



EUROPEAN COMMISSION
DIRECTORATE-GENERAL FOR MIGRATION AND HOME AFFAIRS

Directorate E – HOME Affairs Funds
The Director

Brussels
HOME.E.1/AI

NOTE
FOR THE ATTENTION OF THE MEMBERS OF THE
COMMITTEE FOR THE HOME AFFAIRS FUNDS

Ref.: HOME-Funds/2023/39

Subject: Launch of the call for expression of interest for “Specific Action to support Member States' national strategies for a European integrated border management”, financed under the Instrument for Financial Support for Border Management and Visa Policy (BMVI).

Reference no. BMVI/2023/SA/1.2.3

1. INTRODUCTION

Regulation (EU) 2021/1148 of the European Parliament and of the Council of 7 July 2021 establishing, as part of the Integrated Border Management Fund, the Instrument for Financial Support for Border Management and Visa Policy, provides that Member States may receive funding for specific actions in addition to their initial allocations in their respective programmes.

Specific actions aim to fund transnational or national projects that bring Union added value in accordance with the objectives of the Instrument for which one, several or all Member States may receive an additional allocation to their programmes.

They will be implemented as one of the components of the Thematic Facility, in line with Art. 8 of the above-mentioned Regulation and in accordance with the relevant financing decisions and work programmes for the BMVI Thematic Facility ⁽¹⁾.

By the present note and on the basis of the above-mentioned Commission implementing decision, the Commission launches a call for expression of interest for the “**Specific Action to support Member States' national strategies for a European integrated border management**”.

⁽¹⁾ [Integrated Border Management Fund – Border Management and Visa Instrument \(2021-27\) \(europa.eu\)](#)

2. GENERAL PRINCIPLES

Specific actions are implemented by one or more Member States participating in the BMVI, by means of the funding received in addition to the allocations received under their BMVI programmes.

Funding for specific actions is added to the Member States' programme allocations at the time of the approval of the initial programme or by means of a programme amendment. That additional funding is earmarked for the specific action concerned and it shall not be used for other actions in the Member State's programme, except in duly justified circumstances and as approved by the Commission through the amendment of the programme.

Whereas the regular EU co-financing rate under the Member States' programmes will not exceed 75% of total eligible expenditure, projects implemented under specific actions may benefit from an increased co-financing rate of up to 90% of total eligible expenditure.

The specific action must be implemented by the Member States in accordance with the BMVI ⁽³⁾ Regulation and the Common Provisions Regulation (EU) 2021/1060 (CPR) ⁽⁴⁾.

Your attention is drawn, in particular, to one provision of the CPR. As regard the value added tax ("VAT") eligibility regime, Article 64 (1)(c) of the CPR provides that VAT is not eligible, except:

- (i) "for operations the total cost of which is below EUR 5 000 000 (including VAT);
- (ii) for operations the total cost of which is at least EUR 5 000 000 (including VAT) where it is non-recoverable under national VAT legislation".

In addition, any specific action must be implemented by the Member States in compliance with EU fundamental values, rights and principles enshrined in the Union acquis, in particular with the Charter of Fundamental Rights of the European Union, and with the Union's international obligations as regards fundamental rights.

3. CALL FOR EXPRESSION OF INTEREST

3.1. Indicative budget available

The indicative amount envisaged for this call (BMVI/2023/SA/1.2.3) is **EUR 10 million**.

⁽³⁾ Regulation (EU) 2021/1148 of the European Parliament and of the Council of 7 July 2021 establishing, as part of the Integrated Border Management Fund, the Instrument for Financial Support for Border Management and Visa Policy.

⁽⁴⁾ Regulation (EU) 2021/1060 of the European Parliament and of the Council of 24 June 2021 laying down common provisions on the European Regional Development Fund, the European Social Fund Plus, the Cohesion Fund, the Just Transition Fund and the European Maritime, Fisheries and Aquaculture Fund and financial rules for those and for the Asylum, Migration and Integration Fund, the Internal Security Fund and the Instrument for Financial Support for Border Management and Visa Policy.

Please note that the 6% Technical Assistance (TA) should be covered within the indicative amount mentioned above, as per the notes sent to the Committee under the ref. no. HOME-Funds/2022/10 ⁽⁵⁾ and ⁽⁶⁾.

Please note that this call is addressed to both Member States and Schengen Associated Countries (hereafter SAC) ⁽⁷⁾. For the conditions for the SAC, see below in section 4.1 ⁽⁸⁾.

The overall EU contribution requested, including technical assistance, should not be:

- **Lower than EUR 400.000 per application**

and

- **higher than EUR 1.000.000 per application.**

Member States/SAC may submit only one application.

3.2. Background for the specific action

In accordance with the **Treaty on the Functioning of the European Union** (Article 77(1)(c)), the European Union is to develop a policy with a view to ensuring “*the gradual introduction of an integrated management system for external borders*”.

The “**Strategy towards a fully functioning and resilient Schengen area**” issued on 6 June 2021, highlights that “*The Union and the Member States need to jointly work towards achieving a fully effective European integrated border management in practice, bringing together all relevant actors at both European and national levels.*”

The **Commission Communication establishing the multiannual strategic policy for European integrated border management (EIBM)** ⁽⁹⁾, which was adopted on 14 March 2023, identifies a number of strategic challenges that affect the environment in which EIBM operates. Addressing these challenges requires not only actions at EU level, but also strong and coordinated measures at national level, taking into account the different ways Member States are affected by those challenges (e.g. countries of arrival, transit and destination, types of borders, geographical location and topography, size of external border sections).

Effective and efficient coordination among national authorities competent for the implementation of EIBM is key. Article 8(6) of Regulation (EU) 2019/1896 (the EBCG Regulation) requires that Member States establish national strategies “*through close cooperation between all national authorities responsible for the management of external borders and returns*”. Furthermore, the multiannual strategic policy for EIBM underlines the importance of inter-agency cooperation at national level ⁽¹⁰⁾, in order to guarantee the

⁽⁵⁾ ARES(2022) 1616638 of 04/03/2022

⁽⁶⁾ ARES(2022) 5157574 of 15/07/2022

⁽⁷⁾ Switzerland, Iceland, Liechtenstein and Norway

⁽⁸⁾ Where this call refers to Member States henceforth it is meant to include both Member States and the Schengen Associated Countries.

⁽⁹⁾ COM(2023) 146 final of 14/03/2023

⁽¹⁰⁾ Inter-agency cooperation includes cooperation among the national authorities in each Member State that are responsible for border control or for other tasks carried out at the border, as well as between authorities responsible for return in each Member State, including the regular exchange of information. Inter-agency cooperation should be

“comprehensive, cross-sectoral, joined-up and cost-effective implementation of IBM”. This concept was elaborated in particular under component 5 of EIBM: *“Inter-agency cooperation among the national authorities in each Member State which are responsible for border control or for other tasks carried out at the border, as well as between authorities responsible for return in each Member State, including the regular exchange of information through existing information exchange tools, including, where appropriate, cooperation with national bodies in charge of protecting fundamental rights”.*

Well-functioning EU border management requires an effective national governance system for EIBM in each of the Member States and SAC. The Schengen evaluations carried out in 2022, confirmed that weak governance and limited strategic approach in some Member States have a negative impact on the effectiveness of border control activities. In the area of border management, while some Member States reinforced their national governance, by establishing for example strategic coordination units, others chose to follow a more decentralised approach, which could raise strategic border control coordination challenges.

The need for a national coordination framework was underlined as well in the Thematic Schengen evaluation 2019-2020, in the subsequent Schengen evaluations and in vulnerability assessments. The Schengen evaluations contain recurring recommendations to Member States on:

- a) ensuring effective governance of the EIBM as well as coherent national overview and coordination of border control at the national level,
- b) reassessing the distribution of tasks that are split between different services and departments in national authorities, and
- c) ensure strategic planning for the development of national capabilities for border management, in particular comprehensive national strategies for human resources.

The EBCG Regulation includes two mechanisms to support a national centralised governance function for EIBM: **national contact points** (Article 13) and other types of coordination solutions, such as the **national coordination centres** (Article 21), nominated to coordinate the strategic level of border management:

- The main task of the **national contact points (NCP)** is information exchange and cooperation. They serve as communication points with Frontex on all matters pertaining to the activities of the Agency, without prejudice to the role of the national coordination centres. The EIBM component on information exchange adds that the national contact point should represent all national authorities involved in border management and return procedures.
- Other national coordination solutions identified by the Member States to ensure effective implementation of EIBM, such as strategic coordination structures and/or **national coordination centres (NCC)** appointed to ensure strategic coordination of EIBM.

Furthermore, the multiannual strategic policy for EIBM provides strategic guidelines on NCC's and NCP's, calling for Member States to establish an effective national coordination

well-established at national level to guarantee the comprehensive, cross-sectoral, joined-up and cost-effective implementation of IBM.

mechanism, in order to ensure efficiency at the national level as well as of the cooperation with Frontex. In this regard, Member States should have a responsible NCP (24/7) for all matters pertaining to the activities of the Agency, as stipulated in Article 13(1) of the EBCG Regulation. The NCP should represent all national authorities involved in border management and return. It should be separate from the NCC responsible for the exchange of information in EUROSUR.

As pointed out in the Commission Communication, “*the EU funding instruments have a crucial role to play in the effective implementation of the EIBM strategy*”. By funding one of the components of the EIBM strategy, aimed at improving cooperation and information exchange among all relevant authorities at national and EU level, this specific action aims at better understanding, detecting and responding to threats at the EU’s external borders.

Therefore, Member States and SAC are encouraged to take further action to improve coordination in the area of external border management, allowing for more effective actions by reason of scale and complementarity of tasks performed, thereby moving towards implementing the EIBM strategy.

3.3. Scope and purpose of this specific action

The purpose of this specific action is to provide support to Member States and SAC in the establishment of their national strategies for the implementation of EIBM, specifically with a view to the setting up or the enhancing of a **national centralised governance function**.

This function should encompass the coordination between all relevant national authorities with competences in EIBM, and should take into account the implications of other EU policies implemented at the external borders of each Member State by the competent national authorities within their respective mandates, such as police, customs control and sanitary control authorities. ([U](#)).

The framework governing such coordination should take into account the institutional and administrative specificities of the Member State concerned. It could be put into effect by means of cooperation agreements which lay down concrete forms of cooperation, as well as concrete activities.

To contribute to the setting up or the enhancing of this national centralised governance function, Member States can propose projects - implemented entirely at national level - to strengthen coordination between national authorities having competences in the management of external borders, in line with the EIBM and by means of the specific national strategies. Projects may include one or more of the following activities:

1. Development of action plans and/or standard operating procedures and/or inter-agency cooperation agreements, following the identification – by means of an audit, analysis or study - of actions needed to improve the national coordination framework, including through reorganisation, assessment of the tasks distribution and appointment of the authority responsible at national level for the integrated border management coordination;
2. Enhancement of the necessary capabilities, including by ensuring the appropriate human resources and trained staff, contributing to the integrated border management coordination and intra-agency cooperation;

3. Trainings and seminars on EIBM for the national authorities contributing to a better inter-agency cooperation in the area of border management;
4. Pilot projects to enhance cooperation between relevant national authorities, including by posting liaison officers to the NCC, by reinforcing the role of the designated national contact point, organising field and table-top exercises to test and improve practical cooperation and coordination, interoperability, reporting and communication;
5. The implementation or improvement of information management systems to ensure timely and efficient inter-agency information sharing;
6. The setting up of a national IT tool (i.e. shared portal or platform; website) on EIBM, including the different areas of border management.

The proposals should present an intervention logic, showing the added value of the activities to be carried out. To that end, the proposals should:

- a) describe the existing organisational set-up, notably the authorities competent at national level to ensure integrated border management, as well as the relations between them and the existing level and ways of cooperation;
- b) describe the identified gaps and challenges, as well as the measures needed at national level for a more effective coordination in the area of border management (including those which address the Schengen evaluations recommendations and vulnerability assessments made), highlighting – out of those – which are proposed to be funded under this BMVI specific action; complementarities with other actions funded with EU support under other EU instruments and Funds will be indicated;
- c) identify the national authorities to be responsible for and involved in the implementation of the project and the national authorities that would benefit from it;
- d) explain how the proposed activities for setting up or enhancing the centralised governance function fit in the national strategy and will ensure an efficient coordination between the national authorities in charge of general oversight of integrated border management and all national authorities with responsibilities in border management.
- e) provide a planning and clarifications on how the requested EU contribution will be used to achieve the purpose of this call.

3.4. Expected results following the call

The main expected result is to secure the existence of an adequate centralised governance function in as many Member States as possible, for the effective implementation of EIBM.

Key areas of improved cooperation in the different Member States through the selected projects could relate to (a) the exchange of information, (b) joint risk analysis, (c) joint operations and shared use of European and national capabilities, in line with their competences, trainings and exercises, as well as (d) the protection and promotion of fundamental rights across all border management activities and operations.

Moreover, it could also cover an improved cooperation between national authorities in the national coordination centres by posting Liaison Officers (LO)'s and a better functioning of the national contact points.

4. PROCEDURE FOR APPLICATION

4.1. Admissibility and assessment aspects

All EU Member States participating in the BMVI are eligible. The SAC, the Schengen Associated Countries (Switzerland, Iceland, Liechtenstein and Norway) may participate in the call and, if successful, will receive additional funding once the legal arrangements for their participation in the BMVI are in place.

The Specific Action proposed should:

- **not start before 14 March 2023 and**
- **be completed by the end of 2026.**

DG HOME will assess the project proposals submitted.

To be considered **admissible** a project proposal:

- 1. has to be submitted within the deadline** (see below) to the BMVI specific actions functional mailbox **HOME-BMVI-SPECIFIC-ACTIONS@ec.europa.eu**, with the official **BMVI/2023/SA/1.2.3. Application Form** attached to this note, **together with its annexes, and be readable and complete (all fields necessary for assessment are to be filled in English language),**
- 2. has to be submitted by the BMVI Managing Authority**, on behalf of the entity in the Member State / SAC that will be responsible for the implementation of the specific action.
- 3. has to identify a project beneficiary** (an entity) **that will be responsible for the overall implementation of the specific action in the Member State/ SAC.**

Other entities in the Member State can be involved in the implementation of the specific action, as co-beneficiaries.

DG HOME will assess admissible project proposals on the basis of the following **assessment criteria**:

- A. Relevance (maximum 40 points, minimum score 20 points):**
 - 1. Clarity and consistency of the objectives and scope of the proposal with the overall purpose of the call:** degree to which the proposal would contribute to the setting up and enhancing of the national centralised governance function; **(max. 15 points)**
 - 2. Coherence of the proposal with the EIBM strategy:** degree to which the proposal is in line with the objectives of the EIBM strategy **(max. 15 points)**

3. **Complementarity of the proposal with relevant ongoing actions under the ISF-Borders and BMVI programme and, where applicable, other funding instruments.** Degree to which the activities of the proposal reinforce and accompany existing activities relating to the improvement of exchange of information, cooperation and coordination between national authorities and the IT tools to support such activities. **(max. 10 points)**

B. Quality and content (maximum 30 points, minimum score 15 points):

The appropriateness of the design of the project (methodology), the organisation of work (actors involved and their roles), the strategy for project management (including operational and financial management) and the budget. Furthermore, the planned implementation (timetable); the communication activities, the monitoring and reporting to achieve the expected results, as well as risk management.

Applications and the activities planned therein are required to be designed and implemented in full compliance with the EU acquis in the area of border management. Member States/ the SAC should also ensure respect for the horizontal principles described in Article 9 of Regulation (EU) 2021/1060.

C. Impact (maximum 30 points, minimum score 15 points):

1. **Impact of the proposed action in relation to the objective of the call:** how the project will contribute to improving the overall implementation of EIBM at national level. Under this point can be considered the role of the project in the follow-up on the relevant Schengen evaluation recommendations and vulnerability assessments carried out by the European Border and Coast Guard Agency. **(max. 15 points)**
2. **Sustainability:** how the project will continue having an impact on the implementation of the EIBM completion of the planned activities, through provision of sufficient resources (financial, human, etc.) and possible formal arrangements, after the project has ended. **(max. 15 points)**

4.2. Application procedure

Deadline for the application: By **6 November 2023 at the latest**, Member States are invited to submit their project proposals at the latest, using the official BMVI/2023/SA/1.2.3. Application Form attached to this Note, together with its annexes, filled in English. They may submit additional documentation if necessary.

In order to ensure equal and fair treatment of the proposals and allow the Commission to allocate at the same date all the available funding, DG HOME will assess all proposals simultaneously. Therefore, proposals submitted after the deadline will not be admissible.

The members of the Committee for the Home Affairs Funds will be informed at the latest 10 working days before the deadline for the submission of applications, in case the deadline for the submission is extended.

E-mail address: The applications should be submitted to the BMVI specific actions functional mailbox: **HOME-BMVI-SPECIFIC-ACTIONS@ec.europa.eu**.

Deadline for any clarification requests on this note: Member States and SAC can send requests by **15 October 2023**, to the above BMVI specific actions functional mailbox. Requests should be sent **by the Managing authority**. The Managing Authority has an important role explaining to the interested beneficiaries the applicable rules and specificities of the programmes in general and of a specific action in particular and to help prepare applications for a specific action. The Managing Authority should be the contact point and take the responsibility to review questions from potential beneficiaries and raise questions to or request clarifications from the Commission services where necessary. As projects under specific actions are managed at national level, according to national rules, specific questions on eligibility of costs should be addressed first to the Managing Authority.

In order to respect the equal treatment and transparency, the replies to the written requests for clarification received will be sent to all Member States, via HOME-AFFAIRS-FUNDS-COMMITTEE@ec.europa.eu.

After having received the applications, the Commission may contact the Member State to request further specific information. A reply should be provided by the Member State within 3 working days.

DG HOME will inform Member States of the outcome of the assessment of the proposals towards the end of February 2024, while the respective revisions of the BMVI programme(s) will be subsequently carried out.

5. AMENDMENT OF THE BMVI PROGRAMMES AND ELIGIBILITY OF EXPENDITURE

After having been informed of the outcome of the call for expression of interest, each successful Member State shall submit to the Commission a request to amend its BMVI programme via SFC. The amended programme should include a short description of the specific action, adjust the output and result indicators and include the costs and codes linked to this specific action (respectively in the description and under tables 1, 2 and 3 of the relevant specific objective, and table 6 of the programme; table 4 on technical assistance should also be adjusted).

When amending a BMVI programme of a Member State, two situations may arise regarding the eligibility of expenditure ⁽¹²⁾:

1. For Member States that have included all the types of interventions listed in Annex VI table 1 of the BMVI Regulation that are relevant for the Specific Action “Support to Member States' national strategies for a European integrated border management” in table(s) 2.1.3 of the relevant specific objective(s) in their *initially approved* BMVI

⁽¹²⁾ Art. 63(7) of Regulation (EU) 2021/1060.

programme: **expenditure for the Specific Action will be eligible as of 14 March 2023.**

2. For Member States that have *not* included all the types of interventions listed in Annex VI table 1 of the BMVI Regulation that are relevant for the “ Specific Action to support Member States' national strategies for a European integrated border management” in the tables in the table(s) 2.1.3 of the relevant specific objective(s) in their initially approved BMVI programme: **expenditure for the Specific Action will be eligible from the date of submission by the Member State of its request for amendment of the BMVI programme that will add the respective types of interventions in the programme.**

Yours faithfully,

Silvia MICHELINI

Enclosures: Annex 1: Application form
 Annex 2: Budget form
 Annex 3: BMVI indicators upgrade

c.c.: Permanent Representations – JHA Counsellors