

Expression for interest of strategic projects – Priority Axis 4

Assessment grid

Project 539 – STEP - EUSAIR STAKEHOLDERS ENGAGEMENT POINT

Summary of the project proposal (as from section A.2 of the application form)

STEP is the second of the three strategic projects aimed to support the governance of EUSAIR in the period 2023-2027 and it is financed by Axis 4 of the IPA-ADRION Program 2021-2027 for a total of 2,160,000.00 euros in the period September 2023-December 2027.

Through the improvement and strengthening of the EUSAIR STAKEHOLDER PLATFORM (hereinafter ESP), the functions attributed to the project in May 2021 by the EUSAIR Governing Board are the following:

- involvement and interaction with stakeholders;
- support for financial dialogue and the establishment and coordination of a network between the Managing Authorities.

Thus the general objective of the project is ensure more efficient implementation of EUSAIR Priorities and Flagships by:

- updating and enhancing the ESP as a virtual data insight and analytics tool that accelerates data driven decision making in different topics and gathers information to create long-term sustainable value;
- developing the involvement and engagement of key stakeholders at national and transnational levels;
- supporting financial dialogue and embedding of the integration of EUSAIR within the Mainstream ERDF programs and the Territorial Cooperation Programmes;
- supporting the full integration of EUSAIR into the IPA III programming framework.

The main project expected changes will be the following:

- improvement and updating of the ESP cloud infrastructure;
- the creation of a data center accessible via ESP;
- the updating and implementation of a Joint EUSAIR Stakeholder Engagement Plan;
- the creation of an online joint solution for dialogue with the main financial institutions to support the implementation of the EUSAIR Flagships and the consolidation and animation of the network of ETC Management Authorities;
- the acceleration of the process of integrating EUSAIR Flagships and Priorities into the IPA III Programmes.

The transnational approach is essential in a project aimed at supporting the governance of a macroregional strategy like the Adriatic-Ionian one which can be considered as a political lab for a future enlarged Europe.

Indeed, beside the challenging testing of the experimental Joint Coordination Mechanism with the other 2 strategic projects, it is to be mentioned the more inclusive approach in working side-by-side with 2 IPA partners which will have a direct responsibility in the implementation of key-work packages (EUSAIR stakeholders engagement and embedding EUSAIR into IPAIII programmes).

| Project initial total eligible budget (in EUR) | <i>Out of which INTERREG</i> |
|---|------------------------------|
| 2.160.000,00 | 1.836.000,00 |

Partners involved:

| Project partner No | Partner name | Abbreviation | Total Interreg budget | Total budget | Participating Country |
|---------------------------|--|---------------------|------------------------------|---------------------|------------------------------|
| 1 | MARCHE REGION | MR | 948.472,50 | 1.115.850,00 | IT |
| 2 | Directorate for European Integration of the Council of Ministers of Bosnia and Herzegovina | MR | 510.977,50 | 601.150,00 | BA |
| 3 | State Agency for Strategic Programming and Aid Coordination | SASPAC | 376.550,00 | 443.000,00 | AL |
| 4 | Associated partner Presidency of the Council of Ministers – Department for Cohesion Policy | DPCoe | | | |
| 5 | Associated partner Ministry of Foreign Affairs and International Cooperation | MFAIC | | | |
| | | | 1.836.000,00 | 2.160.000,00 | |

Overview of the overall final score:

| Operational criteria | Minimum score: 30/50 | Attributed scores |
|-----------------------------|-----------------------------|--------------------------|
| | TOTAL | 32/50 |

Quality assessment grid

Operational criteria

| | | Workplan | Attributed score |
|-----------|--------------------|--|-------------------------|
| Work plan | 1a Max 5 points | <p>Is the overall approach suitable to obtain the planned outputs and results?</p> <p>How effective are the proposed measures to support the EUSAIR governance structures (Governing Board, the Thematic Steering Groups) and they ensure the implementation of the European Green Deal?</p> <p>Are the coordination mechanisms with other two projects supporting EUSAIR Governance efficient to ensure the necessary support and is overlapping functions avoided?</p> | |
| | | <p>+The proposed project intends to implement some of the functions defined by EUSAIR Governing Board as relevant for its functioning and support.</p> <p>+The approach adopted by the project is fairly suitable to obtain the planned outputs and results.</p> <p>+The proposed measures fairly intend to support the EUSAIR governance structures; they include follow up of activities already implemented in 2014-2020 and new ones. More specifically, two main measures are envisaged:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> a) The update of the stakeholder platform (ESP) b) The support of the Managing Authorities operating in the EUSAIR geographical area. <p>+Coordination mechanism is fairly described; regular meetings with the other projects shall ensure the absence of future overlapping functions. However, the absence of overlapping activities with regard to the identification and mapping of the funding resources for project proposals of project No 3 SP4EUSAIR and activities in D.2.1.2 should be confirmed.</p> | 3 |
| | 1b Max 5 points | <p>Are the work plan and timing of activities, deliverables and outputs realistic, consistent and transparent?</p> <p>Are the proposed financial and human resources appropriate to implement the project?</p> <p>Is the contribution of each project partner to the project clearly described?</p> | |
| | | <p>+ Work plan and timing of activities seems fairly described although characterised by a high number of activities which, in some cases could have been melt together. Potential added value of some ESP</p> | 3 |

| | | |
|--------------------|---|---|
| | <p>improvement (e.g.: deliverable D.2.3.1 ESP mapping of EU/IPA 2021-2027 funding opportunities) could have been better explained.</p> <p>-The quantification of envisaged outputs has not always been provided.</p> <p>+ Irrespective to the lack of quantification, it is assumed that proposed financial resources are considered as adequate to implement the planned activities.</p> <p>+Dedicated staff for ESP technical implementation and support is envisaged.</p> <p>+ The contribution to each project partner to the project is clearly described and responsibilities clearly outlined.</p> | |
| 1c Max 5 points | <p>Are project outputs and results that contribute to Programme indicators realistic, i.e.:</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. It is possible to achieve them with the chosen approach; 2. it is possible and realistic to achieve them with the proposed timeframe, budget and partners engagement <p>Does each work package envisage at least one project output?</p> <p>Are the quantified output indicators foreseen in the first three years of project implementation (end of 2026) at least 75% of the output indicators reported in the application form?</p> | |
| | <p>±Proposed output and results can realistically be achieved as their quantification is not very ambitious. ESP potentials and the wide spectrum of the envisaged target groups could have been better exploited. RCO 118 could have been included as well, since it envisages the number of involved organisations in the project.</p> <p>+ Each work package envisages at least one project output.</p> <p>-Quantification of indicators and the link between output and result indicators needs further clarifications: out of 4.060 participants (RCO81) only 10 participations in joint actions across borders are envisaged after completion (RCR85 is the result indicator linked to the output indicator RCO81). The quantification of output indicator RCO 115 (8) related to the public events across borders jointly organised seems unambitious taking into account the nature of the proposed activities.</p> <p>±Considering the overall low quantification of output indicators, it is assumed that the target of at least 75% of the output indicators reported in the application form shall likely be reached.</p> | 3 |
| 1d Max 5 points | <p>Are the respect of horizontal principles, including the DNSH principle clearly described and adequate measures ensured?</p> <p>Are compulsory ways of cooperation well mirrored in the proposed activities?</p> | |

| | | | |
|------------|--------------------|--|-------------------------|
| | | Are ownership, durability and transferability properly described? | |
| | | <p>+The project proposal effectively contributes to the horizontal principles.</p> <p>+ The project soundly addressed to all the three compulsory ways of cooperation; joint staffing has also been envisaged and adequately mirrored in the proposed activities.</p> <p>+Considering the support the project will give the macro-regional strategy, the strategy is the highest expression of durability and transferability of the envisaged activities.</p> | 4 |
| Management | 2a Max 5 points | <p>Does the management approach show good potential to secure a sound project management, coordination, and risk mitigation?</p> <p>Is the proposed project management structure effective? Are the internal communication and the management structure appropriate to ensure smooth and effective co-operation within the partnership?</p> <p>How well the foreseen management structure is proportionate to the partnership, project size and needs and allow partners' involvement in decision-making?</p> <p>How will the involved partners ensure the management and implementation of EUSAIR at national level? How well will the countries that are not involved as PPs will benefit from the project results at national level?</p> | |
| | | <p>+Three out of the five work packages are coordinated by the lead partner, whereas the remaining two are coordinated by experts appointed by the other two project partners. A dedicated ESP digital management team shall be in charge of the development and regular maintenance of the tool.</p> <p>+ Project Steering Committees are envisaged.</p> <p>+The description of the proposed project management structure is present; operational tools like the operative workplan, project budget breakdown staff charts etc are listed and envisaged to be set in place as first implementation project steps.</p> <p>+ Even if no information is provided with regard to how the management and implementation of EUSAIR shall be ensured at national level, the fostered ESP platform and the other actions envisaged by the project shall ensure a strong involvement of potential stakeholders at national level as well. All participating countries, including those not actively participating to the project shall benefit from the project activities.</p> <p>+Regular coordination activities with the other two strategic projects are envisaged.</p> | 4 |
| | | Communication | Attributed score |

| | | | |
|----------------|--------------------|--|-------------------------|
| Communication | 3a Max 5 points | <p>Are communication activities planned in the work plan and are they relevant for achieving communication objectives?</p> <p>Are the communication activities and deliverables appropriate to reach the relevant target groups and stakeholders?</p> <p>Will the target groups, the partners, and the stakeholders benefit from the co-operation?</p> <p>Is the Regulation requirement according to art. 36.4.e) of the Interreg Regulation of organizing a communication event at project partner level respected?</p> | |
| | | <p>± The project states that coordination activities shall be jointly managed by the three strategic projects in accordance with the Communication Strategy drafted by the project No 1 Facility Point. It is assumed that evidence on compliance with obligation set forth in art. 36.4 e) of Interreg Regulation shall be respected along with the organisation of the planned public events.</p> <p>+ All target groups, stakeholders and project partners shall benefit from the cooperation.</p> <p>- Information on the update of the dedicated web site hosted by IPA ADRION web site is not provided</p> | 3 |
| | | Budget | Attributed score |
| Project budget | 4a Max 5 points | <p>To which extent the presented budget is transparent and include sufficient details per partner in particular in the period 2023-2026?</p> <p>Is the choice of using simplified cost options (SCOs) appropriate and in line with the programme rules?</p> | |
| | | <p>±The budget is sufficiently transparent and provides the information as requested in the Application Manual.</p> <p>±The project does not envisage the use of SCOs with the exception of the compulsory use related to administrative costs and the lump sum amount devoted to preparation one.</p> | 3 |
| | 4b Max 5 points | <p>To which extent resources planned by the project partners are adequate (in terms of quantity and quality) and reflects market prices?</p> | |
| | | <p>+The resources planned by the project partners are considered as adequate having regard to their engagement and leadership role within the project, as well as the level of details as requested in the Application Manual.</p> | 3 |

| | | | |
|--------------|----------------------|--|-----------|
| | | -The proposed suggestions on how to structure the costs per budget lines excepted costs for equipment have not been followed and should be reformulated to avoid future misunderstanding during the monitoring and verification of expenditure. | |
| | 4c Max 5 points | To which extent project budget is proportionate to the proposed work plan and project outputs? Is distribution of budget per period in line with workplan? | |
| | | +The proposed budget is proportionate to the proposed work plan and described outputs. -Project outputs are illustrated although not always quantified. ±Financial allocation per period ranges from 10 to 13%. | 3 |
| | 4d Max 5 points | Is the financial allocation per cost category in line with the programme rules? Are the partners' budgets coherent with their respective role in project activities for each Work Package? | |
| | | + Financial allocation is in line with the programme rules. Ca 71% of the total budget is allocated under budget line external experts, whereas staff costs amount to 20% of the total budget. +Partners' budget is coherent with their role in project activities. | 3 |
| TOTAL | Max 50 points | | 32 |

State Aid check

| | |
|---|----|
| The project proposal is State Aid relevant | NO |
| List of State Aid relevant activities and involved project partner | |
| Conditions for avoiding State Aid: | |

Anti-fraud checks:

No problems detected.

Is the selected operations directly affected by a reasoned opinion by the Commission in respect of an infringement within the scope of Article 258 TFEU?

Not applicable

The project proposal is:

| | |
|----------------------------------|---|
| Approved | |
| Approved under conditions | X |
| Rejected | |

Conditions for improvement

The project proposal answers the requirements approved by the EUSAIR Governing Board and considered as relevant for the sound implementation of the macro-regional strategy.

From a technical point of view, some requests for clarifications would be necessary to help the project in being smoothly implemented:

Conditions for improvement

- Project partner 3 is asked to revise the text related to the questions “which of the organization’s thematic competences and experience are relevant for the project” and “describe the organization’s experience in participating in and/or managing EU co-financing projects or other international projects” since it is the same.
- Consider reducing the number of actions by melting those that can be considered as part of a more general one.
- Provide the quantification of the envisaged outputs when not provided, as well as clarify how the quantification of envisaged indicators has been done for the provided ones.

- Consider adding the output indicator RCO118 that has not been selected.
- Clarify and, if necessary revise the quantification of the result indicator RCR85 linked to the output indicator RCO81, and of the output indicator RCO 115.
- Clarify coordination and/or synergies with regard to the following and revise if necessary:
 - The difference between activity 2.4 of project 1 (cross-macro-regional cooperation) regarding the exchange knowledge, transfer of good practice and enabling of peer learning and activity 1.5 of the project No 3 (“*exchange of knowledge of the best practices within and outside MRS will support capacity building for PPs and TSGs in the development of implementation formats*”);
 - The difference between the activity 3.1 and 3.2 of project 1 regarding the engagement of pillar thematic experts aimed at observing the situation and trends of the MR and activity of project3 WP 3 aimed at involving and engage EUSAIR stakeholders, which includes, among other, the inclusion of new flagships (action 3.3).
- Confirm that the planned events include those compliant with art. 36.4.3) of Interreg Regulation;
- Ensure that the project web site hosted in the IPA ADRION web site will be regularly updated and by which PP.
- Confirm or clarify the calculation method of the budget per cost category “staff”;
- Confirm that the proposed timeline has been agreed by the EUSAIR Governing Board.
- Provide declarations of the 2 associated partners;
- Revise the data and coordinates of the involved organisations of BiH and AL.

Proposed revised budget

| Project initial total eligible budget (in EUR) | Project revised eligible budget (in EUR) | <i>Out of which INTERREG</i> | Difference (in EUR and %) |
|---|---|------------------------------|----------------------------------|
| 2.160.000,00 | 2.160.000,00 | 1.836.000,00 | 0 |