

Rules & Regulations – DIH INNOVAMARE Innovation Competition

Introduction

In the framework of the Interreg VI-A Italy–Croatia 2021–2027 project **DIH INNOVAMARE** (Project ID: ITHRO200416) and in line with the objectives of **Activity 4.2 – Innovation competition in cooperation with financial institutions, venture capital funds, private equity funds and corporations for the development of innovative solution concepts**, the consortium is organizing the **Innovation Competition**.

The Innovation Competition (hereinafter referred to as the “**Competition**”) will take place at the **Business Center in Via Banchina dell'Azoto 15 in Marghera (Venice, Italy)**, in **hybrid format** (in-person and online) during the implementation period of the project. The event is aimed at fostering innovation and cross-border collaboration in the field of marine technologies and the sustainable blue economy.

The Competition is open to **solution-provider teams**, including companies, scientific-research institutions and graduate student teams, who will develop innovative solution concepts in response to specific challenges previously identified within Activity 4.1 of the project. These challenges focus on addressing real and emerging needs in the Adriatic Sea region through marine technological innovation.

Participants will have the opportunity to collaborate with stakeholders from different sectors (private and scientific) and countries, thus boosting cross-border knowledge transfer. The Competition will also involve financial actors, venture capital and private equity funds, and multinational corporations interested in supporting or implementing the developed solutions.

Participation in the Competition is **free of charge** and implies full acceptance of these **Rules & Regulations** by all participants and their binding application by the Organizer. This initiative also contributes to establishing a long-term service model to be maintained by the DIH INNOVAMARE ecosystem beyond the duration of the project.

Article 1 – Objectives

The **DIH INNOVAMARE Innovation Competition** aims to promote the development of innovative solutions in the field of marine technologies and the sustainable blue economy.

As an integral part of the DIH INNOVAMARE project under the Interreg VI-A Italy–Croatia 2021–2027 Programme, the competition fosters cross-border collaboration, knowledge transfer and co-creation among innovation ecosystem actors. It also contributes to the establishment of a long-term transnational service model for supporting digital and green transformation in the Adriatic Sea region.

By engaging stakeholders from both the private and research sectors, the initiative promotes the emergence of market-driven solutions, encourages technological entrepreneurship and facilitates access to investment opportunities and testing environments for promising concepts.

Article 2 – Eligibility

The Competition is open to multidisciplinary teams composed of:

- Companies and start-ups;
- Scientific and research institutions;
- Graduate and postgraduate students;
- Mixed teams involving members from both scientific and private sectors.

Participants must be legal residents or registered legal entities located within the Interreg Italy–Croatia 2021–2027 Programme area. Teams may be cross-border and are strongly encouraged to include members from both countries to promote transnational collaboration. Each team must be composed exclusively of individuals who are not affiliated with the event’s organization in a privileged position, such as organizers, volunteers, jury members or sponsors.

In line with EU values and the principles of responsible research and innovation (RRI), the Competition ensures equal opportunities for all applicants. No form of discrimination will be tolerated on the basis of race, ethnicity, religion, nationality, gender, gender identity, sexual orientation, socioeconomic status, age or disability.

The organizers also encourage the formation of teams that reflect gender balance, interdisciplinary expertise, and cross-sector partnerships to foster a more inclusive and impactful innovation process.

Article 3 – Challenges

The Innovation Competition will focus on a series of carefully selected challenges related to sustainable marine technologies, environmental monitoring, digital tools and other key priorities within the blue economy.

These challenges were submitted through an open call and evaluated in July 2025 by the DIH INNOVAMARE project consortium, as described in the **D4.1.2 Report on Organized Open Call**. Each challenge was reviewed and scored (on a scale from 1 to 5) against the following criteria:

- Relevance to blue economy sectors
- Innovation potential
- Feasibility of proposed solutions
- Impact on stakeholders

Based on the total evaluation scores, the top 20 challenges, each achieving a cumulative score of 100 or higher, were selected to advance to the Innovation Competition phase (Activity A4.2).

These selected challenges form the foundation for this competition, offering a collaborative platform for interdisciplinary teams to develop, refine and present innovative solution concepts. The ultimate goal is to enable potential implementation opportunities within the DIH INNOVAMARE ecosystem and promote cross-border cooperation, innovation and sustainability in the Adriatic region.

Teams must develop their solutions by addressing one or more of the challenges identified. These challenges span critical sectors of the Blue Economy:

1. Sensor Suite Design for Monitoring Regenerative IMTA Systems in the Adriatic Sea (Blue Biotechnology)
2. Marine litter in coastal areas - finding an innovative and eco-friendly solution (Maritime transportation)
3. Insufficient port infrastructure that can support ships in reducing pollution while docked (Maritime Transportation & Coastal Infrastructure)
4. Efficient Autonomous Underwater Monitoring for Marine Ecosystem Protection and Port Infrastructure Safety (Maritime Transportation)
5. Poor waste management practices for tracking and recycling system for fishing gear and fish processing byproducts (Fisheries and Aquaculture)
6. Marine pollution - liquid and solid waste in nautics (Maritime transportation)
7. Inefficient waste management in the fish processing industry (Fisheries and Aquaculture)
8. Lack of ability of dynamical validation of efficiency measures, fuel savings, emissions reductions in the Adriatic Sea (Maritime transportation)
9. Operational and Maintenance Inefficiencies Across the Maritime Lifecycle: From Shipbuilding to Fleet Management (Maritime Defence, Security, and Surveillance)
10. Real-time hydrographic and meteorological data integration (Maritime transportation)
11. Integration between rail transport and port logistics (Research and Infrastructure, Other: Last Mile Railway)
12. Lack of underwater data transmission technologies - expanding the range of sources for multi-source environmental data acquisition and processing platforms (Research and Infrastructure)
13. Seabream predation and climate change weather extremes in mussel and oyster production systems (Fisheries and Aquaculture)
14. Poor integration between railway infrastructure and ports, especially in the Last Mile segment (Research and Infrastructure, Other: Last Mile Railway)
15. Lack of integrated visitor data for tourism planning (Tourism and Recreation)
16. Insufficient legacy onboard sensors (Other: Sensor for sea data acquisition)
17. High maritime traffic congestion during peak tourism seasons (Maritime Transportation & Coastal Infrastructure)
18. Legal aspects of autonomous surface vessels (Maritime Transportation)
19. Digitalization & sustainability in maritime transport (Maritime Transportation)
20. Energy supply from renewable sources in Croatia (Other: Port Authority, Maritime Transportation)

Article 4 – Application and Participation

Participation in the Innovation Competition requires prior registration through the official competition form available at the following [link](#) to be submitted by the specified deadline (16/02/2026). The registration form will also be accessible via websites of the DIH INNOVAMARE project partners and official communication channels.

At the time of registration, each participant must indicate, whether they are applying as an individual or on behalf of a legal entity (e.g., company, research institution, association, etc.). Where applicable, the participant must confirm that they hold all necessary authorizations to represent the legal entity they comply all relevant legal and institutional obligations for the full duration of the Competition and any subsequent activities.

Each team must appoint a Team Leader, who will serve as the primary point with the Organizer and be responsible for all communications before, during and after the event.

The Organizer will confirm receipt of applications by email, using the contact details provided by the applicants. It reserves the right to reject any incomplete, non-compliant, or otherwise unsuitable application. Furthermore, the Organizer may refuse participation in any individual or team for reasons including, but not limited to, event security, integrity of the Competition, or failure to comply with these Rules.

Participants will be organized into teams of up to four (4) members. Selected teams will be invited to join part in the one-day hybrid event held at the **Business Center in Via Banchina dell'Azoto 15 in Marghera (Venice, Italy)**, with the option to participate either on – site and remotely, depending on availability and location.

All submissions during the Competition must consist of original work created by the participants and must not have been previously published, disclosed or distributed in any form. The Organizer shall not be held liable for any infringement of intellectual property rights. Each participant bears sole responsibility for the originality and authorship of the submitted materials.

Each team will register for a specific challenge proposed by the Organizer. However, based on expertise, background, and challenge requirements, the Organizer reserves the right to assign or reassign participants to different challenges to ensure balance and relevance.

By participating in the Competition, each individual grants the Organizer, its partners, service providers, and authorized representatives the irrevocable right to record, use and publish any photographs, images, or video footage taken during the event for promotional, documentation and communication purposes without geographic or time limitations and without compensation.

Article 5 – Format and Deliverables

The DIH INNOVAMARE Innovation Competition is designed as a **high-intensity learning and development process**, aimed at exposing teams to the **seven (7) essential elements of project maturity** required for the successful development of a Blue Economy project.

The Competition follows a **fast-paced structure** and is organized into **two main phases**, taking place during a single day in a hybrid format (in-person and online).

Phase 1 – Preparation and Pitch (09:00 – 13:00)

Teams must connect to the official project link at **09:00 AM on 26 February 2026**. During this phase, teams will be required to complete a **Business Model Canvas** and prepare their initial solution concept.

Each team must deliver a **10-minute pitch** to the Jury, presenting their proposed solution and its key elements. A stable internet connection is essential for remote participants.

In-person participation bonus:

Teams will receive **+2 points** towards their final score if at least one team member attends the event in person at the Marghera Business Center.

Phase 2 – The Blue Economy Contest (starting at 14:30)

The second phase represents the core competitive component of the Innovation Competition and focuses on the rapid development of ideas related to project maturity elements.

The process is structured as follows: an expert will introduce a specific topic through a **5-minute explanation**, after which teams will have **10 minutes** to complete a structured digital format (via **Padlet**) responding to targeted questions related to the topic.

This rapid-fire contest will cover the following **seven (7) essential topics**:

1. Market description
2. Innovation in the Blue Economy
3. Communication and reputation
4. Technology Readiness Level (TRL) and legal structure
5. Business plan
6. Reference partners (industrial, technical, institutional, market)
7. Team competences

Deliverables

By the end of the Competition, each team must submit the following deliverables:

- A **short written concept note** (maximum 3 pages);
- A **pitch presentation** (maximum 10 minutes);
- **Visual materials or prototypes**, where applicable.

Article 6 – Jury and Evaluation

1) Composition of the Jury

The evaluation of the submitted solution concepts will be carried out by a Jury of at least five (5) members, appointed by the Organizers. The Jury will include representatives from the following sectors:

- a) Scientific and research institutions.
- b) Private sector and in marine technology sustainability experts;
- c) Financial institutions, including venture capital and private equity representatives.
- d) DIH INNOVAMARE project partners.
- e) Independent experts, as appropriate.

2) Evaluation Criteria

Each team's solution shall be evaluated based on the following criteria:

- a) Relevance to the competition challenge (20%)
- b) Innovation and technological feasibility (20%)
- c) Cross-sector and cross-border collaboration approach (15%)
- d) Implementation or commercialization potential (15%)
- e) Sustainability and environmental impact (15%)
- f) Presentation and clarity of concept (15%)

3) Evaluation Procedure

- a) Each team will present its solution in a pitch format, limited to a maximum 10 minutes, followed by a Q&A session with the Jury.
- b) The Jury will evaluate each presentation individually, scoring them based on the established evaluation criteria.
- c) The final scores will be calculated as the weighted average of the individual criterion scores.
- d) In the event of a tie, the Jury Chair will cast the deciding vote.

4) Decision and Awards

- a) The decisions of the Jury are final, binding, and not subject to appeal.
- b) The team ranked first by the Jury will be awarded a **monetary prize of EUR 1,000 (one thousand euros)**. The prize is intended as recognition of the quality, innovation potential, and relevance of the proposed solution and does not imply any obligation regarding further development or implementation.
- c) In addition to the monetary prize, top-ranking solutions may receive **formal recognition** and may be offered opportunities for further development, such as mentoring, networking, visibility, or potential follow-up within the **DIH INNOVAMARE ecosystem** and with interested financial or institutional partners.
- d) Any further collaboration, funding opportunity, or support arising from the Competition shall be subject to separate agreements and shall not create any automatic entitlement for the awarded teams.

Article 7 – Prizes and Follow-Up Opportunities

- 1) The DIH INNOVAMARE Innovation Competition does include a monetary prize of **EUR 1.000,00 (one thousand euros)** for the team ranked first. In addition, top-ranked teams will receive non-financial awards aimed at supporting the growth and visibility of their proposed solutions. These may include:
 - Access of mentoring and business development support from DIH INNOVAMARE;
 - Priority consideration for regional, national, and EU funding opportunities for further advanced their solution.
 - Enhanced visibility through promotional materials campaigns, media exposure, and participation in international events.
 - Access to the Digital Innovation Hub's facilities and services such as testing environments, laboratories, and expert consultations.
 - In addition to the main awards, the Jury may, at its discretion and based on evaluation outcomes, grant special recognition, including:
 - i) "Most Innovative Solution"
 - ii) "Best Cross-Border Team"
 - iii) "Best Sustainable Impact"

These recognitions aim to highlight outstanding achievements in key areas of innovation, collaboration, and sustainability.

- 2) Engagement with Financial Partners: selected teams will have the opportunity to present their solutions to representatives from venture capital firms, private equity funds, and financial institutions attending the event. The Organizers will actively facilitate introductions and follow-up meetings for those solutions demonstrating strong investment potential.
- 3) Post-Competition Support: All participating teams may be integrated into DIH INNOVAMARE network and invited to take part in future training programs, pilot initiatives, and co-creation workshops. The Innovation Competition serves as a gateway to longer-term collaboration within the broader innovation ecosystem.

Article 8 - Force majeure, extension reserve

The Organizer shall not be held liable for any changes, reductions in scope or cancellations of the Competition resulting from force majeure or circumstances beyond its control. The Organizer reserves the right to extend the participation and to reschedule any previously announced dates as necessary. Any changes to the official rules will be issued as amendments and will take effect upon publication online. By continuing to participate in the Competition after the effective date of any amendment, participants are deemed to have accepted the revised terms. Participants who do not accept the amendments must withdraw from the Competition.

Article 9 – Personal Data Protection

1. In accordance with Regulation (EU) 2016/679 (General Data Protection Regulation – GDPR), the Organizer informs participants that the personal data collected through the registration process and

during the Innovation Competition will be processed solely for the purposes of organizing, managing, evaluating, and promoting the Competition.

2. The data collected may include, but is not limited to: full name, contact details, professional affiliation, team composition, and media (e.g., photos and videos taken during the event). This data may be shared with project partners, evaluators, and institutions involved in the implementation and dissemination of the DIH INNOVAMARE project.
3. Participants' data will be stored securely and will not be transferred to third parties for commercial purposes. The Organizer ensures that appropriate technical and organizational measures are in place to protect personal data against accidental or unlawful destruction, loss, alteration, or unauthorized access.
4. Participants have the right to access, rectify, restrict, or erase their personal data at any time by contacting the Organizer. Participants may also withdraw their consent to data processing, which may affect their participation in the Competition.
5. By registering and participating in the Competition, participants consent to the processing of their personal data as outlined in this article.

Article 10 – Intellectual Property and Confidentiality

1. Ownership of Results

Each team retains full ownership of the intellectual property (IP) related to the solutions, concepts, prototypes, or other outputs developed during the Innovation Competition, unless otherwise agreed in writing by all team members and relevant parties.

2. Joint Ownership (if applicable)

If a solution is developed collaboratively by individuals from different institutions or legal entities, any resulting intellectual property will be considered **jointly owned** by the respective participants, unless otherwise agreed. Participants are responsible for clarifying and documenting ownership agreements internally.

3. Rights of Use for Project Communication

By participating in the Competition, each team grants the Organizer and DIH INNOVAMARE project partners a **non-exclusive, royalty-free license** to use brief descriptions, visuals, and non-confidential presentations of the developed concepts for communication, dissemination, and promotion activities related to the project. This excludes detailed technical or commercial information unless explicitly authorized by the team.

4. Confidentiality

Participants agree not to disclose to third parties any confidential information they may receive during the Competition, whether from other teams, mentors, jury members, or organizers. This obligation remains in force for a period of **twelve (12) months** after the end of the Competition.

5. Voluntary Disclosure

If participants choose to publicly present or publish their solutions (e.g., during pitching sessions), they do so at their own discretion and responsibility. The Organizer encourages participants to protect sensitive elements before public disclosure, including via NDAs or provisional IP filings where appropriate.

6. Third-Party Rights

Participants guarantee that their contributions do not infringe the intellectual property rights of any third party. The Organizer is not liable for any disputes related to the misuse or misappropriation of third-party IP.