



TERMS OF REFERENCE

for experts ('assessors') to assist in the evaluation of grant applications received in the framework of the call for proposals

Reference number of the Call: F2F Academy 2022/441-175

SUPPORT TO CIVIL SOCIETY ORGANISATIONS THROUGH FARM TO FORK ACADEMY FUND

Deadline: 15 April 2025

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1. BACKGROUND INFORMATION

The “Farm to Fork Academy for Green Western Balkans - Our shared European future” project is implemented in the six Western Balkan Countries (Albania, Bosnia and Herzegovina, Kosovo*¹, Montenegro, North Macedonia, Serbia) and Croatia. The project focuses on strengthening the contribution of civil society actors across WB-6 in the implementation of the EU integration and approximation process in the WB in the agricultural and rural development sector through advancing the green and just transition in the region. It will do so by stimulating a better environment for CSOs and CSOs Networks and other rural stakeholders to proactively contribute to addressing challenges related to climate changes and biodiversity losses, whereas are able to sustain participatory and bottom-up consultation and constructive policy dialogue to accelerate the reforming process in approximating with EU CAP, in particular alignment with the EU Green Deal and F2F Strategy.

The project partners - the partnership of National Rural Development Networks (NRDNs) in the six Western Balkan countries (WB-6) and Croatia and their regional cooperation platform Balkan Network for Rural Development (BRDN) are leading the way in tackling today’s critical issues concerning sustainable rural development. These genuine civil society networks support the formulation and implementation of agriculture and rural development policies at the national and regional level in the light of the principles that guide the European integration processes of the region. The proposed action reflects the project partners’ shared vision in contributing to the implementation of the EU integration and approximation process in the WB in the agricultural and rural development sector through advancing the green and just transition across the region. The project partners are aware of the important role of the civil society sector (CSOs and CSO Networks) in the region in addressing societal challenges. However, they have limited capacities to contribute to the long-term social and economic transformation of the region.

To address these limitations, the project focuses on three main pillars: building the capacities of CSOs and CSO networks to enable them to address current societal challenges effectively; sustaining local solutions through the establishment of the F2F Academy Fund and promoting bottom-up advocacy and policy agenda. Participatory consultation processes remain at the heart of initiatives undertaken by NRDNs to empower the ‘bottom-up’, inclusive and participatory approach to local development.

1.1. Objectives of the call

The overall objective of the F2F Academy Fund is to strengthen the contribution by civil society in the EU integration process of the WB-6, in particular alignment with the EU Green Deal and F2F Strategy.

The specific objectives of the F2F Academy Fund is to introduce innovative, green and inclusive solutions for sustainable food systems and livelihoods and their further promotion to address challenges related to climate changes and biodiversity losses. **The outputs of the F2F Academy Fund will be locally led small-scale actions promoted by civil society organizations focusing on innovative, green and inclusive solutions for sustainable food systems and livelihoods.** Furthermore, The F2F Academy Fund will support NRDNs in each WB-6 and BRDN in improving coalition and capacity building for an increased impact of CSOs on agriculture and rural reforming processes.

¹ This designation is without prejudice to positions on status, and is in line with UNSC 1244 and the ICJ Opinion on the Kosovo Declaration of Independence.

1.2. Contracting Authority

Rural Development Network of North Macedonia

2. OBJECTIVE, PURPOSE & EXPECTED RESULTS

2.1. Overall objective

To recruit assessors to assist the contracting authority in the selection of the best proposals received under the Farm to Fork Academy Fund and to achieve a high-quality, complete and coherent selection process of projects in line with the criteria set in the guidelines for applicants.

2.2. Results to be achieved by the contractor

Assessors will carry out the technical and financial assessment of full applications in accordance with guidelines to be provided by the contracting authority and which are based on the published evaluation grids. Each full application has to be assessed individually by 2 assessors

These assessments will be used by the evaluation committee in the process of selecting the best proposals.

3. SCOPE OF THE WORK

3.1. General

The Farm to Fork Academy for Green Western Balkans project aims to support civil society organizations (CSOs) in the Western Balkans in promoting a green and just transition aligned with the EU Green Deal and the Farm to Fork (F2F) Strategy. Strengthening the role of CSOs in sustainable agriculture and rural development is crucial for promoting climate resilience, biodiversity conservation, and environmentally friendly food production systems. Despite the increasing relevance of sustainable food systems, many rural communities and small-scale farmers in the region lack the necessary resources and institutional support to transition towards greener practices. Investments in sustainable farming and rural development are often perceived as additional financial burdens, rather than opportunities for economic and environmental sustainability. Therefore, it is essential to enhance awareness, build technical and financial capacity, and create incentives that empower local actors to embrace sustainable solutions. To address these challenges, the project will provide targeted financial support through the Farm to Fork Academy Fund. This initiative will enable local CSOs, including Local Action Groups (LAGs), grassroots organizations, and farmer cooperatives, to develop and implement innovative projects that contribute to sustainable food production, climate change adaptation, and biodiversity conservation.

3.2. Specific activities

The assessors are bound by a declaration of impartiality and confidentiality² to be signed before starting the assessment. If an assessor believes there might be a situation of conflict of interests in relation to one or more applicants, he/she must inform the contracting authority immediately. In addition, strict confidentiality is required from the experts involved in the implementation of this contract, notably on the assessments of individual applications.

² A standard document will be made available by the contracting authority.

(1) Role and tasks of assessors

Assessors should provide written technical and financial assessments to the contracting authority of full applications (this includes the verification of the budget proposed by the applicants for the action, assessing its overall coherence and particularly its cost-effectiveness, with an emphasis on the identification of potential anomalies and/or overpriced items or budget lines).

At least 2 assessors must assess each full application, working independently of each other.

The assessments must be undertaken in accordance with the guidelines and instructions provided by the evaluation committee. These are based on the published evaluation grids in the guidelines for applicants. The overall assessment should be based on the scores obtained under each subheading, added up by heading and the final score is the arithmetical average of the scores given by the assessors.

Each application must be assessed on its own merits and not by comparing different applications. External assessors are expected to bring their own experience of the sector and project implementation to bear in the analysis of each proposal.

The assessor will be invited to the evaluation committee to justify and discuss his/her assessment of the proposals.

3.3. Specific work

The Contractor should provide the following consultancy services:

Perform the second phase of applications' evaluation i.e. evaluation of project proposals' quality, including the proposed budget and the capacity of the applicants for implementation of project initiatives that passed the administrative check.

The assignment includes the following tasks:

- **Analysis of project proposals** submitted by grassroot civil society organizations (CSOs) from North Macedonia within the **Farm to Fork Academy Fund** Call for Applications.
- **Independent and impartial evaluation** of project proposals against the selection criteria defined in the **Farm to Fork Academy Fund Guidelines for Applicants**.
- **Ranking of all project proposals** and recommendation for awarding the most promising initiatives that align with the fund's objectives on sustainable agriculture, rural development, and climate action.
- **Preparation of a reserve list** of project proposals to be considered if an awarded applicant fails to commence implementation within the planned timeframe.
- **Preparation of an evaluation report** summarizing expert assessments, justifications for rankings, and recommendations for the final selection of funded projects.

3.4. Project management

3.4.1. Responsible body

The Rural Development Network of North Macedonia will be responsible for managing the contract. RDN of NM will be responsible for conducting the first phase of evaluation i.e. **Opening, administrative check of the project proposals and verification of eligibility of the applicants.** After receiving the ranking of project initiatives from both evaluators, the Contracting Authority will compare the lists, cross check the scoring and with arithmetical means determine the final ranking of initiatives to be awarded. This process will be overviewed by the Evaluation Commission.

3.4.2. Management structure

The Contracting Authority is responsible for developing the terms of reference and the tendering documentation for the required service. It will invite potential consultants, in accordance to this ToR, and will make the selection of the best candidate.

4. LOGISTICS AND TIMING

4.1. Location

Location of assignment is North Macedonia. The assessor will work remotely.

4.2. Start date and period of implementation

The intended start date is 5 May, 2025 and the period of implementation of the contract will be until 16 June, 2025.

5. REQUIREMENTS

5.1. Staff

5.1.1. Assessors

Qualifications and Skills

- University degree in agriculture, rural development, environmental sciences, economics, or a relevant directly related discipline, or equivalent professional experience.
- Strong analytical and evaluation skills with the ability to assess project proposals against established criteria.
- Excellent report-writing and communication skills.
- Familiarity with EU policies and funding mechanisms related to rural development, sustainable agriculture, and climate change adaptation.

General Professional Experience

- Minimum of five (5) years of professional experience in project evaluation, grant management, or rural development programs.

- Fluent knowledge of *local language* and English language
- Experience working with civil society organizations (CSOs) in the Western Balkans and/or EU accession-related projects is preferred.
- Demonstrated understanding of the socio-economic challenges and opportunities in rural areas, particularly regarding sustainable agriculture and green transition.

Specific Professional Experience

- Proven expertise in one or more of the thematic areas covered by the Fund, including sustainable farming, environmental protection, climate change adaptation, and biodiversity conservation.
- Capacity to analyze and evaluate initiatives with high potential for enhancing agriculture and rural development activities/interventions.
- Familiarity with financial and technical feasibility assessments of project proposals.

The assessors will play a critical role in ensuring a transparent and objective evaluation process, selecting high-quality projects that align with the objectives of the **Farm to Fork Academy Fund** and contribute to the sustainable development of rural areas in the Western Balkans.

6. REPORTS

6.1. Reporting Requirements

The Contractor will prepare a final report on the implementation of the tasks upon completion of this contract. The approval of the final report by the Contracting Authority will be the basis for issuing the final payment, as specified in the Special Conditions.

The consultant will submit the following reports two copies:

- **Ranking list** of evaluated project proposals based on the selection criteria outlined in the **Farm to Fork Academy Fund Guidelines for Applicants**.
- **Final report** (maximum 5 pages, excluding annexes), to be submitted within **5 days** after the completion of the evaluation process. The report shall provide a detailed description of the evaluation process, key findings, and recommendations. Supporting analyses and justifications will be included as annexes.
- **The final report must be submitted together with the corresponding invoice.**

The required formats of the reports will be communicated to the Contractor by the Contracting Authority after the signature of the contract.

6.2. Submission & approval of reports

The report referred to above must be submitted to the project manager identified in the contract. The Project Manager is responsible for approving the report in a reasonable time period.

7. MONITORING AND EVALUATION

7.1. Definition of indicators for this Contract

- Evaluation of project proposals conducted from 05.05.2025 to 10.06.2025

- Ranking list of evaluated project proposals according to criteria from the sub-granting Guideline for applications – 12.06.2025
- Report submitted – 16.06.2025.

The indicator of the successful implementation of the contract is “Services provided in timely and quality manor, as required in these Terms of Reference”.

8. EXPRESSION OF INTEREST

Interested candidates are invited to share their financial offer and submit the following documents by **15 April 2025**: CV and Current status of the entity issued by the Central Register of the Republic of NM (if the applicant is a registered entity) at this email address: info@ruralnet.mk