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Call for Empowering Women in Agrifood (EWA) Grow Programme 2026 Participants Guidelines

EIT Food/EWA Grow/2026

EIT FOOD

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Call Fact Sheet

Title of Call	Call for Empowering Women in Agrifood (EWA) Grow Programme 2026 Participants
Objective and Scope	Selection of women entrepreneurial talents in southern and central-eastern European regions (from Albania, Bulgaria, Croatia, Cyprus, Italy, Lithuania, Portugal, Serbia, Slovenia, Spain, Türkiye and Ukraine) that are looking for establishing or growing their agrifood business.
Call Open Date	24 March 2026
Call Deadline	26 April 2026, 23:59 CEST
Available Funding	Up to 11,000 EUR per participant Total call budget: 192,000 EUR
Project Duration	May – November 2026
How to apply	Application form at MyEITFood Portal
Contact Information	Carolina Silva Marques carolina.silvamarques@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](#).

Our Thematic Priorities

At EIT Food we believe that good ideas and solutions don't stop at a single project or pilot stage but grow into coordinated, large-scale solutions capable of driving systemic change across the food system. In order to deliver systemic change, three priority areas have been identified where we can make the greatest difference to Europe's food future through innovation: **resilient agriculture, protein diversification, and biotechnology.**

EIT Food Regional Innovation Scheme (RIS)

The EIT RIS is the EIT Community's outreach introduced in 2014 to share good practices and experience emerging from EIT Community activities. The EIT RIS opens the activities of EIT's Innovation Communities to innovators that are not partners, by providing targeted support to individuals and

organisations to take part in and benefit from EIT Innovation Communities' activities, services and programmes. EIT Food RIS aims at strengthening those regions in Europe which are modest and moderate in terms of innovation in the agrifood sector. This outreach scheme is open to innovators that are not partners of EIT Food and provides targeted support to EIT RIS stakeholders through a portfolio of projects.

General information about the EWA programme

The Empowering Women in Agrifood (EWA) Programme, is an initiative by EIT Food that supports women entrepreneurs in the food and agriculture sector. The programme provides training, personalized mentorship, networking opportunities, and access to funding to help them start or scale their businesses. The EWA Programme addresses a gender gap in the agrifood sector and unlocks potential and opportunities for female entrepreneurs.

Read more on the [EWA Programme website](#).

The EWA Programme has evolved from one single-track programme to a flexible, three-module structure (EWA Explore, EWA Grow, EWA Advance). This call refers only to the EWA Grow module. The EWA Programme support women at every stage of entrepreneurial journey, providing tailored support.

The EWA Grow Programme will be managed by EIT Food in cooperation with local organisations (“**Organisations**”) specializing in boosting female entrepreneurship.

Module 3: EWA Grow

The objective of the EWA Grow Programme is to boost enterprise development in European countries targeted at emerging female entrepreneurs. The EWA Grow Programme aims to provide up to 120 women entrepreneurs (10 by country every year) (“**Mentees**”) across 12 European countries with the required knowledge, confidence, support and networking opportunities to successfully start and develop sustainable businesses.

The EWA Grow 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. In 2026, EIT Food will implement the EWA Grow Programme in **Albania, Bulgaria, Croatia, Cyprus, Italy, Lithuania, Portugal, Serbia, Slovenia, Spain, Türkiye and Ukraine**.

EWA Grow Programme offer

The EWA Grow Programme offers minimum 20 hours of trainings in total, minimum 1,5 hours of 1:1 mentoring per week and networking opportunities:

- **1 offline Matchmaking** (min. 90 min)
- **minimum 15 online trainings / expert sessions / firesides** (min. 90 min each)
- **weekly mentoring touchpoints** (min. 90 min each)
- **1 online or offline Masterclass** (min. 90 min)
- **1 online Demo Day prep session** (min. 60 min)
- **1 offline Demo Day** (1 day)

The EWA Grow trainings will tackle the following areas:

- **leadership skills** (team management, diversity and inclusion, public speaking, pitching, negotiations, active listening, empathy, time management);
- **business skills** (financial management, legal matters, IP management, data management, successful sales, market mapping);
- **agrifood expertise** (new trends in agrifood sector, new regulations in agrifood sector – country wise and at the EU level incl. New Green Deal and Farm to Fork Strategy, food security requirements, supply chain in agrifood);
- **self-development** (natural talents, emotional intelligence in business and coaching);
- **business-specific elements** like law, finance, marketing or logistics.

The EWA Grow Programme is organized around the following steps:

- a. Open application for EWA Grow programme's participants – **March – April 2026**;
- b. Evaluation and selection of applicants – **April – May 2026**;
- c. Kick-off and matchmaking activity – **beginning of June 2026**;
- d. Mentoring and training including Masterclass activity – **June – October 2026**;
- e. Pitching event ("**Demo Day**") – **end of October/beginning of November 2026**;

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

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

2. Purpose of this Request

This EIT Food call has the objective of recruiting **10** EWA Grow 2026 Programme Mentees in each country, namely from **Albania, Bulgaria, Croatia, Cyprus, Italy, Lithuania, Portugal, Serbia, Slovenia, Spain, Türkiye and Ukraine**.

3. Description of Profile

The EWA Grow 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.

To participate in the pitching competition and to receive Proof of Successful Completion, Mentee must:

- a. attend a minimum of 80% of the training activities planned within the EWA Grow Programme in the respective country (specific dates will be defined and communicated in advanced by organisers),
- b. attend the Matchmaking, Masterclass and Demo Day events,

- c. complete a minimum of 80% of the time allocated for Mentor & Mentee sessions,
- d. complete Entrepreneur's Journey Roadmap,
- e. timely complete the obligatory documents provided during training and mentorship ensuring capturing relevant progress and business information from the participant,
- f. support EIT Food and provide information before and after the activities within the EWA Grow Programme that allow participant's business progress monitoring (satisfaction surveys, mentoring feedback, business idea progress report for Prizes winners),
- g. support EIT Food in EWA Grow Programme dissemination and comply with the branding requirements.

Only if these minimum participant obligations are met the Proof of Successful Completion will be issued acknowledging the competences gained during the EWA Grow Programme.

4. Deliverables

Deliverable: Proof of Attendance at Masterclass (signature on the attendance list in case of the in-person event or screenshot in case of the online event).

5. Funding

1st Round - Subgrant (Financial Support)

The Subgrant ("Financial Support") is available for all the selected applicants (Mentees). A total of up to **1000 euros gross is granted per Mentee** to support their costs of participation in the EWA Grow Programme activities.

The Financial Support is intended to support costs directly linked to the Mentee's participation in the programme and is aligned with Horizon Europe and EIT Food priorities. It may cover the following cost categories:

- **Travel and subsistence (up to 1.000 euros):** Transportation and accommodation costs (e.g. train, flight, local transport) for in-person attendance at programme activities, Matchmaking, Masterclass, Demo Day event, meetings with mentor or investors. The Financial Support was estimated by looking at average costs within different countries in Europe.

The Financial Support is based on a lump sum and value for money. All costs, including co-funding, need to comply with Horizon Europe regulations regarding the eligibility of expenses. Please refer to Article 6 of the [Model Grant Agreement](#) and the [Annotated Model Grant Agreement](#).

The total lump sum contribution will be disbursed in instalments. It is conditional upon the delivery of the project deliverable mentioned above. Each deliverable is associated with proportional cost allocation and deduction rate. In cases where deliverables are not completed or only partially fulfilled, a deduction will be applied up to the amount associated with the incomplete deliverable.

First instalment will be paid as the pre-financing in the amount of €500 (50% of the lump sum) after the Subgrant Agreement signature.

Deliverable: Proof of Attendance at Masterclass (signature on the attendance list in case of the in-person event or screenshot in case of the online event):

- Allocated Value: €1000 (100% of the lump sum value – second instalment is the remaining 50%)

- Delivery date: by the 30th September 2026

2nd Round - Prizes

The third local event within the EWA Grow 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)** (“Prizes”) winners and networking all participants with the local startup and innovation ecosystem. Prizes are meant to be used toward the progress of the business.

The Winner who receives the Prize is committed and ensures through a Prize Agreement that:

- The Prize 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 Prize 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 Grow Programme.
- In case the business was already registered legally before the EWA Grow 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.

6. Call Timeline and Application

Timeline

Call Open Date	23 March 2026
Call Deadline	26 April 2026, 23:59 CEST
Evaluation and additional interviews	27 April – 7 May 2026
Communication to selected participants	8 May 2026
Standstill period, Onboarding and Signing the Agreement	10 – 31 May 2026
Programme Kick-off & Matchmaking Events	1 – 5 June 2026

The standstill period is a set time after funding selection for appeals, final administrative checks, and compliance in the award process. The project cannot start before this period.

Application Submission

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

7. Evaluation, Eligibility and Selection Process

Evaluation Process

The evaluation panel is formed by at least one external evaluator and at least one representative from EIT Food or the Organization, who will remotely review and score the applications based on the scoring approach described below via [MyEITFood Portal](#). EIT Food is aiming at gender balance among

evaluation committee. The selection of Mentees will be based on eligibility and quality criteria.

Applicants who scored between 2,5 - 5,0 after assessment of the proposal may be invited to an online interview to determine the final selection.

The Mentee who wants to compete for a Prize, will prepare and deliver a business pitch during Demo Day. Each Mentee will present a 4-minute pitch following 5-minute Q&A from the jury panel. The jury panel will be formed with at least 3 independent experts. Please read Prizes Evaluation Criteria section of this document for specific criteria description.

Eligibility Criteria

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

Applicant Eligibility	Each participant must:
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Identify as a woman, • Be a resident of, and in case of start-up representatives, having a company registered in Albania, Bulgaria, Croatia, Cyprus, Italy, Lithuania, Portugal, Serbia, Slovenia, Spain, Türkiye and 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:
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Be complete, • Be submitted on time via F6S platform.

Evaluation Criteria

The following quality criteria and weighting will be used in the assessment:

Quality Criteria	Description	Scoring	Weight
1 - Founder Readiness	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 - Strategic Fit	The extent to which the applicant holds potential for fulfilling the aims of the EWA Grow Programme and delivering against EIT Food Missions.	1 to 5	20%
3 - Business Viability	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 - Growth Potential	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 - Programme Impact	The extent to which EWA Grow Programme's mentoring, online training and funding will make a difference and allow further development of applicant's business idea.	1 to 5	20%
Additional point	Gender and Diversity dimension of the solution	0 to 0,5	100%

The total score can amount **up to 5,5 points**.

Each quality criteria will be scored from 1 to 5 using the following scoring system. The quality threshold for selection is a total weighted score of 2,5. The highest-scoring applications will be selected.

Note: if there is a tie, the Mentees will be selected based on the combined score received for selection criteria number 3 and 4.

Score	Description
1	Poor: The criterion is inadequately addressed, or there are serious inherent weaknesses.
2	Fair: Application broadly addresses the criterion but there are significant weaknesses.
3	Good: Application addresses the criterion well, but a number of shortcomings are present.
4	Very Good: Application addresses the criterion very well, but a small number of shortcomings are present.
5	Excellent: Application successfully addresses all relevant aspects of the criterion. Any shortcomings are minor.

***Gender and Diversity dimension of the solution:** Additional points will be given to applications that address gender and diversity dimensions during the analysis of the intended impact of the innovation/solution/product in question, including on different social groups (e.g., age, gender).

Prizes Evaluation Criteria

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

1. Progress score over the EWA Grow 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 Prize, will prepare and deliver a business pitch during Demo Day. Each Mentee will present a **4-minute pitch** following **5-minute Q&A** 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	Mentee 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	Mentee has the skills, knowledge, and experience necessary to take advantage of the identified market opportunity.	10	10%
6	Mentee indicates whether and how the Prize 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. The highest scoring applicants will win the prize.

All applicants will be alerted in writing to the outcome of their application.

[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 Lumpsum Subgrant Agreement 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 Prize Agreement to be signed between the Mentee and EIT Food.

[Payment Schedule](#)

EIT Food will transfer the Financial Support in two instalments. This Financial Support will be released after verifying that the participant's obligations were met.

EIT Food will transfer the Prizes in one instalment. These Prizes will be released after selecting the pitching competition winners at the Demo Day.

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 Lumpsum Subgrant Agreement and/or Prize Agreement 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 Call for EWA Grow Mentees, please contact Carolina Silva Marques (carolina.silvamarques@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.