

Label of Women Entrepreneurship Centre



Criteria for acquiring of label Procedures & conditions



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1 Abbreviations and glossary of terms

BWCON	Bwcon GmbH
DR	Danube Region
EWC	Women Entrepreneurship Centre
IRS	Innovation Region Styria Ltd
LP	Lead Partner
ME	Ministry of Economy of Bulgaria
MRA	Maribor Development Agency
PBN	Pannon Business Network Association
PIMM	Association of Small and Medium Entreprises in Constanta
РР	Project Partner
ODIMM	Organization for Small and Medium Enterprise Sector Development
RAPIV	Regional Agency for Entrepreneurship and Innovations - Varna
SEBS	School of Economics and Business, University of Sarajevo
SGZ	Chamber of Commerce and Industry of Stajerska
TSoC	Transnational Study of Current State
TPV	Technology Park Varazdin Ltd.
UOC	OVIDIUS University of Constanta
UP	University of Pannonia
VFU	Varna Free University "Chernorizets Hrabar"
YWE	Young women entrepreneurship



2 Scope of the document

The document provides an overall insight and a detailed overview on specifics of EWCs, criteria and procedure to be followed for acquiring a label, maintenance and renewed of the label, financial conditions, and visual identity to be followed.

3 Summary

The quality process underpins the value of the EWC Quality Label and of the organisations that have received the licence (professionalism, performance, consistency and positioning). EWC are becoming more and more dependent on financing from local bodies and their own ability to generate their own resources. To adopt user-oriented behaviour is becoming increasingly important.

The EWC Quality Label enables the measurement of conformity of an organisation to the WOMEN IN BUSINESS model. The purpose of the criteria is to provide an assurance that certified organisations meet standards in terms of their service offering and performance.

4 Introduction

Gender Equality represents an important element of democracy and prerequisite for complete exercising of human rights. Equality is of key importance for the attainment of social justice and drawing closer together sustainable, intelligent, and affiliated economic growth. It touches upon all fields of life, thus the integration of the gender equality principle in all policies is a requisite condition and guarantee for good management and progress of society.

In the past decade, the public perception of a woman's role in society has steadily improved and younger generations are met with more family support and encouragement. There are definitely more and more strong women role-models and women are far more likely to go for leadership, science and entrepreneurial roles than in previous generations.

Despite the progress, the Trnansational Study of Current State (2019) reflects that the national culture in transitional countries, including less developed EU members, such as Bulgaria, Croatia and Romania are still not supportive enough for women entrepreneurs, does not encourage women to engage in entrepreneurship and advance in their careers. In the developed countries that were encompassed in this study, Austria and Germany, the situation is better, however, our findings show that availability of jobs in Austria and Germany, providing young professionals with a good status and salary, as well as women being cautious and risk-averse result in fewer women starting their own business, especially when they are young and maybe lacking self-confidence.



The motivational driver of young women in being or becoming an entrepreneur is the employment and earning for a reasonable living, whereas the job security plays a significant role of those who are not entrepreneurs yet. The autonomy in terms of realization of own dreams and ideas is also a strong motivational aspect of YWE. YWEs in the study perceive themselves more creative than innovative, but at the same time very self-efficient.

The main obstacle for YWE is access to finance, followed by the lack of savings. This finding is in line with previous studies that demonstrated that access to finance is one of the most frequent barriers for successful entrepreneurial attempts. In transition countries, an important barrier to start the own business is high corruption as well, followed by the red tape and overall the weak economic environment. This gives a clear guide for the policymakers – to make access to finance a priority tool for boosting the entrepreneurship in general, and women entrepreneurship in particular.

The most important competencies barrier is the lack of information about how to start a business, followed by a lack of entrepreneurial skills. The highest "soft" barrier for them is uncertainty about the future in case of starting own business, followed by the risk of losing the balance between work and personal life.

The success of young women entrepreneurs is further linked to the education and business training that enables them to gain management skills and obtain relevant courses and mentoring, advisory and consulting support. Different types of training, coaching and mentoring are needed among young women entrepreneurs. Although the business subjects prevail (marketing, entrepreneurship, finance, accounting) some young women proposed also training for personal growth, storytelling, rhetoric, writing, coping with stress and negotiations. Previous success, participation in business and professional networks and clusters plays a prominent role in their business life. Although there are already many programmes for improving competencies of entrepreneurs, findings of previous paragraphs show the pressing need for additional means of support to YWE, justifying the formation and potential of the Women Entrepreneurship Centres (EWCs) in the Women in the Business project.

The EWCs act as a "boundary organizations" of knowledge, learning and information that facilitate communication between young women, experts, universities, research institutes and SMEs.

They are spaces that can provide both social and economic transformation. Importantly, their impacts are often more long-term, rather than demonstrating short term gains in the regions they target. The potential benefits of a EWC outside of just business-focused statements to the following based on the follow findings:

- EWC can build collaborative communities that foster both social connectivity and economic change (at the individual and collective level)
- EWC can attract diverse members with heterogeneous knowledge which can collaborate and exchange knowledge
- EWC can localize global entrepreneurial culture, supporting the diversification of national/ regional economies



• EWC can facilitate creativity and collaboration in physical and digital space, giving individuals and businesses/entrepreneurs the chance to both learn and engage with digital technology for a range of skill levels.

The primary purpose of the EWC is to foster entrepreneurship and motivate, educate and support young women willing to start and develop their own businesses which will lead to creation of entrepreneurial environment in the Danube region and beyond. EWCs supports young women by providing on-line training using the e-learning platform and mentoring programmes, networking opportunities, tailored matchmaking, consulting, other services. EWCs also provides a creative and interactive atmosphere - monthly meetings, daily discussions - on issues, successes, and challenges, problem solving events as well as first necessity business infrastructure and facilities.

5 Women Entrepreneurship Centres within WOMEN IN BUSINESS project

The EWCs established within WOMEN IN BUSINESS project are the backbone of young women entrepreneurship sector in the Danube region. They serve as drivers in the region. EWCs provide focused support to entrepreneurs through a supportive environment that helps them establish their business ideas and develop their concepts into market ready products, supports the acquisition of business knowledge, facilitates the raising of necessary finance, introduces the entrepreneurs to business networks, all of which should substantially reduce the level of failure. They not only allow new entrepreneurs to start their business by reducing the related costs and risk but do also increase their chances of survival and success by building capacity, networks and a supportive community.

The work programme of the Centres is a combination of policy development, training, research and educational innovation. Through the residential nature of their activities, the EWCs can achieve what is not possible through financial support in the form of grants alone: the EWC mark biographies and make memories, they create sustainable networks and co-operation, and they engage in development and build consolidated knowledge. This knowledge serves as a reference point for the YWE policies and programmes of the countries from the Danube region and other countries, of other international institutions, and of non-governmental partners in the international WEs sector.



6 Specify of Women Entrepreneurship Centre

The standard that EWCs represent concept covers all aspects of the policy, programme, infrastructure, management and administration of the centre. It can be best expressed and understood through the five specific areas of what the EWC from WOMEN IN BUSINESS project do and of how they do it:

1) Multiplication of economic impact

• The activities of Women Entrepreneurship Centre aim to support the establishment and development of female-owned and or female-led SMEs and micro-businesses, fostering a more diverse and innovative economy, fostering the creative class, increasing the employment opportunities of users, and fostering better usage of resources.

2) Multiplication of social and community impact

• The activities of Women Entrepreneurship Centre aim to support women entrepreneurs to become actors of social change, not only on their individual development and to foster social connectivity.

3) Influence on women entrepreneurship policy

 EWC host and promote standard-setting activities in field important for women entrepreneurship policies from European to local level; intensive cooperation of women entrepreneurship work practice, research and women entrepreneurship policy is encouraged.

4) Knowledge and skills development

 EWC provides women-friendly support and access to services specifically designed for women entrepreneurs on how to establish and develop own business. Knowledge and skills development is ensured by implementation of different programmes through inside staff members, and external experts and mentors.

5) International co-operation and networking

• EWC builds a supportive ecosystem for entrepreneurship, that should be done in cooperation with local, regional or national government and different stakeholders. It provides e-learning platform with the opportunity to exchange experience and learn across national borders.



7 Added value of the EWC Quality Label for candidate centres

What do interested centres stand to gain if they go through the process of acquiring the EWC Quality Label and maintain the standards promoted?

Quality development

Candidate centres can use the process of acquiring the label to improve the quality of their offer to young women entrepreneurs or would be entrepreneurs. Such quality development is self-paced, because the candidate centre decides how fast it can achieve the standard. In support of this quality development process, RAPIV and/or 4 EWCs established in the WOMEN IN BUSINESS project can provide the candidate centre with expert input in relation to the conceptual and practical development of women entrepreneurship policy, and specific advice on the development of the infrastructural, managerial, administrative and educational quality of EWCs whose main mission is value support for business women.

Training and resources

Candidate centres can count on some specific support measures. For example, they have the opportunity to participate in the events organized by EWCs network, their staff can participate in EWCs training activities, they have access to e-learning platform, the educational materials for women entreprenuership for internal use and dissemination, and they have access to copyright for translations of such materials that are provided.

Networking

The process to acquire the label will bring candidate centres into contact with an elaborate infrastructure for international networking among professionals and women entrepreneurs. On the one hand, centres will have access to participation in relevant international activities for exchange and knowledge sharing, particularly the WOMEN IN BUSINESS e-learning platform. On the other, they will be supported in making connections with other structures that have successfully acquired the label that can advise them. In addition, candidate centres will have access to the WOMEN IN BUSINESS network of experts in training, mentoring, policy developemt, research and support.

Visibility and Prestige

The acquisition of the EWC Quality Label provides centres with transational recognition and legitimation for their work. This can help centres to access recognition at home and abroad, and may help them to access support and resources to fulfil their mission. In addition, acquiring the quality label gives the centre concerned the right to use its visual identity, including relevant logos and publicity materials.



8 **Criteria for aqcuiring the label**

Acquiring the EWC Quality Label takes place on the basis of a **qualitative assessment**. It is hoped that the criteria will give centres already in operation the impetus to improve their offer to women entrepreneurs and the female entrepreneurship sector. For those centres in the planning stages, and yet to be established, it is hoped that the criteria can act as a guide and work plan, but they could also check the Guideline for setting up and running of Women Entrepreneurship Centre¹ (2021) for more details.

The EWC Quality Label can either be granted to an organisation as a whole or to a specific department or unit of an existing organisation. In the latter case, the criteria apply to that specific department. It can also be granted to organisations or departments which operate on more than one site, as long as the label is given to the organisation or department responsible for ensuring that the EWC Quality Label criteria are fully implemented on all sites.

The Regional Agency for Entrepreneurship and Innovations - Varna (RAPIV) autonomously manages the EWC Certification. The branded EWC Quality Label is managed by RAPIV, which is obliged to implement the EWC Certification enabling the development of a network of excellence through the integration of a quality approach. Thereby, RAPIV is charged with granting, renewing and withdrawing EWC certification. The process of certification will be supported by all PPs being part of WOMEN IN BUSINESS project.

Eligibility criteria

EWCs promote, stimulate and develop women owned start-ups, scale-ups and/or SMEs through the delivery of smart and comprehensive detection, ideation, support and acceleration processes, with the goal of contributing ultimately to regional/local economic development, competitiveness and growth.

EWCs hold a mission of both public and private interest. Indeed, EWCs contribute extensively to regional development, by creating wealth and generating jobs, while supporting directly the private sector through specialized services.

Each EWC has to take into account the needs expressed by the regional/local realities.

¹ Women Entrepreneurship Centre Guide: setting up and running - <u>http://www.interreg-</u> <u>danube.eu/uploads/media/approved_project_public/0001/47/9227771436c2fcbd6927499be699d2f4</u> <u>81bf3607.pdf</u>



The candidate centre must able to demonstrate that:

- The centre has as its prime mission, the aim to serve and to support women entrepreneurs and women would be entrepreneurs.
- The centre works in a specific geographical area.
- The centre ensures an active partnership with both the public and private social, economic and innovation agents of the ecosystem is in place, ensuring also their role is acknowledged by the relevant public authorities in the women entrepreneurship area if appropriate.
- The centre promotes transnational networking and cooperation in the field of women entrepreneurship.
- The centre contributes to the orientation of women entrepreneurship policies.
- The centre has to ensure delivery of seamless startup and acceleration entrepreneurship services therefore engaging in the delivery of the appropriate mix of services to potential women entrepreneurs, start-ups and/or SMEs.
- The centre has identifiable premises/ workspace (an EWC may be an unit hosted by a bigger organisation) and a clear identity and branding as an EWC that differentiates them from other business support organizations in the catchment area;
- The centre is managed professionally and autonomously, have a dedicated team of a very minimum of two staff equivalent, appropriately qualified, experienced and involved in the core activity of business support as e.g. business advisors and coaches – of which one must be the manager/CEO with overall responsibility for the EWC. At least one member of the staff must be English-speaking
- The centre is financially sustainable with an allocated budget, ensuring when possible a more dynamic, diversified business model with a good mix of public and/ or private sources of income to gain sustainability.

It is important to note that centres without primary mission to support women entrepreneurship through delivering of trainings for establishing and business development such as for-profit commercial centres are excluded.

Additional criteria

Once the eligibility criteria are met, the candidates must then meet certain criteria described below. As reality is different from country to country there is certain flexibility in the interpretation of these criteria. As will become clear in the following, "indicators" will serve as a guide for the assessment of the extent to which these criteria are met by a given candidate centre.



Criteria 1: The Centre has as its prime mission, the aim to serve and to support women entrepreneurs and women would be entrepreneurs

Conditions to be fulfilled:

- 1.1 The primary focus of the centre's programme is to foster and support women entrepreneurship and those working with and for women entrepreneurs;
- 1.2 The majority of the educational activities in the centre correspond to the profile of non-formal education.



Criteria 2: The Centre works in a specific geographic area

Conditions to be fulfilled:

2.1 The scope of a EWC can be local, regional, or can be widened to the national or international levels (e.g. responding to specific geographical and demographical territorial needs).

2.2 More than one EWC can serve a same region, provided that they work in coordination and within the framework of their missions.



Criteria 3: The Centre ensures active partnership with stakeholders working in the field of women entrepreneurship

Conditions to be fulfilled:

3.1 The centre must provide evidence that is supported by local/ regional/ national public authorities and other stakeholders – business support and other organizations, interested NGOs, academia, R&D, etc. The evidence could be support letter, partnership agreement, and memorandum of understanding, decree or other official document stating that the activity of the centre for fostering women entrepreneurship is supported by the relevant stakeholders.

3.2 The centre has a mandate from the involved stakeholders to apply for EWC Quality Label.

3.3 The centre must provide evidence that has structured links and communication mechanisms with the stakeholders working in the field of supporting entrepreneurship, innovations, and women. Evidence could be contract, support letter or another official document giving evidence of structured relationship.



Indicators:

3.I The centre takes into account the situation and challenges faced by women entrepreneurs and would be entrepreneurs in the development of its programme

3.II The centre is an ally for women civil society in advocating for decision makers and power holders to take women entrepreneurs' points of view and concerns into account when making and implementing policies



3.III The centre calls on the expertise of women organizations, associations and structures that have relevant specific competence to enrich certain activities, and considers them as consultants

3.IV The centre develops key activities and best practices in a participative manner with women, female organizations, business associations and structures.

Criteria 4: The centre promotes transnational networking and cooperation in the field of women entrepreneurship

Conditions to be fulfilled:

4.1 The centre must demonstrate the ability to promote and/or to be involved in transnational/international networks and to implement networking activities.

4.2 The centre makes efforts to multiply good practices from other countries and spread the knowledge and values about training and promotional activities at national, regional and local level.

Indicators:

4.I The centre is engaged in direct advocacy for sound women entrepreneurship policies, in other words, for a stronger link between the on-the-ground reality of women entrepreneurs and the content of women entrepreneurship policies.

4.II The centre has regular exchange on women entrepreneurship policy with the public authorities responsible for economy and business development.

Criteria 5: The centre has to ensure delivery of seamless and quality pre-, startup and business development services

Conditions to be fulfilled:

5.1 The centre has to attract and stimulate potential women entrepreneurs through implementation of actions such as (not exhaustive):

- Promotional events;
- Web presence and social media networking
- Awards and competitions;
- Technical events (e.g. bootcamps, hackathons, business cafes, etc)
- Ambassador networks
- Local, regional, national and international partnerships

5.2 The centre has to provide targeted services to support women willing to start own company but without business experience and female startups such as (not exhaustive):



- o Training;
- Mentoring through establishment of mentors network;
- Coaching;
- Consulting;
- Business modeling;
- Access to funding (e.g. governmental grants, seed funding, loans, VC, etc.)
- Support on founding of company
- Acceleration services;
- Opportunities for networking;
- Access to WOMEN IN BUSINESS community.

5.3 The centre has to provide targeted services for women entrepreneurs with more than 3 years business experience such as (not exhaustive):

- Training;
- Access to funding
- Access to international markets
- Advisory services
- Business to business and business to customer support;
- Networking opportunities.

Indicators:

5.I The users of the centre are systematically asked to provide evaluation and feedback about the service delivered by the centre.

5.II The management of the centre take into account user evaluations and feedback to improve the quality of the service on ongoing basis.

Criteria 6: The centre offers appropriate working conditions

Conditions to be fulfilled:

6.1 The centre has to demonstrate ability to use space for personal meetings, workshops, etc. The evidence could be contract for delivery, framework contract, decree, etc.

6.2 The centre has to be on attractive location, easy to be reached and transport links.

6.3 The centre has minimum facilities and equipment needed for providing on-site and virtual services such as (not exhaustive):

- Stable internet connection;
- Presentation equipment
- o Smart boards
- Desks and chairs

Indicators:

6.I The working conditions in the centre are suitable to different formats of activities, interactive methodology activities as well as seminars, and policy meetings.



6.II The centre offers flexible and adequate working conditions for activities using nonformal education methodology and an atmosphere suitable and favourable to international activities.

Criteria 7: The centre has adequate staff working to support activities

Conditions to be fulfilled:

7.1 The center has at least one internal member staff (manager) responsible for ensuring conceptual coherence, quality assurance, and support for activities, including those run by external training staff.

7.2 The centre's staff team is adequately large for the number and volume of activities run.

7.3 The centre can demonstrate the competence of its staff for value-based, non-formal educational activities.



Indicators:

8.I The Centre can demonstrate that relevant financial management and accountability mechanisms are in line with national tax and non-for-profit regulations are in place.



9 Procedures

Acquiring the EWC Quality Label takes place on the basis of a qualitative assessment. The procedure assumes that the applicant centre is willing to develop the quality of its offer to foster women entrepreneurship to meet and maintain the standard represented by the criteria outlined.

RAPIV and the expert group responsible for the quality label, will support the candidate centre in identifying the actions it needs to make in order to achieve the quality standard.

The procedure to acquire the quality label takes place in several stages:

1. Expression of interest

• The candidate centre prepares an expression of interest for the quality label. There is no deadline for submission; expressions of interest are accepted on an ongoing basis. Candidates receive an expression of interest form from the secretariat.

2. Assessment of expression of interest

 $\circ~$ The candidate centre's expression of interest is reviewed by the expert group composed of members of the Advisory Board, staff of RAPIV and selected consultants.

The expert group makes a decision on the initial eligibility of the candidate centre for an exploratory visit in accordance with the preconditions outlined above. Candidates that clearly do not fit the eligibility criteria will be informed that the process will not be pursued any further.

• Candidates that are considered eligible will be contacted to agree on the details of an exploratory visit. Candidates can expect to be contacted about eligibility within three months of the submission of their expression of interest.

3. Exploratory visit of the expert group

- The expert group visits the candidate centre to assess how the centre already meets certain criteria and to advise on which criteria require development.
- This assessment takes place in dialogue with the management of the candidate centre through an open discussion on all aspects of the criteria.
- $\circ~$ On the basis of the visit, the expert group prepares its interim evaluation report. This report
 - ✓ takes stock of the criteria already met
 - ✓ recommends whether the centre concerned should further pursue the acquisition of the quality label
 - ✓ requests improvements / changes that would allow for the label to be awarded.



- The expert group shares the interim evaluation report with the candidate centre within two months of the exploratory visit.
- The candidate centre communicates any comments or issues it may have with the report to the secretariat.
- The candidate centre formally informs the secretariat of its intention to continue the process of acquiring the quality label in accordance with the recommendations of the interim evaluation report

4. Decisions

The expert group must take one of the following descisions:

- The organisation conforms with the label criteria and shows performance appropriate to its spatial characteristics, its age and its financial means: threeyear license to be granted (any recommendations must be clearly stated in the relevant section of the report);
- The organisation conforms to the label criteria but does not perform at an optimum level: conditional one-year license to be granted. A list of conditions must be provided along with the timescale for compliance with these. In this kind of case, RAPIV may give recommendations and suggest a period of technical assistance through a contract with RAPIV;
- The organisation does not seem to conform to the label criteria: no licence to be granted (a list of reasons must be given to the organisation);
- Postponement of a decision to the next or a subsequent Expert group meeting (reasons should be presented).

10 Maintanance and renewal of the EWC Quality Label

The label is awarded for an initial period of three years, during which the centre is expected to maintain the standards demanded by the criteria. An application for renewal is mandatory after the first three years expire. This application should include documentary evidence of how the quality criteria are being upheld and how other improvements are being made.

A visit of the expert group can be organised to re-evaluate the status quo. In some cases, this may lead to a further development phase before the label is renewed. The label can also be retracted in cases where the centre has departed too far from the criteria (for example, in the case of a change of profile from women entrepreneurship centre to another kind of centre).

11 Financial conditions

The EWC Quality Label is awarded free of charge to eligible centres. The work of the Expert group is on voluntarily basis. The candidate centres are expected to cover board and lodging costs for all evaluation visits of the expert group.



12 Logo of EWC

Common visual identity will be applied by all certified EWCs. It is not allowed to be used the EWC logo if the Centre is not granted with the current Quality Label.

The logo of the EWC plays a role of utmost significance in creating brand association regarding visual communication. The logo of the EWC should not be recreated in any circumstance. Only the logo version presented in this document is the correct one, only this one should be used and only in English.

Standard logo / Full colour version

The standard logo is the full colour version. This version should be used whenever possible. Ideally the logo should be used on white backgrounds only. Using the logo on a coloured background is possible if there is no alternative, but it has to be a very light background.



Greyscale logo / Black and white logo

For single colour reproductions, a greyscale / black and white / 1-colour (reflex blue) logo version of the logo should be used. These versions should only be used whenever full colour is not available. These versions are recommended when applied through serigraphy and engraving procedures or/and on restrictive surfaces of certain materials - fax, stickers – whenever the full-color version of the logo cannot be applied.



Logo colors:

