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South Baltic



▲ **INNOVATIVE**

▲ **SUSTAINABLE**

▲ **ATTRACTIVE**

▲ **ACTIVE**

Interreg South Baltic Programme 2021–2027

**Call for external quality experts
to support the assessment of project proposals
submitted to the Interreg South Baltic Programme
in the funding period 2021-2027**

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1 BACKGROUND

The Interreg V-A Poland-Denmark-Germany-Lithuania-Sweden Programme (Interreg South Baltic Programme 2021-2027) has been established based on Regulation (EU) No. 2021/1058, Regulation (EU) No. 2021/1059 and Regulation (EU) No. 2021/1060. The strategic Programme document, called Cooperation Programme (CP), has been approved by the European Commission on 4 October 2022.

The Interreg South Baltic Programme 2021-2027 enters a new era of multilateral cross-border cooperation between the coastal regions of five EU Member States: Germany, Denmark, Sweden, Lithuania, and Poland. For the Programming period of 2021-2027 the Programme sets a vision of its development direction as “United by the sea into action for blue and green future – Innovative, Sustainable, Attractive and Active South Baltic”. The total European Regional Development Funding (ERDF) allocated to the Programme for the period 2021-2027 is 87,7 million EUR.

The Programme should, hence, play a considerable role in strengthening the development efforts of the involved regions, while contributing to an integrated development of the entire Programme area by supporting cross-border cooperation projects with mutual benefit, tangible outputs and concrete results.

Four Programme Priorities and seven Programme Measures (PM) were defined by the Interreg South Baltic Programme 2021–2027 to be addressed within the cross-border cooperation:

PRIORITY 1 - Innovative South Baltic

- **Programme Measure 1.1 Digitalising the region**

The project activities should propose innovative approaches including digitalisation of public services and increasing the level of digitalisation of different sectors to integrate services and strengthen connectivity within the South Baltic area. It is expected that proposals will support development of digital skills and boost the development especially of sectors related to the blue and green economy.

- **Programme Measure 1.2 Building connectivity of the region through internationalization**

The Project proposals are expected to enhance the SMEs competitiveness, innovativeness, and their presence on an international market: expansion of SMEs stands in need of efficient cross-border learning and networking platforms, business advisory services and matchmaking actions to assist them in moving from domestic to international business practices.

PRIORITY 2 - Sustainable South Baltic

- **Programme Measure 2.1 Supporting transition towards green energy**

The cross-border projects are anticipated to be aimed at raising awareness of the need for developing solutions to improve the production and use of renewable energy, which can further help implementing the energy transitions. Solutions may include complementary actions focusing

on developing and adapting systems of energy storage and distribution in order to ensure the safe and efficient use of renewable energy.

- **Programme Measure 2.2 Promoting sustainable use of water**

The Baltic Sea and its tributaries suffer from a high level of pollution (e.g., plastics and chemicals) and eutrophication. Actions planned in project proposals should aim at broadening support of efficient and sustainable water management, especially in the field of reducing the outlets of nutrients and hazardous substances into river-basins, and subsequently the Baltic Sea to enhance the water quality.

- **Programme Measure 2.3 Supporting a circular and more resource efficient development**

There is a visible potential for cross-border projects aimed at promotion and implementation of circular economy related actions connected to reuse and recycling, circular product development and design, new resource efficient products and services, water efficiency methods for industry and public sector etc. Proposals of the new solutions for the areas of mobility, employment, healthcare and social security systems, use of natural (non-renewable) resources, business sectors etc are expected from the project partners.

PRIORITY 3 - Attractive South Baltic

- **Programme Measure 3.1 Developing sustainable, resilient, and innovative tourism**

Project proposals are anticipated to address sustainable tourism development: the actions should focus on the improvement of the tourist and cultural offers and creation of new ones forming new and innovative services and products; reduction of the negative impact of travel and tourism on the natural environment; sustainable use of resources such as energy; mitigation of tourism seasonality and transition towards sustainable, all-year-round tourism.

PRIORITY 4 - Active South Baltic

- **Programme Measure 4.1 Strengthen the cooperation capacity of actors based within the South Baltic Area (including civil society)**

To solve common cross-border problems and build mutual reliance in the areas of administration, regional development and cross-border mobility projects are proposed to include a wide group of actors, especially local actors, to cooperate, create ample opportunity for networking, exchange experience and build cooperation capacities under implementation of a joint project.

2 GENERAL PROCEDURE FOR THE QUALITY ASSESSMENT OF PROJECT PROPOSALS

The Joint Secretariat (JS) is responsible for the quality assessment of project applications. The decision on the selection of project proposals is taken by the Monitoring Committee of the Programme, based on the results of the assessment. As the Programme's general rule, each application should be assessed by at least two JS staff members and one external expert. Detailed procedure on appointment of external experts to project assessment is described in point 5 of this document.

By applying pre-defined assessment criteria and using the Programme's quality assessment sheet, the experts will assess the submitted applications allocated to them. The Programme uses an online tool for submission of application forms by applicants - the WOD2021 Application system. An external expert will be provided with access to the WOD Application System and allocated to them applications together with respective Supplementary Application Forms (in MS Excel) to perform quality assessment. The prepared assessment sheet must be submitted in (in MS Word) via the WOD2021 Application system.

As the result of the assessment procedure, the JS prepares a consolidated assessment for each project, which integrates the findings of the assessors. The consolidated assessments will serve as supporting documents for the Monitoring Committee decisions. Should essential discrepancies occur between assessments of an expert and JS staff members, the JS moderates the process of finding a common view on a project between all three assessors. The experts may be asked to discuss their assessment reports with the JS staff members (preferably via phone) and to agree on a common standpoint. This may be followed by the necessity to correct/update the result of the assessment in the WOD2021 Application system by the expert.

More detailed information on the procedure of quality assessment is provided in Annex 6 Project selection process and criteria to the Programme Manual.

3 REQUIREMENTS REGARDING THE PROFILES OF THE EXPERTS

- In order to establish a pool of external assessors at the Programme level, the JS is looking for experienced individuals (thematic experts, professional consultants, practitioners, academic researchers, etc.) who will form the external assessment team. Prospective independent experts are expected to have a high level of professional experience in one or more thematic fields covered by the Programme's Priorities and the respective Programme Measures. Hence, interested experts must fulfill the following requirements:
- have a university degree
- have at least 5 years of professional experience (following the award of the university degree) acquired in positions related to one or more thematic fields of the Programme Priorities and the Programme Measures
- have relevant professional experience in the Baltic Sea region cooperation and knowledge about the regions covered by the Programme

- have proven experience in cohesion policy, European Territorial Cooperation (Interreg) and/or international cooperation
- have experience in assessment or evaluation tasks at programme and/or project level
- be fluent in speaking, reading and writing English (at least at C1 level).
- Experience in the assessment of proposals for cooperation projects under national, European or international funding programmes as well as under programmes directly managed by the European Commission is considered as an advantage.
- Experts should also dispose of expertise on cross cutting issues such as:
 - transnational and cross-border cooperation
 - transnational and cross-border project management and budgetary issues
 - administration, management and/or evaluation of projects, programmes or policies
 - analysis and monitoring of policy measures and instruments
 - exploitation of project results, dissemination, communication, capitalisation and knowledge transfer.

4 TASKS TO BE ACCOMPLISHED

The tasks to be accomplished by an expert consist of quality assessment (based on strategic and operational criteria) of project proposals, to be executed under coordination of the JS.

The expert's tasks include the following:

- acquaintance of relevant Programme documents (e.g. Cooperation Programme, Programme Manual and its Annexes, application package, assessment sheets and guidelines, WOD2021related documents etc.)
- closely communicate and exchange with the JS
- quality assessment of project proposals according to the following assessment criteria:

strategic

- project relevance
- cooperation character
- project intervention logic
- partnership relevance
- horizontal criteria

operational

- work plan
- communication
- budget

The assessors are requested to provide points in each criterion with justification for their assessment highlighting the strengths and weaknesses for each criterion separately. Each criterion

is evaluated according to a five-point scale. The expert's conclusions must be presented in a clearly structured and comprehensive way. In case of recommending a project proposal for funding expert shall define specific conditions and/or clarifications, recommendations for necessary amendments during the clarification phase. If the project is recommended for rejection, the assessors are expected to provide a recommendation on potentially re-applying to the Programme.

Along with the quality assessment, the assessors will be asked to evaluate the project's potential for being an operation of strategic importance (Programme Manual, Chapter III, Section 1.2 Project types, Annex 6 to the Programme Manual, Section 2.2 Quality assessment).

In case of insufficient quality of the assessments provided or essential discrepancies occur between assessments of the experts and JS staff members, experts might be asked to discuss their assessments with the JS in the frame of the consolidation process. Therefore, they must ensure their availability also after the delivery of the assessments.

5 APPLICATION AND SELECTION PROCEDURE

Applications may be submitted at any time, however the deadline for participating in the assessment of project proposals received under the 4th call for proposals is **24th January 2025** (please note that the 4th call for proposals is open from 5th November 2024 till 4th February 2025)). Applications submitted after this date will be considered only for the assessment of future calls for project proposals.

Interested experts who fulfil the above-described requirements should submit their applications by e-mail to the following addresses: and southbaltic@southbaltic.eu and agnieszka.limanowka@southbaltic.eu. Please use the enclosed application form to provide the requested information. Application must be submitted as an electronically signed document or as a signed scan.

Only those candidates who meet the criteria set out under point 3 will be included in the pool of experts. The successful experts will be informed about their inclusion in the South Baltic's experts' pool for the assessment of project proposals. Experts will be included in the pool for the entire Programming period 2021-2027. However, it shall be noted that the inclusion in the experts' pool does not guarantee the selection and appointment for assessment of project proposals.

The experts successfully included in the pool might be appointed to assess projects proposals basing on:

- the thematic scope of the received project applications
- their thematic expertise and knowledge to carry out assessment
- their availability in a given timeframe
- their impartiality to perform assessment (submitted impartiality declarations will be verified by the JS).

6 WORK SCHEDULE

Time frame	Experts' involvement
Up to 2 months (after the closure of each call for proposals)	appointment of the experts to particular projects; verifying experts' availability; signing contracts with the appointed experts;
month 2-3	assessment of the projects;
month 3	being available for clarifications;

The 4th call for project proposals is open till 4th February 2025, thus it is expected that experts will be involved in the project assessment in February-March and shall be also available in case of clarifications until the end of April 2025. Please note that the concrete dates of the assessment period and the deadline for the delivery of work will be included in the contracts and will be set on an individual basis.

7 REMUNERATION

The expert is entitled to a fee of EUR 210 (gross) per each project proposal assessed. One expert may receive more than one project for assessment within one call.