GPEK
Greening Private
Enterprises in Kosovo

Greening Private Enterprises
in Kosovo (GPEK)

CHALLENGE FUND

CALL FOR PROPOSALS

CFP-2026-01

Schweizerische Eidgenossenschaft
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Greening Private Enterprises in Kosovo (GPEK) is a project of the Swiss Agency for Development and Cooperation (SDC), co-funded by Sweden and implemented by Helvetas.

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Kosovo (GPEK)

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Issued by:	Greening Private Enterprises in Kosovo Project
Issued date:	July 20, 2026
Closing date:	January 31, 2027, at 16:00 CET. Early applications are strongly encouraged.
Subject:	Invitation to eligible entities to submit Expressions of Interest (EOI) for partnership funding aimed at addressing the systemic financial barriers that hinder green innovation among Small and Medium Enterprises (SME) in Kosovo.
Eligibility:	Applicants must be SMEs legally registered in Kosovo for a minimum of two years.
Funding:	Awards will range from EUR 50,000 to maximum EUR 100,000. Awards falling below EUR 50,000 may be taken into consideration in well-justified and exceptional circumstances.
Information:	A specific timetable for information session(s) will be published at Helvetas Kosovo Facebook and LinkedIn pages. If you have any questions about the application, please email gpekgrants@helvetas.org.
Application:	Applicants should submit completed EOIs to the GPEK Challenge Fund team electronically to gpekgrants@helvetas.org, with the subject: CfP#1 Application – Applicant's Name.

1. Challenge Fund Background

The Greening Private Enterprises in Kosovo (GPEK) project aims to enhance the competitiveness and resilience of Kosovo's SMEs by supporting their transition toward cleaner, more resource-efficient technologies and business practices. Within this framework, the Challenge Fund is designed as a catalytic financing mechanism that enables enterprises to test, adopt, and scale innovative green solutions. Unlike traditional grant facilities, the Challenge Fund operates on a co-investment logic, meaning that it does not fully finance business activities but rather shares risks with private sector actors to encourage investment in areas that may not yet be fully commercially viable but demonstrate strong potential for both business and environmental impact.

2. Purpose of the call

The objective of this call is to support innovative, market-oriented green investments by SMEs in Kosovo. It aims to encourage businesses to explore new approaches that improve both environmental performance and competitiveness. Proposals must:

- Introduce/or scale environmentally sustainable technologies or processes;
- Improve resource efficiency and deliver measurable impact (e.g. CO_2 reductions, energy savings);
- Support compliance with emerging green standards or open new sustainability-linked business opportunities;
- Demonstrate replication potential influencing other market actors through demonstration effects.

3. Priority Areas for Funding

Through this funding call, GPEK welcomes impactful and innovative applications that demonstrably improve green innovation among SMEs, drive systemic change within the sector, and contribute measurably to the programmes expected outcomes. Specific tasks proposed by the applicants could include but are not limited to delivering solutions to the following areas such as:

- *Green Competitiveness & Market Access* - ESG compliance and certification readiness for SMEs (support for eco-labeling, sustainability standards, and export compliance), digital traceability systems and manufacturing (tools for tracking supply chains and meeting buyer requirements), resource efficiency & circular economy adoption, supplier upgrading for EU value chains etc.
- *Innovation Ecosystems & Collaboration Platforms* - Green innovation hubs and pilot initiatives, cluster development in key sectors (agrifood, manufacturing), university-industry collaboration for applied research, digital platforms for knowledge sharing and benchmarking,

- *Green Finance & Investment Mobilization* - Investment readiness programs for SMEs (business planning, ESG reporting, financial literacy), ESG-aligned financial products (supporting banks in developing green loans, performance-based financing), blended finance and risk-sharing mechanisms (de-risking green investments for smaller firms), awareness and matchmaking platforms (connecting enterprises with financial institutions and investors).
- *Business Environment & Policy Reform for Green Growth* - streamlining certification, permitting, and inspection systems, support for implementation of EPR and eco-labeling frameworks, public-private dialogue platforms, regulatory impact assessments and policy harmonization with EU standards.
- *Inclusive Green Growth & Support for Women and Underrepresented Groups* - Targeted support for women-led and minority-owned enterprises in accessing green markets and finance, tailored capacity-building and mentorship programs, inclusive innovation initiatives, removal of structural barriers to participation in green sectors, and promotion of equitable access to skills development, employment, and leadership opportunities within the green economy.

4. Eligible applicants

This call is open to **private sector SMEs** registered in Kosovo that demonstrate innovation potential and a capacity to co-invest in their growth.

Basic Eligibility Requirements

To qualify, applicants (including partners) must:

- Be legally registered and actively operating in Kosovo for a minimum of two years;
- Possess basic financial and operational management capacity;
- Be able to commit the required cash co-financing contribution.

Minimum Organizational and Financial Capacity

Eligible SMEs must demonstrate the following:

Operational Capacity

- Qualified management and technical staff capable of delivering project activities;
- Functioning financial management systems and internal controls;
- Available and verifiable financial records for at least the past two years;
- An active and verifiable bank account;
- Ability to manage grant funds in full compliance with donor requirements;
- Demonstrated capacity to safeguard assets, prevent misuse of funds, and implement activities effectively.

Strategic and Programmatic Alignment

Eligible SMEs must also demonstrate:

- Clear alignment with the objectives of the GPEK Challenge Fund;
- A tangible contribution to green innovation, environmental sustainability, and market development;
- Ability to implement activities in accordance with SDC, SIDA, and Helvetas policies and standards;
- A firm commitment to co-investment and milestone-based implementation.

5. Ineligible applicants

Organizations that are ineligible for support under the Challenge Fund include:

- Entities and individuals involved in fraud, corruption, money laundering, terrorist financing, or other illegal activities, human rights abuses or unethical business practices;
- Entities listed on international sanctions lists (UN, EU, Switzerland);
- Entities that have misused SDC or SIDA funds in the past;
- Entities that promote anti-democratic agendas or illegal activities;
- Political parties or affiliated institutions;
- Entities that intend to use funds for religious purposes and/or
- Organizations with a conflict of interest, including affiliation with Helvetas.

Greenwashing - Applicants engaged in greenwashing shall not be eligible for support. Greenwashing refers to false, misleading, exaggerated or unsubstantiated environmental claims regarding the environmental characteristics or benefits of an investment. Environmental claims shall be supported by objective technical documentation and recognised calculation methodologies. Investments for which the claimed environmental benefits cannot be substantiated shall be rejected.

6. Grant Size

Subject to the availability of funds, any awards resulting from this funding opportunity are expected to be in the range of:

- **EUR 50,000 – EUR 100,000.**
- Awards falling below EUR 50,000 may be taken into consideration in well-justified and exceptional circumstances.

- The Challenge Fund covers up to 70% of eligible project costs. Applicants must contribute at least 30% in cash. In-kind contributions are encouraged but cannot replace the minimum cash requirement.
- Implementation period of funded activities is up to **2 years.**

Funds may only be used for productive investment and innovation activities. Debt repayment or servicing of any kind is not allowed.

7. Eligible Costs and Activities

To strengthen the green transition of the eligible applicants in Kosovo GPEK and the Challenge Fund encourage businesses to submit investment projects covering the following aspects.

- Green technologies, equipment and machinery: acquisition, installation and commissioning of green technologies, production equipment, digital technologies, renewable energy systems, energy-efficient equipment, minor fixed assets, materials and other productive investments directly related to the proposed green innovation.
- Consultancy and specialized technical services (during project implementation): fees for external experts providing engineering and technical design, environmental assessments, certification support, specialized training, technical supervision, feasibility studies, advisory services, or other expertise required for the implementation of the approved green investment.
- Travel (where directly related to project implementation): transportation, accommodation and subsistence costs necessary for activities such as technical training, equipment installation and commissioning, supplier or technology visits, certification processes, or other implementation activities directly linked to the proposed green investment.
- Equipment: digital equipment, minor fixed assets, materials, etc.
- Events, communication and dissemination (where directly related to project implementation): venue hire, workshops, stakeholder consultations, demonstration events, project visibility materials, printing, publication, translation, document formatting, event logistics, and other implementation-related communication costs, visibility materials, etc.
- Certifications: GPEK can co-finance first-time certification, first renewal certification (up to 50%), and related capacity building/training needed for all certifications including after first renewals.

Eligible investments should contribute to one or more aspects of the green transition, including resource efficiency, circular economy solutions, renewable energy, energy efficiency, sustainable production processes, environmental compliance, green certification, low-carbon technologies, or other innovations that demonstrate environmental performance and business competitiveness.

8. Ineligible Costs and Activities

All costs incurred under GPEK project grants must be reasonable, allocable and allowable in accordance with the terms of the grant agreement and applicable cost principles. Ineligible costs or activities include (but are not limited to) the following:

- Personnel costs
- Alcoholic beverages;
- Bad debts, fines and penalties imposed on the grantee and any associated legal costs;
- Entertainment costs, including amusement, diversion, and social activities and any costs directly associated with such costs;
- Fund raising, including financial campaigns and endowment drives, incurred solely to raise capital or contributions;
- Goods or services for personal use of the organization's employees (including costs of housing, housing allowances and personal living expenses);
- Armaments, weapons, or related components;
- Tobacco production or trade, Gambling, casinos, or betting;
- Pornography or racist media;
- Production of restricted or hazardous substances not aligned with safeguard standards.
- Interest payments and other borrowing costs are not eligible for support under the Challenge Fund. Eligible expenditures must relate to approved project activities and be supported by appropriate documentation, regardless of whether they are financed through grant funds, own resources, or loans;
- Activities that are political in nature and activities that are associated with, or linked to, any political parties;
- Organization costs including incorporation fees, brokers' fees, attorneys, investment counsellors, etc.

9. Cost Sharing

Applicants are required to share at least 30% of the costs of implementation of the proposed project activities. Applicants that do not include any cost-share in the proposal will not be considered.

Applicants are encouraged to make in-kind contributions; however, as they do not involve cash expenditure for grantees, <u>they will not be treated as co-financing</u>. "In-kind" represents investment made in the form of goods and services, rather than in cash.

10. Systemic Approach

Unlike the common donor approach in Kosovo which typically focuses on funding individual companies to boost their competitiveness, GPEK operates differently. GPEK does not fund or support initiatives designed solely to improve the performance or competitiveness of a single business or entity. That said, GPEK may engage with individual companies when the improvements achieved are expected to generate broader benefits across the sector.

GPEK exclusively funds initiatives where applicants can demonstrate that their proposed activities will drive meaningful, systemic changes within their respective sector. "Systemic impact" in this context means that the benefits of the proposed activities extend well beyond a single organization or partner. Strong applications will present a clear and convincing case for the type and scale of systemic change expected to result from the partnership with GPEK that will create economic, environment and social impact.

To assess whether a proposed intervention qualifies as systemic, applicants may find it useful to consider the following questions:

- Will the intervention benefit a wide range of actors, entities, or companies — rather than just one?
- Will it drive behavioral changes among a large number of market actors, inspiring others to adopt new practices?
- Will it enable a partner to pilot or test a new product or service?
- Will it help establish a new norm of competitive behavior within the sector?
- Will it provide market actors with better, more sustainable access to market information?

11. Key Desirable Outcomes

Applications submitted under this solicitation are required to demonstrate how their funding requests and proposed activities contribute to at least one of the outcome indicators below.

While applications are evaluated from multiple angles, those that clearly demonstrate greater potential for impact in one or preferably more outcome indicators will (all else equal) have a greater chance of receiving funding.

- Increase green innovations/technologies.
- Increase number of relevant green certifications obtained.
- Increase jobs, including for women, youth, and minorities.
- Increase number of individuals completing industry-relevant training.
- Increase availability of financing options to companies (ESG, equity financing, etc.).
- Increase digitalization of companies.

12. Application Process

This funding opportunity will involve a multi-tiered application and evaluation process.

Phase 1: Submission of Expression of Interest (Concept Note)

During the first phase, applicants are required to submit an Expression of Interest (EOI), summarizing the problem statement, it aims to address the relevance of the proposed activities to GPEK goals, description of main proposed activities and tasks, the expected systemic impact, expected results (describing how the results contribute to the project's outcome indicators), a management plan, past relevant experience of the applicant, and an initial proposed budget. The EOI should clearly and concisely explain the proposed grant activity's purpose, relevance, activities, and expected results in support of GPEK objectives as set forth in this call. All EOIs must be submitted in the EOI format included in this solicitation and must not exceed 5 pages.

Applicants should submit written EOIs to GPEK Challenge Fund team electronically, via email to gpekgrants@helvetas.org not later than is January 31, 2027, 16:00 (CET). EOIs submitted after this date and time will not be considered under this call.

GPEK will convene a Grants Assessment Committee (GAC) that will evaluate EOIs submitted in response to this funding opportunity on a rolling basis. EOIs will be evaluated based on the criteria specified below. Should an applicant's EOI be accepted by the GAC, the applicant will be invited to submit a Full Grant Application as detailed below.

Documents to be submitted:

- EOI Template;
- Business Registration Certificate and Fiscal/Tax Certificate;
- Ownership & Management Structure with CVs of key staff.

Phase 2: Submission of Full Grant Application

Upon evaluation of EOIs, GPEK will invite organizations that submitted successful EOIs to submit a full grant application (FGA) based on the concept and technical approach proposed in the EOI. All applications must be submitted in the Full Grant Application Format provided by GPEK team. The FGA Format requires applicants to expand in detail on the proposed grant activity, objectives, systemic impact, and expected results, including a description of target beneficiaries and stakeholders, a proposed staffing structure, and a detailed grant budget. The Full Grant Application must not exceed 15 pages.

Documents to be submitted:

- Full Proposal Template (template to be provided to shortlisted applicants);
- Detailed Budget (template to be provided to shortlisted applicants);
- Financial statements (last 2 years);
- Bank account details and
- Additional supporting documents (upon request).

13. Evaluation Criteria

GPEK will convene a Grants Assessment Committee (GAC) that will review both EOIs and FGAs submitted in response to this funding opportunity on a rolling basis. Priority is given to projects introducing new technologies, processes, or business models that go beyond business-as-usual. The GAC will evaluate EOIs and FGAs based on the following criteria:

Criteria (%)	Description
Relevance to GPEK objectives & impact (20%)	Proposed grant activity, goals, and objectives in line with the objectives of GPEK Project (i.e., resource efficiency, renewable energy, circular economy, compliance)
Business case & financial viability (20%)	Credibility of business model, realistic costs, co-financing
Technical feasibility & implementation (20%)	Clear activities, timeline, milestones, risk mitigation
Scalability & systemic impact (20%)	Replication potential, market relevance, sustainability post-grant
Capacity & experience (10%)	Track record, team capacity, financial management
Cost-effectiveness (10%)	Efficiency of costs relative to expected results
Total 100%	

If the GAC accepts the EOI based on the above criteria, GPEK will notify the applicant in writing and will invite the organization to submit a full grant application. The deadline for the FGA will be communicated to the successful applicant upon notification that the EOI has been accepted. The GAC will evaluate the FGA based on the criteria listed above.

GPEK reserves the right to reject any or all applications received if such action is in the best interest of the donors. Applications are submitted at the risk of the applicant; should circumstances prevent making an award, all preparation and submission costs are at the applicant's expense.

Shortlisted applicants also undergo Due Diligence covering organizational capacity, financial health, technical feasibility, business case, environmental impact, and additionality.

14. Technical assistance to shortlisted applicants

Shortlisted applicants may receive targeted Technical Assistance (TA) to strengthen their full proposals based on the GAC review. TA experts can help with refining the technical solution, strengthening financial assumptions, estimating environmental impact, and structuring implementation plans. TA support is advisory only and does not guarantee funding.

15. Grant Application, Evaluation, and Implementation

#	Process	Description
1	Call Launch	Public announcement, info sessions, Q&A
2	EOI Submission	Applicants submit short concept + supporting documents
3	Eligibility Screening and shortlisting	Review of minimum criteria; eligible EOIs scored; shortlisted applicants invited to the FGA phase
4	Full Proposal	Detailed proposal, budget, and implementation plan
5	Due Diligence	Financial, technical, and organizational assessment
6	Final Evaluation	GAC review; subject to donor veto
7	Contracting	Grant agreements signed
8	Implementation	Milestone-based disbursements and ongoing monitoring
9	Grant Completion/Closing	Upon successful completion of all milestones and results outlined in the grant agreement, GPEK certifies the grant as successfully implemented.