

**Contracting authority**: Agenzia Italiana per Cooperazione allo Sviluppo

EU for Economic Development – Tourism-led, Local, Economic Development, with a focus on Cultural Heritage under IPA 2018

Guidelines  
for grant applicants

Budget Line: 4.1 Local Development Grants

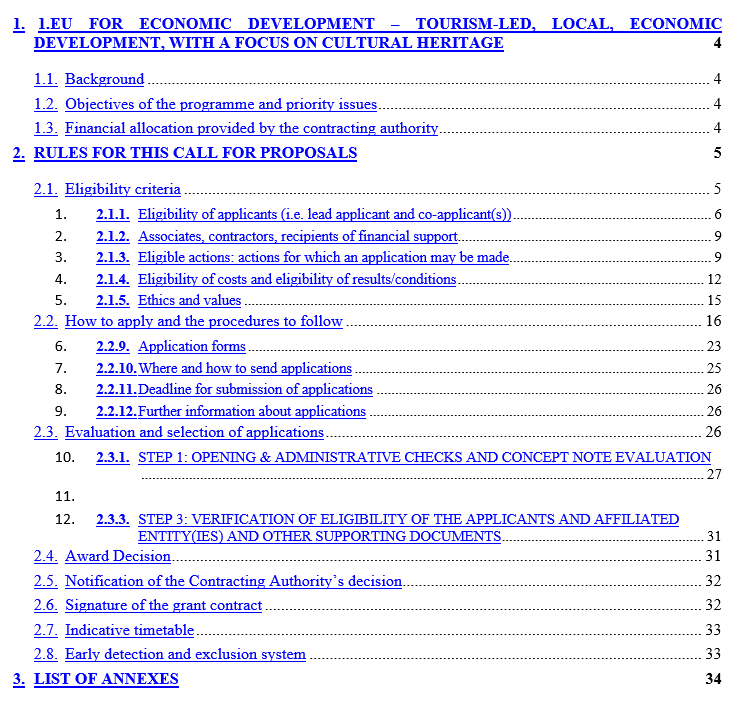
Reference: 2020 / 420-271

Deadline for submission of full application: 23 August 2025

NOTICE

This is an open call for proposals, where all documents are submitted together (concept note and full application). In the first instance, only the concept notes will be evaluated. Thereafter, for the lead applicants who have been pre-selected, the full applications will be evaluated. After the evaluation of the full applications, an eligibility check will be performed for those which have been provisionally selected (including those placed on the reserve list). Eligibility will be checked on the basis of the supporting documents requested by the contracting authority and the signed ‘declaration by the lead applicant’ sent together with the full application.

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1. EU for Economic Development – Tourism-led, local, economic development, with a focus on Cultural Heritage
   1. Background

The "EU for Economic Development – Tourism Local Economic Development with a Focus on Cultural Heritage" project, funded under the Contribution Agreement for the Instrument of Pre-Accession (IPA) 2018, seeks to promote the sustainable development of tourism through the preservation and enhancement of Albania's rich cultural heritage. This initiative is aligned with the EU’s broader goals of fostering competitiveness and innovation in the region, contributing to the socio-economic development of Albania, particularly in its rural areas. The project is being implemented by the Agenzia Italiana per la Cooperazione allo Sviluppo (AICS), through its Tirana office, with support from key Albanian institutions, including the Ministry of Economy, Culture, and Innovation, the National Institute of Cultural Heritage, and the Institute of Archaeology. The project targets the Byllis[[1]](https://euc-word-edit.officeapps.live.com/we/wordeditorframe.aspx?ui=en-US&rs=it-IT&wopisrc=https%3A%2F%2Faicsgov.sharepoint.com%2Fsites%2FAICSTIRANA%2F_vti_bin%2Fwopi.ashx%2Ffiles%2F938df32e0ae34b76913a62072e632f93&wdenableroaming=1&mscc=1&hid=09F89FA1-50FA-C000-8DFA-4910439644E3.0&uih=sharepointcom&wdlcid=en-US&jsapi=1&jsapiver=v2&corrid=ea22a366-68fa-8760-44da-431be6756bbd&usid=ea22a366-68fa-8760-44da-431be6756bbd&newsession=1&sftc=1&uihit=docaspx&muv=1&ats=PairwiseBroker&cac=1&sams=1&mtf=1&sfp=1&sdp=1&hch=1&hwfh=1&dchat=1&sc=%7B%22pmo%22%3A%22https%3A%2F%2Faicsgov.sharepoint.com%22%2C%22pmshare%22%3Atrue%7D&ctp=LeastProtected&rct=Normal&wdorigin=ItemsView&wdhostclicktime=1747738412916&afdflight=78&csc=1&instantedit=1&wopicomplete=1&wdredirectionreason=Unified_SingleFlush#_ftn1) and Klos Archaeological sites, along with the Hekal village, which is part of Albania’s "100 villages" program aimed at enhancing rural development and promoting local tourism. The Municipality of Mallakaster also plays an essential role as a local stakeholder.

This initiative addresses the dual challenge of preserving Albania's cultural heritage while unlocking its economic potential. By focusing on the restoration and protection of the Byllis site, the project ensures that this important archaeological asset will be safeguarded for future generations. At the same time, the project works to improve the accessibility of the site for both local and international visitors, making it a more attractive destination for tourism and contributing to the local economy. Furthermore, the project includes the adoption of the EU’s Community-Led Local Development (CLLD) approach, which emphasizes the importance of empowering local communities and boosting their capacity to actively participate in the management and development of cultural heritage sites.

Over the course of six years, with an additional year allocated for defect liability and final reporting, the project will implement a comprehensive set of activities aimed at preserving and enhancing the archaeological sites, improving local infrastructure, and fostering community participation. The project is supported by a budget of 6 million euros from the European Union, with an additional 250,000 euros contributed by AICS. This funding will be used to support the activities outlined in the management plan for the Byllis Archaeological Park, including the preservation and restoration of the cultural heritage site, as well as necessary civil works and infrastructure improvements that will enhance the site's sustainability and accessibility.

In addition to these efforts, the project will offer training and capacity-building programs to local communities, enabling them to actively participate in the management and preservation of the sites. By equipping local stakeholders with the necessary skills and knowledge, the project ensures that these communities can continue to benefit from the cultural heritage sites in the long term. The key expected outcomes of the project include the preservation and restoration of Byllis, improved accessibility and sustainability of the cultural and natural assets, and the stimulation of local economic growth through enhanced community engagement and capacity-building.

Cultural heritage is a powerful asset for local development, and the project recognizes the significant role it can play in driving economic growth, promoting cultural diversity, and enhancing territorial identity. By improving the cultural heritage sites of Byllis and Klos and integrating local communities into the process, the project will contribute to a sustainable tourism model that benefits both the local population and Albania as a whole. This initiative represents a key step in promoting inclusive growth, fostering economic development, and strengthening Albania’s position as a cultural tourism destination in the region

[[1]](https://euc-word-edit.officeapps.live.com/we/wordeditorframe.aspx?ui=en-US&rs=it-IT&wopisrc=https%3A%2F%2Faicsgov.sharepoint.com%2Fsites%2FAICSTIRANA%2F_vti_bin%2Fwopi.ashx%2Ffiles%2F938df32e0ae34b76913a62072e632f93&wdenableroaming=1&mscc=1&hid=09F89FA1-50FA-C000-8DFA-4910439644E3.0&uih=sharepointcom&wdlcid=en-US&jsapi=1&jsapiver=v2&corrid=ea22a366-68fa-8760-44da-431be6756bbd&usid=ea22a366-68fa-8760-44da-431be6756bbd&newsession=1&sftc=1&uihit=docaspx&muv=1&ats=PairwiseBroker&cac=1&sams=1&mtf=1&sfp=1&sdp=1&hch=1&hwfh=1&dchat=1&sc=%7B%22pmo%22%3A%22https%3A%2F%2Faicsgov.sharepoint.com%22%2C%22pmshare%22%3Atrue%7D&ctp=LeastProtected&rct=Normal&wdorigin=ItemsView&wdhostclicktime=1747738412916&afdflight=78&csc=1&instantedit=1&wopicomplete=1&wdredirectionreason=Unified_SingleFlush#_ftnref1) The Byllis Archaeological Park is one of the most significant archaeological sites of Albania. By Decision of the Council of Ministers no. 396, issued on 31.3.2005, the area was proclaimed as Archaeological Park of Byllis, including zoning and regulation of administration. Later, according to the Prime Minister's Order No. 132, dated 21.10.2019, the Bylis Park was included in a single administration under the name of the Archaeological Park of Apollonia and Bylis. The new management plan for the Byllis Archaeological Park has proposed the establishment of a new entity that would encompass the archaeological sites of Byllis and Klos.

* 1. Objectives of the programme and priority issues

The proposed Action promotes the economic development of local communities, with particular attention to young people and women. The initiative firmly supports the participation of women and girls, both in local development activities, and in capacity-building and technical assistance activities. Participation of women and girls is foreseen in the Local Development Fund for small enterprises – earmarked at a minimum threshold of 50 % of women/girls’ beneficiaries out of the total.

The small-scale grants (intended for entrepreneurial activities of young people and women) will aim at stimulating and facilitating the improvement of the various production chains and support employment. The Manual of Procedures will define the evaluation grids for the selection of the grants. The evaluation of the requests will be entrusted to the GMC. The proposals must guarantee respect for the objectives of the project (improvement of marketing and the offer of typical products, increase in the quality of the touristic offer or the opening of new activities in the cultural sector) and requests submitted by young men and women will be privileged. Synergies with other projects imply no financial flow between them and this project.

The **global objective** of this call for proposals is: “to promote the economic development of local communities, with a focus on empowering young people and women. The initiative aims to enhance local development, stimulate entrepreneurship, and foster job creation through the active participation of women and youth.

The **specific objective(s)** of this call for proposals is/are to:

* Promote active participation and leadership of women and girls in local economic, social, and cultural development initiatives in Mallakastër (Albania) region.
* Foster entrepreneurship by providing resources, training, and opportunities specifically aimed at young people and women, helping them start or grow their micro and small enterprises
* Improve the visibility, attractiveness, and competitiveness of local cultural and artisanal products through branding, storytelling, digital marketing, and creative packaging.
* Promote access to finance for small businesses by encouraging shared financial responsibility and sustainable growth, requiring them to contribute 10–20% of the total action, to ensure financial sustainability.

The priorities of this call for proposals are the following:

* **Empowerment of women,** g**irls, and the younger generation**

Focus on increasing the capacity, skills, and economic independence of women and youth, promoting inclusivity and equal opportunities.

* **Economic development of local communities**

Support small enterprises that contribute to the local economy by enhancing production processes, creating jobs, and fostering innovation within traditional and new sectors.

* **Tourism-focused activities and preservation of local values**

Promote tourism initiatives that highlight local heritage, crafts, and culture while engaging communities to preserve and share their unique traditions and values.

* 1. Financial allocation provided by the contracting authority

The overall indicative amount made available under this call for proposals is EUR 210,000.00. The contracting authority reserves the right not to award all available funds.

**Size of grants**

Any grant requested under this call for proposals must fall between the following minimum and maximum amount:

* minimum amount: EUR 30,000.00
* maximum amount: EUR 50,000.00

Any grant requested under this call for proposals must be co-financed by the grant beneficiary at a rate of 10% to 20% of the requested grant amount (based on the total eligible costs of the action). The co-financing may be provided either in-kind or in monetary form.

The balance (i.e. the difference between the total cost of the action and the amount requested from the contracting authority) must be financed from sources other than the general budget of the Union or the European Development Fund[[1]](#footnote-2).

1. rULES FOR THIS cALL FOR pROPOSALS

These guidelines set out the rules for the submission, selection and implementation of the actions financed under this call, in conformity with the practical guide (PRAG), which is applicable to the present call (available on the internet at this address

<https://wikis.ec.europa.eu/display/ExactExternalWiki/ePRAG> ).[[2]](#footnote-3)

* 1. Eligibility criteria

There are three sets of eligibility criteria, relating to:

1. the actors (2.1.1.):

* the ‘**lead applicant’**, i.e. the entity submitting the application form;
* its **co-applicant(s)** (**where it is not specified otherwise the lead applicant and its co-applicant(s) are hereinafter jointly referred as ‘applicant(s)’**);

1. the actions (2.1.3.):

• actions for which a grant may be awarded;

1. the eligible costs or results/conditions (2.1.4.):

* the eligible costs, the types of cost that may be taken into account in setting the amount of the grant.
  + 1. Eligibility of applicants (i.e. lead applicant and co-applicant(s))

**Lead applicant**

In order to be eligible for a grant, the lead applicant must:

* be a legal person, **and** be non-profit-making **and**
* be a specific type of organisation such as: non-governmental organisation[[3]](#footnote-4),, be effectively established in[[4]](#footnote-5) Albania and registered as per the national law before 1st January 2025, **and**
* be directly responsible for the preparation and management of the action with the co-applicant(s), not acting as an intermediary **and**
* not being in any of the situations listed in Section 2.4. of the practical guide.

The lead applicant must act with co-applicant(s) as specified hereafter. If awarded the grant contract, the lead applicant will become the beneficiary identified as the coordinator in Annex G (special conditions). The coordinator is the sole interlocutor of the contracting authority. It represents and acts on behalf of any other co-beneficiary (if any) and coordinate the design and implementation of the action.

**Co-applicant(s)**

Co-applicant(s) are obligatory, and must:

* be effectively established in[[5]](#footnote-6) Albania and registered as per the national laws **and**
* be a specific type of organisation such as: non-governmental organisation[[6]](#footnote-7), public sector operator or local authority, or micro enterprises, as per the definitions in laws, established in Mallakaster. Co-applicants participate in designing and implementing the action, and the costs they incur are eligible in the same way as those incurred by the lead applicant.

Co-applicants participate in designing and implementing the action, and the costs they incur are eligible in the same way as those incurred by the lead applicant.

Co-applicants must satisfy the eligibility criteria as applicable to the lead applicant himself.

The maximum number of co-applicants is 2 (two).

Co-applicants must sign the mandate in Part B Section 4 of the grant application form.

If awarded the grant contract, the co-applicant(s) (if any) will become beneficiary(ies) in the action (together with the coordinator).

* + 1. Associates, contractors, recipients of financial support

The following entities are not applicants nor affiliated entities and do not have to sign the ‘mandate for co-applicant(s)’:

* **Associates**

Other organisations or individuals may be involved in the action. Such associates play a real role in the action but may not receive funding from the grant, with the exception of per diem or travel costs. Associates do not have to meet the eligibility criteria referred to in Section 2.1.1. Associates must be mentioned in Part B Section 5 — ‘Associates participating in the action’ — of the grant application form.

* Contractors

The beneficiaries and their affiliated entities are permitted to award contracts. Beneficiaries or associates cannot be also contractors in the project. Contractors are subject to the procurement rules set out in Annex IV to the standard grant contract.

Each actor should only participate in a single role in an action. This is to avoid any potential conflicts of interest and ensure clear allocation of rights and obligations as well as certainty on cost eligibility.

* + 1. Eligible actions: actions for which an application may be made

**Definition**

An action is composed of a set of activities.

**Duration**

The initial planned duration of an action may not exceed 12 (twelve) months.

**Sectors or themes**

Any grant requested under this call for proposals must be linked to the following theme:

1. Support sustainable local economic development by strengthening value chains in artisanal crafts and traditional products, while promoting youth and women's employment. Encourage the creation of cultural and tourism-related micro-enterprises that reflect local heritage and identity, in order to diversify the economy and enhance the quality of the tourism offer.

**Location**

Actions must take place mainly in Bylis Archaeological Park (Hekal) and other surrounding areas and villages of the Mallakastër region.

**Target group are Youth and Women of Mallakastër.**

**Types of action**

The following types of action are ineligible:

* actions concerned only or mainly with individual sponsorships for participation in workshops, seminars, conferences and congresses;
* actions concerned only or mainly with individual scholarships for studies or training courses;
* actions and measures that may result in violation of human rights in partner countries or causing significant adverse effects on the environment or the climate[[7]](#footnote-8);

**Types of activity**

Types of activity which may be financed under this call:

* Support for women-led micro-enterprises in crafts (e.g., embroidery, olive oil, raki, traditional food etc.).
* Creation of tools that stimulate production, packaging, and marketing of local agricultural and artisanal products.
* Development of site-specific souvenirs and handicrafts inspired by local heritage.
* Creation or revitalization of traditional products based on intangible cultural knowledge (e.g., culinary traditions, farming or craft techniques).
* Promotion of sustainable, eco-friendly practices such as reuse, upcycling, or zero-waste production methods related to tourism.
* Branding, storytelling, and marketing of local artisan identity (including digital platforms or collective labels).
* Support for networks of artisans and small producers to strengthen access to local or national markets.
* Organization of cultural events (e.g., local fairs, festivals, exhibitions, performances) inspired by local traditions, crafts, and stories—including those of minorities and marginalized communities in the given region.
* Creation of temporary or mobile venues, installations, or pop-up cultural spaces near heritage sites in cooperation with local cultural institutions.
* Production of educational and promotional materials (printed or digital), including inclusive formats for persons with disabilities and multilingual content for visitors.
* Documentation and demonstration of intangible cultural heritage (songs, dances, folklore, culinary traditions, myths, rituals).
* Youth-led programs offering hands-on experiences in cultural heritage, tourism, and conservation through volunteering, apprenticeships, or entrepreneurship.
* Capacity building for young entrepreneurs and women in tourism, travel, and service provision.
* Establishment of community partnerships to support integrated models of promotion, linking local government, civil society, artisans, and businesses in shared cultural initiatives.

**Financial support to third parties[[8]](#footnote-9)**

Financial support to third parties is not allowed.

**Visibility**

The applicants must take all necessary steps to ensure the visibility of the European Union as the funder or co-founder of the action, through the correct and prominent display of the EU emblem and relevant funding statement. Unless the European Commission agrees otherwise, actions that are wholly or partially funded by the European Union must ensure the visibility of EU financing by displaying the EU emblem in accordance with the guidelines set out in the Operational guidelines for recipients of EU funding, published by the European Commission.

All measures and activities relating to visibility and, if applicable, communication, must comply with the latest Communication and Visibility Requirements for EU-funded external action, laid down and published by the European Commission ([Communication and Visibility Requirements for EU External Actions | International Partnerships (europa.eu)](https://ec.europa.eu/international-partnerships/comm-visibility-requirements_en)).

Derogation from contractual visibility obligations is permitted in exceptional situations, which may be required in the framework of this action due to security issues for the staff and beneficiaries, local political sensitivities, when this is in the interest of the beneficiary or the contracting authority. In such cases, visibility tools, products, and channels to be used in promoting a given action will be determined on a case-by-case basis, in consultation and agreement with the EU prior to limiting EU visibility. Requests for derogation from contractual visibility obligations should be included in Annex A.2 – Full application form and negotiated as part of the Special Conditions of the contract.

**Number of applications and grants per applicants**

The lead applicant should not submit more than 1 (one) application under this call for proposals.

The lead applicant maybe a co-applicant in another application at the same time.

A co-applicant maybe the co-applicant in more than 1(one) application under this call for proposals.

**Form of the grant**

The grants awarded under this call for proposals take the following form(s):

* Reimbursement of eligible costs that may be based on:

(i) actual costs incurred by the beneficiary(ies)

* + 1. Eligibility of costs and eligibility of results/conditions

**Reimbursement of costs**

Only ‘eligible costs’ can be covered by the grant. The categories of costs that are eligible and non-eligible are indicated below. The budget is both a cost estimate and an overall ceiling for ‘eligible costs’.

Eligible costs can be reimbursed as actual costs

Eligible direct costs

To be eligible under this call for proposals, costs must comply with the provisions of Article 14 of the general conditions to the standard grant contract (see Annex G of the guidelines).

The applicants agree that the expenditure verification(s) referred to in Article 2.8 of the general conditions to the standard grant contract (see Annex G of the guidelines) will be carried out by the contracting authority or any external body authorised by the European Commission/contracting authority.

Recommendations to award a grant are always subject to the condition that the checks preceding the signing of the grant contract do not reveal problems requiring changes to the budget (such as arithmetical errors, inaccuracies, and in case of reimbursement of costs, unrealistic costs and ineligible costs). The checks may give rise to requests for clarification and may lead the contracting authority to impose modifications or reductions to address such mistakes or inaccuracies. It is not possible to increase the grant or the percentage of EU co-financing as a result of these corrections.

It is therefore in the applicants' interest to provide a **realistic and cost-effective budget**.

Contributions in kind

Contributions in kind mean the provision of goods or services to beneficiaries free of charge by a third party. As contributions in kind do not involve any expenditure for beneficiaries, they are not eligible costs.

Contributions involving real estate must be excluded from the calculation of the amount of co-financing. In kind contributions must comply with national tax and social security rules.

Co-financing in kind proposed, must be included in Annex B (Worksheet 3) to the guidelines for applicants on the expected sources of funding for the action. The same amount must be indicated in the budget (Worksheet 1).

Co-financing shall be based on estimates provided by the applicant.

Ineligible costs

Costs that do not comply with the conditions laid down in the contract are not eligible. The following costs are not eligible:

* debts and debt service charges (interest);
* provisions for losses or potential future liabilities;
* costs declared by the beneficiary(ies) and financed by another action or work programme receiving a European Union (including through EDF) grant;
* purchases of land or buildings, except where necessary for the direct implementation of the action, in which case ownership must be transferred in accordance with Article 7.5 of the general conditions of the standard grant contract, at the latest at the end of the action;
* currency exchange losses;
* bonuses included in costs of staff;
* negative interest charged by banks or other financial institutions;
* credit to third parties;
* salary costs of the personnel of national administrations.
  + 1. In addition, as a rule, partners are not requested to implement communication activities for the purpose of promoting the action and/or the EU. Only if specifically requested by and agreed with the contracting authority, communication activities should be properly planned and budgeted at each stage of the project implementation.
    2. Ethics and values

**Absence of conflict of interest**

The applicant must not be affected by any conflict of interest and must have no equivalent relation in that respect with other applicants or parties involved in the actions. Any attempt by an applicant to obtain confidential information, enter into unlawful agreements with competitors or influence the evaluation committee or the contracting authority during the process of examining, clarifying, evaluating and comparing applications will lead to the rejection of its application and may result in exclusion decisions for other award procedures and/or financial penalties according to the Financial Regulation in force.

**Respect of environmental legislation and core labour standards**

Applicants who are awarded a grant must comply with the environmental legislation including multilateral environmental agreements, and with the core labour standards as applicable and as defined in the relevant International Labour Organisation conventions (such as the conventions on freedom of association and collective bargaining; elimination of forced and compulsory labour; abolition of child labour).

**Respect of EU values**

Applicants who are awarded a grant must commit to and ensure the respect of basic EU values, such as respect for human dignity, freedom, democracy, equality, the rule of law and human rights, including the rights of minorities.

**Zero tolerance for sexual exploitation, abuse and harassment**

The European Commission applies a policy of 'zero tolerance' in relation to all wrongful conduct which has an impact on the professional credibility of the applicant.

Physical abuse or punishment, or threats of physical abuse, sexual abuse or exploitation, harassment and verbal abuse, as well as other forms of intimidation shall be prohibited.

**Anti-corruption and anti-bribery**

The applicant shall comply with all applicable laws, regulations and codes relating to anti-bribery and anti-corruption. The contracting authority reserves the right to suspend or cancel project financing if corrupt practices of any kind are discovered at any stage of the award process or during the execution of a contract and if the contracting authority fails to take all appropriate measures to remedy the situation. For the purposes of this provision, ‘corrupt practices’ are the offer of a bribe, gift, gratuity or commission to any person as an inducement or reward for performing or refraining from any act relating to the award of a contract or execution of a contract already concluded with the contracting authority.

**Unusual commercial expenses**

Applications will be rejected or contracts terminated if it emerges that the award or execution of a contract has given rise to unusual commercial expenses. Such unusual commercial expenses are commissions not mentioned in the main contract or not stemming from a properly concluded contract referring to the main contract, commissions not paid in return for any actual and legitimate service, commissions remitted to a tax haven, commissions paid to a payee who is not clearly identified or commissions paid to a company which has every appearance of being a front company.

Grant beneficiaries found to have paid unusual commercial expenses on projects funded by the European Union are liable, depending on the seriousness of the facts observed, to have their contracts terminated or to be excluded from receiving EU/EDF funds.

**Breach of obligations, irregularities or fraud**

The contracting authority reserves the right to suspend or cancel the procedure, where the award procedure proves to have been subject to breach of obligations, irregularities or fraud. If breach of obligations, irregularities or fraud are discovered after the award of the contract, the contracting authority may refrain from concluding the contract.

* 1. How to apply and the procedures to follow

Open call for proposals

* + 1. Application forms

Applications must be submitted in accordance with the instructions on the concept note and the full applications in the grant application form annexed to these guidelines (Annex A). Lead applicants should then keep strictly to the format of the grant application form and fill in the paragraphs and pages in order.

Applicants must apply in English.

Please complete the full application form carefully and as clearly as possible so that it can be assessed properly.

**WARNING**

The title of your proposal will become, if selected, the subject matter of the grant contract that will be signed with your organisation.

On the [Europa website](https://ec.europa.eu/budget/financial-transparency-system/index.html), the field ‘Public subject’, using the title of the selected proposal, is used for publication in the Financial Transparency System (FTS) of all EU grants. This field, being intended for the general public, should provide general and clear information on the purpose of the expenditure.

We therefore recommend to define the subject matter of your proposal along the following indications.

An appropriate subject:

• refers to the content of the project or its objective;

• does not repeat information available in other fields such as the recipient's name, the programme, the year;

• is preferably written in English;

• may contain acronyms if relevant for the citizens;

• may contain the reference to the project or programme.

Any error or major discrepancy related to the points listed in the instructions on the concept note or any major inconsistency in the application (e.g. if the amounts in the budget worksheets are inconsistent) may lead to the rejection of the application.

Clarifications will only be requested when the information provided is unclear and thus prevents the contracting authority from conducting an objective assessment.

Please note that only the grant application form and the published annexes which have to be filled in (budget, logical framework) will be evaluated. It is therefore of utmost importance that these documents contain ALL the relevant information concerning the action.

**Please note that incomplete applications may be rejected. Lead applicants are advised to verify that their application is complete using the checklist (Section 7 of Part B of the grant application form).**

In addition, the following documents should be submitted together with t the application form:

1. The statutes or articles of association of the lead applicant, and of each co-applicant. A completedidentification form (see Annex D).
2. The declaration on honour (Annex H to these guidelines) signed by the lead applicant as well as all co-applicants certifying that they are not in one of the exclusion situations (see Section 2.4.2 of the practical guide).

These documents must be supplied in the form of originals, photocopies or scanned versions (i.e. showing legible stamps, signatures and dates) of the said originals. The declaration on honour on exclusion criteria shall be submitted also in original if awarded. For the other documents, originals shall be kept on file for controls in accordance with the record keeping obligations laid down in Section 2.5.5. of the practical guide.

Where such documents are not in one of the official languages of the European Union [or in the language of the country where the action is implemented], a translation into the language(s) of the call for proposals of the relevant parts of these documents proving the lead applicant's and, where applicable, co-applicants' ' eligibility, must be attached for the purpose of analysing the application.

Where these documents are in an official language of the European Union other than the language of the call for proposals , it is strongly recommended, in order to facilitate the evaluation, to provide a translation of the relevant parts of the documents, proving the lead applicant's and, where applicable, co-applicants' ' eligibility, into the language of the call for proposals.

If the abovementioned supporting documents are not provided by the deadline for the submission of the application form, the application may be rejected.

* + 1. Where and how to send applications
    2. Applications must be submitted on line at the email address not more than 200 Mg: Deadline for submission of applications

The deadline for the submission of applications is 23 August 2025.

Any application submitted after the deadline will be rejected.

* + 1. Further information about applications

An information session on this call for proposals will be held on **10 July 2025 at 10:00**, and the place to be notified via social channels of AICS.

Questions may be sent by e-mail no later than 21 days before the deadline for the submission of applications to the below address(es), indicating clearly the reference of the call for proposals:

E-mail address: [tirana@aics.gov.it](mailto:tirana@aics.gov.it)

The contracting authority has no obligation to provide clarifications to questions received after this date.

Replies will be given no later than 11 days before the deadline for the submission of applications.

To ensure equal treatment of applicants, the contracting authority cannot give a prior opinion on the eligibility of lead applicants, co-applicants, s, an action or specific activities.

Questions that may be relevant to other applicants, together with the answers, will be published on the website where the call was published: <https://tirana.aics.gov.it/> It is therefore advisable to consult the abovementioned website regularly in order to be informed of the questions and answers published.

Please note that the contracting authority may decide to cancel the call for proposals procedure at any stage according to the conditions set out in Section 6.5.9 of the practical guide.

* 1. Evaluation and selection of applications

Applications will be examined and evaluated by the contracting authority with the possible assistance of external assessors. All applications will be assessed according to the following steps and criteria.

If the examination of the application reveals that the proposed action does not meet the eligibility criteria stated in Section 2.1, the application will be rejected on this sole basis.

* + 1. STEP 1: OPENING & ADMINISTRATIVE CHECKS AND CONCEPT NOTE EVALUATION

During the opening and administrative check, the following will be assessed:

* If the deadline has been met. Otherwise, the application will be automatically rejected.
* If the application satisfies all the criteria specified in the checklist in Section 6 of Part B of the grant application form. This includes also an assessment of the eligibility of the action. If any of the requested information is missing or is incorrect, the application may be rejected on that **sole** basis and the application will not be evaluated further.

The concept notes that pass this check will be evaluated on the relevance and design of the proposed action.

The concept notes will receive an overall score out of 50 using the breakdown in the evaluation grid below. The evaluation will also check on compliance with the instructions on how to complete the concept note, which can be found in Part A of the grant application form.

The evaluation criteria are divided into headings and subheadings. Each subheading will be given a score between 1 and 5 as follows: 1 = very poor; 2 = poor; 3 = adequate; 4 = good; 5 = very good.

|  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- |
|  | **Scores\*** | |
| **1. Relevance of the action** | Sub-score | **20** |
| 1.1 **Consistency with the objectives of the call**: How relevant is the proposal to the objectives and priorities of the call for proposals and to the specific themes/sectors/areas or any other specific requirement stated in the guidelines for applicants? Are the expected results of the action aligned with the priorities defined in the guidelines for applicants (Section 1.2)? | 5 |  |
| 1.2 **Relevance to the country/region/sector needs**: How relevant is the proposal to the particular needs and constraintsof the target country(ies), region(s) and/or relevant sectors (including synergy with other development initiatives and avoidance of duplication)? | 5 |  |
| 1.3 **Target groups and final beneficiaries**: How clearly defined and strategically chosen are the target groups and final beneficieries? Have their needs (as rights holders and/or duty bearers) and constraints been clearly defined? Does the proposal address them appropriately? | 5 |  |
| 1.4 **Added value elements**: Does the proposal contain particular added-value elements (e.g. innovation, best practices.) | 5 |  |
| **2. Design of the action** | Sub-score | **30** |
| 2.1 **Intervention logic**. Does the proposal indicate the expected results (outputs/outcomes/impacts) to be achieved by the action? Does the design of the proposed action identify explicitly the necessary sequence to achieve the desired objectives beginning with inputs, moving through activities and outputs, and culminating in outcomes and impacts? | 5x2\*\* |  |
| 2. **Context analysis**. Does the design of the action include a robust analysis of the needs to be addressed, including the capacities of the relevant stakeholders? Are those also embedded adequately in the intervention logic? | 5 |
| 2.3 **Risks and assumptions**. Is the design based on clear assumptions (the necessary and positive conditions that allow for a successful cause-and-effect relationship between different levels of results)? Does it take into account also risks (the factors that might hinder the achievement of results)? | 5 |  |
| 2.4 **Indicative Activities**. Is the indicative list of activities linked to and consistent with the expected outputs? | 5 |  |
| 2.5 **Cross-cutting issues**: To which extent does the proposal integrate relevant cross-cutting elements such as environmental/climate change issues, promotion of gender equality and equal opportunities, needs of disabled people, rights of minorities and rights of indigenous peoples, youth, combating HIV/AIDS (if there is a strong prevalence in the target country/region)? | 5 |  |
|  | |  |

[\* Note: A score of 5 (very good) will only be allocated if the proposal specifically addresses more than the required minimum number of priorities as indicated in Section 1.2 (objectives of the programme) of these guidelines.]

\*\*this score is multiplied by 2 because of its importance

Once all concept notes have been assessed, a list will be drawn up with the proposed actions ranked according to their total score.

Firstly, only the concept notes with a score of at least 30 will be considered for pre-selection.

Secondly, the number of concept notes will be reduced, taking account of the ranking, to the number of concepts notes whose total aggregate amount of requested contributions is equal to 200% of the available budget for this call for proposals. After the evaluation of concept notes, the contracting authority will send letters to all lead applicants, indicating whether their application was submitted by the deadline, informing them of the reference number they have been allocated, whether the concept note was evaluated and the results of that evaluation. The evaluation committee will then proceed with the lead applicants whose proposals have been pre-selected.

* + 1. EVALUATION OF THE FULL APPLICATION

If the applications pass the opening and administrative checks along the instructions of the Step 1: they will be further evaluated on their quality, including the proposed budget and capacity of the applicants. They will be evaluated using the evaluation criteria in the evaluation grid below. There are two types of evaluation criteria: selection and award criteria.

**The selection criteria** help to evaluate the applicant(s)'s operational capacity and the lead applicant's financial capacity and are used to verify that they:

* have stable and sufficient sources of finance to maintain their activity throughout the proposed action and, where appropriate, to participate in its funding (this only applies to lead applicants);
  + have the management capacity, professional competencies and qualifications required to successfully complete the proposed action.

**The award criteria** help to evaluate the quality of the applications in relation to the objectives and priorities set forth in the guidelines, and to award grants to projects which maximise the overall effectiveness of the call for proposals. They help to select applications which the contracting authority can be confident will comply with its objectives and priorities. They cover the relevance of the action, its consistency with the objectives of the call for proposals, quality, expected impact, sustainability and cost-effectiveness.

*Scoring:*

The evaluation grid is divided into Sections and subsections. Each subsection will be given a score between 1 and 5 as follows: 1 = very poor; 2 = poor; 3 = adequate; 4 = good; 5 = very good.

**Evaluation grid**

|  |  |
| --- | --- |
| **Section** | **Maximum Score** |
| **1. Financial and operational capacity** | **20** |
| 1.1 Do the applicants and, if applicable, their affiliated entity(ies) have sufficient in-house experience of projectmanagement? | 5 |
| 1.2 Do the applicants and, if applicable, their affiliated entity(ies) have sufficient in-house technical expertise? (especially knowledge of the issues to be addressed) | 5 |
| 1.3 Do the applicants and, if applicable, their affiliated entity(ies) have sufficient in-house management capacity? (Including staff, equipment and ability to handle the budget for the action)? | 5 |
| 1.4 Does the lead applicant have stable and sufficient sources of finance? | 5 |
| **2. Relevance** | **20** |
| *Score transferred from the Concept Note evaluation* |  |
| **3. Design of the action** | **15** |
| 3.1 **Intervention logic**: Does the proposal indicate the expected results (outputs/outcomes/impacts) to be achieved by the action? Does the design of the proposed action identify explicitly the necessary sequence to achieve the desired objectives beginning with inputs, moving through activities and outputs, and culminating in outcomes and impacts? Is the indicative list of activities linked to and consistent with the expected outputs? | 5 |
| 3.2 **Logical Framework Matrix**: Is the logical framework provided in Annex C complete? Does each result (output, outcome, impact) include an adequate number of indicators that are sufficient in scope to measure its achievement? Is each indicator RACER (Relevant, Accepted, Credible, Easy to monitor, Robust)? Does each indicator have a baseline value (with year), target value (with year), and a credible source of data? If baselines and targets are not available, this is to be justified and a study (or other relevant tools) to be foreseen and budgeted in the proposals? | 5 |
| 3.3 **Context analysis**. Does the design of the action include a robust analysis of the needs to be addressed, including the capacities of the relevant stakeholders? Are those also embedded adequately in the intervention logic? | 5 |
| **4. Implementation approach** | **15** |
| 4.1 **Action plan**: Is the action plan for implementing the action clear and feasible? Are types of activities clearly clustered by output in the Activities Matrix? Is the timeline realistic? | 5 |
| 4.2 **Monitoring, reporting and evaluation**: Does the proposal include an effective and efficient monitoring and reporting system? Is the system in place adequate to update the values of the indicators included in the Logical Framework Matrix - thus informing regularly on progress towards the achievement of impact, outcomes and outputs? Is there an evaluation planned and budgeted (previous, during or/and at the end of the implementation)? If relevant, is the role of third party assessor included? | 5 |
| 4.3 **Project management (technical)**: Do the co-applicant(s) have the necessary technical skills to attain the objectives of the action? Are the co-applicant(s)’s adequately involved in the implementation (e.g. advocacy, research, capacity building, outreach related activities)? | 5 |
| **5. Sustainability of the action** | **15** |
| 5.1 **Long-lasting benefits**: Is the action likely to ensure long lasting and transformative benefits to the target groups and the final beneficiaries? | 5 |
| 5.2 **Multiplier effects**: Is the action likely to have multiplier effects, including scope for replication, extension, cross-fertilisation of experience and knowledge sharing? | 5 |
| 5.3 **Sustainability** How likely the effects are to last after the intervention ends?   * Financial sustainability: which financial resources are available to fund the continuation of the services provided by the intervention? How long are they likely to be available and from which sources?) * Institutional sustainability: which institutional arrangements allow for maintaining the benefits achieved? Is there any measure in place to ensure local ownership? * Policy level sustainability (if applicable): is there any expected policy related effect from the action, e.g. improved legislation, codes of conduct, methods * Environmental sustainability (if applicable): will the action have a negative/positive environmental impact? * Risk analysis and mitigation measures: will the action be accompanied by a good risk analysis (including physical, environmental, political, economic and social risks) and relevant mitigation measures? | 5 |
| **6. Budget and efficiency of the action** | **15** |
| 6.1 **Budget:** Are the activities appropriately reflected in the budget? In the case of entire of partly use of financing not linked to costs, are the results and performance indicators adequately reflected in the budget? | / 5 |
| 6.2 **Efficiency**: Is the relation between the estimated amounts as per budget and the expected results adequate?? | / 10 |
| **Maximum total score** | **100** |

If the total score for Section 1 (financial and operational capacity) is less than 12 points, the application will be rejected. If the score for at least one of the subsections under Section 1 is 1, the application will also be rejected.

If the lead applicant applies without co-applicants or affiliated entities the score for point 4.3 shall be 5 unless the involvement of co-applicants or affiliated entities is mandatory according to these guidelines for applicants.

*Provisional selection*

After the evaluation, a table will be drawn up listing the applications ranked according to their score. The highest scoring applications will be provisionally selected until the available budget for this call for proposals is reached. In addition, a reserve list will be drawn up following the same criteria. This list will be used if more funds become available during the validity period of the reserve list. The contracting authority informs those lead applicants provisionally selected and those placed on the reserve list, that they will be subject to the final eligibility check.

* + 1. STEP 3: VERIFICATION OF ELIGIBILITY OF THE APPLICANTS AND OTHER SUPPORTING DOCUMENTS

The eligibility verification will be performed on the basis of the supporting documents requested by the contracting authority see Section 2.2. It will by default only be performed for the applications that have been provisionally selected (including those placed on the reserve list) according to their score and within the available budget for this call for proposals. In this case:

* The declaration by the lead applicant (Section 8 of Part B of the grant application form) and declaration of honour on selection and exclusion criteria will be cross-checked with the supporting documents provided by the lead applicant. Any missing supporting document or any incoherence between the declaration by the lead applicant and the supporting documents may lead to the rejection of the application on that sole basis.
* The eligibility of applicants will be verified according to the criteria set out in Section 2.1.1, including exclusion criteria.

Any rejected application will be replaced by the next best placed application on the reserve list that falls within the available budget for this call for proposals.

In the eventuality that the evaluation committee is not satisfied with the strength, solidity, and guarantee offered by the structural link between one of the applicants, it can require the submission of the missing documents allowing for its conversion into co-applicant. If all the missing documents for co-applicants are submitted, and provided all necessary eligibility criteria are fulfilled, the above-mentioned entity becomes a co-applicant for all purposes. The lead applicant has to submit the application form revised accordingly.

* 1. Award Decision

After verifying the supporting documents (step 3), the evaluation committee will make a final recommendation to the contracting authority, which will decide on the award of grants.

The contracting authority may decide not to award any grants and cancel the call for proposals without having the applicants any right to compensation.

The award decision shall indicate the successful applicants, the names of the applicants rejected, and a reserve list (if any).

* 1. Notification of the Contracting Authority’s decision

The lead applicants will be informed in writing of the contracting authority’s decision concerning their application. Please note that the lead applicant is the intermediary for all communications between applicants and the contracting authority during the procedure.

In case of rejection, they will be informed about the reasons for the negative decision. For the avoidance of doubt, please note that for applications rejected for reasons such as non-compliance with the admissibility requirements (for example, if the application was sent after the deadline), with the eligibility (the entity or person is not part of the predefined eligible population of entities or persons), the selection (the entity does not have financial capacity or professional or operational capacity) and the award criteria (the proposal does not comply with the predefined requirements such as quality, cost/efficiency), no prior adversarial procedure is required.

Applicants placed on the reserve list will also be informed. The applicable terms to the reserve list are laid down in Section 6.5. of the practical guide.

An applicant believing that it has been harmed by an error or irregularity during the award process may lodge a complaint. See Section 2.12 of the practical guide.

* 1. Signature of the grant contract

Following the decision to award a grant, the beneficiary(ies) will be offered a contract based on the standard grant contract (see Annex G of these guidelines). By signing the application form (Annex A of these guidelines), the applicants agree, if awarded a grant, to accept the contractual conditions of the standard grant contract. Where the coordinator is an organisation, whose pillars have been positively assessed, it will sign a contribution agreement based on the contribution agreement template. In this case, references to provisions of the standard grant contract and its annexes shall not apply. References in these guidelines to the grant contract shall be understood as references to the relevant provisions of the contribution agreement.

The budget proposed for the action by the successful applicants at the call for proposals stage must be corrected to remove any obvious arithmetical errors or ineligible costs prior to signing the contract. The description of the action is corrected accordingly if need be.

The contracting authority may decide that other clarifications or minor corrections may be made to the description of the action or to the budget in so far as they do not call into question the grant award decision, do not conflict with equal treatment of applicants, and:

* + - * relate to matters clearly identified by the evaluation committee; or
      * aim at taking into consideration changes that have occurred since the date of receipt of the proposal.

These amendments cannot lead to an increase in either the amount of the grant or the percentage of the European Union contribution as set in the guidelines of the call for proposals. In this respect, records of the contacts with the applicants must be kept on the file.

In no case the conditions announced in the guidelines can be altered at this stage. Apart from the above-mentioned clarifications and/or corrections, any other alteration of the initial proposal or deviation from the award conditions laid down in the guidelines is strictly prohibited.

**Any other alteration to the successful applicant’s proposal, or negotiation of it, is prohibited.**

* 1. Indicative timetable

|  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- |
|  | **DATE** | **TIME** |
| **1. Information meeting (if any)** | 10.07.2025 | TBA |
| **2. Deadline for requesting any clarifications from the contracting authority** | Date 21 days before the submission deadline | - |
| **3. Last date on which clarifications are issued by the contracting authority** | Date 11 days before the submission deadline | - |
| **4.** **Deadline for submission of applications** | 23.08.2025 | - |
| **5.**  **Notification of the contracting authority decision** | 180 days from the submission deadline | - |
| **6.** **Contract signature** | within 90 days from the notification (5.) | - |

All times are in the time zone of the country of the contracting authority.

* 1. This indicative timetable refers to provisional dates (except for dates 2, 3, and 4) and may be updated by the contracting authority during the procedure. In such cases, the updated timetable will be published on the web site where the call was published: https://tirana.aics.gov.itEarly detection and exclusion system

Applicants and, persons who have powers of representation, decision-making or control over them, natural or legal person that assumes unlimited liability for the debts, natural or legal person who is essential for the award or for the implementation of the legal commitment, beneficial owner , are informed that, should they be in one of the situations of early detection or exclusion, their personal details (name, given name if natural person, address, legal form) may be registered in the early detection and exclusion system, and communicated to the persons and entities concerned in relation to the award or the execution of a grant contract.

For more information, you may consult the privacy statement available on

<http://ec.europa.eu/budget/explained/management/protecting/protect_en.cfm>

1. LIST OF annexes

**Note that all annexes must be adapted to the call and published together with the guidelines**

**Documents to be completed**

|  |  |
| --- | --- |
| Annex A | Grant application form (Word format) |
| A.1 | Concept note |
| A.2 | Full application form |
| Annex B | Budget (Excel format) |
| Annex C | Logical framework (Excel format) |
| Annex D | Identification form |
| Annex H | Declaration on Honour on exclusion criteria |
|  |  |

**Documents for information[[9]](#footnote-10)**

|  |  |
| --- | --- |
| Annex G | Standard grant contract |
| Annex II | General conditions |
| Annex IV | Contract award rules |
| Annex V | Standard request for payment |
| Annex VI | Model narrative and financial report |
| Annex IX | Standard template for transfer of ownership of assets |
| Annex I | Daily allowance rates (per diem), available at the following address: <https://international-partnerships.ec.europa.eu/funding/guidelines/managing-project/diem-rates_en> |
|  |  |
|  |  |

**Useful links**

|  |  |
| --- | --- |
| PRAG | <https://wikis.ec.europa.eu/display/ExactExternalWiki/ePRAG> |
| Project Cycle Management Guidelines | <https://ec.europa.eu/international-partnerships/funding/managing-project_en> |
| The implementation of grant contracts, A Users' Guide | <https://wikis.ec.europa.eu/pages/viewpage.action?pageId=48169235> |
| Financial Toolkit[[10]](#footnote-11) | <https://ec.europa.eu/international-partnerships/financial-management-toolkit_en> |
| Early Detection and Exclusion System (EDES) | <https://commission.europa.eu/strategy-and-policy/eu-budget/how-it-works/annual-lifecycle/implementation/anti-fraud-measures/edes_en#data-protection> |

1. Where a grant is financed by the European Development Fund, any mention of European Union financing must be understood as referring to European Development Fund financing. [↑](#footnote-ref-2)
2. Note that a lead applicant (i.e. a coordinator) whose pillars have been positively assessed by the European Commission and who is awarded a grant will not sign the standard grant contract published with these guidelines but a contribution agreement based on the contribution agreement template. All references in these guidelines and other documents related to this call to the standard grant contract shall in this case be understood as referring to the relevant provisions of the contribution agreement template. [↑](#footnote-ref-3)
3. For the avoidance of doubt, non-governmental organisation means a voluntary, independent from government, non-profit organisation, which is not a political party or a trade union (Article 2(48) FR). [↑](#footnote-ref-4)
4. To be determined on the basis of the organisation’s statutes, which should demonstrate that it has been established by an instrument governed by the national law of the country concerned and that its head office is located in an eligible country. In this respect, any legal entity whose statutes have been established in another country cannot be considered an eligible local organisation, even if the statutes are registered locally or a ‘Memorandum of Understanding’ has been concluded. [↑](#footnote-ref-5)
5. To be determined on the basis of the organisation’s statutes, which should demonstrate that it has been established by an instrument governed by the national law of the country concerned and that its head office is located in an eligible country. In this respect, any legal entity whose statutes have been established in another country cannot be considered an eligible local organisation, even if the statutes are registered locally or a ‘Memorandum of Understanding’ has been concluded. [↑](#footnote-ref-6)
6. For the avoidance of doubt, non-governmental organisation means a voluntary, independent from government, non-profit organisation, which is not a political party or a trade union (Article 2(48) FR). [↑](#footnote-ref-7)
7. Article 29 NDICI. [↑](#footnote-ref-8)
8. These third parties are neither affiliated entity(ies) nor associates nor contractors. [↑](#footnote-ref-9)
9. These documents should also be published by the contracting authority. [↑](#footnote-ref-10)
10. Please note that the toolkit is not part of the grant contract and has no legal value. It merely provides general guidance and may in some details differ from the signed grant contract. In order to ensure compliance with their contractual obligations beneficiaries should not exclusively rely on the toolkit but always consult their individual contract documents. [↑](#footnote-ref-11)