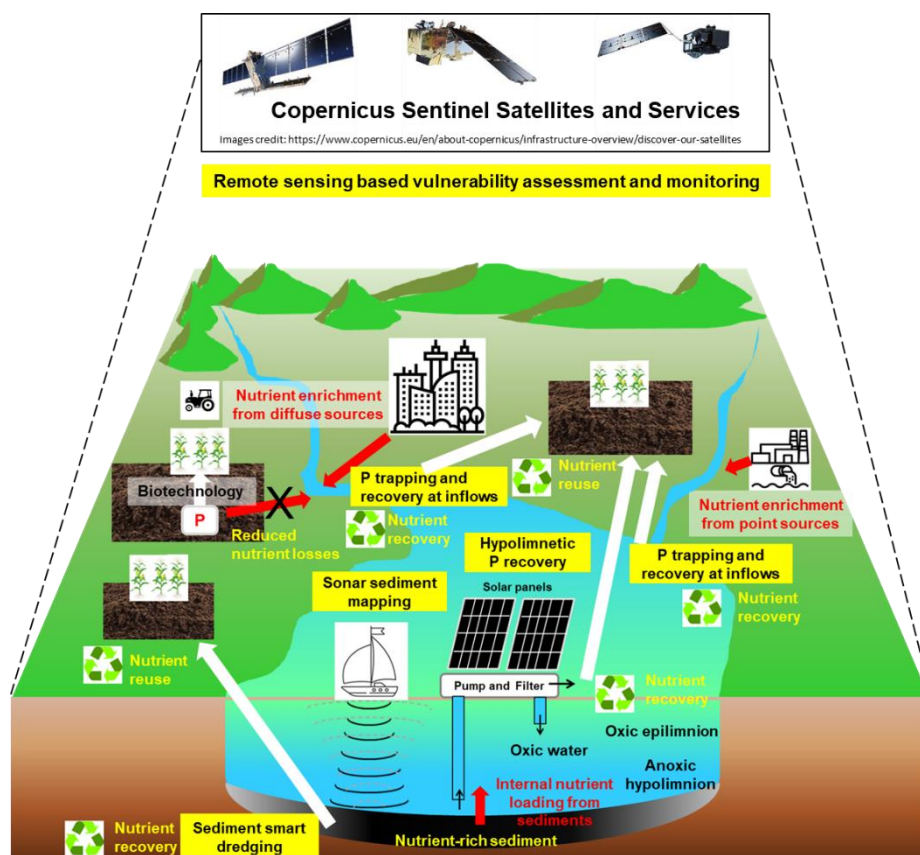




FERRO

Fostering European
Lake Restoration

FERRO Open Call for Associated Regions: Guideline for Applicants



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1 About FERRO project

The FERRO project explores **practical, innovative and sustainable approaches** to improving lake water quality and recovering nutrients for agricultural use. The project develops and implements **sustainable, nature-based solutions** that trap nutrients in catchments and remove phosphorus directly from lakes. These nutrients are then safely **reused as fertilizer**, supporting both ecological restoration and a circular, resilient agricultural system.

FERRO is focusing on four core areas:

- i. **Classifying and prioritising lakes** for restoration using satellite and in-situ monitoring;
- ii. **Reducing nutrient loads** at lake inflows through catchment-based interventions with the potential to recycle them subsequently;
- iii. **Removing phosphorus from lakes** using innovative, sustainable technologies that allow nutrient recycling; and
- iv. **Transferring knowledge and training stakeholders** to apply FERRO solutions across Europe.

FERRO is piloting these solutions in selected demonstration sites and support **associated regions** in adapting and replicating them. The aim is to **restore freshwater ecosystems** by **reducing pollution, enhancing biodiversity** and **building climate resilience** while promoting a **thriving circular economy** in line with key EU strategies (Water Framework Directive, Biodiversity Strategy 2030, Green Deal, Zero Pollution Action Plan). The project is led by a consortium of seven partners, three companies, two universities and two research institutes, from six EU countries: Czech Republic, Bulgaria, Denmark, Finland, Germany and Sweden.

2 About the FERRO Open Call

The FERRO grants support three selected associated regions in developing a two-year action plan to transfer, adapt and implement FERRO restoration solutions (refer to section 4.2). The process involves co-creating and tailoring solutions to local conditions, with the broader goal of scaling nutrient recovery and reuse efforts to combat eutrophication. Remotely-sensed water quality information for the associated lakes shall be made available through a dedicated dashboard during the FERRO project's lifetime.

FERRO will award grants of up to €100,000 each to three associated regions to develop an action plan for applying FERRO restoration solutions to a selected **natural lake¹ ecosystem** or its catchment in their region. We seek regions currently facing eutrophication challenges similar to those addressed at FERRO demonstration sites (Table 1) and willing to implement at least one FERRO restoration solution in their **natural lake ecosystem**. These challenges may include:

- Elevated nutrient levels (e.g., phosphorus and nitrogen)
- Frequent or seasonal algal blooms
- Low oxygen conditions in bottom waters (hypoxia or anoxia)
- High nutrient loading from agricultural or other diffuse sources
- A history of unsuccessful or only partially effective restoration efforts
- A need for sustainable nutrient recovery and reuse approaches

The goal is to extend the impact of FERRO's approach and promote sustainable nutrient management across Europe.

¹ A natural lake is a standing body of freshwater that has formed through natural geological or hydrological processes, such as glacial activity, tectonic movements, volcanic craters, or river meandering, without being created or significantly modified by artificial structures such as dams or levees.

Table 1 Overview of FERRO restoration solutions, demonstration sites and nutrient sources contributing to eutrophication.

	Demo site 1	Demo site 2	Demo site 3	Demo site 4	Experimental site 1
Restoration solution	Recycling of nutrients from lake sediments and reduction of P losses from agricultural soils using biotechnology	Recovery of nutrients at lake inflows and reuse as fertilizer in agriculture.	Phosphorus removal from lake hypolimnion using solar pumps, Fe-based filters and recycling to agricultural soils.	Phosphorus removal from lake hypolimnion using solar pumps, Fe-based filters and recycling to agricultural soils.	Smart-sediment dredging and re-use in agriculture
Lake (Country)	Catchment of Lake Ormstrup (Denmark)	Dröda Reservoir (Germany)	Lake Fure (Denmark)	Vrchlice Reservoir (Czech Republic)	Lake Mustijärv (Estonia)
Lake Area [km²]	0.11	1.1	9.41	1.03	0.01
Catchment area [km²]	1	53.3	79	97.61	-
Mean depth [m]	3.4	13	13.5	-	2
Max depth [m]	5.5	36	37.7	30	3.8
TP [µg L⁻¹]	720	60	50	500	160
TN [mg L⁻¹]	2.05	3.6	0.8	3	1.5
Chl a [µg L⁻¹]	100	7.3	70	8.5	63
Trophic state	Hyper-eutrophic	Eutrophic	Eutrophic	Eutrophic	Hyper-eutrophic
Major source of nutrients	Internal loading, external loading (agriculture)	External nutrient loading (urban run-off, agriculture) and internal loading	Internal loading	External nutrient loading (agriculture) and internal loading	External nutrient loading (urban run-off, agriculture) and internal loading

3 General information

3.1 Terminology

This section defines key terms used in the FERRO Open Call documentation. Unless otherwise noted, these definitions apply throughout.

Associated Region (AR): A region with a natural lake located in an EU Member State or a Horizon Europe Associated Country, excluding countries already represented in the FERRO consortium.

Local and Regional Authorities: Governmental or administrative bodies operating at the municipal, city, state, provincial or district level. These entities are responsible for managing water resources, including lakes and their catchments (e.g., water departments, municipalities, environmental agencies).

Sister Projects: Refers to the three projects funded alongside FERRO under the call HORIZON-MISS-2023-OCEAN-01-04: European natural lakes: demonstration of integrated approaches for protection and restoration of natural lake ecosystems and their biodiversity. These are [EUROLakes](#), [FutureLakes](#) and [ProCleanLakes](#).

3.2 Submission guidelines

Proposals to the FERRO Open Call are submitted in a single stage followed by an evaluation (see timeline in **Figure 1**).

Submission requirements:

- i. Applications must be submitted in English and in PDF format.
- ii. Only the official application forms provided may be used.
- iii. Applications, along with any required annexes, must be submitted by email to: info@ferroproject.eu
- iv. The submission deadline is **30 November 2025 at 17:00 (Brussels time/CET)**.
- v. Late or incomplete submissions, or those sent via other channels, will not be considered.



Figure 1 FERRO FSTP grant timeline

3.3 Language

English is the official language for both the FERRO Open Call and the implementation phase. All submissions must be in English and English will serve as the working language for successful applicants throughout the implementation of their projects.

4 Eligibility

4.1 Eligibility criteria

Applicants must meet all of the following eligibility criteria:

- i. **Authority type:** The applicant is a local or regional authority (e.g., city, catchment or lake authority) with jurisdiction over a **natural lake** or its catchment and is responsible for restoration activities. *Local and regional authorities may apply individually or jointly as a consortium. In a consortium, one authority must serve as the Lead Applicant, responsible for project delivery and fund distribution.*
- ii. **Location:** The authority is based in an EU Member State or Horizon Europe Associated Country, excluding those already represented in the FERRO consortium (Bulgaria, Czech Republic, Denmark, Finland, Germany and Sweden) or hosting a FERRO experimental site (Estonia).
- iii. **Target lake identification:** A specific natural lake or catchment has been identified for the implementation of FERRO solutions. The application must include evidence of eutrophication problems (e.g., nutrient concentrations, chlorophyll-a, oxygen levels), restoration efforts and describe other relevant environmental pressures.
- iv. **Previous restoration experience:** The authority has experience with lake or catchment restoration efforts, particularly where earlier measures had limited success in addressing eutrophication or nutrient pollution.
- v. **Remote sensing suitability:** The selected lake has a surface area of at least 0.5 km², making it suitable for effective monitoring using satellite-based remote sensing tools. *While larger lakes suitable for remote sensing are preferred, this is not a strict requirement. Regions with smaller lakes (<0.5 km²) are explicitly encouraged to apply to promote inclusiveness.*
- vi. **No overlapping grants:** The proposed lake or catchment must not have received funding under the same Horizon Europe call from any of FERRO's sister projects (EUROLakes, FutureLakes and ProCleanLakes). Only one grant per lake/catchment is allowed across the projects funded under this call.

4.2 Eligible activities

- i. Preliminary catchment and lake investigations and monitoring (e.g., high-frequency monitoring, historical analysis of lake data, nutrient balances, sediment and soil investigations including mapping, groundwater monitoring, remote sensing).
- ii. System analysis or studies that help clarify the contribution of specific pressures (e.g., external and internal nutrient loading, climate change). This may include preliminary investigations in the lake and catchment, such as:
 - High-frequency and historical data analysis
 - Nutrient budgeting or mass balance studies
 - Sediment and soil investigations (including mapping)
 - Catchment land use assessment
 - Remote sensing
 - Temperature and oxygen profiling

- iii. Laboratory and field tests of FERRO catchment and in-lake solutions e.g. testing of P-absorption filters, sediment mapping, nutrient recovery from sediments, smart (i.e. targeted) sediment dredging, re-use of sediments in agriculture.
- iv. Stakeholder engagement activities e.g., communication and dissemination, involvement of citizens, research institutes, universities and other interested parties.
- v. Demonstration of the remote sensing lake monitoring dashboard.
- vi. Participation in meetings and events and collaboration with FERRO experts
This may include:
 - Participation in FERRO-organized meetings, training sessions or consortium events
 - Visits to FERRO demonstration sites to exchange knowledge and observe restoration solutions in practice
 - Hosting FERRO experts at the applicant's site for on-site meetings, fieldwork or joint planning activities.

The eligibility check will shortlist proposals for evaluation. Ineligible proposals will be rejected with applicants receiving a notification detailing the reasons for this decision. Only proposals meeting all eligibility requirements will advance to the evaluation phase (refer to section 6.1 and 6.2).

5 Funding

5.1 Financial conditions

To be eligible, proposals must meet the following financial conditions:

- i. The total financial support per associated region is up to a maximum of €100,000;
- ii. The requested amount must represent 100% of the eligible costs. This includes direct costs such as personnel, travel and subsistence as well as indirect costs (up to 25%) related to participation in FERRO internal meetings and interactions with the consortium;
- iii. Financial support will be provided as a lump sum with a fixed ceiling. The lump sum is not based on actual incurred costs. It will be paid in two installments: 50% pre-financing at the start of the project and 50% upon successful completion of the activities defined in the action plan; and
- iv. Each associated region may receive financial support only once under this Horizon Europe topic. This restriction applies to all four projects funded under the same call, including FERRO and its sister projects.

5.2 Subcontracting

Applicants (local and regional authorities) may subcontract specific tasks to research institutions, universities or small and medium-sized enterprises (SMEs) if the expertise is not available in-house. The subcontracted work must directly support the objectives of the proposed action and be described in the work plan. The total subcontracting budget must not exceed 35% of the total amount requested under the FERRO grant.

5.3 Contractual obligations for third parties receiving the support

The beneficiaries (recipients) of the FERRO grants are obliged to accept the contractual obligations under the following Articles of EU Grant Agreements:

- i. Article 12 — Conflict of interests
- ii. Article 13 — Confidentiality and security
- iii. Article 14 — Ethics and values
- iv. Article 17.2 — Visibility, European flag and funding statement
- v. Article 18 — Specific rules for carrying out the action
- vi. Article 19 — General information obligations
- vii. Article 20 — Record-keeping

The beneficiaries accept that the bodies mentioned in Article 25, Checks, reviews, audits and investigations, extension of findings (e.g. granting authority, OLAF, Court of Auditors (ECA), etc.) can exercise their rights also towards the recipients. Article 25.

Note: Third parties receiving financial support from FERRO through the Open Call will not become part of the FERRO Grant Agreement. The FERRO Grant Agreement will not need to be amended to include the selected beneficiaries. Potential applicants are invited to read the EU Funding & Tenders Portal Online Manual² and the EU Grants AGA, Annotated Grant Agreement³

5.4 Restrictions on funding eligibility

Entities subject to EU restrictive measures under Article 29 of the Treaty on the European Union (TEU) and Article 215 of the Treaty on the Functioning of the EU (TFEU) are **not eligible** to receive financial support under this call.

Additionally, following Council Implementing Decision (EU) 2022/2506, as of 16 December 2022, **no legal commitments can be signed** with Hungarian public interest trusts established under Hungarian Act IX of 2021 or any entity they maintain. These entities **may apply** but cannot participate in any **funded role**, including as recipients of financial support to third parties, unless the Council measures are lifted.

6 Evaluation

6.1 Evaluation criteria

Financial support will be awarded based on a rigorous evaluation process that adheres to the Horizon Europe evaluation criteria, customized for the FERRO project. The criteria and their respective weightings are as follows:

² Visit the EU Funding & Tenders Portal Online Manual at <https://webgate.ec.europa.eu/funding-tenders-opportunities/display/OM/Online+Manual>

³ <https://european-digital-innovation-hubs.ec.europa.eu/knowledge-hub/guidance-documents/annotated-grant-agreement-all-eu-funding-programmes-2021-27>

Excellence (30%)

- i. **Relevance to objectives (15%):** The proposal must align with the FERRO project's objectives and Horizon Europe EU Mission: [Restore our Ocean and Waters](#). *Applicants should describe how their project goals and planned activities match and support the overall aims of the FERRO project and the Ocean Mission, demonstrating strategic alignment.*
- ii. **Scientific and technical quality (15%):** Evaluation of the scientific merit and technical feasibility of the proposed lake restoration approach. *Applicants should clearly describe the scientific and technical background, objectives and key challenges to demonstrate the merit and feasibility of their approach.*

Impact (40%)

- i. **Contribution to FERRO objectives (15%):** Clear indication of how the proposal will contribute to the FERRO project's objectives. *Applicants should describe their unique strengths, expertise, data, tools or practices that will complement FERRO's solutions and contribute to achieving the project's objectives and extending its impact.*
- ii. **Sustainability and long-term impact (15%):** Assessment of the project's sustainability and potential for long-term impact. *Applicants should detail how their project will achieve lasting local impact, ensure sustainability beyond the funding period and contribute to FERRO's broader long-term goals.*
- iii. **Stakeholder engagement and dissemination (10%):** Plans for community engagement and dissemination of results. *Applicants should describe strategies to involve relevant stakeholders, ensure community participation and effectively communicate and share results with wider audiences.*

Quality and efficiency of implementation (30%)

- i. **Quality of work plan (10%):** Detailed work plan with activities, milestones and deliverables. *Applicants should provide a realistic and well-structured plan that clearly defines activities, milestones and deliverables to demonstrate effective project management.*
- ii. **Resource allocation (10%):** Appropriateness of the resource allocation, including budget and personnel. *Applicants should justify how resources, budget and personnel are allocated to ensure efficient and effective delivery of the proposed activities.*
- iii. **Risk management (10%):** Inclusion of a risk assessment and contingency plans. *Applicants should identify key risks, describe their potential impact and present clear mitigation and contingency strategies to ensure successful implementation.*

6.2 Evaluation and selection

Evaluation and ranking

Eligible applications will be evaluated by a panel of FERRO consortium members using the criteria outlined in **Section 6.1**. Three internal evaluators (2 evaluators linked to the FERRO solution to be transferred to the beneficiaries and 1 evaluator independent of the FERRO solution to be transferred to the beneficiaries) will evaluate each application. Evaluators will sign a declaration of confidentiality. The form used for evaluation also carries a declaration of freedom of conflict of interest. The evaluators will assess each applicant independently and score them according to the criteria specified in Table 2. After scoring, the evaluators will jointly create a ranked list of

applicants based on the combined total of the three individual scores for each proposal. If two or more proposals have the same top score, the proposal with the higher “Impact” score will be awarded the grant. If the “Impact” scores are also equal, priority will then be given to the proposal with the higher “Excellence” score.

Table 2 FERRO Open Call application scoring guide

Score	Label	Description
1	Poor	The proposal fails to address the criterion adequately. It shows major weaknesses or omissions. The information is vague, incomplete or lacks credibility.
2	Fair	The proposal addresses the criterion in general terms but with several weaknesses. Important aspects are insufficiently developed or unclear, limiting its potential effectiveness or feasibility.
3	Good	The proposal addresses the criterion clearly and covers the key aspects but shortcomings remain. Some elements lack detail, depth or justification. Improvements are needed to strengthen the overall proposal.
4	Very good	The proposal addresses the criterion comprehensively and with clarity. It is well-structured, coherent and convincing with only minor shortcomings.
5	Excellent	The proposal fully and convincingly addresses all aspects of the criterion. It demonstrates strong alignment, high quality and strategic value. It exceeds expectations in terms of clarity, feasibility and potential impact.

Selection

The top three proposals will be invited to the contract negotiation phase. All applicants will receive either an acceptance or rejection letter with an anonymized version of their evaluation report. The outcome of the call will be published without delay, including a brief description of the selected proposals, award date, duration and successful applicants’ legal names and countries.

7 Requirements for associated region projects

7.1 Project tasks

Projects will run until 30 April 2025 and must include the following tasks:

- i. Identify an individual in the Associated Region to serve as the main contact for FERRO activities.
- ii. Attend two in-person General Assembly meetings in 2026, 2027, and final project meeting in 2028, with travel costs covered by the financial support received. Also participate in online General Assemblies, webinars, and other meetings called by the coordinator or work package leaders (no travel costs covered).
- iii. Plan visits to FERRO demonstration sites. Organise at least one visit of up to 5 days per year to the FERRO demonstration site(s) where their chosen restoration solution is being implemented, to enable hands-on knowledge transfer and practical learning.
- iv. Conduct preliminary investigations, monitoring and other analyses needed for the adaptation of FERRO solutions to your lake.

- v. Co-create, test, and start implementing FERRO solutions. Work with local stakeholders to adapt the solutions to local conditions through collaboration, and initiate pilot or small-scale implementation within the 2-year timeframe.
- vi. Stakeholder engagement and capacity building. Organize meetings, workshops, trainings, and citizen involvement.
- vii. Develop an action plan for restoration activities beyond the project's duration.
- viii. Prepare a detailed plan to guide the transfer and adaptation of FERRO restoration solutions after the project ends. The plan should define clear steps, responsibilities, timelines, resources, and identify financing options for future restoration activities. It should include communication and dissemination measures to support scaling and focus on improving ecological and chemical status, restoring biodiversity, enhancing the Blue Economy, engaging the public, increasing climate resilience, and establishing circular economies through resource recovery from lake sediments.

Applicants must provide sufficient background on their lake and their team to demonstrate suitability for FERRO support. They should also identify FERRO solutions of interest that are relevant to their lake's challenges.

7.2 Reporting requirements

Funding recipients must submit both an interim report (Month 13) and a final report (Month 24) demonstrating use of the granted funding, verifiable implementation activities and outcomes achieved, and a financial report on expenditures. The European Commission (EC) reserves the right to inspect original receipts or request them later.

Additional reporting may be required during or after the project to meet (EC) requirements or support project promotion. This may include:

- Data management practices
- Origin and management of externally sourced data
- Ethics and quality management procedures
- Ongoing communication and dissemination activities, including periodic reports summarising work done and results achieved (Month 13, interim report)
- Information for promotional materials such as videos or success stories
- Statistics on personnel involved
- Selected entities are indirect beneficiaries of EC funding and must use the funding appropriately, complying with all Horizon Europe obligations as described in the sub-grant agreement and reference documents.

8 Responsibilities of beneficiaries

8.1 Avoiding conflicts of interest

Beneficiaries must take all necessary measures to prevent any situation that could compromise the impartial and objective implementation of the project, including conflicts arising from economic interests, personal ties or shared interests. Any actual or potential conflict must be reported immediately to the FERRO coordinator who may verify the adequacy of measures taken and require further actions within a set deadline. Breach of these obligations may result in automatic termination of the sub-grant agreement and rejection of costs.

8.2 Checks and audits

The European Commission may arrange checks or reviews at any time during the project and up to five years after its conclusion. These may be carried out by external auditors or EC services, including the European Anti-Fraud Office (OLAF). The procedure is deemed initiated on the date the relevant letter is received. Beneficiaries must ensure proper use of funding to meet milestones and deliverables and submit a final financial statement to the FERRO coordinator at project completion.

8.3 Communication and visibility

Beneficiaries must actively promote their sub-project, the FERRO project and its results to diverse audiences, including the media and the public and must always acknowledge the financial support of the European Commission in all communications.

9 Confidentiality and data protection

To process and evaluate applications, FERRO will collect only the minimum necessary personal and organisational data in full compliance with the General Data Protection Regulation (EU) 2016/679 (GDPR). Please note that the Sub-Grant Agreement Template and Bank Account Information Form (Supporting documents) are provided for reference purposes only. These documents will be required only if the applicant is selected for funding.

9.1 During application

A list of applicants, including basic information, will be prepared for statistical and transparency purposes. This list will be shared with the European Commission and other projects funded under the same topic to support coordination efforts. It will not be made public except in aggregated form as part of the project's communication materials.

9.2 During evaluation

FERRO will process the personal and industrial data required for proposal evaluation. Full applications will be shared with the evaluation board and may also be provided to selected external reviewers bound by non-disclosure agreements to ensure confidentiality. FERRO will maintain full compliance with the General Data Protection Regulation (EU) 2016/679 (GDPR) and will limit data collection to what is strictly necessary at each stage. Following the evaluation process, the final list of awarded projects and beneficiaries will be published, including project name, abstract, legal entity, type, country, results, duration and budget.

10 Contact information

To ensure equal access for all applicants, the FERRO consortium will provide official information exclusively via the FERRO project website. Responses to individual applicant questions will be provided privately via email.

Resources:

FERRO Project website: <https://ferroproject.eu>

FERRO Open Call: <https://ferroproject.eu/open-call>

For application submissions or further support, contact: info@ferroproject.eu

11 Supporting documents

The FERRO Open Call is supported by the following documents, all of which are available for download at <https://ferroproject.eu/open-call>

Applicants are strongly encouraged to read all relevant files before submitting their application.

- i. **Guidelines for applicants** (this document)
- ii. **Annex 1: Application form** (to be completed and submitted)
- iii. **Annex 2: Sub-grant agreement template** (for reference; to be signed only by selected applicants)
- iv. **Annex 3: Declaration of honour** (to be completed by all applicants)
- v. **Annex 4: Legal entity form** (to be completed by all applicants)
- vi. **Annex 5: Bank account information form** (for reference; only required from selected applicants)

12 Acknowledgements and disclaimer

FERRO is funded by the European Union under Grant Agreement Number 101157743. Views and opinions expressed are those of the author(s) only and do not necessarily reflect those of the European Union or the European Climate, Infrastructure and Environment Executive Agency (CINEA). Neither the EU nor CINEA can be held responsible for them.