

Evaluation Manual

“EmBRACE”

**(Enhancing MSEs sustainable gRowth And
CompEtitiveness)**

**Interreg VI-A IPA Croatia – Bosnia and Herzegovina – Montenegro 2021-
2027 Programme**

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1. INTRODUCTION

The guidelines for evaluating Small Projects (SPs) are intended to provide support to the EmBRACE evaluators on how to use the EmBRACE evaluation grids and how to execute their ex-ante assessment of the new EmBRACE SPs before the projects are endorsed for financing, in order to select and fund high quality SPs.

1.1. PROGRAMME AND LEGAL BACKGROUND

The Interreg VI-A Programme IPA Croatia – Bosnia and Herzegovina – Montenegro 2021-2027 has set up a Small Project Fund (SPF) for micro and small enterprises (MSEs) as Final Recipients (FRs) in order to foster MSE growth and support their tendencies for digital transformation.

Small Project Fund (SPF) EmBRACE is a pilot project that plans to offer support to MSEs in the Programme area and enhance the competitiveness of micro and small sized enterprises in the border regions. MSEs in all three countries account for the largest significant share of business and total employment, but the 'starting a business' category is still one of the lowest rankings as the bureaucratic administration remains a burden. Support will be given to the development and adaptation of business models, products, services and processes, fostering development of local MSEs with strong focus on introducing product or process innovation, developing pilot actions and new business solutions, while simultaneously enhancing their cross- border business cooperation.

Croatian Agency for SMEs, Innovation and Investments (HAMAG-BICRO) as Small Project Fund Beneficiary (SPFB) will directly support businesses via grants.

Support to SPs under SPF will be organised as defined in the Article 2(10) of the CPR (Regulation (EU) No 2021/1060) and Article 25 of the Interreg Regulation (Regulation (EU) No 2021/1059). The FRs within a SPF shall receive support from the Programme through the SPF beneficiary and implement the SPs within that SPF.

1.2 Duration of the Small Project and amount of financing

Duration of the SPs shall be at minimum 6 and maximum 12 months. FRs should have balanced budget in their cooperating SPs in order to prove their participation in implementing small project activities. FR's budget should amount minimum 20% of total SP budget.

Minimum and maximum size of SPs in the 1st call for Applications within the EmBRACE project are listed in the table below. Different thresholds of SPs size can be applied for each call.

		Total eligible costs (100%)	EU co-financing (up to 85%)
Option 1 (SPs up to 100.000 €)	Minimum per SP	20.000,00 EUR	17.000,00 EUR
	Maximum per SP	100.000,00 EUR	85.000,00 EUR
Option 2 (SPs that exceed 100.000 €)	Maximum per SP	235.294,00 EUR	200.000,00 EUR

EU contribution to the FRs financed from the EmBRACE project is a non-repayable grant. Payment of the EU and national co-financing takes place upon the approval of the Small Projects' periodical project reports and final report.

A maximum up to 85% of the total eligible expenditure can be requested as a grant from the EmBRACE. The rest, a minimum of 15% of total eligible expenditure, shall be covered as own contribution from the FRs composed of any kind of financial resources (e.g. money in the bank account, bank loan, other fund donors) with the exception of grants requested from the EU or from National co-financing resources.

Value added tax (VAT) is eligible expenditure and must be planned in SP budget.¹

1.3. Eligibility of the Final Recipients and the Small Project

Each FR and the SP are eligible for funding if they fulfil the next criteria:

- FR (and/or its owner company having more than 50% of ownership rights over the FRs, and/or its linked enterprise(s) through a natural person, all cumulatively) is a MSE (micro and small sized enterprise);
- FR having at least one closed business year for seat and/ or branch in the Programme area;
- FR equity is positive for the last closed business year for seat and/ or branch in the Programme area;
- FR should have their seat (headquarters) or its branch and should operate in the Programme area;
- At least one FR should have its seat or its branch and should operate in the EU member state (Croatia);
- FRs have a valid registration to pursue their activities or they have not been convicted of an offence concerning their professional conduct by a judgement which has the force of 'res iudicata', further they have not been guilty of grave professional misconduct proven by any means which the SPFB can justify;
- FRs have fulfilled their obligations relating to the payment of social security contributions or the payment of taxes in accordance with the national legal provisions;
- FRs have not been the subject of a judgement which has the force of 'res iudicata' for fraud, for corruption, for severe breach of contract in connection to obligations stemming from public procurement rules or from rules governing the use of Community funding or national subsidies, for involvement in a criminal organization or for any other illegal activity detrimental to the Community's financial interests;
- FRs are not subject to a conflict of interests connected to their participation in the present EmBRACE project;
- FRs are not guilty of misrepresentation in supplying the information required by the SPFB/MA/NA as a condition of participation in the EmBRACE or in failing to supply information;

¹ In line with Article 64 of [CPR](#), VAT shall not be supported by the Programme and EmBRACE project, except:

- For operations the total cost of which is below EUR 5,000,000.00 (including VAT);
- For operations the total cost of which is at least EUR 5,000,000.00 (including VAT) and VAT is non-recoverable under national legislation;
- For SPFs and investments made by FRs in the context of SPFs.

In those cases, VAT is eligible, if:

- it is established that it is borne by the FR;
- it is clearly identified in the invoice.

- FRs have not attempted to obtain confidential information or to influence the Selection Committee during the evaluation process of their Small Project Application;
- SP does not contain development of the following activities: fishery and aquaculture, primary production, processing and marketing of agricultural products listed in Annex I to the Treaty (see Annex I of the Guidelines for MSEs as Final Recipients (GfA)), or the establishment and operation of a distribution network towards third countries or Member States and do not belong to the NACE codes representing the target economic sectors of EmBRACE (see Chapter 3.6. GfA);
- FRs' business is not in difficult situation (according to Commission Regulation (EU) No 651/2014 of 17 June 2014);
- FRs are not bankrupt, not being wound up, liquidated or having their affairs administered by the courts;
- FRs have not entered into an agreement with creditors;
- FRs have not suspended business activities;
- FRs are not subject of proceedings concerning matters written above, or are in any analogous situation arising from a similar procedure provided for in national legislation or regulations;
- Duration of the project is within the limits of minimum 6 and maximum 12 months;
- Total eligible costs of the SP are between the minimum and maximum limits set in chapter 1.2 depending on the option;
- The SP requests a maximum 85% of the total eligible expenditure as a grant.

1.4 Eligible costs of the Small Project

	SP Option 1 up to EUR 100.000	SP Option 2 exceeding EUR 100.000
Cost category	Form of reimbursement	Form of reimbursement
Staff costs	Specific lump sums Total costs of SP do not exceed EUR 100.000.	20 % flat rate of direct costs (real costs)
Office and administrative costs		15 % flat rate of staff costs
Travel and accommodation costs		15% flat rate of staff costs
External expertise and services costs		Real costs
Equipment costs		Real costs
Costs of infrastructure and works		Real costs

Eligible costs approved for financing SPs:

- Preparation costs
Each FR has to budget EUR 1,500.00 of preparation costs as a lump sum.
- Staff costs

The amount of staff costs for FRs is **20% flat rate of direct costs (real cost)**.

c) Office and administrative expenditure

As regard to the eligibility of office and administrative expenditure, it is automatically calculated as a **flat rate of 15% of the staff costs**.

d) Travel and accommodation costs

The amount of travel and accommodation costs for FRs is **15% flat rate of the staff costs**.

e) External expertise and services

In order to verify the costs during the process of application, FRs will be required to submit with the SPA:

- For costs between EUR 2,500 to EUR 20,000 (excluding VAT), FRs must submit 1 pro-forma (non-binding) offer
- For costs over EUR 20,000.00 (excluding VAT), FRs must document market research, i.e. submit 3 pro-forma (non-binding) offers.

f) Equipment

In order to verify the costs during the process of application, FRs will be required to submit with the SPA:

- For costs between EUR 2,500 to EUR 20,000 (excluding VAT), FRs must submit 1 pro-forma (non-binding) offer
- For costs over EUR 20,000.00 (excluding VAT), FRs must document market research, i.e. submit 3 pro-forma (non-binding) offers.

g) Infrastructure and works (small scale infrastructure up to 10% of total budget per Final Recipient)

In order to verify the costs during the process of application, FRs will be required to submit with the SPA the proof of legal interest (proof of ownership or lease contract) and submit a technical description of the planned works according to the national laws and acts for each country if SP includes small scale infrastructure costs.

External expertise and services costs, and / or equipment costs and/ or costs of infrastructure and works have to be used in the SP budget and with the purpose of Small Project activities implementation.

1.5. Ineligible costs of the Small Project

The following expenditures shall not be eligible for funding under the EmBRACE as Small Project Fund:

- In line with Article 64 of [CPR](#):
 - interest on debt;
 - value added tax (VAT) is eligible expenditure except when the total cost of operation is below EUR 5,000,000.00²;
 - the purchase of land
- In line with Article 38(3) of Interreg Regulation:
 - Fines, financial penalties and expenditure on legal disputes and litigation;

² Since the total cost of each small project submitted under Call for SPA submission cannot be above 5,000,000.00 EUR, VAT is eligible and must be planned in small project budget.

- Costs of gifts³;
- Costs related to fluctuation of foreign exchange rate.
- Other ineligible expenditures:
 - consultant fees between FRs for services and work carried out within the operation;
 - contracting of employees (staff) of the FRs as external experts (e.g. as freelancers, translators, IT experts, etc.);
 - alcohol, except in duly justified cases, when related to the operation theme/subject⁴;
 - the manufacturing, processing and marketing of tobacco and tobacco products;
 - any expenses which are not indicated in the Application or specifically approved during operation implementation by the SPFB;
 - equipment or external services purchased from another FR;
 - cost for infrastructure and works outside the Programme area;
 - shared costs⁵;
 - charges for national financial transactions;
 - sub-granting (e.g. small grant initiatives under grant operation);
 - contributions in kind;
 - discounts not considered when claiming the costs (only the discounted amount is to be regarded as eligible);
 - tips;
 - costs of audits and evaluations at operation level.

This list is not exhaustive. Costs not listed are therefore not automatically to be considered as eligible. Additional ineligible costs may be defined in other relevant Programme documents (e.g. Programme Manual on Eligibility).

2. SELECTION AND EVALUATION OF THE SMALL PROJECT APPLICATIONS (SPA)

2.1 Selection process

The selection process aims to provide an objective selection process and offer the best and most suitable candidates for financing. The small project selection process shall be conducted in two steps/phases: Administrative and eligibility (A&E) check and Content evaluation.

Small Project Application (SPA) must be filled in and submitted only through the online [EmBRACE platform](#).

Small Project Applicants should ensure appropriate quality of submitted documentation to avoid insufficient, incomprehensible or unclear information, provided in individual fields of the application – resulting in a lower score of the evaluation. SPAs and mandatory annexes (statements/declarations) have to be filled in English. The remaining supporting documentation (other documentation) can be either in English or in national languages and scripts, but SPFB reserves the right to request an authorized translation into English from applicants if delivered documents in national language or script will not be understandable.

If A&E evaluation is positive, evaluators designated by SPFB need to run the content evaluation of the application.

³ Promotional materials are not considered as gifts.

⁴ Please note that wine is considered a food product, in line with EU and national legislations.

⁵ Cost sharing is defined as a pro rata allocation of certain project expenditure incurred by one project partner and allocated to various other project partners.

The evaluators are obligated to fill in all of the comments section in the Evaluation forms. Evaluators need to finish their evaluation report after the SPFB has informed them of the application submission on the Google drive/Microsoft OneDrive. The deadline for the entire evaluation process is 70 calendar days after respective cut-off date. The SPFB will then inspect and collect the evaluation results and provide a list of small project applications (ANNEX V List of SPAs in this document).

The SPFB is entitled to contact the evaluators in case any evaluation irregularities are observed.

Within 75 calendar days after the cut-off date, a Selection Committee (SC) session will be organised.

The SC is responsible for the selection of the SPAs. The applicants will be informed about the decision of the SC within 15 calendar days after the meeting. In case of a positive EmBRACE Project application, the SPFB will start the precontracting process with FRs. Precontracting process will be conducted online or face-to-face meetings. Eventual shortcomings in the SPA translation will be, for the approved projects, dealt with in the Fulfilment of conditions phase before signing the contract with SPFB. All costs related to the precontracting meetings must be financed by FRs. After finishing the precontracting process, FRs will sign a contract with SPFB.

2.2 Application submission

The SPAs are to be submitted by any of the involved FRs through the [EmBRACE platform](#) for the given cut-off date. SPAs and mandatory annexes (statements/declarations) have to be filled in English. The remaining supporting documentation (other documentation) can be either in English or in national languages and scripts, but SPFB reserves the right to request an authorized translation into English from applicants if delivered documents in national language or script will not be understandable.

SPA submission takes place through uploading of the following documents:

1. **Small Project Application form** (all relevant fields are filled in English in MS Word, signed and scanned in pdf format). In case there is a discrepancy between the Small Project Application form in Word and pdf, the pdf version shall prevail.
2. **Small project budget** (all relevant fields are filled in English in MS Excel)
3. **Joint Statements of FRs** (completely filled in, signed and scanned in pdf format)
4. **De minimis declarations of FRs** (completely filled in, signed and scanned in pdf format)
5. **Tax administration certificate of FRs** (not older than 30 days)
6. **Company register extracts of FRs** ([Croatia](#); [Bosnia and Herzegovina](#); [Montenegro](#))
7. **Pro-forma offers for external costs and equipment costs** (not older than 30 days)
8. In case of small-scale infrastructure costs: FRs will be required to submit with the SPA **the proof of legal interest** (proof of ownership or lease contract) and submit **a technical description of the planned works** according to the national laws and acts for each country if SP includes small scale infrastructure costs (not older than 30 days)
9. **Employment contract** - proof of employment of 1 employee) – for each FR
10. **Annual financial report** for the previous year – for each FR

The SPFB will upload all applications to the Google drive/Microsoft OneDrive file and dedicate project applications to the selected evaluators after application submission, ultimately within 3 working days after the respective cut-off date. Besides, the SPFB shall upload a complete list of project applications received for the respective cut-off. This list will have the following information for each small project application: 1. Application ID; 2. Application title; 3. Final Recipient names and 4. County of origin.

Based on this list and the Project assignment document, SPFB will grant restricted permission to the applications uploaded to Google drive/Microsoft OneDrive for evaluators appointed by SPFB.

Persons that are dealing with project applications, irrespective on which level (administrative or eligibility check, content evaluation) have to sign ANNEX IV Declaration confirming the absence of any conflict of interest and the Project Assignment document for each person (ANNEX VI).

2.3. Administrative and Eligibility check (A&E check)

SPFB shall appoint persons (evaluators) in separate internal sector (Sector for Evaluation and Contracting Projects) to perform A&E check of the FRs that have submitted applications. Evaluators need to run an **Administrative and eligibility (A&E) check according to the checklist for administrative criteria (ANNEX I) and checklist for eligibility criteria (ANNEX II)**. Evaluators will check if the Small Project Application form has been properly completed and if all the required documentation has been submitted.

- If the SPA is not submitted by the deadline, the application will automatically be rejected.
- If one of the FRs has submitted more than one SPA, only the first one will be evaluated.

Evaluators will conduct the administrative check of submitted material and they will determine whether the application is complete, according to the **Checklist for administrative criteria (ANNEX I)**.

Administrative check is application-based which means that each evaluator will check the whole application and give his/her output.

For each SPA, two **administrative check outputs** are possible:

- a) Documentation is complete and can continue the evaluation process if evaluator confirms the correct content of the material
- b) Documentation is invalid and the Small Project is rejected – if submitted documentation is not valid and/or adequately filled out within the given deadline.

Evaluators will confirm the verification of the submitted material and they will determine whether the application is **eligible**, according to the **Checklist for eligibility criteria (ANNEX II)**.

For each SPA, two **eligibility check outputs** are possible:

- a) All FRs are eligible and can continue the evaluation process if evaluator confirms the eligibility.
- b) One or more FRs are ineligible and the Small Project is rejected - if one or more eligibility criteria for one or more FRs are not fulfilled.

The evaluators are required to fill in the comments section of the A&E check form.

2.4. Content Evaluation

After positive A&E evaluation, each SPA shall be further subject to content evaluation (assessed for quality) against the criteria measuring the relevance and the feasibility of the small project. It helps to establish a common understanding for decision-making. Content evaluation criteria are divided into two categories:

- **Strategic evaluation criteria** - The main aim is to determine the extent of the project's contribution to the achievement of Programme objectives (including contribution to Programme indicators) by addressing the joint or common needs of the target group.
- **Operational evaluation criteria** - The main aim is to assess the viability and feasibility of the proposed project, as well as its value for money in terms of resources used versus results delivered.

The evaluation criteria are divided into questions and guiding principles for an evaluation covering **four main thematic groups**, namely **project relevance, partnership relevance, work plan and budget**. Based on the submitted SPA (and its annexes) every project will be evaluated and a ranking list with evaluation documentation for the SC will be prepared.

Small Projects shall be evaluated according to the criteria in the tables below.

Scores are allocated to each assessment criteria as follows:

Table 1: Quality assessment scores

Insufficient	0	The application fails to address the criterion or cannot be assessed due to missing or incomplete information.
Good	3	The application addresses the criterion to a sufficient level, but some aspects have not been met fully or are not explained in full clarity or detail. Some improvement needed.
Excellent	5	The application successfully addresses all relevant aspects of the criterion. The provided information is clear and coherent. There are no shortcomings or shortcomings are minor.

Each thematic group is evaluated with a **score, which is supported by written comments**. The comments should reflect the strengths and weaknesses fairly and give reasons for the scores. The evaluation of one criterion should NOT influence the evaluation of another criterion. In particular, the same weakness/shortcoming should not be referred to under different criteria (no double penalization). If evaluators give 0 points in any of the thematic groups, justification should be provided. Giving 0 points in one of the thematic groups is a strong signal to the SC, meaning that there are serious problems with the project.

A total of 100 (100%) points within the content evaluation is possible. Each thematic group is evaluated with 0, 3 or 5 points.

Each project has to score **at least 60% or 60 points. Projects not reaching 60 points shall be rejected**. Projects reaching 60 points or more shall be discussed at the SC meeting with the possibility of being **approved for funding, not approved for funding, or put on the reserve list**.

The content evaluation is performed according to the following selection criteria:

Table 2: Strategic evaluation criteria/project relevance

No	Evaluation question	Sub-questions for evaluation	Score	Section in SPA form
C1	Project relevance		0 / 3 / 5	
C1.1	How well is the need for the small project justified?	The project addresses common challenge of the Programme or a joint asset of the Programme area – there is a real need for the project (well justified, reasonable, well explained). There is a clear benefit for selected target group/s. New/existing solutions developed/adopted/implemented during the project and FRs		A2, C2 and D

		approach is well described, reasonable and well explained.		
C1.2	To what extent will the project contribute to the achievement of Programme's objectives and indicators?	The project's overall objective clearly contributes to the achievement of the Programme priority specific objective.		A2 and C2
		The project's outputs/deliverables clearly link to Programme output indicators and their contribution to Programme targets is sufficient.		A2, C2 and D
		Project's contribution to Programme results indicators (RCR 03 – SMEs introducing product or process innovation, RCR 104 - Solutions taken up or up-scaled by organizations, RCO 84 Pilot actions developed jointly and implemented in projects and RCO 116 Jointly developed solutions) is realistic.		C2
C1.3	To what extent will project outputs/deliverables have an impact beyond the project's lifetime?	The project's outputs/deliverables have potential to become durable (in the sense that they bring people together and create favourable cooperation conditions) – if not, it is justified. <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - the SPA is expected to provide a significant and durable contribution to solving the challenges targeted 		C2.2
C1.4	To what extent is the project intervention logic plausible?	The project specific objective is specific, realistic and achievable.		C2.1
		Proposed project outputs/deliverables are needed to achieve project specific objective.		A2, C2 and D
		Project outputs/deliverables and results that contribute to the Programme indicators are realistic (it is possible to achieve them with given resources– i.e., time, FRs, workplan, budget – and they are realistic based on the quantification provided).		C2.1, C4, D and E with budget in Excell
C1.5	What added value does the cooperation bring?	The importance of cooperation beyond borders for the topic addressed is clearly demonstrated <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - the results cannot/can only to some extent be achieved without cooperation - there is a clear benefit from cooperating for the FRs/target groups/project area/Programme area. 		C1.4 and C2
SCORE				

Maximum score is 45 points, 45%

Table 3: Strategic evaluation criteria/*partnership relevance*

No	Evaluation question	Sub-questions for evaluation	Score	Section in SPA form
C2	Partnership relevance		0 / 3 / 5	
C2.1	To what extent is the partnership composition relevant for the proposed project?	The small project involves the relevant actors needed to address the common challenge/joint asset and the objectives specified.		A2
		The project partnership: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - if SP consist of two (2) FRs from two (2) participating countries in the Programme area (0 points) - if SP consist of three (3) or more FRs from three (3) participating countries in the Programme area (5 points) 		B1.3, C2 and C4
		All partners play a defined role in the partnership and the Programme territory benefits from this cooperation.		C1.2, C1.3 and C4
		The project partnership consists of partners (FRs) that complement each other.		C1.2, C1.3 and C4
		Distribution of tasks among FRs is appropriate (e.g., sharing of tasks is clear, logical, etc.).		C1.3, C4 and D
		The structure of partnership, FRs' role in project implementation and contribution to the project is well described and explained.		C4
SCORE				

Maximum score is 30 points, 30%

Table 4: Operational evaluation criteria/work plan

No	Evaluation question	Sub-questions for evaluation	Score	Section in SPA form
C3	Work plan		0 / 3 / 5	
C3.1	To what extent is the work plan realistic, consistent and coherent?	Proposed activities are relevant and lead to planned outputs/deliverables and result.		D 1 and D 2
		How well are the selected target groups addressed by planned outputs/deliverables and results?		D 1 and C2
C3.2	To what extent are communication activities appropriate to reach the relevant target groups and stakeholders?	Communication activities are appropriate to reach the relevant target groups and stakeholders: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - communication objective is relevant and is expected to contribute to small project specific objective 		D 1 and C 2.1
SCORE				

Maximum score is 15 points, 15%

Table 5: Operational evaluation criteria/budget

No	Evaluation question	Sub-questions for evaluation	Score	Section in SPA form
C4	Budget		0 / 3 / 5	
C4.1	To what extent is the small project budget proportionate to the project activities and results?	The project budget is proportionate to the proposed work plan, project outputs/deliverables and project's contribution to Programme indicators.		D and E with budget in Excell
C4.2	To what extent is the small project budget balanced between FRs?	Final Recipients have balanced budget between themselves in well elaborated cooperation activities based on joint cooperation of Final Recipients.		D and E with budget in Excell
SCORE				

Maximum score is 10 points, 10%

Besides the strategic and operational criteria **horizontal principles** shall also be assessed, resulting in a written justification. For those criteria no scores shall be given because neither the projects nor the criteria in the different specific objectives are comparable. Fulfilment of required minimum in horizontal principles has a neutral contribution in entire evaluation process. The FRs shall indicate the contribution of the small project to horizontal principles as positive, neutral or negative and provide a short justification. Negative assessment in one of the horizontal principles will lead to rejection of the project.

For Interreg IPA HR-BA-ME, it is crucial that horizontal principles are integrated in the planning, implementation, monitoring, reporting and evaluation of the project activities. During the whole life cycle of the small projects, FRs should take into account the horizontal principles of the EU. More precisely, actions should be planned, implemented and reported considering the horizontal principles of **equal opportunities and non-discrimination, gender equality and sustainable development**.

Table 6: Horizontal principles

Reference	Nr.	Horizontal principles	Section in SPA form: C.3
Sustainable development	C5	The project makes a positive contribution to Programme horizontal principle sustainable development as set out in Article 11 TFEU, taking into account the UN Sustainable Development Goals and the Paris Agreement.	POSITIVE or NEUTRAL or NEGATIVE
Equal opportunities and non-discrimination	C6	The project makes a positive contribution to Programme horizontal principle equal opportunities and non-discrimination based on gender, racial or	POSITIVE or NEUTRAL

		ethnic origin, religion or belief, disability, age or sexual orientation.	or NEGATIVE
Gender equality	C7	The project makes a positive contribution to Programme horizontal principal equality between men and women, gender mainstreaming and the integration of a gender perspective.	POSITIVE or NEUTRAL or NEGATIVE

After finishing the entire evaluation process, the evaluators are required to upload to the Google drive/Microsoft OneDrive the following files:

1. Signed Administrative checklist for each SPA proposal (PDF)
2. Filled in A&E Checklist (Word)
3. Signed Eligibility checklist for each SPA proposal that have passed the administrative check (PDF)
4. Signed Evaluation grid for Selection of SPA (PDF)
5. Filled in Evaluation grid for Selection of SPA (Word)

2.5. Evaluators

Each SPA will be evaluated by experienced evaluators.

The evaluators will perform the evaluation impartially, responsibly, qualitatively and professionally, in accordance with the standards of the profession, the criteria established in the GfA, or in accordance with the documentation published for the needs of a particular Call, or the given legal framework.

Evaluator's justifications will be used to provide feedback to the applicants. They must be coherent, relevant and of use. Evaluators are encouraged to be honest and direct.

It is expected from evaluators:

- to evaluate independently;
- to evaluate objectively;
- to evaluate without prejudice;
- to give sufficient time and effort to the process;
- to clearly justify each provided score;
- to uphold the confidential nature of the application;
- to formulate the necessary conditions / budget cuts which are needed to guarantee the keeping of the eligibility rules of the Call and to ensure proper preparedness of the SPs for implementation (e.g. indicators are complete and covering the outputs of the SP; necessity, proportionality and reality of budgeted costs items are properly underpinned and can be clearly derived from the planned activities).

2.6 Selection Committee (SC)

The SC is the body responsible for managing the selection of small project parts and of the FRs that will implement them as part of the EmBRACE pilot project. The SC is to decide on the SPAs submitted in the framework of the EmBRACE pilot project.

The SC is composed of voting and non-voting members.

The six (6) voting members of the SC are from respective institutions in all participating countries from the Programme area:

Each National Authority (NA) shall deliver a decision on the appointment of SC members to the SPFB.

Within 75 calendar days after the respective cut-off date the SPFB will organise an SC meeting, however the postponement of the deadline is possible if the quality check of the evaluation or the appointment of new evaluators is necessary.

At least 15 calendar days before the meeting, SPFB will inform SC members about the date and place of the meeting, and grant them permission to approach the Google drive/Microsoft OneDrive files which consist of:

1. List of evaluated SPAs with evaluation results and requested co-financing amounts per project
2. Signed Administrative checklist for each SPA (PDF)
3. Signed Eligibility checklist for each SPA that have passed the administrative check (PDF)
4. Signed Evaluation grid for Selection of SPAs (PDF)

for all received Small Project Applications for respective cut-off date.

Nominated SC members are required to confirm their attendance to the meeting at least 7 days before the meeting or to appoint a substitute.

At the meeting, for Small Project Applications that have passed A&E check, one of the following outcomes will be suggested, based on the evaluation score at the List of Small Project Applications:

1. **A Small Project is (conditionally) suggested for co-financing**
2. **A Small Project is on a reserve list (SPAs with 60 points and more but funds are insufficient)**
3. **A Small Project is rejected due to insufficient evaluating score/ insufficient funds available**

After that, voting will be held for each Small Project Application, according to GfA.

If two or more SPAs have equal score result, the one with the higher score in the Strategic evaluation criteria/project relevance will be favoured. If the score is the same the SPA that has earlier submission time will be favoured.

The SPFB reserves the right to modify the allocation depending on the quality of the Small Project Applications. In case of low-quality evaluated SPAs, SPFB has right not to use all available funds. On the other hand, in case of high-quality evaluated SPAs, SPFB has right to finance additional high-quality SPs.

After the meeting, SPFB will send Minutes of the meeting to the SC members for approval, including the list of Small Project Applications agreed for co-financing.

Within 30 calendar days after the meeting, SPFB will inform the Small Project applicants about the outcome of the evaluation and the next steps via e-mail/post. Each FR has the right to file a complaint in case they have received an administrative rejection of their submitted Small Project Application, according to the GfA (see chapter 5.2).

If an applicant/s of a Small Project decides to retract their application after they have passed to the next step, the SPFB will finance next project from the reserve list one by one according to the ranking order. SPFB will inform the SC about the change via e-mail.

3. CONFIDENTIALITY

- 1) The Evaluation Manual for evaluating SPs, Evaluation grids and Forms, as the name suggests, are intended for evaluators only and is provided only to them.
- 2) All criteria, rules and assessment methods are the same in the GfA. The Evaluation Manual for evaluating SPs delivers additional written instructions to help evaluators identify a quality project and the way to do better quality selection.
- 3) It is important that evaluators and SC members do not have a conflict of interest (for reasons involving family, emotional life, political or national affinity, economic interest or any other shared

interest with the FR or natural persons associated with FR). For this reason, evaluators and SC members have to sign the *Declaration confirming the absence of any conflict of interest* (ANNEX IV)

- 4) All information in the SPAs are business secrets therefore strictly confidential and evaluators will be asked to sign *Declaration confirming the absence of any conflict of interest* (ANNEX IV).

4. CONTRACTING

- 1) Decisions in the SC for the selection of the SPAs are made by the unanimous positive decision of SC members for ranking list of SPs. From programme level bodies, the MA, JS and NAs are invited as non-voting members, however the MA shall have the right of veto if a decision made by the SC would threaten the overall due performance of the cross-border cooperation programme.
- 2) For every SP, chosen for funding by the SC, FRs will have to fulfil conditions set for SP by SPFB in order to successfully finish precontracting process and sign the Subsidy Contract with SPFB.

GLOSSARY

Abbreviation	Description
SPF	Small Project Fund
FR/FRs	Final Recipient/Final Recipients
MSE/MSEs	Micro and small enterprise/Micro and small enterprises
Programme	Interreg VI-A IPA Croatia – Bosnia and Herzegovina – Montenegro 2021-2027 Programme
SPA/SPAs	Small Project Application/ Small Project Applications
VAT	value-added tax
SC	Selection Committee
SP/SPs	Small Project/Small Projects
HAMAG-BICRO	The Croatian Agency for SMEs, Innovations and Investments, SPFB
SPFB	Small Project Fund Beneficiary, HAMAG-BICRO
MA	Managing Authority
NA	National Authority
JS	Joint Secretariat
GfA	Guidelines for MSEs as Final Recipients

LIST OF ANNEXES

- 1 ANNEX I Checklist for administrative criteria
- 2 ANNEX II Checklist for eligibility criteria
- 3 ANNEX III Content evaluation grid
- 4 ANNEX IV Declaration confirming the absence of any conflict of interest
- 5 ANNEX V List of Small Project Applications
- 6 ANNEX VI Project Assignment document
- 7 ANNEX VII Small Project Application Form
- 8 ANNEX VIII Small Project budget
- 9 ANNEX IX De minimis declaration
- 10 ANNEX X Joint Statement