

# Western Balkans Mobility Scheme

## A POLICY ANSWERS Pilot Programme

### Guide for reviewers

Version of 11 July 2024

#### Preface

This guide is designed to answer the most frequent questions in the context of the review procedure of the Western Balkans Mobility Scheme (WBMS).

The WBMS invites early career researchers from Western Balkan economies to apply for a research stay in a different Western Balkan economy. All research fields and topics are accepted.

The scheme is designed light, and so are the application and review processes. A one-stage process will be deployed, applications will comprise a project description of no more than four pages. Two reviewers are foreseen per application. Please consult the POLICY ANSWERS website with all call-related documents at <https://www.westernbalkans-infohub.eu/calls/western-balkans-mobility-scheme/> for further details on the WBMS.

If your questions on the review process are not answered in this guide or directly in the review module, please contact the Joint Call Secretariat at DLR-PT (e-mail: [calls-europe@dlr.de](mailto:calls-europe@dlr.de)).

This document has one annex (“WBMS code of conduct for reviewer”) which has to be signed by all experts. Further information could be found in the section “How will I be selected to review applications?”.

Since the projects within this scheme are supported by the European Commission according to the Financial Support to Third Parties (FSTP) regulations, the scheme will be carried out in the light of the same basic principles which govern European Commission calls<sup>1</sup>:

- (1) **Excellence**: The proposal(s) selected for funding must demonstrate a high quality in the context of the topics and criteria set out in the call.
- (2) **Transparency**: Funding decisions must be based on clearly described rules and procedures, and all applicants should receive adequate feedback on the outcome of the review of their applications.

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<sup>1</sup> “Guidance note on financial support to third parties under H2020” ([https://www.ffg.at/sites/default/files/downloads/page/h2020guidancenote\\_financialsupport2thirdparties.pdf](https://www.ffg.at/sites/default/files/downloads/page/h2020guidancenote_financialsupport2thirdparties.pdf))

- (3) Fairness and impartiality: All proposals submitted to a call are treated equally. They are reviewed impartially on their merits, irrespective of their origin or the identity of the applicants.
- (4) Confidentiality: All proposals and related data, knowledge and documents are treated in confidence.
- (5) Efficiency and speed: Review of proposals and award of the financial support should be as rapid as possible, commensurate with maintaining the quality of the assessment, and respecting the legal framework.

## General information for reviewers

### How to review an application

To perform a review, you must login to the [WBMS Review Module at PT-Outline](#). It is through PT-Outline that you will complete and submit your review. If you access the portal for the first time, please use the “forgot password” button to get your password sent. **Please note: In case that no applications are assigned to you, you are not able to enter the Review Module, even if you try to sign-in.**

Once logged into PT-Outline, you will have access to the applications and the uploaded CVs that the call secretariat at DLR Projektträger has assigned to you:

We ask you to:

1. Read this guide carefully.
2. Carefully read the application(s) and the CV(s).
3. Rate each of the three criteria (please see below) by using a scale from 0 to 5 points:
  - 0 being the lowest and
  - 5 being the highest.
4. Provide a detailed justification for each score. You will need to write more than 1 sentence.
5. Double-check the content of your assessment.
6. Submit your assessment before your personal deadline, set by the WBMS call secretariat.

If improvements are required, you will receive an email requesting you to amend your review. If the quality issues continue to be unaddressed, we reserve the right to refuse payment and, in serious cases, to exclude you from the list of experts.

Within two weeks after the end of the overall review process we will send all experts that carried out at least one review within the WBMS review process a payment template containing the total number of reviews conducted as well as the individual IDs of all applications for which a review was carried out. Please insert your bank account details, sign, scan and send it back to [calls-europe@dlr.de](mailto:calls-europe@dlr.de). Each accepted review will be remunerated with EUR 25.

### Assessment criteria and score

The assessment of the applications will be carried out according to the three weighted criteria excellence (40%), impact (40%) and quality and efficiency of the implementation (20%). The

(weighted) sum of your scores will be used to prepare a preliminary ranking list. Please note that the explanations given below the criterion or no sub-criteria that have to be assessed separately.

1. Excellence (threshold 3/5)
  - Clarity and pertinence of the project's research and innovation approach and objectives as well as the soundness of the proposed methodology;
  - Quality of the home and host institution and its research infrastructure;
  - Extent and quality of the accompanying activities at the host institution like training, capacity building, soft skill development.
  
2. Impact (threshold 3/5)
  - Quality of expected research outputs and relevance to regional, economy-level or local policy context;
  - Quality of the measures to enhance the career perspectives and employability of the Early Career Researcher (ECR) and contribution to his/her skills development;
  - Suitability and quality of the measure(s) to maximise the exploitation of the research results and its visibility;
  - Contribution to the establishment of joint follow-up measures and long-term co-operations.
  
3. Quality and efficiency of the implementation (threshold 3/5)
  - Quality and effectiveness of the work plan, hosting arrangements and allocation of resources;
  - Complementarity of the role and the benefits of all three stakeholders (ECR, home institution, host institution).

The entry into the free text field needs to elaborate and correspond to the point score. Each criterion will be scored between 0 and 5. The maximum score that can be reached from all three criteria together is 15 points with:

*0 - Failure: The proposal fails to address the criterion in question, or cannot be judged because of missing or incomplete information;*

*1 - Poor: The criterion is addressed in an inadequate manner, or there are serious inherent weaknesses;*

*2 - Fair: While the proposal broadly addresses the criterion, there are significant weaknesses;*

*3 - Good: The proposal addresses the criterion in question well, although improvements would be necessary;*

*4 - Very good: The proposal addresses the criterion very well, although certain improvements are still possible;*

*5 - Excellent: The proposal successfully addresses all relevant aspects of the criterion in question. Any shortcomings are minor.*

Furthermore, you are asked to summarise the main strengths and weaknesses of the proposed project, considering the criteria listed above. Please bear in mind that applicants will be provided with this summary in order to give them a transparent view on the review process and to enable them to learn from the assessment of the reviewers. Of course, these summaries will be fully anonymized.

Please be aware during your assessment, that the WBMS is a mobility scheme for early-career researchers from the Western Balkans resulting in very small projects. According to the nature of the scheme you are not dealing with cutting-edge research projects but with young researchers who should be supported within their career development.

## Expert registration, selection and deadlines

### How can I register as a WBMS expert?

You will have to register as reviewer in the Western Balkans Mobility Scheme (WBMS) before you will be able to review any application. The call for reviewer is available [here](#) and the registration link to the WBMS reviewer database can be found [here](#). If you are interested to register as expert, you are invited to do so until 14 July 2024.

### Experts must

- have at least 5 years of active postgraduate research experience.
- be proficient in English.

### How will I be selected to review applications?

Reviews are expected to be conducted from 15 July to 18 August 2024. Please note: If you are not available in the named period, please inform us as soon as possible by sending an email to [calls-europe@dlr.de](mailto:calls-europe@dlr.de). It is important to inform us before we start assigning you applications.

After the submission deadline, we begin to match the eligible applications to potential experts. This is performed by project officers with a technical, scientific, or engineering background. They will read the application in question, and will check against information entered by the experts into the registration tool. Two suitable experts will be identified per application from the eligible list.

It is possible that one expert be allocated several applications. If we think that the workload could present a potential problem, we will re-allocate some to a reserve expert instead. It is also possible that an eligible expert receives no reviews, if no applications are received within your specialisation area, or if the list contains more suitable individuals.

Since the applications in the WBMS are short, also the review process is designed light. We have a review window measured in weeks, not months. As soon as we match applications to suitable experts, we will begin to contact the experts who have been chosen to perform a review. Depending on the number of applications we receive, this may take several days to complete. You may therefore be contacted with assigned applications over different days.

For the first application assigned to you, you will receive an email containing the template of “WBMS code of conduct for reviewer” (annexed to this document) which is to be completed, signed, scanned and sent back to [calls-europe@dlr.de](mailto:calls-europe@dlr.de).

For each application assigned to you, you will receive an email inviting you to login to the WBMS Review Module at PT-Outline, where you can see the application(s) assigned to you.

Once logged in, please download and read the application carefully. After that please check and confirm that a) you do not have any direct or indirect conflict of interest, b) the application is in your area of expertise. In case one or both of these points cannot be confirmed by you personally, you are asked to abstain from completing the assessment form and to inform the WBMS call secretariat immediately. In case of a breach of these obligations, we reserve the right to refuse payment and, in serious cases, to exclude you from the list of experts.

### Delivery of the assessment

Reviews must be performed in accordance with the expectations of quality outlined previously in these guidelines. Reviews must be performed in English language, and according to the following deadlines:

- For a single application, you will be expected to deliver the assessment within 6 days.
- For up to three applications, you will be expected to deliver them all within 10 days.
- For more than three applications, you will be expected to deliver them all within 15 days.

Please note: The deadline counts from the day you receive your first application. For example, if today you are assigned an application, you will be expected to deliver it within 6 days; if tomorrow you are assigned a second application, you will be expected to deliver both assessments within 10 days from receiving the first application.

As for your availability, we understand that things can happen, and that circumstances can change. If you are no longer available, please let us know immediately, so we can plan alternative arrangements.

If we see that you have not logged into the platform within several days, we will attempt to contact you to make sure you are still interested to complete the review.

If we cannot reach you and we cannot see that you are working, we will have to withdraw the invitation to review applications and seek alternative experts.

Reviews can only be submitted once. If you wish to amend the review, please contact us as soon as possible.

Annex to “Guide for reviewer”

## Code of conduct for reviewers of the POLICY ANSWERS Western Balkans Mobility Scheme

[For the independent expert acting as reviewer]

Name.....

I undertake to abide by the *code of conduct for reviewers of the POLICY ANSWERS Western Balkans Mobility Scheme, namely:*

1. The task of a reviewer is to take part in the review process in a confidential, fair and equitable way. He/she must use his/her best endeavours to achieve this goal, follow any instructions laid out in the “guide for reviewers” by the DLR-Projektträger (DLR-PT) as call secretariat to this end, and deliver a constant and high quality of work.
2. All applications shall be treated equally by the reviewer, the assessment of an application shall be based solely upon the information contained in the application.
3. All applications received by the reviewer shall be completely assessed and reviewer shall carry out a compliance check for ethical principles, and that the research is not of military character. In all cases of non-compliance, the reasons are to be indicated.
4. Reviewer shall only review proposals belonging to their broader domain of expertise.
5. The reviewer works as an independent person. He/she is deemed to work in a personal capacity and, in performing the work, does not represent any organisation.
6. The reviewer commits him/herself to strict confidentiality and impartiality concerning his/her tasks.
7. Reviewers may not discuss any application with any third party, including other reviewers or DLR-PT officials not directly involved in the evaluation process.
8. Reviewers must not communicate with applicants. Reviewers’ advice to the DLR-PT must not be communicated by them to the applicants or to any other person.

9. Reviewers are not allowed to disclose any detail of the monitoring and assessment processes (including names of other reviewers participating in the assessment) and their outcomes or of any application submitted for evaluation to third party without the written approval of the DLR-PT.
10. Reviewers are not allowed to have applied in the POLICY ANSWERS call or to be involved in any application submitted.
11. Experts must perform their work impartially and take all measures to prevent any situation where the impartial and objective implementation of the work could be compromised for reasons involving family, emotional life, political or national affinity, economic interest or any other direct or indirect interest ('conflict of interests'). Reviewers have to inform DLR-PT immediately if they discover any disqualifying or potential conflict of interest (direct and/or indirect) with any application that they are asked to review.
12. Reviewers will promptly notify DLR-PT about any circumstances which affect the fulfilment of obligations assigned to them in a review accepted by them, including delays in the assessment of applications allocated to them.
13. Reviewers must not deploy any Artificial Intelligence (AI) driven tools in assessing the application.

Reviewers accept that failure to comply with these undertakings might lead to their exclusion from the assessment and may render them liable. DLR-PT might reduce or exclude remuneration in the event of non-conformity with this code of conduct.

This agreement shall be governed and interpreted exclusively by the laws of Germany. All disputes which cannot be amicably settled shall be referred to the exclusive jurisdiction of the competent court of the juridical county of Bonn, Germany.

**For acceptance:**

*Signature:*

*Place, date:*