



# **Guidelines for Assessors**

Assessment of Concept Notes and Applications  
submitted under

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European Partnership with Municipalities

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## 1 INTRODUCTION

This guide is based on the Practical Guide (PRAG) and in particular its Chapter 6 and related annexes.

The purpose of this document is to guide assessors on how to conduct their evaluations so that all assessments are made in a coherent and consistent way.

It is recalled that the Evaluation Committee has to base its decisions on the individual assessments of the assessors and therefore needs to ensure compliance with the criteria defined in the Call for Proposal and that these are commonly understood and applied by all assessors, whether they be internal to the Commission (based in EU Delegations or at Headquarters) or external (external experts).

To this end, all assessors should independently from each other carry out the assessment of the proposals assigned to them in a consistent manner by applying the same methodology, interpretation and understanding of the objectives and criteria described in the Guidelines for grant applicants. This does not necessarily mean that the scores of two different assessors are expected to be identical, but rather that each assessor applies the same standards and provides a well substantiated opinion supporting his/her individual scores. This may be achieved by applying the following standards and good practices.

Before starting the examination of the proposals (concept note or full application), all assessors must familiarise themselves with the following documents:

- The present Guidelines for Assessors;
- The Guidelines for grant applicants responding to this call for proposals, available at: <https://webgate.ec.europa.eu/europeaid/online-services/index.cfm?do=publi.welcome> and [www.cfcu.gov.rs](http://www.cfcu.gov.rs), including the annexes and eventual FAQs
- Chapter 6 of the PRAG: <http://ec.europa.eu/europeaid/prag/document.do>
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## 2 OBJECTIVES AND PRIORITIES FOR THIS CALL FOR PROPOSALS

Assessors must familiarise themselves with the documents related to the call for proposals. The information below refers to certain key points but does not substitute a thorough reading of e.g. the Guidelines for grant applicants, their annexes and the FAQs published for the call.

### 2.1 Specific background

#### European PROGRES background

European PROGRES is a multi-donor Programme, financed by the European Union (EU), the Government of Switzerland and the Government of Serbia, designed to support sustainable development in the South East and South West Serbia. The Programme has been conceptualised jointly with the European Integration Office of the Government of the Republic of Serbia (SEIO), which has responsibility for monitoring implementation and providing assistance and facilitation. The United Nations Office for Project Services (UNOPS) has been granted with an initial budget of 17.46 million Euros and has the overall responsibility for the Programme implementation.

Through a multi-sector approach this Programme will contribute to sustainable development of underdeveloped areas and creation of more favourable environment for infrastructure and business growth by strengthening local governance, improving vertical coordination, planning and management capacities, improving business environment and development, as well as enhancing implementation of social inclusion and employment policies.

The Programme works towards achieving four main results, while good governance principles are interwoven as a cross cutting aspect of the entire intervention:

1. Strengthened local governance, planning and management capacities through introduction of new, or improvement/elimination of existing procedures and processes in line with the principles of good governance
2. Increased competitiveness of local economy through improved business environment and management/organizational capacities of small and medium enterprises/agricultural cooperatives
3. Improved access to employment, offering equal opportunities to both men and women, and social inclusion of most vulnerable and marginalised groups through development and implementation of local policies resulting in reduced migration from South East and South West Serbia
4. Effects of Serbia's European accession communicated to general public. Final beneficiaries, but also the key stakeholders and financial contributors of this Programme are 34 municipalities from the third and fourth group of development level, which have responsibility of taking ownership of activities implemented in their territory:

Novi Pazar, Ivanjica, Nova Varoš, Priboj, Prijepolje, Raška, Sjenica and Tutin, in the South West Serbia

Prokuplje, Blace, Žitorađa, Kuršumlija in the Toplica District

Leskovac, Bojnik, Vlasotince, Lebane, Medveđa and Crna Trava in the Jablanica District

Vranje, Bosilegrad, Bujanovac, Vladičin Han, Preševo, Surdulica and Trgovište in the Pčinja District

Brus in Rasinska District

Aleksinac, Gadžin Han, Doljevac, Merošina and Svrlijig in Niški District

Babušnica, Bela Palanka in Pirotski District

Knjaževac in Zaječarski District.

Other beneficiaries include municipality-founded institutions and public utility companies, civil society organisations (CSO) and media in the participating municipalities. It is the inhabitants of the South East and South West Serbia who will feel the biggest benefits of the Programme.

### **Specific background**

The programme will intensively work on strengthening local administration capacities and increasing efficiency and effectiveness in service providing and implementation of existing legal framework, especially regarding public procurement. This is in line with the findings of the Serbia 2014 Progress Report (pages 10 and 25). In order to increase potentials of municipalities in strengthening industrial activities this programme will support development of infrastructure preconditions for economic development, as well as satisfy basic infrastructure needs of benefiting municipalities, which is fully in line with the Serbia 2014 Progress Report (pages 20 and 22). Furthermore, the programme will provide support to SMEs and agricultural producers in increasing their competitiveness through introduction of cooperation, new technologies and standardisation, which is underlined in the Serbia 2014 Progress Report as one of main issues concerning economic criteria (pages 29, 30, 31, 37 and 38).

The European Union has earmarked 19.6 million Euros and the Swiss Government 4.86 million Euros for the implementation of European PROGRES. The Government of Serbia will provide co-funding of individual projects through the line ministries and local self-governments. From the total budget, eight million Euros have been set aside for priority infrastructure projects, which will be implemented directly through the Ministry of Finance's Central Financing and Contracting Unit (CFCU). The European Integrations Office of the Government of Serbia provides strategic guidance and the Programme is implemented by UNOPS and the Government of the Republic of Serbia.

The United Nations Office for Project Services (UNOPS) has been granted with an initial budget of 17.46 million Euros and has the overall responsibility for the Programme implementation.

This Programme will have direct effect on beneficiary municipalities in a variety of sectors: good governance as cross-cutting and with specific result activities, education, employment, infrastructure and economic development. New and improved economic infrastructure will enable creation of jobs and promote sustainable economic development. An emphasis on inter-municipal projects, in particular the common economic development exercises, will enhance mutual cooperation and trust between ethnic groups and factions.

The Programme will contribute to strengthened competitiveness of participating areas, making them more attractive to foreign and domestic investment and less prone to deterring factors. It should thereby serve to help reduce the widening disparities between regions in the country, improving cohesion and stability on the national level. The reduction of unemployment will also help enhance intra-regional social cohesion and promote stability locally.

Attention to employment that takes into account equal opportunities for men and women, and keeps environmental concerns in mind can help build awareness of the regions' unique characteristics and potential for tourism. This is not only a prospective growth industry, but can assist in forming a more positive regional identity that can inspire youths to remain and develop their regions rather than seek their careers in other regions or countries.

The Programme will work **Horizontal dimension of good governance** by providing specific support to the local self-governments endeavouring to improve their organisational structures which would internally enhance concrete application of the five good governance principles, thus making the public sector in a municipality, including local administration, more accountable, transparent and efficient in providing services to the citizens. This will start with the Programme providing support to municipalities in assessing and identifying governance issues that need to be addressed at the local level, and subsequently in development and/or improvement of new/existing local policies or regulations that will be in the line with the overall objective.

## Features of the Sector

**Regional disparities** in the Republic of Serbia are among the highest in Europe.

The largest concentration of the extremely underdeveloped municipalities is in the South East and South West Serbia<sup>1</sup>, where 29 municipalities belong to the group of 46 extremely underdeveloped. Other five municipalities participating in the Programme are closely connected geographically and are from the third group development level (less than 80% of the national average), sharing similar economic and social problems as well as communication and utility infrastructure needs.<sup>2</sup>

Opportunities for any wide and sustainable economic growth in these underdeveloped municipalities are severely hampered by **stagnant and opaque local regulations, depleted and inadequate capacities of local administrations and their officials, obsolete and/or run-down infrastructure, lowered levels of education and other investments in human capital, which all result in unfavourable business environment**. In turn this influences the ability to attract new direct foreign and domestic investments. These obstacles are underpinned by other elements of poor governance practices resulting in general inability to implement national reforms at the local level.

A common feature of all local self governments (LSGs) is that they are not well prepared to implement complex activities related to **municipal planning** and economic development. The infrastructure projects are chosen on ad hoc basis, without proper planning or impact assessment. The

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<sup>1</sup> Please see Annex II for the Map of underdeveloped municipalities in Serbia

<sup>2</sup> Municipalities bordering AoR are within the first and second developmental group and for this reason they are not included in the programme.

key preconditions for strategic planning: planning documentation, planning of investments, and resolved land ownership - are missing. The budgets are still prepared annually despite the fact that the legislation envisages process that takes into account three-year investment needs. The failure to update the land registers over decades led to huge discrepancies between the land registers and the land cadastre, resulting in additional obstacles in infrastructure development.

The speed of **economic development** is closely connected with the amount of direct domestic and foreign investments. The investment decisions of companies/investors are mainly influenced by the existing business opportunities and ease of doing business. The obsolete and inadequate infrastructure, lack of project documentation and low potentials for promotion and attracting of investors, therefore hamper further development. The lack of project documentation is a consequence of poor design capacities and financial constraints preventing municipalities to entrust these tasks to the third parties. This has a discouraging effect on the financiers and very often prompts them to abandon investments. Introduction of capital investment plans, whereby selection of investment projects would be based on a long-term perspective, taking into account achievement of financial, social, environment benefits, would solve the issue.

There is a high **unemployment** rate in the South East and South West Serbia, especially among young people, Roma and vulnerable groups. The most difficult situation is in Crna Trava, Trgovište and Lebane, where the number of employees dropped by 47% in comparison to 2002. T

On average more than 40% unemployed are without any qualifications (Raška District 44%, Jablanički District 32%, Pčinjski District 47.5%, Toplički District 40.5%<sup>3</sup>), only 6.5% of population are with college or university education and 32.7% with high school education.<sup>4</sup> This is also one of serious obstacles to economic development especially having in mind the capacity of local self-governments to lead coordinated responses to social inclusion of vulnerable and marginalised groups and to promote new approaches to social service delivery in the community. The educational profile of the labour force does not correspond to the needs of the economy.

## 2.2 Specific objectives of the call for proposals

The **global objective** of this Call for Proposals is to contribute to sustainable development of underdeveloped areas of Serbia by creating more favorable environment for business and infrastructure growth, thus increasing employability and social inclusion.

The **specific objective** of the Call for Proposals is to improve local infrastructure facilities in target municipalities. The activities will cover improvement of living conditions and economic infrastructure.

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<sup>3</sup> Annual Report Municipalities in Serbia, Statistical Office of Republic of Serbia, May 2011

<sup>4</sup> Please see Annex III: Number of unemployed per municipality

## 2.3 Specific priorities

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### Sectors or themes

For actions to be eligible they must contribute to the objectives as outlined in section 1.2 and be in line with the socio-economic development priorities of the area, as defined in the relevant national/regional/sub-regional/local strategies and plans.

The priorities have been identified based on the main strategic documents for the **Competitiveness sector**, which are presented in National priorities for international assistance (NAD) 2014-2017 with projections until 2020. Namely, *dynamic and stable economic growth based on increase in investments*. Economic growth and increase in competitiveness of the economy represent a realistic basis for increase in employment and living standard of the population.

Projects also must contribute to enhanced governance. Therefore, the project proposal must address at least one of the principles of good governance and propose adequate measures. In addition, project implementation must follow the principles of good governance.

### Location

Actions must take place in one or more of the following municipalities:

Raška	Novi Pazar	Bojnik	Bosilegrad	Trgovište	Knjazevac
Ivanjica	Tutin	Vlasotince	Bujanovac	Aleksinac	Svrljig
Nova Varoš	Blace	Lebane	Vladičin Han	Brus	Babusnica
Priboj	Žitorađa	Leskovac	Vranje	Doljevac	BelaPalanka
Prijepolje	Kuršumlija	Medveđa	Preševo	Gadzin Han	
Sjenica	Prokuplje	CrnaTrava	Surdulica	Merosina	

### Types of actions

Projects must be infrastructure, municipal or inter municipal in nature, i.e. they must produce impact affecting individual or groups of municipalities.

#### **For Lot 1- Local infrastructure projects aiming at improvement of living conditions**

All infrastructure projects (i.e. construction or reconstruction projects, including purchase of equipment with proven direct link to infrastructure improvement), that will contribute to better living conditions of citizens are eligible for this call for proposal. The following types of actions are **among other** eligible under this lot:

- Environment protection, improvement of solid waste management, waste water treatment, reduction of pollution and energy efficiency projects.
- Actions aiming at improvement of living conditions for vulnerable groups, including Roma, through advancing and upgrading of existing social and communal infrastructure .

#### Indicators for Lot 1:

- Number of available/improved educational facilities
- Number of public institution buildings enabled for full accessibility for physically impaired persons
- Number of user coverage with water supply/ sewage system or percentage of improved quality of water supply/sewage system
- Number of users of health services served in new improved health care facilities
- Number of public buildings that satisfy energy efficiency standards
- Percentage of separated waste
- Number of closed waste dumping sites
- Amount of waste removed from rivers

#### For Lot 2- **Local infrastructure projects contributing to economic development**

The following types of actions are **among other** eligible under this lot:

- All infrastructure projects (i.e. construction or reconstruction projects, including purchase of equipment with proven direct link to infrastructure improvement) that are contributing to establishment of conditions for development of new businesses and attraction of investments are eligible for this action. For example business support facilities: business incubators, information centres, business development centres, laboratories and research facilities, technology centres.
- Infrastructure construction and procurement projects aiming towards rehabilitation of Brownfield sites are eligible for this action
- Communal equipping of Greenfield sites and improvement of infrastructure conditions in the existing industrial zones are eligible under this call

#### Indicators for Lot 2:

- Number of new or upgraded business support facilities (business incubators, information centres, business development centres, laboratories and research facilities, technology centres)
- Surface of Brownfield sites restored to function
- Surface of Greenfield sites communally equipped and ready for investment

### **3 EVALUATION**

Applications submitted for the call for proposals will be evaluated to identify the best proposal which merit EU funding.

The proceedings of the evaluation exercise are confidential and all parties involved are bound to adhere to the principles of confidentiality, impartiality and no conflict of interest. The assessors must sign a declaration to this fact.

Only the Chairperson of the Evaluation Committee may authorise contacts with an applicant during and after the evaluation process. This includes communications related to clarifications, the announcement of the results of each phase as well as dealing with requests for information and questions raised by any applicant about the results.

Any applicant whose applications have not been pre- or provisionally selected will be informed about the scores obtained in the evaluation including a breakdown by section and sub-section of the evaluation grid. They may also be given the comments and justifications provided by the assessors and/or the Evaluation Committee.

#### **3.1 The evaluation process**

Recommendations on the proposals are to be provided to the Contracting Authority by an appointed Evaluation Committee, comprising a non-voting Chairperson, a non-voting Secretary and an odd number of voting members (minimum of three). The role of the assessors is to carry out all or part of the detailed examination so as to assist the Evaluation Committee in its deliberations.

Assessors are used for this call for proposal

- For the administrative checks.
- For the evaluation of concept notes and full proposals.

Assessors work under the supervision of the Chairperson of the Evaluation Committee.

For each submission step (concept note and, in the case of restricted procedures, the full application), there is an administrative check to be carried out.

Concept notes submitted and which duly passed the administrative checks are evaluated for the relevance and design of the action, using an evaluation grid (see Annex E5\_a). As a first step, only the concept notes which receive a score of at least 30 points in the evaluation are considered for pre-selection. The final score is the arithmetical average of the scores given by the assessors.

The Secretary draws up the first report containing the result of the administrative checks and the concept note evaluation, ranked by score.

In restricted procedures, any pre-selected applicant is invited to submit full proposals. These are subject to another administrative submission check.

For the proposals that pass this check, and all the pre-selected proposals in an open procedure, the quality of the application forms is assessed using the evaluation grid (see Annex E5\_b) containing the selection and award criteria. The score for relevance is transferred from the concept note evaluation to the full application evaluation grid and is not assessed again. The final score is the arithmetical average of the scores given by the assessors.

The Secretary draws up the second report containing the results of the administrative check and the evaluation of the full proposals, ranked by score. The evaluation committee will make a recommendation for provisionally selected proposals as well as a reserve list of applicant, should additional funds become available within a defined time period.

For the provisionally selected proposals and those on the reserve list, an eligibility check will be undertaken on the basis of submitted supporting documents to confirm earlier statements in checklists and declarations.

The Secretary draws up the third report containing the results of the eligibility checks and the Evaluation Committee makes a final recommendation to the Contracting Authority.

Coordination of the assessment and securing overall quality checks of concept Notes and full applications is in responsibility of the Team Leader.

The Team Leader ensures that every assessor is familiar with the relevant working documents provided by the Contracting Authority such as the Guidelines for Applicants and the Guidelines for Assessors, which provide for the application of a standard methodology when evaluating the applications.

The Team Leader is the sole interlocutor between the assessors and the Contracting Authority /Evaluation Committee.

The Team Leader ensures that the evaluation grids and standard format are strictly followed, agreed deadlines respected and the evaluation reports are in conformity with the evaluation guidelines. The GS manager will pay a special attention to the fact that the written appraisals are consistent and coherent with the given score under each section of the evaluation grid (i.e. that a high score is not associated to negative comments, and vice versa), and that they are written in a way that clearly allows the evaluation committee to use them directly in the selection process as well as for communicating the assessment results to the applicants.

The Team Leader ensures as well that grids do not contain calculation mistakes and/or spelling and grammatical mistakes.

The Team Leader submits all the evaluations of the proposals of each call to the Evaluation Committee.

The Team Leader provides feedback in the form of a report on the evaluation exercise and/or lessons learned.

The Team Leader and assessors will ensure that all the evaluation grid are fully compliant and that the sections ‘strengths and weaknesses’ is properly justified for each grid.

The indicative timetable:

	<b>DATE</b>	<b>TIME*</b>
<b>Information meeting (if any)</b>	31 March, 1 and 2 April  (Novi Pazar, Prokuplje, Vladicin Han)	11:00
<b>Deadline for requesting any clarifications from the Contracting Authority</b>	07/04/2015	15:00
<b>Last date on which clarifications are issued by the Contracting Authority</b>	17/04/2015	-
<b>Deadline for submission of Concept Notes</b>	28/04/2015	15:00
<b>Information to applicants on opening, administrative checks and concept note evaluation (Step 1)</b>	August 2015*	-

<b>Invitations to submit Full Application Form</b>	August 2015*	-
<b>Deadline for submission of Full Application Form</b>	October 2015*	-
<b>Information to applicants on the evaluation of the Full Application Form (Step 2)</b>	February 2016*	-
<b>Notification of award (after the eligibility check) (Step 3)</b>	April 2016*	-
<b>Contract signature</b>	June 2016*	-

### 3.2 Content of the evaluation

**For the administrative checks**, the assessors should verify each proposal against the Checklist and the Declaration by the applicant (see Annex E3b). The criteria published in the checklist with the call may under no circumstances be modified. Each proposal need only to be checked by one assessor. Each evaluation grid must be initialled, signed and dated by the assessor having carried out the evaluation. The administrative check will be implemented at the premises of the CA in close cooperation with the CA staff.

**For the evaluation of concept notes and proposals**, assessors should write an assessment using the published evaluation grids (see Annexes E5a and E5b) without modification. At least two assessors must assess each concept note and each proposal, working independently of each other. The assessors must not discuss the evaluation of specific proposals between themselves. Assessors are fully responsible to complete their evaluation grids in compliance with the quality evaluation standards described in these Guidelines and the criteria listed in the evaluation grid available. Each application must be assessed on its own merits and not by comparing different applications. Each criterion of the evaluation grid should be evaluated only once by the assessor and should not influence assessment of other criteria. The assessor must give concise, pertinent and well justified comments for each sub-section of the evaluation grid, in a wording that may be given directly to the applicant, if requested. Strong and weak points must be reflected. In particular, comments should not include only a summary of the proposal, but should provide a short critical analysis in line with the respective questions of the evaluation grid. Each evaluation grid must be initialled, signed and dated by the assessor having carried out the evaluation.

While assessing the full application form, the assessors are required to prepare the assessment of the budget, item by item, with clear explanatory notes per specific budget items analysing if they can be considered eligible or not (necessary for implementation of the action, compliant with market standards, accountable etc.). The assessment of the budget will be used by the CA in the budget clarification process, meaning that clear recommendations and guidance in relation to the budget (for example proposal on decreasing unit-rates) should be provided by assessors.

The evaluation grids should be completed in English language. Each evaluation grid must be initialled, signed and dated by the assessor having carried out the evaluation. The assessors will ensure that within each grid strengths and weaknesses are properly described, enabling the EvC sufficient basis and information for conclusions. The EvC might require additional justification from the assessors if necessary.

Each assessor will submit (through a Team Leader) a recapitulative list, duly signed, of all assessed applications mentioning the scores for each Chapter of the evaluation grid and all assessor's relevant conclusions or specific comments. On basis these tables, the Secretary of the EvC will establish recapitulative tables mentioning the scores for each Chapter of the evaluation grid and the assessors' relevant conclusions or specific comments. These tables will be submitted to the EvC at the end of each evaluation phase for decision.

The Evaluation Committee will check the quality and coherence of the assessors' scores and comments. Assessors are expected to provide briefing on the outcome of the assessment / evaluation to the EvC after each phase of the evaluation. Should the assessments not satisfy the quality expected by the EvC, it may return the applications to the assessor for a re-assessment by the same or another expert.

At each of the respective evaluation steps (CN or FAF) the final result of the evaluated application is established as the average of the scores of the two evaluations. In case of serious discrepancies between the positions of the two assessors, a voting member of the Evaluation Committee will evaluate the application. Voting members of the Evaluation Committee may decide to re-evaluate any of the applications based on the scores, comments or other elements provided.

The evaluation grids should be completed in English

## **4 SCORING**

The applications will be ranked in accordance with the final score they are attributed by the Evaluation Committee.

The concept note will receive an overall score out of 50 using the breakdown in the evaluation grid. Only the concept notes with a score of at least 30 will be considered for pre-selection.

The list of concept notes will be reduced, taking account of the ranking, to those for which the total of requested contributions is the number of Concept Notes whose total aggregate amount of requested contributions is equal to 200% of the available budget for this Call for Proposals. > the available budget for this Call for Proposals, based on the indicative financial envelopes for each lot.

The full application will receive an overall score out of 80. The score received for "relevance" in the concept note evaluation will be transferred to the full application evaluation grid as this aspect will not be assessed again.

### **4.1 General**

Comments and scores must be coherent and consistent with the corresponding score. Therefore, a high score combined with critical or negative comments or a low score accompanied by positive comments would be incomprehensible and rather confusing for the Evaluation Committee to appreciate and the conclusion may be that it is not possible to rely on the assessment. Remember also that the comments provided may be communicated to the applicant upon request.

Scores between 1 and 5 (not 0) must be given. Half points are not accepted. The calculation of the sub- and total scores must be verified carefully.

The evaluation grid is divided into sections and subsections.

The first section contains the selection criteria which evaluate the financial, professional and technical capacity of the applicant to implement the action it proposes. Applicants and their affiliated entity(ies) must have the necessary professional competencies and qualifications to complete the proposed action. The applicant must also have stable and sufficient sources of funding to keep operating throughout the action period and to participate, where appropriate, in its funding. The assessments are made considering the action proposed, the applicable payment schedule of the

contract and on the basis of the relevant supporting documents defined in the guidelines to applicants. These may include an external audit report of the applicant, the profit and loss account and the balance sheet for the last financial year for which the accounts have been closed. If the answer is negative to one or more of the criteria, the evaluation of the other subsections must still be carried out by the assessor.

The other subsections will be given a score between 1 and 5 (never 0) in accordance with the following guidelines: Each subsection will be given a score between 1 and 5 as follows:

1 = very poor; 2 = poor; 3 = adequate; 4 = good; 5 = very good.

If the assessor has any doubts about the scoring of an applicant, the issue should be raised to the Chairperson of the Evaluation Committee for further advice and/or necessary clarification requests to the applicant.

#### **4.2 Specific issues to be examined during the assessment**

Contact Person: will be nominated before the evaluation process starts.