



3rd Call for Blue Challenges/Blue Schools

In the framework of the project

EnLIGHTening future Schools to deliver BLUE Sustainability in
Europe

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1. Introduction

This call for proposals is launched under the BlueLightS – EnLIGHTening future Schools to deliver BLUE Sustainability in Europe project, funded by the European Union under the Horizon Europe Programme.

The main aim of BlueLightS is to enhance Ocean and Water Literacy in schools by engaging children and young people in the EU Blue School programme and the [EU Mission: Restore our Ocean and Waters](#) (hereafter referred to as *Mission Ocean & Water*).

The Mission Ocean & Water aims to address the degradation of oceans, seas, rivers, and inland waters caused by human activities, including climate change, pollution, and unsustainable resource use. Its objectives include:

- protecting and restoring ecosystems
- preventing and reducing pollution
- supporting a sustainable blue economy

Achieving these goals depends strongly on education and awareness. In this context, the [Network of European Blue Schools](#) (NEBS), developed under the EU4Ocean Coalition, plays a key role.

The NEBS connects schools, organisations, and initiatives that promote ocean literacy. Schools are encouraged to implement a “Find the Blue” project, linking learning activities to ocean and water topics. By successfully completing their project and sharing results, schools can receive the European Blue School label.

This call defines the conditions for funding Blue Challenges projects, supporting schools to design and implement such initiatives.

2. Objectives, activities and topics

2.1. Objectives of the call for Blue Challenges/Blue Schools

The call aims to:

1. Support the development of impactful school projects that contribute to the Mission Ocean & Water and strengthen the Network of European Blue Schools (NEBS)
2. Encourage participation from a diverse range of schools (coastal and inland, primary, secondary, and vocational, including schools for students with disabilities)
3. Promote collaboration between schools, including through **eTwinning**

Priority will be given to projects that:

- Are **innovative and inspiring**, and can serve as examples for other schools
- Address key **regional challenges** (e.g. pollution in the Mediterranean, ecosystem protection in the Atlantic or Danube regions, sustainable aquaculture in the Baltic, etc.)

- Contribute to the **experimentation activities** of the BlueLightS project in the following countries: France, Portugal, Croatia, Greece, Spain, Finland, Sweden, Ireland, and Romania

2.2. What types of projects can be submitted

The call supports projects that promote Ocean and Water Literacy in primary and secondary education (including vocational schools).

Each project must:

- Contribute to the objectives of the EU Mission “Restore our ocean and waters by 2030”
- Support and strengthen the Network of European Blue Schools (NEBS)
- Schools must either already be a European Blue School or apply to become one. You may check the mandatory and optional criteria on how to become a European Blue School [here](#)¹
- Promote **collaborative learning**, including through eTwinning
- Actively involve students, teachers, school leaders, and (where relevant) the wider school community

Projects should be practical, engaging, and clearly linked to learning activities.

2.3. Who is eligible to apply

The call is open to:

- Primary and secondary schools (including vocational education and training – VET, up to ISCED level 3)
- Located in EU Member States or countries associated with [Horizon Europe](#)

Applications must be submitted by the **school as a legal entity** (not by individuals). However, schools are encouraged to involve:

- students
- teachers
- school leadership
- and, where relevant, external stakeholders

in the design of the project.

¹ The 5 mandatory criteria for a school to become a European Blue School are:

1. Develop a project with interlinked activities
2. Produce a clear output
3. Involve all students
4. Collaborate with a local partner
5. Communicate project results

For further information, you may visit the Network of European Blue Schools website [here](#).

2.4. What topics should be addressed in the projects

Projects must address **at least one** of the following topics (maximum three):

- Pollution/plastics / microplastics
- Ocean/water ecosystem conservation
- Initiatives about carbon neutrality and positive environmental impact
- Sustainable aquaculture
- Fresh water conservation
- Freshwater Protected Areas
- Climate change literacy
- The European Ocean Coalition (EU4Ocean) - each European is a citizen of our ocean and waters
- Marine Protected areas
- Using ecosystem-based services and nature-based solutions to protect the coast and seas
- Protecting European rivers, lakes and aquiferous horizon
- Ending destructive fishing practices, e.g. overfishing
- Reduce pesticides in seas and waters / tackling micro pollution – zero spill
- Reduce underwater noise pollution
- Sustainable shipping
- Promoting renewable ocean energy
- Sustainable fish consumption
- Blue biotechnology
- Sustainable ports and marinas
- Active citizenship, awareness raising campaign
- Sustainable coastal tourism/water sports
- Coastal hazards
- Biodiversity

or

- Other linked to the Mission Ocean & Water's objectives

2.5. Duration of the projects

Projects must have a duration of:

- **Minimum:** 2 months
- **Maximum:** 3 months
- Projects should be designed to fit within this timeframe and demonstrate realistic planning.

3. Funding call timeline and budget

3.1. Timeline

- **Call opening:** 15 April 2026
- **Submission deadline:** 18 September 2026, 17:00 CET
- **Evaluation period:** 21 September – 20 November 2026
- **Announcement of results:** 1 December 2026
- **Contract signing:** 2 December 2026 – 31 January 2027
- **Project implementation:** 1 February – 30 April 2027
- **Final reports & payments:** by 31 May 2027

3.2. Available budget

The total budget of the BlueLightS Blue Challenges scheme is **€325,000**, distributed across three calls.

For this 3rd Call:

- **Available budget:** €151,436
- **Expected number of funded projects:** approximately 45–50
- **Maximum grant per project:** €3,000

The requested budget may be lower or higher than €3,000; however, the **maximum grant awarded will not exceed €3,000**. The final awarded amount may be lower than requested, based on the evaluation results and in order to ensure a balanced distribution of funds.

At the time of publication, the distribution of the budget across countries is as follows:

Country	Total budget (€)	1st Call (€)	2nd Call (€)	Remaining for 3rd Call (€)
Spain	16.250	6000	6000	4250
Portugal	16.250	5780	6000	4470
Croatia	16.250	1780	9000	5470
Finland	16.250	5568	6000	4682

Romania	16.250	3000	9000	4250
France	16.250	3000	9000	4250
Greece	16.250	6000	6000	4250
Ireland	16.250	6000	6000	4250
Sweden	16.250	0	0	16.250
Other countries	178.750	12.000	67.436	99.314
TOTAL BUDGET	325.000	49.128	124.436	151.436

The table above presents the indicative allocation of the budget across countries. It should be noted that:

- The figures represent maximum available amounts per country, not fixed allocations per project.
- Schools may apply for a **grant of up to €3,000**, regardless of the country.
- Depending on the available budget in each country, it may be possible to fund:
 - one project, or
 - more than one project with adjusted budgets

As a result:

- The number of projects funded per country will depend on the **remaining available budget at the time of selection**.
- The grant awarded to each project may be **lower than the requested amount**, in order to optimise the use of available funds.
- Any unallocated funds may be redistributed to the **highest-quality proposals**, based on the evaluation results and the decision of the Selection Committee.

For more details, please refer to Section 5 – Financial provisions.

4. Eligibility conditions

4.1. Eligible beneficiaries

To be eligible, applicants must:

- Be a **school with legal status** (public or private), officially recognised by the relevant national authority

- Provide **formal primary or secondary education** (including vocational education and training – VET), up to **ISCED level 3**
- Be established and operating in an **EU Member State** or a **country associated with [Horizon Europe](#)**
- Applications must be submitted by the **school as a legal entity**, through a representative (e.g. teacher, school principal, or authorised staff member).

Additional notes

- Schools that are part of a **cluster or group** may apply **individually**, provided they have their own legal personality
- Multiple schools from the same cluster may apply, as long as each school submits a **separate application**
- The applicant must be an **employee of the school**

Eligible countries

Applicants must be established in one of the following:

- EU-27 Member States
- Horizon Europe associated countries, including: Albania, Armenia, Bosnia and Herzegovina, Canada, Egypt, Faroe Islands, Georgia, Iceland, Israel, Korea, Kosovo, Moldova, Montenegro, New Zealand, North Macedonia, Norway, Serbia, Switzerland, Tunisia, Turkey, the United Kingdom, and Ukraine

Network of European Blue Schools (NEBS)

Applicants must:

- Be already a **member of the Network of European Blue Schools (NEBS)**, OR
- Commit to applying to the Network **no later than the final month of project implementation**

Applicants are encouraged to review the **5 mandatory criteria** of the NEBS before applying [here](#).

4.2. Consortia

Proposals may be submitted either:

- by a **single school**, or
- by a **consortium of two or more schools from the same country**

In the case of a consortium:

- All participating schools must meet the **eligibility criteria**
- One school must act as the **applicant (coordinator)**
- The other schools participate as **partners**
- The applicant school is responsible for submitting the proposal and managing communication with the project team.

4.3. Eligible applications

To be considered eligible, applications must:

- Be submitted between **15 April and 18 September 2026 (17:00 CET)**
- Be submitted **electronically** via the official application form on the BlueLightS website

- Present projects that **have not already been funded** under:
 - the BlueLightS previous Calls
 - the PROBLEU or SHORE projects
- Only complete applications submitted before the deadline will be evaluated.

4.4. Eligible activities:

Projects may include one or more of the following activities:

- **Study visits and field trips** - Educational visits and outdoor learning activities
- **Development or upgrading of laboratories** - Creating or improving school facilities for learning activities
- **Educational events** - Workshops, lectures, student projects, or school events
- **Student involvement activities** - Participation in workshops, conferences, exhibitions, field trips, virtual activities, or similar initiatives
- **In-classroom lessons** - Development of teaching materials and activities across school subjects
- **Practical learning outside the classroom** - Activities using hands-on or citizen science approaches
- **Research-based activities** - Simple research activities, experiments, or data collection and analysis
- **Communication and dissemination** - Activities to share project results within the school and the wider community
- **Competitions** - Participation in or organisation of competitions related to ocean and water literacy
- **Twinning activities** - Collaboration with other schools (e.g. via eTwinning)
- **Open schooling activities** - Collaboration with local communities or external stakeholders
- **Participation in training and events** - Attendance in relevant educational or professional development activities

Projects are encouraged to combine different types of activities in a coherent way.

4.5. Exclusion

Applicants must declare that all information provided in the application is **accurate, complete, and truthful**, and that they comply with the eligibility criteria.

A grant will not be awarded to applicants who:

- Are in an **exclusion situation**, as defined in the Declaration of Honour
- Have provided **false or misleading information**, or failed to provide required information

- Were involved in the preparation of the call documents in a way that could **distort competition or create unfair advantage**

If any of the above situations is identified, the application will be rejected.

5. Financial Provisions

The grant is provided as a **lump sum (fixed amount)**.

The **maximum grant per project is €3,000**.

The overall distribution of the budget across countries is presented in Section 3.2. These amounts represent the **maximum available budget per country across the three calls** and do not constitute fixed allocations per project.

Applicants may request a grant of up to €3,000. However, the **final awarded amount may be lower than requested**, depending on the evaluation results, the justification of costs, and the need to ensure an efficient use of the available budget.

Applicants must submit a **simple and realistic budget**, based on the estimated costs necessary to implement the proposed activities. The proposed budget should be clearly linked to and proportionate with the project activities.

The consortium reserves the right to **reduce the requested budget** where:

- the costs are not sufficiently justified; or
- the requested amount is not proportionate to the scope of the project

5.1. Eligible costs

To be eligible, costs must:

- Be **necessary for the implementation of the project**
- Be clearly linked to the **activities described in the proposal**
- Be incurred during the **project implementation period**

Below are the main categories of eligible costs (examples are indicative, not exhaustive):

Table 1. Eligible costs

Cost category	Examples of expenses
Travel and accommodation	• Travel, accommodation, and subsistence costs for: ○ students, teachers, and school staff ○ invited experts or professionals

	• Visits to museums, laboratories, research centres, exhibitions, or similar venues • Participation of teachers/staff in relevant training or events
Cost of equipment	Purchase or rental of equipment necessary for project activities, such as: • laboratory equipment • digital or photographic equipment • specialised software • materials for educational or creative activities
Other goods, works or services	• Registration fees for training courses or conferences • Organisation of events (e.g. room rental, audiovisual equipment, catering, printing) • Purchase of educational materials (books, software, supplies) • Communication and dissemination costs (e.g. social media, printing, events, competitions) • Consumables needed for project activities • Translation services • Production of videos, graphics, or communication materials
Subcontracting	• External services may be subcontracted where necessary Maximum subcontracting allowed: 30% of the requested lump sum

Non-eligible costs

The following costs are **not eligible**:

- Personnel costs (salaries or fees of staff already employed by the school)
- Purchase or rental of real estate

5.2. Payment arrangements and conditions

The grant is paid as a lump sum linked to the completion of activities.

Payments are made in two instalments:

- **Pre-financing (50%)** upon contract signature
- **Final payment (50%)** after completion of the project and approval of the final report

Important:

If the project **is not fully implemented as agreed**, the beneficiary may be required to **return part of the grant**, corresponding to activities not completed.

Payments will be made in **Euro** to the bank account of the applicant school.

The **legal representative** of the school will sign the contract and is responsible for the proper implementation of the project.

6. Award Criteria

Eligible applications will be evaluated with a maximum score of **100 points**.

To be considered for funding, proposals must:

- Reach a minimum of **70/100 points overall**, and
- Meet the minimum threshold in each criterion:
 - **Relevance:** 21/35
 - **Quality:** 18/30
 - **Impact:** 21/35
- Each application will be evaluated by **two independent evaluators** selected by the BlueLightS consortium.

Applications are assessed across three main criteria:

Table 2. Award criteria

Relevance (Maximum 35 points, threshold: 21 points)	• The proposal clearly addresses Mission Ocean & Water (sea/river basin), including citizen participation, engagement, and education (max. 4 points) • Objectives are clear, realistic, and aligned with the proposed activities (max. 4 points) • Integrates 21st century skills (e.g. critical thinking, collaboration, creativity, digital literacy, social responsibility) (max. 4 points) • Reflects EU values (e.g. inclusion, equality, active citizenship, diversity) (max. 4 points) • Includes collaboration and/or twinning with other schools, in particular within the NEBS (max. 5 points) • Demonstrates a credible approach to sustainability (e.g. circularity, environmental impact) (max. 4 points) • Proposal shows originality or creative approach (max. 5 points) • Activities have the potential to inspire other schools within the NEBS (max. 5 points)
Quality (Maximum 30 points, threshold: 18 points)	• The project addresses one or more topics stated in the call (max. 3 points) • Activities are appropriate to achieve the project objectives (max. 3 points) • Promotes Ocean and Water Literacy among students and the school community (max. 3 points) • Includes a coherent set of complementary actions connected by a central theme (e.g. exploration, plus fieldwork, plus art or lab activities, plus presentation of findings) (max. 3 points)

	• Roles and responsibilities are clearly defined (max. 2 points) • Project management and organisation are sound (max. 2 points) • Risks are identified with mitigation measures (max. 2 points) • The work plan is feasible, realistic and clear (max. 2 points) • Expected results are clear and meaningful (max. 2 points) • The project will produce outcomes (events organized, purchase of equipment, resources developed, etc.) with measurable outputs e.g. knowledge gained, involvement and engagement, capacity building (max. 2 points) • The planned activities can be integrated into the school curricula and school activities, i.e. will add new resources to existing curricula and/or introduce new topics (max. 3 points) • Encourages the collaboration beyond the classroom, allowing teachers from different disciplines, age groups and subjects to work together (max. 3 points)
Impact (Maximum 35 points, threshold: 21 points)	• The proposal demonstrates active involvement of students in key project activities (max. 4 points) • Shows potential for long-term impact and contribution to the Mission Ocean & Water objectives (max. 5 points) • Demonstrates potential for wider impact at local (community) level (max. 5 points) • Involves experts such as marine scientists, NGOs, science centers, maritime companies or government bodies (max. 5 points) • The school is from isolated and/or low populated region in Europe (max. 3 points) • Involves students with fewer opportunities (e.g. socio-economic difficulties, disabilities, migrant background) (max. 3 points) • Demonstrates impact within the school community (students, teachers, parents) (max. 5 points) • Results will be shared and used (e.g. communication, dissemination activities) (max. 5 points)

- Proposals that do not reach the required thresholds will not be considered for funding.
- The final grant amount may be **lower than requested**, depending on the evaluation results and the available budget.

7. The submission process

Applications must be submitted online via the project website:

<https://blue-lights.eu/grant-for-schools/>

The application form includes:

1. Administrative information about the school and contact person
2. Description of the proposed project and activities
3. Estimated project budget
4. Declaration on Honour (eligibility and exclusion criteria)

Important information

- Applications must be submitted in **English**
- The deadline for submission is:
18 September 2026 (17:00 CET)
- Questions can be submitted via email to:
grants@blue-lights.eu
- A **FAQ section** will be available on the website
- Only applications submitted before the deadline and in the correct format will be evaluated.
- The maximum grant per project is €3,000.

8. The selection process

Following the eligibility check, all applications will be subject to a qualitative evaluation based on the award criteria described in Section 6.

Each proposal will be evaluated independently by two evaluators, using a scoring system out of 100 points. The evaluation process will be coordinated by the Selection Committee, which will ensure the consistency and soundness of the assessment.

After the individual evaluations, the Selection Committee will organise a debrief session with the evaluators in order to review the results, ensure consistency in scoring, and discuss any significant deviations. A final ranking list of all eligible applications will then be established based on the scores obtained.

The list of selected applications will be determined by the Selection Committee, taking into account:

- the overall ranking of proposals based on the evaluation results;
- the available budget per country;
- in the case of proposals with the same final score, priority will be given to the proposal with the higher score in the Impact criterion.

The consortium reserves the right to reduce the requested budget where the proposed costs are not sufficiently justified or are not proportionate to the planned activities. All grants will be awarded as lump sums.

The results of the call will be published on the BlueLightS project website and may also be disseminated through other communication channels. The published information will include the title and a short description of the selected projects, the duration, and the name and country of the beneficiary.

8.1. Notification of selected projects

The results of the call will be announced on 1 December 2026.

Following the announcement, the results will be published on the BlueLightS website and may also be communicated through other relevant channels.

The published results will include:

- a list of approved projects;
- a reserve list of eligible projects that could not be funded due to budget limitations;
- a list of non-approved projects.

All applicants will receive an evaluation report summarising the assessment of their proposal, including scores and brief comments on strengths and areas for improvement. This feedback aims to ensure transparency of the selection process.

Successful applicants will receive further instructions regarding the acceptance of the grant, the contract signature, and the implementation and reporting requirements.

9. Visibility

Beneficiaries shall acknowledge the support of the European Union in all communication and dissemination activities related to the funded project.

In particular, they shall display the European Union emblem and include the appropriate disclaimer on all outputs produced within the framework of the project. Beneficiaries are also expected to use the BlueLightS visual identity and, where relevant, the Mission Ocean & Water communication materials.

Detailed communication guidelines will be provided to the selected beneficiaries.

10. Processing of Personal Data

In order to submit an application, applicants are required to provide certain personal data (such as name and contact details). These data will be processed in accordance with Regulation (EU) 2016/679 (General Data Protection Regulation – GDPR).

Unless otherwise indicated, personal data collected in the context of this call will be processed solely for the purpose of evaluating applications and managing the selection process.

11. GDPR information clause

In accordance with Articles 13 and 14 of the GDPR, the following information is provided:

Data controller

The controller responsible for the processing of personal data is IDEC.

Address: Iroon Polytechniou 96, 18536 Piraeus, Greece

Email: info@idec.gr

Data Protection Officer (DPO)

Name: Grigoris Chatziantoniou

Email: grigoris@idec.gr

Tel: +30 210 4286227

Purpose and legal basis

Personal data are collected and processed for the purpose of evaluating applications and managing the call. Failure to provide the required data will prevent the processing of the application.

Data retention

Personal data will be stored only for the period necessary to fulfil the purposes of the call and to comply with applicable legal obligations.

Recipients of data

Personal data may be shared with authorised service providers, public authorities, or other entities legally entitled to receive such data. Data may also be shared with administrators of related funding schemes (e.g. SHORE and ProBleu) for the purpose of preventing double funding.

Rights of data subjects

Applicants have the right to access, rectify, or erase their personal data, as well as the right to restrict or object to processing, in accordance with the GDPR. Personal data will not be subject to automated decision-making or profiling.

For any questions regarding data protection, applicants may contact the Data Protection Officer.