

Guideline for applicants

Within ABD Grant Scheme as a part of the project:” Support to economic diversification of rural areas in Southeast Europe (SEDRA)”.

The ABD Grant Scheme corresponds to the Mountain tourism value chain in the cross-border regions of Prespa, Sharra and Prokletije-Bjeshket e Nemuna.



**Opening date of call is 02.09. 2019 and
the closing date is 15.10. 2019 at 16:00 Central European Time**

GUIDELINE FOR APPLICANTS

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1. GENERAL INFORMATION

This Guideline aims to give practical information for applicants to the 2019 ABD Grant Scheme. It helps applicants to submit project proposals and offers information on the application procedure, eligibility and selection criteria, as well as the decision-making procedures.

The “ABD grant scheme” (named as such for the purpose of this guide) is to be implemented by the SWG Head Office/Secretariat on behalf of the Regional Rural Development Standing Working Group” in partnership with the Deutsche Gesellschaft für Internationale Zusammenarbeit GmbH (GIZ), within the project ”Support to economic diversification of rural areas in Southeast Europe (SEDRA)”.

The grant scheme is designed to support the Mountain tourism value chain development in the cross-border regions of “Prespa”, “Sharra” and “Prokletije-Bjeshket e Nemuna”, related to potential to generate added value, to generate income, to create employment and to valorize the local natural resources in an environmentally, socially, and culturally sustainable manner. Special attention will be paid in the involvement of women and youth in the cross-border areas. Promotion and coordination of the ABD Grant Scheme in the cross-border regions “Prespa”, “Sharra” and “Prokletije-Bjeshket e Nemuna” is facilitated by SWG RRD in partnership with GIZ.

2. BACKGROUND

2.1 What is SWG?

The SWG is an International Intergovernmental Organization, consisting of governmental institutions in South Eastern Europe (SEE) responsible for agriculture and rural development (Ministries of Agriculture) in countries and territories of South-East Europe (SEE).

The SWG vision is to promote innovative and sustainable agriculture and rural development through regional cooperation, to improve rural livelihoods in the SEE countries.

The main SWG work is organized through activities implemented in the following areas:

- Networking and capacity enhancement of SWG Member Institutions;
- Facilitating regional cooperation between rural stakeholders in the SEE region;
- Implementing the area-based development approach as a tool to foster sustainable growth in the SEE region.

2.2 What is Area Based Development (ABD)?

Area Based Development (ABD) is considered to be an innovative and effective approach to facilitate sustainable growth in rural areas in decline. It is tailor made concept for geographical areas in Cross-Border regions in the Western Balkans, characterized by specific complex development problems. The approach uses a methodology which is inclusive, participatory, as well as flexible and it ensures integration and coherence.

It is suitable in particular for areas where one or several of the following situations are present: poverty gap, post-natural or human disasters, post-conflict environment and exclusion issues.

2.3 Project: Support to Economic Diversification of Rural Areas in Southeast Europe (SEDRA)

The regional project: Support to Economic Diversification of Rural Areas in Southeast Europe (SEDRA) involves the countries: Albania, Bosnia and Herzegovina, Kosovo*, North Macedonia, Montenegro, and Serbia. The Southeast European countries are characterized by great disparities between the urban and rural areas. Almost half of the population lives in rural areas with the majority being financially dependent on agriculture and forestry. In most of the rural areas, the lack of income and employment, depopulation and land-abandonment, as well as the unsustainable use of natural resources have led to a substantial loss of economic viability, poorer quality of life, less cultivated land, and a major loss of the biodiversity.

On the other hand, the rich and highly diverse natural and cultural heritage of the rural areas offers a big potential for diversification of the rural economy. Preservation and sustainable use can be crucial for the revitalization of rural areas of the Southeast European (SEE) countries, primarily in agriculture, forestry, crafts, tourism and digitalization.

SEDRA contributes to the improvement of capacities for evidence-based rural development policies focused on economic diversification in the region and facilitates community-led area-based development and value chain promotion in rural, cross border areas Sustainable business models in structurally weak border regions are developed in selected value chains. This includes improvement of the production, processing, distribution and marketing of agricultural and wild products, local crafts and culinary traditions, sustainable tourism and digitalization.

The support is realized through different capacity development measures, targeted investment support to relevant key stakeholders from the public and private sector and by facilitation of cooperation and networking along the value chain, mainly with the aim of increasing added value and employment by improving access to finances, services and markets.

2.4 Support of the Mountain Tourism Value Chain

The term 'value chain' refers to the fact that as the preliminary product / service passes through the stages of the value chain its economic value increases through combination with other resources. These value chains are therefore very important for sustainable rural development, and the improvement of "value chain competitiveness" is recognized as a powerful approach for increasing rural incomes, creating jobs and stimulating economic growth in rural areas.

Mountain tourism value chain in the cross-border regions of "Prespa", "Sharra" and "Prokletije-Bjeshket e Nemuna":

The overall objective of the Mountain tourism value chain is to strengthen mountain tourism as an important source of income and employment for the population in the targeted regions, by increasing tourist visits and tourist spending, as well as by greater involvement of the rural households in tourism related services.

By joint forces and cooperation within the value chain of representatives from the public, private and civil sector on local, regional and national level, achievement of the following results is expected: the targeted regions provide an attractive and diverse tourism offer; the region is well known as an attractive mountain tourism destination; the local population is motivated and skilled for getting successfully involved in providing tourism related services and the relevant stakeholders for mountain tourism cooperate within their region and across the borders.

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

3. OBJECTIVES OF THE GRANT SCHEME

The general objective of the ABD Grant scheme within the SEDRA project is to contribute to the diversification of economic activities in rural areas of SEE, through strengthening of the selected value chains in the specific cross-border regions. In order to achieve the objectives of the Mountain tourism value chain in the cross border regions of “Prespa”, “Sharra” and “Prokletije-Bjeshket e Nemuna” it is envisaged to provide support to applicants from the private, civil or public sector who provide tourism or tourism/related services or work on development of mountain tourism in the targeted regions.

In particular, the Grant Scheme specific objectives are:

- To improve the quality standards in mountain tourism;
- To up-grade and diversify the mountain tourism offer;
- To Improve marketing & sales of the existing and new products;
- To create new employment and income;
- To further develop and strengthen the cooperation, networking and economic links between the actors in the mountain tourism value chain;
- To involve women and youth¹;
- To include digitalization and digital possibilities as a tool for business development;
- To attract additional financial support for the mountain tourism value chains.

4. FINANCIAL ALLOCATION PROVIDED WITHIN THE CALL

The overall indicative amount available under this ABD Grant Scheme in the cross-border regions “Prespa”, “Sharra” and “Prokletije-Bjeshket e Nemuna”, is estimated on **90.000 EUR**. The SWG reserves the right not to award all available funds in this Call for proposals.

Size of grants

Applications are eligible as individual as well as within the partnerships: local, cross-border and between different cross-border regions, indicated in the guideline.

The value of a grant for individual beneficiary awarded under this Call for proposals, must fall between the following minimum and maximum amounts of the eligible costs:

- minimum amount: 1.000 EUR
- maximum amount: 10.000 EUR

The same eligible minimum and maximum amounts refer for a project with a group of beneficiaries that apply as partnership under this Call.

Example given: 3 beneficiaries/partners for one project can jointly apply for up to 10.000 EUR, approximately 3.300 EUR per applicant.

¹ Person younger than 40 years

The value of the grant for each beneficiary might be up to 60 % of the total eligible costs (60% equal to maximum 10.000 EUR). The remaining cost of the action must be financed from the beneficiary or other sources.

It is important to NOTE that VAT is not considered as an eligible cost.

Example given: Total investment of beneficiary is 18.000 EUR, from which approximately 15.000 EUR is considered as an eligible cost (amount without VAT). The beneficiary will receive 60 % of the eligible costs - 9.000 EUR.

5. RULES APPLICABLE UNDER THIS CALL FOR PROPOSAL

This guideline sets out the rules for the eligibility, actions, costs, submission of concept notes, complete application packages, selection and implementation of actions financed under this Call.

5.1 Eligible areas

The grant will be available in the following countries/territories and municipalities of the cross-border regions “Prespa”, “Sharra”, “Prokletije-Bjeshket e Nemuna“:

Cross-Border region of “Prespa” (countries and municipalities):

Albania: Pogradec, Pustec, Maliq, Korca, Devoll and Kolonje;

North Macedonia: Ohrid and Resen;

Cross-Border region of “Sharra” (countries/territories and municipalities):

Albania: Kukes;

Kosovo*: Dragash, Prizren and Shterpce;

North Macedonia: Jegunovce and Tearce;

Cross-Border region of “Prokletije-Bjeshket e Nemuna” (countries/territories and municipalities):

Albania: Shkodër , Malësi e Madhe and Tropoje;

Kosovo*: Peja and Decan;

Montenegro: Plav, Andrijevic, Berane, Rozaje and Gusinje;

5.2 Eligibility criteria's

There are following sets of eligibility criteria's, relating to:

- Applicant(s) which may request a grant and their partnership;
- Economic sectors eligible for support;
- Type of eligible activities;
- Types of cost which may be taken into account in setting the amount of the grant.

5.2.1 Eligibility of applicants - who may apply?

In order to be eligible for a grant, applicants **must** be:

- Applicants from the private, civil or public sector, operating as a registered legal entity, such as:

- Rural households, rural tourism service providers, tourist facilities (small hotels, hostels, mountain huts, camping sites, katuns, catering facilities), traditional food processing facilities; small food producers, artisans;
 - Non-governmental organizations (NGOs), civil society organization (CSOs), associations, organizations of farmers, tourism organizations /association /clusters, cooperatives, Local Action Groups (LAGs) and sports/mountain clubs;
 - Local and regional tourism organizations, local and regional development agencies, public enterprises and public institutions, national park/authorities of protected areas;
- Must propose projects to be implemented on the territory of the municipalities of the cross-border regions indicated in point 5.1 - Eligible areas.
 - Must be registered and operational at the business register/register of agricultural holdings/ register of private accommodation providers or another relevant registry in accordance with the legislation of the country, for at least 6 months before the submission of the concept note;
 - In case of investments related to construction works (adaptation and renovation) on buildings or purchase of equipment, the applicant must prove that he/she is the owner of the land/facility or have a long-term lease, for at least 5 years.

5.2.2 Overall economic sectors eligible for support

Following sectors are eligible for support:

- Tourism and tourism related sectors;
- Agriculture with linkages to tourism;

5.2.3 Type of eligible activities

- Upgrading and increasing standards of accommodation, catering and other tourism related facilities;
- Establishment of facilities for selling and tasting traditional products and non-wood forest products as part of the tourism offer, such as stores/info points/degustation rooms/open farms etc.;
- Development of new and improving existing small-scale public mountain tourism infrastructure, such as:
 - hiking/mountain biking/ski touring /horse trekking trails (development, marking and signposting);
 - bivouac or resting areas, observation platforms, information boards along the trails, bow hunting parkours, zip-lines, via ferrata, etc.
- Upgrading touristic rental equipment to improve safety and standards;
- Development of new mountain tourism products and services within and across the targeted cross-border region/s;
 - Promotion and other activities which support sales of mountain tourism products;
 - Digital solutions for improving service delivery as well as promotion/marketing and sales;

- Development of rural and mountain tourism products and services
- Promotion of traditional products as part of the tourism offer, such as displays for regional farm specialties / souvenirs at guest houses, initiative for supplying local agricultural products to restaurants and guest houses, etc.
- Co-operation activities across the mountain tourism value chain;

Note: In exceptional cases the costs for the activities related to the promotion should be partial and limited component of the total investment up to 20% of the eligible costs. The approval for promotion is done on behalf of SWG.

5.2.4 Eligibility of costs within the grant

Only eligible costs incurred after the signature of the contract can be taken into account for the grant and they must be based on real costs and original supporting documents.

Eligible costs:

Eligible costs are actual costs incurred by the Beneficiary which meet all the following criteria:

- a) they are incurred during the implementation of the grant;
- b) they are indicated in the estimated overall budget for the grant;
- c) they are necessary for the implementation of the grant;
- d) they are identifiable and verifiable, in particular being recorded in the accounting records of the Beneficiary and determined according to the accounting standards and the usual cost accounting practices applicable to the Beneficiary;
- e) they comply with the requirements of applicable tax and social legislation;
- f) they are reasonable, justified and comply with the requirements of sound financial management, in particular regarding economy and efficiency.

Subject to the respect of the above-mentioned eligibility criteria, a list of examples of eligible costs is given below. The list is not exhaustive and other costs that are mentioned below may also be considered for financing, if they can clearly contribute to the achievement of the objectives of the grant scheme.

- Renovation/adaptation/quality improvements of accommodation facilities for tourists in households, small hotels/hostels, camps, katuns, mountain huts and etc.;
- Equipment for accommodation or leisure facilities for tourists in households, small hotels/hostels, camps, katuns, mountain huts and etc.;
- Small scale infrastructures and equipment for newly created tourism activities;
- Accessories for tourists in households, small hotels/hostels, camps, tourism organizations which are already renting similar equipment: e.g. bikes, tents, kayaks, sport equipment and etc.;
- Equipment for marking touristic paths (hiking/mountain biking/horse trekking trails, etc.);
- Equipment and accessories for presentation of touristic offers in the region;
- Reconstruction and equipping of tourist sites, recreational and picnic areas and sightseeing places/bird watching places.

- Renovation/adaptation of space for preparing, serving and selling food and drinks for tourists in touristic premises, restaurants, local markets;
- Equipment for preparing serving and selling food and drinks for tourists in touristic premises, restaurants, local markets;
- Cost of procurement of equipment for promotion (stands, advertising displays, panels and etc.);

Costs of other goods and services are eligible, if they are purchased specifically for the action and in accordance with the conditions set out in the guideline. Such goods and services include, for instance, printing promotional materials consumables and supplies.

Digitalization:

- Development of digital products, services, solutions and platforms.

The applications that involve procurement of digital products, services, solutions and platforms will be prioritized on:

- The impact that the digital technology or services will have on the business (measured by revenue growth, increase in gross profit, employment outcomes);
- The extent to which the digital technology or services will make the business in selected value chains more competitive;
- The potential and likelihood of the digital technology or service to create job/contribute to job growth.

Ineligible costs

- Taxes (VAT, Personal Income Tax and other taxes);
- Customs or import duties, or any other charges;
- Purchases, rent or leasing of land and existing buildings;
- Purchase of second-hand equipment;
- Bank charges, costs of guarantees and similar charges;
- Conversion costs, charges and exchange losses associated with any of the component specific euro accounts, as well as other purely financial expenses;
- Depreciation costs;
- Debts and debts service charges;
- Provision for losses or potential future liabilities;
- Interest owed;
- Credit to third parties;
- Repair costs of equipment;
- Non-capitalized research and development expenses;
- Accounting and legal fees;

- Items already financed in another framework;
- Administrative and operating costs (salary, per diems, office supply, vehicle maintenance, fuel etc.);
- Contribution in kind;
- Development/improvement of big scale infrastructure (roads, sewage/drainage systems, water supply systems etc.);
- Other costs which can be considered as ineligible and not approved by SWG.

5.3 Number of projects and grants per applicant

An applicant may not submit more than one project under this Call for proposals (may not appear as founder, owner or member of management bodies of other applicants). Consequently, all projects where the repeating applicant appears will be automatically treated as not eligible. Furthermore, one applicant cannot present himself/herself more than once within one joint project. Projects where applicants represented or owned by the same person and/or a close relative, will not be considered as an eligible.

5.4 Partners and partnership

The concept of Value Chain represents the idea of partnership – networking and creating active cooperation structure between all involved actors. The ABD Grant Scheme enables and emphasize the further active cooperation between actors in the value chain and provides the opportunity for the strengthening of the partnership relations in one project within the ABD Grant Scheme.

Partners

- Applicants who create a partnership and jointly design and implement the action, as additional support, will be awarded by additional points, as provided under the ranking criteria;
- Partners must submit one joint concept note, together with required documents;
- Each applicant in the partnership must satisfy the eligibility criteria separately;
- SWG will sign the contracts individually with each partner of the joint action to be supported;
- The costs to be incurred by each of the partners must be presented separately for each of them in the joint concept note and later in the application package. The partners will be reimbursed for the eligible costs of the investment they have undertaken, only after the finalization of the investment by all the partners included in the partnership and indicated in the concept note and later in the application for the grant.

Partnership

- The partners must clearly state the purpose of the partnership in the project, including the specific role of each partner in the project and in the value chain;
- The partnership must be concluded at least for the period of the duration of the joint action as established in the grants contract;
- The Partnership Statement, confirming the interest of the applicants to cooperate, must be signed by each partner and attached to the Concept note;

- Together with the contract all future partners - beneficiaries need to sign the Code of Practice;
- Partnerships among family members will not be eligible under this Grant scheme.

5.5 Environmental Policy and Natural Resources Preservation

Environmental Policy:

Applicants and selected Beneficiaries shall not only comply with national environmental laws and regulations, but also implement measures contributing to the protection of the environment. They are encouraged to strive towards minimize the adverse environmental impact of their products and services during the whole chain cycle.

Natural resources preservation:

Applicants and selected Beneficiaries are encouraged to use natural materials and resources in a sustainable way as well as to eliminate the waste produced by all its activities.

The beneficiary should avoid undue and unnecessary use of materials and utilize recycled materials whenever appropriate.

Conservation:

Processes and activities should be monitored and modified as necessary to ensure conservation of scarce resources, including water, flora and fauna and productive land in certain situations.

Energy Use:

The beneficiary should adapt production and delivery processes as well as heating, ventilation, lighting, and transportation to maximize efficient energy use and to minimize harmful emissions.

6. SUBMISSION OF CONCEPT NOTE AND APPLICATION PACKAGE

This is a restricted Call for Proposals, two-step approach.

In the first instance, the applicant is submitting Concept Note and other relevant documentation.

After the first evaluation is performed - eligibility check and on-spot control, the pre-selected applicants will be invited by SWG Secretariat to submit a complete application package.

The applicants which will submit the complete application package will undergo the second evaluation - final eligibility check and ranking, based on the submitted complete application package with all supporting documents.

Documentation for the call for proposals regarding ABD Grant Scheme can be obtained from the SWG website: www.seerural.org

The official language of the ABD Grant scheme is English, documentation related to the application process can be submitted in local languages.

6.1 Submission Concept Note

The Concept Note must be submitted using the format and instructions provided - annexed to these Guidelines.

The Concept Note package must contain the following:

1. Concept Note (Signed and stamped);
2. Partnership statement - Signed and stamped by the partners (In case of a partnership);
3. A copy of a valid certificate of registration of the entity in the eligible sector for each applicant and/or partner.

Questions regarding Concept Note

Questions regarding Concept Notes may be sent by e-mail no later than 10 days before the deadline for the submission of proposals to the address listed below,

abda@swg-seerural.org

The SWG has no obligation to accept questions after **05.10.2019**.

Where and how to send the Concept Note?

The Concept Note together with the requested documentation should be submitted electronically by the prescribed deadline to the e-mail address: abda@swg-seerural.org (all relevant documents are to be scanned and attached to the e-mail).

The deadline for the submission of Concept Notes is **15.10.2019**, at **16:00h**. The date and time considered as evidence will be the date of email received by the SWG.

Any Concept Notes submitted after the deadline, not prepared in accordance with the Guideline or being incomplete will be rejected.

Further information regarding Concept Note

Incomplete Concept Note or sent by any other means (e.g. by fax) or delivered to other addresses **will not be taken into consideration**.

The SWG will keep a record of the received Concept Note package and will send e-mail confirmation for received Concept Note packages.

6.2 Submission of Complete Application package

The applicants who have submitted Concept Notes that are pre-selected, will be notified and invited by SWG Secretariat, to submit the complete Application package.

The Grant Application and the Business plan must follow the format and instructions provided by SWG.

Note: The main elements outlined in the Concept note must be included in the Grant application, and every change should be indicated and justified.

The application package must contain the following:

1. Grant Application Form;
2. Business plan (the business plan should be filled in separately for each applicant).
3. Partnership statement (in case of a partnership)

Supporting documents such as:

- Proof of registration of applicant in the Farmer Registry/business registry/Private accommodation service provider or another relevant registry – original or certified copy of the original form;
- An excerpt from the Property/Land Registry as proof of ownership of the applicant's property not older than 3 months at the date of submission the application – original or copy certified by the applicant (requested in case of investments related to purchase of equipment when specific requirements shall apply, adaptation/renovation works);
- The proof of the ownership or at least 5-year lease contract of the land/facility is to be requested in case of investments, regarding adaptation/renovation works on enterprise buildings, purchase of equipment when specific requirements shall apply;
- Copy of technical documentation (for the investments in renovation/adaptation of the facilities) if obligatory in the country where the investment will be realized;
- Copy of building permission (for the investments in renovation/adaptation of the facilities) if obligatory in the country where the investment will be realized;

The application package **must be** prepared using the official templates provided by SWG Secretariat.

Any additional information specific to the action can be requested from the applicant.

Questions regarding the Application Package

Questions regarding Application Package (Application form, Business Plan and other relevant documentation) may be sent by e-mail no later than 10 days before the deadline for the submission of the application package to the e-mail address listed below,

abda@swg-seerural.org

The SWG has no obligation to accept questions after this date.

Where and how to send the Application package?

The complete application package (Application form, business plan, and all other relevant documentation) must be submitted in **original and in electronic format.**

An electronic version of the complete application package:

The electronic version of the complete application package needs to be sent on the following e-mail address: abda@swg-seerural.org

The application package must contain exactly the same documents as the enclosed original paper version. For evaluation purposes Application form and Business plan documents must be submitted also in open source (word and excel) format.

Original documentation of the complete application package via post:

The original Application package must be submitted to Project Management Units/Offices in a sealed envelope by mail service, private courier service or by hand at one of the addresses below. It is important that applicants should request from the mail service a certificate confirming that the mail was posted.

Postal address of Project Management Units/Offices for delivery:

SWG Head Office/ Secretariat ,Goce Delchev Boulevard, MRTV Building, 12th floor

P.O.Box 659 ,1000 Skopje, Republic of North Macedonia

The outer envelope must bear the title: **ABD Grant Scheme within SEDRA**, together with the full name and address of the Project Management Units/Offices in charge where the application is submitted.

The deadline for submission of the complete Application package is **45 days**, beginning from the moment when the applicant is informed and invited by SWG Secretariat to submit a complete application package. Applications arriving after the specified deadline will only be considered if the postal mark indicates a sending date before the official deadline.

Further information regarding Application package

Incomplete application package or application package sent by any other means (e.g. by fax) or delivered to other addresses **will not be taken into consideration**.

The SWG will keep records of the received application package and will issue pertinent receipts - confirmation of posting or e-mail confirmation for the received application package.

In case if the application is evaluated positively, SWG Secretariat will request from the applicant to fulfill and submit the following documents:

1. Contract;
2. Code of Practice;
3. Fulfilled Questionnaire (for Value Chain development and project monitoring).

SWG will prepare and provide to the Beneficiary above mentioned documents.

7. GRANT APPROVAL PROCEDURE - EVALUATION AND SELECTION OF APPLICANTS

7.1 First evaluation:

Concept notes will be evaluated during the first evaluation process in which the SWG Secretariat and/or experts will be involved.

Eligibility check:

Concept notes will be assessed according to the administrative criteria and objectives of the call. Concept notes address at least 2 specific objectives of the call (stated in point 3. Objectives of the grant scheme).

Administrative criteria:

- Whether the documents are issued by the relevant authorities;
- Whether the documents have all elements proving their reliability (stamp, a signature of the responsible person, date, etc.);
- Whether the documents are valid according to the date of validity specified in the Guideline for beneficiaries.

If the examination of the concept notes reveals that the action/applicant does not meet the eligibility criteria, the concept note shall be rejected on this sole basis and will not be processed further.

On-spot control:

The on-spot control will be performed by SWG personnel on the applicants which met the criteria's and have positive results within the eligibility check. The aim of the on-spot control is to confirm the correctness of the information stated and provided in the Concept Note and other additional documentation, regarding the applicant, location of the investment/project (procurement of equipment/reconstruction, financial aspect and other relevant information).

All applicants will be informed about the results of the first evaluation.

The applicants that will fulfill the necessary criteria's and eligibility within the first evaluation, will be invited to submit a complete application package.

7.2 Second evaluation:

Administrative check of the Full Application Package

The following will be assessed:

- if the submission deadline of the application has been respected. If the deadline has not been respected the application will automatically be rejected.
- If the Grant Application Form with annexes satisfies all the criteria of the grant application form. If any of the requested information is missing or is incorrect, the application may be rejected on that sole basis and will not be evaluated further.
- If the supporting documents meet the following criteria:
 - Whether the documents are issued by the relevant authorities;
 - Whether the documents have all elements proving their reliability (stamp, a signature of the responsible person, date, etc.);
 - Whether the documents are valid according to the date of validity specified in the Guidelines for beneficiaries;

Final Eligibility check and ranking

The **eligibility check** of the submitted complete application package, including the relevance of the proposed action/eligibility of applicant/eligible cost will be carried out in accordance with the eligibility criteria set out in chapter 5.

The eligibility criteria enable the selection of applications which the SWG can be confident will comply with objectives and priorities, as well as guarantee the best quality of the proposed actions for financing. They cover such aspects as the relevance of the action, its consistency with the objectives of the call for proposals, quality, expected impact, sustainability, and cost-effectiveness.

The complete application package will be evaluated and ranked by the Evaluation Committee. Members of the Committee will be nominated by SWG Delegates and/or external experts in coordination with SWG Secretariat.

All application packages submitted by applicants will be assessed and applicants will be informed about progress in the grant approval procedure accordingly.

After checking compliance of applications with the eligible criteria, the successful applications (only those that meet eligibility criteria) will be further ranked according to the ranking criteria and ranking list of the projects with the number of obtained points will be established.

If the examination of the complete application package reveals that the action/applicant does not meet the eligibility criteria, the application shall be rejected on this sole basis and will not be processed further.

Projects with the highest number of ranking points will be proposed for financing (based on the availability of financial allocation provided within this call).

The evaluation and ranking criteria are set as follows:

7.3 Evaluation and Ranking Criteria:

Ranking criteria	Explanation	Max points
Business plan	From 0 to 30 points	30
Does the project contribute to new employment?	From 0 to 15 points	15
Does the project contribute to the further develop and strengthen the cooperation, networking and economic links between the actors in the value chain?	From 0 to 10 points	10
Does the project contribute to increase the value added in the value chain	From 0 to 8 points	8
Does the project involve and support women?	From 0 to 8 points	8
Does the project involve and support young people (below 40 years old)?	From 0 to 8 points	8
Does the project include digitalization and digital possibilities/solutions as a tool for business development?	From 0 to 8 points	8
Does the project contribute to economic partnership relations within the project?	From 0 to 5 points	5
Does the project have positive environmental impact and strives towards natural resources preservation	Positive environmental impact - If "yes" than 4 if "no" than 0 Natural Resources Preservation - If "yes" than 4 if "no" than 0	8
Total max points		100

To be eligible the project must obtain at least 50 points.

In a case where applications have reached the same number of points, the one applying for the first time within the ABD Grant Scheme will be awarded. Otherwise, application with the earliest date of registration will be awarded.

The final list of the supported applications:

After completing eligibility checks and ranking of the applications and taking into account the available allocation provided within this call, a final list of the applications recommended for the support will be established.

Next, SWG will inform the applicants whether their application was recommended for the support or not. Successful applicants will be invited to sign a contract with the SWG for the realization of the investment.

7.4 Code of practice

The **Code of Practice** is a document that describes the general value chain framework, the impacts on the economy, legislation, environment, and how those factors can be alleviated against sustainable development in the cross-border regions. The Code summarizes guiding principles that are used as a basis for cooperation among beneficiaries in the value chains.

The Grant Beneficiaries are required with the signing of the contract, to also sign the Code of Practice.

In addition, this document should be signed among additional actors of the value chains on a voluntary basis and should serve as a statement of “goodwill and practice” for **active cooperation** along the value chain. Complying with this code provides the beneficiaries and value chains members to achieve effective partnership relationships, more successful results, improved performance, and increased profitability.

7.5 Signing the contracts with the beneficiaries and implementation of the investment

The SWG HQ will sign contracts for the realization of action with successful applicants. From that moment the investment might officially start, and the costs related to the implementation of the investment becomes eligible.

The list of supported projects will be made public.

7.6 Modifications of the project proposals

After the contract enters into force, beneficiaries can only modify the action after receiving permission from the SWG. The beneficiary is required to ask for permission in writing with a proper explanation and can implement requested changes only after receiving the approval in writing.

8. RULES ON IMPLEMENTATION AND AFTER IMPLEMENTATION OF THE ACTION

The timeframe for implementation of the grant is limited – not more than **9 months** from the moment of signing the contract between SWG Secretariat and Beneficiary.

The implementation of the action must be realized in line with the provisions stipulated in the contract to be concluded between the beneficiary and SWG.

The beneficiary will receive complete reporting documentation before the contract is signed. After project implementation, the beneficiary will be obligated to submit a technical and financial report with all supporting documentation (both, technical and financial).

The below mentioned list of rules might not be exhaustive.

8.1 Legal and administrative obligations to be fulfilled by the beneficiaries

The action of the project applications must meet the following rules and procedures:

- When designing activities/investments for support, the beneficiaries should consult closely the list of eligible costs under this call (see 5.6 eligibility of costs within the grant);
- Actions must comply with the requirements of the local and national law of the country where the investment takes place (if applicable). It is a responsibility of the beneficiary to ensure that the action was realized in line with the legal requirements of the country where the investment took place;
- Realization of actions can start only after signing a contract by the beneficiary with SWG. No payments done by the beneficiary prior to the signature of the contract will be reimbursed;
- The planned duration of the project must not be longer than 9 months from the moment of the signature of the contract,
- Actions must be realized respecting relevant procurement rules (see 8.2 procurement rules),

- Action financed under this grant cannot be subject of financial support from any other grant schemes, including international or national assistance. Each applicant is responsible to ensure that double financing will not occur.

8.2 Procurement rules:

Complete documentation for the procurement process for goods/services above 1000 EUR which includes:

- 1. Request for offers** to at least 3 service/goods providers, which includes specification of requested goods/services with the indicated net, VAT/Personal Income Tax and gross amount. If the provider of goods/services is not in the VAT system, this should be indicated in the offer. If the offer is requested by e-mail, communication to be attached (request for an offer and received offer).
- 2. Minimum 3 received offers**, as per submitted request.
- 3. The decision for selection of best offer.** In the decision, NET amounts (amount without VAT/Personal Income Tax) in the eligible offers should be compared and the lowest of the at least three eligible offers will be taken into consideration for reimbursement of the costs for procured service/good related to the realization of the project/activity.
- 4.** In specific cases, offer other than the lowest could be selected with prior approval by the SWG, by providing a detailed explanation of why this offer should be selected.
- 5.** If three service providers cannot be located and three offers cannot be obtained, this must be communicated and approved by the SWG in order to continue with the procurement process.

All payments must be done via bank transfer.

SWG reserves the right to evaluate received offers and their actual market value/price and eventually reject the chosen offer or costs incurred.

For the purpose of preparation of the Financial Report with the specification of costs and presenting the costs paid in local currency into EUR, the Contractor should use the average exchange rate published on the website by the Central/National Bank of the country where the cost occurred, on the date of the payment.

8.3 Monitoring and checks within and after the implementation of the investment

Realization of the investment by the beneficiary will be monitored on a regular basis by the SWG Secretariat and staff from the regional offices. The Beneficiary should be in close communication with SWG regional offices staff.

On-spot control after project realization

After the realization of the investment and submission of the final technical and financial report, on-spot control will be performed.

The aim of the on-spot control after project realization is to confirm the correctness of the information stated by the beneficiary in the documentation submitted during the reporting phase. During the on-spot control, several aspects such as the location of the investment/project, procurement of equipment/reconstruction, financial aspect, and presented costs, and other relevant information will be checked.

8.4 Reporting package

Technical documentation:

1. Original signed technical report on the performed activities (signed and stamped by the responsible person);
2. Photo documentation of the realized investment/activity;
3. Other supporting technical documentation, relevant for the grant.

Financial documentation:

- Original signed financial report with a specification of costs (signed and stamped by the responsible person);
- Original or certified copies of bills, invoices, and documents for proof of payment - bank statements (signed and stamped by the responsible person);
- Request for payment (original, signed and stamped by the responsible person);

8.5 Payments within the project

- Beneficiaries will be reimbursed up to 60% of the total eligible costs after the completion of the action.
- Completion of the action is defined as the moment when the beneficiary finalized the investment and submit to SWG original documents (invoices, bank statements, contracts, etc.) confirming purchase of the equipment/realization of the works/IT development solutions and after positive evaluation within the on-spot control performed after realization of the action.
- Payments are conditional to the completion of the actions by all beneficiaries of joint actions (joint application/partnership).

8.6 Noncompliance with the rules of the contracts

The grants can only be used for the approved activity presented in the Grant application form and business plan. Therefore, if the beneficiary acts contrary to the provisions of the concluded contract or the rules on the use of the grant are violated in any way, or in case of irregularities, the disbursed grant must be returned. Detailed provisions concerning breaching rules will be presented in the contract to be concluded between the beneficiary and the SWG.