

# METHODOLOGY FOR PROJECT EVALUATION AND SELECTION

## INTERREG VI-D MAC 2021-2027



# MAC 2021-2027

## Territorial Cooperation

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## 1. INTRODUCTION

As set out in Article 22 of Regulation (EU) 2021/1059:

For the selection of operations, the Monitoring Committee or, where appropriate, the Steering Committee shall establish and apply transparent and non-discriminatory criteria and procedures, ensuring accessibility for persons with disabilities and gender equality, taking into account the Charter of Fundamental Rights of the European Union and the principle of sustainable development, as well as the EU environmental policy in accordance with Articles 11 and 191(1) of the Treaty on the Functioning of the European Union (TFUE).

Criteria and procedures shall ensure the prioritisation of operations to be selected in order to maximise the contribution of EU Funds to the achievement of Interreg program objectives and implement the cooperation dimension of operations under Interreg programmes.

When selecting operations, the Monitoring Committee or, where appropriate, the Steering Committee shall:

- a) ensure that selected operations comply with the Interreg programme and provide an effective contribution to the achievement of its specific objectives;
- b) ensure that selected operations which fall within the scope of an enabling condition are consistent with the corresponding strategies established under Article 10(1) or one or more of the EU external financing instruments;
- c) ensure that selected operations present the best relationship between the amount of support, the activities undertaken and the achievement of objectives;
- d) verify that the beneficiary has the necessary financial resources and mechanisms to cover operation and maintenance costs for operations comprising investment in infrastructure or productive investment, so as to ensure their financial sustainability;
- e) ensure that selected operations which fall under the scope of Directive 2011/92/EU of the European Parliament and of the Council are subject to an environmental impact assessment or a screening procedure and that the assessment of alternative solutions has been taken in due account, on the basis of the requirements of that Directive;
- f) verify that where the operations have started before the submission of an application for funding to the managing authority, applicable law has been complied with;
- g) ensure that selected operations fall within the scope of the Fund concerned and are attributed to a type of intervention;
- h) ensure that operations do not include activities which were part of an operation subject to relocation in accordance with Article 2(27) of the Regulation (EU) 2021/1060 or which would constitute a transfer of a productive activity in accordance with point (a) of Article 65(1);
- i) ensure that selected operations are not directly affected by a reasoned opinion by the Commission in respect of an infringement under Article 258 TFEU that puts at risk the legality and regularity of expenditure or the performance of operations, and
- j) ensure that an assessment on the expected climate change impacts is conducted for infrastructure investments with an expected lifespan of at least five years.

The Monitoring Committee or, where appropriate, the Steering Committee shall approve the methodology and criteria used for the selection of Interreg operations, including any changes thereto, without prejudice to point (b) of Article 33(3) of Regulation (EU) 2021/1060 with regard to community-led local development and Article 24 of this Regulation.

## 2. STEPS IN THE EVALUATION AND SELECTION PROCEDURE OF APPLICATIONS

The assessment and selection procedure of applications for the INTERREG MAC 2021-2027 Programme is divided into three steps:

- A. **ELIGIBILITY:** Applications submitted in the framework of a call for proposals approved by the Monitoring Committee must meet the specific criteria defined for the assessment of their eligibility. Applications meeting all eligibility requirements will be assessed in the evaluation step.
- B. **EVALUATION:** The quality of applications is assessed on the basis of the following groups of criteria:
  - a. **General criteria:** Criteria for assessing the relevance and feasibility of project proposals to be divided into two types of criteria:
    - i. *Strategic criteria:* determine the contribution level of the application to the achievement of the Programme objectives and results, the strategy and relevance of the cooperation by addressing joint needs and the partnership quality.
    - ii. *Operational criteria:* determine the feasibility and viability of the proposed project, as well as its cost-effectiveness in terms of resources used compared to results obtained, and assess the application quality with regard to its work and financial plans.
  - b. **Other criteria:**
    - i. **Criteria according to each Specific Objective:** these established by the programme to assess the achievement of the Programme Specific Objectives.
    - ii. **Assessment by Third Countries.**
- C. **SELECTION:** The Management Committee shall take the relevant decisions concerning the project selection, depending on the evaluation and the financial resources available.

In order to carry out the evaluation procedure, all documents submitted with each application form will be analysed through the e-MAC software application. Additional documents and/or clarification of certain aspects may be requested.

### 2.1. **ADMISSIBILITY**

The project must fulfil ALL and EACH of the admissibility requirements. These conditions are established taking into account the requirements established by the Monitoring Committee in each call for proposals.

The verification of these conditions can be:

- A. **Prior to the application submission:**
  - o *Automatic verification:* the management software application itself verifies compliance such conditions, since it warns about non-compliance, if any, when the lead beneficiary validates the prepared application. If any of the conditions is not met, the application cannot be submitted.

1	Online application within the deadline set out in the call for proposals.
2	Submission of the completed form.
3	ERDF budget within the limits set out in the call for proposals.
4	Overall project duration within the deadline set out in the call for proposals.
5	Simplified cost methods set out in the programme are applied.
6	EU horizontal principles are respected.
7	The Lead beneficiary is an eligible entity (it is not a private company, nor a third country entity).
8	Beneficiaries are included in the categories covered by the programme.
9	The partnership is transnational (at least one entity from the European territory of the programme and one entity from a third country are participating).
10	<b>An Annex is attached (verification of the content in the next phase: PowerPoint summary presentation of the project, up to 10 slides).</b>

B. After the application has been submitted:

- *Documentary verification:* compliance with these conditions is verified by taking into account the application submitted through the computerised application system. If any of the conditions are not met, the exclusion of the application from the evaluation process will be proposed to the Steering Committee.

1	The attached mandatory annex is the one required by the call for proposals (PowerPoint summary presentation of the project, up to 10 slides)
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Failure to comply with any of the eligibility requirements will result in the direct exclusion of the project and the technical assessment of the project will not be carried out.

A check-list for the verification of eligibility requirements by beneficiaries will be included in the application kit in order to facilitate the correct submission of their applications.

**In any case, the submission of the application via the e-MAC does not presuppose that the admissibility requirements have been fulfilled.**

## 2.2. EVALUATION

The quality of the applications is assessed on the basis of the following groups of criteria:

- A. **General criteria:** The assessment weighting of these criteria is **70% of the total**. The Joint Secretariat (JS), with the support and advice of Regional Officers if necessary, will carry out the assessment of these criteria.
- i. *Strategic criteria:* their weighting within the general criteria is 60%.
  - ii. *Operational criteria:* their weighting within the general criteria is 40%.
- B. **Other criteria:** The weighting of both the assessments of the specific criteria and third countries is **30% of the total**.

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- **Criteria according to each Specific Objective:** Those responsible for regional governments of the Canary Islands, the Azores and Madeira will assess the specific criteria for each Specific Objective from a regional perspective. They will assess the projects in which an entity from their region participates. The weighting of this assessment will be 90% of the weighting of the group under "other criteria".
- **Assessment by third-country national responsible parties**

Each national responsible party shall participate in the assessment process by carrying out an assessment of the projects in which an entity from their territory participates. They shall inform the relevant Delegation of the European Union of such assessment results. The weight of the assessment of all third countries participating in a project will be 10% of the group of "other criteria".

The weighting matrix for evaluation criteria is as follows:

### Weighting of criteria

<b>GENERAL CRITERIA</b>	<b>70%</b>	
<b>Strategic criteria</b>		<b>60%</b>
Regarding the context of the cooperation project		50%
Regarding the intervention logic		30%
Regarding the partnership		20%
<b>Operational criteria</b>		<b>40%</b>
Regarding the work plan		60%
Regarding the financial plan		40%
<b>OTHER CRITERIA</b>	<b>30%</b>	
Criteria regarding each Specific Objective		90%
Assessment by TC national responsible parties		10%

Within each block of criteria, specific aspects will be assessed with specific weightings, the quantification of which will answer the question "**To what extent...?**".

A quantitative evaluation is proposed, with each evaluation criterion being assessed on a scale of 1 to 5:

- 1=very insufficient,
- 2=insufficient,
- 3=average,
- 4=good,
- 5=very good.

The assessment of all the selection criteria will give rise to an evaluation sheet for each project, to be generated by the management software application itself. It will be available in the application document repository.

Evaluators must provide a brief justification for the marks awarded on the evaluation sheet.

All documents included in the application form will be taken into consideration for project evaluation.

The evaluator's experience in the management of previous projects by the same participants or in similar thematic areas will provide added value in analysing what is described in the form. However, evaluators may request, during the evaluation process, any kind of clarification or additional documentation to allow a better assessment of any selection criteria.

In addition, evaluators will analyse the projects by taking into account the similarity of their thematic areas in order to make a comparative analysis at Specific Objective level and improve the evaluation quality.

## A. GENERAL SELECTION CRITERIA

### A.1. STRATEGIC CRITERIA

The aim is to assess the level of the application adequacy to the strategy and objectives of the Territorial Cooperation Programme, the relevance of the cooperation and the partnership quality. They are analysed on the basis of the information provided in the project description and specific sections.

Criteria are divided into 3 blocks:

#### A.1.1. Criteria regarding the context of the cooperation project: relevance and cooperative nature.

The aim is to assess the project appropriateness to the Programme strategy, its contribution to the development strategies of the regions and countries in the relevant cooperation area and the existence of an effective cooperation.

In the block below, the following criteria will be specifically assessed:

- ***Project need to face common challenges/needs.***

It is assessed the real need (well justified, reasonable, well explained) for the project to address common territorial challenges of the programme and/or to take advantage of joint opportunities in the territory.

- ***Project contribution to achieve programme objectives and indicators.***

It is assessed that the overall project objective clearly contributes to the achievement of the programme specific objective, that the project outcome is clearly linked to the programme output and outcome indicators, and the relevant contribution is realistic and sufficient.

- ***Innovative nature with respect to the thematic area, geographical area of application and/or target group.***

It is assessed whether the project uses available knowledge and builds on existing outcome and practices. It is analysed whether the project tries to avoid overlap and replication. It is assessed whether the project demonstrates new solutions that go beyond existing practice in the programme/country sector/area participating or adapts and implements solutions already developed.

- ***Benefits derived from cooperation for the partnership, project recipients and project area:***

It is assessed whether the cooperation added value in the field of action is clearly demonstrated, whether there is an effective cooperation with joint activities and not only parallel actions developed independently in each territory, whether the outcome could not (or only partially) be obtained without cooperation.

- ***Contribution to the horizontal principles of the European Union:***

It is assessed the extent to which the project contributes to the horizontal principles of sustainable development, equal opportunities and non-discrimination on grounds of sex, racial or ethnic origin, religion or belief, disability, age or sexual orientation and gender equality.

The weighting distribution of the ratings for each criterion within the block concerning the “Context of the cooperation project: strategy and relevance” is as follows:

Regarding the context of the cooperation project	
The project faces clearly identified common challenges/needs	10%
The project contributes to the achievement of the programme objectives and indicators	50%
The project is innovative with regard to the thematic area, the geographical area of application and/or target group(s)	10%
There is a clear benefit derived from cooperation for the partnership, project beneficiaries and project area	25%
Contribution to EU horizontal principles	5%

#### **A.1.2. Criteria regarding the project intervention logic: objectives and expected outcome and output.**

This mainly involves the assessment of the results-orientation of the project, taking into account that such outcome and output are consistent with the Programme priorities and contribute to the achievement of the expected outcome and the fulfilment of indicators.

In this sense, criteria assess the connection of objectives, outcome and output set out in the project with those planned for the Programme as a whole.

In this block on intervention logic, the following criteria are specifically assessed:

- ***There is coherence between the expected project objectives, outcome and indicators:***

The degree of internal coherence is assessed: expected project objectives are reflected in the expected outcome and output, and can be measured by the relevant indicators.

- ***Project outcome and output:***

- ***clearly defined***
- ***address identified needs***
- ***realistic (feasible to be achieved with the available resources)***

It is assessed the level of precision in the definition of the expected outcome, the coherence between the expected outcome and the identified needs, and the realism in the achievement of the expected outcome and output. In short, it is assessed the extent to which the expected outcome is clear, accurate, coherent and realistic (it is possible to be achieved with the available resources, i.e. time, partners, budget).

- ***The main project outcome may be capitalised:***



It is assessed whether the project outcome provides a significant and lasting contribution to the solution of the challenges addressed (durability).

It is also assessed whether the project outcome is applicable and replicable in other sectors, other geographical areas and/or other target groups (transferability).

It is also assessed whether financial and institutional support for the products/products developed by the project is ensured (ownership).

The weighting distribution of the assessments of each criterion within the block concerning the project objectives, expected outcome and output is as follows:

Regarding the intervention logic	
There is coherence between the project expected objectives, outcome and indicators	30%
The project outcome and output are clearly defined, meet identified needs and are realistic	30%
Main project outcome can be capitalised on: the assessment of the durability, transferability and ownership	40%

### A.1.3. Partnership criteria.

The aim is to assess the relevance and appropriateness of the partnership for the project implementation.

In this block, the following criteria will be specifically assessed:

- ***The partnership is coherent and relevant to the project implementation:***

The suitability of the partnership as a whole is assessed (complementarity, homogeneity...) as well as whether the project involves the relevant partners necessary to address the joint territorial challenge, specific objectives and planned actions.

- ***The role of each entity in the project implementation, management and execution is appropriate (the task distribution is clear, logical and detailed):***

It is assessed the extent to which each beneficiary is assigned tasks according to its capacities and competences and the territory benefits from this cooperation, by analysing how clearly the task allocation among all project beneficiaries in the different project development steps is described in the form.

- ***Beneficiary entities have knowledge/capacity in the proposed thematic area:***

It is assessed whether the beneficiaries have proven experience and competence in the thematic area concerned, as well as the necessary capacity to implement the project (financial, human resources, etc.).

The distribution of the weighting of the ratings for each of these criteria within the partnership block is as follows:

Regarding partnership	
The partnership is coherent and relevant to the project implementation	40%
The role of each entity in the project set-up, management and implementation is appropriate	30%
Beneficiary entities have knowledge/capacity in the proposed thematic area	30%

## A.2. OPERATIONAL CRITERIA

The aim is to assess the technical quality, feasibility and reliability of the application, and the cost involved in the achievement of proposed outcome. Criteria here are divided into 2 blocks:

### A.2.1. Regarding the work plan.

It is assessed the extent to which the work plan is realistic, consistent and coherent. This involves assessing the clarity, coherence and consistency of the planned actions, the realism of the activity schedule, the project usefulness, the adequacy of the communication plan and the planned management system.

In this block, the following criteria are specifically assessed:

- ***The project description is clear, coherent and detailed:***

It is assessed the extent to which the project description makes it possible to know what the project will consist of, what it is used for, the activities to be carried out, who it benefits and what is the outcome to be obtained.

- ***The proposed activities are relevant and lead to the achievement of the main expected outcome:***

It is assessed the relevance of the planned activities, whether they are visible, useful, innovative, lead to specific outputs and contribute to the achievement of the outcome, taking into account the activities already carried out by other projects in similar thematic areas or in the same geographical areas.

- ***The planned activity schedule is realistic and coherent:***

It is assessed whether the activity cadence is coherent and the project execution time is sufficient to carry them out.

- ***The project communication and dissemination plan is detailed, appropriate and effective in reaching target groups and stakeholders:***

An assessment is made of whether the planned communication actions will enable the project to achieve an adequate degree of visibility at the level of direct beneficiaries and, where appropriate, at the level of the general population. Therefore, the degree of preciseness of the communication and dissemination plan of the project will be assessed. The creation of a specific portal or website for the project with public information will also be positively assessed, as well as the dissemination of the project actions in social networks and media.

- ***Management procedures are clear, transparent, efficient and effective, and involve beneficiaries in decision-making:***

The soundness of the partnership's planned management and coordination system, organisation, internal communication, planned monitoring and control systems, decision-making procedures and other internal organisational issues between the partners are assessed, taking into account the size and needs of the project.

The distribution of the weighting of the assessments for each of these criteria within the work plan block is as follows:

Regarding the work plan	
The project description is clear, coherent and detailed	30%
The proposed activities are relevant and lead to the achievement of the main expected outcome	30%
The planned activity schedule is realistic and coherent.	10%
The project communication and dissemination plan is detailed, appropriate and effective in reaching target groups and stakeholders.	20%
Management procedures are clear, transparent, efficient and effective, and involve beneficiaries in decision-making.	10%

### **A.2.2. Concerning the financial plan.**

The aim is to assess the extent to which the project budget is used in accordance with the principles of economy, efficiency and effectiveness, whether the total budget is reasonable and appropriate to the planned activities, and whether the distribution by beneficiaries, activities and types of expenditure is also considered appropriate.

In this block, the following criteria are specifically assessed:

- ***The project budget is reasonable with respect to the main expected outputs and outcome:***

The principles of economy (minimisation of resource costs), efficiency (relationship between the resources used and the results obtained in terms of quantity, quality and time) and effectiveness (compliance with the objectives and achievement of the expected outcome) are assessed. It is fundamentally assessed whether the cost of the project is reasonable for the expected results and products, the actions to be carried out, the usefulness of the project and its visibility.

It is analysed whether the costs are realistic and whether sufficient and reasonable resources have been foreseen to ensure the implementation of the project.

- ***The financial plan is consistent with the work plan:***

The financial distribution of the project by beneficiaries is assessed, whether the partners with the largest budgets are the ones that implement actions with the largest financial endowment or implement the largest number of actions. Therefore, the coherence of the activities that each partner plans to carry out is analysed with respect to the cost foreseen in its budget and the execution time, thus assessing the degree of feasibility to carry out the activities with the budget foreseen for each one and the execution time foreseen in the chronogram.

- ***The distribution of the budget in cost categories is consistent:***

The consistency of the distribution of the budget, in cost categories, with the description of the project will be assessed. Adequate justification of the need to contract external services and experts to carry out activities will also be assessed.

The weighting distribution of ratings for each criterion within the work plan block is as follows:

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Regarding the financial plan	
The project budget is reasonable with respect to the main expected output and outcome	50%
The financial plan is consistent with the work plan.	30%
The distribution of the budget in cost categories is coherent	20%

**B. OTHER CRITERIA.****B.1. SPECIFIC SELECTION CRITERIA (TO BE ASSESSED BY THOSE RESPONSIBLE FOR THE EUROPEAN REGIONS)**

Depending on the Specific Objective under which each project is submitted, the following specific criteria will be assessed:

<b>PRIORITY 1. SMART MAC - Improving business competitiveness through innovative and smart economic transformation</b>	
SO 1.1 Development and improvement of research and innovation capacities and deployment of advanced technologies	
The project is consistent and complementary with other regional, national and/or European interventions and contributes to wider macro-regional and sea basin strategies (Atlantic Strategy)	30%
Relevance of the entities participating in the project as agents of the regional innovation systems of the cooperation area	30%
The project improves the transfer of scientific and technological knowledge to the business sector	20%
The project is in line with the priorities defined in the regional smart specialisation strategies (RIS 3), especially key sectors such as tourism, green economy and blue economy	20%
SO 1.3 Strengthening sustainable growth and SME competitiveness and job creation, also through productive investments	
The project is consistent and complementary with other regional, national and/or European interventions and contributes to wider macro-regional and sea basin strategies (Atlantic Strategy)	30%
Relevance of entities participating in the project as support agents for the productive fabric	30%
The project supports the business fabric in strategic sectors and activities (tourism, green and/or blue economy) or new market niches favouring the diversification of economic activity and job creation	40%

<b>PRIORITY 2. GREEN MAC - ECOLOGICAL TRANSITION, SUPPORTING THE DEVELOPMENT OF A GREEN AND BLUE ECONOMY, COMBATING CLIMATE CHANGE, PREVENTING AND MANAGING RISKS AND DISASTER</b>		
SO 2.1 Promoting energy efficiency and reducing greenhouse gas emissions		
The project is consistent and complementary with other regional, national and/or European interventions and contributes to wider macro-regional and sea basin strategies (Atlantic Strategy)		30%
Relevance of entities participating in the project to implement energy efficiency and greenhouse gas emission reduction measures.		30%
Relevance of energy efficiency products, processes and/or new technologies leading to more efficient energy consumption (especially in the sectors related to tourism, business or public infrastructures)		40%
SO 2.2 Promoting renewable energies in accordance with Directive (EU) 2018/2001, in particular sustainability criteria detailed therein		
The project is consistent and complementary with other regional, national and/or European interventions and contributes to wider macro-regional and sea basin strategies (Atlantic Strategy)		30%
Relevance of entities in the field of renewable energies participating in the project		30%
Relevance of actions to promote a higher penetration of renewable energies (mainly wind, solar and marine energies, as well as other alternatives such as biomass and geothermal energies)		40%
SO 2.4 Promoting climate change adaptation, disaster risk prevention and resilience, taking into account ecosystem-based approaches		
The project is consistent and complementary with other regional, national and/or European interventions and contributes to wider macro-regional and sea basin strategies (Atlantic Strategy)		30%
Relevance of entities participating in the project in the fight against climate change and the prevention and management of natural disasters		30%
Priority nature of the intervention against risks caused by climate change or against risks and natural disasters not directly linked to climate change, such as seismic and volcanic risks, forest fires and marine and coastal pollution		40%
SO 2.6 Promoting the transition to an efficient and circular economy in the use of resources		
The project is consistent and complementary with other regional, national and/or European interventions and contributes to wider macro-regional and sea basin strategies (Atlantic Strategy)		30%
Relevance of entities participating in the project to promote the circular economy		30%
The project proposes relevant circular economy measures adding value to the competitiveness of the productive fabric with a clear focus on environmental sustainability		40%
SO 2.7 Promoting the protection and preservation of nature, biodiversity and green infrastructure, including urban areas, and reduction of all forms of pollution		

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The project is consistent and complementary with other regional, national and/or European interventions and contributes to wider macro-regional and sea basin strategies (Atlantic Strategy)	30%
Relevance of entities participating in the project as agents for sustainable environmental management, preservation and protection	30%
The project proposes relevant actions for the development of green and/or blue infrastructures or the protection of the natural environment and biodiversity of the territory	20%
The project takes place in Natura 2000 network areas and/or in other protected natural areas of the territory	20%

\*In the evaluation process of the criteria of the Specific Objectives of Priority 2 (Green MAC), the regional authorities will consult the respective Environmental Authorities so that, where appropriate, they can issue their assessment within the deadline established for this purpose. In the event that they do not issue their assessment within the deadline, positive silence will be applied.

<b>PRIORITY 4. MOBILITY MAC - Improving migration management at origin and destination</b>	
IEO2 Mobility and migration management	
The project is consistent and complementary with other regional, national and/or EU interventions, especially the ESF.	30%
Relevance of the entities participating in the project to address aspects of the migration phenomenon	30%
Relevance of the actions, prioritising those related to unaccompanied immigrant minors and to those territories of origin, transit or destination of migratory movements.	40%

### **B.2. ASSESSMENT BY THIRD COUNTRY NATIONAL RESPONSIBLE PARTIES.**

The project is relevant in the framework of the third-country strategic priorities and consistent with the Multiannual Indicative Programme (MIP) adopted by the European Commission.	100%
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### **2.3. SELECTION.**

It is the responsibility of the Programme Steering Committee to evaluate and approve project applications, in accordance with the financial allocations set out in the Programme.

#### **4.1. The following documents shall be taken into account for project approval decisions:**

- Terms of the call for proposals.
- Application forms for eligible projects.
- Evaluation sheets for these projects.
- List of projects ordered according to the technical assessment obtained, including at least the following elements: priority, specific objective, code, acronym, title, participating entities, region/country, requested fund (ERDF/ NDICI if applicable) and total cost.
- List with the average execution rate achieved by each beneficiary in the projects in which they participated in the Interreg MAC 2014-2020 programme.

4.2. The Steering Committee may adopt, by consensus, the following types of duly motivated decisions:

- Approval of projects according to the application submitted.
- Approval of projects subject to conditions. The Steering Committee may attach conditions to projects for approval, which may include:
  - Adaptation of the total budget of the project and/or of the aid requested.
  - Merger of several projects with very similar partners and/or themes.
  - Changes within the partnership.
  - Modulation of the aid to be granted to beneficiaries according to the average degree of implementation achieved in Interreg MAC projects in the period 2014-2020. If a beneficiary has not participated in such a programme, inexperience will not be taken into account for this purpose.
  - Any other matter deemed appropriate by the Steering Committee within the regulatory framework of the Programme.
- Rejection of projects.
- Approval of a reserve list of projects to be considered at a later stage by the Steering Committee depending on financial availability.

The Steering Committee shall establish the procedure to ensure the right of complaint of beneficiaries of unsuccessful projects, applying the principles of transparency, equal treatment and non-discrimination.