

**INTERREG VI-B IPA ADRIATIC-IONIAN  
COOPERATION PROGRAMME 2021-2027  
“IPA ADRION”**

**ASSESSMENT MANUAL – 1st CALL FOR PROPOSALS – PRIORITY AXES 1, 2 and 3**

*Approved on 28 July 2023*

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## 1. Actors involved

The following actors are involved in the selection process of the received project proposals according to the following:

The Monitoring Committee (MC) in charge of approving:

- the methodology and criteria for the selection of the operations<sup>1</sup> as well as the application package (terms of reference, programme manual and other relevant documents) for each call for proposal, including the approval of the operations.

Criteria and procedures shall be:

- non-discriminatory and transparent, ensure accessibility to persons with disabilities, gender equality and take account of the Charter of Fundamental Rights of the European Union and the principle of sustainable development and of the Union policy on the environment in accordance with Article 11 and Article 191(1) TFEU;
- in accordance with IPA ADRION strategy and objectives;
- in accordance with requirement set forth in art. 22.4 and 22.5 of the Interreg Regulation;

The Managing Authority (MA), in charge of:

- Drawing up the appropriate selection procedure and criteria and, once approved, applying them in accordance with art. 22 of Regulation (EU) No 2021/1059 (hereinafter: Interreg Regulation);
- Ensure all the requirements listed in art. 73) of Regulation (EU) No 2021/1060 (hereinafter: CPR);
- Coordinating the assessment process;
- Defining the timetable of the assessment process in cooperation with the Joint Secretariat;
- Submitting, in cooperation with the Joint Secretariat, the results of the assessment process to the MC;

The Joint Secretariat (JS), in charge of supporting the MA in:

- Drafting the expression of interest for the identification of external assessors in charge of contributing to the projects assessment to be submitted to the MC for approval; and making it publicly available and selecting the most suitable experts;
- Defining the timetable of the entire assessment process in cooperation with MA;
- Performing the admissibility and eligibility checks of the received project proposals;
- Coordinating the quality assessment and prepare the final quality assessment grids in accordance with the IPA ADRION Application Package approved during the 2<sup>nd</sup> MC meeting on 24 March 2023;
- Coordinating the support of the National Contact Points in charge of specific checks (see below) and providing them with the necessary harmonized tools and procedures;
- Ensuring the implementation of all the necessary checks in addition to the admissibility, eligibility, and quality assessment, i.e.: absence of double funding, anti-fraud checks, the latter through ARACHNE database for those potential beneficiaries located in the EU Participating Countries where the tool is operational, as well as other necessary administrative checks;
- Ensuring the overall process harmonization and consistency;
- Regular reporting to the MA and submitting the checks outcomes for approval;
- Submitting the results of the assessment process to the MC for approval in accordance with MC Rules of Procedure.

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<sup>1</sup> “Operation” and “project” words are used interchangeably.

The National Contact Points (NCPs), appointed in each IPA ADRION Participating Country, in charge of:

- Supporting their relevant national authorities in the confirmation of the legal status of the applicants<sup>2</sup> located in their country;
- Supporting the MA/JS with regard to the anti-fraud checks where the ARACHNE database is not operational (i.e.: in IPA Participating Countries and Greece);
- Providing additional information and/or performing specific checks on behalf of the JS deemed as necessary.

The external independent assessors, in charge of:

- Contributing to the quality assessment of the eligible project proposals;
- Ensuring the absence of double funding of project proposals according to the approved methodology;
- Ensuring the absence of activities compliant with State Aid.

#### *Appointment of external assessors (quality assessment)*

In general, the external assessors are selected among those who sent their expressions of interest following the launch of an *ad hoc* Call for Applications/expression of interest to support the assessment of the eligible project proposals.

Calls for applications are published on IPA ADRION /ART-ER web site. The Call shall also be spread by NCPs and MC members through their communication channels. Assessors are required to have skills and assessment experience in relation to the topics relevant to the call for proposals. Experts may be citizens of the EU or IPA Participating Countries to the programme.

If no suitable experts and/or not enough experts can be selected through the call expression of interest or in case of their unavailability during the assessment period, the MA/JS shall also check the availability of those experts included in the 2014-2020 ADRION roster. The MA/JS shall inform the MC about this decision.

The external assessors may be invited to carry out the assessment fully or partially at their home/place of work (remote assessment) or at the JS premises.

The external assessors must guarantee their absence of conflict of interest in relation to the proposals assessed; they can be replaced by MA/JS if their performance is considered not satisfactory.

The external assessors shall be coordinated through:

- Introductory meeting (in presence or online) to illustrate e.g.: goals and timeline, describe the activities to be done and their challenges, explain procedures and tools, provide information on reference persons within the JS.
- Meetings from remote (using teams or conference call) to provide guidance and ensure streamlined approaches following the detection of specific cases, monitor the assessment state of play calendar.
- Bilateral meetings, emails and phone calls.

The external assessors shall assess each project proposal in its entirety.

The external assessors are asked to support the JS in defining the conditions for improvements for those project proposals that are recommended for funding, as well as to ensure absence of double funding.

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<sup>2</sup> “Project partner/project applicant”, and “lead partner/lead applicant” and are used interchangeably.

The MA/JS shall provide the external assessors the quality assessment template and assessment guidance.  
The MC is informed about the selected experts.

### *Appointment of State Aid experts*

State Aid experts are selected among those who sent their expressions of interest following the launch of an *ad hoc* Call for Applications published on the IPA ADRION /ART-ER web site. Due to the specificity of the topic in relation to its application to Interreg projects, MA shall reserve the right to check the availability of those experts included in the 2014-2020 ADRION roster. The MA/JS shall inform the MC about this decision.

Experts may be citizens of the EU or IPA Participating Countries to the programme. State Aid experts are in charge of the verification on the existence of the State Aid compliance of the activities included in the project proposals which positively passed all assessment steps.

State Aid experts must have a high level of professional experience, in particular with regard to the application of State Aid in the European Territorial Cooperation context and in the recent decisions of the EU Court of Justice, with a focus on the most recent developments of the use of the *de minimis* regime.

Similarly to the quality external assessors, also State Aid expert must ensure absence of conflict of interest with the analysed project proposals and the bodies involved.

State Aid experts may be invited to carry out the assessment fully or partially at their home/place of work (remote evaluation) or at the JS premises.

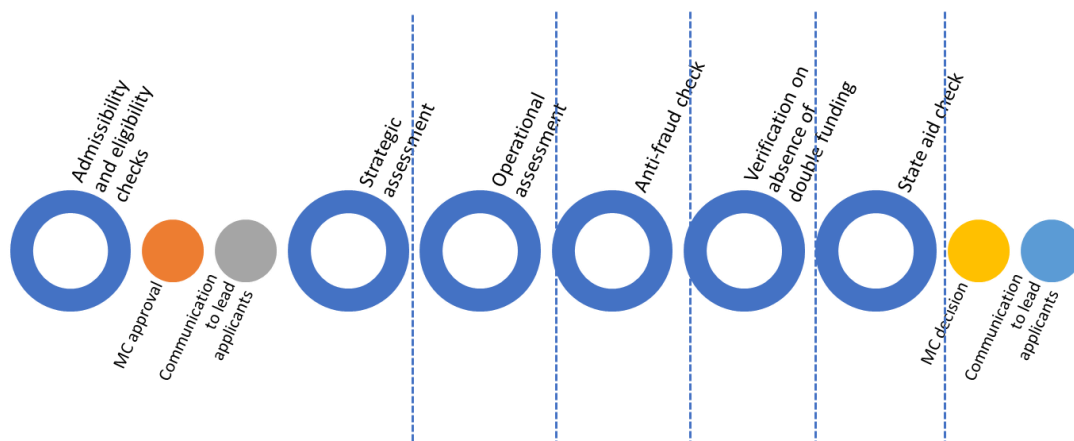
State Aid experts shall also be briefed by MA/JS in order to ensure a consistent approach vis-à-vis the detected cases and a harmonized identification of solutions to minimize or reduce the application of the *de minimis* regime.

## **2. Assessment audit trail**

The assessment audit trail is traceable on JEMS, which contains the received project proposals and related attachments, and the grids containing the checks performed along all the assessment steps.

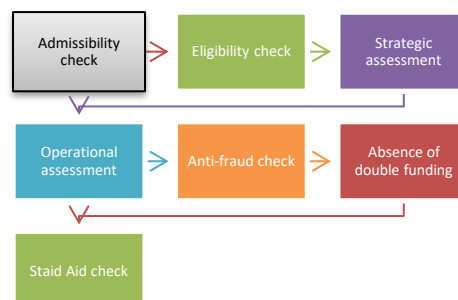
## **3. The assessment process**

The assessment process can be visualized according to the picture below:



Each step is described in detail in the following paragraphs.

In order to ensure time and costs efficiency, only those applications which have successfully passed one step, will progress further.



### 3.1 Admissibility check

The admissibility check is aimed at ensuring the presence of the minimum administrative requirements and the completeness of the received proposals as specified in the Application Manual.

The absence of one admissibility requirement brings to the rejection either of the project proposal or of the affected applicant(s): the defined requirements are not open to interpretation and must be answered with “YES” or “NO”. Consequence of failure of each admissibility requirement is provided in the Application Manual.

An exception to this principle applies to the criterion No 1.2 regarding the filling-in of Declarations, as the MA/JS reserve the right to ask for integrations if elements listed under letters b), c) or d) below are missing:

Declarations shall:

- a) Be signed by the legal representative (or his/her authorized delegated person);
- b) Provided on the headed paper of the potential beneficiaries;
- c) Be dated;
- d) Be stamped.

The admissibility check is performed through the filling-in of a check list containing the admissibility criteria reported in the Application Manual; the check is done by the JS according to the four-eye principle, i.e.: double independent verification of each received application by two JS members.

The admissibility check lists drafted for each project proposal are available on JEMS in order to ensure the necessary audit trail.

The MA/JS reserve the right to ask for clarifications, also through the NCPs, if necessary, to the lead applicants in case some additional information that reveals necessary.

Results of the admissibility check are submitted to the MA for approval.

### *3.1.1 Common tools*

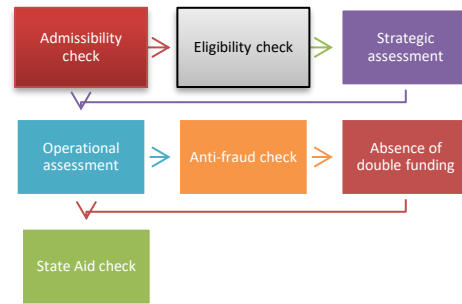
Verifications are performed through the filling-in of a check list containing the admissibility criteria reported in the Application Manual.

The table below reports the list of admissibility criteria and the consequences for the project proposal/project applicant following a detected failure.

## Admissibility criteria

1	Reference to the Application Form section or other document	Admissibility criteria	Admissibility questions	Y/N	Consequence on failure
1.1	Application Form	Use of on-line system JEMS	Has the Application Form been submitted through JEMS?		Rejection of the project proposal
1.2	Application Form and Declarations	Completeness of the submitted Application Form and Declarations	Have all the sections of the Application Form been filled in?		Rejection of the project proposal
			Has the Application Form been filled in English?		Rejection of the project proposal
			Has the Lead Partner Declaration been submitted through JEMS?		Rejection of the project proposal
			Have Project Partners' Declarations been submitted through JEMS?		a) Exclusion of the project partner b) Rejection of the project proposal if: 1) the exclusion of such partner leads to the non-fulfilment of the minimum partnership requirements 2) two or more Project Partners are excluded.
			In case of involvement of Associated Partner(s), has (have) the Declaration(s) been submitted through JEMS?		Exclusion of the Associated partner(s)

<p>Has the Lead Partner declaration been fully filled in and in English using the original Programme template (i.e.: not altered)?</p>		<p>Rejection of the project proposal</p>
<p>Has/have the Project Partners' Declarations been fully filled in and in English using the original Programme template (i.e.: not altered)?</p>		<p>a) Exclusion of the project partner  b) Rejection of the project proposal if:  1) the exclusion of such partner leads to the non-fulfilment of the minimum partnership requirements  2) two or more Project Partners are excluded.</p>
<p>Is the Lead Partner Declaration signed by the legal representative or his/her authorised delegated person?</p>		<p>Rejection of the project proposal</p>
<p>Is the Project/Associated partner Declaration signed by the legal representative or his/her authorised delegated person?</p>		<p>a) Exclusion of the project partner  b) Rejection of the project proposal if:  1) the exclusion of such partner leads to the non-fulfilment of the minimum partnership requirements  2) two or more Project Partners are excluded.</p>



### 3.2 Eligibility check

The eligibility check ensures the presence of the minimum requirements the received project proposal must have as specified in the Application Manual.

The absence of one eligibility requirement brings to the rejection either of the project proposal or of the affected applicant(s): the defined requirements are not open to interpretation and must be answered with “YES” or “NO”. Consequence of failure of each eligibility requirement is provided in the Application Manual.

The following requirements:

- Minimum number of partners and their location;
- Location of the lead partner;
- Maximum duration of the project;
- Compulsory cooperation according to the following: joint development, joint implementation and joint financing;
- Selection of one of the pre-identified priority axes and specific objective;
- Maximum EU budget;

will be automatically checked by JEMS (i.e.: only applications that fulfil these requirements can be submitted).

The eligibility check, with the exception of the following verifications under criteria No 2.2 – eligibility of lead applicant - and 2.3 – eligibility of project financing partners - , is performed by the JS according to the four-eye principle, i.e.: double independent verification of each received application by two JS members.

The checks related to criteria No 2.2 and 2.3 namely:

#### Criterion 2.2

1. Is the Lead Partner located (legal and operational seat) in one of the NUTS 2 region of an ERDF participating country or in an IPA participating country (exception: Italian Assimilated Partner) and be endowed with legal personality?
2. Does the Lead Partner belong to one of the following categories as reported in the Application Manual?
  - a) Public body (national, regional or local level), including their associations;
  - b) Body governed by public law, including their associations formed by one or several bodies governed by public law;
  - c) EGTC within the meaning provided by art. 23.6 of Interreg Regulation;
  - d) Public body or body governed by public law competent in its scope of action for certain parts of the eligible area but located outside of it (Assimilated Partner - for Italian partners only);

- e) International organization acting under the national law of one of the participating countries.

Criterion 2.3
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1. Is the Project Partner located (lead and operational seat) in one of the NUTS 2 region of an ERDF participating country or in an IPA participating country (exception: Italian Assimilated Partner) and is endowed with legal personality?
2. Does the Project Partner belong to one of the following categories as reported in the Application Manual?
  - a) Public body (national, regional or local level), including their associations;
  - b) Body governed by public law, including their associations formed by one or several bodies governed by public law;
  - c) EGTC within the meaning provided by art. 23.6 of Interreg Regulation;
  - d) Public body or body governed by public law competent in its scope of action for certain parts of the eligible area but located outside of it (Assimilated Partner - for Italian partners only);
  - e) International organization acting under the national law of one of the participating countries;
  - f) Private body, including private companies.
  - g) Is the information provided in the Application Form and in the Declarations consistent with regard to the legal status?
3. Is the Associated Partner (if present) located in the EU or in one of the participating countries of IPA ADRION?

shall be performed by NCPs and communicated to MA/JS accordingly,

As far as the Italian NCP is concerned, the checks also include the confirmation of the status of “assimilated partner” according to the definition provided in the Application Manual.

In order to perform their tasks, NPCs are free to ask potential beneficiaries for supporting documentation or to do desk base research.

Final liability of this check lays within the responsibility of the Participating Country involved.

The eligibility check lists of each project proposal are available on JEMS order to ensure the necessary audit trail.

JS/MA reserve the right to ask NCPs for further clarifications, if necessary.

Results of the eligibility checks are submitted to the MA for approval.

### 3.2.1 Common tools

Verifications are performed through the filling-in of a check list containing the eligibility criteria reported in the Application Manual.

As far as the NCPs support is concerned, they shall be offered a template, guidelines and calendar in order to perform their tasks in a timely and consistent way.

The table below reports the list of eligibility criteria and the consequences for the project proposal/project applicant following the detected failure.

**Eligibility criteria**

2	Reference to the Application Form section or other document	Eligibility criteria	Eligibility questions	Y/N	Consequence on failure
2.1			Is the partnership composed of at least 3 project partners from 3 different ERDF participating countries and at least 3 project partners from 3 different IPA participating countries?		Rejection of the project proposal
			Is each participating country represented by a maximum of 2 project partners?		Rejection of the project proposal.
			Is the same institution acting as Lead Partner involved in maximum 2 project proposals per call in two different Priority Axes?		Rejection of the project proposal according to its time of submission.
			Is the same institution involved in maximum 3 project proposals per call?		a) Exclusion of the project partner of those project proposals arrived after the third one where the same project partner is included b) Rejection of the project proposal if: 1) the exclusion of such partner leads to the non-fulfilment of the minimum partnership requirements 2) two or more Project Partners are excluded.

2.2	Application Form (section B) and declarations	The Lead Partner is eligible	Is the Lead Partner located (legal and operational seat) in one of the NUTS 2 region of an ERDF participating country or in an IPA participating country (exception: Italian Assimilated Partner) and be endowed with legal personality?	Rejection of the project proposal
			<p>Does the Lead Partner belong to one of the following categories as reported in the Application Manual?</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. Public body (national, regional or local level), including their associations;</li> <li>2. Body governed by public law, including their associations formed by one or several bodies governed by public law;</li> <li>3. EGTC within the meaning provided by art. 23.6 of Interreg Regulation;</li> <li>4. Public body or body governed by public law competent in its scope of action for certain parts of the eligible area but located outside of it (Assimilated Partner - for Italian partners only);</li> <li>5. International organization acting under the national law</li> </ol>	Rejection of the project proposal

			of one of the participating countries;		
2.3	Application Form, (section B.2) and Declarations	Project financing partners are eligible	Is the Project Partner located (lead and operational seat) in one of the NUTS 2 region of an ERDF participating country or in an IPA participating country (exception: Italian Assimilated Partner) and is endowed with legal personality?		<p>a) Exclusion of the project partner</p> <p>b) Rejection of the project proposal if:</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1) the exclusion of such partner leads to the non-fulfilment of the minimum partnership requirements</li> <li>2) two or more Project Partners are excluded.</li> </ol>

Does the Project Partner belong to one of the following categories as reported in the Application Manual?

1. Public body (national, regional or local level), including their associations;

2. Body governed by public law, including their associations formed by one or several bodies governed by public law;

3. EGTC within meaning provided by art. 23.6 of Interreg Regulation;

4. Public body or body governed by public law competent in its scope of action for certain parts of the eligible area but located outside of it (Assimilated Partner - for Italian partners only);

5. International organization acting under the national law of one of the participating countries;

6. Private body, including private companies.

a) Exclusion of the project partner

b) Rejection of the project proposal if:

1) the exclusion of such partner leads to the non-fulfilment of the minimum partnership requirements

2) two or more Project Partners are excluded.

	Application Form, (section B.2) and Declarations		Is the information provided in the Application Form and in the Declarations consistent with regard to the legal status?		Request for amending the wrong statement in case the project proposal is recommended for funding
			Is the Associated Partner (if present) located in the EU or in one of the participating countries of IPA ADRION?		Exclusion of the Associated Partner
2.4	Application Form, section C.7.5	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

### **3.3 Communication of the outcomes of the admissibility and eligibility checks to the Monitoring Committee and to the lead applicants**

The outcomes of the admissibility and eligibility checks of each project proposal, as well as an overview on the most common detected mistakes and weaknesses are communicated to the MC for approval.

The MC decision can be taken either through written procedure or during a MC meeting.

Each lead applicant is informed on the MC decision in written form by MA/JS.

In case a project proposal is rejected, or one of its project partners is excluded, related reasons are communicated by MA.

The communication also contains the possibility for the lead applicant to complain in accordance with the rules set forth in the Application Manual (see paragraph below).

The outcomes of this milestone of the assessment process are stored in JEMS.

### **3.4 Complaints management**

#### Complaint Committee

According to art. 9 of MC Rules of Procedure complying with art. 69.7 of CPR, the Participating Countries shall ensure the effective arrangements for the examination of complaints. IPA ADRION MC has set in place a Complaint Committee governed by its own Rules of Procedure.

The Complaint Committee Rules of Procedure define the type of complaints acceptable, the procedure to follow and the members of the Complaint Committee.

According to the dedicated section “Complaints procedure” of the Application Manual, the LP has the availability of 10 working days to submit a complaint concerning the MC decision on its project proposal after having received the communication from MA/JS.

Any complaint related to the admissibility and eligibility outcomes shall be addressed by the LP, 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 PPs individually shall not be taken into consideration.

#### The procedure

In case official complaints are received, they are considered as admissible from the administrative point of view only if:

- They are submitted by the lead applicant and within the set deadline reported in the MA communication informing on the outcomes of the admissibility and eligibility checks;
- They are clearly identifiable by the wording “formal complaint”, project number and acronym in the subject of the request;
- They have been submitted in English to the following email address: [info@interregadrion.eu](mailto:info@interregadrion.eu);
- The LP has specified in its communication what failures or mistakes have been assumed to occur during the selection process and include clear reference to programme documents (e.g. call announcement; the Application manual, etc).

Complaints not complying with the above and:

1. Related to project proposals submitted in the last 5 calendar days from the deadlines for the submission of the project proposals and related to the slowing down of JEMS system;
  2. Related to project proposals whose LP failed to meet the deadline;
- will not be accepted.

Requests for information or clarifications shall not be considered as complaints.

The MA, with the support of the JS, shall analyse and submit the Complaint Committee all the necessary elements to allow to form an independent and reasoned opinion regarding the issues raised by the complainant.

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

The Complaint Committee is informed – in accordance with its Rules of Procedure – on the complaints received and on the related performed analysis.

In case the complaint is accepted by the Complaint Committee, the project proposal shall then be admitted to the further assessment steps and/or the previously excluded partner(s) shall be readmitted.

The decisions of the Complaint Committee are further communicated to the MC and to the lead applicant(s) of the affected project proposal(s).

The Complaint Committee decision is 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.

### **3.5 Quality assessment**

The novelty introduced by the EU legislation package 2021-2027 requires that the assessment process is as quickly and accurate as possible to ensure the early reimbursement of technical assistance as a flat rate linked to the eligible expenditure included in each payment application.

In complying with this requirement, MA considered that the assessment of the received project proposals was to be finalized within the end of the year 2023 to receive the first reimbursement of technical assistance within the end of the year 2024.

The MC decision of keeping the call open one additional month than what proposed and the need of finalizing the administrative closure of all possible 2014-2020 projects make the achievement of the initially set deadline more challenging to be reached.

According to the recent EC publication "*Towards simplification – analysis of selection of operations*"<sup>3</sup> IPA ADRION methodology assessment borrowed by the previous ADRION 2014-2020, is in line with the recognised best practices with regard to:

- a) Set up of a clear intervention logic and effective targeting of the call;
- b) Reduced administrative burden via digitalisation and standardization;
- c) Good communication during all stages of the call (to MC and potential beneficiaries);
- d) Provision of adequate support to applicants.

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<sup>3</sup> [https://ec.europa.eu/regional\\_policy/sources/reports/selection-operations/analysis-selection-operations.pdf](https://ec.europa.eu/regional_policy/sources/reports/selection-operations/analysis-selection-operations.pdf)

To keep the envisaged deadline for the assessment finalization and having regard to the number of received applications, it is necessary to boost human resources<sup>4</sup> while keeping the methodology and the quality of the assessment unchanged. In relation to that, it is proposed that, exceptionally, a limited number of proposals, estimated in ca 30% out of the received ones, shall be assessed, according to the proposed methodology, by two external assessors under the supervision and coordination of the JS.

Only those applications which have passed the admissibility and eligibility checks are assessed from a quality point of view.

In order to guarantee a fair, equal and transparent process, and to minimize external pressure and risk of complaints, each project proposal is double independently assessed either by:

- 1) Internal assessors (JS team), and
- 2) External assessors,

Or by:

- 3) Two external assessors.

Each eligible project proposal is analysed according to the quality assessment criteria grouped in relation to strategic and operational elements and verified along two separate steps:

1. **Strategic assessment criteria** - whose main aim is to determine the extent of the project's contribution to the achievement of Programme objectives (contribution to Programme results), by addressing joint or common target group needs;
2. **Operational assessment criteria** - whose main aim is to assess the feasibility of the proposed project, as well as its value for money in terms of resources used vs. results delivered.

In order to proceed with the aforementioned considerations in a fair and transparent way, strategic and operational steps are characterized by criteria, sub-criteria and related scores.

As far as the scores are concerned, each sub-criterion is attributed a score ranging from 1 to 5 according to the following grid:

5	<b>Excellent</b> – the section of the application analysed in accordance with the requirement of the criterion is of excellent quality and provides clear and coherent information
4	<b>Good</b> – the section of the application analysed in accordance with the requirement of the criterion is clear and contain minor shortcomings
3	<b>Fair</b> - the section of the application analysed in accordance with the requirement of the criterion is sufficiently clear and requires further clarification from the applicant
2	<b>Sufficient</b> - the section of the application analysed in accordance with the requirement of the criterion is of low quality
1	<b>Poor</b> - the section of the application analysed in accordance with the requirement of the criterion does not meet the requirement/the information is not present

The total score of each criterion is the sum of the scores attributed to each sub-criterion.

The score attributed to each group of criteria is the sum of the scores attributed to each criterion.

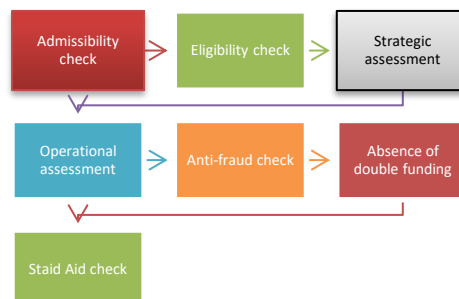
The overall project score will result from summing up of each group of criteria category/criterion score.

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<sup>4</sup> Ibidem, page 19.

Use of half scores is not envisaged.

The quality assessment will be organised in two steps: first, projects will undergo a strategic assessment.



### 3.6 Strategic assessment

The strategic assessment is carried out first.

The assessment shall be aimed at verifying the following elements:

- a) Relevance;
- b) Intervention logic;
- c) Partnership;
- d) Cooperation character.

Each criterion will get up to the following maximum score:

Criterion	Max score
Relevance	20
Intervention Logic	20
Partnership	10
Cooperation character	10
<b>Total score</b>	<b>60</b>

Only the project proposals having reached an overall score of **at least 36/60 (60%** of the overall score related to strategic elements) will progress to the Operational assessment and be appraised according to the criteria of group 2.

Project proposals which do not pass the strategic assessment shall not be recommended for funding.

The quality assessment grid is reported in the table below:

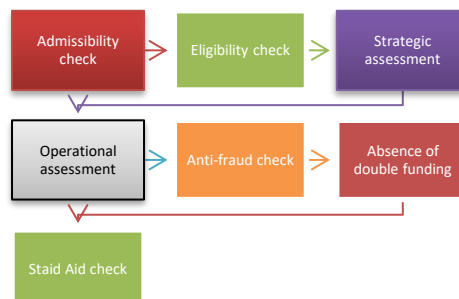
### Quality assessment grid

<b>STRATEGIC ASSESSMENT</b>	
<b>Relevance</b>	
Max 5 points	<p>Is the need for the proposed project well justified, reasonable and well explained: does the proposal address a common territorial challenge of the Programme or a joint territorial asset?</p> <p>Is the project proposal relevant in relation to the targeted programme specific objective and the expected result?</p>
Max 5 points	<p>Does the project proposal clearly contribute to the relevant policy framework at different levels?</p> <p>Does the project clearly and consistently contribute to specified EUSAIR macro-regional strategy objectives and actions?</p> <p>Is the proposal of relevance to the territory of the programme: will the programme area benefit?</p> <p>Is the project relevant for the territorial needs in IPA participating countries to ensure the transfer of knowledge and build capacity in the implementation of EU policies and practices?</p>
Max 5 points	<p>How does the proposal contribute to the respect of horizontal principles?</p> <p>How does the project position itself with regard to the pre-defined environmental topics and the “do not significant harm” principle?</p>
Max 5 points	<p>Does the proposal build on existing practices:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Does the proposal demonstrate new solutions that go beyond the existing practice in the sector/programme area/participating countries?</li> <li>- Does the proposal adapt and implement already developed solutions?</li> <li>- Does the proposal introduce a completely approach?</li> </ul> <p>Is the proposal making use of synergies with other projects or initiatives?</p>
<b>Intervention logic</b>	
Max 5 points	<p>Is the proposal’s intervention logic (i.e., project specific objectives, outputs and expected results) clearly defined and consistent?</p>
Max 5 points	<p>Are project outputs and results that contribute to Programme indicators realistic:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Is it possible to achieve them with the given resources – i.e., time, partners, budget -?</li> </ul>

	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Is it possible to reach them with the chosen approach?</li> <li>- Are they realistic based on the quantification provided)?</li> </ul>
Max 5 points	Do the project main outputs clearly link to the programme output and results indicators? Do the project main outputs clearly link to programme specific objectives and the project specific objectives?
Max 5 points	Does the project proposal clearly conceptualise the ownership/durability, long lasting effects and transferability of outputs and results? Is financial, institutional, political sustainability ensured?
<b>Partnership</b>	
Max 5 points	<p>Is the partnership composition, including Associated Partners, relevant and strategic for the proposed project?</p> <p>Is it balanced with respect to the participating countries, the addressed sectors and levels?</p> <p>Is it consistent in size and composition with the proposed activities?</p>
Max 5 points	<p>Does the lead partner have sufficient experience in the thematic field concerned and is it competent enough having the capacity to manage a complex transnational cooperation project under ETC?</p> <p>Do all project partners have competence and proven experience, as well as the necessary capacity to implement the project (financial, human resources, etc.)?</p>
<b>Cooperation character</b>	
Max 5 points	<p>Does the partnership reflect the transnational cooperation approach?</p> <p>Does the transnational co-operation have a significant added value for the partners and the territories involved?</p>
Max 5 points	<p>Do all partners play a defined role in the partnership, in line with the compulsory and optional ways of co-operation described?</p> <p>Are tasks and roles for each project partner clearly defined? Is the distribution of tasks and responsibilities of project partners appropriate?</p>
<b>Max 60 points</b>	

### 3.6.1 Common tools

A quality assessment grid template, including reference to the application form sections to be analysed, shall be provided to each assessor. If necessary, assessors shall be offered standard sentences to ensure consistency and ease the harmonisation process.



### 3.7 Operational assessment

Only those proposals which have positively passed the strategic assessment are assessed according to the operational point of view.

Project proposals assessment shall be aimed at verifying the following elements:

- a) Work plan;
- b) Communication;
- c) Budget.

Each criterion will get up to the following maximum score:

Criterion	Max score
Work plan	20
Communication	10
Budget	20
<b>Total score</b>	<b>50</b>

As far as the Operational Assessment is concerned, the proposals not reaching **at least 30/50 (60% of the overall score related to operational assessment)** will be rejected.

As per the strategic assessment, each quality criterion is structured according to sub-criteria, highlighting specific elements to be considered.

The appraisal of each sub-criterion must also be accompanied by scores a score ranging from 1 to 5 as reported in the previous chapter.

The quality assessment grid is reported in the table below:

**Operational criteria (as included in the Application Manual)**

<b>OPERATIONAL ASSESSMENT</b>	
<b>Workplan</b>	
Max 5 points	Is the overall approach suitable to obtain the planned outputs and results?
Max 5 points	Are the work plan and timing of activities, deliverables and outputs realistic, consistent and transparent? Are the proposed financial and human resources appropriate to implement the project?
Max 5 points	Will the target groups, the partners, and the stakeholders benefit from the co-operation?
Max 5 points	Does the management approach show good potential to secure a sound project management, coordination and risk mitigation? Is the proposed project management structure effective? Are the internal communication and management structures appropriate to ensure a smooth co-operation within the partnership? To which extent the need for engaging external expertise is justified (with specific reflection on partnership expertise)?
<b>Communication</b>	
Max 5 points	Are communication activities planned in the work plan and are they relevant for achieving communication objectives? Are the communication activities and deliverables appropriate to reach the relevant target groups and stakeholders? Will the proposed communication activities lead to sufficient visibility of the project among relevant target groups and stakeholders?
Max 5 points	Are the capitalization activities foreseen in the workplan? If, yes, are these activities ensuring that the project outputs and results are effectively disseminated and used?
<b>Budget</b>	
Max 5 points	To which extent the presented budget is transparent and include sufficient details per partner and per cost category? Is the application of simplified cost options (SCOs) appropriate and in line with the programme rules?
Max 5 points	To which extent resources planned by the project partners are adequate (in terms of quantity and quality) and reflects market prices?

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?
Max 5 points	Is the financial allocation per cost category in line with the programme rules? To which extent the budget allocated to staff and external expertise is in line with the project content and the costs are realistic? To which extent the budget allocated to pilot actions and equipment (if applicable) is realistic and in line with the project content?
<b>Max 50 points</b>	

### 3.7.1 Common tools

A quality assessment grid template including reference to the application form sections to be analysed shall be provided to each assessor. If necessary, assessors shall be offered standard sentences to ensure consistency and ease the harmonisation process.

## 3.8 Quality assessment finalization process

### Peer review

The two independent assessments related to the same eligible project proposal are subject to a peer review characterized by the following steps:

- 1) Exchange of views between the two assessors on the outcomes of the assessment to highlight shared/diverging opinions;
- 2) Review of the project proposal assessment to come to shared conclusions;
- 3) In case the assessment is performed by two independent assessors, the peer review shall be coordinated by the JS.
- 4) Decision, in case of persistent diverging opinions (more than 15 points difference persists at overall project final score), on the need of a third assessment performed by a different independent assessor. The two more aligned assessment grids shall be taken into considerations in the steps described below.

Both grids are reported in one project assessment fiche (assessors' names are not disclosed); the final score of each sub-criterion/criterion is the average score of those attributed by the two assessors: half scores shall be admitted.

### Overall harmonization

All grids are further counterchecked by the JS to ensure consistency between the use of wording and scores, and the adequacy of conditions for improvement among all assessed project proposals.

Only those proposals having passed the quality assessment (Strategic and Operational) with a score of **at least 66/110 (60%** of the overall maximum score) shall move to the further appraisal steps.

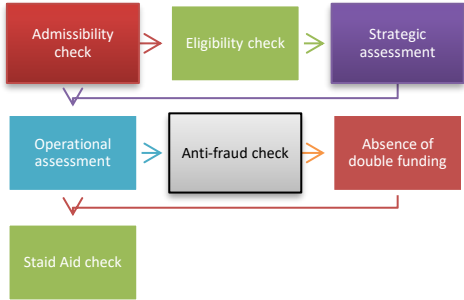
Project proposals which do not reach the minimum overall score shall be rejected.

The project final score is:

<b>Average strategic assessment score + average operational score = project final overall score</b>
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If the proposal has a quality score of at least 66/110, its quality assessment grid shall include, if necessary, conditions for improvement aimed at reducing the identified weaknesses and requiring a review of the application form during the negotiation process. Conditions for improvement shall be priorly agreed by the two assessors.

The checks described in the following paragraphs apply only to those project proposals which have reached the minimum score from a quality point of view.



**3.9 Anti-fraud check**

The anti-fraud checks consist of the verification of the existence of previous fraudulent behaviours or other fraudulent practices by lead applicant/project partners involved in the project proposal.

In accordance with the European Commission recommendation, IPA ADRION uses the ARACHNE database for performing the checks; however, since the database is not applicable to IPA and Greek potential beneficiaries, other tools must be used/have been developed in order to ensure that all potential beneficiaries are checked in a fair way.

In order to ensure consistency of verifications through all the tools used, all verifications must exclude:

- *Economic operators in financial distress*: exclusion of an economic operator from participation in a procurement procedure if the operator is the subject of insolvency or winding-up proceedings.
- *Economic operators convicted for crimes*: exclusion of an economic operator if the operator or any member of the administrative, management or supervisory body has been the subject of a conviction.
- *Economic operators convicted for tax evasion*: exclusion of an economic operator if the operator is in breach of its obligations relating to the payment of taxes or social security contributions.

The table below shows the different tools in place:

<b>ARACHNE database</b>	The tool is used for checking potential beneficiaries of <u>Croatia, Italy and Slovenia</u> . Checks are performed by MA.
<b>EDES (Early Detection and Exclusion System) database</b>	The tool is used for checking potential beneficiaries from <u>Albania, Bosnia and Herzegovina, Montenegro, Serbia and North Macedonia</u> and it is available at the EU Delegations. Checks are performed through NCPs and European Commission officials.
<b>Ad hoc template and procedure</b>	This approach is in force in <u>Greece</u> only. The procedure has been set in place by the Greek NCP in cooperation with JS. The Greek NCP analyses the documentation enclosed in a self-declaration submitted by the potential beneficiaries.

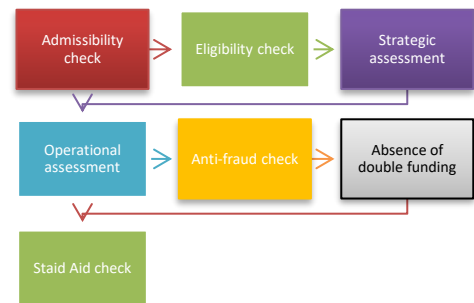
	The NCP provides the JS an overview table (excel file) following the analysis of the received documentation. Template of the self-declaration is provided in Annex 1.
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MA/JS send the affected NCPs the list of potential beneficiaries to be checked, which shall be returned with the outcomes of the check.

In case the fraudulent behaviour/practice affects:

- a) the lead applicant: the project proposal is rejected;
- b) a project partner: it is excluded from the project proposal; in case the exclusion of such partner(s) leads to non-fulfilment of the minimum partnership requirements or if the proposal experiences the exclusion of up to two partners, the project proposal is rejected.

Outcomes of the anti-fraud checks are uploaded on JEMS and included in the project assessment grid to be submitted to the MC.



### 3.10 Absence of double funding

In accordance with Art. 181.4.b) of Regulation (EU, Euratom) No 2018/1046 (Financing Regulation), and with what reported in the Declaration signed by each applicant with regard to the exclusion from subsidy, MA/JS shall exclude from funding those activities that have been already granted to the same potential beneficiary(ies) by Interreg Danube and/or EURO MED programmes.

Checks shall take place only on those applications which successfully passed all the previous checks described in the appraisal process.

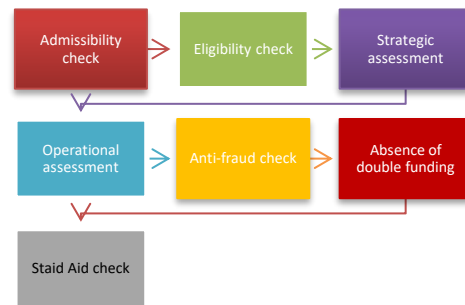
Checks are performed through the analysis of approved applications of the aforementioned programmes dealing with similar topics and implemented by the same institutions involved in IPA ADRION project proposals.

Checks shall be done by analysing publicly available information and information received from the EURO MED and DANUBE JS.

Checks are performed by the independent/external assessors under the supervision and coordination of the JS.

In case the presence of double funding is confirmed, identified activities are considered as not eligible for being granted; this may imply the rejection of the project proposal.

Check list is provided in Annex 2.



### 3.11 State Aid check

In case the eligible project proposal positively passes the steps described in the previous paragraphs, State Aid compliance is verified primarily at project level, i.e.: if actions/activities are considered favouring certain undertakings or the production of certain goods, distorting or threatening to distort competition. If compliance with State Aid is detected, the analysis is further performed at project partner level.

The check is performed by State Aid external experts; in case clarifications are needed, the lead applicant may be contacted by the JS on behalf of the expert.

State Aid experts are not only in charge of detecting the eventual presence of State Aid compliant activities but also to:

- a) Detect the existence of “disguised partners” i.e.: the presence of service providers acting as project partners;
- b) In case activities complaint with State Aid are detected and the project is in principle recommended for funding, elaborate conditions aimed at minimizing or reducing the State Aid risk.

The State Aid experts are requested to fill-in a state aid assessment grid; the final result of the analysis can bring to one or more of the following outcomes:

- a) **Project activities are not State Aid relevant.** In this case no contractual conditions are set on the subsidy contract;
- b) **Some project activities are State Aid relevant** (list shall be provided) but the application of the **State Aid discipline (*de minimis*) can be avoided if specific countermeasures apply** (list shall be provided). In such case, specific obligations will be introduced in the subsidy contract referring to the countermeasures applied to avoid the state aid discipline (*de minimis*) (e.g. wide dissemination of outputs, etc);
- c) The **application of the State Aid discipline for some activities cannot be avoided, bringing to the respect of the *de minimis* threshold to those specific activities and partners** (list shall be provided). In such case, specific contractual provisions will be introduced in the subsidy contract, indicating the activities and partners to which the State Aid discipline (*de-minimis*) applies.
- d) **Indirect aid granted to third parties** outside the project partnership. In such case, a contractual condition setting a threshold in accordance with GBER art.20a<sup>5</sup>, referring to exemption of aid of limited amount in the context of INTERREG, will be introduced in the Subsidy Contract.

<sup>5</sup> Article 20a of Regulation (EU) No.651/2014, introduced by the amending Regulation (EU) No.2021/1237.

### 3.11.1 Common tools

In order to perform the checks, the State Aid experts are provided with a template State Aid assessment grid as reported as Annex 3.

## 4. Finalization of the project proposal assessment and final project assessment grid

The outcomes of all the checks shall contribute to the project proposal assessment.

Per each assessed project proposal, a final project assessment grid is drafted and includes the following information:

- 1) Summary of the project proposal (copy and paste from the summary included in the submitted application form);
- 2) Partners involved, the Participating Countries where they are located, and their budget;
- 3) Results of the strategic assessment (description and score of each criterion, and final score attributed by the two assessors);

*The outcomes of the following checks are included, according to the progress of the assessment:*

- 4) Results of the operational assessment (description and score of each criterion, and final score attributed by the two assessors);
- 5) Outcomes of:
  - a. Anti-fraud check;
  - b. Absence on double funding check;
  - c. State aid compliance check.
- 6) Conditions for approval (if the project is recommended for funding and if conditions are deemed as necessary);
- 7) Project budget request and proposed revised budget (the latter is deemed as necessary).

## 5. Deliverables to the Monitoring Committee

The following documentation is sent to the MC to support its decision for funding and in accordance with the MC Rules of Procedure:

1. Per each assessed project proposal, the final project assessment grid;
2. A ranking list containing, per Specific Objective, an overview of the scores obtained by each project proposal per criterion (according to strategic and operational assessment), the overall score, the initial budget (total, Interreg request) and the final proposed budget (total, Interreg request), and the outcomes of the additional checks performed (see Annex 4);
3. List of external assessors involved (Thematic and State Aid experts);
4. Overview of the assessment process and statistical data;

## 6. Monitoring Committee decision

The decision for funding is adopted by the MC according to the following:

- a) **Approved:** the proposal is considered ready to start, fulfilling the requested quality level and positively responding to all the selection criteria;
- b) **Approved under conditions:** the proposal is considered approved provided that the lead partner and/or the partnership satisfy specific conditions for improvement within a given deadline;
- c) **Rejected:** the proposal is considered not matching a certain readiness and quality level and responding to the selection criteria.

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

## 7. Communication of the outcomes of the MC decision to the lead applicants

The MC decision is communicated to each lead applicant (personalized communication) containing the reasons for approval/approval under conditions/rejection.

The lead applicant is offered the possibility to submit a complaint only if it refers to the respect of the assessment process/procedure.

Complaints must be submitted in accordance with the requirements described in the Application Manual and in paragraph 3.4 of the present document.

## 8. Management of received complaints

According to the Application Manual, any complaint related to the quality assessment may refer to the respect of the assessment process/procedure only.

The internal procedure to process the received complaints and described in paragraph 3.4 applies.

If the Complaint Committee does not detect any mistake in the assessment process implementation, the MA/JS draft a letter to the complainant describing the implemented process, and informing on the rejection of the complaint. If this is the case, the communication is prior submitted to the Complaint Committee for approval.

In case the Complaint Committee decides to accept the complaint:

- a) The project proposal shall be included in the priority ranking list according to which the MC bases its decision for funding. The MC shall decide the next steps in order to finalize the ranking list.
- b) The previously excluded partner(s) shall be readmitted. The MC shall decide the next steps in order to finalize the ranking list.

The MC is informed on the Complaint Committee decisions accordingly.

The outcome of the Complaint Committee decision is 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 it is based on the same grounds.

## **9. Negotiation process**

The negotiation process starts with the communication of the outcomes of the MC decision to the lead applicant.

The process of improvement of the project proposals approved under conditions is supported by the organization of a lead partners' seminar, provision of targeted guidance to lead applicants and bilateral meetings.

As the project proposal does not envisage – during the assessment process described in the previous pages – any check regarding the lead applicant legal representative, this will be done during the negotiation process (existence of the signatory person and its power of signature) and in any case before the Subsidy Contract is awarded.

Lead and project partners whose declarations were characterised by missing elements (reference to 3.1), will be asked to resubmit them.

The revision of the application form must be ensured through the use of JEMS.

After the finalization of the negotiation process, the MC is informed about its outcomes and the lead partner receives a communication which reports, among other, the final project budget and the Interreg share.

## **Annex 1 – declaration on absence of fraudulent activities**



### **Lead/Project Partner Declaration**

**concerning the absence of fraudulent activities**

**First call for proposals – Priority Axes 1 and 2**

[To be printed on an official letterhead of the Lead/Project Partner organization]

<b>Project acronym</b>	
<b>Title of the project</b>	
<b>Name of the Lead/Project Partner in English language</b>	
<b>Name of the Lead/Project Partner in its original language</b>	

I, the undersigned, **[name, surname]**,

In my capacity as the legal representative and/or delegated person<sup>6</sup> of **[Name of the Lead/Project Partner in original language and name of Lead/Project partner in English]**, acting as Lead Applicant/Project Partner (select respectively) of the above mentioned project proposal in view of being funded by IPA ADRION Programme

**declare that:**

- The organization I represent is not in financial distress;
- I am not convicted for crimes related to my professional activity;
- I am not convicted for tax evasion;

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<sup>6</sup> Declarations have to be filled in in all its parts and signed by the legal representative(s) of the concerned institutions or by delegated person(s). In case of signature by the legal representative(s), such declaration 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). In case of signature by delegated person(s), such declaration must be accompanied by a document confirming the validity of such delegation and by a valid identity document (e.g. identity card, passport).

I am not subject to conflict of interest as it is defined in EU Law within the framework of IPA Adrion Programme.

I acknowledge that untruthful/false declarations, in addition to the administrative sanctions and the request for refunding unduly received contribution charged with the interests, can also be prosecuted by the penal code.

The present declaration is supported by the attached following documents:

- Organization's certificate of non-bankruptcy (provided by the First Instance Court);
- Legal representative's Criminal Record Copy (provided by the First Instance Court);
- Organization's certificate of taxes and social security payment (provided by the competent service).

Signature

Place and date

Name of the Signatory

Position of the Signatory

## Annex 2 - Check list on double funding



### Project identification

Project title	
Project acronym	
Project number	
Names of person/s filling in the checklist	

	Yes	No	Comments
<b>EURO MED programme<sup>7</sup></b>			
<i>Is there any project financed by the EURO MED programme dealing with the topic handled by the project and performing similar activities?</i>			<i>Please indicate the names of the projects</i>
<i>In case the answer to the previous question is “yes”, please indicate if any partner involved in the IPA ADRION project is involved also in the identified EURO MED project/s</i>			<i>Please indicate the IPA ADRION project partners</i>
<b>Danube Programme<sup>8</sup></b>			
<i>Is there any project financed by the Danube programme dealing with the topic handled</i>			

<sup>7</sup>Source of information: <https://interreg-euro-med.eu/en/what-we-do/> and [www.keep.eu](http://www.keep.eu)

<sup>8</sup>Source of information: to be provided and [www.keep.eu](http://www.keep.eu)

<i>by the project and performing similar activities?</i>			
<i>In case the answer to the previous question is “yes”, please indicate if any partner involved in the IPA ADRION project is involved also in the identified Danube project/s</i>			
<b>Assessment conclusion</b>			
<i>Are the outcomes of the checks performed satisfactory and double funding risk excluded?</i>			

Date

Signature

### Annex 3 – State Aid assessment grid

Presence of State Aid relevant activities:

<b>Work package</b>		
WP 1	<i>(list of activities, partner name(s) to be provided – please also indicate the “disguised partner”, if present)</i>	
WP 2	<i>(list of activities, partner name(s) to be provided – please also indicate the “disguised partner”, if present)</i>	
WP 3	<i>(list of activities, partner name(s) to be provided – please also indicate the “disguised partner”, if present)</i>	
WP xx		
<b>Involvement of beneficiaries outside the project partnership</b>		
	<b>Yes</b>	<b>No</b>
Does the project proposal envisage the involvement of beneficiaries outside the project partnership?		
If yes, will they be subject to the application of art. 20a of GBER?		
The project proposal is:		
	<b>(please mark what relevant)</b>	<b>Description</b>
<b>A</b>		Not State Aid relevant (please explain the reason why).
<b>B</b>		State Aid relevant: some project activities are State Aid relevant, but the respect of the State Aid discipline can be avoided if the following measures apply in relation to the activities of the following identified partners <sup>9</sup> :
<b>C</b>		State Aid relevant: the respect of the State Aid discipline of some activities cannot be avoided, requiring the application of the <i>de minimis</i> threshold.  Affected activities and partners are <sup>10</sup> :

<sup>9</sup> The provided text shall be part of the “Conditions for improvement”, i.e.: requests for revision of the project proposal included in the negotiation process between the Managing Authority and the Lead Applicant. Conditions for improvement must be previously approved by the Monitoring Committee.

<sup>10</sup> Ibidem.