

Applicants Manual

for the period 2014-2020

Version 1.1

PART 5: APPLICATION AND ASSESSMENT

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PART 5: APPLICATION and ASSESSMENT

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I. Overview

The call for proposal of the Danube Transnational Programme is organised in two relevant steps:

- "First Step" with the Expression of Interest (EoI) outlining mainly the intervention logic of the proposal and the strategic relevance for the DTP submitted through the programme website
- * "Second Step" with the submission of the completed Application Form (AF) with the required annexes through the programme monitoring system

Only proposals pre-selected in the first step can submit the completed Application Form (with its required annexes) in the second step.

This part illustrates clearly and transparently the project selection system. This system is made public in order to make all stakeholders and project partners aware of the selection procedures and criteria before preparing their applications. Hence, they can develop high quality proposals and assist the programme to reach its specific objectives of realising high quality, result-oriented transnational projects relevant to the programme area.

II. First step

II.1. Application procedure

In the first step, applicants are requested to submit an EoI based on a reduced level of information compared to the Application Form.

The EoI presents mainly the intervention logic and the strategic relevance of the proposal. A simplified operational part that includes the budget and the work plan is also described but its details in this phase are reduced compared to the complete Application Form.

Once filled in completely and accurately, the EoI can be uploaded onto the dedicated section of the programme website. No additional documents will be accepted and/or considered. Only electronic submission is allowed and only the first version submitted will be taken into account. Any further version of the same project proposal will not be considered as valid and will not be assessed. Once the e-version of the document is submitted no changes are possible.

Once the deadline for submission has expired, the assessment of the EoI is carried out by the JS. The assessment results are then presented to the MC who decides which EoI is to be invited to submit a full application.

In very limited and specific cases, the applicants are provided with recommendations on their proposal (e.g. extending the partnership, merging with other project proposals, etc.). Applicants are informed about the result of the assessment through electronic communication.

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<u>Please note:</u> The programme recommends that project proposals are already at an advanced stage on EoI submission: project partners involved and the overall structure well defined. Only project proposals matching a certain readiness, quality level and responding to the selection criteria can be invited to enter the 2nd step of the application procedure.

ATTENTION: The LP and the intervention logic cannot be changed between the first and second step.

II.2. Assessment procedure

In course of the selection process, two different sets of criteria are applied to come to the decision of approving an application:

- ➤ The eligibility criteria
- > The quality criteria

The eligibility check aims at confirming that the proposal has arrived within the set deadline, that the Expression of Interest is complete and conforms to the requirements and that the partnership and the projects fulfils the criteria established at programme level. This check will be carried out by the JS, supported by the NCPs for the verification of the eligibility of the Lead Applicant, and the decision is taken by the MC. Failure to meet the eligibility requirements leads to the rejection of the proposal. Eligibility criteria are of "knock-out nature" and should be clearly answered with a YES or NO as to a large extent they are not subject to interpretation.

Nr	Eligibility criteria	Description
1	The EoI has been submitted within the set deadline (date and time)	The EoI has been submitted within the date and time set in the call announcement.
2	The EoI has been submitted through the official DTP website	The EoI has been submitted through the specific section of the official DTP website.
3	The EoI is compiled in English	All parts of the EoI are compiled in English, as the official language of the DTP.
4	Partnership is composed by at least three financing partners from at least three	Partnership complies with the minimum requirement for a transnational DTP partnership: at least three financing partners

	participating countries of which at least one is located in a Member State	(receiving ERDF or IPA co-financing) from at least three participating countries, of which at least one is located in a Member State.
5	Lead Partner is an eligible beneficiary	The Lead Applicant fulfils the requirement set in Part 2, section II of this manual.
6	The proposal contributes to the programme objectives/mission and the programme priorities.	The proposal clearly addresses the Programme mission. It clearly focuses on and contributes to the selected priority.
7	The proposal contributes to at least two programme output indicators	The proposal contributes to the horizontal output indicator predefined in the EoI and to at least another programme output indicator.

The quality check forms the basis for an assessment of the EoI with the aim of bringing the projects into a certain ranking for selection. Quality assessment criteria are divided in two categories:

- Strategic assessment criteria The main aim is to determine the extent of project's contribution to the achievement of programme objectives (contribution to programme results)
- Operational assessment criteria The main aim is to assess the viability and the feasibility of the proposed project, as well as its value for money in terms of resources used versus results delivered

Each criteria group ("Strategic" and "Operational") is assessed on basis of sub-criteria with each being scored from 0 (not present / missing) to 5 (very good):

Score		Description
0	None	The information requested is missing (either not filled it in or not provided in the text). The information is provided but reflects the inexistence of a requirement.
1	Very poor	The information provided is considered as not relevant or inadequate
2	Poor	The information provided lacks relevant quality and contains strong weaknesses
3	Fair	The overall information provided is adequate, however some aspects are not clearly or sufficiently detailed
4	Good	The information provided is adequate with sufficiently outlined details
5	Very Good	The information provided is outstanding in its details, clearness and coherence

To assure project results relevance for the programme, the strategic assessment is carried out first and independently of the operational assessment. Only projects that are successful at the strategic assessment stage are assessed also from the operational point of view. The knock-out threshold for the strategic relevance is set at 60%. If proposals receive a lower score, then they won't be checked for the operational relevance and fail the overall assessment.

The criteria for the quality check will contain:

- ➤ Six sub-criteria for the strategic relevance for a maximum score of 30 points
- > Two sub-criteria for the operational relevance for a maximum score of 10 points

A. Strategic relevance

Assessment	Guiding questions	Points
main questions		
Are the	Are the territorial needs/ challenges coherently described?	
territorial needs and	Is the proposal clearly addressing the needs/ challenges?	
challenges identified and duly justified?	Are the described needs/ challenges relevant for achieving the programme objectives?	5 points
Is the intervention	Is the project intervention logic coherent with the programme one?	
logic coherent?	Is the project main objective clearly contributing to achieving the selected programme specific objective?	5 points
	Are the envisaged activities expected to reach the planned result?	
To which extent the proposal	Is the project concretely contributing to a programme relevant EU strategy/ policy (other than EUSDR) in the thematic field addressed by the project?	
contributes to an EU strategy or policy?	Does the project clearly contribute to one or more Priority Areas as set out in the Action Plan of the EUSDR?	5 points
or poncy.	Does the project provide clear value added regarding the achievement of actions and/or targets defined for one or more EUSDR Priority Areas?	
Is the partnership composition relevant,	Is the partnership representing the right mix of countries and competences according to the project topic? Is the partnership balanced and not overly dominated by one	
justified and balanced for	country? Is the Lead Applicant experienced and competent to lead the	5 points
the proposed project?	partnership?	
Is the need for transnational	Does the project have a clear transnational dimension/impact?	
cooperation demonstrated?	Is the added value of the transnational cooperation clearly described?	5 points
Is the target group defined	Is the target group clearly identified?	
and has ownership of	Does the proposal clearly explain how the target group will integrate/use the project results?	5 points
the project results?	Are the durability and transferability of its results clearly ensured?	
	Total	30 points

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B. Operational relevance

Assessment main questions	Guiding questions	Points
Is the work plan realistic,	Is the proposed timetable coherent and realistic?	
consistent and coherent?	Are the planned activities realistic and coherent with the overall methodology?	5 points
	Is the work plan well-structured and mature?	
Does the project budget	Is the overall requested amount coherent with the proposed activities, outputs and partnership?	
demonstrate value for money?	Is the budget of each WP coherent with the planned activities and involved partners?	5 points
	Total	10 points

The overall score will be calculated as an average of the score related to the strategic relevance and operational relevance, taking into consideration the points that each criterion provides to the overall points (strategic relevance 30/40 = 75% of the total score, operational relevance 10/40 = 25% of the total score).

Project proposals receiving a minimum 75% of the score between the strategic and operational relevance will be recommended by the JS for immediate selection.

Project proposals receiving between 60% and 74% of the score between the strategic and operational relevance will need further discussions and a final decision will be taken by the MC.

The final decision will be taken by the MC and might take into consideration the number of projects contributing to each output indicator.

Project proposals receiving less than 60% of the score between the strategic and operational relevance will be recommended by the JS for rejection.

Applicants will be informed about the results of the assessment within 10 days from the official approval of the assessment from the Monitoring Committee.



III. Second step

III.1. Application procedure

The AF is to be submitted electronically together with the other relevant documents via DTP website www.interreg-danube.eu.

The AF is composed of two parts:

- The PDF template, which contains detailed information regarding the partnership, intervention logic, the strategic relevance of the proposal, work packages, time frame and infrastructure and works.
- The excel template, which contains detailed information regarding the budget.

ATTENTION: In order to be considered eligible, both the PDF and the excel templates duly filled in have to be submitted by the LAs. Please note that in case one of the two templates is missing the entire project will be considered ineligible. Please, also note that only the official templates provided by the Programme will be accepted.

Once filled in completely and accurately, the **AF (PDF and excel templates)** and its **Annexes** can be uploaded onto the dedicated section of the programme website. Please, consider that all Applicants must submit the Partnership Agreement, the Co-financing and State Aid Declarations, while ASP and International Organization Declarations are to be submitted only if it is the case.

ATTENTION: All the documents (AF and Annexes) have to be submitted in **one single package**. Only electronic submission is allowed and **only the first version of any of the submitted** documents will be taken into account. Any further versions of the same document will not be considered as valid and will not be assessed. Once the e-version of the documents is submitted no other changes are possible.

Once the deadline for submission has expired, the assessment is carried out by the JS. The assessment results are then presented to the MC which decides which projects will be financed by the Programme.

In specific cases, the applicants are provided with conditions and recommendations on their proposal (e.g. budget revision, correction of intervention logic, dropping the not eligible partners, etc.). Applicants are informed about the result of the assessment through electronic communication.

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III.2. Assessment procedure

The aim of the "Second Step" is to allow the Programme bodies to in depth understand the details of the project proposals that have been considered most promising after the assessment of the EoIs.

In course of the selection process, during the "Second step", two different sets of criteria are applied to come to the decision of approving an application: the eligibility criteria and the quality criteria.

The **eligibility criteria** aim at confirming to the applicant that their proposal has arrived within the set deadline and that the Application Form is complete and conform to the requirements. As the eligibility criteria are of "knock-out nature", they should be clearly answered with a YES or NO as to a large extent they are not subject to interpretation.

This phase will be carried out by the JS and assisted by the NCPs.

The failure to meet the eligibility requirements leads to the rejection of the proposal or to the rejection of the partner which eligibility problem is related to.

The following table lists all eligibility criteria whose consequence on failure results in failing the whole proposal:

Nr	Eligibility criteria	Description	
1	The AF in all its parts has been submitted within the set deadline (date and time)	The AF (in its PDF and excel parts) has been submitted within the date and time set in the call announcement.	
2	The AF in all its parts has been submitted in the official templates through the DTP website	The AF (in its PDF and excel parts) has been submitted in the official template through the DTP website.	
3	The AF in all its parts, including the annexes have been submitted in one single package	The AF (in its PDF and excel parts) and its annexes have been submitted in one single package through the programme website.	
4	The AF is compiled in English	All parts of the AF are compiled in English, as the official language of the DTP.	
5	Partnership is composed by at least three financing partners from at least three participating countries of which at least one (LP) is located in a Member State	Partnership complies with the minimum requirement for a transnational DTP partnership: at least three financing partners (receiving ERDF or IPA co-financing) from at least three participating countries of which at least one	
6	Lead Applicant is an eligible beneficiary	The Lead Applicant fulfils the requirement set in Part 2, section II of the Applicants Manual.	
7	At least 3 joint cooperation levels are indicated	According to Art 12(4) of EU reg. 1299/2013, among the four levels of cooperation (joint development, joint implementation, joint staffing and joint financing)	

		beneficiaries shall cooperate in the development and implementation of projects and in either the staffing or the financing of projects, or in both.	
8	The project intervention logic in the AF has not been modified compared to the one outlined in the EoI	The project main objective, specific objectives, results, outputs as outlined in the EoI are not modified in the AF.	
9	The Lead Applicant in the AF has not been changed compared to the one in the EoI	The institution of the Lead Applicant in the AF is the same as the one applying in the EoI. Administrative changes are not considered a change under this criterion.	
10	Changes of partners between the EoI and the AF respected the thresholds	Changes of directly financed partners based on the size of the partnership can be allowed as follows: 1 For partnerships with up to 10 partners, a replacement or withdrawal of max 2 partner is allowed 2 For partnerships with up to 15 partners, a replacement or withdrawal of total max 3 partners is allowed 3 For partnerships larger than 15 partners, a replacement or withdrawal of total max 4 partners is allowed	
11	Completeness of Partnership Agreement	The Partnership Agreement is containing all the compulsory parts and is signed by all directly financed partners.	

The following table lists all eligibility criteria whose consequence on failure results in failing the single partners affected:

Nr	Eligibility criteria	Description
11	Financed partners (ERDF/IPA) are eligible	The ERDF/IPA financed partner fulfils the requirement set in Part 2, section II of the Applicants Manual.
12	Completeness of submitted ERDF/IPA partner documents	The documents (Declaration of co-financing, State Aid declaration, Declaration for International organisations) are filled in and signed by the partner.
13	Completeness of submitted ASP documents	The document (ASP declaration) is filled in and signed by the ASP.

In case of missing signatures in the Annexes to the AF the LA will be awarded 5 working days from the JS notification for the completion of the documents.

The purpose of the **quality criteria** is to assess the quality of the eligible project proposals. Quality criteria are closely linked to the specific objectives and results of the DTP CP and are common to all Priority Axes.

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This phase will be carried out by the JS, supported by external assessors. The assessment is based on an assessment matrix with the following criteria groups:

- > <u>Strategic assessment criteria</u> The main aim is to determine the extent of project's contribution to the achievement of programme objectives (contribution to programme results).
- Operational assessment criteria The main aim is to assess the viability and the feasibility of the proposed project, as well as its value for money in terms of resources used versus results delivered.

Each criteria group ("Strategic" and "Operational") is assessed on basis of sub-criteria with each being scored from 0 (not present / missing) to 5 (very good). The score of the main question is an average of the scores of the related guiding questions.

Score	Description	
0	None	The information requested is missing (either not filled it in or not provided in the text). The information is provided but reflects the inexistence of a requirement.
1	Very poor	The information provided is considered as not relevant or inadequate
2	Poor	The information provided lacks relevant quality and contains strong weaknesses
3	Fair	The overall information provided is adequate, however some aspects are not clearly or sufficiently detailed
4	Good	The information provided is adequate with sufficiently outlined details
5	Very Good	The information provided is outstanding in its details, clearness and coherence

In the following tables the sub-criteria to assess the strategic and operational relevance are illustrated. The sub-criteria are defined using a set of questions to be answered by the assessor. Due to the complex requirements of transnational projects, these questions cannot be answered with a yes or no response. The assessor must assess to what extent the questions are applicable to the specific proposal and if they are satisfactorily answered by the applicant and then give an overall assessment score. Guiding questions should be considered binding whenever applicable, as it is the case for the maximum score that can be attributed to single guiding questions.

A. Strategic relevance

Assessment main questions	Guiding questions	Points
	To which extent are the territorial needs/ challenges coherently described?	5 points

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identified and duly justified?	To which extent is the proposal clearly addressing the needs/ challenges?	
	To which extent are the described needs/ challenges relevant for achieving the programme objectives?	
	To which extent does the project make a positive contribution to the programme's horizontal principles?	
Is the intervention logic	To which extent is the project intervention logic coherent with the programme one?	
coherent?	To which extent is the project main objective clearly contributing to achieving the selected programme specific objective?	
	To which extent are the specific project objectives, expected results and output indicators clearly defined and consistent?	5 points
	To which extent are the envisaged activities expected to reach the planned result?	
	To which extent are the project outputs and results realistic and linked to the needs of the selected target groups?	
To which extent the proposal contributes to an	To which extent is the project concretely contributing to a relevant EU strategy/ policy (other than EUSDR) in the thematic field addressed by the project?	
EU strategy or policy?	To which extent does the project clearly contribute to one or more Priority Areas as set out in the Action Plan of the EUSDR?	5 points
	To which extent does the project provide clear added value regarding the achievement of targets and/or actions defined for one or more EUSDR Priority Areas?	
Is the partnership composition relevant, justified	To which extent is the partnership representing the right mix of countries and competences according to	
and balanced for the proposed	To which extent is the partnership balanced and not overly dominated by one country?	
project?	To which extent does the partnership prove experience and competence in the thematic field concerned to achieve the project outputs and results?	5 points
	To which extent is the role of the partners balanced and relevant for achieving the main objective?	
	To which extent can the partners demonstrate that their participation in the project is to the benefit of the territory they represent?	
Is the need for transnational cooperation	To which extent does the project have a clear transnational dimension/ impact? To which extent is the added value of the transnational	5 points
demonstrated?	cooperation clearly described? To which extent are the four levels of cooperation understood by the applicant?	5 points

Is the target group defined and has ownership of the project results?	To which extent is the target group clearly identified? To which extent does the proposal clearly explain how the target group will integrate/use the project results? To which extent are the durability and transferability of its results clearly ensured? To which extent does the proposal take into consideration the capitalisation of previous projects and the synergies with on-going projects?	5 points
	Total	30 points

B. Operational relevance

Assessment main questions	Guiding questions	Points
Is the work plan realistic, consistent and coherent?	To which extent is the proposed timetable coherent and realistic? To which extent are the planned activities, outputs and results realistic and coherent with the overall methodology? To which extent are the activities described in detail (how, where, when and by whom they will be undertaken) and balanced in terms of geographical implementation (national, regional, local)? Is the work plan well-structured and mature?	5 points
To what extent are management structures and procedures in line with the project size, duration and needs?	To which extent are the management structures (e.g. project steering committee) and procedures clear, transparent, efficient and effective? To which extent does the partnership ensure proper dissemination of information and knowledge transfer between the partners?	
	To which extent is the quality management of the project clearly described and effective? To which extent has the lead applicant demonstrated that it has capacity to manage EU co-financed projects or other international projects or can ensure adequate measures for management support?	5 points
To what extent are	To which extent are the communication objectives clearly linked to the project specific objectives?	5 points

communication activities appropriate and forceful to reach the relevant target groups and stakeholders?	To which extent are the chosen approach and/ or tactics appropriate to reach the communication objectives? To which extent are communication activities and deliverables appropriate to reach the relevant target groups and stakeholders?	
Does the project budget demonstrate value for money?	To which extent is the budget allocated to each activity justified and correctly quantified? To which extent is the budget of each WP and BL coherent with the planned activities and involved partners? To which extent is the spending forecast realistic and correctly timed? To which extent is the budget allocated to project management and communication justified? To which extent is the budget allocated to external expertise and equipment justified and correctly quantified?	5 points
	Total	20 points

The overall score will be calculated as an average of the score related to the strategic relevance and operational relevance, taking into consideration the points that each criterion provides to the overall points.

Project proposals receiving a minimum 75% of the score between the strategic and operational relevance will be recommended by the JS for immediate selection.

Project proposals receiving between 60% and 74% of the score between the strategic and operational relevance will need further discussions and a final decision will be taken by the MC. The final MC decision might take into consideration the number of projects contributing to each output indicator.

Project proposals receiving less than 60% of the score between the strategic and operational relevance will be recommended by the JS for rejection.

IV. Complaint procedure

All rules set in this manual are meant to provide transparent information to all applicants who are applying for a financial support from the Danube Transnational Programme. Specifically,

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assessment and selection procedures set in this manual offer a fair and transparent consideration of all received proposals.

The rules set in this section are aimed at providing a transparent complaint procedure against decisions taken by Programme authorities during the project assessment and selection process¹.

The complaint against a decision of the Managing or Certifying Authority of the Programme during project implementation based on the subsidy contract concluded between the Managing Authority and the Lead Partner follows the rules laid down in the subsidy contract.

- 1. The Lead Applicant is the only one entitled to file a complaint.
- 2. The right to complain against a decision regarding the project selection applies to the Lead Applicant whose project application (either EoI or AF) was not selected for the Programme co-financing during the project assessment and selection process.
- 3. The complaint is to be lodged against the communication issued by the Managing Authority/Joint Secretariat based on the decision by the Monitoring Committee as the MA/JS' communication is the only legally binding act towards the Lead Applicant during the project assessment and selection process.
- 4. The complaint can be lodged only against the outcomes of the eligibility assessment performed by the JS, supported by the NCP and approved by the MC.
- 5. The complaint should be lodged in writing by e-mail to the Managing Authority of the Programme within 5 calendar days after the Lead Applicant had been officially notified by the MA/JS about the results of the project selection process. The complaint should include:
 - a. Name and address of the Lead Applicant
 - b. Reference number and acronym of the application which is a subject of the complaint
 - c. Clearly indicated reasons for the complaint, including listing of all elements of the assessment which are being complaint and/or failures in adherence with procedures limited to those criteria mentioned in point 4
 - d. (e)signature of the legal representative of the Lead Applicant (scanned signatures are accepted)
 - e. Any supporting documents (no additional content-related information than the one included in the proposal is allowed)

¹ In case of appeal to the judiciary system against the decision of the programme authorities during the project assessment and selection process, the court of Hungary has the jurisdiction on the matter.

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- 6. The relevant documentation shall be provided for the sole purpose of supporting the complaint. No other grounds for the complaint than indicated in point 4 will be taken into account during the complaint procedure.
- 7. A complaint will be rejected without further examination if submitted after the set deadline or if the formal requirements set in point 5 are not observed.
- 8. In case the complaint is rejected under provisions set in point 7, the MA/JS conveys this information within 10 working days to the Lead Applicant and informs the Monitoring Committee.
- 9. Within 5 working days after the receipt of the complaint the MA/JS confirms to the Lead Applicant in writing having received the complaint and notifies the Monitoring Committee.
- 10. The Managing Authority, assisted by the Joint Secretariat, examines the complaint and prepares its technical examination regarding the merit of the complaint.
- 11. The complaint will then be examined on the basis of the information brought forward by the Lead Applicant in the complaint and the technical examination prepared by the MA/JS by the Complaint Panel.
- 12. The Complaint Panel is the only body entitled to review a complaint against a decision regarding assessment and selection of projects co-financed by the Programme.
- 13. The Complaint Panel comprises of 3 members of whom one is the Chair of the Monitoring Committee, one is member of the Monitoring Committee and the third one is member of the Managing Authority or Joint Secretariat (not involved in the assessment).
- 14. The members of the Complaint Panel are appointed by the Monitoring Committee.
- 15. Impartiality of members of the Complaint Panel towards the case under review has to be ensured. If this cannot be provided, the distinct member shall refrain from the distinct case's review and be replaced by another impartial member.
- 16. The Joint Secretariat acts as the secretariat for the Complaint Panel and provides any assistance necessary for the review of the complaint.
- 17. The Managing Authority shall provide the Members of the Complaint Panel no later than 10 working days after the receipt of the complaint with a copy of:
 - a. The complaint with the technical examination by the Managing Authority and Joint Secretariat
 - b. The original application and all supporting documents that were taken into consideration by the relevant bodies during the project assessment and selection process
 - c. All documents relating to the assessment of the application in question including checklists and the record of the Monitoring Committee's decision

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- d. Any other document requested by the Members of the Complaint Panel relevant to the complaint
- 18. The Complaint Panel will have 5 working days to provide a binding decision through written procedure.
- 19. The decision if the complaint is justified or to be rejected is taken by the Complaint Panel by consensus. In case it is justified, the case will be sent back to the Monitoring Committee to review the project application and its assessment. The Complaint Panel has to provide the Monitoring Committee with a written justification with explicit reference to the criteria established in the Complaint Procedure
- 20. The decision of the Complaint Panel is communicated by the MA/JS in writing to the Lead Applicant and the Monitoring Committee within 5 working days from the receipt of the Complaint Panel decision.
- 21. The complaint procedure, from the receipt of the complaint to the communication of the Complaint Panel's decision to the Lead Applicant, should be resolved within maximum 30 calendar days.
- 22. The decision of the Complaint Panel is final, binding to all parties and not subject of any further complaint proceedings within the Programme based on the same grounds.

Proposals rejected after the quality assessment will receive an official electronic communication from the programme with the reasons for rejection outlined in a summarised grid. Further details on the reasons for rejection can be requested on demand and, according to the needs, could be discussed in bilateral meetings.

