



SWIM

**Sustainable Water and Integrated Management of Fish
Migration and their Habitats in the Danube River Basin
and NW Black Sea**

Call text for the open call for associated regions

Deliverable n° D6.3

May, 2026



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This document has been edited with the support of AI-assisted language tools used only to polish grammar, spelling, and clarity of the English language. All ideas, concepts, methods, and conclusions were conceived and developed by the authors. The content was subsequently reviewed and validated by the authors and designated reviewers to ensure accuracy and alignment with the project objectives.

AB	Advisory Board
AIH	Adria Innovation Harbour
AR	Associated Region
C	Criterion
CEKOM	Centar kompetencija za istraživanje i razvoj d.o.o.
CET	Central European Time
CINEA	European Climate Infrastructure and Environment Executive Agency
D	Deliverable
DDNI	Institutul National de Cercetare-Dezvoltare Delta Dunarii
EC	European Commission
EEA	European Economic Area
ENP	European Neighbourhood Policy
EU	European Union
FSTP	Financial support to Third parties
NGO	Non-governmental organisation
p.m.	Post meridiem
SDEWES	Medunarodni Centar za održivi razvoj energetike voda i okoliša Udruga
SWIM	Sustainable Water and Integrated Management of Fish Migration and their Habitats in the Danube River Basin and NW Black Sea
TEU	Treaty on the European Union
TFEU	Treaty on the Functioning of the EU
UNIZG	Sveučilište u Zagrebu, Fakultet strojarstva i brodogradnje
WP	Work Package

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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

This is a formal deliverable under WP6 – Stakeholder Engagement, Associated Regions and Results Multiplication, of the SWIM project financed by the Horizon Europe Programme of the European Commission (Grant Agreement n° 101215230). Its primary goal is to provide inclusion of additional regions interested in implementing and adapting the SWIM solution. This deliverable define the framework for the implementation of the Open Call for the inclusion of Associated Regions in the SWIM project, establishes the purpose and objectives of the Open Call, the role of the Associated Regions in the context of the project and their contribution to the dissemination, replication and long-term sustainability of the project results, as well as the eligibility criteria for participation, in order to ensure the transparency and clarity of the selection process.

1. INTRODUCTION

1.1. 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.

1.2. Purpose and scope of Deliverable D6.3 Call text for the open call for Associated Regions

The purpose of Deliverable D6.3 Call text for the open call for associated regions is to define and present the full text of the open call for the selection of Associated Regions (AR), including all relevant information required for application, evaluation, and implementation of activities under the Financial Support to Third Parties (FSTP) mechanism. This deliverable will ensure, for project partners involved in the SWIM project, applicants to the open call, and ultimately the future beneficiaries of financial support, a transparent, structured, and clear framework for the preparation of applications by local

and/or regional authorities, with the aim of extending the knowledge, techniques, and technologies developed within the SWIM project to additional geographical areas, as well as ensuring a transparent evaluation process of submitted proposals. The scope of the deliverable includes the description of eligible applicants and participation conditions (local and regional authorities, individually or as part of a consortium), the definition of eligibility, evaluation, and selection criteria for AR, the description of eligible activities and types of support to be funded, the definition of financial conditions including the maximum amount of support and allocation mechanisms, the description of application, evaluation, and contracting procedures, as well as the definition of obligations of the selected Associated Regions, including knowledge transfer, participation in project activities, and the preparation of plans for the replication of solutions.

This deliverable also contributes to ensuring that the open call is fully aligned with programme rules, as well as with the principles of transparency, equal treatment, and data protection, and with the objectives of the EU Mission “Restore our Ocean and Waters”.

Furthermore, Deliverable D6.3 – *Call text for the open call for Associated Regions* – provides clear and structured guidance to local and/or regional authorities on how to approach and participate in the call, with the aim of strengthening their capacities for planning and implementing ecosystem restoration, protection, and management measures. Particular emphasis is placed on knowledge transfer, technical support, and preparation for the replication and scaling-up of solutions developed through the project’s pilot activities.

This deliverable is primarily addressed to potential AR across the four referential basins (Danube–Black Sea, Atlantic–Arctic, Mediterranean Sea, and Baltic–North Sea)¹, with the objective of attracting and engaging at least **six** regions willing to collaborate with the SWIM project. Through the Open Call, these regions are invited to explore and implement opportunities for the replication, adaptation, and uptake of SWIM concepts, results, and technological solutions, in line with their specific territorial, governance, and policy contexts.

By targeting AR with relevant mandates and capacities, this deliverable supports the scaling-up of SWIM solutions beyond the pilot areas, thereby strengthening their long-term impact and contributing to integrated water management, the protection of migratory fish species, and the restoration of aquatic ecosystems at both regional and basin levels

¹ A minimum of 1 representative from each basin will be selected, with a particular emphasis on selecting at least 2 regions from the Danube River and Black Sea Basin. However, if no valid or eligible applications are received from a particular basin, valid applications from other basins will be considered based on their ranking.

2. Open Call Objectives

The objective of this open call is to select and support AR that will contribute to the restoration, protection, and enhancement of freshwater and transitional ecosystems, with a particular focus on habitats of migratory fish species. The call is aimed at strengthening the capacities of local and regional stakeholders, as well as fostering knowledge transfer, replication, and scaling-up of innovative solutions developed through the project activities. The specific objectives of the call include the selection of AR, i.e. regions facing similar ecological challenges related to the potential application of ecosystem restoration solutions tested and validated during the implementation of the SWIM project. Furthermore, the call aims to provide technical support and facilitate knowledge transfer to enhance the capacities of local and regional authorities for planning and implementing protection and restoration measures. It also seeks to support the development and implementation of concrete activities, projects, and operational solutions focused on monitoring, protection, and restoration of habitats. In addition, the call contributes to the implementation of EU Mission objectives and policies, in particular the EU Mission “Restore our Ocean and Waters”, through concrete on-the-ground actions and the integration of results into a broader European context. These objectives will be achieved through establishing cooperation between project partners and AR, enabling the exchange of data, experience, and best practices, ensuring technical support for the development and implementation of activities, and promoting the involvement of local communities and relevant stakeholders. The expected results include developed and ready-to-implement plans for ecosystem restoration and protection activities, increased capacities of public authorities for natural resource management, application and adaptation of innovative solutions in new regions, contribution to improved ecosystem status and biodiversity conservation, as well as strengthened cooperation and knowledge transfer at the European level.

2.1. Call for proposal

The SWIM project invites interested 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 (Figure 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 Associated Regions 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

2.2. Eligibility

Eligible beneficiaries for this call are local and/or regional authorities from Member States and associated countries to Horizon Europe Programme². Countries that are part of the SWIM consortium cannot participate³.

Eligible beneficiaries, referred to as Associated Regions 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 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.

² See full List of [Participating Countries in Horizon Europe](#)

³ Countries that are part of the SWIM consortium and thus cannot participate: Austria, Bosnia and Herzegovina, Croatia, Czechia, Germany, Hungary, Montenegro, North Macedonia, Portugal, Romania, Slovakia, Serbia, Switzerland, Turkiye and Ukraine

The Associated Regions 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 Map⁴ as well as Council Implementing Decision (EU) 2022/25066.

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.

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.

2.3. Timeline

This section presents the timeline of the Open Call, including the main phases and associated deliverables throughout its implementation. The timeline is expressed in both calendar dates and project months to ensure clarity and alignment with the overall project schedule (Table 1 and Figure 2).

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.

The timeline presented is indicative and may be subject to adjustments depending on project needs, the number and quality of applications received, and other implementation-related factors.

⁴ <https://www.sanctionsmap.eu/#/main>

TABLE 1 – TENTATIVE TIMELINE

Phase	Timeframe
Call opening date	4th May 2026
Call closing date	3rd July 2026
Evaluation and Selection	until 31st August 2026
Granting completed	30th September 2026
Project implementation	from 1st November 2026
Project End	31st August 2029

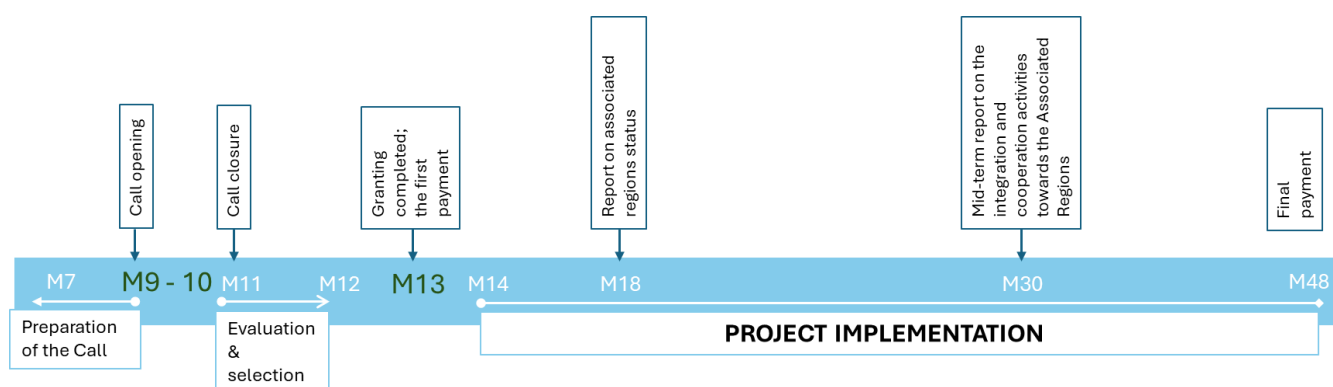


FIGURE 2 – TENTATIVE TIMELINE

2.4. Open Call evaluation criteria and assessment process

The evaluation and selection of proposals submitted under the Open Call will be carried out through a two-stage process based on predefined criteria and scoring rules. In the first stage, proposals will be assessed against criteria C#0, C#1, and C#2, which will be used to verify eligibility and to score and rank the applications.

Criterion C#0 will be evaluated on a binary basis (eligible/non-eligible), and proposals deemed non-eligible will not be further assessed. The involvement of Associated Regions 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.

Criteria C#1 and C#2 will be scored on a scale from 1 to 5, including half-point increments, and minimum thresholds will apply both at the level of individual criteria and the overall score. The final proposal score will be calculated using a weighted formula and will determine both the ranking of proposals and their eligibility for financial support. Only proposals reaching the minimum threshold will be considered for funding.

The second stage of the evaluation will take place at the end of the implementation period and will be based on the assessment of criterion C#3, which evaluates the degree and

quality of completion of the planned activities. The score obtained at this stage will directly influence the final payment, including the possibility of partial payment, suspension, or cancellation in case of insufficient performance.

The maximum financial support per selected applicant is set at EUR 60,000, regardless of whether the applicant is a single entity or a consortium, and no additional or complementary funding may be granted. The exact amount of financial support will be determined based on the proposal score, with eligible proposals receiving up to 100% of the requested amount, capped at the maximum amount defined.

Financial support will be provided in the form of lump sums and will be disbursed in two instalments, with 60% of the total amount paid upon signature of the agreement and the remaining 40% paid upon completion of activities and validation of the final report, subject to the results of the final evaluation. The assessment of the criteria will be based on the descriptions of activities and the justifications provided in the Application Form and during reporting period, which must be completed by and for each applicant.

The selection process will be carried out by a jury composed of senior members of the consortium together with members of the Advisory Board, ensuring absence of conflict of interest. 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 selected projects, date of award, duration, and beneficiary details.

The following criteria will be used for ranking:

Criterion #0 (C#0) - the eligibility of the region to become SWIM Associated Regions. Note that Associated Regions should be in Member States/Associated countries other than those that are part of the project consortium.

Criterion #1 (C#1) - the degree of complementarity and/or synergy with SWIM pilots' activities and scope.

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

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).

2.4.1. Evaluation Guide for Evaluators for Criteria C#1 and C#2

The Evaluation Guide complements the criteria described in Section 2.4 *Open Call evaluation criteria and assessment process* and provides additional support for their consistent and transparent application. It is intended to facilitate a harmonised approach

to scoring and to support the justification of the assigned scores. Evaluators should base their assessment exclusively on the information provided in the Application Form and ensure that scoring is consistent with the defined thresholds and methodology. The use of this guide aims to reduce subjectivity and ensure comparability of scores across evaluators.

The section outlines key aspects that evaluators should consider when assessing proposals under Criteria C#1 and C#2, as well as indicative guidance for scoring.

For C#1 – the degree of complementarity and/or synergy with SWIM pilots' activities and scope, the evaluators consider the following aspects, but is not limited to them:

- Relevance of proposed activities to SWIM objectives
- Similarity of ecological challenges to SWIM pilot sites
- Added value to replication, scaling, or Mission goals
- Evidence that the region can effectively apply SWIM approaches

For C#2– the quality and credibility of the proposed activities by the candidate, the evaluators consider the following aspects, but is not limited to them:

- Clarity and feasibility of the action plan
- Realism and proportionality of the budget
- Institutional capacity and experience
- Expected impact and local stakeholder engagement

To support a consistent approach to evaluation, the table below provides indicative scoring descriptions for Criteria C#1 and C#2 (Table 2).

TABLE 2 – POSSIBLE SCORING CRITERIA

Score	Description
5	Excellent quality; highly credible, well-structured, and feasible proposal with strong expected impact
4	Very good quality; minor improvements possible but overall robust and credible
3	Good quality; acceptable proposal with some weaknesses
2	Limited quality; significant weaknesses in design, feasibility, or impact
1	Poor quality; proposal is not credible or not feasible

2.4.2. *Evaluation Guide valuation Guide for Criterion C#3 (Implementation Phase)*

Criterion C#3 applies to the implementation phase of the selected AR and is not used in the proposal evaluation stage. Unlike Criteria C#1 and C#2, which are applied for the assessment and ranking of proposals, Criterion C#3 serves to monitor and evaluate the actual implementation of the planned activities after the selection of AR.

Based on this criterion, the degree and quality of the execution of activities defined in the proposal are assessed, as well as the consistency of implementation with the objectives of the SWIM project. The results of the evaluation under Criterion C#3 directly affect the disbursement of the final instalment of financial support and may lead to a reduction or cancellation of the final payment in cases of insufficient performance.

In C#3 the degree and quality of completion of tasks, the following items or steps can be consider, but not limited to following aspects:

- the degree of implementation of planned activities compared to the proposal
- the quality of delivered activities and outputs
- the consistency of implementation with the planned objectives and the SWIM approach
- the level of engagement of relevant stakeholders and local communities
- the applicability and potential for further replication of results

2.5. **Financial support**

Within this open call, Financial Support to Third Parties (FSTP) is foreseen to enable the participation of AR in project activities and to support the implementation of ecosystem restoration, protection, and management measures. The FSTP mechanism provides targeted financial and technical support to selected regions, facilitating knowledge transfer, capacity building, and the preparation of activities for the replication of solutions developed within the project.

The financial support is provided in the form of a lump sum, with a maximum amount of up to EUR 60,000 per AR, depending on the fulfilment of the defined eligibility and quality criteria (for eligibility and financing criteria see Annex 1).

2.6. Open Call Promotion

The promotion and communication of the Open Call for Associated Regions is designed to ensure broad outreach, high-quality applications, and strong engagement of relevant stakeholders across the four Mission basins (Danube–Black Sea, Mediterranean, Baltic–North Sea, and Atlantic–Arctic). The communication approach aims not only to inform potential applicants, but also to actively motivate and support them in preparing strong proposals aligned with the SWIM objectives.

To ensure the success of the Open Call for Associated Regions, the communication strategy will provide clear and immediate answers to applicants' key questions:

1. What are the benefits of my application/potential participation in the proposed activities?

- Financial support to be used to implement activities related to ecosystem restoration, protection, and management, with a maximum amount of up to EUR 60,000.
- Technical assistance and tailored guidance provided by SWIM project partners.
- Networking and collaboration opportunities, including exchange of experiences, best practices, and integration into the SWIM stakeholder network and Mission community.
- Access to knowledge, methodologies, and tools developed within SWIM pilot activities, supporting the implementation of solutions for improving habitat connectivity and protection of migratory fish species.
- Support in developing sustainable and transferable approaches and governance models for ecosystem restoration and management.

2. Who can apply and how to apply for the SWIM Call for Proposals?

- Local and/or regional authorities from EU Member States and Horizon Europe associated countries (excluding countries participating in the SWIM consortium).
- Individual organisations or a consortium representing an Associated Region.
- Each Associated Region shall benefit from the Financial Support to Third Parties (FSTP) only once under the same Horizon Europe topic. The involvement of Associated Regions that have not yet participated in Mission projects will be favoured in case of a tie.
- Proposals must be submitted by the deadline indicated in the call text. The application form is available as part of the Open Call documentation. Applicants are encouraged to download and complete the template and submit it in PDF format.

- Queries about applications can be sent via the official SWIM contact email. A Frequently Asked Questions (FAQ) section will be made available and regularly updated on the project website.

3. What should your proposal have?

Applicants are expected to submit a proposal aligned with SWIM objectives, demonstrating relevance, feasibility, and potential for replication and scaling-up in their regional context, following instructions provided in Annex 1 and Annex 2.

2.7. Open Call targeted audience

While direct applicants are the primary focus, the communication strategy will also target multipliers, stakeholders who can amplify the message and reach potential applicants.

These multipliers include:

- SWIM project partners and associated stakeholders
- SWIM Alliance and relevant stakeholder groups
- EU Mission “Restore our Ocean and Waters” networks and Lighthouse initiatives
- Relevant European networks, platforms, and clusters related to water management, biodiversity, and ecosystem restoration
- European Commission platforms and communication channels

By engaging these multipliers, the SWIM consortium aims to ensure broad dissemination and maximise the reach and impact of the Open Call.

2.7.1. Communication Approach and evidence report

This section outlines the communication approach adopted for the Open Call, together with the evidence of dissemination activities implemented to ensure broad outreach and engagement of relevant stakeholders

SWIM communication channels:

- Social media channels (e.g. LinkedIn)
- Project website, including a dedicated Open Call section, news updates, and announcements (Fig. 3)
- Promotion of the Open Call at events, workshops, and stakeholder meetings organised within the project duration
- Possibility to organise an online webinars and info sessions with Q&A for potential applicants in case of necessary support

Multipliers' / stakeholders' channels:

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- Website banners and announcements on partner websites
- Social media posts shared through partners' channels
- Press releases distributed via stakeholders' networks
- Email invitations targeting relevant potential applicants

A combination of communication channels, including social media, website content, and possible webinars, will be used to disseminate the Open Call, with appropriate metrics applied to assess visibility, engagement, and overall impact (for ex. # of posts, # of likes, shares and comments, # of webpages views or # of registrations or # of participants on possible webinars).

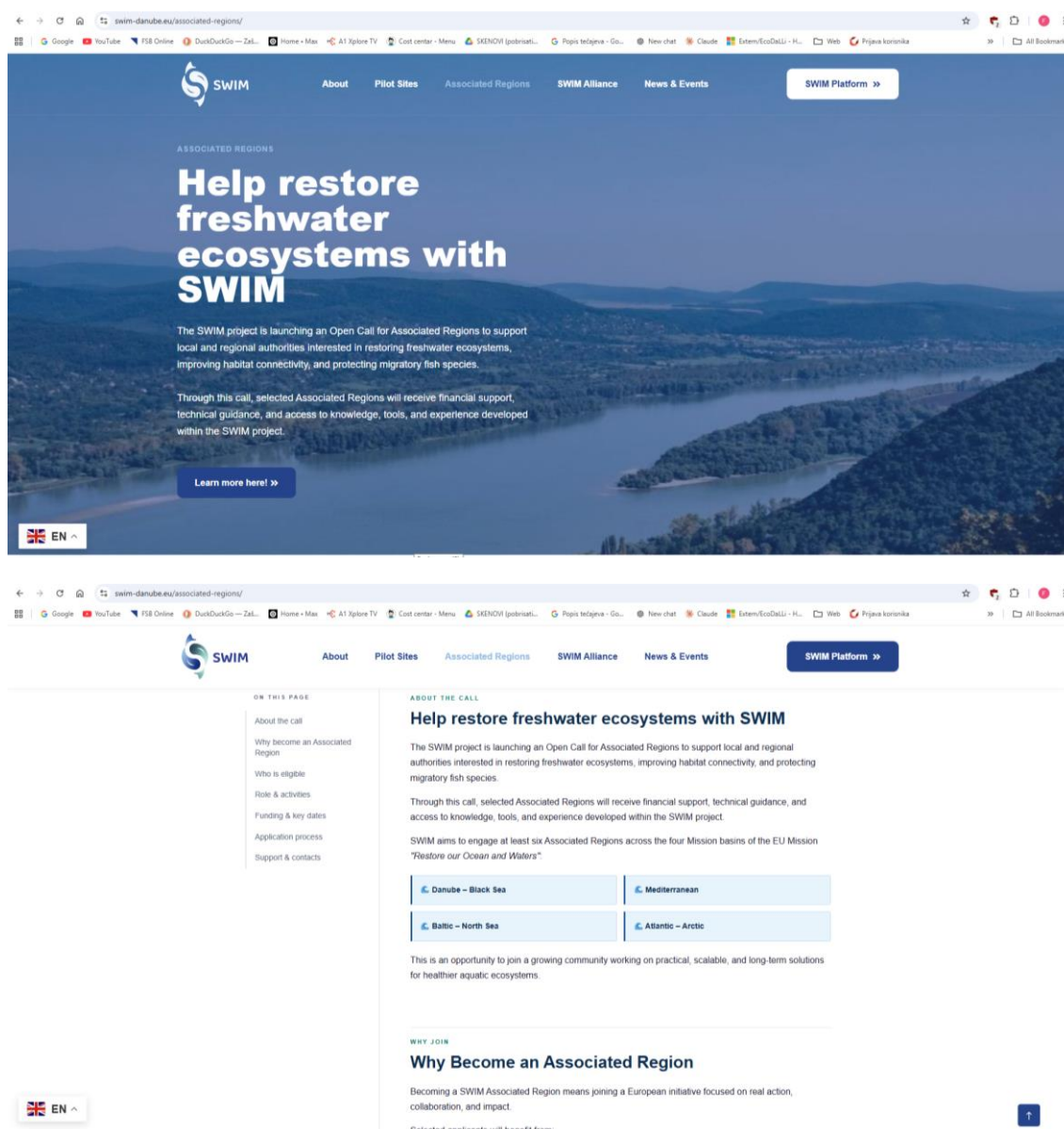


FIGURE 3 – SCREENSHOT OF THE SECTION DEDICATED TO ASSOCIATED REGION ON THE SWIM WEBSITE

2.8. Open Call's documentation

The Open Call for Associated Regions is supported by a set of documents that provide information to the potential applicants or templates that must be provided as part of the application process. These annexes are briefly described below:

ANNEX 1

Annex provides a concise overview of the open call for AR, including key information about the SWIM project and its objectives. It outlines the purpose of the call, namely the inclusion of new regions in the application and adaptation of solutions developed for the restoration and protection of aquatic ecosystems. It also defines who can apply, with a focus on local and regional authorities from eligible countries, as well as the main participation conditions. The annex indicates the main types of activities that can be funded and the maximum amount of financial support per selected region. Furthermore, it provides key information on the application process, deadlines, and modalities for participation in the open call.

ANNEX 2

Annex represents the application form for participation in the open call AR, designed to collect key information on the applicant and the proposed activities. The form includes basic administrative data (project title, contact details, location, responsible person), a description of regional challenges, as well as the objectives and planned actions aligned with the SWIM project and the EU Mission objectives. It also covers a detailed description of motivation, expected results, and the impact of participation on the region and the organisation. A dedicated section addresses the planned budget, including eligible cost categories and the maximum amount of financial support. The application form serves as the basis for the evaluation of proposals and the selection of AR, based on the quality, relevance, and feasibility of the proposed activities

2.9. 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 reinitiate the process.

2.10. Conclusion and next steps

This deliverable presents a comprehensive framework for the implementation of the Open Call for Associated Regions, including the call text, eligibility and evaluation criteria,

application procedure, and communication approach. It also defines the conditions for the allocation of Financial Support to Third Parties (FSTP) and ensures a transparent and structured process for the selection and integration of Associated Regions into the SWIM project. The deliverable addresses the need to extend the impact of the SWIM project beyond its pilot areas by involving additional regions facing similar ecological challenges, while enabling the effective engagement of local and regional authorities, as well as the transfer and application of SWIM knowledge and solutions.

The main contribution of this deliverable lies in establishing a standardised and transparent framework for the implementation of the Open Call, aligned with the objectives of the EU Mission “Restore our Ocean and Waters”, while ensuring consistency and fairness in the evaluation process. Through clear communication, emphasising the benefits for the regions, including financial support, technical assistance, and access to knowledge and solutions developed within the SWIM project, as well as the simplicity of the application process, a high level of interest and participation is expected. The use of multiple communication channels, both within the project and through partners and stakeholders, will ensure effective dissemination and outreach to target groups across the four referential basins. In this context, the promotion and communication of the Open Call are aimed not only at directly eligible applicants, but also at engaging a wider network of multipliers who can further amplify the reach and impact of the call.

Recommendations for future actions include the continuous promotion of the Open Call, targeted engagement of underrepresented regions, and, where necessary, the adaptation of communication measures or timelines. The results of this deliverable will be further developed through the implementation phase and the monitoring of activities carried out by the selected Associated Regions.



SWIM

**Sustainable Water and Integrated Management of Fish
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and NW Black Sea**

ANNEXES



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Annex 1: Call for Proposals

Call text for the open call for associated regions

Deliverable n° D6.3

May, 2026.

Open Call for Associated Regions

Disclaimer

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This document has been edited with the support of AI-assisted language tools used only to polish grammar, spelling, and clarity of the English language. All ideas, concepts, methods, and conclusions were conceived and developed by the authors. The content was subsequently reviewed and validated by the authors and designated reviewers to ensure accuracy and alignment with the project objectives.

1. INTRODUCTION

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.

2. 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

2.1. 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 innovative solutions to restore freshwater ecosystems. The purpose of their involvement

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

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.

2.2. Expected Activities

Supported activities include:

- ✓ desk research;
- ✓ fieldwork (in-situ);
- ✓ travels (within scope);

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

- ✓ 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

2.3. 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).

2.4. 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:

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

Minimum Thresholds:

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

2.5. 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:

TABLE 1. 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:

TABLE 2. 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.

2.6. 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: via <https://swim-danube.eu/associated-regions/>

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.

2.7. 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.

2.8. 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 reinitiate the process.

2.9. 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.

Table 1: Timeline dates and phases

Phase	Timeframe
Call opening date	4th May 2026
Call closing date	3rd July 2026
Evaluation and Selection	until 31st August 2026
Granting completed	30th September 2026
Project implementation	from 1st November 2026
Project End	31st August 2029

2.10. 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.

Project Coordinator Contact

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Annex 2: Application Form

Open Call for associated regions – Application Form

May, 2026.

GENERAL INFORMATION AND INTRODUCTION

TITLE OF YOUR PLANNED ACTION	<i>Please describe in 150 characters</i>
LOCATION OF YOUR ASSOCIATED REGION	<i>Country, Region, Municipality</i>
APPLYING ENTITIV	<i>Full legal name and acronym (if applicable)</i> <i>Type of entity</i> <i>Proof of the role as a local and/or regional authority should be attached to the application (e.g., municipal or regional statute, legal act of establishment, official registry extract, or equivalent documentation issued by a competent national authority)</i> <i>Entities applying as a consortium must provide proof for each participating authority or a mandate showing formal representation.</i> <i>Website link (if applicable)</i>
CONTACT DETAILS OF THE RESPONSIBLE PERSON	<i>Name and surname, function, email contact</i>
SHORT STATEMENT ON THE CHALLENGES	<i>Please describe the key challenge in your associated region and demonstrate how your proposed action will support the protection and restoration of migratory fish habitats, contribute to the objectives of SWIM, and align with the EU Mission "Restore our Ocean and Waters". (max 1000 characters)</i>
OBJECTIVES & PLANNED ACTIONS	Which topic relates best to your planned action (multiple choice)? ☐ Improvement habitat and habitat connectivity of migratory fish ☐ Improvement of long-term sustainability and ecological resilience of migratory fish habitats ☐ Monitoring and rehabilitation of ecosystems of migratory fish habitats

	☐ Engagement of local communities and fisheries communities ☐ Sustainable aquaculture ☐ Biodiversity improvement through restocking actions ☐ Capacity enhancement and commissioning of hatchery area ☐ Reconstruction and operational deployment of fish farm ☐ Removal or mitigation of migration barriers ☐ Sediment management and river morphology restoration (riverbank naturalisation, side-arms restoration) ☐ Contribution to SWIM alliance ☐ Dredging activities ☐ Water quality testing ☐ Bathymetry within project area Please elaborate each choice why (max 2500 characters)
MOTIVATION AND SUMMARY	<i>Please describe (max 5000 characters):</i> - <i>The primary issue and primary obstacles</i> - <i>A brief overview of the existing state in migratory fish habitats/rehabilitation of ecosystems in habitats/ status of migratory fish</i> - <i>Aspirations for forthcoming actions</i> - <i>Potential collaborators and stakeholders for these initiatives</i> - <i>The existing financial resources for executing these endeavours</i> - <i>What motivates your interest in participating in the SWIM project?</i>

BUDGET

Please indicate your planned budget (max. total EUR 60.000). Only actual costs incurred by the recipients when implementing the supported activities will be reimbursed.

Personnel costs (€)	Purchase costs -Travel and accommodation expenses (€)	Purchase costs – Equipment (€)	Purchase costs - Other goods, works and services (€)	Indirect costs (€)	TOTAL Grant amount (€) (max. € 60.000)

Explanation of cost categories:

- ✓ **Personal costs:** Cost limited to salaries (including net payments during parental leave), social security contributions, taxes and other costs linked to the remuneration, if they arise from national law or the employment contract (or equivalent appointing act) and be calculated on the basis of the costs actually incurred.
- ✓ **Travel and accommodation expenses:** costs actually incurred and in line with the beneficiary's usual practices on travel associated with project implementation
- ✓ **Purchase costs – Equipment:** must be declared as depreciation costs, calculated based on the costs actually incurred and written off in accordance with international accounting standards and the beneficiary's usual accounting practices. Only the portion of the costs that corresponds to the rate of actual use for the action during the action duration can be taken into account.
- ✓ **Purchase costs - Other goods, works and services:** Such goods, works and services include, for instance, consumables and supplies, promotion, dissemination, protection of results, translations, publications, certificates and financial guarantees that are in line with project guidelines.
- ✓ Indirect costs⁴: Cost that will be reimbursed at the flat-rate of 25% for all the above-mentioned cost categories

⁴ Indirect cost example: 20.000,00 (Personnel) + Travel (8.000,00) + Equipment (20.000,00) = 48.000,00 + 25% = 60.000,00 (TOTAL)

IMPACT

What do you hope to gain from the SWIM project?

Please explain the expected impact of your participation as an Associated Region in SWIM on your region and your organisation's capacities (max 3000 characters).

CONSENT TO PARTICIPATE

BY SUBMITTING THIS FORM, YOU CONFIRM TO PARTICIPATE IN SWIM – ASSOCIATED REGIONS CALL AND AGREE TO THE FOLLOWING RULES OF PARTICIPATION

- ☐ I AGREE TO PARTICIPATE in the SWIM project under the participation rules
- ☐ I GIVE MY EXPRESS CONSENT to the processing of my personal data, as described in the Privacy Statement
- ☐ Project partner hereby consents to share all data gained from project with members of SWIM alliance.

Annexes

- ☐ Legal status and jurisdiction of the applying entity (mandatory)
- ☐ Brochures (optional)
- ☐ Prior plan(s) for intervention in the concerned region (optional)

DATE, PLACE AND SIGNATURE