practices and knowledge in the addressed intervention field, are mostly repeated instead of being upgraded; - the applicant failed to justify the capitalization potential of the project idea; e.g. the project idea is not built on existing practices and knowledge in the addressed intervention field/s 	5 0
2.	Partnership relevance	Max 25
	<p><i>To what extent is the partnership composition relevant for the proposed project idea?</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - The proposed partnership is appropriate, e.g. all partner organizations have proven experience and competence (incl. legal rights to act in the proposed way) in the addressed intervention field/s (condition 1). The proposed partnership is balanced and reflects the addressed issue in terms of target groups, sectors, territory (condition 2). Partner organizations complement each other (condition 3). There are 4 or more project partners, at least 2 from each side of the border, and their budgets are balanced – all budgets are within the range of 20% difference from each other (condition 4). 25 - The proposed partnership is relevant – 3 out of 4 conditions are met. 20 - The proposed partnership is sufficiently relevant - conditions 1 and 2 are met, but not condition 3. There are less than 4 partners, and there budgets are sufficiently balanced. 15 - The proposed partnership is insufficiently relevant – conditions 1 and 2 are partially met, but not condition 3. There are less than 4 partners and or/their budgets are not sufficiently balanced. 10 - The proposed partnership is not relevant – none of the conditions 1 and 2 is met, the degree of meeting condition 3 is irrelevant. There are less than 4 partners, and their budgets are imbalanced. 0 	
3.	Maturity of the project idea	Max 20
	<p><i>To what extent is the attached project maturity development plan realistic and consistent with the project idea?</i></p>	

	- The plan is realistic, well-structured, and consistent with the project idea , e.g. it lists the actions required by law, e.g. licenses, designs, permits, approvals from third institutions (condition 1), clear division of partners’ responsibilities (condition 2) and a feasible timeline (condition 3);	20
	- The plan is mostly realistic, structured, and is consistent with the project idea. All 3 conditions appear to be mostly met, but with slight potential shortages.	15
	- The plan is not sufficiently realistic, but still consistent with the project idea , e.g. 2 out of 3 conditions are met.	10
	- The plan is neither realistic, nor is it consistent with the project – neither of the three conditions is met and/or information is missing	0
	MAX TOTAL SCORE	100

The final score of each concept note is calculated by multiplying the total coefficient (step 1) by the total score (step 2). The Operational Unit performs this.

For example: A project idea has received a total coefficient of **0.75** for its contribution to the Territorial Strategy’s objective 1 (Step 1). Also, it has received a total score of **80 points** during the quality assessment (Step 2). Thus, the final score of this project idea is 60, i.e. **0.75 x 80 = 60**

Applicants, whose project ideas have received a final score of 60 points or more, will be:

- invited to submit full project proposal under a targeted call in no less than three months from the date of the invitation letter. Only invited applicants will be eligible to participate in the targeted call. The number of project ideas invited to the next stage would be based on the ranking list and the available budget.

or

- included in a reserve list of project ideas

6.1. Indicative timeline

Step	Description	Indicative date of period
1	Publication of Call 1 (concept notes)	15 th of June 2023

2	Deadline for application under Call 1	15 th of August 2023
3	Assessment of concept notes under Call 1	16 th of August – 16 th of October 2023
4	Notification letters to all applicants with concept notes + Monitoring committee meeting: (1) endorses the TS and the list of identified project ideas; (2) approves the Application package for full project proposals; (3) gives mandate to MA/NA to launch the targeted call	20 th of October – 30 th of November 2023
5	Launch of the targeted call for full project proposals	December 2023 (minimum three months for application)

7. Request for clarification from applicants

Upon the finalization of the project idea identification process, the OU will notify by e-mail (up to 14 working days after the end of the identification process) applicants whose project ideas do not continue with the submission of full project proposals. In the notification letter the OU will thoroughly explain the reasons for that and will give an opportunity to the applicant to address its questions about the identification result their project idea has obtained. Moreover, the OU will include in the notification letter recommendations (made by the assessors who screened and strategically assessed the concept note) for improvement of the project idea so that the applicant prepares a better proposal for subsequent calls for identification of project ideas under the Territorial Strategy. The applicant, then, will have 7 working days after the receipt of the notification letter, to reply with a request for clarification, if willing to do so. The SB/OU will examine and answer the questions, up to 14 working days after the receipt of the request, to help resolve any ambiguity left. Only the Lead partner of the project idea is entitled to send the request for clarification. The request for clarification must include the following information:

- the name, address and contact details of the lead applicant,
- the reference number assigned by the programme to the project application and the project acronym,
- a clear indication of the reasons for the request and arguments to support it,
- the signature of the legal representative of the lead applicant.

The OU will have 10 working days to reply to the applicant's request for clarification.