

# Blue Challenge: Interreg Project Development Training Programme

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Online training and Back-to-back event to the Atlantic- WestMED  
Stakeholder Conference

Concept Note

# Introduction

**Project development** is a critical step in turning innovative ideas into tangible solutions that can drive the sustainable growth of the blue economy. For early-career professionals, having the skills and support to design strong, fundable projects is essential to actively contribute to addressing key challenges such as climate change, marine conservation, and sustainable resource management. Empowering young talent to shape and lead these initiatives not only strengthens their career pathways but also ensures a continuous flow of fresh, impactful ideas into the sector. This is particularly important for initiatives such as WestMED and the Atlantic Sea Basin Strategy, which rely on high-quality, collaborative projects to deliver on their priorities and accelerate innovation across regions. In this context, **Interreg funding programmes play a key role by supporting transnational cooperation**, enabling partners from different countries to jointly address shared challenges, exchange knowledge, and develop innovative, scalable solutions with real territorial impact.

**The Blue Challenge: Interreg project development training** programme is intended for young adults (ages 18-25, included) wishing to develop a successful project proposal on sustainable development and cooperation.

This training offers a **4-month interactive** journey through the life of **Interreg project development**, from programming to project design, proposal writing, budgeting and submission.

Through detailed **1h webinars** that include case studies and exercises on key project design and management tools, this interactive training course provides a thorough understanding of essential techniques for successful, result-oriented and cost-effective project proposal writing of Interreg projects (i.e. Interreg Atlantic, Interreg MAC, Interreg Next-MED and Interreg EURO-MED).

Designed to help early-career students and professionals understand the complexities of Interreg funding project development schemes, the training course covers all development phases of an Interreg Project submission, from programming until submission phase.

In addition, the course aims to support good management practices and effective decision-making throughout the project defining and development cycle: from programming, identification, formulation, to successful submission.

Experienced high-level practitioners will guide participants throughout a total of 3 training modules, which would include different learning approaches:

- **Interactive training:** Online webinar sessions examining the theoretical and practical aspects of Interreg project development.
- **Practical group discussions:** Designed to develop essential project management skills.
- **Case studies:** Based on real Interreg funded projects.
- **Individual tests:** Aiming to evaluate the performance and level of understanding of students but also giving participants the opportunity to maximize their personal learning experience.
- **Blue Challenge Day:** ½ Day in person project development challenge to draft a full winning project proposal – followed up by an 8 min Pitch-Session to a Jury – Selection of Winner proposal – 15th September 2026 (Las Palmas de Gran Canarias, Spain)

- **Winner's Award Ceremony:** Back-to-back to the Atlantic and WestMED Stakeholder Conference 2026 – 16th September 2026 (Las Palmas de Gran Canarias, Spain)

This training will enable participants to strengthen the development of their own project proposal, allowing them to work on their proposal while learning at the same time. Participants will receive tips and hints on how to present their proposal successfully, how to formulate it in 'INTERREG' terminology and to identify what obstacles they may encounter.

# Practical information

## 1 Eligibility

Participation in *The Blue Challenge: Interreg Project Development Training Programme* is subject to the following eligibility conditions:

### Number of Participants

A maximum of **100 participants** will be selected for the training programme. Eligible applicants beyond this limit will be placed on a **waiting list**, which may be activated in case of withdrawals.

### Target Group

The programme is open to **young adults aged between 18 and 25 years (inclusive)**, regardless of whether they are currently studying or employed. Applicants may come from a wide range of backgrounds, including but not limited to universities and higher education institutions, research centers, vocational education and training (VET) institutions, think tanks, as well as associations and non-governmental organizations (NGOs). Participants must be nationals or residents of countries eligible under **Interreg programmes**, including **but not limited to** Mediterranean and Atlantic countries such as Algeria, France, Ireland, Italy, Libya, Malta, Mauritania, Morocco, Portugal, Spain, and Tunisia.

### Participation Criteria

This training is designed as a **beginner-level course** in Interreg project development. No prior experience in EU project design or Interreg programmes is required. Participants will be selected on a **first-come, first-served basis, ensuring geographical and gender balance**, provided they meet all eligibility requirements.

### Language Requirements

The working language of the programme is **English**. Participants must have a **good command of English**, sufficient to follow the training and actively engage in discussions. No formal certification will be required.

### Technical Requirements

Participants must have:

- Access to a **computer**
- A **stable internet connection**

These are necessary to fully participate in the online training sessions and related activities.

## 2 Format

The *Blue Challenge: Interreg Project Development Training Programme* will be delivered through a combination of **online training, virtual networking, and an in-person final event.**

### Online Training (May – July 2026)

The programme will start in **early May 2026** and run until **mid-July 2026**, through a series of interactive online webinars. No sessions will be scheduled in **August 2026**.

Participants will receive **training materials in advance** of each session to support preparation and enhance the overall learning experience. The programme includes access to relevant tools and platforms (e.g. Canva), as well as supporting resources.

### Virtual Networking and Collaboration

Throughout the training, participants will have access to dedicated **discussion fora and interactive spaces**, enabling exchange, collaboration, and peer learning. Additional networking activities will be organised to foster connections among participants across countries and backgrounds.

### In-person Blue Challenge Day (15 September 2026)

The programme will culminate in an **in-person Blue Challenge Day**, taking place on **15 September 2026 in the city of Las Palmas de Gran Canaria in the Canary Islands, Spain.**

Participants who have **successfully completed** the training (**tests graded A**) will be **encouraged to attend self-funded**.

During this day:

- Participants will be divided into **four groups**, each addressing a specific challenge introduced during the final webinar
- Teams will collaboratively develop a **full Interreg project proposal** over the course of a half-day working session
- Each group will present their proposal through an **8-minute pitch** to a **Jury of Blue Economy experts**

The jury will evaluate the proposals and select the winning team(s).

### Awards Ceremony (16 September 2026)

Winners will be officially announced on **16 September 2026**, during the **WestMED and Atlantic Stakeholders Conference**, held **in the city of Las Palmas de Gran Canaria in the Canary Islands, Spain.**

### 3 Recognition Award

Winning teams will receive a **formal recognition award** during the Stakeholders Conference. In addition, they will benefit from **tailored follow-up guidance** aimed at further developing their project proposals into fully-fledged applications for upcoming **Interreg funding calls**. To further incentivize participation, additional prizes may be awarded by the Interreg programme representatives.

This support will be provided with the involvement of the **National Hubs of the Sea Basin Assistance Mechanism both for the WestMED Initiative and the Atlantic Strategy**, ensuring alignment with programme priorities and increasing the chances of successful submission.

The evaluation of proposals will be carried out by a jury composed of up to **six members**, including:

- **Four representatives** from Interreg Programme Secretariats:
  - Interreg Atlantic
  - Interreg MAC
  - Interreg NEXT MED
  - Interreg EURO-MED
- **One Blue Economy expert:** Thanos Smanis
- **One BlueInvest expert** (to be confirmed)

### 4 Financial support for EU countries participants attending the in-person Blue Challenge Day (15 September 2026)

Participation in the in-person Blue Challenge Day event in Las Palmas de Gran Canaria, Spain, **IS NOT FUNDED** by the organizers. Participants willing to participate are encouraged to **ensure self-funding** to attend in-person.

### 5 Financial support for participants from non-EU countries attending the in-person Blue Challenge Day (15 September 2026)

Participation in the in-person event in Las Palmas de Gran Canaria, Spain, may present challenges for participants from non-EU WestMED countries. To support inclusivity and facilitate their participation, financial support may be granted to **one participant per eligible non-EU country from the WestMED Initiative** (Libya, Malta, Mauritania, Morocco, and Tunisia) provided by the WestMED Assistance Mechanism. This support will be awarded to participants who have successfully attended all webinars and obtained the highest scores (tests graded A) in the programme assessments. In the event of equal scores amongst participants from same eligible country, selection will be determined by organizers

through a random draw. The financial support will cover travel (flights) and accommodation for attendance at the final event in the Canary Islands (15<sup>th</sup> September 2026). Financial support **does not cover** visa-related expenses, meals, or any other additional costs.

In addition, Interreg MAC program will cover the participation and accommodation of **some** of the selected participants from **Cape Vert, Senegal, Gambia, Ghana, Ivory Coast or Sao Tome and Principe**.

Participants from **other non-EU countries eligible under Interreg programmes** may also be arranged by these programmes or other partner organisations.

## 6 Timeline

	May	June	July	August	September
Open call for submissions				FREE MONTH	
Close call and selection of students					
Training: Webinars & Tests					
Blue Challenge Day in-person in Gran Canaria, Spain					15/09/26

# TRAINING CONTENT

## Interreg Project Development Training Programme

The training programme is structured into **three modules**, combining **six online webinars** (two per module, 1 hour each), **knowledge tests**, and a **final evaluation survey**. Additionally, at the end of each of the three modules an assessment test will take place.

### Platform

The training will be delivered through a dedicated **Canva platform**, accessible via individual login credentials. Participation is restricted to registered users; guest access will not be permitted.

### Module 1 – Introduction & Scoping

#### **Webinar 1 – Understanding Interreg and its Core Characteristics**

Interreg programmes fund projects through competitive calls for proposals. While many applications are submitted, only those meeting strict quality criteria and contributing to programme policy objectives are selected.

This session will cover:

- What Interreg is and why it exists
- The link between EU Cohesion Policy, Interreg policy objectives, and programme structures
- The four strands of Interreg programmes and their key features
- The four core characteristics of Interreg projects
- What these characteristics mean in practice for project developers

### **Webinar 2 – Project Development Lifecycle**

- Key attributes of Interreg project development
- Aligning project ideas with objectives, scope, work packages (WPs), and tasks
- Defining objectives that are both ambitious and realistic
- Structuring ideas into WPs, tasks, and activities
- The role of partners and consortia in shaping project proposals

### **Module 1 Test – Introductory Assessment**

### **Module 2 – Proposal Design**

#### **Webinar 3 – Work Plan and Budget Design**

- Defining timelines and project structure
- Developing a Gantt chart
- Building a clear and coherent budget plan

#### **Webinar 4 – Impact, Excellence and Communication**

- Defining and measuring project impact
- Linking results to indicators and expected outcomes
- Demonstrating the excellence of the project consortium
- Designing effective communication strategies: objectives, target groups, and activities

### **Module 2 Test – Intermediate Assessment**

### **Module 3 – Risk Management and Final Skills**

#### **Webinar 5 – Risk Identification and Management**

- Identifying potential risks in project development
- Applying basic risk management approaches

### **Webinar 6 – Final Recommendations and Pitching Skills**

- Key recommendations for successful Interreg proposals
- Introduction to presentation design
- Developing effective pitching skills

### **Module 3 Test – Final Assessment**

#### **Final Evaluation**

All participants will be required to complete a final evaluation survey following the Blue Challenge Day (after 15 September 2026), aimed at assessing the quality and impact of the training programme.