INNOVABLUE Challenge

Open Call for Blue Innovation teams

Turning research into real solutions for seas, rivers, and lakes

The INNOVABLUE Challenge

invites multidisciplinary teams to develop innovative, practical solutions that support the sustainable use of aquatic environments and strengthen blue economy sectors across the ADRION region.
The competition connects researchers, innovators, engineers, and entrepreneurs with real market needs from SMEs, public authorities, ports, environmental actors, and technology users.
Selected teams will participate in international hackathons, collaborate with stakeholders and investors, and compete to become recognized Blue Champions: projects with strong potential for technology transfer and real-world deployment.
The challenge is implemented within the *Innovablue project*, supporting innovation uptake through collaboration between academia, industry, and SMEs.

Why participate?

Participants receive:
- ✓ access to real market and user challenges
- ✓ collaboration with SMEs and sector stakeholders
- ✓ visibility among the industry and investors
- ✓ participation in international hackathons
- ✓ mentoring and follow-up support
- ✓ recognition as a Blue Champion

Accommodation costs for selected hackathon teams are covered by the Innovablue project.

Who should apply?

We are looking for:
- ✓ researchers,
- ✓ innovators,
- ✓ startup teams,
- ✓ technology developers,
- ✓ multidisciplinary teams with solution concepts.

Team requirement: minimum 3 members

Multidisciplinary teams encouraged

Total teams selected: 30 (15 per hackathon)

Challenge focus

The INNOVABLUE Challenge is **problem-driven**. We encourage solutions that are pilot-ready or near deployment (TRL 3–4+), with clear pathways toward real implementation.

Topic 1
Smart monitoring and digital tools for blue environments and SMEs

Problem

SMEs and public operators lack affordable real-time environmental data and sector-adapted digital tools, limiting compliance, sustainability, and data-driven decisions.

Solution areas

- low-cost water quality sensing
- AI analytics for pollution/biodiversity monitoring
- digital twins for ports, marinas, and aquaculture
- environmental compliance tools
- traceability and certification platforms
- sustainable blue tourism tools

Beneficiaries

- water utilities
- municipalities
- ports
- aquaculture
- SMEs
- tourism
- regulators

Topic 2
Blue biotechnology solutions for environmental health and sustainability

Problem

Aquatic ecosystems face pollution and biodiversity pressures, while valuable biological resources remain underused due to gaps in validation and commercialization.

Solution areas

- bioremediation technologies
- environmental biotech monitoring
- bio-based compound extraction
- biodiversity restoration technologies
- environmental/public health applications
- blue biotech commercialization pathways

Beneficiaries

- biotech SMEs
- research teams
- aquaculture
- environmental actors
- public health

Timeline

Call opens: February 26th 2026

Application deadline: March 31st 2026

Selection results: May 2026

Hackathon 1: Skopje, North Macedonia - June 30th – July 2nd 2026

Hackathon 2: Šibenik, Croatia - September 15th – 17th 2026 (tbc)

Blue Champions selected: October 2026

Applicants choose their preferred hackathon location.

Blue Champions Awards

Following both hackathons, 5 Blue Champions are selected by the DIH Innovamare Technical Secretariat Jury:

- ✓ **€5,000 value support package per team**

- ✓ **Targeted expert services supporting technology refinement, validation and testing, regulatory/market readiness, and deployment with users.**

- ✓ **Mentoring programme**

  - 20 mentoring sessions for 5 Blue Champions

  - Each team receives 4 tailored mentoring sessions (½–1 day each) delivered by
  - Innovablue and DIH Innovamare experts across technology, business, and market domains.

How to apply

To participate, please register your team by March 31, 2026, at 12:00 p.m. through Mairos platform - https://mairos.org/news/innovablue-challenge-open-call-for-blue-innovation-teams/

Teams will submit:
- team description, preference will be given to multidisciplinary teams
- concept description
- solution maturity level (TRL 3-4 are minimum): higher TRL levels are favorable
- expected commercialization pathway post hackathon
- preferred hackathon location (Skopje or Šibenik)

Attached to this communication, you will find the Rules and Regulations of the event.
- *Innovablue challenge flyer*
- *Open call rules and regulations*

Join the movement

➢ **The INNOVABLUE Challenge connects research, industry, and innovation ecosystems to accelerate sustainable blue solutions.**

➢ **We invite bold, practical ideas ready to move from concept toward deployment.**

➢ **Be part of shaping the future of sustainable water environments.**

For any additional questions, please contact us at info@innovamare.org