

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

Request for Applications for People-to-People Actions

Issuance Date: November 01, 2023

Applications Closing Date: December 15, 2023, 16:00 hours CET

Subject: Request for Applications (RFA) Number: SWG 2023-001 People-to-People Actions

Dear Prospective Applicants,

The Regional Rural Development Standing Working Group (SWG) is seeking applications from qualified applicants in the Western Balkans countries/territories of Albania, Bosnia and Herzegovina, Kosovo*, North Macedonia, Montenegro, and Serbia (WB 6) to apply for funding for People-to-People (P2P) actions/events like small fairs, sales manifestations, promotional agriculture and tourism actions for beneficiaries from rural municipalities all over the Western Balkans and capacity building activities for rural entrepreneurs, including women, youth, people with disabilities and returnees.

The RFA is comprised of the following main sections:

- 1. Project Description**
- 2. Eligible applicants**
- 3. Illustrative activities to be financed under this RFA**
- 4. Payment**
- 5. Visibility rules**
- 6. Eligible costs**
- 7. Non-eligible costs**
- 8. Reporting documentation**
- 9. Important financial and procurement rules**
- 10. Evaluation**
- 11. Award administration information**
- 12. Submission requirements**

Subject to availability of funds, SWG intends to fund the implementation of approximately 20 "People-to-People (P2P)" actions to be held between February 01, 2024 and July 01, 2024.

The available funding per action/event is up to 2,500 EUR. Applicants are asked to submit an Application for P2P action in the attached format, which will be reviewed by SWG's Evaluation Committee. Applicants will be notified if their application qualifies for reimbursement and will invite the applicant to sign a contract for implementation.

Awards will be made to the responsive applicants whose applications best meet the requirements of this RFA and applications that have not been previously funded under the P2P open call 2022/2023.

**This designation is without prejudice to positions on status, and is in line with UNSCR 1244/1999 and the ICJ Opinion on the Kosovo declaration of independence*

SWG requires that the Application for P2P action be submitted electronically (e-mailed) to SWG Secretariat at swgsecretariat@swg-seerural.org starting November 01, 2023 until December 15, 2023.

SWG reserves the right to fund any or none of the applications submitted. Issuance of this RFA does not constitute an award commitment on the part of SWG, nor does it commit SWG to pay for any costs incurred in the preparation and submission of an application. Further, SWG reserves the right to reject any or all applications received. All preparation and submission costs are at the Applicant's own expense.

1. PROJECT DESCRIPTION

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 North 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 adopted 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.

In November 2021 the German Federal Ministry for Economic Cooperation and Development awarded SWG a 38-month project with the title "Promotion of Economic Diversification in Rural Areas of South Eastern Europe (SEDRA II) in SEE - Value chain capacity building on agriculture and rural tourism to promote rural employment opportunities".

The project is implemented under an agreement between SWG and the Deutsche Gesellschaft für Internationale Zusammenarbeit GmbH (GIZ) for the Western Balkans countries/territories of Albania, Bosnia and Herzegovina, North Macedonia, Montenegro, Serbia and Kosovo*.

The project strives to contribute to balanced socio-economic development of rural areas in the Western Balkans, through efficient regional cooperation and strengthened regional capacities for rural economic diversification and employment. The overall goal of the project is to stimulate competitiveness and employment in the region through strengthening capacities and promoting entrepreneurship.

**This designation is without prejudice to positions on status, and is in line with UNSCR 1244/1999 and the ICJ Opinion on the Kosovo declaration of independence*

This will ultimately 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's objective is to enhance economic diversification by facilitating capacity building measures in the tourism sector with a potential of levitating gainful employment opportunities. The project focus is 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.

P2P action is a tool for strengthening the networking, cooperation, promotion of the rural regions, enabling the economic potential by developing, promoting and sales of products and services for further development of the selected value chains: agriculture and rural tourism. The main goal of the P2P action should be capacity building to promote employment opportunities, business diversification and business development.

Expected Results

- A. Increased number of MSMEs that have taken advantage of the event/action and rate their business development more positively.
- B. Increased number of youths, women and people with disabilities that have found new or additional employment in the tourism and agriculture sectors in the WB6.

2. ELIGIBLE APPLICANTS

Entities that are registered in one of Western Balkans 6 countries and territories Albania, Bosnia and Herzegovina, North Macedonia, Montenegro, Serbia, and Kosovo* that are:

- Micro Small and Medium-sized Enterprises (MSMEs)
- Business Support Organizations (BSOs): chambers, clusters, associations, incubators, innovation centers
- Local Government entities, local and regional development agencies
- Non-Governmental Organizations (NGOs)
- Educational institutions and training centers; and
- Coalitions of these entities

who are willing to organize activities like small fairs, sales manifestations, promotional touristic actions, and activities for beneficiaries from rural municipalities all over the Western Balkans and capacity building activities for rural entrepreneurs, including women, youth, people with disabilities and returnees.

Please see a list of rural municipalities attached in Annex 4.

The applications that will include the following will have an advantage in getting the support over other applicants:

- MSMEs
- Young people (below or equal to 40 years old)
- Women
- People with disabilities
- Returnees- Stayed in Germany or another country for more than 3 months after 2001

**This designation is without prejudice to positions on status, and is in line with UNSCR 1244/1999 and the ICJ Opinion on the Kosovo declaration of independence*

3. ILLUSTRATIVE ACTIVITIES TO BE FINANCED UNDER THIS RFA

Areas of attention and illustrative activities for P2P actions may include one or several activities to accomplish the results listed above.

The illustrative activities may include actions/ events that will support:

- Growing, processing, and selling of traditional products, which includes agricultural and food products of animal and plant origin, e.g., cereals, vegetables, fruit, meat and meat products, eggs, milk and dairy products, medicinal and herbal plants, wild products, and beekeeping
- Rural, agro, eco-tourism events that promote rural areas and rural way of living
- Local crafts

4. PAYMENT

The payment will be done in one installment after completion of the action/event amounting up to 100% of the total agreed amount of the eligible costs after submission and acceptance of complete technical and financial documentation.

5. VISIBILITY RULES

- Communication and visibility measures are important contractual obligations. Therefore, beneficiaries should take visibility seriously, since non-compliance can have financial consequences;
- Beneficiaries should coordinate communication and visibility activities closely with the SWG staff;
- Beneficiaries should elaborate on communication and visibility plan before the start of the operational activities. The plan should follow the whole project cycle;
- Beneficiaries should ensure proper visibility of the donors, the region, as well as the project that the event is supported by;
- Beneficiaries are required to display the SWG logo and the logos of the other donors respectively. The support received under the project should be acknowledged and promoted in all communication and promotional material, including press release, publicity material, official notices, reports and publications;
- All promotional materials should be previously approved by SWG before the final printing/publishing process;
- Beneficiaries will receive the respected logos from SWG for their use in the promotional materials;
- Beneficiaries should respect the reporting documents. Beneficiaries should act in accordance with the agreed communication and visibility plans which they designed;
- Communication and visibility activities carried out during the implementation shall be accounted for in the final reports on the action.

6. ELIGIBLE COSTS - BENCHMARKS FOR BUDGET LINES / TYPES OF COSTS

- Promotional costs – design and printing of posters, banners, leaflets, invitations, program, t-shirts, handicrafts, broadcasting, caps, bags, notebooks, badges, aprons;
- Accommodation costs for participants and exhibitors;
- Transport services per invoice - Transport costs will be considered as eligible, only in a case when an official transport company is engaged.
- Food and non-alcohol beverages/refreshments;
- Rent of facility;
- Rent of equipment – sound, light, stage, tents, stands, translation equipment;

**This designation is without prejudice to positions on status, and is in line with UNSCR 1244/1999 and the ICJ Opinion on the Kosovo declaration of independence*

- Engagement of trainers, experts, speakers, photographers, guides, skippers, translators, designer. The cost for engagement of physical person will be considered as eligible, only in a case that supplement documentation is submitted. The supplement documentation needs to be in accordance with local laws and regulations - signed contract for the engagement of physical person, specifically, gross and net amount needs to be indicated in the contract;
- Workshop materials;
- Other costs which are in line and contribute to the organization of the event and approved by SWG.

7. NON-ELIGIBLE COSTS:

- VAT;
- Personal Income Tax;
- Other taxes;
- Customs or import duties, or any other charges;
- Purchases of land and existing buildings;
- Purchase of new and second-hand equipment (in exceptional cases, after submitted detailed explanation why the purchase of new promotional equipment is needed and how it will contribute to the organization of the event, SWG can give approval for purchase and consider this cost as an eligible cost);
- 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;
- Items already financed in another framework;
- Administrative and operational costs;
- Salaries, per diems;
- Pocket money;
- Alcohol beverages (in exceptional cases, if procurement of alcohol beverages is essential for the organization of the event, SWG can give approval for purchase and consider this cost as an eligible cost);
- PET bottles or any other materials which can cause pollution of the environment;
- Other costs which can be considered as ineligible and not approved by SWG.

8. REPORTING DOCUMENTATION TO BE SUBMITTED

After completion of the action/event the applicant is expected to submit:

8.1 Technical documentation:

- Original signed technical report on the performed activities (signed and stamped by the responsible person);
- List of participants (signed by participants and in a format provided by SWG);
- Program and background documents for the event;

**This designation is without prejudice to positions on status, and is in line with UNSCR 1244/1999 and the ICJ Opinion on the Kosovo declaration of independence*

- Monitoring and Evaluation (M&E) Reports filled out by all MSMEs-organizers and participants (after successful application and after 6 and 12 months)
- At least one hard copy/specimen/items of each promotional material produced for the regional event;
- Press clipping;
- Photo documentation of the regional event
- Other supporting technical documentation.

8.2 Financial documentation

- Original signed financial report with 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);
- Original or certified copies of the receipts for cash payments, (signed and stamped by the responsible person);
- Request for payment (original, signed and stamped by the responsible person);
- Complete documentation for the procurement process for goods/services **above 1,000 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. Received offers, as per submitted request.
 3. 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 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.
 6. All payments must be done via bank transfer. In specific cases, where cash payment is inevitable, the beneficiary must inform SWG and to receive WRITTEN APPROVAL BY MAIL FROM SWG Officer/Representative, in order to continue with the procurement/payment process. The cash payment needs to be accompanied by relevant fiscal bill or receipt.

9. IMPORTANT FINANCIAL AND PROCUREMENT RULES

Any procurement and purchase shall not be artificially divided within a budget line or its equivalent with the intention to make a small purchase or procurement under 1,000 EUR or to reduce a request for an offer to a smaller or no bid request.

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

**This designation is without prejudice to positions on status, and is in line with UNSCR 1244/1999 and the ICJ Opinion on the Kosovo declaration of independence*

The Contractor shall be entitled to spend up to maximum 15% more for any budget line, provided that the costs are reduced by the same amount in one or more of the other budget lines. All amendments to the contract should be communicated and approved by the SWG.

10. EVALUATION

The evaluation of the People-to-People actions will be made according to the following criteria:

1. The action is linked to the illustrative results and further development of the agriculture and tourism value chains;
2. Economic aspect and sustainability
 - Income generation opportunities;
 - Possibilities for creating of new or additional local employment in the tourism and agriculture sectors;
 - Involvement and participation of MSMEs;
3. Involvement of women, youth, people with disabilities and returnees;
4. Consideration of the positive environmental aspect of the action/event;
5. Budget and cost-efficiency;
6. Regional aspect of the event where beneficiaries are from several Western Balkans countries/territories.;

11. AWARD ADMINISTRATION INFORMATION

Place of assignment: The place of assignment is the 6 Western Balkans countries/territories.

Timeframe: February 01, 2024 – July 01, 2024

- **Communication language:** The communication language with SWG for the assignment is English and the respective country/territory language.
- **Action/event language:** May be in one of the local languages.
- **Maximum reimbursed amount:** SWG will reimburse up to 2,500 EUR Gross. VAT is non-eligible and thus it will not be reimbursed but deducted from the Invoice and will be considered as participant's co-funding. The 2,500 EUR Gross also includes all taxes, required to be paid by the national legislation in the country of residency.
- **Application format:** All applications must be submitted in the format provided. Applications written in a different format will not be considered.
- **Payment disbursement:** Funds will be reimbursed by wire transfer to the recipient's bank account from SWG.
- **VAT:** VAT is a non-eligible cost, thus SWG will NOT reimburse VAT.
- **Application language:** All application documents must be submitted in English language.
- **Number of applications:** One applicant can submit only one application.

12. SUBMISSION REQUIREMENTS

The application form, (Annex 1) along with the defined budget (Annex 2), should be submitted at least two months before the event/action starts. Then the application along with the budget is subject to approval for financing. Additional clarifications or documents will be requested in order to support the submitted application and budget.

After the requested additional clarifications and submitted corrections in the documentation, the final version of the application and budget form will be approved and a contract for allocation of funds will be prepared. Approved activities/costs should start after signing the contract by both parties.

Exceptional cases related to a timeframe of starting of activities/costs could be additionally considered for their acceptability.

SWG requires that the Application be submitted electronically (e-mailed) to SWG Secretariat at swgsecretariat@swg-seerural.org starting November 01, 2023, until December 15, 2023.

Applicants must submit the following documents:

- ANNEX 1. APPLICATION FOR P2P signed copy in PDF
- ANNEX 2. Budget in MS Excel
- ANNEX 3. P2P Indicators
- Attachment 1. Copy of the registration certificate not older than 6 months.

Please state “Your organization’s name – P2P Application” in the Subject field of your e-mail.

SWG will retain all materials and documents submitted by applicants. It will not use this information for purposes other than application review and will not share it with other persons or institutions.

After the evaluation process, the decision will be communicated to the Applicants via e-mail.