



Head Office / Secretariat of the Regional Rural Development Standing Working Group in South-Eastern Europe (SWG) – Skopje

Terms of Reference

Expert for quality standards of the fresh fruits and vegetables

1. Introduction

The Regional Rural Development Standing Working Group (SWG), as a platform for networking and regional co-operation, has been established during the Agricultural Policy Forum 2005 (“Rural Development Opportunities for Co-operation in the SEE”) held in Macedonia and Serbia in June 2005.

With the International Agreement in March 2009, the SWG is registered as an International Intergovernmental Organization, with its managing and coordinative body – SWG Head Office/Secretariat based in Skopje, North Macedonia. On September 7th, 2009, the Law on Ratification of the SWG Agreement has been decisively completed by the Parliament of the Republic of North Macedonia.

The main SWG strategic framework is composed of the following elements:

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

Mission - to increase horizontal cooperation among respective countries and territories of South Eastern Europe, by coordinating regional initiatives related to agriculture and rural development and supporting the process of social and economic development of rural areas in SEE region.

General objective of SWG is to facilitate close cooperation between the Ministries of Agriculture and other stakeholders in the field of agriculture and rural development and to support EU integration in SEE. The SWG has four specific objectives on which the organization has focused its work:

- To improve the common understanding on agriculture and rural development policies;
- To assist the improvement of implementing structures and systems for agriculture and rural development, with specific emphasis on cross border cooperation;
- To improve the understanding and use of implementation tools for agriculture and rural development;
- To identify and share information and application of good practice in agriculture and rural development to broaden the rural agenda.

2. Background

In August 2021 the German Federal Ministry for Economic Cooperation and Development approved the realization of a 3-years regional programme with the title “**Support to economic diversification of rural areas in Southeast Europe (SEDRA II)**”. The project strives to strengthen the regional and national capacities through facilitating theme-specific policy dialogues providing technical expertise on issues related to rural economic diversification in SEE countries in their EU approximation process.

The project overall goal is to encourage competitiveness and employment in the Western Balkan region through strengthening networking capacity for rural development and promotion of the economic diversification and competitiveness of rural areas. Participation of the local actors in less favoured rural

areas in promotion of the cross-sectoral innovation and inter-regional knowledge exchange through the implementation of local projects, will ultimately contribute to inclusive, environmentally and climate friendly economic diversification, increase the attraction of the areas, improve the market access, encouraging young people and women to get more involved and contribute to reduced out-migration.

The project activities are focused to the further support of the regional platforms for political and policy dialogue and mechanisms for more intensive and broader cooperation, strengthening the regional stakeholders' competencies and expertise related to the EU CAP and Green Agenda for Western Balkans as per adopted Action plan, as well as further alignment of the agriculture and rural development policies of the SEE countries to the EU CAP.

The regional project includes the Southeast European countries/territories and the lead executing agencies are the ministries competent for agriculture and rural development, through their membership in the regional organisation Standing Working Group for Regional Rural Development (SWG RRD), which at the same time is the main implementing partner.

The three main project outputs are:

- 1) to improve evidence-based policy making processes for sustainable development of rural areas in the context of the EU approximation of the Western Balkans. The impact logic is that an enabling policy framework, agreed at regional level and implemented at national level, will promote economic diversification and competitiveness of rural areas.
- 2) to build networking capacity for rural development. The impact logic is that bottom-up engagement of local actors in less favoured rural areas promote cross-sectoral innovation and inter-regional knowledge exchange through the implementation of local projects, thus contributing to inclusive, environmentally and climate friendly economic diversification.
- 3) to improve the qualification offer for rural MSMEs as well as for the population in seven cross-border rural areas. The impact logic is that increased regional value creation and local resilience building, especially in less favoured rural border areas, will change the socio-economic decisions of poor and vulnerable population groups in particular so that they see improved prospects for themselves and their families.

3. Specific Situation / Scope of assignment

The project aims at strengthening the institutional capacities of selected stakeholders in Southeast Europe for supporting EU-compliant economic diversification in rural areas.

The impact logic is that increased regional value creation and local resilience building, especially in less favoured rural border areas, will change the socio-economic decisions of poor and vulnerable population groups in particular so that they see improved prospects for themselves and their families. The project is focused on strengthening the economic inclusion of the rural and marginalized population, supporting the rural formal/informal sector, fostering sustainable natural resource management practices, as well as, promoting women & youth entrepreneurship in rural areas.

The Secretariat of the Regional Rural Development Standing Working Group (SWG) in Southeast Europe as an international intergovernmental organisation, consisting of governmental institutions responsible for agriculture and rural development in respective Western Balkan countries and territories is responsible for implementation and management of the project. It will be implemented in Albania, Bosnia and Herzegovina, North Macedonia, Montenegro, Serbia and Kosovo*.

The agricultural quality/marketing standards of the fresh fruits and vegetables are an important issue for all Western Balkan countries/territories, particularly for the export market, where the vegetable and fruit growers have to deal with increasing demands made on their product and their production system.

The major outcomes of the assignment are:

- Six national assessments related to national policies on marketing standards for fresh fruits and vegetables and their impact on agriculture production and market, including recommendations for improving the fresh fruits and vegetable marketing standards policies in the Western Balkans countries.
- One cross-country synthesis assessment summarizing the common issues, approaches and consequences of the fresh fruits and vegetable marketing standards for agriculture and rural development in the Western Balkans and policy recommendations for regional cooperation on the marketing standard issue;

The work will be conducted by an experts' team, consisting of:

- Regional Expert
- Seven National Experts, from each of the countries/territories of the Western Balkans: Albania, North Macedonia, Kosovo*, Serbia, Montenegro, BiH (Federation of Bosnia and Herzegovina and Republika Srpska)

The experts' team will be supported by inputs from representatives from relevant national authorities.

4. Project activities relevant for the expert's tasks

The overall objective of this mission is to support the project team in implementing the activities of the project "Support to Economic Diversification of Rural Areas in Southeast Europe (SEDRA II)" in Western Balkan countries/territories.

The renewed EU accession process is the main incentive for harmonisation and adaptation of the rural development policies and instruments of the six Southeast European countries (Albania, Bosnia and Herzegovina, Kosovo*, Macedonia, Montenegro and Serbia) to the needs of their rural regions and the people living there. An explicit aim of the EU is to strengthen economic and social cohesion through its structural policy, its common agricultural policy (CAP) and their accompanying instruments.

The European Union (EU) marketing standards for fresh fruits and vegetables produce apply across the marketing chain. They are intended to make sure that fresh produce offered to the consumer is accurately labelled, of acceptable quality and that unsatisfactory produce is kept off the market. The marketing standards form part of the EU marketing rules which apply across the marketing chain, from pack-house or point of import, through wholesale and distribution to retail outlets. All retailers of regulated fresh products covered by the EU marketing standards are legally responsible for making sure that this produce, both loose and pre-packed meets the requirements of the relevant specific or general marketing standards

The project contributes to improvement of the technical, methodological and implementation capacities for evidence-based rural development policies for economic diversification, accelerate rural development, as well as agricultural value chain development.

To achieve the project goal, a number of actions will be conducted, such as

- measurements of the fruit and vegetables sector production cycle, processing, market access, marketing interventions, including production technologies, interventions inputs, and other related aspects;
- carry out of several initial assessments;
- alignment of the agriculture and rural development policies of the SEE countries to the EU CAP;
- capacity building for competent authorities and control bodies:
- trainings on identified topics for inspection and extension services:
- promotional activities to strengthen the market quality standards enforcement:
- examine opportunities and prospects for organic fruit and vegetable production;
- identify existing conditions and opportunities for the fresh fruits and vegetables sector development.

5. Tasks for the Regional and the National Experts on Fresh Fruit and Vegetables Quality Standards

UNECE has developed specific marketing standards for fresh fruit and vegetables (including the 10 types covered by the specific EU marketing standards). Specific EU marketing standards for individual products are in line with the relevant UNECE standards. The EU actively supports the fruit and vegetables sector through its market-management scheme. All Western Balkan countries are in the accession process (in various stage) to European Union membership.

The competent institutions of the Western Balkans adopt the general and specific standards for putting the fruit and vegetables on the market, establish register of fruit and vegetable traders, prescribes the application form for registration and the records keeping, performing control compliance of market standards of fruit and vegetables quality and the risk assessment method.

The agricultural quality/marketing standard of the fresh fruits and vegetables is an important issue for all Western Balkan countries/territories, particularly for the export market, where the vegetable and fruit growers have to deal with increasing demands made on their product and their production system. The EU marketing standards is partially applied in the Western Balkan countries.

For its regular operation SWG Secretariat is looking to hire one Regional Expert and 7 National Experts (from Albania, Bosnia and Herzegovina (entity of Federation of BiH and Republika Srpska), Kosovo*, North Macedonia, Montenegro and Serbia) to support the Western Balkan countries/territories for applying the quality requirements for fresh fruit and vegetables in increasing demand and competitiveness on the world market.

More specifically, the National Experts will carry out of an initial assessment of **The State of Art of the Fresh Fruits and Vegetables Quality Standards** in respective country/territory, addressing legal framework, agricultural and rural development policy, food safety, quality and marketing standards rules.

More specifically, the Regional Expert will coordinate the inputs of the National Experts and will prepare a regional cross-country synthesis assesment which addresses the above mentioned issues on a regional level in the Western Balkans.

The experts will receive the necessary logistical and organizational support by the staff of the SWG regional offices in the Western Balkans countries.

For accomplishment of the above-mentioned outcomes a Works Contract is foreseen. The total number of days foreseen for the engagement is approximately 10 days.

6. Place of assignment

The place of assignment is the Western Balkans region.

7. Timeframe

The Expert should accomplish the deliverables in the timeframe from 10th of May – 15th of September 2022.

8. Working language

The working language for the assignment is English.

9. Expert's profile

- A university degree in Agriculture or closely related economic or biotechnic science discipline relevant to the assignment;
- Proven professional experience in policy assessment;
- High quality analytical and document drafting
- Proven practical professional experience in applying agricultural and rural development policy;
- Understanding of the situation as well as the relevant legislative and policy framework in the respective country/territory;
- Understanding and in-depth knowledge of the fruits and vegetable growing potentials of the rural areas of the Western Balkans;
- Practical experience for the fruit and vegetables sector production technologies, food safety and quality standards;
- Practical professional experience in the fruit and vegetables production cycle, processing, market access;
- Excellent communication and reporting skills;
- Fluency in English;
- Computer literacy
- Ability to work in a team.