

Call for the provision of financial support for the implementation of small-scale projects under the RISTANC project, funded by the Horizon Europe programme

GUIDELINES FOR APPLICANTS

1. Subject and purpose of the call

The call is published as part of the implementation of the European RISTANC project, which is co-financed by the Horizon Europe programme. The project contributes to the implementation of the EU Mission “Restore Our Ocean and Waters by 2030” (short: *Mission Restore Our Ocean & Waters*), with a focus on the Slovenian marine area, which is part of the cross-border North Adriatic region.

With the Mission “Restore Our Ocean & Waters”, the European Union has set an ambitious strategy – comparable to the “Man on the Moon” programme – aimed at tackling the most pressing challenges related to restoring the health of Europe's seas and waters through research and innovation, public engagement, and targeted “blue” investments. It has set three main objectives: **1) Protect and restore marine and freshwater ecosystems and biodiversity; 2) Prevent and eliminate pollution of our ocean, seas and waters; 3) Establish a carbon-neutral and circular blue economy in the EU.** To achieve these objectives, it is essential to empower a wide range of stakeholders, public and private organisations, national, regional and local actors, coastal, riverbank and island communities, businesses and ordinary citizens to actively participate in shaping the future of European marine and freshwater ecosystems. More information on the Mission Restore Our Ocean & Waters can be found at: <https://missionoceanwaters.eu/#/>

The RISTANC Project strives to achieve the goals of the EU Mission “Restore Our Ocean & Waters” in the Slovenian sea, with an emphasis on achieving social innovation. It develops solutions to specific challenges in the local environment through the broad cooperation between stakeholders, and aims to demonstrate the value and success of such transdisciplinary collaboration. Specifically, it aims – alongside other project activities – to showcase successful small projects as an incentive for us to tackle future marine challenges and opportunities as a society based on concrete needs, by integrating diverse perspectives and knowledge, and to ensure they are not left aside. As stakeholders, we may hold different professional roles, but we share a fundamental connection with the sea and the urgent need for cross-sectoral cooperation. More information can be found at: <https://www.ristanc.eu/sl>

The purpose of the call is to support the implementation of projects that address the key challenges of the RISTANC project and contribute to the objectives of the EU Mission “Restore Our Ocean & Waters”.

The call is specifically intended to encourage the participation of individuals, organisations and communities that have not previously participated, or have participated less frequently, in European research and innovation projects. Particular attention is paid to supporting less common forms of activity and new interdisciplinary partnerships, involving local communities, and developing innovative solutions that contribute to achieving the objectives of the RISTANC project and the EU Mission “Restore Our Ocean & Waters”.

1.1 Key challenges

The call encourages projects that contribute to addressing the following thematic areas:

- **The establishment and management of moorings** in the Slovenian sea for recreational and tourist vessels that prevent damage to marine seabed habitats,
- **The planning and implementation of interventions in the coastal zone** of the Slovenian sea that harmonise the various needs and interests of people and the environment,
- **Other measures in the Slovenian sea area (and potentially beyond) that contribute to the objectives of the EU Mission “Restore Our Ocean & Waters”**, such as reducing pollution in the marine environment (including plastic and other waste), the conservation and restoration of marine ecosystems, and the development of a sustainable blue economy.

2. Beneficiaries

The call is open to a wide range of applicants, including innovators, researchers, artists, individuals, representatives of civil society, non-governmental organisations, local communities, informal and local initiatives, start-up companies, schools, research teams and other individuals and organisations whose projects contribute to achieving the objectives of the call.

The following entities are eligible to apply for the call:

- **public and private legal entities** (e.g. non-governmental organisations, associations, institutes, commercial companies, local communities, research organisations, educational institutions, social enterprises and other legal entities),
- **natural persons.**

Additional conditions:

- If the applicant applies as a (public or private) legal entity, the registered office or business address of the beneficiary must be located in a Member State of the European Union, its overseas countries or territories (OCTs), or in a country associated with the Horizon Europe programme. If the applicant applies as a natural person, they must hold a permanent residence address within the European Union Member States.
- Applications may be submitted individually or in partnership. If the applicant includes partners in the project implementation, they remain the project lead and responsible for the project implementation, including financial responsibility for its execution.
- Each beneficiary may participate in only one application under this call, either as an applicant or as a partner. In the event that the same applicant submits or participates in multiple applications, only the first application submitted will be considered, and the remaining applications will not be processed.

- The proposed project must address one or more of the challenges set out in the call, and the planned activities must be implemented in the Slovenian territorial sea, including the coast,¹ or contribute to addressing challenges in this area.
- The selected applicant must have settled all outstanding tax liabilities and, where relevant, social security contributions before signing the funding agreement. The contracting authority will verify compliance with this condition prior to the signing of the contract. If the verification reveals that the condition has not been met, the contract shall not be concluded; the project may be rejected and financial support awarded to the next highest-ranked project.
- Consortium partners of the RISTANC project are not eligible to apply for this call, either as legal entities or as natural persons.
- Informal or local initiatives may apply through a natural person acting as the applicant, who shall be responsible for the project implementation.
- The project or activities for which financial support is claimed under this call must not be funded by other European, national, or local public sources. The applicant shall provide a declaration to this effect in the application documentation.
- Applicants who are personally, professionally, economically, or otherwise linked to the RISTANC consortium partners must disclose their connections.

3. Eligible activities

Activities eligible under the call are those that contribute to the objectives of the RISTANC project and the EU Mission “Restore Our Ocean & Waters”, and address one or more of the challenges listed in point 1 of the call.

The following types of activities, in particular, are eligible:

- **Experimental activities** (projects implementing innovative approaches in support of the Mission “Restore Our Ocean & Waters”, i.e. for the cleaning, protection, or restoration of the marine environment, or for the establishment of a zero-emission, circular, and sustainable blue economy).
- **Prototype development** (activities focused on developing prototypes to solve specific challenges related to marine ecosystems).
- **Feasibility studies and scoping** (assessing the feasibility of larger-scale measures).
- **Research and innovation** (initiatives to research new methods or technologies that contribute to reducing pollution and to the protection or restoration of biodiversity, including improvements to regulatory frameworks and governance structures).
- **Artistic, cultural and community activities** (initiatives and programmes that use art and culture to engage local communities in pollution prevention, nature protection and restoration, and awareness campaigns on ocean health and related human well-being).
- **Educational activities and capacity-building initiatives** (education, training and workshops for stakeholders, children, young people and adults, including professionals, to strengthen knowledge, competencies and skills in sustainable

¹The valid Slovenian Maritime Spatial Plan is used to define the geographical scope of this call. Boundaries and designations shown do not imply any endorsement or position on their legal status.

practices related to reducing pollution, the conservation or restoration of biodiversity, and the sustainable blue economy).

- **Monitoring and citizen science activities** (activities to assess the effectiveness and impacts of implemented solutions on marine ecosystems, citizen science activities).
- **Knowledge brokering and transfer** (activities that translate existing research results into actionable evidence for policy-making or practice, such as synthesis reports, policy recommendations, stakeholder dialogues, living labs, etc.; also includes institutions as focal points for transdisciplinary research and innovation activities with European reach).
- **A combination of the above activities.**

Proposed projects must contribute to the development of sustainable and inclusive solutions for challenges facing the marine environment in the North Adriatic area.

3.1 Ethical requirements

Projects participate in a research process guided by the RISTANC project Ethical Protocol, approved by the Scientific Council of ZRS Koper. Applicants commit to:

- adhering to ethical principles when planning project activities,
- indirect participation in the research process, subject to prior and informed consent.

Both aspects are covered in the Ethical Aspects document. A breach of ethical principles or failure to participate in the research process may result in the termination of funding.

4. Project duration

The project shall commence on the date the funding agreement is signed and may last for **a minimum of 6 and a maximum of 12 months**. Regardless of the project duration, it must **be completed by 28 February 2028 at the latest**.

Key dates	
15.9. 2026	Opening of the call
15.11. 2026, 23:59 (CET)	Closing of the call
16.11. 2026 – 14.12. 2026	Evaluation period for project applications
15.12. 2026	Publication of the final selection
15.12. 2026 – 21.12. 2026	Signature of the contract (Grant Agreement)
1.1. 2027	Earliest possible start of the project duration
28.2. 2028	Latest possible end of the project duration
30 days after the end of the project	Submission of the final project report

5. Amount of funding

A total of **EUR 60,000.00** is available for the implementation of this call.

5.1 Amount of funding per individual project

An individual project may receive financial support in the amount of EUR 7,500.00 to EUR 12,000.00.

Funding is awarded at up to **100% of the project's total costs**, but must not exceed the maximum amount allowed per individual project as specified in this call.

It is anticipated that approximately **5 to 8 projects** will be funded, depending on the amount of funding approved for individual projects.

Funding of projects within this call is implemented as **lump sum funding** – a lump sum is a flat-rate contribution towards the implementation of the project, paid out on the basis of results achieved or activities carried out, and not on the basis of proof of actual costs incurred.

5.2 Method for determining the amount of financial support

The amount of financial support is determined based on the estimated project budget submitted by the applicant in the application form, within the limits of available funds and the maximum allowed amount of financial support per individual project.

If the applicant meets all the conditions of the call and the project is eligible for funding based on the evaluation, financial support shall be set at the amount of funds requested by the applicant in the application form, up to a maximum of EUR 12,000.00.

5.3 Allocation of funds

Projects shall be funded in the order of their ranking on the priority list, established on the basis of the evaluation, until the available funds have been exhausted.

In the event that the available funds are insufficient for the funding of the last eligible project in full, **partial funding or an amount lower than that requested** may be approved, even if this is lower than the minimum specified amount of financial support.

In the event that funds are not fully utilised upon the conclusion of the call, the contracting authority reserves the right to re-publish the call.

6. Cost categories

The lump sum covers costs that are directly linked to the implementation of the approved project and are necessary to achieve its objectives.

Costs categories include:

- personnel costs (staff) for persons directly involved in the implementation of project activities (for the project duration, up to a maximum of 12 months),
- costs of materials and equipment strictly necessary for the implementation of project activities,
- service costs required for the implementation of the project (e.g. external contractors, expert reports, analyses, development services),
- costs of implementing activities such as pilot actions, experimental activities, workshops, training, field activities and similar,
- dissemination and communication costs related to public information, stakeholder engagement and the promotion of project results.

6.1 Financial rules

The lump sum is paid out on the basis of the results achieved or the activities carried out, as defined in the application and confirmed in the project implementation report, and not on the basis of proof of actual costs incurred.

Costs and implementation of the project must be:

- consistent with the defined project activities and objectives,
- in line with the principles of economy, efficiency and effectiveness.

The rules governing lump sum funding are consistent with the applicable Horizon Europe legal framework, national legislation and applicable accounting standards.

Costs or activities that are not directly linked to the project implementation or are not necessary to achieve its objectives, are not covered by the lump sum.

7. Method and application submission deadline

The application for funding, together with all required attachments in PDF format, shall be submitted by email to the address ristanc-funding@zrs-kp.si. In the email subject line, please state: RISTANC – application for the call [name of applicant].

The application may be submitted in Slovenian or English.

The application submission deadline is from 15 September 2026 to 15 November 2026 until 23:59 (CET).

An application shall be considered timely if the email is sent by the deadline specified in the call.

The application must include a completed and signed application form, including the required annexes as defined in the application form.

7.1 Questions and clarifications

An information seminar will be organised for all (potential) applicants, which will take place **on Tuesday, 6 October 2026, on the Zoom online platform**. Attendance at the seminar is highly recommended, but is not mandatory for application.

Applicants may send questions regarding the call to the email address ristanc-funding@zrs-kp.si no later than **31 October 2026**. Answers to questions will be published on the call website and will form an integral part of the tender documentation. The contracting authority will not respond to questions received after the deadline.

8. Selection procedure, project evaluation, and approval and disbursement of funds

8.1 Evaluation and priority list

The opening of Applications is not public. Following the expiry of the application submission deadline, the expert commission shall first verify the timeliness and formal completeness of the Applications received. If the commission finds that an Application is formally incomplete (e.g. unclear administrative data in Sections A and B; this does not apply to Section C), it may request the applicant to supplement it. Supplementing the Application is intended to rectify formal deficiencies and must not affect the project content, the requested amount of financial support, or its evaluation. The deadline for supplementation is five (5) working days from receipt of the call, which the commission shall send only once. If the applicant fails to supplement the Application within the prescribed period or if the supplementation is inadequate, the Application shall be rejected.

Only complete applications shall be admitted to the evaluation process. An application shall be considered complete if:

- it contains all required application forms, evidence, declarations, and annexes specified in this call for applications;
- it was submitted within the prescribed deadline and in the manner specified in the call;
- all mandatory information in the application forms has been completed;
- it is signed by the applicant's legal representative (or an authorised person) if the applicant is applying as a legal entity; it is signed by a natural person if the applicant is applying as a natural person

Applications that do not meet all the above conditions will be considered incomplete.

Project evaluation:

Projects are evaluated by a **five-member expert commission** on the basis of pre-determined and published criteria. The applicant will receive the evaluation criteria together with the application form. A priority list of projects is established on the basis of the scores achieved.

To be eligible for funding, a project must achieve **at least 55 points** in the evaluation.

The highest-rated applicants will be invited to a short **oral presentation of the project idea**, which is expected to take place on **10 December 2026, either in person or remotely** (e.g. via Zoom). The purpose of the oral presentation is to provide a brief overview of the project idea and an opportunity for further clarification before the final project selection decision is made.

Applicants will be notified of the results of the call by **15 December 2026** at the latest.

In the event that no submitted project reaches the minimum funding threshold or is selected for co-financing, the call organiser reserves the right to repeat and adapt the call.

8.2 Approval and disbursement of funds

The selected applicant shall be deemed not to accept the funding if, within **10 days of receipt of the selection notification, they fail to provide written confirmation of acceptance of the funds (written confirmation via the email address provided in the application form is also valid)**. In the event of withdrawal by the selected applicant, funding may be approved for the next beneficiary on the priority list.

The funds are paid out in three instalments:

- 20% as an advance payment upon signing the co-financing agreement;
- 30% following the approval of interim results and/or achieved milestones, as specified in the agreement;
- 50% following the approval of final results, including the final technical report and all required supporting documentation.

Funds shall be disbursed in accordance with the rules of the Horizon Europe programme, applicable national legislation and the provisions of the funding agreement.

9. Reporting and evidence of implementation (lump sum)

Beneficiaries are required to submit substantive reports on project implementation and other evidence specified in the agreement within the deadlines specified in the funding agreement.

As the funding is implemented as lump sum funding, Beneficiaries do not report actual costs using accounting documents, but instead report on the activities carried out, results achieved and the fulfilment of contractual obligations. At the request of the call for applications issuer, they must be able to demonstrate the implementation of activities and the achievement of results.

Mandatory reports include:

- an interim report covering a description of the activities carried out and milestones achieved;
- a final report including a description of the overall project implementation, the results achieved and the impact of the project;
- evidence of the activities carried out, such as reports, materials, photographs, documentation of workshops, prototypes or other project results.

Reports shall be submitted to the email address (ristanc-funding@zrs-kp.si) in accordance with the deadlines specified in the funding agreement.

In the event of unclear or incomplete reports, the call manager may request further information or amendments. Beneficiaries must submit the requested amendments within five (5) working days.

10. Communication, visibility and participation in promotion

Beneficiaries are required to appropriately acknowledge funding under the RISTANC project and the Horizon Europe programme in all communication and dissemination activities related to the project.

All materials produced as part of the project (e.g. flyers, invitations, posters, presentations, online posts, printed materials, promotional materials, scientific publications, and other communication tools) must contain:

- The RISTANC project logo.
- The 'Funded by the European Union' logo.
- Disclaimer: *"The RISTANC Project (Research and Innovation Cooperation for Sustainability and Reaching EU Missions Objectives) has received funding from the European Union's Horizon Europe research and innovation programme under call HORIZON-MISS-2024-*

CROSS-02, grant agreement No 101217089. Views and opinions expressed are however those of the author(s) only and do not necessarily reflect those of the European Union or the RISTANC project consortium. Neither the European Union nor the granting authority can be held responsible for them."

All communication activities must comply with the applicable rules on the use of the Horizon Europe programme visual identity.

Graphic elements, logos and detailed instructions for use will be available to beneficiaries on the call website.

10.1 Participation in media content and field visits

Beneficiaries must, at the discretion of the RISTANC project communication team, facilitate a field visit during the project duration (e.g. up to one on-site visit). The beneficiary undertakes to participate in the organisation of the visit, which includes photography and the filming of video footage and statements. In the event of significant geographical distance or if an on-site visit is not feasible, the beneficiary undertakes to provide appropriate audio-visual materials (photographs, short video clips, statements) themselves, based on instructions from the communication team. The material obtained will be used for the preparation of interim/final promotional videos and for publication on the official channels of the RISTANC project and the European Commission. The beneficiary must ensure that all persons appearing are appropriately informed of the purpose of the filming and have provided prior written consent for the processing of personal data and the use of their image.

10.2 Accessibility and monitoring

Beneficiaries must ensure that project results are appropriately presented to the public and, upon request, provide access to information, documentation and project results for the purposes of monitoring, audits or verifications by the competent national or European authorities.

11. Principles of good financial management and procurement

Selected applicants are obliged to act economically, efficiently and transparently during project implementation, and in accordance with the principles of good financial management.

If a beneficiary procures goods, services or works during project implementation, they must act in accordance with the principles of transparency, equal treatment of bidders and the ensuring of competition, even if the procedures do not constitute public procurement under national legislation.

Funding of projects within this call is implemented as lump sum funding; therefore, the eligibility of funds is not verified on the basis of individual invoices or actual expenditure, but rather on the basis of the activities carried out, results achieved and the fulfilment of contractual obligations.

Beneficiaries are obliged to respect the rules of the Horizon Europe programme, the provisions of the funding agreement and the instructions of the call organiser.

12. Intellectual property

Unless expressly provided otherwise by a subsequent written agreement between the contracting parties, all economic copyright and other intellectual property rights in the work and in all its components and accompanying materials created by the applicant within this contract, including images, texts, audio recordings, software code and other creative materials, shall remain with the applicant or the author.

For the purposes of the RISTANC project, the applicant grants the call organiser a non-exclusive, royalty-free, and perpetual worldwide licence, to use the work and accompanying documentation to the extent necessary for the following purposes:

- reproduction, public display or presentation of the work and accompanying documentation for non-commercial research and educational purposes, and for public engagement activities related to the RISTANC project;
- inclusion and display of the work in the RISTANC project (on the website, social media, and in other publications of the contracting authority and partner institutions);
- use of images, recordings and excerpts from the work in publications, reports, presentations, on websites and social media for non-commercial information, dissemination and communication purposes in connection with the RISTANC project;
- archiving of the work and accompanying documentation in the RISTANC project research archive and in appropriate open-access repositories, where required by funding obligations under the Horizon Europe programme.

The licence does not grant the call organiser the right to sell, commercially exploit or sub-license the work to third parties, except to the extent necessary for the above-mentioned non-commercial purposes of the project and the operation of project platforms, without the prior written consent of the applicant. Any other commercial use of the work is permitted only on the basis of a prior written agreement.

If the subject of the work is also a computer programme or software code, the economic copyright in such programme or code shall not transfer to the call organiser but shall remain with the applicant or the author, while the call organiser shall only acquire a non-exclusive licence to the extent specified in this clause.

The applicant shall retain the right to independently exhibit, publish, reproduce, and otherwise use and commercially exploit the work before, during, and after the completion

of the contract. The call organiser undertakes that, for every use of the work, wherever possible given the nature of the use, it shall clearly and appropriately credit the author or applicant.

The applicant guarantees that they hold all necessary rights or that, prior to the use or delivery of third-party materials included in the work (in particular photographs, music, archival or found footage, texts, and similar content), they will obtain all relevant permissions and settle the rights required for the use of such materials. At the request of the call organiser, the applicant must provide proof that the rights have been settled.

As the RISTANC project is funded under the Horizon Europe programme, which is subject to mandatory open-access rules, the results of this contract that are considered research results under the relevant grant agreement (e.g. documented research through artistic practice or co-authored publications) may be deposited in an appropriate open-access repository in accordance with the requirements of the project's grant agreement.

13. Legal protection

No appeal or objection is admissible against the substantive decision, assessment, and evaluation of projects by the expert commission.

An applicant may lodge an objection solely in the event of suspected procedural errors (breach of the public call procedure). An objection shall be lodged with the call organiser within 8 days of receipt of the notification of the outcome of the call. The head of the procedure shall decide on the objection within 15 days of its receipt.

If the objection is upheld and a procedural error is identified, the challenged decision on selection or non-selection shall be set aside, and the applicant's application shall be returned to the expert commission for reconsideration and a new decision. The commission must rectify the identified error in the reopened procedure.

14. Personal data protection notice in accordance with Article 13 of Regulation (EU) 2016/679 (GDPR)

Within this call, personal data is processed exclusively for the purpose of conducting the call, evaluating applications, selecting beneficiaries, and for the monitoring and project implementation of the RISTANC project. The processing of personal data is permitted in accordance with the regulations governing personal data protection and the rules applicable to research purposes.

The personal data controller is the Science and Research Centre Koper, Garibaldijeva 1, 6000

Koper, and the Association for Culture and Education PINA, Gortanov trg 15, 6000 Koper. The controller processes personal data only to the extent necessary for the purpose of the call and project monitoring.

The provision of personal data is required for participation in the call. If the requested data is not provided, the application cannot be considered in accordance with the call rules.

Personal data may also be processed for research purposes, provided that the conditions set out by law are met. Research results shall be published in an anonymised form. Exceptionally, they may also be published in a pseudonymised form if anonymisation is not possible for technical reasons or due to research objectives.

For the purpose of contacting individuals to obtain consent or additional data or clarifications for research, only the personal name, permanent or temporary residence address, telephone number, and email address may be processed.

Personal data is stored only for as long as is necessary for the purpose for which it was collected, or in accordance with the rules on the retention of documentation for projects funded by EU funds, if these rules stipulate a longer retention period.

The collection of the tax number and permanent residence address is carried out exclusively for the purpose of verifying the conditions for participation and fulfilling the exclusion criteria of the call, as well as for the subsequent preparation of contracts for selected candidates. Personal data of unsuccessful candidates will be deleted after the conclusion of the selection process, while the data of selected recipients will be stored in accordance with legal obligations and the provisions of the RISTANC project.

Individuals may exercise their rights regarding personal data protection by contacting the controller at the email address ristanc-funding@zrs-kp.si.