

Terms of Reference

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“UNIDO–WTCA Blue Economy Global Call 2026”

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1. UNIDO ITPO Italy

UNIDO ITPO Italy, created in 1987 and based in Rome, has mandate to enhance the competitiveness of small to medium-sized enterprises (SMEs) in developing countries, through the mobilization of investments as well as the transfer of technology and management skills together with capacity building activities required for the implementation of industrial projects and SMEs upgrading in developing and emerging countries. In 2020, ITPO Italy designed, launched, and implemented the UNIDO ITPO Global Call for the first time, with the aim of mobilizing global efforts to support developing countries and economies in transition in their response to and management of the COVID-19 crisis. From its inception to date, the Global Call has sought to foster the development and promotion of innovative ideas and technologies capable of delivering tangible impact, with a particular focus on benefiting developing countries and economies in transition.

2. World Trade Centers Association

World Trade Centers Association (WTCA) is the global brand-licensing organization behind the World Trade Center® name — a platform recognized worldwide as a symbol of international business, credibility, and connection. For more than 50 years, WTCA has licensed and connected independently operated World Trade Center businesses across a trusted international network that supports trade, investment, and economic connectivity across markets. This network serves as an international ecosystem of global connections, iconic properties, and integrated trade services, bringing together commercial property developers and operators, economic development agencies, and businesses looking to connect globally. Today, the WTCA network includes more than 300 licensed World Trade Center businesses in nearly 100 countries worldwide.

3. The Blue Economy – Background

According to the OECD the Blue Economy accounted for 1.5 trillion dollars in 2010 and it is expected to double in 2030 while reaching the 5 trillion dollars of gross value added by 2050. Aside from the economic features, it is estimated that over 3 billion people worldwide depend directly on Blue Economy related activities. Furthermore, oceans and inland freshwater water have a central role in climate balance and life conservation, which makes of paramount importance to balance economic growth with ocean and water reserve health.

The sustainable development of the Blue Economy leverages on innovation, inclusive governance, and nature-based solutions. Aside from mainstream activities like fishery, tourism and shipping & port activities, the Blue Economy presents emerging sectors like renewable energy, marine biotechnology, desalination, and ecosystem services like carbon sequestration and coastal

protection. All these applications are currently transitioning toward a more interconnected and digitalized functioning, a feature that will play a central role in the future.

Against this background, startups and innovators are emerging with solutions aimed at restoring ocean and water reserves & streams' health while promoting a sustainable development paradigm. These innovations, spanning a wide range of interconnected and interdependent sectors, have the potential to drive a systemic transformation of the Blue Economy.

4. Scope

The UNIDO-WTCA Blue Economy Global Call 2026 (Global Call) scope is to promote the sustainable development of the Blue Economy by supporting and scaling up innovative ideas and companies. The Call will identify and award one ready deployable, innovative, and scalable solution for each of the six strategic categories (refer to Section 5). The winning ideas will enter an acceleration program under the UNIDO-WTCA umbrella and benefit from the UNIDO and WTCA expertise, network, and high-level mentoring. Supported by UNIDO's technical cooperation, selected projects will receive potential pilot opportunities in partner countries, while through the WTCA's business development platforms, companies will access business programs, new markets and expand worldwide. Both institutions will provide direct support for scaling up and matchmaking services to enhance winners' impact and success.

5. Sectors of Interest

The UNIDO-WTCA Blue Economy Global Call 2026 aims to identify and promote readily deployable and scalable solutions and innovative technologies contributing to an inclusive, resilient, and sustainable development of the Blue Economy. Particular attention will be paid to high impact solutions for Developing Countries and Small Island Developing States.

The Global Call encompasses six strategic categories related to innovative solutions in Blue Economy:

1. **Blue Renewable Energy** (emerging technologies that harness the ocean's potential—such as wave, tidal, ocean thermal (OTEC), salinity gradient, and marine biofuels—to support the global energy transition while promoting sustainability and resilience in coastal and island economies)
2. **Sustainable Blue Food** (responsibly sourced aquatic foods—such as fish, shellfish, and seaweed—that contribute to food security, nutrition, and livelihoods while preserving aquatic ecosystems. With a particular emphasis on practices like regenerative aquaculture and climate-resilient mariculture to ensure long-term ecological and economic sustainability)

3. **Green Maritime Transport and Smart Ports** (modernization of shipping and port infrastructure through sustainable shipbuilding, alternative fuels, and digital technologies to reduce emissions, increase efficiency, and support decarbonization. Aiming to align maritime trade with climate goals while enhancing global logistics connectivity)
4. **Coastal and Marine Tourism & Recreation** (sustainable and nature-based tourism activities—such as ecotourism, pescatourism, and cultural marine tourism—that promote local livelihoods and environmental stewardship. Minimizing ecological impact while maximizing economic and social benefits for coastal communities)
5. **Sea, Lakes and River Health & Restoration** (safeguarding and regenerating aquatic ecosystems through pollution control, habitat restoration, and sustainable resource management. Enhance biodiversity, climate resilience, and the long-term viability of Blue Industry activities)
6. **Blue Tech & Biotechnology** (application of advanced marine technologies —like observation data, blue database and platforms, drones, visualization models, and integrated artificial intelligence— and biological innovations—such as bioremediation, biofuels, biomaterials, and deep-sea bioprospecting—to drive sustainable industrial solutions)

6. Target Groups

The Global Call for proposals will target the following groups for participation in the competition:

- Micro, small, medium (MSMEs), and large enterprises;
- Start-up companies operating in sectors linked to the contest;
- Academic institutions/centers;
- Public-Private Partnership (PPP) initiatives;
- Non-governmental organizations (NGOs); public and private foundations linked to the business world and international development cooperation;

The organizers encourage the submission of proposals, from early-stage ideas to scaling up projects, but also innovative technologies under testing and evidence collection.

7. Eligibility criteria

By entering this contest, applicants accept and agree to be bound by these Terms of Reference.

Proposals are required to meet a set of minimum eligibility criteria in order to be able to be considered for evaluation in the context of this call.

The eligibility criteria are as follows:

- Individuals must be eighteen (18) years of age or older to enter.
- Each individual submission should clearly state the focus area by selecting the most applicable category in the application form. Candidates may select up to two categories (refer to Section 5).
- The description of the business project should not be written in a promotional tone, but use neutral, factual language.
- The applications sent by admissible candidates will be submitted for an initial screening phase and will be considered only if complete in all the mandatory fields and coherent with the Global Call for proposal objectives and themes.
- Only the admissible proposals, following a verification of their feasibility and credibility requirements, will enter the evaluation process.
- To ensure that the proposed solutions are beyond the conceptual stage and have already reached a minimum level of technical maturity and reliability, business projects must present a Technology Readiness Level equal or superior to 4 (Annex).
- Applications must be submitted in English.
- All entries are final; no revisions or modifications after submission are accepted.
- Entries must include only materials created by the entrant and must not infringe on the intellectual property rights of any other person or entity. Entrant must not copy material or include materials, images, graphics, music or trademarks belonging to any third parties or incorporate the names, likeness or personas of any party other than yourself in your entry. Except as stated herein, no entries may contain brand names, trademarks or company logos not owned by entrants.
- Entries that do not meet the eligibility criteria are subject to disqualification and/or removal, at the organizer's sole discretion.

8. Structure

The UNIDO-WTCA Blue Economy Global Call 2026 is divided into three key components: the Call for Innovators, the Evaluation & Selection Period, and the Award Ceremony & Showcase.

- A. The Call for Innovators** consists of a global call on innovative blue economy solutions, inviting on-line applications from micro, small, medium, large companies and start-ups but also academia, NGOs as well as public-private projects and initiatives. The call will prioritize women- and youth-led initiatives and projects focusing on developing countries as well as small island developing states.
- B. The Evaluation & Selection Period** represents a period of analysis of submitted applications where a Scientific Committee will evaluate applications, and a dedicated International Jury will elect the winners of the Global Call.
- C. The Award Ceremony & Showcase** will take place in Rome, Italy at the Euro Mediterranean Water Forum, where the six best-in class ideas identified as the winners of the UNIDO-WTCA Blue Economy Global Call will showcase their innovative ideas.

9. The Jury

The Jury shall comprise around 10 members, selected for their outstanding leadership and distinguished contributions to the promotion of a sustainable development of the Blue Economy. Its composition has been composed by merging different backgrounds and expertise, with particular attention to ensuring both geographical balance and gender diversity.

Jury members will be in charge of the evaluation and rating of applications -according to the evaluation criteria (refer to Section 11), and the ultimate selection of the winning innovative technologies and ideas in the context of the UNIDO-WTCA Blue Economy Global Call 2026.

10. Scientific Committee

The Scientific Committee serves as an independent technical body entrusted with ensuring the quality, coherence, and credibility of the evaluation process, focusing on the assessment of the applications received during the Call for Innovators. Composed of recognized experts across the various sectors of the blue economy, the Scientific Committee provides the specialized knowledge needed to analyze the highly technical, innovative, or sector specific aspects of applications. Its members support the organizers by reviewing the admissible applications, examining the soundness of the proposed solutions, and validating their relevance within the six strategic categories of the Call (refer to Section 5). Through a rigorous and impartial approach, the Committee helps ensure that each submission' innovation claims are substantiated and that the technical merit and potential impact of each solution are properly understood. Beyond individual assessments, the Scientific Committee contributes to safeguarding the overall integrity and transparency of the process. It offers authoritative guidance to the jury by clarifying complex cases, interpreting technical evidence, and ensuring that the final selection is grounded in solid scientific judgement. In doing so, it strengthens the legitimacy of the outcomes and reassures all stakeholders—applicants, partners, and the broader public—that the Global Call adheres to high standards of neutrality, expertise, and due diligence.

Ultimately, the presence of the Scientific Committee reinforces the credibility of the initiative and enhances the value of the winning solutions. Its contribution ensures that the awarded innovations are not only aligned with the objectives of the Call but also represent technically robust, scalable, and meaningful contributions to the sustainable development of the Blue Economy.

11. Evaluation Criteria

Applications with demonstrated compliance and alignment with call requirements will be evaluated by the Scientific Committee and the international jury through a fair, transparent process based on to the following criteria:

Innovative content of the proposal	25%
Technology Readiness Level of the innovation	10%
Environmental, social and economic impact and long-term sustainability	10%
Scalability and possibility of expansion to different geographical and socioeconomic contexts	15%
Expected occupational return	10%
Medium to long-term financial sustainability	10%
Team competitiveness	20%

12. Award Modalities and Prizes

Six innovative ideas – one for each of the Sector of Interest (refer to Section 5) - will be awarded at the Euro Mediterranean Water Forum in Rome, Italy the 1st of October 2026, and enter a dedicated acceleration program under the UNIDO–WTCA umbrella, benefiting from:

- UNIDO’s technical cooperation expertise and promotion in partner countries with potential opportunities to pilot or implement their innovative solutions.
- WTCA’s global business development platforms, enabling market access, matchmaking with clients as well as business accelerators, and international visibility.
- High-level mentoring, strategic guidance as well as direct support for scaling up winning solutions impact for the following one year from the awarding.
- Up to ten shortlisted of best-in-class applicants for each of the categories (refer to Section 5) will be promoted and supported in their capital-raising efforts through virtual or in-person demo days, and/or through inclusion in investment portfolio booklets. These will be presented to a selected group of public and private financial actors, ranging from philanthropic and development institutions to traditional investors, venture capital funds, other investment funds, and banks.

- The winners will be eligible to receive reimbursement of up to Three Thousand Dollars (USD \$3,000) from the WTCA for reasonable travel-related and lodging expenses incurred in connection with the presentation ceremony held at the Euro Mediterranean Water Forum in Rome, Italy. The winners are solely responsible for arranging and booking their own travel and lodging. All travel dates, visit timing, and related logistics must be coordinated with and approved in advance by Sponsor. Reimbursement is limited to actual, reasonable, and documented expenses for transportation and lodging directly related to the visit, up to a maximum of Three Thousand Dollars (USD \$3,000) total. The winner must submit valid itemized receipts and other documentation reasonably requested by Sponsor within the timeframe specified by Sponsor. Failure to provide required documentation may result in denial of reimbursement. No reimbursement will be provided for expenses exceeding Three Thousand Dollars (USD \$3,000). Any costs and expenses not expressly stated as reimbursable herein, including but not limited to meals, ground transportation, incidental expenses, travel insurance, taxes, fees, or personal expenses, are the sole responsibility of the winners.
- The working language in which the follow-up activities will be held is English.

13. Openings and Deadlines

2026	Gen.	
	Feb.	
	Mar.	
	Apr.	➤ Applications Opening 20 th of April
	May	
	Jun.	➤ Application Deadline 19 th of June
	July	➤ Application Deadline extended to 19th of July
	Aug.	➤ Evaluation & Selection Period ➤ Notification of the Winners
	Sept	
	Oct.	➤ 1st of October Award Ceremony & Showcase
	Nov.	
	Dec.	

14. How to participate

There is no fee required to enter this contest. Applications must be submitted through the official form on the third-party component JotForm Inc. (link will be available on itpo-rome.unido.org/GlobalCall2026 starting from April 20th 2026). Applicants are required to fill all the mandatory fields in the registration form and accept related terms and conditions. By entering this contest, entrants accept and agree to be bound by these Terms of Reference.

If you are not comfortable using this third-party platform, you may alternatively submit your submission via email to: itpoitaly.globalcall2026@unido.org. Please note, however, that attachments sent by email must not exceed 20 MB. Should your files exceed this limit, you will need to use an external file-sharing service to transmit the attachments.

15. Privacy Policy

PRIVACY NOTICE for the purpose of processing personal data related to UNIDO-WTCA Global Call 2026 used by UNIDO.

A. Introduction
The protection of your privacy including your personal data is of great importance to the United Nations Industrial Development Organization (UNIDO). Consequently, all personal data that can identify you either directly or indirectly will be handled legitimately and with the necessary care. This Privacy Notice describes how UNIDO processes your personal data for the purpose it has been collected for and what rights you have as a data subject. Your personal data is collected, processed, and stored by UNIDO in accordance with the principles and provisions laid down in the UNIDO Policy on the Protection of Personal Data (hereafter referred as The Policy), which is based on e.g., the UN system-wide Principles on Personal Data Protection and Privacy adopted by the High-Level Committee on Management (HLCM) in 2018. To collect your submission, UNIDO ITPO Italy uses a third-party component, namely JotForm Inc. platforms, outside UNIDO systems, with your knowledge and permission. The use of JotForm Inc. platforms does not in any way imply endorsement of them or their privacy policies. In order to use this third-party content, you need to accept their specific terms and conditions, including their cookie policies, over which UNIDO has no control. We recommend that you carefully read the JotForm Inc. privacy policies which explain their data processing policy, use of data, users' rights and the way how users can protect their privacy when using these services. If you are not comfortable using this third-party platform, you may alternatively submit your submission via email to: itpoitaly.globalcall2026@unido.org. Please note, however, that attachments sent by email must not exceed 20 MB. Should your files exceed this limit, you will need to use an external file-sharing service to transmit the attachments.
B. Purpose of the processing: Why do we process your data?
The purpose of the processing is the evaluation of your submission according to criteria outlined in this Terms of Reference, internal audit (i.e. due diligence); to communicate with you; to send information about this initiative, and in case of awarding, to promote your project and logistics arrangement.
C. Data processed: What data do we process?
The personal data, which may be processed for the described purpose(s) are the following: Please refer to Annex I of this Terms of Reference "Form fields" as well as submission date and applicant's IP address.

This information will be collected only with the user's knowledge and permission through the third-party component JotForm Inc. platforms, outside UNIDO systems.

D. Data controller: Who is entrusted with processing your data?

The Data Controller determining the purpose and the means of the processing activity is in UNIDO. The UNIDO organizational entity responsible for managing the personal data processing is:
GLO/ITP/ITA – ITPO Italy

To collect your submission, UNIDO ITPO Italy uses a third-party component, namely JotForm Inc. platforms, outside UNIDO systems, with your knowledge and permission. The use of JotForm Inc. platforms does not in any way imply endorsement of them or their privacy policies. In order to use this third-party content, you need to accept their specific terms and conditions, including their security and cookie policies, over which UNIDO has no control. We recommend that you carefully read the JotForm Inc. privacy policies which explain their data processing policy, use of data, users' rights and the way how users can protect their privacy when using these services.

E. Recipients of your personal data: Who has access to your data?¹

The recipients of your personal data on a strict need-to-know basis are the following:
ITPO Italy Team. Personal data may also be shared with UNIDO relevant divisions responsible for audit and reporting activities to be carried out.

Beside third-party component JotForm Inc. which will collect your submission, WTCA representatives, Global Call 2026 Jury and Scientific Committee members will have access to your data for evaluation purposes, as outlined in this Terms of Reference.

In addition, personal may be also disclosed to Law Authorities for security and legal reasons.

F. Rights of the data subject: What rights do you have?

You have the right to access your personal data and the right to request the correction of any inaccurate or incomplete personal data, as well as to request the erasure/deletion of your personal data. You can also object to the processing of your personal data on compelling and legitimate grounds including a decision based solely on automated processing without human intervention.

G. Legal basis: On what grounds do we collect your data?

As per Para 26 (a), Section IV of the Policy, personal data shall be processed in a fair manner and on the basis of data subject consent, as well as on legitimated interests of UNIDO consistent with its mandate.

H. Time limit - data storing: For what period and how do we store your data?

Our aim is to keep your personal data not longer than necessary for the purposes we collect them. The retention period of your personal data, in line with UNIDO's Records Retention Schedules, is 31 December 2030. You will be informed in case of any deviation from this date.

Your submission on GlobalCall2026 form on JotForm Inc. platform will be kept until 15 October 2026. Anyway, we recommend that you carefully read the JotForm Inc. privacy policies which explain their

data processing policy, use of data, users' rights and the way how users can protect their privacy when using these services.

Security of data:

Please refer to JotForm Inc. Security disclaimer regarding the security information, with reference the data you submit through their platforms. In order to use this third-party content, you need to accept their specific terms and conditions, including their security and cookie policies, over which UNIDO has no control.

UNIDO securely stores your personal data. In order to protect your personal data, UNIDO has put in place a number of technical and organizational measures. Technical measures include appropriate actions to address online security, risk of data loss, alteration of data or unauthorized access, taking into consideration the risk presented by the processing and the nature of the personal data being processed. Organizational measures include restricting access to the personal data solely to authorized persons with a legitimate need to know for the purposes of this processing activity.

If you have enquiries regarding the processing of your personal data, you can also contact itpo.rome@unido.org.

16. Disclaimer

The information provided on this website regarding the UNIDO–WTCA Global Call 2026 is published for general information and transparency purposes. UNIDO and UNIDO ITPO Italy disclaimers and scam also apply.

<https://www.unido.org/overview/disclaimer>

<https://www.unido.org/overview/scam-alert>

<https://www.unido.it/disclaimer.php>

The official emblem or logo of UNIDO, shall not, under any circumstances, be used without UNIDO prior written consent, nor represent or imply an association or affiliation with UNIDO. Nothing herein shall constitute or be considered to be a limitation upon or a waiver of the privileges and immunities of UNIDO, which are specifically reserved.

The World Trade Centers Association, Inc. (WTCA) is not responsible for any lost, late, misdirected, incomplete, or undeliverable entries; any technical or human errors that may occur in the administration of the contest; any injury, loss, or damage of any kind arising from participation in the contest or acceptance, receipt, use, or misuse of any prize; or any other circumstances beyond the WTCA's reasonable control. By entering, participants agree to release and hold the WTCA harmless from any and all liability, claims, or actions of any kind arising from or related to the contest.

By using the UNIDO-WTCA Global Call 2026 webpage, users acknowledge and agree to these disclaimers.

17. Final Provision

Participating applicants acknowledge that the organizer intends to carry out a fair and open competition, with no expectation of incurring liability by virtue of such participation.

Applicants declare that any documents, image, or footage possibly involved in their applications were taken by them or that they received permission to use them, and that such materials may be used by UNIDO and WTCA for objectives as outlined in these Terms and Conditions.

Applicants also declare that, if applicable, permission to submit the entry in this competition has been given to them by their employers. Applicants confirm that the information contained in this proposal is correct and complete while declaring to be fully compliant with eligibility criteria set out in the call.

Applicants accept that they will be contacted by the Organizers regarding follow-up activities arising from this competition.

Links to non-UNIDO websites, except for JotForm Inc platforms, are provided solely as a pointer to information on topics that may be useful to UNIDO staff, project stakeholders, and the public.

The use of particular designations of countries or territories does not imply any judgement by UNIDO nor WTCA as to the legal status of such countries or territories, of their authorities and institutions or of the delimitation of their boundaries.

The mention of names of specific companies, industries and/or enterprises or products (whether or not indicated as registered) does not imply any intention to infringe proprietary rights, nor should it be construed as an endorsement or recommendation on the part of UNIDO or WTCA.

Applicants acknowledge that UNIDO, UNIDO ITPO Italy, and WTCA are not going to be part of any non-disclosure agreement with respect to any document or information of any kind or nature that applicants submit to the Competition ("Disclosed Information"). All disclosed information is expressly agreed to be not confidential, with no restrictions on the use or disclosure of the disclosed information.

Nothing in and relating to these Terms and Conditions or the competition will be deemed a waiver of any of the privileges and immunities of UNIDO, UNIDO ITPO Italy, and WTCA.

Applicants release and hold UNIDO, UNIDO ITPO Italy, and World Trade Centers Association harmless from any claim, liability, damage, demand or action, of any kind or nature arising out of any of the

activities of the competition – including without limitation: (i) decisions on competition winners and disqualifications, regardless of whether such actions are willful or negligent, and (ii) any other injury, loss, cost, harm, liability or damage sustained by applicants as a result of any participation in the Competition, regardless of whether - such as injury, loss, cost, harm, liability or damage results from negligence or willful misconduct of the Organizer.

18. Annex

Number	Category Name	Field Requirement
1	Business/Legal Name	Mandatory
2	Type of Entity	Mandatory
3	Country	Mandatory
4	State/ Province	Mandatory
5	City	Mandatory
6	Address (Street)	Mandatory
7	Posta/ Zip code	Mandatory
8	Website	Mandatory
9	Company phone	Optional
10	Company e-mail	Mandatory
11	Other e-mail	Optional
12	LinkedIn profile	Optional
13	Main Contact Person	Mandatory
14	Contact person e-mail	Mandatory
15	Contact person position	Mandatory
16	Link to LinkedIn profile	Optional
17	Award Category	Mandatory
18	Specific sector of activity	Mandatory
19	Project Title	Mandatory
20	Short description	Mandatory
21	Unique Value Proposition	Mandatory
22	Innovative content of the proposal	Mandatory
23	Technology Readiness Level (current at the date of proposal submission) - min. TRL 4	Mandatory
24	Justify your choice of TRL	Mandatory
25	Impact on economic, social, and environmental sustainability	Mandatory

26	Gender dimension and Inclusiveness - Complying with SDG5, explain how your company and your innovative project benefit, contribute and strengthen the implementation of GEEW leaving no one behind	Optional
27	Sustainable Development Goals matched	Optional
28	Certifications obtained by the company	Optional
29	IP registered by the company	Optional
30	Describe the project's short-term objectives	Mandatory
31	Describe the project's medium-long term objectives and overall ambition	Mandatory
32	Describe approaches, methodologies, tools, or services	Mandatory
33	Describe how appropriate open science practices are implemented as an integral part of the proposed methodology (if relevant)	Optional
34	Describe the measures to maximize the expected outcomes and impacts, including: market overview and current positioning, communication strategy, target groups, dissemination actions and tools)	Mandatory
35	Regulatory, Market, Social and Policy Barriers	Mandatory
36	Mitigation measures	Mandatory
37	Brief presentation of the team	Mandatory
38	Brochures	Optional
39	Project photos	Optional
40	Project video pitch (video)	Mandatory
41	How did you hear about the call?	Mandatory
42	Registration to Newsletter	Optional
43	Terms and Conditions	Mandatory