



EUROPEAN COMMISSION
DIRECTORATE-GENERAL FOR MIGRATION AND HOME AFFAIRS

Directorate E – HOME Affairs Funds
The Director

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HOME.E/SM

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Subject: BMVI Specific Action

Invitation to submit an application for the Specific Action ‘Support Member States to reinforce border control capabilities in light of the February Special European Council’ – BMVI/2023/SA/1.1.2

Dear Ms Petkova,

Dear Ms Mihai,

1. INTRODUCTION

Regulation (EU) 2021/1148 of the European Parliament and of the Council of 7 July 2021 establishing the Integrated Border Management Fund, the Instrument for Financial Support for Border Management and Visa Policy (BMVI Regulation) 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 and national projects that bring high Union added value in accordance with the objectives of the Instrument and in line with agreed Union priorities. They will be implemented as one of the components of the Thematic Facility in line with Article 8 of the above-mentioned Regulation and in accordance with the relevant financing decisions and work programmes for the Instrument for Financial Support for Border Management and Visa Policy (BMVI) Thematic Facility ⁽¹⁾.

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

2. GENERAL PRINCIPLES

Specific actions will be implemented by Member States participating in the BMVI via funding received in addition to the allocation under their BMVI programmes.

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.

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 ⁽²⁾ and the Common Provisions Regulation (EU) 2021/1060 (CPR) ⁽³⁾.

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".

3. INVITATION TO SUBMIT AN APPLICATION

3.1. Background for the specific action

In 2022, a high number of irregular border crossings were detected (330,000) in the EU, the highest since 2016 and a 66% increase from 2021. In absolute numbers, the highest increase concerned the Western Balkan route (+82,000). Moreover, when it comes to the Western Balkan route, in 2022 there was a significant increase in the number of Eurodac hits indicating movements via Bulgaria.

The Western Balkan Action Plan identified operational measures, strengthening inter alia the partnership with the Western Balkans and key actions to take inside the EU such as reinforcing border management along the whole migration route.

⁽²⁾ 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

⁽³⁾ [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.

This action focuses on external borders relevant for the Western Balkan route that are particularly affected by migratory pressure. There, financial support to border capabilities will reinforce other activities being carried out to address the challenges of migration in a sustainable manner in the logic of the Western Balkan Action Plan, such as the deployment of personnel and equipment by Frontex and the setting up of pilot projects for fast asylum and return procedures.

The European Council of 9 February 2023 ⁽⁴⁾ called on the Commission “*to fund measures by Member States that directly contribute to the control of the EU external borders, such as the border management pilot projects, as well as to the enhancement of the border control in key countries on transit routes to the European Union*”, with a priority on the Bulgaria-Türkiye border. It also called on the Commission to “*immediately mobilise substantial EU funds and means to support Member States in reinforcing border protection capabilities and infrastructure, means of surveillance, including aerial surveillance, and equipment*”. As a follow-up to these recommendations, the President of the Commission identified areas for immediate action in her letter of 20 March 2023. Among them, as a first objective for strengthening the external borders, it identifies as a priority to support the *key border* of Bulgaria and Türkiye, in particular, with *the purchase of equipment to be launched in April 2023*. In complementarity, the letter also identifies an additional area of support in the implementation of two pilot projects in Bulgaria and Romania for swift asylum procedures and returns and improved border management.

On 17 March 2023, there was an agreement between the European Commission and the government of Romania about a pilot project for accelerated asylum procedures, and effective returns, border management and cooperation with Serbia. The joint statement indicates that the pilot foresees the implementation by Romania of several tools on asylum, returns, border management and international cooperation, building on the good Romanian practices in these areas.

On 20 March 2023, the Commission and the government of Bulgaria agreed on a pilot project with a focus on asylum and return. This pilot project aims at preventing irregular arrivals, strengthening border and migration management and it foresees the implementation by Bulgaria of targeted tools and practices in the area of accelerated asylum procedures and effective returns. The pilot project is the result of a close cooperation with the Bulgarian authorities. Furthermore, it will be implemented with strong operational and technical support of the Commission and the relevant Home Affairs EU agencies (EUAA, Europol and Frontex).

Bulgaria-Türkiye border

According to Frontex, migratory pressure at Bulgaria-Türkiye border increased in 2022 by approximately 130% to about 1 600 illegal migrant apprehensions. Furthermore, according to the Bulgarian authorities, in 2022 there were over 164 000 attempts for illegal crossings of the Bulgaria-Türkiye border, with the pressure representing 99% of the total migratory pressure on Bulgarian borders.

Such pressure is expected to remain high, considering the political situation in Türkiye, as well as in the countries of origin of migrants. Moreover, the announcement of the Greek authorities to further extend the technical obstacle along the Greek - Türkiye border might

⁽⁴⁾ See [European Council conclusions, 9 February 2023](#)

further lead to a shift of the route to Bulgaria. In addition, a side effect of the implementation of Frontex-coordinated operational activities at the North Macedonian – Greek border might be a shift of migratory pressure and an increase of illegal border crossings to Bulgaria on entry from Türkiye, as well as on exit to Serbia.

Romania-Serbia and other borders

While a number of inland detections point to some challenges especially at the Romanian-Serbian border, in 2022, migratory pressure along the Romania-Serbian border decreased by 64% compared to 2021. However, migrants, often with the support of people smugglers, continue to cross the Romanian-Serbian border undetected. Almost every day, the Romanian and Hungarian authorities spot groups of migrants who attempt to cross the Hungarian-Romanian border on foot or enter at BCPs hiding in vehicles. At the same time, since mid-2021, the Hungarian-Serbian border area has once again become attractive for migrants wishing to leave the Western Balkans towards EU Member States. It appears that this attractiveness increased in 2022. In January-November 2022, the Hungarian authorities recorded some 133 852 illegal crossing attempts, compared to 58 922 in the same period of 2021 (+127%).

3.2. Indicative Budget available

The indicative amount of **EUR 55 million** (including funds available under the 2021-2022 Thematic Facility work programme) will be made available to the two Member States under the Border Management and Visa Policy Instrument (BMVI) in the most effective way to complement the investment plans under their programmes, with priority to the Bulgaria-Türkiye border, as per the European Council conclusions.

3.3. Scope and purpose of the specific action

The European Commission proposes this specific action as part of the response to the above-mentioned request from the European Council to fund measures by Member States that directly contribute to the control of the EU external borders, such as the border management pilot projects, as well as to the enhancement of the border control in key countries on transit routes to the European Union.

This specific action gives priority to support to the EU's protection capability for the Bulgarian / Turkish border, but considering secondary movements, may additionally target the Bulgarian / North Macedonian border, the Bulgarian / Serbian and Romanian / Serbian border.

You are invited to launch initiatives to make improvements to further enhance the protection capability for these sections of the EU external border, including the extension or upgrading of existing border surveillance systems, the purchase of means of transport including with thermo-vision capabilities, operating equipment such as movement detection cameras and thermo-vision cameras, upgrades to related ICT systems.

Support for operating cost and staff relating to the equipment purchased can be funded through this specific action subject to a ceiling of 20% of the final allocated amount and for a maximum duration of 18 months.

Applications will need to demonstrate that the proposed actions are complementary to the respective Member State's programme and are part of capacity building strategies for a strong and effective integrated border management at national level.

You are invited to provide information on the expected concrete and quantifiable results in terms of the time and degree of surveillance capacity and on the overall impact the additional resources will bring to bear on the surveillance system at the border sections concerned.

Please present in your application the different priorities as work packages composed of several items that you wish to purchase and, where relevant, the related operating cost and staff, identifying/presenting for each priority the different budget items and their relevance with regards to the capability gaps and expected timeline for delivery.

We recommend that you present your priorities ranked in order of importance / preference. Please describe the reasoning behind the ranked work packages in the application form and use the budget form to detail each priority with the relevant activities. It is possible that only some work packages will be financed. Since there is no earmarking of the amount per Member State and the EU budget may not be sufficient to cover all additional needs identified by the two Member States, the application should present your views on the priorities for funding among the needs identified and the degree of urgency for each priority.

The application should also include (for instance as a separate annex) an overview of the planned investments, with an indicative breakdown of the budget per item purchased and, where relevant, the operating cost and staff, and an explanation how the needs are complementary to those investments. The amount allocated will be entered into the year 2023 in the financial plan of your national programme.

4. PROCEDURE FOR APPLICATION

The application should identify your additional needs for support, the complementarity with your 2021-2027 BMVI programme, and the expected impact of these additional resources for the protection of the EU external border.

You will find in the attached documents the details of the requirements necessary for the application to be considered admissible and complete, as well as the application form and the budget form.

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

To be considered admissible a 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 in the official Application Form attached to this note, together with the budget form, and is readable and complete (all fields necessary for assessment are filled in),
2. has to 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. has to 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).

Once the application would be submitted, DG HOME will assess your proposal based on the following criteria:

- **Relevance:** degree to which the budget items in the proposal will address the situation at the external border sections identified as priority.
- **EU Added value:** concrete benefits and quantified results of the budget items in the proposal for the border management capability of the Member State concerned.
- **Impact:** extent to which the project is likely to have positive effects in addressing the detection of migratory flows and the overall protection capability of the external borders of the Member States and the EU.
- **Cost-efficiency:** budget adequate and proportionate to the importance and the expected impact of the promised results (best value for money)
- **Complementarity:** Applications will need to demonstrate that the proposed actions are complementary to the respective Member State's programme and are part of capacity building strategies such as Frontex operational plans (for a *strong and effective integrated border management* at national level).

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

Deadline for the application: You are invited to submit your application at the latest by **Friday 19 May 2023** (17.00 Brussels Local Time).

The application should be submitted to the BMVI specific actions functional mailbox HOME-BMVI-SPECIFIC-ACTIONS@ec.europa.eu using the official Application Form to this Note, together with its annexes.

Deadline for clarification requests: In order to provide you with the response before the deadline for submission of application, you can send requests to the BMVI specific actions functional mailbox HOME-BMVI-SPECIFIC-ACTIONS@ec.europa.eu by Friday 5 May 2023 at the latest.

DG HOME will inform the Member States of the outcome of the assessment of the proposals by mid-June through a notification letter. This will also specify the exact requirements to be met by each Member State, reflecting the activities covered by the pilot projects referred to in section 3.1 above.

The programme amendment introducing the allocation in the Member State's BMVI programme will be subject to the assessment of progress in the implementation of the pilot projects mentioned in section 3.1 above.

Yours sincerely,

Silvia MICHELINI