



EUROPEAN COMMISSION
DIRECTORATE-GENERAL FOR MIGRATION AND HOME AFFAIRS

Directorate E – HOME Affairs Funds
The Director

Brussels
HOME.E.2/JG

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

Ref.: HOME-Funds/2023/25

Subject: Launch of the call for expression of interest under the “Specific Action MS under pressure - reception at the external border” under the Asylum, Migration and Integration Fund (AMIF) – Reference AMIF/2023/SA/1.2.1

1. INTRODUCTION

Regulation (EU) 2021/1147 of the European Parliament and of the Council of 7 July 2021 establishing the Asylum, Migration and Integration Fund (AMIF)¹ 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 Fund 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.11 AMIF Regulation and the relevant financing decisions and work programmes for the AMIF Thematic Facility.

By the present note, the Commission launches a call for expression of interest for Specific Action “MS under pressure – reception at the external border”, in line with the actions listed in the above-mentioned Commission’s financing decision and work programme.

¹ Regulation (EU) 2021/1147 of the European Parliament and of the Council of 7 July 2021 establishing the Asylum, Migration and Integration Fund.

2. GENERAL PRINCIPLES

Specific actions will be implemented by Member States participating in the AMIF via funding received in addition of the allocation under their AMIF 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 AMIF Regulation² 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. CALL FOR EXPRESSION OF INTEREST

3.1. Budget availability and reserve list

3.1.1. Indicative budget available

The indicative amount envisaged for the call AMIF/2023/SA/1.2.1. is EUR 120 million with lot 1: unaccompanied minors and lot 2: reception at the external border.

As part of the same call AMIF/2023/SA/1.2.1, both lots will be assessed together by DG HOME which can adjust the amount envisaged for each lot, according to the needs.

For Lot 2 EUR 50 million is available.

² Regulation (EU) 2021/1147 of the European Parliament and of the Council of 7 July 2021 establishing the Asylum, Migration and Integration Fund

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.

The requested amount (i.e. the Union contribution to the Member State's AMIF programme under the Specific Action, including technical assistance):

- should not be lower than EUR 5 million per application/work package (if applicable) and
- should not be higher than EUR 20 million per application /work package (if applicable), except in duly justified cases.

There are two priorities under this lot. Priority 1 has a co-financing rate up to 80% and priority 2 up to 50% (see section 3.4).

3.1.2. Reserve list

Under the Thematic Facility work programme 2023-2025, additional amounts could be allocated in 2024 to Member States under pressure for proposals on unaccompanied minors and reception at the external border. Following the submission of proposals by Member States, the Commission would establish a reserve list in case additional budget is available in the future. The reserve list would be composed of:

- Proposals not selected under the present call: the Commission will establish a reserve list for proposals which are not selected but obtained a **minimum score of 65/100**.
- Proposals partially financed under the present call: when applying, Member States could submit proposals composed of different work packages. The Commission can propose to fund either one or multiple work packages, each one within the above-mentioned ceilings, and include the remaining one(s) in the reserve list, provided that they meet the **minimum score of 65/100**. In order for this to become applicable, please provide the information requested in the application form, where you also find more information on work packages.

3.2. Background for the specific action

The JHA Council of 25 November 2022 examined the situation of increasing migratory pressure along all migratory routes, including the particularly challenging situation in the Mediterranean and in the Western Balkans, and the largest refugee crisis since the Second World War in Europe, with around 4 million refugees from Ukraine who received temporary protection. The EU endorsed Action Plans on the Western Balkans and the Central Mediterranean route, bearing in mind the respective challenges of irregular border crossings and disembarkations after search and rescue. The JHA Council emphasized the need for joint efforts and solidarity, bearing in mind the need for a whole-of-route approach to find solutions.

The European Council of 9 February 2023 discussed the migration situation and invited the Commission to present Action Plans for the Atlantic, Western and Eastern Mediterranean routes, with a view to quickly alleviating the pressure on the Member States most affected.

A call for actions to support reception, asylum and return systems under pressure will contribute to the efforts of Member States to address challenges identified. The call will invite Member States to launch initiatives to make structural improvements at national level, taking into account shortcomings identified when facing the migratory pressure.

In order to quickly alleviate the pressure on MS particularly affected and bearing in mind Union acquis, the EU Charter of Fundamental Rights and standards set by the EU Asylum Agency or the UNHCR, this call supports MS to remedy shortcomings identified in reception systems at the external border. The call will invite Member States to launch initiatives to make structural improvements at national level, taking into account shortcomings identified when facing the migratory pressure.

3.2.1 EU legal and policy framework

The Reception Conditions Directive (2013/33/EU) lays down standards for the reception of applicants for international protection throughout the EU. It is intended to ensure equal treatment of applicants in all Member States, and it applies during all stages and types of procedures concerning applications for international protection, in all locations and facilities hosting applicants, including at the border, and for as long as they are allowed to remain on the territory of the Member States as applicants.

The Reception Conditions Directive allows for some flexibility when housing capacities normally available are temporarily exhausted. In these exceptional cases, there is a possibility to set modalities for material reception conditions (such as the forms of accommodation) different from those provided in the relevant provisions of the Reception Conditions Directive. However, this should be for the shortest possible time and an assessment of the specific needs of the applicant is required. In any case, the conditions shall cover basic needs of the applicants.

In 2016, the European Commission proposed a Reception Conditions Directive recast as part of the CEAS reform package, which aimed to further harmonize reception conditions in the EU. In 2020, the Commission proposed the New Pact, which maintained the Reception Conditions Directive recast proposal from 2016. The negotiations of this proposal have now been finalized by two co-legislators and the compromise reached awaits adoption together with the rest of the Pact files.

The EUAA issued a guidance on reception conditions in 2016 and is currently in the process of developing additional standards and indicators on areas not covered in the first guidance document.

3.2.2 Current challenges and gaps

The reception of asylum seekers in the European Union (EU) has been a complex issue since 2015, with an increased number of applications and temporary protection. The challenges faced by reception systems are complex and require political will and cooperation at all levels. The challenges are linked to the length of asylum procedures, obstacles to integration, return policies, lack of social housing, and overall public support for asylum policies.

Good-quality data on reception is essential, and contingency planning is crucial to be better prepared for different situations of possible migratory pressure. The EU Agency for Asylum (EUAA) assists Member States in improving their reception systems and can help developing contingency plans. All Member States must participate in finding effective ways to address the challenges associated with the reception of asylum seekers in the EU.

The EU's proposed Pact aims to provide more efficient asylum systems, fair sharing of responsibility and solidarity, and support to Member States through financial, operational, and technical means.

The EU is facing unprecedented times with increased number of asylum applications coupled with some four million people benefiting from temporary protection in the EU. Hosting millions of persons fleeing the Russian war of aggression against Ukraine in a short period of time has proven to be a great challenge. Although as a response to a high influx of persons enjoying temporary protection from Ukraine in 2022, different types of temporary or more permanent accommodation were provided by national authorities and municipalities, private sponsors and housing market, it has had and continues to have an impact on the reception systems for asylum applicants.

According to the Reception Conditions Directive recast, Member States shall ensure material reception conditions. These conditions include providing the applicant with an adequate standard of living, which guarantees their subsistence and mental health as well as necessary support to account for the applicants' special reception needs. To that end, Member States with external borders might use premises that are at or in proximity to the external border or transit zones.

Flexible accommodation capacities are necessary to respond to rapidly evolving crisis situations but also to be able to increase or decrease overall accommodation needs for applicants of international protection as flows change. Access to affordable housing solutions is essential for a smooth transition from reception facilities to independent living. Some Member States have found that keeping capacity after a decrease in flows and utilising accommodation centres for other purposes is financially more beneficial compared to building new capacity from scratch. Modelling of costs is important to ensure contingency and preparedness plans are effective. Also, private actors, such as NGOs and private sponsors, have played a critical role in recent crisis responses notably in the aftermath of the Russian invasion of Ukraine and the arrival of some four million persons to the EU. All of these elements are to be factored in when designing or finding new innovative ways to ensure adaptable housing and accommodation solutions in continuously changing circumstances.

Member States with an external land and/or sea border continue to be disproportionately impacted by the arrivals of applicants, as they need to provide reception facilities in accordance with the Reception Conditions Directive to all arriving applicants, including where applicable directly at or near the border areas. Reception facilities can take many different forms and can be categorised in different ways, such as arrival centres, meant for quick processing and transition to a more permanent structure; accommodation centres where residents wait for a decision on their application, but a reception facility can also refer to accommodation in the form of an apartment. These reception facilities are often the first stable place for applicants since they began their journey.

Reception facilities close to the external borders often face their own specific challenges when it comes to providing reception conditions, in particular with regard to emergency accommodation, transport and medical assistance as these locations are often remote and bottlenecks can occur when faced with migratory pressures. Where appropriate, this information should be provided in the application form.

The call will focus on expending reception facilities at the external borders either by extending the existing centers and/or services or by building new facilities.

3.2.3. Complementarity

The actions to be financed under this call should be complementary to any actions that Member States may finance under the AMIF 2021-2027 National Programmes or other EU funding instruments for the objective of enhancing the capacity of national reception systems in a sustainable manner, such as the ESF+, the ERDF, the Technical Support Instrument (TSI) etc.

In case the Member State has a EUAA operational plan with a reception component that involves specific support related to the reception and care for children, the proposal should be designed to ensure complementarity with it.

Applications for financing under the present call should not consist in re-funding of previous EU projects that have not been well assimilated into the system. The proposals should describe how sustainability of the measure will be ensured after the finalisation of the project and how the project would complement other source of funding.

3.2.4. Minimum requirements for the proposals

The call will invite the Member States facing migratory pressure arising in 2022 and in the first half of 2023 to launch initiatives to make structural improvements at national level, given shortcomings identified in the national reception system at the external EU border.

The proposals should be embedded in a national strategy and thus contribute to capacity building at national level for these systems. The application should describe the baseline situation, the strategy concerned and the expected results. This means that proposals should indicate how the project fits into the (broader) plans of the government for improving the reception system in the mid to long term. The project may contribute to better implementation of existing policies, for instance by upscaling activities related to the reception system, or prepare for other forms of support, by testing a new initiative, which would then be continued and/or replicated in a sustainable manner afterwards with national budget.

To contribute to a successful strategy, the proposals should take into account existing guidance from the EUAA and could involve further targeted guidance for the proposed actions from the EUAA and, where appropriate, other international organisations and/or national asylum agencies in other Member States.

The proposals should support measures that are in line with EU standards and guidance and where appropriate build on good practices in other Member States.

Furthermore, the applicants should consult EUAA on their proposed actions. The applicant could involve, for instance, the EUAA to support the proposal with the design of the initiative, its testing and roll-out.

Moreover, the proposals should demonstrate sustainability of the capacity being built through the project at national level. To this end, proposals will need to outline the cooperation and active participation, and at the very least contain the written agreement of all the national administrations and/or institutions benefitting from it. Applicants are strongly encouraged to involve regional and/or municipal authorities and civil society

organisations, including migrants' organisations, in the designing/implementation of their project whenever possible and relevant. Such an involvement can often contribute to the sustainability of the project and increase the acceptance of the host society.

The proposals should also include a description about steps to be taken after the end of the project in connection to the national strategy for reception capacity building and the Member State should provide an explanation relating to sustainability of the measures at the end of the project.

3.2.5. Proposals of higher priority

Proposals aimed at increasing compliance with Union acquis and key guidance by introducing new and innovative means, tools or methods for accommodation in the country concerned will be given priority⁴.

Proposals focusing on ensuring better responsiveness to the rapidly changing flows at the external EU borders to meet the requirements of the Reception Conditions Directive will also be given priority. For instance, activities that render more flexible the accommodation offer of the facility concerned.

3.3. Scope of the specific action for Member States under pressure

This call for specific action is part of a number of specific actions that seek to address the challenges identified at the February European Council on migration. All these specific actions aim to support Member States under migratory pressure, in accordance with the work programmes for AMIF and BMVI of the Thematic Facility. The work programme for AMIF refers to actions to support reception, asylum and return systems under pressure.

3.3.1. Distinction from programmes and emergency assistance

The scope of the support for Member States under pressure under these specific actions needs to be well defined and a clear delineation must be drawn with funding opportunities under:

- a. Member States' Programmes (National Programmes); and
- b. Emergency assistance (EMAS),

as well as direct awards provided to international organisations and non-profit organisations assimilated with international organisations in accordance with Article 156 of the Financial Regulation for this same purpose.

3.3.2. General principles for specific actions Member States under Pressure

The following general principles should be taken into account for Specific Actions under the concept of Member States under Pressure:

- The actions should serve to cover additional structural or exceptional needs and running costs, including contingency, stemming from the additional burden resulting

⁴for instance, making space in the accommodation for separation of men and women, families with children, adequate facilities for people with disabilities, different/conflicting ethnicities, religious beliefs, sexual orientation, etc., for making space for capacity to enable their earlier identification).

from the continuous migratory pressure in the Member State concerned or at its external borders.

- The request for funding should demonstrate that national funds and/or funds under Member States' programmes or other sources of funding are not sufficient over the 7 years period to carry out the proposed actions, or that the proposed actions deliver additional EU added value to the actions funded under the Member State programme.
- The complementarities between the different funding tools should be demonstrated to avoid potential overlaps.
- The actions deliver particularly high EU-added value considering recent developments and demonstrate EU solidarity with Member States under pressure in line with the specific objectives of the Fund-specific Regulations.
- The actions are foreseeable and of medium or long-term nature. The needs are predictable and can be planned by the Member States authorities. The applicant should ensure that the proposed action will be implemented in full respect of the Charter of Fundamental Rights of the European Union and in line with EU acquis.

3.3.3. Requirements relating to Member State under Pressure

For this specific action, proposals should provide a justification that the Member State concerned is facing continuous pressure on its migration system and is bearing a high share of responsibility on behalf of the Union as a whole.

The description of the baseline situation at the time of the application in the proposal should provide data for this purpose.

Data can include for instance the number of new and/or pending asylum applications, the occupancy rate in the national reception system, in particular at the external border, (including in points of arrivals and in pre-removal detention centres), the number of beneficiaries of temporary protection, international protection, the number of pending return decisions and any other criteria justifying the relevance of the proposal (see also section 3.4).

Data may also relate to concerns about shortcomings in the national reception systems or the risks of not complying fully with the Union acquis.

Data should be comparable and reference should be made to how the data was collected, measured or calculated.

3.4. Objective and activities of the specific action

The specific action proposed can include activities related to one or both of the following two priorities as follows:

- a. Supporting the **extension and/or refurbishment of reception centres at external borders in accordance with EU standards and recommendations** (with a co-financing rate up to 80%) (priority 1)
- b. Increasing reception capacity **by building new centres at external border** (with a co-financing rate up to 50%) (priority 2).

The objective of this specific action is to support Member States under pressure to make structural improvements to their reception system by increasing the overall reception capacity. This call targets Member States under pressure (due to the number of arrivals or structural problems in their reception systems) which have an EU external border and invites these Member States to improve reception at these borders.

The geographical scope of this specific action is limited to land and sea EU external borders. It applies to locations within the geographical distance or area to perform the border control according to national legislation. Member States could request to extend the above defined geographical scope by providing justification about specific circumstances applicable to the project.

In case proposals are envisaged for both priorities, Member States must submit two different application packages (application form and dedicated budget forms): one for each priority including the respective co-financing rate (priority 1: up to 80%; priority 2: up to 50%). Each Member State can submit maximum two proposals (see section 4.1).

3.5. Expected results following the call

The aim of the specific action is to increase the reception capacity of the EU and its ability to welcome adequately third country nationals arriving at borders.

The proposals must provide figures and indications on the proposed increase (targets for the extra number of places, targets for the increase in quantity or quality of services, where appropriate per target population) and how the addition in the reception at the border will affect the overall national capacity of accommodation and/or services, either through priority 1 or 2.

The proposals should also explain and where possible quantify how the proposed addition will contribute to structural improvements in the national asylum system (nature or scope of the impact on the overall reception system, the contingency planning capability, the capacity to respond more flexibly to rapidly changing flows, services for various categories of arrivals, such as vulnerable groups, capacity to screen and register arrivals, capacity to identify vulnerable persons and speed up the processing of asylum applications, balance between first line and second reception etc.).

3.6. Follow up and monitoring projects selected

DG HOME may organise workshops bringing together all project beneficiaries to meet, share information and report on progress and exchange good practices throughout the life cycle of the projects.

The aim of this joint monitoring activity is not only to share information on preliminary results, indicators, methodology, implementation issues and any preparations for sustainability but also to compile results collectively and thus identify the overall impact of the specific action.

4. PROCEDURE FOR APPLICATION

4.1. Application content

You have the possibility to present in your application the different priorities/topics/stages of the proposal as work packages composed of activities that you wish to carry out. For each work package, indicate the priority in relation to the other ones, describe the different activities and their relevance with regards to the capability gaps and expected timeline for delivery.

We recommend that you present the work packages according to a logic that is inherent, in your opinion, to an optimal development of your reception system at the external border. Please describe the reasoning behind this intervention logic with work packages in the application form and use the budget form to detail each work package, within a separated excel sheet, with the relevant activities.

The work packages that are part of a proposal should be clearly inter-connected and contribute to the achievement of the objective(s) of the proposal. Nevertheless, should there be work packages not selected/added to the reserve list, it should not affect the implementation of the work package(s) selected and their effective commencement.

Given the limited budget available, it is likely that only some work packages of a proposal 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, the application should present your views on the priorities for funding among the needs identified and the sequencing for each activity.

Each Member State can submit a **maximum of two applications** (one for each priority). Each application will be assessed on its own merits and independently from other applications submitted by the same Member State.

4.2. Admissibility and assessment aspects

All EU Member States participating in the AMIF are eligible. 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 AMIF specific actions functional mailbox HOME-AMIF-SPECIFIC-ACTIONS@ec.europa.eu in the official AMIF/2023/SA/1.2.1 Application Form attached to this note, together with its annexes, and 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)
4. cannot result in financing of equipment or infrastructure that has already been procured and delivered.

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

DG HOME will assess admissible proposals based on the following criteria:

- A. Relevance and content (40 points – minimum ‘pass score’: 25 points):**
1. Degree to which the Member State concerned is under pressure and the proposal outlines structural improvements to address the pressure in the system in line with the objectives of the call (section 3.3.3)
 2. Compliance with the minimum requirements (section 3.2.4) and degree to which a higher priority is achieved (section 3.2.5)
 3. Connection to the external border and degree to which the proposal will support future developments on reception and processing of asylum applications at external borders
 4. Clarity and consistency of the objectives of the proposal against the scope and expected results identified in this call for expression of interest (sections 3.4 and 3.5)
- B. Quality (30 points – minimum ‘pass score’: 15 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.
 2. Complementarity of the project with current and/or past use of national budget or other EU funding instruments; degree to which the proposal will build on actions funded previously or ensures synergies with ongoing projects;
 3. Cost-effectiveness: reasonability and feasibility of the estimated costs in relation to the scale and types of equipment, and the methodology for the calculation of the costs; justification of costs not directly linked to the objectives of the proposal, if any.
 4. Degree of peer-to-peer review by other Member States, involvement of other Member States, EU Agencies, the Commission services and/or other stakeholders to support innovation and/or full compliance with EU acquis, recommendations and good practices established in the EU
- C. Impact (30 points – minimum ‘pass score’: 15 points):**
1. The impact or effect of the proposal in relation to the objective of the call for expression of interest in terms of:
 - a. scope and size of structural improvements made by the proposal.
 - b. alleviation of the pressure in the asylum system
 2. Dissemination and communication on the project.
 3. The expectations for the sustainability of the improvements achieved with the proposal.

Member State(s) should also ensure respect for the horizontal principles described in Article 9 of Regulation (EU) 2021/1060.

4.2. Application procedure

Deadline for the application: Member States are invited to submit their proposals by 25/08/2023 at the latest, using the official AMIF/2023/SA/1.2.1. Application Form attached to this Note, together with its annexes.

The proposals should be submitted to the AMIF specific actions functional mailbox HOME-AMIF-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 04/08/2023 at the latest to HOME-AFFAIRS-FUNDS-COMMITTEE@ec.europa.eu.

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.

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 won't 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 the deadline for the submission of proposals is extended.

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

5. AMENDMENT OF THE AMIF 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 AMIF 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).

Yours faithfully,

Silvia MICHELINI

Enclosure: Annex 1: Application form
 Annex 2: Budget form (priority 1)
 Annex 3: Budget form (priority 2)

c.c.: Permanent Representations – JHA Counsellors