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Western Balkans Investment Framework WBIF
BUILDING THE EUROPEAN FUTURE TOGETHER
Global Gateway

WBIF TA Round 36 Guidelines for Applicants



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Introduction

The European Commission and the Bilateral Donors launched a WBIF call for applications on 29 October 2026 to provide technical assistance for public sector projects.

- **TA Round 36 for technical assistance grants** to support the preparation of infrastructure projects included in the Categories A, B and C, as described further below. Funding for this round is provided by the Instrument for Pre-accession Assistance III (IPA III) and Bilateral Donor contributions to the European Western Balkans Joint Fund (EWBJF).

These Guidelines have been prepared in support of the WBIF TA Round 36 call for applications. Their primary purpose is to assist beneficiaries and financial institutions in preparing applications for this call. The document sets out the eligibility criteria applicable to project proposals, describes the submission process, and specifies the information required for applications to the WBIF Project Financiers' Group.

1. General eligibility provisions

1.1 Geographical coverage

Projects may be eligible for financing under the WBIF if they will be implemented for the benefit of one or more of the following Beneficiaries: The Republic of Albania, Bosnia and Herzegovina, Kosovo*, Montenegro, the Republic of North Macedonia, and the Republic of Serbia.

The legal entity benefiting from a public sector WBIF contribution to investments shall be registered within a Beneficiary. For transnational or regional projects that also involve non-eligible countries, the institution or body in charge of the investment may be based in a non-eligible country, but the support provided through the WBIF will cover only the portion of the investment implemented on the territory of the participating Beneficiary.

1.2 Eligible entities for WBIF support

Public sector projects for financing under the WBIF may benefit (depending on the type of project and/or the intervention area addressed):

(a) public entities;
(b) private entities, such as, for example, without limitation, entities established within the context of public-private partnerships (PPPs), joint ventures or mutual joint ventures; or
(c) other entities with mixed public-private capital, in each case responsible for the management, construction and provision of public utilities and services.

2. TA Round 36 eligibility criteria

This is a call for applications for technical assistance grants to support the preparation of the following categories of infrastructure projects:

Category A	Projects for financing by the Reform and Growth Facility (RGF), as reflected in the Beneficiaries' respective indicative lists of RGF projects[1], in the following key sectors: 1) sustainable transport; 2) clean energy; 3) digital future; and 5) human capital development.
Category B	Projects that are in final stage of preparation and have benefited from a WBIF TA grant for earlier phases of the preparation (and whose objective of a new TA grant is to arrive at mature projects ready for investment), in the following key sectors: 1) sustainable transport; 2) clean energy; 3) environment and climate; 4) digital future; and 5) human capital development.
Category C	Projects envisaged to be financed beyond the current Multiannual Financial Framework (post 2027), in the following key sectors: 1) sustainable transport; 2) clean energy; 3) environment and climate; 4) digital future; and 5) research and innovation.

*This designation is without prejudice to positions on status, and is in line with UNSCR 1244/1999 and the ICJ Opinion on the Kosovo declaration of independence.

[1] In the case of Bosnia and Herzegovina, which has not yet submitted to the European Commission an indicative list of RGF projects, Bosnia and Herzegovina will need to confirm in section 21.2 of the application form that will be submitted under this call for applications that the investment in reference will be included in the indicative list of RGF projects that will be submitted to the European Commission.

In their applications (in section 19), applicants must specify the category (A, B, or C) under which the technical assistance requested falls, and demonstrate its eligibility under that category.

With a view to leveraging private sector finance and expertise for public investments – in particular when the investment design is complex, the operation of the infrastructure is challenging, or when the fiscal space of the borrower is limited – TA applications for the preparation of investments to be implemented under a publicprivate partnership (PPP) approach are strongly encouraged under the current round. As such, relevant applications should foresee an option analysis of the benefit and opportunities to develop the infrastructure through a public-private-partnership. This requirement does not apply to applications concerning investments at advanced stages of preparation; in these cases, a justification for not conducting an option analysis must be provided in the application form. In all other cases, when the PPP could not be a viable option anyway, a justification should also be provided in the application. Guidance on the potential for PPP is available on the WBIF website in the library (EPEC studies).

2.1 Main eligibility criteria

For projects included in Categories A and B

Sustainable transport

Subsector	
Railways infrastructure	• Rehabilitation of existing and construction of new resilient and smart transport infrastructure on the TEN-T core and extended core railway network
Road infrastructure	• Rehabilitation of existing and construction of new resilient and smart transport infrastructure on the TEN-T core roads network
Maritime/Inland waterways infrastructure	• Inland waterways TEN-T Core network • Port infrastructure
Intermodality	• Terminals/multi-modal hubs
Urban mobility	• Rapid urban transit systems

Clean energy

Subsector	
Electricity	• Transmission lines contributing to market integration (between Western Balkans partners and/or with EU Member States), sustainability (integration and transmission of renewable energy) and security of supply • Distribution network upgrade • Digitalisation of the network • Energy storage: battery storage and pumped hydro storage
Renewable energy production	• Rehabilitation of hydropower plants • Innovative renewable energy solution projects (if not supported through EFSD+ guarantees, proven not to be revenue-generating and abiding by the latest EU cyber security rules in the energy sector)

Energy efficiency	• Energy efficiency measures for infrastructure in the education sector (from early childhood education to high-level education) and in the health sector (hospitals and health centres) abiding by the latest EU cyber security rules
Subsector	
	in the energy sector if solar components are included

Digital future

Subsector	
Infrastructure	• Ultra-fast and secure broadband (including 5G) for governments, households, businesses, education and health, connections with remote areas, connection to EU digital backbones. Full alignment with the EU's 5G cybersecurity toolbox and technology neutrality must be ensured. • Secure, energy-efficient, trustworthy and AI-ready data centres, edge and cloud infrastructures, as well as linking to EU initiatives on highperformance computers and/or GEANT programme; these efforts must ensure cyber-resilience • Exploring synergies with other connectivity areas, such as transport and energy, in the context of infrastructure sharing • Investments in improving the digitalisation of infrastructures in the fields of education (from early childhood education to high-level education) and health (hospitals and health centres)

Human capital development

Subsector	
Education & skills	• Infrastructure investments necessary for implementation of concrete reforms included in Reform Agenda
Social inclusion	• Infrastructure investments necessary for implementation of concrete reforms included in Reform Agenda
Employment	• Infrastructure investments necessary for implementation of concrete reforms included in Reform Agenda

Environment and climate (only for Category B projects)

Subsector	
Water management	• Rehabilitation of existing and construction of new drinking water and wastewater treatment plants • River basin management/flood prevention
Waste management	• Rehabilitation of existing and construction of new waste management centres • Closure of non-compliant landfills, including rehabilitation according to EU standards (only if in association with waste management centres) • Equipment

Air quality	• Services/ works/ equipment
Nature protection	• Management of natural resources, resource protection (deployment of reservoirs, irrigation; green and blue infrastructures; ecosystem restoration and resilience; restoration of carbon rich habitats; water retention)
Industrial pollution/chemicals	• Services (studies)
Subsector	
	• Cleaning/remediation of local waste dumpsites • Integrated industrial decarbonisation and depollution solutions

For projects included in Category C

Sustainable transport

Subsector	
Railways infrastructure	• Rehabilitation, upgrading and construction of resilient, smart and interoperable TEN-T Core and extended core railway network, including ERTMS deployment, electrification, safety and digitalisation measures
Road infrastructure	• Rehabilitation, upgrading, safety improvements, digitalisation, and climate-resilient adaptation of the road infrastructure on the TEN-T core and extended core road network. New road construction should be limited to the completion of the TEN-T corridors and missing links with clear regional connectivity value. Priority should be given to projects contributing to cross-border connectivity and accession objectives.
Maritime/Inland waterways infrastructure	• Sustainable port infrastructure, inland waterways on the TEN-T network and investments supporting decarbonisation, alternative fuels, shore-side electricity and safety improvements
Multimodality	• Infrastructure facilitating modal shift and improving connectivity between transport modes, including multimodal freight terminals, logistics platforms and infrastructure facilitating modal shift from road to rail and waterways where these contribute to the performance of TEN-T corridors and regional connectivity objectives

Clean energy

Subsector	
Electricity transmission / Connectivity	• Transmission network reinforcement and modernisation, especially when contributing to market integration within the Western Balkans region and/or with EU Member States, to sustainability of electricity supply (integration of renewable energy) and security of supply • Digitalisation of the electricity network related to connectivity within the Western Balkans region and/or with the EU Member States

Renewable energy Production and storage	• Innovative renewable energy production solutions (if not supported through EFSD+ guarantees, proven not to be revenue-generating and abiding by the latest EU cyber security rules in the energy sector) • Energy storage: large batteries and pumped hydro storage

Environment and climate

Subsector	
Water management	• Rehabilitation/upgrade of existing and/or construction of wastewater treatment plants with a minimum investment value of €70 million; the project should include particular attention to sustainability and governance issues. Support can be extended to associated investments in biodiversity.
Subsector	
Waste management	• Rehabilitation of existing and/or construction of new waste management centres with sorting and recycling infrastructure, in alignment with green agenda and focused on circular economy, with a minimum investment value of €50 million. Support can be extended to associated investments in biodiversity.

Digital future

Subsector	
Infrastructure	• Ultra-fast and secure broadband (including 5G) for governments, households, businesses, education and health, connections with remote areas, connection to EU digital backbones. Full alignment with the EU's 5G cybersecurity toolbox and technology neutrality must be ensured.

Research and innovation

Subsector	
Research	• Research infrastructures that pursue scientific excellence and promote integration into the European Research Area
Innovation	• Technology infrastructures required to develop, test, upscale and validate technology. Their primary purpose is to enable and accelerate technological innovations towards societal/market adoption, boosting industrial competitiveness.

2.2 Additional eligibility criteria

- The underlying investment projects of technical assistance grants must be endorsed by the Ministry of Finance, unless no financing from the national budget is expected (e.g. projects under the responsibility of a municipality). In case the requested TA is at an early stage of development, either at pre-feasibility or feasibility study level, it is sufficient to demonstrate that the Ministry of Finance has been consulted.
- TA applications must support preparatory work for eligible investment projects. For example, without limitation, masterplans, (pre)feasibility studies, cost-benefit analyses, environmental and social impact assessments, comprehensive risk assessments, including disasters and climate change risks and vulnerability, preliminary and detailed designs, targeted capacity building and implementation support

(including tender documents preparation, procurement assistance), sector development studies, and general capacity building.

- Activities related to the technical review, check and verification of any project design(s) as per national legislation, other activities specific to the urban planning and/or land ownership (e.g. the preparation of urban plans, documentation for land expropriation, etc.) that fall under the Beneficiary's responsibility as part of its due diligence and control for the project management are not eligible for grant funding.
- Support for overcoming specific obstacles delaying project preparation or implementation may be accepted, provided that for faltering projects, the grant application provides a thorough analysis of the causes and a clear and logical use of the grant to drive their progress.
- For projects with preparatory studies under development (e.g. the feasibility study is under preparation), grant financing for the next stage will not be provided until those studies are completed and the beneficiary and Lead IFI approve their results. Similarly, additional grant financing will not be considered when a grant has already been awarded but not disbursed.
- To ensure efficient use of resources, proposals should reflect the logical sequence of the project cycle and, therefore, should be confined to immediate needs. For example, if a feasibility study is required, assistance for designs and tender documents should not be part of the grant request but rather be applied for in the future if the feasibility study proves positive.
- TA applications for the preparation of investments to be implemented under a PPP approach are encouraged under the current round. As such, relevant applications should foresee an option analysis of the benefit and opportunity to develop the infrastructure through a public-private partnership. This requirement does not apply to applications concerning investments at advanced stages of preparation; in these cases, a justification for not conducting an option analysis must be provided in the application form. In all other cases, when the PPP could not be a viable option anyway, a justification should also be provided in the application. Guidance on the potential for PPP is available on the WBIF website in the library (EPEC studies).

2.3 Maximum co-financing rates for WBIF technical assistance grants

The WBIF grant can finance 100% of the costs for technical assistance.

3. Requirements for the submission of application forms

The applications must be pre-notified and submitted via the WBIF MIS platform by National IPA Coordinators in the prescribed application form and in accordance with the deadlines communicated at the launch of the call.

Project proposals must be supported by a Lead Financial Institution (LFI), namely the AFD, CEB, EBRD, EIB, KfW, or the World Bank.

The application form for TA Round 36 is included in Annex 1 of these guidelines; its editable format is available for download in the WBIF MIS Library under the "GAF Templates" tab. Instructions for completing the application form are embedded in the template.

The applicants must submit a duly completed application form. All sections of the application form must be completed as clearly and concisely as possible, while adhering to the suggested maximum character limits and avoiding repetition.

The application forms must be submitted together with an accompanying letter signed by the NIPAC, which confirms the Beneficiary's commitment to the submitted projects, confirms that the Lead Financial Institution has been consulted and is in agreement with the content of the application form.

The Beneficiaries shall prepare the project proposals under the supervision of the NIPACs and in close cooperation with the LFI. Consultations and coordination with the EU Delegations must be ensured before the submission of the application.

3.1 Phased submission of TA applications

The submission of the TA application form is organised in two phases. The **Phase 1 application form** contains the information required to ensure a meaningful understanding of the application, in line with the policy framework.

Once an application has successfully passed Phase 1, **Phase 2** begins. During this phase, which runs concurrently with the assessment process, applicants are required to complete additional sections of the application form. The sections to be completed in each phase are indicated in the implementation form set out in Annex 1 to these Guidelines.

3.2 Sections pertinent to the preparation of Terms of Reference

The complete application form *includes sections relevant to the preparation of the Terms of Reference (ToR) for the TA assignment*, the content of which is set out in the table below.

Section	Heading
2	Grant code
7	Beneficiary(ies)
10	Action/Grant application name
11	Lead Financial Institution
14	Total WBIF grant amount (€)
16	Implementation of TA activities
17	Responsible authority of the Beneficiary
18	Implementing entity(ies)
19.1	Background and context of the Project
19.2	Needs/demand analysis
19.3	Project map
19.4	Description of the Project
19.5	Reference documents
21.1	Alignment with the Economic and Investment Plan for the Western Balkans
21.2	Alignment with the Growth Plan and the Reform and Growth Facility for the Western Balkans
21.3	Alignment with Green Agenda objectives

21.4	Compliance with adopted national/sectoral/regional strategies
23.1	Description of entities involved
23.2	Organisational set-up
28.2	Detailed scope of work and results for TA grant activities (the Action)
31.2	Detailed planning of TA activities

Following a positive opinion from the WBIF Operational Board and, where applicable, approval by the Assembly of Contributors, the MIS will automatically generate extracts of the relevant sections of the ToR. These extracts will then be uploaded to the MIS under grant attachments as the "ToR Framework" and transmitted to the Lead IFIs for finalisation of the ToR.

3.3 Submission of the ToR to WBIF Secretariat

Within two months of receiving a positive opinion from the WBIF Operational Board and, where applicable, approval from the Assembly of Contributors, the Lead IFI shall submit the Terms of Reference (ToR), as approved by both the beneficiary and the Lead IFI, to the WBIF Secretariat for "No Objection".

No procurement procedure may be initiated, nor may any legally binding commitments between the Lead IFI and third parties enter into force, prior to the WBIF Secretariat issuing its "No Objection" to the final ToR.

Once the WBIF Secretariat has issued its "No Objection", the ToR shall be uploaded to the MIS, and implementation may proceed.

If the ToR are not submitted to the WBIF Secretariat within this two-month deadline, the TA grant shall be submitted for cancellation in accordance with Article 3.02(b)(ii)(2) of the General Conditions.