

Doc 6 - Western Balkans Investment Framework

Public blending - EU eligibility criteria

aligned with the Economic and Investment Plan for the Western Balkans¹

General Requirements

The following eligibility criteria have been developed for both technical assistance and investment grants. To be eligible for grants, national sector strategies must be in place and project proposals must be prioritised and identified in the Single (National) Project Pipelines, as compiled within the remit of the National Investment Committee or equivalent national structures.

For respective co-financing rates, please refer to [Doc 6 - WBIF public blending EU co-financing rates aligned with the Economic and Investment Plan for the Western Balkans](#).

Eligibility Criteria for the Sustainable Transport Sector

- Transport projects shall relate to one of the three transport flagships (Connecting East to West, Connecting North to South, Connecting the Coastal Regions) suggested in the Annex of the Economic and Investment Plan and/or be located on the indicative extension of the TEN-T Core network to the Western Balkans. Projects that match both criteria are prioritised;
- For rail: Improvements in the rail network will be key to lowering emissions, fostering modal shift (namely freight) and creating a sustainable transport network, including modernisation of key railway stations and enhancing their connections with other public transport systems;
- For roads: The integration of sustainable and smart elements in road transport, such as multimodal transport nodes, electric charging stations or intelligent transportation system (ITS) will be promoted;
- For maritime and inland waterways: Support will continue for maritime and inland waterway ports and related infrastructure, with the exception of tourism terminals and facilities dedicated specifically to the transport and storage of fossil fuels. Investments should enhance resilience of port and other infrastructure to disasters and climate change and focus on developing multimodal, interoperable solutions. For the avoidance of doubt, only Core airports, Core maritime ports and Core inland ports as defined under the Indicative Extension of the TEN-T Network to the Western Balkans are eligible for investment grants.
- Multimodal transport: Priority is given to green multimodal public transport solutions.
- Rolling stock, vessels and vehicles are not eligible.

Eligibility Criteria for the Clean Energy/Energy Efficiency sector

- Environmentally sound investments in renewable energy sources and roll-out of clean and modern energy technologies and low-carbon fuels;
- In line with the foreseen initiative “Coal regions in transition platform in the Western Balkans

¹ COM (2020) 641 final

2 December 2020

and Ukraine”, support to transition strategies offering cleaner alternatives to coal for the coal-dependent regions (e.g. switch to modern, low emission gas infrastructure and renewable energy, and other investments supporting a green economy transition in the region, including energy efficiency, circular economy and economic diversification into other green activities), while avoiding lock-in effects.

- Energy interconnections (prioritised in the framework of the Energy Community with the Projects of Energy Community Interest and Projects of Mutual Interest);
- New gas infrastructure, new future-proof pipelines (including the extension of the Trans Adriatic Pipeline) respecting EU rules and demonstrating its long term viability (prioritised in the framework of the Energy Community with the Projects of Energy Community Interest and Projects of Mutual Interest);
- In line with foreseen “EU renovation wave”; refurbishing and improving building stock;
- Modernisation of the electric grid and development of smart grids;
- Priority is given to investments fostering energy market integration;
- Diversification of supply.

Eligibility criteria for the Environmental/Climate Change Sector

- Infrastructure for flood prevention, protection and mitigation;
- Development of hazard and flood risk prevention maps, plans and measures, including public information and training in reducing risks;
- Integrated Solid Waste Management infrastructure, including waste treatment, energy production, biomass, landfill phase-out;
- Waste-water treatment and drinking water supply;
- Establishment of proper air and water monitoring systems and pollution prevention measures;
- Deployment of reservoirs, and irrigation infrastructure and water use efficiency, etc.;
- Ecological green and blue infrastructures; ecosystem restoration and resilience; restoration of carbon rich habitats; water retention through nature, nature-based solutions, including freshwaters, forests, soils;
- Only large scale projects (e.g. waste-water treatment for capitals or other similarly large cities), or investments with regional impact are eligible;
- When duly justified, also pilot, exploratory, and innovative projects with potential expansion/duplication at regional level may receive WBIF co-financing.

Eligibility criteria for the Digital Sector

- Investments in digital infrastructures should focus on deploying ultra-fast and secure broadband with a view to ensure universal access, promote higher energy efficiency standards and resilience. The development and roll-out of national broadband infrastructure should have a particular focus on connecting 'white zones' (areas without access to broadband network);
- Digital infrastructures and security should be improved with particular focus on remote areas and low-income population;
- Digital access to citizens particularly in business, integrating digital, secure infrastructures with

2 December 2020

collaborative digital environment;

- Setting up secure, energy-efficient and trustworthy data centres, edge and cloud infrastructures, as well as linking to EU initiatives on high performance computers;
- Building on ongoing initiatives such as the Balkan Digital Highway, exploring synergies with other connectivity areas such as transport and energy in the context of infrastructure sharing.
- Exploring synergies with other connectivity areas such as transport and energy in the context of infrastructure sharing (e.g. Balkans Digital Highway).
- Projects in digital sector have to ensure alignment with EU's rules related to data protection and EU practices to mitigate cybersecurity risks (compliance with the EU toolbox²). Interventions have to be part of broader strategies at regional and or country level.

Eligibility criteria for the Social Sector

- Education infrastructure. Construction and/or conversion/extension of education infrastructure future proof (energy, climate and disaster resilient), sustainable and equipped for digital education. Priority is given to investments contributing to the Economic and Investment Plan Flagship 10 Youth Guarantee, notably addressing possible shortage of education, continued education and traineeship infrastructures and accessibility;
- Health infrastructures. Construction and/or conversion/extension of healthcare facilities (hospitals, clinics, health centres, hospices, etc.) future proof (energy efficient, disaster-resilient), sustainable, high-quality and digital healthcare systems (e.g. hospitals and health centres, networks of health infrastructures, etc.);
- Investments have to be part of a country or regional education and health strategy;
- Only investments with regional impact are eligible;
- When duly justified, also pilot, exploratory, and innovative projects with potential expansion/duplication at regional level may receive WBIF co-financing.
- Technical Assistance can be deployed to support preparation of public sector investments under WBIF.

The main criteria of eligibility for technical assistance would be the following:

- TA proposals must be flagship relevant or relate to an existing WBIF project.
- Support for project preparation (e.g. masterplans, (pre)feasibility studies, environmental and social impact assessments, comprehensive risks assessments, including disasters and climate change risks and vulnerability, designs, etc.);
- Support for project implementation: project management (including tender documents, procurement assistance), communication and visibility, etc.;
- Construction supervision (only for funding channelled through the Joint Fund);
- Support for overcoming specific obstacles delaying the preparation or implementation of projects.

² COM(2020) 40 final Secure 5G deployment in the EU - Implementing the EU toolbox