

ASSESSOR'S MANUAL

INTERREG V-A ROMANIA-HUNGARY PROGRAMME



RESTRICTED CALLS FOR STRATEGIC PROJECT PROPOSALS

Partnership for a better future

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List of abbreviations

AWG	Assessment Working Group
BRECO	Oradea Regional Office for Cross Border Cooperation Romania-Hungary
CN	Concept Note
eMS	Electronic Monitoring System
FA	Full Application – phase II for Flagship projects within a Restricted Call
Interreg V-A RO-HU	Interreg V-A Romania-Hungary Cross border Cooperation Programme
Ip	Investment priority
IP	Info Point
JS	Joint Secretariat
LA	Lead Applicant
MA	Managing Authority for Interreg V-A Romania-Hungary within MRDPAEF
MC	Monitoring Committee
MRDPAEF	Ministry of Regional Development, Public Administration and European Funds
NA	National Authority
wd	Working days

Glossary of terms

Application packages	All documents required when applying for funding.
Applicant / Potential Beneficiary	Is any juridical person or regional/local branch having the registered office or competences in the eligible area of the Programme, which, by delivering a Financing Application, expresses its intention to implement a project within a joint venture, in order to benefitate from non-refundable financial assistance by means of the Interreg V-A Romania –Hungary Programme, based on a financing agreement entered with the MA.
Restricted Call for proposals	Refers to a public invitation addressed by the MA to an explicitly identified category of potential applicants, so they can deliver, in a limited period of time, the financing applications for projects within the Interreg V-A Romania – Hungary Programme. The calls can have thematic objectives (restricted).
Cooperation Programme	Programme document drafted by the Managing Authority and approved by the European Commission, which established a common strategy of several European Union Member States through a coherent set of priorities whose implementation is calling on European Regional Development Fund.
Concept Note	Represents the standard form of the application form provided by the Programme through the Applicant's Guide, completed and submitted by the applicants, including supporting documents in view of funding through the Interreg V-A Romania-Hungary in phase I – development of the Restricted Call for proposals (for strategic projects - FSP).
Electronic Monitoring System (eMS)	The eMS is a monitoring system with communication portal to support submission, approval, management and administration of projects in the context of ETC programmes. The system supports collection of all information on submitted and approved projects, their implementation and achievements, modifications and closure. Additionally aggregated data on the progress of projects and a programme are recorded in the system. All programme bodies are

able to communicate with beneficiaries via the system and re-use the data already collected. The eMS is built to support programme authorities in day-to-day programme management and should fulfil all legal requirements.

European Regional Development Fund (ERDF)	One of the financing instruments of the European Union, through which the present programme is financed. Beneficiaries will get support for their projects besides the state co-financing from ERDF.
Full Application	Represents the standard form of the application form provided by the Programme through the Applicant's Guide, completed and submitted by the applicants, including supporting documents in view of funding through the Interreg V-A Romania-Hungary in phase II - implementation of the Restricted Call for proposals (for strategic projects - FSP).
Joint Secretariat	(JS) is the organizational structure established according to the provisions of the Government's Decision no. 274/2015 and of art. 23 paragraph (2) of the EU Regulation no. 1299/2013. It is constituted at Department level within BRECO (Oradea Cross Border Cooperation Regional Office). It assists the Managing Authority and the Monitoring Committee in carrying out their respective duties and is the main contact point between the programme and the potential/project beneficiaries.
Lead Applicant	Public or private body responsible for initiating and implementing an operation, designated project leader within the partnership and assumes all responsibilities associated with this role, within the meaning of art. 13 of EU Regulation 1299/2013.
Managing Authority	The Romanian Ministry of Regional Development, Public Administration and European Funds - is responsible for managing and implementing the operational programme in accordance with EC Regulations and the principles of sound financial management. The Managing Authority signs the ERDF subsidy contracts with the Lead Beneficiaries as well as the co-financing contracts with the Romanian project beneficiaries (for the co-financing granted from the Romanian state budget). The Managing Authority took over the role of certifying the expenditures (role of Certifying Authority).

Monitoring Committee	Is the bilateral Romanian-Hungarian structure, having no juridical personality, constituted in order to monitor the implementation of the Interreg V-A Romania –Hungary Programme, according to articles 47-49 of the EC Regulation no. 1303/2013 (CPR).
National Authority	The Prime Minister Office from Hungary – is the counterpart of the Managing Authority and will sign the co-financing contracts with the Hungarian project beneficiaries (for the co-financing granted from the Hungarian state budget).
Objective of European Territorial Cooperation	The overarching objective of European Territorial Cooperation (ETC) is to promote a harmonious economic, social and territorial development of the Union as a whole. European Territorial Cooperation (ETC), better known as Interreg, is one of the two goals of cohesion policy and provides a framework for the implementation of joint actions and policy exchanges between national, regional and local actors from different Member States.
Project	Represents a series of indivisible activities, conceived to produce a specific result in a given period of time and having clearly established objectives, for the achievement of which the beneficiary receives non-refundable funds within the Programme.

1. INTRODUCTION

The present document is addressed to external assessors involved in the project assessment process of strategic project proposals also known as flagship projects submitted under the Restricted Calls for proposals in the framework of the INTERREG V-A ROMANIA – HUNGARY Programme, hereinafter referred to as the Programme.

The Manual is developed taking into account the Cooperation Programme (including the annexes), the Methodology and criteria for assessment and selection of flagship projects, adopted by the Monitoring Committee on 16 of December 2016.

However, the assessors will need to consult not only the above mentioned documents, made available by JS, but also the Guides for applicants for flagship projects (including Corrigenda, if the case), the entire Application package (including the supporting documents) submitted by the applicants, the User's Manual for eMS, and the relevant pieces of legislation .

2. ASSESSMENT AND SELECTION REQUIREMENTS

2.1 General principles

The following general principles are governing the Applications' assessment and selection process:

- a) Transparency
- b) Equal treatment
- c) Non-discrimination
- d) National integrity
- e) Sustainable development

The assessment and selection procedure promotes the fulfilment of those principles and excludes any opposite behaviour or action.

During the assessment process, the assessors will keep in mind the general principles that need to be reflected in the selection criteria under all Investment priorities. Those include:

- Respecting the principle of sustainability, justified demand for the new capacities created;
- Cost-efficiency of the supported actions;
- Clearly justified contribution to the specific objective of the relevant Ip;
- Preventing double-financing of operations (examples may include institutional development, road development, water management);
- Creating added value;
- Clear cross-border impact, synergies of the interventions.

In order to ensure equal opportunities and non-discrimination, at least the following criteria will be taken into account when selecting operations:

- Only those projects can be selected, which are non-discriminatory and transparent and take into account gender equality and non-discrimination principles;
- In projects, where it is feasible, preference may be given on the social inclusion of people living in deep poverty.

In addition, when performing the assessment of project proposals, external assessors have to rely on their own expertise in the fields covered by specific investment priorities

and their previous experience in assessing project proposals. They have to dispose of and use in their work the in-depth knowledge of the relevant strategies and development plans at national, county or local level, even if they are available only in national languages. They also have to assess if activities of project proposals are in line with both EU and national legislations in the field covered by their expertise.

Each Application (CN or FA) and its associated documentation will be assessed and analysed individually by each of the two assessors who will form the team of assessors. Thus, both assessors will assign separate scores to all the criteria/sub-criteria in the quality assessment grids.

2.2 Roles and responsibilities of Programme bodies

The roles and responsibilities of each Programme body involved in different stage of assessment and selection of the Applications (operations), are clearly described in the Regulation (EC) No. 1303/2013 and the Cooperation Programme (CP):

The Monitoring Committee (MC) examined and approved the methodology and criteria used for selection of Applications, which are made available to applicants through the Guides for applicants for flagship projects. Moreover, the MC approves the list of the projects proposed to be financed (under conditions, if the case), the reserve list and the list of the rejected Applications. In the case of accepted complaints, the MC may revise the decision for selection of the projects proposed to be financed, at the request of MA.

The responsibility of the overall assessment process belongs to the **Managing Authority (MA)**. The MA ensures during the entire process that effective and proportionate anti-fraud measures are in place. In this regard, but not only, **Managing Authority** and **National Authority** have the right to observe the assessment process by designating persons to participate in the process, which is organized at JS premises. The MA may perform checks, by sample, in order to make sure that the assessment process is carried out correctly.

The Managing Authority approves the assessment reports prepared by JS/AWG and participates as a member with voting rights in the selection and approval of the projects proposed to be financed in the MC.

The **Joint Secretariat (JS)** organizes the assessment and selection process, participates in the Assessment Working Group (AWG), ensuring the administrative and eligibility check for the submitted projects and prepares all the necessary information for the project selection meeting of the Monitoring Committee.

The JS will also ensure the secretariat of the Assessment Working Group, during the whole selection process.

At the request of MA/JS, when is the case, the staff of **InfoPoints** may be involved in the assessment process.

The **National Authority (NA)** responds to AWG requests submitted by the JS on specific issues related to the national Hungarian regulatory framework if the case.

The NA participates as a member with voting rights in the selection and approval of the projects in the MC, as well.

The quality assessment is performed by external experts/assessors. The investigation of complaints, if it is the case can be also helped by external experts/assessors. The contracting of external experts is the attribute of the MA, according to the approved CP. If it is necessary, this attribute may be delegated to JS.

The external assessors are members of the **Assessment Working Group**. The AWG is established for each Call for Proposals.

After the projects are assessed by the external experts, the AWG receives the Quality assessment grids, signed by each assessor. The AWG elaborates the assessment report containing the ranking of all the project proposals, according to the final score, and submits them to the MA for approval and to the NA for consultation, before sending the list of the ranked project proposals to the MC for the final decision.

2.3 Requirements of impartiality and confidentiality

All actors within the assessment and selection process have to be completely impartial and free of any conflict of interest from project proposals submitted in the framework of the Interreg V-A Romania-Hungary programme. In this respect, the contracted external experts as independent assessors have to sign a Declaration of confidentiality and impartiality and on conflict of interest (Annex 1) and they will be briefed by the President of the AWG regarding this issue and the consequences of non-compliance as well. The declaration will be archived in the administrative file of the assessment.

Under no circumstances may an assessor attempt to contact an applicant or partner on his/her own account. On the other hand, any attempt by an applicant to influence the process in any way (by initiating contact whether with the members of the MC, MA, NA, JS, IPs, or with the contracted assessors) will result in the immediate exclusion of the relevant proposal from further consideration. The MC and MA will be immediately informed of any attempt to influence the independent assessment, in a written manner.

Programme bodies will ensure that all the documents submitted by project applicants under the Call are kept confidential. All the assessors should keep in mind that the content of the project proposals may not be printed, published or forwarded to persons or institutions, which are not directly engaged in the project assessment or decision making procedure, especially not to project applicants or the wider public.

All actors within the assessment procedure have to guarantee that the privacy and confidentiality of all project proposals submitted and documents (including assessment grids and other results of the assessment) for the Call will be kept and that all national laws of privacy and the EU- directive¹ on the protection of personal data (95/46/EC) will be respected.

The assessor may be excluded from the proposed team with the request to replace him with another assessor with at least the same experience and training in the following conditions:

- 1) Not declaring a conflict of interest;
- 2) Violation of confidentiality and impartiality during the assessment process;
- 3) Failure to fulfil obligations / delayed assessment;
- 4) Inadequate assessment service (incorrect and/or incomplete assessment and/or non-compliance/ignorance of applicable legislation /procedures /instructions).

¹ <http://eur-lex.europa.eu/LexUriServ/LexUriServ.do?uri=CELEX:31995L0046:en:HTML>

3. RESTRICTED CALLS FOR STRATEGIC PROJECT PROPOSALS

The flagship projects are projects of key importance that address the most important needs of the eligible area. They are intended to help to achieve the expected results and have a tangible impact on a significant part of the Programme area.

The Applications for flagship projects are submitted within the Restricted Calls for proposals that concerns only Priority Axis 1 (only Ip 6/c), PA2, PA3 and PA4:

**PA1 - Joint protection and efficient use of common values and resources
(Cooperating on common values and resources)**

Ip 6/c Conserving, protecting, promoting and developing natural and cultural heritage

**PA2 - Improve sustainable cross-border mobility and remove bottlenecks
(Cooperating on accessibility)**

Ip 7/b Enhancing regional mobility through connecting secondary and tertiary nodes to TEN-T infrastructure, including multimodal nodes

Ip 7/c Developing and improving environment-friendly (including low-noise), and low-carbon transport systems including inland waterways and maritime transport, ports, multimodal links and airport infrastructure, in order to promote sustainable regional and local mobility

**PA3 - Improve employment and promote cross-border labour mobility
(Cooperating on employment)**

Ip 8/b Supporting employment-friendly growth through the development of endogenous potential as part of a territorial strategy for specific areas, including the conversion of declining industrial regions and enhancement of accessibility to, and development of, specific natural and cultural resources

PA4 - Improving health-care services (Cooperating on health-care and prevention)

Ip 9/a Investing in health and social infrastructure which contributes to national, regional and local development, reducing inequalities in terms of health status, promoting social inclusion through improved access to social, cultural and recreational services and transition from institutional to community-based services

3.1 Financial allocation

The estimated **total amount allocated for the Restricted Calls for proposals**, including national public and private funding is of **EUR 111,258,042.00**, out of which, ERDF amount is **EUR 94,569,336 (50% of the total ERDF Programme budget)**.

The minimum threshold for the total project budget of a flagship project will be € 6,470,600.00. The maximum total project budget (ERDF + State Contribution + Own Contribution) for one flagship project cannot exceed € 50,000,000.00.

Thus the amount of the ERDF contribution to a project will not be less than € 5,500,000.00 and cannot exceed € 11,815,000.00, for both phases (CN and FA). Out of the total project budget, a **maximum of € 350,000.00 (maximum € 297,500.00 from ERDF) per project may be allocated for the first phase – Concept Note** – dedicated to the development of the FA.

The following table reflects the allocation scenarios at project potential beneficiary level, based on financing sources:

Financing sources	Romanian Central Public Authorities	Romanian Beneficiaries other than Central Public Authorities	Hungarian Central Budgetary Organs as Beneficiaries	Hungarian Beneficiaries other than Central Budgetary Organs
ERDF	Max. 85%	Max. 85%	Max. 85%	Max. 85%
But not more than € 11,815,000.00 / project				
State contribution	Min. 15% -	Max. 13%	Max. 15%	Max. 10%
		But not more than 15.2941% from ERDF	But not more than 17.6470% from ERDF	But not more than 11.7647% from ERDF
Own contribution		Min. 2%	Min. 0%	Min.5%

The total ERDF amount may not be exceeded, under any circumstances.

3.2 Application phases

All projects must have at least one Project Applicant on the other side of the border, which must fulfill the same eligibility criteria. The maximum number of Project Applicants in one project is 8 (eight). Not complying with this provision will lead to the rejection of Applications. In specific cases and based on sound justification, in addition to the Lead Applicant and Project Partners, Associated Partners may also be involved to

support the implementation of the project, in a maximum number of 4 per one project (2 in Romania and 2 in Hungary).

The Lead Applicant selected among the flagship's project partners must be public body.

All Applications are submitted through the electronic monitoring system – eMS, by the Lead Applicant, selected among the project partners. Each Application has attached supporting documents, scanned from the original dossier prepared by the applicants.

All project submitted in the system will receive an eMS code (specific for the Call and Priority Axis), to be further used during project assessment/ contracting/ implementation.

The language of the Applications is English and the supporting documents are either in English or in native language (RO/HU) according to the Guide for Applicants.

All the documents relating to the assessment of the application will be also archived automatically and/or electronically in eMS.

The Application for flagship projects is designed as a two-phase process in order to lead to mature, complex flagship project proposals, including all relevant supporting documentation: the Concept Note (CN) and the Full Application (FA).

Concept Note – The flagship project idea is detailed in the Concept Note, dedicated to the development of the Full Application. The CN, as the first phase of the Restricted Call, will focus on project relevance, its strategic and cross-border character, on the planned activities and estimated results, on partnership and estimated budget.

The best Concept Notes will be selected in order to be supported for developing Full Applications; therefore, subsidy contracts will be signed, focusing only on activities related to the elaboration of the Full Application and related supporting documentation (such as feasibility studies, technical projects, studies, impact assessment, translation services, etc.)

The related subsidy contracts will cover an implementation period of maximum 6 months and will focus exclusively on costs related to the development of mature, well-designed projects.

Full Application – may be submitted only by applicants who have a CN implemented in the first phase of the application process.

Full project proposals will be assessed and in case of compliance with the requirements of the FA, will be finally selected in order to be implemented; therefore, dedicated subsidy contracts will be signed with the Lead Beneficiaries of the selected projects.

Full Application will be submitted on on-going basis, no later than 1 month after the end of the implementation period of the Concept Note.

All flagship projects must have the total project duration (development Phase + implementation Phase) between 24 - 42 months from the starting date of the project, on condition that the final reimbursement claim for the implementation phase is submitted according to the subsidy contract. Out of the minimum / maximum implementation period, a period of maximum 6 months is dedicated to the development of the Full Application, respectively to the CN.

No investment shall be placed outside the eligible area!

The projects which have initiated investments in infrastructure (even not physically completed or fully implemented) before the application for funding under the Programme are not eligible.

All the details regarding the eligibility of the applicants, activities (operations) and expenditures are mentioned in the Guide for Applicants.

3.3 Focus on results

The Restricted Call takes into account the focus on the results in the 2014-2020 programming period. The Programme results are measured by indicators and the performance framework is one of the tools to achieve a result-orientation of the ESI Funds. The performance framework is a table with a set of milestones and targets defined for each priority in the Programme.

The quality of the project proposals, as reflected in their compliance with the selection criteria, is very important, in order to ensure that the Programme delivers concrete and visible outputs and results that tackle, in a cross-border and integrated manner, the challenges and needs affecting the Programme area.

The indicator matrix at Programme level, for the Restricted Call, is:

Investment priority	Result indicator	Output indicator
Ip 6/c	Tourist overnight stays in the eligible programme area	Increase in expected number of visits to supported sites of cultural and natural heritage and attractions

Investment priority	Result indicator	Output indicator
		Surface area of habitats supported to attain a better conservation status
Ip 7/b	Cross-border population served by modernized infrastructure leading to TEN-T	Total length of newly built roads
		Total length of reconstructed or upgraded roads
Ip 7/c	Ratio of people to motorized road vehicles crossing the border	Number of cross-border public transport services developed / improved
		Total length of newly built bicycle road
Ip 8/b	Employment rate in the eligible area as a percentage of the working age population	Number of participants in joint local employment initiatives and joint training
Ip 9/a	Average service level in health care institutions in the eligible area	Population having access to improved health services
		Number of health-care departments affected by modernized equipment

Indicators² measure whether the project has achieved its objectives or not. In this respect, each project must contribute to the achievement of the Programme indicators (both output and result indicators). The choice of appropriate indicators and the way the project contributes to the Programme results is important for the project selection by the Monitoring Committee. Therefore, result oriented projects, with tangible results, coordinated with the national/regional/local strategies and with high impact on the eligible area shall be selected.

In addition, the environmental indicators set during the Strategic Environmental Assessment procedure for the Programme are to be taken into account.

For more details, the assessors should see the Guide for applicants for flagship projects, Chapter 1.2.2 Programme indicators.

² For CN phase, please see the annexes V.5 and V.6 of the Application. For FA phase, please see the work package *Investment and Implementation* section of the Application from eMS and annex VI.5 of the Application.

4. PROCESS OF ASSESSMENT AND SELECTION

As it was mentioned before, the Restricted Call for proposal for flagship projects is designed as a two-phase process, the Concept Note and the Full Application, each phase involving CN respectively FA assessment, in two steps, administrative and eligibility check and quality assessment. All CN/FA will be assessed and selected according to the criteria previously approved by the MC.

The first step of the assessment procedure is to set up the Assessment Working Group for each Call, composed of:

- President – within JS (usually head of JS)
- Secretary – within JS
- Experts for administrative and eligibility check – within JS and IP, if the case.
- External experts, as independent assessors for State Aid incidence (later co-opted), in case of the Calls under State-Aid incidence.
- External experts, as independent assessors for quality assessment (later co-opted).

The assessment of the project proposals will be made at the JS headquarters, hosted by Oradea Regional Office for Cross Border Cooperation, BRECO, RO- 410087, Calea Armatei Române, No.1/A.

The assessors will perform the assessment of the applications in the eMS system, on the following link:

<http://ems-rohu.mdrap.ro/app/main?execution=e1s1>

Therefore, every assessor has to register in the eMS system and activate an user account. The steps for registering are set up in the User's Manual for eMS (please Annex 4 of this Manual).

The four-eye principle is applied in the assessment process.

4.1 Phase I – Concept Note

The Applications are submitted online, in the eMS system. Each Application has attached supporting documents, scanned from the original dossier prepared by the applicants.

All the Applications submitted until the deadline of each restrictive Call is included in the assessment process.

4.1.1 Administrative and eligibility check

The administrative and eligibility check is carried out by internal experts from the Joint Secretariat and IF NEED/ IF CASE Info Points.

4.1.2 Quality assessment of the Concept Note

The quality assessment is the second step of the CN assessment. In order to provide high quality, impartial and professional assessment, the quality assessment, technical and financial, is performed by external independent experts, contracted by the Managing Authority/JS. The experts are organized in teams, two-expert teams, selected for each Investment priority (Ip).

The deadline for mobilizing the external experts (the time by which the assessors will arrive at the place where the assessment is conducted) is up to 2 working days from the JS/MA's request.

The external experts will participate in the initial meeting held in English, at the headquarters of the Contracting Authority, with the MA/JS representatives, referring to:

- Clarification of requirements for quality (technical/financial) assessment of the submitted applications;
- Clarification of the Programme Document and other supporting documents as well as making available by MA/JS of an indicative list of relevant legislation regarding the European Territorial Cooperation;
- Training on the electronic application, eMS, used for the submission and assessment of the Applications and related documentation;

The attendance at this initial meeting of the external assessors is mandatory.

Each CN/FA and its associated documentation will be assessed and analysed individually by each of the two evaluators who will form the team of evaluators. Thus, both evaluators will assign separate scores to all the criteria/sub-criteria in the quality assessment grids.

Within the quality (technical-financial) assessment, the external assessors will consider the mandatory average assessment period for a CN submitted and its related documentation at 1 working day and for a FA submitted and its related documentation, the average mandatory assessment period is one to 2 working days.

Each evaluator will strongly and thoroughly argue the given score, mentioning both the sub-criteria to which the project was depreciated, the reasons for the depreciation, and the arguments for each score awarded.

In order to ensure the clarity of the assessment, JS/MA representatives, members of AWG, will perform a review of how the quality assessment grids were complemented, to verify the correspondence between the score and the comments that justify the score given by the evaluator, reserving the right to request Clarifications. JS/MA reserves the right to reject the assessment grids if the written justification provided is not sufficiently detailed.

At the end of each quality (technical-financial) assessment, the assessors will provide an Analysis Report on the technical and financial assessment of the project proposals which will include a synthesis of the main conclusions derived from the assessment, based on the criteria considered in the grid, namely efficiency, effectiveness, relevance and budget.

The Analysis Report (Annex 6), for each CN/FA, will be accompanied by the signed quality assessment grids individually and completely completed by each assessor in eMS and Word format. The Word version will be printed, signed and scanned. The grids will be submitted by the assessors to the AWG President in electronic format and signed and scanned version as well.

The main steps to be followed by the external assessors within the quality assessment of the CN are:

- Each contracted and selected assessor will carefully analyse the Concept Note and all the annexes, will evaluate individually every assigned CN and will complete the Quality assessment grid awarding points for each criterion and making comments to justify the awarded score for each criterion, as indicated in detail in the relevant evaluation grid.
- If certain information is not very clear, supplementary clarifications, but not completions, may be requested only once during the quality assessment. After analysing the received clarifications from the LA, each assessor completes the evaluation grid (Annex 2) for every project and concludes either the project proposal is formally compliant or not.
- The assessors will calculate the total score for each Application and will decide if it is or not recommended for support.
- If there are major differences between the scores awarded for an Application by the two external assessors, as describes in Chapter 4.1.4. the president of the AWG may organise a reconciliation meeting with both assessors.
- In case the reconciliation fails, the AWG president, with the agreement of the MA, will appoint a third assessor for quality assessment.

- The third assessor will evaluate and score the Application, independently from the previous two assessors.

In the **CN Quality assessment grid** (Annex 2) there are two sets of criteria to be assessed:

- A. Strategic criteria (maximum 80 points)
- B. Operational criteria (maximum 20 points)

The CN Quality assessment grid explains in detail what relevant information needs to be assessed for every criterion and maximum score to be awarded. However, the assessors should keep in mind that in the CN phase the application is mainly focused on gathering information upon the project to be further developed in the FA phase. Several sections in the CN application form are dedicated to the whole project proposal to be developed in case the Concept Note is selected for support. Those sections are clearly mentioned in the CN application form (see the Guide for applicants for the First restricted Call for strategic projects proposals) and the provided information is mainly assessed under Section A of the CN Quality assessment grid, Strategic criteria.

The assessors should be aware that sections of the CN application refer to the whole project to be further developed, and that some characteristics, i.e. the strategic character of the project, are assessed exclusively in the CN phase.

A. Strategic criteria

- Relevance

For evaluation of project's relevance, the assessors will give maximum score to project ideas directly contributing to the programme's objectives, addressing the thematic focus of the selected specific objective and having a significant contribution to achieving the output/result indicators. The projects should clearly define specific local needs and common challenges, address them appropriately and select relevant target groups. The projects should demonstrate new solutions that go beyond the existing practice in the sector / programme area / participating countries or adapt and implement already developed solutions.

- Strategic character

The flagship projects to be selected within the restrictive Call, should have an important strategic character, based on a strong and balanced partnership on the two sides of the border, extended to a substantial part of the eligible territory and should demonstrate significant impact on large target groups. A strategic project should produce a long lasting effect, creating permanent structures and services, producing permanent shifts

in the local markets, capable to ensure a long term growth. The flagship projects must provide added-value on existing interventions, must be best-practices in their key areas of intervention; capitalising previous success should be a strong characteristic of all flagship projects. Therefore, projects should make use of available knowledge and build on existing results and practices (see Guide for applicants for the First restricted Call for strategic projects proposals, Chapter 2.2.1.2 Eligibility of actions).

The strategic character of an intervention is also given by the amount of support from the relevant stakeholders in its key area of intervention. The project should demonstrate that it is in line with the county strategy, relevant for the Programme area, or other relevant policies and strategies from the eligible area.

The Concept Notes shall be accompanied by Compliance letters from relevant authorities / bodies at national / regional / county level (ministries and other units, acting under their subordination, coordination or under their authority, public authorities on regional / county level). It is mandatory to provide at least one letter from Romanian authorities (county, regional OR national level) and one from Hungarian County Councils, as required by the national legislation. The letter will include proper justification of the projects (non) compliance.

The assessors will carefully analyse the submitted extracts of relevant strategies and / or other relevant development strategic documents, proving the project's compliance.

For assessment the criterion B14 from the administrative & eligibility grid of the Flagship Project will be considered not only the map from the Guide for Applicant but also the General Master Plan for Transport, according to the correspondence with EC.

The EUSDR is a macro-regional strategy adopted by the EC on 08 December 2010 and endorsed by the European Council on 24 June 2011. The Strategy was developed by the Commission together with the Danube Region countries and stakeholders in order to address common challenges.

- Cross-border character

The external assessors have to examine if activities have a real CBC character and if there it is a real CBC impact of the results of the project.

The projects must have direct CBC impact, which shall be understood in terms of proving all four of the following cooperation criteria: joint development, joint implementation, joint financing and joint staffing. The maximum points (5 points) in the assessment will be granted for partnerships properly proving all four cooperation criteria. In addition, the associated partners, if the case, will have to prove the fulfilment of at least two cooperation criteria.

- Expected results are correlated with the estimated budget

The projects should justify the need for cross border cooperation approach through the proposed activities and estimated outputs and results.

The assessors must make sure that expected results are correlated with the estimated project budget.

For example, a project with a total estimated budget covering 50% of the Ip allocation will ideally contribute with minimum 50% of the output indicators of the respective Ip.

An example of calculating the proportionality between the estimated project budget and proposed indicators is given in the Guide for applicants for the First restricted Call for strategic projects proposals, Chapter 4. Assessment and selection of Applications/ 4.1 Concept Notes.

Note:

Investment priority 9a has two output indicators; an example of calculating the proportionality between the estimated project budget and proposed indicators is given in the Guide for applicants for the Second restricted Call for strategic projects proposals, Chapter 4. Assessment and selection of Applications/ 4.1 Concept Notes.

B. Operational criteria

The Section B of the CN Quality assessment grid, Operational criteria is focused on two operational criteria related to financial allocation versus activities planned in order to develop full mature project proposals.

- Overall design of the project

Firstly, the coherence of the **overall design** of the project is assessed; the action is feasible and consistent in relation to the objectives and expected results.

- Project budget

Secondly, when evaluating the project's **budget**, the assessors should make sure that the planned budget of the project is adequate in relation to the planned activities, outputs, results, and involvement of current and planned partners.

The assessors should read carefully the Guide for applicants for Flagship projects, Annex III. Programme rules on eligibility of expenditures and Chapter 2.2.1.3. Eligibility of costs/expenditure, in order to properly assess the expenditures for activities.

The assessors should keep in mind that Concept Note shall cover only costs, dedicated to the development of the Full Application. Staff, office and administrative and equipment related costs are not eligible under this phase. More, only travel and accommodation, external expertise and services costs are eligible as preparation costs under Concept Note budgets. Exceptionally, the costs for all mandatory certificates/permits in order to comply with the rules of the restricted Call are accepted under Infrastructure and works budget line (e.g. urban planning certificate).

External expertise and services costs for Concept Notes are eligible based on the specific needs of each project and will be properly documented, according to the national legislation/Programme's procedure related to public/direct procurement. For examples of types of expenditures included under the budget line External expertise and services costs, see the Guide for applicants for flagship projects, for the First restricted Call, Chapter 2.2.2.1 CONCEPT NOTE.

Assessors should note that expenditure on external expertise and services cannot be split among the project beneficiaries, i.e. common/shared costs are not allowed.

External expertise/services for elaboration of the Concept Note itself are not eligible.

Assessors shall also analyse if costs are realistic for the activities to be implemented and make proposals for budget cuts, if it is the case. Proposals for budget cuts have to be accompanied by a sound justification.

A balanced distribution of funds should be ensured between the 8 eligible counties, therefore the assessors should check that the projects are not over budgeted, that all the activities are necessary, are cost-effective, are leading to the envisaged results and are contributing to the Programme's output indicators.

Each assessor will evaluate individually every assigned CN and will complete the CN Quality assessment grid (Annex 2), awarding points for each criterion and making comments, as indicated in detail in the relevant evaluation grid.

The assessors will complete the Comments column for every quality criterion, in order to justify the awarded score.

4.1.3 Clarifications

If certain information is not very clear, supplementary clarifications, but not completions, may be requested only once during the quality assessment. Assessors may not contact the applicants under any circumstances.

Both appointed assessors for evaluation of the CN, need to agree on every clarification mentioned in the letter. If necessary, the AWG president may organize a conciliation session.

When the final wording is agreed, it is sent to the AWG secretary who will send the letter to LA. The JS will invite the Lead Applicant to submit the information within a deadline of maximum **5 working days**.

After analyzing the received clarifications from the LA, each assessor completes the evaluation grid for every project and scores each assessment criterion. The assessors will complete the *Comments column* for every quality criterion, in order to justify the awarded score. Also, the assessors can make recommendations regarding any aspects to be followed in the next steps (selection, contracting, implementation of the projects, budget cuts, etc.).

In case the Lead Applicant does not provide the supplementary clarifications within the deadline, the Concept Note will be assessed based on the initial information.

The assessors will calculate the total score for each CN and will decide if the CN is or not recommended for support. The assessor's decision is justified in the grid, where not only the total score is calculated but reasons for the decision are also completed.

Please see Annex 2, CN Quality assessment grid, for more indications, completed under the Comments field, on where to find relevant information for every criterion.

The final score for each CN is calculated by the AWG president who processes the external assessors' assessment grids, as the average of the scores awarded by both assessors.

MA/JS reserves the right to request clarification in case there is inconsistency between the points awarded and the comments justifying the score given by the assessor or the right to reject those assessment grids that are non-compliant with all the criteria analyzed or where written justification provided is not sufficiently detailed.

4.1.4 Reconciliation

The president of the AWG may organise a reconciliation meeting with both assessors, in the following situations:

- a. One assessor awards the application a total score which recommends it for financing, but the second assessor awards a score which recommends it for rejection³;
- b. The difference between the scores awarded for an application by the two assessors is more than 10 points;
- c. For the section “strategic criteria”, one of the assessors gives a score under the established threshold⁴, while the other gives a score above the relevant threshold;
- d. The difference between the scores awarded for a criterion by the two assessors is more than 50% of the total points of the respective criterion (mentioned in the first column of the Quality assessment grid).

The reconciliation will be a free discussion, each assessor arguing for his position. The president will arbitrate the debate. Following the reconciliation meeting, if agreement is reached, one or both assessors will change the relevant grid. All the grids, initial and final, are attached to and archived with the rest of the evaluation documents.

In case the reconciliation fails, the AWG president, with the agreement of the MA, will appoint a third assessor for quality assessment. The third assessor will evaluate and score the CN, independently from the previous two assessors.

For situations described under a) and c), the final score for the CN will be the average between the similar two awarded scores, above or under the threshold. For the situations described under b) and d), the final score is the average between all the three awarded scores. Therefore, for every CN, the final score will either recommend or not the support for funding.

After completing the final grids, each evaluator will prepare an analysis report (Annex 6) for each assessed CN. It will include a synthesis of the main conclusions derived from the assessment, based on the criteria considered in the grid, namely efficiency, effectiveness, relevance and budget. The reports will be prepared and delivered electronically at the end of each CN assessment to AWG President. Their transmission to the JS in printed form will be made before the submission of the Final Working Report.

³ Threshold for CN/FA quality assessment is minimum 65 points out of 100 points.

⁴ Threshold for strategic criteria (CN) is minimum 50 points out of 80 points.

4.1.5 Selection of Concept Notes

The Concept Notes are ranked by Investment Priorities in descending order, taking into account the scores awarded, and considering their contribution to the Programme's indicators (output and result), if necessary.

When CN Quality Assessment step is finalised, the president and the secretary will complete the Assessment Report and send it via eMS to MA for approval and to the NA for consultation. After the approval of the MA, the JS will launch the procedure for the MC meeting for the selection of the projects. The MC will decide on the list of projects proposed for financing, the reserve list, and on the list of rejected projects.

4.1.6 Audit trail for Concept Notes assessment

In **Concept Note** phase, the Quality assessment process includes the following activities and deadlines to be followed by the external quality assessors:

No.	Activity	Responsible	Time allocated for activity (working days)	Documents
1	Participating in the initial meeting, at the headquarters of the Contracting Authority	AWG President, external assessors	1	Attendance list
2	Individual quality assessment of CN /Ip	AWG external assessor	max.1	Completed quality assessment grids (Annex 2)
3	Asking for clarification (if the case)	AWG president, secretary	1	Letters to Lead Applicants, Annex 5
4	Analysis of the written answers received from LA if necessary, completion evaluation grids;	AWG external assessors	1	Quality assessment grids, printed and signed;
5	Conciliation (if the case)	AWG President	1	Completed quality assessment grids, minutes of conciliation

6	Elaborating the analysis report for each assessed CN; submission to AWG President	AWG external assessors	1	Analysis report (Annex 6)
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4.2 Phase II – Full Application

Applicants with successfully implemented Concept Notes will submit Full Applications in the eMS system. FA will be submitted on on-going basis, no later than 1 month after the end of implementation period of the relevant CN. All Full Applications submitted in this range of time will be included in the assessment process, in a continuous manner.

No fundamental modification of the project proposal is allowed between the Concept Note and the Full Application phases, in terms of objectives, results and targeted indicators. Just as well, the partnership may not change between the CN and the FA phases and the estimated budget for the intervention in the FA should suffer modification of maximum 10% as opposed to the estimations within the CN, and up to the limit set by the GfA. Only generated by legislative changes, where the powers, prerogatives and liabilities of the beneficiary concerned are taken over (i.e. reorganization/restructuring etc.), may be accepted.

All FAs will be assessed and selected according to the criteria hereby approved by the MC.

4.2.1 Administrative and eligibility check

For the FA, administrative and eligibility check is carried out by internal assessors from the Joint Secretariat and IF NEED/ IF CASE Info Points.

4.2.2 Quality assessment of the Full Application

The quality assessment is the second step of the FA assessment. As for the CN quality assessment, in order to provide high quality, impartial and professional assessment, the quality assessment, technical and financial, is performed by external independent experts, contracted by the Managing Authority. This attribute may be delegated to JS. The experts are organized in teams, two-expert teams, selected for each Investment priority. The main steps to be followed by the external assessors within the quality assessment of the Application are:

- Each contracted and selected assessor will carefully analyse the Full Application and all the annexes, will evaluate individually every assigned FA and will

complete the Quality assessment grid awarding points for each criterion and making comments to justify the awarded score for each criterion, as indicated in detail in the relevant evaluation grid.

- If certain information is not very clear, supplementary clarifications, but not completions, may be requested only once during the quality assessment. After analysing the received clarifications from the LA, each assessor completes the evaluation grid (Annex 3) for every project and concludes either the project proposal is formally compliant or not.
- The assessors will calculate the total score for each Application and will decide if it is or not recommended for support.
- If there are major differences between the scores awarded for an Application by the two external assessors, as describes in Chapter 4.2.4. the president of the AWG may organise a reconciliation meeting with both assessors.
- In case the reconciliation fails, the AWG president, with the agreement of the MA, will appoint a third assessor for quality assessment.
- The third assessor will evaluate and score the Application, independently from the previous two assessors.

In the **FA Quality assessment grid** (Annex 3) there are several sets of criteria to be assessed:

- A. Project management (maximum 20 points)
- B. Communication activities (maximum 10 points)
- C. Work Plan (maximum 25 points)
- D. Impact and sustainability (maximum 25 points)
- E. Budget (maximum 20 points)

The FA Quality assessment grid explains in detail what relevant information needs to be assessed and the maximum score to be awarded. Each contracted and selected assessor will evaluate individually every assigned FA and will complete the FA Quality assessment grid awarding points for each criterion and making comments to justify the awarded score for each criterion, as indicated in detail in the grid. In the Full Application phase the maturity of the project proposal is assessed.

The assessors will complete the Comments column for every quality criterion, in order to justify the awarded score.

A. Project management

In assessing the **project management**, the assessors will take into account that, flagship projects are projects of significant complexity and the capacity of the partners

is of high importance in the efficient and sustainable management of the projects. Therefore, the Programme strongly recommends avoiding the externalization of the project management. Moreover, maximum score will be granted only to applications ensuring the management staff.

B. Communication activities

Communication criterion is fulfilled if the communication objectives are clearly linked to the project specific objectives; the approach and tactics chosen are appropriate in order to reach communication objectives; communication activities and deliverables are appropriate in order to reach the relevant target groups and stakeholders.

C. Work Plan

The proposed activities mentioned in the **Work plan** and the corresponding deliverables are relevant, clearly provide benefits for the programme area and lead to the planned main outputs and results. If justified, activities outside the programme area are allowed, up to maximum 10% from the financial support requested from ERDF, but:

No investment shall be placed outside the eligible area!

D. Impact and sustainability

When assessing **Impact and sustainability** of project proposals, the assessors should award higher score to projects implementing positive specific measures to clearly promote horizontal themes. However, accomplishing the minimum requirements of law in the fields of promotion of equal opportunities and non-discrimination, equality between men and women and sustainable development is mandatory and will not be extra scored.

E. Budget

The financial allocation per **budget** lines should be in line with the work plan and the distribution of the budget per period should be also in line with the work plan.

The assessors should read carefully the Guide for applicants for flagship projects, Annex III. Programme rules on eligibility of expenditures, in order to properly assess the expenditures for activities. Some costs can be included in different budget lines (i.e. license fee for the use of software needed for the project, annual insurances for vehicles purchased and used for implementation of project tasks etc.) therefore the assessors should check that the project partners have budgeted properly every activity/item.

Under External expertise and services costs, external services contracts cannot be concluded with employees directly employed by the Beneficiaries. Project beneficiaries / Associated Partners or their staff cannot be contracted as an external expert or a subcontractor. In case of Romanian Beneficiaries only service contracts can be concluded, civil contracts are not acceptable.

Assessors shall also analyse if costs are realistic for the activities to be implemented and make proposals for budget cuts, if it is the case. Proposals for budget cuts have to be accompanied by a sound justification.

The assessors should take into account that **revenue generating projects** may be financed under the restricted Call for proposals. However, it must be kept in mind that the goals of Interreg V-A Romania – Hungary Programme relate to general public interests and well-being, thus envisaging and strongly encouraging not for-profit activities.

The EU Regulations applicable to 2014-2020 period do not provide for a definition of "revenue" as only "net revenue" needs to be taken into account for the calculation of eligible expenditure.

Net-revenues are not eligible.

According to Article 61 CPR (EU Regulation No. 1303/2013) "net revenue means cash inflows directly paid by users for the goods and services provided by the operation, such as charges borne directly by the users for the use of infrastructure, sale or rent of land or buildings, or payments for services less any operating costs and replacement costs of short-life equipment incurred during the corresponding period."

In the FA the applicants have to mention if their project is revenue generating (please see the Budget section of the Application from eMS). More details are mentioned in the Guide for applicants for flagship projects, Chapter 1.5 Revenue Generating Projects.

4.2.3 Clarifications

During quality assessment:

- One round of clarifications is allowed;
- Assessors may not contact the applicants under any circumstances.

If certain information is not very clear, supplementary clarifications, but not completions, may be requested only once during the quality assessment. Both appointed assessors for evaluation of the FA, need to agree on every clarification

mentioned in the letter. If necessary, the AWG president may organize a conciliation session.

When the final wording is agreed, it is sent to the AWG secretary who will send the letter to LA. The Lead Applicant is invited to submit the information within a deadline of maximum **5 working days**.

In case the Lead Applicant does not provide the supplementary clarifications within the deadline, the Full Application will be assessed based on the initial information.

After analyzing the received clarifications from the LA, each assessor completes the evaluation grid for every project and scores each assessment criterion. The assessors will complete the *Comments column* for every quality criterion, in order to justify the awarded score. Also, the assessors can make recommendations regarding any aspects to be followed in the next steps (selection, contracting, implementation of the projects, budget cuts, etc.).

The assessors will calculate the total score for each FA and will decide if the FA is or not recommended for support. The assessor's decision is justified in the grid, where not only the total score is calculated but reasons for the decision are also completed.

Please see Annex 3, FA Quality assessment grid, for more indications, completed under the Comments field, on where to find relevant information for every criterion.

The final score for each FA is calculated by the AWG president who processes the external assessors' assessment grids, as the average of the scores awarded by both assessors.

MA/JS reserves the right to request clarification in case there is inconsistency between the points awarded and the comments justifying the score given by the assessor or the right to reject those assessment grids that are non-compliant with all the criteria analyzed or where written justification provided is not sufficiently detailed.

4.2.4 Reconciliation

In case reconciliation meeting is necessary, proceedings are similar as for the CN, described in chapter 4.1.4 Quality assessment of the Concept Note, in the situations a), b) and d).

In case the reconciliation fails, the AWG president, with the agreement of the MA, will appoint a third assessor for quality assessment. The third assessor will evaluate and score the FA, independently from the previous two assessors.

For situations described under situation a) the final score for the FA will be the average between the similar two awarded scores, above or under the threshold. For the situations described under b) and d), the final score is the average between all the three awarded scores. Therefore, for every FA, the final score will either recommend or not the Application for support.

For Full Application phase, the projects proposed for financing are those projects which have obtained a score above the minimum threshold of **65 points (out of 100 points)** in the quality assessment and whose budgets contain eligible expenses which do not exceed the limit set forth for the restricted Call.

MA/JS reserves the right to request clarification when there is inconsistencies between the between points awarded and comments justifying the score given by the assessor or reject those assessment grids that are non-compliance for all criteria analyzed or where written justification provided is not sufficient detailed.

After completing the final grids, each evaluator will prepare an analysis report for each assessed FA. It will include a synthesis of the main conclusions derived from the assessment, based on the criteria considered in the grid, namely efficiency, effectiveness, relevance and budget. The reports will be prepared and delivered electronically at the end of each FA assessment to GLE President. Their transmission to the SC in printed form will be made before the submission of the Final Working Report.

4.2.5 Selection of the Full Applications

The AWG will process the external experts' evaluation grids and calculate the final score for each FA, ranking the project proposal in descending order, on each Ip. The projects which have scored less than 65 points in the FA phase are deemed rejected.

Whereas there are firm recommendations of the external assessors impacting / conditioning the approval and contracting of a FA, the respective project may be put forth for approval by the MC "under conditions".

When FA Quality Assessment step is finalized, the president and the secretary will complete the Assessment Report and send it via eMS to MA for approval and to the NA for consultation. After the approval of the MA, the JS will launch the procedure for the MC meeting for the selection of the projects. The Monitoring Committee will approve the list of all the evaluated FA, in a descending order according to the scores that have been granted, as well as the list of rejected projects, per Ip.

4.2.6 Audit trail for Full Applications

The duration of the assessment process of the FA, until the approval of the Evaluation Report will be maximum 3-4 months. The Quality assessment process includes the following activities and deadlines to be followed by the external quality assessors:

No.	Activity	Responsible	Time allocated for activity (working days)	Documents
1	Participating in the initial meeting, at the headquarters of the Contracting Authority	AWG President, external assessors	1	Attendance list
2	Individual quality assessment of FA /Ip	AWG external assessor	max.2	Completed quality assessment grids (Annex 3)
3	Asking for clarification (if the case)	AWG president, secretary	1	Letters to Lead Applicants, Annex 5
4	Analysis of the written answers received from LA if necessary, completion evaluation grids;	AWG external assessors	1	Quality assessment grids, printed and signed;
5	Conciliation (if the case)	AWG President	1	Completed quality assessment grids, minutes of conciliation
6	Elaborating the analysis report for each assessed CN; submission to AWG President	AWG external assessors	1	Analysis report (Annex 6)

4.3 Complaints

If the outcomes of the quality assessment of the project proposal do not correspond to the information provided by the Lead Applicant, it is possible that a complaint will be filed.

The complaints, if there are any, will be settled by a Complaint Panel, nominated by MA.

The complaints will be examined and assessed following the procedure for a regular CN/FA. The four-eye principle is applied in the assessment process of a complaint.

The assessors will provide an Analysis Report which will address, individually for each Application, a well-founded written point of view resulting from the analysis of the arguments underlying the complaints submitted by the applicants regarding the performance and/or the results of the quality assessment process (technical-financial).

4.4 Archiving

CN/FA assessment related documents will be archived to the administrative file of each Application, including clarification letters and the relevant answers. The individual grids, printed and signed by each assessor will be attached to and archived with the Evaluation Report. The evaluation documents will be also archived automatically and/or electronically in eMS.

4.5 Reporting requirements

After completion of the assessment process, each assessor will elaborate a report of his activity. The report will contain all the Applications that were assessed by the assessor, a summary of the main conclusions derived from the assessment, the grids printed and signed by the assessor, etc.). The report will be printed and signed by the assessor and endorsed by the contract manager⁵ from the company with whom was signed the service contract for quality assessment.

⁵ The contract manager appointed by the company that was selected for external services for quality assessment

ANNEXES

Annex 1: Declaration of confidentiality and impartiality and on conflict of interest

Annex 2: CN Quality assessment grid

Annex 3: FA Quality assessment grid

Annex 4: User's Manual for eMS

Annex 5: Clarifications letter

Annex 6: Analysis report

Annex 7: Methodology and criteria for assessment and selection of projects