



Baltic MUPPETS



DELIVERABLE 5.2

REPORT ON THE IMPLEMENTATION OF THE FSTP CALL



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1. INTRODUCTION

The deliverable 5.2 “Report on the implementation of the FSTP call”, provides a comprehensive overview of the implementation of the Baltic MUPPETS Innovation Call implemented under WP5 Third-party financing (FSTP). The intention of WP5 and the planned Innovation Call was to test solutions and optimize technology in collaboration with third parties that support the future sustainability of mussel farming businesses. The FSTP mechanism was called the Innovation Call and was established to distribute project funds to external beneficiaries in order to support innovative activities of its partners and expand the Baltic MUPPETS project impact.

This document is aimed at providing details about the complete lifecycle of the Innovation Call, from its preparatory stage to the final selection and sub granting process. It outlines the process and report performed activities such as co-creation process, documentation preparation, launching the call and further elaborates on eligibility, evaluation and selection of beneficiaries. It includes a full list of the selected beneficiaries, with their respective names and amount of the subgrant awarded. For each beneficiary, a clear description of the funded activities is provided, highlighting how their work contributes to the overall objectives of the Baltic MUPPETS project. Furthermore, the report transparently outlines the key outcomes and progress achieved through the funded work, including the monitoring, the administrative and financial management.

This deliverable reports all activities undertaken to successfully prepare and implement the Innovation Call with the timeframe and rules agreed with consortium partners and dedicated FSTP rules.

2. THE BALTIC MUPPETS INNOVATION CALL

The Baltic MUPPETS consortium with F6S as a leading partner, organised the Innovation Call **investing a total of €100.000** to fund projects which drive sustainable business strategies and technological advancements within the mussel value chain. This initiative aimed to accelerate the market uptake of mussel-based products and services, promoting environmental sustainability, fostering economic growth, and supporting ecosystem restoration efforts.

This call was dedicated to projects in two key areas: **testing and piloting activities**, particularly for submerged mussel farms, and **feasibility studies**, market analysis, and business strategy development, complementing ongoing investments in Baltic MUPPETS mussel farms and market research. The call was open to SMEs and startups based in regions in Sweden, Germany, Denmark, Estonia, and Ireland.

The Baltic MUPPETS Innovation Call was open for almost 3 months, attracting applications from 5 regions and with the aim to select 2 innovative proposals with maximum funding up to €50.000 for 5 months implementation programme. The phases of Innovation Call included:

- **Preparatory phase** focused on analysis and definition of the call orientation and objectives prepared in collaboration with the partners.
- **Implementation phase** focused on aligning with the existing I3 legal framework dedicated to FSTP and proper publication of Innovation Call, evaluation and selection.
- **Monitoring phase** dedicated to monitoring of the Innovation Call winners and selected third party projects.

The figure 1 shows a roadmap and details of each phase of Baltic MUPPTES Innovation call process being implemented during the period between May 2024 and January 2025:

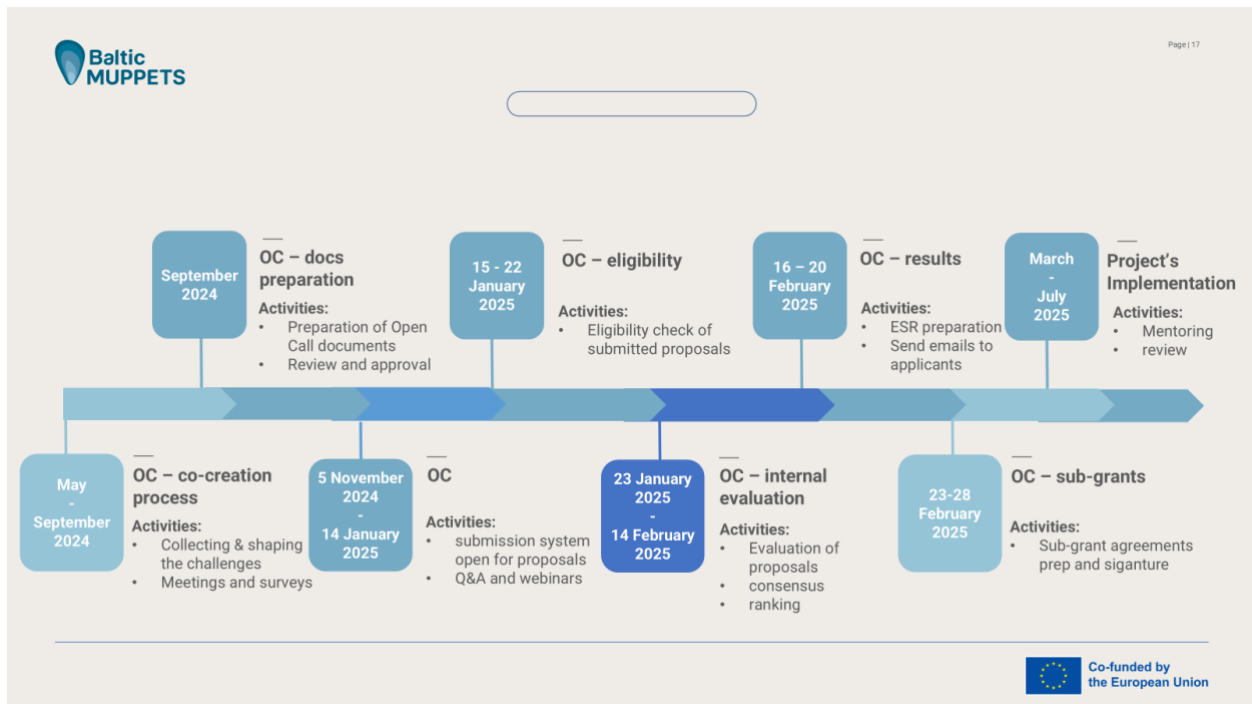


Figure 1: Baltic MUPPETS Innovation Call process.

3. PREPARATORY PHASE OF THE BALTIC MUPPETS INNOVATION CALL

This section details the preparatory phase preceding the official launch of the Baltic MUPPETS Innovation Call. This period was crucial for establishing a solid foundation for the FSTP mechanism. The preparatory work, which took place over several months, involved a collaborative co-creation process to define key challenges, the development of a comprehensive suite of call documentation, and strategic planning for the call's launch and dissemination.

3.1 Co-creation process

The co-creation process was an essential process of the preparatory phase of Baltic MUPPETS Innovation Call and took place between May and October 2024 to define the challenges and requirements to be addressed by applicants in the first Innovation Call, aligned with Project Coordinator, Project Officer and consortium partners expectations.

The preparation for the Innovation Call started many months before the official Call launch, allowing sufficient time to discuss and plan all Call details. F6S as WP5 “Third-party financing” Leader successfully led the process starting with preparatory internal sessions for Baltic

MUPPETS consortium partners to provide insights into what FSTP is and how it works, ahead of launching the Innovation Call. The internal sessions laid ground for the next steps of the preparation.

The aim of Baltic MUPPETS Innovation Call co-creation process was to:

- Identify and shape the **challenges** to be covered by the 3rd parties;
- Develop a **support scheme** provided to selected 3rd parties;
- Prepare Innovation Call **documents** for 3rd parties;

The identification of the challenges has been supported by collaborative sessions with the whole consortium to understand the needs of project partners which might be covered by external 3rd parties. As a result, several challenges were identified, which had been further refined. The next steps consisted of individual conversation and surveying partners to deeper understand their needs, possibilities to support identified challenges and their openness and willingness to collaborate with 3rd parties.

All partners were invited to complete the questionnaire dedicated to Innovation Call challenges and each partner was invited to contribute by submitting the challenges relevant to their activities in the Baltic MUPPETS project. The survey and individual conversation supported the definition of challenges, ensuring alignment with Baltic MUPPETS project goals and the broader objectives of sustainable development and economic growth in the Baltic Sea region.

The co-creation process, allowed to design 3 clusters of challenges, dedicated to testing, product validation and feasibility study, which after a thorough discussion with consortium and alignment with the project objectives were narrowed down to 2 key areas and challenges:

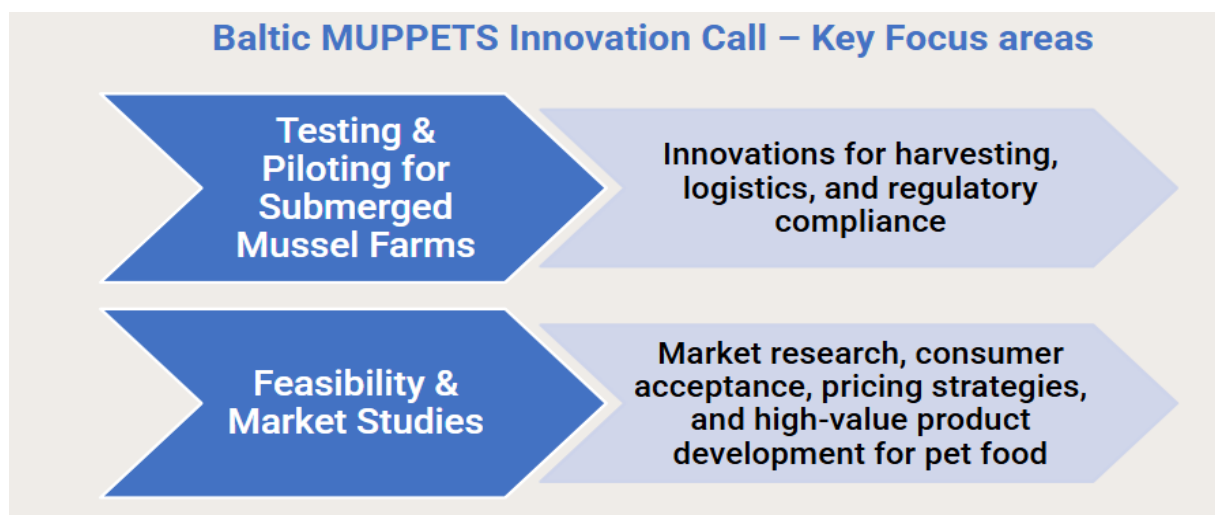


Figure 2: Key focus areas of the Innovation Call.

Cluster 1 - Testing and piloting activities for submerged farms

- Challenge #1.1 Test solutions for submerged farms - Assessment of durability and stability of ropes (Sweden)
- Challenge #1.2 Test solutions for submerged farms - Regulatory requirements, such as marking systems to document ownership (Denmark)
- Challenge #1.3 Pilot the solution for submerged farms - New logistic solutions for harvested mussels (Sweden)

Cluster 2 - Feasibility study, market study, business strategy

- Challenge #2.1 Strategy on how to overcome barriers for market entry of new mussel products
- Challenge #2.2 Strategy to increase consumer acceptance for mussel products
- Challenge #2.3 Go-to-market strategy with assessment of willingness to pay for mussel products
- Challenge #2.4 Recommendation for certification to improve mussel production
- Challenge #2.5 Sales of goods and services from mussel farming

For each challenge, **SMART** (Specific, Measurable, Achievable, Relevant, and Time-bound) goals were identified. Details and specific requirements of each challenge were properly described and provided for potential applicants in the Innovation Call document - Guidelines for Applicants.

Following the challenges composition, the next steps were dedicated to development of a support scheme and documentation preparation. The challenges influenced the requirements for 3rd parties and their sub-projects composition.

The co-creation process laid down the foundation for Baltic MUPPETS Innovation Call reflecting the project's mission, technical needs and expected impact coming from the 3rd parties and in line with the plan set out in the Grant Agreement (GA).

3.2 Preparation of support scheme provided to selected 3rd parties

The challenges created in the first step influenced the requirements for 3rd parties, their sub-projects composition and support scheme which was provided during the implementation of select sub-projects. The support scheme covered mentoring and monitoring support. Among consortium partners it was decided that:

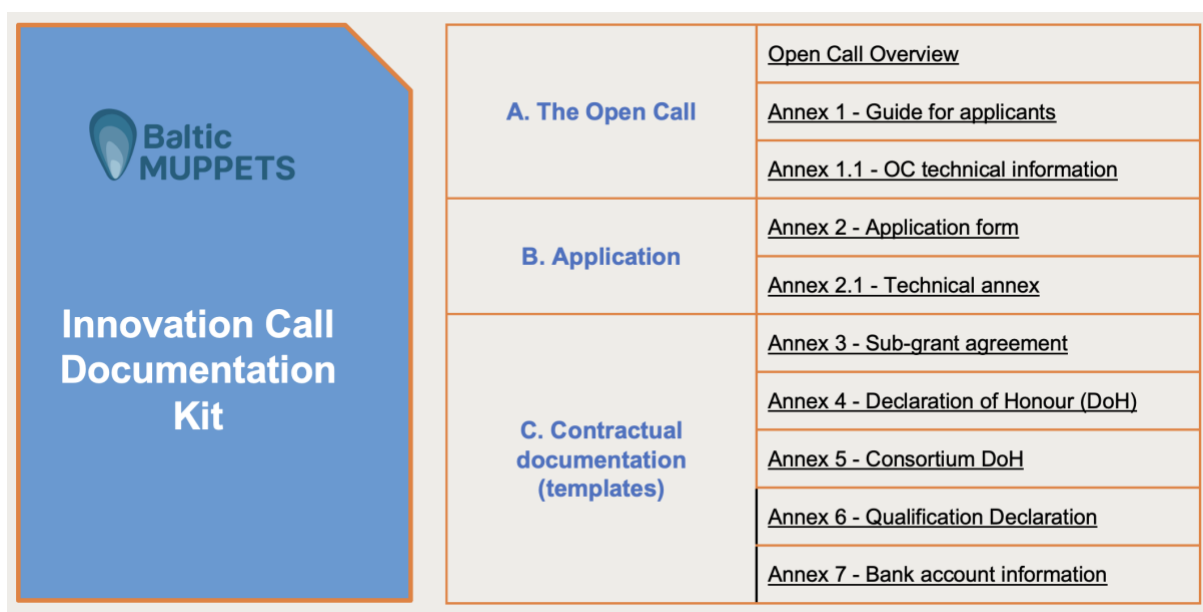
- Each sub-project will be assigned a mentor from the Baltic MUPPETS consortium
- Mentors will offer guidance, track progress, and ensure projects align with established objectives.

To achieve the Baltic MUPPTES project goals, each sub-project will consist of three stages, each with its own timeline and outcome:

- **Stage 1:** A detailed implementation plan delivered within 15 days of the project start
- **Stage 2:** A mid-term report submitted by the last day of this stage's implementation
- **Stage 3:** A final report/deliverable provided within 10 days of project completion.

3.3 Documentation and launching of the Innovation Call

The Baltic MUPPTES Innovation Call had been supported with clear, transparent rules for the application, evaluation, and funding process. All these aspects were clarified in a series of Call Documentation Kit setting up the legal base for Innovation Call.



The diagram shows a blue folder icon on the left labeled 'Innovation Call Documentation Kit' with the Baltic MUPPETS logo. To its right is a table with three main sections: A. The Open Call, B. Application, and C. Contractual documentation (templates). Each section lists specific documents included in the kit.

A. The Open Call	<u>Open Call Overview</u>
	<u>Annex 1 - Guide for applicants</u>
	<u>Annex 1.1 - OC technical information</u>
B. Application	<u>Annex 2 - Application form</u>
	<u>Annex 2.1 - Technical annex</u>
	<u>Annex 3 - Sub-grant agreement</u>
C. Contractual documentation (templates)	<u>Annex 4 - Declaration of Honour (DoH)</u>
	<u>Annex 5 - Consortium DoH</u>
	<u>Annex 6 - Qualification Declaration</u>
	<u>Annex 7 - Bank account information</u>

Figure 3: Innovation Call documentation kit.

The Innovation Call Documentation Kit consisted of:

- **Baltic MUPPETS Innovation Call - Guidelines for Applicants**, document providing comprehensive information regarding Baltic MUPPETS project and the scope and objectives of the Innovation Call; The guidelines provided information about challenges, potential applicants characteristics, eligibility condition and evaluation and selection process;
- **Baltic MUPPETS Innovation Call - Proposal template**, an online application form, available at F6S platform; the template consisted of section about applicant, proposal identification and proposal description; covering budget details, ethics and security aspects;

- **Baltic MUPPETS Innovation Call - Sub-grant Agreement template**, template of the sub-grant agreement that the successful applicants will be requested to sign covering all legal rules for implementing the grant;
- **Baltic MUPPETS Innovation Call - Declaration of Honour template**, template consisting of all conditions of the Innovation Call which shall be accepted by an SME legal representative;
- **Baltic MUPPETS Innovation Call - SME Declaration template**, which evaluated the status of the SMEs participating in Innovation call;
- **Baltic MUPPETS Innovation Call - Bank account information template**, template which collects information on the applicant(s)' bank account where the Baltic MUPPETS payments will be sent to.

These documents established a transparent framework supporting SMEs and start-ups in proposing, executing, and managing funded projects that align with Baltic MUPPETS' Innovation Call goals for environmental sustainability and economic growth in the Baltic Sea region.

The documents were published on the first day of the opening of the Innovation Call and later gathered as a Deliverable 5.1, a comprehensive collection of all documents governing the Baltic MUPPETS Innovation Call.

Following the preparatory phase of Baltic MUPPETS Innovation Call, the Call was successfully launched on the 5th of November 2024 and closed on the 28th of January 2025, at 17:00 CET taking into consideration extension for 14 days to provide applicants with more time to complete their proposals, as the number of submissions was initially lower finish proposals, which at the time of preliminary closure date, set for the 14th of January 2025, were still in progress. The deadline was extended by 14 days than anticipated.

For the period of nearly 12 weeks, the Innovation Call was actively disseminated and supported with live webinar and "AMA sessions" (Ask me anything sessions) providing relevant content to the applicants and giving an opportunity to ask questions.

4. BALTIC MUPPETS INNOVATION CALL IMPLEMENTATION PHASE

This section focuses on all support activities which were delivered to ensure comprehensive guidance to attract and retain the interest of potential third-party applicants for the Innovation Call opportunity. These activities are integral to the broader effort organised and executed under the Baltic MUPPETS Innovation Call, in collaboration with the main communication partner, SUBMARINER.

4.1 Communication strategy

The communication strategy for the Baltic MUPPETS Innovation Call was designed and managed by SUBMARINER to ensure broad outreach and engagement with relevant SMEs and start-ups across the eligible regions. Key communication channels included the [official Baltic MUPPETS website](#), [LinkedIn account](#), [YouTube channel](#), [the F6S platform](#), and targeted email campaigns. The strategy aimed to clearly articulate the call's objectives, challenges, funding opportunities (up to €50,000 for 2-4 selected applicants), and application process, with a strong emphasis on innovative solutions for small Baltic Sea blue mussels. The application deadline was set for January 28, 2025.

4.2 Webinar and Q&A Sessions

To provide comprehensive guidance and address potential applicants' queries, a series of online informational sessions were organised:

- **Innovation Call Webinar:** Held on November 28, 2024, from 11:00 - 12:00 CET via Zoom Webinar. This session provided a project overview, detailed the challenges from Cluster 1 (Testing and Piloting for the Submerged Mussel Farms) and Cluster 2 (Feasibility study, market study, business strategy), and offered a step-by-step guide on how to apply. A dedicated Q&A segment allowed for direct interaction. The webinar was recorded and made available on the [Baltic MUPPETS YouTube channel](#) for those unable to attend live.
- **Live Q&A Sessions:** Two follow-up in-depth Q&A sessions were scheduled to further support applicants in clarifying doubts and maximising their chances of success:
 - **Session 1:** December 17, 2024, 15:00 CET
 - **Session 2:** January 13, 2025, 11:30 CET

These sessions provided additional opportunities for direct engagement with the Baltic MUPPETS team. Applicants were also encouraged to reach out via a dedicated email created for these purposes at opencall@balticmuppets.eu for any queries.



4.3 Broad Dissemination of the Call

Information about the Innovation Call was broadcast widely through various channels, including targeted newsletters and messages sent through established "blue economy" and "Expression of Interest" pipelines. A dedicated post was also made on the Innovation Call section of the Baltic MUPPETS website.

Targeted Outreach Campaigns included:

- A proactive search for relevant industry events and entities was conducted to identify key stakeholders and potential applicants.
- Communication in the BlueBioMatch Mussels Working Group.
- Information was specifically disseminated in Ireland [through the Marine Institute](#), ensuring regional relevance.

4.4 Scouting Activities

Scouting activities were undertaken to actively identify and engage potential applicants within the target regions and sectors. The Baltic MUPPETS Innovation Call utilized the F6S scouting services, a process focused on identifying highly qualified applicants inside and outside the F6S user base with an emphasis on "quality over quantity."

This process involved a thorough, three-stage search performed by the F6S scouting team, based on the specific profile of entities sought for the call. It leveraged existing networks, participated in relevant industry events, and included direct outreach to promising SMEs, start-ups, innovators, innovation hubs, and universities. As a result, individual emails about the innovation call were sent to **42 entities** that were deemed highly relevant and were eligible to apply for the Innovation Call. Out of all the entities contacted, 22 have expressed interest and started their application on the website, and 6 applicants finalized their application.

The overall aim of these activities was to foster a diverse and high-quality pool of applications addressing the Innovation Call's challenges, particularly those focusing on submerged mussel farms and market development for mussel-based products. Ultimately, while a lot of effort was made to reach a valuable audience and key stakeholders, the impact was low due to the very specific nature of the regions, the niche topic, and the limited number of companies doing this type of work in these regions.

5. BALTIC MUPPETS INNOVATION CALL EVALUATION AND SELECTION PROCESSES

The evaluation and selection of proposals for the Baltic MUPPETS Innovation Call followed a structured, multi-step process designed to ensure fairness, transparency, and the selection of the most impactful and feasible projects.

5.1 Eligibility check

An initial eligibility check was performed to filter and discard non-eligible proposals. All submissions were required to meet the following criteria:

- **Submission Method and Language:** Proposals had to be submitted exclusively in English through the F6S platform by the defined deadline (January 28th, 2025, 17:00 CET).
- **Proposal Quantity and Completeness:** Each applicant was permitted to submit only one proposal, which needed to be fully completed, including all required sections.
- **Applicant Status and Registration:** The applicant had to be an SME/start-up legally registered and established in one of the eligible regions covered by the Call (Sweden, Germany, Denmark, Estonia, and Ireland).
- **Budget Adherence:** The total budget of the proposal could not exceed €50,000, and this amount had to represent 100% of the total project costs.
- **Consortium Exclusion:** Proposals from entities who are partners (beneficiaries) or affiliated entities/linked-third parties to the Baltic MUPPETS consortium were not accepted.

Proposals that did not meet all eligibility criteria were deemed non-eligible and discarded. Applicants of non-eligible proposals were notified via email after the conclusion of this step.

5.2 Evaluation and Selection

The evaluation and selection process for the Innovation Call was designed to be fair, and transparent, adhering to the guidelines established in the Baltic MUPPETS Innovation call - Guidelines for Applicants.

Evaluator Briefing and Training

To ensure a high standard of evaluation, each internal evaluator was thoroughly trained. F6S organized a dedicated briefing session for the final group of selected evaluators. This training focused on:



- The context and objectives of the overall Baltic MUPPETS project and its sub-granted projects.
- A detailed walkthrough of the Innovation Call process, from submission to final evaluation.
- Practical instructions on how to use the evaluation sheets to manage and report on applications.

The briefing also provided each evaluator with a list of the proposals they were assigned, with two evaluators designated for each application to ensure fair and neutral scoring.

The Evaluation Process

Following the training, F6S prepared a dedicated evaluation template in an Excel format for each evaluator. This template was a critical tool for standardizing the assessment and ensuring all criteria were addressed. The template included:

- **Proposal Identification:** A link to the proposal, application ID, and proposal title.
- **Proposal Scoring:** Boxes for scoring and commenting on each of the four evaluation criteria: Concept and Approach, Implementation, Impact, and Team and Value for Money.
- **Scoring Rules:** Clear guidance on the scoring scale (1 to 5), with a minimum threshold of 3 points for each criterion to be considered for funding.

The evaluation followed a two-step process:

1. **Individual Evaluation:** Each of the two assigned evaluators for a given proposal independently completed their evaluation using the provided template.
2. **Consensus Meeting:** F6S organised a consensus meeting where two evaluators aligned on a single evaluation text and a final score for the proposal.

This methodical approach was designed to ensure objectivity and provide a consistent basis for all assessments.

Final Ranking and Selection

The final ranking and selection of proposals were conducted in a highly structured manner, which was agreed upon in the Guidelines for Applicants and with the consortium, and subsequently approved by the Project Officer. The process followed these specific rules:

- **Ranking by Score:** Applications were ranked primarily based on their final average score.
- **Tie-breaking Rules:** In the event of a tie, proposals were ranked according to a predefined hierarchy: first by the highest score on Criterion 1 (Concept and Approach), then by Criterion 2 (Implementation), and finally by Criterion 3 (Impact). If a tie persisted, the proposal with the lower funding request was given priority.

- **Cluster Priority:** Priority was given to applications addressing Cluster 1 (Testing and Piloting Activities) to ensure the core technical objectives of the call were met. Proposals from Cluster 2 were considered to utilize any remaining budget.

Eligible proposals proceeded to a multi-step evaluation process:

- **Individual Internal Evaluation:** Each eligible application was assigned to at least two experts from the Baltic MUPPETS consortium for individual assessment.
- **Consensus Meeting:** Following individual evaluations, internal experts convened for a consensus meeting to agree on a common evaluation text and a unified score for each proposal.
- **Ranking Lists:** A final ranking list was prepared for each of the two clusters (Cluster 1: Testing and Piloting Activities; Cluster 2: Feasibility Study, Market Study, and Business Strategy Development) based on the evaluation scores.

Proposals were scored based on four criteria, each receiving a score between 1 (Poor) and 5 (Excellent), with no half-points, as shown in table 1 below:

Table 1: Selection criteria.

Criteria	Description
Criterion 1: Concept and approach	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Alignment with the Baltic Muppets project and the challenge selected. ● Coherence and plausibility of the application. ● Innovation, novelty and feasibility of the proposed solution and approach.
Criterion 2: Implementation	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Quality and feasibility of the work plan and the concept fit to a 5-month programme. ● Quality and feasibility of the described scenario of the testing or piloting activities (challenge dedicated to piloting or testing activities) or plan for preparing the strategy (challenges dedicated to strategies).
Criterion 3: Impact	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● The expected impact of the proposed solution. ● Exploitation potential of the proposed solution beyond the project timeline.
Criterion 4: Team and value for money	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Demonstrated capacity to implement the proposed solution. ● Knowledge, technological and business expertise. ● Allocation and justification of resources and project costs.

Each criterion under examination exhibited in Table 1 received a score value that is represented by the rationale detailed in the Table 2 below.

Table 2: Innovation Call score sheet.

Score	Rationale
1 - Poor	The application addresses the criterion in an inadequate manner or there are significant weaknesses.
2 - Fair	The application addresses the criterion broadly, but there are still several weaknesses.
3 - Good	The application addresses the criterion well, but improvements are necessary.
4 - Very Good	The application addresses the criterion very well, but some improvements are still possible.
5 - Excellent	The application successfully addresses all relevant aspects of the criterion. Any shortcomings are minor.

After the final selection, F6S prepared a comprehensive **Evaluation Summary Report (ESR)** for every single applicant, regardless of the outcome. The ESR included the proposal ID, title, scores for each criterion, and detailed, objective feedback from the evaluators. This process was completed internally by F6S, and all ESR letters were sent out to all applicants simultaneously to ensure transparency and fairness across the board.

6. BALTIC MUPPETS INNOVATION CALL – ANALYTICS OF RECEIVED PROPOSALS

6.1 Analysis of submitted proposals

Baltic MUPPET Innovation Call was successfully closed on 28th of January 2025. The Innovation Call attracted a moderate number of applications – **13 submitted (out of 22 started)** allowing to meet the number of **applications KPI for the project at 43% (KPI = 30)**.

The Innovation Call team encountered various constraints that posed challenges to reach the predefined application KPI (30 submitted applications). These were:

- **Regional focus:** The call was targeting SMEs and startups from specific regions rather than entire countries, which limited the potential pool of applicants;
- **Specific objectives:** The call's objectives were very specific, further narrowing the focus to a niche audience and reducing the number of eligible participants;
- **Timing of the Call:** The period for the call occurred at the end of the year and the beginning of the new year, a time typically marked by holidays, which may have impacted engagement.

Despite these constraints, the Innovation Call team implemented a wide range of promotional activities to attract a strong and relevant applicant pool. The strategy included:

- **Broad promotion:** The call was promoted through multiple channels to ensure wide reach
- **Scouting activities:** Proactive scouting efforts were undertaken to identify and directly engage potential innovators
- **Targeted webinars:** Several webinars were organized to provide detailed information about the call and address applicant questions
- **Communication campaign:** A focused campaign on LinkedIn was executed to reach a broader audience including professionals and organizations within the target sectors.

These coordinated efforts were crucial in ensuring that the call meets and even surpassed its designated KPI, demonstrating the effectiveness of a multi-faceted approach to outreach.

The following analytics are based on the applicants answers in their online application form submitted in the Baltic MUPPET Innovation Call submission platform hosted by F6S.

Applicants successfully addressed 4 of the 8 challenges, resulting in a diverse range of proposals.





Figure 4: Proposals received per each challenge

In terms of number of applications submitted per region, the call was open for SMEs and startups located in regions covered by Baltic MUPPETS consortium:

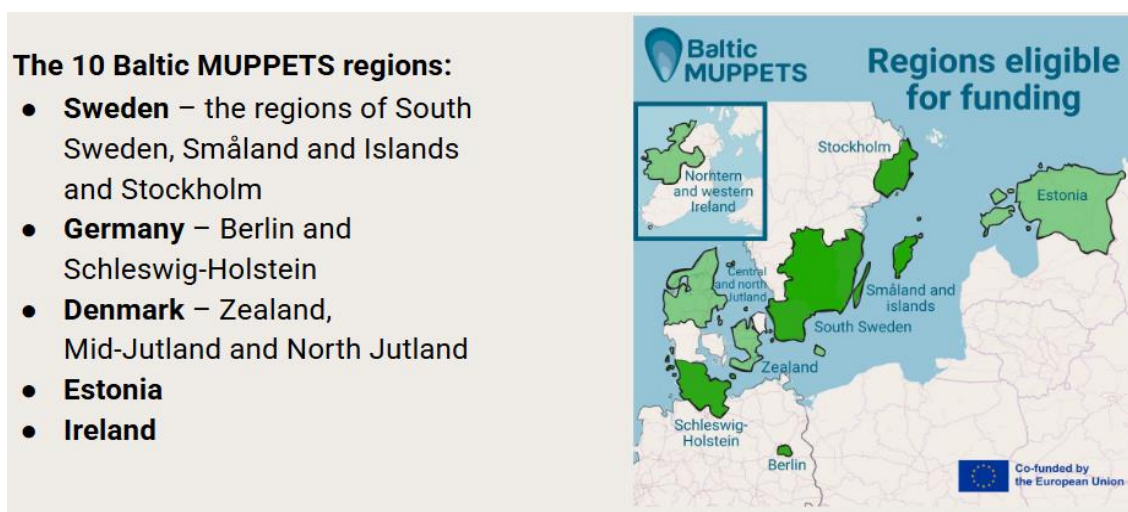


Figure 5: Regions covered by the Innovation Call.

The Innovation Call attracted a diverse geographical interest, with leading applications from following countries and regions (figure 6):

- **Sweden:** Stockholm (5 applications), South Sweden (2), Småland and Islands (1)
- **Germany:** Schleswig-Holstein (1), Berlin (1)
- **Estonia:** Eesti (1)
- **Denmark:** Zealand (1), Mid-Jutland (1)

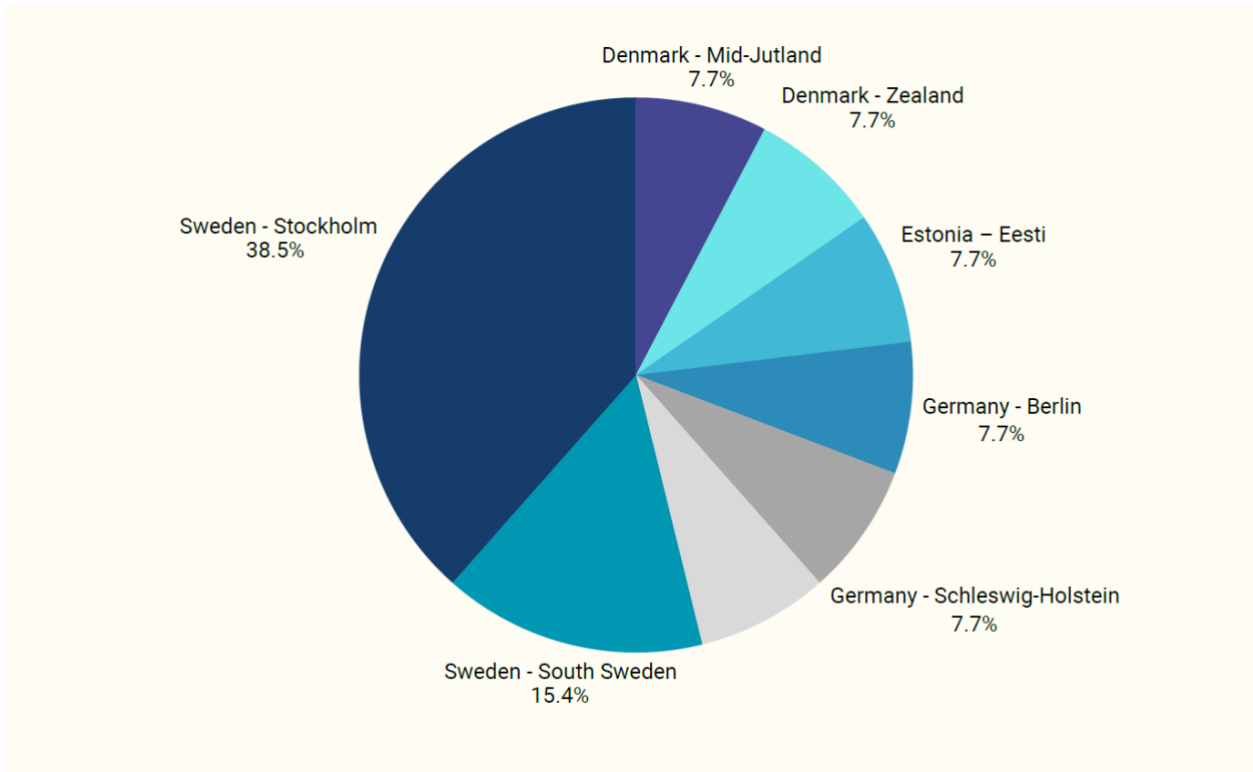


Figure 6: Proposals received per each country.

6.2 Eligibility and evaluation phase

The eligibility check of 13 applications was performed according to the rules stated in **Baltic MUPPETS Innovation Call - Guidelines for Applicants** and it resulted in **7 non-eligible and 6 eligible** proposals that proceeded into the evaluation phase, as seen in figure 7.

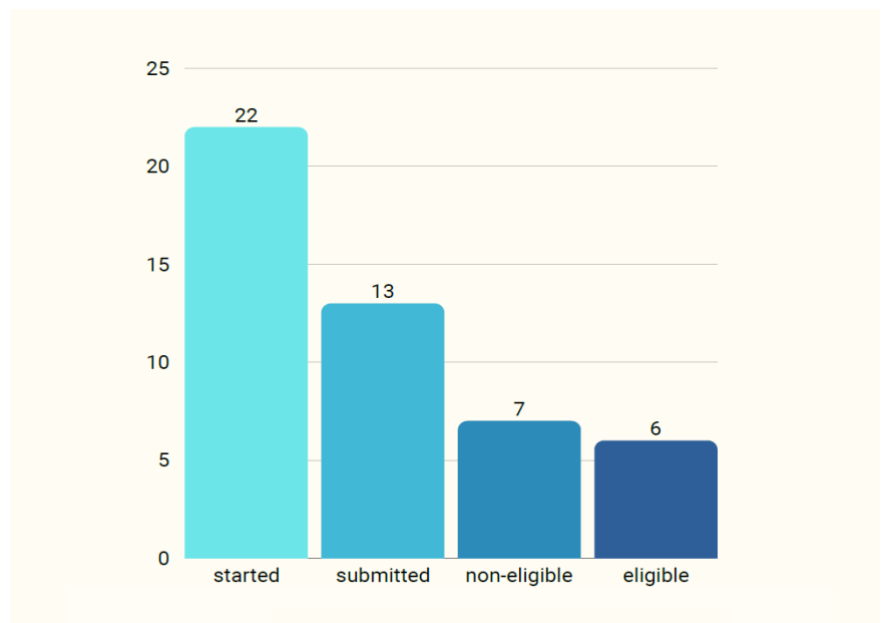


Figure 7: Breakdown of submitted applications and eligibility.

Applicants were deemed ineligible for the following reasons:

1. Applicants were not legally registered in the regions covered by the Baltic Muppets Consortium, including partner and associated partner regions, after an in-depth analysis.
2. Each applicant addressed more than one challenge, whereas Section 3 of the Baltic Muppets Innovation Call - Guidelines for Applicants stated that only one challenge could be addressed.
3. Applications were incomplete and not submitted in English.
4. The total budget per project proposal exceeded €50,000.00.

Considering regions and countries, eligible applications were distributed as seen in figure 8:

- **Sweden:** South Sweden (1), Småland and Islands (1)
- **Germany:** Schleswig-Holstein (1)
- **Estonia:** Eesti (1)
- **Denmark:** Mid-Jutland (1), Zealand (1)

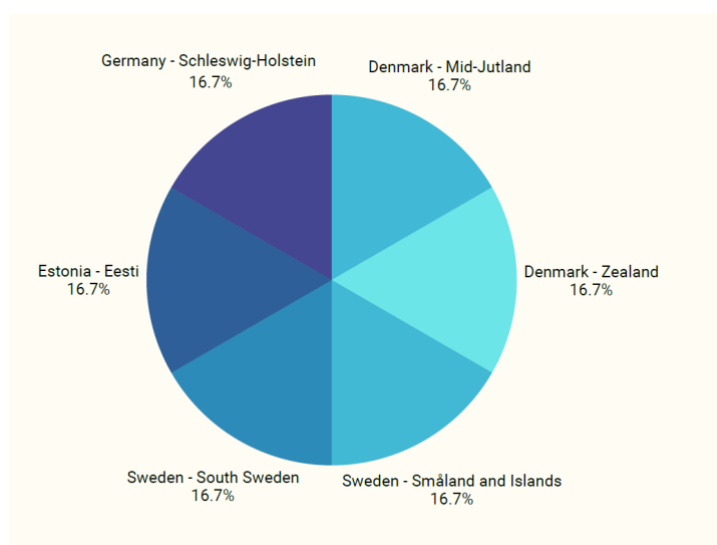


Figure 8: Eligible applications considering regions and countries.

Regarding the distribution of the challenges, eligible proposals covered 4 out of 8 challenges:

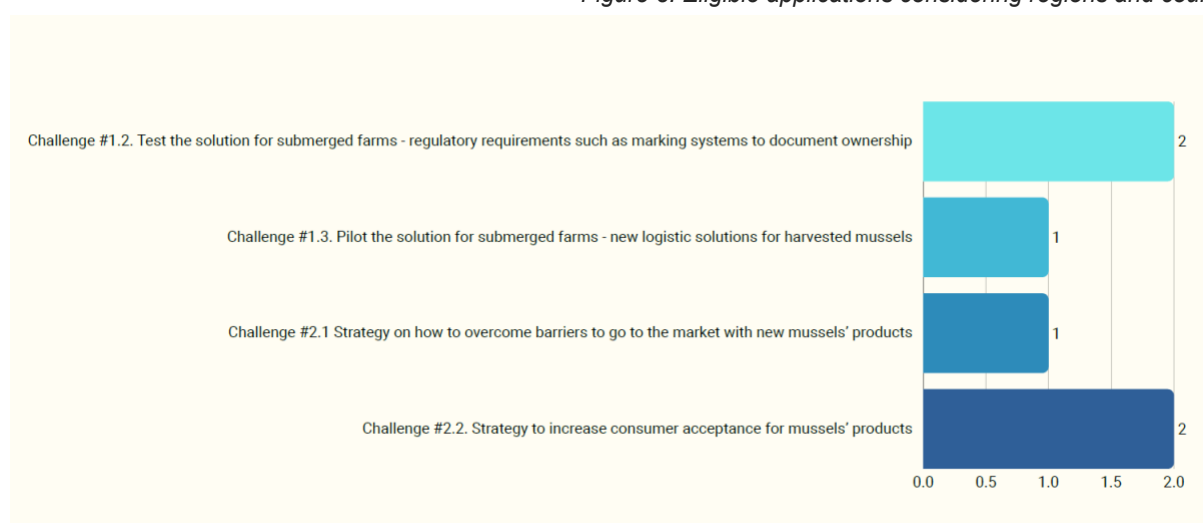


Figure 9: Eligible applications considering distribution of the challenges.

6.3 Final selection

The evaluation phase and final ranking was performed according to the rules stated in the **Baltic MUPPETS Innovation Call - Guidelines for Applicants**. Each proposal underwent review by two internal evaluators before a consortium ranking and selection panel made the final decisions. The evaluation phase concluded with the following results:

- Proposals evaluated: 6
- Proposals selected: 2

7. SUMMARY OF SELECTED PROPOSALS AND BENEFICIARIES

As a result of the Baltic MUPPETS Innovation Call, 2 SMEs have been selected. Both selected companies addressed specific challenges within **Cluster 1 – Testing and Piloting Activities, focusing on developing and piloting innovative solutions for mussel farming**, with a strong emphasis on practical testing, operational efficiency, and scaling up promising ideas beyond the pilot.

Table 3: Summary of selected applicants.

Applicant	Country and Region where the applicant is legally established	Acronym of the proposal	Challenge of the proposal	Sub-grant amount
Saga Aqua	Sweden - Småland and Islands	BALANCE	Challenge #1 - 1.3. Pilot the solution for submerged farms - new logistic solutions for harvested mussels.	49,828.00
<p>Title: Baltic Aquaculture: Low-impact Alterations for Next-gen Cultivation Efficiency</p> <p>Saga Aqua will pilot new, efficient logistic solutions to enhance the survival and quality of harvested mussels from farms along Sweden’s east coast. Due to high harvesting costs and limited mussel viability during transport and storage, Saga Aqua aims to identify critical factors—such as water temperature and packaging density—that impact mussel survival. They will propose and pilot two innovative technical solutions, integrating harvesting, transport, and storage processes. These solutions are expected to optimise logistics, reduce operational costs, improve mussel quality, and support sustainable growth in the Baltic mussel industry.</p>				

Focuslink ApS	Denmark - Mid-Jutland	MM-BM	Challenge #1 - 1.2. Test the solution for submerged farms - regulatory requirements such as marking systems to document ownership.	48,000.00
<p>Title: Mussel Marking for Baltic Muppets</p> <p>Focuslink ApS will develop and pilot robust, cost-effective marking solutions for submerged mussel farm equipment in Denmark’s Limfjord. Under Danish regulations, each mussel farm component must carry a unique identification mark that remains readable for over 20 years, even when exposed to harsh marine conditions and extensive biofouling. To address this, Focuslink ApS will design and evaluate three prototype marking systems, testing them for ease of application, durability in seawater, long-term readability, biofouling resistance, and cost-effectiveness. Successful implementation of these solutions will simplify regulatory compliance, lower operational costs, and enhance overall efficiency for Danish mussel farmers.</p>				

8. BALTIC MUPPETS INNOVATION CALL SUPPORT SCHEME PROVIDED TO SELECTED THIRD PARTIES

The effective monitoring and mentoring of selected proposals were paramount to ensuring the successful implementation of the Baltic MUPPETS Innovation Call projects. This comprehensive support system was designed to provide continuous guidance, track progress, mitigate risks, and facilitate communication between the sub-grantees and the Baltic MUPPETS consortium, particularly with the Innovation Call manager F6S and the technical partners.

8.1 Innovation Call Programme Development

A comprehensive programme was developed as a central guidance for all selected sub-grantees. This programme clearly outlined the operational rules and expectations for the funding programme, covering essential elements such as:

- **Milestones:** Defined key project phases and deliverables;
- **Payment Scheme:** Explained the financial contribution distribution and timelines;
- **Calendar:** Provided a detailed timeline for project implementation and reporting;
- **Templates:** Offered standardised templates for reports and other necessary documentation;

- **Roles & Responsibilities Table:** Clarified the roles of all involved parties (sub-grantees, F6S, technical partners) with respective contact information;
- **Communication Flow:** Illustrated the established channels and protocols for communication;
- **Follow-up and Technical Meetings:** Explained the distinct purposes and periodicity of these meetings, ensuring clarity on monitoring and technical support;

8.2 Kick-off Meeting and Onboarding

The onboarding process for the selected sub-grantees began with a comprehensive kick-off meeting, designed to formally introduce the projects, outline the programme structure, and foster initial connections:

- **Date and Logistics:** The "Baltic MUPPETS Innovation Call - kick-off meeting for selected sub-projects" was held on March 13, 2025, at 12:00 PM Brussels time via Zoom. Invitations were extended to all parties, including the coordinator, consortium partners, and the third-party beneficiaries (Saga Aqua and Focuslink ApS).
- **Agenda Highlights:** The meeting's agenda was structured to provide a holistic overview and facilitate interaction:
 - **Welcome and Introductions:** A round-table introduction allowed all participants to familiarise themselves with each other.
 - **Baltic MUPPETS Project Presentation:** A representative from SUBMARINER introduced the overarching project scope and objectives.
 - **Meet the Innovation Call Winners:** Representatives from Saga Aqua and Focuslink ApS presented their sub-projects.
 - **Meet the Mussel Farms and Challenges:** Representatives from Ecopelag and Wittrup (technical partners) provided insights into their mussel farms and the specific challenges being addressed by the funded projects.
 - **Baltic MUPPETS Funding Programme Overview:** An F6S representative detailed the programme elements, including milestones, payment schema, calendar, templates, roles and responsibilities, communication flow, alongside providing any additional information.
 - **Dissemination and Promotion of Sub-projects:** SUBMARINER outlined plans for communicating and promoting the awarded projects.
 - **Q&A and Next Steps:** An open Q&A session concluded the meeting, followed by a discussion on immediate next steps.

This kick-off served as a crucial foundation for the sub-grantees, ensuring they were well-informed about the programme's requirements and the support available.

8.3 Ongoing Monitoring and Mentoring

F6S, as the Innovation Call manager, undertook continuous monitoring activities, primarily focusing on tracking overall progress and identifying potential issues for technical intervention. As a non-technical partner, F6S's role was to bridge communication, payments following the acceptance of deliverables and ensure timely resolution of challenges.

- **Scheduled Follow-up Meetings:** Regular follow-up meetings were organised by F6S, with the periodicity defined in the programme calendar. These meetings involved all third-party sub-grantees and a representative from the relevant technical partner entity. The purpose was to discuss ongoing activities, assess progress, and address any non-technical challenges.
- **Deliverables and Reports:** Templates for the Innovation Call deliverables, were provided to the sub-grantees. These templates were designed to facilitate comprehensive reporting on activities, results, KPIs, risk management, and communication efforts, and were evaluated by internal technical partners to track progress effectively.
- **Periodical Reminders:** F6S ensured that sub-grantees and technical partners received periodical reminders regarding upcoming deliverables, end of sprints/cycles, and other important deadlines.
- **Technical Meetings:** Beyond the F6S-led follow-up meetings, technical partners organised dedicated technical meetings. These sessions focused on in-depth discussions of the technical activities being performed within each sub-grantee project, offering expert guidance and problem solving.

8.4 Sub-Grantee Progress Reviews

Key review points were integrated into the programme to formally assess project progress and serve as triggers for payment disbursements. The review process was primarily led by the F6S team being responsible for logistical coordination and communication, with the technical partners being responsible for the deliverables/reports review.

The programme's review process was structured around a mid-term and a final review meeting to ensure consistent progress monitoring.

The **Mid-term Review**, held on June 23, 2025, served as a crucial check-in point where sub-grantees presented their progress, discussed upcoming plans and risks, and confirmed reporting requirements for the second half of the project. During this review, sub-projects were given additional support and very detailed feedback to ensure their deliverables met the required standards, demonstrating innovation call manager's commitment to supporting its beneficiaries for a successful outcome. The meeting successfully verified that both projects were on track and allowed the consortium to provide timely support.

The **Final Review**, held on August 29, 2025, was the culmination of the process, where sub-grantees presented their final results. Both funded projects have successfully finished the implementation phase, with **Saga Aqua** completing testing and delivering a final report on their submerged mussel farm logistics solution, and **Focuslink ApS** developing and testing an innovative marking system for submerged mussel farm equipment. All final reports have been successfully submitted and were reviewed by the technical partners. Once the reviews were completed, the payment process was initiated to formally close out the monitoring and administrative support for the Innovation Call projects.

Both sub-projects, while successfully completing their final reports, experienced some challenges. The evaluation and selection process, though effective in prioritizing Cluster 1 projects, highlighted that the pool of applicants was smaller than anticipated, leading to fewer proposals. During implementation, there were additional bumps in the road; Saga Aqua faced delays in testing with live mussels due to high sea temperatures, and FocusLink ApS required guidance to refine its initial deliverables. These issues, however temporary, demonstrate the vital role of the robust monitoring, mentoring, and review processes. These systems were crucial in providing the necessary support and a clear framework for accountability, ensuring that both innovative projects successfully achieved their objectives despite their individual hurdles encountered.

9. ADMINISTRATIVE AND FINANCIAL MANAGEMENT

As the Innovation Call manager and treasurer, F6S was responsible for the full administrative and financial organisation of the sub-grant agreements. This involved several key steps to ensure compliance and proper management of the program's funds.

Before the signing of contracts and the release of any payments, F6S performed a mandatory Know Your Customer (KYC) check on all beneficiaries. This process is a legal requirement in line with the EU's anti-money laundering legislation. Upon the acceptance of the KYC check, F6S, as the innovation call manager, signed contracts with the selected beneficiaries.

Following the successful acceptance of all deliverables and reports by the technical partners, F6S released the payments to the beneficiaries. The structured organization of all related documents, from the initial innovation call to the final reports, was made in the internal project repository, which greatly facilitated this process and ensured a smooth project closeout.

10. LESSONS LEARNED FROM THE BALTIC MUPPETS INNOVATION CALL

Reflections on the implementation of the Baltic MUPPETS Innovation Call provide valuable insights for cascade funding initiatives, particularly concerning the balance between targeted outreach and the inherent limitations of a highly specific call.

1. Challenge of niche-specific calls

The Innovation Call was designed with very specific objectives and a limited geographical scope. While these ensured proposals were highly relevant to the project's goals, it also presented a major challenge for attracting a large number of applicants. Despite extensive efforts, the total number of applications was moderate (13 applications whereas call targeted min. 30). The specific nature of the regions and the niche topics had a low impact on the number of applications received.

2. The structured and transparent process

Applying multi-stage evaluation process, clear guidelines and supported the transparent process of Innovation Call management and implementation. The comprehensive "Innovation Call Documentation Kit" provided applicants with all necessary information, from application rules to the sub-grant agreement template, which set a clear legal and operational framework. Implementing clear and easy step-by-step application process demonstrated throughout the webinars, scouting activities, AMA sessions and the rest of the communication campaign allowed applicants to clearly see how easy it is to apply and the benefits they would receive as a result of being a part of the program. Additionally, the multi-step evaluation process, including an initial eligibility check and a two-stage review by trained evaluators, ensured that

all proposals were assessed consistently and objectively. The provision of a detailed Evaluation Summary Report (ESR) to all applicants, regardless of the outcome, further reinforced the commitment to transparency and fairness. The support scheme, including an onboarding kick-off meeting, ongoing monitoring and mentoring, and structured progress reviews, was crucial for the successful implementation of the selected projects. This demonstrated that the project's commitment to its beneficiaries extended beyond just funding.

3. Proactive outreach

Even with a niche focus, active and varied outreach was critical to the call's success.

- **Multi-channel approach:** The use of a mix of communication channels, including the official website, social media, webinars, and email campaigns, was effective in reaching out to the target audience.
- **Scouting:** scouting services and direct outreach to relevant entities were fundamental to attracting a qualified pool of applicants.

Extending the deadline: The decision to extend the application deadline by 14 days was a practical measure that allowed applicants who had started their proposals to finalize them, contributing to the overall success of meeting the KPI. This shows the value of flexibility in administrative processes to accommodate applicant needs.