

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 Cross-border Cooperation Programme – Montenegro – Albania and Montenegro – Kosovo\* 2021-2027 under the Instrument for Pre-accession Assistance (IPA III)

TERMS OF REFERENCE

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# BACKGROUND INFORMATION

The Ministry of European Affairs (MEA) of Montenegro, in cooperation with the Ministry of Finance of Montenegro - Directorate for Finance, Contracting and Implementation of EU Assistance Funds as Intermediate Body for Financial Management(IBFM), and in association with the State Agency of Strategic Programming and Aid Coordination of the Republic of Albania (SASPAC) and the Ministry of Local Government Administration of the Republic of Kosovo (MLGA), is the coordinating body for the implementation of EU-funded Cross-Border Cooperation Programmes (CBC) Montenegro – Albania and Montenegro – Kosovo within the period 2021-2027. These CBC programmes are funded under the Instrument for Pre-Accession Assistance 2021-2027 (IPA III) and are implemented through the respective grant schemes in the border regions between Montenegro and Albania, and Montenegro and Kosovo. Under the CBC programmes, projects which have a beneficial impact on both sides of the border are/will be implemented. This involves the launching of the Calls for Proposals (CfP) for each of the CBC programmes and financing the implementation of joint cross-border projects.

**1.1 Cross-Border Cooperation programme Montenegro – Albania 2021-2027**

The main objective of the Programme is to promote good neighbourly relations, foster Union integration and contribute to social, economic and territorial development by improving the quality of life of the population in the programme cross-border area by tourism development based on cultural/natural heritage and by protecting the environment.

Project applications within the Programme **Montenegro – Albania** may be proposed under the following **Thematic Priorities**:

* Protecting the environment and promoting climate change adaptation and mitigation, risk prevention and management TP2 and
* Encouraging tourism and cultural and natural heritage TP 5.
* For both thematic priorities and allocations 2022 and 2025 the indicative available funds will be 7.480.00,00 € (TP 2 – 3.740.000,00 € and TP 5 – 3.740.000,00 €)

**1.2 Cross-Border Cooperation programme Montenegro – Kosovo 2021-2027**

The main objective of the Programme, with a total value of **5.4 million euros (EU contribution for allocations 2022 and 2024),** is the promotion of good neighbourly relations, encouraging the integration of the Union and contributing to the social, economic and territorial development of the programme's cross-border area, improving the standard and quality of life of people in the programme area through ecologically sustainable and socially comprehensive economic development of human resources, while respecting its common cultural and natural heritage.

Also, project proposals within the Programme **Montenegro – Kosovo** may fall under the following **Thematic Priorities**:

* Promoting employment, labour mobility and social and cultural inclusion across borders TP 1 – 2.399.760,00 € and
* Encouraging tourism and cultural and natural heritage TP2 – 3.000.240,00 €

More details about Cross-Border Cooperation Programmes Montenegro – Albania and Montenegro – Kosovo 2021-2027 (IPA III) can be found in the programme documents, which are downloadable from the following links of the programmes’ web pages: <https://www.cbc-mne-alb.org/ipa-iii-cross-border-cooperation-programme-montenegro-albania-published/> and <https://cbc-mne-kos.org/ipa-iii-cross-border-cooperation-programme-montenegro-kosovo-published/>.

# 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 Intermediate Body for Financial Managementin the selection of the best quality proposals under upcoming Calls for Proposals within the Cross-border Cooperation Programme Montenegro – Albania and Montenegro – Kosovo 2021-2027 under the Instrument for Pre-accession Assistance (IPA III) and to achieve a high-quality, complete and coherent selection process of project proposals 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 IBFM and which are based on the published evaluation grids. Each concept note has to be assessed independently by two 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 IBFM and which are based on the published evaluation grids. Each full application has to be assessed independently by two assessors.

These assessments will be used by the Evaluation Committee in the process of selecting the best quality proposals.

# SCOPE OF THE WORK

## 3.1 General

External assessors will be engaged to carry out detailed examination/evaluation of all those concept notes/full applications that after submission are considered as administratively compliant under the Calls for Proposals within these Programmes.

Assessors must familiarise themselves with the documents related to the Calls for Proposals. 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 Calls 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 of impartiality and confidentiality to this fact.

Only chairperson and secretary of the Evaluation Committee is authorised to have contact with an applicant during and after the evaluation process.

This includes communications related to clarifications, 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. evaluation grids and checklists of the application form 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-selected 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 IBFM by the 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 MNE - KOS and MNE - ALB 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.

## 3.2 Specific activities

Assessors are bound by a declaration of impartiality and confidentiality[[2]](#footnote-2) 2 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 as well as affiliated entities, 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 IBFM 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.

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 guidelines and instructions 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 Evaluation Committee to justify and discuss his/her assessment of the proposals.

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, implying that 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/IBFM
* A re-assessment of project proposals upon the request of the EvC/IBFM if the assessors find acceptable

1. **Role and tasks of the Evaluation Committee**

The Evaluation committee (EvC) is appointed by the IBFM 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 IBFM 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 EvC Rules of Procedures 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 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.

If the assessments do not meet the expected quality, the EvC may request from the assessors to improve their assessment (grids) or propose the reassessment. If the IBFM is not satisfied with the quality of assessment, the IBFM 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 consequently by the decision of the IBFM.

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

# LOGISTICS AND TIMING

## 4.1 Location

Assessors are to perform the assessment remotely, or if required assessors may be asked to perform assessment of project applications in the premises of the IBFM, while presentation of their assessment to the EvC is to be organised in the premises of the IBFM. There is also possibility, in justifiable cases, 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 Podgorica, Montenegro for each call for proposal, upon the request received from the IBFM.

## 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 IBFM 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, the IBFM reserves right not to approve payment for assessment of that concept note/full application.

# 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 documents for the cross-border programmes.

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.

For each task performed, the assessor selected must demonstrate an appropriate ethical conduct and must respect the confidentiality of the information and documents to which he/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.

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 Joint Evaluation Committee and in case that a project needs more thorough evaluation, the chairperson can ask for a re-evaluation of the same project proposal by a different assessor(s).

For the administrative checks (including the eligibility of the action), in charge is IBFM staff, i.e. nominated EvC or only chairperson and secretary who later will present the voting members the findings of the administrative check. 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 reports 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 written 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.

### Assessors

Minimum requirements for candidates include the following:

Qualifications and skills:

* University degree (minimum 240 ECTS);
* Excellent knowledge of English language[[3]](#footnote-3); and
* Have proper computer/IT literacy necessary to complete the assignment.

General professional experience:

* At least 6 (six) years of general working experience. Obtained after the university degree

Specific professional experience:

* At least 3 (three) years of relevant working experience related to one or more of following sectors:

Employment, labour mobility and social and cultural inclusion across borders; Protecting the environment and promoting climate change adaptation and mitigation, risk prevention and management; Tourism and cultural and natural heritage.

* At least 2 (two) years of relevant working experience related to management, implementation, supervision or design of EU or other donors funded programmes and/or projects;
* Prior experience in assessment of project proposals under national and/or European and/or international funding programmes and/or under programmes directly managed by the European Commission;
* Sound knowledge of the national legislation and strategies of one of the IPA beneficiary countries participating in the CBC programme (Montenegro, or Albania, or Kosovo) of the field of professional expertise will be considered an advantage;
* 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.

* 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 Affairs, being the Contracting body for contracts with assessors, will replace him/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 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 will 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 IBFM, neither the staff from all structures and bodies involved in the programme management.

**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 Directorate for European Territorial Cooperation Programmes** **of the Ministry of European Affairs:** [**nada.pejovic@mep.gov.me**](mailto:nada.pejovic@mep.gov.me)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 email please indicate the following reference in the subject line: **Assessor for evaluation of project proposals within the CBC Programmes Montenegro – Albania and Montenegro – Kosovo.**

All interested parties who have submitted the above mentioned data by **15:00 hours CET on 04/11/2024 will be included in the list.**

N.B. Inclusion on the list does not commit the MEA 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, will be financed by the budget for the implementation of technical assistance under these CBC programmes.

# 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/her final report (including time sheets) on implementation of the tasks at the end of this contract in English. The approval of final report will be the basis for issuing the final payment

The required formats of the reports will be communicated to the Assessor by the MEA after the signature of the contract with the MEA.

## 6.2 Submission & approval of reports

One copy of the reports referred to above must be submitted to the project manager identified in the contract. The reports must be written in English. The project manager is responsible for approving the reports, after IBFM confirms that the work is done and provides attendance sheets from the meetings.

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. A standard document will be made available by the IBFM [↑](#footnote-ref-2)
3. Please note that the knowledge of English language will be tested [↑](#footnote-ref-3)