

Innovablue Open call rules and regulations

Introduction

The Innovablue Challenge (the “Challenge”) is an open innovation competition organized within the Innovablue project framework, which supports the development and transfer of sustainable blue-economy solutions in the Adriatic–Ionian (ADRION) region. The Innovablue project is implemented under the Interreg IPA ADRION programme 2021–2027.

The Challenge connects multidisciplinary teams with real market and public-sector needs across the ADRION region and offers selected teams participation in two transnational hackathons and a post-hackathon pathway toward recognition as “Blue Champions”.

Participation is free of charge. By submitting an application and/or participating in any Challenge activity, applicants and participants accept these Rules & Regulations in full.

Article 1 - Definitions

For the purposes of this document:

- **Organizer:** Innovablue project partnership.
- **Challenge:** the Innovablue Challenge open call, selection process, hackathons, and Blue Champion award process described herein.
- **Applicant:** a team submitting an application via Mairos platform.
- **Team:** a group of individuals applying jointly (minimum 3 people).
- **Team Leader:** one individual designated by the Team as the single contact point and operational representative.
- **ADRION eligible area:** the Interreg IPA ADRION programme area, encompassing the seven countries listed in Article 4.
- **Hackathon:** an intensive, time-bound collaborative event organized by the Innovablue Challenge, as per Article 10.
- **Blue Champion:** one of five (5) top-ranked teams selected after completion of both hackathons.
- **Third-Party Support Package:** the in-kind expert support (EUR 5,000 equivalent) delivered through contracted expert providers to each Blue Champion (Article 13).
- **Background:** pre-existing IP, data, software, know-how, and materials owned or controlled by Team members prior to participation.
- **Results:** outputs developed during the Challenge/Hackathons (prototypes, models, documentation, pitch decks, etc.).

INNOVABLUE

Article 2 - Objectives and scope

The Innovablue Challenge aims to speed up real solutions for Adriatic–Ionian blue-economy needs. It brings together diverse teams (from multiple countries) to work on identified problems, learn from experts, and possibly get funding.

The Challenge objectives are to:

1. Accelerate development of practical, implementable blue-economy solutions addressing real user needs across seas, rivers, and lakes in the ADRION region .
2. Strengthen collaboration between research, SMEs/startups, engineers, entrepreneurs, public authorities, and other sector stakeholders in a “problem-driven” innovation process.
3. Increase technology transfer readiness by supporting solutions that are pilot-ready or close to market deployment, with a minimum maturity threshold defined by TRL expectations (Article 8).
4. Provide visibility and follow-up support pathways (mentoring/matchmaking) for the most promising teams (“Blue Champions”).

The Challenge is not a procurement procedure and does not create any obligation for the Organizer, project partners, mentors, investors, or stakeholders to purchase, fund, license, or deploy any submitted or developed solution.

Article 3 - Challenge topics and expected solution maturity

The Challenge is problem-driven and focuses on the following topics (the “Topics”):

- **Topic 1: Smart monitoring and digital tools for blue environments and SMEs**
- **Topic 2: Blue biotechnology solutions for environmental health and sustainability**

Teams must propose solutions aligned with at least one Topic and demonstrate a realistic pathway toward implementation and deployment.

Solution maturity (TRL expectation): Applicants must self-declare a minimum maturity of **TRL 3–4** (or higher) and describe evidence supporting the declared TRL and the steps required to reach pilots/deployment .

(Reference note: the TRL concept is widely used in EU R&I funding; applicants should ensure consistent, evidence-based TRL justification.)

Article 4 - Eligibility criteria

Eligible applicant types

The Challenge is open to Teams composed of eligible individuals affiliated with one or more of the following categories:

- researchers and research staff (universities, research institutes, labs),

INNOVABLUE

- innovators, engineers, and technology developers,
- startup teams and SMEs,
- multidisciplinary teams combining the above.

Teams may include public-sector or civil-society participants (e.g., public authorities, NGOs) provided the Team satisfies the legal and practical requirements for participation and, where relevant, contracting (Articles 6 and 13).

Any 3-person team combining academics, innovators, companies, or NGOs can apply. At least the Team Leader must come from one of the 7 ADRION countries (Croatia, Italy, etc.). Teams may partner across organizations, or all belong to one. The proposed project must address the stated maritime technology topics and be legal. If a team lies on the application or steals someone's idea, they will be disqualified.

Geographic scope

At the application stage, Teams are eligible if they meet the following rules:

- The **Team Leader** must be either:
 - legally resident in, or
 - employed/contracted by, or
 - legally established (if applying on behalf of a legal entity) within the **Interreg IPA ADRION eligible area**.

The Interreg IPA ADRION eligible area encompasses the following seven countries from which project partners are:

- Croatia
- Greece
- Italy
- Slovenia
- Montenegro
- North Macedonia
- Serbia

Other Team members may be based outside the eligible area; however: - the Organizer may require that **at least 50% of Team members** be based in the eligible area where this is necessary for programme alignment, travel support rules, or audit requirements; and/or

- Teams with stronger ADRION representation may be prioritized during evaluation under the "regional relevance" sub-criterion (Article 9).

Team size and composition rules

- Minimum Team size: **3 members**.
- limit on-site participation support (accommodation/meals) to 3 people

Teams are encouraged (not required) to be multidisciplinary and cross-sector.

INNOVABLUE

Consortium vs single applicants

Teams may apply in any of the following forms:

- **Single-entity Team:** all members are affiliated with the same legal entity; or
- **Consortium Team:** members represent multiple legal entities (e.g., university + SME + startup + NGO).

For consortium Teams: - the Team must identify a **Lead Participating Entity** (or confirm “no legal entity” where applicable);
- the Team must accept internal responsibility for clarifying ownership and decision-making (Article 14).

Sector and activity constraints

Solutions must fall within the broader **sustainable blue economy** scope and align to the Topics in Article 3.

The Challenge is not open to activities that are illegal, unethical, or incompatible with EU and programme values, including discrimination and harassment (Article 18).

Exclusion and integrity constraints

A Team is not eligible if:

- the application contains false declarations or materially misleading information,
- the proposed solution infringes third-party rights or intentionally misappropriates confidential information (Article 14).

Article 5 - Accessibility, inclusion, and equal treatment

The Challenge applies a strict equal-treatment principle:

- No discrimination will be tolerated on grounds such as sex, race, color, ethnic or social origin, genetic features, language, religion or belief, political opinion, minority membership, property, birth, disability, age, or sexual orientation (consistent with EU fundamental rights principles).
- The Organizer encourages gender-balanced and inclusive Teams (encouragement only; not an eligibility condition).

Accessibility commitments (best practice): - The Organizer will make reasonable efforts to ensure that application materials are accessible (screen-reader friendly PDFs, structured forms, clear language) and that event venues provide reasonable accessibility accommodations. This aligns with EU public-sector accessibility norms (Directive (EU) 2016/2102) as a best-practice benchmark for public-facing digital services. - Applicants will have organized accommodations by project partners.

INNOVABLUE

Article 6 - Call publication, communications, and official language

The call opens on Feb 26, 2026 and closes on Mar 31, 2026 (noon). Teams register online (using Mairos) and upload any required documents. One member is the Team Leader, who must ensure all team members agree to the rules.

- The call opens: **26 February 2026**.
- The official language of the call, submissions, hackathons, and evaluation is **English**, unless the Organizer publishes an explicit bilingual exception.
- Official communications are those published via:
 - the call page on the Mairos platform; and/or
 - the Innovablue project communication channels; and/or
 - direct email from the project partner's official address.

Article 7 - Application process and required documents

Submission platform and deadline

Applications must be submitted via the **MAIROS platform** by:

- **30 April 2026, 12:00 (noon) CEST (UTC+2)**.

Late submissions will not be evaluated. The organizers will update teams by email and the official website. Results of the selection round (who goes to hackathons) will be sent around May 2026.

Application content (minimum required)

Each application must include:

1. Team identification and contacts (Team Leader + members).
2. Team profile and interdisciplinarity description (including roles).
3. Topic selection (Topic 1 or Topic 2) and problem statement addressed.
4. Solution concept description, including novelty and differentiators.
5. TRL self-assessment and evidence (minimum TRL 3–4).
6. Expected post-hackathon commercialization/uptake pathway.
7. Preferred hackathon location (preference only; allocation subject to capacity).

Required acceptance when submitting application

Unless the Organizer explicitly waives a requirement, Teams must accept:

- eligibility statements, truthfulness, IP rights to use disclosed materials, and acceptance of rules,
- consent to processing of personal data under Article 15,
- where relevant, state-aid/de minimis declaration if the Team includes an undertaking and later receives the Champion support package (Article 13).

INNOVABLUE

- **Team member** inclusion of personal data in the application.

Completeness and admissibility check

The Organizer will conduct an administrative check for completeness and basic eligibility. The Organizer may request clarifications; failure to respond within the stated time limit may result in rejection.

Article 8 - Selection process overview

The Challenge runs in two stages:

- **Stage 1: Open call selection for hackathons**
Selection of **30 Teams total** (indicatively **15 per hackathon**) .
- **Stage 2: Blue Champion selection after hackathons**
Selection of **five (5) Blue Champions** after completion of both hackathons (October 2026, indicative) .

Article 9 - Evaluation criteria and scoring

Teams will be scored on relevance, innovation, feasibility, impact, and team strength. (For simplicity: judges look at how well the idea fits the challenge, how new and doable it is, its environmental/societal benefits, and the team's skills.) The top teams after the hackathons become Blue Champions.

General scoring method

- Each criterion is scored on a **0–5 scale**, where:
- 0 = not addressed / non-compliant
- 1 = very weak
- 2 = weak
- 3 = satisfactory
- 4 = strong
- 5 = excellent / best practice evidence

Scores are weighted and aggregated into a final score out of 100.

Stage 1 criteria (open call → hackathon invitation)

Stage 1 evaluation criteria and weights:

1. **User relevance and problem fit** - 20%
2. **Innovation and differentiation** - 15%
3. **Feasibility and TRL credibility** - 20%
4. **Implementation pathway and scalability** - 15%
5. **Sustainability and environmental contribution** - 15%
6. **Team capacity and interdisciplinarity** - 15%

INNOVABLUE

Tie-break rules (Stage 1):

If two Teams are tied on the final weighted score, the higher score on “User relevance and problem fit” prevails. If still tied, the jury chair decides (Article 11).

Stage 2 criteria (post-hackathon → Blue Champions)

Stage 2 evaluation criteria and weights:

1. **Validation with users and transferability** - 25%
2. **Solution progress and technical robustness** - 20%
3. **Feasibility of deployment plan (time/cost/partners)** - 20%
4. **Impact and sustainability** - 15%
5. **Team execution capacity** - 10%
6. **Pitch quality and clarity** - 10%

Tie-break rules (Stage 2):

Higher score on “Validation with users and transferability.” If it is still tied, jury chair decides.

Article 10 - Timeline, hackathons, and participation conditions

Official timeline and milestones

- Call opens: **26 February 2026**
- Application deadline: **31 March 2026** (12:00 CEST)
- Selection results announced: **May 2026**
- Hackathon 1: **30 June – 2 July 2026**, in Skopje
- Hackathon 2: **15 – 17 September 2026 (tbc)**, in Šibenik
- Blue Champions selected: **October 2026 (after both hackathons)**

Hackathon participation requirements

Selected Teams must:

- confirm participation by the Organizer’s acceptance deadline,
- attend hackathon onboarding sessions (if scheduled),
- comply with the event code of conduct and safety requirements,
- deliver required outputs (Article 17).

If a Team cannot attend its allocated hackathon, the Organizer may invite a reserve Team.

Coverage of accommodation and meals

For hackathon participation, the Organizer will cover **accommodation costs and meals (breakfast and lunch) for 2 days** for selected Teams, travel and other costs are borne by Teams.

INNOVABLUE

Article 11 - Jury composition, appointment, and decision-making

Jury composition

The evaluation is conducted by a jury appointed by the Organizer and includes at least four members representing (they can be Innovablue project partners):

- research/scientific institutions,
- blue economy industry/SMEs,
- public authorities or user organizations,
- finance/investment and/or innovation support ecosystem actors.

Decisions and appeal

- Jury decisions are final and not subject to appeal, except in case of proven procedural error or proven conflict-of-interest mismanagement.
- Any complaint must be submitted in writing within **5 calendar days** of results announcement to info@innovamare.org. The Organizer's final determination is binding.

Article 12 - Prizes and follow-up

Blue Champion awards

The **winners** are called *Blue Champions*. Each of the **5 champion teams** gets €5,000 worth of expert services (mentors, coaches, etc.). This is a **service package** (not cash). Each champion team gets dedicated mentoring to advance their solution. (No prize money is paid out.) Being a champion doesn't automatically guarantee any government funding or sales – it's just recognition and support.

Five (5) Blue Champions will receive:

- the title "Blue Champion";
- enhanced visibility and matchmaking with mentors/users/partners; and
- a **Third-Party Support Package** delivered through expert providers, **valued at EUR 5,000 per Champion** (in-kind services).

The support package is provided as services (not cash). No cash alternative is offered.

Scope of the support package

Each Blue Champion receives **4 mentoring sessions** covering fields of expertise needed to bring solutions closer to real-life application and potential users.

No automatic investment or procurement rights

Being selected as a Blue Champion does not create any entitlement to further funding, procurement, or adoption by the Organizer or partners.

INNOVABLUE

Article 13 - Eligible costs

Hackathon cost coverage rules

Innovablue pays for local costs during the hackathons (hotel for two nights, breakfast and lunch). Teams cover their travel.

Eligible covered items:

- accommodation (2 days) and meals (breakfast and lunch) for Teams.

Not covered: travel, dinner, per diem, additional nights, equipment shipping, consumables, insurance.

Article 14 - Intellectual property, ownership, and licensing

Each team retains full ownership of any solutions, concepts, prototypes, and other results it develops during the Challenge. If team members come from different organizations, they must agree among themselves on who owns what. The only permission teams give to Innovablue is to use simple info about their project (like team name, summary, and pictures) in Innovablue publicity. Innovablue cannot claim the team's detailed technical work or know-how.

Background IP

Each Team member retains ownership of Background. By participating, Team members grant other Team members a limited internal right to use relevant Background strictly for Challenge purposes, unless the Team agrees otherwise.

Ownership of Results

Each Team retains ownership of Results developed during the Challenge unless Team members contractually agree otherwise. For consortium Teams, ownership allocation is the Team's responsibility and should be governed by a Team internal agreement.

Organizer communication license

To support Innovablue dissemination, each Team grants the Organizer and Innovablue project partners a non-exclusive, royalty-free license to use:

- Team name, short abstract, non-confidential visuals, and non-confidential pitch materials for communication, dissemination, and reporting activities related to Innovablue and the Interreg IPA ADRION programme.

This license excludes transfer of proprietary technical documentation or trade secrets unless Teams explicitly authorize it.

INNOVABLUE

Third-party rights warranty

Teams warrant that their submissions and Results do not knowingly infringe third-party IP rights. The Organizer is not liable for IP disputes among Teams or with third parties.

Article 15 - Confidentiality and publication

Teams decide what project details to share. If a team wants to keep something secret, they can submit it behind closed doors (and consider an NDA or patent). But if they publicly pitch an idea, that information can be seen by others. Also, teams must not leak any sensitive info they learn from other teams or judges during the hackathon. This confidentiality lasts about a year after the event.

- Teams control what they disclose publicly.
- If Teams present in public sessions, disclosure is at their discretion.
- Participants must not disclose confidential information obtained from other Teams, mentors, jurors, or organizers for **12 months** after the relevant event, unless written consent is granted.

Article 16 - Data protection, media, and recordkeeping

The rules affirm compliance with GDPR: personal data (from applications or event media) will only be used to promote Innovablue, communicate with teams, and report to the EU. It should be kept safe. Teams agree that photos or videos taken at the event can be used by Innovablue organizers for promotion.

Data protection notices (GDPR-aligned structure)

Personal data collected through applications and participation will be processed for:

- organizing and administering the Challenge,
- eligibility checks and evaluation,
- communications and event logistics,
- dissemination and reporting obligations under Innovablue / Interreg IPA ADRION; and
- security and compliance.

Data categories may include names, contact details, affiliations, Team details, photos/videos recorded at events, and evaluation-related notes (where lawful).

Data will be stored securely and shared only with relevant partners, evaluators, and service providers acting under organizer instructions.

The Organizer will publish or provide the following missing specifics prior to submission opening:

- Data controller

INNOVABLUE

Lead Partner, DIH Innovamare is the data controller for all personal data collected in the Innovablue Challenge. All queries about personal data processing can be directed to info@innovamare.org.

- Lawful basis

Personal data collected through the application process and during events will be processed on the following legal basis:

- **Performance of a task carried out in the public interest** (organization and administration of the Challenge in support of the Interreg IPA ADRION programme).
- **Legitimate interests** of the Organizer (e.g. vetting applications, managing hackathon logistics, security, event photography/publicity) where such interests are not overridden by data subjects' rights.
- **Contractual necessity** for applicants who become Blue Champions (entering into service agreements for the expert support packages).
- **Consent** of team members for specific processing (e.g. use of their images in promotional photos/videos) where indicated on consent forms.

Purposes of Processing: Personal data will be used only for purposes directly related to the Challenge, including eligibility and evaluation of applications; communicating with applicants and participants; logistical organization of hackathons; monitoring and reporting under the Innovablue project and Interreg IPA ADRION programme; and outreach/publicity activities involving participant materials.

Data Categories and Recipients: Data collected may include team members' names, contact details (email/phone), affiliations, role, nationality, and any text/images they submit (concept notes, slide decks, etc.), as well as photos/videos taken at events. Personal data will be stored securely by the Organizer and shared only with Innovablue project partners, evaluators, contracted service providers (e.g. platform host, event photographer), and authorized Interreg auditors – all bound by confidentiality obligations. Raw data or sensitive identification documents (e.g. passport scans) will only be requested if strictly necessary (e.g. to verify eligibility for certain benefits) and handled with extra security.

- Retention periods

Personal data related to submitted applications of non-selected teams will be retained for up to 3 years after the close of the call, or as long as necessary to handle disputes or audit inquiries. For selected teams, data will be retained at least until finalization of the Innovablue project plus the statutory archival requirement for Interreg IPA ADRION projects. After retention expires, personal data will be securely deleted or anonymized.

INNOVABLUE

- Data subject rights and contact route

Every individual whose personal data are processed by the Innovablue Challenge has the right to:

- Access their data and obtain a copy.
- Request rectification of inaccurate data.
- Request erasure (the “right to be forgotten”) when data are no longer needed or consent is withdrawn (unless overriding legal obligations exist).
- Restrict or object to processing (e.g. withdraw consent for use of images).
- Data portability (where applicable).
- Lodge a complaint with supervisory authority.

The Organizer will inform participants of these rights, and data subjects may exercise them by contacting the data controller (info@innovamare.org). Any decision not to comply with a request must be justified.

- Where applicable, cross-border transfers

Innovablue is an Interreg IPA ADRION (EU-associated) project. Personal data will not be transferred outside the EEA/Switzerland unless required by project partners in non-EU IPA countries (e.g. North Macedonia, Serbia). In such cases, transfers will occur under appropriate safeguards (e.g. standard contractual clauses or adequacy decisions) to ensure GDPR-level protection.

Photo/video consent

By participating in hackathons and related events, participants grant the Organizer the right to record and use photos/videos for promotion and project communication without compensation, unless a participant opts out in writing before the event.

Article 17 - Reporting, monitoring, and deliverables

Stage 1 deliverables (application stage)

Deliverables are the submitted application fields and declarations (Article 7).

Hackathon deliverables (minimum set)

Each selected Team must produce, at minimum:

- a concept note (recommended max 3–5 pages),

INNOVABLUE

- a pitch deck (recommended 5–10 slides),
- a demo/prototype or equivalent evidence of solution progress, where applicable.

Blue Champion deliverables

Blue Champions must deliver:

- participation in Innovablue dissemination requests (e.g., success story interview), subject to confidentiality constraints.

Failure to deliver may result in termination of the support package (Article 20).

Article 18 - Ethics, integrity, and conduct

Everybody must behave respectfully (no bullying, etc.). If someone breaks the code of conduct or the law (like data or environmental rules), they can be kicked out of the event.

- Participants must behave professionally and respectfully. Harassment, hate speech, discrimination, or intimidation results in immediate disqualification and removal. (Aligned with EU fundamental rights principles.)
- Teams must comply with applicable laws (including data protection, environmental regulation, and sector rules relevant to their solution).

Article 19 - Publicity, branding, and acknowledgement of EU funding

Because Innovablue is financed under Interreg IPA ADRION, Teams (especially Blue Champions in dissemination activities) must comply with branding rules communicated by the Organizer.

Minimum branding rule set:

- Use the correct project logo and required funding statement where instructed. The Interreg IPA ADRION branding guidance specifies that the project logo combines the programme logotype, the EU emblem, the statement “Co-funded by the European Union,” and the project acronym, and it must be displayed as an invariable unit.
- Follow EU emblem rules: the funding statement must be spelled out in full and placed next to the emblem (not “EU”), and emblem use must not imply endorsement or institutional affiliation.

Branding assets and templates will be provided in the onboarding package.

INNOVABLUE

Article 20 - Risk management, liability, force majeure, termination

Organizer **is not responsible** for a team's travel accidents or technology glitches. If a team can't make it or misbehaves, the Organizer can remove them from the Challenge.

Risk and liability allocation

- Participants are responsible for their own equipment and for safe conduct during events.
- Participants are responsible for travel documents (passport, visa, insurance) unless the Organizer explicitly provides otherwise.
- The Organizer is not liable for:
 - loss, theft, or damage to participant property,
 - indirect damages (lost profits, reputational harm),
 - any disputes between Team members.

Force majeure

The Organizer may modify dates, format, or scope (including cancellation) in case of force majeure or circumstances beyond its control.

Termination / disqualification

The Organizer may disqualify a Team or terminate participation and/or support if:

- eligibility conditions are no longer met,
- serious breach of rules or code of conduct occurs,
- fraud, misrepresentation, or IP infringement is identified,
- a Blue Champion fails to cooperate with mentors.

Article 21 - Legal terms and dispute resolution

If someone complains, first the team and Organizer should try to resolve it directly. If that fails, it escalates to a designated officer, then ultimately to the courts in the country of the lead partner (as stated in the rules).

Applicable law and jurisdiction

Because Innovablue operates across multiple jurisdictions, the applicable law will be:

- governing law: law of the country where the Lead Partner is established;
- jurisdiction: competent courts of the Lead Partner seat.

Dispute resolution ladder

1. Good-faith negotiation (written notice + 15 calendar days).
2. Escalation to Organizer's designated dispute officer.
3. If unresolved, litigation before the defined competent court.



INNOVABLUE

Article 22 - Amendments and final provisions

The Organizer may issue amendments. Amendments take effect upon publication; continued participation constitutes acceptance. Participants who do not accept amendments must withdraw.