Interreg

Co-funded by the European Union

Italy – Croatia

SEAS

QUESTIONS & ANSWERS

SEAS Call for Small Project proposals

Latest update: 5.11.2026.

The aim of this document is to provide general guidance on the implementation of the SEAS project, and should be read in combination with:

Guidelines for SMEs as Final Recipients

1. A company is opening a seat in the programme area: currently they have their offices in Rome but they are opening offices in Taranto. Would they be eligible, if they open the office before applying for the Call? Or should the seat be active for at least for a minimum time?

One of the eligibility criteria set out in the Guidelines for SMEs as Final Recipients, each applicant must meet the requirements specified in Section 2.4. which states that Final Recipients must have at least one closed business year for seat and/ or branch in the Programme area. Therefore, they would not be eligible applicants, as they must operate in Programme area for at least one year prior to date of application submission.

2. A research organisation would be interested in participating. Would they be eligible?

One of the eligibility criteria set up in Section 2.4. of the Guidelines is "FR (and/or its owner company having more than 50% of ownership rights over the FRs, and/or its linked enterprises through a natural person, cumulatively) is a SME (small and medium sized enterprise) or start-up". Therefore, research organisations are not eligible as FRs, only SMEs and Start-up companies are eligible.

3. Which time zone applies to the application submission deadline: CEST or CET?

The application submission deadlines are based on Central European time (CET). The reference to Central European Summer Time (CEST) in the Call documentation was included by mistake. Therefore, applications submitted by 23:59 CET on the relevant cut-off date will be assessed.

4. Could an SME qualify under the blue biotechnology sector if its core expertise is biotechnology innovation and commercialisation, but its principal registered business activities are not specifically classified as blue economy activities?

Section 2.5. of the Guidelines states that Final Recipients (FRs) must operate in the blue economy sector and carry out activities in the blue economy sectors. Furthermore, they must be registered to carry out the business activity or activities to which their Small Project relates.

5. Would the development and validation of a cross-border platform for commercialisation and market access of blue biotechnology innovations constitute an eligible project activity, provided that it represents a genuinely new product/service and is jointly developed with an Italian SME?

The development and validation of a cross-border platform for commercialisation and market access of blue biotechnology innovations could potentially be considered eligible, provided that the proposed activity meets the requirements of the Call. In particular, in the application it should be clearly described what will be developed, what makes the proposed product or service new, how it will be jointly developed and how the expected results will contribute to the blue economy. The final assessment would depend on the complete project proposal and its compliance with the eligibility and content assessment criteria set out in the Call documentation.

6. Is there any specific requirement regarding the registered business activity/NACE code that an applicant must have in order to demonstrate that it operates within the blue economy sector?

The Call does not specify particular NACE codes that are considered eligible. However, applicants must operate within blue economy sector and have a registered business activity relevant to the activities to be carried out in the Small Project.

7. Can associations apply to the Call?

One of the eligibility criteria, Section 2.4. of the Guidelines is "FR (and/or its owner company having more than 50% of ownership rights over the FRs, and/or its linked enterprises through a natural person, cumulatively) is a SME (small and medium sized enterprise) or start-up". Therefore, associations are not eligible applicants.

8. Can companies registered outside the eligible Programme area apply?

No, Programme area is defined in Section 2.3. of the Guidelines and one of the basic eligibility criteria is that Final Recipients must be legally established and registered in the Programme area in Croatia or Italy or have a branch office registered as autonomuous legal entity in the Programme area.

9. Can an existing Croatian company (d.o.o.) that has not been actively operating for an extended period apply to the Call, if he meets all other eligibility criteria?

One of the main eligibility requirements is that the company must have been registered in the Programme area and have at least one closed business year for seat and/or branch in the

Programme are. Also, they must have had positive equity for the last closed business year for seat and/or branch in the Programme area. All applicant eligibility requirements are specified in Section 2. of the Guidelines.

10. Would a project focus on collagen extraction from fish by-products, with focus on innovative processing and the valorisation of by-products, be thematically aligned with the objectives of the SEAS Programme?

Primary fishery and aquaculture activities are excluded from the SEAS Call (Section 2.6. of the Guidelines), while processing and distribution of fish aquaculture products are eligible. However, the final assessment of the project's eligibility and its alignment with the SEAS Call will be determined during the assessment process, based on the information and documentation submitted in application.

11. What are the requirements regarding the project's Technology Readiness Level (TRL) and is it possible to apply with a project in which further development and validation of the process would be carried out in cooperation with specalised laboratory?

The projects must have reached at least Technology Readiness Level – TRL 5 at the time of application, which means that the technology has been validated in a relevant environment. Projects at TRL 5 or higher are eligible, if they meet the other eligibility criteria of the Call. Further details on TRL and cooperation criteria are provided in Section 5. of the Guidelines.

12. What are the options for financing the company's private contribution if the company currently does not have sufficient fund available? Is financing through a bank loan or another source of private financing acceptable?

Any source of financing is acceptable, including bank loans and other fund donors, except for grants requested from EU funds or national co-financing resources, as stated in Section 3.3. of the Guidelines.

13. Are costs related to external laboratory analyses, process development and testing, pilot production, equipment purchase and expert services eligible?

Eligible costs under SEAS Call include external expertise and services costs and equipment cost, both reimbursed on a real-cost basis. Costs for external expertise and services that are necessary for the implementation of the Small Project and have clear cross-border added value are eligible, as specified in Section 5.2.5. of the Guidelines. Equipment costs are also eligible, provided that the items are essential and directly related to the implementation of the Small Project, as specified in Section 6.2.6. of the Guidelines.

Furthermore, the technology, service or product development must have reached at least Technology Readiness Level 5 (TRL 5) at the time of application. Activities corresponding to TRL levels below TRL 5 are not eligible.

The eligibility of specific costs will be assessed based on the information provided in the application and in accordance with the rules set out in the Guidelines.

14. Is an advance payment available, or project costs must be pre-financed until the grant is paid?

No advance payments are available. The project operates on a reimbursement principle, meaning that Final Recipients (FRs) must pre-finance all project activities. The costs incurred and paid are reimbursed after the submission and assessment of the project progress report, as stated in Section 3.4. of the Guidelines.

15. Is there an official platform or database for finding an Italian company that could participate in the project as a technological or industrial partner?

Yes, companies can register on the SEAS platform, under the "Partners" section, and search for potential partners. There are already companies registered on the platform that are interested in participating in Small Project and are looking for partners. You can also contact SEAS project team at seas@hamagbicro.com for further assistance in finding a suitable partner.

16. Are there any additional application deadlines after the first deadline, or is it possible to apply in the next deadline of the Call? How cut-off dates work?

The Call has an open application process with multiple assessment cut-off dates. This means that application can be submitted at any time, but those received by each cut-off date will be assessed in the corresponding assessment round. After each assessment round, Call allocation will be reviewed. If the available budget is fully allocated, the Call will be closed and the remaining cut-off dates will not take a place. If funds are still available after the 3rd cut-off date, additional cut-off dates may be announced. Further details are provided in Section 7. of the Guidelines.

17. Can an ice cream manufacturer, considering that it is registered in other business activities, qualify as an eligible Final Recipient in the coastal tourism sector, provided that all other Call requirements are met? Is it necessary to demonstrate existing business operations in the tourism sector, or is the development of a new tourism service also eligible for an enterprise whose main business activity is ice cream production?

According to Section 2.5 of the Guidelines, a Final Recipient (FR) must operate in the blue economy sector and carry out activities related to one or more of the eligible sectors, including coastal tourism. The Guidelines also explicitly require the FR to be registered to carry out the business activity or activities to which its Small Project relates.

Therefore, an ice cream manufacturer may potentially qualify as an eligible FR if it is duly registered to carry out the activities related to the proposed tourism service and the project activities fall within the coastal tourism sector. The eligibility of the FR, project and activities can only be determined during the assessment process.

18. Can the development of the new gastronomic experience service be considered an eligible project output in the coastal tourism sector, given that it combines a local marine ingredient, a production facility and a tourism experience?

Section 6.1. of the Guidelines identifies coastal tourism as an eligible sector and allows the development of business models based on products, services and processes with added value, the development of new services from TRL 5 onwards, and joint pilot actions introducing new business solutions.

Consequently, a newly developed gastronomic experience could potentially qualify as an eligible project output if it constitutes an innovative tourism service within the coastal tourism sector and is developed through substantive cross-border cooperation between the Croatian and Italian FRs. It should demonstrate clear added value beyond the promotion of an existing product or service and involve joint development by both partners, have practical relevance for the participating regions and contribute to the development of new business opportunities. However, the eligibility of the specific activities, objectives and outputs described in the project application will be assessed during the assessment process, considering the requirements set out in the Guidelines.

19. Can ice cream development and sample production be considered eligible components of such a project? Does the exclusion concerning the processing and marketing of agricultural products, as set out in Section 2.6 of the Guidelines, apply to these activities?

Section 6.1. of the Guidelines permits the development of new products and services from TRL 5 onwards, as well as joint pilot actions introducing new products, business solutions and process innovations.

Accordingly, the development and testing of an ice cream recipe and the production of samples could potentially be considered eligible if they are strictly necessary for the development and piloting of the jointly developed tourism service and are not intended to finance ordinary commercial production. Exclusion concerning the processing and marketing of agricultural products, as set out in Section 2.6. of the Guidelines, do not apply to these activities. The eligibility of these activities will be assessed during the assessment process, based on the information provided in the application and the requirement set out in the Guidelines.

20. Are the proposed internationalisation activities eligible for promoting the gastronomic experience and the associated ice cream in new foreign markets? If eligibility differs depending on whether the tourism service or the ice cream as a standalone product is being promoted, we would appreciate clarification of this distinction.

Section 6.1. of the Guidelines explicitly includes activities aimed at entering new markets for jointly developed products and services among which are marketing activities targeting markets outside the Programme area.

Internationalisation activities like targeted marketing campaigns may be eligible if they directly support the introduction of the jointly developed tourism service or product and contribute to cross-border cooperation and access to new markets.

21. Can Google Ads advertising costs and external campaign management services targeting new markets outside the Programme area be funded under the Call? Would the proposed employee training activities also be eligible?

Costs for external expertise and services are eligible if they are necessary for the implementation of cross-border activities planned in the Small Project as stated in Section 6.2.5. of the Guidelines. The eligibility of the specific services listed above, including Google Ads and employee training activities, will be assessed during the assessment process of the application, considering the planned project activities and the eligibility set out in the Guidelines.

22. How does the TRL requirement apply to a project of this nature? Is the readiness level of the ice cream and the tourism service assessed separately, and what evidence would be required to demonstrate the TRL of the gastronomic experience?

Section 6.1. of the Guidelines establishes that joint cross-border technology, service and product development must start from TRL 5 onwards to be an eligible activity.

For the proposed project, the application should describe the current maturity of the proposed gastronomic experience. Its eligibility will be assessed during the assessment process, considering information provided in application and the eligibility requirements set out in the Guidelines.

23. Can a company based in Veneto region – Verona be a partner in SEAS Small project?

No. According to Section 2.3. of the Guidelines, only Italian provinces of Venezia, Padova and Rovigo are eligible within Veneto region. Therefore, a company based in Verona is not eligible to participate as a partner in the SEAS Small Project.

24. Eligibility criteria: it is specified that Final Recipient Beneficiaries must have at least 1 full-time employee during last fiscal year. Can we count SME owners and administrators? What supporting documentation need to be provided to assess this requirement?

An SME owner or administrators can be counted towards the 1 FTE requirement if they are employed by the applicant company basis and receive a salary. If they are employed elsewhere and only perform the duties of an administrator in the applicant company, they cannot be counted. This requirement can be verified through the company's annual financial report. If it cannot be verified through the annual financial report, additional supporting documentation demonstrating compliance with this requirement should be provided.

25. In the administrative checks during the application procedure, the document n°4 requests Quotation/Market for external expertise and services costs and equipment costs. Does this mean that evidence of the quotation must be demonstrated when applying or is it something we can plan in the application form and then carry out during the project implementation?

Yes, quotations or market price offers must be submitted at the application stage, as they will serve as the basis for the proposed project activities and budget and help demonstrate that the estimated costs reflect market prices. Final Recipients are not required to purchase the equipment or services from the suppliers who provided the quotations submitted with the application. But the actual purchases must remain consistent with the planned project

activities and budget, and the equipment or services must correspond to the intended purpose and scope of the approved costs.

26. Can the purchase of electric bicycles, aimed at modernising guided cycling tour services and electric bicycle rental services within a national park, be eligible for funding as part of an innovative cross-border project with an Italian partner?

The SEAS Call supports projects within the blue economy that introduce innovative products, services or technologies from TRL 5 or bringing to the market already developed innovative products, services or technologies. All proposed activities and expenditures must be related to the blue economy and comply with the eligibility requirements set out in Guidelines. The eligibility of the specific equipment will be assessed during the assessment process, based on the information provided in application and the requirements set out in the Guidelines.

27. What eligibility requirements must a VAT registered craft business (obrt u sustavu PDV-a) meet?

VAT- registered craft businesses are eligible to apply if they meet all the eligibility criteria set out in Chapter 2. Eligibility of Applicants, of the Guidelines. Applicants are advised to consult the Guidelines for SMEs as Final Recipients for the complete list of eligibility criteria and applicable conditions.

28. We kindly ask you to clarify whether the purchase of the following equipment for the purposes of green mobility within a coastal tourism project would be considered an eligible cost: electric bicycles (e-bikes), electric scooters, electric quad bike (ATV), a small electric two-seater vehicle (L-category). Would such equipment qualify as eligible equipment costs and are there any restrictions on the purchase of vehicles subject to registration (e.g. quad bikes and small electric vehicles)?

The purchase of equipment is eligible only if the items are essential and directly related to the implementation of the Small Project. As stated in Section 6.2.6. of the Guidelines, the equipment must be necessary for carrying out the planned cross-border activities and demonstrate clear cross-border added value. Equipment that does not meet these conditions is not eligible for funding. The eligibility of the specific equipment listed above, including vehicles subject to registration, will be assessed during the assessment process of the application, considering the planned project activities and the eligibility set out in the Guidelines.

29. Is the full purchase cost eligible or only the depreciation costs incurred during the project implementation period?

As stated in Section 6.2.6. of the Guidelines, depreciation costs are not eligible. The full purchase cost of eligible equipment can be claimed under the Small Project.

30. Is the cost of the corresponding charging station / charging equipment also eligible?

See answer to Question 27.

31. Is renting (leasing) also eligible instead of purchasing?

Renting/leasing costs for equipment are not eligible under the SEAS Call.

32. Are there any conditions regarding the use of equipment (exclusively for project activities, durability, ownership after the end of the project) and are there any State aid rules (de minimis) applicable to this cost?

As stated in Section 6.2.6 of the Guidelines, the equipment must be essential and directly related to the implementation of the Small Project and necessary for carrying out the planned cross-border activities. The durability and ownership requirements are set out in Section 5.6. of the Guidelines. Regarding State aid, support is granted under Article 20 of the General Block Exemption Regulation (GBER), not under the *de minimis* aid rules.

33. Should the table "State aid granted" in the declaration list: a) only State aid (e.g. aid granted under the GBER), or b) both State aid and de minimis aid? The table and totals refer to "State aid", and de minimis aid is mentioned separately in point 3 of the declaration. However, Chapter 4 of the Guidelines states that "the applicants must report any support granted or applied for within the State-aid declaration", so we would like to confirm which approach is correct. If de minimis aid should be included, please also confirm the reference period (e.g. the last three years).

Applicants must declare all State aid received, including aid granted under the GBER and de minimis aid, during the last three years.

34. The Call lists "Processing and distribution of fish and aquaculture products" as one of the nine eligible sectors, while the list of unacceptable activities lists primary fisheries and aquaculture and ANNEX II Checklist for eligibility criteria states in their exclusion

criteria the following: "*3.1. Small Project containing development of the following activities: fishery and aquaculture, primary production, processing and marketing of agricultural products listed in Annex I to the Treaty, or the establishment and operation of a distribution network towards third countries or Member States and do not belong to the one or more blue economy sector representing the target economic sectors of SEAS (see Chapter 6.1. of the GfA)*". Please confirm that the exclusion refers to primary production, and that the processing of fishery/aquaculture products is acceptable in this Call.

Yes, processing and distribution of fish and aquaculture products are eligible sectors under the SEAS Call for Small Project proposals. As is stated in Section 2.6. of the Guidelines primary fishery and aquaculture are not eligible, as well as primary production, processing and marketing of agricultural products. The overall eligibility of the Small Project and its activities will be assessed during the assessment process.

35. Can the costs related to the financial guarantee (fideiussione for IT partner) required upon signing the contract be included in External expertise and services?

No, the costs related to the financial guarantee (fideiussione) required upon signing the contract are not eligible and cannot be included under External expertise and services budget category.

36. The SEAS Guidelines specify the supporting documentation to be submitted for each Final Recipient, while the application platform refers to certain documents as needing to be signed and scanned in PDF format. Could you please clarify whether the following documents need to be additionally signed and/or stamped by the Final Recipient's legally authorised representative before uploading, or whether the original/official documents in PDF format are sufficient:

- **Application Form;**
- **Tax Administration Certificate / DURC;**
- **annual financial report for the previous year and confirmation of receipt/submission;**
- **company register extract, where applicable;**

In particular, we would appreciate confirmation whether the wording "signed and scanned in PDF format" on the application platform applies to all documents listed there, or only to documents and declarations prepared by the applicants themselves.

For the Application Form specifically, could you also please confirm whether the entire Application Form needs to be signed and stamped, or whether it is sufficient to sign and stamp only the relevant Partnership Statement section(s) indicated in the Call documentation?

The Application Form must be submitted in Excel format. The entire Application Form must also be submitted in PDF format signed, stamped and scanned. The Joint Statement and State-aid declaration must also be completed, signed, stamped and scanned in PDF format.

The Tax Administration Certificate/DURC, annual financial report and company register extract doesn't need to be signed, stamped and scanned by the FRs.

37. Are the costs of materials and consumables needed to build a prototype (e.g. raw materials, components and process consumables) eligible under the Call? If so, under which cost category should they be budgeted?

The costs of materials and consumables needed to build a prototype may be eligible, provided that the minimum TRL 5 requirement is met at the time of application and that the costs are directly related to and necessary for the implementation of the Small Project. These costs may be budgeted under the Equipment cost category if they comply with Section 6.2.5. of the Guidelines. However, the eligibility of the specific costs will be assessed during the application assessment process, considering the planned project activities and the eligibility set out in the Guidelines.

38. SME Classification in the Joint Statement (Annex I, Reg. EU 651/2014 / Rec. 2003/361/EC, Art. 3). Could you please confirm whether our reporting approach is correct:

- **Holdings < 25%: Entities where the shareholding is strictly below 25% (with no control agreements) are considered autonomous and do not need to be reported in Table 2 or Table 4.**
- **Holdings between 25% and 50%: Must be reported exclusively in Table 4 (Partner companies) on a pro-rata basis.**
- **Holdings > 50%: Only subsidiaries exceeding 50% (or with dominant influence) must be reported in Table 2 (Linked companies) at 100%.**

Yes, your understanding is correct.

39. Digital Signatures - Are Italian eIDAS-compliant digital signatures accepted instead of a handwritten signature and stamp? If so, does the platform accept .p7m files, or must documents strictly remain in .pdf format?

Digital signatures are accepted. Applicants must also provide the documents in PDF format. Both the digitally signed files and corresponding PDF documents should be included in a ZIP folder when submitting the application.

40. We would appreciate clarification on two cost eligibility matters:

- **Equipment costs: is the purchase of materials and components required to build the prototype eligible under this category? Are there any distinctions or limitations between construction materials, components incorporated into the prototype and equipment used to build or test it?**
- **External expertise and services: are project management and dissemination activities entrusted to an external organisation, separate from the project partners, throughout project implementation eligible under this category? Are there any specific conditions or limitations?**

Equipment costs: The costs of materials and consumables needed to build a prototype may be eligible, provided that the minimum TRL 5 requirement is met at the time of application and that the costs are directly related to and necessary for the implementation of the Small Project. The eligibility of the specific costs will be assessed during the application assessment process, considering the planned project activities and the eligibility set out in the Guidelines.

External expertise and services: External project management services may be included under external expertise and services cost category, if they comply with Section 6.2.5. of the Guidelines. These services must be necessary for the implementation of cross-border activities planned by FRs. Please note that at least one FR's employee must be involved in the implementation of the Small Project under the Staff costs category, and the list of personnel who will work on the Small Project must be submitted with the application. Applicants must also budget 20% of the direct costs (real costs) to the Staff costs category as stated in Section 6.2.2. of the Guidelines.