Interreg NEXT MED

Co-funded by the European Union

Interreg NEXT MED Programme

Guidelines for Applicants

Call for capitalisation projects

Mediterranean Multi-Programme Mechanism (MMM)

Sustainable Tourism

Table of contents

List of acronyms 4
Introduction 5
1. About Interreg NEXT MED Programme 6
1.1 Background information 6
1.2 Priorities and specific objectives 7
1.3 Budget 8
1.4 Management structures 9
2. Main features of the call for proposals 11
2.1 A coordinated call for enhancing sustainable tourism across the Mediterranean region 11
2.2 Priorities and budget 12
2.3 The intervention logic 14
2.3.1 Key characteristics of Interreg NEXT MED projects 16
2.4 The Lead Partner and Partners: roles and responsibilities 18
2.5 Project coordination and management 21
2.5.1 Project management activities in the Application Form 24
2.6 Communication and visibility 26
2.6.1 Project branding and main visibility requirements 26
2.6.2 Project acronym 28
2.6.3 Project website 29
2.6.4 Communication activities in the Application Form 29
2.7 Use of languages 31
3. Application procedure 31
3.1 How to apply 31
3.2 Deadline for the submission of the proposal 32
3.3 Further information 32
4. Admission requirements 32
4.1 Eligible territories 33
4.2 Financial dimension of projects 34
4.3 Eligibility of Applicant and Project Partners 35
4.3.1 Location of Applicant and Project Partner organisations 35
4.3.2 Legal status of Applicant and Partner organizations 36
4.4 Specific requirements 38
4.4.1 Participation 38
4.4.2 Partnership composition 38
4.4.3 Specific financial requirements 39
4.4.4 Project duration 39
4.4.5 Compliance with eligibility criteria 39
4.5 Compliance with State aid provisions 40
4.6 Eligible costs and budget structure 41

4.6.1 Key principles....41
4.6.2 Eligible costs....41
4.6.3 Ineligible costs....42
4.6.4 Budget structure....43
4.6.5 Exchange rate....47
4.6.6 Sources of funding....47
4.6.7 Non-profit principle....48
4.7 Ineligible proposals....48
4.8 Exclusion situations....48
4.9 Financial capacity....51
5. Evaluation....52
5.1 Evaluation process....52
5.2 Methodology and scoring....53
5.3 STEP 1....54
5.3.1 Administrative check....54
5.3.2 Operational evaluation....57
5.4 STEP 2....61
5.4.1 Strategic evaluation....61
5.4.2 Eligibility of Applicant and Partner organisations....62
5.5 Environmental screening and State aid assessment....64
5.6 Notification of the Monitoring Committee decision....68
5.7 Appeal procedure....68
5.8 Indicative timetable of the selection procedure....69
5.9 Conditions applicable to project implementation....70

List of acronyms

AA – Audit Authority
AB – Assessment board
CBC – Cross-border cooperation
CCP – Control Contact Point
CPR – Common Provisions Regulation
EC – European Commission
ENI – European Neighbourhood Instrument
ENPI – European Neighbourhood and Partnership Instrument
ERDF – European Regional Development Fund
ETC – European Territorial Cooperation
EU – European Union
EUMC – European Union Mediterranean Countries (EU Member States participating in the Programme)
GOA –Group of Auditors
IPA – Instrument for Pre-accession Assistance (country)
JS – Joint Secretariat
LP – Lead Partner
PO – Policy Objective
PP – Project Partner
MA – Managing Authority
MC – Monitoring Committee
MMM - Mediterranean Multi-Programme Mechanism
MPC – Mediterranean Partner Country
NA – National Authority
NC – National Controller
NCP – National Contact Point
NDICI – Neighbourhood, Development and International Cooperation Instrument
OLAF – European Anti-Fraud Office
SEA – Strategic Environmental Assessment
SME – Small and medium sized enterprise
SO – Specific Objective
WP – Work Package

Introduction

This document is an integral part of the Interreg NEXT MED "Application pack" developed by the Managing Authority and composed of the following documents:

- **Key documents**:
  - ✓ Text of the call for proposals
  - ✓ Guidelines for applicants
  - ✓ Terms of reference of the call for proposals (thematic guidance), including the database of relevant outputs to capitalise on and the Annex "Alignment with potential transnational actions"
- **Mandatory documents** to be uploaded in the e-application form:
  - ✓ Declaration by the Applicant
  - ✓ Partner Statement
  - ✓ Advisory Partner Statement (only in case of the participation of an Advisory Partner)
  - ✓ Declaration for international organizations (only for international organizations and in addition to the Declaration by the Applicant or Partner Statement as the case may be)
  - ✓ Associate declaration (if any)
  - ✓ State aid self-assessment check grid (for the Applicant and partners, to be submitted as one single merged pdf file)
- **Documents to support the preparation of project proposals:**
  - ✓ Programme Document
  - ✓ Performance framework methodology paper
  - ✓ Guide for project preparation
  - ✓ Courtesy application form
  - ✓ Courtesy budget
  - ✓ Overview of main policies, strategies and initiatives having synergies and complementarities with Interreg NEXT MED Programme
  - ✓ Note on financial capacity
  - ✓ Note on State aid
  - ✓ Guide for greening project implementation
- **Documents published for information:**
  - ✓ Model of Grant Contract
  - ✓ Partnership Agreement
  - ✓ Information note on personal data processing

These Guidelines have been drafted in conformity with the provisions of the applicable EU legislation, in particular the Common Provisions Regulation (EU) 1060/2021, the European Regional Development Fund Regulation (EU) 1058/2021, the Interreg Regulation (EU) 2021/1059, the NDICI Regulation (EU) 2021/947 and the Interreg NEXT "Mediterranean Sea Basin (NEXT MED)" Programme document approved by Commission Implementing decision

C(2022) 9543 of 12.12.2022. All documents are available on the Programme website at www.interregnextmed.eu

In the event of differences between these Guidelines for Applicants and the text of the call for proposals, the information contained in the latter shall prevail.

1. About Interreg NEXT MED Programme

1.1 Background information

Interreg NEXT MED is a Programme funded by the European Union (EU) that supports transnational cooperation through the financing of joint projects which aim at making the Mediterranean area more resilient to the shared challenges it faces.

NEXT MED is part of Interreg[1], a key instrument of the European Union which promotes European territorial cooperation across borders by means of joint programmes, projects and networks among national, regional and local actors from different EU Member States and among EU actors and adjacent non-EU countries, partner countries, overseas countries and territories (OCTs). Interreg encourages the harmonious economic, social and territorial development of the EU as a whole and its neighborhood – a core objective of the EU's Cohesion Policy. Interreg tackles common challenges and develops shared solutions to address issues of joint interest like climate change, digital transformation, social inclusion, health, research, education, etc. For 2021-2027, Interreg has a total budget of almost €10.1 billion covering 86 programmes and four strands: cross-border (Interreg A), transnational (Interreg B), interregional (Interreg C) and integration of Outermost Regions (Interreg D).

In light of the positive EU cooperation with neighbouring countries placed along the EU external borders from the Northern Periphery to the Mediterranean region and from Atlantic to Black Sea Basin – established under European Neighborhood Policy and funded by the European Neighborhood and Partnership Instrument (ENPI) for the period 2007-2013 and further reconfirmed under the European Neighborhood Instrument (ENI) for the period 2014-2020 – the external dimension of EU territorial cooperation with partner and IPA (Instrument for Pre-accession Assistance) countries is governed by the EU Cohesion Policy for the period 2021-2027 and the programmes will be fully part of Interreg under the NEXT (acronym for "Neighborhood External") component.

Interreg NEXT has a total allocation of €1.1 billion coming from the European Regional Development Fund (ERDF), the Neighborhood, Development and International Cooperation Instrument (NDICI)[2] and the Instrument for Pre-Accession Assistance (IPA)[3].

[1]Available at https://ec.europa.eu/regional_policy/policy/cooperation/european-territorial_en
[2]Regulation (EU) 2021/947 establishing the Neighbourhood, Development and International Cooperation Instrument –Global Europe, amending and repealing Decision No 466/2014/EU and repealing Regulation (EU) 2017/1601and Council Regulation (EC, Euratom) 480/2009.
[3]Regulation (EU) 2021/1529 of the European Parliament and of the Council of 15 September 2021 establishing the Instrument

Building on the experience and results of ENPI (2007-2013) and ENI (2014-2020) cross-border cooperation (CBC) 'Mediterranean Sea Basin' (MED) programmes, Interreg NEXT MED will continue to support effective Euro-Mediterranean relations for the period 2021-2027 as part of Interreg strand B "Transnational Cooperation", allowing for cooperation around the Mediterranean Sea Basin among EU Member States and Southern Neighborhood partner countries. The principles of mutual accountability, shared ownership and responsibility, and cooperation on equal footing are at the core of the Interreg NEXT MED Programme.

With a budget of €263 million, Interreg NEXT MED aims at contributing to smart, sustainable, fair development for all across the Mediterranean basin by supporting balanced, long-lasting, far-reaching cooperation and multilevel governance. The programme mission is to finance cooperation projects that address joint socio-economic, environmental and governance challenges at the Mediterranean level such as the uptake of advanced technologies, competitiveness of SMEs and job creation, energy efficiency, water management, climate change adaptation, transition to a circular and resource efficient economy, education and training, health care.

The cooperation area, home to over 200 million people, covers over 100 eligible territories of 15 countries: Algeria, Cyprus, Egypt, France, Greece, Israel, Italy, Lebanon, Jordan, Malta, Palestine, Portugal, Spain, Tunisia and Türkiye.

The full list of eligible territories per participating country can be consulted in section 4.1 of these guidelines.

1.2 Priorities and specific objectives

Through a broad multi-step analysis and consultation process involving national authorities, key stakeholders and regional actors and based on the strategic framework contained in the EU regulatory framework, the participating countries have identified 4 Priorities that best reflect the common challenges of the cooperation area:

- **A more competitive and smarter Mediterranean** by promoting innovative and smart economic transformation through Research and Innovation (R&I), sustainable growth and Micro, Small and Medium Enterprises (MSMEs) competitiveness to help reduce disparities and contribute to socioeconomic integration.
- **A greener, low-carbon and resilient Mediterranean** supporting the transition towards a net zero carbon economy by promoting clean and fair energy transition, sustainable water management, circular economy, climate change mitigation and adaptation.
- **A more social and inclusive Mediterranean** to provide learning opportunities, ensure equal opportunities and socio-economic integration and improve access to health care through the use of digitalization and technological innovation.

for Pre-Accession assistance (IPA III).

- **A better cooperation governance for the Mediterranean** by fostering local governance models and processes, encouraging cooperation and dialogue between citizens, civil society actors and institutions in view of addressing issues of joint interest.

The Interreg NEXT MED Programme document, approved by the European Commission, offers a detailed description of the content of each Priority: it is highly recommended to all Applicants to carefully read the Programme document to ensure consistency between the propels and the Programme strategy.

The following table shows the 4 Programme Priorities and the 9 Specific Objectives:

Priorities	Specific Objectives
1. A more competitive and smarter Mediterranean	1.1 Developing and enhancing research and innovation capacities and the uptake of advanced technologies
	1.2 Enhancing sustainable growth and competitiveness of SMEs and job creation in SMEs, including by productive investments
2. A greener, low-carbon and resilient Mediterranean	2.1 Promoting energy efficiency and reducing greenhouse gas emissions
	2.2 Promoting climate change adaptation and disaster risk prevention, resilience taking into account ecosystem-based approaches
	2.3 Promoting access to water and sustainable water management
	2.4 Promoting the transition to a circular and resource efficient economy
3. A more social and inclusive Mediterranean	3.1 Improving equal access to inclusive and quality services in education, training and lifelong learning through developing accessible infrastructure, including by fostering resilience for distance and on-line education and training
	3.2 Ensuring equal access to health care and fostering resilience of health systems, including primary care, and promoting the transition from institutional to family- and community-based care
4.A better cooperation governance for the Mediterranean	4.1 Other governance actions: Fostering local governance models and processes through cross-sectoral, multilevel and cross-border partnerships, encouraging the cooperation and dialogue between citizens, civil society actors and institutions in view of addressing issues of joint interest at local level through transnational exchanges, bottom-up and participatory approaches

1.3 Budget

The overall EU contribution to the Programme for the 2021-2027 period is **€263.094.725** out of which **€239.177.023** for project financing. The Programme does not foresee any pre-

allocation of funds by territory or country. Therefore, projects will be selected solely based on the selection and award criteria.

1.4 Management structures

Programme management and coordination are entrusted to the following structures[4]:

- **Monitoring Committee (MC)**: It is the decision-making body of the Programme. It oversees the implementation of the Programme and progress towards the achievement of its objectives. The MC ensures the efficient and timely implementation of the Programme: it takes all decisions related to the Programme life cycle, including the launching of the calls for proposals, the selection and approval of projects, and monitors the quality and effectiveness of the Programme implementation. It is composed of the national and regional representatives of the 15 countries involved in the Programme and the European Commission (with observer status) and chaired by the Managing Authority.
- **Assessment Board (AB)**: supervising the overall evaluation process and in charge of the strategic evaluation of project proposals, it is composed of members appointed by the participating countries.
- **Managing Authority (MA)**: as executive body and contracting authority of the Programme, it is responsible for the day-to-day operational and financial management of the Programme. In particular, the MA launches the call for proposals, signs the grant contracts with beneficiaries, supports the implementation and monitoring of funded projects, manages technical assistance funds and payments to projects, and ensures visibility to the Programme. Furthermore, the MA assists the work of the Monitoring Committee and informs relevant stakeholders about the progress made toward the achievement of Programme objectives. Finally, the MA supervises the work of the Joint Secretariat, which assists the MA in its functions, and of the two Branch Offices. The Managing Authority is the Autonomous Region of Sardinia by decision of the participating countries and is in Cagliari (Italy).
- **Audit Authority (AA)**: the independent body in charge of carrying out audits on the Programme annual accounts, on the management and control systems and on funded projects. The audit functions are assigned to the Autonomous Region of Sardinia, within a department (‘*Presidenza–Ufficio dell'Autorità di Audit dei Programmi Operativi FESR ed FSE*') which is functionally independent from the Managing Authority. The AA is supported by the Group of Auditors, which is composed of representatives of each participating country.
- **National Authority (NA):** the National Authority is the national institutional counterpart of the Managing Authority (MA) in each participating country. Its main functions are related to the establishment and effective functioning of management

[4] See chapter 3, section 3.2 of the Programme document.

and control systems, as well as the coordination of the institutions involved at the national level. The NA represents the country within the Monitoring Committee. The NAs are listed in the Programme Document as they are the Contact Point for Interreg NEXT MED Programme of each participating county.

- **National Contact Points (NCP):** NCPs, which contact details are available on the Programme website, are established in all participating countries. Their main missions are related to informing interested organizations about funding opportunities, assisting in the preparation of project proposals, supporting beneficiaries in the implementation of projects, including through training, and contributing to the promotion of the Programme at national level.
- **National Controllers (NC):** the EU Member States participating in the Programme and Türkiye have adopted a national control system for the verifications of project expenditures, as per art. 46(3) to (9) of Regulation (EU) 2021/1059 ('Interreg' Regulation). Consequently, these countries will have a National Controller responsible at national level for the system of expenditure verification. The description of each national system will be published on the Programme website.
- **Control Contact Points (CCP)**: for the countries where the management verifications are carried out by the Managing Authority (namely all the MPCs but Türkiye), a Control Contact Point will support the MA in the verification of expenditure, as per article 74(1)(a) of the CPR Regulation, in line with the system already adopted for the 2014-2020ENI CBC MED Programme (the list of countries having a Control Contact Point is available on the Programme website).
- **Joint Secretariat (JS)**: it assists the Managing Authority in the day-to-day management of funded projects. The JS supports beneficiaries and partners in the implementation phase and processes technical and financial reports submitted by projects. The JS is based in Cagliari within the Autonomous Region of Sardinia and is composed of international staff (permanent and seconded officers by the participating countries, as the case may be).
- **Branch Offices**: given the large extension of the cooperation area, two Branch Offices (BOs) have been established to ensure more proximity with local beneficiaries. BOs support the MA and JS in the dissemination of the Programme opportunities, organization of events and training, as well as monitoring and communication of funded operations. BOs are in Valencia (within the *'Generalitat Valenciana'*) and in Aqaba (within the Aqaba Special Economic Zone Authority, ASEZA). The Valencia BO covers western Mediterranean countries (Algeria, France, Italy, Malta, Portugal, Spain, Tunisia) while the Aqaba BO is responsible for eastern Mediterranean countries (Cyprus, Egypt, Greece, Israel, Jordan, Lebanon, Palestine, Türkiye).

2. Main features of the call for proposals

2.1 A coordinated call for enhancing sustainable tourism across the Mediterranean region

The Mediterranean is one of the world's most visited regions, attracting more than 360 million international tourists in 2024, with projections reaching 500 million by 2030. While tourism is a key economic driver, its rapid growth has increased environmental pressures - particularly in coastal areas - and intensified challenges such as seasonality, resource depletion and uneven territorial development.

In response to these shared challenges, the Interreg Mediterranean Multi-Programme Mechanism (MMM) was launched in 2022 as a strategic framework to strengthen cooperation among Interreg programmes operating across the Mediterranean basin. Initially involving three programmes - Interreg Euro-MED, Interreg Italy–France Maritime and Interreg NEXT MED - the mechanism has progressively expanded to include additional Interreg programmes - namely Interreg Greece–Cyprus, Interreg Italy–Croatia, Interreg Italy–Malta, Interreg NEXT Italy–Tunisia, Interreg Italy–Slovenia, Interreg IPA South Adriatic and Interreg IPA ADRION - creating a unique platform for cross-programme coordination and knowledge exchange.

Within this framework, the present coordinated call aims to support capitalization projects promoting sustainable tourism in the Mediterranean, by transferring, adapting and scaling up results from existing Interreg projects to new territories and contexts across the region.

Projects funded under this call must therefore build on existing Interreg outputs and focus on replicating, adapting and scaling proven solutions rather than developing entirely new ones. Proposals should contribute to addressing key Mediterranean tourism challenges, including:

- Innovative and smart tourism products
- Tourism and the green transition
- Social dimension of tourism (employment and upskilling) and inclusive and accessible tourism
- Shared and strategic governance of the tourism offer

At the core of this call is the requirement to **identify at least one output** generated by another Interreg programme Mediterranean Multi-Programme (MMM) and contained in the common database of outputs, and to design concrete activities to reuse, adapt, replicate, and scale it up, explaining relevance to the new context, and detailing how the transfer, adaptation, and/or scaling-up will be effectively carried out. Capitalisation of outputs developed under other EU/relevant frameworks can be considered if this is relevant to the scope of the project proposals.

For detailed information on the thematic focus and the type of projects expected, applicants should consult the dedicated Terms of Reference (ToR).

2.2 Priorities and budget

Based on the thematic priorities outlined in the Terms of Reference, the Monitoring Committee has opened this call with an EU contribution of **€8.2 million** (€8.250.221,68), distributed among the selected Programme Priorities and selected Specific Objectives, as shown in the table below.

Each proposal shall **indicate one Specific Objective only within the Priority concerned, as well as the connected sustainable tourism topic from the call's Terms of Reference**.

Priority	Specific Objective	Topic from the Terms of Reference	EU co-financing (92%)	Project co-financing (8%)	Total
1. A more competitive and smarter Mediterranean	**TOTAL**		**€2.400.000**	**€208.695,65**	**€2.608.695,65**
	1.1 Research and innovation capacities and the uptake of advanced technologies	Innovative and smart tourism products	€1.200.000	€104.347,83	€1.304.347,83
	1.2 Sustainable growth and competitiveness of SMEs and job creation in SMEs		€1.200.000	€104.347,83	€1.304.347,83
2. A greener, low-carbon and resilient Mediterranean	**TOTAL**		**€2.400.000**	**€208.695,65**	**€2.608.695,65**
	2.2 Climate change adaptation and disaster risk prevention, resilience taking into account ecosystem-based approaches	Tourism and the green transition	€1.200.000	€104.347,83	€1.304.347,83
	2.4 Transition to a circular and resource efficient economy		€1.200.000	€104.347,83	€1.304.347,83
3. A more social and inclusive	**TOTAL**		**€1.200.000**	**€104.347,83**	**€1.304.347,83**
	3.1 Equal access to		€1.200.000	€104.347,83	€1.304.347,83

Mediterranean	inclusive and quality services in education, training and lifelong learning through developing accessible infrastructure, including by fostering resilience for distance and on-line education and training	Social dimension of tourism (employment and upskilling) and inclusive and accessible tourism			
	TOTAL		**€ 2.250.222**	**€195.671,48**	**€2.445.893,48**
4. A better cooperation governance for the Mediterranean (Interreg Specific Objective)	4.1 Other governance actions: Fostering local governance models and processes through cross-sectoral, multilevel and cross-border partnerships, encouraging cooperation and dialogue between citizens, civil society actors and institutions in view of addressing issues of joint interest at local level through transnational exchanges, bottom-up and participatory approaches	Shared and strategic governance of the tourism offer	€2.250.222	€195.671,48	€2.445.893,48
TOTAL			**€ 8.250.222**	**€717.410,61**	**€8.967.632,61**

2.3 The intervention logic

The project intervention logic, commonly referred to as the Logical Framework (Logframe'), is a structured planning and management tool used to design, monitor, and evaluate projects effectively. It provides a logical and systematic representation of the project's objectives, activities, outputs, results, indicators. The intervention logic serves as a roadmap for project implementation and helps ensure that the project's design aligns with its intended goals.

Under Interreg NEXT MED, the project intervention logic needs to echo clearly the change(s) the project is aiming for, linking them with the territorial challenges and common needs identified. The change(s) to be achieved must be result-oriented, reflecting the initial situation (the problem/need/challenge to be addressed) and the desired change(s) which the project seeks to achieve through its implementation, meaning demonstrating that the project will produce positive, long-lasting effects and measurable improvements compared to the initial situation, as well as benefits for the identified target groups and final beneficiaries.

As projects are expected to contribute to the achievement of the Programme objectives and indicators, the project intervention logic mirrors the Programme intervention logic. As a matter of fact, Programme outputs and results build on outputs and results to be achieved by the funded projects. Consequently, there has to be a clear coherence between the project and the Programme intervention logic. In order to measure the achievement of Programme outputs and results, project outputs and results are captured by means of corresponding output and result indicators.

The project intervention logic, to be filled in as part of the online application form, is structured around the following key components:

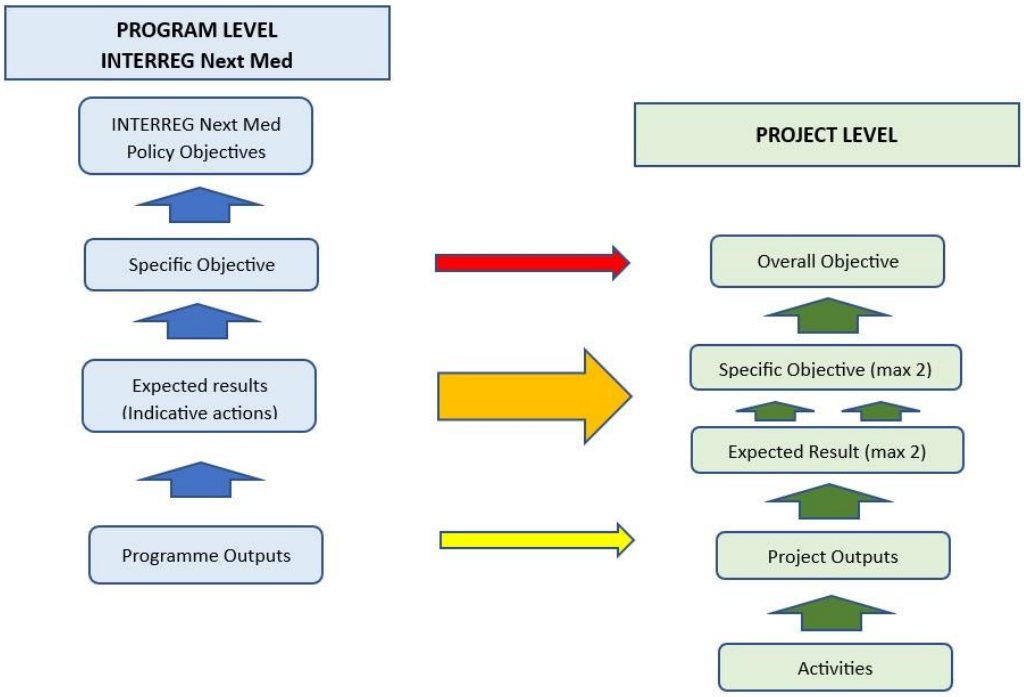
- **Project overall objective**: it defines the broader, long-term change to which the project aims to contribute at transnational and sector, societal level, for the benefit of the involved territories and target group(s). In the context of Interreg NEXT MED, the choice of the project overall objective is set and corresponds to the Programme Specific Objectives. For instance, Programme Specific Objective (SO) "2.4 Promoting the transition to a circular and resource efficient economy" will become the overall objective projects submitted under this SO.
- **Types of intervention**: following the selection of the overall objective, projects should choose the most relevant "Type of intervention" from the available list in the online application form. The "type of intervention", based on a standard nomenclature defined in Annex 1 of Regulation (EU) 2021/1060 (Common Provisions Regulation), allows to monitor the financial breakdown of the programmed resources by type of intervention, in particular with reference to the achievement of an overall target of 30% of the European Union budget expenditure to support climate objectives.

- **Project specific objective**: it defines the actual purpose of why the project is being submitted and describes the immediate goal that a project can realistically achieve within the project lifetime through its planned activities and related outputs and deliverables. The specific objective has to clearly contribute to the overall project objective and should be specific and measurable. At the end of the project, it should be verifiable whether the specific objective has been reached. In the context of Interreg NEXT MED, it is highly recommended to limit the number of Specific Objectives of the project to one (maximum two if deemed indispensable), so that projects have a clear purpose and focus. Although not mandatory, it is suggested to draft the Specific Objective(s) based on the examples of indicative non-exhaustive actions contained in the Interreg NEXT MED Programme documents for each Programme Specific Objective.
- **Project expected result(s)**: it corresponds to the immediate effect and change, compared to the initial situation at territorial level and/or with target groups/final beneficiaries, which a project intends to achieve through the use of its outputs, thus contributing directly to the attainment of the project specific objective(s). In the context of Interreg NEXT MED, projects shall define one expected result maximum per specific objective, meaning maximum two expected results per project. A particularly complex expected result may contain more than one element in its description. Each expected result shall correspond to at least one Work Package[5].
- **Output(s)**: they represent the products, capital goods and services which results from the implementation of project activities. Outputs need to be consistent with and contribute to the achievement of the project specific objective(s).
- **Result and output indicators**: to measure its achievements and impact, Interreg NEXT MED has defined a set of indicators, given priority to the common result and output indicators provided by the European Commission in Annex 1 of Regulation (EU) 2021/1058 of 24 June 2021 on the European Regional Development Fund and on the Cohesion Fund. Both result (identified with the code 'RCR') and output (identified with the code 'RCO') indicators should capture and be consistent with the relevant expected result(s) and output(s) they are associated with. In the application form, projects shall indicate the value of the chosen indicator to be achieved, how the number will be achieved and monitored, and provide additional information on the type of organisation, sector, scope, geographical area and timeframe associated with the indicator. The Programme "PERFORMANCE FRAMEWORK METHODOLOGY PAPER" provides definitions of each result/output indicator and background information on how target values have been elaborated.
- **Work Packages**: activities should be clustered in Work Packages (WPs). Under Interreg NEXT MED, projects shall include two mandatory Work Packages (WP1 'Management' and WP2 'Communication') and a maximum of four technical Work

[5] Refer to the "Guide for project proposals preparation".

Packages, having considered that each project expected result shall correspond to at least one Work Package. Technical WPs can refer to different levels of intervention, such as the societal level (e.g., capacity building), the technical level (e.g., pilot projects, living lab) and the regulatory level (e.g., policy framework). For each output to be achieved under the different Work Packages, a maximum of three key activities shall be indicated.

The following scheme shows the interconnection between the Programme and project intervention logic.



2.3.1 Key characteristics of Interreg NEXT MED projects

The principles to follow for the planning and implementation of activities undertaken by the projects are listed below. Please note that this list was developed considering the lessons learnt over the past two programming periods.

- **Boosted by cooperation**: cooperation shall be considered as the actual engine of all projects implemented under Interreg NEXT MED Programme. Based on the provisions of article 23 of Regulation (EU) 2021/1059 (Interreg Regulation), "Partners shall cooperate in the development and implementation of Interreg operations, as well as in the staffing or financing, or both, thereof". Indeed, partners should consider the following cooperation dimensions in the development and implementation of projects:

- **Joint development**, meaning that the project proposal has to integrate ideas, expectations, priorities and contributions from all partners. The partners should share the understanding of the project needs and contribute to achieving the results, avoiding situations where some partners commit to the project on a late notice before the closing the call for proposals, not being fully aware of the objectives of the proposal, their role in the project and responsibilities vis-à-vis the Programme authorities.
- **Joint implementation**, meaning that activities have to be carried out by all partners based on a balanced distribution of tasks and responsibilities. All partners should play a key role in the project implementation, meaning the project could not be implemented without their contribution and expertise. Joint implementation also involves the proportional involvement of all partners in management, reporting, communication, and monitoring activities.
- **Joint financing,** meaning that there is one single budget for the project, divided among partners according to the activities they will carry out. Co-financing shall be provided by all partners, illustrates the commitment of each partner to the joint project.
- **Joint staffing,** meaning that staff from the different partners should work together on the project. Partners should not merely carry out activities in parallel at local level but divide the tasks to be implemented, through coordination, exchange and collaboration. While the Lead Partner organization shall bear the overall responsibility for project management/communication/reporting functions and oversees the correct and timely implementation of project activities, project partners should also assign staff according to their responsibilities within the project**.** As much as possible, duplication of similar functions should be avoided.

- **Truly transnational**: a transnational cooperation project is more than organizations from different countries being involved in a partnership. A genuinely transnational project involves defining a common objective to address a joint challenge that goes beyond national borders. Projects should be implemented developing and applying common methodologies, approaches and tools - fostering mutual learning and sharing of expertise to create even better solutions that incorporate the experience and knowledge of partners - adapting developed methodologies, approaches and tools to the specific features of territories, if needed (the magnitude of the common problem to be addressed could be of different scale). Transnational cooperation projects must have a positive impact and benefits in all involved territories, avoiding projects with a sole North-South perspective, with pilot activities being deployed only in certain territories. Additionally, in the framework of this specific call for proposals, projects are encouraged to strengthen exchanges and cooperation across Mediterranean territories, fostering mutual learning among

stakeholders involved in sustainable tourism. Building on the results and experiences generated by different Interreg programmes, projects should promote the sharing of knowledge. tools and practices among actors from different regions. Interreg programmes provide a valuable platform for knowledge transfer and peer learning across borders, enabling stakeholders to capitalise on existing experiences, test and adapt solutions in different territorial contexts, and build lasting partnerships. Activities that facilitate exchanges among tourism operators, local authorities, youth organizations, entrepreneurs, civil society organizations and other relevant actors are therefore encouraged, in order to support the transfer, adaptation and replication of sustainable tourism solutions across the Mediterranean.

- **Multidisciplinary approach**: transnational cooperation projects typically involve different sectors and disciplines. They bring together organisations, stakeholders, experts from various fields, such as academia, government, industry, non-governmental organizations (NGOs), and civil society, to leverage their collective knowledge and expertise.
- **Synergies and complementarities**: projects should demonstrate that they build on synergies, exploiting and capitalizing on available knowledge, not just reinventing the wheel and starting from scratch but rather scaling up existing solutions and fostering their wider implementation and mainstreaming. In the framework of this call for proposals, this is even more important as project proposals should demonstrate how they intend to capitalize on, transfer and scale-up outputs developed by relevant projects implemented under the MMM.-
- **Consistency with horizontal principles:** project design and implementation shall ensure the respect of a series of horizontal principles, including but not limited to the respect of fundamental rights, promotion of gender equality, prevention of discrimination including accessibility for people with disabilities, promotion of sustainable development, etc. Under Interreg NEXT MED Programme, the way projects intend to promote the respect of horizontal principles will be checked through a dedicated evaluation criterion, scored 4 points. Further information on horizontal principles can be found in the document under the title “Overview of main policies, strategies and initiatives having synergies and complementarities with Interreg NEXT MED Programme.

2.4 The Lead Partner and Partners: roles and responsibilities

Each proposal must be submitted by an Applicant, which becomes the Lead Partner in case the project is approved: itis the actor responsible for management, implementation and co-ordination of activities among the partners involved. The Lead Partner is responsible for the preparation and management of the project.

- **Lead Partner**

The Lead Partner bears legal responsibility for the whole partnership vis-à-vis the Managing Authority, acting as a link between the project partners and the Managing Authority to:

a. submit the Application Form on behalf of the partnership;

b. ensure that each partner is fully aware of the composition of the partnership and of the contents of the Application Form;

c. sign the Grant Contract with the Authorising Unit of the Managing Authority for the amount allocated;

d. fulfill all obligations set out in the Grant Contract, including a potential financial guarantee to cover the pre-financing instalments to be received[6], as the case may be;

e. be responsible for the preparation of the Partnership Agreement to be signed by all project partners, based on the model form provided and available as part of the application package;

f. ensure the allocation and the fulfillment of the tasks amongst the project partners in compliance with the Grant Contract and the Partnership Agreement;

g. ensure that the project partners receive the respective share of the grant as per the provisions of the Grant Contract; no amount shall be deducted or withheld and no specific charge or other charge with equivalent effect shall be levied that would reduce that amount for the other partners.

h. establish proper communication with and among the project partners;

i. set up a control system to ensure efficient administrative and sound financial management of the project, as well as an adequate project monitoring and evaluation system;

j. ensure that expenditure presented by all partners has been paid in the framework of the project implementation and corresponds to the activities agreed between all the partners, and is in accordance with the document provided by the Managing Authority;

k. ensure the access of the project accounting and related supporting documents, including the proof of delivery of all project activities, to the MA, NAs, NCs or CCPs, AA, GoA, EC, OLAF, Court of Auditors and any authorised auditor by any of these bodies during the period of time indicated in the Grant Contract;

l. open a dedicated bank account in euro[7];

[6]The financial guarantee is not requested for EU Public Bodies, including EU bodies governed by public law and International Organisations as defined in section 4.3.2 of this document and for the public bodies of MPCs for which their countries are financially responsible, according to the Financing Agreement signed with the EC or other specific national regulation concerning financial responsibilities of national and local authorities. Please note that, the financial guarantees, up to the amount of the first pre-financing, may be requested only to Lead Beneficiaries, on the basis of a risk analysis performed by the Managing Authority and, among other elements, the financial capacity and previous experience.

[7] The obligation to open a dedicated bank account in euro does not apply to public bodies in the event they cannot open new accounts due to limitations set by the concerned national legislation. In this case the public body can use a pre-existing non

m. be legally and financially responsible for the activities that the project is implementing and for the share of the Union funds that it receives;

n. be responsible for the recovery of the unused funds or Programme funds to be reimbursed to the Managing Authority from all the project partners, according to the provisions of the Grant Contract and the Partnership Agreement.

The Lead Partner should have the following profile:

a. experienced in the management of EU funded projects;

b. prepared to take on a leading and driving role within the partnership;

c. having sufficient capacity (institutional, financial and human resources) to prepare the project application and to manage the implementation of the project;

d. having the relevant thematic knowledge and expertise for the project;

e. being committed throughout the project proposal application process as well as during the implementation phase;

f. guarantee efficient communication in the project's working language in order to ensure sound communication within the partnership and with the Programme authorities.

- **<u>Project partners</u>**

The Project Partners (beneficiaries according to terminology used in the REGULATION (EU) 2021/1060):

a. participate with the Lead Partner in the design and elaboration of the project application;

b. sign a Partnership Agreement with the Lead Partner as a prior condition for concluding the Grant Contract with the MA;

c. ensure the implementation of the project's activities under their responsibility according to the Partnership Agreement signed with the Lead Partner;

d. cooperate with the Lead Partner and the other project partners in the implementation of the project, the reporting and monitoring;

e. provide financial and progress reports, including all supporting documentation, to the auditors/controllers for the verification of expenditure per each of the reporting periods established for the Project and ensure full cooperation and assistance for the timely and accurate performance of verification;

f. ensure access to the project accounting and related supporting documents, including the proof of delivery of all project activities, to the MA, NAs, NCs or CCPs,

dedicated bank account in euro provided that it guarantees to keep track of all the incomes and all the payments related to the funds transferred by the MA and of the amount of interests accrued.

AA, EC, OLAF, Court of Auditors and any authorised auditor by any of these bodies during the period of time indicated in the Grant Contract;

g. be legally and financially responsible for the activities that it is implementing and for the share of the Union funds that it receives, thus assuming responsibility in the event of any irregularity in the expenditure they have declared and repay the Lead Partner the amounts unduly received or unduly spent, as well as the reimbursement of pre-financing received in excess due to under spending.

Role and obligations of the project partners:

a. sign a Partnership Agreement with the Lead Partner and all partners involved in the project;

b. comply with all the rules and obligations stated in the Programme contractual documents published with this call for proposals;

c. have the financial and administrative capacities to implement project activities and anticipate the payment of project costs;

d. are responsible for communication with their national representative within the Programme, namely the National Authority (NA), the National Contact Points (NCP), the Authority in charge of the designation of the national controller;

e. contribute to project activities under the direction of the LP and in cooperation with the rest of the project partnership in line with sound financial and project management principles;

f. contribute to a functional and permanent communication flow within the partnership to ensure an efficient exchange of information that enables the successful delivery of the project results;

g. ensure the timely submission of the elements related to the reporting on finances and activities to the Lead Beneficiary;

h. guarantee efficient communication in the project's working language in order to ensure sound communication within the partnership and with the Programme authorities.

2.5 Project coordination and management

The successful and efficient implementation of transnational projects, involving organizations from different countries with diverse expertise and administrative/institutional contexts, requires a reliable and sound coordination methodology and an experienced management team given the varied nature of tasks to be carried out, including complex administrative, technical, reporting, financial, communication activities, within the timeframe set in the grant contract.

At strategic level, each project should define lean, yet adequate procedures and rules for decision-making and overall coordination of the partnership, ensuring the involvement of

all partners in decision-making processes following the principles of co-ownership and cooperation on equal footing. This includes establishing a steering committee, composed of representatives from all the partners, which should meet on a regular basis (at least twice a year) to ensure the proper monitoring of the project implementation from the technical and financial standpoint, including reviewing and approving work plans and reports, or agreeing on any changes to the project. Clear procedures should be set up to ensure smooth internal communication flows within the partnership, defining precisely the role and responsibilities of each member of staff involved. Please see section 2.6.1 for more information on how to design WP1 'Management and coordination' in the application form.

As far as the day-to-day management of the project is concerned and having considered that the Lead Partner assumes the full responsibility for ensuring the implementation of the entire project (as per article 26 "Task of the lead partner" of Regulation (EU) 2021/1059 – Interreg Regulation), consistently with the principle of sound financial and project management, the Lead Partner shall appoint the following project management positions:

- **a project coordinator**: he/she oversees, coordinates and monitors the implementation of the project - including management, financial and communication aspects - towards the achievement of its objectives, and ensures the timely delivery of technical and financial reports to the MA. He/she works in close contact with partners, providing guidance and advice. Besides having extensive experience of several years in managing complex cooperation projects funded by international donors or the European Union, ideally including experience with projects carried out under ENPI/ENI/Interreg programmes, the coordinator should also demonstrate knowledge of the thematic field(s) addressed by the project, as well as acquaintance with the institutional, administrative and cultural contexts of the countries participating in the project. In addition to a perfect command of the project language, the knowledge of other languages represented within the project partnership, in particular Arabic, is an asset to ensure effective communication among partners. The project coordinator should possess excellent leadership, interpersonal and negotiation skills in order to engage diverse partners towards a common objective, handle potential disputes, and ensure smooth relationships with the Programme authorities and stakeholders.
- **a financial manager**: he/she is responsible for ensuring the sound and efficient financial management of the project, including regularly monitoring the financial performance of the project in close contact with the project coordinator and the partners in order to avoid ineligible expenditures or the risk of financial de-commitment at Programme level (that is the budget has to be spent within 3 years after the Programme received the money from the EU). The financial manager should possess substantial experience in managing EU funds and be familiar with accounting and bookkeeping and demonstrate the ability to handle international transactions, overseeing the correct management of the project budget, budget modifications, financial reporting, submission of payment claims and transfer of

Interreg funds to the project partners. He/she should be aware of the EU and national legislation regarding financial management and controls, public procurement and, where appropriate, State aid. In addition, the financial manager should possess excellent interpersonal skills to efficiently support all the project partners in relation to financial issues.

- **a communication manager**: he/she takes responsibility and ownership for designing the project communication strategy and oversees the implementation of all related activities, including the organisation of events, design of communication material, management of the project website and social media profiles, relations with media, stakeholders, and communication service providers, among other key tasks. The communication manager acts as the sole contact point with the Interreg NEXT MED Programme communication manager (or the programme officer appointed to follow the communication activities of the project) and deals with any request coming from the Managing Authority/Joint Secretariat regarding communication issues. The communication manager should have vast experience in the communication of EU projects or projects funded by international donors, and familiarity in working in multicultural contexts. Creative, goal-driven, highly motivated to deliver engaging communication, he/she supports the design and implementation of communication activities of project partners, providing them with expert guidance and ensuring that relevant EU and Programme visibility rules are fully respected. Having excellent writing skills, the communication manager is able to translate complex, technical information into clear, engaging, meaningful content that makes sense to a variety of audiences, including institutional stakeholders, media representatives, the general public, including young people for instance. Considering the importance of visual impact of communication, skills in graphic design and video editing are essential assets for the communication manager. The communication manager to be appointed by the Lead Partner does not prevent partners from actively contributing to the design and the implementation of the communication strategy and related activities (see also par. 2.8.4).

The 3 key project management positions listed above should be preferably considered at senior level (at least 5 years of experience) in view of the demanding and complex nature of Mediterranean transnational cooperation projects. These three positions should be part of the staff of the Lead Partner organisation, either as permanent staff or staff specifically recruited for the purpose of the project, while subcontracting of project coordination, financial and communication management functions to private companies should be avoided to ensure the full ownership of the Lead Partner on the project.

Whilst project partners should appoint a sufficient, yet reasonable number of human resources to efficiently and timely contribute to the project implementation and reporting, the project management structure should reflect a logical division of tasks consistently with the partnership principle, avoiding the duplication of similar functions.

All staff and experts working within the project must be fluent in the project official language (English or French depending on the language chosen for the application), which is used for all communications with the Managing Authority, Joint Secretariat and other Programme authorities and stakeholders. Finally, all staff and experts appointed to perform core project management/financial/communication tasks should have sufficient experience in EU-funded projects.

The hosting of Interreg Volunteer Youth (IVY), an initiative of the European Commission to engage young people in the implementation of European Territorial Cooperation's programmes and projects, is encouraged, provided they do not replace key management staff necessary for the implementation of the project. For more information, please visit the IVY website: https://www.interregyouth.com/

2.5.1 Project management activities in the Application Form

The project and financial management of the proposal will be defined under the compulsory Work Package 1 (WP1 'Management and coordination') which must be considered as an essential part of both project design and implementation.WP1 will be managed by the Lead Partner which will have to act, during the whole project life, as an inspirational and motivational leader for the partnership.

When drafting WP1, the Applicant will make sure that the management and financial system is clear, easy to understand and transparent. With that purpose, it will establish a comprehensible management structure and an effective financial circuit that will be shared by all partners.

The management structure is aimed at enabling a smooth implementation of the project activities which often are hampered by the absence of clear management and decision-making procedures to be followed. The project will struggle to overcome bottlenecks if the management structure has been poorly designed. In this sense, in the proposal, the Applicant will pay special attention to:

- Define a management structure and a decision-making process where the role of every partner is predefined, stable, and very clear. All partners must intervene in the processes.
- Foresee the establishment of a Project Steering Committee (or equivalent) that will follow up the implementation of the project and will take the relevant decisions (for example, if a major change of the project is needed). This committee will be ruled by internal regulations. The application of the regulation will be mandatory during the whole project life. The Committee will meet on a regular basis and whenever the implementation of the project requires it. Decision-making processes should ensure that all partners participate in equal footing.
- Make sure that the distribution of activities is known and shared by each partner. Too frequently, projects have performed poorly due to a lack of internal communication. The Applicant will indicate how internal communication with the partners and between

partners will be guaranteed (channels, frequency, etc.). By no means can this issue be underestimated. The project coordinator will keep frequent contact with each partner.

- Ensure that WP1 integrates evaluation and monitoring mechanisms. Any deviation from the approved project road map must be detected and mitigated in the shortest delays. This is only possible if proper and specific mechanisms are established to ensure that the partners detect potential issues before they happen or become critical.
- Establish a risk prevention and mitigation plan. As experience teaches, many risks can become a reality and jeopardize the project implementation. The project should distinguish between internal risks (failure of partner, lack of cash-flow, internal dispute, late availability of bank accounts in euros, etc.) and external risks (financial crises, sectorial strikes, massive change in the regulation applicable to the thematic of the project, external dispute, currency losses, etc.) and indicate how it will mitigate them.

As far as financial management is concerned, the **Lead Partner** will guarantee:

- To foresee the draft and the approval of a Project Guide for Financial procedures shared and understood by all the partners. Financial issues are often due to the lack of understanding of the Programme financial rules by the partners, event until the last stages of the project life.

The **Project Financial Manager** will guarantee that:

- The financial rules are well known, and he/she will organize the relevant training sessions. These sessions, ideally to be held at the start of the project, and during each meeting of the Project Steering Committee, are deemed indispensable to avoid major financial issues.

In conformity with the Grant Contract and with the Partnership Agreement, the project will establish the financial circuits that suit the most the interest of the project. The proposal should indicate when the payments to the partners will be made and the link with the specific performance of partners. In this sense, the decisions on payments to partners should be taken for the sake of a sound project implementation, the interest of the whole project being always more important than the interest of a single partner. The first goal of project and financial management is to contribute to delivering the expected results and the outputs as indicated in the project proposal.

Another critical point for successful implementation is the submission of reports to the Managing Authority. The timely and effective submission of reports can be complex if the Lead Partner has not established specific mechanisms to be followed by each partner both for the reports per se and for the audit of the financial part of the reports (project expenditures). The proposal should reflect how the project intends to ensure that the individual partner reports (financial and narrative) and the consolidated reports are produced on time. Late reports by partners or even the inability of a partner to produce a report is an actual risk that should not be underrated.

The Applicant will briefly elaborate on two very important elements that may jeopardize the timely implementation of activities and the consequent report of expenditures: recruitment of staff and public procurement procedures.

The proposal should indicate which partners are likely to need to hire staff if the project is approved and how the procedure will be launched (with information of timing). The Lead Partner should be aware of the capacities of each partner and know where and when new staff will be needed to implement the activities.

The same applies to public procurement in the case of equipment, external services or infrastructure must be purchased. It is recommended that the proposal mentions the drafting of a Procurement Plan with a strict calendar to be followed by each partner.

Finally, the budget of WP1 will be allocated in a cost-effective and realistic manner. The administrative burden of the project should be well considered on the budget of the LP. The cost of external audits will be indicated and will correspond to the standard prices of each participating country.

2.6 Communication and visibility

Interreg NEXT MED Programme considers communication as a key pillar of any project, as equally important as sound project and financial management.

Communication is an essential component of implementation not only for amplifying the visibility of the project results with media, institutions, key stakeholders and the general public, but also for demonstrating value for money of EU funding, i.e., how public money is being invested and for which purposes, thus boosting awareness of the benefits of the EU on people's lives, highlighting at the same time the added value of working together in the Mediterranean to address challenges that know no borders.

While the EU regulatory framework sets the minimum requirements under which projects communicate (the fundamental principle is that project partners must inform the general public and all those involved in the project about the support received from the European Union), the success of these efforts ultimately depends on the actual commitment, professionalism, expertise of project partners. Which means going well beyond complying with the regulatory provisions, not treating communication as a bureaucratic box-ticking exercise, but as a central aspect and a primary concern of projects towards successful implementation. The Programme MA and JS, through dedicated guidelines, specific training sessions, and personalized guidance to projects, will uphold this ambition, fostering a community working together with a shared sense of purpose: showcasing success stories and a positive momentum for the Mediterranean.

2.6.1 Project branding and main visibility requirements

In order to ensure a high visibility and harmonised visual identity of European Union cohesion policy programmes and projects, of which Interreg NEXT MED Programme is part, the regulatory framework for the 2021-2027 period provides a set of simplified instructions

for branding communication activities. These are laid down in Articles 46-50 and Annex IX of the Common Provisions Regulation (EU) 1060/2021, as well as in Article 36 of the Interreg Regulation (EU) 1059/2021.

A central element of the Interreg NEXT MED visual identity is the use of the joint Interreg branding, a shared visual identity among dozens of programmes and hundreds of projects, providing greater visibility for the Interreg community at all levels and towards the widest audience thanks to a consistent, common, easily recognizable appearance based on a harmonized logo.

The Programme logo includes the following elements:

- European Union emblem (EU flag);
- Statement "Co-funded by the European Union";
- Name of funding strand (Interreg);
- Programme name (NEXT MED);
- An "identity" visual element – not exceeding the size of the EU emblem and placed on the upper-left corner of the logo – which aims to symbolize cooperation (through the sun made of people) and the Mediterranean Sea (through the waves).

Following their approval, projects will be provided with the harmonised Interreg NEXT MED logo, customised with the project name (acronym, see section below for details on defining a project acronym). In consequence, **projects are under no circumstance allowed to develop their own project logo and no cost for designing project logos will be eligible nor shall be included in the budget**, while costs for developing project communication supports (headed paper, PPT template, business cards, roll-up, etc.) are eligible. In very specific and exceptional, duly justified cases, logos aiming to become a label or brand could be developed for outputs with a lifetime that goes well beyond the project duration and shall be expressly accepted by the Programme communication manager.

Projects must acknowledge the support from the EU by placing the project logo prominently on all communication materials used for internal or public purposes, such as printed or digital products, websites, social media channels including their mobile views as well as promotional materials. The size of the logo should be always reasonable, recognizable and readable.

Where relevant, funded projects will also be encouraged to display the MMM logo alongside the official project logo. Detailed instructions will be available on this matter to ensure adequate visibility. Other key communication obligations deriving from the EU regulatory framework, in particular article 4 of Regulation (EU) 2021/1059, foresee that each partner of an Interreg project must:

- place a poster of a minimum A3 size or equivalent electronic display with information about the project including the financial support from the Union and the project logo at a location clearly visible to the public, such as an entrance area

of a building. Therefore, all project partners must place this poster and send photographic evidence of its display to the Programme communication manager or designated Programme officer within three months after the signing of the grant contract.

- display durable plaques or billboards clearly visible to the public, presenting the emblem of the Union in accordance with the technical characteristics laid down in Annex IX of Regulation (EU) 2021/1060, as soon as the physical implementation of an Interreg project involving physical investment or the purchase of equipment starts or purchased equipment is installed, with regard to operations supported by an Interreg fund, the total cost of which exceeds 100 000 euros.

In addition, in accordance with Regulation (EU) 2021/1060 (Chapter III, Section II, Article 49.6 and the Annex IX), communication and visibility material, including at the level of project partners, must be made available upon request to the European Union's institutions, bodies, offices, or agencies. A royalty-free, non-exclusive, and irrevocable license to use such material and any pre-existing rights attached to it must be granted to the Union. This should not require significant additional costs or a significant administrative burden for the project.

Finally, the Managing Authority requires that **each project produces at least two short videos, foreseeing dedicated financial resources in the budget for this activity**: one presenting the project at its inception and another presenting the project's achievements towards its end. Ideally, these two videos should be short (not exceeding 3 minutes) of a reasonable budget (not exceeding 5.000 euros per video), and the script be shared with all partners to integrate their inputs. Projects are encouraged to produce additional videos about their activities and achievements through the implementation period.

Further instructions are contained in guidelines for communication and visibility available on the Programme website (https://www.interregnextmed.eu/resources-for-implementation/).

Compliance with visibility rules is of utmost importance to secure Programme funding to communication activities and avoid ineligible expenses when disregarding EU and Programme branding requirements. When remedial actions or amendments to violated requirements are not possible and in accordance with section 6 of Article 36 of Regulation (EU) 2021/1059, the Managing Authority shall recover up to 2% of the support from the funds awarded to any beneficiary who fails to comply with their obligations on transparency and communication, taking into account the principle of proportionality by considering the infringement.

2.6.2 Project acronym

A key component of a project's branding is its acronym. It is important, if possible, to decide on an acronym that is short, easy to pronounce and remember, meaningful, catchy and intuitive, and has a meaning associated with the project's theme. Project acronyms should

not exceed 16 characters: an excessively lengthy acronym would make the use of the project logo complex. Since the project acronym will be used to create the project website's url (see next section), the acronym must not contain special characters (& ! . * @, etc). Preferably, the acronym should not mix lowercase and uppercase.

2.6.3 Project website

Once approved and in line with the harmonised and integrated approach for communication, projects will be provided with a standard website, hosted on the Programme website, integrating functionalities necessary for online communication (see existing project websites at https://www.interregnextmed.eu/projects/) Projects will be requested to update their webpage on a regular basis according to the parameters, targets and quality standards to be set in the guidelines for communication and any other relevant document: failure to meet these targets may lead to the cancellation of related communication expenses. Performance of project webpages will be monitored through web analytics to be sent at least once a year to project coordinators and communication managers.

Costs for developing and hosting websites are not eligible and shall not be included in the budget. Only in exceptional cases and upon approval of the Programme communication manager based on a detailed description provided by the project, the design of separate IT platforms could be authorized for developing specific output such as e-learning tools, complex databases with functionalities not covered by the project webpages.

Financial support will not be granted to websites being developed only for information purposes, with no real added value compared to the functionalities offered by the project webpages developed by the Programme.

2.6.4 Communication activities in the Application Form

The Application Form includes a mandatory Work Package dedicated to communication and dissemination activities.

Work Package (WP) 2 should highlight the overall approach to communication and visibility for the project, including objectives, target audiences, key activities, communication channels, and planned budget. Applicants are invited to demonstrate the broad purpose of the project approach to communication, highlighting for instance how they will raise awareness, disseminate knowledge, change behavior or mindset, showcase impact and benefits, engage with beneficiaries and stakeholders, etc.

In addition, projects should pay special attention in identifying and defining as clearly and precisely as possible communication target groups, meaning those people and audiences who need to know about the project and its work and ideally be engaged in its communication for it to succeed. While target groups like "politicians", "media", and "institutions" might be too generic, "municipal elected politicians and public officials dealing

with water management", "environmental-oriented media and journalists", "environmental activists and NGOs" are examples of better-defined target groups.

As one of the WP outputs, it is recommended to foresee a communication plan which will guide the activities in case the project is approved.

When drafting WP2, projects are expected to develop a mix of actions using different tools that can ensure an appropriate level of visibility and reach out to the identified target groups. This includes for instance: online communication (website, social media, use of influencers), media relations, public relations (events) and production of materials (printed, digital, audio-visual), thematic campaigns, advocacy actions, etc.

Planned communication activities should be tailored and consistent with the specific nature of the call for capitalization projects, highlighting how the project promotes the reuse, transfer, and scaling-up of existing project results in the field of sustainable tourism. This may include but not limited to:

- Showcasing successful experiences through news articles, case studies, videos and storytelling formats, highlighting their impact and added value.
- Demonstrating reuse and transfer by explaining how results are adapted, replicated or scaled up in new contexts, extending their geographical reach.
- Engaging sector stakeholders and expanding networks via workshops, peer-learning events, study visits and thematic exchanges to involve additional tourism stakeholders.
- Targeting public authorities and policy-makers through policy briefs, dedicated events and tailored dissemination actions aimed at integrating good practices into policy debate and supporting policy development and change.
- Promoting mainstreaming by ensuring that results are accessible, understandable and actionable for decision-makers at local, regional, national and Euro-Mediterranean levels.

The implementation of paid advertisement and digital marketing on the web and social media - specially to build an audience at the beginning of the project, promote specific highlights, opportunities or achievements, and encourage the participation to project events – should be considered by projects and costs included in the budget, as the case may be. With all due precautions, the potential use of Artificial Intelligence (AI) tools should be assessed in the context of the project to enhance and maximise tasks such as video/picture/voice-over generation and editing.

Considering the importance of communication in project implementation, Work Package 2 shall be coordinated by the Lead Partner: this is to ensure the **full ownership of the Lead Partner on communication activities and a consistent link between the implementation project activities, results achieved and their sound, timely promotion under communication efforts.** Whilst the supervision of communication activities falls under the responsibility and coordination of the Lead Partner, **all partners shall contribute to the implementation of the project communication strategy and**

shall develop their own communication activities, budgeting costs for this end in the project proposal.

2.7 Use of languages

The official Programme languages are English, French and Arabic.

However, in all procedures and in all documents referring to projects - from the submission of the proposal to the drafting of the final project reporting, only English or French shall be used. Moreover, only English and/or French are used for legal and arbitration issues. Requests of information addressed to the Managing Authority, Joint Secretariat and Branch Offices and the related answers will have to be drafted in one of the project languages (English or French).

3. Application procedure

3.1 How to apply

Proposals must be submitted **only** by means of the e-form.

The prior registration of the Applicants in the online system is a necessary pre-requisite in order to fill in the e-Form.

The project proposals are submitted in **one STAGE only** and shall include:

- **Application form** (to be filled in through the online platform available at https://eform.interregnextmed.eu)
- **Mandatory documents** (to be uploaded on the online application form):
    - Declaration by the Applicant
    - Partner Statement(s)
    - Advisory Partner Statement (only in case of the participation of an Advisory Partner)
    - Declaration for international organizations if any
    - Associate declaration(s), if any
    - State aid self-assessment check grid to be uploaded as a single merged pdf document (for both Applicant and partners)
    - Financial capacity form (for both Applicant and partners) to be filled in through the e-form
    - Documents related to the environmental check, as the case may be (to be filled in through the e-form)

Proposals submitted, which are incomplete or use incorrect forms, **will be rejected** (e.g., hand-written application forms, such as word or pdf files etc., will not be accepted).

The e-form must be filled in by using one of the following languages: **English or French.**

Courtesy forms can be downloaded from the Programme website, along with all mandatory documents to be uploaded on the e-form.

3.2 Deadline for the submission of the proposal

The deadline for the submission of proposals is indicated in the text of the call for proposals. The compliance with the deadline will be evidenced by the receipt of the online submission system.

It is highly recommended to gather all the relevant information and documents well in advance, especially those regarding the partner organisations.

3.3 Further information

Information sessions on this call for proposals may be held according to the dates indicated on the Programme website.

Questions on the call may be sent in English or in French at the latest **15 calendar days** before the deadline for the submission of the Application Form according to the modalities described in the "Frequently Asked Questions" (FAQs) section of the Programme website. As the questions may be relevant to other Applicants, they will be published on the Programme website, together with the answers. Only the answers provided through the FAQs section of the Programme website are considered as official Programme answers.

The Managing Authority has no obligation to provide additional clarifications for questions received after the above-mentioned time-limit.

Replies will be given no later than **10 calendar days** before the deadline for the submission of the project proposals.

No replies to queries regarding the status of the selection procedure shall be given.

In the interest of equal treatment of Applicants, the Managing Authority, the Joint Secretariat and the Branch Offices **cannot give a prior opinion on the compliance of the proposals with the eligibility and selection criteria**.

Please note that the answers given through the FAQs section of the Programme website will be considered as binding. Any major inconsistency in the submitted documents with the content of these answers may lead to the rejection of the proposal.

In case of contradictions between the official call documents and the FAQs, the latter will prevail.

4. Admission requirements

In order to be eligible under the Interreg NEXT MED Programme, project proposals must meet the following requirements regarding:

- Eligible territories

- Financial dimension
- Specific requirements
- Eligibility of Applicant and Partner organisations
- Eligibility of budget costs

4.1 Eligible territories

Project activities shall be implemented in the territories of the countries participating in the Interreg NEXT MED Programme, as listed in the table below.

Exceptionally, specific activities outside the Programme area may be included, only provided that their added value to the Programme area is duly justified in the Application Form. Their eligibility will be assessed on a case-by-case basis.

Activities under the responsibility an Advisory partner (see paragraph 4.3) – in case it is involved in a project – should be implemented for the benefit of the Programme area (e.g., a study carried out by an advisory partner should focus on one or more territories covered by the Programme, a training organized by an advisory partner should involve participants from one or more territories covered by the Programme, etc.).

For the complete list of territories/regions covered by the Programme, please refer to the following table:

COUNTRIES	REGIONS COVERED BY THE PROGRAMME
Algeria	Tlemcen; Ain-Temouchent; Oran; Mostaganem; Chlef; Tipaza; Boumerdes; TiziOuzou; Bejaia; Jijel; Skikda; Annaba; El-Tarf; Alger.
Cyprus	Whole country
Egypt	Matruh; Al Iskandariyah (Alexandria, alex.); Al Buhayrah (Al Beheira); Kafr-Ael-Sheikh; Al Sharqiyah (Al Sharkia); Al Daqahliyah (Al Dakahlia); Damietta; Al Ismailiyah (Al Ismailia); Port Said; Governorate of Cairo.
France	Languedoc-Roussillon; Midi-Pyrénées; Provence-Alpes-Côte d'Azur; Corse.
Greece	Αττική/Attiki;ΒόρειοΑιγαίο/Voreio Aigaio;ΝότιοΑιγαίο/Notio Aigaio;Κρήτη/Kriti; Ανατολική Μακεδονία, Θράκη/AnatolikiMakedonia, Thraki; Κεντρική Μακεδονία/Kentriki Makedonia; Δυτική Μακεδονία/Dytiki Makedonia; Ήπειρος/Ipeiros;Θεσσαλία/Thessalia;Ιόνια Νησιά/IoniaNisia; ΔυτικήΕλλάδα/DytikiElláda;ΣτερεάΕλλάδα/Sterea Elláda;Πελοπόννησος/Peloponnisos.

Israel[8]	Whole country
Italy	Liguria; Campania; Puglia; Basilicata; Calabria; Sicilia; Sardegna; Toscana; Lazio.
Jordan	Whole country
Lebanon	Whole country
Malta	Whole country
Palestine[9]	Whole country
Portugal	Algarve.
Spain	Catalunya; Comunitat Valenciana; Illes Balears; Andalucía; Región de Murcia; Ciudad de Ceuta; Ciudad de Melilla.
Tunisia	Zaghouan; Kairouan; SidiBouz; Manouba;Siliana; Le Kef; Gafsa;Kebili;Ta taouine; Jendouba; Beja; Bizerte; Ariana; Tunis, Ben Arous, Gabes, Mahdia, Medenine, Monastir, Nabeul, Sfax, Sousse.
Türkiye	Tekirdağ, Edirne, Kırklareli; Balıkesir, Çanakkale; İzmir; Aydın, Denizli, Muğla; Manisa, Afyonkarahisar, Kütahya, Uşak; Antalya, Isparta, Burdur; Adana, Mersin; Hatay, Kahramanmaraş, Osmaniye.

4.2 Financial dimension of projects

The minimum and maximum EU contribution to projects is reported below.

Minimum EU co-financing	Maximum EU co-financing	Maximum total eligible costs
€920.000	€1.200.000	€1.304.347,83

The EU contribution is fixed to 92% of the project total eligible costs and the project co-financing is set to 8% of the total eligible costs[10].

[8]The eligibility criteria formulated in the Commission Notice Nr. 2013/C- 205/05 (OJEU C-205 of 19.07.2013) establishing Guidelines on the eligibility of Israeli entities and their activities in the territories occupied by Israel since June 1967 for grants, prizes and financial instruments funded by the EU from 2014 onwards, shall apply for all actions under this Interreg NEXT MED Programme, including with respect to third parties receiving financial support in the cases where the respective action involves financial support to third parties by grant beneficiaries in accordance with article 137 of the EU's Financial Regulation.
[9]This designation shall not be construed as a recognition of a State of Palestine and is without prejudice to the individual positions of the Member States on this issue.
[10]Beneficiaries from Italy, Greece and Türkiye are entitled to receive national contribution to provide project co-financing. The conditions and modalities will be set by the respective National Authorities and they will be published in the Programme webpage.

The co-financing provided with the Applicant's and partners' own resources, or with public or private (national/regional/local) sources other than the European Union Budget and the European Development Fund, shall cover the remaining budget costs.

4.3 Eligibility of Applicant and Project Partners

4.3.1 Location of Applicant and Project Partner organisations

Applicants and project partners must be based in the Programme area (see table in section 4.1) and they shall be legally registered there for at least two years prior to the launching date of this call.

The following **exception** to the geographical eligibility rule applies in the framework of this call for proposals to allow the participation of the Advisory partners, meaning organizations **established and having their headquarters** in any of the fifteen countries participating in the Programme but from territories/regions not included in the Programme area. The participation of "**Advisory partners**" is subject to the following conditions:

- Participation is allowed on a case-by-case basis by the Monitoring Committee upon recommendation of the Assessment Board based on the assessment carried out within STEP 1 by the external evaluators (see par. 5.2). In particular, the involvement of "Advisory partners" shall be duly justified in the e-form and based on the specific and unique expertise (meaning it is demonstrated it is not available in the cooperation area) as well as a clear demonstration of the added value of their participation to achieve the project's specific objective.
- Advisory partners cannot be Lead Applicants of project proposals.
- Activities must be carried out in or for the benefit of the territories of the Programme area.
- Advisory partners must be registered for at least 2 years before the launch of the call for proposals.
- A maximum of 1 (one) Advisory partner per project proposal is allowed.

Decentralized offices can participate in this call for proposals as "advisory partners" **only** provided that their head office meets the above-mentioned requirements.

Ministries (of the fifteen countries which are not based in the Programme area) and International Organisations can participate as Applicants or Partners only if they have an independent operational office in the eligible area. They can also participate as Advisory Partners in case they do not have an independent operational office in the territories concerned. However, International Organizations do not contribute to the fulfilment of the minimum geographic partnership requirement (see paragraph 4.4.2).

In addition to the categories of Applicants and Partners, the proposal may involve "third parties" as follows:

Associates. They are associated organisations which may be involved in the project, but they **cannot receive funding from the grant**. They may be invited to participate in the partnership and project events and the related costs of travel and accommodation shall be covered by the project partners/applicant. Associates do not have to meet the geographical eligibility criteria of the previous sections. The associates have to be clearly mentioned in the e-form. Their role is not compatible with that of sub-contractor, meaning that associates cannot participate, under no circumstances, in procurement procedures launched by the project. In the context of this call for capitalization projects, applicants are encouraged to consider involving, as associates and when relevant, organizations established in areas covered by other programmes participating in the MMM, including EU Member States (Bulgaria, Croatia, Slovenia) and IPA countries (Albania, Bosnia and Herzegovina, Montenegro, North Macedonia, and Serbia). This is intended to foster access to, reuse, and replication of outputs developed under the MMM framework, particularly those included in the common MMM database of outputs on which the proposed project intends to build. It is **recommended** to limit the number of associates to six (6) organizations and involve only those organizations that bring added value to the project.

4.3.2 Legal status of Applicant and Partner organizations

The Applicants and project partners located in the Interreg NEXT MED Programme cooperation area can receive Programme Funds. Public and private bodies[11] established in the participating countries and legally registered there since at least two years from the launching date of this call, as well as international organisations, can submit project proposals.

The concerned organisations must be **legal entities** in accordance with national legislations, laws and regulations.

Public bodies, according to the National legislations, laws and regulations, include also the "**bodies governed by public law"** according to article 2 (4) of Directive EU2014/24. They are governed by public laws and shall meet all the following conditions:

- they are established for the specific purpose of meeting needs in the general interest, not having an industrial or commercial character;

[11]A non-exhaustive list of possible eligible bodies follows: National administrations and institutions; Decentralised bodies such as regions, departments, provinces and municipalities; Joint bodies set up by the participating countries and regions (i.e. European Grouping of Territorial Cooperation - EGTC) international organisations, including regional organisations, UN bodies, departments and missions, international financial institutions and development banks, in so far as they contribute to the objectives of the Interreg Regulation. European Union agencies provided that they meet the conditions set by the EC to participate; (i) public or public equivalent or parastatal bodies, local authorities or administrations and consortia thereof; (ii) companies, firms and other private organisations and businesses; (iii) financial institutions that grant, promote and finance private investment in partner countries and regions; (iv) non-state actors as defined in the following point; the following non-state actors: (i) non-governmental organisations; (ii) organisations representing national and/or ethnic minorities; (iii) local citizens groups and traders associations; (iv) cooperatives, trade unions, organisations representing economic and social interests; (v) local organisations (including networks) involved in decentralised regional cooperation and integration; (vi) consumer organisations, women's and youth organisations, teaching, cultural research and scientific organisations; (vii) universities and research centres/institutes; (viii) churches and religious associations and communities; (ix) the media; (x) cross-border associations, non-governmental associations and independent foundations.

- they have legal personality;
- they are financed, for the most part, by the State, regional or local authorities, or by other bodies governed by public law; or are subject to management supervision by those authorities or bodies; or have an administrative, managerial or supervisory board, more than half of whose members are appointed by the State, regional or local authorities, or by other bodies governed by public law.

Bodies governed by public law in Mediterranean Partner Countries are those bodies obliged to follow the public procurement rules, in accordance with the respective national law.

Private organisations (including profit making and non-profit organizations) are eligible in the Interreg NEXT MED Programme provided that they have been legally registered **for at least 2 years from the launching date of the call to participate**.[12]

Private companies whose main activity, including their role in the project, is solely limited to supporting actions (project coordination, management, communication, etc.) cannot be involved as project partners. Indeed, their participation could fall within the scope of public procurement as subcontractors and usually do not contribute to the overall project activities.

Pursuant to article 156 of the Implementing Rules of the Financial Regulation for the General Budget of the European Union (Regulation EU 2018/1046), **international organisation** [13] means international public-sector organisations set up by intergovernmental agreements, and specialised agencies set up by such organisations - these organisations may have worldwide or regional scope. Organisations created under national law are not international organisations (e.g., national NGO with several regional/country offices). In cases of doubt, to ascertain whether an organisation is covered by the above-mentioned definition, it is necessary to assess the nature of the organisation mainly on the basis of the legal instruments of the organisation (for instance, its statutes and/or the intergovernmental agreement setting up the organisation).

International organisations act under international law, and they can only participate in the Programme upon their explicit acceptance, in line with what is requested to any of the Programme eligible bodies, of all the requirements deriving from the Interreg Regulation and the other provisions applicable in the framework of the Interreg NEXT MED Programme. This acceptance implies the non-applicability of other agreements with the European Commission for the use of the own rules of the International Organisation. It includes -but is not limited- to the following:

[12] The Programme is open to public and private bodies established in the participating countries, and international organisations. Natural persons are not allowed to participate in calls for proposals as applicant or project partner.
[13] International organisations are international public-sector organisations set up by intergovernmental agreements as well as specialised agencies set up by them; the International Committee of the Red Cross (ICRC) and the International Federation of National Red Cross and Red Crescent Societies, European Investment Bank (EIB) and European Investment Fund (EIF) are also recognized as international organisations.

- Full acceptance of the Programme provisions, including all the requirements set by the Grant Contract and its annexes in the framework of the Programme and by the management and control systems;
- Acceptance of undergoing audits and checks by all those bodies entitled to carry out such controls in the framework of the Programme, including the European Commission, the Managing Authority, the Audit Authority, the European Court of Auditors, the European Anti-Fraud Office, as well as the relevant national authorities if the organisation is located in an EU Member State. Storage of all documents required for these controls must allow their performance in the geographical area covered by the Programme.

The international organisations will have to submit an *ad hoc* declaration explicitly stating it undertakes these obligations. The format of this declaration will be provided by the Managing Authority.

4.4 Specific requirements

4.4.1 Participation

The proposal may only address **one (1) Programme Specific Objective** and one type of intervention even though there may be cross-over effects with other Specific Objectives.

The same organisation[14] can apply only once as Applicant (Lead Partner) under this call. No limitation applies for the participation of the same organization at partner level. In case an organisation participates in more than one (1) project as Applicant , all concerned projects submitted by this organisation under this call will be rejected.

4.4.2 Partnership composition

The project partnership shall:

- represent a minimum of three (3) participating countries including at least one (1) EU Mediterranean Country (EUMC) and one (1) Mediterranean Partner Country (MPC).
- include at least 5 different organisations.
- not include more than two (2) organisations from the same country.

[14] Any legal entity, indicated under Reference to the par. on the eligible partners and according to the national legislations of Mediterranean Partner /IPA countries, which is provided with juridical, economic, technical and human capacities committed by the legal person as a whole. These conditions must result from supporting documents (such as statutes, registration papers and/or other official documents) proving the capacity to undertake legal obligations (signing contracts), to assume financial liability and to manage the resources for the achievement of stated purposes (i.e., public administrations or universities will be considered as ONE organisation represented by ONLY ONE legal person despite the functional independence of their departments or units). The participation of each organisation will be checked under step 1 (relevance and quality of the design) on the basis, among others, of the following information: national registration number (e.g., VAT, national code, social security etc.), name of the organisation and name of the legal representative.

In addition, a balanced geographical representation of the Programme cooperation area (North/South – East/West) is **highly recommended in project partnerships to ensure a real transnational dimension.**

International Organisations (as defined in section 4.3.2) **do not contribute** to the fulfilment of the above-mentioned minimum partnership requirement (point a).

4.4.3 Specific financial requirements

When preparing the budget, **at least 50%** of the project total eligible costs shall be dedicated to activities to be implemented in the Mediterranean Partner Countries territories (see section 4.1). This criterion is fulfilled in the following cases:

a) foresee to allocate **at least 50%** of the project total eligible costs to the partners from the Mediterranean Partner Countries

or

b) in case the financial allocation to partners from Mediterranean Partner Countries is lower than the said minimum percentage, the difference up to the minimum of 50% shall be justified by activities implemented by the EU Applicant and/or partner/s and/or International Organisations in the Mediterranean Partner Countries. The said budgeted direct costs shall be indicated and justified in the dedicated budget table. During project implementation, the MA will monitor the actual achievement of the level of expenditure in MPCs in order to ensure the compliance with this rule[15].

A same organisation may be allocated up to a maximum of 35% of the project total eligible costs.

4.4.4 Project duration

The estimated project duration shall not be lower than **18 months** and must not exceed **24 months**.

4.4.5 Compliance with eligibility criteria

Compliance with the eligibility criteria listed in the table below will be checked automatically by the online system.

Key project requirements	
Max. EU contribution	€ 1.200.000
Min. EU contribution	€ 920.000
EU co-financing rate	92%
Co-financing rate by the partnership	8%
Max. Project total costs	€ 1.304.347,83
Min. Project total costs	€ 1.000.000
Min. number of countries in partnership	3
Min. number of organisations of Mediterranean Partner Countries (MPC) in the partnership	1
Min. number of organisations of EU Mediterranean Country (EUMC) in the partnership	1
Min. number of organisations in the partnership	5
Max. number of organisations from the same country	2
Max. duration (months)[16]	24
Min. duration (months)	18
Max. number of partners and well-balanced North-South and East-West (highly recommended)	7

4.5 Compliance with State aid provisions

Applicants and project partners from the EU and from Egypt, Jordan, Tunisia and Türkiye shall comply with the State Aid provisions as foreseen by EU Regulation no. 1059/2021 (Interreg Regulation). Moreover, the provisions of any bilateral agreements between the MPCs and the EU (e.g., aid should not distort or threaten to distort competition and trade between the European Union and that specific Mediterranean Partner Country) should be taken into consideration[17].

In particular, private and public bodies, acting as economic operators, are subject to the following limitations:

- the amount of public funding granted to State Aid relevant activities included in the project will be granted according to art. 20 of the 651/2014 General Block Exemption

[16]Each project can consider a duration of 18 or 24 months.
[17]For details on the conditions to be met on state aid, please refer to the "Note on state aid" published with this call for proposals.

Regulation (GBER) as amended in June 2023 (Commission Regulation (EU) 2023/1315 of 23 June 2023 amending Regulation (EU) No 651/2014).

- Applicants and partners from all EU Members States and from Egypt, Jordan, Tunisia and Türkiye are required to provide information on State aid relevant activities, by using a specific self-assessment grid to be uploaded onto the e-Form.

4.6 Eligible costs and budget structure

It is in the Applicant's interest to submit a **realistic and cost-effective budget.** Therefore, when preparing the budget, the applicant has to consider carefully the expenditure eligibility rules as follows:

4.6.1 Key principles

As set out in Financial Regulation 2018/1046, the following key principles must be considered when preparing proposals and implementing projects:

• The principle of economy which requires that the resources used by the organization to deliver their activities shall be made available in due time, inappropriate quantity and quality, and at the best price.

• The principle of efficiency which concerns the optimal balance between the resources used, the activities undertaken and the achievement of objectives.

• The principle of effectiveness which concerns the extent to which the objectives pursued are achieved through the activities undertaken.

Indeed, the total project budget must be in line with the action plan, outputs and expected results, as well as the duration of the project and the number of partners.

Please note that the budget breakdown between the reporting periods in the Application Form will be included in the financial plan (spending forecast and expected amount of pre-financing). Therefore, budget must be drafted by considering the actual spending capacity and **the possibility to face advance payments while the pre-financing is not yet received**. It is highly recommended to avoid major expenses at the very end of the project implementation, **setting substantial procedures, tenders, recruitment at least during the first half of the project**.

4.6.2 Eligible costs

Expenditure on approved projects (except for costs calculated as flat rates or lump sums) may be eligible for reimbursement provided that they meet all of the following general eligibility criteria:

- they are related to the implementation of the project according to the latest approved version of the Application Form;
- they are necessary for the implementation of the project and would not have been

incurred if the project was not implemented;

- they are indicated in the estimated overall budget for the project;
- they comply with the principle of real costs;
- they are reasonable, justified and comply with the requirements of sound financial management and, in particular, regarding economy and efficiency;
- they are incurred and paid directly by the applicant/partners of the project;
- they are supported by expenditure and payment documents (e.g., contracts, invoices, proofs of payment documents etc.).
- they are incurred during the implementation period of the project;
- they are recorded in the accounts of the project partner through a separate accounting system, or an appropriate accounting code set up specifically for the project;
- notwithstanding the above-mentioned visibility rules, they respect the eligibility rules of the EU, the Programme and the national rules of the country in which the applicant/partner is located;
- they respect the applicable rules on procurement;
- they are related to costs that are not financed by other European funds or other contributions from third parties; as this would constitute double financing;
- they respect the rules of branding and communication established by the European regulations;
- they are not in contradiction with any specific eligibility criteria applicable to the respective cost category (see par. 4.6.2).

Please be aware that expenditures which do not comply with the applicable eligibility rules cannot be claimed and they will be declared ineligible, even though they are included in the approved budget.

4.6.3 Ineligible costs

The following costs shall not be eligible for a contribution from the Programme:

- interest on debt;
- purchase of land for an amount exceeding 10% of the total eligible expenditure for the concerned project; for derelict sites and for those formerly in industrial use which comprise buildings, that limit shall be increased to 15%;
- fines, financial penalties and expenditure on legal disputes and litigation;
- costs of gifts;
- costs related to fluctuation of foreign exchange rate;

- contributions in kind[18];
- depreciation costs;
- subcontracting between partners and/or associated partners of the same project for services, expertise, equipment and works carried out within the project;
- costs for project website and logo (see section 2.6 "Communication and visibility for more information");
- staff costs of non-partner organisations;
- expenditure supporting relocation;
- any expenditure not compliant with the national legislation(s) and/or with the financing agreements signed by the EC with the participating countries;
- excise duties, customs duties and any other indirect taxes. VAT is eligible for all projects with a total cost below €5 million.

4.6.4 Budget structure

The project budget must be structured according to the following cost categories (CC), as per Regulation (EU) 2021/1059[19].

1. Staff costs

Staff expenditure costs consist of the gross employment costs of staff employed by the project Lead Partner or partners for implementing the project (already employed staff or contracted specifically for the project. Staff not contracted specifically for the project should be formally assigned).

Eligible costs in this category are limited to the following:

- salary payments related to the activities which the organisation would not carry out without the project, provided for in an employment document, either in the form of an employment or work contract or an appointment decision, or by law, and relating to responsibilities specified in the job description of the staff member concerned; payments to natural persons working under a contract other than an employment or work contract may be assimilated to salary payments and such a contract shall be considered to be an employment document;
- any other costs directly linked to salary payments incurred and paid by the employer, such as employment taxes and social security including pensions, provided for in an

[18]Contributions in the form of the provision of works, goods, services, land and buildings for which no cash payment, supported by invoices or documents of equivalent probative value, has been made, including unpaid voluntary work. Personnel costs for staff working in one of the partner institutions on the basis of an employment contract and receiving a regular salary do not count as a contribution in kind, but as a cash contribution, as the staff costs are indeed paid by the partner institution.

[19]Please note that VAT is eligible for all projects with a total cost below €5 million.

employment document or by law, in accordance with the national legislation, and not recoverable by the employer.

Please note that the budget dedicated to Cost Category 1 "Staff Costs" cannot be higher than 40% of the project total eligible costs.

2.Office and administrative costs

Office and administrative costs are calculated **at a flat rate of 15%**[20]of the reported eligible direct staff costs of the project accepted by the MA and include all the following elements: office rent, insurance and taxes related to the buildings where the staff is located and to the equipment of the office (such as fire or theft insurance), utilities (such as electricity, heating, water);office supplies, accounting, archives, maintenance, cleaning and repairs, security, IT systems, communication (such as telephone, fax, internet, postal services, business cards), bank charges for opening and administering the account or accounts where a project implementation requires a separate account to be opened; and charges for transnational financial transactions.

Costs of the items listed above, including staff costs for general accounting and security, cannot be reported under any other cost category.

Subcontractors

If the project partners or the Lead Partner are unable to accomplish a specific activity of the project, this activity may be outsourced to subcontractors. However, under no circumstances, the activities assigned to subcontractors will include the bulk of the project core tasks, including the full outsourcing of management and communication. Moreover, the Lead Partner, the project partners and the associated partners cannot act as subcontractors.

3. Travel and accommodation costs

The costs under this category refer to travel and accommodation expenses of the staff of the applicant/partners organizations and/or other persons involved, for missions essential to the effective implementation of the project.

Travel and accommodation costs are calculated **at a flat rate of 15%**[21] of the reported eligible direct staff costs of the project accepted by the MA. Partners do not have to document or prove that the expenses have been incurred and paid, and no documents confirming that the flat rate corresponds to the reality of the costs will be requested.

Travel and accommodation costs of external experts and service providers fall under external expertise and services cost category listed under point 6 below and must be included in the service contract.

4. Infrastructure and works

[20]The e-form will automatically calculate the percentage at 15% of the direct staff costs.

[21]The e-form will automatically calculate the percentage at 15% of the direct staff costs.

The costs in this category relate to the investment in infrastructure and works, necessary to achieve the objectives of the project.

The eligible expenses under this heading shall be limited to:

(a) purchase of land for an amount up to 10% of the total eligible expenditure for the concerned project; for derelict sites and for those formerly in industrial use which comprise buildings, that limit shall be increased to 15%;
(b) building permits;
(c) building material;
(d) labor;
(e) specialised interventions (such as soil remediation, mine-clearing).

All costs related to meeting standards and obligations related to the nature of the investment (e.g., feasibility studies, environmental impact assessments and assessment of expected impacts of climate change), must be included in the cost category 6- external expertise and service costs, unless they are already integrated in an infrastructure procurement contract.

Partners must guarantee they have or will obtain the necessary building permits in order to avoid any issue preventing the correct and timely implementation of infrastructures and works.

After the closure of the project, certain requirements regarding ownership and durability of investments must be fulfilled, and specific rules apply for partners declaring costs related to investments in infrastructure.

Thus, the Programme contribution shall be repaid if, within five years from the final payment to the project, funded infrastructures or productive investments are subject to any of the following:

(a) a cessation or transfer of a productive activity outside the eligible regions in which it received support;
(b) a change in ownership of an item of infrastructure which gives to a firm or a public body an undue advantage;
(c) a substantial change affecting its nature, objectives or implementation conditions which would result in undermining its original objectives.

5. Equipment costs

Costs in this category relate to equipment purchased (new or second-hand[22]), rented or leased by the project partners, that is not already covered by the cost category 6 - Office and administrative costs, and necessary for the delivery of project activities. No purchase

[22]For second-hand equipment and in accordance with Article 43.2 of the Interreg Regulation (EU) 1059/2021: costs related to second hand equipment may be eligible under the following conditions:(a)no assistance has been received for the original purchase of that equipment from the Interreg funds or the Funds listed in the CPR25;(b)the price does not exceed the generally accepted price on the market in question;(c)it has the technical characteristics necessary for the project and complies with all applicable norms and standards.

of equipment is allowed in the last year of project implementation, unless with the official prior authorization by the MA.

Eligible expenditure under this cost category shall be limited to:

(a) office equipment;

(b) IT hardware and software[23];

(c) furniture and fittings;

(d) laboratory equipment;

(e) machines and instruments;

(f) tools or devices;

(g) vehicles;

(h) other specific equipment needed for the project.

6. External expertise and services costs

The costs in this category correspond to external expertise and services provided by a public or private entity, or by a natural person, other than the partners of the project. External experts and service providers are contracted to carry out certain tasks and activities essential to the implementation of the project. The costs of external expertise and services shall be paid on the basis of contracts or written agreements of equivalent value, supported by tangible and documented invoices or claims issued by the providers of goods/services. Such costs have to be aligned with the current market rates and shall not duplicate costs already budgeted under other categories (e.g., human resources). Eligible expenditure under this cost category shall be limited to:

(a) studies or surveys (e.g., evaluations, strategies, concept notes, design plans, handbooks);

(b) training;

(c) translations;

(d) development, modifications and updates to IT systems and website[24];

(e) promotion, communication, publicity, promotional activities and material or information related to the project;

(f) financial management;

(g) services related to the organisation and implementation of events or meetings

[23]IT equipment for the project staff shall be bought within the 1st year of the implementation.

[24]The project website is provided free of charge by the Programme and is therefore not eligible as such, however the costs related to the management of the project website provided by the Programme are eligible. Only in exceptional cases and upon approval of the Programme communication manager based on a detailed description provided by the project, the design of separate IT tools and platforms could be authorized when lined to specific objective or at the very core of the project.

(including rent, catering and interpretation);

(h) participation in events (e.g., registration fees);

(i) legal consultancy and notarial services, technical and financial expertise, other consultancy and accountancy services specifically related to the project;

(j) intellectual property rights;

(k) verification and/or validation of expenditure carried out by authorized controllers;

(l) provisions of guarantees by a bank or other financial institution where required by the Programme or the national legislation

(m) travel and accommodation for external experts, speakers, chairpersons of meetings and service providers;

(n) other specific expertise and services needed for the project.

4.6.5 Exchange rate

Expenditure paid in any currency other than the euro shall be converted into euro using the monthly accounting exchange rate[25] of the Commission in the month during which that expenditure was submitted for verification.

4.6.6 Sources of funding

In the framework of the Interreg NEXT MED Programme, the Interreg grant funds (including ERDF, IPA and NDICI funds) can represent up to 92% of the project total eligible costs of the project; the remaining at least 8% of the budget is therefore borne by the partners who must ensure the co-financing of their activities by other sources of funding (see below).

The co-financing rate is the same for all partners participating in a project, regardless of their legal status or role within the project.

The part of the expenses not reimbursed by the Interreg grant must be financed by each organization through co-financing, which can take the following forms:

Public co-financing source:

- **own public contribution**: national, regional or local public funding provided directly from the public partners own funds or public equivalent. Internal staff costs can be considered as own contribution.
- **automatic public contribution**: national, regional or local public funding, obtained through co-financing mechanisms specifically established by specific Member States (e.g., Italy, Türkiye and Greece)[26];

[25] Please see: https://commission.europa.eu/funding-tenders/procedures-guidelines-tenders/information-contractors-and-beneficiaries/exchange-rate-inforeuro_en

[26] Concerned partners should contact their National Authority for more information on these co-financing mechanisms.

Private co-financing source:

- **private own contribution**: private financing based on the private partners own funds. Internal staff costs can be considered as own contribution.

The nature and amount of the contribution of each project partner, whether public/public equivalent or private, must be specified in the Application Form.

4.6.7 Non-profit principle

In accordance with article 192(3) of Financial Regulation (Regulation (EU) 1046/2018, grants shall not have the purpose or effect of producing a profit within the framework of the project.

Where a profit is made, the MA shall be entitled to recover the percentage of the profit corresponding to the EU contribution to the eligible costs actually incurred by the partner to carry out the project. Profit is defined as "a surplus of the receipts over the eligible costs approved by the Managing Authority when the request for payment of the balance is made".

4.7 Ineligible proposals

Project proposals concerning only or mainly the following activities are ineligible:

- individual sponsorships for participation in workshops, seminars, conferences, congresses;
- individual scholarships for studies or training courses;
- pure academic and research-oriented activities;
- studies;
- one-off conferences: conferences can only be funded if they form part of a wider range of activities to be implemented in the life-time of the project. For these purposes, preparatory activities for a conference and the publication of the proceedings of the conference do not, in themselves, constitute such "wider activities";
- projects already financed by other European Union initiatives or other donors. **It is necessary to avoid any "double funding"**, to this end the MA may conduct any consultation deemed appropriate.

4.8 Exclusion situations

In order to protect the financial interests of the Union, the Commission shall set up and operate an early-detection and exclusion system[27].

The authorizing officer from the MA shall exclude applicants and partners referred to in Article 135(2) of the Regulation (EU) 2018/1046 from participating in award procedures or

[27]Please refer to the art. 135 of the Regulation (EU, Euratom) 2018/1046.

from being selected for implementing Union funds where those applicants and partners are involved in one or more of the following exclusion situations[28]:

(a) the entity is bankrupt, subject to insolvency or winding-up procedures, its assets are being administered by a liquidator or by a court, it is in an arrangement with creditors, its business activities are suspended, or it is in any analogous situation arising from a similar procedure provided for under Union or national law;
(b) it has been established by a final judgment or a final administrative decision that the entity is in breach of its obligations relating to the payment of taxes or social security contributions in accordance with the applicable law;
(c) it has been established by a final judgment or a final administrative decision that the entity is guilty of grave professional misconduct by having violated applicable laws or regulations or ethical standards of the profession to which the person or entity belongs, or by having engaged in any wrongful conduct which has an impact on its professional credibility where such conduct denotes wrongful intent or gross negligence;
(d) it has been established by a final judgment that the entity is guilty of fraud, corruption, conduct related to a criminal organisation, money laundering or terrorist financing, terrorist offences or offences linked to terrorist activities and child labour or other offences concerning trafficking in human beings;
(e) the entity has shown significant deficiencies in complying with main obligations in the implementation of a legal commitment financed by the budget;
(f) it has been established by a final judgment or final administrative decision that the entity has committed an irregularity within the meaning of Article 1(2) of Council Regulation (EC, Euratom) 2988/95;
(g) it has been established by a final judgment or final administrative decision that the entity has created an entity in a different jurisdiction with the intent to circumvent fiscal, social or any other legal obligations in the jurisdiction of its registered office, central administration or principal place of business;
(h) it has been established by a final judgment or final administrative decision that an entity has been created with the intent referred to in point (g).
(i) moreover, applicants and partners with unsuccessful recoveries in ENPI CBC and ENI CBC MED Programmes and in financed Interreg NEXT MED projects will be excluded from receiving Union funds if the project is selected. This means that the grant will be awarded upon condition of full reimbursement of the debt to the MA or to the creditor organisation before the signature of the grant contract. If the condition is not fulfilled by a given deadline set by the MC when awarding the project, the applicant (or lead partner) shall replace the project partner that has not reimbursed the debts. In the event the unsettled debt concerns the applicant itself, no replacement will be allowed. In such cases the award will be cancelled, and the grant contract will not be signed. Where there is evidence to the knowledge of the

[28]Please refer to the art. 136 of the Regulation (EU, Euratom) No 2018/1046.

MA or NAs that an applicant/ partner is in debt to other programmes supported by Interreg funds, this should be taken into account in the selection process and in the award decision by the MC.

Whenever requested by the authorising officer responsible and where this is necessary to ensure the proper conduct of the procedure, the participant, the subcontractor or the entity on whose capacity a candidate or tenderer intends to rely on shall provide[29]:

- appropriate evidence that it is not in one of the exclusion situations;
- information on natural or legal persons that are members of the administrative, management or supervisory body of the participant or that have powers of representation, decision or control with regard to that participant, including persons and entities within the ownership and control structure and beneficial owners, and appropriate evidence that none of those persons are in one of the exclusion situations;
- appropriate evidence that natural or legal persons that assume unlimited liability for the debts of that participant are not in an exclusion situation.

The duration of exclusion shall not exceed any of the following[30]:

- the duration, if any, set by the final judgement or the final administrative decision of a Member State;
- in the absence of a final judgment or a final administrative decision, five[31] or three[32] years.

A conflict of interest[33] exists where the impartial and objective exercise of the functions of a financial actor or other person is compromised for reasons involving family, emotional life, political or national affinity, economic interest or any other direct or indirect personal interest.

For this reason, all the financial actors, including national authorities at any level, involved in budget implementation under direct, indirect and shared management, including preparatory acts thereto, audit or control, shall not take any action which may bring their own interests into conflict with those of the Union. They shall also take appropriate measures to prevent a conflict of interest from arising in the functions under their responsibility and to address situations which may objectively be perceived as a conflict of interest.

It should also be noted that Lead Partners and partners that have breached the obligations contained in the Grant Contracts and related annexes will be excluded.

[29]Please refer to article 137(2) of the Regulation (EU, Euratom) No 2018/1046.
[30]Please refer to article 139 of the Regulation (EU, Euratom) No 2018/1046.
[31]Five years of exclusion for the cases referred to in point (d) of Article 136(1).
[32]Three years of exclusion for the cases referred to in points (c) and (e) to (h) of Article 136(1).
[33]Please refer to the art 61 of the Regulation (EU, Euratom) No 2018/1046.

4.9 Financial capacity

In order to minimize the risk of difficulties in project implementation, a financial capacity automatic check is performed when assessing project proposals based on the information contained in the e-form and proved by supporting documents to be submitted by private applicants/partners during the eligibility check.

The check is aimed at assessing whether the applicant/partners have stable and sufficient sources of funding to maintain activities throughout the project implementation period and to participate in its funding.

As a general principle, the financial capacity check will have to demonstrate that the private applicant/partner:

• Has sufficient liquidity - is able to cover its short-term commitments;

• Is financially autonomous;

• Is solvent - capable of covering its medium and long-term commitments.

Each private applicant/partner shall fill in a self-assessment grid whose template is part of the e-form.

In case of private companies, the following criteria shall be met:

• Grant rate: the ratio "total grant requested divided by the number of project years" / “capital including reserves” is lower than 1

• Liquidity rate: the ratio "current assets" + “cash and cash equivalents” / "current liabilities" is higher than 1

• Debt rate: the ratio "total debts" / "total assets" is lower than 0.8

• Operating profit rate: there is a positive operational profit

Private companies acting as applicants shall meet 3 out of the 4 criteria above in order to be funded; in case this condition is not met, the proposal will be rejected on this sole basis.

Private companies acting as partners not meeting 3 out of the 4 criteria above will be considered at risk; countermeasures may include the compulsory issuing of a financial guarantee for the benefit of the applicant before the signature of the Grant Contract.

In case of private non-profit partners (e.g.: NGOs), the following criteria shall be respected:

• Liquidity rate: the ratio "current assets" + “cash and cash equivalents” / "current liabilities" is higher than 1

• Debt rate: the ratio "total debts" / "total assets" is lower than 0.8

• Grant rate: the ratio "total grant requested divided by the number of project years" / "subsidies" is lower than 1

Private no profit organisations acting as applicants shall meet 2 out of the 3 criteria above in order to be funded; in case this condition is not met, the proposal will be rejected on this sole basis.

Private no profit organisations acting as partners not meeting 2 out of the 3 criteria above will be considered at risk; countermeasures may include the compulsory issuing of a financial guarantee for the benefit of the applicant before the signature of the Grant Contract.

If the application passes to STEP2 (see chapter 5), the private applicants/partners shall be asked to deliver the supporting documents listed under par. 5.4.2 (i.e.: balance sheets, audit reports etc.) which were used to fill-in the self-assessment financial capacity grid. The MA/JS will verify the correctness of the calculations reported in the self-assessment grid, and the compliance with the documents provided. In case of mismatched/not consistent data, the MA/JS may require clarification from the applicant.

In case of failure to provide the requested clarification within the set deadline, the financial assessment will be completed by taking the most prudent approach, i.e., the criteria concerned will be considered as "not met".

5. Evaluation

5.1 Evaluation process

Project proposals are submitted in one stage.

Only the proposals meeting the following pre-conditions will be considered for the evaluation:

1. It has been fully submitted in all its parts by using the online system.
2. The deadline set out in the call for proposals is met.
3. It is drawn up in English or French.

The evaluation process is performed in two different steps.

STEP 1

A. Administrative check (compliance with criteria reported in Section 4)

B. Operational Evaluation:

- Relevance
- Quality of Design
- Partnership Operational and Financial Capacity
- Effectiveness
- Sustainability
- Cost Effectiveness
- Horizontal Principles

STEP 2

A. Strategic Evaluation:

- Relevance (criteria 1.1; 1.2 and 1.4)

B. Verification of the eligibility of Applicants' and partners' organisations.

5.2 Methodology and scoring

When performing the assessment, a common methodology and range of scores will be used. The scoring system is based on a total maximum score of 100 points and will be assessed to what extent each proposal meets the award criteria. This evaluation will be based on the information provided in the e-form only. Each criterion will be given a score between 1 and 4 by the external evaluators (for STEP 1) and by the members of the Assessment Board (for STEP 2). The evaluation framework corresponds to the following rating:

1. **Poor.** The proposal fails to address the criterion under examination. The criterion is addressed in an inadequate manner, or there are serious inherent weaknesses more than strengths.
2. **Adequate.** The proposal shows adequate features regarding the evaluation criterion although some notable weaknesses are detected. Improvements would be necessary.
3. **Good.** The proposal addresses the criterion very well, although certain improvements are still possible. Identified features demonstrate a good overall quality.
4. **Very good.** The proposal successfully addresses all relevant aspects of the criterion. Any shortcomings are assessed as minor.

Decimal scores or zero cannot be attributed.

AWARD CRITERIA	MAXIMUM SCORE
1. RELEVANCE	24 POINTS
2. QUALITY OF DESIGN	16 POINTS
3. PARTNERSHIP OPERATIONAL AND FINANCIAL CAPACITY	12 POINTS
4. EFFECTIVENESS	20 POINTS
5. SUSTAINABILITY	12 POINTS
6. COST EFFECTIVENESS	12 POINTS
7. HORIZONTAL PRINCIPLES	4 POINTS
TOTAL	**100 POINTS**

For each award criterion, the evaluation grid includes specific sub-sections scored from 1 to 4 points. The total score of the evaluation grid is the sum of the totals for each section.

The **Relevance** will be firstly assessed during STEP 1 by the External Evaluators (EE) and its score (max. 12 points) will be transferred to STEP 2.

In STEP 2 "Strategic Assessment" the Assessment Board will assess criteria 1.1, 1.2, and 1.4 of 'RELEVANCE' and total score (max. 12 points) will be added to the one resulting from STEP 1 evaluation.

After STEP 2, a proposal may receive a score of a maximum of 100 points.

Two minimum quality thresholds will be applied during the evaluation process. Proposals failing to meet these minimum thresholds will be automatically excluded from the evaluation process:

- After STEP 1 "Operational evaluation", proposals shall meet a **minimum score of 75 out of 88 points** to be admitted to Step 2 of the evaluation process;

- After STEP 2 "Strategic evaluation", proposals shall meet a **minimum score of 16 out of 24 points for RELEVANCE**.

The Assessment Board (AB) - set up by the MC – is composed of one representative and one substitute for each participating country and collectively bears the responsibility of carrying out the evaluation of project proposals and supervising and reviewing the outcome of the work carried out by internal and external evaluators. Moreover, the Assessment Board will assess the proposals having reached STEP 2 of the evaluation by assessing the strategic added value of the proposal and scoring an additional 12 points to criteria 1.1, 1.2 and 1.4 of 'RELEVANCE'.

The officers of the Managing Authority, the Joint Secretariat and the Branch Offices will act as internal assessors to perform the administrative check, while the external evaluators, in charge of the operational evaluations, will be recruited by the Managing Authority through a call for expression of interest.

In particular, the AB approves the evaluation reports after each STEP of the evaluation and decides on the short-listed project proposals to be submitted to the MC for approval to pass to STEP 2 and, finally, for a grant award decision. Each member has equal voting rights, and he/she is appointed on a functional basis. He/she must be impartial and free from conflict of interest and possess the technical and administrative capacities necessary to give an informed opinion on the proposals and to assess the strategic added value of the proposals.

5.3 STEP 1

5.3.1 Administrative check

All proposals digitally submitted will be first assessed as regards their compliance with the requirements detailed in section 4.

If the proposal does not meet the eligibility criteria, the proposal shall be rejected on this sole basis.

Only the proposals passing the administrative check by complying with all the criteria included in the **"Administrative Checklist"** will be considered in the following evaluation steps (see table below).

BEFORE SUBMITTING YOUR PROPOSAL, PLEASE CHECK THAT EACH OF THE FOLLOWING POINTS IS COMPLETED AND RESPECTS THE FOLLOWING CRITERIA FOR THE APPLICATION FORM:	**To be filled in by the Applicant**	
	Yes	**No**
ADMINISTRATIVE CHECK		
1. All requirements set out in chapter 4 are fully met by the proposal (automated checks performed by the e-form)		
2. The electronic or scanned version of the Declaration by the Applicant has been uploaded onto the online application system. It is on headed paper and/or stamped, dated and signed[34].		
3. All requested mandatory information is included in the Declaration by the Applicant.		
4. The electronic or scanned version of all the Partner Statements by the partners has been uploaded onto the system and they are: - on headed paper and/or stamped; - dated; - signed.		
5. All requested mandatory information is included in the Partner Statements.		
6. If an Advisory Partner is foreseen in the proposal, the electronic or scanned version of the Advisory Partner Statement has been uploaded onto the online application system: - on headed paper and/or stamped; - dated; - signed.		
7. All requested mandatory information in the Advisory Partner Statement is included.		
8. If an international organisation is foreseen in the proposal, the electronic or scanned version of the International Organisation Statement(s) has/have been uploaded onto the online application system: - on headed paper and/or stamped; - dated; - signed.		

[34] When available, qualified electronic signatures meeting the requirement of Regulation (EU) 910/2014 are highly recommended.

9. All requested mandatory information in the International Organisation Statement(s) is included.		
10. If associated partners are foreseen in the proposal, the electronic or scanned version of the Associated Partner(s) Statement(s) has/have been uploaded onto the online application system: - on headed paper and/or stamped; - dated; - signed.		
11. All requested mandatory information in the Associated Partners Statements is included.		
12. The State Aid self-assessment check grid (for both Applicant and each partner) has been filled in according to the format provided by the Programme and uploaded onto the e-form.		
13. Environmental screening: Section 3 of the e-Form is filled in (only for proposals under Programme Specific Objectives under Priority 1 and 2).		

Any inconsistency or non-compliance identified during the administrative check will lead to the rejection of the proposal. However, in case of minor errors or inconsistencies in the e-form and/or submitted documents, following the notification by the Managing Authority, Applicants will be given 14 calendar days to provide clarifications.

Clarifications will only be requested when the provided information is unclear, thus preventing the Managing Authority from conducting an objective assessment. **Missing documents will not be requested and will lead to the rejection of the proposal.**

The same applies in case the MA requests to the Applicant specific information to comply with the Environmental screening. In fact, upon the evaluation of the MA of *Section 1.6.2 Environmental sustainability*, regardless of the Priority being addressed, any Applicant may be required to fill in *Section 3. Environmental Screening*.

Clarification will be requested only via email to the Applicant's contact person indicated in the e-form. Failure to provide clarifications within the set deadline will lead to the rejection of the proposal on this sole basis.

The Managing Authority is not responsible for wrong email addresses indicated in the e-form and/or impossibility to deliver the email for any technical reason.

The Operational and Authorising Unit of the MA, with the support of the internal assessors, is responsible for verifying the administrative compliance. The outcomes of the administrative check, approved by the Head of the Operational and Authorising Unit, will be published on the Programme website together with the final results.

5.3.2 Operational evaluation

All proposals passing the administrative check will be assessed on the basis of **22 Award Criteria** of which one (criterion 1.4 of Relevance) will be assessed only by the Assessment Board in Step 2.

Each award criterion is further specified by a series of questions as outlined in the evaluation grid below. These must be considered by external evaluators when assessing the proposal.

1. RELEVANCE (max. score: 24)	Max sub-score	Reference Application Form
1.1 Justification: Does the proposal clearly justify the need for the project and explain how it addresses key sustainable tourism challenges in the Interreg NEXT MED cooperation area, as identified in the Terms of Reference of the call? Does it demonstrate a clear contribution to the Programme Priority and Specific Objective under which it is submitted?	8: 4 (EE in Step 1) + 4 (AB in Step 2)	Sections 2 "Summary" and 3.1.1
1.2 Transnational added value and impact: Does the proposal clearly demonstrate the transnational added value of the project? Does it justify the need for cooperation between the participating territories to transfer and adapt the selected output(s) and achieve the project objectives? Are the expected benefits relevant and tangible for all participating territories in addressing common sustainable tourism challenges and needs?	8: 4 (EE in Step 1) + 4 (AB in Step 2)	Section 3.1.2
1.3 Needs and quantification of target groups/final beneficiaries: Does the proposal appropriately define the needs of the target groups and final beneficiaries from the sustainable tourism challenges point of view? Are the involved target groups and final beneficiaries clearly defined, quantified, and strategically chosen?	4	Section 3.1.3
1.4 Synergies and complementarities: Are synergies/complementarities[35] with other policies, strategies and/or initiatives, particularly those related to sustainable tourism, well demonstrated and likely to be exploited? To what extent is the project likely to contribute to broader policies and strategies at international, EU, national, or regional levels?	4 (AB in Step 2 only)	Section 3.1.4.a

[35] See the document "Overview of main policies, strategies and initiatives having synergies and complementarities with Interreg NEXT MED Programme"

2. QUALITY OF DESIGN (max. score: 16)	Max sub-score	Reference Application Form
2.1 Transfer and adaptation methodology: Does the proposal clearly and coherently explain how the selected output(s) will be transferred, adapted, tested, or further exploited across the participating territories, demonstrating a realistic, feasible, and context-appropriate approach? Furthermore, does the proposal introduce innovative methods or approaches to enhance the adaptation, transfer, or use of existing results/outputs in the field of sustainable tourism?	4	Sections 3.1.4.b and 3.2.1
2.2 Clear, realistic, and achievable objectives: Are the project's Specific Objective(s) and expected results clearly defined, realistic, and achievable? Will they effectively contribute to the Overall Objective? Are the project outputs and activities well-designed and aligned with the Specific Objectives?	4	Sections 3.2.2, 4.1, 4.3 and 4.4
2.3 Consistence with needs of target groups/final beneficiaries: Is the project intervention logic (objectives, expected results, outputs and activities) consistent with the needs of the target groups and final beneficiaries? In particular, is the project likely to deliver tangible support and benefits to the target groups and final beneficiaries?	4	Sections 3.1.3 and 3.2.3
2.4 Indicators: Are the indicators (both at expected Result/s and outputs level) realistically quantified and achievable with the planned resources (time, partners and budget)? Are they coherent with the Programme indicators?	4	Section 3.2.4

3. PARTNERSHIP OPERATIONAL AND FINANCIAL CAPACITY (max. score: 12)	Max sub-score	Reference Application Form
3.1 Lead Partner and partners' capacity, expertise and experience: Does the Lead Partner demonstrate the adequate technical experience and capacity to coordinate, manage and implement the project (financial, human resources and thematic expertise in order to ensure the involvement of the chosen stakeholders)? Do the partners have specific competence in the thematic field(s) and experience in initiatives related to sustainable tourism? Do Partners have stable and sufficient financial capacity to ensure the cash-flow all through the project implementation?	4	Sections 3.3.2, 3.3.3, 3.3.4, 3.3.5 and 3.3.6
3.2 Associated partners: To what extent does the proposal ensure the meaningful involvement of associated partners with demonstrated added value, particularly in providing relevant knowledge and contributing to the access, reuse, and replication of valuable outputs, especially those included in the common MMM database?	4	Section 3.3.7

3.3 Consistence of roles and tasks: Are the roles and tasks of the Lead Partner and partners clearly defined and appropriately distributed? Do all partners actively contribute to the project's implementation? Is the integration of their expertise and experience, along with their respective levels of responsibility in territorial governance and in the sustainable tourism sector, appropriate for the project's scope and expected results?	4	Section 3.3.8

4. EFFECTIVENESS (max. score: 20)	Max sub-score	Reference Application Form
4.1 Management, coordination, monitoring: Is the proposed management and coordination methodology clear and effective to ensure the achievement of the project objectives? Does the project foresee specific tools and resources to ensure proper monitoring of the execution of the activities, risk management, and achievement of project objectives and results?	4	Section 3.4.1, and 4.1 – WP Management
4.2 Work plan: Is the work plan clear, feasible and accurately planned in terms of human, financial and other resources? Is the time schedule realistic with logically sequenced activities and outputs likely to be implemented and delivered?	4	Sections 3.4.2, 4.3 and 4.4
4.3 Capitalisation: Does the proposal clearly identify the rationale for transferring, adapting or scaling up of the existing output(s)/result(s) to be transferred and explain its/their effectiveness for the territories involved in addressing the identified sustainable tourism challenges?	4	Sections 3.1.4.a and 3.4.3
4.4 Communication: Is the communication strategy coherent, well-designed, and cost-effective to reach and engage relevant stakeholders in the sustainable tourism sector (e.g. public authorities, tourism operators, local communities, media and policy-makers)? Do the planned activities effectively promote awareness of sustainable tourism practices, and support advocacy and dissemination? Furthermore, are they likely to ensure strong visibility of project results among target groups and final beneficiaries, as well as wider audiences, including the general public, media, and relevant institutions?	8 (EE in Step 1 counts double)	Sections 3.4.4 and 4 – WP Communication

5. SUSTAINABILITY (max. score: 12)	Max Sub-score	Reference Application Form
5.1 Levels of sustainability: To which extent is the proposed project sustainable:	4	Section 3.5.1

➢ *financially* (how will the results be financed after the end of the project?) ➢ *technically* (will the project outputs continue to be functioning/used after its end?) ➢ *environmentally*[36] (does the project foresee specific eco-friendly measures for its daily activities - especially concerning events/meetings, production of communication material, etc. – that reduce the overall ecological footprint of the intervention – concept of greening project implementation?)		
5.2 Long-term impact: Is the proposal likely to generate a lasting effect in addressing the identified sustainable tourism challenges? Does it show potential to influence or improve policies, strategies, or stakeholder practices beyond the project's lifetime?	4	Section 3.5.2
5.3 Continued use of results: Does the project foresee concrete measures to maintain, replicate, or scale its outputs after completion? Does the project foresee durable cooperation initiatives (e.g. agreements, networks, or follow-up actions) to support the further use and development of results after project completion?	4	Section 3.5.3

6. COST-EFFECTIVENESS (max. score: 12)	Max Sub-score	Reference Application Form
6.1 Budget: Does the project budget appear realistic, consistent and proportionate to the proposed work plan, project outputs and project's contribution to programme indicators aimed for? Is the budget transparent and well-designed?	4	Sections 3.6.1 and5 (budget for the project and financial plan)
6.2 Costs vs results: Is the ratio and balance between the estimated costs and the expected results satisfactory? Is the need for engaging external expertise justified? Are the costs necessary and properly justified?	4	Sections 3.6.2, 4.2 and 5 (budget for the project and financial plan)
6.3 Budget breakdown: Is the budget properly allocated during the time and among partners? Is it logically distributed along the duration of the project to ensure the timely delivery of the outputs and the management of the project cash-flow?	4	Sections 3.6.3, 4.2 and 5 (budget for the project and financial plan)

7. HORIZONTAL PRINCIPLES (max. score: 4)	Max sub-score	Reference Application Form

[36] See the document "Guide for greening project implementation".

7.1 To what extent does the proposal take into account and will ensure compliance, during the implementation phase, with the following horizontal principles: ➢ respect of fundamental rights ➢ promotion of gender equality ➢ prevention of discrimination including accessibility for people with disabilities ➢ promotion of sustainable development ➢ compliance with the "do no significant harm" principle (where applicable)	4	Section 3.7

The external evaluators will submit their evaluation grids through the on-line evaluation system (with comments to justify the scores provided) according to the evaluation methodology described in the Guidelines for Projects Evaluations approved by the MC for this call for proposals.

All proposals having passed the minimum quality threshold will be automatically admitted to STEP 2.

5.4 STEP 2

5.4.1 Strategic evaluation

By using the same scoring methodology previously described, the members of the Assessment Board will assess the shortlisted proposals as regards their **strategic relevance** on the basis of **3 Award Criteria.**

The score of these 3 award criteria of the "RELEVANCE" section will be added automatically to the score of STEP 1 in the final evaluation grid.

1. RELEVANCE (max. score: 12)	Max Sub-score	Reference Application Form
1.1 Justification: Does the proposal clearly justify the need for the project and explain how it addresses key sustainable tourism challenges in the Interreg NEXT MED cooperation area, as identified in the Terms of Reference of the call? Does it demonstrate a clear contribution to the Programme Priority and Specific Objective under which it is submitted?	4 (AB)	Section 1.1
1.2 Transnational added value and impact: Does the proposal clearly demonstrate the transnational added value of the project? Does it justify the need for cooperation between the participating territories to transfer and adapt the selected output(s) and achieve the project objectives? Are the expected benefits relevant and tangible for all participating territories in addressing common sustainable tourism challenges and needs?	4 (AB)	Section 3.1.2

1.4 Synergies and complementarities: Are synergies/complementarities with other policies, strategies and/or initiatives, particularly those related to sustainable tourism, well demonstrated and likely to be exploited? To what extent is the project likely to contribute to broader policies and strategies at international, EU, national, or regional levels?	4 (AB only)	Section 3.1.4.a

Each proposal must be assessed on its own merits without regard to other proposals or views of any party. Based on the "four eyes principle" **each proposal will be assessed by two members of the AB for the 3 criteria 1.1, 1.2 and 1.4 ("RELEVANCE") included in the Evaluation grid**. Indeed, the final score for each criterion is defined considering the arithmetical average between the scores assigned by the two members.

5.4.2 Eligibility of Applicant and Partner organisations

The MA will request, at any stage of the evaluation process, to provide the supporting documents listed below, to check if Applicants and Partners organizations fulfill the requirements listed under par. 4.3, as declared in the Application Form and in the mandatory declarations.

Applicants will be requested to provide the following documents:

1. **The statutes or articles of association** of the **applicant** organization[37] and the **partner organisations**[38] proving their legal status. This obligation does not apply to international organisations having signed a framework agreement with the European Commission.[39] Applicants that have passed the eligibility process under previous calls of the Interreg NEXT MED/ENI CBC MED programme may refer to the statutes/official documents already submitted, provided that they did not change their legal status. This option will be enabled only upon the decision of the MA. In addition, in case of doubts as regards the exact location of the applicant/partners a national registration document could also be requested.
2. **Composition of the Management Board** or other relevant documents (where appropriate) proving that the person who signed the declarations was legally empowered to sign such documents.
3. **Partnership Agreement** signed by the Applicant and all Partners (**scanned version**). The original document will be requested in case the application is selected for a grant;

[37] Where the Applicant and/or (a) partner(s) is a public body created by a law, a copy of the said law must be provided.
[38] When the Council of Europe Convention n. 124 on the Recognition of the Legal Personality of International Non-Governmental Organizations is applicable, nationality shall be determined on the basis of the official evidence issued by the country concerned under the said Convention.
http://conventions.coe.int/Treaty/Commun/QueVoulezVous.asp?NT=124&CM=8&DF=07/03/2011&CL=ENG
[39] A list of the relevant framework agreements is available at the following address:
http://ec.europa.eu/europeaid/work/procedures/financing/international_organisations/other_international_organisations/index_en.htm

4. **The external audit official report**[40] made by chartered auditors of the applicant's annual accounts for the last 2 financial years available (see Note on the Financial Capacity published with the call for more details). In the report, the data concerning Financial Capacity (i.e., for companies the Total Annual Income, Net income (profit and loss), Own funds and Total liabilities) have to be pointed out and/or highlighted.
5. **The external audit official report** of all partners organizations[41], made by chartered auditors of the partners' annual accounts for the last 2 financial years, if available (see Note on the Financial Capacity published with the call for more details). Those entities which are not requested by national law to produce such official annual reports, will have to provide the annual accounts for the last 2 financial years signed by the legal representative. In the report, the data concerning Financial Capacity (i.e., for companies the Total Annual Income, Net income (profit and loss), Own funds and Total liabilities) have to be pointed out and/or highlighted.

In addition, the original (hard copies) of the Declaration by the Applicant, the Partner Statements, Advisory Partner Statement, the International Organisations Declaration(s) and other relevant declarations already submitted electronically with the e-form[42] may be requested. It is therefore highly recommended to keep all the original versions submitted within the application form.

When a document is not written in English or French, a courtesy (unofficial) translation of its relevant parts shall be attached.

If any of the supporting documents listed above is not provided within the deadline indicated by the MA, the proposals will be rejected on this sole basis.

The applicant/partner assumes full responsibility for the content of the documents and the accuracy of the translation.

In case of minor errors or inconsistencies in the submitted documents, Applicants will be given 14 calendar days to provide clarifications or integrations.

The legal status of the partners located in their territories will be confirmed by the relevant National authorities of each participating country.

If an Applicant or a partner proves to be ineligible, the whole proposal will be rejected on this sole basis.

[40]This does not apply to public administrations, public bodies (including bodies governed by public law) and international organisations.
[41]See note 30.
[42]Original (hard) copies of declarations and documents will not be requested in case these are signed through qualified electronic signatures meeting the requirements of Regulation (EU) 910/2014, meaning based on a qualified certificate issued in one EU Member State, uniquely linked to the signatory and capable of identifying the signatory. Equivalent electronic signatures issued in non-EU Member States may be considered if they meet the EU standards.

5.5 Environmental screening and State aid assessment

Based on the outcomes of this screening, all proposals will be required to list any project output(s) with a potential environmental impact, and its (their) possible positive and/or negative direct or indirect effect(s). This information is part of the mandatory "Environmental Checklists" sections of the Application Form.

Moreover, those proposals submitted under certain Programme Specific Objectives (1.1, 1.2, 2.2, 2.4) will be requested to provide additional information, as they were identified among those which can potentially have an environmental impact.

Priority 1 - A more competitive and smarter Mediterranean

- **Specific Objective (S.O) 1.1** - Developing and enhancing research and innovation capacities and the uptake of advanced technologies
- **S.O 1.2** - Enhancing sustainable growth and competitiveness of SMEs and job creation in SMEs, including by productive investments

Priority 2 - A greener, low-carbon transitioning towards a net zero carbon economy and resilient Mediterranean

- **S.O 2.2** - Promoting climate change adaptation and disaster risk prevention, resilience, taking into account ecosystem-based approaches
- **S.O 2.4** - Promoting the transition to a circular and resource efficient economy

In any case, the MA could require further information (including checklist A) also to any proposal submitted under other priorities. Based on the information included in the "Environmental screening" – checklist A, applicants may be immediately requested to fill in also the "Environmental effects" - checklist B (e.g., in case an infrastructure component is foreseen).

Since article 22.4 (j) of the Interreg Regulation requires to perform an assessment of expected impact of climate change for investments in infrastructure with an expected lifespan of at least five years, Checklist C will allow the assessment of its compliance also in line with the climate resilience definition: the assessment should tackle how the climate change may harm the infrastructures and how they have to adapt to these changes.

"Do no significant harm" (DNSH) principle

As per the **EU Taxonomy Regulation (EU) 2020/852** and the **"do no significant harm (DNSH)" principle**, a dedicated assessment has been carried out during the programming phase and before the programme adoption by the Commission in order to prevent the inclusion of activities or types of actions in the programmes that could do significant harm, in accordance with the **art. 10 of the Regulation (EU) 2021/1060 (Common Provisions Regulation – CPR)** that states "*Reflecting the importance of tackling climate change in line with the Union's commitments to implement the Paris Agreement and the United Nations Sustainable Development Goals, the Funds should contribute to the mainstreaming of climate action into policies" supporting "activities that would respect the climate and environmental standards and*

priorities of the Union and would do no significant harm to environmental objectives within the meaning of Article 17 of Regulation (EU) 2020/852 of the European Parliament and of the Council".

The **DNSH principle** focuses specifically on the assessment of the environmental impact of the Interreg NEXT MED Programme considering the six environmental objectives covered by the Taxonomy Regulation:

1. climate change mitigation
2. climate change adaptation
3. sustainable use and protection of water and marine resources
4. circular economy
5. pollution prevention and control
6. protection and restoration of biodiversity and ecosystems

Climate Resilience

Climate resilience is defined as the "capacity of social, economic and ecosystems to cope with a hazardous event or trend or disturbance" by "responding or re-organising in ways that maintain their essential function, identity and structure while also maintaining the capacity for adaptation, learning and transformation[43]". Its pillar is the adaptation to climate change and its assessment should tackle "how the climate change may harm the infrastructure[44]" and how the infrastructure has to adapt to these changes.

Infrastructure is usually long-lasting and may be exposed for many years to a changing climate with increasingly adverse and frequent extreme weather and climate impacts. Under the supervision and control of the concerned public authorities, climate vulnerability and risk assessment help identify the significant climate risks, making the basis for identifying, appraising and implementing targeted adaptation measures. This will help reduce the residual risk to an acceptable level[45].

The project promoter should provide to the public authorities all required information to verify that the acceptable level of residual climate risks has been set with due regard to all legal, technical or other requirements. It is recommended to integrate climate vulnerability and risk assessment from the beginning of the project development process for providing

[43] IPCC, 2022: *Summary for Policymakers* [H.-O. Pörtner, D.C. Roberts, E.S. Poloczanska, K. Mintenbeck, M. Tignor, A. Alegría, M. Craig, S. Langsdorf, S. Löschke, V. Möller, A. Okem (eds.)]. In: *Climate Change 2022: Impacts, Adaptation and Vulnerability. Contribution of Working Group II to the Sixth Assessment Report of the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change* [H.-O. Pörtner, D.C. Roberts, M. Tignor, E.S. Poloczanska, K. Mintenbeck, A. Alegría, M. Craig, S. Langsdorf, S. Löschke, V. Möller, A. Okem, B. Rama (eds.)]. Cambridge University Press, Cambridge, UK and New York, NY, USA, pp. 3–33.
[44] TESIM, 2022: *Investments and climate resilience in Interreg NEXT programmes - Legal requirements*, page 1.
[45] Official Journal of the European Union - Commission Notice, 2021: *Technical guidance on the climate proofing of infrastructure in the period 2021-2027 - par. 3.3 "Adaptation to climate change (climate resilience)"*, page 28.

the broadest range of possibilities for selecting the optimal adaptation options[46]. Article 22.4 (j) of the Interreg Regulation requires as a matter of fact to perform an assessment of the expected impact of climate change for investments in infrastructure with an expected lifespan of at least five years[47].

Monitoring provisions

Article 10 of SEA Directive (Directive 2001/42/EC) specifies that monitoring provisions shall be prescribed in the context of a Strategic Environmental Assessment (SEA) to monitor the significant environmental effects of the implementation of plans and programmes in order, inter alia, to identify at an early-stage unforeseen adverse effects and to be able to undertake appropriate remedial actions.

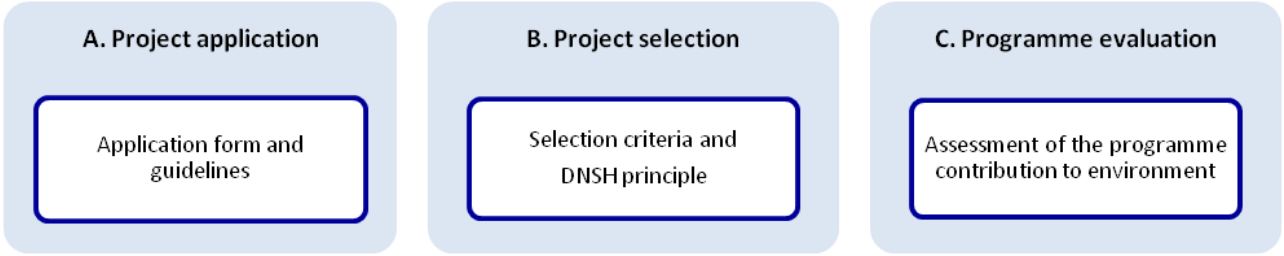
As regards the Interreg NEXT MED Programme 2021–2027, no significant impacts can be expected that could negatively affect the environment. The programme has a limited budget and does not aim to support heavy investments. Instead, it focuses on intangible or 'soft' actions and small-scale investments. Any potential minor and reversible impact (e.g., related to small-scale infrastructure projects) cannot be predicted by the screening process at this stage, and will widely depend on the type of project and location. In some cases, the project may also be subject to a mandatory environmental assessment process according to EU and national legislation.

Nevertheless, some monitoring provisions and arrangements can be proposed to support the programme in preventing and minimising any potential negative impacts on the environment and emphasising the positive ones.

Within the SEA context, monitoring provisions and arrangements are suggested to be considered during the following phases:

Relevant phases for monitoring provisions

Source: Sanopoulos 2022



Monitoring levels

Overall, four levels of environmental screening have been established as follows:

[46] Official Journal of the European Union - Commission Notice, 2021: *Technical guidance on the climate proofing of infrastructure in the period 2021-2027 - par. 3.3 "Adaptation to climate change (climate resilience)"*, pp 28-29.
[47] Official Journal of the European Union, 2021: *Article 22.4 (j), Regulation (EU) 2021/1059 of the European Parliament and of the Council on specific provisions for the European territorial cooperation goal (Interreg) supported by the European Regional Development Fund and external financing instruments*.

1. **First Level - Environmental sustainability**

- During the contract negotiation, all proposals are required to identify the output(s) which might have a positive/negative impact on the environment.
- The MA reviews the content and may ask for further information/documents, as the case may be.

2. **Second Level - Environmental screening "Checklist A"**

- Proposals submitted under one of the following Specific Objectives 1.1, 1.2, 2.2 and 2.4 are also required to fill in the Checklist A.
- The MA may ask that this checklist is filled in for any proposal submitted under other priorities.

3. **Third Level - Environmental effects "Checklist B"**

- Proposals needing a greater level of assessment are required to draft Checklist B, based on the information provided in the boxes of Checklist A (Yes/No column).
- Based on the information provided, the MA may require filling in Checklist C.

4. **Fourth Level - Environmental Report "Checklist C"**

- Proposals needing a more detailed assessment are required to submit the Checklist C, that is for all the projects including an infrastructure of at least 1M Euro or/and the projects including investments in infrastructure with a lifespan of 5 years or more.

State aid assessment

Based on the information contained in the application form and in the self-assessment state aid check-grid, all proposals will go through an evaluation on the relevance of project activities in order to verify the compliance with the State aid applicable regulation.

The assessment will be carried out by independent external assessors contracted by the MA in order to establish if there are any activities to be considered as relevant for public funding granted to State Aid according to art. 20 of the 651/2014 General Block Exemption Regulation (GBER) as amended in June 2023 (Commission Regulation (EU) 2023/1315 of 23 June 2023 amending Regulation (EU) No 651/2014).[48]

[48]For details on the conditions to be met on state aid, please refer to the "note on state aid" published with this call for proposals.

5.6 Notification of the Monitoring Committee decision

Based on the verification of the supporting documents performed by the Managing Authority and according to the ranking lists, the Assessment Board will prepare its recommendations in the Evaluation Report, including a table per Specific Objective listing the proposals ranked according to their score and within the respective available financial envelope as well as a reserve list following the same criteria.

The Evaluation report is transmitted to the Monitoring Committee by the MA.

The Monitoring Committee makes the final decision on the selection of projects based on the ranking list proposed by the **Assessment Board and in line with Art 22(4) of the Interreg Regulation**. Whenever the Monitoring Committee decides not to follow all or part of the recommendations of the Assessment Board, it shall justify its decision in writing.

The Managing Authority will publish the final results of the evaluation process on the Programme website. The publication shall also be deemed to constitute notification to the Applicants. Applicants which proposals have not been awarded for funding may request further details on the evaluation outcomes by sending a request to the Managing Authority.

Following the decision to award a grant, the Lead Partner will be invited to sign a contract based on the Grant Contract model. By signing the Declaration, the Applicant declares to accept, in case a grant is awarded, the conditions as laid down in the Grant Contract.

5.7 Appeal procedure

Any complaint related to the assessment and selection of the project proposals shall be addressed by the Applicant, on behalf of the entire partnership, to the MA within 30 calendar days from the notification of the **final results**. Complaints received from project partners individually shall not be taken into consideration.

Applicants must duly justify their complaints, specifying what failures or mistakes have been assumed to have happened and include clear reference to the Programme documents.

The complaint can only make reference to:

a) Outcomes of the eligibility check;

b) The respect of the assessment procedure.

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

The MA shall be in charge of verifying the admissibility of the request from the formal point of view. Should the Managing Authority find the Applicant's complaint admissible, or should it not be able to settle the dispute with the Applicant, the case will be forwarded to the MC, which shall examine it and provide its position on the complaint.

The outcome of the MC decision shall be communicated in writing the MA to the Applicant. The decisions made after each complaint procedures will be final, binding to all parties and not subject to any further complaint proceedings within the Programme if the complaint is based on the same reasons.

Against the final decision an official litigation procedure can be started according to the Italian legislation within 60 calendar days from the notification of the results. In this case the legal proceedings will take place in Italy (Administrative Court of Cagliari/"*Tribunale Amministrativo Regionale*"). Finally, an extraordinary appeal to the President of the Italian republic could be lodged within 120 days from the notification of the results.

5.8 Indicative timetable of the selection procedure

This timetable has been designed based on the hypothesis of receiving 150 project proposals.

Procedure	Indicative n. of months
1. STEP1 - Administrative check and operational evaluation	2
2. Assessment Board analysis and approval of STEP 1 results	
3. Monitoring Committee analysis and decision on projects to be admitted to STEP 2	
4. Strategic evaluation carried out by the Assessment Board	1
5. Submission of mandatory supporting documents only for pre-selected Applicants (any time if requested)	
6. Check of the mandatory supporting documents and final eligibility check in parallel with the environmental checks	2
7. Assessment Board analysis and approval of STEP 2 results with the recommendation of project proposals to be awarded by Monitoring Committee	
8. Monitoring Committee analysis and decision	
9. Information to Applicants (through the Programme website) on STEP 2 results	
TOTAL = 5 months	

5.9 Conditions applicable to project implementation

Following the decision to award a grant, the Lead Partner will be offered to sign a contract based on the Grant Contract model. By signing the relevant Declaration, the Lead Partner declares to accept, in case a grant is awarded, the contractual conditions as laid down in the Grant Contract. Detailed provisions on project management and reporting are contained in the Project Implementation Manual available at https://www.interregnextmed.eu/resources-for-implementation/