

ASSESSMENT and SELECTION METHODOLOGY

TARGETED CALL FOR THE OPERATIONS OF STRATEGIC
IMPORTANCE UNDER

INTERREG VI-A ROMANIA-HUNGARY PROGRAMME

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List of abbreviations

AWG	Assessment Working Group
BRECO	Oradea Regional Office for Cross Border Cooperation Romania-Hungary
Jems	Joint Electronic Monitoring System
RO-HU Programme	Interreg VI-A Romania-Hungary Programme
P	Priority
IP	Info Point
JS	Joint Secretariat
LA	Lead Applicant
MA	Managing Authority for Interreg VI-A Romania-Hungary within MDPWA
MC	Monitoring Committee
MDPWA	Ministry of Development, Public Works and Administration
NA	National Authority

INTRODUCTION

The present document is addressed to external and internal evaluators and other relevant actors involved in the **assessment and selection process** of project proposals submitted in the framework of the INTERREG VI-A ROMANIA – HUNGARY Programme, hereinafter referred to as the Interreg Programme.

It provides users with information and practical details related to the assessment procedure, such as basic principles, involved actors, setting up assessment working group, designation of evaluators, assessment and selection process, and timeframe.

The document is approved by the Monitoring Committee.

1. GENERAL CONTEXT

All applications will be assessed and selected according to the criteria approved through the relevant MC Decision regarding the related Call documents.

The applications are submitted online, using the Jems system.

The applications will be assessed from the quality (technical and financial) and from the formal and eligibility point of view.

With reference to Chapter 4 of the Interreg Programme document: *Selecting of operations will be carried out through assessment with the involvement of external evaluators relevant for the field of interventions, from both sides of the border, working in mixed pairs (1 RO and 1 HU), to ensure the territorial, legal and holistic embeddedness and synergies with the national and local state of play.*

Fulfillment of formal and eligibility criteria will be checked by the JS/IP. In accordance with the internal work procedures, MA delegates to JS the contracting of the RO external evaluators. The contracting of the HU external evaluators is ensured by the Ministry of Foreign Affairs and Trade, Hungary, which acts as the National Authority in the ROHU Programme.

The overall aim is to select high-quality projects with clear added value to the development of the Programme Area and definite cross-border impact.

1.1 Principles

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

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

Furthermore, the projects shall demonstrate the following characteristics:

- Sustainability and justified demand;
- Cost-efficiency;
- Added value;
- Cross-border Impact;
- Equal opportunities and non-discrimination.

1.2 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 Programme. In this respect, the assessors and all actors involved in the assessment process will sign a Declaration of confidentiality and impartiality and on conflict of interest (Annex 1/1.1). They will also be briefed regarding this issue and the consequences of non-compliance. The declaration will be electronically archived.

Under no circumstances may an evaluator 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 evaluators) 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 involved in the assessment and selection process will ensure that all the documents submitted by project applicants under the relevant Call are kept confidential. All the evaluators should keep in mind that the content of the project proposals may not be printed, published, or forwarded to persons or institutions, that are not directly engaged in the project assessment or decision-making process, especially not to project applicants or the wider public.

All actors within the assessment process 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 and European legislation on the protection of personal data will be respected.

The evaluator may be excluded from the Assessment Working Group if:

- Not declaring confidentiality and conflict of interest;
- Violating confidentiality and impartiality during the assessment process;
- Failing to fulfil obligations;
- Delayed assessment;
- Providing inadequate assessment service (incorrect and/or incomplete assessment and/or non-compliance/ignorance of applicable legislation /procedures /instructions).

2. PROCESS OF ASSESSMENT AND SELECTION

2.1. Creating a pool of external evaluators

In line with the Interreg Programme document, independent external evaluators from Romania and Hungary will be ensured based on the jointly agreed professional criteria/requirements. The requirements that external evaluators should meet are:

- university level degree certified by diploma or other document of same legal value;
- experience in performing quality assessment (or equivalent) of project proposals under national, European, or international funding programmes, ideally in transnational/interregional/cross-border cooperation programmes;
- very good command of the English language (written, spoken);
- computer skills.

The above criteria are cumulative and shall be proved by professional experience and/or studies, as presented in the Europass format CV. Relevant supporting documents might be requested if considered necessary.

Following the submission of the CVs with necessary documentation, they will be assessed against the agreed criteria and the pool of external evaluators will be set up.

The internal evaluator pairs (JS and IP) for administrative and eligibility check, as well as the pool of external evaluators (1 RO + 1 HU) are to be approved by the MA and NA.

The assignment of external evaluators to each application will be managed between the Head of JS, the Head/deputy of MA, and the Head/deputy of NA.

2.2. Setting up AWG

An Assessment Working Group for the Call shall be set up.

The AWG is composed of:

- Chair – within JS (usually the Head of JS)
- Secretary – within JS/BRECO
- External evaluators for quality assessment
- Internal evaluators for administrative and eligibility check
- MA/NA observers

After nomination, all AWG members shall sign the relevant *Declaration of confidentiality and impartiality and on conflict of interest* (Annex 1/ Annex 1.1).

The internal and external evaluators shall participate in the initial AWG meeting, organized by the Joint Secretariat (possibly online), regarding the quality (technical/financial) assessment requirements, the administrative and eligibility check, and the use of Jems, serving also as a training.

The purpose of the initial AWG meeting is to:

- present to evaluators the main rules for the assessment process;
- set a detailed calendar for the assessment exercise, including the deadline for closing the assessment exercise and intermediary targets, taking into account the Applicant's Guide and the number of submitted applications;
- discuss the common and mandatory approach for the evaluators about specific situations that may occur during the exercise, particularly in relation to the verification of administrative and eligibility criteria; if needed, instructions and recommendations will be issued by MA, after previous consultation with NA, where the case;
- deciding on organizational issues, on possible future working meetings between AWG members and MA/NA to discuss the progress and provide supplementary guidance.

External evaluators will participate at the initial AWG meeting at only those agenda points which are relevant for carrying out their tasks (e.g., orientation, main rules, calendar).

The minutes of the initial AWG meeting will be communicated to all participants.

2.3. Basic rules for assessment

In order to ensure e-cohesion, the assessment will be performed using the [Jems](#) system.

In order to ensure integrity and coherency, the four-eye principle is applied in the assessment process.

The internal and external evaluators shall:

- have good knowledge of the Interreg Programme and at least one of its thematic fields and the Applicant's Guide;
- have good knowledge of the Assessment and Selection Methodology (which shall be provided by the JS at the beginning of the assessment process);
- follow the instructions provided in the Methodology and/or in the relevant initial AWG meeting;
- use the Jems and assess the applications according to the quality / Administrative and eligibility Assessment Grids, as annexed to the Applicant's Guide;
- know the content and structure of the application form;
- immediately inform the BRECO or MFA in Hungary if during the assessment, she/he discovers being directly or indirectly connected with an application, that she/he has been asked to evaluate and which impairs her/his impartiality;
- follow the deadlines for finalizing the assessment of the assigned applications;
- be available (by video conferencing platforms, email, or phone) for the Assessment Working Group meetings if further explanations on their work are required. As for the

frequency, generally, one initial AWG meeting is envisaged per submission deadline, and 1 closing AWG meeting per SO under the relevant Call;

- ensure reliability and commitment to deliver high-quality outputs in due time;
- register and activate its user account in the Jems.

2.1 Quality Assessment of the Application

In the **quality assessment grid**, there are seven sets (A. to G.) of criteria to be assessed, grouped in 2 main categories, strategic criteria (A. to E.) and operational criteria (F. and G.).

The quality assessment grid explains in detail what relevant information needs to be assessed for every criterion and maximum points to be awarded. The purpose of the quality assessment is to provide the MC members with sufficient information on how each of the project proposals complies with the quality assessment criteria.

The quality grid is annex of the Applicant's Guide approved by the MC.

Based on the Jems access rights, each evaluator will independently assess every assigned Application and fill in the Jems quality assessment grid, carrying out the assigned duties and performing cross-checks of the information included in the application forms (correlation between different sections and its annexes, as applicable).

The evaluators shall appraise each (sub)criterion with a score, highlighting the strengths and weaknesses of the application, strongly and clearly justifying the score awarded, and providing assessment conclusions per each criterion. Evaluators are expected to comment on each criterion and explicitly refer to the elements of analysis under the relevant criteria.

In case of insufficient information for a correct qualitative assessment or if certain information is not very clear, supplementary **clarifications**, but not completions¹, may be requested only once during the quality assessment (*Annex 2- Clarification Letter*). The AWG secretary will collect the questions formulated by the external evaluators, harmonize the content of the clarification letter and send it to the Lead Applicant. Evaluators may not contact the applicants under any circumstances.

The Lead Applicant will have maximum **5 working days** from the receipt of the clarification letter to answer.

After analyzing the received clarifications/completions, each evaluator will finalize the assessment grid in Jems.

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

The evaluators can make recommendations (including budget cuts, if necessary) regarding any aspect to be followed in the next steps (selection, contracting, implementation of the projects), if the case. The recommendations made by the 2 evaluators of the same team in relation to a

¹ Except for mandatory documents to be submitted with the Application and which are necessary for its technical and financial assessment.

certain application will be agreed upon between the evaluators before being included in the relevant section of Jems.

In the context of the quality assessment, a **reconciliation** might be needed. The Chair of the AWG may organize a reconciliation meeting with both evaluators, in the following situations:

- a. One evaluator awards the Application a total score above the threshold (70 for OSIs), but the other evaluator awards a score below it, if the average score is below 70;
- b. The difference between the total scores awarded for an Application by the two evaluators is more than **10** points;

The reconciliation will be arbitrated by the Chair and proceed as a free discussion. The Chair will present in detail the Quality Assessment Criteria and each evaluator will provide reasoning for their assessment. If the discrepancies specified above remain unresolved after reconciliation, a re-assessment will be conducted by two additional evaluators appointed by the Management Authority. It is important to note that in the event of a re-assessment, the final score will be the average of the two new scores awarded.

The evaluators shall formulate their comments/recommendations in English and shall pay particular attention to clarity, consistency, and appropriate level of detailing, observing the proportionality in terms of activities versus efficient financial management, and instead of expressions like "it seems that, it looks like....., project activities could lead to ..., it is possible to reach the outcome or results, the project budget seems to be overestimated etc." clear explanations in detail and professional opinions shall be provided.

External evaluators shall ensure their availability to review their Assessment grids in the following indicative, but non-exhaustive cases:

- comments do not correspond to scores given in the assessment grid (incoherence);
- assessment grids contain formulation or expressions that are vague, as indicated as examples in the previous paragraph;
- the comments and recommendations do not sufficiently justify the awarded score(s);
- failure to apply the assessment rules established in the relevant Applicants' Guide / Assessment and Selection Methodology;
- grids are of low quality showing superficial consideration of the application.

Only projects with a total average score of at least 70 points (out of a total of 100) and can be further considered for financing, subject to fulfilling the administrative and eligibility criteria

To obtain the maximum score, OSI must meet at least five of the criteria under section B (and minimum 1 from each of the sub-sections B.1 and B.2 of the quality assessment grid – Annex D.1 to the Applicant's Guide) and provide robust evidence of how it will meet (and measure progress towards) these standards of practice in cross-border cooperation.

AWG meetings shall be called when necessary, during the assessment process, but a closing one is mandatory, to summarize the results of the quality assessment process. Minutes are prepared accordingly.

2.2 Administrative and Eligibility Check (AEC)

The administrative and eligibility check is carried out by internal evaluators, namely Joint Secretariat and Info Points. Project proposals will be checked on admissibility and completeness, against the defined administrative criteria. Also, project proposals will be checked against defined minimum eligibility criteria. Each internal evaluator fills in the Administrative and eligibility assessment grid in Jems for every project.

The Administrative and eligibility grid is annex of the Applicant's Guide approved by the MC.

The purpose of the AEC is to:

- Verify that the proposal fulfils the minimum requirements of the Programme;
- Ensure equal treatment of all proposals to be selected for funding.

Failure to comply with the formal requirements (administrative compliance) and established eligibility criteria will lead to the rejection of the project proposal.

The AEC will run in parallel with the quality assessment. Within the administrative and eligibility check, JS may request **clarifications** and/or **completions** in 2 (two) rounds. The requests will be made in writing to the Lead Applicant (Annex 2 – *Clarification Letter*), who will have 5, respectively 4 working days from the receipt of the clarification letter to submit the necessary documents/clarifications.

The JS will provide assistance to the applicants, in case they need clarification on the content of the requests formulated with regards to their application.

If the deadline is not met, or the documents/clarifications submitted are not satisfactory or prove non-compliance with the formal and eligibility requirements, option NO shall be ticked and the project proposal will be proposed for rejection.

The AEC for an Application should not exceed 1 working day.

The Chair of the AWG may organize a reconciliation meeting with both internal evaluators in case they have diametrically opposed views on the result of the AEC assessment for the Application. In case the reconciliation fails, the AWG Chair will appoint a third evaluator for re-assessment.

Grids will be finalized by the internal evaluators working in pairs.

2.3 Closing the assessment process

When the assessment process is finalized², the AWG Chair convenes the closing AWG meeting between the Chair, MA, and NA and sums up and presents the result. The Secretary will complete the Assessment Report accordingly and submit it to the MA for approval and to the NA for consultation. After MA's approval, the JS will call the MC for the selection of the project(s).

² AWG closing meetings could be organized per Specific Objective, depending on the progress of the assessment process, to accelerate the selection of projects.

2.4. Selection process

The OSIs will be selected by the Monitoring Committee, conditioned by reaching the minimum score of 70 points and fulfilling the eligibility criteria.

Complaints shall be accepted and treated as provided by section 4.3 of the Applicant's Guide.

The decision of the Monitoring Committee is followed by the contracting phase.

3. AUDIT TRAIL

Step	Responsible	No. of days	Documents
Set up of the Assessment Working Group	MA/NA/JS/IP/ AWG Members	1	MA Decision
Initial AWG meeting & request for Jems user roles	MA/NA/AWG Members	1	Minutes of the meeting and List of assigned applications per assessor
Quality/AEC assessment	AWG Evaluators	2	Quality/AEC Grids
Clarification round(s)*	AWG Chair/Secretary	1	Clarification Letters
Quality/AEC assessment following clarifications	AWG Evaluators	1	Quality/AEC Grids – after clarifications
Quality/AEC Assessment Grids centralization	AWG Chair/ Secretary	1	Consolidated Quality /AEC Grids / Notification on reconciliation
Reconciliation	AWG Chair, Evaluators	1	Minutes of the reconciliation meeting
Reassessment/revision (following reconciliation)	AWG Evaluators	1	Quality/AEC Grids – following reconciliation
Quality/AEC Grids centralization following reconciliation, with final scores and agreed recommendations	AWG Chair/ Secretary	1	Consolidated Quality/AEC Grids Application(s) proposed for selection / reserve list / rejection
AWG Meeting –closure	MA/NA/AWG Members	1	Minutes of the meeting
Calling the MC for project(s)' selection	MA/NA/JS	1	Invitation and supporting documents
MC Decision communicated to the Lead Applicant	JS	1	Notification on selection/reserve list/rejection (Annex 3)
Complaints			
Complaint Panel (CP)	MA/NA/JS/IP CP Members	1	MA Decision
Complaint analysis	CP Members	1	Complaint Resolution (CR)
MC notification on CR	JS/MC	1	MC Decision approving the CR
MC Decision on CR communicated to the Lead Applicant	JS	1	Notification on MC Decision on CR

*In case of AEC phase, there are 2 rounds of completions/clarifications

NOTE! To this timeframe, other necessary deadlines are to be considered, either for the clarification rounds or related to MA / MC approvals.

4. ARCHIVING

All assessment-related documents will be electronically archived.

5. ANNEXES

Annex 1&1.1 - Declaration of confidentiality and impartiality and on conflict of interest

Annex 2 - Clarifications letter template

Annex 3 – Lead Applicant Notification