


INTERREG VI-A ROMANIA-BULGARIA PROGRAMME

INVITATION FOR SUBMISSION

Priority 4 *An Integrated region*

-  **Governance project** for supporting the Strategy Board responsible with the development and implementation of the Integrated Territorial Strategy for the Romania-Bulgaria cross-border area under Policy Objective 5 - “A Europe closer to citizens” selected within the INTERREG VI-A Romania Bulgaria Programme



April 2024

Approved through MC decision no 24/23.04.2024



Contents

GENERAL INFORMATION.....	3
CONDITIONS, REQUIREMENTS AND FEATURES	4
1. <i>OBJECTIVES</i>	4
1.1 <i>GENERAL OBJECTIVE</i>	4
1.2. <i>SPECIFIC OBJECTIVES OF THE GOVERNANCE PROJECT</i>	4
2. <i>CONDITIONS</i>	4
3. <i>INDICATIVE ACTIONS</i>	5
4. <i>PROJECT FEATURES</i>	5
5. <i>ELIGIBILITY OF EXPENDITURES</i>	6
6. <i>INDICATORS</i>	7
7. <i>HORIZONTAL ISSUES</i>	8
8. <i>COMMUNICATION AND BRANDING</i>	15
9. <i>LOCATION</i>	16
10. <i>PROJECT DURATION AND BUDGET</i>	16
11. <i>HOW TO APPLY AND THE DEADLINE</i>	17
12. <i>ASSESSMENT AND FUNDING PROCESS</i>	17
13. <i>REPORTING</i>	19
14. <i>APPLICATION FILLING</i>	19
15. <i>MANDATORY DOCUMENTS TO BE SUBMITTED WITH THE APPLICATION FORM (AS ANNEXES)</i>	22
ANNEXES TO THE INVITATION FOR SUBMISSION	23
RELEVANT DOCUMENTS TO BE CONSIDERED WHEN PREPARING THE APPLICATION FORM	23

Approved



GENERAL INFORMATION

The Interreg VI-A Romania Bulgaria Programme is organized along 4 priorities, out of which Priority 4 - *An integrated region (PO5)* is dedicated to finance Policy Objective 5 - *A Europe closer to citizens* by (ii) Fostering the integrated and inclusive social, economic and environmental local development, culture, natural heritage, sustainable tourism and security, in areas other than urban areas.

Policy Objective 5 “*A Europe closer to citizens*” is implemented through the Strategy for Integrated Territorial Development of the Romania-Bulgaria cross-border area, backboneed by EuroVelo6 Route.

The Integrated Territorial Strategy is developed, owned and implemented by the relevant stakeholders from the covered territory, as mentioned by article 29 paragraph 2 of Regulation (EU) 2021/1060. In this regard, a Strategy Board was set-up. The Strategy Board is a partnership structure comprising Romanian and Bulgarian relevant stakeholders from the cross-border region, created with the purpose to elaborate an integrated territorial strategy of the area. The members of the Strategy Board were designated through transparent procedures by the Romania and Bulgaria from a national, regional and local level, covering public institutions, local and regional authorities, NGO’s etc. At the moment, the SB includes 28 members from both countries (14 bodies from each side of the border) and 2 non-voting members.

The main tasks of the SB are:

- to develop the integrated territorial strategy of the area, including the list of operations to be supported by Interreg VI-A Romania-Bulgaria Programme and submit it to the Managing Authority within 18 months from the approval of Interreg VI-A Romania-Bulgaria Programme by European Commission
- to accompany the appraisal of the strategy by the Monitoring Committee
- to ensure the implementation and monitoring of the strategy

The work of the Strategy Board should be supported by a **Permanent Secretariat**, whose tasks will be to offer technical support to the Strategy Board. Following the SB decision no 9/15.03.2024 *Approving the partnership to apply for the Integrated Territorial Strategy Governance project developed to support the Strategy Board activity*, the permanent secretariat shall be composed by representatives of the Ministry of Regional Development and Public Works, Bulgaria and the Cross Border Cooperation Regional Office Călărași for Romania-Bulgaria Border.

This contract provides support for the implementation, monitoring and evaluation of the above mentioned strategy. The invitation is open exclusively for the *Governance Project*.



CONDITIONS, REQUIREMENTS AND FEATURES

1. OBJECTIVES

1.1 General objective

The general objective of this invitation is to develop and finance a *governance project* to support the Strategy Board in fulfilling its main tasks, related to the development, implementation, monitoring and evaluation of the Integrated Territorial Strategy for Romania-Bulgaria cross-border area, for the period 2024-2029 and, possibly, for the period after 2030. The Integrated Territorial Strategy will be dedicated to the integrated development of the border area, addressing various economic and social sectors such as tourism, transport infrastructure, environment, small enterprises, education and skills, etc. The strategy will put the EuroVelo 6 route at its centre, as an opportunity and driver for the integrated economic development of the cross-border area.

1.2. Specific objectives of the Governance Project

The Governance Project shall develop and support the Permanent Secretariat (PS) of the Strategy Board and it will ensure the:

- 🌐 Setting up the Permanent Secretariat (PS) of the Strategy Board;
- 🌐 Development of the Strategy Board`s capacity to implement the ITS;
- 🌐 Support the Strategy Board for developing, implementing, monitoring and evaluating the ITS.

2. CONDITIONS

This invitation is open only to the *Governance Project*. This project is developed and implemented by the following partners:

- 🌐 Lead Partner: Cross Border Cooperation Regional Office Călărași for Romania-Bulgaria Border, Romania;
- 🌐 Partner: Ministry of Regional Development and Public Works, Bulgaria.

Permanent Secretariat (PS) of the Strategy Board, having the role to support the Strategy Board set for the development and implementation of the Integrated Territorial Strategy is set by the two partners.

The tasks of the Lead Partner are provided in article 26 of the Regulation (EU) 2021/1059 of the European Parliament and of the Council.

The tasks, responsibilities and the relations between the lead partner and the partners are included in the partnership agreement (*Annex G Template Partnership Agreement*).

The responsibilities of the lead partner are laid down in detail in the subsidy contract signed with the Managing Authority (*Annex E Template Framework subsidy contract*).



All partners should dispose of the expertise, resources and capacity to fulfil their designated tasks. The partners must state their financial and administrative capacity to manage their share of the project.

The staff (full time or part-time) of the Programme structures, including Joint Secretariat, Managing Authority, National Authority (responsible for the programme units) and national controls, cannot be part of the Permanent Secretariat team.

3. INDICATIVE ACTIONS

The Permanent Secretariat will provide the support for the functioning of the Strategy Board. As such, the Permanent Secretariat will perform administrative support for SB, will support future applicants in projects developed under the ITS, will support SB to monitor and evaluate the ITS implementation and will ensure internal and external communication.

In order to achieve the specific objectives and to support the improvement of the SB capacity to implement the ITS, the project should include at least the following types of actions:

- Support the SB during the development, implementation, monitoring and evaluation of the Integrated Territorial Strategy and of its action plan or list of projects;
- Develop SB administrative capacity through trainings, seminars, etc., on specific topics, relevant for the activity of the SB members
- Support SB in preparing updates of the Strategy or of its action plan or list of projects;
- Support applicants in developing their project ideas or project proposals contributing to the ITS.
- Collect data and monitor the ITS progress and ITS projects' implementation
- Provide information/documents and administrative support to SB members in order to facilitate a smoothly, evidence based decision making process;
- provide information/documents to Programme' structures on ITS implementation;
- ensure the internal and external communication function on SB behalf and under the coordination of the SB Chair/Co-chair;
- provides the external expertise needed for ITS implementation (eg. evaluation of ITS etc.).

Costs generated by the activity of the SB (travel and accommodation, office and administration, services and external expertise) shall be supported by the PS from the budget of the governance project.

The members of the Strategy Board shall be informed about / invited to participate to the activities carried out by the SP under the *Governance Project*.

The list of potential projects identified for the implementation of the strategy should be screened continuously in order to identify the real stage of development of the applications, the intention of the potential beneficiary to develop and submit the proposal.

Contact with potential applicants should be ensured via email or meetings in order to support them in preparing good quality applications and overcome potential barriers in this regard.

4. PROJECT FEATURES

The project must observe, at least the following characteristics:



- 🌐 Be accepted by the Strategy Board (a decision of the SB should be issued in this respect)
- 🌐 Have a cross-border character and impact
- 🌐 Contribute to the Programme indicators
- 🌐 Promote solutions that are friendly with the environment and observe the *Do no significant Harm Principle*
- 🌐 Promote the equal opportunities, transparency and green procurement
- 🌐 Partners must cooperate in the development and implementation of the project, as well as in the staffing or financing, or both, thereof.

! If the project does not have a cross-border character and impact and does not observe the cooperation criteria, it will be rejected.

In case 0 is granted to one of the sub-criteria included into the evaluation grid under 2. *Cooperation character* (Evaluation criteria - phase 2 - quality assessment - technical and financial evaluation and state aid incidence assessment) the assessment process shall stop without further analysis and the project shall be returned for improvement.

Cooperation Criteria

Partners shall cooperate in the development and implementation of Interreg operation, as well as in the staffing or financing, or both, thereof. Thus, in order to be eligible, the project must contribute to at least three out of the following four cooperation criteria.

The mandatory cooperation criteria are:

- 🌐 Joint development
- 🌐 Joint implementation

And at least one of the following criteria (the projects can choose one or both of these criteria):

- 🌐 Joint financing
- 🌐 Joint staffing.

5. ELIGIBILITY OF EXPENDITURES

The project budget should be prepared on the basis of the activities needed to meet the projects' objectives and the resources required to carry out these activities within the time allowed. Only "eligible expenditure" can be taken into account for financial support. More details are included in the list of eligible expenditures for Interreg VI-A Romania-Bulgaria Programme, applicable to the *Governance Project*, Priority 4 *An Integrated Region*.

The eligible costs must be based on real costs, except for the lump sums and flat rates, which are automatically calculated.







The following expenditure categories should be envisaged for this project implementation:

- a) Staff costs;
- b) Office and administrative costs;
- c) Travel and accommodation costs;
- d) External expertise and services costs;



e) Equipment costs;

The following types of costs shall be applied:

-  **Staff costs** - direct costs reimbursed on a real costs principle (supported by documents).
-  **Travel & Accommodation** - costs shall be reimbursed as a flat rate of or up to 15% of the eligible direct staff costs; travel & accommodation costs can be incurred and paid inside or outside the programme area. The travel and accommodation costs of the members of the PS are included under the *travel and accommodation costs*, covered by the flat rate.
-  **Office & administrative costs** - costs shall be reimbursed as a flat rate of or up to 15% of the eligible direct staff costs. The office and administrative costs of the project partners are included under the *Office and administrative costs*, covered by the flat rate.
-  **External expertise and services** - direct costs reimbursed on a real costs principle (supported by documents). The travel and accommodation costs of the SB members are considered as direct costs under the services category.
-  **Equipment** - direct costs reimbursed on a real costs principle (supported by documents). The equipment (laptop and/or desktops, printers, scanners etc.) for equipping the members of the PS are included under the *Office and administration costs*, covered by the flat rate.
-  **Project closure lump sum** of 6,500 Euro (total value)

Under this project the expenditure related to Works and Infrastructure are not eligible. No investments are financed under this project.

The starting date of the eligibility of the expenditures is 1st of January 2021.

! All real costs must be justified based on 2 offers or on an independent evaluation of the prices. Previous similar contracts, print screens from sites, SEAP prices, etc. are also accepted as reference/justification. The costs shall be the average of the 2 offers/contracts etc.

In case the applicant does not submit the 2 offers and/or other contracts (clarifications included, if applicable), nor an independent evaluation, if the case, then the respective amount may be reduced or deducted from the budget, during the assessment and selection phase.

For staff, partners shall include in the application, for each position included in PS, the costs with the gross salary (total value, including all the taxes), set in line with their internal remuneration policy. It is the responsibility of each partner to ensure that the salary defined for each position is in line with the remuneration policy and with the equal treatment principle (*equal pay for equal work*).

6. INDICATORS

The project activities must contribute to the achievement of the project's output and results indicators, as well as the project specific and communication objectives. The activities should contribute to the development of the planned outputs.

In this regard, the project should contribute to the following Programme indicators:



Indicator	Measurement unit	Milestone (2024)	Target (2029)	Indicator	Measurement unit	Target 2029
Output				Result		
RCO76 Integrated projects for territorial development	projects	0	60	RCR84 Organizations cooperating across borders after project completion	organisations	45
RCO87 Organisations cooperating across borders	organisations	0	60			

Project is required to set out an envisaged approach to communication and visibility. Thus, the Project must identify a communication objective(s) and specific communication activities to be integrated. The project partners shall direct the communication and visibility activities towards the promotion of the ITS objectives and results. Communication activities can also contribute to the capitalization of achieved outputs and results of the projects financed under the ITS. Communication activities focused on capitalization should address audiences/target groups that go beyond the partnership and participating regions.

Details on how to approach the communication activities are included in the documents Communication Starter Kit, the Manual for Visual Identity of the Programme and Dare to Go Green!

7. HORIZONTAL ISSUES

The project will have to clearly describe how it will comply with the horizontal principles set in the EU regulations and described in the Programme. This means that horizontal principles and issues should, to the possible extent, be integrated in the project activities, outputs and results, thus ensuring their fulfilment. More details are included in the Project Manual Implementation, available on the Programme website, and the related annexes.

SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT

Sustainable development has three dimensions that interrelate:

- environmental sustainability** - ensuring that natural environment is used in a way that will preserve resources for future generation,
- economic sustainability** - capacity of future generation to earn an income and allow for economic growth,
- social sustainability** - future generation having the same or improved access to social resources such as human rights, political stability.

Choosing the sustainable way means commitment to preserve and protect the environment from potential harmful effects of human interventions and to enforce the safeguard of social, environmental and climate benefits. It requires everyone to make decisions in a way that the economic, ecological and social effects of each decision are taken into account.



Project should follow an “environmental sustainability by design” approach. This means that environmental or broader sustainability considerations effects shall be integrated from the beginning into all activities.







To this end, the project will specify which possible effects (positive, neutral or negative) will likely have on the environment, by considering among others the following aspects: water, soil, air and climate, population and human health, fauna, flora and biodiversity, cultural heritage and landscape. It should also refer to the practices, models, solutions, networks and/or knowledge that shall be created by the project and should live on after the project ends.

Project shall fully respect the Union environmental acquis and national legislation on the matter and they shall be in line with the objective of promoting sustainable development, taking into account the UN Sustainable Development Goals, the Paris Agreement and the “do no significant harm” principle.





For further information on the main environmental protection objectives and their interlinkages with the Programme, please refer also to the Programme strategic environmental assessment (SEA) available here: <https://interregviarobg.eu/assets/2022/11/environmentalreport-en-pdf.pdf>

DO NO SIGNIFICANT HARM (DNSH)

The project activities contribute to one of the six environmental objectives and they are compliant with Do no significant harm objectives:



-  Climate change mitigation
-  Climate change adaptation
-  Sustainable use & protection of water & marine resources
-  Pollution prevention & control
-  Transition to a circular economy
-  Protection and restoration of biodiversity & ecosystems

Article 17 of the Taxonomy Regulation¹, defines the significant harm for the six environmental objectives. Thus, an activity is considered to do significant harm:

-  *to climate change mitigation if it leads to significant greenhouse gas (GHG) emissions;*
-  *to climate change adaptation if it leads to an increased adverse impact of the current climate and the expected future climate, on the activity itself or on people, nature or assets;*
-  *to the sustainable use and protection of water and marine resources if it is detrimental to the good status or the good ecological potential of bodies of water, including surface water and groundwater, or to the good environmental status of marine waters;*
-  *to the circular economy, including waste prevention and recycling, if it leads to significant inefficiencies in the use of materials or in the direct or indirect use of natural resources, or if it significantly increases the generation, incineration or*

¹ <https://eur-lex.europa.eu/legal-content/EN/TXT/?uri=celex:32020R0852>



- disposal of waste, or if the long-term disposal of waste may cause significant and long-term environmental harm;*
-  *to **pollution prevention and control** if it leads to a significant increase in emissions of pollutants into air, water or land;*
 -  *to **the protection and restoration of biodiversity and ecosystems** if it is significantly detrimental to the good condition and resilience of ecosystems, or detrimental to the conservation status of habitats and species, including those of Union interest.*

The project will have to promote solutions that are friendly with the environment and observe the Do No Significant Harm Principle.

When developing the application form and the technical annexes, the applicant must include, if the case, adaptation measures, in this regard please consider at least the measures identified in the Annex DNSH_Interreg VI-A RoBg level for the corresponding to Priority 4.



The adaptation measures included in the *Annex AG_H DNSH_Interreg VI-A RoBg* level are mandatory for the project! Therefore, before designing your project and the technical annexes, please check the adaptation measures identified for the Specific Objective and Priority under the project will be submitted.

Please bear in mind that these are minimum requirements, and they can be complemented with additional ones, depending on the legal requirements and the type of the project.






All these adaptation measures shall be implemented and checked during the project execution. Also, please bear in mind that it is your responsibility to request the service provider/contractor to comply with these requirements and monitor their implementation during the works execution/equipment providing.

As such, the terms of reference for works execution, service and equipment providing should clearly mention the compliance with the “Do No Significant Harm” and the adaptation measures that must be applied.

GO GREEN WITH YOUR PROJECT!

When designing and implementing your project, you can act in many ways to reduce impact on the environment and reduce the carbon footprint. You are thus strongly encouraged to apply energy efficient and sustainable principles to the project activities. In fact, measures reducing the impact on the environment cannot only add value to the project in terms of credibility, but it can also result in lower costs.


















There are several examples about how projects can implement sustainability on the operational level:

-  Carefully consider the impacts of the project activities on economical, ecological and social aspects within the project eligible area targeted;
-  Consider giving priority to using “green infrastructure” solutions over “grey solutions” whenever this is possible;
-  Practice to make your daily working choices the sustainable way;
-  Rethink your meeting habits in order to minimise environmental impact;
-  Practice green procurement.



Guidance on simple greening measures projects can apply to contribute to sustainable development are to be found in the United Nations Environment Programme’s (UNEP) guide to climate neutrality: “kick the habit²” and the UNEP Green meeting Guide³.

Here are some tips you can follow:

-  Go paperless or if you really have to use paper, make it recycled one;
-  Publications should be printed for external communication purposes (if needed only). For electronic publications, a “printer-friendly” version (less colours, more compact text, less pages) should be made available;
-  Use the Programme electronic system and e-mail for communicating with the Programme structures or your project partners;
-  Information on the greening efforts made at the meeting/event is provided electronically prior to, and after the meeting;
-  Materials produced for the events (such as banners, posters, signs, etc.) are designed and written in a generic way to allow them to be reused for other events;
-  A dedicated area is provided for participants to return material that can be re-used (such as badges);
-  Switch to cloud computing;
-  Consider online meetings instead of face-to-face meetings where possible;
-  Modernize your equipment - updating and upgrading your equipment can make a significant difference in how eco-friendly you are;
-  Include environmental criteria in procurement procedures.
-  Operate fuel efficient vehicles (electric or hybrid cars);
-  Give preference to environmentally-friendly mobility options (in particular for short travel distances);
-  Use eco-friendly means of transport or go on foot;
-  If possible, all waste produced at the venue of an event is sorted for recycling and sufficient, well-marked bins are provided in both participants and staff areas;
-  Consider resource efficiency and the use of renewable energy at all levels;
-  Consider near-Zero Energy Building
-  Make use of regional supply chains (reducing supply chain length and CO2 emissions).

For more details, please consult the Project Manual Implementation and the related annex (Dare to go green!⁴)

GREEN PUBLIC PROCUREMENT

The Programme encourages sustainable measures and supports the inclusion of additional `green` criteria in tendering whenever legally possible. Thus, by using your purchasing power

² Kick the Habit: A UN Guide to Climate Neutrality | GRID-Arendal (grida.no) <https://www.grida.no/publications/225>















³ <https://www.unescap.org/sites/default/files/Green%20Meetings%20Participant-guide.pdf>

⁴ <https://interregviarobg.eu/en/implementation-rules>



to choose environmentally friendly goods and services, you can make an important contribution to sustainable consumption and production.






Practicing green procurement involves sourcing goods and services that are produced and supplied in a sustainable way. When you procure goods/services, pay attention to the following aspects or review your procurement policies:

-  Are manufactured in a sustainable fashion
-  Do not contain toxic materials or ozone-depleting substances
-  Can be recycled and/or are produced from recycled materials
-  Are made from renewable materials
-  Do not make use of excessive packaging
-  Are designed to be repairable and not throwaway
-  Here are some examples of green contracts:
-  Energy efficient computers
-  Office furniture from sustainable timber
-  Low energy buildings
-  Recycled paper
-  Cleaning services using ecologically sound products
-  Electric, hybrid or low-emission vehicles
-  Electricity from renewable energy sources



EQUAL OPPORTUNITIES AND NON-DISCRIMINATION

Guaranteeing equal opportunities and preventing discrimination are important principles in project implementation. No one should be discriminated based on sex, racial or ethnic origin, religion or belief, disability, age or sexual orientation. Instead, project activities should, where possible, increase the possibilities of all groups to participate in the activities of the society. Any discrimination based on gender, racial or ethnic origin, religion or belief, disability, age or sexual orientation has to be prevented. Accessibility for persons with disabilities shall be taken into account. At the level of projects, applicants are invited to explain in their application form how their project complies with, and possibly even strengthens, equal opportunities and non-discrimination.

Here are some tips you can follow:

-  *Ensure products, goods, services and infrastructures that are open or provided to the citizens are accessible to all citizens including those with disabilities;*
-  *Accessibility to the physical environment, transport, ICT shall be ensured in order to promote inclusion of disadvantaged groups, including persons with disabilities;*
-  *Guarantee that all communication products (websites, electronic newsletters, publications, etc.) are accessible;*
-  *Use straightforward language that guarantees cognitive accessibility;*
-  *Emphasise social diversity in videos, posters, etc., using people with a variety of profiles to encourage identification among all groups;*



-  *Involve members of minority groups in your activities and/or composition of the project team;*
-  *Take into account the needs of the various target groups at risk of discrimination.*








EQUALITY BETWEEN MEN AND WOMEN

In addition to the general principle of equal opportunities and non-discrimination the programme pays attention to the equality between men and women.

Ensuring equality between men and women means in principle to make possible that everyone, regardless of gender, has the right to work and support themselves, to balance career and family life, and to live without the fear of abuse or violence. Gender equality implies not only equal distribution between men and women in all domains of society. It is also about the qualitative aspects, ensuring that the knowledge and experience of both men and women are used to promote progress in all aspects of society, placing equal value and emphasis on the knowledge and skills of both men and women, including ensuring equal pay for work of equal value.

An assessment will be made of the relevance of gender in the project: does the project take gender into account, does the project have an impact on the equality between men and women, etc. This principle is relevant for all projects and priorities. Equality between men and women is taken into consideration also in projects implementation, for instance when recruiting staff and in all personnel policy. At the level of projects, applicants are invited to explain in their application form how their project complies with, and possibly even strengthens, gender equality.

Here are some **tips you can follow**:

-  *Take into account findings from gender analyses, gender impact assessment, or stakeholders consultation when planning your project;*
-  *Elaborate gender-specific objectives in line with the latest findings and with the objectives of the project and explain how these objectives would be achieved;*
-  *Take into account gender-balanced composition of the project team;*
-  *Ensure the participation of gender experts in teams or groups;*
-  *When organizing events and conferences, give a good balance between women and men speakers;*
-  *Give visibility to gender issues and avoid the use of sexist language and stereotypical or discriminatory images;*
-  *Take into account to promote gender equality through the goods, services or works being purchased (it means that the buyer and supplier examine the impact of all contracted activities on women's and men's needs, interests and concerns, and design and deliver contracts in a way that reduces inequalities).*



NEW EUROPEAN BAUHAUS

The New European Bauhaus⁵ initiative promotes a new lifestyle where sustainability matches style, thus accelerating the green transition in various sectors of the economy such as construction, furniture, fashion and in the society, as well as other areas of our daily life. The aim is to provide all citizens with access to goods that are circular and less carbon-intensive, that support the regeneration of nature and protect biodiversity.

Three core inseparable values guides the New European Bauhaus:

- 🌱 sustainability⁶, from climate goals, to circularity, zero pollution, and biodiversity,
- 🌱 aesthetics, quality of experience and style, beyond functionality,
- 🌱 inclusion, valorizing diversity, equality for all, accessibility and affordability.

The New European Bauhaus initiative constitutes one of the main horizontal issues of the Programme. The applicants are invited to explain in their application form how their project will contribute to implement the New European Bauhaus initiative.

We encourage you to try to integrate, where appropriate, the New European Bauhaus values.


Here are several examples about how projects can implement the New European Bauhaus initiative on different categories:

- 🌱 *Techniques, materials and processes for construction and design - tools that may support design and co-creation for more sustainable building and planning processes;*
- 🌱 *Building in the spirit of circularity - places/physical sites that demonstrate the re-use and recycling of materials, renovations, or buildings planned with full circularity in mind contributing to inclusiveness in relation to their function or accessibility;*
- 🌱 *Solutions for the co-evolution of built environment and nature - showing how the built environment may contribute to the protection of nature and biodiversity, taking into account cultural and social needs, or blending of buildings in landscape, or integration of living nature in construction;*
- 🌱 *Regenerated urban and rural spaces - reconversions of abandoned or challenged areas in cities, upgrading of territories and regions in decline;*
- 🌱 *Preserved and transformed cultural heritage - models of preservation that enhance access to cultural heritage for all, or reconversion of heritage infrastructure with a high social purpose and a low carbon footprint;*
- 🌱 *Reinvented places to meet and share - the development and use of public spaces such as streets, squares and parks; or particularly inspirational models of community centers, community gardens, co-creation places that combine style with a strong social purpose and sustainability;*

⁵For more details regarding the New European Bauhaus you can check The EU'S site: https://europa.eu/new-european-bauhaus/index_en

⁶ For the purpose of the New European Bauhaus initiative, “sustainability” is understood as “environmental sustainability”.



-  *Interdisciplinary education models - models and methods that integrate the values of sustainability, inclusion and aesthetics in the content of the curricula and in the learning process.*

SEA MITIGATION MEASURES AND INDICATORS

When developing and implementing the project, the recommendations and the monitoring indicators set by the Strategic Environmental Assessment Report must be observed. The list of the measures and the monitoring indicators proposed for each type of actions is included in Annex AG_D SEA mitigation measures and indicators.



Please consult the provisions of *Annex AG_D SEA mitigation measures and indicators and other environmental aspects* and consider the proposed measures when developing the project. Details regarding the way these measures were considered by the project partners should be included in the description of the work packages/activities (where relevant). These aspects shall be assessed by the evaluators or followed during the implementation stage.

The Bulgarian partners must observe also the recommendations generated by the Bulgarian legislation, as mentioned in *Annex AG_D SEA mitigation measures and indicators and other environmental aspects*.


8. COMMUNICATION AND BRANDING

Co-funded projects have to acknowledge and promote the ERDF support received in all their activities.

Thus, the communication activities are an essential part of this type of projects. Therefore, the project is required to set out the envisaged approach to communication and visibility of the project. For more details, please see Communication Kit, Visual Identity Manual and Project Implementation Manual.

The communication and the branding actions must be related exclusively to the promotion of the ITS (objectives, content, results etc.).

Limited promotional materials are allowed under the Programme, such as:

-  Pens and pencils
-  (Paper) notebooks
-  Bags (made of sustainable materials like cotton, paper or linen)
-  Cardboard conference folders
-  USB sticks
-  Water bottles / thermos bottles or jars.



The project can choose the promotional items from the Programme list, according to their needs.

However, at this project level, partners may decide to propose maximum 5 promotional items, additional to the Programme list.

All promotional items must respect the green principle and the quantity produced should be reasonable and justified. The costs of a single item should not exceed EUR 50.



All the promotional items must promote the ITS.

9. LOCATION

The Interreg VI-A Romania-Bulgaria Programme supports project activities that are implemented in the Programme area. The partners are asked to demonstrate that the activities have cross-border impact on the Programme area and contribute to the objectives of the Programme.

All the activities, regarding the location, must be in the interest of the Programme, and clearly justified.

As an exception, in duly justified cases, IT equipment (laptops and/or desktops) can be purchased and used outside the Programme area, provided they are used in the interest of the programme and are necessary for implementing the project activities.

10. PROJECT DURATION AND BUDGET

Duration of the contract: 31.12.2029

Budget: maximum 2,500,000 euro, in total (out of which ERDF 2 million)

Financial resources will be provided from Interreg VI-A Romania - Bulgaria Programme under the Priority 4 *An integrated region*.



The project budget must be within the indicative allocation. The Programme will grant maximum the ERDF amount mentioned above.



As a general rule, the value of the grant for the contracted project should not be increased, and the Programme management bodies do not encourage such an approach. However, in exceptional and duly justified cases, and only during the latest stages of Programme implementation, the grant value for this project may be increased⁷ by decision of the Monitoring Committee, based on the proposal made by the Managing Authority, in consultation with the National Authority. The proposal shall consider the Programme status indicators, the availability of funds, the existence or non existence of projects on the reserve list and the Lead Partner's justifications.

If the case, the increase of the value of the contract shall be done in consideration of achieving the objective(s) of the project and its indicators.

The ERDF co-financing rate is 80%. Partners shall ensure the needed co-financing, as set by the national rules:

-  Romanian partners - the 20% of the national co-financing is ensured from the state budget (18%) and partner own contribution (2%)
-  Bulgarian partners - the 20% of the national co-financing is ensured from the state budget (18%) and partner own contribution (2%).

When deciding on the funding of this projects the Monitoring Committee can adjust the funded value so as to ensure the sound financial management of the Programme.

⁷ The new project implementation period and/ or the new grant value may exceed the maximum duration/ value, as specified in the current Applicant Guide.



11. HOW TO APPLY AND THE DEADLINE

The present invitation is organized in “one-step” procedure, exclusively online. The project must be submitted in English language, only through the web-based programme joint electronic monitoring system (Jems) available at <https://jems-robг.mdlpa.ro/>.

JEMS manual provides detailed guidelines on the application for funding process.

The *Governance Project* must be submitted by the lead applicant at the latest by 30th of August, 2024 (13:00 CET).



12. ASSESSMENT AND FUNDING PROCESS

Assessment Process

The project proposal shall be assessed based on standardized procedure which complies with the principles of transparency and equal treatment. The main purpose of the assessment process is to ensure a high quality of the project.

The assessment process shall be carried out by an Assessment Committee (AC) based on the criteria approved by the Monitoring Committee (MC).

The evaluation will be carried out in two phases:

-  Phase 1 - administrative compliance and eligibility check
-  Phase 2 - quality assessment (technical and financial evaluation and state aid incidence assessment)

Verification of the compliance of project application with eligibility criteria can be made all through the assessment, funding decision, and contracting process and failure to comply with the established eligibility criteria can lead to the rejection of the application at any stage.

In case the Assessment Committee notices during the assessment that the application needs major improvement, the verification process will be stopped, and the project shall be returned for improvement, in a given time and with clear indications (open for modifications in JEMS).

Considering the fact that this is a pre-set project, the AC can request clarifications during the assessment process and judge the application based on the new information. The assessment process may be finalized with clear recommendations for the adjustment of the project, which must be taken on board by the partners, including during the pre-contracting stage, if the case.

Funding decision

In order for MC to take a decision on the funding process of the project, the application must respect the administrative and eligibility criteria and it must receive at least 70 points at the quality assessment.

In case the project did not receive at least 70 points, it will be submitted to the project partners for improvement. The MC shall set a deadline for revision and improvement of the project.

Contracting process

The decision of the Monitoring Committee is followed by the pre-contractual phase and then the contract will be concluded.

If the funding decision includes conditions/recommendations (under the label of *approved under condition*) a pre-contracting procedure is initiated in order to fulfil the requirements/conditions



for approval set forth by the MC following the assessment process or to correct any technical errors /inconsistencies detected in the pre-contracting phase.



The JS notification letter shall include information regarding any recommendations that the Monitoring Committee has issued for the project. These may include, among others, reduction of the project budget, removal/revision of a particular activity, revision of indicators etc. and it will be operated in the JEMS system by the lead partner during the pre-contracting phase.

During contracting phase, a list of major milestones of the activities shall be prepared and uploaded in JEMS together with all other contracting documents. The respective list of milestones shall become an annex of the subsidy contract. Failing to meet the set milestones may result in decommitment of the budget under the conditions described in the subsidy contract template.

The starting date for the eligibility of expenditures for the projects financed under this call is 1st of January 2021 including for project preparation expenditures. Therefore, from 1st of January 2021 the project can proceed with expenditures (the ones for preparing the project and for project implementation, if the case) and start the implementation of project activities. These expenditures will be eligible from this date (subject to the MA signing of the contract with the related final budget) if the Programme eligibility rules are observed.

All partners participating in a project must sign a partnership agreement before the signing of the subsidy contract with the MA that stipulates the rights and duties of the partners. A model of partnership agreement is annexed to the present Guide. The partners may decide, with prior agreement of the MA, to stipulate additional provisions than those mentioned in the model partnership agreement. These additional provisions should not alter the provisions of the standard template of the partnership agreement.

At the half of the implementation period (all contracts will have specific provisions for each partner regarding the target value of amounts to be requested for validation by the National Control at half of the implementation period), the JS shall analyse the project financial execution, as compared to the initial schedule. In case the project has a financial execution lower than:

-  75%, MA is entitled to decommit 10% of the budget of the partners who have not respected the initial schedule of reimbursement.
-  50%, MA is entitled to decommit 25% of the budget of the partners who have not respected the initial schedule of reimbursement.

The Lead Partner will be granted a two weeks deadline to submit a revised budget and in case such a budget is not provided within the deadline, the decommitment will be applied proportionally to all budgetary lines for the concerned partners. The Lead Partner and its partners may decide to stop implementing the project, but in this case all the paid funds shall be reimbursed.

The subsidy contract will be electronically signed by MA and then submitted to the Joint Secretariat. The latter will submit the subsidy contract to the Lead partner by e-mail, in order to sign the contract until a certain deadline. LP must upload the signed contract and its annexes in JEMS according to the Project Implementation Manual and JEMS Manual.

MA and NA may decide to grant advance payments to partners in an amount ranging between 60%-80% of the national co-financing, depending on the national provisions.

The contract templates annexed to this Guide are only indicative; the final version of all contracts will be presented to the partners of the selected projects in the pre-contractual phase.



13. REPORTING

Every 4 months the Lead Partner must create and submit to Joint Secretariat (JS) via the electronic system a project report including physical and financial progress of the project, based on partners reports submitted in the JEMS in accordance with the conditions provided in the subsidy contract, in the Programme Implementation Manual, JEMS manual and in the applicable legislation.

In addition, the PS shall provide, at the Programme structures request offline reports related to the implementation of the ITS. The template and the structure of these reports/notes shall be set by the IP structures, according to the specificity of each topic. Mostly, these reports shall be related to the status of the ITS implementation (status of the ITS indicators, of the list of the projects, status of the project development, the deadlines etc.), the schedule of the major activities of the SB and PS that may impact the IP (e.g. The planning of the ITS monitoring) etc.

In addition, the PS must provide, yearly, by 31st of March, an Annual Implementation Report of the ITS (covering the previous year) to the Managing Authority and Monitoring Committee. The standard format shall be set by the MA and MC during the implementation stage. PS has to prepare the draft Annual Implementation Report, under the SB coordination.

By the end of 31st of March, 2030, the PS must provide the final implementation report regarding the overall implementation process of the ITS. The standard format shall be set by the MA and MC during the implementation stage. PS has to prepare the draft Implementation Report of the ITS, under the SB coordination.

In addition, the PS and SB can consult the MA, JS and NA on specific issues, when the case.

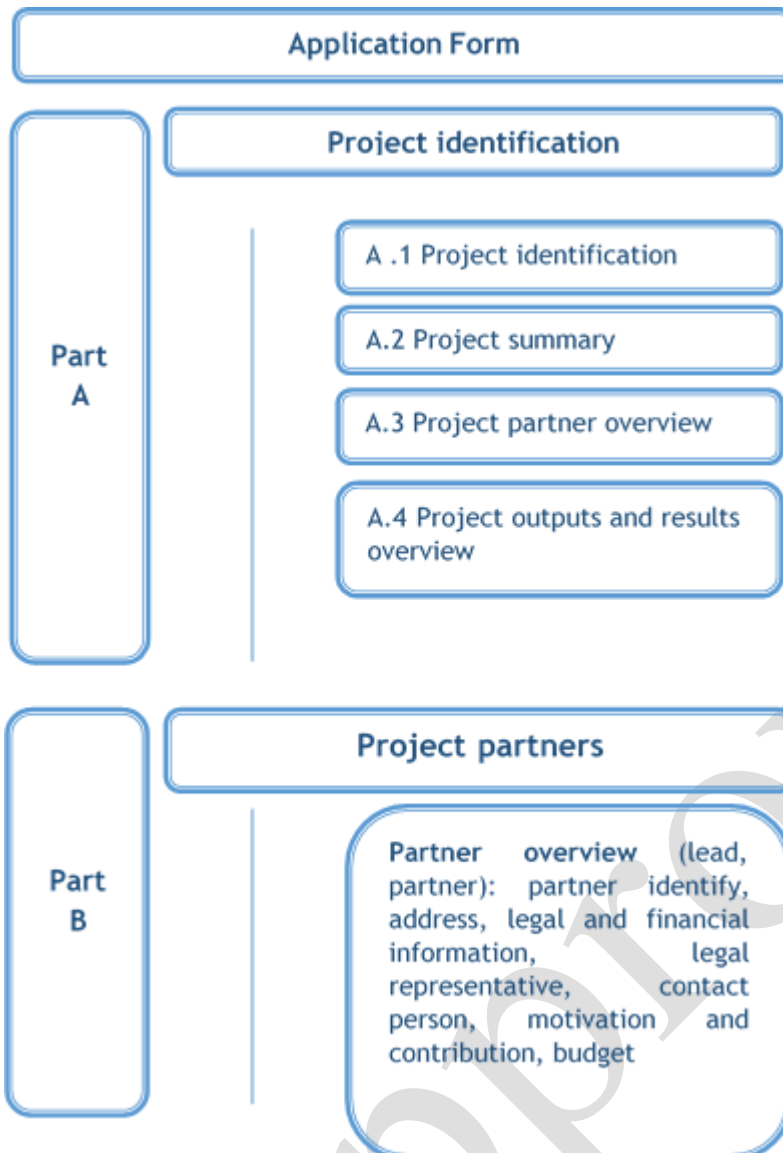
14. APPLICATION FILLING

Joint Secretariat staff and the Bulgarian Info-point (in Ruse) are available for support at all stages of the application process. Consultations with the staff are strongly advised; we are here to help you.

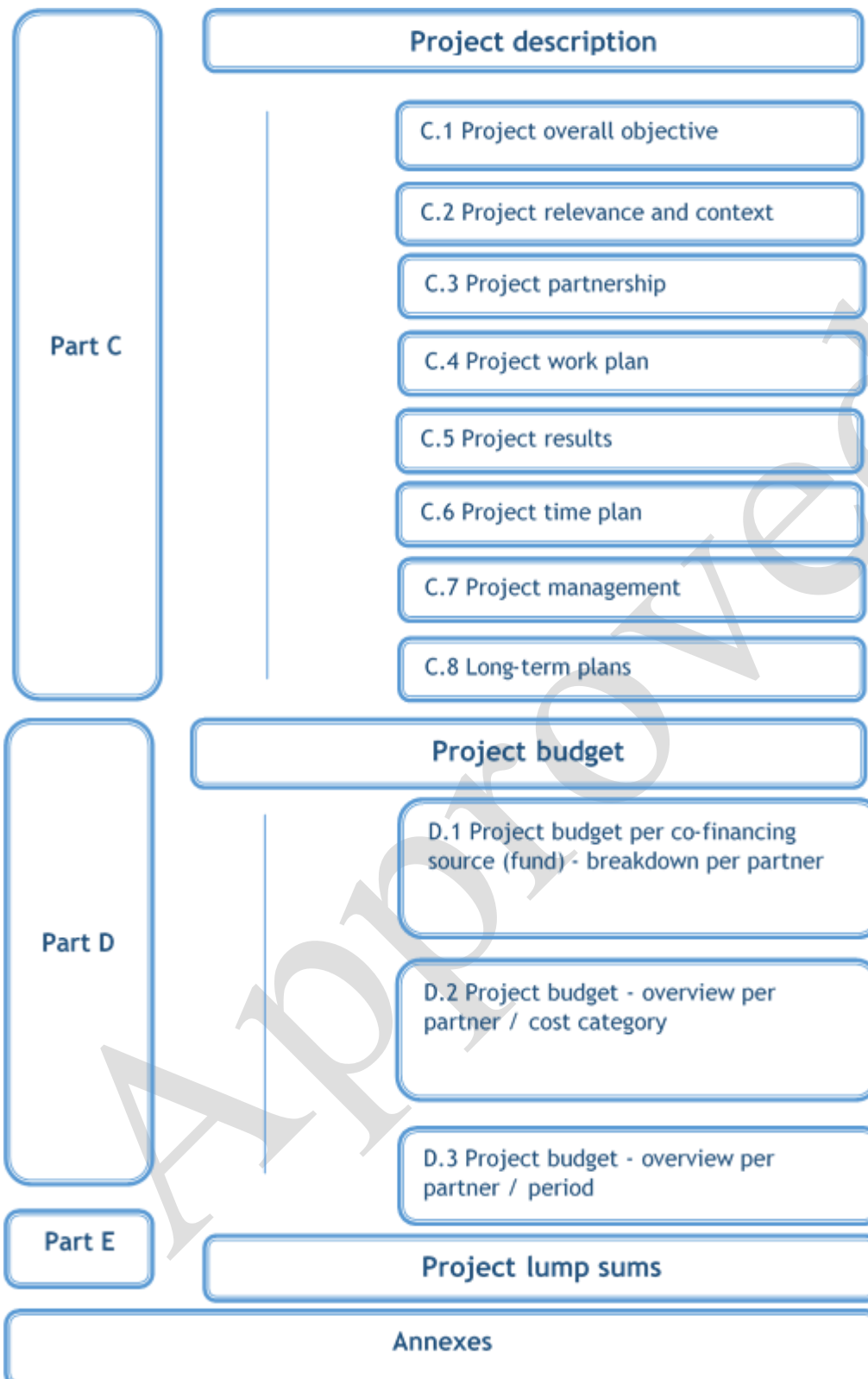
Contacts to and further information on all programme bodies are available at the programme website, <https://interregviarobg.eu/contact>.

The application form (AF) is a binding document, which describes the project and gives detailed information on the work plan and financial figures. It is the reference document for implementation during the whole project duration. The application form builds on the harmonised template developed by the community of Interreg programmes under the umbrella of Interact.

The application form is organised in five main parts and several sub-sections:



Approved





Application form filling and project implementation will follow the Project Implementation Manual (PIM), which describes the main rules, rules and procedures to be followed during the implementation stage.

15. MANDATORY DOCUMENTS TO BE SUBMITTED WITH THE APPLICATION FORM (AS ANNEXES)

1. Project Lead Partner declaration (Annex AF_A1)

This declaration should be filled in, electronic signed by the Lead Partner organization.

2. Project partner declaration (Annex AF_A2), issued and electronic signed by the other project partner.

3. Legalized mandates (Annex AF_A3) of delegation from the legal representatives of partners (in case the annexed declarations are not electronic signed by the legal representatives of the Lead Partner/partners), accompanied by their English translation (open format).

4. Market analysis for each item (Annex AF_A4). The market analysis shall be done either by asking for offers from at least two providers or by print screen (and indicating the websites) out the price offers for the specific items from the web pages of at least two providers or prints from national systems on public procurements, or an independent evaluation of the cost. In addition, in order to have a realistic budget of their project, the partners may make use of the statistical data on prices available at the level of each country, if available.

5. Financial Capacity Self-assessment - Both Excel file format and electronic signed by the legal representative of the organization (Annex AF_A5) - to be provided by all project partners, together with the balance sheet and profit and loss account and the plan, if the case.

Annual accounts for the latest financial year for which the accounts have been closed at the moment of submission of the Application must be submitted by the Lead Partner and all project partners, as full unofficial translation(s) in English (certified through signature by the legal representative of the organisation). The extracts from bank accounts are not equivalent to latest annual account. Only documents (the balance sheet and profit and loss account) providing data about revenues, expenditures, profit and losses will be accepted.

Annual Accounts containing only the Balance Sheet without the Profit and Loss Account or a document providing data about revenues, expenditures, profit and losses for the latest financial year for which the accounts have been closed, will be considered noncompliant and therefore missing documents.

Organisations (any lead partner or project partner) established in 2023 not having the latest annual accounts must submit the Balance sheet for the last closed month.

6. Job description of each position included in the PS.



No legalization of documents or official translations is necessary!

All the documents must be submitted in English. The documents issued by third parties in other language are accompanied by their English translation - in their entirety or only for the relevant provisions.

All the documents shall be electronically signed (in duly justified cases and only for the documents not issued by the project partners, handwritten signature may be accepted).



All annexes duly filled in by each partner (where this is required by the template) will be scanned (in case of handwritten signature for the cases mentioned above) and will be submitted in electronic format in the JeMS!

7. DNSH Declaration

Annexes to the Invitation for submission

- Annex A Evaluation grids
- Annex B List of eligible expenditure
- Annex C Monitoring Committee Decision no. 5/03.05.2023 Approving the Methodologies for using lump sums for project preparation and project closure in the context of Interreg VI-A Romania-Bulgaria Programme - <https://interregviarobg.eu/en/the-monitoring-committee-1>
- Annex D SEA mitigation measures and indicators and other environmental aspects
- Annex E Template Framework subsidy contract
- Annex F Template co-financing contract
- Annex G Template Partnership Agreement
- Annex H DNSH Interreg VI-A Romania-Bulgaria level
- Annex I Relevant national and EU legislation
- Annex J.1 Application form (off-line format)
- Annex J.2 Application form (off-line format)



The contract templates annexed to this Guide are only indicative; the final version of all contracts (subsidy contract, co-financing contract/monitoring agreement, partnership agreement will be presented by the Managing Authority to the partners of the selected operations in the pre-contractual phase).

Relevant documents to be considered when preparing the application form

- Project Implementation Manual - <https://interregviarobg.eu/en/project-implementation-manual>
 - Communication Starter Kit
 - Dare to go green!
 - Practical guide on fraud for applicants and project partners
 - Methodological descriptions of Interreg VI-A RO-BG indicators - SO 5.2 - <https://interregviarobg.eu/assets/2024/01/guidance-on-monitoring-programme-indicators-annex-5-so-52.pdf>
- Manual for Visual Identity of the Programme - <https://interregviarobg.eu/en/implementation-rules>
- Code of Conduct for Interreg VI-A Romania-Bulgaria - <https://interregviarobg.eu/en/implementation-rules>
- JEMS manual - <https://jems.interact-eu.net/manual/>.