

MONITORING COMMITTEE - 2021-2027

for

ESF+ Programme: Fostering the socioeconomic wellbeing of society through the creation of opportunities for all and investment in human resources and skills

Eligibility and Selection Criteria for the Selection of Mainstream Operations (2021-2027)

For the selection of operations, the Managing Authority (MA) is mandated by Regulation 2021/1060 Article 73 to establish and apply criteria and procedures which are non-discriminatory, transparent, that ensure accessibility to persons with disabilities, ensure gender equality and the principle of sustainable development and of the Union policy on the environment in accordance with Article 11 and Article 191(1) TFEU. Selected operations are approved with the general understanding that these should be implemented in line with the Annex III of Regulation 2021/1060 horizontal enabling conditions tied to: (i) Public procurement; (ii) State Aid rules; (iii) Charter of Fundamental Rights of the European Union; and (iv) United Nations convention on the rights of persons with disabilities (UNCRPD).

This paper aims at highlighting the eligibility and selection criteria that are to be adopted in the programming period 2021-2027 for the selection of proposals under ESF+ mainstream Operations. As explained in Table 1 below, the criteria of assessment are divided in two parts: Eligibility criteria and Selection criteria.

- **Eligibility criteria** are the essential criteria that all projects must meet in order to be admissible for a further qualitative assessment. Such eligibility criteria are normally assessed through a technical assessment and consist in a gateway assessment which ensures that all applications have reached a minimum standard. Projects which do not comply with the gateway eligibility criteria will not proceed to full appraisal and scoring. These may be further refined in calls for projects in line with the specific elements tied to the call requirements in line with the Programme parameters.

- **Selection criteria** are designed to assess the fit and contribution of project proposals with the Programme strategy, its target groups and its objectives. These may be further refined in calls for project proposals to include criteria which are specific to one type of activity, area or target group. These criteria are divided in two groups: those that rely on a quantitative assessment and those that require a qualitative assessment. The evaluation will combine both data (quantitative and qualitative) in order to have a comprehensive understanding of the proposal. Moreover, further detail tied to the specific objectives and proposed actions shall be included in the guidance notes issued with each call to guide prospective Applicants on the relevant specific objectives, and actions as set in the Programme.

Table 1: The table below offers a screenshot of the eligibility and selection criteria

| Eligibility Criteria | | Selection criteria | | |
|--|------------|---|-------------|--|
| Criterion | Assessment | Criterion | Marks (max) | Sub-criteria |
| Submission of a complete project application as published in the call | Yes/No | Capacity of the organisation | 10 | Adequate overall expertise within the Applicant organisation and project partners |
| | | | | Past experience in EU/similar projects |
| Applicant organisation is an eligible Applicant as outlined in the call | Yes/No | Contribution of the project to the relevant Development Needs | 10 | Evidence of real demand for the project (qualitative and quantitative evidence) to address a gap as identified in the relevant Priority within the Programme and how it will contribute to the need of the Programme (evidence showing to what extent this need will be addressed through the activities proposed) |
| | | | | To what extent is the project contributing to the National and EU policies and consistent with corresponding enabling conditions |
| Applicant is not in an exclusion situation in accordance with Art 136(1) and Art 141(1) of 2018/1046 Financial Regulation and CPR Art 73(2)(i) | Yes/No | Potential of the project to contribute to the achievement of the Expected Results | 10 | Evidence of how the project will contribute to the achievement of the Expected Results as identified in the relevant Priority in the Programme |
| | | | | If partners are involved, evidence of how they will contribute to the achievement of the Expected Results |
| | | | | The ability of the project to mobilise complementary funding/actions to achieve the Expected Results |
| | | | | Innovative solutions proposed in this project to achieve the Expected Results |

| Eligibility Criteria | | Selection criteria | | |
|---|------------|---------------------------------|-------------|--|
| Criterion | Assessment | Criterion | Marks (max) | Sub-criteria |
| Applicant organisation has remit to implement the project within its mandate | Yes/No | Contribution towards indicators | 10 | The selection of all relevant indicators as applicable for the project |
| | | | | Adequate description of the selected indicators in the project proposal including an explanation of the method of quantification and verification of targets |
| | | | | Assessment of whether there are any unrealistic indicator targets which are not achievable |
| | | | | The contribution of the proposed indicators towards achieving Programme targets as outlined in the call |
| Project to be implemented within the eligible territory or for its direct benefit | Yes/No | Readiness | 15 | Risk associated with the timeline of the project as proposed by the Applicant |
| | | | | Readiness, assessed on the basis of tenders, CBA/FFS/FS, Planning Authority permits, recruitment procedures and other relevant documentation pertaining to training, scholarships amongst others, depending on the nature of the published call and the nature of the proposal |
| | | | | Other risks |
| Proof of co-financing (where applicable) | Yes/No | Project Sustainability | 10 | Magnitude of post operating costs against total project costs |
| | | | | The Applicant organisation's financial stability |

| Eligibility Criteria | | Selection criteria | | |
|--|------------|--|-------------|---|
| Criterion | Assessment | Criterion | Marks (max) | Sub-criteria |
| | | | | Added Value of the project and complementarity with other projects |
| Selection of a relevant Specific Objective as published in the call | Yes/No | Partnership | 5 | The added value of the involved partner/s in achieving the expected results |
| | | | | Clear evidence of the mutual benefit of the proposed partnership |
| | | | | Partnership between organisations of a different nature |
| Selection of at least one output indicator and one result indicator linked to a relevant Specific Objective as published in the call | Yes/No | Horizontal principles - Equal opportunities and non-discrimination | 10 | Effective measures addressing equality between men and women |
| | | | | Effective measures addressing equal opportunities for all |
| | | | | Effective measures ensuring the principle of non-discrimination |

| Eligibility Criteria | | Selection criteria | | |
|--|------------|---|-------------|---|
| Criterion | Assessment | Criterion | Marks (max) | Sub-criteria |
| Status of operation is either ongoing or not yet started unless otherwise allowed by the specific applicable regulations | Yes/No | Horizontal principles – Sustainable Development | 10 | Effective measures that contribute towards economic growth |
| | | | | Effective measures that contribute towards social cohesion |
| | | | | Effective measures that contribute towards environmental sustainability |
| | | Quality of application form | 10 | General presentation and overall coherence between different sections of the proposal |
| | | | | Proposed budget is in line with the proposed activities, demonstrating sound financial management and the absence of 'Double Funding' |
| | | | | |



| Eligibility Criteria | | Selection criteria | | |
|----------------------|------------|--------------------|-------------|--|
| Criterion | Assessment | Criterion | Marks (max) | Sub-criteria |
| | | | | <p>Adequate description and purpose of each activity being proposed including a work plan/Gantt chart with regards to the implementation of these activities</p> |
| | | | | <p>Proposal identifies communication strategies/actions showing how the use of EU Funds will be effectively publicised and communicated with the relevant target groups of the proposed project and the general public</p> |

PART 1 - Eligibility Criteria

The project must fulfil the following gateway criteria to be eligible for further assessment:

1. Submission of a complete project application as published in the call

The Applicant must present a complete application form, filled in with all relevant details and documentation using the system made available by the MA, unless otherwise stipulated by the MA. No outline applications or incomplete applications shall be considered. Submission of project proposals must be made within the time-limit set for receipt of applications.

2. Applicant organisation is an eligible Applicant as outlined in the call

The Applicant organisation should be one of the eligible Applicants¹ as outlined in the relevant call. Supporting documentation related to the legal status of the Applicant, as required in the call would need to be provided by the Applicant.

3. Applicant is not in an exclusion situation in accordance with Art 136 (1) and Art 141 (1) of 2018/1046 Financial Regulation and CPR Art 73(2)(i)

The Applicant should sign a declaration confirming that they or any person involved in the project are not in an exclusion situation in accordance with the Financial Regulation and Common Provisions Regulation.

4. Applicant organisation has remit to implement the project within its mandate

Applicants must be publicly mandated or authorised to implement the project by virtue of the applicable law establishing the organisation or by the respective Statute, in the case of NGOs. The parameters and the objectives of the project must fall within the remit and mandate of the Applicant. Supporting documentation as required in the call would need to be provided.

5. Project to be implemented within the eligible territory or for its direct benefit

The eligible territory for the Programme is the whole territory of the Republic of Malta. All or part of an operation may be implemented outside of a Member State, including outside the Union, provided that the operation contributes to the objectives of the programme and provides direct benefits to the targeted territory of Malta.

¹ In the case of NGOs and VOs, the Managing Authority (MA) on behalf of the Project Selection Committee may request additional information vis-à-vis their position from the Commissioner for Voluntary Organisations in terms of their enrolment and compliance.

6. Proof of co-financing (where applicable)

In cases where Government is not co-financing the project from the national budget, Applicants must submit, together with the application form, evidence of co-financing such as:

- i) A set of audited accounts showing the Applicant's ability to co-finance the project;
or
- ii) A declaration by the Mayor, Executive/Head and Treasurer/Financial Controller of the organisation, stating that the Applicant organisation commits to its co-financing obligations and to the financing of any ineligible costs; or.
- iii) Any other form of evidence/documentation such as bank statements and /or future cash flow projections of the Applicant which show that the entity will be financially able to implement the project.

It is important to note that co-financing in kind is NOT eligible.

7. Selection of a relevant Specific Objective as published in the call

Only proposals that selected the relevant Specific Objective/s as published in the call will be considered.

8. Selection of at least one output indicator and one result indicator linked to a relevant Specific Objective as published in the call

The project must have at least one output and at least one result indicator in the relevant Priority and under the Specific Objective as published in the call.

9. Status of operation is either ongoing or not yet started unless otherwise allowed by the specific applicable regulations

Unless otherwise allowed by the specific applicable regulations, operations shall not be considered eligible for support by the Funds where they have been physically completed or fully implemented before the application for funding under the programme is submitted, irrespective of whether all related payments have been made.

PART 2 – SELECTION CRITERIA

1. Capacity of the organisation (10 marks)

The Applicant organisation will be assessed on its adequate overall expertise to implement the project, including that of the project partners, as applicable. Past experience in EU and/or similar projects will also be assessed.

2. Contribution of the project to the relevant Development Needs (10 marks)

The Applicant should demonstrate evidence of real demand for the project (qualitative and quantitative evidence) to address a gap as identified in the relevant Priority within the Programme and how it will contribute to the need of the Programme and relevant specific objective and are attributed to a type of intervention. Evidence should be provided as to what extent this need will be addressed through the activities proposed. The Applicant should also demonstrate to what extent will the project be contributing to the National and EU Policies, as well as the underlying relevant strategies of the programme including the applicable ESF Secondary Theme. Moreover, should ensure consistency with the corresponding enabling condition strategies.

3. Potential of the project to contribute to the achievement of the Expected Results (10 marks)

The Applicant should demonstrate that through its implementation, the project will contribute to the achievement of the Expected Results as identified in the relevant Priority and specific objective in the Programme. The proposed project should also indicate whether any partners will be involved and explain their contribution to the achievement of the Expected Results. The ability of the proposed project to mobilise complementary funding/actions to achieve the Expected Result/s will also be assessed. Projects will also be assessed as to whether innovative solutions are being proposed to achieve the Expected Results.

4. Contribution towards indicators (10 marks)

The Applicant will be assessed on the selection of all relevant indicators as applicable for the project. An assessment whether the description of the selected indicators is providing an adequate explanation of the method of quantification and verification will be carried out. Moreover, an assessment of whether there are any unrealistic indicator targets which are not achievable will also be carried out. The contribution of the proposed indicators towards achieving Programme targets as outlined in the call will also be assessed.

5. Readiness (15 marks)

In this section, negative marking will be applied based on criteria which hinder the implementation of the proposed project. Assessment will be based on the Applicant's readiness in terms of tenders, CBA/FFS/FS, Planning Authority permits, recruitment procedures and relevant documentation pertaining to training, scholarships amongst others, depending on the nature of the published call and the nature of the project.

The project will also be assessed on how realistic the proposed timeframe is and the associated risks to the successful implementation of the project. The proposal should also identify other risks such as those associated with capacity, applicable procurement procedures, processing of payments and disbursement, implementation of proposed activities (including logistical risks) and legal risks associated with the proposed project. The Applicant should identify mitigation measures to be put in place to address the identified risks.

The more advanced the project is, the more marks will be awarded. Further to the above, evidence of readiness should be provided. This may include contract references, PA permits, studies, consultations, attainment of approvals etc.

6. Project Sustainability (10 marks)

The project proposal should clearly demonstrate the added value of the project and its complementarity with other projects. Moreover, should present the best relationship between the amount of support, activities to be undertaken and the achievements of objectives. The project will be assessed on the magnitude of post-operating costs against the cost of the project. The Applicant organisation should also demonstrate the organisation's financial stability in line with Art 73 (d) CPR and how the benefits of the project will continue to be delivered after grant support comes to an end. The project proposal should clearly demonstrate the added value of the project and its complementarity with other projects.

7. Partnership (5 marks)

Proposals being implemented by two or more project partners and/or by a set of mix of partners will be awarded additional marks. The proposal should identify the added value of involving partners in achieving the expected results, how the partnership can serve as a way to share information, research, knowledge and expertise between the different stakeholders, and identification of the mutual benefit of said partnership.

8. Horizontal principles – Equal opportunities and non-discrimination (10 marks)

The Applicant should provide detailed information beyond the minimum legal obligations in these areas. To this end, the applicant should explain how equality between men and women, equal opportunities, gender mainstreaming and the integration of the gender perspective are taken into account and promoted throughout the project design, implementation, monitoring, reporting and evaluation stages. The Applicant should explain what measures are planned to be carried out to ensure appropriate steps are taken to prevent any form of discrimination based on gender, racial or ethnic origin, religion or belief, disability, age or sexual orientation during all project stages. In addition, Applicant should explain how such measures are put in place during the preparation and implementation stages of the project.

9. Horizontal principles – Sustainable Development (10 marks)

The proposal should provide information on how the project contributes towards sustainable development, namely economic growth, social cohesion and environmental sustainability. Applicants should outline their project's contribution to economic growth through the potential contribution towards the local economy/industry, and towards social cohesion through potential skill development as a result of the project and generation of employment. Another dimension is the Environmental Sustainability where assessment will be based on the extent of which the proposed project incorporates mitigation measures in line with the DNSH principles. To this end, applicants should also explain when and as applicable, how projects are addressing climate change mitigation and adaptation; the sustainable use and protection of water and marine resources; pollution prevention and control; protection of restoration of Biodiversity & Ecosystems; and the Circular Economy.

10. Quality of application form (10 marks)

Marks will be awarded on the general presentation and overall coherence across the different sections of the proposal to show the contribution of the activities towards the achievement of the objectives. An assessment will be carried out as to whether the proposed budget is clear, realistic and in line with the proposed activities, demonstrating sound financial management and also demonstrating that no 'double funding' is present in the proposed activities. Applicant should provide an adequate description and purpose of each activity being proposed, highlighting any dependencies / interlinkages between the different activities, and a work plan and/or Gantt chart with regards to the implementation of these activities. The proposal should identify communication strategies and actions showing how the use of EU funds will be

effectively publicised and communicated with the relevant target groups of the proposed project and the general public.