

CALL FOR EXPRESSIONS OF INTEREST

EWI Regional Innovation Fund

The **EWI Regional Innovation Fund** is established within the project **Economic Inclusion and Justice for Women of the Western Balkans - EWI**, implemented by [CARE Balkans](#), together with local partners: [LINK](#) in BiH, [ENECA](#) in Serbia, [Tehnopolis](#) in Montenegro and [Strategic Development Consulting](#) in North Macedonia, within the framework of the International Partnerships Austria with the support of the [Austrian Development Agency \(ADA\)](#).

The Fund aims to identify, strengthen and finance **validated innovative solutions** that contribute to women's economic inclusion, increased participation in value chains and markets, improved access to technologies and digital tools, green transition, and sustainable business and social models.

Through this Call for Expressions of Interest, the EWI project invites **women-led teams with already validated innovative ideas or solutions** to enter a competitive process for financial support from the EWI Innovation Fund.

1. What is the EWI Regional Innovation Fund looking for?

The Fund is seeking innovative solutions that make a clear and measurable contribution to women's economic inclusion.

Eligible innovations may include, but are not limited to:

- digital solutions facilitating women's access to public services, markets, finance, employment, business information, buyers, partners or service providers;
- digital tools that improve productivity and competitiveness of women entrepreneurs;
- green and ecological innovations, including circular economy models, waste reduction, resource efficiency and sustainable production;
- solutions that open new economic opportunities for women in green sectors;
- innovative models that strengthen women's participation in value chains and markets;

- new approaches to linking women with companies, distributors, retail chains, public procurement or export opportunities;
- innovative financial, business, employment or support services tailored to women;
- models that reduce administrative, financial, digital or logistical barriers to women's economic participation;
- approaches that connect women with institutions, companies, educational institutions or the financial sector.

Potential for institutionalisation, scaling and replication in other communities or countries will be considered an advantage.

2. Who can apply?

The Call is open to teams operating within civil society organisations, social enterprises, start-ups, commercial businesses, academic or research institutions, innovation centres, business associations, formal partnerships or other appropriate structures, from the following countries: Bosnia and Herzegovina, Montenegro, North Macedonia, Serbia.

Eligible teams must:

- be led by a woman and have a majority of women among team members;
- possess relevant capacities for further development and implementation of the proposed innovation;
- present an already validated innovative idea or solution that demonstrates a clear contribution to women's economic inclusion;
- commit to mandatory participation in the online Mentorship and Accelerator Programme if selected;
- be prepared to pitch the proposed innovation if selected as a finalist;
- be ready to implement the innovation under EWI project monitoring until completion of the support scheme, no later than November 2027;
- intend to continue developing and applying the innovation after the end of EWI support.
- commit to promote EWI, International Partnerships Austria and CARE International as donors of the innovation (if funded by this programme).

3. What is considered a validated innovation?

The Fund is not intended for ideas that exist only as initial concepts. Applicants must demonstrate that both the problem and the proposed solution have already undergone a certain degree of practical validation.

A validated idea means that the team has already:

- clearly identified the problem to be addressed;
- identified the intended users or beneficiaries;
- tested assumptions through interaction with users, customers, companies, institutions or other relevant actors;
- developed at least an initial prototype, model, methodology or pilot solution;
- collected feedback on the relevance and usability of the solution;
- demonstrated that further implementation is realistic;
- identified the main resources, partners or capacities required for further development.

4. Expected Results

By the end of the implementation period, supported innovations are expected to:

- demonstrate a tangible contribution to women's economic inclusion;
- reach a functional and operational stage;
- be tested in real-world conditions;
- have clearly identified active users and/or markets;
- establish at least one relevant institutional or market partnership;
- demonstrate a viable sustainability model;
- have a clear strategy for further growth, scaling and/or replication;
- continue operating beyond the EWI support period.

5. How does the application and financing process work?

The EWI Regional Innovation Fund will use a phased competitive selection process.

Phase 1 – Expression of Interest

Teams will submit an Expression of Interest describing:

- the problem addressed;
- the proposed innovation;
- evidence of validation;
- expected contribution to women's economic inclusion;
- team capacity;
- market or institutional potential;
- indicative implementation budget.

Based on the submitted Expressions of Interest, administrative verification, expert evaluation and, where necessary, short online interviews, approximately **6 to 8 teams** will be selected to continue in the financing process through the Mentorship and Accelerator Programme.

Phase 2 – Mentorship and Accelerator Programme

6-8 selected teams will participate in a **four-week online Mentorship and Accelerator Programme** designed to strengthen their innovations and prepare them for the final funding stage. The programme may address topics such as further validation, user and market needs, business or operational model development, implementation and financial planning, sustainability, scaling and replication, partnerships, results measurement, pitch preparation, or similar.

Participation in **100% of the mandatory mentorship modules** is required to remain eligible for the next stage.

Phase 3 – Final Application for Funding



Teams that successfully complete the mentorship programme will have one week to submit a **Final Application for financial support**, including expected results and indicators, risk assessment, detailed implementation plan and budget, milestone plan and validation evidence, sustainability and scaling plan.

Phase 4 – Finalist Selection and Pitching

Based on the Final Applications and performance throughout the programme, **up to five finalists** will be selected for the EWI Regional Innovation Pitching Event.

The final funding decision will consider:

- quality of the Final Application;
- validation evidence;
- technical and financial feasibility;
- implementation readiness;
- expected impact;
- sustainability;
- scalability;
- quality of the milestone plan;
- pitch presentation;
- responses during the Q&A session.

Please note that participation in the pitching event is an important part of the final selection process, but not the sole basis for the funding decision.

6. Financial Support Available

EUR 54,000 is planned for direct financial support to selected innovations.

The Fund will support **two to three innovations with max. 27,000 EUR**.

The final number of supported innovations and the amount awarded to each will depend on:

- the quality of the Final Applications;
- feasibility and readiness for implementation;



- justified funding needs;
- efficiency in the use of funds;
- expected impact;
- quality of the milestone plan;
- overall availability of funds.

Funding will not be allocated as fixed first-, second- or third-place prizes.

Different innovations may receive different amounts depending on their justified implementation needs and the resources available within the Fund.

The Fund reserves the right not to award funding to proposals that do not demonstrate sufficient quality, feasibility and readiness for implementation.

7. Indicative Timeline

Activity	Indicative Period
Deadline for Expression of Interest	23:00 CET, 1 st October 2026
Administrative verification and expert evaluation, including short online interviews of the teams, if required. Selection of 6–8 teams for the mentorship program.	By 9 October 2026
Mentorship and Accelerator Programme	12 Oct - 8 Nov 2026
Preparation and submission of Final Applications	By 16 November 2026
Selection of up to 5 finalists	By 24 November 2026
EWI Regional Innovation Pitching Event and final funding decision	By 7 December 2026
Finetuning of implementation arrangements and contracting	By 30 December 2026
Implementation of supported innovations	January–October 2027
Final reporting	By 30 November 2027

Note: the timeline is indicative and may be adjusted slightly for operational reasons.

8. How to Apply

Interested teams should complete [Expression of Interest Form](#) and submit it together with all required supporting documentation, including [Annex 1 – Budget Summary](#) and [Annex 2 – Risk Assessment](#).

The remaining mandatory documents (CVs, proof of registration, and signed statements) do not follow a fixed template – please prepare them in free form and include them as well.

Complete all text answers directly in the Expression of Interest Form, then save/export it as a PDF. Combine that PDF together with Annex 1 – Indicative Budget, Annex 2 – Risk Assessment, and the remaining mandatory and optional documents into a single ZIP/compressed file.

Send an email with an uploaded ZIP/compressed file to ewi.balkans@care.de or via wetransfer.com (free, no account required) send it directly to ewi.balkans@care.de using WeTransfer's email option.

Email subject: Expression of Interest - EWI Regional Innovation Fund – [Name of Innovation / Team]

Application deadline: 1st October 2026, 23.00 CET.

Questions regarding the Call may be submitted by 20th September 2026 to the following e-mail address: ewi.balkans@care.de, with the email subject: **Questions regarding the EWI Regional Innovation Fund – [Name of Innovation / Team]**

Online info session is scheduled on 22 September 2026 at 14:00. All interested applicants are invited. You can join the session by clicking [here](#).

Relevant clarifications will be shared on **24 September 2026** on www.care-balkan.org with all potential applicants, to ensure equal access to information.