

**Interreg**



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**IPA** Bulgaria - North Macedonia

# **(INTERREG VI-A) IPA BULGARIA NORTH MACEDONIA PROGRAMME**

**2021-2027**

**CCI 2021TC16IPCB006**

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## **GUIDELINES FOR APPLICANTS**

### **OPEN CALL FOR PROJECT PROPOSALS**

**No 2021TC16IPCB006– 2025 – 4**

**SO1 “INCREASE THE COMPETITIVENESS OF THE  
LOCAL ECONOMY AND IMPROVE THE BUSINESS  
ENVIRONMENT”**

**UNDER PRIORITY 3: “INTEGRATED DEVELOPMENT  
OF THE BORDER REGION”**

**SUBMISSION DEADLINE: SEPTEMBER 15, 2025, 17:00 EEST**

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## Glossary of Acronyms

AA	Audit Authority
AB	Accounting Body
AF	Application Form
SWG	Screening Working Group
CBC	Cross-border Cooperation
EIA/AA	Environmental Impact Assessment/ Appropriate Assessment
EC	European Commission
ERDF	European Regional Development Fund
EU	European Union
GD	Government Decision
ICT	Information and Communication Technology
IPA	Instrument for Pre-accession assistance
IT	Information Technology
JEMS	Joint Electronic Monitoring System
JS	Joint Secretariat
LP	Lead Partner
MA	Managing Authority
MC	Monitoring Committee
MS	Member State
NA	National Authority
NACE	Statistical classification of economic activities in the European Community
NUTS	Nomenclature of Territorial Units for Statistics
PRAG	Practical Guide for Procurement and Grants for European Union External Actions
SMEs	Small and Medium sized Enterprises
SCO	Simplified Cost Options
DNSH	Do No Significant Harm (Principle)
VAT	Value Added Tax
CR	Commercial register
SO	Specific Objective
SB	Strategy Board
OU	Operational Unit
PSP	Project Screening Process

## Preface

These Guidelines for Applicants serve as an essential reference document for applicants applying for funding under the Call for Project Proposal within the framework of the (Interreg VI-A) IPA Bulgaria – North Macedonia Programme.

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

- Attachments:
  - Attachment 1 “De minimis FactSheet” – contains important information about the rules for financing of state aid relevant activities;
  - Attachment 2 “Complaint Procedure” – contains important information about the stages, requirements, steps and deadlines which the applicant must observe in case it decides to launch a complaint against the decisions of the Monitoring Committee regarding project selection and financing;
  - Attachment 3 “Indicators”;
  - Attachment 4 “SME Definition User Guide”;
  - Attachment 5 SO 1 “Assessment and selections of Applicants”;
- Annexes A to the Application form – contain templates of all declarations that must be submitted by the project partners together with DNSH assessment Project Proposal;
- Annex C - Subsidy contract – draft version (for information purposes only).

It is recommended that the applicant submitting the proposal under the current call should examine carefully, besides the present Guidelines for Applicants, the adopted Programme Document, which is available on the website of the Programme: <https://ipa-bgmk.mrrb.bg/>

## Explanation of text-box

Across the following pages you will find a highlighted text boxes – marked “**Important**”:

📌 **IMPORTANT** - highlights the most important elements to be taken into account when preparing a project.

## Legal Basis

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

Basic EU legal acts:

- Regulation (EU) 2021/1529 of the European Parliament and of the Council of 15 September 2021 establishing the Instrument for Pre-Accession assistance (IPA III);
- Commission Implementing Regulation (EU) 2021/2236 of 15 December 2021 on the specific rules for implementing Regulation (EU) 2021/1529 of the European Parliament and of the Council establishing an Instrument for Pre-Accession Assistance (IPA III);
- Regulation (EU) 2021/1059 of the European Parliament and of the Council of 24 June 2021 on specific provisions for the European territorial cooperation goal (Interreg) supported by the European Regional Development Fund and external financing instruments;
- Regulation (EU) 2021/1060 of the European Parliament and of the Council of 24 June 2021 laying down common provisions on the European Regional Development Fund, the European Social Fund Plus, the Cohesion Fund, the Just Transition Fund and the European Maritime, Fisheries and Aquaculture Fund and financial rules for those and for the Asylum, Migration and Integration Fund, the Internal Security Fund and the Instrument for Financial Support for Border Management and Visa Policy;
- Regulation (EU, Euratom) 2024/2509 of the European Parliament and of the Council of 23 September 2024 on the financial rules applicable to the general budget of the Union
- Regulation (EU) 2021/1058 of the European Parliament and of the Council of 24 June 2021 on the European Regional Development Fund and on the Cohesion Fund.
- Regulation (EU) 2023/2831 on the application of Articles 107 and 108 of the Treaty on the Functioning of the European Union to de minimis aid.
- Commission Recommendation 2003/361 concerning the definition of micro, small and medium-sized enterprises.

**Basic programme documents:**

- INTERREG VI-A IPA Bulgaria – North Macedonia Programme approved by European Commission of 23.11.2022 by Decision C/2022/8880, with programme reference number CCI 2021TC16IPCB006, including Appendix 3;
- Integrated Territorial Strategy under INTERREG VI-A IPA Bulgaria – North Macedonia Programme

**National legislation**

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

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

## 1. General Information

These Guidelines for Applicants aim at providing practical information under (INTERREG VI-A) IPA Bulgaria North Macedonia. It is the most practical level of information needed for the successful submission of a project proposal under this programme. These Guidelines for Applicants provide information on how to develop of a project idea/proposal, to fill in the application form, budget and related forms, the application procedure, the project selection criteria, the decision procedure.

### 📌 IMPORTANT

Please read carefully these Guidelines for Applicants in order to avoid confusion!

The present version of the document is only relevant in connection to the **Open Call for Proposal under the (Interreg VI-A) IPA Bulgaria North Macedonia 2021-2027:**

**Specific Objective (SO) 1: Increase the competitiveness of the local economy and improve the business environment;**

This Call for proposal only concerns **Priority 3: Integrated development of the border region .**

### 1.1 Overview of (Interreg VI-A) IPA Bulgaria North Macedonia Programme

This Programme is co-financed by the European Union through the Instrument for Pre-accession Assistance III and co-financed by Bulgaria and North Macedonia through contributions from state budgets. Own co-financing by the project beneficiaries is allowed.

The Programme document is available on the following websites:

[www.ipa-bgmk.mrrb.bg/](http://www.ipa-bgmk.mrrb.bg/)

<https://www.mrrb.bg/>

<https://eufunds.bg/bg>

<https://mls.gov.mk/>

The programme continues the evolution of the EU's cross-border initiatives, reflected in the Interreg - IPA Bulgaria – North Macedonia CBC Programme 2014-2020, Bulgaria – Republic of Macedonia IPA Cross-border Programme 2007 – 2013 and Neighborhood Programme between Bulgaria and North Macedonia.

The Programme is designed in the framework of the European Union (EU) policies such as green and digital transition, Territorial Agenda 2030, EU enlargement with the Western Balkans and the relevant national strategic documents.

The Programme contributes to and interacts with the European Strategy for the Danube Region (EUSDR) and the European Strategy for the Adriatic and Ionian Region (EUAIRS) devised for the countries and regions that share common needs and objectives in the region.

### 1.1.1 Programme area

The border is 165 km long with three operating border crossings (Zlatarevo-Novo Selo, Stanke Lisichkovo- Delchevo and Gyueshevo- Deve Bair). The total programme area covers 18 087 km<sup>2</sup>. The population of the programme area is 942 045 inhabitants. The population of the part of Bulgaria is 417 757 while on the side of North Macedonia is 524 288.

The Programme area includes on Bulgarian side two NUTS III districts - **Blagoevgrad and Kyustendil** comprising of 23 municipalities:

- **District of Blagoevgrad:** 14 municipalities - Bansko, Belitsa, Blagoevgrad, Gotce Delchev, Garmen, Kresna, Petrich, Razlog, Sandanski, Satovcha, Simitli, Strumiani, Hadjidimovo, Yakoruda;
- **District of Kyustendil:** 9 municipalities - Bobovdol, Boboshevo, Dupnitsa, Kocherinovo, Kyustendil, Nevestino, Rila, Sapareva Banya, Trekliano.

The Programme area of the North Macedonia comprises the **North-East, the East and the South-East NUTS III statistical regions**, consisting of 27 municipalities:

- **North-East region:** 6 municipalities - Kratovo, Kriva Palanka, Rankovce, Kumanovo, Lipkovo and Staro Nagoricane;
- **South-East region:** 10 municipalities - Valandovo, Gevgelija, Bogdanci, Dojran, Radovis, Konce, Strumica, Bosilovo, Vasilevo and Novo Selo;
- **East region:** 11 municipalities - Berovo, Pehcevo, Vinica, Kocani, Cesinovo -Oblesevo, Zrnovci, Probistip, Stip, Karbinici, Delcevo and Makedonska Kamenica

### 1.1.2 Territorial Strategy

The ambition of the Interreg VI-A IPA Bulgaria-North Macedonia 2021-2027 Programme (hereafter “the Programme”, <https://ipa-bgmk.mrrb.bg/>) is to enhance territorial cohesion in the Bulgaria-North Macedonia cross-border region. The Programme aims to address territorial

disparities, socio-economic imbalances, and the region's overall economic performance by implementing targeted interventions under the priority “Integrated Development of the Border Region” and through a dedicated Integrated Territorial Strategy.

The Strategy aligns with the EU Policy Objective 5: “Europe closer to citizens” for the period 2021-2027. It promotes broad participation of local actors throughout the entire programme cycle, ensuring a bottom-up approach that translates territorial needs and opportunities into integrated solutions. The Strategy applies a multispectral approach to address regional challenges and unlock development potential, fostering cooperation between local stakeholders and cross-border synergies.

A core focus of the Territorial Strategy of the INTERREG VI-A IPA Bulgaria-North Macedonia Programme is to strengthen the competitiveness, sustainability, and digital transformation of local businesses. This is achieved through joint initiatives, technological modernization, and market expansion, ultimately empowering SMEs with essential knowledge, innovation, and access to wider markets. These efforts support the development of a greener, digital, and highly competitive business environment, fostering regional economic growth and social cohesion.

### 1.1.3 Programme Priorities

The focus of Programme priorities are: “Competitive border region”, “Integrated development of border region” and “A more resilient border region”.

The current call is under **PRIORITY 3: Integrated development of the border region:**

#### **Specific Objective (SO) 1: “Increase the competitiveness of the local economy and improve the business environment“**

The SO1 focuses on enhancing the productive capacity of SMEs by encouraging technological modernization, fostering digitalization, and supporting green business practices to improve efficiency and sustainability. It aims to develop a knowledge-based economy by providing training programs, mentorship initiatives, and skill development tailored to the demands of modern industries. Additionally, it seeks to facilitate cross-border cooperation between businesses, and participation in to regional and international value chains boost market integration. Improving market access is another key priority, achieved through initiatives that promote entrepreneurship, business internationalization, and networking opportunities.

### 1.1.4 Programme Indicators

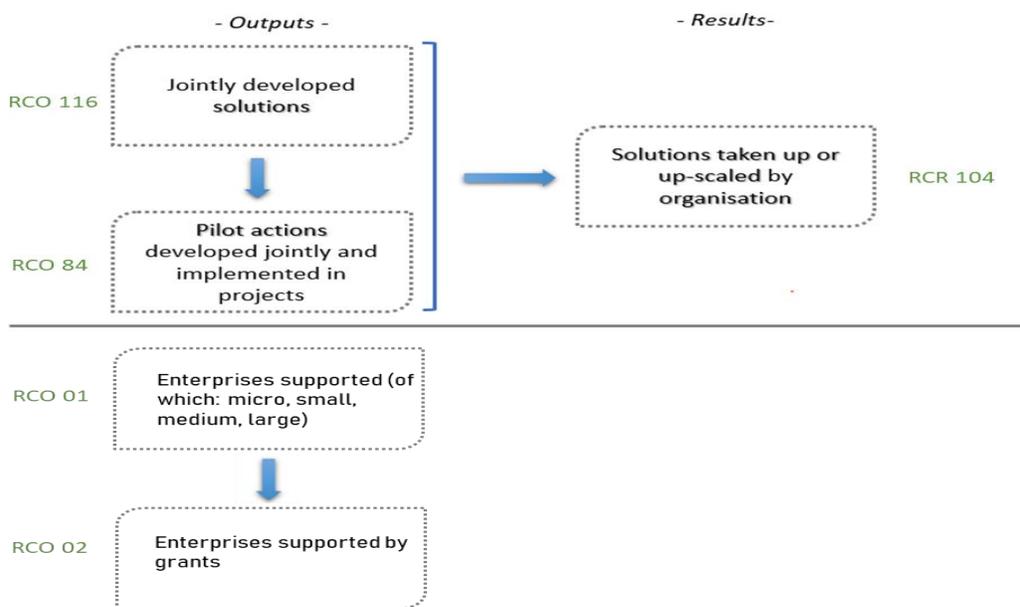
For the 2021-2027 period, a set of common indicators was defined in the ERDF Regulation, allowing easier and more consistent reporting across programmes. The indicators are used as a basis to provide information to the European Parliament and to the Council on performance of programmes.

There are two types of indicators – output indicators and result indicators. The output indicators measure the specific deliverables from the action chosen for support, while the result indicators measuring the outcomes (the effects of the interventions supported, with particular reference to the direct addressees, population targeted or users of infrastructure).

**📌 IMPORTANT**

Project proposals under **Priority 3: Integrated development of the border region** must contribute to the achievement of the **target values of the programme output and result indicators** under Specific objective “Increase the competitiveness of the local economy and improve the business environment”.

**Overview of indicators**



[Detailed information related to the indicators is provided in Attachment 3. Indicators](#)

**1.2 Programme Implementation Structures**

According to the Interreg Regulations 2021/1059 from 24 June 2021, the two partnering countries have established the following main management and implementation bodies:

**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 and NGOs. 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 Ministry of Regional Development and Public Works of the Republic of Bulgaria is designated to perform the functions of Managing Authority under (Interreg-VI-A) IPA Bulgaria- North Macedonia Programme (2021TC16IPCB006) as laid down in Articles 72, 74 and 75 of Regulation (EU) 2021/1060.

The Managing Authority is responsible for managing and implementing the cross-border cooperation programme in accordance with the principle of sound financial management.

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

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

**Joint Secretariat (JS)** is a common structure that assists the programme management bodies in carrying out their respective functions and it is the main contact point between the programme and the potential beneficiaries/project partners).

### **IMPORTANT**

The **JS** is the main structure responsible for providing information and support to potential beneficiaries.

## **1.3 Financial Allocation**

The total budget available for the present call:

Specific objective	EU contribution (EUR)	National contribution (EUR)	Total Amount (EUR)

SO1 Increase the competitiveness of the local economy and improve the business environment	4 241 793	748 552	4 990 345
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## 1.4 No-profit principle

The meaning of a no-profit principle is in accordance with Article 195 of Regulation (EU, Euratom) 2024/2509 of the European Parliament and of the Council of 23 September 2024 on the financial rules applicable to the general budget of the Union

The verification of the no-profit principle shall be applied as follows:

The grant amount representing the EU funds and national co-financing funds may not have the purpose or effect of producing a profit for the project partners. Profit is defined as a surplus of the grant amount received and the revenue generated by the operation over the total amount of eligible expenditures incurred by the project partner and verified by the Managing authority. If this calculation results in a profit for the project partner, the Managing authority will reduce the final amount of the grant with the profit generated.

The revenues may be but not only cash in-flows directly paid by users for the goods or 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 payments for services, payment received by the project partner arising from contractual penalties as a result of a breach of contract between the partner and a sub-contractor, interests accrued on the received pre-financing payment into the bank account using for the operation, etc.

For the purpose of respecting the no-profit principle and for the proper verification of the revenues generated each project partner should keep detailed, timely, adequate and traceable information and accounts concerning the generated revenues during the implementation period of the operation. A declaration for revenues generated with the relevant supporting documents shall be requested by each project partner at the stage of the last reporting of expenditures.

## 1.5 Cross-border impact

The challenges to the industrial sector from the CB area in the context of double transition objectives are significant, given the unsatisfactory starting points (low levels of digitalization and resource productivity, very high levels of carbon intensity). Furthermore, the regional SMEs have to be encourage investing in technological modernization, adoption of circularity models, digitalization, internationalization, entrepreneurship, accessing and setting up regional value chains, facilitating cross-border enterprise networking.

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

A clear cross-border impact could be found in these cases where the implementation of the projects ensures tangible results in the cross-border area (in both countries); otherwise the effect would be at regional level.

Through implementation of the planned activities (which are designed for facing certain specific needs of the partners and the target groups), each project shall contribute to achievement of the overall objective of the Programme. This means that when formulating the project idea, all partners should think about the impact of the project not only for their own organisations and the target groups, but also for the Programme area. Establishment of a partnership among organizations from the two countries by definition brings a cross-border character to the project, but only by itself this is not enough to ensure the direct cross-border impact and added value to the Programme area – rather, it is necessary that the combination of all project activities demonstrate achievement of distinct results in the cross-border area.

### 1.5.1 Cooperation criteria

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

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

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

**Joint staffing** means that there will be a single project team within the project. The project staff should not have duplicate functions on either side of the border and project team members should work together on the project. The partners should not merely carry out activities in parallel without mutual coordination and exchange of information, but the project team will be responsible for project activities on both sides of the border.

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

of project implementation (including transfer of funds and payments) are included in the Partnership agreement, and it can be expanded if partners deem it necessary.

### 📌 IMPORTANT

The importance of the cross-border approach to the topic addressed should be clearly demonstrated. In this matter the project partners from the two participating countries have to cooperate mandatory in **at least both joint development and joint implementation and, additionally, one or both of the other two cooperation criteria: joint financing or joint staffing (as described above) as required of the Regulation (EU) 2021/1059 of the European Parliament and of the Council of 24 June 2021**

## 1.6 Horizontal principles

The (Interreg VI-A) IPA Bulgaria - North Macedonia places an important role to the inclusion of horizontal principles in the planning, implementation, monitoring, reporting and evaluation of the project activities. During the whole life cycle of the projects, beneficiaries are requested to consider transversal actions to the projects' activities, taking into account the horizontal principles of the EU<sup>1</sup>.

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

1. Respect for fundamental rights and compliance with the Charter of Fundamental Rights of the European Union in the implementation of the Funds;
2. Equality between men and women, gender mainstreaming and the integration of a gender perspective are taken into account and promoted throughout the preparation, implementation, monitoring, reporting and evaluation of programmes;
3. Prevent any discrimination based on gender, racial or ethnic origin, religion or belief, disability, age or sexual orientation during the preparation, implementation, monitoring, reporting and evaluation of programmes. In particular, accessibility for persons with disabilities shall be taken into account throughout the preparation and implementation of projects;
4. Sustainable development as set out in Article 11 TFEU, taking into account the UN Sustainable Development Goals, the Paris Agreement and the "**do no significant harm**" (DNSH) principle and the Green public procurement (green public procurement criteria and social considerations as well as innovation incentives should be incorporated into public procurement procedures). To ensure maximum adherence to the principles and targets of the Green Deal, each project supported by the programme, should have gone a positive DNSH assessment during the selection process;

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<sup>1</sup> Horizontal Principles as per Article 9 of the REGULATION (EU) 2021/1060 of the European parliament and of the council of 24 June 2021

5. Projects are expected to contribute to climate change and biodiversity goals, in line with the EU Biodiversity Strategy 2030;

Applicants shall describe in the application how they particularly consider and promote the abovementioned horizontal principles in their activities and which specific actions are implemented in reference to them. Furthermore, applicants are advised to include measures in their proposals that will contribute to the diminishing of the environmental impact of their actions. During the assessment of applications, consideration is given to the project's adherence to the horizontal principles and the quality of the planned specific actions. Approved projects will report regularly to the Programme their achievements.

## 1.7 Applicable law and public procurement

The beneficiaries have the possibility to award service, supply and works contracts to contractors. Contractors are neither partners nor associates. The award of contracts to them is subject to the procurement rules in accordance with Article 58 of Regulation (EU) 2021/1059 of the European Parliament and of the Council of 24 June 2021 on specific provisions for the European territorial cooperation goal (Interreg) supported by the European Regional Development Fund and external financing instruments.

### 📌 IMPORTANT

When the project partners are located in Bulgaria they shall apply national laws, regulations and administrative provisions as Government decree no. 4/2024 (Постановление на Министерски съвет №4/ 11.01.2024 г. за определяне на правилата за разглеждане и оценяване на оферти и сключването на договорите в процедурата за избор с публична покана от бенефициенти на безвъзмездна финансова помощ от Европейските фондове при споделено управление).

### 📌 IMPORTANT

For the award of supply of goods, works or services, the procurement procedures provided for in Articles 181 and 182, and points 37 to 42 of Chapter 3 of Annex I, of the Regulation (EU, Euratom) 2024/2509 of the European Parliament and of the Council of 23 September 2024 on the financial rules applicable to the general budget of the Union shall apply for partners from North Macedonia. In this case, the beneficiaries must refer to and use the guidelines and templates of the **“The practical guide on contract procedures for European Union external action (PRAG)”**.

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

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

individual or legal persons is strictly forbidden.

## **1.8 Communication and Visibility**

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The information and publicity measures for the interventions of the (Interreg VI-A) IPA Bulgaria North Macedonia Programme funds are aimed at publicizing the actions of the European Union, increasing transparency and creating a uniform image of the interventions throughout participating countries.

Through implementation of the planned activities (which are designed for facing certain specific needs of the partners and the target groups), each project shall contribute to achievement of the overall objective of the Programme. This means that when formulating the project idea, all partners should think about the impact of the project not only for their own organisations and the target groups, but also for the Programme area. Establishment of a partnership among organizations from the two countries by definition brings a cross-border character to the project, but only by itself this is not enough to ensure the direct cross-border impact and added value to the Programme area – rather, it is necessary that the combination of all project activities demonstrate achievement of distinct results in the cross-border area. be properly planned and should focus on the achievements and impact of the project actions.

In order to maximize the impact of communication efforts:

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

The following communication and visibility activities might be foreseen by the applicants in their Application forms (a nonexclusive list):

- Online communication: websites, social media, electronic newsletters, e-events, online articles and blogs, etc.;
- Public events: Information campaigns, workshops, seminars, trainings, visits, stakeholder meetings;
- Press and media: press releases, press conferences, press visits, articles in print media;
- Audio visual materials, photography and other productions: video, audio, etc.
- Communication and visibility in print: newsletters, leaflets, brochures, catalogues, displays, stationery, business cards, letterheads, etc.
- Obligatory visibility elements on buildings, vehicles and other supplies: billboards, plates, stickers, etc.

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

- Regulation (EU) 2021/1060 of the European Union and of the Council of 24 June 2021, articles 47 and 50;
- Regulation (EU) 2021/1059 of the European Parliament and of the Council of 24 June 2021, Article 36;
- Communication strategy of the (Interreg VI-A) IPA Bulgaria North Macedonia Programme;
- The present Guidelines for Applicants.

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

When drafting your proposal, you may also pay attention to the following practical hints:

- Project partners should envisage production and installation of durable plaques or billboards, clearly visible to the public in accordance with Art. 36 of the Regulation (EU) 2021/1059 and Annex IX of Regulation (EU) 2021/1060 as soon as the physical implementation of an Interreg operation involving physical investment or the purchase of equipment starts or purchased equipment is installed, with regard to operations supported by an Interreg fund, the total cost of which exceeds EUR 100 000 per partner;
- Programme branding illustrative elements have to be clearly and visibly displayed “on documents and communication material relating to the implementation of the Interreg operation attended for the general public and participants”;
- The project must use the logo provided by the Programme/Interreg brand manual, in accordance with the provisions of the Programme;
- Promotional materials (promotional banners/gifts/gadgets, etc. designed to be distributed during public events) should preferably be “eco-friendly” (according to the Communication strategy of the (Interreg VI-A) IPA Bulgaria North Macedonia Programme);
- Communication activities and objectives must be directly integrated in the work packages to allow the communication strategy to be fully embedded in the project’s overall strategy;
- Communication activities towards the general public and the target groups should be carried out in the language of the participants and in this respect usage of appropriate translation and/or interpretation services is advisable;
- All activities including investment activities related to works, supply of equipment and vehicles, as well as major project results, must acknowledge the EU support and display the European emblem and funding statement. The EU emblem should be accompanied by a

funding statement “Co-funded by the European Union” mentioning. The funding statement “Co-funded by the European Union” shall always be spelled out in full in the operational language of the EU programme and relevant local language(s) and be placed next to the emblem.

More detailed practical guidelines (including templates) concerning the basic information and publicity measures are provided by the European Commission in the Communication and Visibility Manual for EU External Actions, published on the following EU website: [https://international-partnerships.ec.europa.eu/index\\_en](https://international-partnerships.ec.europa.eu/index_en)

More information about the new Interreg branding can be found on: [https://ec.europa.eu/regional\\_policy/en/newsroom/news/2021/12/17-12-2021-new-interreg-branding-for-the-2021-2027-period](https://ec.europa.eu/regional_policy/en/newsroom/news/2021/12/17-12-2021-new-interreg-branding-for-the-2021-2027-period)

## 2. Eligibility Criteria

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

- Eligibility of SMEs and entrepreneurs (see section 2.1),
- Eligibility of activities (see section 2.2) and
- Eligibility of expenditures (see section 2.3).

**The general eligibility criteria were defined by the Strategy Board members in accordance with the Decision of the Strategy Board dated March 24, 2025:**

<https://ipa-bgmk.mrrb.bg/sites/default/files/documents/2025-04/Decision%205th%20SB%20-%2024.03.2025.pdf>

### 2.1 Eligibility of SMEs and entrepreneurs

Partners must comply with all of the following general eligibility criteria:

- 1) be legally established entities according to the national legislation of the state on whose territory they are located;

and

- 2) be registered and operating **not later than 31.12.2022** in the programme area between Bulgaria and North Macedonia;

and

- 3) meets the criteria for micro, small and medium size enterprises (SME) as defined in European Union law (EU recommendation 2003/361), and respective national legislation, with at least 51% private capital.

and

4) with main economic activity in the following divisions in accordance with the Statistical Classification of Economic Activities in the European Community (NACE rev.2.1)<sup>2</sup>:

Division /Class	Title
<b>C</b>	<b>MANUFACTURING</b>
<b>C.10</b>	Manufacture of food products
<b>C.11</b>	Manufacture of beverages
<b>C.13</b>	Manufacture of textiles
<b>C.14</b>	Manufacture of wearing apparel
<b>C.15</b>	Manufacture of leather and related products of other materials
<b>C.16</b>	Manufacture of wood and of products of wood and cork, except furniture; manufacture of articles of straw and plaiting materials
<b>C.17</b>	Manufacture of paper and paper products
<b>C.18</b>	Printing and reproduction of recorded media
<b>C.22</b>	Manufacture of rubber and plastic products
<b>C.23</b>	Manufacture of other non-metallic mineral products
<b>C.24</b>	Manufacture of basic metals
<b>C.25</b>	Manufacture of fabricated metal products, except machinery and equipment
<b>C.26</b>	Manufacture of computer, electronic and optical products
<b>C.27</b>	Manufacture of electrical equipment
<b>C.28</b>	Manufacture of machinery and equipment n.e.c.
<b>C.29</b>	Manufacture of motor vehicles, trailers and semi-trailers
<b>C.30</b>	Manufacture of other transport equipment
<b>C.31</b>	Manufacture of furniture
<b>C.32</b>	Other manufacturing
<b>C.33</b>	Repair, maintenance and installation of machinery and equipment
<b>E</b>	<b>WATER SUPPLY, SEWERAGE, WASTE MANAGEMENT AND REMEDIATION ACTIVITIES</b>
<b>E.38.11</b>	Collection of non-hazardous waste
<b>E.38.21</b>	Materials recovery
<b>E.38.32</b>	Landfilling or permanent storage
<b>E.39</b>	Remediation activities and other waste management services
<b>I</b>	<b>ACCOMMODATION AND FOOD SERVICE ACTIVITIES</b>
<b>I.55.10</b>	Hotels and similar accommodation
<b>I.55.20</b>	Holiday and other short-stay accommodation
<b>H</b>	<b>TRANSPORTATION AND STORAGE</b>
<b>H.52.10</b>	Warehousing and storage
<b>R</b>	<b>HUMAN HEALTH AND SOCIAL WORK ACTIVITIES (all codes in this Division)</b>
<b>S</b>	<b>ARTS, SPORTS AND RECREATION (all codes in this Division)</b>

<sup>2</sup>[https://showvoc.op.europa.eu/#/datasets/ESTAT Statistical Classification of Economic Activities in the European Community Rev. 2.1. %28NACE 2.1%29/data](https://showvoc.op.europa.eu/#/datasets/ESTAT%20Statistical%20Classification%20of%20Economic%20Activities%20in%20the%20European%20Community%20Rev.%202.1.%20NACE%202.1/data)

\* Field of interventions are closely coordinated with the national competitiveness strategies and applicable analyses

and

**5) be directly responsible for the preparation and management of the action, not acting as an intermediary.**

**📌 IMPORTANT**

All the above **5 criteria** must be fulfilled together.

**📌 IMPORTANT**

The project must include **at least one partner SME** from each side of the border region acting in full spirit of cooperation. If the project does not comply with this requirement, it will be eliminated at the eligibility assessment stage. All partners have to be directly responsible for the project implementation and cannot act as an intermediary.

### 2.1.1 Ineligibility criteria

Potential **applicants are not eligible** to participate in this call for proposals, if they are in one or more exclusion situations referred to in Article 138 Regulation (EU, Euratom) 2024/2509 of the European Parliament and of the Council of 23 September 2024 on the financial rules applicable to the general budget of the Union.

**📌 IMPORTANT**

All project partners should sign a **“Partners declaration” (Annex A3)**. They have to declare that they do not fall into any of the categories specified in the Declaration.

#### 1) Investments in the specific objectives are not eligible for support:

- Investments to achieve the reduction of greenhouse gas emissions from activities listed in Annex I to Directive 2003/87/EC of the European Parliament and of the Council;
- The decommissioning and the construction of **nuclear power stations**;
- The manufacturing, processing and marketing of **tobacco and tobacco products**;
- Investment in **airport infrastructure** unless related to environmental protection or accompanied by investment necessary to mitigate or reduce its negative environmental impact.
- Undertakings active in the **fishery and aquaculture sector**, as covered by Regulation (EU) No 1379/2013 of the European Parliament and of the Council of 11 December 2013 on the common organisation of the markets in fishery and aquaculture products, amending Council Regulations (EC) No 1184/2006 and (EC) No 1224/2009 and repealing Council Regulation (EC) No 104/2000;
- Undertakings active in the primary production of **agricultural products**;

- Undertakings active in the sector of processing and marketing of agricultural products, in the following cases:
  - (i) where the amount of the aid is fixed on the basis of the price or quantity of such products purchased from primary producers or put on the market by the undertakings concerned;
  - (ii) where the aid is conditional on being partly or entirely passed on to primary producers;
- Export-related activities towards third countries or Member States, namely aid directly linked to the quantities exported, to the establishment and operation of a distribution network or to other current expenditure linked to the export activity;
- Aid contingent upon the use of domestic over imported goods and services.

Where an undertaking is active in the sectors referred as not eligible and is also active in one or more of the sectors or has other activities falling within the scope of this Call of proposals, those undertaking shall apply to aid granted in respect of the eligible sectors or activities, provided that the applicant concerned ensures, by appropriate means such as separation of activities or distinction of costs, that the activities in the sectors excluded from the scope of this call do not benefit from the de minimis aid granted in accordance with Article 1 para. 2 Regulation (EU) No 2023/2831.

#### **⚠ IMPORTANT**

All project partners will be required to submit a declaration during the contracting stage in accordance with Article 51 of Council Regulation (EU) No 2022/576 dated April 8, 2022. The Regulation explicitly prohibits the provision of direct or indirect support, including financing, financial assistance, or any other benefit under Union, Euratom, or Member State national programs and contracts, as defined in Regulation (EU, Euratom) 2024/2509, to any legal person, entity, or body established in Russia with **over 50%** public ownership or public control.

**Subsidy contracts will not be awarded to any entity falling under the circumstances outlined in Article 51 of Council Regulation (EU) No 2022/576.**

### **2.1.2 Lead Partner Principle**

The Lead Partner (LP), as the applicant of the project proposal, will be responsible for the preparation and submission of the project proposal as well as for implementation of the project. The LP must have the capacity to start the implementation of the project as quickly as possible, to concentrate all available managerial, financing and know-how resources and focus them on the project.

The lead partner shall carry out the following tasks:

- lay down the arrangements with other partners in an agreement comprising provisions that, inter alia, guarantee the sound financial management of the respective funds allocated to the operation, including the arrangements for recovering amounts unduly paid;

- sign the contract for implementation of the operation with MA and further addenda to the contract (if any);
- assume responsibility for ensuring implementation of the entire operation;
- transfer the relevant budget amounts to the partners participating in the operation according to the Project Partnership Agreement and verified costs;
- ensure that expenditures presented by all partners have been paid in implementing the operation and corresponds to the activities agreed between all the partners;
- ensure that the expenditures presented by the partners participating in the operation have been verified by controller(s);
- collect and check the information from the project partners and submit reports on progress of the project to the JS;
- informing MA/NA/JS about necessity of project modifications.

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

#### **🚩 IMPORTANT**

A partner can never act as a **contractor in the any financed project at this Call for Proposal same project and vice versa!**

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

### **2.1.3 Rules concerning partnership**

One of the project partners have to designate by the partners themselves as the Lead Partner.

#### **🚩 IMPORTANT**

**Project Partnership Agreement** is a legal and binding document, which should be **signed by all partners with utmost awareness**. All partners should ensure to **comply with the Project Partnership Agreement requirements (Annex A1)**.

The project partners must have clear roles in project preparation and implementation. All partners must sign a Project Partnership Agreement that stipulates their rights and duties. The signatures of the partners should be on the same page at the end of the agreement.

The Project Partnership Agreement should be enclosed to the application form.

A Project Partnership Agreement template is annexed to the present Guidelines (Annex A1). The partners may decide to add additional provisions to the Project Partnership Agreement.

#### **🚩 IMPORTANT**

***Number of project proposals and grants per project partner!***

Under the current Call for proposals for Priority 3 “Integrated development of the border region” a **single undertaking as defined in Article 2, paragraph 2 of Regulation (EU) 2023/2831 may participate only in one project proposal**. If an SME participates in more than one project proposal—whether as a Lead Partner or a Project partner—all its submissions will be disqualified.

### 🚩 IMPORTANT

The minimum number of partners in a project is two (2), including the Lead Partner, while the maximum, including the Lead Partner, shall not exceed four (4).

## 2.2 Eligibility of Activities

### 2.2.1 Project duration and grant amount

Project duration and eligible grant amount are specified below:

Priority	Specific objective	Type of project	Min. Grant Amount	Max. Grant Amount	Project Duration
Competitive border region	<b>SO1.</b>	Investment	300 000 euro	600 000 euro	Between 12 to 24 months

Eligible grant amount per project partner – SME is specified below\*:

Priority	Specific objective	Type of project	Min. Grant Amount	Max. Grant Amount
Competitive border region	<b>SO1.</b>	Investment	100 000 euro	300 000 euro

*\*When preparing their investment proposals, applicants are encouraged to review the project selection criteria and strategically structure their partnerships. Project partners should aim for balanced and complementary investments. At a minimum, this means allocating 100 000 EUR to one partner and 200 000 EUR to the other, ensuring the total requested funding meets the minimum 300,000 EUR project threshold.*

In addition, the grant is distributed as follows:

- a) **Undertakings from Bulgaria:** 85% EU contribution + **15% national public co-financing**  
AND
- b) **Undertakings from North Macedonia:** 85% EU contribution + **15% national public co-financing**

**Note:** Further to the aforementioned obligatory amount of the activities, each SME may choose to provide ADDITIONAL own co-financing for the needs of the project. The provided own co-financing will be a subject of verification.

### **⚠ IMPORTANT**

Public support given to undertakings in the framework of the (Interreg VI-A) IPA Bulgaria North Macedonia is exclusively in the form of subsidies **granted under the de minimis provisions**, in accordance with Regulation (EU) 2023/2831 on the application of Articles 107 and 108 of the Treaty on the Functioning of the European Union to de minimis aid. Project partners registered in North Macedonia should follow the applicable national regulations regarding de minimis Regulation (EU) 2023/2831.

The use of the de minimis framework, implies that undertakings can receive grants from the Programme only if they have not received public aid under the de minimis rule totaling more than 300 000 euro any period of 3 years prior to the date of grant.

The threshold of 300 000 euro encompass the received public aid under de minimis, together with the applied public support by the single undertaking in the meaning of art. 2, para. 2 from Regulation (EU) 2023/2831.

***Additional information for de minimis framework is provided in Attachment 1. De minimis FactSheet.***

### **2.2.2 Activities' location**

The implementation of project activities under SO1 will cover the entire Programme area, defined in the p. 1.1.1 Programme area. Supported projects are required to demonstrate that those activities have cross- border impact on the Programme area and contribute to the specific objective of Priority 3.

### **2.2.3 Eligible Activities**

The SO1 is focused on the support to the SMEs through broad range of actions aimed at strengthening SMEs' knowledge capacity, equipping them to operate in a greener, more digital, and competitive environment. This involves fostering skill development and knowledge acquisition. Additionally, the call seeks to promote joint solutions that enhance SMEs' productive capacity through technological modernization, improving efficiency and resource management. Another key focus is optimizing product development processes, from concept to market availability, while supporting SMEs in expanding into new markets through marketing strategies and internationalization initiatives.

Under this call for proposals “investment” projects are eligible for funding it means that the project proposals should mainly include investment activities - works, supply, etc. (representing Budget

category 5 – Equipment and Budget category 6 Infrastructure and works). The **investment component should be at least 65% of the total eligible costs of the entire project.**

**The projects must also include “soft” measures”** activities that are mainly oriented at preparing studies, establishing networks, providing trainings, developing concepts, providing services target groups, raising awareness on specific themes, etc. Soft measures also include people-to-people type of actions, e.g. small-scale initiatives among civil society institutions that aim at increasing direct contacts and cooperation across the border among the people and their associations in the region.

**The not exhaustive list of eligible activities is given below:**

#### Investment Component

- Development and adoption of circular economy technologies, including bio-conversion systems, material recycling technologies, energy recovery systems, closed-loop water systems, additive manufacturing, and biodegradable material production;
- Implementation of eco-innovation in products and processes like developing eco-friendly products with reduced environmental footprints or implementation of cleaner production techniques, such as closed-loop systems, water recycling
- Collaboration with research institutions for technology transfer;
- Creation of pilot projects for sustainable solutions;
- Green and circular supply chain integration like creating a reverse logistics system for used product collection and reuse or collecting and reprocessing demolition waste;
- Sustainable product design and development including reducing the use of rare or hazardous substances and incorporating recyclability, upgradability, and reusability in product design;
- Adoption of digital technologies to improve resource efficiency - IoT-enabled sensors to monitor and control energy use in real time or sensor-based systems to optimize water usage in agricultural and industrial operations;
- Investments in automation and smart manufacturing for competitiveness;
- Installation of energy-efficient machinery and processes;
- Adoption of cleaner production techniques to reduce waste;
- Sustainable material sourcing and eco-friendly packaging;
- Implementation of circular business models to close resource loops;
- Implementation of waste minimization and recycling systems;
- Use of secondary raw materials in production;
- Development of innovative waste valorization solutions;
- Investments in industrial symbiosis initiatives (waste-to-resource);

### “Soft measure” activities

- Awareness-raising campaigns on sustainability and carbon reduction;
- Advisory services for SMEs on green business transformation;
- Climate risk assessment and adaptation planning for SMEs;
- Training and workshops on energy efficiency and sustainability;
- Certification and eco-labeling support for SMEs;
- Business development programs for circular economy products;
- Networking and knowledge-sharing initiatives between SMEs and industry leaders;
- Participation in trade fairs aligned with the project's sector;
- Certified upskilling of the project partners' workforce.

#### **📌 IMPORTANT**

Aid shall not be granted to investment in new buildings or expansion of existing buildings.

#### **📌 IMPORTANT**

Each project under SO1 must include investment activities and soft measures. **The eligible costs for soft measures shall not exceed more than 35% of the total eligible project.**

In accordance with Article 22, para 4, (i) of the Regulation (EU) 2021/1059 of the European Parliament and of the Council of 24 June 2021, 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 proposal, the partners are encouraged to check if any reasoned opinion affects the project at the level of Bulgaria. This link ([https://ec.europa.eu/atwork/applying-eu-law/infringements-proceedings/infringement\\_decisions/?lang\\_code=en](https://ec.europa.eu/atwork/applying-eu-law/infringements-proceedings/infringement_decisions/?lang_code=en)) 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, except where there are reasons to believe that the infringement will be lifted within the deadline for the project submission set by this Guide.

#### **2.2.4 Project Preparedness for investment activities under SO 1**

The types of actions have been assessed as compatible with the DNSH principle, since they are not expected to have any significant negative environmental impact due to their nature, and they have been assessed as compatible following the approach under the Recovery and Resilience Facility (RRF).

All projects that envisage rehabilitation of existing facilities, must comply with the environmental legislation of the respective country before the implementation stage. This is verified at the application stage.

**📌 IMPORTANT****Please consider the following requirements for all “investment” activities:**

The land or buildings where the works will be carried out must either owned by the beneficiary or secured through a long-term lease agreement with minimum duration of 10 years as of the date of submission of the project proposal.

All projects that envisage rehabilitation of existing facilities must comply with the environmental legislation of the respective country before the implementation stage. This is verified by the MA and the NA at the application stage.

The envisaged works activities have to be supported with approved/certified detailed technical or works design (where applicable according to the relevant legislation of the country (Bulgaria or North Macedonia), where the works activities will be implemented) and detailed bill of quantities.

In case of construction works, for which the relevant legislation does not require approval of a technical or work design, the applicant has to present a statement by the relevant institution/s for exception of the rule for works design’s approval.

During the application stage, the project partner/s should be provided valid Building permits (if applicable).

All supplies have to be supported by technical specification, relevant unit prices and total price and Market analysis for similar equipment or three offers from different providers, licensed authorized dealers (if applicable).

All prices concerning investment activities have to be in Euro.

All the investment proposals should have positive environmental impact assessment (EIA), if for such kind of activities an EIA is required by the national legislation.

When the relevant legislation does not require an environmental impact assessment, the applicant has to present a statement by the relevant institution/s for exception of the rule for environmental impact assessment.

Have to prove the eligibility according to the current River Basin Management Plans and Flood Risk Management Plans - issued in original language and English translation signed/ signed with qualified electronic signature by respective organization as true copy (for Bulgarian partners only) in case the required information is not included in B6.3

**General principles**

The hierarchy of rules applicable to (INTERREG VI-A) IPA Bulgaria –North Macedonia projects is as follows<sup>3</sup>:

- European level - EU regulations;

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<sup>3</sup> See in the part „Legal basis”

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

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

Only "eligible costs" can be taken into account for financial support. The budget is therefore both a cost estimate and a maximum ceiling for "eligible costs". Note that the eligible costs must be based on real costs based on supporting documents with some exceptions for which the flat rates, unit costs and lump sum will be applied. The eligibility of expenditure applies to EU and national co-financing as well as beneficiaries' own contributions. The expenditures are generally eligible if they comply with the principles of sound financial management and with the relevant rules for public procurement stated in point 1.7.

## **2.3 Eligibility of Expenditures**

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### 2.3.1 General principles

The hierarchy of rules applicable to the current call for proposal under Interreg VI-A IPA Bulgaria – North Macedonia Programme are as follows :

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

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

Only "eligible costs" can be taken into account for financial support. The budget is therefore both a cost estimate and a maximum ceiling for "eligible costs". Note that the eligible costs must be

based on real costs based on supporting documents with some exceptions for which the flat rates, unit costs and lump sum will be applied. The eligibility of expenditure applies to EU and national co-financing as well as beneficiaries' own contributions. The expenditures are generally eligible if they comply with the principles of sound financial management and with the relevant rules for public procurement stated in point 1.7.

Expenditure is eligible for funding when fulfilling all general eligibility requirements listed below. Therefore, expenditure has to:

- be necessary for carrying out the project and must comply with the principles of sound financial management, in particular value for money and cost-effectiveness;
- be essential for the achievement of the agreed activities and would not be incurred if the project is not carried out (additionality principle);
- have been stipulated in the project budget;
- have actually been incurred and paid by the Lead partner or its partners during the implementing period for the project and in accordance with the provisions stipulated in the subsidy contract (with the exception of flat rates, unit costs and lump sums);
- be registered in the project partner's accounts through a separate accounting system or an adequate accounting code set in place specifically for the project;
- be verified as eligible by the controllers designated by the Managing Authority and the National Authority respectively;
- be in line with the provisions of the subsidy contract, European and national legislation including relevant procurement rules stated in point 1.7;
- have not been subject to financing from any other public funds;
- comply with the principles of efficiency, effectiveness and economy.

### **2.3.1. Non-eligible expenditures**

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

- Interest on debt;
- The purchase of land and existing buildings;
- Second hand equipment;
- Fines, financial penalties and expenditure on legal disputes and litigation;
- Costs of gifts;
- Costs related to fluctuation of foreign exchange rate.
- In-kind contributions (including unpaid voluntary work);
- Shared costs;

- Subcontracting between partners and/or associated partners of the same project for services, expertise, equipment and works carried out within the project;
- Charges for national financial transactions;
- Consultant fees between partners for services and work carried out within the project;
- Contracting of employees of the partner organizations as external experts, e.g. as freelancers;
- Other non-eligible expenditures according to EU and national legislation.

### **2.3.2. Form of reimbursement/budgeting**

In order to minimize the administrative burden and to concentrate the efforts in quality implementation of the project activities and achieving the objective and indicators the Simplified Cost Options (SCOs) shall be used for reimbursement/budgeting of some of categories of expenditures.

Using SCOs means also that the human resources and administrative efforts involved in collecting documents and reporting expenditures can be focused more on the achievement of objectives instead of being concentrated on collecting and verifying financial documents.

SCOs which shall be used in the current call for proposal are:

- Flat rates – % of the defined base costs;
- Lump sums – amounts defined for certain activity;
- Unit Costs – maximum prices of certain goods, items, etc.

### **2.3.3. List and description of Eligible Expenditures per budget categories**

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

- BC 1 Staff costs;
- BC 2 Office and administrative costs;
- BC 3 Travel and accommodation costs;
- BC 4 External expertise and services costs;
- BC 5 Equipment costs;
- BC 6 Costs for infrastructure and works;
- BC 7 Project preparation costs

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

#### **1. Staff costs**

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

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

The staff costs shall be limited to the following:

- Salary payments fixed in the employment document (contract, an appointment decision), or by law, relating to the responsibilities specified in the job description of the staff member concerned.
- Any other costs directly linked to the salary such as taxes and social security payments including pensions as long as they are fixed in the employment document or by law and they are in accordance with the legislation and standard practices in the country and/or organization and are not recoverable by the employer.

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

- Staff employed by the beneficiary for management of the project (project team)

The members of the project staff employed by the beneficiary for the management of the project for example are project manager, coordinator, accountant, assistant, and etc. The project team members perform periodically repetitive actions related to the organization, coordination, management and reporting of the activities, expenditures and results related to the project during the project period.

- Staff employed by the beneficiary for implementation of activities under the project content

The project staff employed by the beneficiary for implementation of activities under the project are experts, which perform actions directly related to the project activities, requiring specific expertise which the project partner possesses.

It is the sole right and responsibility of the project partner to: determine the positions and persons needed for the proper functioning of the project team and needed for implementation of the project activities; conclude/establish the type of contract or any other legal relationship with the team members/staff for project activities and to implement changes in this regard during the project implementation.

At the beginning of the project implementation each beneficiary will be requested to present document (internal order, a letter, etc.) for nomination of the project team members, necessary for the successful implementation of the project activities.

**Form of reimbursement:**

Within the current call for proposal, staff costs shall be reimbursed as a **flat rate of up to 20%** of the eligible costs under BC 4, BC 5 and BC 6 of that operation. The exact percentage of the flat rate should be indicated in the Application form (PART B, partner budget) by each project partner

and will remain unchanged for the entire project implementation period. In the verification process the beneficiaries do not need to present supporting documents that the expenditures for staff have been incurred and paid. List of staff members working on the project and any other employment document shall be provided to the programme bodies on request. The appointment of the staff by the beneficiaries is the sole responsibility of the beneficiaries themselves and has to be made in accordance with respective European and national legislation.

### **📌 IMPORTANT**

**If the beneficiary organization envisages to outsource project management activities, i.e. to use external experts not own staff, the cost must be budgeted in BC 4 “External expertise and services costs” and will be reimbursed on the basis of real cost. In such case, no cost are allowed in BC 1 “Staff cost” and beneficiary must select “0%” for flat rate in BC 1 “Staff cost”.**

## **2. Office and administrative costs**

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

Office and administrative costs cover operating and administrative expenses of beneficiaries and are limited to the following elements:

- a) Office rent;
- b) Insurance and taxes related to the buildings where the staff is located and to the equipment of the office (e.g. fire, theft insurances);
- c) Utilities (e.g. electricity, heating, water);
- d) Office supplies;
- e) Accounting;
- f) Archives;
- g) Maintenance, cleaning and repairs;
- h) Security;
- i) IT systems;
- j) Communication (e.g. telephone, fax, internet, postal services, business cards);
- k) Bank charges for opening and administering the account or accounts where the implementation of an operation requires a separate account to be opened;
- l) Charges for transnational financial transactions.

### **Form of reimbursement:**

- **As a flat rate to 15% of staff costs** - The exact percentage of the flat rate should be indicated in the Application form (PART B, partner budget) by each project partner and will remain unchanged for the entire project implementation period. The above list is exhaustive and all listed items are to be considered as covered by the flat rate and cannot be reported under any other budget line or category of costs. Please note that the flat rate is directly linked to the staff costs and will always be calculated based on eligible staff costs. If no staff costs are foreseen and reported, no office and administrative costs can be charged. No supporting documents need to be presented at the reporting stage.  
**This option is mandatory in cases where the project management cost will be reimbursed under BC 1 “Staff cost” as a flat rate (it means that no external management envisaged)**
- **On a real cost basis** - All office and administrative costs should be actually incurred and paid. In this option, all supporting documents should be presented on the verification stage.  
**This option is mandatory in cases where the project management will be outsourced and project management cost will be reimbursed under BC 4 “External expertise and services costs” as a real cost.**

### 3. Travel and accommodation costs

The category of expenditures covers travel and accommodation costs only for the employees of the beneficiary organization and shall be limited to the following:

- a) Travel costs (e.g. tickets (including all types of travel), travel and car insurance, fuel, car mileage, toll, and parking fees); Expenditures for car rental could be eligible in duly justified cases and provided that such costs are in line with national legislation and organisation’s internal policy/rules;
- b) Meal costs;
- c) Accommodation costs;
- d) Visa costs;
- e) Daily allowances.

#### **Form of reimbursement:**

- **As a flat rate up to 15% of staff costs** - The exact percentage of the flat rate should be indicated in the Application form (PART B, partner budget) by each project partner and will remain unchanged for the entire project implementation period. The above list is exhaustive and all listed items are to be considered as covered by the flat rate and cannot be reported under any other budget line or category of costs. Please note that the flat rate is directly linked to the staff costs and will always be calculated based on eligible staff costs. If no staff costs are foreseen and reported, no office and administrative costs can be charged. No supporting documents need to be presented at the reporting stage.

**This option is mandatory in cases where the project management cost will be reimbursed under BC 1 “Staff cost” as a flat rate (it means that no external management envisaged)**

- **On a real cost basis** – The costs under this category refer to travel and accommodation expenses of the staff of the project partner institution for missions essential to the effective implementation of the project. Only expenditures related to the employees of the organization should be considered as eligible. All supporting documents should be presented on the verification stage.

**This option is mandatory in cases where the project management will be outsourced and project management cost will be reimbursed under BC 4 “External expertise and services costs” as a real cost.**

#### **📌 IMPORTANT**

Travel and accommodation for external experts and service providers (outsourced project management) are eligible under BC 4 “External expertise and services costs”.

#### **📌 IMPORTANT**

Partners cannot report costs covered by the flat rates in BC 1, BC 2 and BC 3 in any other cost category.

## **4. External expertise and services costs**

### **➤ External expertise**

External expertise costs correspond to external expertise, provided by a public or private law body or a natural person other than the beneficiaries of the project or the legally related SME, which is strictly linked to the project and be essential for its effective implementation.

Project Partners, the legally related SMEs and their employees shall not be contracted by another project partner within the same project as an external expert or a subcontractor.

Public procurement rules stated in point 1.7 must be respected in selection of the service providers. All costs must comply with other applicable EU and programme information and publicity rules.

The costs of external expertise shall be paid on the basis of contracts or written agreements of equivalent value, supported by tangible and documented invoices or claims issued by the providers of goods/services.

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

- a) Studies or surveys (e.g. evaluations, strategies, concept notes, design plans, handbooks)
- b) Translations;

- c) Development, modifications and updates to IT systems and website;
- d) Promotion, communication, publicity, promotional items and activities or information related to the project;
- e) Intellectual property rights;
- f) Financial management (external project management);
- g) Expenditures for external experts, lecturers, trainers, moderators, interpreters;
- h) Travel and accommodation for external experts, lecturers, trainers, moderators, interpreters, chairpersons of meetings and service providers;
- i) Other specific expertise and services needed for the project.

**📌 IMPORTANT**

**If the beneficiary chooses to outsource the project management activities, the expenditures for remunerations, travel and accommodation of the respective service provider must be budgeted in BC 4 “External expertise and services costs” and no cost are allowed in BC 1 “Staff cost” (beneficiary must select “0%” for flat rate in BC 1 “Staff cost”).**

**📌 IMPORTANT**

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

**Form of reimbursement:**

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

**➤ Service costs (costs for event organizations):**

Services costs shall be the followings:

- a) Expenses for rent of hall for meetings, trainings, conferences, etc.;
- b) Expenses for rent of equipment - translation equipment, audio equipment, IT equipment, etc.;
- c) The expenditure for rent of vehicle for participants in the events (car, van, minibus, bus, etc.);
- d) Expenses for coffee breaks, refreshments, lunches and dinners for participants in the events;
- e) Accommodation costs;

- f) Expenses for purchase of consumables and materials for the participants in the events - paper, files, folders, cases, CDs, printing of invitations, agenda, presentations, etc.

### **Form of reimbursement:**

#### **⚠ IMPORTANT**

Partners can report Service costs (costs for event organizations) covered by **BC 4 “External expertise and services costs”** on the bases of **the unit cost or real costs.**

- In case the expenditures shall be reimbursed on the basis of **real costs** all supporting documents proving successfully implementation of the event, achieving the outputs, number of participants and etc. must be available for control purpose at the verification stage.
- In case the expenditures shall be reimbursed **as unit costs**, so defined costs according to the duration of the event and number of participants should be respected:

- ✓ **14,00 EURO per participant in one day events;**
- ✓ **72,00 EURO per participant in multi-day events.**

Example:

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

1 day \* 20 participants = 20 units

20 units \* unit costs EUR 14 = total costs EUR 280

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

2 days \* 20 participants = 40 units

40 units \* unit costs EUR 72= total costs EUR 2 880

Supporting documents proving successfully implementation of the event, achieving the outputs, number of participants and etc. must be available for control purpose at the verification stage.

**The event unit cost per participant cannot be claimed for:**

- **an event consisting of only evening programme with a dinner or similar get-together;**
- **an evening programme with a dinner or similar get-together which is followed by an actual event on the next day;**

- **working meetings with contracted external experts when meeting only with a partner organisation, for example book-keeping, content expert, external management experts;**
- **working meetings with programme bodies (Managing Authority, National Authority, Joint Secretariat), when meeting only with a partner organization.**

## 5. Equipment costs

Expenditures for equipment include costs on equipment purchased by a partner and what is necessary to achieve the project's objectives.

Equipment costs are limited to the following items:

- a) IT hardware and software;
- b) furniture and fittings;
- c) laboratory equipment;
- d) machines and instruments;
- e) tools or devices;
- f) other specific equipment needed for operations.

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

Equipment must be purchased in compliance with procurement rules, described in point 1.7.

Depreciation costs - for equipment that will not be used by the project partners or the project target group after the project completion and if the economic lifetime of the equipment (respectively – the period of depreciation) is longer than the project duration, only the depreciation costs for the period of project duration are eligible.

The depreciation rate has to be in line with national rules. Depreciation is charged proportionally for each relevant period for which a periodical report is required and prepared. The full value of depreciated costs on equipment in relation to the total project duration cannot be charged as total amount for one particular period. Only the proportionate sum of the depreciations costs according to the use of equipment for the project is eligible. The amount percentage used and time duration has to be properly clarified (auditable). The depreciation costs of equipment can never exceed the purchase price of the equipment.

### **Form of reimbursement:**

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

## 6. Costs for infrastructure and works

The costs in this category relate to the investment in infrastructure and works, necessary to achieve the objectives of the project.

The expenditures for infrastructure and works shall be limited to the following elements:

- a) building material;
- b) labor;
- c) specialized interventions (such as soil remediation, mine-clearing).
- d) works;
- e) supervision of works;
- f) authors supervision;

### **⚠ IMPORTANT**

**Costs of purchase of land and buildings are not eligible.**

### **Form of reimbursement:**

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

## 7. Project Preparation costs

Preparation costs shall be the following:

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

### **Form of reimbursement:**

Project approved for financing by the Monitoring Committee and have concluded Subsidy contract with the Managing Authority are entitled to receive the reimbursement of the preparation costs in a form of a **lump sum** of **EUR 12 000** (project preparation expenditures for projects).

The amount shall be included in the respective project lead partner's budget at the application stage. With the first report, the lump sum for preparation costs shall be added to the lead partner's reported expenditure, and shall be verified and reimbursed to the lead partner. The lump sum for preparation costs is allocated to the lead partner's budget. Nevertheless, to reflect the partners' involvement in the preparation of the application form in a fair and transparent way the partnership

should share the preparation costs. The details of how preparation costs will be shared by the project partners need to be included in the Project Partnership Agreement (Annex 1).

### **IMPORTANT**

**The activities which have already been covered by any other EU funds are not eligible. The project partners should submit a declaration of no double funding for project preparation (if planned such expenditures).**

#### **2.3.4 Currency exchange at the verification stage**

Expenditure incurred by project partners in a currency other than the EUR shall be converted into Euro by using the monthly accounting rate of the European Commission ([http://ec.europa.eu/budget/contracts\\_grants/info\\_contracts/infoeuro/infoeuro\\_en.cfm](http://ec.europa.eu/budget/contracts_grants/info_contracts/infoeuro/infoeuro_en.cfm)) in the month during which expenditure was submitted for verification.

#### **2.3.5 Eligible expenditures for VAT**

The expenditures for VAT is eligible for operations the total cost of which is below EUR 5 000 000 (including VAT). Each project partner must take the respective national VAT legislation into consideration when budgeting project costs.

## **2.4 How to get the Applicants' Package and fill in the Application Form**

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

- Programme website: <https://ipa-bgmk.mrrb.bg/>
- MA website: [www.mrrb.bg](http://www.mrrb.bg)
- NA website: <http://mls.gov.mk/>
- EU Structural Funds in Bulgaria website: [www.eufunds.bg](http://www.eufunds.bg)
- Jems website: <https://jems-bgmk.mrrb.bg/>
- Jems manual: <https://jems.interact.eu/manual/>

The applicants may submit questions of substance in written form up to 21 calendar days before the deadline for submission of proposal. The JS will reply no later than 14 calendar days before the deadline for the submission of proposals.

Questions to be sent by e-mail to the address listed below, indicating clearly the reference of the Call for Proposal - No 2021TC16IPCB006 – 2025-4

E-mail: [joint.secretariat.kyustendil@gmail.com](mailto:joint.secretariat.kyustendil@gmail.com)

In the interest of equal treatment of applicants, the Programme Authorities cannot give a prior

opinion on the eligibility of an applicant, a partner, an action or specific activities.

All questions received by the potential applicants, together with their answers, will be published on the Programme website: <https://ipa-bgmk.mrrb.bg/>

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

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

#### **⚠ IMPORTANT**

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

The electronic version of all documents (file types) must be in line with the below mentioned formats. Please note that scanned version of the Application Form must be signed on each page by the Lead Partner or signed by qualified electronic signature.

Detailed information for the Application Form is provided in <https://jems.interact.eu/manual/> section User Manual, Application/Project details, Application Form.

### **3. Annexes**

#### **⚠ IMPORTANT**

**The Application Form, all Annexes (A) and Supporting Documents (B) must be presented in scanned version (or signed with qualified electronic signatures) using the Electronic System (JEMS).** The scanned (or signed with electronic signature) version of the Application Form must be signed and stamped by the Lead partner or signed with qualified electronic signature.

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

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

In case a project proposal is selected for contracting, the Managing Authority shall request from the Applicant to present **the online submitted documents in original paper version as well. Failure to do so on the part of the Applicant, or in case discrepancies are found between the scanned and paper versions of the documents, shall result in decline of signature of Subsidy**

**contract.**

Regardless of the above, throughout the whole assessment and selection process the Managing Authority reserves its right **to ask the Applicant to submit the already presented scanned documents in hard copies as well, in order to verify their correctness.**

### **3.1. Annexes (A)**

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

#### **Mandatory Annexes**

- A1. Project Partnership Agreement** – signed and dated by all partners;
- A2. Partnership and Co-financing statement** – signed, dated and provided by each partner;
- A3. Project Partner declaration** – signed, dated and provided by each partner;
- A4. Declaration of e-mail address of the Lead Partner** – signed and dated by the Lead partner;
- A5. SMEs declaration** – signed and dated, provided by each partner;
- A6. De minimis state aid declaration** - signed, dated and provided by each partner;
- A7. DNSH declaration** - signed, dated and provided by each partner;
- A8. Climate proofing assessment** (template \*xlsx file) - signed and dated/electronically signed by each partner (Please read carefully the Explanatory note on how to fill this document).
- A9. Declaration circumstances under Art. 51** - signed, dated and provided by each partner

#### **📌 IMPORTANT**

All the annexes may be signed **electronically with qualified electronic signatures**. In case the Annexes are signed with qualified electronic signatures, it should be dated, **but the stamps of the respective organizations are not required.**

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

#### **📌 IMPORTANT**

Please note that **the e-mail address, provided by the Lead partner in Annex A4**, shall be used by the Programme bodies as the **only official communication channel with the Applicant during the entire assessment, selection and pre-contracting process in terms of requests for additional clarifications, notification for selection results, etc.**

The e-mail address should be functional and must be regularly used and checked by the Lead

partner, as the Managing Authority shall bear **NO responsibility in cases when the Applicant does not respond to a clarification request within the set deadline or fails to meet other deadlines!**

Furthermore, any requests for clarifications and notifications shall be deemed to have been received on the date upon which the Managing Authority has sent them to the Lead partner at the e-mail address.

### 3.2. Supporting Documents (B)

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

#### **Mandatory supporting documents:**

**B1.** Decision of the Managing or Steering Boards, Board of Directors or any similar body or managing person depending on the legal form of the SME (for each project partner) regarding the project development, implementation and ensuring the sustainability of the project results for three years after completion of the implementation period – issued in the original language and English translation **signed / signed with qualified electronic signature by respective organization as true copy**. This decision have to indicate the legal representative of the partner.

**B2.** Certificates issued by the responsible Authority in each country verifying the main economic activity (according to NACE rev. 2, clearly indicating the main NACE activity and the complementary NACE activities, issued in the original language from the respective authority, and English translation **signed / signed with qualified electronic signature by respective organization as true copy**.

**B3.** Profit and Loss account and Balance sheet for the last 2 years preceding the application as per National Legislation for each partner. In the case of linked enterprises all required above financial statements have to be submitted for all the linked enterprises issued in the original language and English translation **signed / signed with qualified electronic signature by the legal representative as true copy**.

**B4.** Certificates for Headcount annual work unit (For Bulgarian SMEs Report on employees, wages and other labour costs (Отчет за заетите лица, средствата за работна заплата и други разходи за труд) for the last 2 financial years available or in case the candidate lacks a financial report for the year 2021, they are required to submit reports for the previous 1 accounting year preceding the application as per National Legislation. In the case of linked enterprises all required above certificates have to be submitted for all the linked enterprises issued in the original language from the respective authority, and English translation **signed / signed with qualified electronic signature by respective organization as true copy**.

**B5. Justification for expenditures planned as lump sum costs under Budget category 4** (signed /signed with qualified electronic signature by respective organization (in PDF format)) – each project partner should provide justification for calculation of the amount planned as lump sum costs in English, signed by the legal representative. This justification should contain at least:

- detailed description of the proposed activity;
- calculation of the envisaged experts' input, including number and type of experts needed, days/months of involvement and remuneration unit rate;
- detailed description of the expected outcomes from the activity and calculation of the price;
- any other additional information the applicant may find appropriate for justification of the proposed cost.
- project development, implementation and ensuring the sustainability of the project results.

#### **IMPORTANT**

In addition to all annexes (A1-A8 and supporting documents (B1-B5), the following supporting documents must be presented for the investment activities.

#### **B6. Supporting documents concerning INVESTMENT ACTIVITIES**

**B6.1.** All investment activities have to be performed on **respective partner-owned property or secured through a long-term lease agreement with minimum duration of 10 years as of the date of submission of the project proposal. Ownership act or certificate or Long term lease agreement** (or other legal document according national legislation) for partner ownership of the tangible assets, which will be subject of works activities *together* with **Recent cadastral map of the property** – issued in the original language and English translation scanned in PDF file format, **stamped and signed/ signed with qualified electronic signature by respective organization as true copy.** In case the project envisages the purchase of supplies, which need to be permanently installed, it is necessary to submit an ownership act or a long-term lease agreement with minimum duration of 10 years

**B6.2.** In case of investment activities within territories/objects with special status (National parks, environmental and architectural reserves, cultural monuments, protected areas, areas included in Nature 2000 etc.) relevant documentation (permits, approvals, certificates, statements, etc.) required by the respective national applicable law - issued in the original language and English translation **signed/ signed with qualified electronic signature by respective partner as true copy.**

**B6.3.** Copy of letter issued by the relevant body clearly stating that Environmental Impact Assessment is not necessary - issued in the original language and English translation **signed/ signed with qualified electronic signature by respective partner as true copy.**

#### **OR**

Copy of positive Environmental Impact Assessment (positive opinion from the relevant

body), required by the national legislation - issued in the original language and English translation **stamped and signed/ signed with qualified electronic signature by respective partner as true copy.**

**B6.4.** Copy of letter issued by the relevant body clearly stating that the project proposal is eligible according to the current River Basin Management Plans and Flood Risk Management Plans - issued in original language and English translation **signed/ signed with qualified electronic signature by respective organization as true copy (for Bulgarian partners only) in case the required information is not included in B6.3 (only for Bulgarian Partners)**

**B6.5.** Explanatory note for the envisaged prevention measures for avoiding pollution of water bodies in emergency situations by respective organization (if applicable) - issued in original language and English translation **signed/ signed with qualified electronic signature by respective partner as true copy.**

**B6.6. Approved Detailed Works Design submitted in .pdf format** (if applicable according to the relevant legislation), issued in the original language and English translation **signed/ signed with qualified electronic signature by respective partner as true copy.** English translation should be provided at least of the Explanatory Notes of each of the works design parts, Bill of Quantities, Cover sheets of technical drawings and any other parts of the investment project designs that the applicant thinks might contribute to better assessment.

A) In case of investment activities that according to national legislation require approval of works design applicants should present:

- Approved Detailed Works Design;

#### **For Bulgarian partners**

The works design (in the means of Chapter 8, section I from Spatial Development Act) should be elaborated according to Ordinance 4/21.05.2001 for the volume and the content of investment projects. The works design should be approved by the relevant authority, which should be certified with the seal of the authority placed on the works designs.

For Bulgarian partners the authority responsible for the approval of the investment project designs is defined in article 145 (1) from Spatial Development Act.

**All construction activities (for both partners from Bulgaria and North Macedonia) should be supported by:**

- Explanatory note;
- Bill of quantities and prices (referred to here and afterwards as BoQ) including all parts of the works designs.

The Bill of Quantities should be presented in the form of a table with indicated at least type of the works (including water and sewage works, electrical installations, mechanical installations,

installations and fire protection, landscaping, architecture and construction, elevator installations, etc.) unit, estimated quantity, unit price, amount of the type of the construction works, total amount of the bill of the quantity. Where possible the Bill of Quantities should be supported with a breakdown per investment sites or per parts of the works designs. Calculations for the unit prices of the types of construction/repair works may also be presented.

The Bill of Quantities may be presented in the local currency of the project partner. In these case the table of the Bill of Quantities should mandatory include a column with the unit price in EUR for each type of construction/repair work and a column for the amount in EUR of that type of construction/repair work.

Partners from North Macedonia should convert the local currency into EUR using the monthly exchange rate of the European Commission for the month of the submission of the project proposal.

The Bill of Quantities should be stamped and signed by the certified designers of relevant parts of the works designs, (the document must be signed with an electronic certificate by the authorized designer, separately for each type of work). Bill of quantities are presented by the applicant as scanned originals in PDF file format and English translation **signed/ signed with qualified electronic signature by respective partner as true copy** and also in an editable EXCEL file format.

**B) In case of investment activities which according to national legislation do not require approval of works design** applicants should present:

- Statement by the competent authority, which declares that the envisaged construction/repair works do not require approval of works design **in the original language and English translation signed/ signed with qualified electronic signature by respective partner as true copy**;
- Bill of quantities (as described under point A) above);
- Technological production line scheme(s)/plan(s) and Explanatory note on the technical solutions planned **in the original language and English translation signed/ signed with qualified electronic signature by respective partner as true copy**.

**B6.7. Construction permit** for all the works activities of a project partner which according to national legislation require a building permit, validated “entered into force” by the respective authority - issued in original language and English translation **signed/ signed with qualified electronic signature by respective partner as true copy**.

**A) In case of works activities which according to national legislation require a construction permit** applicants should present:

- Validated by the relevant authority Construction Permit - issued in original language and English translation **signed/ signed with qualified electronic signature by**

**respective partner as true copy;**

Explanatory note and detailed Bill of Quantities.

**B)** In case of works activities which according to national legislation **do not require a construction permit** applicants should present

- Statement by the competent authority, which declares that the envisaged repair works do not require issue of construction permit - issued in original language and English translation **signed/ signed with qualified electronic signature by respective partner as true copy.**

**📌 IMPORTANT**

For Bulgarian partners the investment activities, which do not require approval of works designs, are defined in Article 147 (1) of the Spatial Development Act.

For Bulgarian partners works, which do not require issue of construction permit, are defined in Article 151 (1) of the Spatial Development Act.

For Bulgarian partners, in all cases in which the investment activities require the approval of construction projects, they should have the scope and content of at least "technical project designs" according to Article 139 (1), item 1 of the Spatial Development Act and be elaborated in accordance with Ordinance 4/21.05.2001 for the volume and content of the investment projects.

**For partners from North Macedonia:**

The Investment activities that do not require a building permit are defined in Article 73 of the Law on Building (Закон за градење).

**B7. In case of Supply of equipment, the applicants should present:**

- **Detailed technical specifications for supplies** with units, unit prices and total prices in Euro - issued in the original language and English translation **signed/ signed with qualified electronic signatures by the respective partner.** Detailed technical specifications should be clear enough for determination of the seeking deliverables (if applicable);
- Market analysis for similar equipment or **3 official offers** fully corresponding to the technical specifications from different providers, licensed authorized dealers (if applicable), for the envisaged supply (signed by respective provider) - issued in the original language and English translation **signed/ signed with qualified electronic signatures by**

**respective partner as true copy.**

In order to overcome the impact of future inflation and price instability, the expenditures included in the budget based on the above market analysis could be increased with the average of the **national inflation of the last 3 years** before the application submission, but **not more than 10%**.

In addition, to have a realistic budget of their project, the partners may make use of the statistical data on prices available at the level of each country, if applicable.

The average shall be calculated at the level of partners, in accordance with the national inflation rate.

**📌 IMPORTANT**

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

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

**📌 IMPORTANT**

In addition, project partners may present separate documents with justification of expenditures planned in the budget for implementation of different activities. These documents will be taken into account during the assessment, budget optimization and projects' content modifications procedures and pre-contracting.

**📌 IMPORTANT**

Supporting documents must be supplied also in English translation (signed by respective organization as true copy or signed with qualified electronic signature by the legal representative of the respective organization) or at least the relevant parts of these documents, proving the partners' eligibility must be translated in English. The translated version will prevail for the purposes of **evaluation of the application**.

**3.3. Documents for information (C)**

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**The following documents are provided for information only:**

**C. Subsidy contract** - draft version (for information purposes only).

**A8.1. Explanatory note for climate proofing assessment** (for information purpose only)

**📌 IMPORTANT**

The Screening Working Group/Evaluation Committee may **request additional documents or corrections at any stage of the assessment**.

## 4. How to Submit the Application

### 📌 IMPORTANT

The project proposal must be submitted entirely in electronic form using the Joint Electronic Monitoring System (JEMS) - <https://jems-bgmk.mrrb.bg/>

No paper submission of documentation is required under this Call for Proposals.

Detailed instructions for access to the electronic system and submission of project proposal are provided in <https://jems.interact.eu/manual/> section User Manual, Application/Project details, Application Form.

The applicants are encouraged to follow the official website of the programme for actual information regarding upcoming info days within this Call.

**The Annexes must be submitted using the forms included in the Application Package. Modifying the standard Annexes will result in the rejection of the Application.**

The Application Form must be filled in English. The Supporting documents issued by national/local authorities or other bodies shall be attached in the original language accompanied by a translation into English (as described in Section 3).

The documents issued by public authorities or other bodies should be scanned (when are issued on paper) or presented signed with qualified electronic signature of the respective authority/other bodies issued the document (in case are signed with electronic signature). The documents for the project partners should be uploaded in Jems, section Application annexes, in respective section for each project partner. The documents related to investments, described in Work packages, should be uploaded to the respective number of investment in section Application annexes, Investment documentation. The signed/ signed with qualified electronic signature final version of the AF should be uploaded in section Application annexes, Application attachments.

## 5. Deadline for Receipt of Applications

### 📌 IMPORTANT

The deadline for submission of the Project proposal in **JEMS system is September 15, 2025, 17:00 h Bulgarian local time.**

The application registered after the deadline will automatically be rejected.

## 6. Assessment and Selection of Applications

After the submission of the proposal, the project undergoes a screening process to ensure compliance with all programme requirements necessary to secure funding. This is a binary process, conducted based on Yes/No decisions and does not involve scoring. It is conducted over a period of four months from the start of the Screening Working Group's work.

The Programme's Monitoring Committee (MC) approves the project screening process (PSP), including its criteria, as provided below.

The PSP consists of two main phases, as follows:

**(1) Phase 1 is conducted by the Screening Working Group (SWG)**, comprising a Chairperson, Secretary, and voting members who are representatives of the OU, MA, NA, and/or external experts. Voting members simultaneously undertakes the following steps:

**1.1 Administrative and compliance** - the SWG verifies whether the project meets the necessary eligibility criteria and administrative requirements, ensuring compliance with the Programme's requirements for contracting

**1.2 Quality screening with an operational focus** - the SWG assesses the project's feasibility, focusing on its objectives, intervention logic, and alignment with Programme priorities. This step also evaluates the operational capacity and readiness of the project.

**1.3 Financial capacity risk assessment** - Financial capacity risk assessment - The financial stability assessment aims to ensure a fair evaluation of SMEs participating in the programme by considering their financial capacity based on key indicators. The implemented methodology prioritizes recent financial performance, the last two completed financial years (N-1 and N-2)

**1.4 Budget and content optimization** - the SWG reviews the proposed budget and project content, ensuring financial efficiency, appropriateness of costs, and alignment with project objectives. If necessary, they recommend revisions to optimize both the budget and project content for greater impact and compliance.

The SWG performs the following activities:

- Verifying the submission of all required documents and certifications;
- Checking the project's compliance with eligibility criteria;
- Ensuring administrative compliance of the provided documentation;
- Performing quality screening with an operational focus and revising elements of the project intervention logic, if necessary;
- Requesting revised or additional documentation, if necessary;
- Proposing revisions to the budget and project content, if necessary;
- Verifying the absence of double financing – assessing whether the proposed actions have not already been funded under other EU-funded programmes.

The screening process begins with the SWG, whose work starts after the application deadline in JeMS has passed and when the order for the formation of the SWG is officially enacted.

During Phase 1, the project proposal is screened by two voting members, one from each participating country, working independently under the supervision of the Chairperson. Each SWG member will provide a 'Yes' or 'No' response to each criterion in the administrative compliance and eligibility sections of the grid, as outlined below. If one or more criteria receive a 'No' answer, the voting member must provide a clear and objective justification and request corrective actions, measures, or documents from the Lead Partner within a specified timeframe of no less than 3 working days. If one voting member assigns 'Yes' and the other assigns 'No,' they will need to reach a unified assessment of the criterion. Failure to do so will result in their work being considered incomplete, and additional assessment (arbitration) must be performed.

Furthermore, if a criterion receives a 'No' from both voting members due to insufficient or incorrect information/documents that the Lead Partner cannot resolve within the screening period, the proposal will not proceed further in the process and cannot be financially supported by the Programme.

#### **📌 IMPORTANT**

**All steps of Phases 1 of the screening process are conducted simultaneously and not sequentially. Therefore, the SWG may request the submission of additional documents and/or revisions to the already submitted proposal at any stage of the screening process to ensure the project aligns with programme requirements for funding eligibility.**

All requests for additional documentation/corrections will be sent to the email address of the **Lead partner specified in Annex A4**. This email address will be used as the only official communication channel with the Applicant during the entire screening process.

(2) Phase 2 is carried out by the Programme's Strategy Board. SB members focus on the strategic, long-term, and impact-oriented aspects of the project, while SWG ensures the project's feasibility, compliance, and operational readiness. This approach ensures a comprehensive and balanced screening while utilizing the specific strengths and responsibilities of each actor. Phase 2 is the critical phase where projects are evaluated, scored, and ranked based on how well they meet the defined criteria. This stage plays a pivotal role in the selection process, as it identifies projects that will advance the cross-border area towards more cohesive and efficient service provision.

The OU leads this phase, while the SB implements it, ensuring that the selection process aligns with the fundamental EU principle of subsidiarity—empowering local and regional actors to prioritize interventions.

This phase begins with the OU preparing a summary of the Screening Report and extracting the financial capacity coefficient for each project.

Documenting all discussions and ensuring that justifications for each jointly scored criterion are recorded, coherently and consistently aligned with the given score. These justifications are later incorporated into the Phase 2 Assessment Report.

- Ensuring transparency and fairness, confirming that scoring decisions strictly follow the defined criteria and their descriptions.
- Compiling and verifying all project scores.
- Calculating the final score for each project, incorporating the financial capacity coefficient as part of this calculation.
- Producing a final ranking list of all scored projects.

[Detailed information for Phase 1 and Phase 2 of the projects assessment is provided in Attachment 5. Assessment and selections of Applicants.](#)

## 7. Contracting

Contracting is the procedure carried out in order to conclude a Subsidy contract between the Lead Partner and the MA for the implementation of a project, approved for financing by decision of the MC. This means that the Lead partner is responsible for implementation of the whole project.

### **⚠ IMPORTANT**

**The Lead partner shall sign a Subsidy contract for the whole amount of the approved budget (including the total IPA funds) with the Managing Authority.**

The implementation of the project may start only after the Subsidy contract is signed by both the MA and the Lead partner and is registered in the Registry system of the MA.

Draft Subsidy contract is presented in Annex C to these Guidelines for Applicants.

### INDICATIVE SCHEDULE FOR SELECTION AND CONTRACTING

Type of procedure	Term for implementation*
Administrative compliance and eligibility check	Up to 2 months after the deadline for submission of project proposals
Technical and Quality assessment of project proposals and pre-contracting procedures.	Up to 2 months after publication of the results from Administrative compliance and eligibility check
Contracting	Up to 1 month after approval of the project proposal by the MC

*\*Please, note that the term for implementation of the respective procedure is indicative and depends on the number of the project proposals received under the Call for proposals.*