

**Interreg V-B ADRIATIC IONIAN  
COOPERATION PROGRAMME 2014-2020  
“ADRION”**

**Fourth restricted call for proposals  
Programme Manual  
Priority Axes 1, 2, 3**

**Version: September 2021**

**Disclaimer:**

The present manual intends to provide useful information for applicants. It does not replace or overrule the official EU Regulations and Adriatic Ionian Cooperation Programme.

**List of acronyms**

<b>ADRION</b>	INTERREG V-B Adriatic-Ionian Transnational Cooperation Programme 2014 - 2020
<b>AF</b>	application form
<b>CP</b>	cooperation programme
<b>ENI</b>	European Neighbourhood Instrument
<b>ESI FUNDS</b>	European Investment and Structural Funds
<b>ERDF</b>	European Regional Development Fund
<b>ETC</b>	European Territorial Cooperation
<b>EUSAIR</b>	European Union Strategy for Adriatic and Ionian Region
<b>ERDF Partner States</b>	Croatia, Greece, Italy, Slovenia
<b>ICT</b>	information and communication technologies
<b>IP</b>	investment priority
<b>IPA</b>	Instrument for Pre-Accession Assistance
<b>IPA Partner States</b>	Albania, Bosnia and Herzegovina, Montenegro, Serbia
<b>JS</b>	joint secretariat
<b>MA</b>	managing authority
<b>MC</b>	monitoring committee
<b>NCP</b>	national contact point
<b>PA</b>	priority axis
<b>Partner States</b>	Albania, Bosnia and Herzegovina, Croatia, Greece, Italy, Montenegro, Serbia, Slovenia
<b>PRAG</b>	Practical Guide to Contract Procedures for EU External Actions
<b>SME</b>	Small and Medium sized Enterprises
<b>SO</b>	specific objective
<b>TO</b>	thematic objective
<i>Lead Partner, Lead beneficiary and Lead applicant have been used as synonyms</i>	
<i>Project Partner and project beneficiary have been used as synonyms</i>	
<i>Operation and project have been used as synonyms</i>	

## Table of contents

<b>Introduction</b> .....	5
GENERAL INFORMATION ON THE ADRIATIC-IONIAN PROGRAMME .....	6
<b>Legal and strategic framework</b> .....	7
<b>The ADRION programme in a nutshell</b> .....	9
<i>The Programme eligible area</i> .....	9
<i>ADRION programme budget</i> .....	10
<i>ADRION Cooperation Programme structure</i> .....	10
<b>The EU Strategy of the Adriatic and Ionian region - EUSAIR</b> .....	11
<i>Links between the EUSAIR and ADRION Programme</i> .....	12
<b>Programme key principles</b> .....	13
<b>Horizontal principles</b> .....	14
<i>Equality between men and women and non-discrimination</i> .....	14
<i>Sustainable development</i> .....	15
<b>Programme language</b> .....	15
FOURTH RESTRICTED CALL FOR PROPOSALS: KEY ELEMENTS .....	17
<b>EU funds allocation</b> .....	18
<b>EU Project financial size</b> .....	18
<b>Eligible activities</b> .....	18
<b>Project partnership</b> .....	19
<b>Partners' obligations</b> .....	23
<i>Lead partner responsibility</i> .....	23
<i>Project partner responsibility</i> .....	24
<b>Exclusion criteria</b> .....	25
<i>Exclusion from participation</i> .....	25
<i>Exclusion from subsidy</i> .....	25
<b>Ways of cooperation within a project proposal</b> .....	25
<b>Location of the operation and related activities</b> .....	26
<b>Project duration</b> .....	26
<b>Funding method</b> .....	27
<b>Project budget</b> .....	27
<i>Use of Euro</i> .....	28
<b>Hierarchy of rules on eligibility of expenditure</b> .....	28
<b>General eligibility requirements</b> .....	28
<b>Project budget lines</b> .....	30
<i>Staff costs</i> .....	31
<i>Office and administrative expenditure</i> .....	32
<i>Travel and accommodation costs</i> .....	32
<i>External expertise and services costs</i> .....	34
PROCEDURE FOR SUBMISSION AND SELECTION OF OPERATIONS .....	36
<b>Publication</b> .....	37
<b>Submission of project proposals</b> .....	37
<b>Application Form</b> .....	37

<i>Application form structure</i> .....	38
<b>Assessment of the applications</b> .....	40
<i>Admissibility and eligibility check</i> .....	40
<i>Quality assessment</i> .....	40
<i>Anti-fraud check</i> .....	40
<i>Finalization of the project assessment grid</i> .....	41
<b>Decision making and communication to the Lead Applicants</b> .....	41
<b>Contractual provisions</b> .....	41
<i>Principle of non-cumulative award (double funding)</i> .....	41
<i>Subsidy Contract</i> .....	42
<i>Partnership Agreement</i> .....	42
<i>Payment procedure</i> .....	42
<b>Publicity by the Programme</b> .....	42
<b>Complaint procedure</b> .....	43
<b>Data Protection</b> .....	43
<b>Contacts</b> .....	44
<b>Annex 1– Admissibility and Eligibility Criteria</b> .....	45
<b>Quality Criteria</b> .....	48

## **Introduction**

This Programme Manual is based on the legal framework establishing the ESI Funds, the Adriatic Ionian V-B (ADRION) Cooperation Programme and the decisions adopted by the ADRION Monitoring Committee (MC).

It intends to give guidance to potential beneficiaries interested in submitting project applications in the framework of the **fourth restricted call for proposals, which will be addressed to Priority Axes 1, 2 and 3.**

As the restricted call **is addressed to potential beneficiaries which already got activities granted by ADRION programme in the framework of the first call for proposals and finalized within 31 July 2021**, they are invited to combine guidance provided in this document with rules already in force on projects implementation and reported in the Implementation Manual 1<sup>st</sup> call - version No 2, as well as other documentation related to 1<sup>st</sup> call projects implementation available on programme web site.

The present document is structured according to the following: section 1 provides a general overview on the programme, whereas sections 2 and 3 are targeted to the restricted call characteristics.

**GENERAL INFORMATION ON THE ADRIATIC-IONIAN PROGRAMME**

## Legal and strategic framework

The points below provide an overview (non-exhaustive list) on the legal framework supporting the Interreg ADRION programme; eventual amendments of the listed Regulations must be considered as well:

- Regulation (EU) No 1303/2013 of the European Parliament and of the Council of 17 December 2013 laying down common provisions on the European Regional Development Fund (ERDF), the European Social Fund, the Cohesion Fund, the European Agricultural Fund for Rural Development and the European Maritime and Fisheries Fund and laying down general provisions on the European Regional Development Fund, the European Social Fund, the Cohesion Fund and the European Maritime and Fisheries Fund and repealing Council Regulation (EC) No 1083/2006;
- Regulation (EU) No 1301/2013 of the European Parliament and of the Council of 17 December 2013 on the European Regional Development Fund and on specific provisions concerning the Investment for growth and jobs goal and repealing Regulation (EC) No 1080/2006;
- Regulation (EU) No 1302/2013 of the European Parliament and of the Council of 17 December 2013 amending Regulation (EC) No 1082/2006 on a European grouping of territorial cooperation (EGTC) as regards the clarification, simplification and improvement of the establishment and functioning of such groupings;
- Regulation (EU) No 1299/2013 of the European Parliament and of the Council of 17 December 2013 on specific provisions for the support from the European Regional Development Fund to the European territorial cooperation goal;
- Regulation (EU) No 231/2014 of the European Parliament and of the Council of 11 March 2014 establishing an Instrument for Pre-accession Assistance (IPA II);
- Regulation (EU) No 236/2014 of the European Parliament and of the Council of 11 March 2014, Common Implementing Regulation for External Actions;
- Regulation (EU, Euratom) 2018/1046 of the European Parliament and of the Council of 18 July 2018 on the financial rules applicable to the general budget of the Union, amending Regulations (EU) No 1296/2013, (EU) No 1301/2013, (EU) No 1303/2013, (EU) No 1304/2013, (EU) No 1309/2013, (EU) No 1316/2013, (EU) No 223/2014, (EU) No 283/2014, and Decision No 541/2014/EU and repealing Regulation (EU, Euratom) No 966/2012;
- Delegated and Implementing Acts of the European Structural and Investments Funds Regulations for the period 2014-2020;
- EU legislation and related underlying principles laying down provisions on public procurement, on competition and entry into the markets, the protection of the environment, the equal opportunities between men and women and non-discrimination;
- Art. 107 and 108 of the Treaty on the Functioning of the European Union;
- Commission Regulation (EU) No 1407/2013 on the application of art. 107 and 108 of the Treaty on the functioning of the European Union to *de minimis* aid;
- Delegated and Implementing acts as well as all applicable decisions and rules in the field of state aid.

In addition to the above, the lead and project partners (hereinafter: LP and PP) must also take into account the following:

- The European Territorial Cooperation Programme Interreg V-B Adriatic Ionian CCI 2014TC16M4TN002, approved by the European Commission on 20/10/2015 in its latest version;
- The Interreg ADRION Programme Strategic Environmental Assessment;

- The Call announcement of the present fourth restricted call for proposals.
- The Implementation Manual and other guidelines issued by ADRION supporting projects implementation in their latest versions;
- National rules applicable to the beneficiaries and their activities;
- The laws of the Republic of Italy applicable to the contractual relationship between MA and the LP.

The application package of the fourth restricted call for proposal is available on ADRION web site.

For reference and further documentation please consult the following websites:

[http://ec.europa.eu/regional\\_policy/en/information/legislation/regulations/](http://ec.europa.eu/regional_policy/en/information/legislation/regulations/)

[http://ec.europa.eu/regional\\_policy/en/information/legislation/delegated-acts/](http://ec.europa.eu/regional_policy/en/information/legislation/delegated-acts/)

[http://ec.europa.eu/regional\\_policy/en/information/legislation/implementing-acts/](http://ec.europa.eu/regional_policy/en/information/legislation/implementing-acts/)

[http://ec.europa.eu/enlargement/instruments/overview/index\\_en.htm](http://ec.europa.eu/enlargement/instruments/overview/index_en.htm)



## The ADRION programme in a nutshell

The ADRION overall objective is to act as a policy driver and governance innovator fostering European integration among Partner States (Albania, Bosnia and Herzegovina, Croatia, Greece, Italy, Montenegro, Serbia, Slovenia), taking advantage from the rich natural, cultural and human resources surrounding the Adriatic and Ionian seas and enhancing economic, social and territorial cohesion in the Programme area.

ADRION intends to contribute to *“the harmonious development of the Union’s territory (...) and to strengthen cooperation by means of actions conducive to integrated territorial development linked to the Union’s cohesion policy priorities”*<sup>1</sup> through the funding of project proposals aimed at positively contributing to the needs and challenges of the living conditions in the ADRION area (economic activities, quality of the environment, safety, etc.), rather than highlighting on the needs of a limited number of partners.

### *The Programme eligible area*

The ADRION Programme includes a wide transnational area with more than 70 million inhabitants, and has distinct physical, environmental, socio-economic and cultural characteristics. Hence, it addresses all three dimensions of sustainability, including social, economic and environmental aspects but also institutional elements.

The Programme eligible area involves 8 Partner States primarily surrounding the Adriatic and Ionian Sea basin and covering an important terrestrial surface as well. Four countries are EU Member States, whereas the other four are candidate or potential candidate countries.

#### **EU Partner States:**

1. Croatia (NUTS regions: Jadranska Hrvatska; Kontinentalna Hrvatska);
2. Greece (NUTS regions: Anatoliki Makedonia, Thraki; Kentriki Makedonia; Dytiki Makedonia; Thessalia; Ipeiros; Ionia Nisia; Dytiki Ellada; Sterea Ellada; Peloponnisos; Attiki; Voreio Aigaio; Notio Aigaio; Kriti);
3. Italy (NUTS regions: Abruzzo, Basilicata, Calabria, Emilia-Romagna, Friuli-Venezia Giulia, Lombardia, Marche, Molise, Provincia Autonoma di Bolzano, Provincia Autonoma di Trento, Puglia, Sicilia, Umbria, Veneto);
4. Slovenia: (NUTS regions: Vzhodna Slovenija; Zahodna Slovenija).

#### **Non-EU Partner States:**

5. Albania;
6. Bosnia and Herzegovina;
7. Montenegro;
8. Serbia.

As a general rule, EU Member States benefit from ERDF funds (hereinafter: ERDF Partner States), whereas the others from IPA II (IPA) contribution (hereinafter: IPA Partner States).

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<sup>1</sup>Recitals No 4 and 6 of Regulation (EU) No 1299/2013.

### *ADRION programme budget*

The overall programme budget amounts to EUR 117.918.198, out of which EUR 99.156.616 of EU public resources (EUR 83.467.729 ERDF and EUR 15.688.887 IPA funds).

Funds devoted to operations to be allocated through calls for proposals refer to the three priority axes:

- Priority Axis No 1 - Innovative and smart Region;
- Priority Axis No 2 - Sustainable Region;
- Priority Axis No 3 – Connected Region.

### *ADRION Cooperation Programme structure*

As all the Cooperation Programmes approved in the 2014-2020 programming period, also ADRION is based on a result-oriented approach and follows a programme intervention logic aimed at defining its structure and goals in accordance with the Regulation (EU) No 1299/2013.

The result-oriented approach is based on:

- Result orientation of the programme;
- Programme monitoring through indicators;
- Definition of a performance framework whose targets must be reached in 2018;
- Evaluation and reporting.

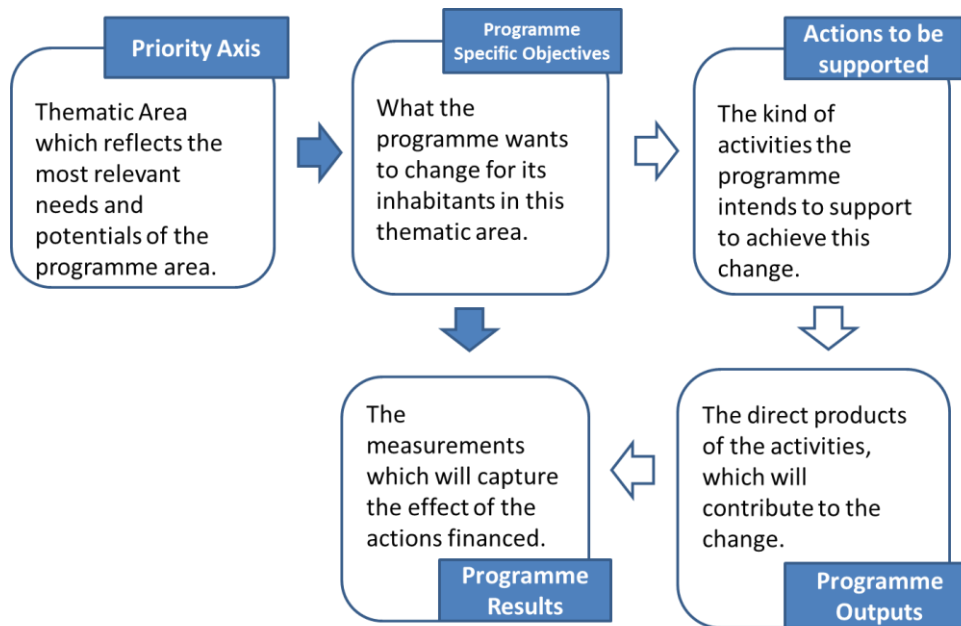
The programme intervention logic is the theoretical framework that structures and visualises the entire logical and sequential process adopted by the programme to define its thematic and specific objectives aimed at contributing to reaching the expected change within the programme area.

The programme structure is characterised by Priority Axes, Programme Specific Objectives, actions to be supported, outputs and results each other closely interlinked:

- A priority axis corresponds to a thematic objective as described in art. 9 of the Regulation (EU) No 1303/2013 and to art. 5 of Regulation (EU) No 1301/2013;
- Each priority axis includes specific objectives and expected results for the specific objectives;
- Descriptions of the type and examples of actions to be supported under each investment priority and their expected contribution to the specific objectives;
- Output indicators including their quantified target value, which are expected to contribute to the results (e.g.: number of firms supported, number of action plans elaborated, etc.);
- Result indicators relating to the specific objectives of the Priority Axis. They refer to the effects on direct beneficiaries brought about by the programme. They provide information on changes to, for example, the behaviour, or the capacity or performance of beneficiaries. Such indicators can be physical (e.g.: reduction of energy consumption, increase of a competence etc.) or financial (e.g.: additional financial resource mobilised, decrease of an expense etc.)<sup>2</sup>.

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<sup>2</sup> ADRION Cooperation Programme, page 130.



**In the framework of the fourth restricted call for proposals, no outputs indicators are expected to be delivered.**

### The EU Strategy of the Adriatic and Ionian region - EUSAIR

The geographical area covered by the ADRION Programme coincides with the one encompassed by the EU macro regional strategy for the Adriatic Ionian Region (EUSAIR), which offers a framework for policy coordination reflected in a joint action plan<sup>3</sup> shared between several countries or regions.

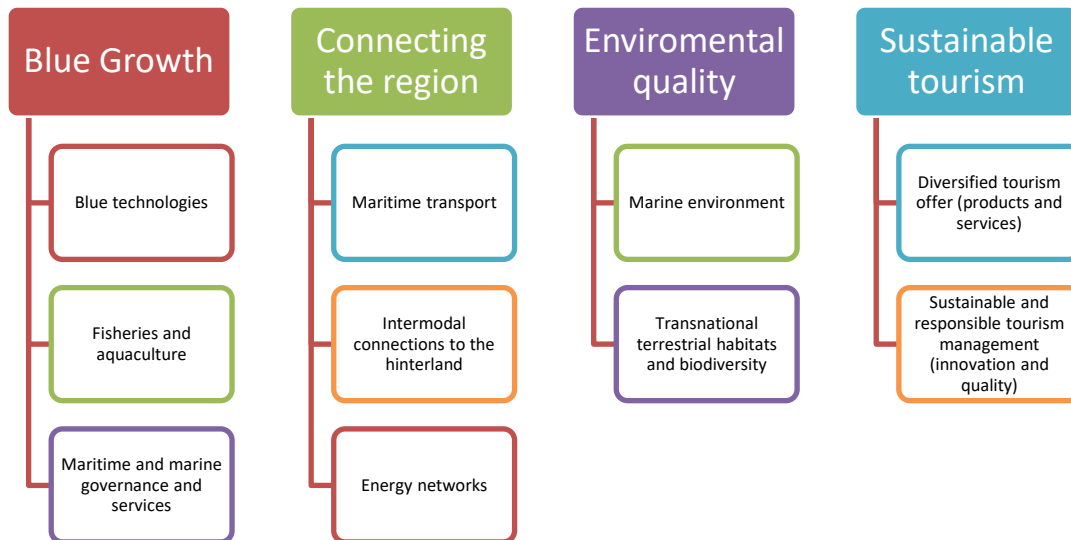
A macro region is an area including the territory of several countries or regions which shares common features or challenges.

The EUSAIR was jointly developed by the countries and stakeholders of the Adriatic-Ionian Region with the support of the European Commission. EUSAIR was finally endorsed by the European Council in October 2014, to identify and address common challenges together.

Through the development and implementation of EUSAIR, the Partner States aim at fostering coordination of interventions across all territories and policy areas in the Adriatic-Ionian Region and to add value to those actions which significantly contribute to address joint challenges and opportunities.

The Strategy is structured into 4 pillars; its action plan identifies topics for joint actions, defines the related targets and will be periodically revised to take into account achievements and changes in the Region.

<sup>3</sup>[http://ec.europa.eu/regional\\_policy/sources/cooperate/adriat\\_ionian/pdf/com\\_357\\_en.pdf](http://ec.europa.eu/regional_policy/sources/cooperate/adriat_ionian/pdf/com_357_en.pdf)



The Strategy encourages a horizontal approach, highlighting interdependence between its four pillars.

EUSAIR is one of the four macro regional strategies put in place; the others are<sup>4</sup>:

- The EU Strategy for the Baltic Sea Region (EUSBSR);
- The EU Strategy for the Danube Region (EUSDR);
- The EU Strategy for the Alpine Region (EUSALP).

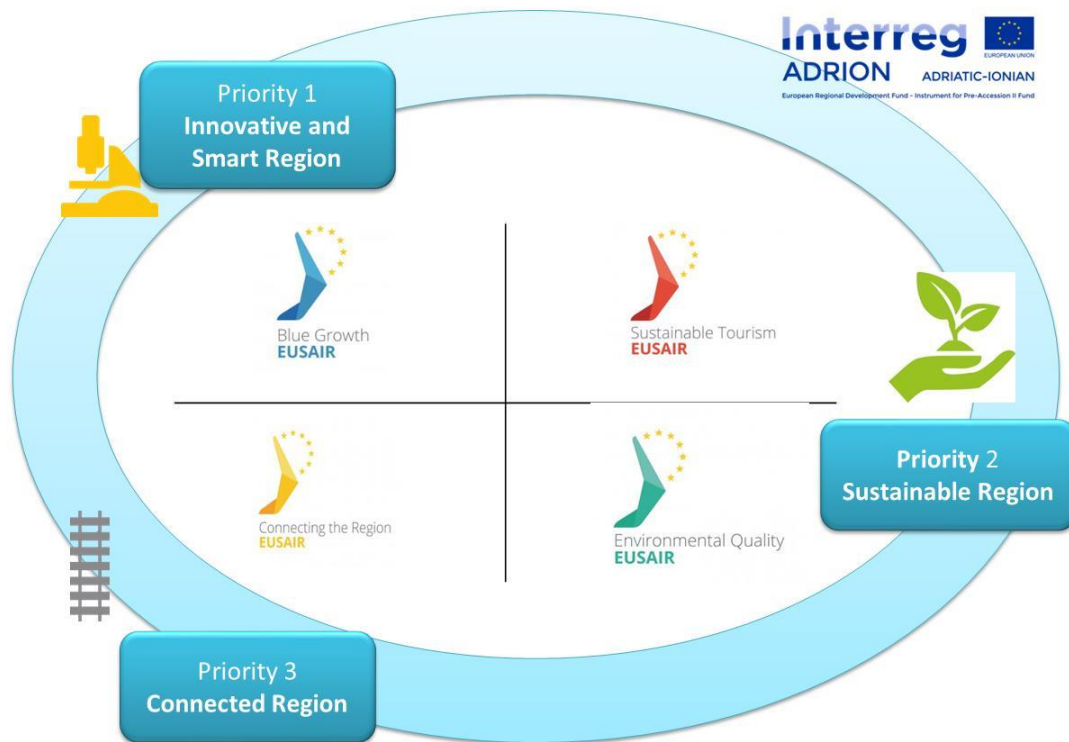
Updated information on the EUSAIR strategy can be found in:

- [http://ec.europa.eu/regional\\_policy/en/policy/cooperation/macro-regional-strategies/adriatic-ionian/](http://ec.europa.eu/regional_policy/en/policy/cooperation/macro-regional-strategies/adriatic-ionian/)
- <http://www.adriatic-ionian.eu/>.

#### *Links between the EUSAIR and ADRION Programme*

ADRION programme must be seen as a strategic programme due to its direct alignment - geographically, thematically, and operationally - to the EU Strategy for the Adriatic and Ionian Region.

<sup>4</sup>[http://ec.europa.eu/regional\\_policy/en/policy/cooperation/macro-regional-strategies/](http://ec.europa.eu/regional_policy/en/policy/cooperation/macro-regional-strategies/)



Priority Axis 1 on innovation addresses directly Pillar 1 on Blue Growth but also encompasses elements of the other three Pillars;

Priority Axis 2 on natural and cultural heritage and biodiversity addresses directly Pillar 4 on Sustainable Tourism through the Investment Priority (IP) 6c, but also Pillar 1 on Blue Growth and 3 on Environmental Quality through IP 6d;

Priority Axis 3 on sustainable transport and mobility addresses directly Pillar 2 on connecting the Region and indirectly Pillar 3 through the promotion of environmental-friendly low carbon transport and also Pillar 4 as a prerequisite for tourism.

However, it should be highlighted that the alignment is not comprehensive, as not all the ADRION topics are present in EUSAIR, and not all EUSAIR ones are mirrored in ADRION.

### Programme key principles

ADRION Programme does not start from scratch: it has its roots in the projects mainly funded by the transnational programme South East Europe and by the IPA cross-border Adriatic programme in the area.

A wide variety of actors have been involved on both Adriatic and Ionian coastlines as well as on its bordering terrestrial surface and a wealth of knowledge, experiences, innovative practices, valuable outputs and results have been generated and must not be dispersed: indeed, they shall be taken into account and capitalised to progress in cooperation and achievements.

In this respect the ADRION programme intends to consolidate the capital built by Interreg projects and programmes with the objectives of:

1. Making the knowledge and results generated by projects more accessible, thus improving transfer of knowledge;

2. Obtaining additional results through benchmarking and detailed content analysis, building on existing knowledge and experience;
3. Promoting the re-use and / or transfer of this knowledge and these results, in order to boost performance and delivery.
4. Raising awareness and improving communication of results in specific fields of regional policy<sup>5</sup>.

This approach shall support the leading principles guiding the ADRION implementation which can be summarised as follows:

1. **Effective contribution of funded operations to the programme results through the realization of programme outputs;**
2. **Positive contribution to the needs and challenges in a transnational perspective of the living conditions in the ADRION area (economic activities, quality of the environment, safety, etc.), rather than highlighting on the needs of a limited number of partners;**
3. **Support the exchange and transfer experiences between regions, transnational interventions and capacity building, and ensure that results are disseminated and used beyond project partners;**
4. (Relevance of) **cohesion policy and capacity building as multiplier of prosperity and growth;**
5. **Leverage for future initiatives and investments.**

## Horizontal principles

### *Equality between men and women and non-discrimination*

In addition to the thematic orientation, ADRION Programme incorporates horizontal aspects highlighted in EU regulations, namely:

1. **Equal opportunities and non-discrimination:**

Projects must ensure that the activities implemented do not generate sex discrimination of any kind (sex, racial or ethnic origin, religion or belief, disability, age or sexual orientation) and to explain how the equal opportunity principle is rooted in the project design and implementation. All projects, regardless the priority axis under which they are submitted are encouraged to foresee measures or actions to promote equal opportunities and preventing any discrimination.

2. **Equality between men and women:**

Projects must ensure that the activities implemented are in line with the principle of equality between men and women and to demonstrate how this principle is rooted in the project design and implementation. This aspect applies to all projects, regardless the priority axis under which they are submitted.

Furthermore, specific cross-cutting issues will be addressed in all the Priority Axes contributing to the overall objectives of the programme:

1. Wide-spread take-up and use of Information and Communication Technologies (ICT);
2. Social cohesion and social innovation;

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<sup>5</sup> Sources of inspirations can be found in the INTERACT database KEEP which collects information on project and partners of Territorial Cooperation [www.keep.eu](http://www.keep.eu), programmes projects portfolios and INTERACT thematic studies.

3. Promotion of data availability and knowledge management according to the “open data” principle;
4. Integrated territorial and eco-systemic approach, i.e.: a way of making decisions to manage activities sustainably. It recognises that humans are part of the ecosystem and that their activities both affect the ecosystem and depend on it. The ecosystem approach requires:
  - a) An integrated approach that considers all ecosystem components (e.g. human activities, habitats and species, and physical processes);
  - b) Consideration of ecosystem functions and resulting ecosystem services;
  - c) Strong participation of stakeholders<sup>6</sup>.

### *Sustainable development*

ADRION programme invites to promote eco-innovation, i.e.: aiming to make a more sustainable use of natural resources under all Priority Axes. More precisely, beneficiaries are requested to describe in their project proposals the efforts they will undertake to reduce the project’s “carbon footprint”.

In line with the principle of sustainable development:

1. Projects which have a positive effect on the environment or which conserve, enhance or rehabilitate existing endowments will be preferred to those that are neutral from this perspective;
2. Projects that have a potentially harmful effect on the environment will be excluded;
3. Actions designed to raise environmental awareness and compliance both within the economic and administrative sectors, and among the general public, including acknowledgement that a high level of environmental performance can provide a long-term competitive advantage will be supported.

Additionally, ADRION invites to implement actions/adopt specific measures to reduce the environmental impact. Indicatively, they can include:

4. Use of video conferencing to reduce travelling;
5. Publications on FSC certified paper;
6. Use of “green public procurement” procedures and innovative public procurement where appropriate;
7. Use of short supply chains in the implementation of projects activities;
8. Raising awareness of partners, beneficiaries and target groups on sustainability issues;
9. Promotion of activities with limited use of energy and natural resources.

### **Programme language**

The official language of ADRION Programme is English. All deliveries, documents, tools, and communication activities of the Programme management bodies will be in English; this language will also be used in all communication with the applicants and beneficiaries and among the project beneficiaries themselves.

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<sup>6</sup> The Convention on Biological Diversity (CBD) defines the ecosystem approach as “a strategy for the integrated management of land, water and living resources that promotes conservation and sustainable use in an equitable way”. In the marine environment, ICES defines it as “the comprehensive integrated management of human activities based on best available scientific knowledge about the ecosystem and its dynamics, in order to identify and take action on influences which are critical to the health of the marine ecosystems, thereby achieving sustainable use of ecosystem goods and services and maintenance of ecosystem integrity”.

Potential beneficiaries can receive information in their national language by the corresponding National Contact Points (NCPs), who, if they deem it relevant, can also translate the Programme documentation in their own language.

English version of documentation and correspondence is however the only binding one.



**FOURTH RESTRICTED CALL FOR PROPOSALS: KEY ELEMENTS**

## Overall goals

First call projects have been highly affected by the pandemic crisis during their last implementation phase, which prevented the wide spreading of their outcomes in their territories and to relevant stakeholders.

ADRION intends to offer **first call projects which have been finalised within 31 July 2021** the chance of further maximizing the effectiveness of their achieved outcomes through a follow up of their activities according to a pre-defined set of conditions as reported in the next paragraphs.

The overall goals the restricted call intends to achieve are:

- a) Increasing awareness among potential beneficiaries, stakeholders and interested institutions on the role of European Territorial Cooperation to increase cohesion.
- b) Promoting the project outcomes and results to national/regional/level.
- c) Promoting the practical use, relevance, and transferability of project outcomes (e.g.: tools, apps, strategies etc) to potential beneficiaries (eventually in cooperation with ADRION National Contact Points).
- d) Providing first-hand information on managing and implementing European projects to future potential beneficiaries (eventually in cooperation with ADRION National Contact Points).

## EU funds allocation

Indicatively, the EU available funds (ERDF and IPA II) to be allocated through the present call amounts to ca MEUR 5,60.

If necessary, use of art. 20.2 of Regulation (EU) No 1299/2013 shall apply.

## EU Project financial size

Project EU budget may be between EUR 100.000,00 up to EUR 150.000,00.

ADRION EU contribution will be limited to a co-financing rate up to 85% of eligible costs for all financing Project Partners (i.e.: both benefitting from ERDF and IPA II contribution). The share of expenditure (at least 15%) not covered by ERDF or IPA II funds shall be ensured by national co-financing sources.

The proposed project budget must be built on the principle of sound financial management, i.e.: it must truly reflect the activities foreseen in the project.

Should the granted projects spend more than what approved by the MC, the EU contribution shall not be increased accordingly.

## Eligible activities

Interested partnerships may only implement the activities listed in the following pre-defined menu list:

1. Organization of at least 1 meeting and/or events per country of beneficiary either in persons or online open to the public; wide online access must in any case be ensured. The topic must be framed under lett a) or b) of the overall goals listed in paragraph “Overall goals”.
2. Organization of activities, e.g.: trainings, manuals, video tutorials, stakeholders’ events, related to the promotion of practical application of products/practices and processes developed (e.g.: in case of a project promoting sustainable tourism, meetings with travel agencies, hotels representatives, etc. could be organized). Activities shall be addressed to relevant stakeholders operating in the sector subject of the project intervention. Activities can be organized either in person or online: wide online access must in any case be ensured. Cooperation with National Contact Points could also be considered.
3. Organization of at least 1 meeting and/or events per partner state hosting project partners on future projects tackling the topics reported in letter d) of paragraph “Overall goals”. Wide online access must in any case be ensured. Cooperation with National Contact Points can also be considered.
4. Update/improvement/enhancement of the already delivered project strategy, action plan and networks to ensure their resilience to COVID-19 and the consequent economic crisis.
5. Merging partially or totally and/or putting in relation the different tools like apps, platforms, etc. elaborated by first call projects.
6. Further enhancement of first call already delivered project’s platforms data and operability.
7. Implementation of up to 2 pilot actions addressing COVID -19 situation.

**In order to maximize the financial allocation of released resources, projects may choose at least 3 up to a maximum of 6 activities.**

### **Project partnership**

The fourth restricted call for proposals is addressed to partnerships of first call projects finalized within 31 July 2021 only.

Interested applicants may submit their proposals upon condition that their proposal:

- a) Is to be understood as a follow up of ADRION first call granted projects.
- b) The involved partnership is the same which implemented the granted project activities: it may not replace partners or include new ones.
- c) In case some project partners which implemented first call projects are not interested in participating, a proposal can still be submitted by the remaining partners upon condition that the proposed partnership meets the minimum eligible requirements set forth in the 1<sup>st</sup> call programme Manual, i.e.:
  - a minimum of three financing partners (ERDF/IPA II) located within the ADRION eligible area from different Partner States, out of which
  - At least one partner must be from an ERDF Partner State.
- d) The lead partner must be the same as of the first call project for which it is intended to submit a follow up project proposal.

Only ERDF institutions may be lead applicants.

It is possible the involvement of the previously engaged Associated Partners with the same role.

Project partners and lead applicants' legal requirements are the same as those in force along the submission of project proposals in the framework of first call for proposals and here reported in the grey box below for convenience.

Applicants are required to inform in the Application Form – B Section - whether their legal status changed as from 1 April 2020.

MA/JS reserve the right to verify the correctness of the provided information.

#### *Eligible partners*

They must be:

1. **Established under the national law of one of the Partner States participating in the Programme.** Nationality will be determined on the basis of the organisation's statute/articles of incorporation which should demonstrate that it has been established by an instrument governed by the internal law of a country participating to the Programme. In this respect, any legal entity whose statute has been established under the national law of a country not participating to the programme cannot be considered an eligible partner, even if it has established branches/offices legally registered under the national law of a Country participating to the Programme;
2. **Have their official seat and their seat of operations in the country/part of the country included in the Programme area** (with the exceptions reported under the sub-paragraph "*Assimilated partners*");
3. Be endowed with **legal personality**.

In addition to what above, eligible partners shall be:

1. **National, regional and local public bodies** (including **EGTCs** in the meaning of Article 2(16) of Regulation (EU) No 1303/2013, (see the sub-paragraph "*European Grouping of Territorial Cooperation*") and associations formed by one or several of such public bodies;
2. **Body governed by public law**, and associations constituted by one or several bodies governed by public law, as defined in Article 2(4) of Directive 2014/24/EU on public procurement, i.e. bodies that have all of the following characteristics:
  - (a) They are established for the specific purpose of meeting needs in the general interest, not having an industrial or commercial character;
  - (b) They have legal personality; and
  - (c) They are financed, for the most part, by the State, regional or local authorities, or by other bodies governed by public law; or are subject to management supervision by those authorities or bodies; or have an administrative, managerial or supervisory board, more than half of whose members are appointed by the State, regional or local authorities, or by other bodies governed by public law;
3. **Private bodies**, including private companies, having legal personality.
4. **International organisations acting under the national law** of one of the Partner States participating to the Programme.

#### *European Grouping of Territorial Cooperation - EGTC*

According to art. 2(16) of Regulation (EU) No 1303/2013 the category bodies governed by public law also frame "*any European grouping of territorial cooperation (EGTC) established in accordance with Regulation (EC) No 1082/2006 of the European Parliament and of the Council, regardless of whether the EGTC is considered to be a public law body or a private law body under the relevant national implementing provisions*".

EGTC can be a project partner on condition that it is governed by the law of the country where the EGTC has its registered office, which is located in one of the EU countries/part of the country participating to the Programme. The minimum number of members of an EGTC is the one reported in art. 3 a) of Regulation (EU) No 1302/2013 modifying Regulation 1082/2006<sup>7</sup>.

As far as the EGTC is concerned, and in accordance with art. 12.3 of ETC Regulation, an EGTC may be the sole beneficiary of an operation provided that it is set up by public authorities or bodies from at least two participating countries.

#### *Private bodies*

Private bodies are understood as bodies established under private law, having legal personality, irrespective of their size and scope.

#### *International organizations*

Only international organizations acting under the national law of a Partner State participating to the Programme are considered eligible (international organizations acting under international law are not eligible).

International organizations must be operational from at least 2 fiscal years at the time of submission of the candidature.

#### *Assimilated partners*

In order to overcome to the Programme geographical constraints applying to Italy, those Italian public authorities or bodies governed by public law which are competent in their scope of action for certain parts of the eligible area, but which are located outside of it (e.g.: Ministries) are considered as assimilated partners, with equal rights and obligations to applicants located within the programme area.

The attribution of the characteristic of assimilated partner to an Italian institution located outside the Programme area shall be duly justified in the project application and further assessed with the support of the NCP.

#### *Other indications regarding the eligibility of partners*

All applicants, irrespective their legal status, must ensure that:

1. They have adequate human and technical resources to ensure a sound project implementation and management;

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<sup>7</sup>*"In accordance with Article 4(3a), an EGTC may be made up of members located on the territory of at least two Member States and of one or more third countries neighbouring at least one of those Member States. For the purposes of this Regulation, a third country shall be considered to be neighbouring a Member State where the third country and that Member State share a common land border or where both the third country and the Member State are eligible under a joint maritime cross-border or transnational programme under the European territorial cooperation goal, or are eligible under another cross-border, sea-crossing or sea-basin cooperation programme, including where they are separated by international waters".*

*2. An EGTC may be made up of members located on the territory of only one Member State and of one or more third countries neighbouring that Member State, where the Member State concerned considers that EGTC to be consistent with the scope of its territorial cooperation in the context of cross- border or transnational cooperation or bilateral relations with the third countries concerned.*

*3. Third countries neighbouring a Member State include maritime borders between the countries concerned".*

2. Their administrative involvement in the project does not undermine their daily activities;
3. Their financial commitment within the project is adequate to their size and capacity;
4. They have the capacity of advancing payments for the implementation of project activities and eventual delays in reimbursement of EU contributions will not undermine their capacity of implementing the foreseen activities within the project.

Only legal entities eligible for funding and listed in the Application Form (AF) may report their costs. In order to ensure a proper audit trail the MA needs to know which organisations receive programme funding and whether they are eligible according to the programme rules. Therefore, an **“umbrella” type of partnership structure, where one partner acts on behalf of, collects funding and represents other partners without naming them, is not possible.**

As a general principle, as far as the **role covered by the partners within the project is concerned, public and private entities whose ordinary main scope of activities and whose role in the project consists mainly in project coordination, management, communication or knowledge management, cannot be considered as eligible partner/beneficiary.** The involvement of such bodies in the project should be, instead, as external service providers to be contracted following the applicable public procurement procedures.

Finally, applicants are strongly advised to **carefully check the indicative list of potential beneficiaries included in the description of each Programme Priority Axis, namely section 2 of the ADRION CP:** such lists are referred to the typologies of beneficiaries that can best contribute to the Programme specific objectives.

#### *Other forms of participation within the projects*

The ADRION Programme does not allow bodies located outside the Programme, either from other EU countries or from Third Countries to directly benefit from its ERDF/IPA funds. In case their participation is relevant and strategic to the project, other forms of participations are possible.

#### *Associated partners*

The ADRION Programme foresees the involvement of *associated partners*, i.e.: those bodies willing to be involved in a project with an observer or associated status without financially contributing to the project. The associated institutions do not account for the partnership minimum requirements; all expenditure incurred by these bodies shall be finally borne by any of the institutions acting as financing partners in order to be considered as eligible. The associated institutions must not act as service providers in order not to enter in conflict with public procurement rules.

The partnership must demonstrate the benefits that the involved associated partner shall bring to the project and its follow up. Expenditure incurred by these bodies shall be limited to reimbursement of travel and accommodation costs related to their participation in project meetings.

Associated partners can also be located outside the Programme area.

#### *Participation of Non-EU Partners located outside the Programme area*

The Programme allows the participation of financing partners from non-EU countries outside the Programme area. Participation is open to public institutions located in Third Countries not included in the Programme area: their financial participation cannot be, however, supported with Programme funds. Interested organizations from Third Countries shall search for other sources of funding (e.g.: ENI, IPA II, United Nation)

or use their own funds. Third Countries participation shall not count for the fulfilment of the minimum eligible partnership size requirement.

#### *Lead applicant*

According to art. 13 of the Regulation (EU) No 1299/2013 “*where there are (two or) more beneficiaries of an operation in a cooperation programme, one of them shall be designed by all the beneficiaries as lead beneficiary*” (lead partner principle).

The following bodies located in the ERDF Partner States shall be considered as eligible Lead Applicants:

1. Public bodies (national, regional or local level), including associations formed by one or several regional or local authorities governed by public law;
2. Bodies governed by public law, including associations formed by one or several bodies governed by public law;
3. EGTC;
4. Assimilated partners;
5. International organizations acting under national law.

All eligible bodies located in IPA Partner States can participate to projects only as partners.

#### **Partners' obligations**

Eligible partners shall be directly responsible for preparation and implementation of their share of project's activities within the partnership, not acting as an intermediary.

Lead partner and project partners responsibility remain unchanged: below an overview on the main obligations for your convenience.

#### *Lead partner responsibility*

The partner designated by all partners to act as lead partner (art. 13 of Regulation (EU) No 1299/2014) assumes the following responsibilities:

1. Is responsible for the coordination of the drafting of the project application and of its submission on behalf of the entire partnership. In case clarifications are necessary during the assessment phase, the Joint Secretariat (JS) will address to it;
2. Signs the subsidy contract on behalf of the entire partnership with the MA;
3. Ensures arrangements with the other partners comprising provisions able to guarantee the sound financial management of the funds allocated to the project and arrangements for recovering the amounts unduly paid;
4. Assumes the responsibility for ensuring the implementation of the entire operation; in this respect it sets the coordination structure through the appointment of key figures (e.g.: a project coordinator, a financial coordinator and a communication manager) operating for the entire partnership;
5. Ensures that expenditure presented by all partners has been incurred in implementing the operation and corresponds to the activities agreed between all the beneficiaries, and is in accordance with the subsidy contract;

6. Ensures that the expenditure presented by all partners has been verified by the controllers appointed by the country where the partner is located according to the specificities of the national system;
7. Ensures that the promised outputs as in the approved application are delivered in accordance with the set timeline;
8. Receives the reimbursed amount from the Programme on behalf of the entire partnership and transfers the due amounts to its partners as soon as possible without deducting any amount or specific charge;
9. Guarantees the reimbursement of amounts unduly paid to the MA upon receiving a recovery order following the detection of an irregularity on behalf of the affected partner(s) (itself or project partner);
10. Ensures that all project documentation (e.g.: progress report etc.) shall be kept available for a period of two years from 31 December following the submission of the accounts in which the final expenditure of the completed project is included or otherwise required by the specific legislation (e.g.: State Aid). The time period referred to shall be interrupted either in the case of legal proceedings or by a duly justified request of the Commission;
11. Coordinates the communication flow towards the MA/JS with regard to the timely submission of the progress reports and requests for reimbursement;
12. Is responsible of the communication flow between the partnership and the Programme (mainly with the JS and the MA), it is in charge of spreading communication and information received by the Programme to its project partners, including the announcements to participate to seminars organized by the Programme;
13. Ensures prompt solutions of management problems (e.g.: change of partners, requests for revision of activities etc.).

#### *Project partner responsibility*

Each project partner carries out activities planned in the approved Application Form within the deadline agreed at Programme and partnership level. Each project partner shall:

1. Signs the Partnership Agreement which transfers rights and responsibilities from the Lead Partner to the project partners;
2. Assume responsibility towards the lead partner of repaying the received undue amount and it assumes its responsibility in case of irregularities in the expenditure it has declared;
3. Carry out information and communication measures for the public about the project activities;
4. Ensure that all project documentation (e.g.: progress report etc.) shall be kept available for a period of two years from 31 December following the submission of the accounts in which the final expenditure of the completed project is included or otherwise required by the specific legislation (e.g.: State Aid). The time period referred to shall be interrupted either in the case of legal proceedings or by a duly justified request of the Commission.



## Exclusion criteria

### *Exclusion from participation*

Potential beneficiaries might be excluded if falling under one of the conditions reported in art. 137-140 of Regulation (EU, Euratom) 2018/1046, for example:

1. They are bankrupt or being wound up, are having their affairs administered by the courts, have entered into an arrangement with creditors, have suspended business activities, are the subject of proceedings concerning those matters, or are in any analogous situation arising from a similar procedure provided for in national legislation or regulations;
2. They or persons having powers of representation, decision making or control over them have been convicted of an offence concerning their professional conduct by a judgment of a competent authority of a Partner State which has the force of res judicata;
3. They have been guilty of grave professional misconduct proven by any means which the contracting authority can justify, including by decisions of the European Investment Bank and international organisations;
4. They are not in compliance with their obligations relating to the payment of social security contributions or the payment of taxes in accordance with the legal provisions of the country in which they are established or with those of the country of the contracting authority or those of the country where the contract is to be performed;
5. They - or persons having powers of representation, decision making or control over them - have been the subject of a judgment which has the force of res judicata for fraud, corruption, involvement in a criminal organisation, money laundering or any other illegal activity, where such illegal activity is detrimental to the Union's financial interests;
6. They are subject to an administrative penalty imposed by any contracting authority for behaviours mentioned above.

### *Exclusion from subsidy*

Applicants will not be granted financial assistance if, in the course of the grant award procedure, they:

1. Are subject to a conflict of interests;
2. Are guilty of misrepresentation in supplying the information required by the Programme as a condition of participation in the grant award procedure or fail to supply this information;
3. Find themselves in one of the situations of exclusion, referred to in the previous paragraph.

## Ways of cooperation within a project proposal

The cooperation among partners shall be **compulsorily** characterised by the following elements (art 12.4 of Regulation (EU) No 1299/2013):

1. Development of the operation;
2. Implementation of the operation.

Additionally, ADRION requires that also joint financing of operation is to be considered as **compulsory**.

The partners can also cooperate in staffing the operation (optional).

#### **Cooperation in the development of the operation**

All partners shall contribute to the project idea generation and mirror their ideas and actions. They will also define how they intend to work together and the tasks distribution, having regard to their knowledge and experience.

The development of activities should not consider the realization of “mirror” activities, i.e.: the same activities to be implemented by all partners, but a real distribution of tasks according to their skills and abilities, which shall be available for the benefit of the entire partnership.

The Lead Partner plays a coordination role of the process.

#### **Cooperation in the implementation of the operation**

Under the overall coordination of the Lead Partner, the partnership starts the implementation of the approved operation. The implementation refers both to the realization of activities described in the approved application form and to the internal management activities.

Activities must properly be carried out and coordinated: it is not enough that activities run in parallel: There must be clear content based links between what is happening on different sides of the border and regular contact between them. The Lead Partner is responsible for ensuring that activities are properly coordinated, that schedules are kept and that the right quality levels are achieved.

#### **Cooperation in the financing of the operation**

The project is characterized by one budget which is the sum of each partner allocation.

According to the lead partner principle characterizing the ETC projects, the financial responsibility of the project budget vis-à-vis the Programme lies within the lead partner, whereas a partnership agreement is signed between the lead and the project partners mirroring the subsidy contract duties and obligations.

The partner budget mirrors the partners’ responsibilities within the project.

#### **Cooperation in the staffing of the operation**

The project defines its internal organization attributing roles and the necessary staff to fulfil them.

Duplication of functions are to be avoided: the project shall have only 1 joint project coordinator, 1 joint financial manager etc., who will keep regular contacts with the partners for the fulfilment of their tasks.

While the presence/absence of the first three dimensions of cooperation is considered as a condition of eligibility of project proposals, their actual shaping in project proposals will be also qualitatively assessed, whereas the fourth dimension (joint staffing) will be evaluated only as a quality element.

### **Location of the operation and related activities**

Activities shall be implemented in the ADRION area.

### **Project duration**

New granted activities may start their implementation as from 1 January 2022 at the latest and end no later than 30 June 2022.

Project progress report must be finalized and submitted to the JS/MA no later than 30 September 2022. No extension is envisaged.

Late submission of project reports will not guarantee their processing on due time and could be subject to decommitment risk.

## Funding method

ADRION contribution is limited to a co-financing rate up to 85% of eligible costs for all partners (i.e.: both benefitting from ERDF and IPA II contribution).

The share of expenditure (at least 15%) not covered by ERDF or IPA II funds shall be ensured by national co-financing sources, i.e.:

1. **Public funding:** public co-financing provided by central, regional or local public bodies, obtained either through specific-co-financing schemes established at Partner State level or on an *ad hoc* basis; public co-financing can also be the contribution directly provided by public or bodies governed by public law involved in the projects<sup>8</sup>;
2. **Own resources of International Organizations:** they may be considered as public co-financing, depending on the decision by the National Authorities of the Partner States where such organisation is located;
3. **Private funding:** refers to the amount of own funds provided by private institutions through their involvement, or to the provision of funds from private sources external to the partnerships.

## Project budget

The system of financing is a budget-based grant (eligible costs). The grant operates through reimbursement of eligible costs calculated on the basis of a detailed estimated budget, indicating clearly the costs that are eligible for ERDF/IPA II funding. Eligible partners shall ensure stable and sufficient sources of finance to ensure both project implementation and the continuity of the organisation activities throughout the lifespan of the project.

The EU grant may not have the purpose or effect of producing a profit for the beneficiaries (profit is defined as a surplus of receipts over eligible costs incurred by the beneficiaries).

The budget of the project must be drafted following the real cost principle<sup>9</sup>, fully accomplishing the principles of adequacy of costs and sound financial management. The principle of sound financial management builds on the following three principles:

1. The **principle of economy:** it requires that the resources used by the beneficiary in the pursuit of its activities shall be made available in due time, in appropriate quantity and quality and at the best price;
2. The **principle of efficiency:** it concerns the best relationship between resources employed and results achieved;
3. The **principle of effectiveness:** it concerns the attainment of the specific objectives set and the achievement of the intended results.

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<sup>8</sup> In the Application Form, Lead Partner and Project Partners' declaration public funding is disentangled in *Automatic public contribution* and *Other public contribution*.

<sup>9</sup> Except for preparation costs and when simplified cost options (flat rate) are used for calculating costs under staff and office and administration budget lines.

## *Use of Euro*

The budget must be drawn up in EUR. Applicants not based in the Euro zone are advised to draft their budget share using the exchange rate published on the Official Journal of the EU on the date of the publication of the call for proposals on the ADRION website, keeping in mind that reimbursement - based on actually incurred expenditure - will have to be converted into EUR by the beneficiaries using the monthly accounting exchange rate of the Commission in the month during which such expenditure will be submitted for verification to the national controller.

The exchange rate used for accounting expenditure might be different from the one used for the purpose of drafting the budget. Costs related to fluctuation of foreign exchange rate are not eligible.

## **Hierarchy of rules on eligibility of expenditure**

Three levels of rules apply to the eligibility of expenditure in the framework of all Interreg programmes, including ADRION **applicable both to ERDF and IPA II project partners**:

- a) EU Regulations;
- b) Programme rules:
  - ADRION Cooperation Programme;
  - Programme Manual and other Programme guidance documents to projects issued by the MA/MC/JS (e.g.: Guidance on communication, Implementation Manual).

**Only in case there are no EU level and/or Programme level provisions or they do not offer detailed provisions, national, regional or local legislation and institutional rules apply.**

- c) National rules
  - National legislation;
  - Local and/or regional legislation;
  - Institutional rules and regulations.

**National rules cannot prejudice or restrict the rules established at a higher level (EU and programme rules). Stricter programme and national rules may apply only in areas that are not precisely regulated at the EU level or where EU Regulations provide the Partner States with a discretionary power to set such rules.**

**Whenever different sets of rules apply to ERDF and IPA II beneficiaries, these are expressly indicated in the paragraphs and sub-paragraphs below.**

## **General eligibility requirements**

In the following paragraphs a set of financial rules are presented: **they are applicable both to ERDF and IPA II partners.**

The text below provides a general overview on eligibility of expenditure; details are provided in the Implementation Manual for first call projects, version No 2.

As a general rule, expenditure is eligible for funding if it fulfils all the following general eligibility requirements:

1. It has occurred in the eligible period defined by the Programme and within the eligible period related to the duration of the project;
2. It refers to costs occurred for the implementation of the project and in accordance with the proposal approved by the MC or its subsequent revisions approved by the Programme implementing bodies, if any;
3. It is incurred within the ADRION programme area;
4. It is essential for the implementation of the project and it would not be incurred if the project is not carried out;
5. It relates to a product or service foreseen in the approved project proposal and that has been delivered and complies with publicity and information requirements;
6. It is borne directly by the beneficiary and supported by accounting documents justifying incurred expenses/payments (invoices, pay rolls...) except for costs calculated as flat rates;
7. It relates to an activity which has not benefitted from financial support by another public source (double funding);
8. It complies with the principle of sound financial management referred to above (efficiency, effectiveness and economy);
9. It complies, if required, to the public procurement rules applicable in that Partner State;
10. It is registered in the beneficiary's accounts through a separate accounting system or an adequate accounting code set in place specifically for the project;
11. It is not in contradiction with specific Programme rules;
12. It has been verified by an authorised national controller.

In accordance with the scope of support of the Regulation (EU) No 1301/2014 the following activities **shall not be supported**:

1. The decommissioning or the construction of nuclear power stations;
2. Investment to achieve the reduction of greenhouse gas emissions from activities listed in Annex I to Directive 2003/87/EC;
3. The manufacturing, processing and marketing of tobacco and tobacco products;
4. Undertakings in difficulty, as defined under Union State aid rules<sup>10</sup>;
5. Investment in airport infrastructure unless related to environmental protection or accompanied by investment necessary to mitigate or reduce its negative environmental impact.

Without prejudice to the specific Programme rules defined in the specific paragraph, the following expenditure is considered **as not eligible** (reference to art. 69 of Regulation (EU) No 1303/2014 and art. 2 of Delegated Regulation (EU) No 481/2014):

1. In kind contributions (in the form of provision of works, goods, services, land and real estate for which no cash payment supported by invoices, or documents of equivalent probative value, has been made);
2. Interest on debt;
3. Purchase of land;

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<sup>10</sup>Guidelines on State aid for rescuing and restructuring non-financial undertakings in difficulty (OJ C 249, 31.07.2014).

4. Recoverable value added tax (VAT), except where it is not recoverable under national VAT legislation;
5. Fines, financial penalties and expenditure on legal disputes and litigation;
6. Costs for gifts, except those not exceeding EUR 50 per gift where related to promotion, communication, publicity or information;
7. Costs related to fluctuation of foreign exchange rate;
8. Charges for national financial transactions.

The Programme also considers as not eligible the following expenditure:

1. Under travel and accommodation budget line, the cost of taxis is not reimbursed, unless (i) it can be demonstrated that no public transport was available at the time and place needed; or (ii) local transportation is covered with a daily allowance provided for by the internal rules of the concerned partner; or (iii) it is the most convenient transport mean.
2. Costs for alcoholic beverages;
3. Costs for the creation of a project web site, as ADRION will offer in its web site space for all funded projects in order to guarantee a coordinated visibility, unless duly justified;
4. Heavy investments, infrastructures and works, as described by the Directive 2014/24/EU (annex II).

Additionally, revenues, i.e.: cash in-flows *directly paid by users* for the goods and/or services provided by the project, such as charges borne directly by users for the use of infrastructure, sale or rent of land or buildings, or payments for services shall reduce the eligible expenditure and consequently the granted amount, with the exception of those operation whose total eligible budget does not exceed EUR 1.000.000. Further information shall be provided in the Implementation Manual.

**Finally, the practice of shared costs shall not be allowed, i.e.: the costs incurred for activities carried out by one partner - or under its responsibility by a sub-contractor – and covered by more than one project partner (the practice of splitting cost items paid by one partner among project partners), even in cases where such activity is for the benefit of the whole project partnership. The budget allocated to a project partner shall fully reflect the activities actually implemented by that partner.**

### **Project budget lines**

Project budgets submitted to ADRION must be structured according to the following budget lines only:

1. Staff costs;
2. Office and administrative expenditure;
3. Travel and accommodation costs;
4. External expertise and services costs.

**Budget line Equipment is not eligible in the framework of this restricted call.**

The text below provides a general overview on eligibility of expenditure; details are provided in the Implementation Manual for first call projects, version No 2.

### *Staff costs*

They refer to the gross employment costs of staff employed by the beneficiary institution (lead partner or project partner) for implementing the project. Staff can either be already employed by the beneficiary or contracted specifically for the project.

Staff costs shall be budgeted and reimbursed according to one of two options:

1. real costs;
2. flat rate of 20% of direct costs other than staff costs<sup>11</sup>.

The choice is made at partner level and cannot be changed during the project implementation.

Applicants which have originally opted for real cost (first call project) can change their choice.

### *Staff costs reimbursed based on real costs*

Eligible expenditure under this budget line is limited to salary payments and to other costs directly linked to them.

### *Staff costs reimbursed according to the flat rate*

Staff costs of any beneficiary choosing this option will be reimbursed for an amount equal to 20% of the sum of costs under all other budget lines, except “staff costs” and “office and administrative expenditure”, without the need of submitting any employment/work contract, any invoice or document having equivalent value nor any proof of payment.

The following table intends to support the choice between staff costs based on real costs and flat rate highlighting pros and cons:

<b>Staff costs reimbursed based on real costs</b>	<b>Staff costs reimbursed based on flat rate (20% of the direct costs other than staff costs)</b>
<b>Project elaboration</b>	
Partnership can decide, in principle, the extent of involvement of their staff;	Ceiling for staff costs;
Project appraisal shall be aimed at verifying whether the staff costs are proportioned with the proposed activities and in accordance with average personnel costs expenditure within the programme area;	Project appraisal shall be aimed at verifying whether the staff costs are in accordance with the proposed activities;
<b>Project implementation</b>	

<sup>11</sup>Direct costs other than staff costs are: travel and accommodation costs; external expertise and services costs; equipment expenditure. Equipment expenditure is, however, not eligible in this restricted call for proposals.

Adequate audit trail of the necessary documentation shall be kept in accordance with the rules set above to get reimbursement of staff costs;

No accountancy is foreseen (i.e.: no provision of supporting documentation shall be provided to first level controllers);  
When reporting staff costs, the distribution of costs between work packages shall reflect the distribution between work packages of the respective direct costs (e.g. costs for external experts and equipment amount to 40% of work package 1 and 60% of work package 2; thus 40% of staff costs shall be allocated to work package 1 and 60% to work package 2);

Staff costs expenditure shall be prior verified by the national controller to be reimbursed;

Staff costs shall not be subject to the verification of national controllers to get reimbursed;

Staff costs can be revised (increased or decreased) during the project implementation.

Flat rate option must be kept along the entire project implementation.

Staff costs are automatically generated in the work package if costs under one or more of the following budget lines: travel and accommodation, external experts and services, and equipment are budgeted.

### *Office and administrative expenditure*

It covers operating and administrative expenditure incurred by the beneficiary organisation that support delivery of project activities.

Office and administrative expenditure shall be reimbursed by the Programme according to a flat rate of 10% of eligible staff costs. No detailed budget needs to be planned for this budget line since the expenditure shall be automatically calculated by the online system for the applications submission (e-MS), both in the application phase and when submitting financial progress reports. This expenditure will be reimbursed without the need of submitting any invoice or document having equivalent value or any proof of payment.

### *Travel and accommodation costs*

Expenditure under this budget line refers to the costs incurred by the partner organisation for travels and accommodation of its own staff necessary for the delivery of the project.

The following items are eligible under this budget line:

1. Travel costs (e.g. tickets, travel and car insurance, fuel, car mileage, toll, and parking fees);
2. Meals costs;
3. Accommodation costs;
4. Visa costs;
5. Daily allowances.

Additionally, COVID-19 tests costs are eligible for project partners' staff/controllers/experts who are required to travel for the implementation of activities related to the projects/verification of activities and expenditure upon condition that they are not otherwise recoverable, and they are paid or reimbursed by the partner organisation/expert.



In order to get reimbursed, the supporting documents must include a) the proof of payment for the test, b) the proof that the test is compulsorily required for entering in the Partner State or visit the institution and c) the reasons for the travel (e.g.: the programme or agenda of the project event to be attended).

The following principles apply:

1. Travel and accommodation costs must clearly link to any project's activities and be essential for their effective delivery;
2. Costs must be definitely borne by the beneficiary organisation (direct payment by a staff member of the partner organisation must be supported by a proof of reimbursement from the employer);
3. The principle of sound financial management should guide to the choice of transport and accommodation. In line with the result-oriented policy approach, effectiveness should be the leading principle. In the second instance, cost-efficiency should be ensured, taking into account the entire cost of the mission (travel cost, staff costs related to the travel, etc.). In particular:
  - Beneficiaries must always choose the most economical modes of transport. Exceptions from this principle must be duly justified in each case;
  - Accommodation costs can be accepted if they are in the middle price range, while higher price ranges must be duly justified in each case;
  - Beneficiaries must respect either their ordinary internal rules for travel and accommodation costs (if any), or respect any maximum ceiling for travel and hotel costs established at national level, whichever is stricter;
  - In the absence of internal and/or national rules, maximum ceilings for travel and accommodation established by the Commission and applicable throughout the programme area shall apply. They shall be considered as maximum ceilings<sup>12</sup>. The amounts exceeding such values shall be in any case considered not eligible;
4. Any expenditure item defined as travel costs, accommodation costs, costs of meals or visa costs that is already covered by a daily allowance, cannot be accounted for and reimbursed in addition to the daily allowance, i.e.: no double funding is allowed (ref: Article 65.11 of Regulation (EU) No 1303/2013). Beneficiaries shall choose the accounting method (daily allowance or direct costs) which is closer to their ordinary practice and/or internal rules.

Travel and accommodation costs of:

1. External experts and service providers including speakers, chairpersons, teachers, etc. shall be reimbursed under the external expertise and services budget line;
2. Associated partners can only be claimed under the external expertise and services budget line.

**In case of approval of project proposals, costs for travel and accommodation for attending programme or national authorities' meetings and events shall be considered as eligible: it is advisable that some additional budget is allocated to attend these events.**

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<sup>12</sup>[https://ec.europa.eu/international-partnerships/system/files/per-diem-rates-20200201\\_en.pdf](https://ec.europa.eu/international-partnerships/system/files/per-diem-rates-20200201_en.pdf)

### *External expertise and services costs*

This budget line covers costs paid by beneficiaries to external experts and service providers on the basis of contracts or written agreements and against invoices or requests for reimbursement.

Sub-contracting between beneficiaries inside the same project partnership is not allowed.

Beneficiaries can sub-contract to external experts and service providers only tasks or activities which are essential for the implementation of the project.

When awarding external expertise and service contracts all project partners irrespective their legal status must ensure that EU and national rules on public procurement are respected, in accordance with the amount of the contract. All contracts must comply with the basic principles of transparency, non-discrimination and equal treatment as defined in the EC Treaty and the Commission Interpretative Communication on the Community law applicable to contract awards below the EU thresholds<sup>13</sup>.

In particular:

**EU beneficiaries** shall respect EU Directives and their respective national legislation on public procurement, depending on the amount concerned.

Furthermore, whenever public bodies or bodies governed by public law have defined internal rules for the purchase of goods and service below the minimum thresholds set by national laws, such internal rules must be respected.

**IPA II beneficiaries** shall follow the provisions of the Practical Guide on Contract Procedures for European Union External Actions (PRAG)<sup>14</sup> in line with the Financing Agreement concluded between the relevant Partner State, the European Commission and the Managing Authority (MA).

Detailed information is available in the Implementation Manual.

Eventual costs for gadgets must be allocated under this budget line and will be considered as eligible only if it is demonstrated its efficacy in reaching one or more target groups. It is recommended that its expenditure will not be higher than 1% of the total eligible budget unless duly justified.

External expertise and services have to be duly specified in the full AF by describing at least the nature and quantity of the expertise/service, the link to the relevant deliverable or output as listed in the work plan and the related budget of the concerned project partner.

Costs referring to project-related tasks sub-contracted by the beneficiary to in-house bodies are eligible under external expertise and service budget line on condition that the following is met:

1. Costs incurred by the in-house body are charged on a real cost basis without any profit margin;

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<sup>13</sup>([http://ec.europa.eu/internal\\_market/publicprocurement/docs/keydocs/communication\\_en.pdf](http://ec.europa.eu/internal_market/publicprocurement/docs/keydocs/communication_en.pdf))

<sup>14</sup>Information on the Procurement and Grants for European External Actions (PRAG) can be found in: [http://ec.europa.eu/europeaid/prag/?header\\_description=DEVCO+Prag+to+financial+and+contractual+procedures+applicable+to+external+actions+financed+from+the+general+budget+of+the+EU+and+from+the+11th+EDF&header\\_keywords=ePrag%2C+europa](http://ec.europa.eu/europeaid/prag/?header_description=DEVCO+Prag+to+financial+and+contractual+procedures+applicable+to+external+actions+financed+from+the+general+budget+of+the+EU+and+from+the+11th+EDF&header_keywords=ePrag%2C+europa)

2. The sub-contracting to the in-house body of project related tasks complies with national and institutional public procurement provisions in force.

Further specific national eligibility rules are reported in the following page of ADRION web site:

<https://www.adrioninterreg.eu/index.php/library/guidelines-for-partners/>

whereas information on verification of expenditure and appointed institutions is available in:

<https://www.adrioninterreg.eu/index.php/contacts/national-contact-points/>

**PROCEDURE FOR SUBMISSION AND SELECTION OF OPERATIONS**

## Publication

The announcement of the restricted call for proposals and the related Application Package is available on the web site of the ADRION Programme.

The Application Package contains:

1. The 4th restricted call for proposals announcement;
2. The present manual;
3. The ADRION Cooperation Programme;
4. Declarations' template;
5. The off-line Application Form (for information purposes).

In case of project approval by the Monitoring Committee, financing partners shall be asked to provide Declarations on their financial commitment, whereas the associated partners shall be asked for Declarations on their engagement.

Declarations signed by the legal representative/delegated person of the Lead Applicant must be accompanied by a document attesting that he/she holds the power of signature and representation and by a valid identity document (e.g. identity card, passport).

## Submission of project proposals

Applications must be submitted through the online application system (e-MS) available on the programme web site [www.interregadrion.eu](http://www.interregadrion.eu).

Lead Applicants shall use their already existing ID and password for creating the application form and submitting it.

Applications must be drawn up in English, using the online form specifically designed for this purpose, and be submitted by the deadline (date and Bologna time) reported in the call announcement of the restricted call for proposals.

No other method of submission of an application will be accepted. Applications submitted in any other way will be automatically rejected. No exceptions will be made.

The project proposal shall:

- Be submitted by the Lead Applicant on behalf of the entire partnership;
- Be submitted using the credentials of the Lead Applicant.

Lead Applicants shall be ensured of having officially submitted their electronic application form through an e-mail acknowledging receipt of their submission. The Lead Applicant shall regularly inform the other project partners on the communications received by the MA/JS.

## Application Form

**Project proposals shall use as project title and acronym the same of the first call approved one by adding the wording "PLUS" to each of them.**

The Application Form is structured according to the following:

1. *Project summary;*
2. *Partnership;*
3. *Project description;*
4. *Work plan, structured according to work packages;*
5. *Project budget overview;*
6. *Partners' budget;*

The on-line application form is characterised by the presence of blocks and/or warnings in most of its parts to force the applicants to ensure its duly filling-in. If the missing information highlighted by the block is not provided, the system will not allow the submission of the proposal.

Please note that sections Workplan – T1 Implementation, and Work Plan – C Communication and the detailed partner budget information do not include blocks/warnings to allow the smooth filling-in of the proposal: even if the eventual lack of information does not imply the ineligibility of the project proposal, such a situation will have a negative impact in the quality assessment, up to the rejection of the project.

#### *Application form structure*

The project proposals shall be sent via eMS through the filling-in of the pre-defined application form template; off-line application form is provided in the application package for information purpose only.

#### *Project work packages*

Project activities within the frame of the ADRION Programme shall be organised around work packages, i.e.: a group of related project activities necessary to produce project deliverables and outputs. The organisation of the activities in work packages ensures a shared knowledge about the project's structure and objectives among all partners; additionally, it increases the capacities of the ADRION Programme MA/JS to follow up the implementation of the expected activities and facilitates the procedures for reporting and accounting of expenditure.

Each work package, structured in activities, shall provide information on the partners involved, the description of the related deliverables and expected outputs, and the related budget.

The application form shall be characterised by a minimum of two, maximum of three work packages (WP), namely:

- a) WP Management (compulsory);
- b) WP Implementation if actions No 4, 5, 6 or 7 out of the menu of pre-defined activities are chosen.
- c) WP Communication if actions No 1, 2 or 3 out of the menu of pre-defined activities are chosen.

No preparation activities are envisaged; related costs shall not be considered as eligible.

#### *Work package: Management*

In this work package the activities aim at ensuring a sound management and coordination of the project concerning: both the overall project management and all aspects linked to the financial management must be described. The work package shall also provide proof on how the work between the partners involved by building a strong collaborative relationship is organized and distributed. The coordination and management activities shall result in the successful implementation of the project as well as in the production and submission of the administrative documents for accounting of expenditure and reporting on the activities implemented.

Structure, responsibilities, and procedures for the day-to-day management and coordination (including whether it is foreseen the externalization of the management), must be included as well.

#### *Work package: Communication*

The communication work package shall include the strategic planning of activities and clear indication of the target group(s) to address. Communication objectives must be specific and measurable (i.e.: proposing of “raising awareness” or to “spread results” without providing to whom and how is not enough).

Eligible activities No 1, 2, 3 can be framed in the Communication work package.

Elements to be considered are reported below for your convenience and refer to the overall structure of the work package.

1. Identification and definition of the objective, message, approach/tactics chosen and target group the project intends to achieve;
2. Integration with the overall project strategy and project specific objectives;
3. Quantification of the communication products (target values), detailed planning of their realization and estimated budget;
4. Specification between internal (management) and external communication;
5. Definition of the related budget;
6. Interaction of the partners (e.g.: activities implemented at partner level, dissemination of results);
7. Measurement of the efficiency of the planned communication activities;
8. Provisions for feedback mechanisms and evaluation measures for the communication activities.

In case of approval, the project proposal shall use the same project logo provided by the programme along the implementation of the first call activities.

The proposal shall also consider including among its activities the update of its web dedicated pages hosted in ADRION web site.

Targeted information is provided in the Implementation Manual.

#### *Work Package - Implementation*

This work package must be envisaged if activities No 4, 5 6, 7 are chosen.

## **Assessment of the applications**

The assessment of the application is coordinated by the MA and performed by the JS.

In order to ensure equal, fair and transparent approach, the project proposals are assessed according to a set of criteria and sub-criteria previously elaborated by the Programme, approved by the MC and specified in the Annex 1. The results of the assessment are reported in a project assessment grid to be prepared for the supporting the MC decision.

The MC is in charge of the final decision on the selection of the operations for funding.

**Only the information provided in the application form shall be subject to assessment.**

### *Admissibility and eligibility check*

The admissibility and eligibility checks are aimed at ensuring the minimum project requirements.

Only those applications which successfully pass these checks are allowed to progress in the assessment process. The list of administrative and eligibility checks to be fulfilled is provided in Annex 1.

In case other formal mistakes are detected than those listed in Annex 1, the Lead Applicant shall have the chance of remedying it in a maximum of 5 working days from the receipt of the communication by the JS.

The verification of the presence of all the requirements is performed by the JS with the support of the NCPs. Applicants may be contacted by their NCPs for the provision of specific documentation.

Results of the admissibility/eligibility check shall be communicated to the MC for endorsement.

All Lead Applicants shall be informed about the results of the project proposal assessment, including its admissibility and eligibility via eMS.

### *Quality assessment*

Only those applications which have passed the admissibility and eligibility check shall be assessed from a quality point of view.

The quality assessment shall be performed by the JS.

The assessment will affect the proposed work plan and budget and performed according to a list of criteria and sub-criteria reported in Annex 1.

### *Anti-fraud check*

The anti-fraud check shall aim at excluding the presence of fraudulent behaviours or other fraudulent practices by the partners involved in the project proposal.

The anti-fraud check shall take place only on those applications which successfully passed all the previous checks described in the assessment process.

The checks will be done either by the MA or at Partner State level by the relevant national authorities with the support of the NCPs and with the use of tools and practices currently in use (e.g.: cross checks with the national authorities administering other funds, knowledge of previous fraudulent applications and other fraudulent practice; use of EU databases).

In case the fraudulent behaviour/practice affects:

1. the lead applicant: the project proposal shall be rejected;



2. a project partner: it will be excluded from the project proposal; in case the exclusion of such partner(s) leads to non-fulfilment of the minimum partnership requirement, this will cause the rejection of the project proposal.

#### *Finalization of the project assessment grid*

The results of the assessment shall be reported in a project assessment grid to be submitted to the MC in charge of the funding decision.

#### **Decision making and communication to the Lead Applicants**

The decision for funding is adopted by the MC by consensus.

A project proposal can be:

1. **Approved:** the proposal is considered ready to start, fulfilling the requested quality level and responding to the selection criteria;
2. **Approved under conditions:** the proposal is considered approved provided that the Lead Partner and/or the project partners satisfy specific conditions within a given deadline;
3. **Rejected:** the proposal is considered not matching a certain readiness, quality level and not responding to the selection criteria.

If a project proposal is funded under conditions, the latter are approved by the MC too; conditions may also foresee a lower budget than the amount requested by the partnership.

All Lead applicants of the assessed projects shall be notified by MA/JS in written form about the MC decision. The Lead Applicant shall immediately inform all the partners accordingly.

Additionally:

1. Under no circumstances the amount awarded may exceed the amount requested;
2. The grant awarding does not establish an entitlement for subsequent years.

The approved operations shall be asked to deliver the MA/JS partners' declarations via eMS.

#### **Contractual provisions**

##### *Principle of non-cumulative award (double funding)*

Lead and project partners must declare to inform the MA/JS without delay on any EU or other public funding source, be international, national, regional or local, received before the signature of the subsidy contract for the implementation of the planned activities.

If during project implementation evidence emerges that an activity/item of expenditure which is being co-financed by ERDF/IPA funds of the ADRION programme, is at the same time being co-financed by any other public fund, the MA may:

1. Impose the modification of the concerned activities and/or exclude from the eligible expenditure the item which would be double-financed;

2. Withdraw from the subsidy contract and demand the repayment of amounts already disbursed.

### *Subsidy Contract*

The offered **subsidy contract**, drawn up in EUR and detailing the conditions and percentage of funding, will be sent to the Lead Partner representing the entire partnership. The template of the subsidy contract is approved by the MC and cannot be modified. The LP is invited to sign the subsidy contract as soon as possible, and in any case no later than the deadline reported in the accompanying communication to the contract.

The subsidy contract is requested to be returned digitally signed or in paper version for that Lead Partner which does not have digital signature: in the latter case, the Lead Partner sends back the MA two copies of it in hard copy, dated, initialled in each page and signed in full in the last one. The MA signs last and sends back a countersigned copy.

### *Partnership Agreement*

The arrangements between the Lead Partner and its project partners are defined in the **partnership agreement**, which contains the legal framework to be respected by all project partners; it formalizes the distribution of responsibilities within the partnership, Lead Partner/ project partners' rights and obligations, as well as provisions aimed at ensuring the sound financial management and arrangements for recovering amounts unduly paid.

As far as the partnership agreement is concerned, the Lead Partner shall inform the MA about its signature by all project partners.

False declarations detected after the approval of the project will imply the exclusion of the concerned project partner from the partnership; if false declarations are provided by the Lead Partner, the subsidy contract will not be signed or withdrawn.

### *Payment procedure*

The requests for reimbursement shall be submitted by the Lead Partner on behalf of the entire partnership only once in project lifetime at the end of the envisaged period. Project implementation rules and instructions for the requests for reimbursement are provided in the Implementation Manual, version 2 (April 2020).

No advance payment is envisaged.

### **Publicity by the Programme**

The MA, National Authorities and/or the European Commission may publish the list of operations, including:

1. beneficiary name (only of legal entities; no natural persons shall be named);
2. operation name;
3. operation summary;
4. operation start date;
5. operation end date (expected date for physical completion or full implementation of the operation);
6. total eligible budget allocated to the operation;
7. Union co-financing rate, as per priority axis;

8. operation postcode; or other appropriate location indicator;
9. country;
10. name of category of intervention for the operation.

### **Complaint procedure**

Any complaint related to the assessment and selection of the project proposals shall be addressed by the Lead Applicant, on behalf of the entire partnership, to the MA. The MA, with the support of the JS and/or experts, shall examine it and provide its position regarding the merit of the complaint.

Complaints received by Project Partners individually shall not be taken into consideration.

Receivable complaints must be clearly identifiable by the wording “formal complaint” and project number and acronym in the subject of the request and submitted according to the rules and deadline defined in the communication sent by MA. The Lead applicant shall be in charge of specifying what failures or mistakes have been assumed to happen and shall include clear reference to programme documents. Requests for information or clarifications shall not be considered as complaints.

**Please note that complaints presented by Lead Applicants of project proposals submitted in the last 5 calendar days from the deadlines of the submission of the project proposals and related to the slowing down of eMS system will not be accepted. Additionally, ADRION shall not accept any complaint from Lead Applicants which failed to meet the deadline.**

The MA shall be in charge of verifying the admissibility of the request from the formal point of view. If the complaint is considered as admissible, it will be submitted to the Complaint Committee.

The Complaint Committee is composed of two Monitoring Committee Partner State representatives - current and future Monitoring Committee Chair - and the MA. The JS is involved with an advisory function.

The complaint can only make reference to:

- a) Outcomes of the admissibility and eligibility checks;
- b) The respect of the assessment process/procedure.

The outcome of the Complaint Committee decision shall be communicated by the MA, in written form, to the Lead Applicant.

The Complaint Committee decision will be final, binding to all parties and not subject to any further complaint proceedings within the Programme if the complaint is based on the same grounds.

### **Data Protection**

The processing of personal data by the ADRION Programme is governed by Regulation (EU) No 2016/679 of the European Parliament and the Council of 27 April 2016 on the protection of natural persons with regard to the processing of personal data and on the free movement of such data, and repealing Directive 95/46/EC.

The data provided by the applicants in the Application Form are processed for assessing project application forms, awarding funds to selected proposals, as well as managing, monitoring and evaluating the funded projects, performing analyses, surveys and studies, protecting the financial interests of the EU (notably for

verifications and audits), and for communicating on the ADRION Programme and its actions (projects and capitalisation platforms). For further details please refer to [eMS Terms of Use](#).

## **Contacts**

For any further information please contact:

- the NCP of your Partner State: coordinates are reported on the ADRION web site;
- The ADRION Programme: [info@interregadrion.eu](mailto:info@interregadrion.eu)

It is warmly recommended that the Lead Applicants address to the JS and the Project Partners applicants to the NCPs.

## Annex 1– Admissibility and Eligibility Criteria

### Admissibility criteria

1	Reference to the Application Form section or other document	Admissibility criteria	Admissibility questions	Consequence on failure
1.1	Application Form	Use of on-line system	Has the Application Form been submitted via the e-MS?	Rejection of the project proposal.
1.2	Application Form	Completeness of the submitted Application Form	Have all mandatory sections of the Application Form been filled-in?	Not filled-in mandatory sections will prevent the submission of the project proposal.
			Has the application form been submitted within the set deadline?	Rejection of the project proposal.

### Eligibility criteria

2	Reference to the Application Form section or other document	Eligibility criteria	Eligibility questions	Consequence on failure
2.1	Application Form	The project fulfils the minimum requirements for transnational partnerships	Does the project proposal have a minimum of three financing partners (ERDF/IPA II) located within the ADRION eligible area? Are the project financing partners from at least three Partner States?	Rejection of the project proposal.
			Were applicants (lead applicant and project partners) already involved as partners in the previous first call project?	Exclusion of the partner(s) not involved in the previous first call project. If the minimum eligible partnership is not ensured, the project proposal is rejected.

2	Reference to the Application Form section or other document	Eligibility criteria	Eligibility questions	Consequence on failure
2.2	Application Form	The Lead Applicant is eligible	<p>Is the lead applicant the same as the one of the previous granted first call project?</p> <p>Has the legal status of the lead applicant been confirmed?</p> <p>If not, is the legal status of the lead applicant falling under one of the following categories?</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>a) Public body (national, regional or local level) including associations formed by one or several regional or local authorities governed by public law;</li> <li>b) Body governed by public law, including associations formed by one or several bodies governed by public law;</li> <li>c) EGTC;</li> <li>d) Public body or body governed by public law competent in their scope of action for certain part of the eligible area which are located outside of it (assimilated partner – for Italian partners only);</li> <li>e) International organizations acting under national law</li> </ul>	<p>Rejection of the project proposal.</p> <p>Rejection of the project proposal if the lead applicant does not fall under one of the identified categories</p>
2.3	Application Form	Project financing partners are eligible	<p>Is the project partner(s) the same as the one(s) of the previous granted first call project?</p> <p>Has the legal status of the project financing partners been confirmed?</p> <p>If not, is the legal status of the project partner falling under one of the following categories?</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>a) Public body (national, regional or local level) including associations formed by one or several regional or local authorities governed by public law;</li> <li>b) Body governed by public law, including associations formed by one or several bodies governed by public law;</li> <li>c) EGTC;</li> </ul>	<p>Exclusion of the project partner.</p> <p>Exclusion of the partner(s). If the minimum eligible partnership is not ensured, the project proposal is rejected.</p>

2	Reference to the Application Form section or other document	Eligibility criteria	Eligibility questions	Consequence on failure
			<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>d) Private body;</li> <li>e) Public body or body governed by public law competent in their scope of action for certain part of the eligible area which are located outside of it (assimilated partner – for Italian partners only);</li> <li>f) International organizations acting under national law</li> </ul>	
2.4	Application form, section C.1.4	Project Partners jointly cooperate	Do Project Partners cooperate in all the following compulsory ways: joint development, joint implementation and joint financing?	Rejection of the project proposal.

## Quality Criteria

Criterion and sub-criterion numbering	Sub-criterion
<b>3</b>	<b>Overall quality</b>
3.a	Has the Application Form been filled in English and mandatory sections include the requested information (e.g.: no artificial filling-in with letters or numbers, xxxxx, 1111 etc)?
<b>4</b>	<b>Work plan</b>
4.a	Are the work plan, timing of activities and deliverables consistent and transparent?
4.b	How well are activities and deliverables in a logical time-sequence?
4.c	How well is the distribution of tasks among partners appropriate?
<b>5</b>	<b>Budget</b>
5.a	Are planned resources reasonable and sufficient to ensure project implementation?
5.b	Are the partners' budget in accordance with their respective role in the project?
5.c	Is the budget clear, realistic and justified? Is the foreseen expenditure in line with the rules and recommendations reported in the programme manual (i.e. gadget)?