

INTERREG IPA SOUTH ADRIATIC PROGRAMME 2021–2027**TERMS OF REFERENCE****Call for the Selection of One (1) First Level Control Officer****Duty Station: Tirana, Albania****Introduction**

The Interreg IPA South Adriatic Programme 2021–2027 is co-financed by the European Union through the Instrument for Pre-Accession Assistance (IPA III). The Programme is managed by the Apulia Region – Department for Economic Development, Innovation, Education, Training and Employment. The Programme eligible area comprises the Italian regions of Apulia and Molise, as well as the entire territories of Albania and Montenegro. The overall objective of the Programme is to promote economic growth and strengthen cooperation across the South Adriatic area by implementing joint actions among national and regional public institutions and non-profit organizations, while fostering smart, inclusive and sustainable development.

The Managing Authority (MA) of the Programme is the Apulia Region, while the Joint Secretariat (JS) is based in Bari, Italy. In Albania, the National Authority (NA) responsible for coordinating the Programme is the State Agency for Strategic Programming and Aid Coordination (SASPAC). The National Info Point (NIP) has been established in Tirana. The National Authority is responsible for ensuring the effective functioning of the management and control system in Albania, particularly by ensuring that all expenditure incurred by Albanian beneficiaries complies with the applicable European Union and national legislation¹

The First Level Controller (FLC) shall perform administrative verifications of expenditure declared by beneficiaries, as well as on-the-spot verifications of operations. The Controller shall carry out the mandatory regulatory verification covering expenditure declared by project partners throughout project implementation.

The First Level Control Officer shall report to the Head of the First Level Control Office, the Contracting Authority, and, where necessary, the Albanian National Authority.

Administrative verifications shall normally include:

- Verification of the accuracy of the expenditure declared in accordance with the Application Form;
- Verification that the expenditure corresponds to the approved operation;
- Verification that the expenditure falls within the eligible implementation period;
- Verification of compliance with the Programme Manual and Programme conditions;
- Verification of compliance with applicable EU and national legislation, including eligibility rules;
- Verification of the adequacy and completeness of supporting documentation;
- Verification of the existence of an adequate audit trail.

¹ In accordance with Article 46(3)–(9) of Regulation (EU) 2021/1059.

Main Responsibilities of the First Level Controller

The **First Level Controller (FLC)** shall perform the following key duties:

- Verify the legality, regularity and authenticity of the activities and expenditure declared by each Albanian beneficiary/partner implementing the operation, ensuring that the co-financed products and services have been delivered, that the declared expenditure has been effectively paid, and that it complies with the applicable legislation, the Cooperation Programme and the conditions governing support for the operation.
- Verify the documentation relating to all operations for which beneficiaries/partners have submitted a **Progress Report**, in order to assess the eligibility of expenditure in accordance with the following principles:

a) Principle of the Reality of Expenditure

Under this principle, the Controller shall verify that the expenditure has actually been incurred and is directly related to the co-financed operation. This includes verifying the implementation of project activities reported by the Albanian beneficiary/partner against the provisions of the Grant Contract, the Partnership Agreement, and the approved Application Form.

b) Principle of Legality and Regularity²

Under this principle, the Controller shall verify that expenditure complies with the applicable European Union, Programme, and national rules.

The verification shall include:

- examining financial reports to ensure that expenditure claimed for reimbursement is consistent with the approved project budget;
- verifying financial documentation to confirm the legality and regularity of declared expenditure and payments made;
- checking that the activities reported comply with the Grant Contract and the approved Application Form;
- verifying compliance with the applicable public procurement rules governing works, supplies and services;
- ensuring compliance with the Programme's visibility and communication requirements.

c) Principle of the Localization of the Co-Financed Operation

Under this principle, the Controller shall verify that expenditure relates to the approved operation and has been incurred within the Programme's eligible area. Where required by the Programme rules, on-the-spot verifications shall be carried out at the headquarters or branch offices of the Albanian beneficiary/partner.

² Legality and regularity refer to the extent to which transactions have been carried out in accordance with the applicable legal framework and contractual obligations.

d) Principle of Documented Evidence

Under this principle, all expenditure must be supported by documentary evidence demonstrating that it has been paid. Supporting documentation shall include invoices, accounting documents of equivalent probative value, or other legally valid accounting records.

The First Level Controller shall also:

- Prepare and issue the Certificate of Validation of Expenditure (CVE) after confirming that the submitted Progress Report and all supporting documentation provided by each Albanian beneficiary comply fully with all applicable Programme requirements. The certificate shall be issued within a maximum period of three (3) months from the date on which the beneficiary submits the required documentation.
- Follow and implement all official documents issued by the Managing Authority and the National Authority within the framework of the Programme, in accordance with the assigned responsibilities, the applicable legal framework, Programme manuals, regulations, decisions, guidelines and other relevant instructions.
- Cooperate with the Joint Secretariat (JS) in all activities relating to First Level Control (FLC) of expenditure incurred by beneficiaries/partners throughout the implementation period of the approved projects.
- Participate in training sessions, information events and FLC seminars organised by the Programme bodies or INTERACT, upon invitation by the Managing Authority and with the prior authorization of SASPAC.
- Collaborates with the Audit Authority and any other national and/or EU entity or body for audit purposes, including the provision of relevant documentation.
- Assists the Programme Bodies, such as the Managing Authority (MA), Joint Secretariat (JS), Monitoring Committee (MC), Accounting Authority (ACA), Audit Authority (AA), or other relevant structures, regarding the functioning and implementation of the Programme, in accordance with the provisions of the Programme Manual.
- Assists the National Authority in preparing reports, statistics, and information related to the certification of expenditures, when required.
- Provides advisory support to all Albanian beneficiaries throughout the entire duration of project implementation.
- Participates in meetings with beneficiaries/partners as scheduled or when requested by the National Authority, as well as in activities organized within the framework of the Programme (where necessary).
- Periodically informs the Head of First Level Control and the National Authority regarding any problems or irregularities identified during the implementation of operations by Albanian beneficiaries.
- Assists the National Authority in delivering training sessions for potential beneficiaries/main partners in the Albanian territory, in accordance with the preliminary plan approved by SASPAC.
- Performs any other tasks assigned by the National Authority, in agreement with the Managing Authority, related to the activities of the First Level Control Office and the certification of expenditures.
- Ensures the timely and high-quality completion of assigned tasks, which shall be carried out with due diligence at all times.

Required Qualifications

1. University degree (Bachelor's or equivalent university diploma, with a minimum of 4 years of study in fields relevant to the intervention area).
2. At least 3 years of professional experience in the management and/or control of EU donors/other donor-funded projects/programmes, including co-financed projects/programmes.
3. Very good knowledge of the English language.
4. Excellent drafting, presentation, and communication skills.
5. Computer literacy (word processing, preparation of presentations, use of databases, and monitoring procedures and systems).

Additional Qualifications to be Considered

1. Postgraduate studies in any field related to the aforementioned duties;
2. Registration in other professional registers, including the Register of Auditors, etc.;
3. Good knowledge of a second EU language;
4. Excellent knowledge of the European legal framework for the management and implementation of programmes co-financed by Structural Funds;
5. Excellent knowledge of public procurement procedures;
6. Experience in the management or technical support of Interreg programmes;
7. Strong organizational skills and efficiency;
8. Ability to work under pressure;
9. Ability to work in a multicultural environment;
10. Capacity to take initiative and assume responsibility;
11. Willingness to travel frequently.

Administrative Elements**1. Candidates/participants will be required to have:**

- a. Good knowledge of the Interreg IPA South Adriatic Programme:
<https://www.italy-albania-montenegro.eu/programme/south-adriatic-2021-27>
- b. Good knowledge of PRAG rules:
<https://wikis.ec.europa.eu/display/ExactExternalWiki/ePRAG>
- c. Good knowledge of the Albanian Labour Code:
<https://qbz.gov.al/preview/c1c18a6c-5f3e-457d-b931-de505b3c7ed0>

2. Evaluation

- a) Their qualifications will be assessed based on the above-mentioned qualification requirements.
- b) Qualified candidates eligible to participate in the testing phase will be evaluated according to the following criteria:

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b1. Application file: up to 15 points.

b2. Written test: up to 60 points.

b3. Oral interview: up to 25 points.

The final selection will be made among the highest-scoring candidates who achieve more than **70 points in total**.