



TERMS OF REFERENCE

for experts ('assessors') to assist in the evaluation of grant applications received in the framework of the call for proposals

EuropeAid/173818/ID/ACT/Multi

2nd Call for Proposals within the Cross-border Cooperation Programme Serbia - North Macedonia 2016-2020 under the Instrument for Pre-accession Assistance (IPA II), allocations 2018, 2019 and 2020

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1. BACKGROUND INFORMATION

This programme is the result of a joint planning effort by the Serbian Government and the Government of North Macedonia.

The Cross-border Cooperation (CBC) Programme Serbia – North Macedonia 2016-2020 is implemented under indirect management and managed by one Contracting Authority as defined in Article 51 of the IPA II implementing regulation. IPA II supports cross-border cooperation with a view to promoting good neighbourly relations, fostering European Union integration and promoting socio-economic development.

The Cross-border Programme Serbia – North Macedonia 2016-2020 is supported under the Instrument for Pre-accession Assistance (IPA II), under which € 1.890.000 have been allocated for the period 2018-2020.

The Programme is implemented jointly by both countries.

In the **Republic of Serbia**, the responsible institutions are:

- The Ministry of European Integration (MEI), in charge of the overall coordination of the programme;
- The Ministry of Finance, Department for Contracting and Financing of EU Funded Programmes (CFCU), responsible for all contract and payment issues, is the Contracting Authority (CA)

These two institutions constitute the Operating Structure (OS) in the Republic of Serbia.

In the **Republic of North Macedonia**, the responsible institution which constitutes the OS in this country is:

- Government of North Macedonia, Ministry of Local Self Government, responsible for the overall coordination of the programme and control, and where the OS is situated in.
- Ministry of Local Self Government (MoLSG) as integral part of the management and control system (control body) in this country.

Moreover, the implementation of the Programme is overseen by a Joint Monitoring Committee (JMC) composed of representatives of both participating countries' institutions and civil society. The JMC examines and provides an advisory opinion on the list of actions selected through this call for proposals before the grant award decision.

The CA, the OSs and the JMC are assisted by the Joint Technical Secretariat (JTS) which is based in Leskovac (Republic of Serbia) with antenna office in Kumanovo (North Macedonia) and staffed with experts from both countries. This administrative body is responsible for the day-to-day management of the Programme including provision of technical and advisory support to potential applicants and grant beneficiaries.

More details about the programming area and the related development strategy and priority measures can be found on the programme document downloadable at the following link of the programme's web page <https://eu.rs-mk.org/programme-documents-2/>. <https://eu.rs-mk.org/>

Programme general objective

The overall objective of the CBC Programme Serbia – North Macedonia 2016-2020 is to strengthen good neighbourly relations, establish partnerships and to contribute to the development of a vibrant programme area by connecting its people and resources in a sustainable way.

Thematic priorities and specific objectives

This 2nd Call for Proposals relates to the following thematic priorities and specific objectives:

Thematic priority	Specific objective
TP 1: Promoting employment, labor mobility and social and cultural inclusion across the border	1.1 To improve skills and create employment opportunities in perspective sectors 1.2: To support the development of an inclusive society
TP2: Encouraging tourism and cultural and natural heritage	2.1. Mobilising cultural and natural resources for joint development of sustainable tourism products and destinations 2.2. Fostering joint risk management systems of natural and cultural sites, as well as human settlements, including disaster or emergency preparedness

Thematic priorities, specific objectives and corresponding results that the applications submitted under this Call for Proposals must fall under, are described below:

Thematic Priority 1: Promoting employment, labor mobility and social and cultural inclusion across the border

Specific objective 1.1.: To improve skills and create employment opportunities in perspective sectors.

Result 1.1.1: Employability of the working age population in the cross-border area raised

Skills and knowledge of the unemployed, students or inactive population included in the programme to engage in perspective sectors are raised. Acquired practical work experience through hands-on training or on-the-job training increases the chances to successfully approach potential employers. Inactive working age population, in particular in rural areas, is able to identify and further develop traditional knowledge and skills and generate additional income. Students and young people from the border are shall be supported in developing their own talents and entrepreneurial ideas to secure their own jobs.

Result 1.1.2: Organisational capacities to activate cross-border employment potentials strengthened

Cross-border cooperation between various actors (business, education, employment services, local self-governments, CSOs, etc.) is established. These actors join resources and knowledge to improve the existing cooperation models, programmes and services or create new ones supporting re-skilling and/or up skilling of the unemployed according to sector specific needs, enabling the acquisition of practical on-the-job experience in SMEs and other organisations, providing start-up support, or developing pilot employment initiatives based on sustainable use of local resources and market needs. These models, programmes and services would enhance the knowledge about the cross-border labour market mobility and would open new opportunities for expansion.

Specific objective 1.2: Development of an inclusive society

Result 1.2.1: Capacities for social and cultural inclusion of disadvantaged groups improved

The ultimate change is in increased possibilities for people at risk of exclusion to be empowered and actively involved in programmes and services supported by the programme. Knowledge base on the situation, actors and good practices in the programme area shall be established. Strengthened cooperation of different actors across the border to jointly address challenges of social and cultural exclusion of disadvantaged groups provides the basis for long term cooperation. New solutions shall be tested and implemented.

Thematic Priority 2: Encouraging tourism and cultural and natural heritage

Specific objective 2.1: Mobilising cultural and natural resources for joint development of sustainable tourism products and destinations

Result 2.1.1: Development of sustainable CB tourist products and destinations initiated

The basis is provided in established contacts and cooperation between relevant actors in the field of sustainable tourism. Integrated knowledge (nature and cultural values, intangible heritage, traditions, people resources, etc.) is used for the elaboration of common strategic development concepts. Knowledge and skills of tourism actors for development of sustainable cross-border tourism products on the basis of active heritage preservation and cooperation are raised. Local population inspired and supported in mobilising their own talents and resources through tourism.

Result 2.1.2: Quality and visibility of tourist offers improved

A gradual valorisation of natural and cultural assets through tourism products and an increased number of visits to the area are expected. Natural and cultural sites/products will be enhanced using active heritage preservation concepts and the development of new interpretative contents to raise the quality of visitors' experience. Joint communication materials, channels and actions will help increase the visibility of the programme area as an undiscovered destination offering genuine experiences.

Specific objective 2.2: Fostering joint risk management systems of natural and cultural sites, as well as human settlements, including disaster or emergency preparedness

Result 2.2.1: Capacities for cross-border risk management and intervention increased

Established knowledge base and common approaches to risk management at natural and cultural sites in the border area provide a basis for further cooperation. Relevant authorities at national, regional and local level will be able to coordinate and intervene across the border in case of emergency events. Awareness of local providers, population and visitors to areas of natural and cultural heritage regarding the risks and prevention measures will be raised.

2. OBJECTIVE, PURPOSE & EXPECTED RESULTS

2.1. Overall objective

To recruit assessors to assist the contracting authority in the selection of the best proposals received under 2nd Call for Proposals within the Cross-border Cooperation Programme Serbia - North Macedonia 2016-2020 under the Instrument for Pre-accession Assistance (IPA II), allocations 2018, 2019 and 2020 and to achieve a high-quality, complete and coherent selection process of projects in line with the criteria set in the guidelines for applicants.

2.2. Results to be achieved by the contractor

- Assessors will carry out the technical assessment of concept notes in accordance with guidelines to be provided by the contracting authority and which are based on the published evaluation grids. Each concept note has to be assessed individually by 2 assessors.
- Assessors will carry out the technical and financial assessment of full applications and related annexes (logical framework matrix and budget) in accordance with guidelines to be provided by the contracting authority and which are based on the published evaluation grids. Each full application has to be assessed individually by 2 assessors.

These assessments will be used by the evaluation committee in the process of selecting the best proposals.

3. SCOPE OF THE WORK

3.1. General

External assessors will be engaged to carry out detailed examination/evaluation of all those applications that after submission have been regarded as administratively compliant under the forthcoming 2nd Call for Proposals within the Cross-border Programme Serbia – North Macedonia 2016-2020.

Assessors must familiarise themselves with the documents related to the 2nd Call for Proposals as well as with the Operational Programme. The information below refers to certain key points but does not substitute a thorough reading of e.g. the Guidelines for Grant Applicants, their annexes and the FAQs published for the 2nd Call for Proposals.

The proceedings of the evaluation are confidential and all parties involved are bound to adhere to the principles of confidentiality, impartiality and no conflict of interest. The assessors must sign a declaration to this fact.

Only the Chairperson and/or Secretary of the Evaluation Committee are authorised to have a contact with an applicant during and after the evaluation process. This includes communications related to clarifications, the announcement of the results of each phase as well as dealing with requests for information and questions raised by any applicant about the results.

The evaluation of project proposals will be conducted respecting relevant Guidelines for Applicants i.e. relevant check lists and Evaluation grids contained within the Application Package. To ensure impartial, professional and smooth assessment process experts will be given proper documentation and guidelines.

Any administratively compliant applicant whose applications have not been pre- or provisionally selected will be informed about the scores obtained in the evaluation including a breakdown by section and sub-section of the evaluation grid. They may also be given the comments and justifications provided by the assessors and/or the voting members of the Evaluation Committee.

Recommendations on the proposals are to be provided to the Contracting Authority by an appointed Evaluation Committee, comprising a non-voting Chairperson, a non-voting Secretary and an odd number of voting members (minimum of three). The role of the assessors is to carry out all or part of the detailed examination so as to assist the Evaluation Committee in its deliberations.

This is an open call for proposals, where all documents are submitted together (concept note and full application). In the first instance, only the concept notes will be evaluated. Thereafter, for the lead applicants who have been pre-selected, the full applications (i.e. the full application form, the budget, the logical framework) will be evaluated.

After the evaluation of the full applications, an eligibility check will be performed for those which have been provisionally selected. Eligibility will be checked on the basis of the supporting documents requested by the contracting authority and the signed 'declaration by the lead applicant' sent together with the full application.

It implies that there will be three phases of the evaluation of proposals.

The evaluation grids should be completed in English language.

3.2. Specific activities

Assessors are bound by a declaration of impartiality and confidentiality¹ to be signed before starting each phase of the assessment. If an assessor believes there might be a situation of conflict of interests in relation to one or more applicants, he/she must inform the contracting authority immediately. In addition, strict confidentiality is required from the experts involved in the implementation of this contract, notably on the assessments of individual applications.

(1) Role and tasks of assessors

Assessors should provide written technical and financial assessments to the Evaluation Committee and the Contracting Authority of concept notes and full applications (this includes the verification of the budget proposed by the applicants for the action, assessing its overall coherence and particularly its cost-effectiveness, with an emphasis on the identification of potential anomalies and/or overpriced items or budget lines).

At least 2 assessors must assess each concept note and each full application, working independently of each other.

The assessments must be undertaken in accordance with the published guidelines for applicants and instructions to be provided by the evaluation committee. These are based on the published evaluation grids in the guidelines for applicants. The overall assessment should be based on the scores obtained under each subheading, added up by heading and the final score is the arithmetical average of the scores given by the assessors.

Each application must be assessed on its own merits and not by comparing different applications. External assessors are expected to bring their own experience of the sector and project implementation to bear in the analysis of each proposal.

The assessors may be invited to the evaluation committee to justify and discuss his/her assessment of the proposals.

¹ A standard document will be made available by the contracting authority.

The assessors shall contribute to the successful completion of the evaluation process by providing:

- Qualitative evaluation of the project proposals in line with the guidelines for applicants, including the published evaluation grids, and the relevant programme documents;
- His/her own experience of the sector and project implementation to bear in the analysis of each proposal;
- Two signed evaluation grids for each concept note and for each full application form evaluation, with each grid providing a scored assessment and textual comments;;
- Coherent comments and scores, that is comments must reflect the scores given, illustrating the scores per question and section of the evaluation grids for steps 1 & 2;
- A list of identified issues per full application and its annexes (e.g. project budget, log-frame matrix as well as the supporting documents for works, if applicable) proposed for funding requiring clarification;
- His/her participation in meetings and/or specific training sessions organized by the Programme Authorities for the execution of the evaluation tasks;
- Further additional comments in exceptional and justified cases at the request of the EvC/Contracting Authority;
- A re-assessment of project proposals upon the request of the EvC/Contracting Authority.

(2) Role and tasks of the evaluation committee

The evaluation committee is appointed by the contracting authority comprising a non-voting chairperson, a non-voting secretary and an odd number of voting members (minimum of three). Its role is to advise the contracting authority on contract award in accordance with pre-established criteria.

The chairperson is responsible for coordinating the evaluation process in accordance with the procedures in the practical guide and for ensuring its impartiality and transparency. The secretary to the committee is responsible for carrying out all administrative tasks connected with the evaluation procedure. These include circulating and collecting the declarations of impartiality and confidentiality and keeping the minutes and any other relevant records and documents.

Where the proposals received are particularly numerous or highly technical, all or part of the detailed examination may be carried out by assessors so that the evaluation committee may conduct its deliberations on the basis of their assessments, including the opinion of the EU delegation in the country where the proposed action will take place.

Assessors work under the supervision of the chairperson of the evaluation committee.

Should the assessments not satisfy the expected quality, the EvC may request from the assessors to improve their assessment (grids) or propose the reassessment. If the CA is not satisfied with the quality of assessment it will inform the EvC and request the reassessment. The reassessment can be conducted by another pair of assessors or the EvC, depending on availability of funds, proposal of the EvC and the decision of the CA.

In case an assessment is rejected by EvC due to insufficient quality, Contracting Authority reserves right not to approve payment for assessment of that project proposal.

4. LOGISTICS AND TIMING

4.1. Location

Assessors are to perform the assessment outside the CA premises while presentation of their assessment to the EvC is to be organised in the premises of the CA, in Belgrade. There is a possibility that meetings with the assessors will be organised via video conference.

If required, assessors may be asked to perform assessment of project applications in the Ministry of Finance, Department for Contracting and Financing of EU Funded Programmes (CFCU) in Belgrade, which is acting as Contracting Authority of the call.

4.2. Start date and period of implementation

Cumulatively, up to 20 (twenty) working days will be allocated per assessor under the 2nd Call for Proposal for Cross-border Programme Serbia – North Macedonia 2016 – 2020 indicatively in the period from June 2022 to December 2022.

Every assessor shall sign a statement of exclusivity and availability for the period of implementation of this assignment at the moment of signing his or her contract. Whenever an assessor is not available any more for the execution of the tasks for which he or she was hired, the contracting authority will replace him or her with one or more of the candidates at the top of reserve list compiled after the recruitment procedure.

5. REQUIREMENTS

5.1. Staff

Assessors must have a clear understanding of the issues being addressed by the grant programme concerned. This requires that they have read and assimilated the information in the Guidelines for Applicants and in the Application Form, as well as the relevant parts of the Programme Document for the Cross-border programme.

Each assessor must sign a Declaration of Impartiality and Confidentiality. In case that it is discovered that assessors have a conflict of interest with potential beneficiaries, they will automatically be excluded from the evaluation process.

The Chairperson of the Evaluation Committee must check that no member of the evaluation committee or the assessor has a potential conflict of interest with any of the potential applicants.

Every assessor shall be independent from the institutional structure of the programme and the applicants, and must sign a Declaration of Impartiality and Confidentiality before receiving copies of the concept notes/Full applications for their appraisal. In case that it is discovered that assessors have a conflict of interest with potential beneficiaries, they will automatically be excluded from the evaluation process.

For each task performed, the assessor must demonstrate an appropriate ethical conduct and must respect the confidentiality of the information and documents to which he or she will have access. Furthermore, assessors may not be personally involved in project elaboration, proposal writing or coordination of partners or linked to any project or activities implemented by the legal entities submitting a project application under this programme. Assessors must ensure equal treatment, in terms of assessing proposals, for all potential beneficiaries.

Assessors must not disclose information regarding the evaluation process, nor about the basis for the selection of the successful applicants, during the grant evaluation procedure nor afterwards once the evaluation process has been completed.

Assessors' work will be closely monitored by the Chairperson of the Evaluation Committee and in case that a project needs more thorough evaluation, the Chairperson can ask the assessor to improve its assessment (if considered appropriate) or propose re-evaluation of the project proposal by a different assessor(s).

For the administrative checks (including the eligibility of the action), preferably CA staff check each proposal against the criteria listed in the checklist and the declaration by the lead applicant.

For the evaluation of concept notes and full applications, assessors must use the published evaluation grids to give scores and provide detailed comments for each given score.

Assessment grids have to be signed by assessors. Assessment grids will be attached to the final evaluation report that have to be submitted. Assessment grids will be treated as the outputs upon which the assessors will receive their fees.

Also, it is possible that assessors will be engaged in reassessment, if there is a need for that.

The assessors will receive instructions related to their responsibilities during the performance of their tasks. In case of a clear disregard of such instructions, the assessors shall be excluded from the pool.

5.1.1. Assessors

Minimum requirements for candidates include the following:

Qualifications and skills:

- A university degree
- Excellent knowledge of the English language
- Computer literacy
- Good analytical and writing skills
- Proficiency in report drafting.

General professional experience:

- The experts need to have minimum 9 years of general working experience

Specific professional experience:

- At least 6, preferably 10 years of relevant working experience in one or more fields related to the thematic priorities of the call (promoting employment, labor mobility and social and cultural inclusion across the border and/or encouraging tourism and cultural and natural heritage;
- At least 2 years of working experience in management, supervision or design of assistance programmes and/or projects;
- Previous experience in project proposal assessment(s) of EU funded programmes and projects or other donors in the Western Balkan countries and related calls for proposals will be considered an advantage;
- Knowledge of local languages will be considered an advantage.

Willingness to travel to the Belgrade, Serbia if requested is required.

Candidates will be appraised against the selection criteria based on data provided in the CV. If the candidate fulfills minimum requirements listed above based on the data provided in the CV, he/she

will be scored and will proceed with interviews and tests. Candidates will be scored both on interviews and on tests.

- The CV should be no longer than 4 pages. In case of CVs longer than 4 pages, only the content of the first 4 pages will be taken into account. At a later phase and prior to the signature of their contract, successful candidates will be expected to document the relevant qualifications and experience in their CVs with copies of diplomas and certificates of employers. Whenever an assessor has not been able to provide the necessary documentary evidence, the contracting authority will replace him or her with one or more of the candidates at the top of reserve list compiled after the recruitment procedure.
- The CV should be submitted in English language. In case that CV is submitted in any other language, the application will be rejected.

Interviews (which may be conducted in person or via video conference) and written test will aim at confirming the candidates' communication and interpersonal skills, Project Cycle Management and Logical Framework approach as the criteria of key importance for a good project

NOTE:

The assessor cannot be a civil servant, staff of the Contracting Authority or the public administration of the beneficiary countries.

5.2. Facilities

N/A

5.3. Incidental expenditure

The assessors' per diems and their travel costs, when required to be present at any meeting or event, will be financed by the budget for the implementation of technical assistance under this CBC programme.

The rates and methods of calculation for travel costs and per diems will be compliant with the rules applied by the Ministry of European Integration of the Republic of Serbia.

6. REPORTS

6.1. Reporting requirements

During the evaluation process, Assessors will provide evaluation grids with scoring, justification and recommendation both electronically and in written form. The written form, signed by the expert, shall be handed over to the Evaluation Committee within a given deadline for each Step.

The assessors' inputs in form of Evaluation grids will be incorporated in the CfP Evaluation Reports.

As Contractor, each assessor will prepare his or her final report (including time sheets) on the implementation of the tasks at the end of this contract in English. The approval of the final report by the Contracting Authority will be the basis for issuing the final payment.

The required formats of the reports will be communicated to the Assessor by the Ministry for European Integration of Republic of Serbia after the signature of the contract.

6.2. Submission & approval of reports

Three (3) copies of the reports referred to above must be submitted to the Chairperson of the EvC delegated by Head of Contracting Authority. The reports must be written in English. The Chairperson of EvC is responsible for approving the Final report and the time sheets before sending the report and the time sheets to the Contracting Authority (Ministry of European Integration).

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