

Joint Stakeholder Conference 2026

Joint Awards

Concept Note

WESTMED
blue economy initiative

ATLANTIC STRATEGY
Supporting the Atlantic Action Plan



Introduction

Both the Atlantic Maritime Strategy and the WestMED Initiative promote the sustainable development of the blue economy through enhanced cooperation, innovation, skills development, green transition, and resilience across European sea basins. Within this framework, both initiatives have successfully established Project Awards as flagship instruments to:

- Showcase best practices and replicable success stories
- Recognise high-impact and scalable initiatives
- Increase the visibility of EU-funded and nationally funded projects
- Strengthen and mobilise stakeholder communities

The organisation of a joint WestMED–Atlantic Stakeholder Conference presents a timely opportunity to further **enhance impact, coherence, and EU added value by aligning the respective Project Awards schemes**, while fully respecting the distinct governance structures, strategic priorities, and geographical specificities of each sea basin.

In this context, the Joint Awards aim to:

- **Highlight excellence and innovation** across two major European sea basins
- **Foster cross–sea basin learning, knowledge exchange, and transferability of solutions**
- **Increase the visibility of projects contributing to key EU priorities**, including the European Green Deal, the Sustainable Blue Economy Strategy, and broader maritime policies
- Encourage **cooperation and synergies beyond regional and thematic silos**
- Reinforce the **strategic narrative and added value of the sea basin approaches**

Under this joint framework, projects from both sea basins will apply under a **common set of priorities** and categories and will be **evaluated within a single competitive process**. This will result in one winner per category, irrespective of the sea basin of origin, thereby ensuring a merit-based and excellence-driven selection.

The **award categories** have been defined on the basis of shared strategic priorities across both sea basins, ensuring strong alignment with the core objectives of the Atlantic Maritime Strategy and the WestMED Initiative. These include: 1) blue skills and ocean literacy; 2) maritime spatial planning; 3) biodiversity, resilience and marine habitat conservation; and 4) maritime transport, green ports and energy transition. These thematic areas reflect not only key policy priorities at EU level, but also the work of established governance and stakeholder structures within both sea basins, such as the Communities of Practice on Maritime Spatial Planning and the Atlantic Pillar and WestMED Technical Group on Blue Skills. In addition, they respond to broader priorities identified by stakeholders themselves, ensuring that the Awards remain

grounded in operational realities, ongoing initiatives, and emerging needs across the blue economy ecosystem.

In addition, the Joint Awards will actively **promote synergies across sea basins by recognising and encouraging projects that demonstrate effective cross-sea basin cooperation**. Particular attention will be given to initiatives involving partners from both the Atlantic and WestMED regions, as well as to those showcasing strong existing collaboration models, knowledge transfer, and replicability across different maritime contexts. By highlighting best practices in inter-basin cooperation, the Awards will contribute to breaking down regional silos, fostering strategic alignment, and reinforcing the role of sea basin strategies as complementary and mutually reinforcing instruments within the broader EU maritime framework.

Guidelines (for stakeholders)

The Guidelines will constitute the **official reference document for the Joint Awards and will be publicly published on the websites of both the Atlantic Maritime Strategy and the WestMED Initiative**. They will provide stakeholders with comprehensive and transparent information on the objectives, eligibility criteria, application procedures, evaluation process, and award categories. As such, the Guidelines will serve as the primary point of reference for applicants and participating organisations, ensuring a common understanding of the framework, facilitating consistent participation across both sea basins, and supporting a fair and transparent selection process.

1 Introduction

The [WestMED Initiative](#) and the [Atlantic Maritime Strategy](#) are key frameworks supporting the sustainable development of the blue economy across European sea basins. Both initiatives promote **cooperation, innovation, skills development, environmental sustainability, and resilience, bringing together stakeholders** from public authorities, industry, research, and civil society.

Within this context, **Project Awards** have been established as flagship instruments in each sea basin to recognise **excellence, showcase impactful initiatives, and strengthen stakeholder engagement**. These Awards highlight projects that contribute to strategic priorities, demonstrate innovation and scalability, and deliver tangible results for coastal and maritime regions.

On the occasion of the Joint WestMED–Atlantic Stakeholder Conference, a unified **Awards scheme is being launched for the first time**, bringing together both sea basins under a common framework. This joint edition represents a significant step towards **enhanced cooperation and alignment between sea basin strategies**, reinforcing their collective contribution to EU maritime and blue economy policies.

The Joint Awards aim to recognise outstanding projects across shared priority areas, promote cross-sea basin learning and transferability, and increase the visibility of successful initiatives at European level. By applying a common set of categories and evaluation criteria, the Awards ensure a transparent, merit-based process, resulting in one winner per category regardless of geographical origin.

These Guidelines provide all necessary information for applicants and stakeholders, including the objectives of the Awards, eligibility conditions, application procedures, evaluation criteria, and timeline. They serve as the official reference document for participation in the Joint WestMED–Atlantic Awards.

Check out previous editions of the Awards:

- [Atlantic project Awards 2025](#)
- [WestMED project Awards 2025](#)

2 Project award categories

To ensure coherence, relevance, and strategic alignment, the Joint Awards are structured **around a set of thematic categories reflecting shared priorities across both sea basins**. These categories have been carefully selected to capture key areas of action where projects are delivering tangible impact, while also aligning with EU policy objectives and ongoing initiatives under the Atlantic Maritime Strategy and the WestMED Initiative. They provide a clear framework for applicants to position their projects and for evaluators to assess excellence, impact, innovation, and transferability in a consistent and transparent manner.

- **Blue skills and ocean literacy:** Encompass projects, initiatives and actions that strengthen workforce development across maritime sectors, including in coastal communities, through quality education, training and lifelong learning. This includes upskilling and reskilling for emerging technologies, promoting maritime careers, enhancing research collaboration, and facilitating the mutual recognition of qualifications to support cross-border mobility. Particular emphasis is placed on supporting the resilience, attractiveness and long-term sustainability of coastal communities by creating opportunities for local employment, skills development, and inclusive participation in the blue economy.
At the same time, it involves advancing ocean literacy and engaging youth, coastal populations, and the wider public through education and awareness initiatives that foster a deeper understanding of the ocean and encourage conservation, restoration, and the sustainable use of marine resources.
- **Maritime Spatial Planning:** projects and initiatives that contribute to the sustainable, integrated and evidence-based management of marine spaces. This covers initiatives that develop or implement MSP processes and tools, support data collection, mapping and digital solutions for spatial planning, and enhance cross-sectoral coordination between activities such as fisheries, aquaculture, offshore energy, maritime transport and conservation. Eligible projects may also promote stakeholder engagement and participatory governance, strengthen transboundary cooperation, and address emerging challenges such as climate change adaptation, cumulative impact assessment and ecosystem-based management.
- **Biodiversity, Healthy Oceans and Resilient Coasts:** encompass projects, initiatives and actions that protect, restore and enhance marine and coastal ecosystems, ensuring their long-term resilience and ecological integrity. This includes efforts to strengthen coastal resilience and reinforce the fight against marine pollution, while supporting the sustainable management of marine and coastal resources. The category covers initiatives focused on habitat restoration, sustainable fisheries and aquaculture, the protection of endangered species, and the implementation of nature-based solutions to address coastal erosion, climate change impacts, and habitat degradation. Eligible projects may also target pollution

prevention and reduction at both sea- and land-based sources, including marine litter, nutrient runoff and chemical contaminants. In addition, projects can support the establishment and effective management of marine protected areas, fishing fleet decarbonization initiatives, improve monitoring and data collection systems, and promote ecosystem-based and adaptive approaches that balance conservation objectives with the sustainable use of marine resources, contributing to more resilient coastal and marine systems.

- **Maritime transport, green ports, energy transition:** encompass projects, initiatives and actions that support the decarbonisation and sustainability of maritime transport and port operations, while accelerating the transition towards clean and efficient energy systems in the blue economy. This includes the development and deployment of low- and zero-emission vessels, alternative fuel, and energy-efficient technologies across shipping and port activities. The category also covers initiatives aimed at transforming ports into green, smart and resilient hubs, including port electrification, onshore power supply, digitalisation, and the integration of renewable energy sources. In addition, this category recognises projects advancing marine renewable energy, such as offshore wind (including floating wind), wave and tidal energy, and hybrid offshore energy systems. Eligible initiatives may address technological innovation, environmental sustainability, spatial planning integration, and the coexistence of renewable energy with other maritime uses. Projects may further contribute to improving logistics and multimodal transport systems, reducing air and water pollution, and optimising port infrastructure and operations. Actions promoting regulatory innovation, cross-border cooperation, and scalable solutions that contribute to climate neutrality and the broader energy transition of the maritime sector are particularly encouraged.

3 Eligibility conditions

Eligibility Conditions

Applications may be submitted by any individual, organisation, authority, network, consortium or institution that:

- Is established, legally registered, or operational within an eligible Atlantic or WestMED country (Algeria, France, Ireland, Italy, Libya, Malta, Mauritania, Morocco, Portugal, Spain and Tunisia)
- Represents a funded project or initiative, either ongoing or completed;
- Has commenced within the defined eligibility period (indicatively the previous 36 months);
- Has been implemented, wholly or partially, within the geographic scope of one of the two sea basins.

Projects with demonstrated transferability, scalability or cross-basin relevance are particularly encouraged.

4 Application procedure

Application Procedure

Applications are submitted through [the online application form \(EU-Survey\)](#) – also accessible via the official websites of both Initiatives. The application form includes:

- Project identification and contact details
- Categories selection
- Description of objectives, activities and results
- Evidence of impact, sustainability and innovation
- Contribution to policy priorities, cooperation and synergies

Applications must be submitted by the deadline specified in the official Call for Applications.

5 Evaluation and Selection Criteria

Applications are assessed on the basis of common evaluation criteria, ensuring fairness, transparency and comparability across sea basins. The criteria include:

- **Project relevance:** Relevance of the problem addressed and alignment with strategic priorities and clarity of objectives and value proposition
- **Impact:** including environmental, social and economic benefits
- **Sustainability, scalability and transferability of results**
- **Level of innovation** of the project, measured in terms of approach, results and working methods.
- **Cooperation dimension**, including cross-regional or international aspects

The assessment of nominations will be carried out by a dedicated **Jury composed of Blue Economy experts from both the WestMED Initiative and the Atlantic Maritime Strategy**. The evaluation will be conducted in line with the criteria defined in these Guidelines, ensuring a transparent, fair, and merit-based selection process.

The final selection of winners in each category will be subject to endorsement by the relevant governance bodies, including members of the WestMED Steering Committee, the Atlantic Maritime Strategy and representatives of the European Commission. To facilitate a streamlined and transparent selection process for both participating countries and the European Commission, an online polling mechanism (e.g., EU Survey or a similar tool) will be established and shared with members of the two Steering Committees and relevant Commission representatives. This survey will present a shortlist of pre-selected projects—ideally comprising approximately twice the number of expected finalists (e.g., two candidates per category)—to enable structured input and prioritisation. To support informed decision-making, the survey will be complemented by a concise Excel document summarising key information for each shortlisted project, including objectives, partnership composition, results achieved, and relevance to the award criteria.

Selected projects will be **formally invited to attend the Joint Awards Ceremony**, to be held in the framework of the WestMED–Atlantic Stakeholder Conference (16 September 2026 in Gran Canaria, Spain). Awarded projects will be informed in advance of their selection; however, they will be requested to maintain confidentiality until the official announcement, which will take place during the ceremony to maximise visibility and impact.

During the Awards Ceremony, following the announcement of the category winners, a final pitching session will be organised among the awarded projects. This session will follow a dynamic and interactive format:

- Each awarded project representative will deliver a 5-minute pitch highlighting the key achievements, impact, and innovation of their initiative.
- A short Q&A session will follow, allowing the audience to engage directly with the project representatives.
- A live voting process will then be conducted among the audience.

Based on the results of the live voting, one project will be selected as the overall “winner of winners” and will receive a special recognition award during the event.

6 The Award

All awarded projects will receive:

- a Sea Basin certificate and a trophy (the “winner-of-winners” will receive an additional trophy)
- a project pitch opportunity to showcase their project/ organization to the Conference participants
- a dedicated follow-up session with our most relevant National Hub experts focused on further promotion/ expansion of the project – i.e. introduction to relevant events/ meetings where applicable with access to the extensive cross-sea basin network covering the WestMED, Atlantic and Black Sea
- promotion via WestMED and Atlantic’s communication channels (web, X, LinkedIn, newsletter)
- the right to use an official Award Seal for communication purposes
- all travel and accommodation expenses to and from the Conference, to be covered by the Assistance Mechanism for one representative of each project/initiative.

7 Timeline

	April	May	June	July	August	September
Launch of the award	08/05/26					
Submission of proposals						
Close award of submissions				30/06/26		
Inform award winners of results					31/07/26	
Awards ceremony at the WestMED Atlantic Conference in Gran Canaria, Spain						16/09/26