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Call for Empowering Women in Agrifood (EWA) Programme 2025 Participants Guidelines

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EIT FOOD

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Call Fact Sheet

Title of Call	Call for Empowering Women in Agrifood (EWA) Programme 2025 Participants.
Objective and Scope	Selection of women entrepreneurial talents in RIS regions (from Albania, Estonia, Greece, Italy, North-Macedonia, Poland, Portugal, Romania, Serbia, Slovenia, Spain, Türkiye and Ukraine) that are looking for establishing or growing their agrifood business.
Call Deadline	25 May 2025, 23:59 CEST
Available Funding	Up to 12,000 EUR per participant (in total: 338,000 EUR)
Project Duration	June – December 2025
How to apply	Application form at F6S.com
Contact Information	Carolina Silva carolina.silvamarques@eitfood.eu , Alicja Krakowska alicja.krakowska@eitfood.eu

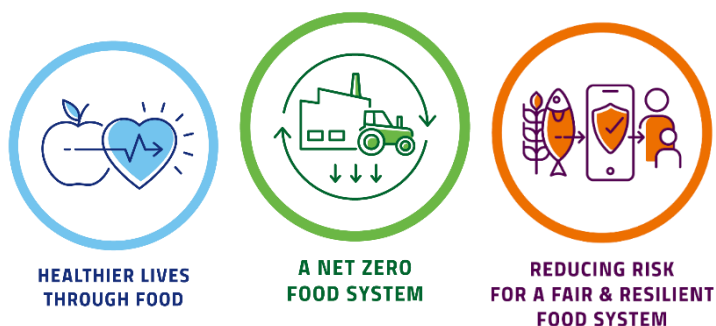
1. Introduction

EIT Food

EIT Food is the world's largest food innovation community, creating connections right across the food system. Supported by the European Union (EU), we invest in projects, organisations and individuals which share our goals for a healthy and sustainable food system.

We have built a unique not-for-profit business to carry out transformative programmes in skills, education, entrepreneurship, start-up investment and communications. We deliver these programmes in partnership with our members to create a culture and build a community which sees the long-term value in the food innovation we fund.

Our Missions



EIT Food's Missions respond to major societal challenges within the food system. The alignment of our chosen challenges towards United Nations Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) and EU policy is detailed in our main funding [strategy document](#) agreed with EIT (European Institute of Innovation & Technology). For more about our Missions-led approach please visit [our website](#).

The three EIT Food Missions:

1. **Healthier Lives Through Food:** We will make a material difference to quality of life by enabling more consumers to have better choices through access to affordable, healthier products and actionable information.
Our thematic priorities are: Diversify protein sources for food products; Improve product choice and supply for a balanced diet to benefit people & planet; Optimise nutrient density of food.
2. **A Net Zero Food System:** We will enable the transition to a net zero food system, measuring and quantifying the change through reduced CO2 equivalent emissions. We will do this by tackling harmful system hotspots, reducing the footprint of proteins through diversification, and creating new markets for food waste.
Our thematic priorities are: Establish Regenerative Agriculture as a commercially viable choice in key value chains; Reduce Food Loss and Food Waste; Create a retail food environment which grows value in a circular food economy.
3. **A Fully Transparent, Fair and Resilient Food System:** We will see the benefits of more resilient, trusted food systems where people experience greater food security and safety through digitally enabled, transparent supply chains.
Our thematic priorities are: Investing in growth of fair business models to improve food integrity and reduce inequality; Empower producers and consumers to drive sustainable urban and rural food systems; Improve sustainable and resilient food production practices.

EIT Regional Innovation Scheme

The European Institute of Innovation and Technology (EIT), an EU body established in 2008, aims to boost Europe's innovation capacity. From 2021–2027, it operates under the Horizon Europe Framework, with EIT Food as an Institutionalized European Partnership ensuring compliance with its regulations.

The EIT Regional Innovation Scheme (EIT RIS), launched in 2014, extends EIT Community activities to innovators outside its partnerships, offering targeted support. Europe faces innovation disparities, with countries classified as innovation leaders vs. moderate/modest innovators, partly due to weak collaboration between businesses, research, academia, and public institutions.

EIT RIS addresses this gap by engaging modest and moderate innovator countries, fostering connections with local entrepreneurs, SMEs, universities, and research labs. The goal is to improve access to EIT Innovation Communities' services, programs, and innovation-driven research.

The principles of the EIT Regional Innovation Scheme are described at: [Regional Innovation Scheme \(RIS\) - EIT Food](#)

General information about the EWA programme

The objective of the Empowering Women in Agrifood Programme (“**EWA Programme**”) is to boost enterprise development in RIS countries targeted at emerging female entrepreneurs. The EWA Programme aims to provide women entrepreneurs (10 by country every year) (“**Mentees**”) across [RIS countries](#) with the required knowledge, confidence, support and networking opportunities to successfully start and develop sustainable businesses.

The [EWA Programme](#) will run for a period of 6 months supporting representatives of female-led early - stage startups and women with a business idea in the agrifood field and it will seek out and assist women to grow and develop their businesses with a tailored, focused approach that specifically considers the concrete challenges, which female entrepreneurs face generally, as well as the barriers that can limit their entrepreneurial activity due to other discriminating factors. Due to budget restrictions, every year EIT Food rotates the RIS countries for this programme. In 2025, EIT Food will implement the EWA Programme in EIT RIS targeted countries, namely in **Albania, Estonia, Greece, Italy, North-Macedonia, Poland, Portugal, Romania, Serbia, Slovenia, Spain, Türkiye and Ukraine**.

The EWA Programme will be managed by respective Co-Location Centres – South (“**EIT Food CLC South**”) and North-East (“**EIT Food CLC NE**”) - in cooperation with local organisations (“**Organisations**”) specializing in boosting female entrepreneurship.

The EWA Programme contains business training, 1:1 mentoring and networking opportunities. There is also a platform dedicated to the creation of women entrepreneurs' community in the agrifood sector in respective countries and at the European level.

2. Purpose of this Request

This EIT Food call has the objective of recruiting 10 EWA 2025 Programme Mentees in each country, namely from **Albania, Estonia, Greece, Italy, North-Macedonia, Poland, Portugal, Romania, Serbia, Slovenia, Spain, Türkiye and Ukraine**.

3. Description of Role & Profile

Role

The EWA Programme is organized around the following steps:

- a. Open application for EWA programme’s participants – **March – May 2025**;
- b. Evaluation and selection of applicants – **May 2025**;
- c. Kick-off and matchmaking activity – **beginning of June 2025**;
- d. Mentoring and training including Masterclass activity – **June – November 2025**;
- e. Pitching event (“**Demo Day**”) – **November 2025**;
- f. Next Bite: Accelerating Innovation Through Female Leadership – pan-European gathering for female entrepreneurs in agrifood – **December 2025**.

The application is open to potential participants for a minimum of one month and requires the completion of a dedicated form at the [F6S platform](#). The dates of activities at local levels are determined on a working basis for the benefit of EWA Mentees.

NOTE: Next Bite: Accelerating Innovation Through Female Leadership is a gathering with the objective to connect entrepreneurs and experts of the EWA Programme all across Europe. The exact date and location in Europe will be disclosed at least 3 months in advance to facilitate travel arrangements.

Participation in EWA Programme constitutes acceptance of devoting additional time to the implementation of the necessary EWA Programme guidelines and the preparation of mandatory materials.

Profile

The EWA Programme is designed for women entrepreneurs who either have an early-stage business (founded within the last three years) or a business idea of a product or solution for the agrifood sector.

Applicants must be living and running their business or project in one of the participating RIS countries, with registered startups also required to be legally established in one of these countries. Participants can be either the founder or an official representative of the business.

All applicants must demonstrate a strong commitment to participating in the programme's activities.

4. Deliverables

Each Mentee must:

- a. attend a minimum of 80% of the training activities planned within the EWA Programme in the respective country (will be defined and communicated in advanced by organisers),
- b. attend the Demo Day and main events (at least 3 out of 4 of the EWA Programme main events – Kick-Off and Matchmaking, Masterclass, Demo Day and the Next Bite: Accelerating Innovation Through Female Leadership),
- c. complete a minimum of 80% of the time allocated for Mentor & Mentee sessions,
- d. timely complete the obligatory documents provided during training and mentorship ensuring capturing relevant progress and business information from the participant,
- e. support EIT Food and provide information before and after the activities within the EWA Programme that allow participant's business progress monitoring (satisfaction surveys, mentoring feedback, business idea progress report for final grants winners),
- f. support EIT Food in EWA Programme dissemination and comply with the branding requirements.

Only if these minimum participant obligations are met (checked through signed attendance sheets in case of events and trainings) the Financial Support will be released. A Proof of Successful Completion will be issued acknowledging the competences gained during the EWA Programme.

5. Funding

1st Round - Financial Support

The Financial Support is available for all the selected applicants (Mentees). A total of **1.000 euros gross is granted per Mentee** to support their costs of participation in the EWA Programme activities ("Financial Support").

The Financial Support will help to cover travel and accommodation costs during activities in each country, as well as costs of care over dependent family members (children, seniors, people with

disabilities) during the activities related to the project, internet and materials needed for the business idea development (buying books, access to online data repository etc.). The Financial Support was estimated by looking at average costs within different countries in Southern and Central and Eastern Europe.

For further information on the requirements for receiving the Financial Support, please refer to the section [4. Deliverables](#) on this document.

2nd Round - Final Grants

The third local event within the EWA Programme, organised face to face (Demo Day) will be organised with the aim of exposing Mentees to public speaking and business competition, selecting **1st (10.000 EUR gross)** and **2nd (5.000 EUR gross)** (“**Final Grants**”) winners and networking all participants with the local startup and innovation ecosystem. Final Grants are meant to be used toward the progress of the business.

The Winner who receives a Final Grant is committed and ensures through a Final Grant Agreement that:

- The Final Grant will be used for business development purposes (including company registration fees and IP registration, market research, prototyping, operations and production-related costs, marketing and communication).
- The Mentee will inform EIT Food after 6 months on Final Grant expenditure through a progress report that will be validated by EIT Food contact point.
- EIT Food is liable to only grant participants that are committed to register legally their business during the following 3 years after the end of the EWA Programme.
- In case the business was already registered legally before the EWA Programme, EIT Food is liable to only grant a startup that is committed to launch a new or improve product or service to the market during the following 1 year.
- Evidence on these requirements could be requested and subject to an audit by EIT Food.

Final Grants will be granted based on:

1. Progress score over the EWA Programme (50%) rated on a scale of 1 to 10 (1 being the lowest and 10 the highest)

	Criteria	Points	Weight
1	Business deck evaluation	10	50%
2	Mentors' evaluation	10	50%

2. Overall pitch score on the day of the Demo Day (50%) rated on a scale of 1 to 10 (1 being the lowest and 10 the highest)

	Criteria	Points	Weight
1	Participant clearly understands and articulates the problem she is trying to address.	10	10%

2	The proposed solution is distinctive enough, innovative and appropriate to address the problem it articulates.	10	20%
3	The proposed solution targets the identified market and differs well from competitive offerings.	10	10%
4	The business model articulates a clear path to market, is scalable and realistic.	10	10%
5	Participant has the skills, knowledge and experience necessary to take advantage of the identified market opportunity.	10	10%
6	Participant indicates whether and how the final grant will be a catalyst for the successful exploitation of the market opportunity.	10	20%
7	The business idea has the potential to transform the food system in the country (or region) and generate a social, environmental and economic impact.	10	20%

The total score (50% overall progress score and 50% overall pitch score) can amount up to 10 points.

To review the detailed evaluation criteria and selection process for the Final Grants, please refer to the [Annex 2. Final Grant Evaluation Criteria](#) in this document.

3rd Round - Visibility Pack

As part of the EWA Programme, a set of selected Mentees will have the opportunity to participate in the Next Bite: Accelerating Innovation Through Female Leadership, an event taking place in Warsaw, Poland, on the 4th of December 2025.

To support them, additional financial support of 1.000 EUR gross ("**Visibility Pack**") will be awarded to **one Mentee per country**, covering travel-related expenses to attend and present their business idea at the event - such as transportation, accommodation, and other eligible costs linked to participation. The Visibility Pack was estimated by looking at average travel and accommodation costs within different countries in Southern and Central and Eastern Europe.

The selection process for the Visibility Pack will follow the guidelines provided below:

1. The Local Implementing Organization will pre-select three Mentees for this grant based on the following evaluation criteria, rated on a scale of 1 to 3 (1 being the lowest and 3 the highest):

	Criteria	Points	Weight
1	Business idea	3	25%
2	Personal development during the programme	3	25%
3	Level of English proficiency	3	25%
4	Communication and presentation skills	3	25%

2. Once the Organization has identified the top three Mentees, EIT Food will make the final selection, considering the following criteria:

	Criteria	Points	Weight
1	Business idea	3	33,3%
2	Alignment with EIT Food's missions	3	33,3%
3	Scoring of the Local Implementing Organization	3	33,3%

The total score can amount up to 3 points.

6. Call Timeline and Application

Timeline

Call Open Date	28 March 2025
Call Deadline	25 May 2025, 23:59 CEST
Evaluation	26 May – 2 June 2025
Communication to selected participants	3 – 6 June 2025
Programme Kick-off & Matchmaking Events	7 – 22 June 2026

Application Submission

Interested candidates complete and submit the application form online at [F6S platform](#) at the appointed time.

7. Eligibility, Evaluation and Selection Process

Eligibility

This call is open to individuals. Please read [Annex 1. Eligibility](#), in addition to the following eligibility criteria:

Applicant Eligibility	Each participant must:
	• Identify as a woman, • Be a resident of, and in case of start-up representatives, having a company registered in Albania, Estonia, Greece, Italy, North-Macedonia, Poland, Portugal, Romania, Serbia, Slovenia, Spain, Türkiye or Ukraine (with excellent or native proficiency of local language), • Have interest and preliminary commitment to attend Programme activities, trainings and events, • In case of running a business – have the company registered for a maximum of 3 years,

	In case of prior investment for the development of this idea – received investment totalling in less than 60,000 Euro.
Application Eligibility	Each application must:
	- Be complete, - Be submitted on time via F6S platform.

Evaluation Process

The selection panel is formed by at least two external evaluators and at least one representative from CLC NE or CLC South, who will score the applications based on the scoring approach described below.

Evaluation Criteria

Selection of Mentees will be based on eligibility and quality criteria.

Quality criteria scored from 1 to 5:

	Quality Criteria	Scoring	Weight
1	The extent to which the applicant possesses the background, capability and motivation to enable her business idea to enter or further develop on the local agrifood market.	1 to 5	20%
2	The extent to which the applicant holds potential for fulfilling the aims of the EWA Programme and delivering against EIT Food Missions.	1 to 5	20%
3	The extent to which the project demonstrates strong potential, with a well-defined market need and a feasible approach. This includes how well the idea is structured, described and positioned to create impact and gain market traction.	1 to 5	20%
4	The extent to which the idea/project holds market potential as a scalable product or service and/or can be the subject of an IP protection.	1 to 5	20%
5	The extent to which EWA Programme's mentoring, online training and funding will make a difference and allow further development of applicant's business idea.	1 to 5	20%

The total score can amount up to 5 points.

Note: If the selection panel lacks information required to evaluate some applications, the candidates who submitted those applications may be asked for additional information or an online interview to determine the final selection.

Appeal on Evaluation Results

Applicants can submit an appeal within 5 days of receiving their result, if:

- The evaluation of their proposal has not been carried out in accordance with the procedures set out in this document.

For more details, please refer to [EIT Food Redress guidance](#).

8. Administrative Items

EIT Food Legal Framework & Legal Documents to be signed

Selected applicants will receive a second communication with instructions regarding the completion of the Participant Consent Form to be signed between the Mentee and EIT Food.

After the Demo Day, selected winners will receive a communication with instructions regarding completion of the Final Grant Agreement to be signed between the Mentee and EIT Food.

Payment Schedule

EIT Food will transfer Financial Support in one instalment. This Financial Support will be released after verifying that the participant's obligations were met, never later than 31/12/2025.

EIT Food will transfer the Final Grants in one instalment. These Final Grants will be released after selecting the pitching competition winners at the Demo Day, within the following 30 days, never later than 31/12/2025.

EIT Food will transfer the Visibility Pack in one instalment. The Visibility Pack amount will be released after the attendance at the Next Bite: Accelerating Innovation Through Female Leadership event, within the following 30 days, never later than 31/12/2025.

All payments will be made to Mentee's personal bank account.

Monitoring

The activity will be monitored and may be audited. All Activities selected for funding undergo continuous monitoring by EIT Food to ensure effective progress and implementation in accordance with the Participant Consent Form and to trigger payments according to the achievement of deliverables.

EIT Food may request regular reporting of actual costs incurred with the subgrant, as well as regular reporting of deliverables, together with the supporting documentation. The monitoring process may result in an amendment to the Activity workplan and/or budget.

Support

If you have any questions about this Request for Implementing Participants, please contact Carolina Silva Marques (carolina.silvamarques@eitfood.eu) and Alicja Krakowska (alicja.krakowska@eitfood.eu).

Annex

1. Eligibility

Please Note:

1. Failing any of the above call specific criteria will make your application ineligible. If an applicant is ineligible, the participant will be informed.

2. [According to EU policies and measures](#), Russian entities will not be authorised to participate in any new grant under the EU Research and Innovation programmes. This ban applies not only to their potential participation as beneficiaries, but to their potential participation in any kind of role: beneficiaries, linked third parties/affiliated entities, subcontractors, in-kind contributors, international partners/associated partners, and third parties receiving financial support. Find the full statement from the European Commission [here](#).

3. Pursuant to Article 2 (2) of the [Decision 2022/2506](#) of 15 December 2022 on measures for the protection of the Union budget against breaches of the principles of the rule of law in Hungary *where the Commission implements the Union budget in direct or indirect management pursuant to of Article 62(1) points (a) and (c), of Regulation (EU, Euratom) 2018/1046, **no legal commitments shall be entered into with any public interest trust established on the basis of the Hungarian Act IX of 2021 or any entity maintained by such a public interest trust.*** This prohibition applies to financial support to third parties (sub-grants and prizes), hence the proposal of any entity or group of entities where a Participant is included in the list of public interest trusts shall be considered as not eligible.

4. Applicants will be deemed ineligible if:

- a. bankrupt, subject to insolvency or winding-up procedures, where its assets are being administered by a liquidator or by a court, where it is in an arrangement with creditors, where its business Activities are suspended, or where it is in any analogous situation arising from a similar procedure provided for under national laws or regulations;
- b. it has been established by a final judgment or a final administrative decision that the organisation is in breach of its obligations relating to the payment of taxes or social security contributions in accordance with the applicable law;
- c. it has been established by a final judgment or a final administrative decision that the organisation is guilty of grave professional misconduct by having violated applicable laws or regulations or ethical standards of the profession to which the organisation belongs, or by having engaged in any wrongful conduct which has an impact on its professional credibility where such conduct denotes a wrongful intent or gross negligence;
- d. is found to be attempting to influence the decision-making process of the call during the process;
- e. attempting to obtain confidential information that may confer upon its undue advantages in the call process;
- f. it has been established by a final judgment that the organisation is guilty of fraud, corruption or money laundering.

2. Final Grant Evaluation Criteria

The detailed evaluation process for the selection of the Final Grant winners is described below:

1. Progress score over the EWA programme (50%) - Quantitative score based on a progress evaluation of Mentees prepared by Mentors, as well as business deck evaluation by Organization's representative (comparing the first business deck (for Matchmaking) and the last one (for Demo Day)).

	Criteria	Points	Weight
1	Business deck evaluation	10	50%
2	Mentors' evaluation	10	50%

1. **Business deck evaluation** will be assessed by Organization's representative, based on the progress and improvements made from the initial business presentation to the final business deck, assessing the following aspects. Each criterion must be scored from 1 to 10 (1 being the lowest score and 10 the highest)
 - **Problem and market need definition** – Clarity in identifying a market problem and target audience, with improved problem validation.
 - **Solution and value proposition** – Strengthening of the solution and clearer articulation of its unique value and differentiators.
 - **Business model and feasibility** – Development of a more structured revenue model and improved feasibility.
 - **Market potential and traction** – Refinement of market positioning, validation, and demonstration of traction.
 - **Presentation quality and clarity** – Enhancement in structure, storytelling, and overall communication effectiveness.
2. **Mentors' evaluation** will be assessed by Mentor based on the progress and improvements made from the initial meeting after Matchmaking Event to the final meeting before the Demo Day, according to the following criteria. Each criterion must be scored from 1 to 10 (1 being the lowest score and 10 the highest)
 - Mentee possesses the background, capability and motivation to enable her business idea to enter or further develop on the local agrifood market.
 - Mentee can identify and evaluate the interconnected aspects of production, processing, distribution, and consumption in agrifood systems.
 - Mentee's idea/project holds market potential as a scalable product or service and/or can be the subject of an IP protection.
 - Mentee has developed a coherent business model for her agri-food startup (it is well structured, described and positioned to create impact and gain market traction).

The overall progress score can amount to 10 points.

- b. Pitch score on the day of the Demo Day (50%) - The Mentee who wants to compete for a Final Grant, will prepare and deliver a business pitch during Demo Day. Each Mentee will present a **4-minute pitch** and answers questions from the jury panel. The jury panel will be formed with at least 3 independent evaluators and experts. The jury will evaluate each pitch according to criteria listed below. Each criterion must be scored from 1 to 10 (1 being the lowest score and 10 the highest).

	Criteria	Points	Weight
1	Participant clearly understands and articulates the problem she is trying to address.	10	10%
2	The proposed solution is distinctive enough, innovative and appropriate to address the problem it articulates.	10	20%
3	The proposed solution targets the identified market and differs well from competitive offerings.	10	10%
4	The business model articulates a clear path to market, is scalable and realistic.	10	10%
5	Participant has the skills, knowledge and experience necessary to take advantage of the identified market opportunity.	10	10%
6	Participant indicates whether and how the final grant will be a catalyst for the successful exploitation of the market opportunity.	10	20%
7	The business idea has the potential to transform the food system in the country (or region) and generate a social, environmental and economic impact.	10	20%

The overall pitch score can amount to 10 points.

Note: if there is a tie, the winners will be selected based on the combined score received for selection criteria number 4 and 5.

The total score (50% overall progress score and 50% overall pitch score) can amount up to 10 points.