

TERMS OF REFERENCE (ToR)

Engagement of Experts for Evaluation and Mentorship

EWI Regional Innovation Fund

Economic Inclusion and Justice for Women of the Western Balkans (EWI)

Indicative engagement period	October-November 2026
Type of engagement	Part time
Modality	Online
Application deadline	28 September 2026
Application format	Candidates may apply for one or more Lots

About the EWI Project

CARE Österreich and CARE Balkans, in cooperation with country-level partners ENECA, LINK Entrepreneurial Center, Strategic Development Consulting and IEC Tehnopolis, are implementing the project Economic Inclusion and Justice for Women of the Western Balkans (EWI), within the framework of the International Partnerships Austria with the support of the Austrian Development Agency (ADA).

EWI is a three-year regional initiative implemented in Bosnia and Herzegovina, Montenegro, North Macedonia and Serbia. Its intended impact is for women in the Western Balkans to be empowered and fully access their economic rights.

About the EWI Regional Innovation Fund

The EWI Regional Innovation Fund is a component of EWI project designed to identify, strengthen and finance validated innovative solutions that contribute to women's economic inclusion, increased participation in value chains and markets, digitalisation, green transition, and sustainable business and social models.

The process of realization of EWI Regional Innovation Fund includes

- a regional Call for Expressions of Interest (EOI);
- administrative verification and professional evaluation of received applications;
- selection of approximately 6-8 teams;
- a four-week online Mentorship and Accelerator Programme;
- preparation and submission of Final Applications;
- EWI regional innovation pitching event for up to five selected finalists.

Up to EUR 54,000 is planned for direct financial support to innovations ultimately selected through the overall Innovation Fund process, with individual support up to 27,000.

More about EWI Innovation fund can be found on <https://care-balkan.org/2026/09/02/ewi-regional-innovation-fund-call-for-expressions-of-interest-now-open/>

Purpose of the Consultancy

CARE Balkans seeks to engage qualified experts to support the realization of the EWI Innovation Fund processes in the segments:

- professional evaluation of applications and
- the delivery of specialized online Mentorship and Accelerator Programme to the selected teams.

For this purpose, CARE is looking for expertise in five topics. Applicants may apply for one, or more areas of expertise - Lots, provided they demonstrate the required qualifications and experience for each selected topic. CARE Balkans may engage more than one expert under a Lot or the same expert under more than one Lot, depending on the profile and number of applications received and the mentoring needs of selected teams.

Lots

LOT 1 - Innovation, Entrepreneurship and Business Model Expert

- innovation development and entrepreneurship
- business and operational models
- market validation and customer/user development
- commercialisation and market entry
- sustainability, scaling and replication
- strategic partnerships

LOT 2 - Digital Innovation and Technology Expert

- digital products and services
- digital platforms and digital transformation
- technology-based innovation
- prototype and MVP development
- technical feasibility and technology risk
- digital adoption and technology-enabled scaling

LOT 3 - Green Economy, Circular Economy and Environmental Sustainability Expert

- green and circular economy
- resource efficiency and waste reduction
- sustainable production and services
- environmental innovation
- green business models
- environmental sustainability and relevant indicators

LOT 4 - Women's Economic Empowerment, Gender Equality and Social Innovation Expert

- women's economic empowerment and women's economic justice
- gender equality and gender-responsive programming
- labour-market and economic inclusion

- social innovation
- inclusion of vulnerable and marginalised women
- gender-responsive impact measurement and Do No Harm

LOT 5 - Finance, Investment Readiness and Scaling Expert

- financial planning and budgeting
- financial feasibility and sustainability
- access to finance and investment readiness
- revenue and financing models
- milestone-based financing
- scaling and follow-on funding

Scope of Work - Evaluation of EOI

Experts selected under Lots 1-5 will be assigned relevant EOI applications for professional evaluation according to their respective areas of expertise. The task will be to:

- Review the complete assigned application package;
- Score the application according to the approved evaluation matrix;
- Provide concise written justification for scores and identify key strengths and weaknesses;
- Flag issues requiring clarification or verification;
- Participate in evaluator coordination/calibration meetings, where requested;
- Participate in short online interviews with top-ranked applicants, where requested;
- Provide a recommendation regarding readiness to proceed to the Mentorship and Accelerator Programme.

CARE Balkans will provide all materials necessary for the task, along with detailed instructions.

Scope of Work - Mentorship and Accelerator Programme

Approximately 6–8 selected teams, represented by up to three team members each, will participate in a four-week online Mentorship and Accelerator Programme. The detailed mentoring plan will be finalised after evaluation of the applications and review of the mentoring needs indicated by applicants. The tasks will include:

- Prepare and deliver thematic online group mentoring sessions relevant to the expert's Lot, as assigned by CARE Balkans
- Provide targeted individual mentoring to selected teams, where assigned;
- Review agreed team outputs and provide concise, actionable written feedback;
- Support teams in strengthening validation, implementation planning, business/operational models, budgets, sustainability, scaling, partnerships, risks, milestones and other areas relevant to the expert's Lot;

- Coordinate with CARE Balkans and other experts to avoid duplication and ensure coherent support.

Experts shall provide additional substantive guidance and feedback. Applicants remain responsible for developing and submitting their own Final Applications, and experts shall not write applications on behalf of applicants.

Unit-Based Contracting and Payment Model

Because the exact number and thematic distribution of Expressions of Interest and the mentoring needs of selected teams cannot be known before the application period closes, this assignment will use a unit-based contracting model rather than a fixed number of consultancy days.

The final workload will be determined after the closure and evaluation of the EWI Regional Innovation Fund applications, based on the number and thematic profile of applications received and the mentoring needs of selected teams. Selected experts will be contracted on the basis of the unit rates submitted in their financial offer and the agreed scope of work.

Payment will be made only for services specifically requested by CARE Balkans, satisfactorily delivered and approved.

Definition of Service Units

Service unit	Unit definition	What is included in the unit	Payment basis
A. Evaluation of Application	Per one assigned EOI application	Review of the full application package, completion of the evaluation matrix, scoring and written justification, identification of key strengths/weaknesses and clarification points, including participation in one applicant interview of up to 1 hour, if requested by CARE Balkans.	Per completed and accepted application evaluation
B. Online Mentoring	Per mentoring hour	Any online mentoring delivered under the programme, including group or individual mentoring, preparation relevant to the session, practical guidance and Q&A.	Per prepared and delivered one hour session
C. Final Team Review and Written Feedback	Per team	Review of agreed outputs developed during the mentoring programme and concise written feedback of up to two pages, highlighting key recommendations for improvement before preparation of the Final Application.	Per completed review and written feedback of up to 2 pages

No separate final expert report is required under this ToR. Documentation of the assignment will be provided through completed evaluation matrices, interview notes where applicable, mentoring materials and written feedback on team outputs.

Indicative Schedule

Activity	Indicative period
Application period for experts under this ToR	28 September 2026
Selection and contracting of experts	First week of October 2026
Professional evaluation of EOI applications	Early October 2026
Short online interviews, if required	Early October 2026
Selection of 6-8 teams for mentorship	October 2026
Four-week online Mentorship and Accelerator Programme	October-November 2026
Completion of mentoring-related deliverables	November 2026

Exact dates and individual assignments will be communicated by CARE Balkans.

Required Qualifications - General Requirements

- University degree in a relevant field; an advanced degree will be considered an advantage;
- Minimum five years of relevant professional experience;
- Demonstrated expertise relevant to the Lot(s) applied for;
- Relevant experience in evaluation, mentoring, acceleration, entrepreneurship support, innovation programmes or comparable assignments;
- Strong analytical and written assessment skills;
- Ability to assess both strategic and practical implementation aspects of innovations;
- Experience working with civil society organisations, businesses, entrepreneurs, social enterprises, innovation ecosystems and/or public institutions;
- Good understanding of the socio-economic context of the Western Balkans;
- Sound knowledge of the barriers contributing to women's economic exclusion and the specific support needed to enable their meaningful economic participation and inclusion (for Lot 4)
- Strong communication, facilitation and feedback skills;
- Professional fluency in English, written and oral.

Knowledge of Bosnian/Croatian/Serbian and/or Macedonian, as well as prior experience with women entrepreneurs, women's economic empowerment programmes or innovations targeting marginalised groups, will be considered an advantage.

Lot-Specific Qualifications

Lot 1: Demonstrated professional experience in innovation management, entrepreneurship, business development, business modelling, market development, commercialisation and/or scaling.

Lot 2: Demonstrated technical or managerial experience in digital products, software, platforms, digital transformation, technology-based innovation and/or prototype/MVP development.

Lot 3: Demonstrated professional experience in green economy, circular economy, environmental sustainability, resource efficiency, sustainable production and/or related technical fields.

Lot 4: Demonstrated professional experience in women's economic empowerment, gender equality, gender-responsive programming, labour-market inclusion, inclusive development and/or social innovation.

Lot 5: Demonstrated professional experience in financial planning, investment, access to finance, entrepreneurship finance, investment readiness, financial modelling, business sustainability and/or scaling.

Conflict of Interest and Independence

Experts must perform all evaluation and mentoring activities professionally, impartially and objectively. Selected experts must disclose any actual, potential or perceived conflict of interest involving applicant organisations, team members, partner organisations, proposed innovations, commercial interests, or relevant personal/professional relationships.

An expert shall not evaluate an Expression of Interest where an actual or perceived conflict of interest exists. CARE reserves the right to reassign applications or exclude an expert from a particular assessment where necessary to protect the integrity of the process.

Participation by an expert in both the initial evaluation and subsequent mentoring of selected teams is permitted under this ToR and is intended to support continuity between the assessment and capacity-development stages.

Selected experts will be required to sign a Conflict-of-Interest Declaration and a separate confidentiality/non-disclosure statement before receiving access to application materials.

CARE's Responsibilities

- Provide relevant Innovation Fund documentation, evaluation criteria and instructions;
- Allocate applications to relevant evaluators;
- Coordinate evaluator calibration/coordination meetings;
- Coordinate applicant interviews, where applicable;
- Communicate with selected innovation teams;
- Coordinate the overall mentoring schedule and allocation of teams/sessions;
- Provide required templates and practical guidance;
- Review and accept completed service units and deliverables.

Application Process

Interested experts may apply for one or more Lots. Candidates must clearly indicate the Lot(s) for which they wish to be considered.

Required Application Documents

- CV, clearly demonstrating experience relevant to the selected Lot(s), including contact details and at least two professional references;
- Brief Statement of Relevant Expertise (maximum one page):

Clearly identify the Lot(s) applied for, briefly explain your relevant expertise, and provide up to three examples of closely related previous assignments. For each example, include a link to publicly available evidence where possible.

Where no public link is available, the applicant must attach a relevant sample or supporting document and clearly reference the title of that attachment in the Brief Statement of Relevant Expertise.

- Financial Offer using the unit-based structure set out below;

Financial Offer - Unit Rates

Applicants shall quote a NET fee in EUR for each service unit below.

Service unit	Unit	Proposed NET fee (EUR)
Evaluation of full application package, including one interview of up to 1 hour if required	per application	EUR ____
Online mentoring	per hour	EUR ____
Final team review and written feedback, max. 2 pages	per team	EUR ____

Any applicable statutory taxes or legally required deductions will be handled in accordance with applicable law and CARE Balkans procedures.

Evaluation and Scoring of Expert Applications

Applications will be evaluated transparently against technical and financial criteria. The maximum score is 100 points: Technical Evaluation - 75 points; Financial Evaluation - 25 points.

Applicants must obtain at least 53 out of 75 technical points to qualify for financial evaluation.

Criterion	Maximum points
Education and relevant academic/professional qualifications	10
Specific professional expertise relevant to the Lot	25

Criterion	Maximum points
Experience in evaluation of innovations, business ideas, grants, accelerators or comparable programmes	15
Experience in mentoring, acceleration, training, coaching or advisory support	15
Western Balkans and/or women's economic empowerment, gender equality or inclusive development experience	5
Quality of the Brief Statement of Relevant Expertise, relevance of submitted evidence of previous work, and availability	5
Financial offer	25
Total	100

Financial Evaluation -

The financial offer will be assessed based on the proposed NET unit rates submitted by the applicant for the services defined in this ToR. The proposed unit rates will be assessed comparatively in terms of competitiveness, reasonableness and overall value for money. The highest financial score will be awarded to the offer providing the best overall value for money among technically qualified applicants.

The selected expert will be contracted for the workload determined by CARE Balkans in accordance with the Unit-Based Contracting. Final Selection of Experts

The final ranking under each Lot will be based on the combined technical and financial score. CARE Balkans may conduct a short online interview with top-ranked candidates to verify experience, availability and communication skills.

Also CARE Balkans may:

- select more than one expert under an individual Lot;
- select the same expert under more than one Lot;
- contract only particular service units according to actual needs;
- establish a pool of qualified experts;
- decide not to award a Lot if no suitable candidate meets the required standard.

Submission of Applications

Applications must be submitted electronically to:

ewi.balkans@care.de

No later than: **28 September 2026**

Email subject: **EWI Innovation Fund Expert - Lot(s) [1/2/3/4/5] - [Applicant Name]**

All requested documents must be submitted in English.

For additional information regarding this ToR, please contact:

Nataša Tandır

Project Manager - EWI

CARE Balkans

E-mail: tandir@care.de