

TERMS OF REFERENCE

to create pool of experts (‘assessors’) to assist in the evaluation of grant applications received in the framework of the calls for proposals within the IPA III: Cross-Border Cooperation Programmes Serbia – Bosnia and Herzegovina 2021-2027, Serbia - Montenegro 2021-2027 and Serbia – North Macedonia 2021-2027 under the Instrument of Pre-accession Assistance (IPA III)

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# BACKGROUND INFORMATION

The IPA III Cross-Border Cooperation Programmes between Serbia and Bosnia and Herzegovina, Serbia and Montenegro and Serbia and North Macedonia are the results of a joint planning effort by the Serbian Government and the Government of North Macedonia, Government of Montenegro and Council of Ministers of Bosnia and Herzegovina. The responsible structures for the implementation of the Programmes are the Ministry of European Integration of the Republic of Serbia, in cooperation with the RS Ministry of Finance – Department for Contracting and Financing of EU Funded Programmes (CFCU), Directorate for European Integration of Council of Ministers of Bosnia and Herzegovina, Government of Montenegro - Ministry of European Affairs and Ministry of Local Self-Government of the Republic of North Macedonia.

**1.1 Cross-Border Cooperation programme Serbia – Bosnia and Herzegovina for 2021-2027**

The programme for cross-border cooperation between the Republic of Serbia (RS) and Bosnia and Herzegovina (BA) will be implemented under the framework of 2021-2027 Instrument for Pre-accession Assistance (IPA III). The overall objective/impact of the Programme is to promote good neighbourly relations, foster union integration and enhance the socio-economic development of the programme cross-border area through social and economic inclusion of specific groups, specially youth, and the competitiveness of tourism. The Cross-border Programme Serbia – Bosnia and Herzegovina 2021-2027 is supported under the Instrument for Pre-accession Assistance (IPA III), under which € 14,000,000.00 have been allocated for the period 2021-2027.

Project applications within the Programme Serbia-Bosnia and Herzegovina may be proposed under the following thematic priorities and its specific objectives:

|  |  |
| --- | --- |
| **Thematic priority** | **Specific objective** |
| **TP 1:** Investing in youth, education and skills | * 1. To enhance youth activism and youth socio- economic participation
	2. To increase the employability of specific groups
 |
| **TP 2:** Encouraging tourism and cultural and natural heritage | **2.1.** Sustainable tourism (incl. cultural and natural heritage) contributing to economic development of CB region  |

**1.2 Cross-Border Cooperation programme Serbia – Montenegro for 2021-2027**

The cross-border cooperation programme between Republic of Serbia (RS) and Montenegro (ME) will be implemented under the framework of the 2021-2027 Instrument for Pre-accession Assistance (IPA III). The overall objective/impact of the Programme is to promote good neighbourly relations, foster Union integration and strengthen the social, economic and territorial development of the programme cross-border area by improving health and social care services and developing sustainable tourism. The Cross-border Programme Serbia – Montenegro 2021-2027 is supported under the Instrument for Pre-accession Assistance (IPA III), under which € 8,400,000.00 have been allocated for the period 2021-2027.

Project applications within the Programme Serbia-Montenegro may be proposed under the following thematic priorities and its specific objectives:

|  |  |
| --- | --- |
| **Thematic priority** | **Specific objective** |
| **TP 1:** Promotingemployment, labour mobility and social and cultural inclusion across borders | **1.1** To improve the quality of public health and social services for inclusion of marginalised groups in the programme area |
| **TP 2:** Encouraging tourism and cultural and natural heritage | **2.1.** To enhance and promote commonly coordinated cross-border tourism offer based on a protected cultural and natural heritage  |

**1.3 Cross-Border Cooperation programme Serbia – North Macedonia for 2021-2027**

The cross-border cooperation programme between Serbia (RS) and North Macedonia (MK) will be implemented under the framework of the 2021-2027 Instrument for Pre-Accession Assistance (IPA III). The overall objective/impact of the Programme is to promote good neighbourly relations, foster Union integration and contribute to social, economic and territorial development of the programme cross-border area by improving social and cultural inclusion and health and by developing sustainable tourism. The Cross-border Programme Serbia – North Macedonia 2021-2027 is supported under the Instrument for Pre-accession Assistance (IPA III), under which € 8,400,000.00 have been allocated for the period 2021-2027.

Project applications within the Programme Serbia-North Macedonia may be proposed under the following thematic priorities and its specific objectives:

|  |  |
| --- | --- |
| **Thematic priority** | **Specific objective** |
| **TP 1:** Promoting employment, labour mobility and social and cultural inclusion across the border | **1.1** Improving social and cultural inclusion and health |
| **TP 2:** Encouraging tourism and cultural and natural heritage | **2.1.** Enhancement of cultural and natural heritage for sustainable tourism development  |

More details about the programming area and the related development strategy and priority measures can be found in the Programme documents for the each cross-border programme in question. Also, they are available for downloading on the programmes websites:

<https://eu.rs-mk.org/wp-content/uploads/2022/07/Operation-Plan-21-27-IPAIII-1.pdf>

<https://cbcsrb-mne.org/wp-content/uploads/2022/12/Programme-document-IPA-III-SRB-MNE.pdf>

<https://srb-bih.org/wp-content/uploads/2024/02/Final-OP.pdf>

# OBJECTIVE, PURPOSE & EXPECTED RESULTS

## Overall objective

To create pool of experts (‘assessors’) per each Thematic priority per each Programme, who can be selected from the pool to assist the Programmes’ contracting authority (CFCU) in the selection of the best proposals received under the Calls for Proposals within the IPA III Cross-Border Cooperation Programmes Serbia – Bosnia and Herzegovina, Serbia –Montenegro and Serbia – North Macedonia under the Instrument of Pre-accession Assistance 2021-2027 (IPA III) and to achieve a high-quality, complete and coherent selection process of projects in line with the criteria set in the guidelines for applicants[[1]](#footnote-1). This pool of assessors will be created for each programme, per Thematic priorities of the programmes.

## 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 Programmes’ contracting authority (CFCU) and which are based on the published evaluation grids. Each concept note has to be assessed independently 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 Programmes’ Contracting Authority (CFCU) and which are based on the published evaluation grids. Each full application has to be assessed independently by 2 assessors.

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

# SCOPE OF THE WORK

## 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 Call for Proposals within the IPA III Cross-Border Cooperation Programmes Serbia – Bosnia and Herzegovina, Serbia – Montenegro and Serbia – North Macedonia under the Instrument of Pre-accession Assistance 2021-2027 (IPA III).

Assessors must familiarise themselves with the documents related to the each Call for Proposal as well as with the Programme documents. The information below refers to certain key points but does not substitute a thorough reading of e.g. the Guidelines for Grant Applicants, its annexes and the FAQs published on the website of the contracting authority for the Calls for Proposal.

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 evaluations of project proposals will be conducted respecting relevant Guidelines for applicants i.e. relevant checklists 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 Programmes’ 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.

First Calls for Proposals for Programmes RS-BA, RS-MK and RS-ME will be published as restricted call for proposals. In the first instance, only the concept notes will be evaluated by the selected assessors from the pool. 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 Programmes’ 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.

## Specific activities

Assessors are bound by a declaration of impartiality and confidentiality 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 Programmes’ 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 Programmes’ 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 with thorough justification of such opinion.

For each Call for Proposals, at least 2 assessors must assess each concept note and each full application, working independently of each other.

The assessments of each calls for proposals 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 by the evaluation committee to justify and discuss his/her assessment of the proposals.

For each call for proposals, 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 proposed for funding and its annexes (e.g. project budget, log-frame matrix as well as the supporting documents for works, if applicable) which require 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/Programme’s Contracting Authority;
* A re-assessment of project proposals upon the request of the EvC/Programme’s Contracting Authority.

#

1. **Role and tasks of the evaluation committee**

# The evaluation committee is appointed by the Programme’s 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 advice the Programme’s 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 will 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 Programme’s contracting authority 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 by the EvC, depending on availability of funds, proposal of the EvC and the decision of the Programme’s contracting authority.

# In case an assessment is rejected by the 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 Programmes’ contracting authority premises (Ministry of Finance – CFCU) while presentation of their assessment to the EvC is to be organised in the premises of the Programmes’ contracting authority (Ministry of Finance – CFCU) in Belgrade. There is also possibility that meetings with the assessors will be organised via video conference.

## Please note that, once assessor is engaged for assessment of specific TP under specific Programme, she/he will be requested to take part in meetings in person in Belgrade, Serbia for each call for proposal, upon the request received from the programmes’ Contracting Authority.

##  If required, assessors may be asked to perform assessment of project applications in the premises of Ministry of Finance, Department for Contracting and Financing of EU Funded Programmes (CFCU) in Belgrade.

## 4.2 Start date and period of implementation

Precise timetable of the assignment will be defined after the selection process and in accordance with indicative timetable for implementation of the grant schemes, which will be presented in the relevant Guidelines for Applicants within the each of the Calls for Proposals that will be published under each of the mentioned programmes. Each assessor shall sign a statement of exclusivity and availability for the period of implementation of evaluation of specific Call for Proposal at the moment of signing his/her contract. Assessor will sign a contract for evaluation process of each Call for Proposals. 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 candidates from the pool compiled after the recruitment procedure.

Each assessor will be paid per approved assessments (Evaluation grids) of Concept notes and Full application forms.

Each Evaluation grid must be approved by the EvC and its Chairperson. 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.

# 5. REQUIREMENTS

## 5.1 Staff

### Assessors must have a clear understanding of the issues being addressed by the programme concerned. This requires that they have read and assimilated the information presented in the Guidelines for Applicants and in the Application Form, as well as in the relevant parts of the Programme Document for the cross-border cooperation programme he/she applied.

### 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 must 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.

### The assessor has to:

### Appraise each sub-criterion with a score, accompanied by a clear qualitative description (highlighting the strengths and weaknesses), justifying the given score as well as providing assessment conclusions per criterion and for the project proposal as a whole;

### Present his/her conclusions in a clearly structured and comprehensive way, putting the EvC in the position to justify a funding recommendation or rejection. Additionally, she/he is asked to provide an opinion on the risk of double-funding with granted projects by other CBC Programmes which overlap the same territory.

### 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 Programmes’ contracting authority staff will 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 re-assessment, 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

The potential Candidates have to **meet the following requirements set as minimum**:

Qualifications and skills:

* At least a university degree (min 240 ECTS)
* Excellent knowledge of the English language[[2]](#footnote-2)

General professional experience:

* The experts need to have minimum 6 years of general working experience obtained after the university degree

Specific professional experience:

* At least 5 years of relevant working experience related to the Thematic priority/ies (TP/TPs) of the call/s for which expert applies (please see parts 1.1, 1.2 and 1.3 of this document for more details related to the TPs per Programme). Expert may apply for one or more Thematic priorities, related to one or more Programmes;
* At least 2 years of relevant working experience related to management, implemenation, supervision or design of EU or other donors funded programmes and/or projects;
* Previous experience in project proposal assessment/s;
* Knowledge of local languages will be considered an advantage.

Candidates will go through administrative check on the YES/NO basis. Candidates that pass administrative check will further be scored against the selection criteria based on data provided in the CV and will be interviewed.

* 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 may 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 is not able to provide the necessary documentary evidence, the Ministry of European Integration, being the Contracting Authority for contracts with assessors, will replace him/her with one or more of the candidates from the pool of experts (assessors) compiled after the recruitment procedure.
* The CV should be submitted in English language, in the Europass template provided as an annex to the Call for Expression of Interest. In case that CV is submitted in any other language, the application may be rejected.

After the administrative check of the potential experts, interviews (which may be conducted in person or via video conference) will be organized with a short-listed candidates with aim at confirming the candidates' assessment skills and understanding of project cycle management and logical framework approach as the criteria of key importance for a good project as well as confirming working experience in one or more fields related to the specific objectives of the calls in which candidate applied.

The assessors cannot be staff of the Programme’s Contracting Authority.

Working languages: Working language of the assignment is English language.

**If you are interested in participating, please send an email to the functional mailbox of the Department for European territorial cooperation programmes** **of the RS Ministry of European Integration:** **cbc@mei.gov.rs** **with** following documents attached:

* + Cover letter (Letter of interest for participation),
	+ Annex A (Application form), and
	+ Annex C (CV in prescribed format in English language).

Please note that CBC Programme or Programmes, as well as Thematic priority/ies for which expert applies, should be clearly indicated in the Application form document and in the Cover letter.

When sending an e-mail please indicate the following reference in the subject line: **"CBCPs: RS-BA, RS-ME, RS-MK - Expression of interest for creation of pool of assessors."**.

All interested parties who have submitted the above-mentioned documents **by 15:00 hours CET on 28/10/2024** will be included in the list.

N.B. Inclusion on the list does not commit the Contracting Authority to invite potential candidate to participate in the interview.

### 5.1.2 Team leader

N/A

## 5.2 Facilities

N/A

## 5.3 Incidental expenditure

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

# 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 Chairperson of EvC after the signature of the contract with the Ministry of European Integration, Republic of Serbia.

## 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 the Head of Contracting Authority of the Programme. The reports must be written in English. The Chairperson of EvC is responsible for approving the time-sheets before sending the report and time-sheets to the Contracting Authority (Ministry of European Integration). The required formats of the reports will be communicated to the Assessor by the by the Chairperson of EvC after the signature of the contract.

\* \* \*

1. During the implementation of the IPA III financial perspective, Programmes’ structures may decide that initially established pool of experts (assessors) should be expanded or changed, for one or more TPs.

. [↑](#footnote-ref-1)
2. Please note that the knowledge of English language will be scored during the interview. [↑](#footnote-ref-2)