

INTERREG IPA ADRIATIC –IONIAN “IPA ADRION” 2021-2027

INTERREG EUROPE 2021- 2027

TERMS OF REFERENCE

Call for the selection of Two (2) First Level Control Officers

Introduction:

The Interreg IPA Adriatic – Ionian “IPA ADRION” 2021-2027 Programme is co-funded by the European Union through the Instrument for Pre-Accession (IPA III). The IPA ADRION Programme is a European transnational programme that invests in regional innovation systems, cultural and natural heritage protection, environmental resilience, sustainable transport and capacity building. By bringing together 10 Partner States across the Adriatic-Ionian region, IPA ADRION fosters European integration and acts as policy driver for the benefit of more than 70 million people. IPA ADRION provides with a funding scheme for public authorities (local, regional and national bodies), research institutions, NGOs, and private companies. The Programme launches Call for Proposals, which cover a wide range of topics according to its thematic priorities. IPA ADRION has a total budget of 160,810 million euros.

The Programme is under the management of the Emilia-Romagna Region, Directorate General for Resources, Europe, Innovation, and Institutions. The eligible area of the Programme encompasses ten countries: four EU Member States (Croatia, Greece, Italy, and Slovenia), five non-EU Partner States (Albania, Bosnia and Herzegovina, Montenegro, North Macedonia, and Serbia) and one third country (San Marino). The program's main objective is to improve the region's attractiveness, competitiveness, and connectivity in order to grow the economy and create jobs. It also aims to protect the environment and guarantee healthy, balanced marine and coastal ecosystems in the Adriatic-Ionian region by implementing joint initiatives between national and regional institutional and non-profit entities and by creating digital tools.

The Managing Authority of the Programme is the Emilia-Romagna Region, and the Joint Secretariat HQ is situated in Bologna, Italy.

The Interreg Europe is an interregional cooperation Programme, co-funded by the European Union. The European Union strives to reduce disparities in the levels of development, growth and quality of life in and across Europe's regions. The Programme contributes to this objective and runs from 2021 to 2027. Interregional cooperation can contribute to a Europe closer to citizens by supporting key areas for the development of effective integrated place-based strategies and policies, which could cover issues like local cooperative digital platforms, bottom-up/local green deal strategies dealing for instance with energy poverty, among other themes. The support could facilitate better spatially adapted governance, as

governance for collective action requires capacity for consensus building and long-term commitment. Moreover, experimentation in terms of building governance networks and structures is an important aspect of efficient cooperation structures, and capacity building is a key precondition for efficient territorial policies. Interreg Europe could help to ensure that integrated territorial strategies are concretely implemented on the ground.

The Managing Authority for Interreg Europe is the Hauts-de-France Regional Council, and the Joint Secretariat is staffed by an international team based in Lille, France.

The Programme area covers the 27 Member States of the EU (242 NUTS2 regions), Norway (7 regions), Switzerland (7 regions), Albania, Bosnia and Herzegovina, Montenegro, North Macedonia, Serbia, Moldova and Ukraine¹.

This Programme has a budget of 394 million euros from the European Regional Development Fund (ERDF). Close to 90% is earmarked for interregional cooperation projects. The rest will fund the Platform's policy-learning services and technical assistance for the programme's implementation.

The State Agency for Strategic Programming and Aid Coordination (SASPAC) serves as the National Authority responsible for coordinating the programmes, with National Contact Points (NCP) located in Tirana. The National Authority's responsibilities include overseeing Albania's management and control system, ensuring that all expenditures by Albanian beneficiaries conform to applicable European Union (PRAG) and National Rules.

In Albania, a centralized first level control system is in place. The First Level Control (FLC) Office in Albania is established by the State Agency for Strategic Programming and Aid Coordination (SASPAC). The staff of the FLC Office is composed of 1 (one) Head and 2 (two) Controllers of First Level. The FLC office shall ensure that the expenditure, declared by the beneficiaries located in Albanian eligible area, can be validated within a period of three months from the date of its submission by the beneficiary.

Duties and Responsibilities

The first level controller carries out administrative verifications on expenditure submitted by beneficiaries and on-the-spot verifications of operations. He/she carries out this regulatory and mandatory verification, which covers the expenditure of partners declared during the implementation of the project.

The First Level Control Officer reports to the Head of the First Level Control Office, to the Contracting Authority and the Albanian National Authority, if necessary.

¹ Following the unprovoked and unjustified Russia's war of aggression against Ukraine and its impact, only the territories under the control of the sovereign Government of Ukraine are eligible under the programme. Regions under Russia's military control will not be eligible.

The administrative verifications are carried out to the submitted expenditure by each beneficiary. They should normally include:

- The correctness of the declared expenditure according to the application form
- The correspondence of the expenditure to the approved operation
- The correspondence of the expenditure to the eligible period
- The Compliance with programmes manuals and conditions
- The Compliance with National and Community legislation and eligibility rules
 - The adequacy of supporting documents
 - The existence of an adequate audit trail

The first level controller shall perform the following main tasks:

- Verifies the legality, regularity and reality of the activities and the expenditure declared by each of the Albanian beneficiaries/partners implementing the operations, by verifying that the co-financed products and services have been delivered and that expenditure declared by the beneficiaries/partners has been paid and that it complies with applicable law, the Cooperation Programmes and the conditions for support of the operation;
- Verifies the documents of all the operations for which the beneficiaries/partners have prepared their progress report, in order to verify the eligibility of expenditure in accordance with the following principles:
 - a) ***Principle of reality of expenditure***, according to which it is necessary to verify that the expenditure has actually incurred and is linked to the co-financed operation; verification of the reporting of activities during the implementation of the project by the Albanian beneficiary/partner, based on the Subsidy Contract, Partnership Agreement and the Application Form.
 - b) ***Principle of legality and regularity***², according to which it is necessary to verify that the expenditure complies with Community, programmes and National rules; verification of financial reports in terms of the compliance of expenditure for which reimbursement is requested with the approved budget; verification of financial documents (legality and regularity of expenditures declared and payments made); verification of the reported activities to ensure compliance with the Subsidy Contract and approved Application Form; verification of the applicable procurement rules and provisions for expenditure on works, supplies and services; and, verification of the fulfillment of the programmes requirements for visibility and communication.

² Namely, the extent to which transactions have been conducted in accordance with the relevant laws and contracts

- c) ***Principle of localisation of the co-financed operation***, according to which it is necessary to verify that the expenditure incurred is related to the operation and made in the eligible programmes area; on-the-spot verifications made at the head office/branch of the Albanian beneficiary/partner, as established by the programmes rules.
 - d) ***Principle of documented evidence*** according to which expenditure is documented as paid with receipts, receipted invoices or accounting records of equal legal validity.
- Prepares and issue the Certificate of Validity of Expenditures - CVE, after verifying the full compliance with all applicable conditions of the progress report/s and supporting documentation sent by every Albanian beneficiary partner of the programmes, within a maximum period of 3 months of the submission of the documents by the beneficiary concerned.
- Follows and implements every official document prepared by the Managing Authority and the National Authority in the framework of the programmes, on the basis of the assigned Tasks and the applicable legal framework, manuals and regulations, orders, guidelines, etc.
- Cooperates with the Joint Secretariat in all activities related to the First Level Control (FLC) of expenditure of the beneficiaries/partners during the whole duration of implementation of the awarded projects.
- Attends training and information sessions and FLC workshops organized by the programmes bodies or INTERACT, on the invitation of the Managing Authority and duly authorised by SASPAC.
- Cooperates with the Audit Authority and any other entitled national and/or EU Control and Audit entities or bodies for the purpose of audits, including the provision of relevant documents.
- Assists the programmes Bodies such as: The Managing Authority (MA), the Joint Secretariat (JS), the Monitoring Committee (MC), the Accounting Authority (AcA), the Audit Authority (AA) or other relevant structures with respect to the functioning of programmes implementation, in compliance with the provisions of the programmes manual.
- Assists the National Authority to prepare reports, statistics and information regarding the certification of expenditure when requested.
- Provides advisory assistance for all Albanian beneficiaries during the whole duration of the project implementation.
- Attends meetings with beneficiaries/partners as planned or when required by the National Authority, as well as activities organized in the framework of the programmes (where relevant).

- Informs periodically the Head of the First Level Control, the Irregularity Officer and/or the National Authority in relation to any issues or irregularities detected during the implementation of operations by Albanian beneficiaries.
- Assists the National Authority to offer training sessions for potential beneficiaries/leading partners in the Albanian territory, in compliance with the preliminary plan approved by SASPAC.
- Carries out any other tasks established by the National Authority in agreement with the Management Authority related to the activity of the First Level Control Office and certification of expenditure.
- Ensures timely and quality performance of the assigned tasks which shall be carried out with due diligence at all times.

Required Qualifications

1. University Degree (at least 4 years of studies in finance, accounting, economics, law or other relevant fields);
2. At least 5 years of working experience in financial management and/or control and audit of projects/programmes, preferably financed by EU Funds;
3. Knowledge of relevant EU regulations, programmes rules and national laws and regulations in place;
4. Good knowledge of public procurement procedures (national and PRAG rules);
5. Familiar with programmes and projects level monitoring procedures and systems;
6. Advanced level of English language, both spoken and written (at least B2); able to prepare documents in standard English and communicate effectively with relevant authorities, when needed;
7. A clean criminal record, as well as no disciplinary record, connected to failures in fulfilling accountancy or financial management tasks.
8. Very good computer literacy including excel, word processing, and use of data bases.

Additional qualifications to be considered

1. Postgraduate studies in a field relevant to the specified tasks.
2. Participation in other registers, such as the Auditor's Register.
3. Proficiency in a second EU language.
4. Good knowledge of the European legal framework for the management and implementation of programmes co-financed by Structural Funds.
5. Profound expertise in public procurement procedures.
6. Experience in the management or technical support of Interreg programmes.
7. Strong organizational skills and effectiveness.

8. Ability to work under pressure.
9. Capability to work in a multicultural environment.
10. Capacity to undertake initiatives and responsibilities.
11. Willingness to travel frequently.

Administrative Elements

1. *Contesters/participants will be asked to have:*

- a. Contestants/participants are expected to have a good knowledge of the Interreg IPA Adriatic – Ionian "IPA ADRION" 2021-2027
<https://www.interreg-ipa-adrion.eu/>
- b. Contestants/participants are expected to have a good knowledge of the Interreg Europe Programme 2021-2027
<https://www.interregeurope.eu/>
- c. Good Knowledge of PRAG Rules
<https://wikis.ec.europa.eu/display/ExactExternalWiki/ePRAG>
- d. Good knowledge of the Albanian Labor Code
<https://qbz.gov.al/preview/c1c18a6c-5f3e-457d-b931-de505b3c7ed0>

2. *Evaluation*

- a. Their qualification will be based on the above **qualification requirements**.
- b. Contesters/participants qualified to enter the test will be evaluated based on the following norms:
 - b1. Dossier: up to 15 points.
 - b2. Written testing: up to 60 points.
 - b3. Interview: up to 25 points.

The final selection will be for the best of those who reach more than 70 points in total.