



First Information Session minutes

BBSEA Call for EOI

Date and Time: 22 September 2025, 14:00 CET

Location: Online

1. Meeting Overview

The first Information session of the Eco-Innovation Challenge, the flagship initiative of the Blueing the Black Sea: a GEF regional project, was a true success, with 10 participants from all over the world (Türkiye, the Netherlands, Pakistan, Georgia, Romania and Austria). Led by the UNOPS team (Glenn Pearce-Oroz, BBSEA Senior Programme Manager, Tsitsino Chkadua, Project Support Officer and Julia Kaufmann, Project Senior Assistant), the session began with an overview of the Blueing the Black Sea (BBSEA) project, followed by a detailed presentation on the Challenge, including the two ways to participate (the "windows"), eligibility criteria, the application process, key timelines, and evaluation criteria. The meeting concluded with a Q&A session.

1. Project Overview

The **Blueing the Black Sea (BBSEA) project** aims to strengthen the preparedness of governments and the private sector in the Project Focus Countries to take actions to reduce pollution in the Black Sea. Funded by the Global Environment Facility (GEF) with a budget of USD 6.39 million, the project will run from December 2024 to September 2028 and is executed by UNOPS on behalf of the World Bank.

2. Participation Windows

The Challenge is designed to support innovations at various stages through two distinct windows.

- **The BBSEA Focus Country Window** is designed for solutions ready for direct implementation in Georgia, Moldova, or Türkiye. Eligible applicants for this window include start-ups, SMEs, universities, NGOs, and private companies that can demonstrate the ability to manage a grant. Winners receive a grant ranging from \$50,000 to \$300,000 and receive ongoing support from a specialized accelerator. Proposals are evaluated based on Innovativeness and Relevance (50%), Scalability Potential (25%), Implementation Feasibility (15%), and in-country experience (10%).

- **The Greater Black Sea Window** aims to develop concepts applicable anywhere in the Black Sea and is suited for proposals at a conceptual or prototype stage. This window is open to individuals, entrepreneurs, early-stage start-ups, and research teams. Winners receive an in-kind technical assistance award valued at \$20,000 to advance their concept. Evaluation criteria for this window are Innovativeness and Relevance (60%) and the Applicant's Capacity to Further Develop the Idea (40%).

3. Eligibility and Requirements (Both Windows)

For both windows, all applicants must be from a World Bank-eligible country and propose a demonstrably innovative solution. The eco-innovation must address one of the four key pollution challenges: eutrophication from agricultural runoff, undertreated municipal wastewater, chemical/industrial pollution, or marine litter. Applicants must not be barred from UNOPS procurement or be ineligible under World Bank anti-corruption guidelines.

4. Application Process

The application process was launched on 08 September 2025. The Expression of Interests (EOI) should be submitted electronically to **BBSEA.EIC@unops.org**. The deadline for submission is **14 November 2025, 23:59 CET**. The EOI should briefly describe the innovation, the pollution problem it addresses, and the applicant's experience. Any written questions for clarification must be submitted by **06 November 2025**.

5. Project Timeline

The EIC journey begins with the Call for Expressions of Interest (8 September - 14 November 2025), followed by an initial screening of proposals. Selected applicants will then be invited to an accelerator-led orientation to refine their proposals (January 2026 - February 2026) before submitting them to a Limited Call for Proposals in March 2026. Finalists will advance to a bootcamp (May-June 2026) culminating in a 'Shark Tank' event in late June 2026, where the definitive winners will be announced.

6. Questions and Answers

Q: Can I apply from outside the Black Sea region?

A: Yes. Applications are welcome from organizations based in any World Bank eligible country. Please note that entities based in the Russian Federation, Cuba, Belarus, and North Korea are not eligible to apply, since World Bank operations in those countries have been suspended. For the **BBSEA Focus Country Window**, you must propose implementation in **Georgia, Moldova, or Türkiye**. Partnering with local organizations is encouraged.

Q: Do I need a local partner to apply for the Focus Country Window?

A: While not required at this initial stage, demonstrating a plan to partner with local entities is encouraged to ensure successful implementation. After the initial screening, an accelerator will be hired to help finalists with matchmaking.

Q: Do you prefer individual or joint/consortium proposals?

A: We have no preference. We welcome both individual and joint proposals and evaluate them equally based on the quality of the innovation.

Q: Can our solution involve government partners or policy interventions?

A: Yes, absolutely. We welcome proposals that involve partnerships with public entities or focus on innovative policy interventions.

Q: If our team has members from different countries, who should apply?

A: The applicant's country of origin does not matter, as long as it is a World Bank eligible country. The key requirements are that the project is *implemented* in a focus country (for the Focus Country Window) and that the lead applicant can demonstrate the capacity to manage grant funds.

Q: Do I need to choose my implementation country at the initial stage?

A: We ask you to indicate a preferred implementation country in your initial application to help us map interest. However, this is not a final commitment and can be modified later in the process.

Q: When will the winning projects begin?

A: Winners will be selected in late June/early July 2026. Projects will begin shortly after, with grant winners starting an 18-month implementation and award winners starting a 6-month mentorship program.

Q: What is the expected time commitment for the accelerator program?

A: The exact methodology is not yet defined. However, finalists can expect multiple training sessions, and the intensity may be tailored to the needs of each innovator.

Q: Is co-financing required?

A: Co-funding is not required at the initial Expression of Interest (EOI) stage. For the Focus Country Window, these details will be discussed with selected applicants during the limited Call for Proposals.

Q: Can the project budget include supporting activities like policy work?

A: Yes. At this stage, we are focused on the idea. For selected applicants, the full budget can include supporting activities (e.g., policy work, enabling environment) as long as they are well-justified and contribute to the innovation's successful implementation.

Q: Are there specific budget caps for low-risk infrastructure?

A: There is no separate cap for infrastructure beyond the overall \$300,000 project limit for the Focus Country Window. Simple, low-risk infrastructure is permissible.

Q: Does the project support implementation outside the Black Sea region?

A: The project's primary goal is to benefit the Black Sea region. The support provided is designed to help you find future funding for implementation within the region.

Q: If we apply as a consortium, who can participate in the accelerator/bootcamp?

A: Each selected innovator can send a small team (typically 2-3 people) to participate in the accelerator training and bootcamp.