



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

Request for Applications for Business Expansion with E-Commerce

Issuance Date: January 16, 2023

Applications Closing Date: February 28, 2023, 16:00 hours CET

Subject: Request for Applications (RFA) Number: SWG 2023-001 Business Expansion with E-Commerce

Dear Prospective Applicants,

The Regional Rural Development Standing Working Group (SWG) is seeking applications from qualified Micro Small and Medium Enterprises (MSEMs) in the Western Balkans 6 (WB6) countries/territories of Albania, Bosnia and Herzegovina, Kosovo*, North Macedonia, Montenegro, and Serbia (WB 6) to apply for funding for opening an E-Shop or join a marketplace platform and open their e-shop as part of an existing marketplace platform for MSMEs operating in agriculture and agricultural processing and rural tourism.

The RFA is comprised of the following main sections:

- 1. Project Description**
- 2. Eligible applicants**
- 3. Activities to be financed under this RFA**
- 4. Procurement process prior application**
- 5. Visibility rules**
- 6. Award administration information**
- 7. Submission requirements**
- 8. Evaluation**

Subject to availability of funds, SWG intends to support WB6 MSMEs to open E-shops or join a marketplace platform and open their e-shop as part of an existing marketplace platform during March 2023 and December 2023.

The available funding per supported MSMEs will be up to 2.500 EUR for Package 1 and 1,500 EUR for Package 2 (see section 3). The selected MSMEs will be asked to contribute with 10% of the requested amount from SWG.

Awards will be made to the responsive applicants whose applications best meet the requirements of this RFA on a 'first come first served' basis.

**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 opening an E-Shop be submitted electronically (e-mailed) to SWG Secretariat at swgsecretariat@swg-seerural.org starting January 16, 2023 until February 28, 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*.

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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 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.

E-commerce offers opportunities for growth of businesses locally by increasing the customer base and access to new domestic clients, and it also provides opportunities for regional expansion. Joining the e-commerce world and opening a new online sales channel will not only enable accelerated growth of MSMEs but it will also increase their competitiveness.

Expected Results

- A. Increased number of MSMEs that have taken advantage of the action and rate their business development more positively.

2. ELIGIBLE APPLICANTS

Micro Small and Medium-sized Enterprises (MSMEs) that are:

1. Registered in one of Western Balkans 6 countries and territories Albania, Bosnia and Herzegovina, North Macedonia, Montenegro, Serbia and Kosovo*
2. Operating in agriculture and agricultural processing and rural, eco and adventure tourism.
3. Do not already have an E-shop or are not part of a joint marketplace platform.

3. ACTIVITIES TO BE FINANCED UNDER THIS RFA

Package 1

1. Opening an E-Shop or improving the performance of an existing e-shop
2. Training of at least one staff member to operate with the E-shop
3. Maintenance/subscription for 1 year

Package 2

1. Join a marketplace platform and open their e-shop as part of an existing marketplace platform and
2. Training of at least one staff member to operate with the E-shop
3. Maintenance/subscription for 1 year

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4. PROCUREMENT PROCESS PRIOR APPLICATION

Before applying for support from SWG, the applicant should conduct the following procurement process and obtain the following documents:

1. **Request for offers sent to at least 3 service/goods providers and a specification.**, If the offer is requested by e-mail, the communication should be kept on file (request for an offer and received offer).

The specification at a minimum should include cost for:

- a) Setting up E-shop or joining a marketplace platform and open their e-shop as part of an existing marketplace platform
 - b) Training and on-boarding of at least one staff member in operating the E-Shop
 - c) Maintenance/subscription for 1 year
 - d) Validity of offer for at least 60 days
 - e) Completion of works: Not more than 8,5 months, starting on April 1, 2023 and ending on December 15, 2023.
 - f) Terms of payment
 - g) Other
2. **Received offers**, as per submitted request and specifications including costs expressed separately for the NET amounts, VAT or Personal Income tax and a total.
 3. **Comparison of Offers and a 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 best value for money offer of the three eligible offers should be taken into consideration for reimbursement of the costs for procured service/good. The format for the Comparison of Offers and a Decision for the selection can be found in Attachment 1.

5. VISIBILITY RULES

- Beneficiaries are required to display the SWG logo and the logos of the other donors respectively and a disclaimer to be provided by SWG. 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;

6. AWARD ADMINISTRATION INFORMATION

- **Place of assignment:** The place of assignment is the 6 Western Balkans countries/territories.
- **Timeframe:** April 1, 2023 – December 31, 2023
- **Communication language:** The communication language with SWG for the assignment is English.
- **The E-shop language:** May be in one of the local languages.
- **Maximum reimbursed amount:**
Package 1
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.

Cost share: The selected MSMEs will be asked to contribute with 250 EUR or 10% of the requested amount from SWG, if the requested amount is less than 2,500 EUR.

Package 2

SWG will reimburse up to 1,500 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 1,500 EUR Gross also includes all taxes, required to be paid by the national legislation in the country of residency.

Cost share: The selected MSMEs will be asked to contribute with 150 EUR or 10% of the requested amount from SWG, if the requested amount is less than 1,500 EUR.

- **Application format:** All applications must be submitted in the required format. 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 may be submitted in English
- **Number of applications:** One applicant can submit only one application.

7. SUBMISSION REQUIREMENTS

SWG requires that the Application be submitted electronically (e-mailed) to SWG Secretariat at swgsecretariat@swg-seerural.org no later than February 28, 2023.

Applicants must submit the following documents:

ANNEX 1. Application for support for Business Expansion with E-Commerce- signed copy in PDF and one in MS Word

ANNEX 2. Procurement documents

- a) Request for offers including specification
- b) 3 Offers
- c) Comparison of Offers and a Decision for selecting the best value for money offer (Attachment 1)

ANNEX 3 Copy of the MSMEs' registration certificate not older than 6 months.

Please state "Your organization's name –Business Expansion with E-Commerce" in the Subject field of your e-mail.

8. EVALUATION

SWG will evaluate the application and if needed request additional clarifications and corrections in the documentation. The final version of the application 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.



The available SWG budget allows only for limited number of applications to be supported. Awards will be made to the responsive applicants whose applications best meet the requirements of this RFA on a 'first come first served' basis.

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.