

MONTENEGRO

1. National Context and Maritime Sector Funding

1.1 Maritime Sector Context

Montenegro is a coastal country with direct access to the Adriatic Sea and a maritime sector that plays a relevant role in its national economy, particularly through ports, maritime transport, fisheries, coastal tourism, and marine environmental protection. Key maritime assets include the Port of Bar, smaller commercial and leisure ports, and an extensive coastline that supports tourism-related maritime activities. Despite this geographical advantage, Montenegro does not yet have a fully articulated national innovation framework specifically dedicated to blue economy or maritime technologies.

The maritime sector in Montenegro is traditionally oriented toward infrastructure operation, transport services, tourism, and fisheries, with limited integration of research-driven innovation, advanced maritime technologies, or structured R&D ecosystems. As a result, funding related to maritime activities is often embedded within broader transport, environmental protection, tourism development, or infrastructure investment programs rather than being framed explicitly as blue economy or maritime innovation funding.

National policy priorities increasingly reference sustainability, environmental protection, decarbonisation of transport, and alignment with EU environmental acquis, which creates indirect relevance for blue and green maritime technologies. However, these priorities have not yet translated into dedicated funding instruments targeting maritime R&D, pilot projects, or technology deployment.

1.2 National Innovation and Research Funding Framework

At the national level, Montenegro's innovation and research funding landscape remains relatively limited in scale and scope. Public funding for research and innovation is primarily channelled through horizontal instruments managed by national ministries and agencies responsible for science, education, economy, and sustainable development. These instruments typically support academic research, capacity building, and general innovation activities rather than sector-specific technological development.

No national R&D programmes dedicated explicitly to maritime technologies, marine robotics, smart ports, or blue economy innovation were identified during the mapping exercise. Innovation funding opportunities that could potentially be relevant for maritime technologies are generally accessible only indirectly, for example through calls supporting environmental technologies, digitalisation, energy efficiency, or climate

INNOVABLUE

adaptation, provided that proposed projects can demonstrate alignment with these broader thematic priorities.

Stakeholder feedback indicates that national innovation funding instruments tend to prioritise early-stage research or general business development, with limited support for demonstration, piloting, or first-of-a-kind deployment of technologies in real maritime environments. This constrains the ability of maritime technology developers to progress beyond conceptual or laboratory-based stages.

1.3 Tax Incentives and Horizontal Support Measures

Montenegro does not provide tax incentives specifically tailored to blue economy or maritime technology activities. Existing fiscal incentives apply horizontally across sectors and may include general measures for investment promotion, employment creation, renewable energy, and energy efficiency improvements. Companies operating in the maritime sector or developing marine-related technologies can access these incentives under the same conditions as enterprises in other sectors, without preferential treatment for blue economy-related activities.

The absence of targeted fiscal measures reflects both the relatively small scale of the national innovation ecosystem and the limited recognition of maritime technologies as a distinct innovation domain within national economic policy. While alignment with EU standards and green transition objectives may create space for future policy development, no concrete plans for maritime-specific tax incentives have been announced to date.

2. Programs Supporting Innovation and SMEs

2.1 Lack of Dedicated Blue Economy Startup Programs

No dedicated startup, acceleration, or incubation programs focusing on blue economy or maritime technologies currently operate at the national level in Montenegro. SMEs and startups active in maritime services, environmental technologies, or coastal management typically rely on generic SME support schemes, entrepreneurship programs, or international project-based funding rather than accessing sector-specific innovation support.

Existing SME support instruments generally focus on business development, access to finance, export promotion, or basic innovation activities without specialised technical mentoring, testing infrastructure, or industry-specific expertise relevant to maritime technologies. As a result, maritime-focused enterprises face structural barriers when attempting to develop innovative solutions that require field testing, regulatory approvals, or collaboration with public maritime authorities.

2.2 General Innovation Support Infrastructure

Montenegro's innovation support infrastructure includes universities, research institutes, business support organisations, and chambers of commerce that provide horizontal support services such as training, advisory services, and limited incubation activities. Participation in EU-funded projects and regional cooperation initiatives represents an important channel for exposure to international innovation networks and knowledge exchange.

However, these structures do not offer specialised facilities or services tailored to maritime innovation, such as marine testing sites, pilot infrastructures, or sector-specific technology validation platforms. Consequently, enterprises seeking to develop or scale maritime technologies often need to rely on partnerships with foreign research institutions, technology providers, or innovation hubs located in neighbouring coastal EU Member States.

3. Regional and Local Funding Opportunities

3.1 Coastal and Port-Related Initiatives

At the regional and local level, funding opportunities related to maritime activities are primarily linked to coastal development, port infrastructure, tourism, environmental protection, and marine spatial planning. These initiatives are usually financed through municipal budgets, national infrastructure programs, and international financial institutions rather than competitive innovation funding schemes.

Local authorities may implement projects related to port modernisation, coastal protection, wastewater management, or tourism infrastructure, occasionally creating opportunities for the deployment of maritime or environmental technologies. However, these opportunities are typically embedded within large infrastructure or service delivery projects and do not operate as open calls for innovative SMEs or technology developers.

3.2 EU and International Donor Programs

As an EU candidate country, Montenegro has access to **IPA III** funding and participates in various EU and international cooperation programmes. These instruments support environmental protection, climate adaptation, transport infrastructure, and institutional capacity building, all of which may indirectly benefit maritime-related activities. International financial institutions such as the EBRD, EIB, World Bank, and bilateral donors play a significant role in financing coastal infrastructure, port development, environmental protection, and transport projects. While these programs are not explicitly designed to support maritime innovation, they can generate demand for modern technologies in areas such as port operations, environmental monitoring,

INNOVABLUE

pollution control, and energy efficiency. Access for SMEs and technology providers typically occurs through procurement processes or subcontracting arrangements rather than direct innovation grants.

4. Maritime Clusters and Infrastructure

4.1 Absence of Structured Maritime Clusters

Despite Montenegro's coastal geography, no formal maritime innovation clusters or blue economy networks were identified during the mapping exercise. Maritime stakeholders operate in a fragmented manner, with limited coordination between academia, industry, port authorities, and public institutions. This fragmentation reduces opportunities for joint project development, coordinated access to funding, and collective advocacy for sector-specific support measures.

The lack of organised clustering mechanisms also limits knowledge exchange, skills development, and the creation of innovation pipelines linking research activities with commercial deployment in maritime contexts.

4.2 Infrastructure and Green Transition

Port infrastructure and maritime transport systems in Montenegro are undergoing gradual modernisation, often supported by international financing and EU-aligned environmental requirements. Green transition elements such as energy efficiency, emissions reduction, and environmental safeguards are increasingly incorporated into infrastructure projects. However, these initiatives focus primarily on compliance and infrastructure upgrading rather than serving as testbeds for innovative maritime technologies or experimental solutions.

5. Public-Private Partnerships

Public-private partnerships in Montenegro are primarily used for infrastructure development and service provision in sectors such as transport, utilities, and tourism. In the maritime domain, PPPs may be applied to port operations, marina development, or coastal infrastructure projects. These arrangements prioritise financial sustainability and operational efficiency rather than innovation or technology experimentation.

For maritime technology developers, PPPs offer limited direct opportunities. Engagement typically occurs as suppliers or subcontractors within larger infrastructure projects, rather than as innovation partners contributing novel technological solutions.

6. Private Funding and Investment

6.1 Limited Availability of Sector-Specific Private Capital

No private investment funds specifically targeting blue economy or maritime technologies operate in Montenegro. The domestic private investment landscape is relatively small, with limited venture capital activity and a strong focus on real estate, tourism, and traditional service sectors. Environmental and maritime technology ventures struggle to attract private investment due to perceived technological risk, long development timelines, and limited domestic market size.

6.2 Development Finance and Bank Lending

Commercial banks and development finance institutions provide financing primarily in the form of loans for established businesses and infrastructure projects. EU-backed guarantee instruments and IFI credit lines may improve access to finance for SMEs, including those operating in maritime-related sectors, but these instruments are not tailored to innovation or early-stage technology development.