



**Accelerating circular bio-based solutions integration in European rural areas**

ESTE DOCUMENTO ES UN BORRADOR NO VINCULANTE

SIRVE DE INFORMACIÓN ADICIONAL PARA LAS ENTIDADES INTERESADAS EN REALIZAR UNA OFERTA COMO ENTIDAD COLABORADORA DEL RETO SUROESTE EN BIOECONOMÍA CIRCULAR DE BIORURAL

## **INNOVATION CHALLENGE in circular bioeconomy applicable on small scale in rural areas**

**CALL FOR PARTICIPATION  
SOUTHWESTERN EUROPE REGION**

**[biorural.eu](http://biorural.eu)**



## PRESENTATION

The innovation challenge in circular bioeconomy applicable on small scale in rural areas is organised in the framework of the [BioRural project](#). The call is part of the set of activities that BioRural promotes the circular bioeconomy, aimed at identifying innovative practices, applicable on a small scale and for rural areas. As well as in transfer actions, and in the generation of a network of interest, the European Rural Bioeconomy Network - ERBN. This activity is financed by the Horizon Europe programme (see details in point 15 of these bases).

The present call corresponds to the first stage of the "European Bioeconomy Challenge", organised by BioRural in Europe in four geographical divisions, through four coordinated but independent contemporary calls, here being the regional call for Southwestern Europe: Italy, Portugal and Spain (SW Europe from now onwards). It is organised by the BioRural partners from SW Europe, namely from Italy (Italian Agroforestry Energy Association), Portugal (UC-University of Coimbra and CBE-Centro da Biomassa para a Energia) and Spain (AVEBIOM - Spanish Biomass Association). These entities conform the organising committee for the present call (see point #1 and #16 of the rules).

The aim of this challenge is to motivate European students, research groups, start-ups, small and micro companies, start-ups, or individuals to propose innovative ideas applicable in rural environments to resolve environmental issues of organic by-products and residues through circularity. Under the present call the three selected ideas will be awarded with an economic prize and will be invited to attend and present their ideas in the final event to be held in 2025 in Brussels.

In order to participate, interested parties must agree to the terms and conditions of the challenge and fill in the requested data within the established deadlines. They must also be available to attend the mentoring activity in person in November 2024.

## PARTICIPATION RULES

### 0. Spirit of the challenge

In today's business world, collaboration has become a key to success. For decades, the business mentality has been linked to competition. However, a more modern and effective perspective has focused on collaboration as a means to achieve shared goals. When different companies and entities collaborate, a unique context for innovation is generated. Diversity of perspectives and approaches often leads to creative and unusual solutions. This is essential in a rapidly evolving business world. And also a way to launch new ideas, new technology-based companies, leveraging part of the necessary costs through shared resources.

Participants will be part of a collaborative process to prepare their ideas to solve environmental and societal challenges related to by-products. Not only the best idea win, but also those who are able to establish networks and collaborations. Under this vision, the challenge is convoked for participants to bring fresh ideas and enjoy a 2 days experience to grow-up and connect them with each other as well as to with other potential stakeholders.

### 1. Organising committee and management team

#### 1.1 Organising Committee

The organising committee is composed of BioRural partners from Italy (AIEL - Italian Agroforestry Energy Association), Portugal (UC - University of Coimbra, and CBE - Centro da Biomassa para a Energia) and Spain (AVEBIOM - Spanish Biomass Association). Its role is to manage, finance and ensure transparency and compliance with the objectives promoted by this award. See details and logos in point #16 of these rules.

Responsibilities for promotion, communication and coordination with participants per country are established as follows: AVEBIOM in Spain, UC supported by CBE in Portugal, and AIEL in Italy. This committee is coordinated by AVEBIOM, and will be managed according to the general bases established by BioRural.

## 1.2 Management team

The "managing entities" or "managing team" of the SW regional challenge are considered to be the BioRural partners AIEL, UC-CBE, AVEBIOM, and the companies or entities contracted for the purpose of supporting the organisation and management of the prize.

## **2. Purpose of the prize and technological level**

### 2.1 Purpose of the innovative idea

The challenge is aimed at innovative ideas in the circular bioeconomy:

- applicable to organic by-products in any sector
- that allow the implementation of new ways of reuse, recycling, extraction of value-added fractions, bioenergy production, crafting of new biomaterials, etc.
- targeted and/or applicable to small-scale solutions (at farm level, or small aggregation of farms)

### 2.2 Technological level

These ideas should be based on existing techniques or processes (at laboratory or pilot plant level), but should not have been put into practice. The ideas presented can be based on a combination of already proven technologies (composting, distillation, thermal treatments, etc.) but not yet applied to the organic by-product addressed by the participant. Ideally, applications should correspond to ideas at a technological readiness level (TRL) between TRL#3 and TRL#4 (equivalent to that of applied research). Ideas in the TRL#2 range (proof of concept in laboratory, possible technology, untested) or TRL#5 (first pilot implementation) are as well eligible. It is recommended to review the [TRL definitions](https://horizoneuropencpportal.eu/store/trl-assessment) and [examples](https://horizoneuropencpportal.eu/store/trl-assessment) provided by the Horizon Europe NCP Portal (available in the web site <https://horizoneuropencpportal.eu/store/trl-assessment>).

## **3. Language and communications**

The presentation of the candidature, as well as the communications, interviews and presentations will be conducted in English. The reference portal will be <https://biorural.eu/> for general information.

Independently of this vehicular language, the organising committee may decide to publish information in the local language of each of the countries participating in the BioRural SW Regional circular bioeconomy Innovation Challenge. For the purpose of the applications and specific processes for the SW Regional Challenge the information in local language will be provided as next:

- for Italy in <https://energiadallegho.it> and <https://aielenergia.it>
- for Portugal at <https://centrodabiomassa.pt/>
- for Spain at [www.intercambiom.org](http://www.intercambiom.org) and [www.avebiom.org](http://www.avebiom.org)

Information may be widespread by other collaborators and dissemination channels, thus being available at other websites. Notwithstanding the official info points are those presented above, as well as the direct contact with national representatives of the Organising Committee (see point #16 of the present rules).

## **4. The participants**

Participants must have their residence, main core activity or nationality in any of the three countries participating in the SW Regional Challenge, Italy, Portugal and Spain. Ideally the candidate ideas can be presented by a group of persons (proposing group) of different affiliations, or by a single person. The call is open to:

- students,
- micro and small enterprises, new companies and start-ups [\*]
- researchers, teachers, educators [\*\*],
- practitioners and industry professionals,
- individuals (no matter their affiliation, but participating representing themselves)

[\*] Any company with more than 50 people, or which is a subsidiary or investee of a large company, or belongs to an industrial group, will be excluded. As well any company with established international commercial operation is excluded.

[\*\*] Universities and/or education/training organisations or research groups can participate, not as a whole group or department, but as individuals of a candidate group. For those organisations only one doctorate or senior researcher can be part of the candidate group, and is expected to include students, postgraduates and/or novel researchers.

It must be noted that the participating ideas must be original, with no record or proof of previous funded projects having or being developing it. Building on already developed ideas, concepts, prototypes is possible (as stated in point #2) as far as the resulting idea for innovation is new and original.

Candidate proposals may be represented by several persons, a "proposing group", formed by the individual natural persons, or representing eligible entities according to the above criteria. It is recommended to have in each group persons with good English language competence. Lack of competence (to be checked in the application text and in the selection interview (phase B of the process), may be a reason for exclusion of the applied proposal.

### **5. Configuration and process (Phases A, B, C)**

The process will take place in 3 phases, as follows.

#### PHASE A: - 30<sup>th</sup> April to 30<sup>th</sup> June

During the application phase, participants will be able to submit their application (proposal) online. They will also be able to contact the "managing bodies" in their country for information and advice.

#### PHASE B: 1<sup>st</sup> July to 20<sup>th</sup> August

Selection phase in which the Organising Committee reviews the proposals, and organises interviews to get to know each candidate proposal, resulting in a selection of the proposals that will be invited to present their idea during Phase C.

#### STAGE C: from 20<sup>th</sup> August to the regional final (November 2024)

The management team will release the list of selected participants to be invited to the regional workshop, and will send instructions for each candidature to prepare for the regional final. It will also ensure the coordination of travel, and presence of each candidature at the regional final (Valladolid, November 2024). The candidates will be requested to participate in 2 or 3 online training events, to get prepared for the on-site event. Attendance will be compulsory as pre-requisite to attend the on-site event in Valladolid, on November 2024.

Notwithstanding the dates specified above may be subject to change due to contingencies, to favour more participants to apply, or in order to coordinate actions with the regional challenges of Europe.

### **6. Submission of applications (Phase A)**

Candidates (proposing groups) must submit the completed Application for Participation form for the 2024 Regional Innovation Challenge in the Circular Bioeconomy Awards accessible from the official info sites (see point #3) as well as any other platform provided announced by the managing entities during the call. Participants will have to summarise their proposal covering the evaluation criteria of the first phase (see point #13 of the rules).

### **7. Selection of applications (Phase B)**

The UC-CBE team, AIEL and AVEBIOM (Organising Committee) will review the applications, and apply the eligibility. The managing entities will communicate to the applicants their acceptance or exclusion. In order to select the applications that will access the regional final (Phase C, in Valladolid, November 2024) the Organising Committee will review the applications and will hold online interviews of 15 minutes, in English, to get to know each initiative

first hand. According to the evaluation criteria (point 13 of the rules) the committee will issue an assessment, selecting those with the highest score, **totalling at least 10 applications (with a maximum of 15)**. The list of selected candidates for the Regional Final (Southwestern Europe) in Valladolid (November 2024) will be communicated after the selection takes place. Communications and publications will be made through the managing bodies.

## 8. Holding of the regional final (Phase C)

The regional final will be held in Valladolid in November 2024. The management team will maintain communication with each candidate (proposing group) in order to organise their preparation as well as their attendance.

The SW regional challenge will consist of two days:

- **Day 1:** will take place as a closed workshop to be participated by the organisers, managing team, candidature representatives (1 or 2 persons per proposing group), specialist mentors, as well as other entities that the Organising Committee may invite.

After the initial reception and a brief presentation among the attendees, the workshop will include:

- a) presentations on aspects of innovation, business model, circularity, among others by specialist mentors.
- b) These professionals (mentors) will then provide brief support in short working sessions with each of the participant candidatures individually, in order to help them orientate their ideas towards a possible business model and development.

*Note: Mentors will cover the following profiles: (i) Business development; (ii) Marketing and Social Marketing strategy; (iii) Financial Management; (iv) Biobased solutions / technologies; (v) Legal and Regulatory Compliance; (vi) Circular (bio)economy. About 4 to 5 mentors are foreseen, covering the 6 mentioned areas. Notwithstanding the Management Team may decide to expand to more mentors, to cover specific areas of interest of the applicants.*

*Note: Mentors may have international profile. When not possible to attend physically, online mentoring will be facilitated during the session.*

- **Day 2:** the first part, held on site, will be dedicated to reviewing the presentations and refining the business models. Afterwards, the session will be open to the public, and streaming access will be provided. Participants will present their ideas to a jury, which will evaluate all the ideas and award the three best candidatures.

*Note: The jury will be evaluate according to the criteria set out in point 14 of the rules and will be composed of 5 persons with next profiles: (1) bioeconomy / circular economy / biobased solutions' practitioner/professional; (2) technical research / academic profesional; (3) innovation expert; (4) entrepreneurship expert / practitioner; (5) environmental science professional. **Jury will have international profile and when not capable to attend, will facilitate mentoring online.** Judges will not participate in the first day of the event.*

## 9. Prizes and contributions to participation

The three winners of the SW regional innovation challenge (Southwestern EU) will be awarded as next: a first prize of €2,500, a second prize of €1,500 and a third prize €1,000. The three winners will have a direct invitation to participate in the European Bioeconomy Challenge to be held in Brussels in 2025.

Travel and accommodation costs for participants attending the SW regional challenge in Phase C may be covered in certain cases of international travel by the member of the Organising Committee of the country concerned. Local or regional travel is exempt from being covered. Guides for accommodation and travel will be provided by the management team. Following such guidelines will be prescriptive for those participants which accommodation and travel costs become covered by the Organising Committee.

## 10. Publication and dissemination

The visualisation of practices will be disclosed during phase C, using title, short summary and an image on purpose to announce the SW regional mentoring workshop and awards celebration in November 2024. Only after the celebration of awards ceremony, the summary factsheet of each candidate idea will be published. Details will be

provided in a document called Dossier of Innovations - BioRural Circular bioeconomy challenge – Southwestern Europe, which will be available on the website.

This dossier will be accessible on the portals generated by the organising committee, either in English or in the local language. It will also be promoted through the BioRural project and its website (<https://biorural.eu/>). The information will be part of public BioRural project deliverable reports.

The candidatures and the event will be widely disseminated, and the organisation will make this information available to the media. Participants authorise the organising committee to disseminate the application information through digital media and social networks, news releases, by means of prints, files, PDF files, and may be object of translation and shared through other information channels or databases.

#### **11. Acceptance of the rules:**

All submitted applications accept the conditions of participation, agree to these terms and conditions, and confirm the originality of the ideas presented. The Organising Committee reserves the right to freely interpret the current rules and conditions of this call for entries and the acceptance of applications.

#### **12. Claims:**

Any complaint about these rules or decisions arising from them will be left to the free interpretation of the organiser. Claims may be communicated to the Organising Committee up to 7 calendar days after the corresponding publication, and the organising committee will resolve them by simple majority, within 3 days of their presentation.

#### **13. criteria for evaluation of applications (during Phase B)**

The applications submitted and meeting the eligibility criteria will be scored according to the following criteria by the Organising Committee:

- A1) Up to 10 points. Innovation level of the solution (innovation in terms of technology, approach, social element, process or resources used), always having in mind its applicability.
- A2) Up to 10 points. Circularity of the solution (reduced waste, waste management, water or energy management, products & materials wise use, etc)
- A3) Up to 10 points. Potential feasibility/applicability of the solution for the specific operating environment and problem stated
- A4) Up to 10 points. Effectiveness of the solution based on the specific problem stated
- A5) Up to 5 points. Scalability and/or replicability of the solution
- A6) Up to 5 points. Social impact of the solution (current or potential) (e.g. jobs creation, social cohesion promotion, inclusion, gender empowerment, etc).

#### **14. Evaluation criteria of the jury during the regional challenge (Valladolid, November 2024, phase-C)**

The applications submitted and meeting the eligibility criteria will be evaluated by an external jury (not participated by the Organising Committee), external to the, according to the following 8 criteria.

- J1) Up to 5 points: Financial sustainability of the solution (current or potential), based on either its proven activity or its business plan.
- J2) Up to 10 points: Innovation level of the solution (innovation in terms of technology, approach, social element, process or resources used), always having in mind its applicability.
- J3) Up to 10 points: Circularity of the solution (reduced waste, proper waste management, sustainable water or energy management, products & materials wise use, regeneration of nature, etc.)
- J4) Up to 10 points: Potential feasibility of the solution based on the specific operating environment and problem stated

- J5) Up to 10 points: Effectiveness of the solution based on the specific problem stated (how well does the solution address the problem it seeks to solve)
- J6) Up to 5 points: Scalability and/or replicability of the solution (potential of the solution for scalability and regional replicability)
- J7) Up to 5 points: Social impact of the solution (current or potential) (e.g. jobs creation, social cohesion promotion, inclusion, gender empowerment, etc).
- J8) Up to 5 points: Team Readiness: maturity or well-composition of the team involved in the solution to ensure its success

### 15. Funding of this prize

The Southwestern regional challenge on circular bioeconomy co-organised by AIEL, UC, CBE and AVEBIOM is framed into the BioRural project "Accelerating circular bio-based solutions integration in European rural areas", funded by the Horizon Europe programme.



**Funded by  
the European Union**

### 16. Organising Committee - Logos and contact

This challenge is organised by the following entities, partners of BioRural, which can be contacted for the purposes of this call as follows.

ITALY	PORTUGAL		SPAIN
			
<b>Associazione Italiana Energie Agroforestali</b>	<b>University of Coimbra</b>	<b>Biomass Centre for Energy</b>	<b>Spanish Biomass Association</b>
<a href="http://www.aienergia.it">www.aienergia.it</a>	<a href="http://www.uc.pt">www.uc.pt</a>	<a href="http://centrodabiomassa.pt">centrodabiomassa.pt</a>	<a href="http://www.avebiom.org">www.avebiom.org</a>
<b>+39 049 883 0722</b>	<b>+ 351 239 790 741</b> <b>+351 935 492 482</b>	<b>+351 239 532 436</b>	<b>+34 983 113 760</b>
<a href="mailto:segreteria.aiel@cia.it">segreteria.aiel@cia.it</a>	<a href="mailto:jose.baranda@dem.uc.pt">jose.baranda@dem.uc.pt</a>	<a href="mailto:geral@centrodabiomassa.pt">geral@centrodabiomassa.pt</a>	<a href="mailto:info@avebiom.org">info@avebiom.org</a>