

Programme “Local Development, Poverty Reduction and Enhanced Roma Inclusion”
financed by EEA and Norway Grants 2014-2021

SMALL GRANT SCHEME

“ACCESS TO FINANCING - 2021”

Launched on 8th of April, 2021

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BUCHAREST, 2021



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Preamble

This document aims to provide the necessary information for potential applicants (Project Promoters – PP) under the call organized under the small grant scheme “Access to financing 2021”, by the **Romanian Social Development Fund (RSDF)**, under the Programme “**Local Development, Poverty Reduction and Enhanced Roma Inclusion**”.

Before filling-in your application, we recommend that you make sure you have gone through all the information presented in this document in the Applicant’s Guide and in the annexes, and that you have understood all the aspects related to the specificity of the projects financed by EEA and Norway Grants 2014-2021 and the manner of their implementation¹.

1. General information on the Programme

The Programme is financed by means of EEA and Norway Grants 2014-2021 and is implemented by RSDF (as Programme Operator – PO) in partnership with The Norwegian Association of Local and Regional Authorities (KS), as Donor Project Partner and with The Council of Europe (CoE), as International Partner Organization.

The objectives of the EEA and Norway Grants 2014-2021 are to contribute to the reduction of economic and social disparities in the European Economic Area and to strengthen the bilateral relations between the Donor States (Iceland, Liechtenstein and Norway) and the beneficiary states.

The overall objective of the programme is to actively contribute to strengthening the economic and social cohesion at national and local level in Romania and to strengthening the bilateral relations with the Donor States. In this respect, the PO facilitates and encourages the establishment of partnerships between entities from Romania and the Donor States Iceland, Liechtenstein and Norway.

The programme has a total value of **86,941,176 Euro**, out of which:

- 25,000,000 Euro financing from EEA Grants 2014-2021
- 48,900,000 Euro financing from Norway Grants 2014-2021
- 13,041,176 Euro financing from the State budget (15% co-financing).

For more information about the programme, please access the following webpage <https://dezvoltare-locala.frds.ro>

2. The Small Grant Scheme “Access to financing - 2021”

The overall objective of the small grant scheme is to increase the capacity of local authorities to obtain funding for the implementation of measures stipulated in local development strategies and plans, that address local development and poverty reduction in poor, isolated/ marginalized communities, as defined within the specific section of this call (section 2.6 Eligibility of target groups).

The call was first launched in February 2019 when 8 projects were contracted (total amount of 170,448 Euro). It was relaunched in April 2020 and, by mid-March 2021, 9 projects were contracted for the total amount of 233,847 Euro.

¹ An indicative list of documents, as well as the addresses of the web pages where these documents can be consulted, is presented at the end of the text of this call

The current call for proposals represents the second re-launch of the call Access to financing. and it keeps the conditions and relevant elements on the previous versions of the call, although some changes have been operated.

In the context of the present grant scheme, the area of local development and poverty reduction is approached via measures that facilitate the improvement of **quality and access to social services** in the broad sense, meaning social services as defined in the national legislation, as well as services in the fields of education, health, employment and housing, aiming to increase the quality of life and to promote social inclusion of vulnerable groups from rural and small urban administrative-territorial units (with a population of less than 20,000 inhabitants).

In order to have a sustainable development of these rural and small urban areas, it is important to improve existing conditions and basic services by developing the social infrastructure. Therefore, the grant scheme provides financial support to local authorities for procurement of technical assistance services in order to develop technical documentation and to obtain the necessary legal approvals for investments aimed at increasing the quality of life in the respective communities by increasing the quality and access of its inhabitants to social services.

The community investments designed under this grant scheme have to be in line with the objectives of Romania's National Strategy on Social Inclusion and Poverty Reduction 2015-2020 with regards to the implementation of people-based and area-based policies, addressing the needs of people at risk of poverty or social exclusion.

The investments will contribute to the enforcement of the **non-segregation principle**, meaning that they will not create new, segregated services, or develop/ maintain existing segregated services, that separate/ isolate further the vulnerable target groups from the rest of the community, with the exception of situations in which the proposal demonstrates that the desegregation measures are not possible for objective reasons and the proposed investment is accompanied by measures that will lead to creating or consolidating the relations between the vulnerable group and the rest of the community. Moreover, the call encourages the investments that promote the **desegregation principle**, meaning that the investments will contribute to eliminate the disparities at territorial and social level between the segregated community and the majority of population and to improve their access to infrastructure and quality services.

In order to justify the relevance of the proposed investment for the marginalized community, the applicants shall indicate, in the project proposal, the strategic documents at local level (local development strategies and action plans of Local Action Groups - LAG, action plans developed under other various programmes and initiatives etc.) that support the necessity and opportunity of the respective investment for the needs of the target groups.

Moreover, the applicants (and partners, if the case) shall apply a community driven development approach in a way that will demonstrate the involvement of the target groups in the selection of the proposed investment, will provide transparency to the decision-making process and will increase the accountability of the local authorities, all these elements being vectors of local development. Details regarding transparency in decision making process and community involvement are provided in the Guide for Applicants.

2.1. Expected results

This call for project proposals falls under the programme area no. 10 "Local Development and Poverty Reduction".

It is expected that the projects financed under the Small Grants Scheme "Access to financing - 2021" shall contribute to the following results:

	Expected programme results	Indicator	Unit of measurement	Source of verification	Target value at programme level	Target value at call level
Outcome	Increased use of social services by disadvantaged groups	Number of submitted applications for social service funding that have been granted	Number	PP records	N.A.	N.A ²
Output	Capacity of the municipalities/ towns to access social service funding reinforced	Number of municipalities/ towns supported in accessing additional funding for social services	Number	PP records	25	25
		Number of applications for social service funding submitted by the supported municipalities	Number	PP records	25	25

The proposals will also set project-level specific indicators, according to the specificity of each project (feasibility studies/ documentation for intervention works developed etc.).

Each proposal can target one single investment objective, as defined by the Government Decision 907/2016. Nevertheless, each investment objective can include one or several investment objects, as defined by the same Government Decision.

The investments must have a reasonable balance between the expected results, in terms of number of beneficiaries who will gain access to quality services, and the estimated costs, aspect which will be scored during content evaluation.

2.2. Financial allocation

The amount allocated for present call, Access to financing - 2021 is **595,705 Euro** out of which 506,349 Euro (85%) represents the financing from EEA Grants 2014-2021 and 89,356 Euro (15%) represents public co-financing.

The minimum grant amount that can be requested by an applicant is **5,000 Euro**, and the maximum amount is **40,000 Euro**, respectively minimum **24.605,00 RON** and maximum **196.840,00 RON** (using the InforEuro exchange rate for April 2021, 1 EUR =4,921 RON)

2.3. Grant rate

Having in view that the applicants can be only public entities³, the grant rate is 100% of eligible expenditure of the project.

2.4. Project duration and implementation period

In determining the duration of the project, the applicants shall take into account the limits set by the programme (the estimated duration of a project, the latest date for finalizing the

² The number of submitted applications for social service funding that will be granted will depend on external factors to this call, therefore there is no target set by the PO.

³ Local government authorities with legal personality who use / manage public funds and / or public patrimony.

implementation of the project), the application of procurement procedures, the specificity of the reporting and payment system, but also the individual aspects of the project (type of activities, type and level of estimated costs etc.).

The expected implementation period of a project is between 6 and 9 months.

2.5. Eligible Project Promoters

The eligible applicants under this small grant scheme are local public administration authorities at the level of following administrative-territorial units⁴:

- Communes,
- Towns (including municipalities),
- Counties.

This small grant scheme addresses exclusively those local authorities whose territory includes marginalized communities (as defined in section 2.7 Eligibility of target groups) **from rural or small-urban** administrative-territorial units (with a population of less than 20,000 inhabitants, according to the 2011 Census).

Specific points in evaluation will be given to local authorities with low financial capacity, given the social-economic context of the area, and lack of specialized human resources, that hinders their access to existing funding and therefore, implicitly, cannot provide the necessary infrastructure needed for ensuring the access of the population from marginalized communities to social services. The target of the call is on the local authorities with a poor record of accessing non-reimbursable funding, respectively having accessed maximum 5 projects in the last 5 years (April 2016- March 2021).

The eligible applicants may submit a single application for financing under this small grant scheme "Access to financing - 2021".

At the level of the small grant scheme, one PP can receive financing, in this capacity, for maximum two projects (cumulated for the grant schemes launched in 2019, 2020 and for the present one launched in 2021). The entities that already signed a financing contract under this small grant scheme (launched in 2019 or in 2020) can submit only one more project proposal under this grant scheme in 2021. If this provision is not complied with, the PP will be requested to choose one project proposals to remain in the competition and to renounce to the other one(s).

The projects submitted under the Small Grant Scheme "Access to financing" are not taken into account in calculation of number of projects submitted within the Program.

The entities in one of the following situations are not entitled to receive a project grant:

- *are bankrupt, are under the administration of a judicial authority or under liquidation procedures, have suspended their business activities, are the subject of proceedings concerning the above-mentioned matters, or are in any similar situation arising from a similar procedure applied under the provisions of the national legislation or regulations;*
- *are guilty of serious professional misconduct proven by any means, which the PO can identify or reasonable justify;*
- *have not fulfilled its obligations relating to the payment of social security contributions or payment of taxes to the state budget, in accordance with the legal provisions of the country in which they are registered/established;*

⁴ See Law no 215 / 2001 regarding local public administration as subsequently amended and supplemented.

- *are subject to a final legal judgment “res judicata”, for fraud, corruption, involvement in a criminal organization or any other illegal activity affecting the financial interests, without any evidence that they have taken in recent years corrective measures in this regard;*
- *they have been declared to be in a serious breach of the contractual obligations regarding procurement procedures or procedures for the award of grants;*
- *they are in a situation of a conflict of interest with the organization or persons directly or indirectly involved in the grant award procedure, regardless the moment when the PO ascertains this situation;*
- *they are guilty of serious misrepresentation occurred in the process of supplying the information required by the PO or fail to provide the requested information, regardless the moment when this situation occurs.*

2.6. Eligible partners

The programme aims to support initiatives of cooperation between public entities, between public entities and the civil society and between entities from Romania and Donor States. In this respect, projects can be submitted in partnership that will be evaluated according to the value added brought to the project.

The partners (from Romania and/or Donor States) may be involved in designing the concept of the investment and may be partner with applicant in further submitting an application to access funding for the respective investment or for other purposes.

In this respect, it is recommended that partners have the capacity to act in the project area, in accordance with the role assumed and in accordance with their legal responsibilities or status.

Under this Call, the following public or private legal entities are eligible as partners:

- a. from Romania: public entities, local authorities and nongovernmental organisations⁵, established as Romanian legal persons.
- b. from Donor States: any public or private entity, commercial or non-commercial, as well as nongovernmental organisations established as legal persons in the Donor States.

Situations for which an entity is not entitled to receive a grant as a project promoter also apply to project partners.

Selection of partners

The creation and implementation of the partnership will comply with the applicable national and EU legislation on public procurement, Article 8.15 of the Regulation, as well as the provisions of Chapter V, Article 14 of Government Emergency Ordinance No. 34/2017.

Article 14 of Government Emergency Ordinance No. 34/2017 foresees that Romanian public entities acting as applicants must, when selecting Romanian NGOs to act as project partners, apply a transparent and non-discriminatory partner selection procedure. The selection methodology has to be prepared by the applicant and approved by the legal representative of the applicant. The applicant is entirely responsible for the partner selection process and will have to declare to the PO that it has complied with the applicable legal provisions. Information on the type of documents that the applicant has to submit during the contracting process are included within the Guideline for Applicants (annex to current call document).

⁵ According to Art. 1.6.1 (n) of the applicable Regulation, a non-governmental organization is a legal, voluntary, non-profit, non-commercial entity, independent of local, regional and central government, public entities, political parties and trade organizations. Religious institutions and political parties are not considered as NGOs

Partnership agreement

The applicant will sign a *Partnership Agreement* with the project partners (recommended template provided in the Guide for Applicant). The Partnership Agreement must clearly set out the roles, responsibilities and budget of the parties, coordinating bodies, financial arrangements between the parties etc. (see Article 7.7 of the Regulation). The Partnership Agreement will be submitted in draft as an appendix to the project proposal and will be finalized and signed by the partners before signing the project financing contract. For partners from Donor States, a letter of intent is also required when submitting the application (see the recommended template provided by PO in the application).

Funds for bilateral relations

During the project proposal preparation period, the PO can provide to entities from Donor States and Romania that are eligible under the call, in the framework of a call for bilateral activities proposals, funds for the organization of bilateral activities with the purpose to facilitate partnership relations, respectively to prepare and/ or conclude a partnership agreement for the project, and to effectively and jointly prepare the project application. The bilateral activities may be organized in Donor States or in Romania. More details on how to access these funds, for Call 1, Funds for bilateral relations, can be found on PO's website: <https://dezvoltare-locala.frds.ro/prezentarea-relatiilor-bilaterale/>

2.7. Eligibility of target groups

The target group is represented by the inhabitants (people at risk of poverty or social exclusion) of rural and small-urban marginalized communities from administrative-territorial units (with a population of less than 20,000 inhabitants, according to the 2011 Census), who will benefit from the investments to be made through the subsequent financing to be accessed by the applicants and for which the technical documentation is developed with funding under this call.

Marginalized communities eligible under this small grant scheme are areas that simultaneously meet the following conditions:

1. Low level of human capital
2. Low level of employment on the labour market
3. Poor housing conditions.

The ways of meeting each of the above-mentioned criteria are presented in the Guide for Applicants, subchapter 1.3 Eligible target groups.

The demonstration of the eligibility of a community as being marginalized can be done in two ways:

- a) based on existing reference studies, as follows:
 - in case of administrative-territorial units from rural areas, the commune is identified with a marginalization rate in the *Atlas of Marginalized Rural Areas and of Local Human Development in Romania*⁶;
 - in case of administrative-territorial units from small-urban areas (less than 20,000 inhabitants), the town/municipality is identified in the *Atlas of Marginalized Urban*

⁶ Atlas of Marginalized Rural Areas and of Local Human Development in Romania; Grigoraş, Vlad; Stănculescu, Manuela Sofia; Sandu, Dumitru; Corad, Bogdan; Iamandi-Cioinaru, Cătălina; Man, Titus; Marin, Monica; Moldovan, Ciprian; Neculau, Georgiana. 2016. Washington, DC: World Bank Group, available at http://www.mmuncii.ro/j33/images/Documente/Minister/F6_Atlas_Rural_RO_23Mar2016.pdf, Annex 2 - The rate of marginalization at commune level by development regions

*Areas in Romania*⁷ with a percentage of population that lives in marginalized areas on its territory.

- b) based on the applicants' justification of the marginalization character of the area, if the administrative-territorial unit is not included as presenting marginalized areas in the above-mentioned studies. In this regard, the applicants will fill in the Fiche for validation of marginalized community(es) (see template provided in the Guide for Applicants).

Priority is given to administrative-territorial units with Roma population, which will receive specific points in evaluation.

2.8. Eligible activities

The main eligible activities of the small grant scheme consist of preparing the technical documentation, as supporting documents for the preparation of a financing application for investment projects to be submitted for funding from various national or international programmes or for funding from the state or local budget.

The eligible technical documents to be funded under the present grant scheme are:

- scope of work;
- feasibility studies;
- documentation for the approval of intervention works;
- studies and other related technical documentation;
- payment of taxes/fees for obtaining the approvals/agreements;
- grant application for accessing funds for realising the investment (if necessary).

The value of costs linked to technical documentation (budgeted under chapter 3 Investment Costs) must represent at least 80% of the total budget of the project. This shall be checked and scored during content evaluation under criterion 3. Economic efficiency/ Sustainability.

Important notice:

- eligible technical documentations are the ones specific to the design stage (upon which the technical solutions are based and the technical & economic indicators of the investment objective are established) and not to the subsequent stages such as: the elaboration of documentation for obtaining the building permit, the elaboration of the technical project, of the execution details and of any other documentation / activities necessary in the execution stage of the investment objective.

The technical documentations to be developed will be exclusively linked to community investments to be realised in the future from other funds, such as construction / extension / rehabilitation / modernization of the following types of infrastructure:

- Social Infrastructure - projects targeting social service infrastructure (social, education, health, employment infrastructure);
- Water Infrastructure - projects aiming to ensure the water supply of the units providing social services;

⁷ Elaboration of Integration Strategies for Urban Marginalized Communities: the Atlas of Urban Marginalized Communities in Romania; Anton, Simona; Koo, Bryan; Man, Titus-Cristian; Moldovan, Sandu Ciprian; Stanculescu, Manuela Sofia; Swinkels, Robertus A. 2014. Washington, DC: World Bank Group, available at <http://documents.worldbank.org/curated/en/857001468293738087/pdf/882420WP0P1430085232B00OU00900Atlas.pdf>,

Annex 8. Urban Population Based on Typology of Urban Areas

- Sewerage infrastructure - projects aimed at collecting wastewater for units providing social services;
- Roads, bridges and footbridges - projects targeting county-level interest roads, local-level interest roads, bridges and footbridges that allow/ facilitate disadvantaged groups access to social services;
- Housing Infrastructure - projects targeting social housing.

The investments will lead to an increased quality and access to social services by disadvantaged groups.

To apply/ be eligible for funding under this call, applicants will need to demonstrate ownership/ administration rights of the land / construction targeted for investment

Applicants will attach to the grant application the *Concept Note* elaborated according to the standard content stipulated in the Government Decision no. 907/2016 regarding the elaboration phases and the standard content of the technical and economic documentation related to the public-financed investment objectives / projects (see template provided in the Guide for Applicant).

The projects may also propose other types of activities corresponding to the design stage, with the condition that they contribute to achieving project objectives.

2.9. Eligible costs

As a general rule, the costs are eligible if they were incurred during the eligibility period. The eligibility period of the costs is established in the financing contract. It begins after the signature of the contract, no sooner than the starting date of the project implementation.

At the end of the project, all the planned activities will be completed and all the expenses will be incurred/ committed. Further information on costs eligibility can be found in the Regulation (Chapter 8) and the Guide for Applicants.

The budget of the project shall be expressed in RON and EUR (using the InforEuro exchange rate for April 2021, 1 EUR =4,921 RON) and shall exclusively comprise eligible costs (direct costs, indirect costs and contingency costs, if the case).

Direct costs

The eligible direct costs of the project are:

- Cost of staff assigned to the project, comprising actual salaries plus social security charges and other statutory costs included in the remuneration, provided that this corresponds to the Project Promoter's and project partner's (if the case) usual policy on remuneration. Nevertheless, given the fact that the project proposals to be submitted under this call will consist mainly in the elaboration of different technical documents, the staff costs within projects are not mandatory or shall be limited to minimum possible and should be directly correlated to their actual work in the project.

The corresponding salary costs of staff of national administrations are eligible to the extent that they relate to the cost of activities which the relevant public authority would not carry out if the project concerned were not undertaken;

- Travel and subsistence allowances for staff taking part in the project. By complying with the principle of proportionality, travel costs, including subsistence allowance, may be calculated as a lump sum, according to chapter 5.2 General conditions for eligibility of expenses, from the Guide for Applicants. Similarly, to staff costs, if the case, these costs should be kept to the minimum necessary;
- Costs of consumables and supplies, provided that they are identifiable, necessary and assigned to the project;

- Costs entailed by other contracts awarded by a Project Promoter for the purposes of carrying out the project, provided that the awarding complies with the applicable rules on public procurement and this Regulation and
- Costs arising directly from requirements imposed by the project contract for each project.

Important notices:

The project costs under this call are mainly related to designing services, contracts concluded for the preparation of technical documentation and payment of the taxes/ fees for obtaining the necessary approvals/ permits. Therefore, the value of costs budgeted under chapter 3 Investment Costs must represent at least 80% of the total budget of the project. For these contracts the contracting authority shall be the Project Promoter.

Considering the social character of the Programme and of present call, it is recommended that the design costs to be calculated as an amount up to 3% of the estimated value of the investment objective, mentioned in the Concept Note, subchapter 3.1 *Estimating the expenditures for the implementation of the investment objective*.

Maximum eligible costs of project promotion are 500 EUR, regardless the project total value, as detailed in the Guidelines for Applicants. Nevertheless, besides mandatory promotion activities (that could bare no costs attached), the other promotion actions have to be necessary and well justified in order to be accepted.

As a general rule, the project costs shall be reasonable, in accordance with the market prices, both for the designing services and for the estimation of the investment costs at project level, as well as for the other types of costs included into the project budget, so as to ensure proportionality, efficiency and efficacy use of public funds.

Indirect costs

For entities from Romania, the indirect costs of the project shall be determined either on the basis of actual costs and shall be justified by the analytical accounting system (Art 8.5, lit. a, of Regulation), or on the basis of a flat rate calculation (Art. 8.5, lit. c, of Regulation). The indirect costs calculation method shall be stipulated in the project financing contract and in the Partnership agreement (if the case). The entities from Donor States may identify their indirect costs according to one of the methods mentioned in the Regulation (Article 8.5). The indirect costs calculating method cannot be changed during the project implementation.

Contingency

The maximum value of these costs is 5% of the eligible direct costs. The contingency can only be used with the prior approval of the PO and only after transferring it to the corresponding budgetary line(s) and exclusively for their approved purpose.

2.10. Non-eligible costs

- Interests on debt, debt service charges and late payment charges;
- Charges for financial transactions and other purely financial costs, except costs related to accounts required by the FMC, the National Focal Point or the applicable law and costs of financial services imposed by the project contract;
- Provisions for losses or potential future liabilities;
- Exchange losses;
- Recoverable VAT;
- Costs that are covered by other sources;

- Fines, penalties and costs of litigation, except where litigation is an integral and necessary component for achieving the outcomes of the project; and
- Excessive or reckless expenditure.

2.11. Durability of projects

Given the specificity of the grant scheme, the Project Promoter will need to demonstrate the capacity to use the results of the project once the EEA financial mechanism funding has been completed, in terms of valorisation of the technical documentation delivered within the project.

In this respect, the Project Promoter will develop a plan/ commit to ensure the sustainability of the project results, based on the following minimal requirements:

- The Project Promoter will ensure the quality of the technical documentation delivered by the project and will further update the documentation, at its own expense, if necessary, in order to meet the purpose for which it was elaborated and access funding;
- By April 30th, 2024, the Project Promoter will further submit an application to access funding for the respective investment and will demonstrate it by providing the PO with a proof of submission. It is expected that the application is declared eligible, at least;
- The Project Promoter will duly inform the PO and will submit supporting evidence regarding the approval of the application submitted for accessing funding for the investment designed under the small grants scheme

3. Projects' verification, evaluation, selection and contracting

As PO, RSDF is responsible for collecting the project proposals to be funded under the present call, for selecting projects to be financed and for signing the project contracts.

All projects selection and approval operations shall observe the principles of confidentiality and impartiality.

The project proposals shall be analysed against specific criteria, following two steps: formal verification and content evaluation.

3.1 Formal verification

During the **formal verification stage**, the following shall be checked:

- a) Administrative compliance

The administrative compliance criteria refer to:

- compliance with the announced deadline (the project proposal was uploaded and transmitted through the online system until the date and time announced as deadline);
- compliance with the uploaded submission method (the project proposal was uploaded and transmitted to the online system);
- all requested documents were uploaded and transmitted and comply with the form requirements (all the required and mandatory documents are attached and they comply with the formal requirements mentioned in the call documents).

Important notice: All projects that did not respect the criteria above-mentioned are rejected.

- b) Compliance with eligibility criteria

The eligibility criteria⁸ refer to:

- eligibility of the applicants, as described in 2.5 Eligible Project Promoters;
- eligibility of the partners, as described in 2.6 Eligible Partners.
- the community for which the investment is proposed is identified as marginalized, according to the indicated reference studies or the applicants justified the marginalization character of the area (according to the Fiche for validation of the marginalized community), as described in chapter 2.7 Eligibility of target groups of present call;
- includes only eligible activities as defined in call's documents;
- the requested amount falls within the set limits;
- the investment is in compliance with the non-segregation principle (according to Statement of compliance with the non-segregation principle from Application form, section 16).

The projects proposals must fulfil all administrative and eligibility criteria in order to pass to the content evaluation stage.

The formal evaluation is performed by the PO's specialists.

In case the provided information is not sufficient or/ and clear enough to be able to make an objective decision as to whether a certain criterion is fulfilled or not, the PO may send the applicants requests for clarification. Documents that do not exist in the file or are non-compliant, cannot be submitted at this stage, as the application file cannot be completed after submission.

The applicants shall respond within the deadline mentioned in the request for clarification sent by PO (any document/ clarification received after the deadline shall not be taken into account, the decision will be taken based on the existing documents in the electronic file of the project).

If one or more of the above criteria have not been met, the project proposal is rejected (either as non-compliant or non-eligible) and is excluded from subsequent stages of the selection.

The applicants with projects rejected as non-compliant or non-eligible shall be notified within maximum 45 working days after the deadline for projects submission with regard to the results of the formal evaluation. In well-justified cases, e.g. when the number of received project proposals is high or in other justified situations, the PO may decide to extend this deadline. In this respect, the PO shall publish an announcement on the programme's website informing the applicants about the new deadline.

The project proposals and all the documents related to the verification/ clarifications shall be kept by the PO and some of the relevant data shall be recorded in the database (MIS).

3.2 Content's evaluation

The contents evaluation is performed by independent experts, selected and contracted by the PO.

Each project proposal that fulfils the administrative and eligibility criteria is evaluated by two independent and impartial experts. If the difference between the scores given by the two evaluators is more than 30% of the highest score, a third evaluator shall be appointed by the PO to perform an independent evaluation of the project. In such cases, the average of the nearest two scores shall be considered for ranking the projects.

The main criteria on which the projects shall be evaluated are:

⁸ The first criterion is eliminatory, without the PO asking for any clarification

No.	Evaluation criteria	Maximum Score
1.	Relevance, necessity and opportunity	45
1.1	The investment for which funds are requested to prepare the technical documentation increases the access and/ or quality of social services for the disadvantaged groups.	5
1.2	The number of beneficiaries for which access to social services increases is significant. <i>The score will be differentiated as follows: between 50 and 99 inhabitants receive 1 point; between 100 - 499 inhabitants are awarded 2 points; between 500 - 999 inhabitants are awarded 3 points; between 1000 and 2000 inhabitants are awarded 4 points; over 2,000 people are awarded 5 points</i>	5
1.3	The proposed investment leads to the enforcement of the principle of desegregation in the use of social services	5
1.4	The target groups and their needs are clearly identified and described	5
1.5	The proposed investment objective is relevant and necessary; the proposed solution is appropriate to the target group needs	5
1.6	The investment contributes to Roma inclusion <i>The score will be differentiated according to the number of residents in the administrative-territorial unit who identify themselves as Roma, as follows: no Roma is given 0 points; Under 5% of inhabitants 1 point is awarded, 5% - 10% of inhabitants are awarded 2 points; between 10% and 15% of the population are awarded 3 points; between 15% and 20% of the population are given 4 points; over 20% of Roma people are granted 5 points</i>	5
1.7	The investment is a priority at local/ county/ regional level, being included in the local development strategies/ plans/ other local strategic documents <i>The score will be differentiated, as follows: The investment is not included in strategies/ plans/ other local strategy documents - 0 points The investment is included in strategies/ plans/ other local strategy documents - 3 points The investment is a priority at local/ county/ regional level and sufficient details are provided - 5 points</i>	5
1.8	The applicant demonstrates the need for financial support in order to contract technical documentation services	5
1.9	The support received ⁹ by the same territorial administrative unit in the last 5 years. <i>The score will be differentiated, as follows: The applicant has received financial support for more than 5 projects - 0 points; The applicant has received financial support for 3 to 5 projects - 3 points; The applicant has received financial support for less than 3 projects - 5 points;</i>	5
2.	Technical consistency / Methodology	35
2.1	The Concept Note is designed according to the template provided by PO, is consistent and is correlated with the content of the application	5
2.2	The proposed investment objective is clearly described in terms of: purpose, functions, technical parameters and data, minimum functioning	5

⁹ Projects funded under the Small Grant Access Financing scheme previously launched **are** included in the number of projects for which the authority has received funding in the last 5 years (April 2016-March 2021) and has to be included within the corresponding Annex

No.	Evaluation criteria	Maximum Score
	period, specific requirements for functioning, formulated in a measurable manner	
2.3	The proposed investment has been chosen using a community driven development approach, demonstrating satisfactory involvement of the target groups, <i>The score will be differentiated, as follows:</i> <i>No documents that demonstrate transparency in the decision-making process and community involvement are presented - 0 points</i> <i>The minimum documents demonstrate transparency in the decision-making process and community involvement are presented - 3 points</i> <i>Details/ documents beyond the minimum requirements of the PO that demonstrate transparency in the decision-making process and community involvement is presented - 5 points</i>	5
2.4	There is a realistic planning and methodology for the proposed project activities	5
2.6	The mandatory visibility activities (according to specific Annex) are included. The proposed visibility activities/ methodologies are proportional with the scale of the targeted community.	5
2.5	The proposal describes how the investment will contribute to the compliance with the principle of equal opportunity and to sustainable development in the marginalized community	5
2.7	The risk analysis is realistic and the risk prevention/mitigation measures are feasible	5
3.	Economic Efficiency /Sustainability	20
3.1	The cost of services for the preparation of the technical documentation is reasonable and proportionate to the estimated investment cost. <i>The score will be differentiated according to the % of the budgeted value for design services of the estimated total value for the investment, as follows:</i> <i>over 7% of the investment cost is awarded 0 points; between 5% - 7% of the investment cost is awarded 1 point; between 3% and 5% of the investment cost are awarded 3 points; less than 3% of the investment cost is awarded 5 points</i>	5
3.2	The estimated investment value is based on cost of similar investments (according to section 3.1 of the Concept Note – Annex 3 to Application form)	5
3.3	The proposed budget corresponds to the described activities, the expected results, and falls within the limits defined for eligible costs	5
3.4	The applicant has identified the financing source/sources for accomplishing the proposed investment	5
Total score		100

Each criterion is divided into sub-criteria. For each sub-criterion, the evaluator may award a score between 0 and 5 points.

In order to be eligible for funding, the project proposal must meet cumulatively the following conditions:

- To obtain under criterion no. 1 Relevance, necessity and opportunity of the project, minimum 3 points to each sub-criterion except 1.2 and 1.6, and a total of minimum 25 points under criterion no 1¹⁰;
- To obtain under criterion no. 2 Technical consistency / Methodology, minimum 3 points at sub-criterion 2.3;
- To achieve a total score of at least 65 points¹¹ out of the 100 possible, during the evaluation.

After concluding the desk evaluation, the *Ranked list of projects* (outlined in descending order of the final scores), together with the most relevant remarks of the evaluators, will be drawn up. The list is made available to the members of the Selection Committee¹² (SC).

3.3 Projects' selection and approval

The SC recommends to the PO the projects to be financed based on the conclusions of evaluation carried out by the independent evaluators and may modify the projects ranking in justified cases. The justification for the change shall be detailed in the minutes of the meetings and all the affected applicants shall be informed in writing on the justification for the change.

The PO shall verify that the selection process has been carried out in compliance with the provisions in the Regulation and the SC recommendations and complies with the programme's rules and objectives. After these verifications, the Steering Committee of the PO, based on the SC selection, will make a decision regarding the projects that will be funded/ rejected/ put on the reserve list, depending the available funds and will award the projects.

Until the final decision is taken, all the information related to the projects' evaluation shall be confidential.

All persons involved in the evaluation process shall sign confidentiality and conflict of interest statements

3.4 Applicants' notification

All the applicants (except for those who submitted projects that were rejected during the formal verification stage and who have already received notifications) shall be notified on the results of the projects selection (including on the main reasons that led to the result) within maximum 30 working days after the final decision of the PO. In the case of projects approved for financing, the notification shall also comprise the conditions to be fulfilled for signing the project financing contract, if any. If there are projects rejected as a result of SC's decision or Steering Committee's decision to change the ranking of the projects, the applicants affected by this change shall be informed in writing on the justification.

After finalizing the contracting stage, the final list of projects to be financed shall be published on RSDF's website at <https://dezvoltare-locala.frds.ro/apelul-acces-la-finantare/>

3.5 Appeal procedure

The applicants may appeal the rejection of their project proposal only during the formal evaluation stage, in which case they may file an appeal within maximum 30 calendar days from the date of receiving the notification.

¹⁰ If, after verifying the first criterion *Relevance, necessity and opportunity of the project*, the project proposal does not meet the requirement, the project is rejected at this stage.

¹¹ The average of the two independent appraisers' scores.

¹² The Selection Committee consists of three members: two representatives of the PO and one external expert. The representatives of the Programme Partners (KS and CoE) are invited to participate in the SC's meetings in an advisory capacity and the representatives of the National Focal Point (NFP) from the Ministry of Investments and European Projects and the FMO are invited to participate as observers.

The PO will formulate and send a response within a maximum of 30 working days from the date of appeal's receipt.

There is no appeal procedure as concerns the SC's decision.

3.6 Projects contracting

For each project approved for funding, the PO will conclude a project financing contract.

In view of signing the contract, applicants shall provide all additional documents or proves that the information included in the application or annexed is real, if requested.

During the project implementation, if necessary, the provisions of the financing contract/ its annexes may be mutually amended (without causing substantial changes to the initially approved proposal). The amendments might be subject of addendums to the financing contract, as the case may be.

4. Reporting and payment system

The Programme applies the pre-financing system. In the case of projects selected for financing under this small grant scheme, the payments to the applicant shall be performed by the PO under the form of an advance payment (up to 80%), the interim payment and payment of the final balance (if applicable). The interim payment (up to 20%) is performed based on the interim report containing supporting documents (technical and financial) and following the authorisation by PO of the declared expenses. The project funds (in Lei) shall be transferred to the accounts specifically opened by the applicant for the project at the local treasury.

5. Preparation and submission of the project proposal

If the applicants use the services of a consultant for the preparation of the application/ preparation of the application file, the consultant's name shall be mentioned in the specific field of the application form.

5.1 Help-desk services

During the period the small grant scheme for project proposals is opened, the PO provides the potential applicants/ project partners and other stakeholders, upon request, with help-desk services (information and clarifications). These services are provided by experts working in the main office and in the two branch offices of the PO.

For more information about the help-desk services, please find the specific chapter from Applicants Guide.

We recommend periodic consultation of website <https://dezvoltare-locala.frds.ro/> in order to have access to additional and/or updated information as well as most common answers to the help-desk questions.

5.2 Project proposal file preparation

The grant application form must be filled-in according to the requirements described in the Guide for Applicants (both documents are published at the following address: <https://dezvoltare-locala.frds.ro/apelul-acces-la-finantare/>).

When preparing the project proposal, the PP will ensure compliance with the formal and content requirements specified in section 3.1 Formal verification, otherwise the project proposal will be rejected at this stage.

The grant application and the annexes will be drafted in Romanian, on the template provided by the PO.

The grant application shall be accompanied by a package of additional documents. The list of documents to be submitted together with the grant application is available in the Guide for Applicants. As a mean for verification, PP and partners will check compliance of the project proposal with specific criteria by completing the Grid for verifying administrative compliance and eligibility, Annex E to the Guide of Applicants.

The project proposal will be submitted exclusively in electronic format, through the online system, according to the online upload procedure, annex C of the Guide of Applicants.

In order to submit the project proposal in the online system, it is necessary to have an extended electronic signature, based on a qualified certificate, issued by an accredited certification service provider according to the law.

The electronic signature must belong to the legal representative of the local authority or to the person specially empowered by the legal representative to conclude documents in the name and on behalf of the legal person (of the local public authority) in order to submit projects within the Local Development program.

Also, for the submission of the project it is necessary to create a user account in the name of the project promoter. An applicant can create a single account, being identified by its registration code.

Account creation details and how to upload are described in the online upload procedure, annex C of the Guide of Applicants.

If the PO publishes one or more corrigendum, during the open call for projects, it is mandatory that the project proposal is in accordance with the last form of the published forms / documents / annexes, etc., otherwise there is a risk to reach the rejection of the project file, from the stage of formal (administrative) verification.

5.3 Project proposal submission

The project proposal file will be **sent exclusively through the online submission system**, following an online upload procedure detailed in annex C of the Guide of Applicants, no later than **17 of June, 2021, 17:00 hours**.

We highly recommend to upload the grant application file in a timely manner as to avoid overloading the electronic system or even blocking it. The responsibility for uploading and submitting the project proposal in a timely manner/ before the deadline belongs to the project promoter, and the PO cannot be held responsible for failure to meet the deadline and having the project proposal rejected for this reason.

The files submitted by courier, postal services, fax or e-mail, or in person, as well as those submitted through any other means than above-mentioned shall not be considered valid and shall be rejected.

By the submission deadline, if any applicant wants to modify a submitted and validated project, a request shall be sent to the PO to cancel this project and resume the upload process. The cancelled project proposal will not be quantified at the maximum number of projects for PP.

After the deadline for projects submission has expired, the applicants can no longer upload and sent projects or take initiative to make corrections/ revisions of the project proposal file.

At any time before the PO's approval, the applicants may choose to withdraw the project proposal from the competition. In this case, PP will send an official information the PO and PO will approve the withdraw of the project proposal.

6. Further useful information

For a better understanding of the aspects related to the specificity of the interventions financed from EEA and Norwegian Grants 2014-2021 and the overall projects implementation framework, we recommend consulting the following documents to the <https://dezvoltare-locala.frds.ro/resurse/> (the list is not limited):

- Memorandum of Understanding signed between Iceland, the Principality of Liechtenstein, the Kingdom of Norway and the Government of Romania on the implementation of the EEA Financial Mechanism 2014-2021,
- Regulation on the implementation of the EEA Financial Mechanism 2014-2021,
- Program Agreement signed between the NFP and the Donor States' representatives for the implementation of the programme
- Regulation (EU) 2016/679 on the protection of individuals with regard to the processing of personal data and on the free movement of such data
- Government Emergency Ordinance no. 34/2017 on the Financial Management of the Non-Reimbursable External Funds related to the EEA Financial Mechanism 2014-2021 and the Norwegian Financial Mechanism 2014-2021, as subsequently amended and supplemented;
- Law 98/2016 on public procurement published in the Official Monitor no. 390 of 23 May 2016, as subsequently amended and supplemented,
- Government Decision 395/2016 for the approval of the Methodological Norms for the application of the provisions regarding the award of the public procurement contract / the framework agreement in Law 98/2016, as subsequently amended and supplemented,
- Law 101/2016 on remedies and appeals in connection with the award of public procurement contracts, sectoral contracts and works concession and services concessions contracts, as well as for the organization and operation of CNSC, as subsequently amended and supplemented;
- Order of the Minister of European Funds no. 1284 regarding the approval of the competitive procedure applicable to the private applicants / beneficiaries for the award of services or works supply contracts, financed from European funds, published in the Official Monitor no. 618 of August 12, 2016, as subsequently amended and supplemented;
- Order MDRAPFE / ANAP no. 6.712 / 890/2017 regarding the approval of the procurement procedures for the projects with European financing implemented in partnership;
- Order No 348/2018 on the approval of the rules for the application of lump sums for travel expenses financed from the Bilateral Relations Fund and Technical Assistance Fund of the EEA and the Norwegian Financial Mechanisms 2014-2021;
Decision no 4/XI/SO/14.11.2019 of the PO Steering Committee regarding the approval of methodology for the calculation and payment of lump sums for travel expenses in Romania and abroad, at programme and projects level, financed from the EEA and the Norwegian Financial Mechanisms 2014-2021;
- Government Emergency Ordinance 66/2011 on the prevention, detection and sanctioning of irregularities in the obtaining and use of European funds and / or related national public funds, as subsequently amended and supplemented;
- Government Decision 875/2011 for approving the Methodological Norms for the application of the provisions of Government Emergency Ordinance no. 66/2011 on the prevention, detection and sanctioning of the irregularities in obtaining and using the European funds and / or the related national public funds;

- Government Decision 519/2014 regarding the setting of the rates related to the percentage cuts / financial corrections applicable for the deviations provided in the Annex to GEO 66/2011, as subsequently amended and supplemented;
- Decision no. 907 of November 29, 2016 regarding the elaboration phases and framework content of the technical and economical documentation related to investment objectives / projects financed from public funds;
- Law no. 50 of July 29, 1991 regarding the authorization of construction works execution, as subsequently amended and supplemented;
- Order no. 839/2009 for approving the Methodological Norms for the application of Law no. 50/1991 regarding the authorization of construction works execution, as subsequently amended and supplemented;
- Law no. 10/1995 regarding the quality in constructions, as subsequently amended and supplemented;
- Guides adopted by FMC / NMFA in accordance with applicable Regulations (For more details, access the following link:
https://eeagrants.org/resources?title=&field_resource_type_target_id=112&page=1
- Atlas of Marginalized Rural Areas and of Local Human Development in Romania; Grigoraș, Vlad; Stănculescu, Manuela Sofia; Sandu, Dumitru; Corad, Bogdan; Iamandi-Cioinaru, Cătălina; Man, Titus; Marin, Monica; Moldovan, Ciprian; Neculau, Georgiana. 2016. Washington, DC: World Bank Group, available at http://www.mmuncii.ro/j33/images/Documente/Minister/F6_Atlas_Rural_RO_23Mar2016.pdf
- Elaboration of Integration Strategies for Urban Marginalized Communities: The Atlas of Urban Marginalized Communities in Romania; Anton, Simona; Koo, Bryan; Man, Titus-Cristian; Moldovan, Sandu Ciprian; Stanculescu, Manuela Sofia; Swinkels, Robertus A. 2014. Washington, DC: World Bank Group, available at <http://documents.worldbank.org/curated/en/857001468293738087/pdf/882420WP0P1430085232B00OU0900Atlas.pdf>