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MareSkill

INTERREG ITALY-CROATIA
Programme 2021 – 2027

Smart and innovative blue skills for competitive blue economy MareSkill

D.3.3.2. Report on organized final conference



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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: 3

Activity title: A 3.3. -

Collaboration Framework of cross-border knowledge hub by signing Cooperation Agreements among companies and scientific—research institutions

Delivery period: PR5

Activity description: The activity focuses on establishing and formalising cross-border cooperation through the preparation and signing of cooperation agreements defining areas of collaboration, partner responsibilities and expected results

Partner responsible: VUS

Dissemination level: Public

Status: Final

Version: 1.0

Date: 30.09.2026.

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Introduction

The MareSkill project – Smart and Innovative Blue Skills for Competitive Blue Economy – was implemented within the Interreg Italy–Croatia Programme 2021–2027, under Priority 1 "Sustainable growth in the Blue Economy" and Specific Objective 1.2 "Developing skills for smart specialisation, industrial transition and entrepreneurship".

MareSkill addressed the gap between labour market needs and the skills available in the blue economy by developing and testing new educational approaches and by strengthening cooperation between education, research and industry across the Italy–Croatia cooperation area.

The project's Final Conference was organised on 10 September 2026 at Šibenik University of Applied Sciences under the theme "From skills gaps to blue opportunities: connecting education, research and industry for a sustainable blue economy." It provided an opportunity to look back at the project journey, present its main achievements and lessons learned, and discuss how the results can continue to support blue skills development and cross-border cooperation beyond the project lifetime.

This report presents the Final Conference, its main sessions and participants, and the key messages related to the future use and capitalisation of MareSkill results.



Figure 1 - MareSkill Final Conference, Šibenik, 10 September 2026.

Event overview

The MareSkill Final Conference was held on 10 September 2026 at Šibenik University of Applied Sciences in Šibenik, Croatia. The event was organised in a hybrid format, allowing participation both onsite and online.

A total of 32 participants attended onsite, including project partners and external stakeholders from higher education, research, business and innovation support organisations. The hybrid format additionally enabled online participation and supported wider access to the event. This combination reflected the cross-sectoral character of MareSkill and the project's objective of bringing education, research and industry closer together.

The conference programme followed the development path of the project itself. It began with the challenges MareSkill set out to address and the identification of blue economy skills needs, continued with the development and testing of new training programmes and then moved towards capacity building, knowledge transfer and cooperation between research, education and industry.

The second part of the programme looked beyond completed activities. Through a stakeholder round table and closing sessions, participants discussed future skills requirements, the sustainability and uptake of MareSkill results and opportunities for continued cross-border cooperation.



Figure 2 - Participants at the MareSkill Final Conference

Main Sessions

Following registration, the conference officially opened with welcome addresses by Frane Urem on behalf of the Lead Partner, Šibenik University of Applied Sciences, together with invited institutional and Programme representatives. The opening placed MareSkill within the wider context of the Interreg Italy–Croatia Programme and its support for sustainable blue economy development and skills.

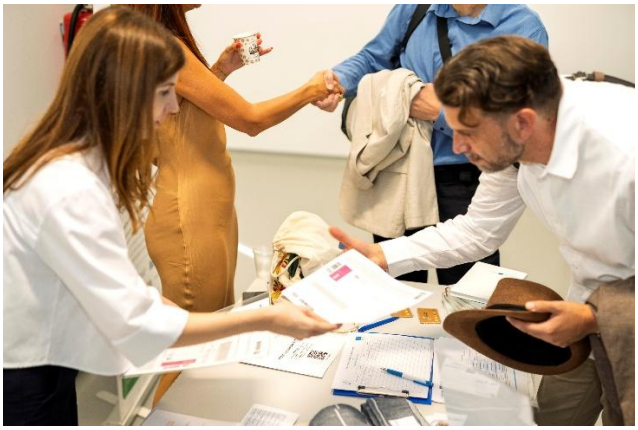


Figure 3 – registration



Figure 4 – Welcome speech by Frane Urem

The first thematic session, MareSkill Journey: From Skills Gaps to Blue Opportunities, introduced the project journey, its objectives and the challenges it was designed to address. It showed how MareSkill moved from the identification of skills needs towards practical educational solutions and cooperation activities, with a particular focus on better alignment between labour market requirements and the competences available in the blue economy workforce.

The presentation From Skills Gaps to Education: What Does the Blue Economy Need?, delivered by Ana Gundić from the University of Zadar (UNIZD, PP2), focused on skills needs, stakeholder involvement and the link between identified gaps and the educational solutions developed within MareSkill. It highlighted the importance of involving blue economy stakeholders in defining current and future skills requirements so that education can respond more effectively to real labour market needs.



Figure 5 - The presentation From Skills Gaps to Education: What Does the Blue Economy Need? By Ana Gundić UNIZD

This was followed by Turning Needs into Learning: MareSkill Training Programmes & Pilot Experiences, presented by Zlata Beliavea from Fondazione Fenice (FF, PP5). The presentation showed how the identified needs were transformed into concrete learning opportunities and shared lessons from their implementation. MareSkill developed seven modular micro-credential programmes and tested them through pilot activities in Croatia and Italy. By the end of the fourth reporting period, five pilot course implementations had been completed, exceeding the planned minimum of four, with 84 participants from 41 organisations. The project also introduced a digital certification approach, with seven certificate templates developed and 115 digital certificates/open badges issued to participants.



Figure 6 - Turning Needs into Learning: MareSkill Training Programmes & Pilot Experiences, presented by Zlata Beliavea from Fondazione Fenice (FF, PP5)

Alessandra Lanzoni from the National Institute of Oceanography and Applied Geophysics – OGS (PP7) presented Skills for a Sustainable Blue Economy: Lessons from Training & Capacity Building. Her contribution focused on the competences needed for a sustainable blue economy and on experience gained through MareSkill training and capacity-building activities. The session underlined the importance of combining specialised sector knowledge with sustainability, environmental responsibility, innovation and the ability to respond to technological change.



Figure 7 - Alessandra Lanzoni from the National Institute of Oceanography and Applied Geophysics – OGS (PP7) presented Skills for a Sustainable Blue Economy: Lessons from Training & Capacity Building.

The presentation From Knowledge to Innovation: Connecting Education, Research & the Blue Economy, delivered by Valeria Patruno, shifted the focus towards the relationship between knowledge and practical application. It highlighted the importance of stronger links between research and education organisations, companies and innovation actors, and the role of knowledge transfer in turning research and expertise into practical benefits for blue economy sectors.

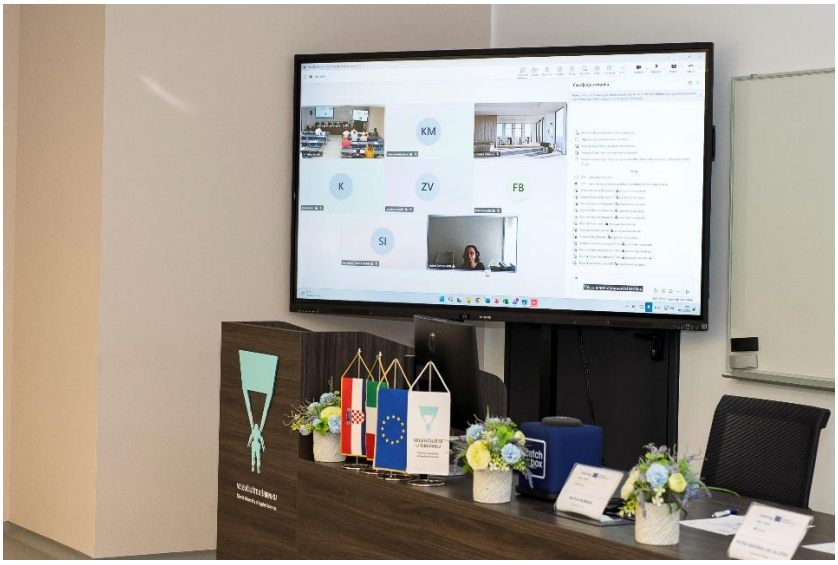


Figure 8 - The presentation From Knowledge to Innovation: Connecting Education, Research & the Blue Economy, delivered by Valeria Patruno

The presentation block concluded with MareSkill Legacy – What Comes Next?, delivered by Frane Urem on behalf of the Lead Partner. The session provided a transition from completed project activities towards the future use of MareSkill results, including their sustainability, transferability and potential to support further cooperation.

A central part of the conference was the stakeholder round table Blue Skills for the Future: Are Education and Industry Ready for the Next Generation of the Blue Economy? The discussion brought together different perspectives from academia, research and the private sector. Participants included Prof. Petar Slapničar from the University of Zagreb, Faculty of Mechanical Engineering and Naval Architecture (FSB), Antonio Mikulić, a young researcher who had also actively participated in MareSkill study visits, Matija Bumbak from Platforma 22 d.o.o. in Šibenik, representing SMEs, and Petra Radobuljac-Alcedo from the University of Zadar, also representing the perspective of a young researcher.

The discussion explored future blue economy skills from different professional and generational perspectives. Topics included closer cooperation between education and industry, changing skills requirements, the role of young researchers and professionals in knowledge transfer, and the value of practical learning opportunities that connect academic knowledge with real sector needs. The involvement of participants who had already taken part in MareSkill activities also provided an opportunity to reflect on the value of study visits, direct interaction with companies and research institutions, and experience-based learning.



Figure 9 -The stakeholder round table Blue Skills for the Future: Are Education and Industry Ready for the Next Generation of the Blue Economy?

The conference concluded with the closing message Skills for the Blue Future, delivered by JS Project Manager Sorrentino Fatica from the Joint Secretariat of the Interreg Italy–Croatia Programme. His contribution provided a forward-looking perspective and highlighted the importance of capitalising on MareSkill results after project completion. Particular attention was given to opportunities for stronger links with other projects funded under Specific Objective 1.2, including BIOBASED, IN4BLUE, BLUESLINKS and LEAP TO BLUE. Their complementary focus on skills, knowledge transfer, SME support, innovation and networking creates good potential for future cooperation and further use of MareSkill results.

Final Remarks

The MareSkill Final Conference brought together the project's main results, experiences and stakeholders in one final public event. More importantly, it showed how the different elements of the project connect: from understanding skills gaps, through the development and testing of new learning opportunities, to stronger cooperation between education, research and industry.

While the conference marked the formal closing of MareSkill, its final message was clearly forward-looking. The training approaches, knowledge gained and partnerships created during the project provide a basis for continued exchange, transfer and capitalisation, particularly through cooperation with other Interreg Italy–Croatia initiatives working towards complementary goals in the blue economy.



Figure 10 – Group photo "Goodbye MareSkill"

References

Project social media channels:

- MareSkill LinkedIn page
- MareSkill Facebook page

Web coverage:

- Official website of the Šibenik University of Applied Sciences (VUS).
- Partner websites (UNIZD, ARTI, CCE, Fenice Foundation, University of Trieste).
- Regional and national news portals

Academic outputs:

Urem, F., Gundić, A., & Jureković, D. (2026). Supporting Microlearning Ecosystems through Verifiable Digital Credentials. In M. Dyvak (Ed.), Proceedings of the 16th International Conference on Advanced Computer Information Technologies (ACIT 2026) (pp. 1687–1692). IEEE. https://doi.org/10.1109/ACIT69831.2026.11700048