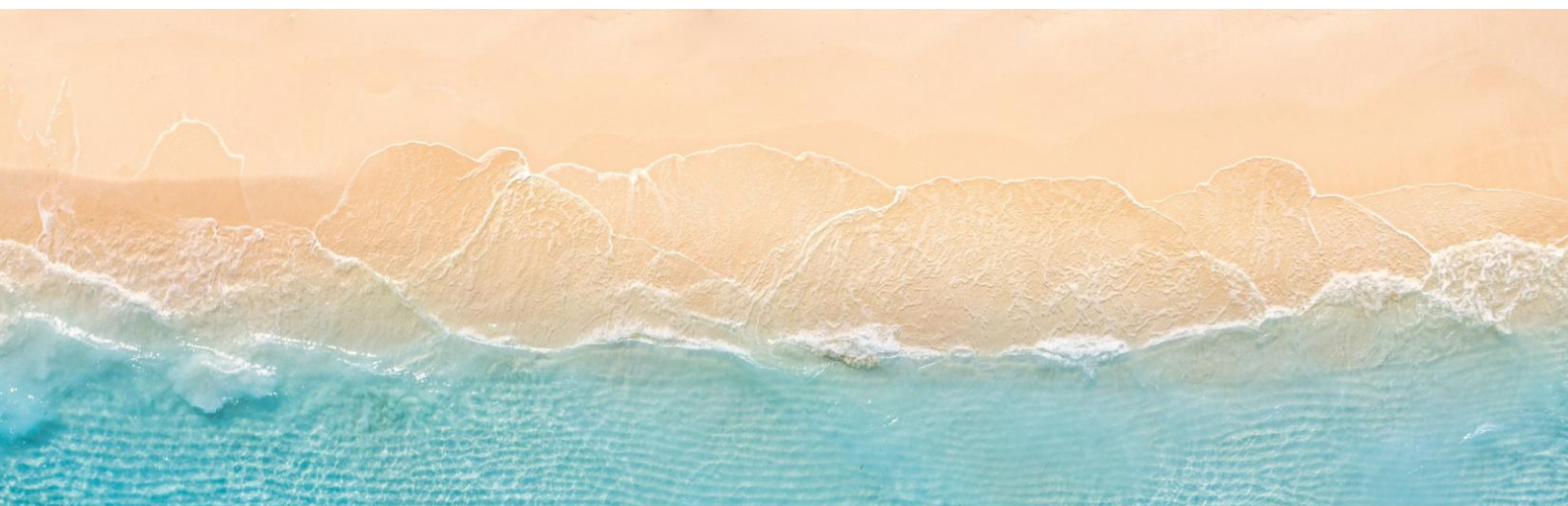




Open Call for “Associated Regions” (OC4ARs)

ANNEX 1 - Guidelines for applicants

Submission deadline: May 31st, 2025, 17.00 CET



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1.0 Introduction

1.2 *The RHE-MEDIation Project*

RHE-MEDIation Project aims to **establish effective water pollution management by using efficient control of single pollutants**, including the most challenging, and help to set up appropriate propositions to regulatory standards. Through these measures, the project actively contributes to preserving the integrity of entire water ecosystems in the Mediterranean area.

Funded by the European Union's Horizon Europe program, **RHE-MEDIation is a 5.8-million-euro, three-year project that will establish a responsive hub for deploying long-term governance centered on the mission to de-stress the Mediterranean Sea from chemical pollution**, including peak concentrations in known hot-spots. A hot-spot is considered a marine confined area (linked directly or indirectly to the Mediterranean) affected by known marine chemical pollution.

In particular, **the project will test and validate a chemical pollution remediation technology based on micro-algae solutions integrated within existing water/wastewater treatment systems that will enhance the removal of heavy metals, pesticides, PFAS, and forever chemicals**. Moreover, the solution will be complemented with mobile and fixed sensor systems to identify and measure the presence of chemical substances in both inland and marine waters. Furthermore, the measured data will be delivered to the EC EMODnet platform to contribute to the Digital Twin of the Ocean, with the aim to model the ocean's multiple components and provide knowledge and easy and free access to a wealth of marine data, metadata, and data products.

Three hot-spots sites (located in Italy, Greece, and Turkey) have been chosen for demonstration and, once realised, five potential replication sites will be added to the list for further investigation to assess the replicability of the technology in the Associated Regions. For this purpose, local stakeholders will be empowered to manage this transformation, and it is in this context that fits the Open Call for Associated Regions (OC4ARs).

1.2.1 *General Objectives*

The RHE-MEDIation Hub approach brings an integrated framework to up-scale from the demonstration and validation application at the local demo-site to the assessment and appraisal at the national and then at the EU level. The variety of cases and site contamination characteristics are such to be representative of most cases of the remaining hot-spots of the Mediterranean basin; then, **the replication effort can be considered straightforwardly affordable.**

RHE-MEDIation brings 3 complex demonstration cases (demo-sites or user cases), selected in three different Mediterranean countries: Italy, Greece, and Turkey, represented by the cases of Mar Piccolo Bay, Elefsis Bay and Izmit Bay, respectively. They represent well-known hot-spots of chemical pollution in the Ionian, Aegean, and Marmara seas. According to the RHE-MEDIation strategy, aimed to demonstrate the capabilities to abate pollutants either in the seawater or in the wastewater before the latter reaches the sea, three distinct micro-algae-based scaled plants in these areas have been planned in the project. **The representativeness of the case studies ensures broad replicability of the proposed project solutions, given that different conditions for the microalgae-based technology are tested and validated.** The selected demo-sites have been accurately studied and investigated in the past years, and representative data is available to constitute the necessary site background to start with.

1.2.2 *Specific goals of the RHE-MEDIation Project*

- **Prevent chemical pollution in waters reaching the Mediterranean Sea from land**, and address environmental challenges with innovative solutions along the entire discharge networks;
- **Minimize and control pollution by enabling prompt reactions in the Mediterranean hot-spots**, promoting data sharing with stakeholders at demo-sites;
- **Remediate existing polluted hot-spots by working at the source of major pollution discharge to enable a return to a ‘Good Environmental Status’** in the long-term period through improved dilution conditions.

2.0 Call for Proposal

2.1 *Purposes*

In the framework of WP5, the RHE-MEDIation Project is managing a lean financial support scheme to allocate funds to selected replication sites, thus complementing the exploitation activity of the RHE-MEDIation technologies by sharing knowledge to maximise future implementation opportunities.

The RHE-MEDIation Open Call for Associated Regions (OC4ARs) has a **total budget of €500,000 to fund up to five (5) replication projects** and aims to:

- Engage local and/or regional authorities to demonstrate the feasibility, replicability, and scalability of the RHE-MEDIation solutions.
- Support the selected Third Parties¹ in Horizon Europe in the development of the replication strategy and creating an associated roadmap.
- Securing the interest of local/regional authorities related to coastal seawater or inland semi-confined areas (linked directly or indirectly to the Mediterranean) affected by persistent chemical pollution (also defined as hot-spots) because of the low recirculation and the persistent polluted discharge from human activities on land and that are willing to acquire knowledge about cleaning technologies, like the one proposed by the RHE-MEDIation Project, thus setting the basis for a roadmap to program future scenarios of distress solutions implementation.
- Ensure the adequate monitoring of grant spending and provide support to grantees.
- Support the Third Parties involved to up-scale from local to national.

The present OC4ARs will enable the participation of Associated Regions not represented by the partners of the consortium. The awarded Third Parties will be involved in further demonstrating the innovative RHE-MEDIation solutions. Beneficiaries are required to propose their own use cases that address their specific challenges and objectives, aligning with the goals of RHE-MEDIation and aiming to identify suitable solutions from the RHE-MEDIation Project that will support their chemical pollution monitoring and remediation activities. The selected Third Parties of the Associated Regions will showcase the feasibility of the solutions in their replication sites (use case) and prepare for implementation and scale-up of the tested tools and technologies in the selected replication sites. Beneficiaries will be enabled to follow the RHE-MEDIation Project in its major achievements/demonstration activities and will be assisted with

¹ Local/Regional authorities from countries located in Member States/Associated countries, other than those that are members of the RHE-MEDIation’s Project Consortium, and that result eligible to benefit from financial support from the RHE-MEDIation Project.

technical advisory during the development of their own roadmap and plans to destress the selected replication site from chemical pollution under the future implementation of the proposed solutions and address at the same time possible barriers potentially endangering the feasibility of the implementing innovative solutions.

RHE-MEDIation will provide financial support to Third Parties based on the principles of transparency, objectivity, and fairness.

The present document describes procedures and rules established to target and select 5 Associated Regions to participate in the OC4ARs of the RHE-MEDIation Project. The selected stakeholders will be enabled to follow the RHE-MEDIation Project in its major achievements/demonstration activities and be assisted with technical advisory during the development of their own roadmap and plans to destress the identified replication site (use case) from chemical pollution under the future implementation of the proposed solutions, addressing at the same time potential barriers endangering the feasibility of these innovative solutions.

In particular, the concept driver is looking at areas that are already of interest for remediation solutions but that have not started specific actions to reduce the environmental stress yet and to support local/regional authorities to up-scale the attention/interest from the local to the national level. The grants will have the objective of verifying the feasibility, replicability and scale-up of the solutions potentially implemented in the “associated regions” replication site (use case) with pollution characteristics similar to those of the RHE-MEDIation Project case studies.

2.2 Funding

Support to the Third Parties will be provided only in the form of grants. The exact amount to be granted per each associated region will be established during the selection and negotiation phase, **and it will not exceed 100,000€**, being the maximum funding available for the selected five (5) associated regions equal to 500,000 €. This cost allocation is intended to be calculated based on cost reporting based on eligibility items in line with the EC contract standards.

2.3 Application process and timeline

Call launch: March 31 st , 2025.
Deadline for submission: May 31 st , 2025; Single-stage submission.
Applicants shall submit their application through the RHE-MEDIation project webpage (https://rhemediation.eu/open-call.html)
Evaluation and selection: mid-June 2025.
Granting completed: August 31 st , 2025.
Project implementation: from September 1 st , 2025.
Project end: May 31 st , 2026.

Table 1- Application process and timeline

2.4 OC4ARs Requirements and Recommendation for Applicants

OC4ARs - Requirements
The proposed extended use case and area must be aligned with the objectives, solutions, and processes of the RHE-MEDIation Project . Proposals addressing domains that have already been covered in the internal project use cases can be similar but must be implemented in a different region. Proposals should encompass activities that facilitate the deployment, testing, and engagement of the developed RHE-MEDIation solutions. These activities may include analyses, small-scale tests, roadmaps, plans, projects, and stakeholder engagement aimed at

preventing, eliminating, and remediating pollution in the relevant associated region. Proposals should also address potential barriers and demonstrate the feasibility of implementing the solutions. The attractiveness and replicability of the proposed use case will be prioritized.			
Applicant	Financial support to third parties may only be awarded to local and/or regional authorities from an ‘associated region’ (linked directly or indirectly to the Mediterranean). See Eligibility criteria in Section 3.0		
Geographical Location	‘Associated regions’ are to be considered as areas with similar ecosystems (e.g. neighbouring regions and/or regions in a different river basin) and/or less-developed regions, with the view to build capacity to implement innovative solutions to remediate existing polluted hot-spots. The proposals should ensure that the associated regions are located in Member States/Associated countries other than those that are members of the RHE-MEDIation’s Project Consortium. An “associated region” shall benefit from the Financial Support to Third Parties provided under this topic only once.		
Compliance to EU standards	Applicants should adhere to EU standards of transparency, equal treatment, conflict of interest and confidentiality. Applicants must be eligible for participation in the EC Horizon Europe Framework Programme and must ensure the following obligations of the Grant Agreement, namely 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 (record-keeping) ¹ . Applicants should comply with the EU restrictive measures also applicable for financial support to third parties. Please consult the EU Sanctions Map ² .		
Minimum deliverables required (M= month; D= deliverable).	Stage 1 (M1-2) Replication site (use case) definition	Stage 2 (M3-6) Replication site (use case) implementation	Stage 3 (M7-9) Replication site (use case) up-scale: evaluation and feedback
	D1. Workplan for replication site (use case) definition and characterization	D2. Technical and progress report on replication site (use case) implementation and co-creation activity	D3. Upscale (exploitation) plan, including stakeholder assessment and impact assessment
KPIs	The implementation progress will be overseen by a Mentorship Committee, which will assist the applicant in achieving the individual KPIs established in the individual mentoring plan at the sub-contract level. These KPIs will be based on the proposed co-creation activity within the replication site and will be jointly agreed upon between the applicant and the RHE-MEDIation Mentorship Committee during the replication site (use case) definition stage.		

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

RHE-MEDIation Consortium commitment	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Mentorship Committee. • Develop the grant contracts with the selected Third Parties. • Support the selected Third Parties with the provision of technical advisory services in the development of the replication strategy and creating associated roadmaps. • Ensure the adequate monitoring of grant spending and support to grantees. • Support the Third Parties to up-scale from local to National. • Provide know-how on building a successful use case based on the RHE-MEDIation methodology. • Dissemination of the activities and results via RHE-MEDIation communication channels.
Final outcomes	Successful replication site (use case) that demonstrates the feasibility, replicability and scale-up of the RHE-MEDIation solutions.

Table 2 - Open Call Requirements

OC4ARs – Recommendations	
Standards	Compliance with standards: the proposed replication site (use case) and strategies should harmonize with the exploitation activity of the RHE-MEDIation technologies and provide reliable data according to the relevant standards.
Ethics	The proposals should adhere to the Do No Significant Harm (DNSH) principle. The proposed activities should not entail activities creating significant harm to any of the objectives of the European Green Deal.
Data management	The data obtained by the project should comply with the Findable, Accessible, Interoperable, and Reusable (FAIR) principles while sensitive data, arising from intellectual property rights and other proprietary aspects of partner technologies, should be managed according to proper confidentiality measures.
Other	Participants can organize stakeholder event/s, attracting end-users and local supporting institutions, agencies or organisations presenting RHE-MEDIation solutions and assessing their feasibility, replicability and scale-up in the region.

Table 3 - Open Call Recommendations

3.0 Eligibility criteria

All applicants will have to adhere to the following eligibility criteria to be considered eligible for RHE-MEDIation OC4ARs:

- Submissions are made ONLY through the [F6S platform](https://www.f6s.com/rhemediation-open-call/apply) using the following address: <https://www.f6s.com/rhemediation-open-call/apply>. Proposals submitted differently will NOT be evaluated.
- Applicants must be local/regional authorities, from associated regions located in EU Member States/Associated countries, related to coastal seawater or inland semi-confined areas (linked directly or indirectly to the Mediterranean) affected by persistent chemical pollution (also defined as hot-spots), other than those that are part of the project consortium.
- An “Associated Region” shall benefit from the Financial Support to Third Parties (FSTP)

- provided under the topic HORIZON-MISS-2022-OCEAN-01-03, only once.
- Proposals must showcase the use of RHE-MEDIation technology to be replicated in new regions.
 - The proposal should foresee a clear European dimension.
 - The Application and all the requested documents must be provided ONLY in English language.
 - The proposal description must be submitted according to the Guidelines for Applicants (Annex 1) and provided Proposal Template (Annex 2).
 - Respect the maximum budget request per proposal (100,000 €).
 - Only complete applications will be accepted, including administrative data and the supporting documents specified in the open call.
 - Proposals must be submitted before the indicated deadline (May 31st, 2025).
 - EU restrictive measures are also applicable for financial support to Third Parties³.

A proposal is considered eligible only if its content corresponds specifically to the RHE-MEDIation requirements, including the specific eligibility conditions. Applications that do not adhere to those criteria will be excluded and marked as ineligible.

RHE-MEDIation will publish the call widely to comply with EU standards of transparency, equal treatment, conflict of interest and confidentiality. It will be officially published on RHE-MEDIation's website, as well as in the Funding & Tenders Portal. It will remain open for 2 months (from March 31st until May 31st, 2025). If the submission deadlines change, it will be immediately announced through the project website. RHE-MEDIation will publish the outcome of the call without delay, including a description of the selected third-party projects, the date of the award, the duration, and the legal name and country.

3.1 Type of beneficiary (applicant)

RHE-MEDIation OC4ARs will fund projects submitted only by local/regional authorities, from associated regions located in EU Member States/Associated countries, related to coastal seawater or inland semi-confined areas (linked directly or indirectly to the Mediterranean) affected by persistent chemical pollution (also defined as hot-spots), other than those that are part of the project consortium (see eligible countries in Section 3.2).

Local or regional authorities from an associated region are legal entities, including bodies representing a regional/local authority (such as regional/local agencies, regional planning bodies, regional/local transport authorities, etc.), whose role is significant and relevant for showcasing the feasibility, replicability and scalability of the solutions developed in the project⁴. The Third Parties will have to investigate the legislation in their country and provide the necessary official evidence showing that it is defined as a local or regional authority to be eligible.

Important: Private entities classified as third parties are not permitted to join the consortium. However, once a local or regional authority has been awarded the contract, it may consider alternative collaboration methods with these entities, such as subcontracting.

3.2 Eligible countries

RHE-MEDIation OC4ARs is open to Associated Regions located in EU Member States/Associated countries (linked directly or indirectly to the Mediterranean) not represented by the partners of the consortium.

³ As above.

⁴ The RHE-MEDIation consortium reserves the right to request a document proving the status of the entity as an authority in case of any doubts.

Eligible beneficiaries for this call are local and/or national authorities from Member States and associated countries to the Horizon Europe Programme. Please check the list of member states and Associated countries eligible for HE support⁵.

Non-eligible countries are those in which the RHE-MEDIation Project partners are based: Belgium, Greece, Italy, Portugal and Turkey. Also, other authorities that have been funded under the iMERMAID's open calls are not eligible.

3.3 Activities eligible for funding

The selected beneficiaries commit to carry out the following activities in their role as Associated Region to the RHE-MEDIation Project:

- Be aware of the project progress through reading the project publishable documentation made available through the project website and participation to the project webinar/workshop at the end of demonstration phase.
- Contribute to outlining pros and cons associated with the use of the proposed RHE-MEDIation technologies in the site under analysis.
- Undertake a preliminary design assessment for a potential establishment at the site under study and develop a work timetable and roadmap for future implementation, including the specifications of governance and the financial processes to be mobilised, stakeholders to be involved, and permissions to be achieved.
- Promote the exploitation of the developed roadmap to be endorsed at the national level, to upscale the level of interest for other potential replication sites in the same territory/nation.
- Contribute to or participate in a specific workshop where relevant authorities and interested stakeholders are invited to attend at the end of the WP5 of the RHE-MEDIation project.

3.4 Deadline

Only proposals submitted within the deadline will be considered. After the call closure, no modification to the received proposals will be accepted. Submission to the RHE-MEDIation OC4ARs is open between **March 31st, 2025** and **May 31st, 2025** at **17:00 CEST** (Brussels time). The deadline hour for submission is not flexible. Final deadline is **May 31st, 2025** at **17:00 CEST** (Brussels time).

3.5 Language

English is the official language for RHE-MEDIation OC4ARs. Submissions done in any other language will not be considered and evaluated. English is also the only official language during the whole implementation of the RHE-MEDIation program. This means that the submission of deliverables must be done in English.

3.6 Conflict of interest

IMPORTANT: To avoid conflicts of interest, applications cannot be sent by individuals or organisations who are partners in the RHE-MEDIation Consortium. Please check the list of partners at <https://rhemediation.eu/project-partners.html>.

Applicants must not have any actual or potential conflict of interest with the RHE-MEDIation selection process and during the whole project. The selected applicants will be required to declare that they are aware of such potential conflicts of interest by submitting Annex 3 - RHE-MEDIation Declaration of Honour during the contracting phase.

⁵ https://ec.europa.eu/info/funding-tenders/opportunities/docs/2021-2027/common/guidance/list-3rd-country-participation_horizon-atom_en.pdf

In case of suspected cases of conflict of interest, these will be investigated case by case. In particular, applicants must take into account that potential situations ‘conflict of interests’ can extend also to economic interest, political or national affinity, family or emotional ties or any other shared interest.

4.0 Application procedure

The submission will be done through the [F6S platform](#) using the following link: <https://www.f6s.com/rhemediation-open-call/apply>. The applicants are required to register a profile at F6S in order to submit a proposal. The templates for the OC4ARs documents are available here: <https://rhemediation.eu/open-call.html>

These are:

- Annex 1: Guidelines for Applicants (the current document)
- Annex 1.1: Technical Specification
- Annex 2: Proposal Template: a document that must be submitted in a .PDF format containing the project proposal and uploaded as part of the application form on the F6S platform.
- Annex 3 - RHE-MEDIation Declaration of Honour.

NOTE: Consider that after the application submission, editing is not possible. If the applicant discovers an error in the proposal and provided the call deadline has not passed, the applicant may request the Open Call RHE-MEDIation team to re-submit the proposal. To request a re-submission, you are required to send an email to opencall@rhemediation.eu with a message titled: RE-SUBMISSION REQUEST. Please, avoid requesting resubmissions less than 48 hours before the call deadline, for technical reasons that may arise.

5.0 Evaluation process

This chapter outlines the evaluation process for the OC4ARs.

5.1 Step 1 - Eligibility Check

Eligibility to participate in the funding program, managed by CNR (Consiglio Nazionale delle Ricerche, project’s partner), will initially consider the following criteria:

- Proposals reception: via F6S platform and by the defined deadline.
- Existence of a legal entity in an eligible country: whether the same entity applied in other proposals, there is the suspicion of any conflict of interest, the applicant is established in Member State/Associated Country other than those that are part of the project consortium etc.
- Type of Third Party: the applying entity is a local or regional authority.
- All entities are eligible for EC funding under the rules of Horizon Europe.
- The proposal is written in English.
- All required documentation is submitted correctly.
- The proposal does not exceed the maximum available funding.

At this stage, the eligibility criteria are checked, by CNR, against the self-declarations included in the application form. Later, during the evaluation process, the above criteria will be evaluated, and if an applicant is not compliant with any of them, it will be excluded. The eligible Proposals, identified and selected by CNR, will move to the next stage, while the non-eligible applicants will be informed by email. No additional details will be provided.

5.2 Step 2 - Relevancy Screening

The Relevancy Screening will be carried out by the RHE-MEDIation Evaluation Committee (under the coordination of CNR and composed of one representative of each project's partners). The overall summary/general objectives of all proposals deemed eligible in the previous check will be reviewed to evaluate the following items:

- Scope of the proposal – in line with the scope of the RHE-MEDIation Project as it is described in the present Annex 1 Guidelines for Applicants.
- For the Funding Instruments, it should be clear that applicants will propose replication strategies aimed at promoting the adoption of solutions developed by the RHE-MEDIation partners.
- European Dimension of the proposal – with reference to the dimension of the RHE-MEDIation Project and its proposed technology.

Proposals that address the above-mentioned criteria will move to the next stage “Evaluation”. Proposals that do not comply with the abovementioned will be informed by email. No additional details will be provided.

5.3 Step 3 – Evaluation

Proposals passing the relevancy screening in Step 2 will move on to the evaluation phase (step 3). The RHE-MEDIation Evaluation Committee (under the coordination of CNR) will be composed of one representative from each beneficiary of the RHE-MEDIation Project and under the coordination of CNR.

The Evaluation will be done remotely by expert evaluators of the Evaluation Committee who will evaluate the proposal received, based on the evaluation criteria outlined in this document.

The Evaluation Committee will carry out evaluations on an individual basis, not as representatives of their institution, country, or any other entity.

5.3.1 Evaluation criteria

The evaluators will follow the 3 evaluation criteria listed in Table 4. The following scores will be assigned to each criterion for the evaluated proposal.

0 = Fail: The proposal fails to address the criterion or cannot be judged due to missing or incomplete information.

1 = Poor: criterion is inadequately addressed or there are serious inherent weaknesses.

2 = Fair: proposal broadly addresses the criterion, but there are significant weaknesses.

3 = Good: proposal addresses the criterion well, but a few shortcomings are present.

4 = Very good: proposal addresses the criterion very well, but a small number of shortcomings are present.

5 = Excellent: proposal successfully addresses all relevant aspects of the criterion. Any shortcomings are minor.

The initial ranking will be based on the above-described evaluation criteria, following the rationale described in Table 4.

The Evaluation Committee (under the coordination of CNR) will be composed of one representative from each beneficiary of the RHE-MEDIation Project.

Each evaluator will score the three evaluation criteria from 0 to 5. After all members of the Evaluation Committee have scored the evaluation criteria, the committee will gather and produce an Evaluation Summary Report (ESR) for each eligible applicant.

For each section/criteria, the minimum threshold is 3 out of 5 points. The overall threshold,

applied to the sum of the three individual scores, is 10. If a proposal receives less than 3 in any of the criteria it will be rejected automatically. An Evaluation Summary Report (ESR) will be then prepared by the Evaluation Committee, representing opinions and scores on which the evaluators assessing the application agree.

The Evaluation Committee will rate all eligible proposals, taking into account the following key aspects:

- **Technical value**
 - **Relevance** (Which is the level of relevance of the proposed replication site (HOT SPOT). Proposals have to conform to the requirements, goals and scope of the RHE-MEDIation Project, as well as the importance of the indicated HOT SPOT in the associated region because of its natural characteristics and contamination levels and the willingness to deploy actions to destress the environment.
 - **Uniqueness** (How many remediation actions have been implemented so far? What is the level of knowledge already acquired?). Proposals should not overlap with already running initiatives related to chemical pollution reduction even if a risk assessment, as well as studies on Human Health and Environmental Impact with indicators on local communities may be already established and constitute an asset to the RHE-MEDIation replicability analysis context.
- **Impact of the proposed technology**
 - **Social & environmental Impact** (What is the estimated impact at both local and national level consequent to the successful destress of the replication site (HOT SPOT) in a measurable way (authorities involved, number of businesses impacted, current environmental impact, the potential for new jobs and skills, etc.)?)
 - **Local Network and upscale potential** (How strong and extended is the local organisations network supporting your proposal? What is the capacity to upscale to national level and the potential degree of replication within the region? Are financial schemes to be mobilized at local / national level available or planned?)
- **Implementation of the proposed activity**
 - **Quality of implementation** (Are the proposed actions realistic, feasible, well-defined, and balanced with the requested financial support?)
 - **Sustained data flow & follow up** (What is the proposed data flow during the activities deployment, as well as the follow up beyond the project end for this initiative?) It is desirable that data flows set up within the project activities are designed to continue beyond the duration of the project, and as much as possible, in an automated/continuous way.
 - **Team and resources** Applicants must demonstrate strong management and leadership capabilities, as well as the ability to take a concept from initial idea to system deployment, showcasing their capacity to execute their vision. The team should be cross-functional, with diverse skills and expertise, and should consider gender balance. The attractiveness and replicability of the Use Case will be prioritized in the evaluation process. Applicants must demonstrate the quality and effectiveness of the resources allocated to achieve the proposed objectives and deliverables. This includes ensuring that the resources are adequate and well-suited

to support the successful execution of the project.

EVALUATION CRITERIA	MAX SCORES	NOTES
TECHNICAL VALUE	5	Threshold:3
Relevance and technical challenge	3,5	
Uniqueness	1,5	
IMPACT OF THE PROPOSED ACTIVITY	5	Threshold:3
Social & environmental Impact	2,5	
Local Network and upscale potential	2,5	
IMPLEMENTATION OF THE PROJECT	5	Threshold:3
Quality of implementation	3	
Sustained data flow & follow-up	1	
Team and resources	1	

Table 4 - Open Call Evaluation Criteria

Proposals scored equal or above all three defined thresholds will be considered for funding. Only one contract is expected to be negotiated with the TP of an associated region.

A model of the sub-grant contract will be provided during the contracting phase. Selected Third Parties will be required to follow an administrative process in conformity with Horizon Europe practices. Countries involved as Third Parties will be other than those already participating in the RHE-MEDIation Project.

The sub-grant contract to be signed by the Third Parties includes a request for compliance with contractual clauses relating to conflict of interest, confidentiality and security, ethics, visibility, specific rules for carrying out actions, information and record keeping, as the beneficiaries of the main contract with EC. Furthermore, it includes specific clauses to guarantee the bodies referred to article 25 of the Horizon Europe general model contract (e.g., granting authority, European Anti-Fraud Office (OLAF), Court of Auditors (ECA), etc.) being able to exercise their rights towards the recipients. EU restrictive measures are also applicable for financial support to third parties EU Sanctions Map.

5.4 Step 4 - Intermediate ranking of proposals

At the end of the Evaluation process (Step 3), all proposals will be ranked based on their overall average score, which is the sum of scores from criteria 1 to 3. In the case of a tie, the following criteria will be used to resolve it, in order of priority:

- The highest score in the Technical Value Section.
- Gender balance among the personnel responsible for carrying out the activities.

Following the evaluation, a "Ranking List" will be generated.

5.5 Step 5 - Consensus meeting

The RHE-MEDIation Evaluation Committee will draft, at this stage, the 'List of selected proposals' and the 'Reserve List'. The first list will comprise the highest-ranked proposals selected for funding, while the latter will be used in the case the Evaluation Committee will object to a specific third party, on the basis of the existence of significant ethical concerns or a potential

conflict of interest or other reasons. In this case, the choice may pass to the next-ranked proposal. The maximum number of proposals to be funded under RHE-MEDIation's OC4ARs is 5. Applicants may be requested to provide additional information, whether some issues deserving clarification should arise before the final selection.

5.6 Step 6 - Final ranking and Selection

Selected proposals will be notified and will be invited for a sub-grant agreement preparation and signature phases by CNR. All Proposals that have passed Stage 5 will receive an acceptance or rejection letter together with the Evaluation Summary Report (ESR).

5.7 Appeal requests

An applicant may submit an appeal request if he believes the results of the eligibility checks have not been correctly applied, or if they feel that there has been a shortcoming in the application of the rules of the RHE-MEDIation – OC4ARs. Appeal requests must:

- Be received within three (3) working days from the reception of the rejection letter or the ESR information letter.
- Indicate and describe the subject of the complaint, providing evidence in support of the complaint.
- Be sent by the entity's legal representative who has also submitted the proposal.

Any appeal requests will be examined by the Evaluation Committee of RHE-MEDIation. The committee will review the complaint and recommend an appropriate course of action. If clear evidence of a shortcoming is found that could influence the funding decision, all or part of the proposal may be re-evaluated.

Please note:

- This procedure is solely concerned with the eligibility and evaluation organization process. The committee will not challenge the scientific or technical judgment of expert evaluators during the proposal evaluation. A re-evaluation will only occur if there is clear evidence of a shortcoming that impacts the final funding decision
- The evaluation score resulting from any re-evaluation will be considered definitive and may be lower than the original score.
- Anonymous or incomplete complaints will not be considered.
- Only one request for redress per proposal will be reviewed by the committee. All requests for redress will be treated in confidence and must be sent to RHE-MEDIation at: opencall@rhemediation.eu

6.0 Contracting

6.1 Project negotiation and sub-grant agreement

At the end of the evaluation phase, up to five (5) proposals will be selected and invited to the sub-grant project negotiation phase. If one or more of the selected proposals fails to sign the sub-grant agreement, the proposals with the highest rank from the reserve list will be invited to take their place. After the conclusion of the Open Call evaluation and project selection (managed by CNR), CNR will initiate the contract preparation process in collaboration with the coordinators of the selected proposals. This process includes administrative and financial checks (performed by CNR) and may involve technical, ethical, or security negotiations, based on the CNR comments.

The contract aims to fulfil the legal requirements between the RHE-MEDIation

Consortium (represented by CNR) and every beneficiary of the call.

The items covered will be:

- Inclusion of the comments (if any) in the ESR of the Proposals and mapping to the Sub-grant agreement (Contract).
- Validation of the legal documents.

Each third-party project will sign the contract (Sub-Grant Agreement (SGA)) under a 'lump sum model'.

This will imply that RHE-MEDIation will provide financial support to the third parties upon the delivery of the expected outputs. The Sub-Grant Agreement (SGA) will include the Individual Work Plan as an annex for each project. This document, prepared by CNR, will outline the KPIs and deliverables that will be considered when evaluating the grantees' performance at the milestone reviews at the end of each stage of the RHE-MEDIation program for third parties, as well as the project's budget.

The lump sum must be aligned with the Beneficiary's actual costs, and consequently, each Work Plan shall include an outline of dedication of resources and a detailed cost estimate. This cost estimate, which will be verified from the implementation point of view, shall:

- Include only costs that would be eligible for an actual-costs grant and must exclude costs that are ineligible under the Horizon Europe rules;
- Be clearly connected with the action task and the Deliverables/KPIs to be achieved stated in the Individual Work Plan.

Finally, OC4ARs grantees must ensure, according to Article 9.4 in the General Model Grant Agreement, that they will be compliant with contractual obligations under 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 (record-keeping).

Third parties should be aware that they share the same accountability for budget expenditures as the RHE-MEDIation Consortium. The granting authority and auditing bodies, such as OLAF and the Court of Auditors (ECA), have the right to hold them accountable as well. The Sub-Grant Agreement (SGA) will include provisions to formalize this accountability.

The contract as provided to the sub-grantee is final and may not be changed.

The RHE-MEDIation Consortium will request the above documentation within predefined deadlines. Generally, the sub-project negotiation should be completed within two weeks from the selection and invitation. An additional week may be granted by CNR in cases where significant justification is provided. If contracting is not concluded within this timeframe, the proposal will be automatically rejected, and the next proposal on the reserve list will be invited.

6.2 Sub-Grant Agreement Signature

At the end of the contracting phase, the sub-grantee funding agreement will be signed between the RHE-MEDIation Consortium, represented by CNR (Consiglio Nazionale delle Ricerche, Project Partner), and the selected beneficiary, represented by its leader.

7. RHE-MEDIation Third Parties programme specifications

The programme has a total duration of 9 months and is divided into 3 stages.

Stage 1 - "Replication site (use case) definition" is associated with the starting point of each project and will have a maximum duration of 2 months (see Table 5 below). Within this stage, the beneficiary, with the support of the Mentorship Committee, will elaborate on the milestones, KPIs and deliverables which will be delivered during the programme and which will

be evaluated at the end of each stage. During this stage, beneficiaries, in collaboration with the Mentorship Committee, should evaluate the compatibility of the project activities with this chosen replication site.

At the end of Stage 1, beneficiaries will have to deliver the assigned deliverables:

- Workplan for replication site (use case) definition and characterization

Stage 2 - “Replication site (use case) implementation” involves the actual implementation of the activities described in the proposal. The duration of this stage is 4 months during which beneficiary will execute all implementation tasks to demonstrate the feasibility of adopting the selected RHE-MEDIation solution/s at the selected location. Depending on the chosen replication site, activities such as preliminary work, roadmaps, plans, field tests, sampling, addressing possible barriers and showing the feasibility of implementing innovative solutions will be conducted.

At the end of Stage 2, beneficiaries will have to deliver the assigned deliverables:

- Technical and progress report on replication site (use case) implementation and co-creation activity and other deliverables (if any) as agreed with the Mentorship Committee. It must include a publishable summary of the results obtained.

During this stage, beneficiaries can conduct stakeholder meetings and workshops with relevant groups, such as potential end-users and the wider public, to assess the feasibility of the selected solutions and also consider the potential up scaling of those solutions at the national level.

Stage 3 - “Replication site (use case) Remediation strategy up-scale: evaluation and feedback” is aimed at leveraging the results of the previous stage. The aim is to evaluate the potential for the replication of the RHE-MEDIation solutions and to deliver an exploitation plan to upscale the level of interest for other potential replication sites in the same territory / Nation, including impact and feedback assessment, sustainability aspect and the potential for shared exploitation. Moreover, at the end of stage 3, CNR will organize a specific workshop to invite relevant authorities and interested stakeholders from the 5 selected ‘associated regions’ and will include a common discussion about the opportunity per country and the chance to maximise effects by co-designing synergies.

Additionally, in Stage 3, a final stakeholder event can be organized, with relevant industry representatives, expert groups, and civil organizations and citizens, with the aim of disseminating the achieved results.

At the end of Stage 3, beneficiaries will have to deliver the assigned deliverables:

- Upscale (Exploitation) Plan including stakeholders assessment and impact assessment to be endorsed at the National level, to upscale the level of interest for other potential replication sites in the same territory/nation. It must focus on use case validation, understanding internal processes, system integration, and risk management, and should include a roadmap for the uptake of a selected RHE-MEDIation solution.

RHE-MEDIation OC4ARs ANNEX 1 - Guidelines for applicants			
Stage	Stage duration (months)	Mandatory Deliverables	Fixed Lump Sum

Stage 1: Replication site (use case) definition	2	D1. Workplan for replication site (use case) definition and characterization	Up to 17 000 EUR
Stage 2: Replication site (use case) implementation	4	D2. Technical and progress report on replication site (use case) implementation and co-creation activity	Up to 58 000 EUR
Stage 3: Replication site (use case) up-scale: evaluation and feedback	3	D3. Upscale (exploitation) plan including stakeholders assessment and impact assessment	Up to 25 000 EUR
TOTAL	9 months		Up to 100 000 EUR

Table 5 - RHE-MEDIation FSTP programme Stages and payments schedule

8. RHE-MEDIation Third Parties programme evaluation

The selected grantees will define and detail their deliverables, KPIs, and milestones in their ‘Individual Work Plan’ at the start of the support program, in collaboration with the Mentorship Committee. The outputs will be evaluated at the end of each stage through a remote review conducted via a teleconference platform. The Beneficiary will present the work completed, analyze progress, and respond to questions from the RHE-MEDIation experts. Following the review, the Beneficiary will receive a review report that includes comments and potential recommendations. The report will also indicate whether the deliverables and KPIs have been accepted. Upon acceptance of the deliverables, payments will be released no later than thirty (30) calendar days after notification by the Contractor. Also, CNR will regularly collect information from the grantees based on KPIs and on needs declared during the submission phase to be verified.

The Mentorship Committee will evaluate the performance of grantees based on the following criteria:

- Deliverables Quality
- Technical Performance Indicators: Assessed by the Mentorship Committee using KPIs.
- Deadline Compliance: Evaluated by the Mentorship Committee.

Each criterion will be scored on a scale of 0 to 10, with the following weights applied to the final score:

- Deliverables Quality: 30% (up to 3 points)
- Technical Performance Indicators: 60% (up to 6 points)

- Deadline Compliance: 10% (up to 1 point)

Based on the final score:

- Grantees scoring above the threshold (6 points) will successfully receive their next payment and be eligible to continue in the program.
- Grantees scoring below the threshold will be proposed by the Mentorship Committee as candidates for dismissal from the program. If this proposal is confirmed by the Evaluation Committee, the grantees will be removed from the program and will not receive the payment due.

The Evaluation Committee may grant a short extension, allowing grantees to update and resubmit deliverables, which could make them eligible for payment if approved. The Evaluation Committee will make the final decision and approve payments.

8.1 Participation in events

During the three stages, the selected beneficiary will participate in a variety of events (such as audio calls, video calls, webinars, online training sessions, and virtual conferences) organized or recommended by the RHE-MEDIation Consortium. These events are intended to closely monitor the project and its demonstration activities while building the capacity to implement innovative solutions aimed at preventing, eliminating, and remediating chemical pollution, addressing potential barriers, and demonstrating the feasibility of implementation.

Applicants may also allocate resources for one trip to an RHE-MEDIation demonstration site, which will be agreed upon during Stage 1 and included in the selected applicant's Individual Mentoring Plan. Applicants are also encouraged to allocate resources to showcase their involvement in relevant events, such as those organized by the Commission and the Mission Oceans team.

9. Resources and tailored support provided within RHE-MEDIation FSTP programme

Within the duration of the programme, each Beneficiary will benefit from a Mentorship Committee support and an open call manager acting as an administrative contact point. The Mentorship Committee is composed of one representative for each RHE-MEDIation Project partners with expertise in the topics and solutions being addressed within the project.

The Mentorship Committee will be responsible for supporting, providing feedback, and motivating the Beneficiary.

The Mentorship Committee will support the beneficiaries in performing the following activities:

- Reading the relevant project documentation related to the demonstration site phase.
- Outlining pros and cons associated with the use of the proposed technologies to the site under analysis.
- Undertaking a preliminary design assessment for a potential establishment at the site under analysis.
- Developing, in cooperation with the Beneficiary, a work timetable and roadmap for future implementation, including specification of governance, a financial process to be mobilised, stakeholders to involve, permissions to be achieved.
- Ensuring that the work plan, deliverables, and project reports are submitted on time.
- Monitor the project's progress toward achieving defined KPIs and outcomes (sub-granted)

project progress).

- Provide technical evaluations of the deliverables and reports submitted by the beneficiary, including approval, rejection, or requests for improvements.

The Open Call Manager, appointed by CNR, serves as the administrative contact throughout the project's implementation. He works closely with the project's assigned Mentorship Committee to ensure its success. Specifically, the Open Call Manager will:

- Track project progress through monthly surveys.
- Communicate with the project's Mentorship Committee about progress and address any issues identified in the monthly surveys.
- Collect deliverables and reports from the beneficiary and share them with the Mentorship Committee for evaluation.
- Organize project reviews at the end of each stage.
- Report progress to the RHE-MEDIation coordination team for reporting purposes.

The RHE-MEDIation Consortium will coordinate the Third Parties/beneficiaries activity, which will be deployed in terms of:

- Reading the relevant project documentation related to the demonstration site phase;
- Outlining pros and cons associated with the use of the proposed technologies to the site under analysis;
- Undertaking a preliminary design assessment for a potential establishment at the site under analysis and
- Developing a work timetable and roadmap for future implementation, including specification of governance financial processes to be mobilised, stakeholders to be involved, permissions to be achieved.

The work undertaken by the Third Parties/beneficiaries during the implementation will be closely monitored and supported by the RHE-MEDIation Project partners. The Call Manager (CNR) will regularly collect information from the grantees based on KPIs and on needs declared during the submission phase to be verified.

10. Financial support provided

Grants to third parties are provided as a fixed lump sum per FSTP recipient in EUR. To access funding, third-party projects must demonstrate and present evidence of their progress and achievements, with deliverables assessed positively at each stage. If these requirements are not met, third parties may forfeit payment and could be asked to discontinue their participation in the RHE-MEDIation Project.

The grant received by the Third Parties is to finance actions aimed to:

- Be aware of the project progress through reading the project publishable documentation made available through the project website and participation to project webinar/workshop at the end of demonstration phase.
- Contribute to outlining pros and cons associated with the use of the proposed RHE-MEDIation technologies in the site under analysis.
- Undertake a preliminary design assessment for a potential establishment at the site under

study and develop a work timetable and roadmap for future implementation, including the specifications of governance and the financial processes to be mobilised, stakeholders to involve, permissions to be achieved.

- Promote the exploitation of the developed roadmap to be endorsed at national level, to upscale the level of interest for other potential replication sites in the same territory / nation;
- Contribute to / participate in a specific workshop where relevant authorities and interested stakeholders are invited to attend at the end of WP5.
- Travels associated with the project deployment or RHE-MEDIation activities.
- Dissemination and Communication of the activities and results.
- Exploitation and impact assessment-related activities in a given region(s) addressing local directives and regulations.
- Minor subcontracting of non-key domain expertise (less than 30%) is permitted, provided it is adequately justified.

Payments will be made in 3 instalments (17% + 58% + 25%) based on concrete results, deliverables, and review of each Stage. Detailed payment schedule and payment conditions will be settled in the Sub-grant (Beneficiary) Agreement.

Note: Minor subcontracting that is directly linked to the implementation of the action and can be attributed to it is eligible. Subcontracting costs for the action must be calculated based on the actual costs incurred, meet the general eligibility conditions, and be awarded according to the beneficiary's usual purchasing practices. These practices should ensure that subcontracts provide the best value for money (or, if appropriate, the lowest price) and that there is no conflict of interest. The selection of the subcontractor must be fully documented and included in the annex of the final report for potential audits by the European Commission (EC). It should also be carried out in strict compliance with the public procurement legislation applicable to the organization submitting the proposal for this Open Call (i.e., national procedures for tendering and national public procurement rules apply). It is the responsibility of the Open Call 1 beneficiaries to avoid conflicts of interest when awarding subcontracts. RHE-MEDIation partner organizations cannot be subcontractors in any project proposals submitted in Open Call 1, as they cannot benefit from the Open Call grant, either directly or indirectly. Finally, subcontracted activities should be executed within the nine-month timeframe of the RHE-MEDIation FSTP program.

11. Responsibility of the beneficiaries

The selected third parties are considered indirect beneficiaries of the EC funding. As such, they are responsible for the proper utilization of the funding and must ensure that recipients comply with the obligations outlined in the specific requirements of Horizon Europe.

11.1 Data protection and confidentiality

During the implementation of Open Call 1 activities and for up to five years after the conclusion of the program, the Beneficiary(ies) must maintain the confidentiality of any data, documents, or other materials identified as confidential at the time of the subcontract signature (referred to as "confidential information"). The selected Beneficiary(ies) may disclose this confidential information to the RHE-MEDIation Consortium and to the selected reviewers, who will be bound by a specific Non-Disclosure Agreement.

11.2 Promoting actions and giving visibility to the EU funding

The selected Beneficiary(ies) must promote the program activities, the RHE-MEDIation Project, and its results by providing targeted information to various audiences, including the media and the public, in a strategic and effective manner. They must also emphasize the financial support from the European Commission. Detailed requirements will be outlined in the Sub-Grant Agreement (Contract).

Unless otherwise requested or agreed upon by the European Commission or CNR, any communication activity related to the action (including electronic communications via social media), as well as any publicity at conferences or seminars, and any type of information or promotional materials (such as brochures, leaflets, posters, presentations, etc.), along with any infrastructure, equipment, and major results funded by the grant, must:

- Display the EU emblem
- Display the Mission Ocean logo
- Display the RHE-MEDIation logo
- Include the following text: For communication activities: “This project has indirectly received funding from the European Union under the Horizon Europe programme: RHE-MEDIation (GA no. 101113045)”, linked with <https://rhemediation.eu/index.html>.

Any publicity created by the selected Third Party in relation to the project, regardless of the form or medium used, must clearly state that it reflects only the author's views and that the European Commission or the RHE-MEDIation project is not responsible for any use that may be made of the information contained therein.

12. Contact

The RHE-MEDIation Consortium provides the following support:

- F6S support team (for any technical issues with the F6S platform): support@f6s.com
- More info and available documents at: <https://rhemediation.eu/open-call.html>

For extraordinary communication needs, please contact the Help Desk: opencall@rhemediation.eu

Funded by the European Union's Horizon Europe program, RHE-MEDiation is a 5.8 million euro, three-year project that will be a responsive hub for deploying long-term governance centered on the mission to destress the Mediterranean Sea from chemical pollution, including peak concentrations in known HOT SPOTS.

In particular, the project will test and validate a chemical pollution remediation technology based on micro-algae solutions that will be integrated within existing water/wastewater treatment systems that will enhance the removal of heavy metals, pesticides, and PFAS and forever chemicals. Moreover, it will be complemented with mobile and fixed sensing systems to identify and measure the presence of chemical substances in both land and marine waters, being measured data delivered to the EC EMODnet platform to contribute to the Digital Twin of the Ocean.

Three sites (Italy, Greece and Turkey) have been chosen for demonstration and once realized, five replication sites will be added to the list for further investigation. To this end, local stakeholders will be empowered to manage this transformation.



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