

Call for Expression of Interest (EOI) for

Applications for the Eco-Innovation Challenge for Blueing
the Black Sea: a GEF regional project

Reference No. **BBSEA-2025-EIC-01**

Call for Expression of Interest

For Applications under the Eco-Innovation Challenge, a Flagship Initiative of the Blueing the Black Sea (BBSEA) GEF Regional Project

Reference number: BBSEA-2025-EIC-01

Description: The Eco-Innovation Challenge is a flagship initiative under the Blueing the Black Sea (BBSEA) GEF Regional Project, implemented by the World Bank and UNOPS. This global competition seeks innovative solutions to tackle four key pollution issues affecting the Black Sea: agricultural/livestock runoff, municipal wastewater, chemical/industrial pollution, and marine litter. Eligible innovators from World Bank-recognized countries can apply under two windows:

- BBSEA Focus Country Window (Georgia, Moldova, Türkiye) for ready-to-implement solutions (grants of USD 50,000–300,000)
- Greater Black Sea Window for early-stage ideas (technical assistance worth up to USD 20,000)

Deadline date for submission of EOI: 14 November 2025

Posting date: 08 September 2025

1. Background

The Black Sea is one of Europe's most polluted seas, with eutrophication from land-based nutrient runoff, chemical/industrial pollution, and marine litter being primary drivers of environmental degradation. This pollution severely impacts the region's environment, human health, and vital economic sectors like tourism and fisheries. To address these transboundary challenges, the World Bank, in cooperation with UNOPS, is implementing the **Blueing the Black Sea (BBSEA): a GEF regional project**.

A core initiative of this project is the **Eco-Innovation Challenge (EIC)**, a global competition designed to identify, finance, and promote innovative solutions specifically targeting the region's most critical pollution issues: the impact of agricultural and livestock runoff; the impact of undertreated municipal wastewater; the impact of chemical or industrial pollution (including non-hazardous war-related pollution); and the impact of marine litter (including non-hazardous war-related marine litter).

Nature-based solutions (NBS) are especially encouraged under this initiative, recognizing their critical role in reducing pollution while delivering co-benefits for climate resilience, biodiversity, and local livelihoods. These solutions include green infrastructure, wetland restoration, sustainable agricultural practices, and other interventions that work with natural processes to prevent or mitigate pollution. By leveraging ecosystems' ability to filter contaminants, absorb nutrients, and manage stormwater, NBS offer cost-effective and sustainable approaches to tackling the Black Sea's complex environmental challenges. The Eco-Innovation Challenge welcomes proposals that incorporate or are grounded in nature-based methodologies as a central element of their design.

The EIC is structured to receive proposals through two distinct windows: (1) the **BBSEA Focus Country Window (for Grantees)** and (2) the **Greater Black Sea Window (for Awardees)**.

2. Eco-Innovation Challenge – Implementation Timeline

(Indicative and subject to change)

Phase	Activity	Timeline	Notes
COMPETITION & AWARD PHASE	Call for Expressions of Interest - CURRENT STEP	September – November 2025	Open for both windows
	First Screening of EOIs	November – December 2025	Separate screening for each window: - BBSEA Focus Country Window - Greater Black Sea Window
	Accelerator-led Orientation	January – February 2026	Up to 25 ideas selected per window
	Limited Request for Proposals	March 2026	- Focus Country Window: Technical & financial proposals - Greater Black Sea Window: Technical proposals only
	Selection Committee Evaluation	April 2026	Up to 10 finalists recommended per window
	Accelerator-led Bootcamp	May 2026	Capacity-building for shortlisted applicants

	Eco-Innovation Challenge Shark Tank Event	June 2026	Selection of 6–10 winners per window
EXECUTION PHASE	Implementation of Grants in Georgia, Moldova, or Türkiye (Focus Country Window)	18 months from July 2026 or signing of GSA	
	Launch of Technical Assistance (Greater Black Sea Window)	From July 2026 6-month tailored support by the accelerator	

2. What We're Looking For: Eligible Solutions and Support Offered

The aim of this call for Expressions of Interest (EOI) is to welcome a broad range of eco-solutions to address the four pollution problems of the Black Sea. Innovators must apply to one of the two windows, each with a different scope and outcome. The competition is open to all entities from World Bank eligible countries.

- **BBSEA Focus Country Window (leading to a Grant):** This is for innovators with well-developed, ready-to-implement solutions. The goal is to directly fund and execute projects in one of the three BBSEA focus countries: Georgia, Moldova, or Türkiye. Grants range from **USD 50,000 to USD 300,000**.
- **Greater Black Sea Window (leading to an Award):** This is for innovators with early-stage concepts, prototypes, or ideas. The goal is to nurture promising ideas with a bespoke, in-kind technical assistance package from an international accelerator, valued at up to **USD 20,000**.

Proposed eco-solutions may encompass technological advancements, economic incentives, business models, policy interventions, or innovative financial mechanisms that support pollution reduction efforts. Consortium proposals are encouraged, especially those that include entities from focus countries as well as women-led organizations.

FOCUS COUNTRY WINDOW REQUIREMENTS (Grant funding of USD 50,000–300,000)

Who can apply:

Registered legal entities with organizational and technical capacity, such as:

- Start-ups and SMEs

- Universities and research institutions
- NGOs and civil society organizations
- Business associations and cooperatives
- Public service providers
- Private companies and consultancies

Geographic scope:

Applicants must be based/registered in a **World Bank-eligible country** and propose implementation in **Georgia, Moldova, or Türkiye**.

Capacity Requirements:

Applicants must demonstrate the ability to manage a grant through:

- Adequate financial and administrative systems
- Governance and legal standing
- Procurement and reporting mechanisms

Note: As part of the grant award process UNOPS will conduct a capacity assessment and provide capacity-building support to eligible applicants where gaps are identified.

Infrastructure Restrictions:

- Only **low-risk infrastructure or minor installations** are eligible for funding.
- Pose only low to moderate environmental and/or social risks
- UNOPS will assess an applicant's technical capacity for small-scale works if relevant.

Definition – Low-Risk Infrastructure / Minor Installations:

Projects involving standard, well-understood technologies in stable environments, with:

- Low probability of failure
- Low-moderate environmental or social risks or impacts
- Minimal complexity and investment

GREATER BLACK SEA WINDOW (Technical Assistance worth up to USD 20,000)

Who can apply:

Early-stage innovators without the need for grant management capacity, including:

- Individuals and entrepreneurs
- Early-stage start-ups
- Research teams and university labs
- NGOs and grassroots initiatives

Focus:

Proposals should present ideas addressing one or more BBSEA pollution problems and may be in a:

- Conceptual, pilot, or prototype stage
- Not yet ready for direct in-country implementation

Support Offered:

Winners will receive **bespoke in-kind technical assistance** from an international accelerator to further develop their innovation.

Potential Upgrade:

If matched with a Focus Country partner, successful applicants may be invited to re-submit under the **Focus Country Window** and be considered for a grant, subject to a capacity assessment.

3. Submission Guidelines: Simple and Flexible Process

The application process is designed to be **simple, accessible, and flexible** to encourage a wide range of innovators to participate.

Applicants are encouraged to submit their Expression of Interest (EOI) using **any format they are comfortable with**, as long as it addresses the key required elements. To further streamline the process, an **Annex A - Application Form** is provided to guide submissions and ensure completeness. Use of the form is **strongly recommended but not mandatory**.

Your EOI should briefly and clearly cover the following:

- A description of your eco-innovation
- The application window you are applying for (Focus Country or Greater Black Sea)

- The pollution problem(s) your innovation addresses
- Intended use of funding or technical assistance
- Stage of development and scalability potential
- Basic budget overview
- Applicant experience and (if applicable) any low-risk infrastructure anticipated.

4. Evaluation and Shortlisting Criteria

All Expressions of Interest (EOIs) will be reviewed by the UNOPS Project Implementation Unit (PIU), supported by an accelerator, against the following eligibility and **core evaluation criteria**:

Eligibility Criteria

✓ General Eligibility (Applicable to all applicants):

- The proposal must address one or more of the four defined pollution challenges
- The innovation must be clearly defined and demonstrably innovative
- Applicant must be from a World Bank-eligible country
- Applicant must not be barred from UNOPS procurement or ineligible under World Bank anti-corruption guidelines

✗ Ineligibility Criteria:

- Those that do not address any of the four pollution problem
- Lack any innovative elements
- Proposals involving large-scale infrastructure
- Submissions from ineligible countries or banned entities
- Infrastructure not classified as low-risk or minor installations

A. Core Evaluation Criteria for BBSEA Focus Country Window (Grants)

Criterion	Weight
Innovativeness and Relevance: The proposed solution is practical, realistic, and implementable in its current or proposed stage of development	50%
Scalability Potential: The proposed solution demonstrates a clear capacity to be expanded or adapted to reach broader populations or additional regions, with a feasible plan for growth and sustainability over time.	25%
Implementation Feasibility: The proposed solution is practical, realistic, and implementable in its current or proposed stage of development within 18 months following the award of the grant	15%
Experience in the Country of Intended Implementation	10%

Proposals will be assessed to ensure balance across the three BBSEA focus countries: Georgia, Moldova, and Türkiye.

B. Core Evaluation Criteria for Greater Black Sea Window (Technical Assistance)

Criterion	Weight
Innovativeness and Relevance	60%
Applicant Capacity to Further Develop the Idea	40%

Gender Inclusion Consideration

As part of the Eco-Innovation Challenge's commitment to inclusive development, special consideration will be given to women-inclusive enterprises. These are defined as entities that meet at least one of the following criteria: (i) owned by women — with at least one female shareholder holding representative and managing powers; (ii) managed by women — with at least one female C-level manager or with a minimum of 25 percent female representation in mid-level management; or (iii) employing a proportion of women that exceeds the average in their respective sector. The percentage of women-inclusive enterprises among applicants,

shortlisted candidates, and final awardees will be monitored and reported to promote gender equality and ensure equitable participation in the Challenge.

5. Submission Details

All proposals, information, documents and correspondence exchanged between UNOPS and the applicant shall be in **English**.

Information Sessions & Clarifications

Applicants are encouraged to attend one of the virtual information sessions to better understand the objectives, scope, and submission process for this Expression of Interest. These sessions will provide an opportunity to ask questions directly to the UNOPS PIU.

Upcoming Virtual Information Sessions:

1. Session 1: Monday, 22 September 2025 – 14:00–15:00 CEST

 [Join via Google Meet](#)

2. Session 2: Thursday, 9 October 2025 – 12:00–13:00 CEST

 [Join via Google Meet](#)

3. Session 3: Friday, 24 October 2025 – 14:00–15:00 CEST

 [Join via Google Meet](#)

Request for Clarifications

Applicants may submit written questions for clarification regarding this Call for Expressions of Interest no later than **6 November 2025, 23:59 CET**.

 Please send your questions to: **BBSEA.EIC@unops.org**

 Subject line: **BBSEA-2025-EIC-01 – Request for Clarification**

All clarifications will be compiled and shared with all potential applicants as posted on UNGM.




Submissions must be made electronically to:

 **Email:** BBSEA.EIC@unops.org

 **Subject Line:** BBSEA-2025-EIC-01 - EOI

The deadline for submissions is **14 November 2025, 23:59 CET**. Submissions received after this deadline will not be considered. All inquiries should be directed to the email address above.

6. Table of Important Dates

Virtual Information Session #1	Monday, 22 September 2025	14:00–15:00 CEST	 Join via Google Meet
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Virtual Information Session #3	Friday, 24 October 2025	14:00–15:00 CEST	 Join via Google Meet
Deadline to Request Clarifications	Thursday, 6 November 2025	23:59 CET	Email to: BBSEA.EIC@unops.org
Proposal Submission Deadline	Friday, 14 November 2025	23:59 CET	Email to: BBSEA.EIC@unops.org