



SWIM

Sustainable **W**ater and **I**ntegrated **M**anagement of Fish
Migration and their Habitats in the Danube River Basin
and NW Black Sea

Open Call for Associated Regions

May, 2026



About the SWIM project

SWIM project aligns with the EU Mission “Restore our Ocean and Waters,” aiming to restore, protect, and enhance habitats of migratory fish species in the Danube River Basin and the Northwestern Black Sea region.

By developing and implementing innovative, sustainable, and scalable solutions through 13 activities foreseen at 7 pilot sites, SWIM seeks to improve habitat connectivity, quality, and conservation, and overall, the aquatic ecosystems. The project sets new benchmarks in habitat restoration and actively contributes to the implementation of EU environmental policies through a holistic, multi-disciplinary approach. Building upon extensive past work in relevant projects such as MEASURES, WE PASS 1 and 2, SIMONA, EcoAdvance and the Danube Lighthouse projects DALIA, DaWetRest and Restore4Life, the SWIM consortium goes a step further in implementing actual complementary technologies (ex situ conservation and restocking actions, fish passages, lateral reconnections, digital platform in articulation with MEASURES Info System and DTO, distributed Info centres, etc) in a wide range of freshwater streams (Danube and tributaries).

A key element of SWIM’s strategy is fostering transnational cooperation among diverse stakeholders and across different societal levels, co-designing joint solutions with governmental bodies, NGOs, researchers, and local communities, working through the SWIM Alliance. This broad involvement aims to raise public support and ensure the long-term sustainability of the habitat restoration and protection measures, fostering biodiversity conservation, enhancing ecological resilience and the provision of ecosystem services, and thus promoting the socio-economic well-being of the local communities.

SWIM’s comprehensive approach to ecological restoration and management has the potential to serve as a model for similar efforts across Europe and beyond, making a significant impact on the health and sustainability of aquatic ecosystems.

CALL FOR PROPOSAL

The SWIM project invites interested Associated Regions (AR) to join the project with the aim of increasing the territorial reach, replicability, and long-term impact of the developed solutions. Through this Open Call, SWIM intends to engage at least **six** AR across the four referential basins of the EU Mission Restore our Ocean and Waters (Danube–Black Sea, Mediterranean, Baltic–North Sea, and Atlantic–Arctic). This call is part of larger collaboration and synergies between designated “lighthouses” with SWIM being part of the Danube Lighthouse.

Within the SWIM framework, AR are conceived as active institutional partners that will explore opportunities to apply and adapt to the SWIM approach in line with their specific regional contexts (Fig. 1). Their role goes beyond the technical replication of individual solutions and includes active contributions to the development of strategic, governance, and planning frameworks necessary for the long-term improvement of river connectivity and the protection of migratory fish habitats at a broader territorial scale.

Collaboration between the SWIM Project Partners and AR is based on a two-way exchange of knowledge and experience. On the one hand, SWIM provides access to methodologies, tools, and lessons learned from pilot sites and reference sites; on the other hand, AR contribute their institutional expertise, regulatory responsibilities, local priorities, and governance practices. This interaction supports the development of regional guidelines and action frameworks addressing fish migration barriers, the improvement of freshwater ecosystem health, ecological connectivity, and the integration of biodiversity objectives into sectoral and regional policies.

The SWIM Project Partners will provide the necessary support to build regional capacity and enable the implementation of innovative solutions to restore, protect, and enhance habitats of migratory fish species and, more broadly, the health of aquatic ecosystems. Through their involvement, AR will gain insight into new benchmarks in habitat restoration and, by applying them in their territories, will actively contribute to the implementation of EU environmental policies. This will support the long-term sustainability of targeted habitat restoration and protection measures, foster biodiversity conservation, enhance ecological resilience, and contribute to the provision of ecosystem services and the socio-economic well-being of local communities.

As AR are directly involved in project activities, project results extend beyond the pilot sites and serve as a foundation for the broader uptake and adaptation of SWIM solutions across diverse regional settings.



FIGURE 1 – SWIM ON THE MAP

Eligibility

Eligible beneficiaries for this call are local and/or regional authorities from Member States and associated countries to Horizon Europe Programme¹. Countries that are part of the SWIM consortium are not eligible to participate (Austria, Bosnia And Herzegovina, Croatia, Czechia, Germany, Hungary, Montenegro, North Macedonia, Portugal, Romania, Slovakia, Serbia, Switzerland, Turkiye and Ukraine) or under EU restrictive measures.

Therefore, eligible beneficiaries for this call are local and/or regional authorities from Member States and associated countries to Horizon Europe Programme: Armenia, Bulgaria, Belgium, Canada, Cyprus, Denmark, Egypt, Estonia, Faroe Islands, Finland, France, Georgia, Greece, Ireland, Iceland, Israel, Italy, Korea, Kosovo, Latvia, Liechtenstein, Lithuania, Luxembourg, Malta, Moldova, Netherlands, New Zealand, Norway, Poland, Slovenia, Spain, Sweden, Tunisia and United Kingdom.

Eligible beneficiaries, referred to as AR within the SWIM project, are understood as areas with similar ecosystems (e.g. neighbouring regions and/or regions located in different river basins) and/or less-developed regions, with the view to build capacity to implement the

¹ See full List of [Participating Countries in Horizon Europe](#)

innovative solutions to restore freshwater ecosystems. The purpose of their involvement is to strengthen regional capacities for the implementation of innovative solutions addressing fish migration, habitat conservation, water quality improvement, and overall ecological health. The proposed activities should be aligned with and complementary to SWIM activities and must demonstrate a high level of quality, relevance, and credibility.

The AR may be represented by individual organisations or a consortium. Only local and/or regional authorities may apply (either alone or jointly).

The EU restrictive measures are applicable to this call. Applicants can check these restrictions: Article 29 of the Treaty on the European Union (TEU), Article 215 of the Treaty on the Functioning of the EU (TFEU), EU Sanctions Map² as well as Council Implementing Decision (EU) 2022/25066.

Key Eligibility Criteria

- Eligible applicants include local and/or regional authorities from EU Member States, EEA countries (European Economic Area), ENP associated countries to Horizon Europa (European Neighbourhood Policy), and may be represented by individual organisations or a consortium.
- Applicants must be eligible for Horizon Europe participation, have a good command of English
- Applicants must comply with the same contractual obligations of the project's Grant Agreement (Grant Agreement n° 101215230) and standard EC Grant Agreement requirements (i.e. Articles 12 (conflict of interest), 13 (confidentiality and security), 14 (ethics), 17.2 (visibility), 18 (specific rules for carrying out action), 19 (information) and 20 (recordkeeping)
- Each Associated Region shall benefit from the financial support to third parties (FSTP) only once under the same Horizon Europe topic. The involvement of AR that have not yet participated in Mission projects will be favoured in case of a tie.

In addition, applicants should submit their proposals by the deadline. SWIM consortium encourages AR to submit their application in English using the provided template.

Expected Activities

Supported activities include:

- desk research;
- fieldwork (in-situ);

² <https://www.sanctionsmap.eu/#/main>

- travels (within scope);
- technical meetings;
- organisation of events/workshops/meetings;
- preparatory activities (e.g. baseline assessments, technical scoping, administrative preparation, stakeholder consultation setup, and logistical planning necessary to implement the proposed restoration or management activities);
- local activities (actions) performing;
- Procurement of external expertise
- preparation issuing and/or revision of report
- Preparation of technical documents

Financial support

The maximum amount of financial support per recipient is set up to EUR 60,000 (regardless of whether the applicant is a single individual entity or a consortium)³. If all the criteria are met and the amount requested by the AR is higher than EUR 60,000, the maximum value of EUR 60,000 will apply for the financial support. No eligibility for a higher amount nor complementary funding (e.g. travel arrangements to participate in meetings) can be considered.

It will be provided in two separate lump sums:

- First Payment: 60% of the contracted/agreed total lumpsum by the signature of the adhesion contract.
- Second/Final Payment: 40% of the contracted/agreed total lumpsum upon completion, delivery and validation of the due report on the activities performed.

The exact amount of each grant for each AR will be calculated considering the Proposal Stage and the Final Stage:

- Proposal Stage (same criteria used for ranking and selection)
 - Criterion #0 (C#0) - the eligibility of the region to become SWIM AR. Note that AR should be in Member States/Associated countries other than those that are part of the project consortium. The involvement of AR that have not yet participated in Mission projects will be favoured in case of a tie. Each Associated Region shall benefit from the FSTP only once.
 - Criterion #1 (C#1) - the degree of complementarity and/or synergy with SWIM pilots' activities and scope.

³ Both the proposal stage score and the final stage score may lower the funding support threshold. See specific rules below.

Criterion #2 (C#2) - the quality and credibility of the proposed activities by the candidate (a) individual organisation, or (b) consortium.

- Final Stage at the end of participation in the project (end of the activities)
Criterion #3 (C#3) The degree and quality of completion of tasks upon selection and engagement in SWIM. This will be assessed through the progress review reports (WP1).

Selection Process and Results

The first Criterion (C#0) will be scored **0** (if non-eligible) or **1** (if eligible), only. If the first Criterion (C#0, eligibility) will score 0, the proposal will be considered non-eligible, and it won't be evaluated further. All the other criteria are to be scored 1 to 5 with the possibility of "half-points".

At the call stage, the Criteria C#0, C#1 and C#2 will be used to score and rank proposals for selection but also for the financial support threshold definition, according to the following rule:

$$\text{PROPOSAL SCORE} = C\#0 \times \frac{C\#1 \times 1,3 + C\#2 \times 2}{3,3}$$

Minimum Thresholds:

C#1 : 3; C#2 : 3; Overall threshold : 3

Calculation of exact amount of FSTP

The initial exact amount of financial support to third parties will then be calculated as follows:

- The *PROPOSAL SCORE* will be approximated to the "half point". If below 3, the proposal and the candidate are not eligible for financial support. For *PROPOSAL SCORE* above threshold:

PROPOSAL STAGE/PROPOSAL SCORE

PROPOSAL SCORE	MAXIMUM FINANCIAL SUPPORT
2.5 or below	Not eligible for funding (proposal rejected)
3.0 or above	100% of EUR 60,000 or 100% of the amount requested by the applicant, whichever is the lowest

Criterion C#3 is scored on a scale of 1 to 5, including half-point increments. Upon evaluation and scoring of Criterion C#3 (at the end of the activities), if the evaluation returns a low score, penalty or suspension of the second/final payment may be decided:

FINAL STAGE/SECOND SCORE

C#3 SCORE	SECOND/FINAL PAYMENT
below 3.0	Second/final payment suspended. Corrective actions to ask. If not resolved, payment is cancelled
3.0	50% of amount due in the second/final payment
3.5 or above	100% of amount due in the second/final payment

The selection of AR will be made by a jury composed of senior members of the consortium together with members of the Advisory Board (AB). The results of the Financial Support to Third Parties process will be published online without delay (<https://swim-danube.eu/associated-regions/>), including a description of third-party projects, the date of the award, the duration, the authority awarded and the legal name and country.

A Financial Support to Third Parties (FSTP) Agreement will be concluded with the selected AR, represented by the designated local authority bodies.

Application Process

This call for proposals opens on 4th of May 2026. Proposals must be submitted by 3rd July 2026 at 17:00 (CET). The Application form is available as integral part of this document.

Applicants are encouraged to download and complete the template and submit it in PDF format.

The form must be completed and submitted at the latest at the call closing date 17:00 p.m. CET.

- Call type: Single Stage
- Call opening date: 4th May 2026
- Call closing date: 3rd July 2026
- Submission: email to info@swim-danube.eu
- Language: English

Please send any queries about applications by email to info@swim-danube.eu. SWIM will post a FAQ (Frequently Asked Questions) section on the project's website <https://swim-danube.eu/associated-regions/>, which will be updated regularly.

Transparency of Results

To support the Mission objectives of replication, scalability, and shared learning, the SWIM project will publish the list of selected Associated Regions together with a short summary of their funded activities, the amount awarded, and the duration of support. Non-confidential results and key lessons from the activities implemented by the selected regions may also be made publicly available through the SWIM website and project communication channels. Detailed obligations regarding reporting, confidentiality, and possible publication of deliverables will be defined in the FSTP Agreement to ensure compliance with data protection, ethical standards, and the Grant Agreement requirements.

Contingency Plan

In case of a low number of applicants, lack of representativeness of the 4 referential basins, or scores below the overall threshold: 3 (Low Risk but High impact), the SWIM consortium, will by all channels of communication further advertise the opportunity, and immediately reinstate the process.

Timeline

The timeline is expressed in both calendar dates and project months to ensure clarity and alignment with the overall project schedule (Table 1).

The Open Call process is structured into several phases, including preparation and launch, submission of applications, evaluation and selection of proposals, contracting, and implementation of selected projects. Each phase is associated with specific activities, deadlines, and expected outputs.

A structural and graphical representation of the timeline is provided below to support a clear understanding of the sequence and duration of the different phases, as well as their interconnections.

Timeline dates and phases

Phase	Timeframe
Call opening date	4 May 2026
Call closing date	3 July 2026

Evaluation and Selection	until 31 August 2026
Granting completed	30 September 2026
Project implementation	from 1 November 2026
Project End	31 August 2029

Processing of personal data

Any personal data collected, processed, or published in the context of this Open Call will be handled in full compliance with Regulation (EU) 2016/679 (General Data Protection Regulation – GDPR).

Personal data will be processed solely for the purposes of managing and implementing the Open Call, including application evaluation, communication with applicants, project monitoring, and dissemination of results, where applicable.

The data controller(s) will ensure that appropriate technical and organisational measures are in place to safeguard personal data and protect it against unauthorised access, loss, or misuse. Access to personal data will be limited to authorised persons involved in the implementation of the Open Call.

Data subjects have the right to access, rectify, erase, or restrict the processing of their personal data, as well as the right to data portability and to lodge a complaint with a competent supervisory authority, in accordance with the GDPR.

Personal data will be retained only for as long as necessary for the purposes outlined above and in accordance with applicable legal and contractual obligations.

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