EuroCluster Rural Tourism

Co-funded by the COSME programme of the European Union

Announcement of the EU RURAL TOURISM open call for tourism SMEs

Action acronym:	**EU Rural Tourism**
Action grant agreement number:	**101074557**
Action full name:	**Eurocluster Rural Tourism**
Open call Publication Date:	**07/07/2023**
Open call Deadline Date:	**10/09/2023** **65 days after publication on Funding & Tender Portal**
Total EU funding available :	**950.000 Euros (190x5.000**)
Expected duration of participation:	**9 months**

Service pack valued indicatively at an **average** of **EUROS 5000** per SME.

Call identifier: **SMP-COSME-2021-CLUSTER**

Information and contacts:

Web address for further information (full call text/proposal guidelines):

https://www.euroclusterruraltourism.eu/en/calls/

Email address for further information: info@euroclusterruraltourism.eu

This Call for proposals is available in English.

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I.BACKGROUND INFORMATION

a. The EuroCluster Rural Tourism Project

The EuroCluster Rural Tourism Project (ECRT), funded under the European COSME Programme, will support at least 190 rural tourism SMEs by improving selected digital, green and soft/social competences. This project addresses specifically the needs of these micro and nano SMEs that are still lagging behind in the green and digital transition. Rural Tourism and similar services such as Eco-Tourism, Farm-Tourism etc. respond to new trends of the European and worldwide tourism demand, increased by the ongoing COVID-19 pandemic that generates additional demand for services of this type. This project provides a unique opportunity to upscale activities and at the same time, create a critical mass of European rural tourism services in 15+ countries that are supported under this form of collaboration with a vision of internationalization. This project reduces "digital and green fear" by offering simple, easy-to-understand knowledge improvement that "picks up SMEs where they stand", proposes practical solutions in the fields of digital and green internal management, marketing, and product development that are adapted to the realistic human and financial capacity of micro SMEs, creates a unified and coherent access to basic training, tools, and to "further reading" complementary resources for micro-SMEs, defines a methodology and tools for SME business support structures that can be replicated, adapted to specific local needs, and be translated into different languages and the challenge to keep up with new trends, including digital and green innovations. Support will be provided through pre-approved external Assistance Service Providers (ASP) selected through an open call. The SME may select another ASP for the delivery of support, but the consortium needs to approve and to train them in order to ensure the quality of the services offered.

b. Objectives of the Call for participation

Through this call for proposals, the EU RURAL TOURISM project will support tourism SMEs (at least 190), by improving their digital, green and social maturity, skills, and capacities. The participants will be working closely with experts to bridge the digital, eco-sustainability and soft/social skills gap. The following table shows the total budget of this Call and its distribution in the Consortium Partners:

Partner	Total indicative available budget	Minimum number of SMEs per partner
Venetian Cluster	100,000.00 euros	20
Czech National Cluster Association	50,000.00 euros	10

Asociatia de Dezvoltare Intercomunitara Harghita	50,000.00 euros	10
Asociación Cluster De Turismo Sostenible de Aragón	50,000.00 euros	10
Federation Europeenne de Tourisme Rural (Ruraltour)	500,000.00 euros	100
EURACADEMY Association	200,000.00 euros	40
TOTALS	**950,000.00 euros**	**190**

The ECRT publishes its open call, respecting transparency, equal treatment, conflict of interest and confidentiality. In particular, the call is carried out by respecting the following principles:

Excellence. The proposals selected for funding will demonstrate a high quality based on the criteria set out in the call;

Transparency. The funding decisions will be based on the clearly described rules and procedures stated at this call, and all applicants will receive feedback on the outcome of the evaluation of their proposals;

Fairness and impartiality. All proposals submitted to a call are treated equally. They are evaluated impartially by evaluation committees on their merits, irrespective of their origin or the identity of the applicants;

Confidentiality. All proposals and related data, knowledge and documents are treated in confidence;

Efficiency and speed. The evaluation of proposals and the award of the financial support will follow the agreed timetable and will respect the legal framework.

c. Benefits for the beneficiaries

The direct support package to 190+ SMEs consists of:

Phase 1

- Initial and final capacity building event for all supported SMEs in a region
- Self-assessment of the current situation in order to address needs for improvement
- On-site audit, revision of the product idea and improvement plan

Phase 2

- Mentoring, technical advice and support during the implementation process.
- Budget for additional external services that may be needed for implementation

- Final evaluation and follow up visit by advisor
- Final meeting and discussion of results of the support action amongst all assisted SMEs

The following list of 12 specific actions and support areas with the highest needs of improvement from the fields of digital, green and soft/social competences were defined by the consortium. Each SME will be guided during project implementation to choose and improve at least 4 out of the 12 action areas, that preferably address at least 1 from each field (digital, green and sustainable, and soft/social).

DIGITAL
Digitalization of the processes in SMEs
Digital marketing and promotion
Marketing intelligence, data analysis, marketing strategy based on data
GREEN and SUSTAINABLE
Sustainable management practices for SMEs
CO2 management and reduction to address climate change
Sustainable mobility
Gastronomy and food based on local supply chains
SOFT / SOCIAL
Social-cultural skills (attend visitors from different cultural background)
Experience generation for visitors (includes development of corresponding products)
Inclusive Tourism / Visitors with special needs
Integration with the local community
Interpretation techniques for cultural, historic, natural etc. resources

The participants that are selected for Financial Support to Third Parties (FSTP) are entitled to receive a service pack valued indicatively at an average of EUROS 5000 that enables them to design and develop a new Tourism product for international markets by integrating digital, sustainable and socio-cultural improvements into their business.

SERVICE	DETAILED CONTENT OF THE SERVICE
PHASE 1	
Participation at initial national / regiona meeting	A national/regional meeting will be organised, in presence or online, in which all beneficiary SMEs are requested to participate.
Self-assessment and preparation of new product outline	Mentorship and support for self-assessment and vision outline of at least one new product.
Audit visit, report, improvement plan	Assistance to the SME to respond to the self-evaluation results, define needs for improvement, and elaborate an individual Improvement plan and its implementation and reporting. Digital, green and sustainable, soft/social skill needs will be addressed and integrated in the improvement plan. The audit visit will be face to face and the travel and accommodation costs of the expert will be covered by the SME allowance through the Financial Support to Third Parties (FSTP).
PHASE 2	
Mentoring and advisory during assistance	Mentoring and advice during the full period from start of self-evaluation to final evaluation report, as specified in the individual improvement plan.
Budget for specific additional external services	Specific services that are required as a result of the improvement plan. Examples are website design, translations, certifications, SM campaigns, etc.
Second audit visit, final report	Second visit by mentor, final report. The audit visit will be face to face and the travel and accommodation costs of the expert will be covered by the SME allowance through the Financial Support to Third Parties (FSTP).
Final meeting and discussion of results of the support action amongst all assisted SMEs	A final meeting will be organised, in presence or online, in which all beneficiary SMEs are requested to participate.
Other services	Country/region specific contingencies or additional actions, contests, participation at fairs etc.

II. ELIGIBILITY CRITERIA

a. Eligibility of applicant

This project addresses specifically the needs of these micro and nano SMEs and how to cover them under the Cluster concept. Such SMEs respond to the following profile:

- Micro businesses run by individuals or by a family, with a history of operation covering at least 3 years and have a maximum of 10 employees.
- Located in the countryside, or in villages or towns in rural areas.
- Accommodation providers (agritourism, farm tourism, small hotel, guest house, holiday cottage, etc). Priority will be given to providers offering extra services such as food service (breakfast, half/full board), nature or farm activities, classes (culinary, crafts), guided tours, etc.
- Proof of commitment to participate in the programme by a letter explaining the reasons.

This Call is open to SMEs that comply with the following NACE classifications:

- Hotels and similar accommodation (I5510);
- Holiday and other short-stay accommodation (I5520);
- Camping grounds, recreational vehicle parks and trailer parks (I5530);
- Travel agency, tour operator reservation service and related activities (N79)

The official registration certificate provided by responsible national tourism authorities for one of the above is sufficient even if it does not contain the NACE classification code.

b. Geographical Eligibility

Participation is limited on the SMEs established in the following EU member states or their regions and third countries participating in the COSME programme or their regions as follows, under the condition that at least one external Assistance Service Provider (ASP) per category of service (digital, green and sustainable management, soft/social skills) has responded to the ASP Call and has been approved by the Consortium:

- Belgium - Wallonia
- Bosnia-Herzegovina
- Croatia
- Czech Republic

- Estonia
- France
- Greece
- Hungary
- Ireland
- Italy
- Latvia
- Lithuania
- Montenegro
- Netherlands
- North Macedonia
- Romania - Harghita
- Serbia
- Slovakia
- Slovenia
- Spain - Aragón, Cataluña, La Rioja, Navarra total 190

Preference to receive the package of FSTP will be given to up to 10 SMEs per country. In Italy, Spain and Greece, the number of SMEs that will receive the package of FSTP may be up to 30 SMEs as national and cross-national partners operate in these countries. This maximum number of SMEs per country may be increased in a few cases, depending on the interest shown by SMEs in the above listed countries/regions.

c. Liability

The ECRT Project Consortium cannot be held liable for any damage caused to the Third Party Beneficiaries as a consequence of implementing the action, including for gross negligence. Beneficiaries shall comply with the obligations set out in this Call for Proposals and in the Grant Agreement to be signed with the funding ECRT partner. Applicants must provide complete and accurate applicant information and data as requested in the application form.

d. Reduction and Revocation

At any moment of implementation of the action and afterwards, the Consortium has the right to carry out checks, reviews and audits, to ascertain:

• the proper use of the lump sums as FSTP and the production of required deliverables and results;

• compliance with the obligations laid down in the Call;

• the truthfulness of the declarations and information produced by the applicants.

The contribution is reduced, rejected or revoked by the Consortium in the following cases:

• the implemented activities do not comply with the agreed activities stated in the signed bilateral Grant Agreement

• reporting does not comply with the requirements set.

e. Conflicts of interests

The Consortium must take all measures to prevent any situation where the impartial and objective implementation of the action is compromised for reasons involving economic interest, political or national affinity, family or emotional ties or any other shared interest ("conflict of interests"). Participation in the selection phase is strictly forbidden to any SME applicant which, at the time of the present Call publication, have any links with any consortium partner e.g. being part of its organisational structure, and/or as a shareholder participating in the SME.

f. Exclusion Criteria

Applicants will be excluded from the evaluation process if they present the following:

- Receive funds and support under another project of the European SMP-COSME-2021-CLUSTER call, in which double funding for the same action is not allowed;
- Present the characteristics of a "company in difficulty," as defined by EU Commission Regulation No.651/2014;
- Lacking the necessary administrative, technical, operational and financial capacity to implement the project activities, as defined in Article 125 of EU Regulation No. 130.125 of EU Regulation No. 1303/2013.

g. Confidentiality

Access to the received applications will be given to the ECRT Team and its Evaluation Committees. The title and overall scope of the project will be shared on the ECRT platform. During the implementation of the action and for five years after the payment of the balance from the EISMEA to the Consortium, all parties must keep confidential any data, documents or other material (in any form) that is identified as confidential at the time it is disclosed ('confidential information').

The confidentiality obligations no longer apply if:

(a) the disclosing party agrees to release the other party;

(b) the information becomes generally and publicly available, without breaching any confidentiality obligation;

(c) the disclosure of the confidential information is required by EU or national law.

All requested data will be used only in the framework of this Call, in line with art. 13 of the EU Regulation n. 2016/679.

III.PAYMENT OF FINANCIAL SUPPORT

The ECRT financial support is paid in lump sums, payments against deliverables, no financial report is required from the beneficiary since the principle is payment against expected results directly to the selected SMEs. The ECRT financial support will not be paid in the unfortunate event of SME not attaining its objectives at a promised standard, set up case by case in the initial Agreement.

The financial support will be based on the following principles:

Equal treatment: The general principle of equal treatment and non-discrimination requires that comparable situations are not treated differently unless differentiation is objectively justified.

Transparency: the financial support shall be awarded following a publication of this Call for proposals and evaluated by the established Evaluation Committee.

Non-cumulative award and no double financing: Each action may give rise to the award of only one financial support pack per SME.

Non-retroactivity: Financial support shall not be awarded retroactively or for activities outside the duration of the project. Expenses must be incurred during the projects' period.

IV.EVALUATION PROCEDURE

a. Evaluation process

The evaluation process of the applications to the present Call for Participation will take approximately 3 weeks after the Call is closed. The steps are described below:

1. The project partners will start the administrative revision of all relevant applications and request additional documentation, if needed.
2. The "Eligibility criteria" (listed in ANNEX III) will be applied to discard non-eligible proposals. Proposals being marked as non-eligible will get a rejection letter for being classified as non-eligible.

3. Each partner will set up a two-member Evaluation Committee for the country or countries the partner is responsible for, and will distribute all eligible applications to the Evaluation Committee members for a check of conflict of interest.

4. If a conflict of interest for an evaluator is detected, another evaluator shall be nominated.

5. Each Evaluator will record his/her individual opinion on a standard evaluation form (Annex III).

6. The Evaluator Committee will agree on Consensus on all eligible applications.

7. The partner will collect the Evaluation Forms and submit them to a second level Consortium Evaluation Committee. All partners will be represented by one member in this committee. The six-members committee will review all the evaluation forms, approve the selection of SMEs and will generate a ranked list from the highest scored application to the lowest for each geographical area.

8. The Consortium Evaluation Committee will notify each partner about the number of SME selected which should add up to 190 SME, and 30 additional applicants (distributed among partners) will remain in a reserve list. The ECRT will publish the results of the Call for SMEs, including number and country of origin of all received proposals and a final list of selected SMEs, including the final recipients' legal name, country of origin, date of award, and duration of the support. The results will be published on the official website of the European Cluster

for Rural Tourism (ECRT) at https://www.euroclusterruraltourism.eu/en/services/#Financial_support, as well as on ECRT's social media channels. Additionally, each consortium partner will share the list on their respective websites and social media channels.

9. Once the evaluation process is completed, selected successful applicants shall be informed by email asking for confirmation of reception. A letter of acceptance will be forwarded to them in due course.

10. The letter of acceptance shall be signed by the selected applicant within 7 days after receiving the notification, otherwise the applicant's interest in participating in the Programme will be considered withdrawn, and its spot will be offered to the next ranked applicant from the reserve list.

11. All other applicants will be informed about their application not being successful, with an unsigned version of the consensus report of their application.

12. If applications do not reach the minimum score defined in the Full Call Details to cover the assigned number of SMEs for each partner, the call can re-open at a later date following the above procedure.

13. Signed individual and consensus forms plus other relevant documents shall be retained by the respective project partners / beneficiaries for at least 5 years.

b. Evaluation criteria of applications

Each partner will delegate the task of evaluation to two competent evaluators, fluent in the language of the application covered by the EuroCluster Rural Tourism Consortium Partners (EN as transversal language, CZ, ES, FR, GR, IT, RO). An evaluation form will be completed for each eligible applicant. Only proposals ranked equal to or over 60 points in the Proposal Evaluation Form, Section A, and have successfully reached the minimum threshold in Section B will be pre-selected.

V. POST-SELECTION PROCEDURE AND REPORTING

a. Grant Agreement between ECRT and SME

After the receipt of the letter of acceptance, a Grant Agreement (Annex IV) will be prepared by the partner responsible for each country or region and will be sent to the SME. The selected SMEs are expected to provide evidence of financial standing either an official copy of the profit and loss account, balance sheet, or income tax statements demonstrating good financial capability, for the last two years for which accounts have been closed.

Each beneficiary and each ECRT partner (funding entity) will sign a bilateral specific agreement; signing this agreement, the beneficiary agrees and accepts the financial support and commits to implement the activities under its own responsibility, in accordance with the agreement's conditions and obligations. Both parties need to sign the Grant agreement that includes: introduction and definitions, grant offer, purpose of the Grant, grant funding period, amount of the grant, timing of Grant payments, reduction and recovery of Grant, Managing the grant, confidentiality, visibility, amendment, liability, force majeure, payment arrangements, settlement of disputes, conflict of interests, ethics and values, general information obligations, record keeping.

Following the approval of the individual improvement plan, a complementary agreement will be signed by both parties committing both of them to the actions foreseen by the plan and the cost of each action.

b. Transfer of funds

The payment of the financial support installment will be done directly to the SME as a reimbursement for already received services, within 30 days from the validation of the reporting. This reporting shall include all documentation and proof that justifies that planned and financed activities for this partial installment have been fully implemented. Each Consortium Partner can choose, case by case, to provide the FSTP in one payment at the end of the support period and upon receipt of the **Final Report**, or in two payments after completion of Phase 1 and Phase 2. Rules of payment will be defined within the Grant Agreement with each SME.

Each SME has to produce specific deliverables in order to receive and justify the payment in the form of a lump sum.

For the first installment, 40% of the total budget, the SME needs to confirm the completion of Phase 1 actions (interim report):

-participation at initial national / regional meeting;

-self-assessment and preparation of new product outline;

-audit visit, report, improvement plan.

For the second installment, remaining 60% of the budget, the SME needs to confirm the completion of Phase 2 actions (final report):

-implementation of the improvement plan;

-public visibility of the new product that was created though this plan;

-second audit visit, final report;

-final meeting and discussion of results of the support action amongst all assisted SMEs.

A devoted template will be provided to all participating SMEs.

VI. PERSONAL DATA PROTECTION

Any personal data under the Call for Participation and provided in any of the documents or forms on the on-line platform, will be processed by each Consortium partner, in compliance with article 13 of EU Regulation 2016/679. "Information to be provided where personal data are collected from the data subject".

In the forms, filled in by the participants, the Consortium will indicate specific information about Personal Data responsibilities and roles of each national partner.

VII. HOW TO APPLY

a. General rules and deadline for submission of applications

Participation in this call for proposals is completely free of charge for SMEs.

This call is published for 65 days on: European Cluster Collaboration Platform (ECCP), Enterprise Europe Network (EEN), Funding and Tenders Portal (F&T), EuroCluster Rural Tourism website (ECRT), each Consortium Partner's individual website and Euroclusters' and Consortium Partners' social media channels, tagging EISMEA, the Commission's Directorate General for Internal Market, Industry, Entrepreneurship and SMEs (DG GROW) and the European Cluster Collaboration Platform. If call deadlines are changed, they will be published immediately on the call page and all potential applicants will be informed.

The application form is available on the following website: https://clustersubmissionplatform.eu/eurocluster_post/eururaltourism-smes-open-call/ and can be submitted only through this web page.

You can find in annex a copy of the application form (Annex I).

Only one application per applicant can be submitted. Different applications or multiple submissions of the same application by the same applicant will be rejected, and the most recent application will be used.

The Application Form (Annex I) has to be filled ONLINE and will be checked for eligibility.

The following should be attached with the application:

-registration of the business with tourism authorities or chamber of commerce;

-personal data of the legal representative (copy of ID or passport), this person must be coincident with the name that appears in the registration of the business with tourism authorities;

-CV with list of projects and experiences from core staff;

-duly signed declaration form (ANNEX II of the Call for SME).

Proposals will be submitted online in **ENGLISH**. A summary of the call for SME and the translation of the application form will be available in any of the languages covered by the EuroCluster Rural Tourism (EN as transversal language, CZ, ES, FR, GR, IT, RO) inside the Project website as well as in each Consortium Partner's website. All legal documents (registration, ID) and any other relevant supporting materials can be uploaded in the national language of the proposer.

An acknowledgement receipt shall be provided upon reception.

After the date and time of closure of the call, modifications to an already filed application will be rejected. New applications will be accepted for a waiting list, to be used only if the number of SMEs approved for support is below the assigned Budget. Applicants shall be informed by an automatic email reply.

Further information about applications: Questions may be sent by e-mail no later than 7 days before the deadline for the submission of applications to the following e-mail address info@eurocluster ruraltourism.eu, indicating clearly the reference of the Call for participation and the question. The EuroCluster Rural Tourism Project Consortium partners have no obligation to provide clarifications to questions received after this date. Replies will be given no later than 5 days before the deadline for the submission of applications.

b. Where and how to send applications

The application shall be completed exclusively online at this link .

Paper/printed versions submitted by post or other means will not be accepted. Hand-written applications will not be accepted.

ANNEX I

The EuroCluster Rural Tourism Project will support at least 190 rural tourism SMEs by improving their digital, green and soft/social competences. This project addresses specifically the needs of micro and nano SMEs that are still lagging behind in the green and digital transition. The Rural Tourism Cluster project will assist at least 190 SMEs in at least 15 countries with a total budget of 950,000 EUR.

DEADLINE: 10th September 2023 (65 days after publication of the CALL on the Funding and Tender portal: https://ec.europa.eu/info/funding-tenders/opportunities/portal/)

For more information, contact at info@eurocluserruraltourism.eu

* Required

DISCLAIMER

By sending your reply, you agree that the information provided therein will be used for internal processing and will be evaluated by the EU Rural Tourism Cluster in the context of the call for support to rural SMEs. Information provided is undisclosed to third parties.

*I accept it

ELIGIBILITY

1. Are you the owner or manager of a Rural Tourism service*

YES/NO IF NO THANK YOU NOTE IS SENT

2. Type of accommodation please select*

-Hotels and similar accommodation (I5510);

-Holiday and other short-stay accommodation (I5520);

-Camping grounds, recreational vehicle parks and trailer parks (I5530) ;

-Travel agency, tour operator reservation service and related activities (N79)

-other IF N/A THANK YOU NOTE IS SENT

3. Has your company received alternative funding under another project of the European SMP-COSME-2021-CLUSTER call? *

YES/NO * IF YES THANK YOU NOTE IS SENT

A. Company Information

4. Company Name in English *

5. Company Name in the Original Language *

6. Name and Surname of Legal Representative*

7. Business Address *

Street_____ Number_____

Post code _____ Country_____

Village, Town or City _____

if a business is situated in the countryside : Name of the nearest town or city _____

8. Business online presence (website, online booking link, etc.)*

9. Date of Establishment *

10. Name and Surname of Contact person:*

11. Email*

12. Phone Number*

13. Business Registration Number*

14. Number of employees (Full Time Equivalent) in 2022*

15. Annual Turnover in 2022*

16. Briefly describe the personal profile of the owner or responsible manager and his/her motivation to participate in this call. (max 300 words)

B. Self -Assessment

17. Have you already planned any digital, green and soft/social actions to improve management and services of your business, or to provide new products ?

YES /NO

If yes, which ones? If not, why not?

18. In relation to your business and its current digital, green and soft/social competences, please, assess and rate the following dimensions as follows: **5–Outstanding**, **4–Good, 3-Adequate, 2- Basic, 1-None**

- Digital management of your business
- Digital marketing – website, social media, web data analysis, evaluation, and follow-up of digital campaigns, etc
- Mobility and accessibility of visitors, attention to clients with reduced mobility
- Sustainable management (e.g. energy efficiency, waste reduction and management, food waste minimization, noise control, sustainable water management, circular economy applications).
- Social sustainability (e.g. friendly personnel policies, gender equality, age-friendly and family friendly services and products).
- Welcoming visitors from different countries and cultural backgrounds
- Creating positive experiences for your visitors
- Information on and interpretation of the surrounding area to guests (e.g. natural and cultural environment, local communities)

C. Ambition and impact

19. Please briefly describe the new product and/or service improvement that you want to implement through COSME support.

(The following examples are not exhaustive: a new service of gastronomy catering for special needs or preferences, improving accessibility of persons with reduced mobility, creating/publishing code of conduct for visitors, introducing quality certification, networking/clustering with complementary businesses in the area, etc) (max 300 words)

20. Briefly describe how you plan to improve your digital, green and soft/social competences in this context and use them in the new product or service (preferably address all three competences).

(The following examples are not exhaustive: understand the convenience of counting with a set of recommendations, decalogue of measures on sustainability for clients, and/ or network and align with other companies in your destination around the same issue, design and incorporate measures to be a family friendly and/ or age friendly establishment or activity).

21. Describe the proposal's expected impacts, include the expected outcomes, outputs, and potential of the results as future Best Practice. (max 500 words)

(For example, reach new segments of clients thanks to the improvement and/ or diversification of your offer: more sustainable, suitable for different segments around food needs preferences, suitable for different age segments, suitable for people with functional physical diversities and disabilities, suitable for different segments where compatible (family friendly, adult friendly, bike friendly, pet friendly))

22. Please select your preferred Assistance Service Provider for the pre-approved list of experts. (This field is not mandatory)

Business Mentoring Expertise_____

Technology and Digital Expertise_____

Green and Sustainable Management Expertise_____

Soft/Social Skills Expertise_____

Direct upload basic minimum files that accredit eligibility:

- registration of the business with tourism authorities
- personal data of the legal representative (copy of ID or passport) - *this person must be coincident with the name that appears in the registration of the business with tourism authorities*
- Duly signed declaration form (ANNEX II of the Call for SME)
- CV/list of projects and experiences from core staff

Annex II

DECLARATIONS FORM

Information concerning other EU grants for this project Please note that there is a strict prohibition of double funding from the EU budget (except under EU Synergies actions).We confirm that, to our best knowledge, neither the application as a whole nor any parts of it have benefitted from any other EU SMP-COSME-2021-CLUSTER grant. If NO, explain and provide details.	**YES/NO**
We hereby declare that the information provided is true and correct. We also understand that any wilful dishonesty may render for refusal of this application.	
We hereby declare that our company is not bankrupt, subject to insolvency or winding up procedures, its assets are not being administered by a liquidator or by a court, it is not in an arrangement with creditors, its business activities are not suspended, or it is not in any analogous situation arising from a similar procedure provided under national legislation or regulations.	
We confirm that our company is not part of a bigger group of enterprises (such as holdings or similar);.	
We have the adequate legal capacity to participate in the Call for Proposals and especially to submit all required documents.	
Any person legally authorised to represent it has not been involved in fraud, corruption, cooperation with a criminal organisation, money laundering or other illegal activity.	
We declare that our company is not subject to a conflict of interest.	

By signing this declaration, I hereby declare that I have read and accepted terms and conditions set out in this Call for Proposals and its annexes; I have read and accepted the Guidelines for Awarding Financial Support to Third Parties (Tourism SMEs) of the COSME Programme, I have read the Confidentiality and Communication rules applicable to this Call for Proposals;

Date ……. Name……..

ANNEX III

EVALUATION FORM

COMPANY NAME				
EVALUATOR NAME			SIGNATURE	
DATE				
RESULT SCORE	PART A		PART B	

PART A **Proposal Evaluation Criteria**	**Max. score**
A. **Quality of the proposal** General description of the company, achievements, actual needs with respect to the transition to a digital and green economy and to a more eco-sustainable tourism offer.	30
Comments	
B. **Innovation potential of the proposal** The consistency of the problems selected and the selection of innovative solutions to address it.	20
Comments	
C. **Impact of the proposal** How the improvements will drive the green and digital transition of the SME.	20
Comments	
D. **Implementation potential** The consistency of the problem described and the fit with the selected plan for improvement; capacity issues, challenges.	15

Comments	
E. **Management expertise of project** The background expertise and vitality of the SME, the profiles of the core person or team	15
Comments	
F. **All 3 fields of support are covered in the proposal** At least 1 action from each field (digital, green and sustainable, and soft/social) is selected.	15
Comments	
TOTAL AT LEAST 60	

PART B **Business Evaluation Criteria**	**Score (1-5)**
Enterprise viability: Does the company demonstrate a competitive advantage? Is it financially and commercially viable, and does it possess the management and financial resources to absorb project intervention? Score: **(Minimum threshold is 3 out 5)**	
Comments	
Business benefit : Does the intervention reflect the management strategy and vision and will the expected outputs bring further expansion of the business? **(Minimum threshold is 3 out 5)**	
Comments	
Capacity / Skills: Which is the level of current technical skills to implement new projects and ideas proposed by the experts: In case the SME does not have them, what actions/ideas are proposed to offset this lack of skills internally? Level of business	

networking skills, especially the affiliation to local, regional or national professional bodies**(Minimum threshold is 3 out 5)**	
Comments	
Scoring options: **0:** No information is available to address the criterion under examination or cannot be judged due to missing or incomplete information; **1 Poor:** The criterion is addressed in an inadequate manner, or there are serious inherent weaknesses; **2 Fair:** While information regarding the criterion is provided, there are significant weaknesses; **3 Good:** The business addresses the criterion well, although improvements would be necessary; **4 Very good:** The business addresses the criterion very well, although certain improvements are still possible; **5 Excellent:** The business successfully addresses all relevant aspects of the criterion in question. Any shortcomings are minor.	

ANNEX IV

Draft version of the Grant Agreement

to be signed with awarded rural tourism SMEs

The Parties to this Grant Agreement are:

EuroCluster Rural Tourism (ECRT)'s Partner

Organization Name: (*Name of organisation)*

Represented by: *(Name of the legal representative, position within the company)*

As ECRT project's authorised partner *(The Authority)*

And

The Company: *(Name of the awarded applicant company)*

Represented by: (Name of the legal representative, position within the company)

As beneficiary of the Grant (The Grantee)

1. Introduction and Definitions

1.1 This Grant Agreement contains the terms on which grant funding is provided to the Grantee for the Project.

2. Grant Offer

2.1 The Authority offers to pay the Grantee the grant funding set out in this Grant Agreement on condition that the Grantee complies fully with the terms of this Grant Agreement.

2.2 The Grantee acknowledges that the Authority agrees to provide funding only for the amount, period and purposes set out in this Grant Agreement.

3. Purpose of the Grant

3.1 The beneficiary SMEs will receive a direct equity-free funding under the form of Grant for the receiving a service pack valued at *(amount that applies for the SME)* that will enable them to design and develop a new Tourism product for international markets by integrating digital, sustainable and socio-cultural improvements into their business. The Grantee will be guided during project implementation to choose and improve at least 4 out of the 12 action areas, that preferably address at least 1 from each field (digital, green and sustainable, and soft/social).

DIGITAL (Digitalization of the processes in SMEs, Digital marketing and promotion, Marketing intelligence, data analysis, marketing strategy based on data);

GREEN and SUSTAINABLE (Sustainable management practices for SMEs, CO2 management and reduction to address climate change, Sustainable mobility, Gastronomy and food based on local supply chains);

SOFT / SOCIAL (Social-cultural skills (attend visitors from different cultural background), Experience generation for visitors (includes development of corresponding products), Inclusive Tourism / Visitors with special needs, Integration with the local community, Interpretation techniques for cultural, historic, natural etc. resources).

3.2 The Grantee accepts responsibility for the proper use and administration of all funding provided under this Grant Agreement and undertakes to use such funding only for the purpose

of carrying out the Project in accordance with the Project outputs and activities set out in the submitted Application Form.

3.3 The Grant must not be used to support other activities.

3.4 The Grantee agrees and accepts that it will not apply for duplicate funding (included other European SMP-COSME-2021-CLUSTER call), in respect of any part of the Funded Activities or any related administration costs that the Authority is funding in full under this Grant Agreement and that it may be prosecuted for fraud should it dishonestly and intentionally make such an application.

4. Grant Funding Period

4.1 The grant funding period is from [Start Date] to [End Date].

4.2 Project Implementation will begin on the day after the last of the two Parties signs this Grant Agreement.

4.3 For this Agreement to be signed, the Grantee should have selected an appropriate and competent Assistance Service Provider (ASP). All ASPs involved must be accredited by the Authority for the grant to be justified.

5. Amount of the Grant

The Authority will provide the cost of the service pack valued a xxx EUROS in line with the Call for SMEs specifications.

6. Timing of Grant payments

6.1 The Grantee will receive the Financial Support from the Authority in one or two installments. In case of one installment, the Grantee will receive 100% of Financial Support at the end of the support period and upon receipt of the Final Report. In case of two installments, the payment will be divided into the following phases:

Interim payment: 40% upon the submission of the interim report (not later than month 3) and within 15 days after its approval;

The SME needs to confirm the completion of Phase 1 actions (interim report):

-participation at initial national / regional meeting;

-self-assessment and preparation of new product outline;

-audit visit, report, improvement plan.

Final payment: 60% (upon the successful completion of the service pack and the submission of the final report -month 6- and within 30 days after its approval).

The SME needs to confirm the completion of Phase 2 actions (final report):

-implementation of the improvement plan;

-public visibility of the new product that was created though this plan;

-second audit visit, final report;

-final meeting and discussion of results of the support action amongst all assisted SMEs.

6.2 The Authority will not authorise any payment unless the Grantee has:

(a) signed and returned a copy of this Grant Agreement to the Authority;

(b) agreed to comply with the terms of this Grant Agreement, including the reporting requirements.

6.3 The Authority reserves the right to withhold all or any payments of the grant funding if it has reasonably requested information and/or documentation from the Grantee and this has not been provided to the Authority within the timescales reasonably required.

7. Reduction and Recovery of Grant

7.1 Without prejudice to the Authority's other rights and remedies, the Authority may withhold or suspend payment of any grant funding due to the Grantee in case of non compliance with the present Agreement .

7.2 If the Grantee fails to comply with any of the terms of this Agreement, the Authority may require that all or part of the grant funding be repaid.

7.3 If the Authority detects false reporting, fraud, any other situation that invalidates the justification of grant payments received by the SME or determines to terminate the project for reasons according to <I.8.5> below, it is entitled to immediately stop any further possible pending payments and require from the Grantee that unjustified amounts are repaid.

8. Managing the Grant

Reporting

8.1 The Grantee will receive and fill up two templates for the technical reports during the Funding Period starting from *Start Date*:

ECRT_technical - Interim Report at month 3 containing all data described in part 6; and,

ECRT_technical - Final Report at month 6 containing all data as described in part 6;.

The Authority will only make the final grant payment when the Final Report has been submitted to the Authority, in the format requested and with all the information that is required.

Monitoring and Evaluation

8.2 The Authority will monitor the progress of the Project throughout the Funding Period and reserves the right to carry out Evaluation Visits, after giving reasonable notice.

8.3 The method and timing of the Evaluation Visit, and the Evaluation of the Project, will be at the Authority's discretion.

8.4 The Grantee will make staff available to meet with, answer questions and provide management information to the Authority or the evaluator appointed by the Authority.

8.5 The Authority and the Grantee will undertake a joint review of the Project if the Authority considers it necessary to refocus the Project outputs. If, at any stage, the Project outputs are not achieving the agreed objectives, impact and delivery, the Authority may terminate the Project.

8.6 If the Authority requests information from the Grantee about the use of grant funding provided under this Grant Agreement for procurement, the Grantee will provide sufficient information to show that its procurement processes are transparent, fair, allow for competition and were cost-effective, according to the national procurement law and subcontracting procedures related to public funding.

9. Confidentiality

Each Party will treat the other's information as confidential, keep it safe and not disclose it to a third person without the original owner's prior written consent unless disclosure is expressly permitted by this Grant Agreement.

9.1 Sensitive information

The parties must keep confidential any data, documents or other material (in any form) that is identified as sensitive in writing ('sensitive information') — during the implementation of the action.

Unless otherwise agreed between the parties, they may use sensitive information only to implement the Agreement.

The SME beneficiaries may disclose sensitive information to their personnel or other participants involved in the action only if they:

(a) need to know it in order to implement the Agreement and

(b) are bound by an obligation of confidentiality.

It may disclose sensitive information to third parties, if:

(a) this is necessary to implement the Agreement or safeguard the EU financial interests and (b) the recipients of the information are bound by an obligation of confidentiality. The confidentiality obligations no longer apply if:

(a) the disclosing party agrees to release the other party

(b) the information becomes publicly available, without breaching any confidentiality obligation (c) the disclosure of the sensitive information is required by EU, international or national law.

9.2 Classified information

The parties must handle classified information in accordance with the applicable EU, international or national law on classified information (in particular, Decision 2015/44417 and its implementing rules).

Deliverables which contain classified information must be submitted according to special procedures agreed with the granting authority.

Action tasks involving classified information may be subcontracted only after explicit approval (in writing) from the consortium.

Classified information may not be disclosed to any third party (including participants involved in the action implementation) without prior explicit written approval from the consortium.

9.3 Consequences of non-compliance

If a beneficiary breaches any of its obligations under this Article, the grant may be reduced.

10. Visibility – European Flag and Funding Statement

10.1 The Grantee shall acknowledge the grant funding provided by the Authority for the Project in materials produced during the Funding Period and at related public events unless the Authority directs otherwise. Where the Authority directs that its funding must not be acknowledged, the Grantee will comply with this instruction.

10.2 The Grantee must consult the Authority regarding the content of any promotion or publicity regarding the Project [particularly if it proposes to use any of the Authority's branding or logos] and is obliged to obtain the Authority's written consent before using any such content. On the other hand, the Grantee must ensure the promotion and visibility of the European flag as well as the ECRT logo.

10.3 The emblem provided by Consortium Partner to the Grantee will need to remain distinct and separate and cannot be modified by adding other visual marks, brands or text.

10.4 The Grantee shall include the following text in all documents as well as dissemination activities: "This project has indirectly received funding from the European Innovation Council and SMEs Executive Agency (EISMEA), entrusted by the European Commission COSME Programme, via an Open Call issued and executed under project SMP-COSME-2021-CLUSTER ECRT PROJECT". In fact, the Grantee must ensure that all project publications and similar include a proper acknowledgment referring to ECRT as co-funded by the COSME Programme of the European Union, and to the respective Funding Organization.

10.5 Consequences of non-compliance: if the Grantee breaches any of its obligations under this Article, the grant may be canceled.

11. Amendment of this Grant Agreement

11.1 This Grant Agreement may be amended only by written agreement of the Parties and such amendments must be recorded in writing, signed by both Parties and attached to the signed original of this Grant Agreement.

12. Liability

12.1 The Authority will be not responsible for any false declaration made or undersigned by the Grantee; the Grantee will be the only responsible legally and financially shall it be found guilty of false declarations and statements regarding the company, its nature, business and all related information.

12.2 Except in case of force majeure, the Grantee must refund the ECRT consortium for any damage it sustains as a result of the implementation of the action or because the action was not implemented in full compliance with the Agreement. This compensation will be done with a partial or total refund of the lump sum awarded that was contracted.

13. Force Majeure

13.1 'Force majeure' means any situation or event that:

- prevents either party from fulfilling their obligations under the Agreement;
- was an unforeseeable, exceptional situation and beyond the parties' control;
- was not due to error or negligence on their part (or on the part of third parties involved in the action), and;
- proves to be inevitable in spite of exercising all due diligence.

14. Payment Arrangements

14.1. Bank account for payments: The payments to the Grantee will be made to the following bank account, an official bank certificate containing below data has to be provided:

- Name of bank: *[insert the name Bank account reference (IBAN and BIC codes)]*

- Full name of the account holder: *[insert the full name]* The name of the account holder must be identical to the one of the beneficiary of this grant agreement.

- IBAN code: *[insert the IBAN code]*

14.2 Costs of payment transfers

- the beneficiary bears the cost of transfers charged by its bank;

- the party causing a repetition of a transfer bears all costs of the repeated transfer.

15. Settlement of Disputes

15.1 The parties shall endeavor to settle their disputes amicably. If, and to the extent that, any such dispute, controversy, or claim has not been settled amicably, the court of the nationality of the Authority shall have exclusive jurisdiction. Nothing in this Consortium Agreement shall limit the Parties' right to seek injunctive relief in any applicable competent court.

16. Conflict of interests

16.1 Conflict of interests

The beneficiary SMEs must take all measures to prevent any situation where the impartial and objective implementation of the Agreement could be compromised for reasons involving family, emotional life, political or national affinity, economic interest or any other direct or indirect interest ('conflict of interests').

They must formally notify the Consortium without delay of any situation constituting or

likely to lead to a conflict of interests and immediately take all the necessary steps to rectify this situation.

16.2 Consequences of non-compliance

If a beneficiary SME breaches any of its obligations under this Article, the grant may be reduced and the grant or the beneficiary may be terminated.

17. Ethics and Values

17.1 Ethics

The action must be carried out in line with the highest ethical standards and the applicable EU, international and national law on ethical principles.

17.2 Values

The beneficiaries must commit to and ensure the respect of basic EU values (such as respect for human dignity, freedom, democracy, equality, the rule of law and human rights, including the rights of minorities).

17.3 Consequences of non-compliance

If a beneficiary breaches any of its obligations under this Article, the grant may be reduced

18. General information obligations

18.1 Information requests

The beneficiaries must provide — during the action or afterwards — any information requested in order to verify the proper implementation of the action and compliance with the other obligations under the Agreement.

The information provided must be accurate, precise, and complete and in the format requested, including electronic format.

18.2 Participant Register data updates

The beneficiaries must keep — at all times, during the action or afterwards — their information provided to the Consortium up to date, in particular, their name, address, legal representatives, legal form and organisation type.

18.3 Information about events and circumstances which impact the action

The beneficiaries must immediately inform the granting authority (the Consortium) of the following:

(a) events which are likely to affect or delay the implementation of the action or affect the EU's financial interests, in particular:

(i) changes in their legal, financial, technical, organisational or ownership situation (including changes linked to one of the exclusion grounds listed in the declaration of honour signed before grant signature)

(b) circumstances affecting:

(i) the decision to award the grant or

(ii) compliance with requirements under the Agreement.

18.4 Consequences of non-compliance

If a beneficiary breaches any of its obligations under this Article, the grant may be reduced

19. Record keeping

19.1 Keeping records and supporting documents

The beneficiaries must keep adequate records and other supporting documents to prove the proper implementation of the action as described in art. I.6 and in line with the accepted standards in the respective field (if any). The beneficiaries must keep any adequate records and supporting documents to prove that their cost accounting practices have been applied in a consistent manner, based on objective criteria, regardless of the source of funding, and that they comply with the eligibility conditions set out in the Call for SMEs.

The records and supporting documents must be made available upon request or in the context of checks, reviews, audits or investigations .

If there are on-going checks, reviews, audits, investigations, litigation or other pursuits of claims under the Agreement the beneficiaries must keep these records and other supporting documentation until the end of these procedures.

The beneficiaries must keep the original documents. Digital and digitalised documents are considered originals if they are authorised by the applicable national law. The granting authority may accept non-original documents if they offer a comparable level of assurance.

For the Authority:

Full Name:

Signature:

Company name:

Date:

For the Grantee:

Full Name:

Signature:

Company Name:

Date: