



# GUIDE FOR APPLICANTS

## FINANCIAL SUPPORT

### **Strengthening the institutional capacities of business support organizations on both banks of the Nistru River for sustainable economic growth and energy resilience**

IMPLEMENTED THROUGH THE PROJECT

“ADVANCED CROSS-RIVER CAPACITIES FOR TRADE” (AdTrade),  
implemented by UNDP with financial support from Sweden and the United Kingdom

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## CONTEXT

Following the crisis caused by the global pandemic and the tense regional context due to the war in Ukraine, the micro, small, and medium-sized enterprise (MSME) sector on both banks of the Nistru River continues to face significant challenges. These include: a substantial decline in commercial activities and demand for products and services, particularly in sectors with intensive international trade, due to reduced purchasing power and economic uncertainty. MSMEs face challenges related to limited access to external markets, supply chain disruptions, reliability of energy delivery, rising energy costs, and risks related to supply continuity.

In the current context, most MSMEs face major challenges in promoting their interests and navigating a volatile economic environment. Business support organizations (BSOs) and business associations remain essential for their continuous contribution to the business climate improvement and support of MSMEs in accessing new markets and adopting the necessary standards.

The current situation has clearly highlighted the impact of the regional energy crisis. Many enterprises lack the knowledge required to optimize their energy consumption and adopt efficient and sustainable practices in the field of energy efficiency (EE) and renewable energy (RE) sources. Additionally, existing best practices are not widely adopted or implemented, which limits competitiveness, increases operational costs, and exposes MSMEs to energy-related risks. This context highlights the need to develop specialized support mechanisms that provide mentoring, training, and counseling to the private sector, facilitating the transition to more energy-efficient and sustainable production and consumption models.

The project “Advanced Cross-River Capacities for Trade” (AdTrade), implemented by the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP) with financial support from Sweden and the United Kingdom, continues to provide essential support to business associations and business support organizations (BSOs). This grant call aims to strengthen the institutional capacities of BSOs to promote MSME interests and contribute to creating a more resilient business environment on both banks of the Nistru River, with a focus on energy efficiency and renewable energy use.

This approach envisages empowering a BSO from the left bank, in partnership with a BSO from the right bank, which will function as a specialized center of expertise for the private sector, providing services in the field of energy efficiency and renewable energy use. At least 70% of resources and activities available under this call, will be directed to the left bank, while the right-bank partner will contribute through know-how transfer, mentoring, and technical support. The center of expertise will offer mentoring, training, and technical assistance services in the field of energy efficiency, contributing to the adoption of sustainable practices and increasing the energy resilience of MSMEs.

## I. PURPOSE AND OBJECTIVES OF THE CALL

The purpose of this call is to strengthen a coherent and functional ecosystem of business support organizations capable of guiding the business environment — especially MSMEs — in adopting energy efficiency solutions and renewable energy sources, in line with EU market expectations and DCFTA opportunities.

### **Objectives:**

- Improve the capacities and services of actors on both banks, with a stronger focus on the left bank, in the field of energy efficiency and renewable energy use;
- Empower BSOs on both banks, with an increased focus on the left bank, to function as Energy Efficiency Expertise Centers, providing advisory services in energy efficiency, renewable energy, resource optimization, and sustainable production models;
- Facilitate partnerships between BSOs on both banks through the exchange of good practices, standard harmonization, coordination of approaches, and strengthening of trust between organization, with an emphasis on the transfer of expertise to left-bank actors;
- Strengthen the institutional capacities of up to 10 business support organisations on both banks, to enable the provision of advisory and support services in the areas of energy efficiency, renewable energy use, resource optimisation, and sustainable production models
- Conduct at least 10 energy audits for private-sector entities.

The assistance will be implemented through an open and competitive call for proposals aimed at identifying a single partnership initiative worth up to USD 140,000. This initiative will be developed and presented by a consortium of Business Support Organizations (BSOs) or associations from both banks of the Nistru River, with the aim of strengthening energy efficiency in the private sector.

Business support organizations—including sectoral business associations, producer unions, patronage organizations, chambers of commerce, and other non-governmental and non-profit business support organizations—will play a key role in supporting the private sector to improve energy efficiency and resource management. Through joint efforts, the applicant organizations will identify support needs for the private sector, strengthen the dialogue between the public and private sectors, and propose feasible solutions for creating a **specialized center of expertise in energy efficiency on the left bank of the Nistru River**, with the support of a partner on the right bank, who will contribute through the transfer of expertise, methodologies, working tools, and best practices, as well as through involvement in joint training, mentoring, and experience-sharing activities.

Selected BSOs will function as a mechanism for:

- **mentoring**, providing specialized guidance to MSMEs;
- **training**, through certified instruction and access to energy audit methodologies and tools;
- platform for **sharing knowledge and practical experiences**, by collecting and analyzing experiences from the private sector on both banks, facilitating thematic discussions and promoting good practices in the field of energy efficiency, harmonizing standards in a neutral, technical, and context-sensitive manner

The final result aims to increase BSO capacity to deliver high-quality energy efficiency services, support MSMEs in adopting sustainable and energy efficient practices, reduce energy-related risks and costs, and promote a culture of sustainable development, including social responsibility and gender equality in business environment.

## II. IMPLEMENTATION PERIOD AND BUDGET

**Implementation period:** up to 6 months.

**Maximum available funding:** USD 140,000.

### III. ELIGIBLE PROPOSALS

Applicants have significant flexibility in identifying the real needs and priorities of the private sector in the field of energy efficiency and renewable energy sources. They are encouraged to propose creative and well-founded solutions that take an integrated approach, combining several measures to maximize impact. Possible activities to strengthen the organizational capacities of BSOs and deliver services to MSMEs, with a focus on energy efficiency, include:

- **Establishment and operation of a specialized energy efficiency expertise center on the left bank**
  - Development of a centralized mechanism to provide **mentoring, training, and counseling for MSMEs** in the field of energy efficiency and renewable energy sources.
- **Investments in the physical infrastructure of the specialized expertise center**
  - Setting up spaces for training and mentoring, including training rooms and demonstration labs. Proposals may include physical improvements that are strictly necessary and proportionate to the premises intended for the operation of the center on the left bank (e.g., training/mentoring spaces, demonstration settings), to the extent that these are justified by clear operational needs and are directly related to the delivery of services to MSMEs. Such investments may only be included where they are indispensable for the operation of the centre and directly linked to the delivery of services to MSMEs. Expenditure for such investments shall not exceed 10% of the total grant budget. This ceiling is separate from and additional to the ceiling applicable to equipment and technologies (maximum 20%). All proposed investments must be reflected in a compliant budget distribution between partners and must not affect the required cooperation between organisations from both banks.
  - Equipping the center with **energy-efficient equipment and technologies**, such as:
    - Smart lighting;
    - Integration of an energy management system;
    - Smart metering devices;
    - Demonstration photovoltaic (PV) panels, etc.;
    - *and other solutions that fall into this category*
- **Training and mentoring programs for MSMEs**
  - Organization of courses, workshops, and applied trainings and demonstrations for the implementation of best practices in energy efficiency and the use of renewable energy sources.
- **Knowledge exchange between BSOs and business associations**
  - Partnerships between both banks of the Nistru River with the purpose of organization of study visits, best practices exchange, thematic workshops, and other professional networking activities. Eligible proposals will include activities aimed at strengthening the institutional capacities of business support organisations on both banks, with the purpose of enabling them to develop and deliver advisory and support services to the private sector in the areas of energy efficiency, renewable energy use, resource optimisation, and sustainable production models.
- **Development of tools and methodologies for energy audit**
  - Creation and provision of practical tools and guidelines for assessing and optimizing energy consumption in MSMEs.
  - Purchasing energy audit kits;
  - Development of energy audits for MSMEs

- Support for providing advice on energy efficiency, renewable energy use, resource optimization, and sustainable production models.
- **Awareness-raising and inclusion activities**
  - Promoting gender equality and inclusion in the private sector by adjusting internal processes and providing professional training for women in the field of energy efficiency.

Participatory, inclusive, and gender-sensitive approaches and methods are encouraged, as is corporate social responsibility in establishing dialogue between different actors and decision-makers in the private sector.

#### IV. APPLICANT ELIGIBILITY

Applications will be assessed according to the following eligibility criteria:

- Proposals must be submitted by a consortium consisting of at least two **Business Support Organizations (BSOs)** from both banks of the Nistru River (at least one organization from the left bank and one from the right bank). The partnership must demonstrate a clear commitment to cooperation, knowledge transfer, and inclusive collaboration. The partnership documentation (e.g., partnership agreement or memorandum of understanding) must explicitly describe the planned collaboration, the roles of the partners, and the mechanisms for knowledge transfer.
- Each organization may submit only one proposal as the lead applicant, but may participate as a co-applicant in multiple applications.
- All applicants and co-applicants must be **non-profit Business Support Organizations**, such as sectoral business associations, chambers of commerce, producer unions, clusters, or other legally registered non-profit entities that provide services to MSMEs.
- All participating organizations must be legally registered and able to provide proof of registration at the time of application.
- The lead applicant must demonstrate a minimum of two years' experience with documented results in supporting MSMEs through capacity building, advisory services, sector development, or similar activities.
- Organizations that have ongoing grant agreements with **UNDP Moldova**, valid between March 30, 2026 to December 31, 2026, are not eligible to apply as lead applicant in this call. They may participate as co-applicants, provided that the proposed activities do not duplicate or conflict with the commitments made under existing UNDP grants.

#### **Non-eligibility criteria:**

- The lead applicant or partner organization has been found responsible for serious financial or professional mismanagement, as demonstrated by evidence recognized by UNDP Moldova.
- The lead applicant and/or partner organization has/have failed to fulfill its/their contractual obligations under previous agreements with donor organizations.
- The lead applicant and/or co-applicant(s) is/are a private entity.
- The lead applicant and/or co-applicant(s) is a legal entity owned by the state or established by public authorities.
- The lead applicant has an ongoing grant agreement with UNDP Moldova, with an active implementation period between March 30, 2026, and December 31, 2026.
- The implementation period of the project proposal is longer than 6 months.

## V. BUDGET

- The project budget, as part of the application form, must be expressed in US dollars.
- The budget must contain clear information on how the funds will be used and a detailed breakdown of expenses, separately for each organization involved.
- The budget must be realistic and cost effective.
- The budget must correspond to the work plan as described in the project proposal.
- All goods and services purchased shall include the value excluding VAT.
- Up to 70% of the budget shall be allocated to one of the partners within the consortium of BSOs.
- **The final tranche, not exceeding 10% of the total approved grant amount, shall be covered from the beneficiary's own contribution and disbursed retroactively only upon submission and formal acceptance by UNDP of the Final Narrative and Final Financial Reports.**

### Eligible expenses are:

- Expenses for experts, consultants, trainers and IT support.
- Expenses for service providers for the provision of services to both implementing organizations and beneficiary companies.
- Expenses for training.
- Transportation expenses (hire of means of transport, fuel, transportation for participants, etc.).
- Marketing expenses and promotional materials.
- Expenses for the purchase of consumables and other materials necessary for the project.
- Event expenses (catering, accommodation, information and awareness campaigns, photocopying, printing, interpretation and translation, etc.).
- Administrative expenses (staff remuneration, communications, rent and utilities, postal and banking services) must not exceed 20% of the proposed project budget and must be well justified.
- The costs of purchasing equipment must be well justified and strictly related to the purpose and activities of the project. These shall not exceed 20% of the total budget;
- Expenses for repairs/fittings (civil works/renovations) strictly necessary for the operation of the center on the left bank and directly related to the delivery of services to MSMEs; these shall not exceed 10% of the total project budget and must be duly justified.

### Non-eligible expenses:

- Expenses made prior to signing the contract (including expenses related to project submission).
- Fines and penalties.
- Activities that are already covered financially by another funding program.
- Individual sponsorship for participation in workshops, seminars, and conferences.
- Individual scholarships.
- Covering the current costs of an organization, unless they are clearly related to the project objectives.
- Expenses for the purchase or production of alcoholic beverages, tobacco products, ammunition, luxury goods, and other goods prohibited under UN regulations, including those related to the organization of gambling;
- Losses due to exchange rate difference.

## VI. SELECTION CRITERIA

### **Impact on the sector.**

Eligible projects must demonstrate a clear impact on the energy and resource efficiency sector in the private sector on both banks of the Nistru River. The proposal must show how the proposed activities will support MSMEs in adopting good practices in the field of energy efficiency, the use of renewable energy sources, and resource optimization, thereby contributing to the competitiveness and energy resilience of the sector.

Projects must include the active involvement of relevant stakeholders, such as business support organizations, local and central authorities, as well as the academic and the business communities, to ensure an integrated and sustainable approach.

Proposals should include clear mechanisms for building trust and cooperation on both banks of the Nistru River through regular interaction between entrepreneurs and organizations, exchange of good practices, harmonization of standards, mentoring, and training sessions. The roles of each partner and how they will contribute to knowledge transfer and to the operation of the center must be clearly described in the project proposal.

**The relevance** of the proposed project refers to how it supports the development of the organizational capacities of BSOs and MSMEs in the field of energy efficiency and renewable energy sources, including through mentoring, training, and consulting. The proposed measures must be aligned with the mandate of the partner organizations and correspond to the skills and experience of the staff involved, thus ensuring effective implementation and a sustainable impact on the private sector.

**The implementation logic and development approach** will be assessed based on the correlation between the proposed activities and the expected results of the center of expertise in energy efficiency and renewable sources, as well as on the feasibility of the action plan. The risks identified for achieving the project objectives and the proposed mitigation measures are taken into account. The relevance of the budget must be clearly justified, with well-defined expenses aligned with the project activities.

**Innovation** refers to how the project will generate ripple effects and can be replicated in other organizations or fields. Applicants are encouraged to integrate innovative approaches, digital solutions, and green economy practices, develop public-private cooperation platforms and networks, and contribute to promoting energy and ecological transition in the MSME sector.

**Financial sustainability** refers to the project's ability to maintain the operation of the center of expertise in energy efficiency and renewable sources and related services after the end of the funding period. The proposal must present a clear sustainability plan, show how the project complements or builds on existing initiatives, and describe measures to avoid overlapping activities. To strengthen sustainability, there will be collaboration with business support organizations and service providers in order to ensure the continued provision of advice, training, and knowledge to MSMEs on both banks of the Nistru River.

Eligible proposals will be evaluated technically based on the following criteria:

Selection criteria	Description	Score
Impact on the sector	Identification of energy challenges (20 p.)	20
Trust-building measures	Potential for improving the competitiveness of MSMEs and energy resilience (20 p.)	40
	Alignment with EU/DCFTA expectations on green transition and added value for the BSO ecosystem (20 p.)	
Relevance of the proposal	Alignment with the organizational mandate and demonstrated expertise (15 p.)	40
	Relevance of the proposed activities to energy efficiency and green transition objectives (25 p.)	
Implementation logic and expected results	Clear and realistic roadmap and work plan with defined indicators (25 p.)	50
	Quality and clarity of expected results; expected impact on institutional capacity building in the field of energy efficiency (25 p.)	
Sustainability of the proposed initiative	Clear and realistic sustainability plan describing how the EE expertise center and related services will continue to operate after the project completion (30 p.)	30
Confidence-building and cooperation between both banks of the Nistru River	Quality of the design (structure) of cooperation between the two banks (10 p.)	20
	Clarity and robustness of partner roles and joint activities (10 p.)	
<b>Total</b>		<b>200</b>

## VII. APPLICATION PROCEDURE

Interested organizations shall submit a package of documents, which shall include:

- **Application form** (Annex 1), which will include the project proposal
- **Project budget** (Annex 2)
- Copy of the **registration certificate** for each partner organization
- Copy of the **charter** of each partner organization
- **Partnership agreement**, signed by all business support organizations, which specifies the role of each partner
- **CVs** of key personnel who will be involved in the implementation of the project. CVs of the experts to be hired and their written consent to participate in the project.

The application form and the applicant's guide are posted on the UNDP in Moldova website (<https://sc.undp.md/viewtenders2/>). These documents can also be obtained by sending a request to Cristina Trifan at the following e-mail address: [cristina.trifan@undp.org](mailto:cristina.trifan@undp.org)

The application package for the call of proposals shall be sent electronically by e-mail to [cristina.trifan@undp.org](mailto:cristina.trifan@undp.org) and [alina.rosca@undp.org](mailto:alina.rosca@undp.org) before the **deadline of 13 March, 2026, 16: 00 GMT+2**. Subject line: **EOI / EE Center of Expertise**.

Applications submitted by any other means will be rejected. Incomplete application packages or those submitted after the deadline will not be examined. Those sent by e-mail should not exceed 20 MB. Application packages larger than 20 MB will be divided into several messages, and in the subject of each message, in addition to "**EOI / EE Center of Expertise**", "part x of y" must be indicated, as mentioned above. Large files should be archived (ZIP).

Clarifications on application may be requested at the address [cristina.trifan@undp.org](mailto:cristina.trifan@undp.org). The deadline for submitting **requests for clarification is 11 March, 2026, 17:00, GMT+2**.

## VIII. SELECTION PROCEDURE

The selection will be based on the principles of merit, transparency, equality, and rational use of funds. The evaluation of project proposals consists of two stages:

Stage I: Verification of applicant eligibility and compliance with the application package requirements. Assessment of the relevance of the submitted project proposal, the available expertise, the proven partnership, as well as the budgetary relevance and the reliability of implementation. Incomplete project proposals (including annexes) and project proposals that do not meet the evaluation criteria will not be considered.

Stage II Evaluation of project proposals and budget accuracy in accordance with the evaluation criteria. This stage is carried out by the Project Evaluation Committee. The projects that receive the highest total scores will be recommended for final approval by the AdTrade Project Board. During the evaluation process, attention will be paid to the coherence between the objectives of the proposal, the activities aimed at strengthening the capacities of business support organisations, the anticipated impact on service delivery to the private sector, as well as the measures proposed to improve the business environment through interventions in the field of energy efficiency.

Annex 1 - Application Form.  
Annex 2 - Project Budget