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INTERREG ITALY-CROATIA PROGRAMME 2021 – 2027

Call announcement

2nd Call for Proposals

(Version 1.0 – 17th of September 2024)



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Introduction

Italy - Croatia

The INTERREG VI-A Italy—Croatia 2021-2027, a **Cross-Border Cooperation Programme**¹ in the framework of the European Territorial Cooperation, is launching the Call for Operations of Strategic Importance (OSIs), and it invites interested eligible applicants to submit their project proposals.

This document is part of the "Application Package for the Call for Operations of Strategic Importance (OSIs)" available for applicants.

The application package consists of:

- Call announcement (present document)
- Annex 1 to the call announcement "Thematic descriptive sheets"
- Annex 2 to the call announcement "Guidance on Aid Schemes for Priority 1"
- Project selection procedure
- Annex 1 to the Project selection procedure "Assessment criteria"
- Guidelines for Applicants
- Off-line Application Form template for OSIs (for information purposes)
- Lead partner (LP) Declaration template
- Project partner (PP) Declaration template
- Associated partner (AP) Declaration template
- Subsidy Contract template (for information purposes)

Further information and documents on the application process can be found in sections 10 and 12 of this document. The present Call is implemented through the Joint electronic monitoring system (Jems).

The Call for proposals is governed by EU Regulations², the Interreg Programme and the present document. Italian legal framework shall be applied wherever applicable. In terms of State aid, General Block Exemption Regulation³ and the de minimis Regulations⁴ apply to the present Call for proposals.

1. Programme overview

The Programme area's greatest potential and core driver for development is represented by the Adriatic Sea: indeed, the strengths deriving from the maritime dimension are numerous, from the strategic

⁴ Regulation (EU) 2831/2023, Regulation (EU) 717/2014



¹ EC Implementing Decision C(2022) 5935 and subsequent modifications.

² ERDF Regulation (EU) 1058/2021, Interreg Regulation (EU) 1059/2021, Common Provision Regulation (EU) 1060/2021

³ Regulation (EU) 651/2014

position and good performance of ports in the area, to the impressive richness of biodiversity and the strong attractiveness of the region for coastal tourism flows. Thus, the Programme intends to exploit these opportunities by focusing the cooperation efforts on **blue economy domains**, in consistency with the EU Blue Economy strategy. Moreover, synergies and complementarities with other funding instruments at EU, national, regional level including National Recovery and Resilience Plans (NRRP) will be encouraged. The Programme's vision expressed as follows: "Focusing on innovation and sustainability in the blue economy, capitalising previous cooperation experiences, creating synergies with EUSAIR" will be attained through the Programme's 5 Priorities and their 7 Specific Objectives (SOs)

Priority	Priority's title	SO	Specific objective's title
Filolity	Filolity's title	30	
		1.1	Developing and enhancing research and innovation capacities
1	Sustainable growth in		and the uptake of advanced technologies
1	the blue economy	4.2	Developing skills for smart specialisation, industrial transition
		1.2	and entrepreneurship
			Promoting climate change adaptation and disaster risk
	Green and resilient	2.1	prevention, resilience taking into account eco-system based
2			approaches
2	shared environment		Enhancing protection and preservation of nature, biodiversity
		2.2	and green infrastructure, including in urban areas, and
			reducing all forms of pollution
	Containable manitime		Developing and enhancing sustainable, climate resilient,
	Sustainable maritime		intelligent and intermodal national, regional and local
3	and multimodal	3.1	mobility, including improved access to TEN-T and cross-border
	transport		mobility
	Culture and tourism for		,
4	sustainable	4.1	Enhancing the role of culture and sustainable tourism in
·	development		economic development, social inclusion and social innovation
	· · · · · · · · · · · · · · · · · · ·		
5*	Integrated governance for	5.1	Other actions to support better cooperation governance
	stronger cooperation		

^{*}For Priority 5 no OSI is foreseen, therefore no funds are allocated in this Priority within the present Call for Proposals.



2. Addressed area

The Call for Operations of Strategic Importance is addressed to the whole Programme area, covering the following NUTS III regions:

Italy: Teramo, Pescara, Chieti (Abruzzo Region), Brindisi, Lecce, Foggia, Bari, Barletta-Andria-Trani (Apulia Region), Ferrara, Ravenna, Forlì-Cesena, Rimini (Emilia-Romagna Region), Pordenone, Udine, Gorizia, Trieste (Friuli Venezia Giulia Region), Pesaro e Urbino, Ancona, Macerata, Ascoli Piceno, Fermo (Marche Region), Campobasso (Molise Region), Venezia, Padova, Rovigo (Veneto Region);



Croatia: Primorsko-goranska, Ličko-senjska, Zadarska, Šibensko-kninska, Splitsko-dalmatinska, Istarska, Dubrovačko - neretvanska (Adriatic Croatia region), Karlovačka (Pannonian Croatia region).

3. Objectives of the Call

The INTERREG VI-A Italy—Croatia 2021-2027 intends to select high-quality cross-border strategic projects in which organisations can cooperate to address common relevant thematic issues and very concrete needs in the area. The Operations of Strategic Importance (OSIs) are part of the adopted Interreg Programme, described in particular in appendix 3, in compliance article 17 (3) of the Interreg Regulation. On this basis, the Programme bodies have defined specific **Annex 1 to the call announcement "Thematic Descriptive Sheets"** for the selected Programme Specific Objective, which are integral part of the Call for Proposals, meant to guide the applicants to focus on strategic topics and actions, expected by the Programme. The Call's objectives are considered fully attained with the financing of one project per Specific Objective, in full coherence with the Interreg Programme and in line with the methodology related to the performance framework of the Programme.

In addition, the **relevance of the partnerships** and the **cross-border approach** of each project is of utmost importance and it is therefore highly considered in the project assessment. Since the Programme is addressing common challenges of the cross-border area, all project proposals should be jointly developed and implemented by the partners. Moreover, OSIs are subject to a specific supervision by the Monitoring Committee and to specific communication requirements, set out in art. 30 and in art. 36 (4) of the Interreg Regulation respectively.



Within the Call for Operations of Strategic Importance, the projects can address the Programme's **Specific Objectives** according to the following table and expected number of projects:

Priority	Specific Objective (SO)	Number of projects
1	1.1	1
1	1.2	1
2	2.1	1
2	2.2	1
3	3.1	1
4	4.1	1

4. Call budget and co-financing

The Programme will allocate **30.500.000 EUR** from the European Regional Development Fund (ERDF) to the Call for Operations of Strategic Importance (see below the detailed budget per SO).

The ERDF co-financing rate is equal to 80% of total eligible costs of the project.

The share of expenditure not covered by ERDF funds (equal to 20% of total eligible costs of the project) shall be ensured by national co-financing sources. For Italian organisations, the national co-financing is ensured by the State (Fondo di Rotazione).⁵

State-aid assessment could entail the possible reduction of public contribution as described in the **Programme implementation manual**, while for OSIs under Priority 1 specific rules are applicable, as specified in the related **Guidance for Aid Scheme**.

5. Features of the Operations of Strategic Importance

These projects are **complex cooperation projects** typically originating from a top-down process, guided by the Programme decision-makers, who acknowledge a need or a potential for a cross-border solution. As these projects have a substantial financial size and adequate partnerships than the Standard projects, it is necessary to involve highly competent and capable partner organisations who can ensure impact on

⁵ Ex Law n. 183/1987 and CIPESS Decree n. 78/2021.



the territories as well as sound management. Furthermore, these projects foresee actions such as the implementation of new solutions, the testing of new services, the development of strategies, joint action plans and pilots, the sharing of expertise, joint training actions, and the setting up of new governance structures in strategic domains for the cooperation area addressed by the Programme.

The cross-cutting elements described in the **Annex 1 to the call announcement "Thematic Descriptive Sheets"** must be addressed in all OSIs.

Moreover, in order to take into account the specificities of the OSI projects to be funded under Priority 1 (Specific Objectives 1.1 and 1.2), which shall include State aid schemes for voucher and grants addressed to SMEs of the Programme area, a specific guidance is provided in **Annex 2 to the call announcement** "Guidance on Aid Schemes for Priority 1".

Each OSI must contribute to **Programme output and result indicators** as described in the **Annex 1 to the call announcement "Thematic Descriptive Sheets"**.

Duration

The duration of the projects must not exceed **42 months** from the start date and all projects must end by 31st of December 2028: within this timeframe, project extensions may be granted in compliance with the rules specified in the Programme Implementation Manual.

Budget size of the projects

The Programme expects to fund projects according to the following financial size:

OSI	OSI projects ERDF (EUR)	Number of projects
1.1	2.500.000	1
1.2	5.000.000	1
2.1	6.000.000	1
2.2	5.500.000	1
3.1	6.000.000	1
4.1	5.500.000	1
TOTAL	30.500.000	6



Available financing options

Use of **Simplified Cost Options** (hereinafter: SCOs) is encouraged by the Programme. **Three financing options**, which include different possibilities of using real and flat rate costs, are available. It should be noted that in some cases the use of SCOs is mandatory.

In addition, to the budgeting options and SCOs, the Call for Operations of Strategic Importance also foresees the reimbursement, as Lump sums, of **preparation costs** and **closure costs**.

In compliance with article 64 (1) (c) of the Regulation (EU) 2021/1060, for the OSIs the total cost of which is at least EUR 5.000.000 (including VAT), VAT is eligible only if it is non-recoverable under national VAT legislation.

The 40% flat rate on staff costs option⁶ is not applicable in the OSIs under Priority 1, as at least 75% of funds shall be devoted to the SMEs activities.

The information on financing options and the use of SCOs is described in the **Programme Implementation**Manual and summarised in the **Guidelines for Applicants**.

Advance payment

Granting of advance payment to the projects is not foreseen in the framework of this Call for Proposals.

6. Eligibility of applicants

General provisions

Institutions/entities willing to participate in the Call for Operations of Strategic Importance must fulfil all the following criteria:

- Be **established under the national law** of **Italy** or **Croatia** (except for international organisations, see below):
- Have their official seat or seat of operations in the Programme area, as long as the official seat is
 active for at least twelve months and the seat of operation is active for at least six months before
 the date of publication of this call announcement and its location in the area is demonstrated
 through official documentation (e.g. through a public register or equivalent), to be uploaded in
 Jems with the application form;
- Be endowed with legal personality⁷.

⁷ "Legal Personality" is interpreted here as the institution's/entity's ability to acquire rights and obligations (e.g., to conclude contracts, buy property), sue and be sued with no regard to the issue of registration. The bodies concerned are capable of entering into a contract and can be held liable in case of a breach of obligations.



⁶ Article 56 (1) of Regulation (EU) 2021/1060.

Specific provisions

Eligible applicants must belong to one of the following categories of organisations:

Public Entities	Private bodies	International organisations
National, regional and local public bodies and their associations ⁸	Non-profit organisationsProfit-making	 International organisations acting under the national law of an EU Member State
 Bodies governed by public law, as defined in point (4) of article 2(1) of Directive 2014/24/EU on public procurement, and their associations 	organisations	 International organisations acting under the international law⁹

Assimilated partners

Italian and Croatian public entities that are located outside the Programme area (both with its legal and operational seats) are eligible as Assimilated partners, only if they:

- are competent in their scope of action for certain parts of the Programme area;
- carry out activities that are beneficial for the Programme area.

Assessment of the competence is performed by the relevant National Authority of the country in which the assimilated partner is located.

Assimilated partners have **equal rights and obligations** as do applicants located within the Programme area and their budgets should be developed following the same principles and constraints applicable to Lead partners and Project partners.

Financial Capacity of private Applicants

The financial capacity of private applicants is going to be assessed only for those OSIs which are recommended for financing, through the information included in the Balance sheets and profit and loss accounts of the last two financial years¹⁰ and a bank reference letter¹¹, which should be based on financial accountability and generally applied principles to assess financial capacity of private entities. Private

¹¹ A bank reference letter shall indicate the "Degree of trust" between the applicant and the banking system. This document declares the financial reliability of the organisation applying for the funds. The bank reference letter generally includes that the applicant has always met its bank commitments, has adequate solvency requirements, and can consequently be considered to have the financial capacity to carry on the project.



⁸ Including European Grouping of Territorial Cooperation (EGTC).

⁹ These organisations must explicitly accept all requirements deriving from the EU Treaty and the regulations applicable in the framework of the Interreg Italy-Croatia Programme by providing an ad-hoc declaration signed by these institutions that can be requested by the Managing Authority prior to granting the funds.

¹⁰ Eligible private organisations must have the approved financial documents related at least to the last two financial years previous to the submission of the project proposal and make them available to the Programme.

partners not fulfilling the financial capacity requirement will have to be replaced during conditions clearing for selected projects, therefore lead applicants are recommended to check its respect, before submitting the project proposal. Additional information is available in the **Project selection procedure**.

Rules for participation

As a general rule, each organisation can take part in a **maximum of 2 proposals, out of which maximum 1 as Lead Partner**. Therefore, should the applicants infringe on the above rule, during the administrative compliance and eligibility check, they will be required to confirm the 2 proposals to be retained. In case the applicant fails to reply within 5 working days, the first proposal submitted as lead applicant and the first proposals submitted as project partners in chronological order shall be considered eligible.

Participation "per department"

The following public institutions can be considered as "per department":

- Ministries
- Regions/Counties
- Universities/Research institutions

"Department" is understood as an organizational unit with financial and administrative autonomy and having technical and administrative staff to ensure its functioning. Thus, each single department within the above listed institution can be considered as a separate potential applicant.

7. Provisions applying to the Lead Applicant

Lead Applicant legal status

Each project partnership shall appoint one organisation acting as the Lead Applicant that is in charge of coordinating the generation and submission of the proposal.

In compliance with the 'lead partner principle', if the proposal is approved, the Lead Applicant assumes the role of Lead Partner (LP) and takes full financial and legal responsibility for the implementation of the entire project.

Only **public entities** listed in paragraph 6 "Eligibility of applicants" can act as Lead Applicant.

Organisation typology for the Lead Applicant

The lead applicants shall provide a confirmation, included in the Lead Applicant Declaration, that their organisations belong to typologies of partners listed in the table below; documental evidence such as abstract of the legal statute, establishment act or equivalent public document, where these function, scope and objectives are clearly specified shall also be attached to the application form in Jems:



S.O.	Eligible organisation typology
1.1 1.2 ¹²	 A) Regional public administrations / Counties, such as through the departments having competence in economic development B) Public sectorial agencies¹³, such as regional development or innovation agencies C) Business support organisations, such as chambers of commerce / economy D) Universities
2.1	A) Regional public administrations / Counties, such as through the departments having competence in civil protection B) Public sectorial agencies, such as regional civil protection agencies and regional development agencies
2.2	 A) Regional public administrations / Counties, such as through the departments having competence in environmental issues B) Public sectorial agencies, such as regional or national environmental management public authorities or agencies and regional development agencies
3.1	A) Regional public administrations / Counties, such as through the departments having competence in maritime transports B) Public sectorial agencies or authorities, managing public infrastructures, such as Port authorities and regional development agencies
4.1	A) Regional public administrations / Counties, such as through the departments having competence in touristic or cultural development B) Public sectorial agencies, such as agencies in charge of touristic or cultural development or tourism boards and regional development agencies

For all lead applicants, a qualitative assessment of the competence in the topic and previous experience will be performed on the basis of the respective qualitative selection criteria.

8. Partnerships

The Programme encourages applicants to ensure geographic balance and establishes the following **minimum requirements** for the partnerships:

- For priority 1, at least 2 partners, out of which 1 Italian, and 1 Croatian partner;
- For priorities 2, 3 and 4, at least 6 partners, out of which at least 3 Italian, and 3 Croatian partners.

¹² Lead applicants of OSI 1.1 and 1.2 shall ensure that their project partners have the capacity to operate for the benefit of the SMEs of the entire Programme area and thus they are able to set up aid schemes covering SMEs of the entire Programme area. ¹³ A public agency is defined as a public body or body governed by public law according to Article 2(1) of Directive 2014/24/EU, which is established by public authorities to fulfil specific public functions and tasks in a specific sector, regulated in the establishment act or other national rules.



As to assure an effective management of project activities, it is also **recommended** to involve an appropriate number of partners, with a balanced participation between Italian and Croatian partners, as follows:

- For specific objective 1.1 maximum 4 project partners are recommended
- For specific objective 1.2 maximum 8 project partners are recommended
- For priorities 2, 3 and 4 maximum 12 project partners are recommended.

In order to allocate sufficient funds per project partner, as to ensure a significant contribution to achieving the project objective, a **minimum amount of 300.000 € ERDF per partner** is compulsory.

Associated partners

The participation of the **Associated partners** in the Call for Operations of Strategic Importance is envisaged, even if it is **not compulsory**. These are partners, may also be based outside the Programme area or in third countries, without a project budget. They should however contribute to the achievement of the project's objectives, i.e. demonstrate an added value for the partnership. In particular, the associated partner may be important for capitalizing achieved results, as well as for synergies and complementarities among projects, programmes and EU macro-regional strategies.

The number of Associated partners shall not exceed the number of project partners.

Additional information about their participation can be found in the **Programme Implementation**Manual.

RULES ON PARTNERSHIPS		
Minimum number of partners per project in Priority 1	2 (one from IT, one from HR)	
Minimum number of partners per project in Priorities 2, 3 and 4	6 (three from IT, three from HR)	
Minimum ERDF budget per partner	300.000 EURO	
Recommended maximum no. of partners per project in S.O. 1.1	4	
Recommended maximum no. of partners per project in S.O. 1.2	8	
Recommended maximum no. of partners per project in S.O. 2.1, 2.2, 3.1 and 4.1	12	
Maximum n. of associated partners per project (all SOs)	Equal to no. of partners (LP + PPs)	



9. Call timeline

Deadline for submission

The 2nd Call for proposals opens on 17/09/2024 and it is organised in a "single-step" procedure.

The lead applicants must submit the project proposals by 19/11/2024 at 2.00 PM

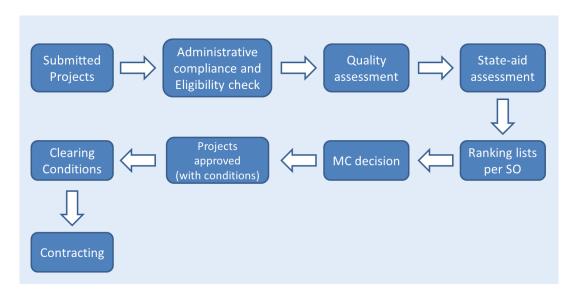
After the above deadline, Jems will automatically disable any further submission of project proposals.

The Managing Authority (MA) reserves the right to postpone the Call for proposal's deadline in case of duly justified circumstances.

Assessment procedure

The selection of project proposals is carried out by the Monitoring Committee, on the basis of the assessment performed by the Joint Secretariat. More information is available in **Project selection** procedure.

The following image illustrates the project selection steps:



Upon completion of the assessment, the submitted applications, reaching the minimum thresholds, will be **ranked separately per Specific Objective**. The Monitoring Committee of the Programme reserves the right not to commit all available resources depending on the quality of submitted applications. **Any savings from this Call for Proposals will be allocated for future calls for proposals**. Results of the assessment process will be published on the **Programme website**.



Contracting procedure

Considering the time necessary for the assessment process and the internal administrative procedures, contracting should take place approximately in Spring 2025. Therefore, applicants should plan to **start the activities** in **the second quarter of 2025**.

In any case, the actual starting date of projects will be the one included in the application form resulting from the Condition Clearing process.

10. How to apply

Project proposals must be submitted in English language and only through Jems. Timely registration in the Jems system is highly recommended. No other method of submission will be accepted, and applications submitted in any other way will be automatically rejected.

In order to confirm the willingness of the Lead Applicant to submit the proposal, the legal representative, or a duly delegated person, **shall sign the Lead Partner's Declaration and the Application Form's print-out through a valid e-signature** (certificate compliant with the Regulation on the Electronic IDentification Authentication and Signature eIDAS¹⁴) or, in case of a handwritten signature, while attaching a valid ID-document of the signatory.

The LP is in charge of the submission of the project proposal on behalf of the whole partnership and it needs to be registered on Jems in order to be able to create and submit valid proposals.

For more information on how to fill-in the Application form see **Guidelines for Applicants**.

11. Complaints

According to Article 69 (7) of Regulation (EU) 1060/2021, the Programme set up a complaint procedure in order to find an amicable and mutually acceptable solution to avoid any form of litigation between the MA and the LP.

Information for applicants regarding the complaint procedure during the selection process is available in **Project selection procedure**.

12. Assistance and other resources

The Joint Secretariat (JS) is based in Venice, with an antenna in Zadar, and can be contacted, by Lead Applicants only, at any time for any queries related to project development and application at:

¹⁴ Regulation (EU) 910/2014.



<u>is.italy-croatia@regione.veneto.it</u> <u>is.it-hr.antenna@mrrfeu.hr</u>

Other useful information

The Programme offers the following support and tools for the applicants available at **Programme website**.

- > FAQs
- Updates on the infodays (days and location)
- ➢ Glossary
- > Partner search tool
- Consultations with the JS (pay attention to the nature of the meetings and the procedure for the request described in the Programme Implementation Manual and Programme website): in order to minimize the administrative burden and ensure high quality proposals, it is strongly recommended for the applicants to have a consultation with the JS before the finalisation and submission of the proposal. The "Online Consultation Meeting" shall be requested to the JS by the Lead Applicant that has opened an Application Form in Jems according to the instructions available on the Programme website. More than one consultation meeting per project proposal can be requested, although the equal treatment must be guaranteed by the JS.

Useful documents for the development of the proposals

EU Policy Framework documents

- Regulation (EU) 2021/1060 Common Provisions Regulation (CPR)
- Regulation (EU) 2021/1059 Interreg Regulation
- Regulation (EU) 2021/1058- ERDF Regulation
- Regulation (EU, Euratom) 2018/1046 Financial rules applicable to the general budget of the Union

Interreg Italy-Croatia 2021-2027 documents available at the Programme website

Home > Implementation > Programme Documents > Programme

- Interreg Programme (IP)
- Programme Intervention logic
- Contribution to EUSAIR Flagships
- Programme Capitalisation plan



Home > Implementation > Programme Documents > Evaluation

SEA Environmental Report

Home > Implementation > Project Implementation Documents > Project and Financial Management

- Programme Implementation Manual (PIM)
- Beneficiary financial capacity
- > DNSH procedure

Home > Jems > Jems Implementation Manuals

Manual for Submitting Project Application in Jems





13. Summary: Main Features and Requirements of the Call

Main Feature	Operation of Strategic Importance		
Max. n. of project proposals per applicant	2, of which max. 1 as LP, per organization* *Ministries, Regions/counties, Universities/Research centers counted per department		
OSI themes and max. n. of	SO 1.1 SMEs-Research Cooperation & Access to research 1 OSI		
projects per specific objectives	SO 1.2 SMEs cooperation 1 OSI		
	SO 2.1 Climate change risks 1 OSI		
	SO 2.2 Biodiversity protection	1 OSI	
	SO 3.1 Green & Smart port	1 OSI	
	SO 4.1 Tourism diversification & delocalisation	1 OSI	
Eligible lead partners	<u>ONLY public entities</u> , being Regional public administrations / Counties, Public sectorial agencies competent in the topics, Business support organisations, Universities, according to specific typologies identified per each S.O.		
Min. no. of Partners	2 partners for Priority 1 (at least 1 in IT and 1 in HR) 6 partners for Priority 2, 3, 4 (at least 3 in IT and 3 in HR)		
Min. budget per partner (ERDF)	300.000€		
Max. duration	42 months and end date by 31.12.2028		
Indicative start	Second quarter 2025		
ERDF contribution	80% (20% co-financing, for Italian partners FdR)		
Expected financial size of each project (ERDF)	OSI 1.1: 2.500.000 € OSI 1.2: 5.000.000 € OSI 2.1: 6.000.000 € OSI 2.2: 5.500.000 € OSI 3.1: 6.000.000 € OSI 4.1: 5.500.000 €		

