

Quick Guide to the Call for Services of General Interest

INTERREG (VI-A) IPA BULGARIA-SERBIA PROGRAMME

Deadline for application in JEMs: 26 September 2025, 17:00 EEST

What are Services of General Interest?

The definition of SGIs applied in this Call is as follows:

Unlike commercially provided services, SGIs are publicly funded and aim to serve the public interest by enhancing citizens' well-being and supporting business development across various policy areas.

This Call does not prescribe specific sectors for SGI interventions. Instead, applicants must base their proposed actions on identified territorial needs or territorial potential within the eligible cross-border area. Applicants are encouraged to choose policy areas that align with these identified needs and demonstrate a clear contribution to public welfare and cross-border cohesion.

IMPORTANT

SGI project proposals related to wildfires and tourism are excluded, as these topics have already been addressed in previous calls of the programme. <https://ipa-bgrs.mrrb.bg/>

Who may apply?

(1) **National, regional or local public authority**

(2) **Public equivalent body¹**, which means any legal body:

a) Established for the specific purpose of meeting needs in the general interest², not having an industrial or commercial character, and

b) Have legal personality, and

c) Financed, for the most part, by the state, or regional or local authorities, or other bodies governed by public law,*

* or is subject to management supervision by those authorities or bodies,

* or have an administrative, managerial or supervisory board, more than half of whose members are appointed by the state, regional or local authorities or by other bodies governed by public law

¹ Here, the “public equivalent body” means a “body governed by public law” as defined in Article 2, point 1 (4) of Directive 2014/24/EU of the European Parliament and of the Council of 26 February 2014 on public procurement

² “Needs in the general interest” refer to needs that cannot be met solely through market-driven goods and services. Instead, due to their importance to society, the State or Local Government chooses to provide them directly or maintain significant control over their delivery.

(4) **Public and/or municipal enterprises**³ authorized by law to provide SGI with at least 51% public/municipal capital, which are not in bankruptcy proceedings

(4) **Non-Governmental organizations**

📌 **IMPORTANT**

Each project proposal must include at least two partners - one from each partner country - and a maximum of four partners. Additionally, each project partner may only participate in one project proposal, either as a Lead partner or a project partner.

Overall scope of SGI project proposals

➤ Project proposals may include one or both of the following SGI solutions:

1. Development, testing, and adoption of new SGI

2. Upgrade of existing SGI in terms of availability, accessibility, affordability, quality, and safety

➤ Project proposals may include one or both of the following components:

1. Investment component - optional. It includes infrastructure works and/or supply of equipment/software/hardware necessary to develop and/or enhance the provision of the SGI.

📌 **IMPORTANT**

Applicants are solely responsible for ensuring that all submitted investment documentation complies fully with relevant legal requirements, particularly regarding the acquisition of legally required permits issued by third-party institutions. If permits are mandated by law but not submitted with the project application, they will be requested during the selection process. However, applicants who do not provide the permits at the application stage will be granted a significantly shorter timeframe for submission. Failure to submit the required permits within this period will result in the project's exclusion from the selection process.

To avoid disqualification, applicants are strongly advised to carefully review all legally required investment documents and ensure their availability at the time of application submission.

2. Soft component – mandatory. It refers to non-infrastructure activities aimed at developing and/or enhancing the provision of the SGI.

³ According to Art. 2. (1) of Public Enterprises Act, public enterprises shall be:

1. commercial companies with more than 50 percent state/ municipal participation in the capital, or in which the State/ Municipality otherwise exercises a dominant influence;
2. the subsidiaries of the commercial companies under item 1 and the enterprises under item 3, if through them, the State/ Municipality controls more than 50 percent of the voting assets / shares or otherwise exercises a dominant influence;
3. the state-owned enterprises, established by special Acts, pursuant to Art. 62, Para. 3 of the Commercial Act.

➤ All project proposals must contribute to the following programme indicators:

- Output indicator **RC084 'Pilot actions developed jointly and implemented in projects'** - *design, develop, and test new or improved service models, delivery methods, or operational approaches that enhance the accessibility, quality, and efficiency of SGI in the cross-border region*
- Output indicator **RC0116 'Jointly developed solutions'** – *focuses on creating a sustainable and replicable service or approach that is intended for long-term use beyond the project's implementation*
- Output indicator **RC074 'Population covered by projects in the framework of strategies for integrated territorial development'** - *number of people who will directly benefit from the project's implementation*
- Result indicator **RCR104 'Solutions taken up or up-scaled by organisations'** – *number of jointly developed SGI solutions that are adopted (taken up) and/or further improved and expanded (up-scaled) by organizations during the project's implementation*

Detailed definition of the indicators is provided in Attachment 4 of the application package.

- Duration of SGI projects – maximum 24 months
- Application is online, via the Monitoring System of Interreg VI-A IPA Bulgaria-Serbia Programme [JEMs](#).

Cross border impact of SGI projects

Another important requirement that applicants must consider is the cross-border effect of the proposed SGI solutions, ensuring that they do not result in 'mirror' solutions. In the context of the programme, "cross-border effect" refers to the measurable outcome and added value that a proposed SGI solution brings to the entire cross-border area, rather than just mirroring similar actions on both sides of the border without real integration or cooperation.

A strong cross-border effect means that the SGI solution:

- **Addresses common challenges** shared by both countries.
- **Creates synergies** through joint development, implementation, and use.
- **Enhances connectivity** and cooperation between institutions, services providers or communities across the border.
- **Leads to sustainable benefits** that would not be achievable without cross-border collaboration

Financial framework of the Call

The total budget available for this Call is EUR 4 630 028.

Maximum grant amount of a project proposal is EUR 1 million. Grant intensity is 100%.

However, as a general rule, applicants must ensure reasonable and well-justifiable balance between project activities and project costs. Unrealistic and overestimated projects will not be awarded a contract.

Projects with budgets between EUR 500,000 and EUR 1,000,000 must deliver more than one pilot actions (output indicator RCO84), jointly developed solutions (output indicator RCO116) and solutions taken-up (result indicator RCR104).

Projects with budgets below EUR 500,000 must deliver at least one pilot action (RCO84), jointly developed solution (RCO116), and solution taken up (RCR104).

⚠ IMPORTANT

Public support given to undertakings⁴ in the framework of the (Interreg VI-A) IPA Bulgaria Serbia Programme is granted under the de minimis provisions, in accordance with Regulation (EU) 2023/2831. Project partners registered in Serbia should follow the applicable national regulations regarding de minimis Regulation (EU) 2023/2831.

A project grant is distributed as follows:

a) **for Bulgarian partners:** 85% EU contribution + 15% national public co-financing

AND

b) **for Serbian partners:** 85% EU contribution + 15% own co-financing

Project partners are free to co-finance their SGI solutions with additional own resources. If they choose to do so, this must be clearly indicated in the application form.

Project application

Applicants must carefully review the entire application package, available on the following websites:

- **Programme website:** <http://www.ipacbc-bgrs.eu/>
- **MA website:** <https://www.mrrb.bg/>
- **NA website:** <https://www.mei.gov.rs/eng/>
- **EU Structural Funds in Bulgaria website:** www.eufunds.bg

⁶Any entity, be it a natural or a legal person, engaged in an economic activity, regardless of its legal status and the way in which it is financed (COMMISSION REGULATION (EU) 2023/2831, (4)).

The application process is conducted exclusively through [JEMS](#); no paper documents are required at the application stage. Technical guidance on project application and submission is available in the JEMS Manual, accessible at <https://JEMS.interact-eu.net/manual/>.

Additionally, project partners may submit **substantive questions in writing** up to **14 calendar days before the submission deadline**. The **Operational Unit (OU)** will provide replies **no later than 7 calendar days before the submission deadline**.

Questions should be sent via email to the address listed below, clearly indicating the **reference of the Call for Proposals - No 2021TC16IPCB007 – 2025 – 6**:

E-mail: ma_ipacbc@mrrb.government.bg

All questions submitted by potential applicants, along with the corresponding answers, will be published on the Programme website: <https://ipa-bgrs.mrrb.bg/>

Helpful readings

To enhance SGI project development and justification, applicants may consult the following additional information sources:

- https://ec.europa.eu/regional_policy/policy/cooperation/european-territorial/cross-border-public-services_en - Study "Cross-border public services: CPS inventory analysis and policy recommendations"
- <https://archive.espon.eu/cps-2> - ESPON Cross-border Public Services 2.0 (CPS 2.0). At the bottom of the page, you will find an inventory of cross-border public services available in over 40 cross-border areas across Europe.
- <https://www.keep.eu/> - database of all Interreg projects.