



# **Women Entrepreneurs in Renewable, Innovative, and Sustainable Enterprises**

D2.1: Open calls documentation - Open call 1

28 February 2025



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## Terms and definitions

This section describes the relevant terms that are used in the open call documentation. Unless otherwise stated, the definition of a term is the one stated in this section.

*Table 1. Terms and definitions*

Term	Definition
<b>WE-RISE Consortium</b>	Group of legal entities that are cumulatively responsible for implementing the WE-RISE project as defined in the Grant Agreement number No 101193381.
<b>Applicant</b>	Company that intends to submit or has submitted a proposal to the support program implemented by the WE-RISE Consortium.
<b>Beneficiary</b>	Company that has submitted a proposal to the support program implemented by the WE-RISE Consortium that has been accepted for funding and has signed or is in the process of signing the Sub-grant Agreement.
<b>Women-led startup</b>	A company, compliant with the SME definition provided by the EU, where one of the co-founders, the position of either the Chief Executive Officer (CEO), Chief Technology Officer (CTO) or Chief Scientific Officer (CSO) is held by a woman at the time of application for the support program implemented by the WE-RISE Consortium. The word 'woman' equates to a cis woman, or a transgender woman who is legally defined as a woman. The means of verification will be the Identity Card or Passport issued by the country of their nationality.
<b>Co-founder</b>	A co-founder is an individual who jointly establishes a business or organization with one or more partners. In a legal context, co-founders share the responsibility of forming the entity, including filing necessary legal documents, securing initial funding, and making strategic decisions. They typically share ownership and have specific roles and responsibilities as outlined in legal agreements, such as partnership agreements or corporate bylaws. The terms of their collaboration, including profit-sharing, decision-making authority, and exit strategies, are often formalized in these legal documents to protect the interests of all parties involved.
<b>Moderate/Emerging Innovator Countries</b>	Classification of EU and neighbourhood countries according to their innovation performance as contained in the annual European Innovation Scoreboard (more information can be found <a href="#">here</a> ).
<b>Outermost regions</b>	The outermost regions are islands, archipelagos and one land territory (French Guiana). They are located in the western Atlantic Ocean, the Caribbean basin, the Amazonian forest and the Indian Ocean (more details <a href="#">here</a> ).
<b>Strategic Action Plan (SAP)</b>	Strategic Action Plan (SAP) it's a document that clearly communicates short-medium and long term business plans of the participating startup. The SAP will be collaboratively developed within the Phase 1 of the Support Program. Besides, the SAP will represent the application form for the Phase 2 of the Support Program and, to this end, it will be used to select the 10 startups entering this Phase.
<b>WE-RISE Greenhouse</b>	The WE-RISE Greenhouse represents the community of stakeholders supporting the project. It is a collaborative ecosystem supporting female-led GreenTech, AgriTech, and ClimateTech startups.
<b>Deep Tech</b>	Deep tech innovation aims to provide concrete solutions to our societal problems by finding its source in a deep interaction with the most recent scientific and technological advances and by seeking to produce a profound impact in the targeted application areas. Deep tech is technology that is based on cutting-edge scientific advances and discoveries and is characterised by the need to stay at the technological forefront by constant interaction with new ideas and results

	from the lab. Deep tech is distinct from 'high tech' which tends to refer only to R&D intensity.
<b>Deep Tech Venture</b>	Deep tech ventures have the following characteristics: positioning at the knowledge frontier with long and uncertain Research & Innovation cycles; relates to tangible products and industrialisation processes; linked to the ecosystem and especially higher education institutions, problem orientated, or mission driven, focused on the creation of an option space and a dynamic de-risking cycle.
<b>Selection Committee</b>	The <b>Selection Committee</b> will evaluate applications that have successfully passed the eligibility check. It will comprise five experts, each appointed by a different consortium partner. The committee members will bring diverse expertise relevant to the project's scope, including deep tech innovation, startup acceleration, and gender inclusivity.
<b>Eligibility Check Team</b>	The <b>Eligibility Check Team</b> will be responsible for verifying that submitted applications meet the essential eligibility criteria as outlined in the WE-RISE Open Call Document. This team will consist of experts appointed by the consortium partners who are not part of the Selection Committee to ensure impartiality and avoid conflicts of interest.
<b>GreenTech</b>	GreenTech refers to innovative technologies and business models that promote environmental sustainability, improve resource efficiency, and reduce negative ecological impacts. This sector covers, for instance, renewable energy, energy efficiency, circular economy, sustainable materials, water conservation, and waste management.
<b>AgriTech</b>	AgriTech refers to the application of advanced technologies and digital innovations to enhance agricultural practices, improve productivity, sustainability, and efficiency, and reduce the environmental impact, including the impact on biodiversity. This includes, for instance, precision farming, smart irrigation, alternative proteins, vertical farming, and bio-based solutions.
<b>ClimateTech</b>	ClimateTech encompasses technologies, solutions, and innovations aimed at mitigating climate change, reducing carbon emissions, and enhancing climate resilience. This includes, for instance, carbon capture, climate-smart infrastructure, climate finance, and nature-based solutions that align with the EU Green Deal objectives.
<b>Sustainability</b>	Sustainability refers to the ability to meet the needs of the present without compromising the ability of future generations to meet their own needs. It encompasses a balance between economic growth, environmental protection, and social well-being. The concept of sustainability is closely aligned with the United Nations' Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), which are a collection of 17 global goals designed to achieve a better and more sustainable future for all. These goals address global challenges such as poverty, inequality, climate change, environmental degradation, peace, and justice, and aim to ensure that progress in one area does not come at the expense of another. The SDGs provide a comprehensive framework for action to promote sustainability across all sectors and regions.

## 1. About the project

WE-RISE main goal is to empower underrepresented female entrepreneurs in GreenTech, AgriTech, and ClimateTech, through a strategic blend of funding and tailored support. The project



aims to amplify the market presence of high potential Green-women-led startups, particularly from emerging European countries. The project's pillars include amplifying market presence through targeted funding and investor matchmaking, integrating startups into the ecosystem through cross-border acceleration activities, and providing a holistic growth program. By prioritising inclusivity, diversity, and systemic change, WE-RISE seeks to enhance the impact and visibility of Green-Women-led startups, contributing to the broader advancement of the European innovation ecosystem towards sustainability.

## 2. About this call

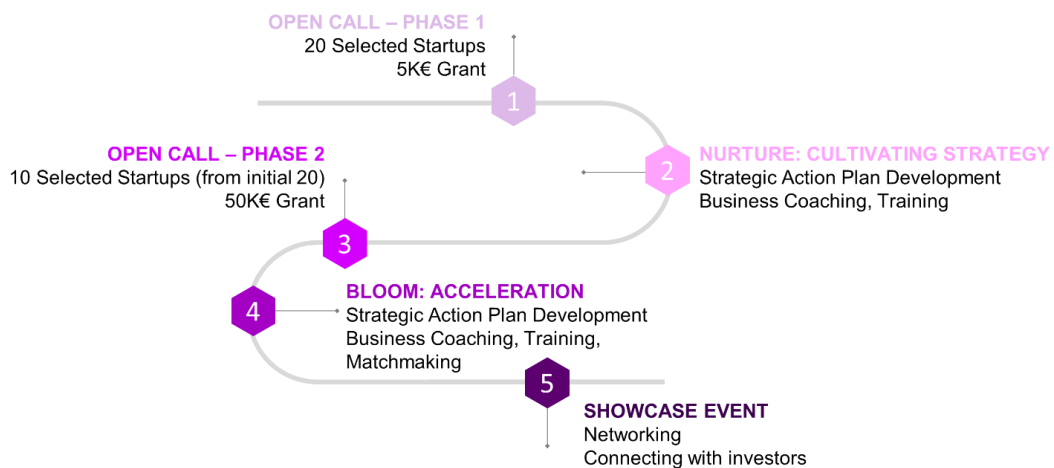
The present Open Call aims to attract and select 20 women-led tech startups in GreenTech, AgriTech, and ClimateTech sectors, particularly from emerging European countries, with ambition to enhance their impact and market presence.

Given WE-RISE's commitment to supporting green-women-led startups and those established in emerging/moderate innovator countries, the Open Call aims to select:

- 100% of the selected startups must be women-led.
- At least 60% of the selected startups must be established in emerging/moderate innovator countries.

The total budget to be allocated for the Open Call is 600.000 €.

Selection of the startups will give them the opportunity to participate in the WE-RISE Support Program which is made of 2 phases.



Picture 1. WE-RISE program scheme.

## 2.1. Phase 1 – Nurture: Cultivating Strategy & Empowerment

In this first phase of the project, **20 selected startups** will embark on a **3-month intensive support program** designed to **strengthen their business strategy and accelerate growth**. Each startup will receive a **€5,000 grant** to cover travel expenses for participating in exhibitions, fairs, and investor meetings, ensuring exposure to key industry stakeholders.

At the core of this phase is the development of a **Strategic Action Plan (SAP)** - a roadmap tailored to each startup's growth objectives. To support this, participants will benefit from those key program elements:

- ✓ **Specialized training workshops** covering essential topics such as investment readiness, market expansion, product development, and regulatory frameworks. These hands-on interactive sessions will equip startups with the knowledge and skills needed to scale.
- ✓ **A curated Learning Nuggets library**, offering bite-sized, on-demand insights that startups can access anytime to address specific challenges as they arise.
- ✓ **Dedicated business coaching**, with each startup assigned a personal coach from our expert consortium partners. This ensures **personalized guidance** to refine their strategy and align their SAP with long-term business goals.
- ✓ **Collaborative peer learning**, through structured **thematic roundtables and peer review sessions** that foster knowledge exchange, feedback loops, and networking with fellow founders. This collaborative space allows startups to review each other's strategies, provide feedback, exchange insights, share insights and refine their approaches, ensuring relevance to real startup challenges.

This phase is **designed to equip startups with the essential tools, insights, and networks** to navigate their growth journey with confidence and strategic clarity.

## 2.2. Phase 2 – Bloom: from Strategy to Acceleration

In this phase of the project, **10 of the most promising startups from 20 selected** in Phase 1, will be selected to advance into the acceleration stage, where they will receive **tailored support** to implement their **Strategic Action Plans (SAPs)**. Each of these startups will be awarded a **€50,000 grant** to fuel their growth, covering essential activities such as product development, market expansion, and investor engagement.

Over the **4-month acceleration period**, startups will move from **planning to execution**, with a **strong focus on investor matchmaking, stakeholder engagement, and strategic business development**.

To support this, participants will benefit from:





- ✓ **Targeted Business Coaching** – Startups will receive **continuous 1:1 support**, ensuring they stay on track with their SAP implementation and adapt their strategies as needed.
- ✓ **Advanced Workshops with Industry Experts** – Exclusive **fireside chats and interactive Q&A sessions** will be hosted with top industry leaders, tailored to address specific challenges and opportunities identified by the startups.
- ✓ **Investor Matchmaking Service** – Startups will be fully prepared for investment with refinement of **investment teasers** and **targeted introductions** to suitable investors from an exclusive network.

A **key priority** in this phase is **creating investor-friendly pitch environments** for Green-Women-led startups. WE-RISE will **focus on building meaningful investor relationships** rather than just **rapid-fire pitching**, fostering an inclusive and supportive fundraising environment.



Furthermore, startups will receive tailored support for Networking & Market Exposure:

- **Matchmaking Sessions** – Startups will engage with **investors, corporates, and public procurers** through structured matchmaking events. These sessions will leverage the **WE-RISE Greenhouse (Ecosystem Community)**, creating new opportunities for collaboration and growth.
- **Showcase & Investor Demo Day** – The **finale of the program**, where startups will pitch their progress and innovations to a high-profile audience, including **investors, corporate partners, and ecosystem players**. This event will serve as a **launchpad for partnerships, funding opportunities, and cross-border collaborations**.


Through this **dynamic acceleration phase**, startups will be **equipped with the tools, connections, and capital** needed to scale successfully within the **European GreenTech, AgriTech and ClimateTech** sectors.

### 3. Benefit of the startups


Joining **WE-RISE** is not solely about securing funding, it is about **unlocking opportunities that drive sustainable growth**. This program is designed to give **Green-Women-led startups**, particularly from emerging European countries, the **resources, connections, and expertise** they need to scale successfully in **GreenTech, AgriTech, and ClimateTech**. Here is what startups stand to gain:


-  **Financial Support to Grow** – Receive up to **€55,000 in grants**, covering key activities like investor meetings, market expansion, and product development.
-  **Tailored Coaching & Mentorship** – Get individualised **guidance** from industry experts and investors who will help refine your strategy, strengthen startups business model, and prepare for the next growth stage.



 **Investor & Corporate Matchmaking** – Gain **direct access** to a curated network of **investors, corporates, and public sector stakeholders**, ensuring meaningful connections and funding opportunities.

 **Specialized Training & Workshops** – Attend hands-on **masterclasses** on **fundraising, market positioning, revenue models, and regulatory compliance**, all tailored to the needs of GreenTech, AgriTech and ClimateTech startups.

 **Visibility & Market Access** – Showcase startups at **high-impact networking and investor demo days**, where there will be opportunity to pitch to top-tier investors, corporate partners, and decision-makers in the ecosystem.

 **A Supportive Community** – Become part of the **WE-RISE Greenhouse**, a thriving ecosystem of like-minded founders, investors, and industry leaders, fostering collaboration and long-term success.

## 4. Origin of the funds

Selected applicants will sign a dedicated **Sub-grant Agreement** with the WE-RISE Consortium. The funds attached to the **Sub-grant Agreement**, that the startups will sign when accepted, comes directly from the funds of the European project WE-RISE and therefore remain property of the EU until the payment of the balance, whose management rights have been transferred to the project partners in WE-RISE via European Commission Grant Agreement No 101193381.

## 5. Who can participate

WE-RISE main target audience **are deep tech green-women-led startups** operating within the cleantech sectors (GreenTech, AgriTech & ClimateTech), with a particular focus on moderate/emerging innovator countries according to the EU Innovation Scoreboard<sup>1</sup>. Startups that have either already achieved market-product fit or have raised at least a round of financing (e.g. seed) will be prioritised.

## 6. Eligibility criteria

The following eligibility criteria will apply:

- 1. Women-led Startup:** A company, compliant with the SME definition provided by the EU, where one of the co-founders, the position of either the Chief Executive Officer (CEO), Chief Technology Officer (CTO) or Chief Scientific Officer (CSO) is held by a woman at the time of application for the support program implemented by the WE-RISE Consortium.

<sup>1</sup> <https://projects.research-and-innovation.ec.europa.eu/en/statistics/performance-indicators/european-innovation-scoreboard/eis-2024#/eis>



2. **Sector:** Greentech, AgriTech, and ClimateTech.
3. **Deep-tech:** The startup must show evidence of development of advanced and disruptive technologies, according to European definitions for deep-tech for each of the subsectors of Greentech, AgriTech, and ClimateTech.
4. **Founding year:** The company should have been founded before 1<sup>st</sup> January 2024.
5. **Origin of start-up or founder:** The company must be legally established in EU member states or Associated Countries to Horizon Europe.

Preference will be given to moderate and emerging innovator countries:

- **Moderate/emerging innovator countries including widening countries:** Bulgaria, Croatia, Cyprus, Czechia, Estonia, Greece, Hungary, Latvia, Lithuania, Malta, Poland, Portugal, Romania, Slovakia, Slovenia, Spain and Italy.
- **Strong innovators:** Austria, Belgium, Denmark, Finland, France, Germany, Iceland, Ireland, Luxembourg, Netherlands, Norway, Sweden, United Kingdom.
- **Associated countries:** Albania, Armenia, Bosnia and Herzegovina, Faroe Islands, North Macedonia, Georgia, Moldova, Montenegro, Serbia, Tunisia, Türkiye, Ukraine.

## 6. Transversal Criteria:

In addition, the startup must meet at least one of the following criteria:

**6.a) Maturity:** Product-market-fit (TRL between 6 and 8; the product/service has been already validated by initial clients in demonstrated pilots).

**6.b) Funding stage:** The company has raised at least 300.000€ in public or private funding.

Applicants shall meet eligibility requirements for the entire program duration. The consortium may request additional documents to prove eligibility.

# 7. Application process overview

As the first step for all related startups fulfilled eligibility criteria is to create their profile on EuroQuity platform and join the Community dedicated to the project (i.e. WE-RISE Greenhouse).

After entering the Community, the applicant will be allowed to fill in the application form for the WE-RISE Open Call – Phase 1.

The application process for the WE-RISE Open Call – Phase 1 will be opened for online submission starting from **March 12<sup>th</sup>, 2025 until May 14<sup>th</sup>, 2025 until 23:59 CET**.

Among the applicants, 20 startups will be selected as a result of the application process, and will be allowed to enter the Phase 1 of the WE-RISE Support Program after the signature of the Su-grant Agreement between the selected applicant and the WE-RISE Coordinator.

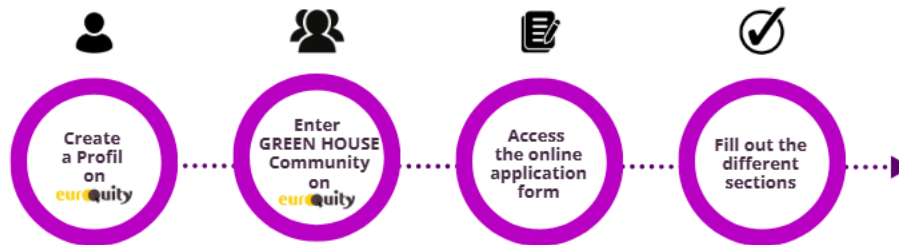
As detailed in Section 2. *About this call*, after the 3-month intensive support program all the 20 startups will develop their SAP, which will also represent the application form for the Phase 2 of the WE-RISE Support Program.



The possibility to apply for the Phase 2 of the WE-RISE Support Program is reserved only to the startups selected for the Phase 1 that have completed the 3-month intensive support program and developed their SAP.

The official opening of the application period for the Phase 2 of the WE-RISE Support Program will be communicated in due time to the selected startups.

## 7.1. Application Form WE-RISE – Phase 1



Picture 2. WE-RISE Phase 1 application overview.

The application process will take place fully online. Applicants will be asked:

- 1) to create a profile on the EuroQuity platform;
- 2) to access the GREENHOUSE Community on the EuroQuity platform used by WE-RISE project to manage the application process;
- 3) once the profile has been created, applicants may access the online form to apply to the Phase 1 of the WE-RISE Support Program and start filling out the different sections by providing the following information, including a short presentation about their company (i.e. pitch deck):

Table 2. Application Form structure – Phase 1

Component	Description / Content
<b>Information about the organization</b>	General information on the organization such as name and contact details, address, PIC number (optional), and other relevant administrative information.
<b>Summary of the project</b>	A full public summary of the project that can be published if the project is funded.
<b>Goals</b>	Clear, measurable goals that align with the startup’s long-term vision.
<b>Current stage of the startup</b>	The position of the startup along the startups journey (e.g. product-market-fit, seed) with a brief explanation.
<b>Finance</b>	Last closed funding round (including grants and / or equity) and year.
<b>The problem/market opportunity</b>	Description of the problem that is being addressed from the customer/user point of view.
<b>Excellence/innovation</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Description of the innovation developed by the applicant.</li> <li>• The need for the innovation (its scalability and potential), the level of innovation within the market and how the project is novel.</li> <li>• The technology readiness level of the product/service.</li> <li>• Actions taken to protect the intellectual property emerging from the developed innovations.</li> </ul>

<b>Market/competition analysis</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Market context: market definition and sizing.</li> <li>• Competition: main competitors outlined, and how the product or service they propose is different and superior compared to alternatives.</li> <li>• Commercial Strategy and Scalability: well explained and scalable business model behind the solution.</li> </ul>
<b>Impact</b>	Broad impacts of the innovation on society, the environment and climate, the UN Sustainable Development Goals and on job creation. Referring to any relevant EU policy.
<b>Company, Team and Management</b>	Description of the company vision, core team composition, skills, experiences and complementarity among team members.
<b>Pitch deck</b>	Company description, problem statement, solution, market opportunity, business model, traction, team, financial summary.

- 4) While filling in the application form, the applicants will be required to conduct an **Investment Readiness Level (IRL) Self-assessment**. To ensure a smooth and accessible application process, the **IRL Assessment** will be conducted as a **self-assessment**, focusing only on its **quantitative** aspects. Applicants will be asked to complete a structured online questionnaire, where they will **assign a score from 1 to 5** for each question based on their startup's level of development in key areas.

This streamlined approach allows startups to **evaluate their own readiness**, while ensuring that the scoring is **aligned with the qualitative information** provided in the application form. The IRL Assessment will cover **six key areas** that are critical for understanding the startup's maturity and support needs:

- **Innovative Idea** – Uniqueness and technological edge of the solution
- **Team** – Skills, experience, and commitment of the founding team
- **Product/Service** – Development stage, validation, and scalability
- **Market** – Target audience, competitive landscape, and go-to-market strategy
- **Impact** – Social, environmental, or economic impact of the startup
- **Finance** – Business model, revenue strategy, and financial sustainability

Applicants will rate their startup's **maturity in each area** by selecting a score from **1 to 5**, based on the following criteria:

*Table 3. Scoring criteria for the IRL Assessment*

Score	Score definition	Description
1	Topic not at all considered or developed	The startup has not considered the specific topic and/or the specific topic is not developed.



2	Topic insufficiently considered or developed	The startup feels not able to completely cover the specific topics and/or the specific topic is not mature enough even though basic elements are considered, so relevant improvements are needed.
3	Topic sufficiently considered or developed	The startup feels confident about the specific topic (i.e. main elements are considered and sufficiently explained), but it retains that further improvement is needed.
4	Topic well considered or developed	The startup feels very confident on the specific topic (i.e. it has a good understanding of the specific topic and has implemented actions/plans to deal with it) and it is aware that there are improvement areas which focus on for further improvements.
5	Topic fully considered or developed	The startup feels to completely cover the specific topic (i.e. has implemented actions/plans to deal with the topic with high efficacy) and it retains no improvements are needed in this area.

The **self-reported scores** will be analysed **alongside the responses in the application form**, ensuring that the **qualitative and quantitative inputs are consistent**. This approach allows for a **fair and efficient evaluation** while minimizing the burden on applicants.

By simplifying the IRL Assessment into a **quick yet insightful** self-assessment, WE-RISE ensure that startups can **easily participate** in the Open Call while still allowing evaluators to **gain a clear understanding of their readiness and potential**.

## 7.2. Application Form WE-RISE – Phase 2

For applying to Phase 2 of the WE-RISE Support Program, the **SAP** developed by each startup in Phase 1 serves as the application form, whose main components are:

- **Goals:** Establish clear, measurable goals that align with the startup's long-term vision and improvement areas.
- **Strategy Development:** Identify the pathway to achieve these goals, considering internal capabilities and market/industry demands.
- **Action Plan:** Create a detailed plan based on the startup's Investment Readiness, including actionable steps, responsible parties, and timelines.
- **Performance Indicators:** Set KPIs to measure progress towards the SAP goals and track the startup's advancements.
- **Timeline:** Develop a realistic timeline for implementing the plan, with clearly marked milestones and deadlines.

Each application will include also a table outlining the following eligible categories for the foreseen costs throughout the duration of the sub-grant support:

*Table 4. Eligible cost categories*

	Month 1	Month 2	Month 3	Month 4	TOTAL
<b>1. Personnel costs (up to 70% of total)</b>					
<b>2. Travel and other direct costs:</b>					
<i>Travel costs (please specify)</i>					



<i>Other direct costs (please specify)</i>					
<b>3. Indirect costs (25% of 1+2)</b>					
<b>4. Subcontracting</b>					
<i>Service 1 (please specify)</i>					
<i>Service n (please specify)</i>					

### 7.3. Application Submission

The application form is open for online submission of application starting from **March 12<sup>th</sup>, 2025 until May 14<sup>th</sup>, 2025 until 23:59 CET.**

The official opening of the application period for the Phase 2 of the WE-RISE Support Program will be communicated in due time to the selected startups.

## 8. Evaluation Criteria

**Applications for the WE-RISE Open Call – Phase 1** will be evaluated with the following criteria:

1. Alignment to WE-RISE objectives (scores from 1 to 5): Applicants must demonstrate a clear set of objectives aligned with the definition of the WE-RISE goals and with the general objectives of the project.
2. Review of the Application Form (scores from 1 to 5):
  - a. Team: core team composition, skills, experiences and complementarity among team members, also considering the Advisory Board.
  - b. Excellence/Innovation: The need for the innovation (its scalability and potential), the level of innovation within the market and how the project is novel; The technology readiness level of the product/service; Actions taken to protect the intellectual property emerging from the developed innovations.
  - c. Impact: Market definition and sizing; Competitive landscape; Contribution to the achievement of strategic EU goals in the respective industry; Scalability of the business model.
3. Review of the IRL Assessment (scores from 1 to 5): Evidence connected with the result of the IRL assessment, ranging in a scale from 1 to 9.

All criteria have the same weight. The maximum score obtainable is 15.

Each application will be assigned to **two evaluators** within the Evaluation Committee set up in the consortium.

The evaluation criteria for **WE-RISE Open Call – Phase 1** are complemented by the following **Transversal Criteria**:

- 100% of the selected startups must be **women-led**



- At least **60%** of the selected startups must be **established in emerging/moderate innovator countries**

Following the development of SAPs, **applications for the WE-RISE Open Call – Phase 2** will be evaluated with the following criteria:

1. Alignment to WE-RISE objectives (scores from 1 to 5): Applicants must demonstrate a clear set of objectives aligned with the definition of the WE-RISE goals and with the general objectives of the project.
2. Comprehensiveness and coherence Strategic Action Plan (scores from 1 to 5): Ability to provide a coherent and comprehensive roadmap for achieving the startup's objectives, ensuring all components work synergistically towards strategic execution and measurable progress. The SAP outlines clear, realistic goals consistent with the indicated KPIs. Significance and scale of the KPIs, such as:
  - Securing substantial investment deals (e.g., closing an investment of at least €100k).
  - Forming major partnerships (e.g., agreements for large pilot projects or scaling innovative solutions).
  - Reaching specific business development targets (e.g., closing a contract with a major client for at least €100k).

All criteria have the same weight. The maximum score obtainable is 10.

Each application will be assigned to **two evaluators** within the Evaluation Committee set up in the consortium.

For both phases of the WE-RISE Open Call each evaluator will rank the application assigning a score from 0 to 5 for each criterion and produce an Individual Evaluation Report.

For each criterion under examination, score values will indicate the following rationale:

*Table 5 - Scoring criteria for the Evaluators*

Score	Rationale
0/UNACCEPTABLE	The sub-project proposal fails to address the criterion.
1/POOR	The sub-project proposal fails to address the criterion or cannot be judged due to incomplete or missing information.
2/FAIR	The sub-project proposal broadly addresses the criterion, but there are significant weaknesses.
3/GOOD	The sub-project proposal addresses the criterion well, but several shortcomings are present and minor weaknesses would need correcting.
4/VERY GOOD	The sub-project proposal addresses the criterion very well, but a small number of shortcomings are present and specific improvements are possible.
5/EXCELLENT	The sub-project proposal successfully addresses all relevant aspects of the criterion. Any shortcomings are minor.



The final score will be calculated as an average of the individual assessments provided by the Evaluators. Each criterion will be scored out of 5. The final score on each criterion will be given by the average of the evaluators. If scores given by the evaluators on an application show significant divergence (more than 1.5 points) between the reviewers, the Evaluation Committee will discuss the final evaluation in the Consensus Meeting.

## 9. Additional criteria for applicants to be eligible

In addition, the following conditions apply:

- The organisations applying should not have convictions for fraudulent behaviour, other financial irregularities, unethical or illegal business practices.
- The participating organisations should not have been declared bankrupt or have initiated bankruptcy procedures.
- Beneficiaries must have the appropriate resources to implement the full set of tasks needed within the project.

## 10. Selection process

The selection process for the WE-RISE Open Call is designed to ensure fairness, transparency, and adherence to the principles of inclusivity and impartiality. This process comprises two distinct phases: the **Eligibility Check** and the **Selection of Eligible Applications**, carried out by designated teams with clearly defined roles and responsibilities (for more details please refer to Annex 1).

The same process will be applied to both Phases of the WE-RISE Open Call.



Picture 3. WE-RISE selection process overview.

The evaluation process will be conducted in the following stages:

### Step 1: Submission and Initial Review

- Applications are submitted through the EuroQuity platform.
- The Eligibility Check Team reviews all submissions for compliance with eligibility criteria.

**Step 2: Assignment of Evaluators**

- Applications are distributed among Evaluation Committee members. Each application is assigned to two evaluators for an independent review.

**Step 3: Scoring of Applications**

- Evaluators assess the proposals based on pre-defined evaluation criteria outlined in the Open Call documentation. A detailed scoring framework is used to ensure consistency and transparency.
- Scores and justifications are recorded in a standardized template.

**Step 4: Consensus Meeting**

- If discrepancies between evaluator scores exceed a pre-defined threshold, the evaluators and the Evaluation Committee Chair meet to discuss and resolve the differences. The final score is determined through consensus.

**Step 5: Final Selection**

- Applications are ranked based on their final scores. The top-ranked proposals, meeting the required quotas (i.e., 100% women-led startups, 60% from moderate/emerging innovator countries), are selected for the program.

**Step 6: Feedback and Results Communication**

- Feedback is prepared for all applicants, highlighting strengths and areas for improvement.
- Selected applicants are notified, and the list of successful proposals is published.

## 11. Maximum amount of financial support

### WE-RISE Open Call – Phase 1

- Maximum amount of financial support: € 100.000
- Number of beneficiaries: 20
- FSTP per beneficiary: € 5.000

### WE-RISE Open Call – Phase 2

- Maximum amount of financial support: € 500.000
- Number of beneficiaries: 10
- FSTP per beneficiary: € 50.000



## 12. Exhaustive list of activities and services that qualify for financial support

The types of activities and services that qualify for financial support are:

### WE-RISE Open Call – Phase 1

1. Participation to international events, conferences, exhibitions, and fairs
2. Travel expenses for events, meeting with investors and other stakeholders

### WE-RISE Open Call – Phase 2

1. Further development of their product leading to achieving higher TRL level
2. Technology improvement to meet market needs
3. Demonstration/tech scale-up activities
4. Access to infrastructures
5. Involving end-users/testers in product/service development process
6. Growth hacking experiments, such as experimenting with new products and services as new revenue streams
7. Developing of new business models and/or business plans
8. Marketing and branding costs
9. Sales efficiency enhancement
10. Pricing model improvement
11. Feasibility and Market studies
12. Marketing and sales-enhancing services
13. Business development & ecosystem building
14. Participation to international events, conferences, exhibitions, and fairs
15. Travel expenses for events, meeting with investors and other stakeholders

## 13. Reporting and payment

### 13.1.Phase 1 – Nurture: Cultivating Strategy & Empowerment

For the Phase 1 of the WE-RISE Support Program, the WE-RISE Consortium will pay to the selected startups 100% of the financial contribution (i.e. € 5.000) upon the signature of the Sub-



grant Agreement. The financial support shall be used by the Beneficiary in compliance with the conditions set in the Sub-grant Agreement and in accordance with Section 12 above.

At end of the Phase 1 of the WE-RISE Support Program, startups will be asked to prepare a report on incurred expenses which will also include both supporting documents and a description of implemented activities and their outcomes.

## 13.2.Phase 2 – Bloom: from Strategy to Acceleration

For the Phase 2 of the WE-RISE Support Program, the WE-RISE Consortium will pay to the selected startups the financial contribution of € 50.000 according to the following payments' distribution:

- 50% of the financial contribution upon the Sub-grant Agreement signature.
- 40% of the financial contribution following a positive evaluation after the mid-term checkpoint, as described below.
- 10% after attending the showcase event, which represents the end of the WE-RISE's Support Program.

The Sub-grant agreement for Phase 2 will establish the KPIs and deliverables that will be considered when evaluating the selected startups' performance at the checkpoint review. The WE-RISE Consortium will review the performance at the mid-term checkpoint at month 2 of the **Phase 2 – Bloom: from Strategy to Acceleration**. The review will be carried out according to the following criteria and their weights in the final score:

- Deliverable quality (Points: 4; Weight: 35%)
- Progress towards set KPIs (Points: 4; Weight: 50%)
- Deadline Compliance (Points: 2; Weight: 15%)

The threshold of the mid-term checkpoint is 7 points.

According to this final score, sub-grantees over threshold (7 points) will successfully receive the next payment and continue in the program. Sub-grantees under threshold will be reviewed by the WE-RISE Consortium who will take the final decision taking into account all possible objective reasons for underperformance (i.e. external factors which might have influenced the performance of sub-grantees). Those not passing this examination won't receive the next payment immediately, having the possibility to show progress within the following month. Should these beneficiaries not reach the threshold during the re-evaluation, they will be invited to leave the program.

The beneficiary must certify that the information provided in the request is complete, correct and true. The beneficiary must also certify that the costs incurred are eligible and that the request for payment is substantiated by adequate supporting documents.



## 14. Duration

The duration of the activities supported by the FSTP mechanism is seven (7) months for each cohort, i.e. 3 months for the first phase of the Support Program, and 4 months for the second phase of the Support Program.

## 15. Appealing procedure

The WE-RISE consortium has foreseen the possibility for applicants to appeal the decision of the consortium of not selecting their proposal.

If at any stage of the evaluation process, the applicant considers that there has been a shortcoming in the way the proposal has been evaluated that may affect the final decision on whether to fund it or not; or if the applicant believes the results of the eligibility checks are incorrect and have failed to comply with the rules of the Open Call; and that her/his interests have been prejudiced as a result, the following appeal procedure is available.

If there is clear evidence of a shortcoming that could affect the eventual funding decision, all or part of the proposal may be re-evaluated. Complaints should also be made within five (calendar) days since the evaluation results are sent to the applicants.

As a general rule, the WE-RISE Open Call Team will investigate the complaints to decide whether to issue a formal notice or to close the case within no more than twenty days from the date of reception of the complaint, provided that all required information has been submitted by the complainant. Where this time limit is exceeded, the WE-RISE team will inform the complainant by email. If a definitive response cannot be given at that stage, this reply will indicate when a definitive response will be provided. The WE-RISE consortium does not undertake to engage in any further discussion about the evaluation of the proposal beyond the definitive response.

## 16. Conflict of interest

Applicants cannot be legally connected to any member of the WE-RISE consortium.

Applicants shall not have any potential conflict of interest with the selection process. All such potential cases will be assessed case by case.

Applications will not be accepted from entities who are partners (beneficiaries) or linked-third parties in the WE-RISE consortium or who are formally linked in any way to the partners/ linked-third parties of the consortium. This excludes, for example, entities that have already engaged with and/ or contributed to the project through specific activities/ initiatives (e.g. Service Providers) who remain independent from the project. Any individual/entity with a previous link to any WE-RISE consortium member (e.g., spin-off), will not be accepted, unless a minimum of 2 years (as of the application date) has passed since the termination of the link.



Applicants must not have any current and/or potential conflict of interest with the WE-RISE – Open Call selection process and during the whole program.

Applicants must formally and immediately notify the WE-RISE coordinator (via [info@we-rise.eu](mailto:info@we-rise.eu)) of any situation constituting or likely to lead to a conflict of interests and take all the necessary steps to rectify this situation.

All cases of conflict of interest will be assessed case by case. Applicants must take all measures to prevent any situation where the impartial and objective evaluation and implementation of the project is compromised for reasons involving economic interest, political or national affinity, family or emotional ties or any other shared interest (i.e. “conflict of interests”). If a conflict of interest is discovered and confirmed at the time of the evaluation process, the proposal will be considered as non-eligible and will not be evaluated.

## 17. Exclusion conditions and loss of eligibility

Specific exclusion conditions and criteria for loss of eligibility are established:

- Applicants must be a women led company (at least one woman occupies a key role, whether as a founder, co-founder, a core management team member on C-Level, or a board director).
- Ineligibility arises if an applicant has previously received funding for the same services requested or fails to comply with the established eligibility criteria, including the submission of accurate documentation.
- Any applicant must demonstrate the link with the project and clearly specify its role and activities carried out.
- Any applicant receiving double funding for the same activities from other sources will be disqualified.
- Misrepresentation or fraudulent activities during the application process will also lead to immediate disqualification.
- Applicants must prepare their SAP and reporting documents and provide required updates during the Support Program – Phase 1.
- Applicants under OLAF investigation will be disqualified.
- Non-compliance with the terms outlined in the Sub-Grant Agreement, including the proper use of funds and adherence to service delivery standards, can also jeopardise future opportunities in EIC funding schemes.



## 18. Confidentiality and Data protection

Applicants should be aware that the information submitted under this Call will be used by the WE-RISE project and other entities directly involved in the WE-RISE project.

Specifically, the selected applicants should be aware that the WE-RISE project will maintain internal records of:

- A list of the applications received, with names and addresses of applicants.
- All communications with applicants prior to the call closure.
- A copy of the completed forms used in the evaluation sessions.
- A record of all relevant facts that occurred before, during or after the implementation of the call, as well as any deviation from the standard procedure.
- Copies of requests for payment and attached administrative documents.
- SAP documents prepared by selected applicants at the end of **Phase 1 – Nurture: Cultivating Strategy & Empowerment**
- All the deliverables prepared for the **Phase 2 – Bloom: from Strategy to Acceleration.**
- Any additional document provided by the applicant.

Subject to the conditions established in the Sub-grant Agreement, decisions, or contracts, any data, knowledge, and information communicated as confidential in the framework of an action shall be kept confidential, taking due account of European Union Law regarding the protection of and access to classified information.

Selected applicants shall comply with national legislation, regulations and ethical rules in their own countries, as well as any other requirements as defined by the participation in the WE-RISE initiative.

By submitting the application, the applicants consent to the processing of their data by the WE-RISE project members and EISMEA (Grant Authority) for the purpose of evaluation of the application. The applicant's data will be processed in accordance with the WE-RISE Privacy Policy and will be retained for 5 years after the application deadline. The WE-RISE Privacy Policy is available on the project website (<https://www.we-rise.eu/privacy-policy-and-terms-of-use>).

The applicant's personal data will be collected, processed and treated by the WE-RISE project in accordance with regulation (EU) 2016/679, also known as GDPR (General Data Protection Regulation).



## 19. Promoting the action and giving visibility to the EU funding

The beneficiary must promote the sub-project, the WE-RISE project and its results, by providing targeted information to multiple audiences (including the media and the public) in a strategic and effective manner and to highlight the financial support of the EC.

Unless the EC or the WE-RISE coordinator agrees otherwise or unless it is impossible (requiring a valid justification), any promotion activity related to the action (including in electronic form, via social media, etc.), any publicity (including at a conference or seminar) or any type of information or promotional material (brochure, leaflet, poster, presentation etc.), and any infrastructure, equipment and major results funded by the sub-grant must:

- Display the EU emblem.
- Display the WE-RISE logo.
- Include the following text: “The [sub-project acronym] has indirectly received funding from the European executed under the WE-RISE project (grant agreement 101193381)”.

Any publicity made by the beneficiary regarding the sub-project, in whatever form and or by whatever medium, must specify that it reflects only the author’s views and that the EC or the WE-RISE project is not liable for any use that may be made of the information contained therein.

The EC and the WE-RISE consortium shall be authorized to publish, in whatever form and on or by whatever medium, the following information regarding the beneficiary:

- The name of the beneficiary.
- Email address of the beneficiary.
- The general purpose of the sub-project.
- The amount of the financial contribution foreseen for the sub-project; after the final payment, and the amount of the financial contribution received.
- The geographic location of the activities carried out.
- The list of dissemination activities and/or of patent (applications) relating to foreground.
- The details/references and the abstracts of scientific publications relating to foreground and, if founded within the sub-project, the published version or the final manuscript accepted for publication.
- The publishable reports submitted to the WE-RISE consortium.
- Any picture or any audio-visual or web material provided to the EC and WE-RISE in the framework of the sub-project.

The beneficiary shall ensure that all necessary authorizations for such publication have been obtained and that the publication of the information by the EC and WE-RISE does not infringe any rights of third parties.



Upon a suitably justified request by the sub-project coordinator on behalf of any sub-project member, the WE-RISE consortium, if permission is granted by the EC, may agree to forego such publicity if disclosure of the information indicated above would risk compromising the beneficiary's security, academic or commercial interests.

## **20. Ethics Self-Assessment**

### **20.1. Ethical dimension of the objectives, methodology and likely impact**

Human participants (all WPs) and Personal data (questionnaire surveys, participants information, workshops and events - all WPs): WE-RISE project will involve various innovation ecosystem stakeholders, including startup founders, CEOs, other members, mentors, experts, trainers, investors, representatives of EU innovation bodies, local ecosystem players. Their involvement will be in online and presential format, in activities such as workshops, coaching and sessions, matchmaking and other online/presential events (showcase events). The project may collect personal data at selection of beneficiaries, and the monitoring, management and follow up on sub-grant implementation. The project partially correlates with environmental (excessive travelling, unjustified use of papers and single-use plastics), health and safety issues. The project does not include transfer of data from the EU to non-EU countries, human embryos, stem cells, tissues, animals, nor artificial intelligence, nor other or cross-cutting issues. Activities related to vulnerable groups (e.g. children, or other persons unable to give consent) will not be part of the project.

The methodology used is mainly based on questionnaire surveys, personal interviews, data gathering via social media and voluntary filling out of the sub-grant open call proposal templates via the EuroQuity platform.

### **20.2. Compliance with ethical principles and relevant legislation**

All project activities will be provided in order to meet highest ethical standards and in accordance with international and national law (e.g. GDPR). WE-RISE will have its own Data Management Plan and Communication and Dissemination plan, which will also cover ethical issues of human involvement (questionnaire surveys, participation in events), personal data; including description of ethical procedures and processes for securing basic human rights (ethical requirements on selection process of survey participants, personal data gathering, processing, re-using and/or refusing, anonymization of the data, and data security). General guidelines for complying with the ethics and scientific integrity of Horizon Europe and more specific project guidelines will be explained and followed.

Human participants and personal data: The participation of people in workshops, coaching and mentoring sessions, and other project activities and events will be voluntary, allowing each



participant to opt out at any time, and no children. Clear participants' selection criteria will be set up. The coordination team will provide templates of both the Informed Consent Forms and Information Sheets that will be written in English providing detailed information about the project, its objectives and expected benefits from the participation. All mentors, experts and trainers involved will sign the Informed Consent Forms allowing them to withdraw their participation any time during or after the end of the project.

The project may collect personal data. The provisions of General Data Protection Regulation (GDPR) will be respected by (i) limiting the data collection to what is strictly necessary for the purpose of the project; and by (ii) proceeding to its anonymization or pseudonymisation. Data Protection Officers of partners will be requested for any question arisen throughout the project.

## 21. Document version and FAQs

The preset document is the version 1.0. Changes and updates to it will be promptly communicated and included in a new version.

FAQs will be available on the project website. They will be regularly updated.

## 22. Contacts

For any further information please contact the WE-RISE project at: [info@we-rise.eu](mailto:info@we-rise.eu)

The WE-RISE Team invites you to use the same email address for a technical problem in relation to the online application form.

