



**EuroCluster  
Rural  
Tourism**



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## **Announcement of a call for expression of interest by external Assistance Service Providers(ASP)**

**Action acronym:** EU Rural Tourism

**Action grant agreement number:** 101074557

**Action full name:** EuroCluster Rural Tourism

**Open call Publication Date:** 21 March 2023

**Open call Deadline Date:** 1 month after publication

**This Call for expression of interest will be available in English.**

This Call for Expression of Interest is launched to identify companies and entities that are interested in providing technical advice and support to rural tourism SMEs to bridge their digital, green and social skills gap. This Call for Expression of Interest is open to any legal entities based in an EU member state or third country participating in the COSME programme.

**Web address for further information:** <https://euroclusterruraltourism.eu/>

**Email address for further information:** [info@euroclusterruraltourism.eu](mailto:info@euroclusterruraltourism.eu)



## I. EuroCluster Rural Tourism Scope and Activities

The EuroCluster Rural Tourism Project (ECRT) will support at least 190 rural tourism SMEs by improving selected digital, green and soft/social competences. 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 internationalisation.

The selected rural tourism SMEs are entitled to receive a full service pack valued indicatively at an average of EUROS 5000. The value of the pack will be calculated precisely after an initial audit of each SME's skill needs to be approved by the project partner. The pack will enable SMEs to design and develop new tourism products for international markets by integrating digital, green management and socio-cultural improvements. The financial assistance will be used to cover the costs for external expert consultants, in-country travel by SME staff, training, and a small allowance for minor improvements.

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



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## II. Call for External Assistance Service Providers (ASP)

The ECRT in order to provide technical assistance to rural SMEs seeks to receive offers from qualified consultants (individual experts, organisations/ companies, informal consortia) based in any EU member state or third country participating in the COSME programme. The specialist support in each field will be provided by the appropriate expert, and one of the experts is also expected to act as a coordinator and mentor to the SME. Proposing entities will determine the number and the specific expertise along with their inputs of the specialists and apply for at least one of the four, independent Field of External Support. Proposing entities will identify the fields they can work on (see below) and their specific expertise in each of them, alongside providing proof of the competence of the experts who will provide the services to the SMEs, and are invited to apply in at least one of the following four independent Fields of External Support.

- Field 1 Mentorship and Coordination
- Field 2 Digital Action Support
- Field 3 Sustainable and Green Management Support
- Field 4 Soft and Social Action Support

## III. Who can an Assistance Service Provider be?

The ASPs that may take an interest in the project should comply with the following rules:

- Have not been declared bankrupt or has initiated bankruptcy procedures;
- Have no convictions for fraudulent behavior, other financial irregularities, unethical or illegal business practices;
- Are legally residing and working in any EU member state or [third country](#) participating in the COSME programme.

The ASPs should possess at least one but preferably more or even all of the following relevant skills:



- 1. Business Mentoring Expertise:** Sufficient experience (at least 3 years) to guide SMEs through the needs audit process, preparation of improvement plan and reporting. The mentor should possess adaptability, flexibility, and resilience to overcome the challenges that might occur during the project.
- 2. Technology and digital Expertise:** Sufficient experience (at least 3 years) and knowledge (relevant qualifications) in the field of digital technology, marketing and promotion of tourism SMEs, and a thorough understanding of micro and nano - SME digital needs.
- 3. Green and Sustainable Management Expertise:** Sufficient experience (at least 3 years) and knowledge (relevant qualifications) in the field of green and sustainable management of tourism SMEs, and a thorough understanding of micro and nano - SME sustainability needs.
- 4. Soft/Social Skills Expertise:** Sufficient experience (at least 3 years) and knowledge (relevant qualifications) in the field of socio-cultural skills needed by tourism SMEs and a thorough understanding of related micro and nano - SME needs.

**Besides fields of expertise, Language skills are mandatory for all ASPs:** Local language fluency (one or more languages) and English language proficiency are both required.

## IV. What does an Assistance Service Provider do?

The rural tourism SMEs that are selected for Financial Support to Third Parties (FSTP) are entitled to receive a full service pack to enable them to design and develop a new Tourism product for international markets by integrating digital, sustainable and socio-cultural improvements to their business.

### **Field 1 Mentorship and Business Support**

The Business Mentor will be responsible for the coordination of the different services provided to the SME. Duties include an on-site audit visit to the SME, on-site advisory assistance to define needs for improvement, and elaborate further on the self-evaluation performed by the SME and prepare an action plan for the necessary improvements. On-line meetings and liaising with other experts and the SME will take place as necessary. A second on-site visit is foreseen, to assess results and provide guidance and advice for future actions and preparation of the final report.

### **Field 2 Digital Action Support**

Advisory support related to specific services required in the context of the improvement plan. Liaising with the Business Mentor and SME through online meetings, preparing the digital actions, and offering direct advice during the full assistance period.



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### **Field 3 Sustainable and Green Management Support**

Advisory support related to specific services required in the context of the improvement plan. Liaising with the Business Mentor and SME through online meetings, preparing the sustainable and green management actions, and offering direct advice on their implementation during the full assistance period.

### **Field 4 Soft and Social Action Support**

Advisory support related to specific services required in the context of the improvement plan. Liaising with the Business Mentor and SME through online meetings, preparing the soft and social actions, and offering direct advice on their implementation during the full assistance period.

It is pre-estimated that the total expert commitment within the full package will be in the region of 10-15 consultant working days. Precise calculation of the work commitment and cost for each field of expertise will be defined after the initial audit of SME needs. In case that the SME selects individual experts to provide assistance, the exact brief for each expert will be consolidated in cooperation with the mentor-coordinator and the SME following the needs audit.

## **V. How to become an Assistance Service Provider(ASP)**

Each ASP (individual expert, legal entity or informal consortium of experts) should complete the application form (ANNEX I) and attach the followings:

- A detailed resume for each applicant highlighting their experience in one or more of the fields of expertise defined above and their expertise in assisting micro and nano SMEs.
- A completed Declaration of Honour (ANNEX II)

The deadline for the submission of applications is 21st April 2023, by 23:59 CET.

Personal data will be processed in compliance with the privacy statement.

If you experience any problems with your application, please email the organisers at:

[info@euroclusterruraltourism.eu](mailto:info@euroclusterruraltourism.eu)

Note: If ASP applicants in a country do not cover amongst them all 4 fields of expertise named above, this country will be excluded from the SME call.



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## VI. Notification and Timeline

The call for expression of interest will remain open until the 21st of April 2023, and the processing of applications will start after the closing date and will last 3 weeks. All expressions of interest received will get an acknowledgment of receipt. The national Consortium Partners Venetian Cluster, Czech National Cluster Association, Harghita Community Development Association and Asociación Cluster De Turismo Sostenible de Aragon will analyse and check applications from Italy, Czech Republic, Romania and Spain respectively and the two transnational partners, Federation Europeenne de Tourisme Rural (Ruraltour) and EURACADEMY Association will process applications from all other countries where interest is expressed.

The eligibility criteria, and appropriateness of expertise will be checked for all complete applications. An interview may be arranged by the responsible partner to further assess competence, if necessary. After the conclusion of the selection process, an official appointment letter and further information will be emailed to the selected candidates. All applicants will be notified via email. A list of all eligible ASPs per country will be created. Each ASP should list the details of each field of expertise to be covered, and be prepared to offer each service separately if so decided by the SME to be assisted.

All selected ASPs should participate in the 3-day training (face to face or online) in May 2023. A business support methodology will be provided to all selected ASPs who will be expected to start work in September 2023. The assignment will last for 9 months. A contract will be signed by the rural tourism SME and the chosen experts detailing the content of services to be provided, the deliverables and the time plan of the action. A subsequent complement to the contract will detail the costs of each expert assistance in the three fields of expertise and the mentoring/coordination following the audit visit to the SME by the mentor.

Finally, each business mentor will prepare a full report of the actions undertaken and their results, submitted to the SME and the partner responsible. The SME will receive payments from the responsible ECRT partner, in partial installments to be agreed, and the SME will be responsible to pay the experts according to the specific payment schedule, defined in the contract.

### Data protection clause

The information provided by applicants who would respond to this Call will be treated as strictly confidential, in accordance with the [EU General Data Protection Regulation \(GDPR\)](#), which governs how personal data of individuals in the EU may be processed and transferred, as consolidated on May 25, 2018. All applicants possess the right to cancel and limit the access to their personal data, at any point of the ASP selection procedure, by



contacting the project coordinator directly at [info@euroclusterruraltourism.eu](mailto:info@euroclusterruraltourism.eu) at any time and without providing any justification. In this case, their candidacy will be canceled and their data will be permanently deleted.

## ANNEX I

[EuroCluster Rural Tourism Application Form for ASP](#)

## ANNEX II

### DECLARATIONS FORM

STATEMENT	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/experts 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 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/ experts are not subject to a conflict of interest. We understand that participation in the selection phase is strictly forbidden to any expert which, at the time of the present Call publication, has any of the Consortium partners being part of its organisational structure, and/or as a shareholder.	

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 Technical Assistance;

Date .....Name.....