



INTERREG ITALY-CROATIA  
Programme 2021 – 2027

# Smart and innovative blue skills for competitive blue economy MareSkill

D.2.2.3. Report on conducted 4 pilot courses



[www.italy-croatia.eu/web/mareskill](http://www.italy-croatia.eu/web/mareskill)



### Project identification

Project id: ITHR0200456

Name of the lead partner organization: Veleučilište u Šibeniku

Name of the lead partner organization in English: Polytechnic of Šibenik

Project title: Smart and Innovative Blue Skills for Competitive Blue Economy

Project acronym: MareSkill

Programme priority: Sustainable growth in the Blue Economy

Specific objective 1.2.: Developing skills for smart specialization, industrial transition and entrepreneurship

Project duration in months: 30

Work package: WP2 Implementation of pilot courses

Activity title: Activity 2.2 Implementation of pilot courses in blue skill education

Delivery period: Period 4, 19 - 24

Activity description: The report from conducted pilot courses in which previously developed education materials for new educational methods was developed will contain all the gathered stakeholders' feedback, information, and conclusions from this activity.

Partner responsible: VUS

Dissemination level: Public

Status: Final

Version: 1

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## 1. Introduction

The MareSkill project, carried out under the Interreg Italy–Croatia Programme, aims to enhance skills development in key sectors of the Blue Economy by promoting cross-border cooperation among higher education institutions, innovation ecosystems, and industry stakeholders.

Within Work Package 2, partners jointly carried out pilot training programs under Output 2.1 – Jointly implemented pilot courses for upskilling and reskilling in the Blue Economy. These pilot activities serve as the practical validation of newly developed micro-credential curricula designed to meet emerging needs in sustainability, digital transformation, aquaculture management, innovation commercialization, and nautical tourism.

By bringing together participants from Croatia and Italy in academic, innovation-driven, and industry-focused environments, MareSkill transformed strategic educational development into tangible learning experiences that meet the changing needs of marine and coastal sectors.



## 2. Development of MareSkill Micro-Credential Programmes

Within the MareSkill project, seven specialized micro-credential programs were created to fill identified skill gaps in the Blue Economy. Each program was developed by a designated project partner, ensuring expertise in the theme and relevance to the sector.

The program “Sustainable Practices in Nautical Tourism with Emphasis on Skippers and Environmental Protection” was created by the University of Zadar (PP2 UNIZD) and centers on enhancing environmental awareness, operational responsibility, and professional skills within the nautical tourism industry.

“Sustainable Environmental Protection in Coastal and Marine Areas” was collaboratively developed by Veleučilište u Šibeniku (LP1 VUS) and PP7 OGS, offering practical knowledge in marine ecosystem monitoring, environmental laws, and hands-on conservation methods.

The program “Sustainability and Digitalization in the Blue Economy” was developed by the University of Trieste (PP8 UNITS) and incorporates digital technologies, environmental monitoring tools, and maritime decarbonization strategies to address cross-cutting sustainability challenges.

“Digital and Circular Transformation in the Blue Economy” was created by the Croatian Chamber of Economy (PP6 CCE) and provides participants with skills related to digital innovation, circular business models, and strategic transformation processes within blue economy industries.

The program “Quality Aquaculture - Management and Sustainable Practices” was created by the University of Bari “Aldo Moro” – Department of Veterinary Medicine (UNIBA) and Regional Agency for Technology and Innovation-Puglia (PP6 ARTI) and focuses on sustainable aquaculture production, certification systems, technological innovation, and sector collaboration.

“Essentials of Technology Transfer and Commercialization” was developed by the University of Rijeka-Faculty of Biotechnology and Drug Development (PP3 UNIRI) and concentrates on intellectual property management, technology evaluation, and commercialization strategies relevant to Blue Economy value chains.

Finally, “Blue Horizon Accelerator for Next-Gen Economies” was established by Fondazione Fenice NGO & VET (PP5 FF) and promotes entrepreneurial skills, innovation management, and funding strategy development tailored to marine and coastal industries.





Together, these programs create a cohesive educational portfolio aligned with the European Qualifications Framework and organized as modular micro-credentials. While each program focuses on a specific thematic area, they all work together to enhance sustainability, innovation capacity, and entrepreneurial skills within the Blue Economy.





### 3. Pilot Implementation of Selected Programmes

By March 2026, five MareSkill micro-credential programs had been launched through pilot initiatives in Croatia and Italy, surpassing the minimum target of four jointly implemented pilot courses. These activities represent the first structured validation cycle of the newly developed educational materials and teaching methodologies.

The program “Sustainability and Digitalization in the Blue Economy” was held from July 20, 2025, to July 26, 2025, in Trieste, Italy, and organized by the University of Trieste (PP8 UNITS) as part of the Summer School iNEST 2025. Throughout this intensive week, participants attended lectures, workshops, and practical discussions focused on sustainable maritime systems and digital innovation in coastal environments.





The programmes “Essentials of Technology Transfer and Commercialization” and “Blue Horizon Accelerator for Next-Gen Economies” took place from October 14 to October 18, 2025, in Šibenik, Croatia, during InnovaMare Academy 3.0 organized by LP1 VUS in collaboration with the Digital Innovation Hub Innovamare (DIH Innovamare) and project partners.





The pilot delivery of “Essentials of Technology Transfer and Commercialization” was led by the University of Rijeka (PP3 UNIRI), while “Blue Horizon Accelerator for Next-Gen Economies” was carried out by Fondazione Fenice (PP5 FF). These activities included mentoring sessions, business modeling exercises, and structured presentations aimed at strengthening innovation management and entrepreneurial skills within blue economy sectors.

The program “Quality Aquaculture – Management and Sustainable Practices” took place from October 28 to October 30, 2025, in Bari, Italy, organized by the Regional Agency for Technology, Technology Transfer, and Innovation - Puglia (PP6 ARTI) in collaboration with the University of Bari.





The training covered sustainability standards, certification systems, and operational practices in aquaculture through direct engagement with sector-specific realities.

The program “Sustainable Practices in Nautical Tourism with Emphasis on Skippers and Environmental Protection” was held from 22 October 2025 to 24 October 2025, in Biograd na Moru, Croatia, during the Biograd Boat Show. The course was led by the University of Zadar (PP2 UNIZD) and gave participants a hands-on industry experience, where theoretical discussions were paired with observing marina infrastructure and nautical operations.



In addition to its implementation in Šibenik, Croatia, the “Blue Horizon Accelerator for Next-Gen Economies” curriculum was subsequently delivered from 5 November 2025 to 7 November 2025 in Padua, Italy, and organised by Fondazione Fenice (PP5 FF). This second implementation further demonstrated the adaptability of the developed curriculum across different institutional and professional settings, confirming its flexibility and relevance beyond the initial pilot environment.



Pilot implementation showed that the developed curricula work well in different learning settings. By combining organized academic discussions with hands-on, practice-based elements, the programs allowed participants to analyze blue economy challenges while linking learning directly to





real-world situations. The use of mentoring, teamwork, and experiential activities encouraged active involvement and improved practical skills.

The pilot phase further confirmed the flexibility of the micro-credential model. Selected programs were successfully delivered in various institutional settings, demonstrating that the curricula maintain their coherence and learning outcomes across different environments.



## 4. Stakeholder Feedback and Validation Outcomes

During the pilot implementation phase, feedback was gathered systematically from participants, lecturers, and involved stakeholders. Evaluation surveys, closing reflections, and informal discussions offered valuable insights into the effectiveness of the newly developed educational methods and materials.

Throughout all pilot activities, 84 participants from 41 different organizations in Croatia and Italy took part in the validation phase. Of these, 49 participants were from Italy, and 35 were from Croatia, showing strong cross-border collaboration and balanced involvement within the region. The organizations involved represented a diverse range, including universities, faculties, research institutes, innovation hubs, public authorities, maritime institutions, tourism organizations, and private sector companies.

Participants consistently emphasized the practical focus of the programs as one of their strongest features. The blend of theoretical fundamentals with hands-on exercises, mentoring sessions, case-based learning, and real-world sector exposure was seen as highly relevant for tackling current challenges in Blue Economy sectors.

Interactive components, especially team-based problem solving and structured pitching sessions, were recognized as effective in enhancing analytical thinking, entrepreneurial skills, and cross-disciplinary collaboration. Stakeholders also highlighted the importance of bringing together participants from academic and professional backgrounds, which promoted knowledge sharing and expanded sectoral viewpoints.

Constructive suggestions mainly focused on extending the duration of practical sessions, increasing networking opportunities, and allowing more time for in-depth thematic exploration. These insights offer valuable guidance for further improving educational methods.

The feedback collected confirms that the developed micro-credential programs are relevant, applicable, and adaptable across various institutional and professional settings.



## 5. Capitalisation and Continuity of Previous Initiatives

The initial implementation of MareSkill training programs was designed as a continuation and strategic advancement of previously established cross-border initiatives in blue innovation and education. Instead of introducing isolated educational efforts, the project leveraged existing cooperation structures, tested methodologies, and built innovation ecosystems across Croatia and Italy.

A clear example of this approach is the organization of InnovaMare Academy 3.0 in Šibenik, Croatia, from October 14 to October 18, 2025. The Academy format, originally developed through earlier innovation-focused initiatives, was reused and further refined to support the implementation of MareSkill micro-credential programs. The project partners, in collaboration with the Digital Innovation Hub Innovamare (DIH Innovamare), integrated the newly developed curricula into a well-established mentoring-based, practice-oriented learning environment. Participants had the opportunity to work in interdisciplinary teams, develop innovation concepts, and present solutions through structured pitching sessions, demonstrating how new educational content can be effectively incorporated into an existing innovation framework.

The capitalisation approach was also evident in Trieste, Italy, from July 20 to July 26, 2025, where the program “Sustainability and Digitalization in the Blue Economy” was conducted as part of the established Summer School iNEST 2025 coordinated by the University of Trieste (PP8 UNITS). By integrating the pilot course into a recognized academic setting, MareSkill broadened cross-border participation and enhanced thematic dialogue between sustainability and digital innovation without duplicating organizational structures.

Throughout all pilot activities, the project depended on previously established cooperation networks linking higher education institutions, innovation actors, and blue economy stakeholders. These networks provided direct engagement with real-world environments, such as aquaculture practices in Bari, Italy, and the nautical industry scene at the Biograd Boat Show in Biograd na Moru, Croatia. Field-based learning, mentoring, and interaction with industry representatives improved the practical aspect of the curricula and increased their relevance beyond the classroom.

Importantly, the developed programs were structured as modular micro-credentials supported by a digital learning environment and digital badge certification. This structure allows the curricula to be reused, adapted, and replicated in different institutional settings. The implementation of the “Blue



Horizon Accelerator for Next-Gen Economies” program in both Šibenik, Croatia, and Padua, Italy, demonstrates this transferability in practice, confirming that the educational model works across diverse organizational environments.

Through the combination of validated training formats, digital certification tools, and cross-border cooperation networks, MareSkill turned previous experience into scalable educational solutions. The partner institutions stay committed to sharing their methodologies, materials, and implementation experiences, ensuring that the developed programs can continue supporting skills development in the Blue Economy beyond the project's duration.



## 6. Conclusions and Future Perspectives

The pilot rollout of MareSkill micro-credential programs confirms the importance and practical benefit of a structured, cross-border approach to upskilling and reskilling in the Blue Economy. By integrating specialized thematic focus with applied learning methods and real-sector engagement, the project has shown that targeted educational efforts can effectively address emerging sustainability and innovation challenges.

The validation phase demonstrated that modular micro-credentials supported by interactive teaching methods offer a flexible and adaptable framework suitable for various institutional settings. The participation of academic institutions, innovation ecosystems, and industry representatives further enhanced the practical aspect of the programs and strengthened their alignment with sector needs.

The experience gained during pilot implementation is not the end of the development process but a foundation for ongoing improvement. Going forward, the developed training portfolio has the potential to be incorporated into regular educational programs, professional training initiatives, and innovation-focused learning environments across the cooperation area. The partner institutions remain dedicated to further dissemination, adaptation, and implementation of the programs, supporting long-term skill development and sustainable growth in the Blue Economy.



## References

### Project social media channels:

- MareSkill LinkedIn page:
  - <https://www.linkedin.com/feed/update/urn:li:activity:7368954781693911041>;
  - <https://www.linkedin.com/feed/update/urn:li:activity:7384275029146038272>;
  - <https://www.linkedin.com/feed/update/urn:li:activity:7391558482111528960>;
  - <https://www.linkedin.com/feed/update/urn:li:activity:7391152671459733504>;
- MareSkill Facebook page:
  - <https://www.facebook.com/mareskillinterregitalycroatia/posts/pfbid0285apUYysnbaonJnbPUT9grRKAButLeFLXV2m819ehWHuBPGaz2a2piYxcNWgfYxAI>;
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  - <https://www.facebook.com/mareskillinterregitalycroatia/posts/pfbid02dYiow4wggw4ZRo3hA58qgVtusSegyiqDdqkKkLo6VbQ5daTYz3MDWQqBxgPoxNADGI>;
  - <https://www.facebook.com/mareskillinterregitalycroatia/videos/678524451694911/>;

### Web coverage:

- Project web:
  - <https://www.italy-croatia.eu/web/mareskill/dettaglio?articleId=26857311&groupId=7943331>;
  - <https://www.italy-croatia.eu/web/mareskill/dettaglio?articleId=27593299&groupId=7943331>;
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