EUROLakes Replication Call

Guideline for Applicants

Co-funded by
the European Union

Contents

1. Background and proposal objectives

EUROLakes takes an innovative, holistic and science-based approach to safeguarding and restoring European natural lakes and their ecosystems. The project is based on the **4 Returns Framework for Landscape Restoration (*4 Returns*)** which is a practical methodology designed to find sustainable, long-term solutions at a landscape level. The aim is to achieve four types of return: inspiration, social benefits, restoration of nature and financial gains. This approach is realised through five key elements: establishing a landscape partnership; fostering a shared understanding; collaboratively envisioning the landscape; taking coordinated action; and continuously monitoring and learning. EUROLakes will establish local communities of practice, collaborating with them to develop and showcase innovative, integrated protection and restoration solutions, particularly focusing on **nature-based solutions (NBS)**. These solutions will be demonstrated in three specific areas: Lake Vico in Italy, Lake Dümmer in Germany, and Lake Bistreţ in Romania.

Furthermore, the project will demonstrate the long-term potential for replication by enhancing local capacity in other European countries through **replication projects in Associated Regions**. These approaches will be complemented by modelling activities and the dissemination of knowledge regarding nature finance, contributing to a comprehensive adaptive management strategy aimed at restoring natural lakes to a 'good' ecological and chemical status. Thus, EUROLakes will contribute directly to the objectives of various EU instruments and policies, including the Water Framework Directive and the Green Deal's mission to **"restore, protect and preserve the health of our Ocean and waters by 2030".**

2. EUROLakes Replication Call objectives

The EUROLakes' Replication Call provides financial support to local and regional organisations to implement small-scale replication projects in **3 additional lake sites in Associated Regions** (*replication sites*). Through this Call, EUROLakes aims to scale up the NBS and participatory approaches that have been developed and tested at the EUROLakes' demonstration sites.

Each selected replication proposal will receive up to **EUR 75.000** to implement concrete protection and restoration measures. Together with EUROLakes' partners, the funded organisations will co-develop replication plans and roadmaps to ensure long-term impact.

The expected results from this Call include:

- **Strengthened capacity** of the funded organisations to apply the EUROLakes' methodology, focusing on the *4 Returns*.
- **Establishment of local communities of practice** engaging key stakeholders.
- **Validated replication plans and implementation roadmaps** for each replication site.

- **Implementation of locally adapted NBS** for lake restoration.
- **Defined long-term strategies** for improving ecological status and resilience.
- **Tangible progress towards the *4 Returns*** – inspiration, social, natural and financial.

3. Eligibility

3.1 Eligible applicants

This Call targets local and/or regional authorities from Associated Regions.

Associated Regions are defined as areas with ecosystems that can benefit from the demonstration activities (e.g. neighboring regions and/or different regions) and/or less-developed regions, with the view to build capacity to implement the innovative solutions to restore freshwater ecosystems.

Local and/or regional authorities are defined as official public institutions (e.g. municipalities, provincial governments, regional environmental agencies) responsible for the management or protection of natural lakes and their catchments.

Eligible applicants must be **legal entities** from **EU Member States** or from **countries associated with the Horizon Europe Programme**, provided they are not part of the EUROLakes' consortium. The following countries are **not eligible:**

- Austria
- Bulgaria
- Germany
- Italy
- Romania
- The Netherlands
- United Kingdom

Authorities already receiving Financial Support to Third Parties (FSTP) under topic HORIZON-MISS-2023-OCEAN-01-04 are not eligible.

Applications may be submitted individually or jointly by eligible authorities under the coordination of a lead partner, assuming full coordination and communication responsibility. Other organisations (e.g. research institutes, companies, NGOs) may only participate as subcontractors.

Entities subject to EU restrictive measures (Article 29 TEU, Article 215 TFEU) or breaches under the Council Implementing Decision (EU) 2022/2406 are not eligible.

Applicants must also comply with the obligations of the Grant Agreement, notably Articles 12 (conflict of interest), 13 (confidentiality and security), 14 (ethics), 17.2 (visibility), 18 (specific rules for carrying out action), 19 (information), 20 (record-keeping) and 25 (e.g. granting authority, OLAF, Court of Auditors (ECA), etc.).

All communication and documentation must be in **English**.

3.2 Eligible proposals

Eligible proposals must focus on the **restoration of natural lake ecosystems through NBS**. Replication sites must include a lake and share comparable ecological characteristics and challenges with at least one EUROLakes' demonstration site. Proposals should demonstrate how the NBS tested in EUROLakes will be adapted and applied to local conditions.

The demonstration sites and their main characteristics are:

1. **Lake Vico (Italy):** A volcanic lake with moderate ecological status, suffering from increased phosphorous and nitrogen runoff from agriculture, in particular from intensive hazelnut production.
2. **Lake Dümmer (Germany):** A lake with poor ecological status facing high nutrient load through intensive agriculture, leading to algae dominance as well as reed decline due to erosion and browsing by animals (including invasive species).
3. **Lake Bistreţ (Romania):** Located within the Danube floodplain, this eutrophic lake with moderate ecological status suffers from the impacts of agriculture such as nutrient and pesticide pollution and disturbance of species.

A more detailed description of the demonstration sites can be found in Annex II and on the project website.

Associated Regions must commit to:

- Participate in capacity-building and knowledge-exchange activities with EUROLakes' partners (e.g. joint workshops, round tables, stakeholder events).
- Engage with EUROLakes' demonstration sites to exchange experience and data.
- Attend regular meetings with EUROLakes' partners to exchange information on the implementation status.
- Co-develop a replication plan and roadmap with EUROLakes' partners and stakeholders, applying a holistic landscape approach for NBS that integrates ecological restoration, biodiversity protection, innovation and socio-economic benefits.

3.3 Eligible costs

Eligible costs are (instructions for calculation of proposal costs can be found in Annex I):

- Personnel costs (based on average unit costs)
- Travel costs and subsistence
- Equipment and other goods
- Subcontracting and other services (max. 30%)
- Overheads (max. 15%, must be specified)

Total requested funding must equal 100% of the eligible costs, up to a ceiling of EUR 75,000. Activities already funded under another EU or third-party funding are not eligible.

Involvement of third parties:

Third parties may provide in-kind contributions (e.g. personnel, equipment or other goods) but may not carry out project tasks or claim these costs as eligible.

Subcontracting:

Subcontractors may perform specific tasks clearly defined as not available in-house, directly supporting the objectives of the proposed activities. Such tasks must be described in the work plan. The total subcontracting budget must not exceed 35% of the total requested funding.

4. Funding scheme

Each selected Associated Region will receive financial support of up to EUR 75,000 in the form of a lump sum grant. A total of **3 proposals** will be approved for funding rate of 100%.

The lump sum of selected proposals will be fixed at grant signature and disbursed in two instalments:

- 80 % pre-financing upon signature of the Grant Agreement
- 20 % final payment after satisfactory completion of the replication activities, submission of the final report and approval by the EUROLakes' coordination team.

5. Timeline

6. Submission

To be considered eligible, proposals must be submitted in accordance with the following procedure:

- Applications must be completed using the official EUROLakes Application Form (Annex I)
- All required documents must be submitted in English as a single PDF file via email to proposals@eurolakes.eu.
- The submission deadline is 15 January 2026, 17:00 CET
- Proposals submitted after this deadline or through any other channel will not be accepted.
- Incomplete or non-compliant applications will be considered ineligible.

All documents relevant for this Call will be published on the official project website: https://eurolakes.eu/fundingopencall/.

7. Evaluation

A selection committee composed of the members of the EUROLakes' management team and independent external experts will evaluate the proposals. External experts may include representatives from European or national organisations and from sister projects funded under the same Horizon Europe Mission topic (HORIZON-MISS-2023-OCEAN-01-04). All reviewers will sign confidentiality and conflict-of-interest declarations.

7.1 Evaluation criteria

After verification of eligibility requirements (see Section 3), all eligible proposals will be evaluated and scored according to five criteria: **Relevance, Impact, Quality** and **Implementation**. Each criterion is rated on a scale of 0 (very poor) to 5 (excellent), using increments of 0.5 points. The **three proposals** achieving the highest total scores will get funded.

A. Relevance (25%)

- Degree of alignment with the overall objectives, methodologies and thematic priorities of the EUROLakes' project.
- Suitability of the proposed measures to the *4 Returns* (further information can be found here).
- Coherence with the environment and socio-economic context of the proposed replication site (lake typology, pressures, challenges).
- Contribution to EU policy goals, notably EU Green Deal, the Water Framework Directive and the EU Mission "Restore our Oceans and Waters by 2023".

B. Impact (25%)

- Expected short- and long-term benefits and returns (environmental, social, economic, cultural).
- Potential to achieve the *4 Returns* outcomes.
- Potential for scalability and replicability of proposed measures beyond the initial site.
- Contribution to improved governance, public awareness and cross-sector cooperation / stakeholder involvement.

C. Quality (25%)

- Alignment between project objectives, expected impacts and proposed activities.
- Technical robustness and realism of the proposed measures, timeline and budget.

- Cost-effectiveness and value for money of the proposed action in relation to expected impact.
- Adequacy of milestones, deliverables and monitoring indicators.
- Identification of risk and adequacy of mitigation strategies.

D. Implementation (25%)

- Relevant experience and qualifications of the applicant (and partners, if applicable) in managing restoration or NBS projects.
- Technical, institutional and financial capacity of the applicant (and partners, if applicable) to implement, monitor and report the replication activities in line to the Horizon Europe standards.
- Demonstrated ability to engage local stakeholders, communities etc. effectively.
- Compliance with applicable legal and ethical requirements.
- Readiness of the applicant to start implementation withing the proposed timeframe (June-September 2026).

Proposals from countries not represented in any of the Horizon Europe Mission projects may receive priority consideration, to ensure a wider geographic spread of impact.

7.2 Evaluation steps

The evaluation and selection of successful proposals will be conducted as follows:

1. **Eligibility screening:** all proposals will be screened for compliance with the eligibility criteria in Section 3. Proposals failing to meet these requirements will not proceed to evaluation.
2. **Proposal evaluation:** proposals considered eligible will move on to the evaluation phase. The selection committee will review and score the applications based on the aspects described under Annex I. At the end of the evaluation process, all proposals will be ranked in a single list. In case multiple proposals are ranked with the same score, a consensus meeting will be held in order to select the ones for funding.
3. **Final selection:** the top three highest-ranked proposals will be invited to enter the contract negotiation phase. The next highest-ranked proposals will be placed on a reserve list. All applicants will receive written notification of the results – either an acceptance or rejection letter – accompanied by an evaluation summary report. The results of the Call will be published on the EUROLakes' website, including the project titles, abstracts, award dates, durations and the legal name and country of each selected beneficiary.

8. Privacy

All personal data collected in the framework of this Call will be processed and stored in compliance with the General Data Protection Regulation (GDPR).

Personal information will only be used for the purposes of proposal evaluation, contracting, monitoring and communication related to the Call. Data will not be shared with third parties outside the evaluation process, except when required by the European Commission, CINEA, OLAF or the European Court of Auditors (ECA) for verification or audit purposes. External reviewers involved in the evaluation will sign non-disclosure and confidentiality agreements to ensure the protection of all submitted materials.

EUROLakes will collect only the minimum data necessary for assessing eligibility and quality of proposals. Additional administrative and financial data will be requested only from selected applicants during the contracting phase.

9. Contact information

For general enquiries and clarifications related to this Call: info@eurolakes.eu

For proposal submissions: proposals@eurolakes.eu

Official website and updates: https://eurolakes.eu/

Follow EUROLakes for updates and networking opportunities:
LinkedIn: https://www.linkedin.com/company/eurolakes/
Facebook**:** https://www.facebook.com/EUROLakes/
Instagram**:** https://www.instagram.com/eurolakes/

Annex I: Application Form

Instructions

- Please note that the **max. length of the proposal is 10 pages in total**. Text exceeding the page limit will be not considered in the evaluation process.
- Proposal must be submitted as **PDF file** via email to proposals@eurolakes.eu before the 15 January 2026, 17:00 CET.
- Delete the instructions before submitting the proposal.

EUROLakes Replication Call

1. General Information:

Proposal title	*Max. 150 characters*
Acronym (optional)	
Location of Associated Region	• *Country* • *Region/province/county* • *Basin (if relevant)* • *Municipality (if relevant)*
Applicant	*Only local and/or regional authorities are eligible to apply*
Website (optional)	
Contact details of the person representing the applicant	• *Name and surname* • *Function* • *Institution* • *E-mail contact*
Contact details of the person authorized to sign the Sub-grant Agreement	• *Name and surname* • *Function* • *Institution* • *E-mail contact*

PIC code of (Lead) applicant (if available)	
Name(s) and PIC code(s) of any partner organisation (if available)	
Expected start date	*Between 1st June 2026 – 30th September 2026*
End date (fixed)	*31st May 2028*

2. Abstract:

Describe the main objectives and activities of the proposal (max. 1.500 characters).

3. Proposal suitability:

Describe the suitability of the proposal in relation to EUROLakes' approach and methodologies.

What are the main characteristics of the lake (morphology, environmental conditions, hydrological and bio-chemical characteristics, challenges and pressures)? Do they share similarities with any of the demonstration sites of EUROLakes?

What are the main characteristics of the landscape that constitutes the ecological and socioeconomic context affecting the lake's health and functionality?

How do the proposed activities and measures align with the 4 Return Framework methodology applied in EUROLakes?

How can the replication site benefit from capacity development to implement NBS to restore lake ecosystems?

4. Indicators & Data availability:

Describe what (ecological) indicators will be monitored and improved by the planned measures and what data is available and/or needed for the planned actions.

What data is available to monitor changes in species richness/diversity, water quality and other ecological indicators over time for this natural lake? (consider data gaps, data quality, spatial and temporal variability, monitoring frequency and duration, etc.)

5. Replication potential:

Describe how and what measures from EUROLakes can be replicated and/or up-scaled at the proposed replication site.

Can the NBS applied at the demonstration sites (e.g. reed protection measures, water quality monitoring, habitat restoration) be effectively up-scaled and/or replicated in the proposed replication site?

What are the available capacities to monitor key ecological indicators (e.g. water quality, biodiversity) to measure the success of the restoration measures?

Is preparatory work necessary for the implementation of the planned interventions?

6. Economic feasibility:

Describe the economic relevance and feasibility of the planned measures and what economic benefits can be expected from the implemented actions (e.g. on fishing, tourism).

Are further finance options (e.g. nature financing) potentially available?

7. Stakeholder engagement:

Describe the current level of involvement from stakeholders and local communities and what is planned in this regard by the proposal.

What activities are being implemented and/or planned to promote active participation of stakeholders and local communities? What groups have the most potential, which ones are the most challenging to engage?

Is there potential to build a platform for communication and engagement of local and hyperlocal stakeholders or does such a platform already exist?

8. Impact and urgency:

Describe the expected impact of the proposal from a holistic perspective (socio-economic and ecological dimensions) on the long-term and the urgency for the implementation of the planned measures.

What are the ecological, social and economic benefits for local communities and stakeholders on local, regional, national and/or EU-level?

What is the estimated impact regionally and nationally as well as for EUROLakes and the EU Mission "Restore our Ocean and Waters"?

What are the capacity needs of the region/country that can be covered by the proposal?

How can the restoration strategies be adapted based on initial results of the proposal and changing conditions, if necessary?

9. Additional comments (if any):

10. Implementation plan:

List of work packages	*Please describe the work packages (WP) you plan to implement. For each WP, provide a list of **deliverables** and **milestones**. More rows can be added to the table. Max 1 page.*
WP1:	
WP2:	
WP3:	
WPx:	

11. Budget:

Please provide a breakdown of your organisation's planned budget (max. total EUR 75.000).

Please provide a detailed break-down of the planned use of the lump sum grant. Any subcontracting costs should be specifically described and justified.

TOTAL BUDGET	**EUR**
Personnel costs	
Travel costs and subsistence[1]	
Equipment and other goods	
Subcontracting and other services (max. 30%)	
Overheads (max. 15%, must be justified)	
Total eligible costs (max. EUR **75.000)**	

[1] *Attendance at EUROLakes' Consortium Meeting 2027 (X no. of people attending), other EUROLakes' site visit/workshop costs, regional travel costs, etc.*

Annex II: Description of demonstration sites

For more information visit: https://eurolakes.eu/demo-lakes/

Lake Vico - Italy

General information:

Lake Vico is a volcanic-origin lake located in central Italy, near the town of Viterbo. It lies within the Lake Vico Natural Reserve, a protected area known for its rich biodiversity and scenic landscapes. It has a surface area of 12.9 km² and an average depth of 22 m and shows signs of progressive eutrophication in recent decades.

Importance of the lake:

The lake holds ecological and socio-cultural and economic significance. As part of a natural reserve, it provides habitat for various species and supports regional biodiversity. Eco-tourism and agritourism are growing industries, providing income to local communities. Historically and currently, the lake serves as a source of water for irrigation and local use, although its water is not heavily exploited for drinking.

Pressures:

Lake Vico faces several environmental pressures. The most prominent challenges include nutrient enrichment leading to eutrophication, sediment runoff from surrounding lands and potential threats from climate change. Agricultural activities in the surrounding areas, particularly from intensive hazelnut production, also contribute to water quality deterioration.

Previous actions:

Prior conservation efforts have been undertaken as part of the lake's designation as a Natural Reserve. However, these actions have been limited in scope. There have been initiatives such as water quality monitoring and research programmes, restriction on agricultural practices, promotion of buffer zones and limitations of water extraction.

Planned interventions:

The planned interventions at Lake Vico in the framework of EUROLakes are: monitoring of pilot NBS, ecosystems, wildlife species and water quality; monitoring key climatic indicators; creation and monitoring of buffer areas near the coast and main streams; development of permanent grass in hazelnut plantations to reduce agricultural inputs; creation of small drainage channels with retention areas along critical slopes; creation of a retention basin to collect stormwater runoff; promotion of stakeholder participation to improve environmental awareness at local and hyperlocal levels.

Lake Dümmer - Germany

General information:

Lake Dümmer, located in Lower Saxony, Germany, is a shallow, eutrophic lake with an average depth of only about 1 m and a surface area of around 13.5 km². It is a well-known freshwater lake with a history of environmental management, though past efforts have often been fragmented.

Importance of the lake:

Lake Dümmer holds significant ecological value. It is surrounded by extensive wetlands and reed beds, making it an important site for bird conservation and biodiversity. The lake also supports recreational activities and is part of regional efforts to balance ecological preservation with tourism and agriculture.

Pressures:

The lake faces environmental pressures typical of many European freshwater systems, including nutrient pollution from agricultural runoff, hydrological modifications, grazing by (invasive) animal species and biodiversity and habitat loss. Despite multiple past interventions, these pressures have persisted due to a lack of cohesive, long-term governance strategies.

Previous actions:

Over the years, several small-scale and short-term interventions have been implemented to improve Lake Dümmer's ecological conditions. Lake Dümmer's water level is actively managed with a combination of dykes, adjustable weirs and sluices to balance ecological needs, agriculture and flood protection. Winter levels are lowered to allow mudflats and shallow zones to form and water is raised again in spring.

Planned interventions:

EUROLakes plans to implement the following NBS at Lake Dümmer: protection of existing reed beds by creating shallow water areas through the construction of fascines; installation of palisades and gabion mesh mats to protect from erosion and grazing by (invasive) animal species; development of new reed beds by planting autochthonous plants; introduction of sediments in eroded areas; protection and development of floating plant zones; monitoring of grazing damage of reed beds; awareness-raising and stakeholder engagement at local and hyperlocal levels.

Lake Bistreț - Romania

General information:

Lake Bistreț is located in the southern part of Romania, near the Danube floodplain. It spans approximately 19.4 km² and is very shallow, averaging around 1.5 m deep with a maximum depth near 5 m. Lake Bistreț is generally considered to be mesotrophic to eutrophic with nutrient levels influenced by agricultural runoff and inflows from nearby rivers.

Importance of the lake:

Lake Bistreț is a crucial habitat for a wide range of species, especially waterbirds. Its shallow waters, reed beds and mudflats create diverse and essential habitats. The lake is designated as a Natura 2000 Special Protection Area and a Ramsar site. It supports local fishing activities, agriculture through irrigation and has great ecotourism potential, especially for birdwatchers.

Pressures:

The lake is subject to various pressures, predominantly stemming from agricultural runoff which leads to nutrient overload and eutrophication. Other likely stressors include habitat degradation, sediment accumulation, invasive species and alterations to natural water flow through drainage systems and irrigation.

Previous actions:

Lake Bistreț has seen involvement from local authorities and conservation organisations. In 2013, Romania and Bulgaria signed an agreement to protect Danube wetlands, including the Bistreț area. This agreement facilitated coordinated conservation efforts across national borders, aiming to preserve critical habitats for migratory birds and other wildlife.

Planned interventions:

EUROLakes will implement NBS at Lake Bistreț including improvement of nesting conditions for *Chlidonias hybrida* and other ichthyophage species by installing buoys and nesting platforms; collaboration with farmers to reduce the nutrient pollution; development of a monitoring plan to assess the conservation status of bird species and water quality; establishing a thematic eco-trail to avoid the disturbance of species and at the same time promote eco-tourism.

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