



EUROPEAN COMMISSION

DIRECTORATE-GENERAL FOR MIGRATION AND HOME AFFAIRS

Brussels
HOME.E.3/PS

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

Ref.: HOME-Funds/2023/16

Subject: Launch of the call for expression of interest under the Specific Action “*Integrated solutions for the facilitation and automation of border crossing*” under the Instrument for Financial Support for Border Management and Visa Policy (BMVI) – Reference No BMVI/2023/SA/1.1.3

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 (BMVI) provides that Member States may receive funding for specific actions in addition to their initial allocations in their respective programmes.

Specific actions aim at funding transnational or national projects that bring Union added value in accordance with the objectives of the BMVI. They are implemented as one of the components of the Thematic Facility in line with Article 8 of the above-mentioned Regulation.

On 12 December 2022, the Commission adopted the financing decision and the work programme for the BMVI Thematic Facility covering the years 2023, 2024 and 2025 ⁽¹⁾.

By the present note, the Commission launches a call for expression of interest for a Specific Action on “*Integrated solutions for the facilitation and automation of border crossing*” in line with the actions listed in the above-mentioned Commission’s financing decision and work programme.

⁽¹⁾ Commission Implementing Decision C(2022) 8993 final of 12.12.2022.

2. GENERAL PRINCIPLES

Specific actions will be implemented by one or more Member States participating in the Instrument for Financial Support for Border Management and Visa Policy (BMVI) via funding received in addition to the allocation under the Member State's programmes, in line with Article 15 of Regulation (EU) 2021/1148.

Funding for specific actions is added to the Member States' programme allocations by means of a programme amendment. That additional funding is earmarked for the specific action concerned and 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. This means that, as a rule, in case of under-spending or non-implementation of the specific action, Member States will not be able to use the corresponding amount to support any other action of their programme. In such cases, any unused amount would be reimbursed to the Union budget and/or decommitted, except under the circumstances referred to above.

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 90% of total eligible expenditure.

The specific action must be implemented by the Member States in accordance with the BMVI Regulation and the Common Provisions Regulation (EU) 2021/1060 (CPR) ⁽²⁾.

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 2023-2025 BVMI Thematic Facility work programme sets out the overall budgetary allocations reserved for specific actions in the years 2023, 2024 and 2025.

⁽²⁾ 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.

The indicative amount envisaged for the present call for Specific Action BMVI/2023/SA/1.1.3 is EUR 34.8 million (including left over from the 2021-2022 BMVI Thematic Facility work programme).

A second call under this specific action may be envisaged for 2024, subject to the results of the present call and availability of funds.

The requested amount (i.e. the Union's contribution to the Member State's BMVI programme under the specific action):

- should not be higher than EUR 7 million per application for Lot 1.1.3.1;
- should not be higher than EUR 2 million per application for Lot 1.1.3.2 (see description of the two lots under below point 3.3).

3.2. Background of the Specific Action

The entry into operation of new EU large-scale IT systems, including the Entry/Exit System (EES) ⁽³⁾ and of the European Travel Information and Authorisation System (ETIAS) ⁽⁴⁾ will contribute to improving border management and security at the external borders of the EU Member States.

Since the EES aims to replace passport stamping and automate border control procedures, it is expected that it will lead to a reduction in waiting times at borders, making travelling to European countries using the EES more efficient to third-country nationals.

However, it is also likely that the EES will result in an upsurge in border crossing times *in the short term*, since third-country nationals travelling for a short stay for the first time will be required to have their biometric data (i.e. fingerprints and facial image) recorded at the border crossing point. In addition, certain Member States are experiencing a major increase in traffic flows at the EU external borders as a result of internal and external events that could not be foreseen prior to the adoption of the EES and ETIAS Regulations.

3.3. Scope and purpose of the specific action

The objective of this specific action is to assist Member States with the optimisation of border controls in the context of the entry into operation of the EES, in order to facilitate the implementation and operation of the system and to prevent an excessive increase in waiting times at the EU external borders after its launch.

⁽³⁾ Regulation (EU) 2017/2226 of the European Parliament and of the Council of 30 November 2017 establishing an Entry/Exit System (EES) to register entry and exit data and refusal of entry data of third-country nationals crossing the external borders of the Member States and determining the conditions for access to the EES for law enforcement purposes, and amending the Convention implementing the Schengen Agreement and Regulations (EC) No 767/2008 and (EU) No 1077/2011 ('EES Regulation').

⁽⁴⁾ Regulation (EU) 2018/1240 of the European Parliament and of the Council of 12 September 2018 establishing a European Travel Information and Authorisation System (ETIAS) and amending Regulations (EU) No 1077/2011, (EU) No 515/2014, (EU) 2016/399, (EU) 2016/1624 and (EU) 2017/2226 ('ETIAS Regulation').

This call targets:

- a) **single Member States** that have experienced or are expected to experience an upsurge in traffic flows and/or in border crossing times at external Schengen land and sea border crossing points and who want to build, update or deploy relevant infrastructure and equipment at border crossing points to address it (*Lot 1.1.3.1*).
- b) **single Member States or groups of Member States** that want to develop and implement national facilitation programmes (NFPs) as defined in Article 8d of the Schengen Borders Code ⁽⁵⁾ and the mutual recognition of these programmes (*Lot 1.1.3.2*).

For **Lot 1.1.3.1**, priority will be given to applications from a Member State for activities in external Schengen land and sea border crossing points:

- a) which have been confronted, in the past five years for which statistical data are available, with an increase of more than 30% in the average traffic flows or in peak periods, excluding the Covid-19 period ⁽⁶⁾, or, alternatively, with an increase of more than 20% in the time devoted per traveller; and
- b) for which an increase of more than 30% in the average traffic flows or in peak periods or, alternatively, an increase of more than 20% in the time devoted per traveller can be anticipated in the two years after the date of entry into operation of the EES.

Member States are required to provide statistical data and an accompanying methodology demonstrating that the border crossing points concerned fall within the above categories.

For Lot 1.1.3.1, consideration will also be given to applications from a Member State that do not meet the percentages mentioned above but that can justify:

- a) that they have experienced, in the past five years for which statistical data are available, a *significant* increase in the average traffic flows or in peak periods, excluding the Covid-19 period, or, alternatively, that they have experienced in that period a significant increase in the time devoted per traveller; and/or
- b) that they anticipate a *significant* increase in the average traffic flows or in peak periods or, alternatively, that they anticipate a significant increase in the time devoted per traveller in the two years after the date of entry into operation of the EES.

For the purpose of this call, an increase in traffic flows and/or waiting times will be considered *significant* when it has the potential to disrupt the effective management of the EU external borders for a sustained period of time.

Lot 1.1.3.1 can include the following activities related to infrastructure and equipment of the external Schengen land and sea border crossing points, to the extent that the

⁽⁵⁾ See Regulation (EU) 2017/2225 of the European Parliament and of the Council of 30 November 2017 amending Regulation (EU) 2016/399 as regards the use of the Entry/Exit System.

⁽⁶⁾ For the purpose of this call, the Covid-19 period is defined as the period between March 2020 and March 2022.

application provides information on how each activity contributes to the facilitation and automation of border crossings and reduction of waiting times:

- Building new infrastructure and/or increasing existing one (e.g. specific lanes for non-Schengen arrivals or departures).
- Installing booths in ports and/or motorways.
- Deploying self-service systems, e-gates or ABC gates.
- Purchasing and installing CCTV cameras.
- Purchasing cameras for capturing facial images.
- Purchasing fingerprint readers.
- Purchasing hardware and/or software to be deployed in the border crossing point(s).
- Feasibility studies to assess the need to build and/or upgrade facilities at border crossing points.
- Studies to identify ways of easing and reducing the duration of border checks.

Lot 1.1.3.2 can include the following activities for developing and implementing NFPs:

- Preparatory work for designing and establishing the relevant legal framework;
- Studies, pilot projects and other relevant actions aimed at preparing and evaluating the functioning of NFPs;
- Delivering dedicated training on NFPs for border guards and other relevant authorities; and
- Information and communication campaigns for potential NFP beneficiaries.

Lot 1.1.3.2 can also include activities related to facilities and equipment at border crossing points concerned (e.g. building of specific lanes or deployment of specific self-service systems), as long as they are specifically intended for being used by NFP beneficiaries, thereby directly contributing to implementing the NFP.

3.4. Expected results following the call

Projects are expected to achieve:

- a) A decrease of at least 20% in border crossing times at the border crossing points targeted by the project compared to existing levels before project implementation;
or
- b) a decrease of at least 20% of the anticipated upsurge in border crossing times resulting from the entry into operation of the EES at the border crossing points targeted by the project.

In order to adequately measure and evaluate project results, Member States are invited to indicate, at the moment of the application, the existing levels of border crossing times and/or the anticipated upsurge in border crossing times resulting from the entry into operation of the EES. Member States are also required to indicate the decrease in border crossing times and/or of the anticipated upsurge in border crossing times that their project expects to achieve. They should explain how the activities foreseen in their application(s) are expected to achieve these results.

4. PROCEDURE FOR APPLICATION

4.1. Admissibility and assessment aspects

All Member States participating in the BMVI are eligible. 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 ⁽⁷⁾.

DG HOME will assess the proposals submitted by the Member States.

To be considered admissible, a proposal should

1. 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/1.1.3 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);
2. be submitted by the Managing Authority on behalf of the entity in the Member State that will be responsible for the implementation of the specific action;
3. identify a project beneficiary (an entity) that will be responsible for the implementation of the specific action in the Member State (in the lead for the action).
4. For projects submitted by a lead Member State on behalf of two or more Member States the proposal needs to include partnership declaration forms of all participating Member States involved in the project proposal. The lead Member State will have to make sure that all participating Member States duly sign the “Partnership Declaration Form” and that they are listed in the Application Form, indicating the share each will receive from the specific action’s amount allocated if the submitted project proposal is successful. Based on this common agreement, each partner will have a role and resulting responsibilities in the implementation of the project and delivering on its objectives.

⁽⁷⁾ References to Member States in the present note should, therefore, be understood as including Schengen associated countries once the legal arrangements for their participation in the BMVI are in place.

DG HOME will assess admissible proposals on the basis of the following assessment criteria ⁽⁸⁾:

A. Relevance (30 points; minimum score: 15 points)

1. **Clarity and consistency** of the objectives and scope of the proposed project against the objectives and expected results identified in this call for expression of interest (points 3.3 and 3.4).
2. **Complementarity** of the project with the BMVI programme(s) and, where relevant, other funding sources, notably the Internal Security Fund – Borders and Visa (ISF-BV).
3. **Coherence** of the project with previous and ongoing efforts of Member States to ensure readiness for EES implementation as reflected in the EES user preparation status produced by eu-LISA.

B. Quality and content (36 points; minimum score: 18 points)

1. **Maturity** of the proposal: appropriateness of the design; planned implementation (timetable), considering the envisaged activities; organisation of work and strategy for project management (operational and financial) and monitoring, measures undertaken to mitigate the identified risks, communication, awareness raising and evaluation. *Applications whose activities are foreseen to be implemented before the end of 2024 will be prioritised.*
2. **Cost-effectiveness:** the applicants should present the amount of financial support requested, its detailed breakdown, and its appropriateness in relation to the scale and type of the activities and to the expected results. They should also demonstrate the overall cost-effectiveness of the proposal by justifying why the activities proposed are the economically most efficient way to achieve the project results.

C. Impact (34 points; minimum score: 17 points)

1. The **impact** or effect of the proposed project in relation to the objective of the call for expression of interest for the EU and the expected number of travellers benefiting from it (Union added value).
2. The changes to the programme's output and results **indicators** listed in Annex VIII of the BMVI Regulation.
3. **Sustainability** of the project: continued production of results after the completion of the planned activities.

Applications and the activities planned therein are required to be designed and implemented in full compliance with the Schengen Borders Code and the EES and ETIAS Regulations. Member State(s) should also ensure respect for the horizontal principles described in Article 9 of Regulation (EU) 2021/1060.

⁽⁸⁾ Only proposals obtaining at least the minimum scores defined for each category (A, B and C) of criteria can be proposed for funding, depending on their overall ranking and on budget availability.

4.2. Application procedure

Deadline for the application: Member States are invited to submit their proposals by 31 May 2023 at the latest, using the official BMVI/2023/SA/1.1.3 Application Form attached to this Note, together with its annexes.

The proposals should be submitted to the BMVI specific actions functional mailbox HOME-BMVI-SPECIFIC-ACTIONS@ec.europa.eu.

Member States may submit additional documentation if necessary.

Deadline for any clarification requests on this Note: Member States can send requests by 10 May 2023 at the latest to the functional mailbox HOME-AFFAIRS-FUNDS-COMMITTEE@ec.europa.eu.

The Commission may contact the (lead) Member State to request further specific information. A reply should be provided by the Member State within 3 working days.

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 the proposals in case that deadline is extended.

DG HOME will inform Member States of the outcome of the assessment of the proposals towards July 2023.

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 should 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 States, two situations may arise regarding the eligibility of expenditure ⁽⁹⁾:

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 “*Integrated solutions for the facilitation and automation of border crossing*” in 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 as of 1 January 2023.

⁽⁹⁾ Art. 63(7) of Regulation (EU) 2021/1060.

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 “*Integrated solutions for the facilitation and automation of border crossing*” 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,

Electronically signed

Silvia MICHELINI

Enclosure: Annex 1: Application form
 Annex 2: Budget form
 Annex 3: Partnership Declaration form
 Annex 4: Indicators

c.c.: Permanent Representations – JHA Counsellors