



TERMS OF REFERENCE

to expand pool of experts ('assessors') to assist in the evaluation of grant applications received in the framework of the call for proposals within the Cross-border Cooperation Programme – Montenegro – Albania and Montenegro – Kosovo* 2014-2020 under the Instrument for Pre-accession Assistance (IPA II)

* This designation is without prejudice to positions on status, and is in line with UNSCR 1244 and the ICJ Opinion on the Kosovo Declaration of Independence

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1. BACKGROUND INFORMATION

The European Integration Office (EIO) of Montenegro, in cooperation with the Ministry of Finance of Montenegro - Directorate for Finance and Contracting of the EU Assistance Funds (CFCU) and in association with the Ministry for Europe and Foreign Affairs of the Republic of Albania (MEFA) 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 2014-2020. These CBC programmes are funded under the Instrument for Pre-Accession Assistance 2014-2020 (IPA II) and are implemented through the respective grant schemes in the border regions between Montenegro, Albania 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.

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

1. Encouraging tourism, culture and natural heritage;
2. Protecting the environment, promoting climate change adaptation and mitigation, risk prevention and management;
3. Promoting employment, labour mobility and social and cultural inclusion across the border.

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

1. Promoting employment, labour mobility and social and cultural inclusion across the border;
2. Protecting the environment, promoting climate change adaptation and mitigation, risk prevention and management;
3. Encouraging tourism and cultural and natural heritage.

More details about Cross-Border Cooperation Programmes Montenegro – Albania and Montenegro – Kosovo 2014-2020 can be found in the programme documents downloadable at the following links of the programmes' web pages: <https://www.cbc-mne-alb.org/tacka-custom/tacka-media/documents/2014-2020-ipa-cbc-montenegro-albania.pdf> and <https://cbc-mne-kos.org/wp-content/uploads/2017/08/2014 - 2020 ipa cbc montenegro-kosovo.pdf>.

2. OBJECTIVE, PURPOSE & EXPECTED RESULTS

2.1. Overall objective

To expand existing pool of assessors to assist the Joint Evaluation Committee (JEC) in the selection of the best proposals under upcoming Calls for Proposals within the Cross-border Cooperation Programmes Montenegro – Albania and Montenegro – Kosovo 2014-2020 under the Instrument for Pre-accession Assistance (IPA II) 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.

2.2. Results to be achieved by the contractor

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

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

3. SCOPE OF THE WORK

3.1. General

External assessors will be engaged to carry out detailed examination/evaluation of all those applications that after submission 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 within these two programmes.

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

Only chairperson and secretary of the Joint 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 Contracting Authority (CFCU) by the appointed Joint 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 Joint Evaluation Committee in its deliberations.

The evaluation grids should be completed in English language.

3.2. Specific activities

Assessors are bound by a declaration of impartiality and confidentiality¹ to be signed before starting each phase of the assessment. If an assessor believes that there might be a situation of conflict of interests in relation to applicants and/or co-applicant/s as well as affiliated entities, he/she must declare it immediately. He/she will have to immediately withdraw from the evaluation of the concerned proposal. The employees of the institutions which form the Operational Structures mentioned in Section 1 (Background information of these Terms of Reference) may not be engaged as assessors. All assessors are required to uphold the integrity of the evaluation process. No information about any aspect of the assessment may be disclosed to any third party outside the evaluation committee.

(1) Role and tasks of assessors

The assessors must possess technical and administrative capacities necessary to provide an informed opinion on the concept notes and the full applications concerned. They shall perform their duties in a fair and impartial manner, maintaining strict adherence to the relevant EU rules, including those on impartiality, confidentiality and conflict of interest.

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

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

The assessments must be undertaken in accordance with the guidelines and instructions provided by the Joint 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 shall participate in meetings of the Joint Evaluation Committee to explain and elaborate their opinion and the marks they have awarded to the grant applications evaluated, namely 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;

¹ A standard document will be made available by the Contracting Authority.

- 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 JEC/Contracting Authority (CFCU);
- A re-assessment of project proposals upon the request of the JEC/Contracting Authority (CFCU).

(2) Role and tasks of the evaluation committee

The Joint Evaluation Committee is appointed by the Contracting Authority (CFCU) comprising a non-voting chairperson, a non-voting secretary and an odd number of voting members (minimum of three). Its role is to advise the Contracting Authority (CFCU) on contract award in accordance with pre-established criteria.

The chairperson is responsible for coordinating the evaluation process in accordance with the procedures defined in the practical guide and JEC 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.

Assessors work under the supervision of the chairperson of the Joint Evaluation Committee.

Should the assessments not satisfy the quality expected by the Contracting Authority (CFCU), it may return the applications to the contractor and ask for a re-assessment by the same or another expert.

In case an assessment is rejected by JEC due to insufficient quality, the European Integration Office, being the Contracting body for contracts with assessors, (EIO) reserves the right not to approve payment for assessment of that project proposal.

4. LOGISTICS AND TIMING

4.1. Location

The assessors will work in camera, in the premises of CFCU in Podgorica, Montenegro, under the supervision of the Chair and Secretary of the JEC. The evaluation by the Joint Evaluation Committee will be performed in Podgorica, Montenegro. The assessors will be asked to be present at the Joint Evaluation Committee meetings and their work shall be performed in camera, in the premises of the Contracting Authority (CFCU).

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 specific Call for Proposal 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 this assignment at the moment of signing his/her contract. Whenever an assessor is not available any more for the execution of the tasks for which

he/she was hired, the Contracting Authority (CFCU) will replace him/her with one or more of the candidates at the top of reserve list compiled after the recruitment procedure.

5. REQUIREMENTS

5.1. Staff

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

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).

Assessors will be asked to perform assessment of project applications in the Ministry of Finance of Montenegro - Directorate for Finance and Contracting of the EU Assistance Funds (CFCU) in Podgorica, which is acting as Contracting Authority of the calls.

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.

5.1.1. Assessors

Minimum requirements for candidates include the following:

Qualifications and skills:

- University degree;
- Excellent knowledge of English language²;
- Computer literacy;
- Good analytical and writing skills;
- Proficiency in report drafting.

General professional experience:

- At least 6 (six) years of general working experience.

Specific professional experience:

- At least 3 (three) years of relevant working experience related to one or more of following sectors:
 - ✓ Encouraging tourism, culture and natural heritage;
 - ✓ Protecting the environment, promoting climate change adaptation and mitigation, risk prevention and management;
 - ✓ Promoting employment, labour mobility and social and cultural inclusion across the border.
- Experience in evaluation and/or assessment of calls for proposals for grant projects, preferably under EU assistance programmes;
- Good knowledge of the Instrument for Pre-Accession Assistance (IPA);
- Good knowledge of the PRAG – Procurement and Grants for European Union external actions – A Practical Guide, especially grant related procedures.

Assets:

- Experience in project implementation, preferably under EU assistance programmes

Candidates will be appraised against the selection criteria based on data provided in the CV. If the candidate fulfils minimum requirements listed above based on the data provided in the CV, he/she will proceed with interviews and tests. Candidates will be scored both on interviews and on tests.

- The CV should be no longer than 4 pages. In case of CVs longer than 4 pages, only the content of the first 4 pages will be taken into account. At a later phase and prior to the signature of their contract, successful candidates will be expected to document the relevant qualifications and experience in their CVs with copies of diplomas and certificates of employers. Whenever an assessor is not able to provide the necessary documentary evidence, the European Integration Office, 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 case that CV is submitted in any other language, the application will be rejected.

Interviews (which may be conducted in person or via video conference) and written test will aim at confirming the candidates' assessment skills and understanding of project cycle management and logical framework approach as the criteria of key importance for a good project.

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

² Please note that the knowledge of English language will be tested.

5.2. Facilities

N/A

5.3. Incidental expenditure

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

6. REPORTS

6.1. Reporting requirements

During the evaluation process, assessors will provide evaluation grids with scoring, justification and recommendation both electronically and in written form. The written form, signed by the expert, shall be handed over to the Joint 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 final report will be the basis for issuing the final payment by the Contracting Authority of this contract (EIO).

The required formats of the reports will be communicated to the contractor by the European Integration Office, after the signature of the contract.

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