

INTERREG VI-A ROMANIA-BULGARIA PROGRAMME

APPLICANT'S GUIDE

OPEN CALL FOR THE OPERATIONS UNDER PO 4

Priority 3: *An educated region*

- ④ *Specific Objective 4.2 - Improving equal access to inclusive and quality services in education, training and lifelong learning through developing accessible infrastructure, including by fostering resilience for distance and on-line education and training*

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Approved



Preamble

This document set the terms and the conditions that apply to the applications submitted under:

- ☉ Priority 3 *An educated Region, Specific Objective 4.2. - Improving equal access to inclusive and quality services in education, training and lifelong learning through developing accessible infrastructure, including by fostering resilience for distance and on-line education and training*

The Applicant's Package include:

- ☉ Applicant's guideline for the open call for the operations under Priority 3, Policy Objective 4, SO 4.2 (this document)
- ☉ Template of the application form
- ☉ Template of Evaluation Grids, template of declarations
- ☉ Template of Partnership agreement, template of the subsidy contract etc.

The language of our Programme is English. Thus, all official communication is conducted in English and all documents regarding the project application are produced in English only or translated if issued in other language than English.

Section 1 - General information

1. The Interreg VI-A Romania-Bulgaria Programme

1.1. General overview



Interreg VI-A Romania-Bulgaria Programme is financed by the European Regional Development Fund (ERDF) under the European Territorial Cooperation goal of EU Cohesion Policy 2021-2027.

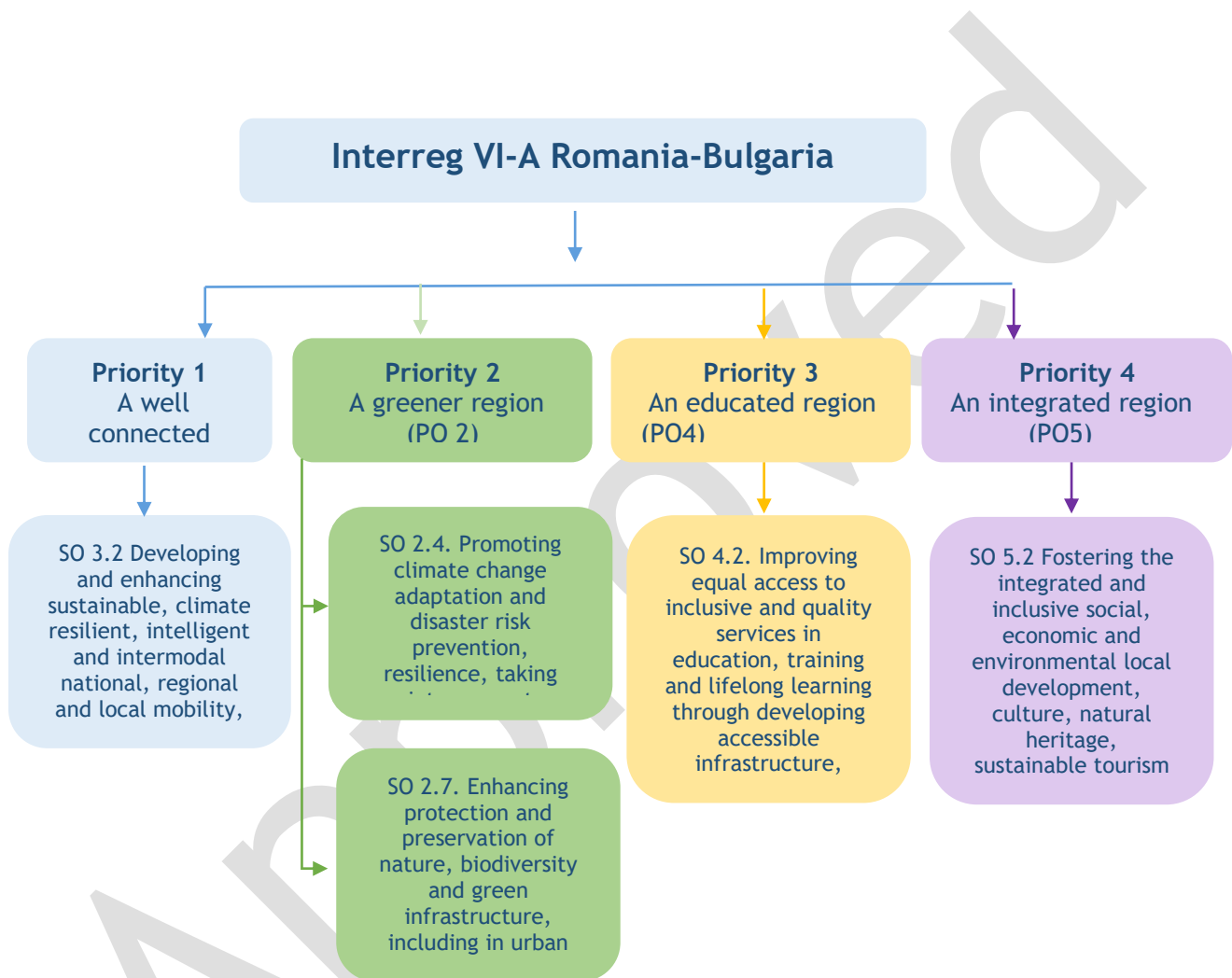
Interreg VI-A Romania-Bulgaria Programme area stretches over seven counties in the Southern part of Romania (Mehedinți, Dolj, Olt, Teleorman, Giurgiu, Călărași and Constanța) and eight districts in the Northern part of Bulgaria (Vidin, Vratsa, Plevna, Ruse, Dobrich and Silistra).

All 15 NUTS3 regions are situated along the 630 km of Romanian-Bulgarian border.



1.2. Programme Priorities and Specific Objectives

The Programme is organized along 4 priorities, which are broken down into 5 specific objectives (SOs).



More details regarding the Interreg VI-A Romania-Bulgaria Programme budget, objectives and indicators are available here: <https://interregviarobg.eu/assets/2022/11/interreg-vi-a-romania-bulgaria-programme-approved-by-ec.pdf>.



1.3. Programme bodies

The governance and management of the Programme is shared between different bodies that, in compliance with EU Regulation, are responsible with the Programme management, coordination, supervision and control. These bodies are:

- ☉ Monitoring Committee (MC)
- ☉ Managing Authority (MA)
- ☉ Joint Secretariat (JS)
- ☉ National Authority (NA)
- ☉ Audit Authority (AA) and Group of Auditors (GoA)
- ☉ National Controllers (NC)

The role of each body is detailed in the Project Implementation Manual, available on the Programme website, <https://interregviarobg.eu/en/implementation-rules>.

1.4. Joint Electronic Monitoring System (JeMS)

JeMS, the Joint Electronic Monitoring System, is the Programme Monitoring System for the 2021-2027 period.

JeMS is an online system conceived to cover the full project and Programme life-cycle in one monitoring tool that allows to reduce the need for additional paper processes to a minimum.

JeMS is available on line at <https://jems-rob主.mdipa.ro/> and it can be accessed via standard web browsers like Google Chrome, Microsoft Edge or Mozilla Firefox, etc. For working in JeMS, it is recommended to use a PC or notebook rather than mobile devices.

Details regarding the access and usage of JeMS are provided in the JeMS manual. A helpdesk for technical support specifically dedicated to JeMS can be reached via email at jems.admin@mdipa.gov.ro.

Section 2 - Conditions, requirements and feature

2.1. Objectives of the call

The Interreg VI-A Romania-Bulgaria Programme is implemented through projects with strategic importance, standard/regular projects and small scale projects.



To this end, the objective of this call is to identify and to select high quality regular and small scale projects relevant for the Programme, under Priority 3, SO 4.2.

Within this call the project proposals can be submitted under Priority 3 An *Educated Region* and its specific objective:

- ☉ *Specific Objective 4.2. - Improving equal access to inclusive and quality services in education, training and lifelong learning through developing accessible infrastructure, including by fostering resilience for distance and on-line education and training.*

The description of Priority 3 and its objectives, together with exemplary actions, is provided for in the IP available on the programme website, <https://interregviarobg.eu/>.

2.2. Eligible applications and applicants

The **following type of applicants are eligible** for funding under this call:

- ☉ National, regional and local public bodies, institutions, administrations, agencies, including the bodies governed by public law (which fall under the definition of Article 2(1) of Directive 2014/24/EU on public procurement), county/district councils, local councils/ municipalities, educational and research institutions etc.
- ☉ Chambers of Commerce and Regional Development Agencies functioning in the eligible area and registered in accordance to national law
- ☉ Non-governmental organizations (associations or foundations) in the sense of art. 192, of Regulation (EU, Euratom) 2018/1046¹
- ☉ Offices/ branches of public national/regional authorities and other public bodies active on the themes of the priority in the programme area (registered and functioning in the programme area). If those offices/ branches which are functioning in the programme area are not legal bodies, the Application should be submitted by their Headquarters indicating the office/ branch responsible for implementing the activities.

In order to be **eligible these applicants must fulfil the following criteria:**

- ☉ Be a Romanian or Bulgarian entity, legally established according to the national legislation of the state on whose territory they are located
- ☉ Prove their competence in the field and the activities envisaged under the project through ownership acts, legal acts/strategies/action plans references, etc.
- ☉ Not be in any of the situations mentioned under Art. 136 of REGULATION (EU, Euratom) 2018/1046
- ☉ Have their headquarters in the Programme area

¹ Grants shall not have the purpose or effect of producing a profit within the framework of the action or the work programme of the beneficiary ('no-profit principle').



- Are Romanian or Bulgarian national public authorities, agencies, or other types of organizations whose area of competence, established by legal acts, extends to the Programme area.
- In case of infrastructure envisaged, the applicants should be the owners of the given territory/building subject of that investment activities. For Bulgarian partners, in case of infrastructure, the investment activities should be carried out on public property (both public and private domain of the state/municipality).
- For both types of projects: small scale and regular projects (soft and hard type of operations), the partnership should include project partners or associated project partners legally responsible for the field of interventions/policy domain addressed by the project and who will be the user of the project outputs.

! The applicants that are in any of the situations mentioned under Art. 136 of REGULATION (EU, Euratom) 2018/1046 shall be excluded from participation in call for proposals.

Applicants, outside the Programme area, but from Romania and Bulgaria, can also participate in projects, but only in exceptional cases, namely if they:

- Are competent in their scope of action for certain parts of the eligible area (e.g. ministries, national agencies, research institutes, organizations etc.);
- Carry out activities that are beneficial for the Programme area;
- Their participation must bring clear added value and expertise to the implementation of a project and has to be beneficial for the Programme area.
- They cannot take the Lead Partner role.

Associated partners

The applicants involved in the project **without financially** contribution are considered as associated partners. Associated partners are key stakeholders of the project, whose involvement can improve the planning and development of project outputs and results. They can help to sustain and mainstream project results generate multiplier and leverage effects. Information on the involvement of associated partners should be provided in the relevant sections of the application form.

Applicants from third country partners (outside and inside EU) can participate as associated partners but cannot receive ERDF funding from the Interreg VI-A Romania-Bulgaria Programme.

Lead partner principle

In compliance with the “lead partner principle”, each project partnership shall appoint one applicant acting as lead partner, which takes full financial and legal responsibility for the



implementation of the entire project. The responsibilities of the lead partner are laid down in detail in the subsidy contract signed with the Managing Authority.

The tasks, responsibilities and the relations between the lead partners and the partners are included in the partnership agreement. The template of the subsidy contract and the partnership agreement are available at the Programme website, under the specific call.

! Political parties are not eligible as either applicant or partner!

No subcontracting between project partners or associated partners is allowed, thus, if such cases are identified, the partnership will be considered ineligible, and the project rejected without further evaluation.

No partnership amendment (partnership changes) is allowed during assessment process and pre-contractual-contractual phase, except for legal succession (e.g. where the partner changes its legal form).

The Managing Authority or the Joint Secretariat may request, at any time, additional documentary evidence and argumentations regarding the eligibility of applicants.

The partners must have responsibilities in the field addressed by the operation.

The partnership should include project partners or associated project partners legally responsible for the field of interventions/policy domain addressed by the project and who will be the user of the project outputs.

If the case, part of the competent public authorities can be included as associated partners, and thus, ensuring the durability and transferability of results.

In order to assess the financial capacity of the partners, **Annex AF_A9 Financial Capacity Self-Assessment must be provided**. In case the results reveal that the subvention, liquidity and debt rate are higher than the set threshold (red risk), the corresponding partner must provide a plan for ensuring the financial resources and the mechanism to cover the financial cash-flow of the project and the operation and maintenance costs of the project. In case this plan is not provided or is not realistic, the project may be rejected from financing. This will be verified during the assessment process of the project.

Size of the partnership

The partnership must observe the minimum requirements:

-  maximum 5 partners
-  at least one partner from each Member State participating the Programme (Romania, Bulgaria).



The size of the partnership should reflect the scope of the project and the role of each partner should be clear justified.

The associated partners are not considered for the maximum number of partners included in the partnership.

2.3. Eligible indicative types of actions

The projects must be developed based on and in the scope of the indicative types of actions included in the Interreg Programme.

! For all operations, it is compulsory that the applicant has among its attributions, according with its statute or according to the national legislation, the implementation of the proposed activities or that the applicant has an agreement with the relevant institutions to implement such activities, according with its statute or according to the national legislation.

For Bulgarian partners, in case of infrastructure and works, the investment activities should be carried out on public property, which includes the public and private property of the state/municipality.

Indicative type of actions:

- ④ Development of extensive and structured language-learning schemes, as a vector for building trust across the border, for creating the basis for future exchanges and also as an employment-boosting factor.
- ④ Development of joint cross-border education and training schemes - on-site in areas where accessibility is not a hindrance or online, using digitised learning tools and methods, if physical presence is not an option.
- ④ Development of cross-border internship or placements and student exchange programmes for young graduates/students.
- ④ Development of joint initiatives supporting adult education and learning (LLL), including facilitating learning mobility.
- ④ Development of partnerships between secondary and higher education establishments and businesses, in order to improve the market orientation and the quality aspect of education and offer young students the possibility to train and/or study on the other side of the border. Long-term exchanges are particularly envisaged.
- ④ Development of partnerships between education and training institutions and stakeholders, at all education levels (early to tertiary), to support mutual learning and exchange of practices between teachers and trainers on both sides of the border.
- ④ Development of joint initiatives and actions to support access to quality inclusive education and training, including LLL, to vulnerable or marginalized groups, including disabled



persons, SEN ('Special educational needs' is a legal definition and refers to children with learning problems or disabilities that make it harder for them to learn than most children the same age).

- Joint measures for improving the link between the labour market and the education and training system.
- Investments in the infrastructure of educational facilities (e.g. learning spaces such as classrooms, labs, libraries, workshops, gyms, outdoor learning spaces but also other facilities) for all education levels and educational activities (including remedial and after-school), technical and vocational training and LLL etc.; special attention will be given to promoting accessible and inclusive learning for all persons.
- Investments in ensuring proper endowment for joint learning facilities with focus on digitalization: equipment, tools, etc., especially those that support the development of practical and/or digital skills and remote learning, such as computers, videoconferencing/distance education equipment, learning etc.

! Projects are encouraged to address the needs of the vulnerable groups and marginalised communities, to strengthening equal access to education and learning.

The development of any learning and education schemes and initiatives will be tailored to all vulnerable groups that could benefit from them (for example: blind people or people with reduced mobility etc.). Also, if joint initiatives will be developed, they should ensure the adequate inclusion of vulnerable and marginalized groups, as well as people with disabilities and special educational needs and ethnic groups, in the envisaged activities.

All projects should consider the desegregation principle so as to deter investments that could lead to increased concentration or further physical isolation of marginalised groups.

Projects are encouraged to carry out targeted actions to strengthen equal access to non-segregated education and training for those in segregated, remote and rural areas, including through digital means.

! The eligibility of an action does not confer eligibility on the expenditure made for the implementation of that activity.

In accordance with article 22 (i) of Regulation 2021/1059 (Interreg), in order to be selected, the 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 projects, the partners are encouraged to check if any reasoned opinion affects the project at the level of Romania and Bulgaria. The following link can



be used to find the active reasoned opinions for each country: **EC reasoned opinions website - Infringement Decisions (europa.eu)**. In this case, the Programme structures do not recommend the development of the project, except where there are reasons to believe that the infringement is lifted within the deadline for the project submission set by this Guide.

If there is any reasoned opinion affecting the projects at the level of Romania and Bulgaria, the project shall be rejected.

Please be aware that this aspect shall be checked during the entire assessment process, and in case such reasoned opinion is issued after the project submission, the project will be rejected from financing (even if the information was not available at the moment of the deadline for the project submission set by this Guide).

2.4. Location of Activities

The Interreg VI-A Romania-Bulgaria Programme supports project activities that are implemented in the Programme area. The applicants are asked to demonstrate that those activities have cross-border character and impact on the Programme area and contribute to the objectives of the Programme.

By exception, activities outside the Programme area can be implemented in duly justified cases. In such cases, the following requirements must be observed by the concerned activities:

- ☉ They are for the benefit of the Programme area
- ☉ They are essential for the implementation of the project
- ☉ They are explicitly foreseen in the application form.

Activities related to investments (equipment, infrastructure, works etc.) should be implemented exclusively in the Programme area.

The purchased equipment must be located, installed and used in the Programme area.

IT equipment (laptop and/or desktops, prints, scanners etc.) for equipping the project implementation team for carrying out the project management tasks are included under the Office and administration costs, covered by the flat rate.

For Bulgarian applicants, in case of infrastructure and works, the investment activities should be carried out on public property, both public and private domain of the state/municipality (the applicant must prove the right to own the public property or the concession of that property).

! Under this call, the investment activities (such as works, equipment, installation of equipment etc.) outside the Programme area are not eligible. Thus, the cost related to



such activities shall be considered as ineligible and shall be excluded from funding under the Programme. These costs must be supported by the concerned applicant from resources outside the Programme.



2.5. Budget of the call

The financial allocation to each Specific Objective is presented below:

Specific Objective	Indicative ERDF allocation - Euro	Indicative total allocation - Euro (Includes the contributions from national co-financing and the own contribution of partners from both countries)
Specific objective 4.2 Improving equal access to inclusive and quality services in education, training and lifelong learning through developing accessible infrastructure, including by fostering resilience for distance and on-line education and training	12,000,000	15,000,000

! The selection of the operations shall be made in the limits of the financial allocation available for this specific objective. A reserve list, if projects available can be set at the level of this Specific Objective.

The ERDF co-financing rate is 80%. Partners shall ensure the needed co-financing, as set by the national rules:

-  Romanian partners - the 20% of the national co-financing is ensured from the state budget (18%) and partner own contribution (2%)
-  Bulgarian partners - the 20% of the national co-financing is ensured from the state budget (18%) and partner own contribution (2%).

When selecting the projects, the Monitoring Committee can adjust the funded value so as to ensure the sound financial management of the Programme.



2.6. Types of operations financed under the call

Under this call, the following types of operations will be financed:

Small scale project - is a project with a limited financial volume. Small-scale projects will support both soft measures (such as training, internships, student exchange, mutual learning and exchange of practices between teachers and trainers, partnerships between education establishments and businesses) and hard measures (small investments in infrastructure and educational facilities and endowments - e.g. small repairs to buildings).

Regular project:

- **Soft operation** - is a project that has works/infrastructure/equipment component below 50% of the eligible budget (cumulated value or stand-alone budget).
- **Hard operation** - is a project that has an infrastructure/works component/ equipment equal or more than 50% of the total project eligible budget (cumulated value or stand-alone budget).

The maximum duration of projects and the budgetary limitations should be in line with requirements set below. However, a project cannot have an end date after 30 June 2029.

Type of operation	Project duration	Total financial support from the programme (including ERDF, and the national co-financing from the state budget and corresponding own contribution)	Features
Small scale project	not exceed 14 months from the starting date of the project	between 150,000 Euro and 300,000 Euro	Includes both small works/infrastructure activities and soft activities, without any limitation
Soft operation	not exceed 18 months from the starting date of the project	between 300,001 Euro and 750,000 Euro	Has works/infrastructure/equipment component below 50% of the eligible budget (cumulated value or stand-alone budget)
Hard operation	not exceed 24 months from the	between 500,000 Euro and 1,500,000 Euro	Has an infrastructure/works/equipment



	starting date of the project		component equal or more than 50% of the total project eligible budget (cumulated value or stand-alone budget)
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When developing your application please observe all features described above for each type of operation. It is very important to identify and to submit the application under the corresponding section on Jems dedicated to the call:

- ☉ Small scale project - Call 3_Specific Objective_Small Scale Projects
- ☉ Hard project - Call 3_Specific Objective_Hard
- ☉ Soft project - Call 3_Specific Objective_Soft

The project budget must be within the set threshold. The Programme will grant maximum the amount included in the table above. If the final proposed value is exceeding the threshold, the difference should be included in the budget as non-eligible costs/ non-refundable funds.

If the case, please include the information regarding the non-refundable funds (non-eligible costs as defined in the eligibility rules of the Programme and other funds not covered by the Programme at the time of the application form submission considering Programme limitations, but which may later become refundable from the Programme considering the savings at project level) in the narrative section *A.2 Project Summary*. If the project is selected, this value shall be included in the subsidy contract, under non-refundable expenditures from the Programme.

As a general rule, the Programme management bodies do not encourage, but in exceptional and duly justified cases, at the latest stages of Programme implementation, the value of the grant for the projects contracted under this call for proposals may be increased² by decision of the Monitoring Committee, based on the proposal made by the Managing Authority in consultation with the National Authority. The proposal shall consider the Programme status indicators, the availability of funds, the existence or non existence of projects on the reserve list and the Lead Partners' justifications.

If the case, the increase of the value of the contract shall be done in consideration of achieving the objective(s) of the project and its indicators.

² The new project implementation period and/ or the new grant value may exceed the maximum duration (by up to 3 months for soft projects and by up to 4 months for hard projects)/ value, as specified in the current Applicant Guide.



2.7. Project outputs and results

The Programme results are measured by indicators. For each specific objective, output and results indicators were set. To each output indicator, a result indicator was identified.

Each project must contribute to at least one output and one result indicator, corresponding to the Specific Objective under which the project is submitted. The pairing of the indicators must be observed.

These are presented below:

Indicator	Measurement unit	Target 2024	Target 2029	Indicator	Measurement unit	Target 2029
Output				Result		
RCO85 Participations in joint training schemes	participations	0	2,600	RCR81 Completion of joint training schemes	participants	1,560
RCO87 Organizations cooperating across borders	Organization	0	33	RCR84 - Organisations cooperating across borders after project completion	Organization	16
PSO4 Investments in education, training and life-long learning services	investments	0	13	PSR4 Annual users of the supported investments in education, training and life-long learning services	Users	7,800

! If the project does not contribute to the SO output and result indicators, it is not selected for funding.

The pair of indicators *RCO87 Organisations cooperating across borders* and *RCR84 Organisations cooperating across borders after project completion* cannot be used as a standalone pair. If this pair of indicators is chosen, at least another pair of indicators must be selected (*RCO85-RCR81* and/or *PSO4-PSR4*). If this rule is not observed, the project shall be rejected from funding, without further assessment.



Please select your outputs/indicators targets carefully, clearly stating the targets while having in mind that failure of meeting the targets during implementation; if the project is selected for financing, may result in financial corrections / decommitment of the project's budget.

2.8. Project features

The projects must observe, at least the following characteristics:

- Have a cross-border character and impact
- Contribute to the Programme indicators
- Integrate, as much as possible the core values of the New European Bauhaus (sustainability, aesthetics and inclusion)
- Promote solutions that are friendly with the environment and observe the *Do no significant Harm* Principle
- Promote the equal opportunities, transparency and green procurement
- Partners must cooperate in the development and implementation of projects, as well as in the staffing or financing, or both, thereof.

! The project that does not have a cross-border character and impact and does not observe the cooperation criteria will be rejected.

In case the mandatory cooperation criteria are not met by the partners, as set in the Guide, the project shall be rejected and the assessment process shall stop without further analysis.

In case 0 is granted to one of the sub-criteria included under 2. *Cooperation character* (Evaluation criteria - phase 2 - quality assessment - technical and financial evaluation and state aid incidence assessment) the project shall be rejected and the assessment process shall stop without further analysis.

Cooperation Criteria

Partners shall cooperate in the development and implementation of Interreg operations, as well as in the staffing or financing, or both, thereof. Thus, in order to be eligible, projects must contribute to at least three out of the following four cooperation criteria.

Mandatory cooperation criteria (to all projects):

- **Joint development (mandatory)** - means that the project must be designed in common by partners from both sides of the border. This means that project proposals must clearly integrate the ideas, priorities and actions 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 on 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.

And at least one of the following criteria (the projects can chose one or both of these criteria):

- **Joint financing (at project decision)** - 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 Partner) and payments representing EU support are made from the Programme to this account. The lead partner 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.
- **Joint staffing (at project decision)** - means that the project should not duplicate functions on either side of the border. Therefore, regardless of where the person is located, there should be one joint project manager, one joint financial manager etc., (of course more staff may be required for larger projects). These staff will be responsible for project activities on both sides of the border. The lead partner is generally the employer of core project staff.

2.9. Eligibility of expenditures

Detailed description regarding the eligibility of expenditures is included within *Annex AG_B - List of Eligible Expenditures 2021-2027*.







The project budget should be prepared on the basis of the activities needed to meet the projects' objectives and the resources required to carry out these activities within the time allowed. Only "eligible expenditure" can be taken into account for financial support. The eligibility of expenditure applies to both public and own contribution, so it is not possible to consider an ineligible expenditure as own contribution.

The budget is therefore both a cost estimate and a maximum ceiling for "eligible costs".




The eligible costs must be based on real costs, except for the lump sums and flat rates, which are automatically calculated.

Under this call, the following types of costs shall be applied:

-  Project preparation (based on lump sum and real costs, if the case)
-  Staff costs flat rate
-  Travel & Accommodation flat rate
-  Office & administrative costs flat rate
-  Project closure lump sum
-  Real costs

The starting date of the eligibility of the expenditures is 1st of January 2021.

-  All real costs must be justified based on 2 offers (eg. Print screen from sites, other contracts of the institution or other organizations, offers etc.) or an independent evaluation of the prices. The offers should be for identical equipment / services, or at least similar in technical specifications.

In case the applicants do not submit the 2 offers to the evaluators (clarifications included, if applicable), nor an independent evaluation, if the case, then the respective amount may be reduced or deducted from the budget, according to their professional judgment.


In case the costs estimation is made on the data provided by a Feasibility Study/ equivalent documents (as foreseen by Annex B2), there is no need to provide 2 offers/independent evaluation for the items/services/works/investments covered by the Feasibility Study/or equivalent documents (as foreseen by Annex B2).

Staff Costs

Form of reimbursement:

Staff costs will be calculated based on a flat rate up to 20% of the direct eligible costs of the operation.

The calculation basis for the application of the flat-rate for *Staff costs* for INTERREG VI-A Romania-Bulgaria will consist in the following direct eligible costs:

-  External expertise and services costs;
-  Equipment;
-  Costs for Infrastructure and works.

Project preparation costs and project closure costs will not be included in the calculation basis.



Considering the form of reimbursement, the partner does not need to document that the expenditure has been incurred and paid out. Still, the project partners shall be able to demonstrate the existence of employment/works contracts or other equivalent legal agreement that allow the identification of the employment relationship with the partner's organisation. However, documents proving the existence of the project team could be requested during the project implementation.

If in the framework of controls and audits, direct costs used as calculation basis for determining staff costs are found to be ineligible, the determined costs for staff must be re-calculated and reduced accordingly.

No detailed budget needs to be planned for this budget line since the expenditure is automatically calculated (by the monitoring system).

Travel and accommodation costs

Form of reimbursement:

Travel and accommodation costs will be calculated based on a flat rate of up to 15 % of the eligible direct staff costs of the operation (as foreseen under the cost category Staff costs).

Considering the form of reimbursement, the partner does not need to document that the expenditure has been incurred and paid out. However, documents proving the actions related to travel and accommodation could be requested during the project implementation.

Travel and accommodation costs shall cover the participation of project partners in events organised within the project (such as partners meetings etc.) or by other entities, relevant for the project implementation (such as the meetings organized by the Programme's structures, other projects etc.).

Travel and accommodation costs of external experts (including invited speakers, experts and chairpersons of meetings) and service providers fall under external expertise and services costs and shall be reimbursed on basis of real costs. The same applies to travel and accommodation costs of staff of institutions acting as associated partners, where the case.

No detailed budget needs to be planned for this budget line since the expenditure is automatically calculated (by the monitoring system).

Office and administrative costs

Form of reimbursement:

Flat-rate of up to 15 % of eligible direct staff costs of the operation.



Considering the form of reimbursement, the partner does not need to document that the expenditure has been incurred and paid out. However, documents proving the actions related to office and administrative costs could be requested during the project implementation.

No detailed budget needs to be planned for this budget line since the expenditure is automatically calculated (by the monitoring system).

External expertise and services

Form of reimbursement:

External expertise and services costs are reimbursed by the programme on a real costs basis.

Points of attention:

External expertise and services cost are connected to certain project tasks/activities that cannot be carried out by the project partners themselves and are therefore outsourced to external service providers.

External service providers' work must be necessary for the project and should be linked to activities foreseen in the application form.

External expertise and services cost shall not duplicate costs already budgeted under staff costs or the task of project management team. In this respect, no activities that are foreseen to be externalised will be also performed by partners' own staff (for example in case of projects externalising parts or hole of the project management, including external expertise related to the organization of the (public) procurement, services related to the financial or technical reporting, or other activities). **In case project management is externalised, the flat rate option for staff costs shall be accordingly diminished.**

Equipment Costs

Form of Reimbursement:

Equipment expenditure is reimbursed by the Programme on a real costs basis.

Infrastructure and works

Form of Reimbursement:

Costs for infrastructure and works are reimbursed by the Programme on a real costs basis.



In case of financing construction works, each partner shall foresee in the application form costs for services for quality audit of the performed works (including trial and laboratory test by independent companies).

! It is recommended, in case of buildings, the technical documentations to include rendering plans.

2.10. Horizontal issues

The project will have to clearly describe how will comply with the horizontal principles set in the EU regulations and described in the Programme. This means that horizontal principles and issues should, to the possible extent, be integrated in the project activities, outputs and results, thus ensuring their fulfilment.

The project should respect the **fundamental rights**³ and should describe its specific contributions to the main three horizontal principles on **sustainable development, equal opportunities and non-discrimination and equality between men and women**, during all phases of the project lifecycle, from its design and preparation to its implementation and reporting.

The accomplishment of the minimum requirements of the law in the fields of promotion of equal opportunities and non-discrimination, equality between men and women and sustainable development is mandatory for all projects and will be monitored during project implementation.

Projects are however expected to take concrete actions at operational level more than just accomplishing the minimum required by law, but to actually have a substantial added value towards promotion of sustainable development, equal opportunities and non-discrimination, equality between men and women.

Another horizontal issue that will have to be considered by the applicants and integrated in the projects is the **New European Bauhaus**⁴, an initiative that connects the European Green Deal⁵ to the daily lives and living spaces. It calls on imagining and building together a sustainable and inclusive future that is beautiful for the eyes, minds, and souls.

Also, the contribution to the European Union Strategy for Danube Region (EUSDR)⁶, EU Green Deal and EU Territorial Agenda 2030⁷ must be proven and detailed in the application form, with clear indication of the Priority Area to which the project is contributing.

³In accordance with the Charter of Fundamental Rights of the European Union and in compliance with Article 9 of Regulation (EU) 2021/1060.

⁴ https://europa.eu/new-european-bauhaus/index_en

⁵ https://ec.europa.eu/info/strategy/priorities-2019-2024/european-green-deal_en

⁶ <https://danube-region.eu/about/>

⁷ <https://territorialagenda.eu/ta2030/>






In addition, the contribution and synergies with the national, regional and local strategies/plans/strategic documents should be described in the application form.

When drafting the application, the following details should be considered, as they will be assessed and scored.

SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT

Sustainable development has three dimensions that interrelate:

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

Choosing the sustainable way means commitment to preserve and protect the environment from potential harmful effects of human interventions and to enforce the safeguard of social, environmental and climate benefits. It requires everyone to make decisions in a way that the economic, ecological and social effects of each decision are taken into account.

Project should follow an “environmental sustainability by design” approach. This means that environmental or broader sustainability considerations effects shall be integrated from the beginning into all activities.

To this end, the project will specify which possible effects (positive, neutral or negative) will likely have on the environment, by considering among others the following aspects: water, soil, air and climate, population and human health, fauna, flora and biodiversity, cultural heritage and landscape. It should also refer to the practices, models, solutions, networks and/or knowledge that shall be created by the project and should live on after the project ends.

Project shall fully respect the Union environmental acquis and national legislation on the matter and they shall be in line with the objective of promoting sustainable development, taking into account the UN Sustainable Development Goals⁸, the Paris Agreement⁹ and the “do no significant harm¹⁰” principle.

⁸ <https://sdgs.un.org/goals>

⁹ <https://unfccc.int/process-and-meetings/the-paris-agreement/the-paris-agreement>

¹⁰ Referring to six environmental objectives as laid down in the EU Taxonomy Regulation, https://ec.europa.eu/info/law/sustainable-finance-taxonomy-regulation-eu-2020-852_en



For further information on the main environmental protection objectives and their interlinkages with the Programme, please refer also to the Programme strategic environmental assessment (SEA) available at <https://interregviarobg.eu/assets/2022/11/environmentalreport-en-pdf.pdf>.

DO NO SIGNIFICANT HARM (DNSH)

The project activities contribute to one of the six environmental objectives and they are compliant with Do no significant harm objectives:

- 🌱 Climate change mitigation
- 🌱 Climate change adaptation
- 🌱 Sustainable use & protection of water & marine resources
- 🌱 Pollution prevention & control
- 🌱 Transition to a circular economy
- 🌱 Protection and restoration of biodiversity & ecosystems

Article 17 of the Taxonomy Regulation¹¹, defines the significant harm for the six environmental objectives. Thus, an activity is considered to do significant harm:

- 🌱 *to climate change mitigation if it leads to significant greenhouse gas (GHG) emissions;*
- 🌱 *to climate change adaptation if it leads to an increased adverse impact of the current climate and the expected future climate, on the activity itself or on people, nature or assets;*
- 🌱 *to the sustainable use and protection of water and marine resources if it is detrimental to the good status or the good ecological potential of bodies of water, including surface water and groundwater, or to the good environmental status of marine waters;*
- 🌱 *to the circular economy, including waste prevention and recycling, if it leads to significant inefficiencies in the use of materials or in the direct or indirect use of natural resources, or if it significantly increases the generation, incineration or disposal of waste, or if the long-term disposal of waste may cause significant and long-term environmental harm;*
- 🌱 *to pollution prevention and control if it leads to a significant increase in emissions of pollutants into air, water or land;*
- 🌱 *to the protection and restoration of biodiversity and ecosystems if it is significantly detrimental to the good condition and resilience of ecosystems, or detrimental to the conservation status of habitats and species, including those of Union interest.*

¹¹ <https://eur-lex.europa.eu/legal-content/EN/TXT/?uri=celex:32020R0852>



The project will have to promote solutions that are friendly with the environment and observe the Do No Significant Harm Principle.

When developing the application form and the technical annexes, the applicant must include adaptation measures, in this regard please consider at least the measures identified in the *Annex AG_I. DNSH_Interreg VI-A RoBg level*, for the corresponding Priority 3 and Specific Objective 4.2.



The adaptation measures included in the *Annex AG_I DNSH_Interreg VI-A RoBg level* are mandatory for all projects! Therefore, before designing your project and the technical annexes, please check the adaptation measures identified for the Specific Objective and Priority under the project will be submitted.

Please bear in mind that these are minimum requirements, and they can be complemented with additional ones, depending on the legal requirements and the type of the project.



All these adaptation measures shall be implemented and checked during the project execution. Also, please bear in mind that it is your responsibility to request the service provider/contractor to comply with these requirements and monitor their implementation during the works execution/equipment providing.

As such, the terms of reference for works execution, service and equipment providing should clearly mention the compliance with the "Do No Significant Harm" and the adaptation measures that must be applied.

GO GREEN WITH YOUR PROJECT!

When designing and implementing your project, you can act in many ways to reduce impact on the environment and reduce the carbon footprint. You are thus strongly encouraged to apply energy efficient and sustainable principles to the project activities. In fact, measures reducing the impact on the environment cannot only add value to the project in terms of credibility, but it can also result in lower costs.

There are several examples about how projects can implement sustainability on the operational level:

-  Carefully consider the impacts of the project activities on economical, ecological and social aspects within the project eligible area targeted;
-  Consider giving priority to using "green infrastructure" solutions over "grey solutions" whenever this is possible;



- Practice to make your daily working choices the sustainable way;
- Rethink your meeting habits in order to minimise environmental impact;
- Practice green procurement.

Guidance on simple greening measures projects can apply to contribute to sustainable development are to be found in the United Nations Environment Programme's (UNEP) guide to climate neutrality: "kick the habit"¹² and the UNEP Green meeting Guide¹³.

Here are some tips you can follow:

- Go paperless or if you really have to use paper, make it recycled one;*
- Publications should be printed for external communication purposes (if needed only). For electronic publications, a "printer-friendly" version (less colours, more compact text, less pages) should be made available;*
- Use the Programme electronic system and e-mail for communicating with the Programme structures or your project partners;*
- Information on the greening efforts made at the meeting/event is provided electronically prior to, and after the meeting;*
- Materials produced for the events (such as banners, posters, signs, etc.) are designed and written in a generic way to allow them to be reused for other events;*
- A dedicated area is provided for participants to return material that can be re-used (such as badges);*
- Switch to cloud computing;*
- Consider online meetings instead of face-to-face meetings where possible;*
- Modernize your equipment - updating and upgrading your equipment can make a significant difference in how eco-friendly you are;*
- Include environmental criteria in procurement procedures.*
- Operate fuel efficient vehicles (electric or hybrid cars);*
- Give preference to environmentally-friendly mobility options (in particular for short travel distances);*
- Use eco-friendly means of transport or go on foot;*
- If possible, all waste produced at the venue of an event is sorted for recycling and sufficient, well-marked bins are provided in both participants and staff areas;*

¹² Kick the Habit: A UN Guide to Climate Neutrality | GRID-Arendal (grida.no)
<https://www.grida.no/publications/225>

¹³ <https://www.unescap.org/sites/default/files/Green%20Meetings%20Participant-guide.pdf>



- 🌱 Consider resource efficiency and the use of renewable energy at all levels;
- 🌱 Consider near-Zero Energy Building
- 🌱 Make use of regional supply chains (reducing supply chain length and CO2 emissions).



Mandatory!

Projects aimed at renovation/modernization of existing buildings and/or construction of new buildings must consider the implementation of solutions to improve energy efficiency, as well as the use of renewable sources of electrical/thermal energy.

GREEN PUBLIC PROCUREMENT

Green Public Procurement (GPP) is defined as "a process whereby public authorities seek to procure goods, services and works with a reduced environmental impact throughout their life cycle when compared to goods, services and works with the same primary function that would otherwise be procured¹⁴.

The Programme encourages sustainable measures and supports the inclusion of additional `green` criteria in tendering whenever legally possible. Thus, by using your purchasing power to choose environmentally friendly goods, services and works, you can make an important contribution to sustainable consumption and production.

Public procurement rules allow for horizontal aspects such as the protection of the environment, social considerations or the enforcement of innovation to be taken into account when purchasing a product, service or work. Thus, the applicants are invited to make use of this possibility whenever possible.

Practicing green procurement involves sourcing goods and services that are produced and supplied in a sustainable way. When you procure goods/services, pay attention to the following aspects or review your procurement policies:

- 🌱 Are manufactured in a sustainable fashion
- 🌱 Do not contain toxic materials or ozone-depleting substances
- 🌱 Can be recycled and/or are produced from recycled materials

¹⁴ For more details regarding green procurement, you can check the European Union site: https://ec.europa.eu/environment/gpp/index_en.htm



- Are made from renewable materials
- Do not make use of excessive packaging
- Are designed to be repairable and not throwaway
- Here are some examples of green contracts:
 - Energy efficient computers
 - Office furniture from sustainable timber
 - Low energy buildings
 - Recycled paper
 - Cleaning services using ecologically sound products
 - Electric, hybrid or low-emission vehicles
 - Electricity from renewable energy sources

EQUAL OPPORTUNITIES AND NON-DISCRIMINATION

Guaranteeing equal opportunities and preventing discrimination are important principles in project implementation. No one should be discriminated based on sex, racial or ethnic origin, religion or belief, disability, age or sexual orientation. Instead, project activities should, where possible, increase the possibilities of all groups to participate in the activities of the society. Any discrimination based on gender, racial or ethnic origin, religion or belief, disability, age or sexual orientation has to be prevented. Accessibility for persons with disabilities shall be taken into account. At the level of projects, applicants are invited to explain in their application form how their project complies with, and possibly even strengthens, equal opportunities and non-discrimination.

Here are some tips you can follow:

- *Ensure products, goods, services and infrastructures that are open or provided to the citizens are accessible to all citizens including those with disabilities;*
- *Accessibility to the physical environment, transport, ICT shall be ensured in order to promote inclusion of disadvantaged groups, including persons with disabilities;*
- *Guarantee that all communication products (websites, electronic newsletters, publications, etc.) are accessible;*
- *Use straightforward language that guarantees cognitive accessibility;*
- *Emphasise social diversity in videos, posters, etc., using people with a variety of profiles to encourage identification among all groups;*



- Involve members of minority groups in your activities and/or composition of the project team;*
- Take into account the needs of the various target groups at risk of discrimination.*

EQUALITY BETWEEN MEN AND WOMEN

In addition to the general principle of equal opportunities and non-discrimination the programme pays attention to the equality between men and women.

Ensuring equality between men and women means in principle to make possible that everyone, regardless of gender, has the right to work and support themselves, to balance career and family life, and to live without the fear of abuse or violence. Gender equality implies not only equal distribution between men and women in all domains of society. It is also about the qualitative aspects, ensuring that the knowledge and experience of both men and women are used to promote progress in all aspects of society, placing equal value and emphasis on the knowledge and skills of both men and women, including ensuring equal pay for work of equal value.

An assessment will be made of the relevance of gender in the project: does the project take gender into account, does the project have an impact on the equality between men and women, etc. This principle is relevant for all projects and priorities. Equality between men and women is taken into consideration also in projects implementation, for instance when recruiting staff and in all personnel policy. At the level of projects, applicants are invited to explain in their application form how their project complies with, and possibly even strengthens, gender equality.

Here are some **tips you can follow**:

- Take into account findings from gender analyses, gender impact assessment, or stakeholders consultation when planning your project;*
- Elaborate gender-specific objectives in line with the latest findings and with the objectives of the project and explain how these objectives would be achieved;*
- Take into account gender-balanced composition of the project team;*
- Ensure the participation of gender experts in teams or groups;*
- When organizing events and conferences, give a good balance between women and men speakers;*
- Give visibility to gender issues and avoid the use of sexist language and stereotypical or discriminatory images;*
- Take into account to promote gender equality through the goods, services or works being purchased (it means that the buyer and supplier examine the impact of all contracted*






activities on women's and men's needs, interests and concerns, and design and deliver contracts in a way that reduces inequalities).

NEW EUROPEAN BAUHAUS

The New European Bauhaus¹⁵ initiative promotes a new lifestyle where sustainability matches style, thus accelerating the green transition in various sectors of the economy such as construction, furniture, fashion and other areas of our daily life. The aim is to provide all citizens with access to goods that are circular and less carbon-intensive, that support the regeneration of nature and protect biodiversity.

Three core inseparable values guides the New European Bauhaus:

-  sustainability¹⁶, from climate goals, to circularity, zero pollution, and biodiversity,
-  aesthetics, quality of experience and style, beyond functionality,
-  inclusion, valorizing diversity, equality for all, accessibility and affordability.

The New European Bauhaus initiative constitutes one of the main horizontal issues of the Programme. The applicants are invited to explain in their application form how their project will contribute to implement the New European Bauhaus initiative.

Therefore your project will have to take the opportunity to explore ways to contribute to creating and delivering sustainable, affordable, accessible, inclusive and beautiful products and/ or services, whether we refer to new cycling infrastructure, digitalization of heritage, learning programs or green areas in cities.

Your project can contribute to implement the New European Bauhaus initiative with a wide range of solutions, from educational and cultural activities, to implementation of nature-based solutions, while making the built environment more attractive.

Also, implementing solutions for making cities greener and using sustainably sourced nature-based materials and a zero pollution ambition model, from environmental actions to tourism, are horizontal objectives which can contribute to the New European Bauhaus initiative implementation.

Fostering sustainable living by improving the common spaces to be used by the local community and making use of the cultural assets (heritage, arts, local craft, etc.) and natural assets (landscapes, natural resources, etc.) projects can offer opportunities for connection and social

¹⁵For more details regarding the New European Bauhaus you can check The EU'S site: https://europa.eu/new-european-bauhaus/index_en

¹⁶ For the purpose of the New European Bauhaus initiative, “sustainability” is understood as “environmental sustainability”.



interaction, including for people at risk of exclusion or poverty, the binding element that creates a sense of belonging.

Here are several examples about how projects can implement the New European Bauhaus initiative on different categories:

- *Techniques, materials and processes for construction and design - tools that may support design and co-creation for more sustainable building and planning processes;*
- *Building in the spirit of circularity - places/physical sites that demonstrate the re-use and recycling of materials, renovations, or buildings planned with full circularity in mind contributing to inclusiveness in relation to their function or accessibility;*
- *Solutions for the co-evolution of built environment and nature - showing how the built environment may contribute to the protection of nature and biodiversity, taking into account cultural and social needs, or blending of buildings in landscape, or integration of living nature in construction;*
- *Regenerated urban and rural spaces - reconversions of abandoned or challenged areas in cities, upgrading of territories and regions in decline;*
- *Preserved and transformed cultural heritage - models of preservation that enhance access to cultural heritage for all, or reconversion of heritage infrastructure with a high social purpose and a low carbon footprint;*
- *Reinvented places to meet and share - the development and use of public spaces such as streets, squares and parks; or particularly inspirational models of community centers, community gardens, co-creation places that combine style with a strong social purpose and sustainability;*
- *Interdisciplinary education models - models and methods that integrate the values of sustainability, inclusion and aesthetics in the content of the curricula and in the learning process.*

SEA MITIGATION MEASURES AND INDICATORS

When developing and implementing the projects, the recommendations and the monitoring indicators set by the Strategic Environmental Assessment Report must be observed. The list of the measures and the monitoring indicators proposed for each type of actions is included in *Annex AG_E SEA mitigation measures and indicators*.



Please consult the provisions of *Annex AG_E SEA mitigation measures and indicators* and other environmental aspects and consider the proposed measures when developing the project. Details regarding the way these measures were



considered by the project partners should be included in the description of the work packages/activities (where relevant). These aspects shall be assessed by the evaluators or followed during the implementation stage.

The Bulgarian partners must observe also the recommendations generated by the Bulgarian legislation, as mentioned in *Annex AG_E SEA mitigation measures and indicators and other environmental aspects*.

2.11. Communication and branding

Co-funded projects have to acknowledge and promote the ERDF support received in all their activities. The overall context of the projects of strategic importance in the cohesion policy regulatory framework is related to visibility and communication, in line with Articles 46(a) and 50(1)(e) of the CPR.






Thus, the communication activities are an essential part of this type of projects. Therefore, each project is required to set out the envisaged approach to communication and visibility of the project. For more details, please see Communication Kit (<https://interregviarobg.eu/assets/2023/04/communication-starter-kit-2021-2027.docx>).

! Please bear in mind that failure to comply with the visibility legal requirements set out by EU Regulation may lead to the appliance of financial correction by the Managing Authority up to 2% of the ERDF total support of the project, based on the principle of proportionality.

Projects are encouraged to use communication products such as roll-ups and banners to promote the project when organising events.

Promotional items are by definition produced in larger quantities and come custom-printed with the Programme logo. They are usually relatively small and inexpensive. Their production has to respect horizontal principles of equal opportunities, non-discrimination, sustainable development and environment protection.

However, limited promotional materials are allowed under the Programme, such as:

-  Pens and pencils
-  (Paper) notebooks
-  Bags (made of sustainable materials like cotton, paper or linen)
-  Cardboard conference folders
-  USB sticks



The applicants can choose the promotional items from the Programme list, according to their needs.

However, at operation level, partners may decide to propose maximum 3 promotional items, additional to the Programme list.

All promotional items must respect the green principle and the quantity produced should be reasonable and justified. The costs of a single item should not exceed EUR 50.

The public availability of results must be guaranteed also after project closure. Results and outcomes must remain available for at least 5 years after the end date of the project.

Also, please bear in mind that you will need to prove you have planted at least 2 or 5 trees, during the project implementation, according to the type of the project and Communication Starter Kit. You can plant your trees on public spaces or near to your headquarters. When selecting the trees, please make sure you have chosen local species (please do not use alien and invasive species¹⁷). Also, please make sure that you can take care of the development of the planted trees.

2.12. State aid

According to Article 107 (1) of the Treaty on the Functioning of the European Union, state aid refers to financial support granted by a Member State or through State resources in any form whatsoever which distorts or threatens to distort competition and intra-community market trade by favouring certain undertakings or the production of certain goods. In order to meet the requirements of the European Commission and in order to allow a smooth implementation of the Programme and its approved projects, in the framework of Interreg VI-A Romania-Bulgaria, State Aid is not permitted.

In case that during project implementation, or during 5 years after the end of project implementation period, illegal state-aid incidence is discovered the MA may apply a correction up to 100% financial correction for the respective project, including penalties and debts from the date of grant award to date.

For state aid to take place the recipient of project funding must be an undertaking, and the Court of Justice has consistently defined undertakings as entities engaged in an economic activity, regardless of their legal status and the way in which they are financed. The term "undertaking" is in this context used in a wide sense as any entity which has an activity of an economic nature and which offers goods and services on the market, regardless the legal form and the way of financing of this entity. Also if an entity is not profit-oriented, state aid rules will apply as long as it competes

¹⁷ The partner shall verified/consult the list/studies of the invasive tree spices, before purchasing and planting the trees. The local/regional environmental agencies can be consulted before the process.



with companies that are profit-oriented. Therefore, not only private companies are subject to state aid rules but also public authorities, if they carry out an economic activity on the market.

The next step in establishing state aid is to use the set of five criteria that all have to be fulfilled cumulatively in order to be state aid.

As defined in Article 107 paragraph (1) of the Treaty on the Functioning of European Union, State aid exists if the following conditions (cumulatively) are met:

- **Economic advantage to an undertaking:** within the meaning of Article 107(1) TFEU, is any economic benefit which an undertaking could not have obtained under normal market conditions, that is to say in the absence of State intervention.
 - As mentioned above, the classification of an entity as an undertaking is always relative to a specific activity, not the status of that entity such as public or private. An entity that carries out both economic and non-economic activities is to be regarded as an undertaking only with regard to the former. Furthermore, the application of the State aid rules as such does not depend on whether the entity is set up to generate profits, as also non-profit entities can offer goods and services on a market too. The only relevant criterion is to decide whether or not the entity carries out an economic activity in the context of the ETC project. Also, the State authorities may themselves be considered as undertakings when they are involved in economic activities. Whenever the State acts in the exercise of its public powers, respectively the activity in question is a task that forms part of the essential functions of the State or is connected with those functions by its nature, its aim and the rules to which it is subject, it is not to be considered an undertaking. Examples are activities related to: maritime traffic control and safety, anti-pollution surveillance, the army or the police, as well as air navigation safety and control etc.
 - Economic transactions carried out by a public body or a public undertaking do not confer an advantage on its counterpart, and therefore do not constitute aid, if they are carried out in line with normal market conditions. In this respect, if the procurement procedure is open (to allow all interested and qualified bidders to participate in the process), transparent (in order to allow all interested tenderers to be equally and reasonably informed at each stage of the tender procedure), sufficiently well publicised, non-discriminatory and unconditional, in compliance with the principles of the EU and National Public procurement rules, it can be presumed that the transactions are in line with market conditions. Also, to establish whether a transaction is in line with market conditions, it can be assessed in the light of the terms and conditions under which comparable transactions carried out by comparable private operators have taken place in comparable situations.
 - An advantage can be conferred on undertakings other than those to which State resources are directly transferred (indirect advantage). An indirect advantage is present



if the measure is designed in such a way so as to channel its secondary effects towards identifiable undertakings or groups of undertakings (e.g. if the funds received by a direct partner are used for building up infrastructure that is to be used for economic activities and the operation of this infrastructure is not granted through open, transparent and unconditional public procurement procedure that has been sufficiently publicized, or if the funds are used by the partner in order to train the employees of certain undertakings and does not pay market price for that, so it has an advantage etc.). This is the case, for example, if the direct aid is, de facto or de jure, made conditional on the purchase of goods or services produced by certain undertakings only.

- **State resources:** the state-aid norms comprise exclusively the measures that imply the public sources/resources transfer (including from national, regional and local authorities, banks and public foundations, etc.). Moreover, the aid does not need to be granted by the state as such. The aid can be granted by a public or private intermediate body appointed by the state. For the Interreg Programmes, the criterion is automatically fulfilled.
- **Selectivity:** a measure is considered selective when it favours “certain undertakings or the production of certain goods”. Not all measures which favour economic operators fall under the notion of aid, but only those which grant an advantage in a selective way to certain undertakings or categories of undertakings or to certain economic sectors.
- **Distortion of competition:** a measure granted by the State is considered to distort or threaten to distort competition when it is liable to improve the competitive position of the recipient compared to other undertakings with which it competes.
A distortion of competition within the meaning of Article 107 TFEU is thus assumed as soon as the State grants a financial advantage to an undertaking in a liberalized sector where there is, or could be, competition. A possible distortion of competition is excluded if (1) a given service is subject to a legal monopoly (established in compliance with EU law), the legal monopoly not only excludes competition on the market, but also for the market (2), the service is not in competition with other services and (3) the service provider is active in another (geographical or product) market that is open to competition, cross-subsidisation has to be excluded.
- **Effect on trade between Member States:** an advantage granted to an undertaking operating in a market which is open to competition will normally be assumed to affect trade between Member States. Public support can be considered capable to affect intra-EU trade even if the recipient is not directly involved in cross-border trade. For instance, the subsidy may make it more difficult for operators in other Member States to enter the market by maintaining or increasing local supply. However, if the service in question is of a purely local impact there is no effect on trade between Member States. In order to assert that this criterion is not fulfilled, the project in question must have a mere local impact. Some examples of situations where the Commission found that public support was not liable to affect trade between Member States:



- sports and leisure facilities serving predominantly a local audience and unlikely to attract customers or investment from other Member States;
- cultural events and entities performing economic activities which however are unlikely to attract users or visitors away from similar offers in other Member States (the Commission considers that only funding granted to large and renowned cultural institutions and events in a Member State which are widely promoted outside their home region has the potential to affect trade between Member States);
- hospitals and other health care facilities providing the usual range of medical services aimed at a local population and unlikely to attract customers or investment from other Member States;
- news media and/or cultural products which, for linguistic and geographical reasons, have a locally restricted audience; etc.

! Please bear in mind that under this call, no state aid is granted, any activities fulfilling all the above criteria cannot be financed. In this regard you have to make an initial assessment of whether State aid is involved in your project and your options for dealing with this. As such, *Annex AF_A3 State Aid Self-Assessment* must be filled in by each partner and submitted with the application.

2.13. Revenue Generating Projects

The projects are expected to share any outputs and results widely and for free. In case where income to the project could happen, the partners should observe the legislation in force.

2.14. Durability, transferability and financial sustainability

The project must ensure the effectiveness, fairness and sustainable impact of the Funds and should guarantee that investments in infrastructure or productive investment is long lasting and prevent the Funds from being used to undue advantage.

Therefore, the sustainability of a project - or more precisely of its results - is crucial. A project is sustainable when it continues to deliver benefits to the project partners and/or other constituencies for an extended period after the project implementation. Hence it is essential to include the aspects of sustainability in the application form. As such, information regarding the necessary financial resources and mechanism to cover the operation and maintenance costs for the operations including investment infrastructure should be provided by the partners.



Also, the durability of the operations in case of investment in infrastructure or productive investment must be ensured for 5 years since the project completion. No cessation or transfer of productive activity, no undue advantage owing to change of infrastructure ownership and no substantial change in nature, objectives etc. are accepted.

Moreover, some outputs/deliverables that will be delivered by the project can be adapted or further developed to be used by other target groups or in other territories. Thus, the project partners should include details and measures for ensuring the transferability of these results to the relevant groups.



Please bear in mind that the Programme will assess and rank the way you ensure the durability and the financial sustainability of the project, after the project implementation. As such, you must include in the application form detailed information on how you will ensure the financial sustainability and the durability of the project and its results after a period of 5 years since the project completion.

2.15. How to apply and the deadline

The present call is organized in “one-step” procedure, exclusively online. The project proposals must be submitted in English language, only through the web-based programme joint electronic monitoring system (Jems) available at <https://jems-robg.mdlpa.ro/>.

JEMS manual provide potential applicants with detailed guidelines on the application for funding process.

Project proposals must be submitted by the lead applicant at the latest by:

9th of September, 2024 at 13:00 PM EET

2.16. Assessment and selection of applications

Assessment Process

The project proposals shall be assessed and selected for funding based on standardized procedure which complies with the principles of transparency and equal treatment. The assessment and selection criteria are available in *Annex AG _A Evaluation grids*.

The assessment process shall be carried out by an Assessment Committee based on the criteria approved by the Monitoring Committee (MC).

The evaluation will be carried out in two phases:



- 🌐 Phase 1 - administrative compliance and eligibility check
- 🌐 Phase 2 - quality assessment (technical and financial evaluation and state aid incidence assessment)

Verification of the compliance of project application with eligibility criteria can be made all through the evaluation, selection, and contracting process and failure to comply with the established eligibility criteria can lead to the rejection of the application in any stage of the assessment, selection, and contracting process.

Selection process

Project proposals will be selected by the programme MC at the level of each specific objective, on the basis of the results of the evaluation process. After the evaluation process is finalized, the Assessment Committee will prepare the list of all the evaluated projects, at the level of each specific objective, in a descending order according to the scores that have been granted.

In order to be proposed for approval, the applications must respect the administrative and eligibility criteria, receive at least **60 points** at the technical and financial evaluation and not be rejected during the state aid incidence evaluation.

Projects which did not pass the assessment process, or have not received at least 60 points at the technical and financial evaluation will be submitted to the Monitoring Committee for rejection.

The Monitoring Committee will discuss the project applications and especially their relevance and cross-border impact.



The projects are evaluated in the order they are received. In case a project has at least 85 points as final score it goes immediately to the Monitoring Committee for approval and, after observing the contracting procedure, the financing contracts are signed.

The evaluation process will start after the deadline for submission of the projects (close date of the call).

The projects, which receive a score below the threshold, are proposed for rejection.

Thus, the projects can be grouped into three categories:

- 🌐 projects proposed for financing;
- 🌐 projects proposed for financing without financial allocation available;
- 🌐 projects proposed for rejection.

Applicants will be notified about the outcome of the selection process after the MC decision regarding the submitted proposals. The Decision of the Monitoring Committee is final and mandatory for all applicants.



Please be aware that the Monitoring Committee is responsible with the selection of the projects, considering the results of the evaluation process, but also the benefits for the Programme and the accomplishment of the IP indicators, and the decisions related to the complaints. In duly justified cases, the Monitoring Committee can decide to reject a project if the Programme indicators targets are not secured, regardless the score awarded, based on a methodology proposed by the Programme structures.

The decision of the Monitoring Committee shall be inserted into the JEMS by the JS after the meeting. The MC decision is recorded in a list 'Funding decision (MC)'.

Possible decisions are:

- Approved - approved applications -" are forwarded to the "contracting" phase, in JEMS.
- Approved under condition (if conditions are to be met in order to be approved for financing, opening the application form to be further modified or supplementary documents to be attached). One of this condition may refer to the adjustment of the project contribution to the Programme indicators.
- Rejected and proposed to be eliminated from the Programme.

Approved under condition

During the contracting phase, after the Lead applicant modifies the application form, the JS reviews the modified application form and sets the status to refused, accepted, or handed back.

- Refused: terminates the modification process and omits all modifications done by the LP. No new version of the AF is created. The project is rejected and archived. In addition, the project shall be eliminated from the Programme (based on the MC decision).
- Accepted: accepts the modifications introduced by the LP and generates a new version of the AF. The project status is changed to 'approved' and the project is moved from 'approved under conditions' to the 'handover and contracting' section.
- Handed back: reopens the AF for further modifications by the LP.

Subsequently, all Lead Applicants will receive notification of the approval/rejection of their projects (via email or JeMS, if function available).

The decision of the Monitoring Committee is followed by the pre-contractual phase and then the contracts will be concluded.

The Joint Secretariat will publish on the Programme website, the list of the approved projects in 5 working days after the Monitoring Committee meeting. It is the responsibility of the lead partner to inform the other project partners about the outcome.



Any attempt to obtain confidential information or to influence the evaluators within the evaluation process or the selection process will lead to your disqualification!

You will be excluded in case it is proven that you are guilty of misleading of the evaluators by providing false information, that are being taken into consideration in the evaluation process or if you did not submit information on issues that would have led to a different decision of the evaluators.

Recommendation for projects proposed for financing: partners are strongly recommended to start the implementation of project activities as soon as possible in order to avoid any delays in implementation. Therefore, the partners are strongly encouraged to start the implementation of project activities, preparing their tender documentations and launch the (public) procurement procedures, before or immediately after the selection of the project by the Monitoring Committee (depending on each partner decision). Contracts may be signed and expenditures paid, as they are eligible starting with 1st of January 2021.

2.17. Contracting process

The decision of the Monitoring Committee is followed by the pre-contractual phase and then the contracts will be concluded.

In case of disagreement with the decision of the Monitoring Committee, the Lead applicant has the right to file a complaint, for further information please refer to Section 2.18. Complaint against MC selection decision.

For the project proposals selected for funding and approved under conditions a pre-contracting procedure is initiated in order to fulfil the requirements/conditions for approval set forth by the MC following the assessment process or to correct any technical errors /inconsistencies detected by the JS in the pre-contracting phase.

The JS notification letter shall include information regarding any recommendations the Monitoring Committee has issued for the respective project. These may include, among others, reduction of the project budget, removal/revision of a particular activity, revision of indicators etc. and will be operated in the JEMS system by the LP during pre-contracting. Through the notification letter, the partners will also be requested to upload in JEMS a set of documents, such as: proof that there are no debts to the consolidated budgets or to the Programme budget (if a partner registers debts to the Programme budget, they will be notified by the MA/JS and in order to continue the contracting process, they have to submit the proof that the debts were cleared), criminal record of the legal representative, proof that the VAT is non-recoverable from other sources, decisions of the governing body for the financing of the project, documents stating the right of property (if not submitted together with application), pre-contracting declaration (regarding the financing sources partially or fully financed from the state budget, no double funding when partners declare that they have



not received public funding for another project implemented or under implementation, with the same objectives, results and activities funded from any other source of grant), etc. the complete list of documents will be included in the notification to be received from the JS. Declarations will be electronically signed by the legal representative or by an empowered person.

Also, please be informed that during the pre-contracting phase, the partners will be asked to provide the total amount each partner commits to spend and request for national control verification by the end of the month marking the half of the implementation period (for further information please refer to Project Implementation Manual). These amounts will be included in the subsidy contract and cannot be changed during the project implementation.

The starting date for the eligibility of expenditures is 1st of January 2021, including for project preparation expenditures. Therefore, from 1 January 2021, the project can proceed with expenditures (the ones for preparing the project and for project implementation) and start the implementation of project activities. These expenditures will be eligible from this date foreseen by the Applicant's Guide (subject to the MA signing of the contract with the related final budget) if the Programme eligibility rules are observed.

Before signing the contracts, on-line or on-the-spot pre-contracting visits will take place. On-the-spot visits may be performed by the JS, MA, NA, or by any other body with responsibilities in the implementation of the programme. All partners have the obligation to provide all necessary documents and to be available for the on-line or on-the-spot visits in order to finalize the pre-contracting process and to conclude the contracts. Please take into consideration that failure to provide the requested documents within the set deadlines during the pre-contracting period will lead to the rejection of the project (for further information please refer to the Project Implementation Manual¹⁸).

All partners participating in a project must sign a partnership agreement before the signing of the subsidy contract with the MA that stipulates the rights and duties of the partners. A model of partnership agreement is annexed to the present Guide. The partners may decide, with prior agreement of the MA, to stipulate additional provisions than those mentioned in the model partnership agreement. These additional provisions should not alter the provisions of the standard template of the partnership agreement.

For the approved projects, when all conditions for approval are fulfilled, subsidy contracts (for ERDF contribution) are concluded between the MA and the Lead Partner. Also, co-financing contracts are concluded between the National Authority (Ministry of Regional Development and Public Works from Bulgaria) and the Bulgarian partners on one hand and between the Managing Authority (Ministry of Development, Public Works and Administration from Romania) and Romanian partners on the other hand. The template of the subsidy contract is annexed to the present Guide.

¹⁸ <https://interregviarobg.eu/en/implementation-rules>



Please bear in mind that the Managing Authority has the right to decide not to sign a financing contract in case a Partner already has in implementation 4 projects. After the finalization of one project the decision may be reconsidered, provided the financial allocation is available.

If the case, please be aware that during the pre-contracting phase, additional clarifications/information regarding the non-refundable funds (e.g. a short and clear description of non-refundable funds necessary for implementing the project activities or the necessity of envisaged non-refundable funds for implementing the project etc.) may be requested by the Programme structures.

A Lead Partner has the possibility to ask expenditure for reimbursement to the MA via a project report submitted in JEMS at any given time (the latest being at 5 months after the end date of the implementation period of the project), for one or more partners in accordance with the defined periods within the electronic system (or with prior modification of the defined periods in the electronic system), provided that the expenditure claimed for reimbursement is not lower than the threshold set by the Programme (the Programme rules related to implementation are detailed in the Project Implementation Manual).


During contracting process, a list of major milestones of the activities shall be prepared by the Lead Partner and uploaded in JEMS together with all other contracting documents. The respective shall become an annex of the subsidy contract. Failing to meet the set milestones may result in decommitment of the budget under the conditions described in the subsidy contract template.

Every 4 months the Lead Partner must create and submit to Joint Secretariat (JS) via the electronic system a project report including physical and financial progress of the project, based on partners reports submitted in the JEMS in accordance with the conditions provided in the subsidy contract, in the Project Implementation Manual, JEMS manual and in the applicable legislation.



Due attention is to be paid to the schedule (the reporting periods within the electronic system), particularly to the amount set for the middle of the implementation period (this sum will be mandatory to be established and its planning is extremely important, since at the middle of the implementation period, the Programme will analyse this particular amount, and may decide to decommit funds from your project).

At the half of the implementation period (all contracts will have specific provisions for each partner regarding the target value of amounts to be requested for validation by the National Control at half of the implementation period), the JS shall analyse the project financial execution, as compared to the initial schedule. In case the project has a financial execution lower than:

-  75%, MA is entitled to decommit 10% of the budget of the partners who have not respected the initial schedule of reimbursement.



- 50%, MA is entitled to decommit 25% of the budget of the partners who have not respected the initial schedule of reimbursement.

The Lead Partner will be granted a two weeks deadline to submit a revised budget and in case such a budget is not provided within the deadline, the decommitment will be applied proportionally to all budgetary lines for the concerned partners. The Lead Partner and its partners may decide to stop implementing the project, but in this case all the paid funds shall be reimbursed.

The subsidy contracts will be electronically signed by MA and then submitted to the Joint Secretariat. The latter will submit the subsidy contracts to the Lead partners by e-mail, in order to sign the contracts until a certain deadline. LP must upload the signed contract and its annexes in JEMS according to the Project Implementation Manual and JEMS Manual.

MA and NA may decide to grant advance payments to partners in an amount ranging between 60%-80% of the national co-financing, depending on the national provisions.

The contract templates annexed to this Guide are only indicative; the final version of all contracts will be presented to the partners of the selected projects in the pre-contractual phase.



Please bear in mind that the lead partner and all project partners are responsible for the truthfulness of information provided and certify that the information uploaded in JeMS is a true and complete copy of the original (if the case). In case differences are identified between the electronic version and the original, inclusive during the project life, the project could be rejected/terminated (for contracted projects).

2.18. Complaint against MC selection decision

In case the applicants are not satisfied by the MC selection decision, a complaint can be filed according to the Complaint Procedure (*Annex AG_ D Complaint procedure for evaluation results*). Following the JS notification to the lead applicant on the MC funding decision, and within the set timeframe available for submitting a formal complaint, the lead applicant may decide to submit a complaint concerning the MC decision on its project proposal. The complaint can be submitted only for the project not accepted for funding (rejected from funding) or selected without available financial allocation.

Only the project's lead applicant as the one representing the project partnership affected by the funding decision is entitled to file a complaint. It is therefore the task of the lead applicant to collect and bring forward the complaint reasons from all project partners.



Section 3 How to develop a high quality project and how to apply

3.1. Application form - general overview

Joint Secretariat staff and the Bulgarian Info-point (in Ruse) are available for support at all stages of the application process. Consultations with the staff are strongly advised; we are here to help you.

Contacts to and further information on all programme bodies are available at the programme website, <https://interregviarobg.eu/contact>.

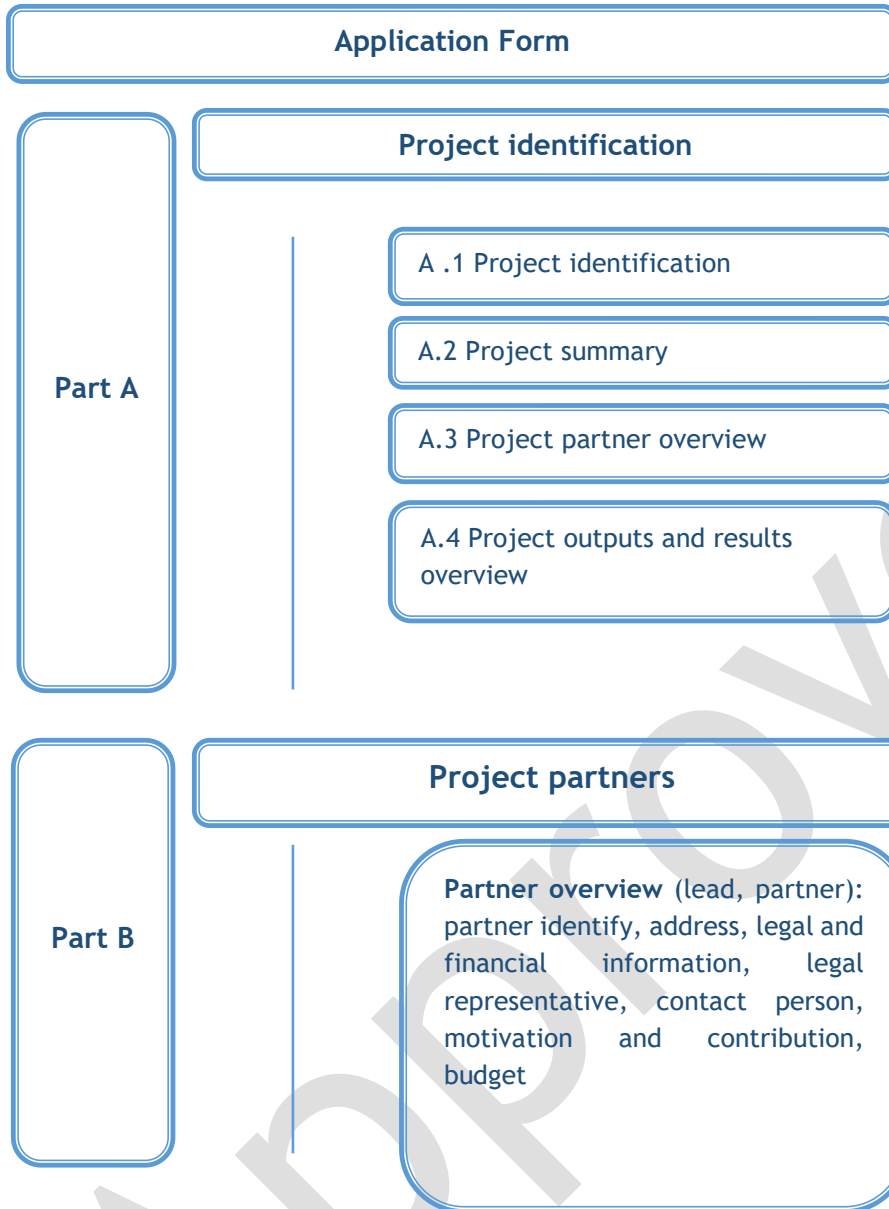
The application form (AF) is a binding document, which describes the project and gives detailed information on the work plan and financial figures. It is the reference document for implementation during the whole project duration. The application form builds on the harmonised template developed by the community of Interreg programmes under the umbrella of Interact.

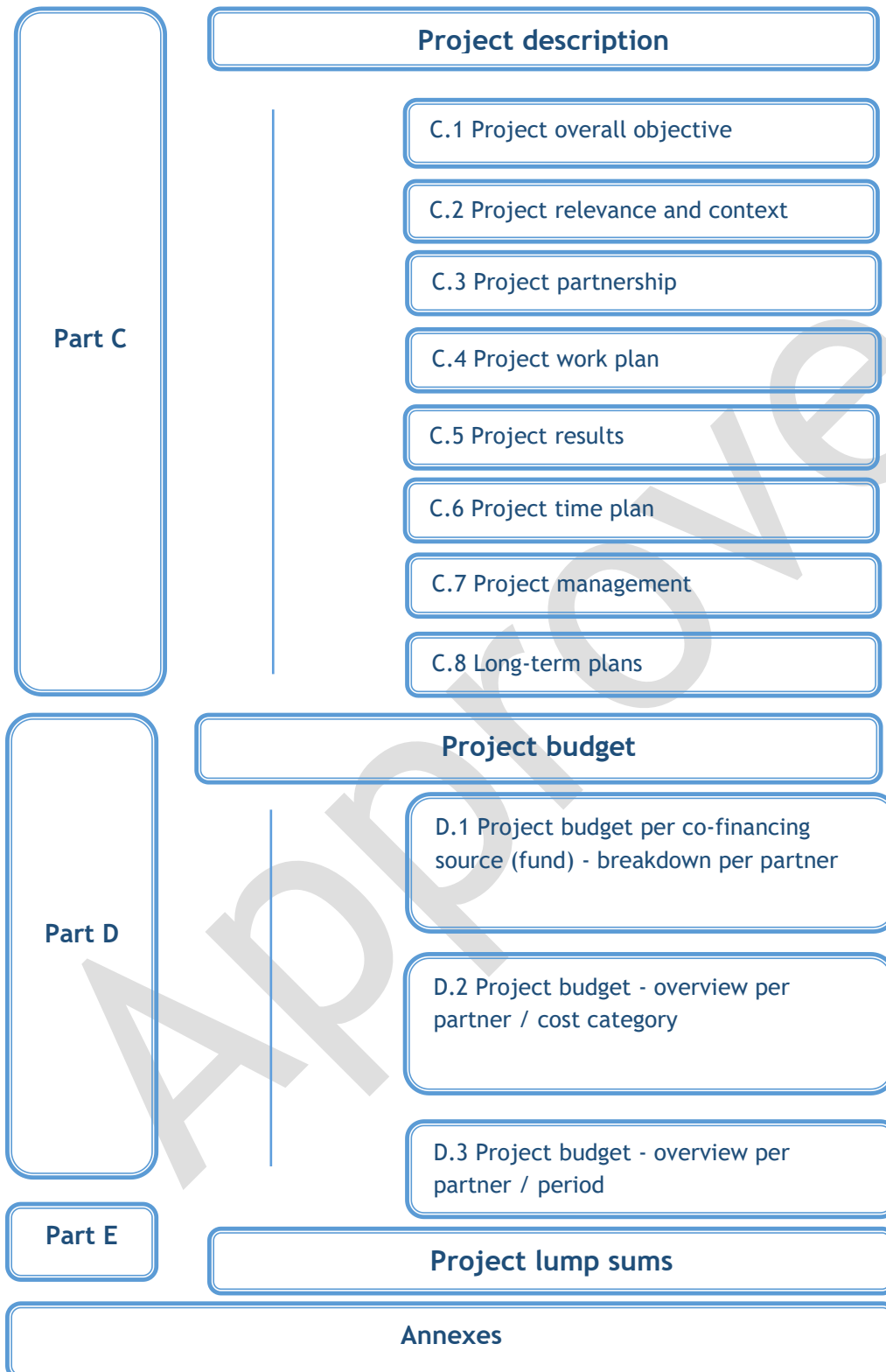


The information filled in the text boxes shall be in English, precise and concise as the number of characters is limited. Once the AF is filled in and submitted no changes are possible.

For an easier identification of each applicant, it is mandatory to also use the PIC number (which can be obtained by registering within the EC Participant Register⁷) when filling in the Partner Identity Information in Jems (<https://ec.europa.eu/info/funding-tenders/opportunities/portal/screen/how-to-participate/participant-register>).

The application form is organised in five main parts and several sub-sections:







In the online application form some fields in various (sub-) sections will be automatically filled in by the system, displaying data which are inserted in other sections of the application form or which are automatically calculated.

More detailed guidance for each part of the application form is provided in the offline template of the application form.

For practical details on how to fill in an application in Jems, you may also consult our YouTube tutorial: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=sipyi-qVt5A&t=505s>.

3.2. How to plan a project

3.2.1. Lead Partner and partnership rules

In compliance with the “lead partner principle” each project partnership shall appoint one applicant acting as lead partner, which takes full financial and legal responsibility for the implementation of the entire project. The tasks of the Lead Partner are provided in article 26 of the Regulation (EU) 2021/1059 of the European Parliament and of the Council.

The tasks, responsibilities and the relations between the lead partners and the partners are included in the partnership agreement (*Annex AG_H Template Partnership Agreement*).

The responsibilities of the lead partner are laid down in detail in the subsidy contract signed with the Managing Authority (*Annex AG_F Template Framework subsidy contract*).

All partners should dispose of the expertise, resources and capacity to fulfil their designated tasks. The applicants must state their financial and administrative capacity to manage their share of the project.

3.2.2. Developing the application

Logic of intervention

The project must follow an intervention logic that reflects the need of the territory (and of the partner) and the intended change the project seeks to induce through its implementation¹⁹. The Programme intervention logic should be mirrored in the projects' intervention logic.

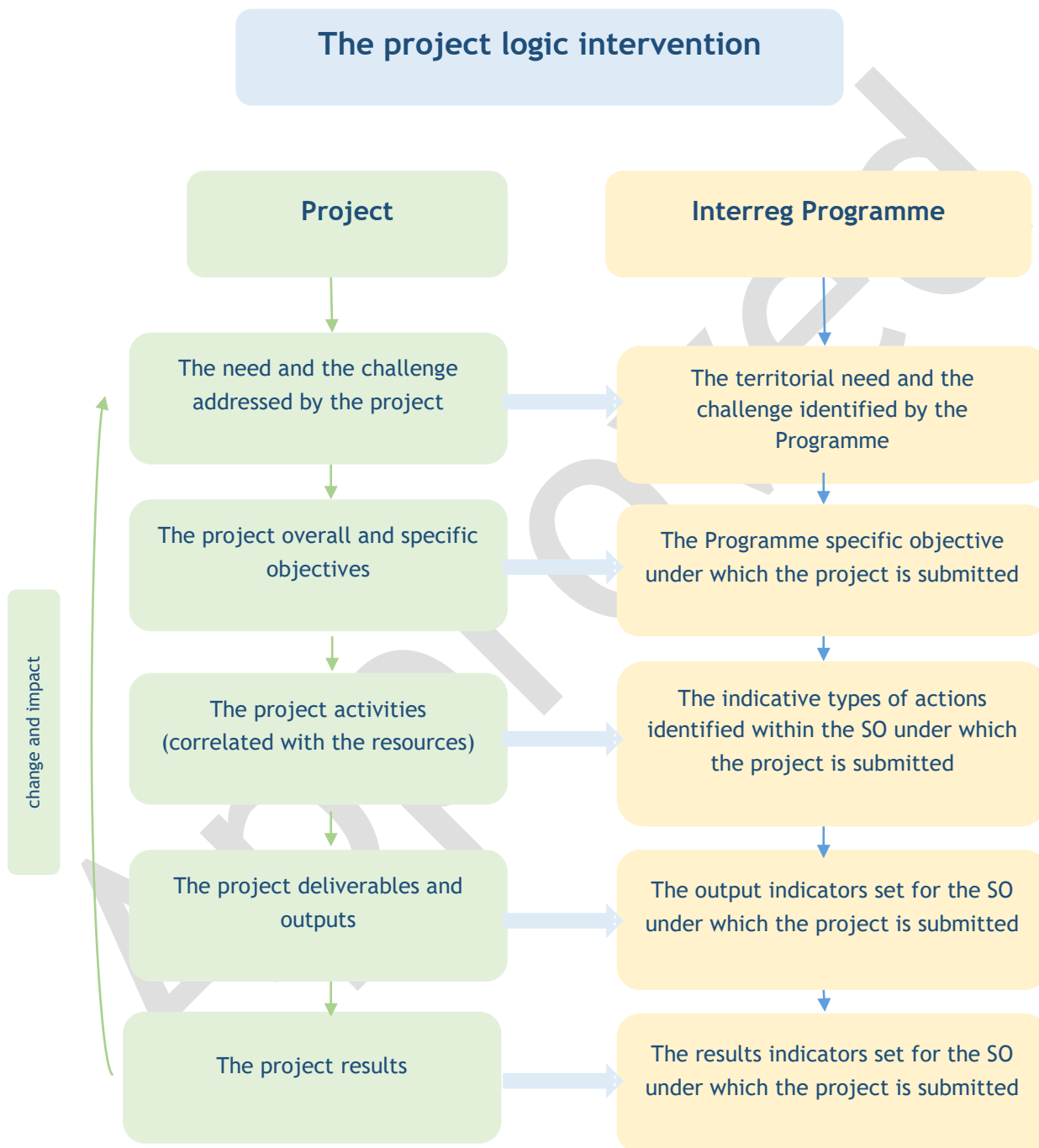
¹⁹ For hints you can check <https://www.interact-eu.net/library?title=&field fields of expertise tid=43&field networks tid=All#1735-info-sheet-interreg-project-quality-characteristics>



The project must be in-line with the specific objective of the Priority under which is submitted and to contribute to the Programme output and results indicators. This linkage should be reflected by the application.

The project must clearly describe its objectives, activities and the expected outputs and results. When developing the project, the partners should describe:

- **The overall project objective** - Provides overall context for what the project is trying to achieve, and aligns to Programme priority specific objective. It relates to the strategic aspects of the project and to the planned project results (and intended territorial change). The overall project objective is broken down into one or more project specific objectives.
- **Project specific objectives** - is a concrete statement describing what the project is trying to achieve e through its planned activities and related outputs and deliverables. It has to clearly contribute to the overall project objective and should be specific and measurable (it refers to the project main outputs). It should be verifiable whether the specific objective has been reached.
- **Project activities** - are the specific tasks performed for which resources are used. It's a work package component which may or may not result in a deliverable or an output. The project activities can be grouped in a project work package.
- **Project output** - is a product that results from the implementation of project activities. All project activities and outputs need to be clearly consistent with and contribute to the achievement of one or more project specific objectives. The project outputs must be linked to the Programme output indicator set for the SO under which the project is submitted.
- **Project deliverable** - is side-product or service of the project that contributes to the development of a project's main output, e.g. analysis reports, feasibility studies, strategy documents, pilot action reports, training documentations. It is recommended to limit the number of project deliverables.
- **Project result** - is the immediate effect and change compared to the initial situation in the area which a project intends to achieve through the use of its outputs. The project results must be linked to the Programme results indicator set for the SO under which the project is submitted.





Project objective and result indicators

The project must select a Programme priority specific objective to which the project contributes and describe how it will contribute. It is important to secure consistency between the project objective(s) and the Programme priority SO as it will help to focus the reach of the project and underline what impact the project will make.

The project can define a number of project specific objectives. The project specific objectives need to show direct contribution to the project overall objective.

Project Work Plan (application form Section C.4)

A project is structured into Work Packages (WP) and activities, and produce deliverables and outputs that contribute to the achievement of the results and the set objectives.

The Work Package (WP) is defined as group of related project activities required to produce project main outputs. This means that the project will have as many work packages as it will have project specific objectives defined.

It is recommend to have up to 3 work packages, but in some cases up to 5 should also be acceptable. Work packages have to be broken down into activities, deliverables and outputs. A work package may include investments.

For each Work Package, a project shall define one project specific objective to be achieved in the project lifetime through the implementation of planned activities and related outputs and deliverables. Please note that each work package should have a distinct project specific objective (i.e. project specific objectives should not be repeated in other work packages).

Each work package should also have at least one communication objective, and related target audiences that contributes to the achievement of the project specific objective.

Project activities, outputs and results

The project activities must contribute to the achievement of the project's output and result indicators, as well as the project specific objectives. Thus, each working package should include activities that are contributing to the achievement of the project specific and communication objectives set in that WP. Please note that the activities should contribute to the development of the planned outputs. The number of activities per work package depends on its complexity, such as the number and type of outputs to be developed. Usually no more than 4 to 6 activities per work package should be foreseen.



Please note that each working package includes specific **communication objectives and activities**. As such, each project is required to set out the envisaged approach to communication and visibility of the WP. Thus, the applicant must identify a communication objective(s) and specific communication activities to be integrated in each work package. The communication activities are designed for each communication objective based on the needs to achieve a specific project objective.

Communication activities vary according to the WP specified and to the identified target groups and messages for them.

Communication activities can also contribute to the capitalisation of achieved project outputs and results. Communication activities focused on capitalisation should address audiences/target groups that go beyond the partnership and participating regions.

Moreover, during all stages of your project, you must make sure that the activities carried out within the project comply with the mandatory requirements for ensuring the publicity and visibility of the EU financial intervention, mentioned by art. 36 paragraph 4 of EU Regulation 1059/2021 and detailed in the **Manual for Visual Identity**²⁰ of the programme. Thus, please note that properly branding all project thematic and communication activities will be crucial for their eligibility.

Details on how to approach the communication activities are included in the documents Communication Starter Kit, the Manual for Visual Identity of the Programme²¹ and Go Green!

Please note: The work plan includes only thematic work packages and there are no separate work packages for project management and communication in the application form. The overall approach to project management and communication has to be described in section C.7 of the application form.

Deliverables

For each activity, at least one deliverable should be defined. Deliverables should present in an aggregated form the outcomes of intermediate (smaller) steps within a certain activity. A deliverable should thus be sufficiently comprehensive. Overall, it is recommended to limit the total number of deliverables per work package (e.g. not more than three deliverables per activity), also keeping in mind that project implementation will be monitored against the deliverables foreseen in the application form.

When planning outputs, please take into consideration the Programme output and results indicators corresponding to your project. Definitions of output and result indicators can be found in *Guidance on monitoring Programme indicators for Interreg VI-A Romania-Bulgaria*.

²⁰ <https://interregviarobg.eu/en/implementation-rules>

²¹ <https://interregviarobg.eu/en/implementation-rules>



Please pay attention also to a realistic timing of activities, deliverables and outputs. Project implementation will have to report project implementation by submitting the deliverables and outputs according to the delivery dates set in the application form.

Investments (where applicable)

There are also no separate investment work packages. Thus, you need to provide detailed information about investments that will be included in the work packages (details are included in the Application form).

Please note that for investments in infrastructure with an expected lifespan of at least five years, the expected impacts of climate change need to be described and how climate proofing will be ensured.

For each investment, a clear and concise description needs to be provided, including of the cross border relevance. This shall include a justification of the investment, its physical location, information on its environmental sustainability and risks, technical and legal requirements and ownership. For determining the total amount of the investment, only items falling under cost categories 5 (Equipment) and 6 (Infrastructure and works) should be considered.



During the assessment stage, the evaluators shall verify how the climate proofing was considered by the project partners for investments in infrastructure, according to the *Commission Notice, Technical guidance on the climate proofing of infrastructure in the period 2021-2027 (2021/C373/01)*. The Programme requires an assessment of expected impacts of climate change related to *Climate resilience (adaptation to climate change) Pillar*. You must provide the *Documentation of climate proofing*²² (maximum 30 pages) and the related statement, according to the *Commission Notice (including the related requirements set by Annex B.2)*²³. The related statement has an open format and should include the main conclusions/findings of the climate proofing documentation or reference to the documentation of climate proofing.

In case these documents (documentation of climate proofing, statement on climate proofing) are not provided with the application, the project shall be rejected during the eligibility stage.

²² Observing the information included in Commission Notice, Technical guidance on the climate proofing of infrastructure in the period 2021-2027 (2021/C373/01) ([https://eur-lex.europa.eu/legal-content/EN/TXT/PDF/?uri=CELEX:52021XC0916\(03\)&from=EN](https://eur-lex.europa.eu/legal-content/EN/TXT/PDF/?uri=CELEX:52021XC0916(03)&from=EN)), Section B.2., page 50

²³ As mentioned in the Commission Notice, Technical guidance on the climate proofing of infrastructure in the period 2021-2027 (2021/C373/01), <https://op.europa.eu/en/publication-detail/-/publication/23a24b21-16d0-11ec-b4fe-01aa75ed71a1/language-en>, page 8



Please note that the documents shall be analysed and assessed based on the evaluation criteria.

Please bear in mind, that an independent verification is not compulsory. However such verification providing assurance that the climate proofing adheres to the applicable guidance and other requirements may be required during the assessment process in case the documentation of climate proofing/statement on climate proofing is unclear or not in line with the Commission Notice, Technical guidance on the climate proofing of infrastructure in the period 2021-2027 (2021/C373/01).

When setting the Work Package and the corresponding activities and outputs, please consider the following aspects:

Cooperation

The projects must promote the **cooperation** among the partners and should continue beyond the project lifetime. Cooperation could also involve associated partners and lead to cooperation (e.g. cooperation networks, agreements etc.). The cooperation should be sustained through formal cooperation agreements or other types of tools. The cooperation is reflected in the following pair of Programme indicators:

- 🌐 Output indicator RCO87 “Organisations cooperating across borders”
- 🌐 Result indicator “RCR84 “Organisations cooperating across borders after project lifetime”

! It is not mandatory to choose this pair of indicators, but, considering the main purpose of Interreg programmes, it is recommended to select it.

This pair of indicators has been selected for each Programme specific objective (reflecting the specificity of each priority), with the main purpose to promote and enhance the cooperation in the programme specific fields.

At the end, all the projects will promote the cooperation, as through the implemented activities and the generated outputs and results, the project partners will acquire experience in cooperating in the project field and promote the development of long term partnerships for future joint initiatives, including beyond the Programme scope.

In order for a project to promote and enhance the cooperation, the following conditions should be fulfilled:

- 🌐 the cooperation is formalized under other form than the “partnership agreement” signed between the project partners;
- 🌐 the purpose of the project is to develop and maintain the cooperation between structures over a longer period of time than the duration of the project;



- not all the project partners need to sign the “cooperation agreement”, only a minimum of 2 partners.

Joint training schemes

Activities will be focused also on the development of **joint training schemes**. These are reflected through the following pair of indicators:

- Output indicator RCO85 *Participations in joint training schemes*
- Result indicator RCR81 *Completion of joint training schemes*

The scope of a jointly training schemes is to focus on concrete activities so that participants may acquire new skills and competencies.

Investments in education, training and life-long learning services

The activities will focus on

- Investments in the infrastructure of educational facilities (e.g., learning spaces such as classrooms, labs, libraries, workshops, gyms, outdoor learning spaces etc.) for all education levels and educational activities (including remedial and after-school), technical and vocational training and LLL etc.; special attention will be given to promoting accessible and inclusive learning.
- Investments in ensuring proper endowment (equipment, tools, etc.) for joint learning facilities with focus on digitalization, digital skills and remote learning.

The specific pairs of indicators, selected for capturing these activities are:

- Output indicator PSO4 *Investments in education, training and life-long learning services*
- Result indicator PSR4 *Annual users of the supported investments in education, training and life-long learning services*

Output and result indicators

The **Programme** has defined a set of indicators to capture outputs and results achieved by projects. Detailed definitions of indicators and further information on the interlinkages between output and result indicators are presented in *Guidance on monitoring Programme indicators for Interreg VI-A Romania-Bulgaria*.

Result indicators were set in direct correlation with the specific objectives of the programme and the changes that are planned to happen at the level of the programme area through the programme interventions. Thus, the result indicators measure short term effects of the interventions with reference to direct addressees, i.e., target groups.



Each result indicator is connected to one output indicator and the outputs (and deliverables) produced under one output indicator will contribute to the achievement of the corresponding result indicator.

Output indicators cover all the thematic fields of interventions of the programme, deriving from its intervention logic and expressing its actions. Thus, the output indicators measure specific outcomes of the actions undertaken by the programme.

- One project can contribute to one or more output indicator, respectively one or more result indicators. However, each output indicator is linked to one result indicator and this link is mandatory to be kept. A project cannot contribute to a result indicator if it does not contribute to its paired output indicator and vice-versa.
- Within a certain Specific Objective, the output indicators RCO87 - Organisations cooperating across borders and with its corresponding result indicator RCR84 - Organisations cooperating across borders after project completion cannot be used on its own. They always have to be complemented by another output indicator (respectively result indicator) set for that Specific Objective.
- When reporting on indicators, the project will report only data stemming from the implementation of that project`s activities.
- The lead partner bears the responsibility for monitoring and reporting on the level of achievement for the project`s output and result indicators, meaning that they should collect and/or collate relevant data received from the project partners and report against each of the output and result indicator relevant to their project.
- Please bear in mind that for some result indicators the reporting period is extend even after project completion (1 year after project completion) and/or specific supporting documents are required. The lead partner will take all the necessary measures for that measurement to be done in time and accurately and that the results are reported to the programme structures. For more details, please check the description for each indicator, within the pages below.

The lead partner should take every measure in order to avoid double counting and to ensure consistency between the achievements reported by each partner.

Based on the activities the project needs to implement in order to achieve its specific objective, each project will list in the Application Form the outputs (and the corresponding results) that will be delivered during the implementation.

Please consider:



- Unlike the output and result indicators, which are defined at Programme level and the project only selects (from a drop-down list) the ones it contributes to, the project outputs and results need to be defined and described in detail in the Application Form.
- When quantifying the targets of the indicators, please set a reasonable, relevant and realistic target value, in direct connection with the Specific Objective of the Programme.
- Evidence should be collected and considered when setting the targets. Later on, during the implementation phase, relevant evidence (documents, statistics, analysis etc.) shall be used in supporting the reported contribution to the indicators targets.
- An output is the main achievement of a set of project activities and it is different from a deliverable. More than one project output can contribute to the same programme output indicator.
- As it can also be seen in the tables below (presented just as examples), the measurement units for both outputs and results are the same as for the output and result indicators defined at programme level. This will allow for the aggregation of data at project and programme level.



Please note that the project outputs and results must have the same measurement unit and definition as the programme output and result indicators, and can be aggregated on project and programme level (project output → programme output indicator; project result → programme result indicator).

All the requirements set for each Programme output and result indicators should be reflected and observed at project level by the outputs and results.

The Work plan in a nutshell (this is just an example):



Project overall objective

Work package 1

Project specific objective 1

Communication objective

Activity 1.1

- Deliverable 1.1.1

Activity 1.2

- Deliverable 1.2.1
- Deliverable 1.2.

Activity 1.3

- Deliverable 1.3.1

Output 1.1

Output 1.2

Work package 2

Project specific objective 2

Communication

Activity 2.1

- Deliverable 2.1.1

Activity 2.2

- Deliverable 2.2.1
- Deliverable 2.2.2
- Deliverable 2.2.3

Investment 2.1

Output 2.1

Project results



Tips:

- ☉ Set realistic targets (when setting the target of each indicator, please be realistic and based on you previous experience and the data sources).
- ☉ When setting the target indicators please consider the data availability, as you have to justify the data sources (e.g. statistic data, surveys, questionnaires etc.).
- ☉ The indicators must reflect the project activities.
- ☉ The indicators reflect the joint outputs/results (so the reporting will be at project level). When setting the target, all the partners should be involved and commonly discussed.
- ☉ Please bear in mind that the output indicators must be reported at the end of the project competition. This means that all the outputs must be completed by the end of the project implementation period, and not during the sustainability period. No contribution from the sustainability shall be considered.
- ☉ The result indicators shall be reported within 6 months or 1 year from the date of the project completion (for more details, please check the *Guidance on monitoring Programme indicators for Interreg VI-A Romania-Bulgaria*, <https://interregviarobg.eu/en/project-implementation-manual>).



Before setting the indicators targets, please read and consider the *Guidance on monitoring Programme indicators for Interreg VI-A Romania-Bulgaria*, the section dedicated to your indicators. Also, please have in mind that failure of meeting the targets during implementation, if the project is selected for financing, may result in financial corrections / decommitment of the project's budget.

Project Management and Communication (application form Section C.7)

Projects need to establish a clear management concept including a decision-making structure - a project steering group (more details regarding the PSG are included in the *Annex.AG_H Template Partnership Agreement*). This group will steer and monitor project progress and, in case of unforeseen situations or risks, to adjust project implementation and find adequate mitigation measures.

Furthermore, projects should set clear provisions for quality management, internal communication as well as reporting procedures at the level of partners towards the LP.

The general approach to communication should describe how communication objectives and activities as defined in the individual work packages across the work plan will help to achieve the project's overall result(s). In this section of the application form it should become clear which role communication plays in the project and how it is approached by the partnership. The description should explain which channels will be used by whom in which way for what reason. It is recommended to define this general approach before defining concrete communication objectives and activities in the thematic work packages.



You must take into consideration the mandatory communication requirements at project level included in the Communication Starter Kit, such us:

- ☉ Designating a communication officer at project level
- ☉ Organising an opening conference of the project or a public promotion event, in compliance with the conditions set by art. 36 paragraph 4, letter e) of EU Regulation 1059/2021
- ☉ Creating a Facebook/Twitter page and/or a dedicated website, if the case
- ☉ Promoting at least 2 press articles during the life of the project
- ☉ Promoting at least 5 photos reflecting “before and after” concept of the project
- ☉ Ensuring promotion on social media of a minimum 2 key life moments of your project.

Details on how to approach the communication activities at project level are included in the documents *Communication Starter Kit, Go Green!* (<https://interregviarobg.eu/en/project-implementation-manual>) and the *Manual for Visual Identity of the Programme*²⁴ available at <https://interregviarobg.eu/en/implementation-rules>.

Project capitalization and synergies (Part C)

The Programme promotes the capitalizations of the already implemented projects, financed from different sources. Thus, it is expected that the project partners will research and take on board the outputs and the results of the previous projects financed by the Interreg V-A Romania-Bulgaria Programme, as well as other Interreg Programmes or EU instruments.

The following links to project databases will help with searching and identifying relevant outputs and results from:

- **Interreg V-A Romania-Bulgaria:** The list of the outputs of the projects financed by the Interreg V-A Romania-Bulgaria can be consulted here: <https://www.interregrobg.eu/en/projects/outputs.html>
- **Interreg Programmes:** The lists of the projects financed by the Interreg Programmes can be consulted here: [Projects and documents - Keep.eu](#)
- **EU funded Regional Policy project:** The list of the projects funded under the EU Regional Policy is here: [Projects - Regional Policy - European Commission \(europa.eu\)](#) and [Kohesio \(europa.eu\)](#)

²⁴ <https://interregviarobg.eu/en/implementation-rules>



Budget planning (Part D)

The Programme is committed to simplification and removal of administrative burden. In this respect, the following simplified cost options have been up-taken and **shall be considered during the budget planning phase**:

Lump sum for project preparation of 14,000 (total value) to be paid out by the Programme after the financing contract (subsidy) is signed. The lump sum for project preparation covers elaboration of applications for financing, including the annex mandatory for all applications as listed in A. Documents mandatory for all applications.

! In addition to the lump sum for project preparation, the projects shall have the possibility to ask the reimbursement of the costs related to the annexes to the application for financing on basis of real costs.

These annexes refer to the following documents listed on B. Documents to be submitted depending on the specificity of the application (non-exhaustive list): feasibility study or equivalent technical document, Cost Benefit Analysis, studies and costs for documentation necessary to obtain the necessary endorsements and authorizations, documentation concerning the urban planning plan, impact assessments, location studies/appraisals, technical verification etc.

Please note that the expenditures for project preparation based on real costs must be requested in the first reporting period, otherwise they would be considered ineligible.

Lump sum for project closure of 6,500 Euro (total value) will be paid out by the Programme.

! Reimbursement of the granted lump sum for project closure is linked to the delivery of predefined output.

Staff costs

Staff costs of the partner shall be reimbursed on the basis of a flat rate up to 20% of **direct costs other than staff costs**. Under this option, the partner does not need to document that the expenditure has been incurred and paid out. For further requirements applicable to staff costs reimbursed according to a flat rate up to 20% refer to *Annex AG_B List of eligible expenditure*.

Travel and accommodation costs

The Interreg VI-A Romania-Bulgaria Programme reimburses travel and accommodation expenditure according to a flat rate of up to 15% of eligible direct staff costs. This form of reimbursement is obligatory for all partners. For more detailed information about travel and accommodation expenditure refer to *Annex AG_B List of eligible expenditure*.








Office and administrative costs

The Interreg VI-A Romania-Bulgaria Programme reimburses office and administrative expenditure according to a flat rate of up to 15% of eligible direct staff costs. This form of reimbursement is obligatory for all partners. For more detailed information about office and administrative expenditure refer to *Annex AG_B List of eligible expenditure*.

All the simplified costs above are mandatory!

Tips and tricks for budget planning - Please read carefully the information below when planning the project budget!

- !** **A strict correlation between the financial resources allocated within the project, the activities foreseen and the expected results shall be ensured!**
-  The partners should decide between themselves on the division of the lump sums received within the project;
-  The lump sum for project preparation and the lump sum for project closure will not be included in the basis for the flat rates used by the Programme (flat rate for staff costs, flat rate for travel and accommodation, flat rate for administration costs);
-  Please consider that the direct costs of the operation which constitute the basis to which the staff flat rate applies is composed of the expenditure under the cost categories listed in *Annex AG_B List of eligible expenditure* of the present guide;
-  In order to ensure the sound financial management of the Programme, the projects must submit evidence about the market price of the items. In this respect the cost of each item shall be based on either 2 (two) price offers from operators well-known on the market - print screens from websites of such operators are accepted, prints from national system on public procurements, other contracts implemented are also accepted - or an independent evaluation of the cost of that particular item (and English translation is required, if issued in other language than English). In case of 2 offers, the budgeted prices must not exceed the average value of the 2 offers. The offers and/or the independent evaluation of costs shall be considered by the evaluators together with the application form in order to assess the proposed budget; these offers and/or the independent evaluation of costs are used only for justifying the budget. During the project implementation, the costs of each item shall be set based on market competition and the results of the procurement procedure. However, the total budget of each budgetary line shall be observed.
-  Considering the flat rate for Staff cost category, please be aware that only external expertise and services for very technical/specific documents/contribution for the project implementation is allowed. In justifying the need for such expertise from the phase of drafting the Application Form and planning the budget, the partner shall have to prove that



the expertise and services to be contracted under External expertise and services is not available at the level of the project management team and that the *Staff costs* are not already financing the type of external expertise and services (to be) contracted. Thus, the percentage of staff flat rate shall be adjusted accordingly by deducting the corresponding amount for external expertise from the calculation basis for the flat rate for Staff costs.

- Travel and accommodation costs of external experts (including invited speakers, experts and chairpersons of meetings) and service providers fall under external expertise and services costs and shall be reimbursed on basis of real costs. The same applies to travel and accommodation costs of staff of institutions acting as associated partners;
- Office and administrative cost category includes equipment for general office use, for which the exclusive use in the project cannot be demonstrated. In consequence, this equipment shall not be allocated under the *Equipment* cost category. Please refer also to *Equipment*;
- Costs of equipment for general office use not exclusively used for the project is not eligible under *Equipment category*, as they are already covered by the flat rate of the *Office and administrative budget line*;
- Purchase of consumables that do not fall under the definition of *Office and administrative costs* and that are necessary for the use of laboratory equipment or machines and instruments (*Annex AG_B List of eligible expenditure*) is eligible and should be included under the *Equipment cost category*;

3.3. Required documents to be submitted with the Application form

A. Documents mandatory for all applications (the costs related to these documents are covered by the lump sum for project preparation as decided at Programme level for all projects financed via the Interreg VI-A Romania-Bulgaria Programme)

1. Project statement (Annex AF_A1)

This declaration should be filled in, electronic signed by the Lead Partner organization.

2. Project partner statement (Annex AF_A2), issued and electronic signed by all project partners

3. State-aid self-assessment (Annex AF_A3) filled in and electronic signed by each project partners. This State-aid self-assessment document has been developed to help the partners to make an initial assessment of whether State aid is involved in their project and the options for dealing with this.



4. **Legalized mandates (Annex AF_A4)** of delegation from the legal representatives of partners (in case the annexed declarations are not electronic signed by the legal representatives of the Lead Partner/partners), accompanied by their English translation.

5. **Documents certifying the ownership status of the land and/or building (Annex AF_A5):**

FOR PUBLIC AUTHORITIES and other PUBLIC BODIES:


- the legal act (e.g. government decision, law, government ordinance, decision of local counties, etc.) stating the fact that the land and/or building/ item of infrastructure is in concession/on long term contract/ in administration/ bailment contract/rent contract/ publicly owned by the applicant/ they hold a right under the real property law over the land and/ or building/ item of infrastructure.
- it must be proved that the land and/ or building/ item of infrastructure / place of investment installation (in case of equipment) is publicly owned or that the duration of the concession/ long term contract/ administration contract/ bailment contract/ rent contract/ any other right under the real property law is for at least 5 years after the completion of the operation and that the owner has given it's written agreement saying that the applicant may perform the infrastructure actions on/ in the relevant land/ building/ item of infrastructure. Such a contract should last for at least 5 years after the completion of the operation.
- declaration from the land and/or building/ item of infrastructure owner that the land and/or building/ item of infrastructure is:
 - free of any encumbrances;
 - not the object of a pending litigation;
 - not the object of a claim according to the relevant national legislation.
- documents related to the registration of the land and/or building/ item of infrastructure in the relevant public registers.

FOR NGOs and other non-profit bodies

- property/ ownership document for the land and/or building/ item of infrastructure; OR
- the applicant holds the land and/or building/ item of infrastructure / place of investment installation (in case of equipment) under a concession/on long term contract/ bailment contract/ rent contract/ any other right under the real property law;
- documents related to the registration of the land and/or building/ item of infrastructure, by the NGO, in the relevant public registers
- it must be proved that the concession/ long term contract/ bailment contract/ rent contract/ any other right under the real property law is for at least 5 years after the



completion of the operation and that the owner has given it's written agreement saying that the applicant may perform the infrastructure actions on/ in the relevant land/ building/ item of infrastructure. Such a contract should last for at least 5 years after the completion of the operation.

-  Declaration from the land and/or building/ item of infrastructure owner that the land and/or building/ item of infrastructure is:
- free of any encumbrances;
 - not the object of a pending litigation;
 - not the object of a claim according to the relevant national legislation.

In case, the documents certifying the ownership status above-mentioned are not available, a declaration on own responsibility regarding the ownership status of the land and/or building, issued and electronic signed by the legal representative of each project partner, will be submitted with the application form.

Please note that the Declaration must include information regarding all the above-mentioned requirements related to the ownership status of the land and/or building, and a clear statement of the reason why the documents are not available at the submission stage.

Documents certifying the ownership status of the land and/or building not submitted together with the application form must be submitted during the pre-contracting phase upon receiving the notification regarding MC Decision on selection.

6. Market analysis for each item (Annex AF_A6). The market analysis shall be done either by asking for offers from at least two providers or by print screen (and indicating the websites) out the price offers for the specific items from the web pages of at least two providers or prints from national systems on public procurements, or an independent evaluation of the cost. 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 be²⁵ increased with the average of the national inflation of the last 3 years before the application submission, but not more than 10%²⁶. In addition, in order 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 available.

7. DNSH declaration (Annex AF_A7)

8. Project associated partner declaration (Annex AF_A8), issued and electronic signed by associated partner (if the case).

²⁵ The partner can chose to increase the corresponding budget for covering the inflation, considering the methodology presented in the footnote 29.

²⁶ The increase shall be reflected distinct in the document, as well as the applied percentage (the average of the inflation rate of the last 3 years, before the application submission. The average shall be calculated at the level of partners, in accordance with the national inflation rate).



9. Financial Capacity Self-assessment - Both Excel file format and electronic signed by the legal representative of the organization (Annex AF_A9) - to be provided by all project partners, together with the balance sheet and profit and loss account and the plan, if the case.

Annual accounts for the latest financial year for which the accounts have been closed at the moment of submission of the Application must be submitted by the Lead Partner and all project partners, as full unofficial translation(s) in English (certified through signature by the legal representative of the organisation). The extracts from bank accounts are not equivalent to latest annual account. Only documents (the balance sheet and profit and loss account) providing data about revenues, expenditures, profit and losses will be accepted.

Annual Accounts containing only the Balance Sheet without the Profit and Loss Account or a document providing data about revenues, expenditures, profit and losses for the latest financial year for which the accounts have been closed, will be considered noncompliant and therefore missing documents.

Organisations (any lead partner or project partner) established in 2023 not having the latest annual accounts must submit the Balance sheet for the last closed month.

10. Declaration (Annex AF_A10) for the absence of the circumstances under Art. 5l of Council Regulation (EU) No. 2022/576 of April 8, 2022 amending Regulation (EU) No. 833/2014 on restrictive measures in view of Russia's actions destabilizing the situation in Ukraine. In case the Applicant does not observe the conditions set in this Annex, the project shall be rejected, without any assessment. This annex should be submitted only by private organizations.


B. Documents to be submitted depending on the specificity of the application (the costs related to these documents are reimbursed by the Interreg VI-A Romania-Bulgaria Programme based on real cost principle)

 **Annex B1 to the Application Form - Cost-Benefit Analysis**

The Cost-Benefit Analysis and English translation (if issued in other language than English) will be annexed to the Application Form. For more explanation on filling in the Cost-Benefit Analysis please also see: http://ec.europa.eu/regional_policy/sources/docgener/studies/pdf/cba_guide.pdf.

This annex is mandatory for only for those partners that may have revenues from the supported activities included in the applications.

In case a Feasibility study is provided, the submission of the CBA is not required.

 **Annex B2 to the Application Form - Feasibility studies/ equivalent technical documents or any other design document elaborated by the licenced designer that contains description of construction works and Bill of Quantities.**

For Romanian partners it should be annexed: **feasibility study for new investments/DALI plus energy audit plus technical expertise for upgrading/reconstruction.**



For Bulgarian partners it should be annexed: **preliminary design (including estimation of bill of quantities and values) or technical design.**

In order to evaluate the technical characteristics of an investment project, the applicants must annex the above document to the application form. Its elaboration and approval must observe the national provisions in this matter.

The Feasibility Study should not have been elaborated/ updated/ revised more than one year before the deadline for the present call for proposals (the document must bear the date of elaboration/revision). Feasibility Study should be submitted in English, as an annex to the application form and should be accompanied by the legal agreements and approvals according to national legislation in force.

In case legal agreements and approvals are not submitted together with the Feasibility study/equivalent technical documents, the respective agreements/approvals will be subject of conditions for signing the subsidy contract. All the documents subject to conditioning of signing of the subsidy contract that will be notified within the Notification for selection under conditions must be provided within the deadline indicated by the JS in the notification letter for selecting projects.

The investments (works, infrastructure and equipment), for which the national legislation does not provide for the elaboration of a Feasibility Study/DALI or preliminary/technical design, the applicants should submit a detailed Bill of Quantities and Costs accompanied by the detailed explanations/plans/ measurements of the object/s of intervention, used for estimating the necessary works and costs. If Bills of Quantities not provided, one clarification may be requested. As regards the technical expertise, if not attached to the Applicant's pack, than it must be clearly stated by the designer that the recommended solution by technical expertise was followed within DALI, under the signature of the designer (verificator de proiecte).

For investment targeting buildings that are part of the cultural heritage, approvals/ certifications from the respective authority (such as the Ministry of Culture or other national or regional bodies) must accompany the technical documentation. If not started the diligences for approving the technical documentation, than the project will be rejected (clarifications can be asked on this issue). If the diligences for approving the proposed intervention on cultural heritage infrastructure were started, but are not fully completed (approved/ certified), than the project will be selected, but under the condition to provide fully approved technical documentation within the deadline indicated by JS. If not provided in the set deadlines, the MA may decide not to sign the subsidy contract.

Where applicable, for Romanian partners, according with the provisions of Government Decision 941/2013, regarding the Organization and functioning of the Technico - Economic Committee for the Informational Society, all projects comprising IT&C investments with a value higher than 2,500,000 RON must obtain, before submitting the Application Form or starting the procurement procedures, the permit from the Technico - Economic Committee for the Informational Society.



🌍 **Annex B3 to the Application Form (RO partners only) - Urban planning permit** (mandatory for applications including infrastructure related activities - only Romanian partners) will be annexed to the Application Form. Only Romanian partners have to submit the urban planning permit.

🌍 **Annex B4 to the Application Form - Environmental agreement** (mandatory for applications including infrastructure related activities) will be annexed to the Application Form.

The applicants must present an official statement/act from the competent environment authority stating that the investment project either:

🌍 observes the legal provisions of environment protection (For Bulgarian partners - a letter from the competent body that a procedure under chapter VI of Environmental Protection Act is **not required**) or

🌍 completed the first phase of the EIA procedure - screening (For Bulgarian partners - the decision of the competent body for the necessity of carrying out of Environmental Impact Assessment; For Romanian partners - "Procedura finalizată de încadrare privind impactul proiectelor asupra mediului" according to the Law 292/2018.).

🌍 **Annex B5 to the Application Form - Environmental Impact Report** (if required by the legislation) and English translation (if issued in other language than English) will be annexed to the Application Form.

🌍 **Annex B6 Assessment of expected impacts of climate change** (Documentation of climate proofing (maximum 30 pages)).

Please note that the assessment of the projects is done only based on the information provided in the application form submitted in Jems and the mandatory annexes.

In case you consider that additional documents/information in supporting/providing detailed information on the way environmental issues were considered (measures proposed in the SEA Report, DNSH, climate proofing etc.) are considered by you, they can be uploaded to the electronic system. The information provided in additional attachments are limited to 30 pages and are not considered part of the application form.



No legalization of documents or official translations is necessary!

All the documents must be submitted in English. The documents issued by third parties in other language are accompanied by their English translation - in their entirety or only for the relevant provisions.

All the documents shall be electronically signed (in duly justified cases and only for the documents not issued by the project partners, handwritten signature may be accepted).



All annexes duly filled in by each partner (where this is required by the template) will be scanned (in case of handwritten signature for the cases mentioned above) and will be submitted in electronic format in the JeMS!



The application shall be rejected (see Annex - A Evaluation grids) without any clarification and further analysis if:

- The project does not have a cross-border character and impact;
- The project does not contribute to the Programme objectives and indicators and are not in the scope of the types of actions included in the Programme.

In case clarifications are requested regarding the missing documents/ annexes mandatory to be submitted together with the application, they will not be accepted if the date of issuance/the date of signature is later than the deadline for the AF submission. The rule regarding the date of signature does not apply to missing Annexes A 1-5, 7, 8 and 10.

Check your application!

After the application form was filled in, before pushing the submission button, please check if:

- The language is simple, easy to understand and follow; the text is coherent! Be objective with yourself! Try to assess and score your application based on the evaluation grid!
- All the mandatory criteria are observed!
- All the mandatory annexes were filled in, signed and uploaded!
- The standard templates are observed! No modifications were brought to them!
- All the supporting documents (if needed) were uploaded!

Legal Bases (non-exhaustive list)

- Commission Decision No. 8928/30.11.2022 approving the Interreg VI-A Romania-Bulgaria Programme;
- 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) 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) 2021/1058 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, Euratom) 2018/1046 of the European Parliament and of the Council of 18 July 2018 on the financial rules applicable to the general budget of the Union, amending Regulations (EU) No 1296/2013, (EU) No 1301/2013, (EU) No 1303/2013, (EU) No 1304/2013, (EU) No 1309/2013, (EU) No 1316/2013, (EU) No 223/2014, (EU) No 283/2014, and Decision No 541/2014/EU and repealing Regulation (EU, Euratom) No 966/2012, with further modifications and completions;
- ☉ COMMISSION NOTICE Technical guidance on the climate proofing of infrastructure in the period 2021-2027 (2021/C 373/01);
- ☉ Other relevant national and European legislation (*Annex AG_J*).
- ☉ <https://education.ec.europa.eu/education-levels/adult-learning/adult-learning-initiatives>

Applicable law:

Projects must be in line with all relevant national and European legislation, including legislation on sustainable development and environmental protection, gender equality, equal opportunities and non-discrimination (art. 22.2 of REGULATION (EU) 2021/1059 and art. 9 of Regulation (EU) 2021/1060), public procurement (art. 58 of REGULATION (EU) 2021/1059) and state aid.

Projects must observe the European legislation provisions on communication, information and publicity (art.36.4 of the Regulation (EU) 2021/1059).

! Please note that all these legal provisions must also be observed by the applicants during both project elaboration and implementation phases.

Glossary of terms

For the purposes of the Interreg VI-A Romania-Bulgaria Programme and its related documents, the following definitions shall apply:

Applicant	Any legal entity meeting the eligibility criteria which submits an application to be financed by the programme
Adult learning	Adult learning means the participation of adults in lifelong learning. Adult learning usually refers to learning activities after the end of initial education and is a vital component of the EU's lifelong learning policy.
Associated partner	Institutions willing to be involved in the project without financially contributing to it are to be considered as “associated partners”. Such








associated partners will not receive ERDF funding, will have to participate with their own funds, and do not account for the fulfilment of the minimum partnership requirements.

Expenditure incurred by the associated partners might be borne by any of the financing project partners in compliance with the applicable eligibility rules and with public procurement rules.

Beneficiary/Partner	Any applicant whose application has been approved for financing
Biodiversity	The variability of living bodies within the land, sea, continental aquatic ecosystems and ecological complexes; this comprises the intra-specific, inter-specific and ecosystems diversity
Climate	Usually defined as the ‘average weather’, or more rigorously, as the statistical description in terms of the mean and variability of relevant quantities of variables such as temperature, precipitation, and wind, over a period of time. The conventional period of time over which weather is averaged to calculate climate is 30 years, as defined by the World Meteorological Organisation (WMO).
Climate change	Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change (IPCC) defines climate change as ‘... any change in climate over time, whether due to natural variability or as a result of human activity.’ The United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change (UNFCCC) defines it specifically in relation to human influence, as ‘a change of climate which is attributed directly or indirectly to human activity that alters the composition of the global atmosphere and which is in addition to natural climate variability observed over comparable time periods’.
Climate change Adaptation	<p>It is a process, or set of initiatives and measures, to reduce the vulnerability of natural and human systems against actual or expected climate change effects. Adaptation can also be thought of as learning how to live with the consequences of climate change. The first consequences of climate change can already be seen in Europe and worldwide, and these impacts are predicted to intensify in the coming decades.</p> <p>Temperatures are rising, rainfall patterns are shifting, glaciers are melting, sea levels are getting higher and extreme weather resulting in hazards such as floods and droughts is becoming more common.</p> <p>Adaptation can also be thought of as learning how to live with the consequences of climate change.</p>
Climate change mitigation	Mitigation – the term used to describe the process of reducing GHG emissions that contribute to climate change. It includes strategies to reduce GHG emissions and enhance GHG sinks.
Climate proofing	It is a process that integrates climate change mitigation and adaptation measures into the development of infrastructure projects. It enables European institutional and private investors to make informed decisions on projects that qualify as compatible with the Paris Agreement. The



process is divided into two pillars (mitigation, adaptation) and two phases (screening, detailed analysis). The detailed analysis is subject to the outcome of the screening phase, which helps reduce the administrative burden.

Carbon sequestration	The removal of carbon from the atmosphere and its storage in carbon sinks (such as oceans, forests or soil). Carbon sequestration is achieved through physical or biological processes, such as photosynthesis.
Carbon sink	An absorber of carbon (usually in the form of CO ₂). Natural carbon sinks include forests and other ecosystems that absorb carbon, thereby removing it from the atmosphere and offsetting CO ₂ emissions.
Eligible expenditure	Expenditures made by a partner, related to the projects financed through the programme, which could be financed from the structural instruments, as well as from the state budget and/or own/ private Beneficiary contribution
Ecosystem services	<p>Ecosystems serve a number of basic functions that are essential for using the Earth's resources sustainably. The Economics of Ecosystem Services and Biodiversity (TEEB) study defines ecosystem services as: 'the benefits people receive from ecosystems'. TEEB also sets out the basis of human dependence on the natural environment. The European-led study builds on the United Nations Millennium Ecosystem Assessment, which defined four categories of ecosystem services that contribute to human well-being:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none">  provisioning services e.g. wild foods, crops, fresh water and plant-derived medicines;  regulating services e.g. filtration of pollutants by wetlands, climate regulation through carbon  storage and water cycling, pollination and protection from disasters;  cultural services e.g. recreation, spiritual and aesthetic values, education;  supporting services e.g. soil formation, photosynthesis and nutrient cycling. (TEEB, 2010)
Programme area	The Romanian counties and Bulgarian districts located in the border area, as mentioned in the programming document approved by the European Commission
Operation of strategic importance	Means an operation which provides a significant contribution to the achievement of the objectives of a programme and which is subject to particular monitoring and communication measures.
Expenditure incurred	Expenditure is incurred when the activity that has generated the expenditure (for example the works executed in accordance with the conditions of the contract) has been completed or the services foreseen in a contract have been provided and accepted by the partners. Proof of expenditures incurred relates to supporting documents indicating the



completion of the activity, for instance take over certificates or confirmation of service delivery.

Investment Works, infrastructure, non-removable installations, fixed and intangible assets, new or renovated building, equipment and software and their installation.

Investment project A project that spends its resources to acquire or significantly improve the capacity or capabilities of an output or deliverable, that remains in use and in the ownership of the lead partner or project partners for at least five years after the project end date.
Categories of eligible investments and their accompanying services: works, infrastructure, non-removable installations, fixed and intangible assets, new or renovated building, equipment and software, investments in access to services.

Infrastructure Infrastructure is a broad concept, which includes:

- buildings, from private homes to schools or industrial facilities, which are the most common type of infrastructure and the basis for human settlement;
- nature-based infrastructures such as green roofs, walls, spaces, and drainage systems;
- network infrastructure crucial for the functioning of today's economy and society, notably energy infrastructure (e.g. grids, power stations, pipelines), transport (fixed assets such as roads, railways, ports, airports or inland waterways transport infrastructure), information and communication technologies (e.g. mobile phone networks, data cables, data centres), and water (e.g. water supply pipelines, reservoirs, waste water treatment facilities);
- systems to manage the waste generated by businesses and households (collecting points, sorting and recycling facilities, incinerators and landfills);
- other physical assets in a wider range of policy areas, including communications, emergency services, energy, finance, food, government, health, education and training, research, civil protection, transport, and waste or water;
- other types of infrastructure.

Green infrastructure Green infrastructure serves the interests of both people and nature. It can be defined as a strategically planned and delivered network of high quality green spaces and other environmental features. It should be designed and managed as a multifunctional resource capable of delivering a wide range of benefits and services. Green infrastructure includes natural and semi-natural areas, features and green spaces in rural and urban, terrestrial, freshwater, coastal and marine areas. Areas protected as Natura 2000 sites are at the core of green infrastructure.

Greenhouse gas (GHG) Any atmospheric gas (either natural or anthropogenic in origin) which absorbs thermal radiation emitted by the Earth's surface. This traps



heat in the atmosphere and keeps the surface at a warmer temperature than would otherwise be possible.

Hard project	Hard operation - is a project that has an infrastructure/works/equipment component equal or more than 50% of the total project eligible budget (cumulated value or stand-alone budget)
Joint Secretariat	The structure responsible for assisting the programme management bodies in carrying out their duties. The Regional Office for Cross Border Cooperation Călărași (for the Romanian Bulgarian Border) is hosting the Joint Secretariat for the Programme.
Lead Partner	(a) lays down the arrangements with the other partners in an agreement comprising provisions that, inter alia, guarantee the sound financial management of the respective Union fund allocated to the Interreg operation, including the arrangements for recovering amounts unduly paid; (b) assumes responsibility for ensuring implementation of the entire Interreg operation; (c) ensures that expenditure presented by all partners has been incurred in implementing the Interreg operation and corresponds to the activities agreed between all the partners, and is in accordance with the document provided by the managing authority pursuant to Article 22(6).
LLL	Life Long Learning - encompasses all learning activities undertaken throughout life with the aim of improving knowledge, skills and competences, within personal, civic, social or employment-related perspectives. The intention or aim to learn is the critical point that distinguishes these activities from non-learning activities, such as cultural or sporting activities.
Managing Authority	The structure responsible for managing the Interreg programme. The Romanian Ministry of Development, Public Works and Administration is the Managing Authority for the Programme.
National Authority	The counterpart of the Managing Authority in the partner state. The Bulgarian Ministry for Regional Development and Public Works is the National Authority for the Programme.
National Legislation	The legislation of the state on whose territory the partner is located.
Natural protected area	Land, aquatic and/or underground area hosting savage fauna and flora species, bio-geographical, landscape, geological, pale-ontological, speleological or other elements and systems with outstanding ecological, scientific or cultural value, governed by special preservation and protection rules in compliance with legal provisions.



Operating costs	Cost incurred in the operation of an investment, including cost of routine and extraordinary maintenance, but excluding depreciation or capital costs.
Partnership Agreement	A document that formalises the relationship between project partners and the Lead Partner. Mutual rights and obligations regarding cooperation in project are laid down in the agreement, also including provisions guaranteeing the sound financial management of the funds allocated to the project.
Potential applicant	Any legal entity meeting the eligibility criteria for submitting an application to be financed by the programme.
Potential beneficiary	Any applicant or potential applicant is a potential beneficiary until the decision for financing its project has been issued.
Project	An operation comprising a series of works, activities or services intended in itself to accomplish an indivisible task of a precise economic or technical nature, which has clearly identified goals, expressed as the application form and its annexes.
Reference period	The number of years for which forecasts are provided in the cost benefit analysis.
Revenue generating project	Any project involving an investment in infrastructure, the use of which is subject to charges borne directly by users, and any project involving the sale or rent of land or buildings or the provision of services against payment.
Revenues	Income to be expected from an investment through pricing or charges.
Subsidy contract	Contract between the Managing Authority and the Lead Partner. It determines the rights and responsibilities of the Lead Partner and the Managing Authority, the scope of activities to be carried out, terms of funding, requirements for reporting and financial controls, etc.
Soft project	Soft operation - is a project that has works/infrastructure/equipment component below 50% of the eligible budget (cumulated value or stand-alone budget).
Small Scale project	Is a project with a limited financial volume. Small-scale projects will support both soft measures (such as training, internships, student exchange, mutual learning and exchange of practices between teachers and trainers, partnerships between education establishments and businesses) and hard measures (investments in infrastructure and educational facilities and endowments).
SEN	SEN - 'Special educational needs' is a legal definition and refers to children with learning problems or disabilities that make it harder for them to learn than most children the same age



Annexes

Annexes to the Application Form:

A. Documents mandatory for all applications

- ☉ **Annex A1** Project statement
- ☉ **Annex A2** Project partner statement
- ☉ **Annex A3** State-aid self-assessment
- ☉ **Annex A4** Legalized mandates of delegation (in case the application form and annexed declarations are not signed by the legal representative of the Lead Partner) (open format, partners decision)
- ☉ **Annex A5** Documents or Declaration on own responsibility certifying the ownership status of the land and /or building (where applicable, open format, partners decision)
- ☉ **Annex A6** Market analysis for each item (open format, partners decision)
- ☉ **Annex A7** DNSH declaration
- ☉ **Annex A8** Associated partner declaration (if applicable)
- ☉ **Annex A9** Financial Capacity Self-Assessment
- ☉ **Annex A10** Declaration for the absence of the circumstances under art.5l of Council Regulation (EU) No.2022/576

B. Documents mandatory to be submitted depending on the specificity of the application

- ☉ **Annex B1** Cost Benefit Analysis
- ☉ **Annex B2** Feasibility studies / equivalent technical documents
- ☉ **Annex B3** Urban planning permit, only for the Romanian partners
- ☉ **Annex B4** Environmental agreement
- ☉ **Annex B5** Environmental Impact Report
- ☉ **Annex B6** Assessment of expected impacts of climate change, the partner declaration and the independent verification report if additionally required (open format, partners decision)

Annexes to the Applicant Guide

- ☉ **Annex A** Evaluation grids
- ☉ **Annex B** List of eligible expenditure
- ☉ **Annex C** Monitoring Committee Decision no. 5/03.05.2023 Approving the Methodologies for using lump sums for project preparation and project closure in the context of Interreg VI-A Romania-Bulgaria Programme - <https://interregviarobg.eu/en/the-monitoring-committee-1>



- ☉ Annex D Complaint procedure for evaluation results
- ☉ Annex E SEA mitigation measures and indicators
- ☉ Annex F Template Framework subsidy contract
- ☉ Annex G Template co-financing contract
- ☉ Annex H Template Partnership Agreement
- ☉ Annex I DNSH Interreg VI-A Romania-Bulgaria level
- ☉ Annex J Relevant national and EU legislation
- ☉ Annex K.1 Application form_4.2 (off-line format)
- ☉ Annex K.2 Application form_ Budget (off-line format)
- ☉ Annex L Checklist of submitted Lead Partner/Partner mandatory documents



The contract templates annexed to this Guide are only indicative; the final version of all contracts (subsidy contract, co-financing contract, partnership agreement will be presented by the Managing Authority to the partners of the selected projects in the pre-contractual phase).

Relevant documents to be considered when preparing the application form:

- ☉ Interreg VI-A Romania-Bulgaria Programme - <https://interregviarobg.eu/assets/2022/11/interreg-vi-a-romania-bulgaria-programme-approved-by-ec.pdf>
- ☉ Project Implementation Manual - <https://interregviarobg.eu/en/project-implementation-manual>
 - ☉ Communication Starter Kit
 - ☉ Dare to go green!
 - ☉ Practical guide on fraud for applicants and project partners
 - ☉ Methodological descriptions of Interreg VI-A RO-BG indicators - SO 4.2 - <https://interregviarobg.eu/assets/2024/01/guidance-on-monitoring-programme-indicators-annex-4-so-42.pdf> and the [related annex \(Annex 4 SO 4.2 - Centralized list of participants\)](#)
- ☉ Manual for Visual Identity of the Programme - <https://interregviarobg.eu/en/implementation-rules>
- ☉ Code of Conduct for Interreg VI-A Romania-Bulgaria - <https://interregviarobg.eu/en/implementation-rules>
- ☉ JEMS manual - <https://jems.interact-eu.net/manual/>.



Although we do not plan to, in case changes to the present Guide are necessary, please note that we will use the following means of communication:

1. *Announcement on the Programme website: <https://interregviarobg.eu/en>*



2. Announcement on the Programme Facebook Page:
<https://www.facebook.com/RomaniaBulgariaCbcProgramme>

3. E-mail to the JS database with those interested in the call, who requested support through helpdesk and other means,

Please rely on methods 1 and 2, since e-mail dysfunctionalities may appear.

Please have in mind that during the call, we strongly recommend you to send your questions regarding the rules of this call up to 5 working days before the deadline. Any other question received in this interval may not receive answer in due time (considering the necessary time for analyzing, drafting replies, consulting within Programme structures, no. of questions aso).

The e-mail addresses where you may send your questions is: helpdesk_robq@calarasibc.ro

Please note that, all the questions and answers (Q&A) concerning the Programme funding, application form content, the technical functioning of Jems also, are published on the Programme website, in a dedicated section and they are regularly extended and updated, <https://interregviarobg.eu/en/apply-for-funding>. In this respect, projects are invited to consult the Q&A section for updates.

Also, before submitting a question, we are kindly inviting you to check the list of Q&A publish on the programme site for similar questions.

Applicants are strongly recommended to fill in and submit the application form in good time, in order to avoid any problems due to the lack of time and/or any other technical issues.



Please note that during the evaluation process as well as pre-contractual - contractual phase, the notifications from the Joint Secretariat will be received through the Joint Electronic Monitoring System (JEMS) or through the e-mail address previously registered in JEMS.

The date of the communication is considered to be the date when the e-mail was sent or when the JEMS message was posted. Lead partners should regularly check their e-mails and JEMS accounts.



We wish all the potential partner best of luck!

As always, we rely on your proposals to improve the eligible area according to the set objectives!

Approved