

Joint Call Offshore Freshened Groundwater 2025



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2021 United Nations Decade
2030 of Ocean Science
for Sustainable Development

JPI Oceans Joint Transnational Call for Proposals

Offshore Freshened Groundwater 2025

CALL TEXT

Call themes	Characterisation, validation, and assessment of offshore freshened groundwater bodies. Environmental assessment of offshore freshened groundwater seeps.
Participating countries and agencies	Malta (Xjenza Malta), Italy (Ministry of Universities and Research & Autonomous Region of Friuli Venezia Giulia), Germany (Federal Ministry of Research, Technology and Space), and Greece (Hellenic Centre for Marine Research)
Co-branding	UN Ocean decade
Submission deadline	6 March 2026 – 17:00 CET
Overall budget	EUR 2 million
Maximum project duration	36 months
Joint Call Secretariat	Malta (Xjenza Malta) and Italy (Ministry of Universities and Research)
Online submission at	Proposals have to be submitted through the following link https://jpi-oceans.eu/en/form/ofg-call-application-form , which will be active until the deadline of the Joint Call. Please check the JPI Oceans homepage for updates.

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1. Definitions

JOINT CALL

A collaborative mechanism through which multiple countries pool their resources to address shared challenges. A Joint Call invites research institutions and other stakeholders across participating countries to submit project proposals on specific topics.

PROJECT PROPOSAL

A detailed and structured document that outlines the objectives, methodology, timeline, budget, and expected outcomes of a planned project or initiative.

PROJECT

A collaborative research endeavour that has been selected through the joint call evaluation process and will receive financial support.

FUNDING PARTNER

One of the Ministries or Funding agencies listed below who have committed themselves to fund the project/s selected through this call for proposals.

LEAD AGENCY

The primary organisation tasked with overseeing and coordinating the entirety of the joint call process.

PROJECT COORDINATOR

S/he is the Principal Investigator of the partner who is leading the project.

PROJECT PARTNER

An organisation that is part of the project consortium and eligible to receive funding from one of the FUNDING PARTNERS under this Call. PROJECT PARTNERS contribute actively to the implementation of the project and are counted toward the minimum consortium requirements.

ASSOCIATED PARTNER

An organisation participating in the project without receiving funding from one of the FUNDING PARTNERS. ASSOCIATED PARTNERS must secure their own resources (cash or in-kind), cannot act as PROJECT COORDINATOR, and their contribution should not be critical to the project's success. ASSOCIATED PARTNERS do not count towards the minimum consortium requirements.

2. Introduction

Offshore Freshened Groundwater (OFG) is a potentially strategic resource for coastal water security and industry with high freshwater requirements. Despite its discovery in the 1960s and estimates of substantial global volumes, OFG remains poorly understood. Existing data are sparse and largely incidental, originating from offshore hydrocarbon drilling. Research efforts have lacked coordinated approaches to assess OFG's potential for sustainable use.

Advancing the understanding of OFG systems requires research into their emplacement history and age, as well as recharge and discharge mechanisms. Investigations into permeability, porosity, and fluid flow pathways will improve predictions of OFG behaviour under natural conditions and potential utilisation scenarios. Fluid flow processes, hydraulic properties, and connectivity between onshore and offshore aquifers must be studied to assess long-term viability and estimate the sustainable yield of an OFG reserve. Understanding recharge processes under current conditions should be a prerequisite prior to any large-scale exploitation, as abstraction could significantly impact the fresh-/saltwater interface.

Determining whether OFG bodies are isolated fossil reserves or dynamically linked to coastal groundwater systems is critical for evaluating their renewability and, consequently, their sustainable management.

Clear guidelines must be established for transboundary planning, licensing, and permitting, aligning with frameworks such as the United Nations Convention on the Law of the Sea (UNCLOS), the Convention on Biological Diversity (CBD) and the Regional Seas Programme (RSP). Integrating OFG research into Maritime Spatial Planning (MSP), the Water Framework Directive, and the Marine Strategy Framework Directive, is crucial to balance resource utilisation with environmental protection and maritime activities. Additionally, assessing the socio-economic feasibility of OFG extraction in comparison to conventional water sources, such as desalination and wastewater reuse, will help determine its viability as a coastal water supply option.

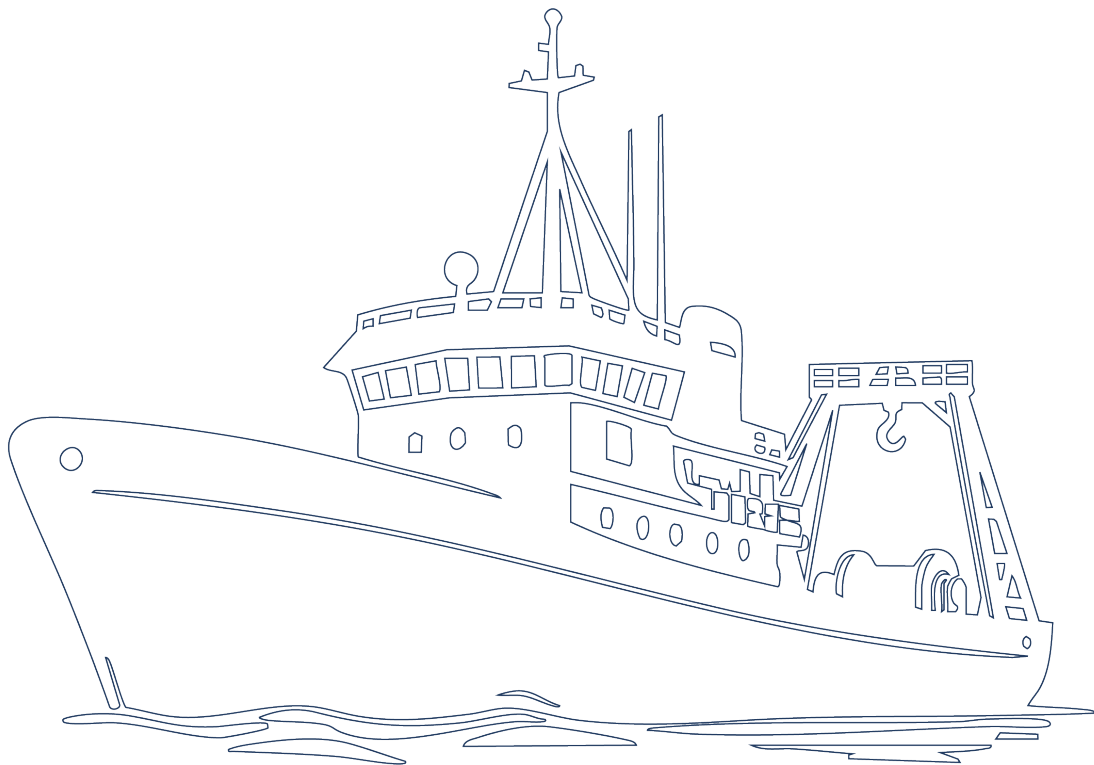
About JPI Oceans

The Joint Programming Initiative Healthy and Productive Seas and Oceans (JPI Oceans) was established in 2011 as a pan-European platform, open to all EU Member States and Associated Countries who invest in marine and maritime research. Our members are ministries and funding agencies that develop, fund, and implement national research agendas.

The distinctive role of JPI Oceans is to strategically prioritise and fund transnational research and innovation to increase the efficiency and impact for sustainably healthy and productive seas and oceans.

Ocean Decade

The Joint Transnational Call is co-branded under the UN Ocean Decade (see Chapter 6 for an explanation of the funded projects' contribution to the UN Ocean Decade and endorsement criteria for applicants).



3. Scientific and Strategic Framework

A major challenge is determining the distribution and extent of OFG. The hydraulic properties of offshore aquifers and their connectivity with onshore systems are poorly understood. Ambiguities in geophysical data interpretation, compounded by a lack of field-based validation, restrict the accuracy of current mapping techniques.

The emplacement mechanisms and groundwater dynamics of OFG also remain unclear. Key uncertainties include recharge processes, paleo-hydrogeological conditions, and the role of past sea-level fluctuations in OFG formation. The timescales of OFG emplacement and potential recharge rates are not well constrained. These uncertainties are further exacerbated by the absence of direct age-dating of OFG bodies.

The environmental and ecological impacts of OFG extraction are also poorly understood. Natural groundwater discharge influences benthic habitats, nutrient and carbon cycling, and microbial communities, yet baseline data on these interactions remain limited. Risks associated with OFG pumping – such as changes in seafloor stability, alterations in salinity gradients, and potential subsidence – have not been thoroughly assessed. Lessons from onshore groundwater extraction, including cases of land subsidence (e.g., Jakarta and Venice), suggest that similar risks could arise in offshore settings, although far from any urban settlement. Additionally, the long-term impacts of large-scale OFG utilisation on coastal water resources remain unknown.

From a governance and policy perspective, the legal status of OFG resources within national and international jurisdictions remains ambiguous. Unlike offshore hydrocarbons, there are no established governance frameworks for managing transboundary offshore freshened groundwater reserves, nor is there a discourse on their strategic role amid growing water scarcity. Furthermore, the socio-economic feasibility of OFG extraction compared to alternative water sources (e.g., desalination, wastewater reuse) within the framework of sustainable resource management remains largely unexamined. Public perception and acceptance of OFG characterisation and utilisation also remain largely unexplored.

The potential environmental risks of OFG utilisation require thorough evaluation. OFG seeps on the seafloor may play a role in supporting benthic habitats, nutrient and carbon cycling, making conservation considerations essential in development planning. The long-term effects of largescale OFG utilisation on coastal water security necessitate robust monitoring frameworks.

4. Call Outline

This Joint Call aims to address key knowledge gaps related to OFG resources and to ensure that research efforts advance both scientific understanding and practical approaches.

The primary objective of this Joint Call is to act as a “proof of concept” through the launch of a pioneering scientific drilling campaign that integrates hydrogeological and geochemical characterisation, with pumping tests, to validate OFG systems and generate critical data on their distribution, properties, recharge mechanisms, and long-term viability as a resource.

This initiative aims to lay the groundwork for the potential future strategic use and sustainable management of OFG resources. The campaign will target pivotal knowledge gaps, including:

- **Data scarcity and inconsistency:** generating systematic and comprehensive data on OFG properties and dynamics.
- **Environmental, technological, and economic feasibility:** assessing the environmental impacts and evaluating the technological and economic viability of potential OFG utilisation, while generating evidence-based input to inform resource governance frameworks/to guide policy and governance development.
- **Legal and governance frameworks:** informing and potentially contributing to the development of guidelines and regulatory frameworks for the integration of OFG exploration and exploitation into existing legal regimes.

The following themes are identified as priorities for the Joint Call:

1. Characterisation, validation, and assessment of offshore freshened groundwater bodies (demonstration projects). Scientific questions originated from knowledge gaps:
 - Functioning of OFG systems and onshore–offshore connectivity
 - Age of emplacement of the OFG
 - Hydraulic and hydrogeologic properties
 - Potential environmental impacts from use of OFG
2. Environmental assessment of offshore freshened groundwater seeps (developing environmental baselines)
 - Seep characterisation (knowledge gap, functioning of seepage)
 - Seep-related ecosystems characterisation (bio-geochemical aspects)
 - Monitoring

Knowledge gaps across scientific, environmental, technological, economic, and governance dimensions as listed above are recognised as cross-cutting elements throughout these two priority themes. Addressing these gaps in an integrated manner will ensure that the outcomes of this Joint Call not only generate new scientific insights but also provide practical foundations for environmental stewardship, technological advancement, economic feasibility, and regulatory coherence. Through this coordinated approach, the Joint Call will seek to establish a solid scientific foundation for the responsible and informed management and for defining regulatory frameworks of OFG resources in the future.

The geographical spread of the proposed research should include the North Adriatic Sea (preferentially in the offshore of the Friuli Venezia Giulia region) but is not limited to it and may also cover other European Marine basins, such as the Mediterranean Sea, the North Sea, and the Baltic Sea.

The proposals may include the execution of offshore stratigraphic and hydrogeological testing through shallow drilling in their work plan. In this case, when needed, the procurement including the tender for the acquisition of the drilling services will have to be included in the work plan and handled within the proponent's consortium.

5. Procedures and Criteria

Proposals should address at least one of the two themes in the Call text; **the characterisation, validation, and assessment of OFG bodies or environmental assessments of OFG seeps.**

Applicants are advised to consult their national funding rules and their National Contact Points for this Call prior to planning and submitting proposals (contact person see further information).

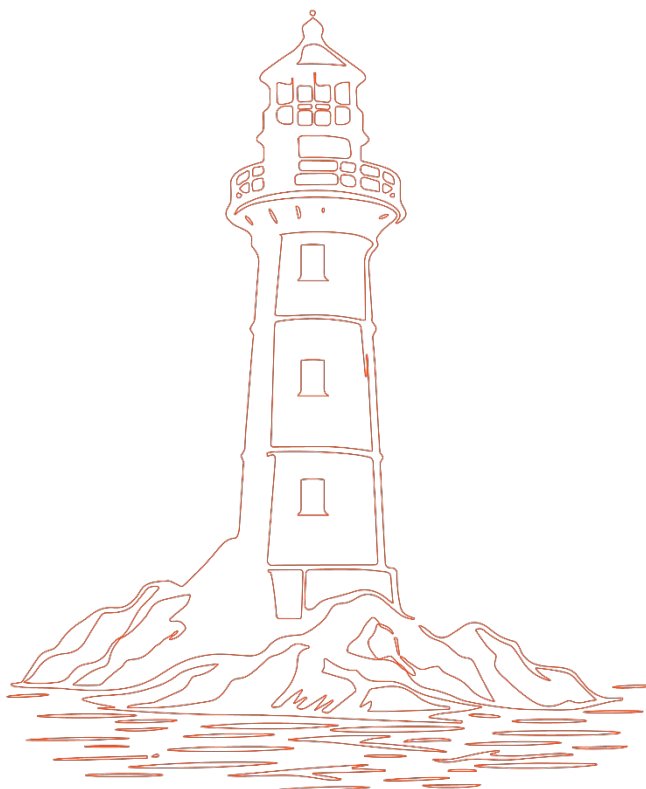
5.1 Deadline for submission of proposals

The deadline for submitting proposals is 6 March 2026 – 17:00 CET. Applications received after the deadline will not be considered.

Applications must be submitted electronically through the following link <https://jpi-oceans.eu/en/form/ofg-call-application-form> which will be active until the deadline of the Joint Call. Please check the JPI Oceans webpage for updates.

The use of the official application form for this Call is mandatory. Instructions and guidelines for submitting applications can be found on the website. In case of technical questions, please contact the Call Secretariat. The language of the application is English.

A final decision on the evaluation of the proposals can be expected by the end of May 2026.



5.2 Eligibility

The Call is open to proposals that meet the following criteria:

- Applications must be submitted by the set deadline, complete and in accordance with all the requirements defined by this document.
- Research and industry PROJECT PARTNERS who are eligible to apply for financial support from their national FUNDING PARTNERS (see Annex 1) are eligible to apply for funding within this Call for proposals.
- Research and industry PROJECT PARTNERS ineligible for funding, either because they are not eligible for funding by the FUNDING PARTNERS or they are from a country not represented in this Call, can participate in project proposals as ASSOCIATED (self-funded) PARTNERS, on the condition that they provide written proof that their part of the project will be covered independently of this Call (in-kind), however they cannot coordinate a project and their contribution to the project should not be critical. ASSOCIATED (self-funded) PARTNERS are not counted for the minimum requirement of eligible PROJECT PARTNERS and countries, see below.
- The PROJECT COORDINATOR of a proposal must be eligible for funding by one of the FUNDING PARTNERS.
- Consortia must be aware that failure of one partner within the consortium to meet the national eligibility criteria may result in the rejection of the entire proposal. It is therefore strongly recommended that the PROJECT COORDINATOR verifies that each PROJECT PARTNER contacts its National Contact Point to check its eligibility prior to planning and submitting the proposal.

5.3 Number of applicants per proposal

Each application should involve eligible PROJECT PARTNERS requesting funding from all respective FUNDING PARTNERS (cash contributions) of this Joint Call.

5.4 Funding period

- The project duration is max. three years (36 months).
- Projects should start within six months from the publications of the results of the selection process and no later than 15.12.2026.

5.5 National eligibility criteria

The eligibility criteria specified by the respective FUNDING PARTNERS must be met. For details, please check Annex 1 for the national funding rules in National Guidelines and/or contact the National Contact Point(s) representative(s) for further advice. Be aware that for some FUNDING PARTNERS it is mandatory to also submit a national application in addition to the international application. Proposals should be in compliance with the 'Do No Significant Harm Principle' and ethical issues given in Annex 2.

5.6 General Procedure for evaluation

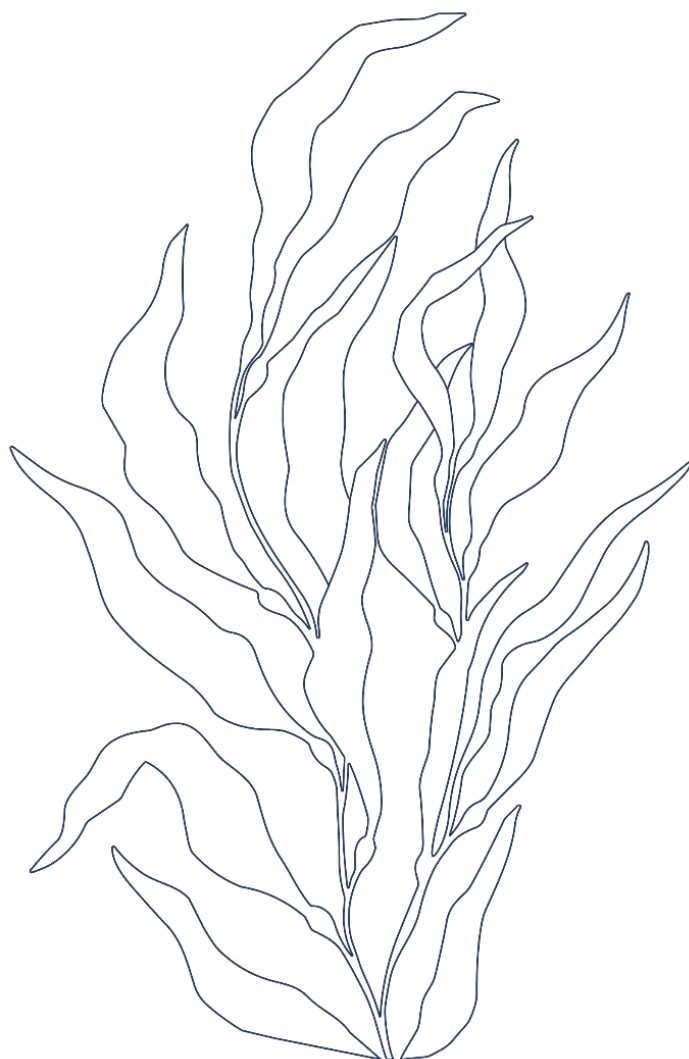
The following procedure will be applied:

- A one-step¹ transnational proposal submission and evaluation procedure will be applied to this Call.
- Proposals must be submitted via the submission platform by the PROJECT COORDINATOR of the proposal.
- After the submission deadline, all proposals are checked against the Call eligibility criteria by the LEAD AGENCIES. FUNDING PARTNERS will check any national eligibility criteria specified in the national funding rules. The national eligibility check will include an ethics screening to ensure that the proposals comply with applicable national rules and regulations.

¹ National rules may require additional steps or follow-up at national level. Please consult annex 1 "National funding rules" for more details.

- The eligible proposals will be sent for scientific evaluation that will be carried out by at least three independent reviewers (jointly selected by the FUNDING PARTNERS).
- An Evaluation Panel, consisting of the independent, international peer referees, ranks the proposals based on the results of the international peer referees review (review reports). The Evaluation Panel groups the proposals in three categories:
 - A. very good proposals recommended for funding;
 - B. good proposals to be funded if sufficient funds are available;
 - C. poor proposals, not recommended for funding.
- Proposals in groups A and B shall be ranked by the Evaluation Panel. No ranking is requested for the proposals in group C. For each proposal, the Evaluation Panel will provide to the FUNDING PARTNERS a Consensus report summarising the results of the evaluation.
- Based on the Evaluation panel recommendations described above and the available funding, the FUNDING PARTNERS jointly agree on a short-list from which a proposal will be selected for funding, assuring a balanced coverage of the two scientific themes of the Call (**the characterisation, validation, and assessment of OFG bodies and environmental assessments of OFG seeps**), to the extent possible. In addition, it is an aim to maximise the contribution by the FUNDING PARTNERS.
- The outcome of this process will be communicated by the Call Secretariat to the PROJECT COORDINATOR of the proposal, who will accordingly inform their respective partners. The evaluation summary report by the Evaluation Panel will be made available to the PROJECT COORDINATOR of the proposal upon request.
- The funding decision is irrevocable and therefore no redress procedure is possible.
- Formal funding decisions are made by the participating FUNDING PARTNERS, and where applicable are followed up by national requests for application submissions.

- Consent provided, the composition of the EVALUATION PANEL will be made public after the funding procedure has been completed. Strict confidentiality is maintained with respect to the identities of applicants and the contents of the proposals throughout the duration of the whole procedure. The funded project will be published on the website of JPI Oceans.



5.7 Criteria for Evaluation and Selection

Proposals submitted to this Joint Call are encouraged to demonstrate diversity and inclusiveness across multiple dimensions. This includes the involvement of a broad range of institutions (e.g., academic, governmental, private sector, and civil society), as well as a balanced representation of participants in terms of career stage and gender. Consortia should aim to include early-career researchers alongside experienced professionals and promote gender balance in leadership and participation.

Potential applicants are advised to take carefully notice of the aims, scope, and the relevance of the topics of the Call as described above. The following criteria will be applied to assess the quality of proposals:

Scientific quality, including novelty, originality and innovation of the proposed research

- Coherence with the scientific objectives of the call
- Sound concept and quality of objectives
- Innovation level (progress beyond the state of the art)
- Added value to European and international science-policy agendas (including contributions to the UN Ocean Decade objectives).

Quality of applicants and suitability of the consortium, including level of integration and interdisciplinarity

- Capacity, role, and complementarity of partners, and the extent to which the consortium as a whole demonstrates the necessary expertise and capability to deliver the proposed work
- Interdisciplinarity of the consortium
- Engagement of small- and medium-sized enterprises (SMEs) will be considered as an asset
- International added value of working as a transnational consortium

Impact and knowledge transfer

- Outreach and dissemination plan, including knowledge transfer activities
- Integration of stakeholders or activities for stakeholders
- Promoting training and networking activities for early career professionals or students
- Contribution of research outcomes to policy development and implementation

Feasibility of the proposed research, suitability of budget request

- Soundness of approach, including work plan and methodology
- Feasibility and assessment of risks of deliverables and milestones
- Suitability and coherence of the budget request
- Management structure and procedure (incl. data management plan)

5.8 Scoring system

0 – LIMITED

The proposal fails to address the criterion or cannot be assessed due to missing or incomplete information.

1 – POOR

The criterion is inadequately addressed, or there are serious inherent weaknesses.

2 – FAIR

The proposal broadly addresses the criterion, but there are significant weaknesses.

3 – GOOD

The proposal addresses the criterion well, but several shortcomings are present.

4 – VERY GOOD

The proposal addresses the criterion very well, but a small number of shortcomings are present.

5 – EXCELLENT

The proposal successfully addresses all relevant aspects of the criterion. Any shortcomings are minor.

The evaluation of each proposal will be based on the criteria described in Section 5.8 which will each individually be scored on a scale of 0 (lowest) to 5 (highest). For each criterion (1 to 5), the median score from all reviewers will be calculated. These median scores will then be summed to determine the total score of the proposal. Note that the score reached for the 'Scientific Quality' criterion will carry double weight in the total scoring process.

5.9 Conflicts of interest

Investigators must disclose any financial or beneficial relationships with a commercial interest (and those of the Investigator's spouse and dependent children) that could be viewed as presenting a potential conflict of interest and must declare any relationship that may lead to a potential commercial bias. All relevant sources of revenue paid, or promised to be paid, by a commercial entity either directly to the investigator, or to the investigator's

institution on their behalf, over the preceding 12 months must be included in the disclosure form.

Public funding sources such as government agencies, charitable associations, etc., generally need not be disclosed. However, if a particular relationship with one of these public funding sources might be perceived as creating an actual or potential conflict of interest, the investigator must disclose the relationship and provide relevant information. Similarly, any royalties (defined as use-based payments made to the investigator or their institution as the holder of a patent, copyright, registered trademark, or other property) should be disclosed.

5.10 Consortium agreements

Following selection of the project for funding, the awarded beneficiaries will be signing a Grant Agreement with the respective FUNDING PARTNER. All PROJECT PARTNERS selected for funding shall sign a Consortium Agreement in accordance with national regulations.

5.11 Funding, in-kind and research infrastructure availability

A total amount of approximately EUR 2 million has been blocked by the FUNDING PARTNERS from *Malta, Italy, and Germany*, see Annex 1 for a detailed list. Each PROJECT PARTNER will be funded by its national or regional FUNDING PARTNER. In addition, *Greece* (Hellenic Centre for Marine Research) is offering in-kind participation in the call. Interested researchers may contact national contact points (Annex 1).

Applicants from countries not funding this Call may participate as ASSOCIATED PARTNER with their own resources (cash or in-kind).

The call seeks to fund one single integrated project (involving a drilling campaign) that demonstrates efficient collaboration and use of available resources across participating FUNDING PARTNERS.

Table 1: Overview of country and respective funding partners with available budget for this Joint Call.

Country	FUNDING PARTNER	K Euro	Additional information
Malta	Xjenza Malta (XM)	300	Maximum requested funding per project: € 300.000,00 Maltese applications are requested to submit to XM a National Application Form and Relevant Annexes.
Italy	Ministry of Universities and Research	300	Maximum amount per project: € 300.000,00 In addition to the project proposal submitted at European level, the Italian participants are requested to submit to MUR a national integrative application § MUR National annex
Italy	Autonomous Region of Friuli Venezia Giulia	500	Maximum amount per project: € 500.000,00 Funds primarily for drilling operations in the northern Adriatic Sea, preferentially in the offshore of the Friuli Venezia Giulia region The budget allocated to this call by the Funding Partner is subject to the approval of the 2026 Regional Financial Law (Draft Regional Law No. 67/2025). It is expected to take effect as of January 1, 2026. See Annex 1 for further information.
Germany	Federal Ministry of Research, Technology and Space	900	
Greece	Hellenic Centre for Marine Research	In-kind	

The funding model for this Joint Call is the Virtual Common Pot, i.e., after a Joint Call and a common evaluation, the FUNDING PARTNERS will fund the partners from their own countries participating in the project selected for funding. All joint activities are funded on an ad hoc, voluntary basis.

The FUNDING PARTNERS aim at funding the highest-ranked proposal according to the criteria and procedures stated in the description of the Call and the Annexes of this Call text.

The FUNDING PARTNERS retain the right to cut the budgets of the proposal if necessary, according to national funding rules. However, imposed budget cuts and inclusion of recommendations should not threaten the feasibility of the proposed project.

5.12 Eligible budget items

Eligible costs are ruled by national funding rules (see Annex 1). Specific questions should be addressed to the National Contact Points of the FUNDING PARTNERS (see Annex 1), if possible, in advance of applying.

- The costs for individual project proposals shall be proportionate and necessary for achieving the project goals and consider the national eligibility criteria about minimum and upper limits of costs.
- Budgetary issues, including potential restrictions for funding should be checked with the national funding rules (Annex 1) and by contacting the National Contact Points (Annex 1).
- The total amount of funding requested from a FUNDING PARTNER in a proposal cannot exceed the budget limitations set by this FUNDING PARTNER and in no case can it exceed the total available budget of this FUNDING PARTNER.
- Project consortium costs should be balanced.

5.13 Project management and reporting

The PROJECT COORDINATOR is required to submit a mid-term report, including a summary for publishing, in English to the JPI Oceans Secretariat and LEAD AGENCY within three months after the mid-term. Furthermore, the PROJECT COORDINATOR will be responsible to submit a final report, including a summary for publishing, to the JPI Oceans Secretariat and LEAD AGENCY, in English, within three months after the end of the project. This report should cover the work undertaken by all the PROJECT PARTNERS.

Independent of the international reporting mentioned above, all PROJECT PARTNERS need to report to their national FUNDING PARTNER in accordance with the national rules of each country.

At the beginning of the project, a joint kick-off meeting with the funded project will be organised. A joint mid-term meeting will be organised half-way through the funding period. A joint final conference will be organised at the end of the funding period. The FUNDING PARTNERS, together with JPI Oceans Secretariat, will organise these three meetings in cooperation with the Principal Investigators of the funded project. The Principal Investigators of each PROJECT PARTNER shall include capacity for their participation to the three meetings in their proposal. Participants of the funded project are expected to participate in the kick-off, mid-term meeting, and in the final conference and should include the relevant travel costs in their proposal budgets.

5.14 Access to data and information

Projects should contribute to improved access to data and information, to an enhanced data basis, and/or promote the harmonization of data to support knowledge-based decision-making. Therefore, the project should ensure that all data and resulting knowledge are provided in an open access, shared, discoverable manner based on the FAIR principles, also in line with national rules.

Dissemination of results

Projects should include clear and precise procedures to disseminate results for further use by policy and practice, especially to decision-makers and non-scientific target audiences creating a user-oriented knowledge product.

5.15 Further information

Potential applicants are strongly advised to consult the general funding requirements of the FUNDING PARTNERS participating in the Call and to contact the National Contact Point whenever necessary, especially regarding eligible costs and other country- or region-specific aspects of the Call.

5.16 Call Secretariat

The Call Secretariat will be run under the co-leadership of the FUNDING PARTNERS Malta and Italy. The Call Secretariat is responsible for organising the evaluation procedure and for all communications with PROJECT COORDINATORS regarding their applications.

Call Secretariat contact information:

- Name: Vegard Dahlen
- Mail: Vegard.Dahlen@jpi-oceans.eu
- Phone: +47 951 91 982

5.17 Visibility on Ocean Matcher

In line with the Memorandum of Understanding between JPI Oceans and the Ocean Matcher platform, PROJECT PROPOSALS may be offered the opportunity to be featured on Ocean Matcher. Ocean Matcher is a digital platform designed to connect high-quality ocean research proposals with potential philanthropic and other FUNDING PARTNERS. PROJECT PROPOSAL information will only be shared with Ocean Matcher subject to the explicit consent of the PROJECT COORDINATOR. Participation is entirely voluntary and has no bearing on the evaluation, selection, or implementation of the project.

5.18 Privacy policy

By submitting the application, the PROJECT COORDINATOR and PROJECT PARTNERS agree to the use, to the share (for specific purposes: e.g., evaluation, for the future nomination of experts, JPI Oceans -specific communication), and the storage of project-related information according to the Privacy Policy and the General Data Protection Regulation (GDPR). Further information on the Privacy Policy is presented on the JPI Oceans website.

6. Co-Branding

This call is co-branded as part of the UN Decade of Ocean Science for Sustainable Development, which is coordinated by UNESCO's Intergovernmental Oceanographic Commission (IOC/UNESCO) on behalf of the UN system, with the aim that the selected funded research and innovation project is endorsed as Ocean Decade project. The UN Decade of Ocean Science for Sustainable Development (the Ocean Decade) is calling for a transformation in the generation and use of ocean research. To reverse the cycle of decline in ocean health, the Ocean Decade strives for an increased understanding and sustainable management of the ocean, seas, and coasts. To that effect, it provides a convening framework for scientists and stakeholders from diverse sectors to co-design and co-deliver the scientific knowledge and the partnerships needed to accelerate advances in ocean science. The Ocean Decade has a focus on inclusive and transformative science and aims to ensure that no one is left behind.

The objectives of the Ocean Decade are to: Identify critical ocean knowledge; build capacity and generate knowledge; and increase the use of ocean knowledge.

The co-branding of this call with the Ocean Decade will ensure that the funded project that is endorsed as Decade Actions form part of a highly visible, shared, global effort that opens up opportunities to create new collaborations across disciplines, geographies, and generations, and to establish access to new sources of support.

Evaluation of applications to this call will involve, as an observer, the Decade Coordination Unit (DCU) that is housed within IOC/UNESCO, the UN agency leading implementation of the Ocean Decade. The involvement of the DCU will allow to estimate if the selected research project align with the endorsement criteria for Decade Actions.

Proponents of endorsed Decade Actions will be able to use the Ocean Decade branding in their communications and awareness-raising activities in accordance with Decade Brand Guidelines, keeping in mind that the beneficiaries must respect the obligation to put the EU emblem and the other logos of the national funding agencies which are funding the project. Furthermore, proponents of the successful proposal will be invited to become members of the Ocean Decade ecosystem. DCU will take care during the evaluation process to evaluate and attribute the endorsement as UN Ocean Decade Actions.

Projects proposed for funding should demonstrate alignment with those of following endorsement criteria of the UN Ocean Decade that are relevant to their proposed actions:

- Contributes to achieving one or more of the three objectives.
- Accelerates the generation or use of knowledge and understanding of the ocean, with a specific focus on knowledge that will contribute to the achievement of the Sustainable Development Goals and complementary policy frameworks and initiatives.
- Is co-designed and/or co-delivered by knowledge generators and users, thus facilitating the uptake of science and ocean knowledge for policy, decision-making, management, and/or innovation.
- Ensures that all data and resulting knowledge are provided in an open access, shared, discoverable manner.
- Strengthens existing or creates new partnerships across nations and/or between diverse ocean actors, including users of ocean science.
- Contributes toward capacity development, including, but not limited to, beneficiaries in small island developing states (SIDS), least developed countries (LDCs), and landlocked developed countries (LLDCs).
- Overcomes barriers to diversity and equity, including gender, generational, and geographic diversity.
- Collaborates with and engages local and indigenous knowledge holders.



Annex 1: National and regional funding rules



MALTA

XJENZA MALTA

NATIONAL CONTACT

Name: Ms Oksana Pachomcik

Affiliation: Xjenza Malta

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BUDGET

- **Anticipated amount of funding for this call:** 300,000 EUR
- **Maximum amount per partner and/or proposal/project:** 300,000 EUR
- **Name of & link to the funding programmes:**
<https://xjenzamalta.mt/media/open-funding-schemes/>

ELIGIBILITY AND NATIONAL FUNDING MODALITIES

Eligible Institutions / Eligible applicants: Public, private and academia (Limited Liability Companies, Partnerships, Non-profit making Organisations, Voluntary Organisations, Professional Bodies, Cooperatives, Public entities, Research & Knowledge – Dissemination Organisations). Further information can be found in the detailed National Rules accessible from the Xjenza Malta website: <https://xjenzamalta.mt/media/funding-schemes/> Researchers, technicians, and supporting staff, to the extent that they are employed on the relevant project or activity by the eligible Malta-based entity. Further information can be found in the detailed National Rules accessible from the Xjenza Malta website: <https://xjenzamalta.mt/media/funding-schemes/>

Maximum project duration: 36 months.

Eligible costs: Eligible costs and rates of funding depend on the type of the Malta-based entities and the funding route chosen.

Eligible costs include the following: personnel; instruments, specialised equipment, and research consumables; IP and knowledge transfer activities; travel and subsistence; subcontracted activities; overheads and other operating expenses.

Further information can be found in the detailed National Rules accessible from the Xjenza Malta website: <https://xjenzamalta.mt/media/funding-schemes/>

Funding rates: Kindly consult the detailed national rules or contact Ms Oksana Pachomcik to determine the funding rates according to the funding modality chosen.

OTHER ISSUES

Subject, relevance criteria:

- **State aid guidelines:** National Regulations for Participation in this Call are accessible from the Xjenza Malta website: <https://xjenzamalta.mt/media/funding-schemes/>

Open access / Open science

- **Mandatory Deliverables (As per National Rules of Participation):** accessible from the Xjenza Malta website: <https://xjenzamalta.mt/media/funding-schemes/>
- **Recommended Deliverables (Same as above):** accessible from the Xjenza Malta website: <https://xjenzamalta.mt/media/funding-schemes/>

Other issues:

- **National Regulations:** National Regulations for Participation in this Call are accessible from the Xjenza Malta website: <https://xjenzamalta.mt/media/funding-schemes/>
- **National additional application (if relevant):** The national application form together with the required annexes can be downloaded from the Xjenza Malta website (<https://xjenzamalta.mt/media/funding-schemes/>) and must be sent to eusubmissions.xjenzamalta@gov.mt by the national deadline specified in the detailed National Rules.

ITALY (NATIONAL)

MINISTRY OF UNIVERSITIES AND RESEARCH (MUR)



NATIONAL CONTACT

Name: Yasmine Iollo

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BUDGET

- **Anticipated amount of funding for this call:** 300.000,00€
- **Maximum amount per project:** 300.000,00€
- **Name of & link to the funding programmes:** National Funds - <http://www.ricercainternazionale.mur.gov.it/era/programmazione-congiunta/jpi-oceans.aspx>

ELIGIBILITY AND NATIONAL FUNDING MODALITIES

Eligible Institutions / Eligible applicants: The following entities are eligible for funding, providing that they have stable organization in Italy:

- Universities, research institutions, research organizations in accordance with EU Reg. n. 651/2014 of the European Commission - June 17, 2014;
- Enterprises, foundations and other not-for-profit legal entities (including associations and NGOs provided they are registered legal entities)
- Entities requesting funds from MUR cannot also request funds from the Autonomous Region of Friuli Venezia Giulia

Legal/administrative/financial conditions: Applicants shall:

- not be defaulting with regard to other funding received by the Ministry of University and Research
- not have requested/got any other funding for the same project
- be compliant to the Italian law "D.Lgs. n 159 del 6/09/2011 e successive modificazioni ed integrazioni"
- not be subject to bankruptcy proceedings as of art. 5, comma 4, letter b) of DM 1314/2021 or must not be a company in difficulty according to the definition under number 18) of article 2 "Definitions" of Regulation (EU) no. 651/2014

- be in compliance with the obligations laid down in the contributory and social security regulations (DURC)

Applicants shall demonstrate their viability and financial soundness regarding their own contribution to the project.

For any private entity, if the following financial criteria, calculated using the data reported in the last approved balance sheet, are not fulfilled, the applicant can be funded only if a bank guarantee is provided:

- $CN > (CP - I)/2$
 - Where: CN = net assets (Capitale netto), CP = sum of the costs of all the projects for which public funding has been requested by the participant during the year, I = sum of the contributions received, approved or requested for the same projects
- $OF/F < 8\%$
 - Where: OF = financial charges (Oneri finanziari), F = turnover (Fatturato)

Maximum project duration: 36 months

Eligible costs: All R&D activities considered as: Basic research, Industrial/Applied research and experimental development are eligible for funding. However, Basic Research and Industrial/Applied research activities must be predominant with respect to Experimental development activities (in terms of budget share).

All costs incurred during the lifetime of the project under the following categories are eligible:

- A) Personnel,
- B) Consulting and equivalent services (subcontracting)
- C.) Travel and subsistence
- D) Equipment
- E) Other goods and Services
- F) Indirect Costs/Overheads ("Spese generali") calculated at 25% flat rate of all direct costs excluding cost category B) Consulting and equivalent services [E) = 25% of A), C), D), E).

Value added tax (VAT) actually and definitively incurred by the beneficiaries is an eligible expense only if it is not recoverable.

Funding rates:

- Maximum funding percentages:
 - Basic research: 70%
 - Industrial/Applied Research: 70%
 - Experimental development / innovation: 25%

OTHER ISSUES

Subject, relevance criteria: The admission for funding is subject to the adoption of the necessary accounting and administrative measures for the allocation of the resources.

Funded participants will be requested to submit financial and scientific reports to MUR.

The criteria and provisions provided herewith are intended only for informative purposes. The complete list of criteria and provisions legally valid, which must be respected by all the Italian participants, is included in the “Avviso integrativo nazionale”, to be published on the dedicated web page on MUR website <http://www.ricercainternazionale.mur.gov.it/era/programmazione-congiunta/jpi-oceans.aspx>

State aid guidelines: -

Open access / Open science:

- **Mandatory Deliverables (As per National Rules of Participation): -**
- **Recommended Deliverables (Same as above): -**

Other issues: -

National Regulations:

<http://www.ricercainternazionale.miur.it/evidenza/normativa-prog-internazionali.aspx>:

- DM n. 1573 del 09/09/2024 - Nuovo sistema di concessione delle agevolazioni del MUR alle attività di ricerca
- DL n. 83/2012 Misure urgenti per la crescita del Paese;
- Avviso Integrativo nazionale

National additional application (if relevant):

In addition to the project proposal, which shall be submitted at European level, the Italian participants are requested to submit to MUR a national integrative application signed by the legal representative person or a person delegated for this task, through the national web platform, available at the following link: <https://banditransnazionali.mur.gov.it>

This national integrative application must be submitted by the same deadline established for the proposal phase submission as defined in the international call. Any participant who does not submit its national integrative application by the deadline of the proposal phase will be considered not eligible for funding.

ITALY (REGIONAL)
AUTONOMOUS REGION OF
FRIULI VENEZIA GIULIA



NATIONAL CONTACT

Name: Ketty Segatti

Affiliation: Autonomous Region of Friuli Venezia Giulia, Specialized Operational Unit for Research, Innovation, the European Social Fund Plus, and other EU funds

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BUDGET

Anticipated amount of funding for this call: 500.000,00 €

The budget allocated to this call by the Funding Partner, the Autonomous Region of Friuli Venezia Giulia, is subject to the approval of the 2026 Regional Financial Law (Draft Regional Law No. 67/2025).

It is expected to take effect as of January 1, 2026.

Maximum amount per project: 500.000,00 €

Name of & link to the funding programmes:

<https://www.regione.fvg.it/rafvg/cms/RAFVG/ricerca/fare-ricerca/>

ELIGIBILITY AND NATIONAL FUNDING MODALITIES

Eligible Institutions / Eligible applicants: The following entities are eligible for funding, providing that they have stable organization in Friuli Venezia Giulia region:

- Universities, research institutions, research organizations in accordance with EU Reg. n. 651/2014 of the European Commission - June 17, 2014;
- enterprises (SMEs and large).

Legal/administrative/financial conditions: Applicants shall:

- Enterprises: be registered in the register of companies at the Chamber of Commerce, Industry, Crafts and Agriculture (CCIAA) and have a registered active office in the Friuli Venezia Giulia region.
- Universities/research institutions/research organizations: have a stable active office in the Friuli Venezia Giulia region.
- Implement the project in the Friuli Venezia Giulia region.
- Not be subject to disqualification sanctions concerning exclusion from benefits, financing, contributions or subsidies (art. 9, paragraph 2, letter d) of the Italian law "D.Lgs. no. 231/2001").
- Be compliant to the regional law no. 18/2003, art. 73 (safety at work).
- Universities/research institutions/research organizations: the funding request must relate to the non-economic activities according to Communication From the Commission 2014/C 198/01 (Framework for State aid for research and development and innovation).
- Not be defaulting with regard to other funding received by the Autonomous Region of Friuli Venezia Giulia.
- Not have requested/got any other funding for the same project.
- Be compliant to the Italian law "D.Lgs. no. 159/2011".
- Not be subject to bankruptcy proceedings as of art. 5, comma 4, letter b) of D.M. no. 1314/2021 or must not be undertaking in difficulty according to the definition under number 18) of art. 2 "Definitions" of Regulation (EU) no. 651/2014.
- Be in compliance with the obligations laid down in the contributory and social security regulations (DURC).

Maximum project duration: 36 months.

Eligible costs: All activities considered as fundamental research are eligible for funding. All costs incurred during the lifetime of the project under the following categories are eligible:

- Consultancy and equivalent services (subcontracting) used exclusively for drilling activities and connected services.
- Other goods and Services incurred directly to the drilling activities.
- Travel and subsistence.
- Personnel: non-employee personnel with research fellowship contracts, research assistants and doctoral students or other similar contractual forms provided for by current legislation.
- Value added tax (VAT) actually and definitively incurred by the beneficiaries is an eligible expense only if it is not recoverable.

Costs are eligible only if they are primarily intended for drilling operations in the northern Adriatic Sea, preferentially in the offshore of the Friuli Venezia Giulia region.

Funding rates:

Maximum funding percentages: Fundamental research: 100%

OTHER ISSUES

Purpose: Funding awarded by the Autonomous Region of Friuli Venezia Giulia, exclusively to Italian Partners located in the Friuli Venezia Giulia region, must be primarily dedicated to the procurement of drilling services and related services aimed at sediment sampling, water characterization, and borehole measurements in the offshore areas of the northern Adriatic Sea, preferentially in the offshore of the Friuli Venezia Giulia region, as outlined in the Activity Plan of the selected project.

The procurement process may be contracted to external public or private entities.

Subject, relevance criteria: Eligibility for funding is conditional upon the implementation by the funded partner(s) of the necessary accounting and administrative measures for the allocation of resources as defined in the "Avviso JPI Oceans".

The criteria and provisions provided herewith, are intended only for informative purposes.

The funding rules of the Funding Partner, the Autonomous Region of Friuli Venezia Giulia, will be published within the "Avviso JPI Oceans" by December 30, 2025. The "Avviso JPI Oceans", will be published on the dedicated web page on regional website <https://www.regione.fvg.it/rafvfg/cms/RAFVG/ricerca/fare-ricerca/>

Funded participants will be required to submit financial and scientific reports to the Autonomous Region of Friuli Venezia Giulia via certified email starting from January 15, 2026.

State aid guidelines: –

Open access / Open science:

- **Mandatory Deliverables (As per National Rules of Participation):** –
- **Recommended Deliverables (Same as above):** –

Other issues: –

Regional Regulations: regional law no. 7/2000.

Regional additional application: In addition to the project proposal, which must be submitted at the European level, regional participants are required to submit an integrative application to the Autonomous Region of Friuli Venezia Giulia. This application must be signed by the legal representative or a person duly delegated for this purpose and submitted through the regional website at the following link:
<https://www.regione.fvg.it/rafvfg/cms/RAFVG/ricerca/fare-ricerca/>

The regional integrative application must be submitted starting from January 15, 2026, and no later than the same deadline established for the proposal submission in the international call. Any participant who fails to submit the regional integrative application within this timeframe will be deemed ineligible for funding.

GERMANY

GERMAN FEDERAL MINISTRY OF RESEARCH, TECHNOLOGY AND SPACE (BMFTR)

Heinemannstr. 2, 53175 Bonn | Postal address: 53170
Bonn, Germany



Federal Ministry
of Research, Technology
and Space

NATIONAL CONTACT

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BUDGET

- **Anticipated amount of funding for this call:** max. € 900,000 (conditional budget).
- **Maximum amount per partner and/or proposal/project:** € 900,000 (max. € 300,000 annually).
- **Name of & link to the funding programmes:** Mare:N – Coastal, Marine, and Polar Research for Sustainability. Link: https://www.bmbf.de/SharedDocs/Publikationen/de/bmbf/7/31173_Mare_N.html

ELIGIBILITY AND NATIONAL FUNDING MODALITIES

Eligible Institutions / Eligible applicants: Universities, research institutions, and commercial enterprises are eligible to apply for funding. Institutions of the municipalities, the federal states, and the federal government as well as associations and other non-governmental organisations are only eligible for funding if they make a substantial research and development contribution of their own to the proposed research project. The eligible applicant is affiliated with an eligible institution.

Maximum project duration: 36 months.

Eligible costs: The funding can be used for project-related personnel, travelling, and material expenses. However, funding for investments and large-scale equipment is only feasible in exceptional cases. Priority must be given to examining all options for involving suitably equipped partner institutions. Only if it can be proven that these options cannot be utilised, the funding provider will consider a case-by-case review, provided that the recipient of the funding can ensure long-term operation.

OTHER ISSUES

National Regulations: The applicant is referred to the corresponding national call, to be released after the international call. Please check the German Federal Gazette for updates:
<https://www.bundesanzeiger.de/pub/de/amtlicher-teil?6>.

National additional application: The successful applicant will be required to submit a full proposal upon positive evaluation and ensuing selection of the transnational proposal. This process is detailed in the national regulations as laid out by the national call.

GREECE

HELLENIC CENTRE FOR MARINE RESEARCH – HCMR

NATIONAL CONTACT

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BUDGET

- **Anticipated amount of funding for this call:** In-kind contribution including infrastructure sharing
- **Maximum amount per partner and/or proposal/project:** No limit to the in-kind
- **Name of & link to the funding programmes:** The Greek in-kind contribution to this call is provided by the Hellenic Centre for Marine Research (HCMR).

ELIGIBILITY AND NATIONAL FUNDING MODALITIES

Eligible Institutions / Eligible applicants: Access to the research infrastructure is open to individuals from all partners in a consortium, not limited to Greek institutes. However, to design and implement experiments using the HCMR infrastructure, it is required to include HCMR as Associate Partner in the project proposals. Requests for access to the infrastructure should be submitted through the Greek national contact point listed in annex 3.

Maximum project duration: 36 months.

Eligible costs: In-kind

Funding rates: In-kind

OTHER ISSUES

Subject, relevance criteria: As stated by the call

State aid guidelines: None

Open access / Open science

- **Mandatory Deliverables (As per National Rules of Participation):**
- **Recommended Deliverables (Same as above):** not required

Other issues: Infrastructure sharing

- **National Regulations:**
- **National additional application (if relevant):** not required

Annex 2: Do No Significant Harm principle & ethic issues

Do No Significant Harm principle (DNSH)

The Do No Significant Harm principle was introduced in the European Green Deal to ensure that the research and innovation activities do not make a significant harm to any of the six following environmental objectives (EU Taxonomy Regulation): Climate change mitigation, climate change adaptation, sustainable use & protection of water & marine resources, pollution prevention & control, transition to a circular economy, and protection and restoration of biodiversity & ecosystems. You can find more information on what is considered as doing significant harm to the above objectives in the following note:

[EUR-Lex - 52021XC0218\(01\) - EN - EUR-Lex \(europa.eu\)](#)

Each project consortium is required to declare if its proposal respects this principle and, if not, to explain why.

Ethics self-assessment

The applicant shall self-assess the respect of the ethics principles by answering the following questionnaire. Whenever an answer is positive the applicant shall describe how he/she is planning to deal the ethic issue.

1. HUMAN EMBRYONIC STEM CELLS AND HUMAN EMBRYOS

Does this activity involve Human Embryonic Stem Cells (hESCs)?

- If yes, will they be directly derived from embryos within this project?
- If yes, are they previously established cells lines?
- If yes, are the cell lines registered in the European registry for human embryonic stem cell lines?

2. HUMANS

Does your research involve human participants?

- If yes, are they volunteers for nonmedical studies (e.g., social or human sciences research)?
- If yes, are they healthy volunteers or medical studies?
- If yes, are they patients for medical studies?
- If yes, are they potentially vulnerable individuals or groups?

- If yes, are they children / minors?
- If yes, are they other persons unable to give informed consent?

Does your research involve physical interventions on the study participants?

- If yes, does it involve invasive techniques?
- If yes, does it involve collection of biological samples?

Does this activity involve conducting a clinical study as defined by the Clinical Trial Regulation (EU 536/2014)? (using pharmaceuticals, biologicals, radiopharmaceuticals, or advanced therapy medicinal products).

- If yes, is it a clinical trial?
- If yes, is it a low-intervention clinical trial?

3. HUMAN CELLS / TISSUES

Does this activity involve the use of human cells or tissues?

- If yes, are they human embryonic or foetal cells or tissues?
- If yes, are they available commercially?
- If yes, are they obtained within this project?
- If yes, are they obtained from another project, laboratory, or institution?
- If yes, are they obtained from biobank?

4. PERSONAL DATA

Does this activity involve processing of personal data?

- If yes, does it involve the processing of special categories of personal data (e.g.: sexual lifestyle, ethnicity, genetic, biometric and health data, political opinion, religious or philosophical
- If yes, does it involve profiling, systematic monitoring of individuals, or processing of large scale of special categories of data or intrusive methods of data processing (such as, surveillance, geolocation tracking etc.)?

Does this activity involve further processing of previously collected personal data (including use of pre-existing data sets or sources, merging existing data sets)?

- Is it planned to export personal data from the EU to non-EU countries? (If yes, specify the type of personal data and countries involved)
- Is it planned to import personal data from non-EU countries into the EU or from a non-EU country to another non-EU country? (If yes, specify the type of personal data and countries involved)

5. ANIMALS

Does your research involve animals?

- If yes, are they vertebrates?
- If yes, are they non-human primates (NHP)?
- If yes, are they genetically modified?
- If yes, are they cloned farm animals?
- If yes, are they endangered species?

6. NON-EU COUNTRIES

- Will some of the activities be carried out in non-EU countries? (If yes, specify the countries)
- In case non-EU countries are involved, do the activities undertaken in these countries raise potential ethics issues? (If yes, specify the countries)
- Is it planned to use local resources (e.g., animal and/or human tissue samples, genetic material, live animals, human remains, materials of historical value, endangered fauna, or flora samples, etc.)?
- Is it planned to import any material (other than data) from non-EU countries into the EU or from a non-EU country to another non-EU country? For data imports, see section 4. (If yes, specify material and countries involved)
- Is it planned to export any material (other than data) from the EU to non-EU countries? For data exports, see section 4. (If yes, specify material and countries involved)
- Does this activity involve low and/or lower-middle income countries? (If yes, detail the benefit-sharing actions planned in the self-assessment)
- Could the situation in the country put the individuals taking part in the activity at risk?

7. ENVIRONMENT & HEALTH and SAFETY

- Does this activity involve the use of substances or processes that may cause harm to the environment, to animals or plants (during the implementation of the activity or further to the use of the results, as a possible impact)?
- Does this activity deal with endangered fauna and/or flora / protected areas?
- Does this activity involve the use of substances or processes that may cause harm to humans, including those performing the activity (during the implementation of the activity or further to the use of the results, as a possible impact)?

8. ARTIFICIAL INTELLIGENCE

- Does this activity involve the development, deployment and/or use of Artificial Intelligence? (if yes, detail in the self-assessment whether that could raise ethical concerns related to human rights and values and detail how this will be addressed).

11. OTHER ETHICS ISSUES

- Are there any other ethics issues that should be taken into consideration?

