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A4SUSTINNO

OPEN CALL FOR PARTICIPATION IN ACCELERATION PROGRAMME



1. About the Project

The A4SUSTINNO - Acceleration for Sustainable Innovation project, co-funded by the Interreg IPA ADRION Programme 2021-2027, aims to strengthen regional innovation ecosystems and support SMEs and start-ups in their transition toward sustainable, competitive and innovation-driven business models.

The project connects partners from *eight Adriatic-Ionian countries*, including regional development agencies, universities, business-support organisations and innovation hubs. Together, they design and implement regional acceleration programmes that embed sustainability, quality management and circular-economy principles into entrepreneurial practice.

At the core of A4SUSTINNO are *Distributed Local Networks (DLNs)* - cooperation platforms that connect SMEs, mentors, researchers, clusters and local institutions, ensuring regional adaptation while maintaining a shared transnational methodology.

The project's main objectives are to:

Strengthen strategic, financial and operational capacities of SMEs and start-ups;

Support the integration of ESG, sustainability and quality principles into business strategies;

Build long-term collaboration through regional DLNs;

Foster innovation-driven and sustainable growth across the Adriatic-Ionian region.

Participation in the acceleration programme is *free of charge*, co-funded by the *European Union (Interreg IPA ADRION Programme)*.

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2. Objective of the Call

The objective of this Open Call is to select innovative and scaling-up SMEs and start-ups to participate in the regional A4SUSTINNO Acceleration Programme, implemented by University of Donja Gorica in Montenegro.

The programme provides *non-financial support* to help companies:

Strengthen strategic, financial and operational capacities;

Enhance innovation management and market competitiveness;

Integrate sustainability, ESG and quality principles into their business models;

Connect with mentors, investors and innovation ecosystem actors;

Participate in cross-border learning and DLN activities.

3. Programme Offer

Selected participants will benefit from a comprehensive acceleration process combining training, mentoring and networking.

The programme includes training modules covering next key business-development areas:



Vision, Strategy & Innovation Foundations



Financial Management & Investment Readiness



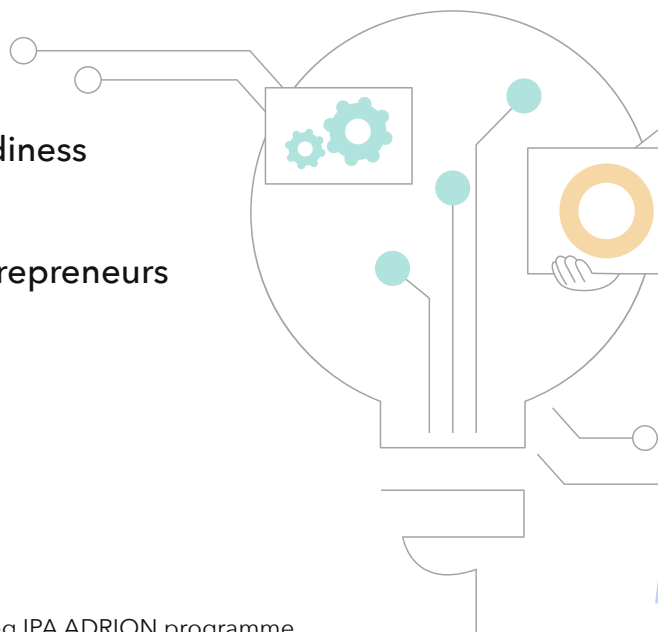
Marketing, Branding & Market Expansion



Practical Management Skills for Micro-Entrepreneurs



Sustainability and Quality Management



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Mentoring and coaching: individual sessions tailored to company needs, focusing on strategic planning, market positioning, innovation scaling and ESG integration.



Networking and visibility: enabling access to mentors, experts and potential partners across the Adriatic-Ionian region.

All activities will be conducted by qualified trainers and mentors, including those identified within the DLN ecosystem, and coordinated by project partners.

4. Programme Structure and Timeline

The Acceleration Program is designed as an intensive 4-month onsite curriculum combining expert-led workshops, practical exercises, and individualized mentoring. The program supports students start-ups, micro, small, and medium enterprises in strengthening competitiveness, improving internal processes, achieving investment readiness, enhancing market presence, and preparing for sustainable long-term growth. The program will run from **March 10th to May 10th**, with structured modules delivered during this period, followed to **individual mentoring and program evaluation**.

Acceleration program calendar is available on:

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5. Eligibility Criteria

Eligible applicants are:

- Legally registered SMEs or start-ups based in Montenegro;
- Student start-ups;
- Operating in innovation-oriented or sustainability-related sectors;
- In early-stage, growth or scaling-up phase;
- With a motivated team willing to participate actively in training, mentoring and evaluation;
- Committed to integrating sustainability and quality principles into their operations.

Enterprises from any sector may apply, provided they comply with the basic eligibility requirements and demonstrate motivation to participate in the Acceleration Program.

However, priority will be given to SMEs and start ups operating within the Smart Specialisation (S3) common areas, specifically:

- Social Innovation
- Digital Technologies
- Health
- Creative and Cultural Industries
- Tourism Innovation



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6. Application and Selection Procedure

Applicants must complete the official application form available at:

<https://forms.gle/zaRtdDuyKR5Nv91e6>

- The application should include:
- Basic company information and contact data;
- Short description of products/services and innovation aspects;
- Statement of motivation and expected benefits from participation;
- Confirmation of availability for all training and mentoring sessions.

Selection will be conducted in a transparent, two-step process:

1. Administrative eligibility check;

2. Qualitative evaluation based on motivation, innovation potential, scalability and relevance to the programme themes.

The maximum number of participants in the acceleration program is 15. In the event that two or more applications receive the same number of points, priority will be given to the application submitted first.

Selected SMEs/start-ups will sign a *Participation Agreement*, outlining mutual obligations, schedule and data-sharing procedures.

7. Key Dates (indicative)

Open Call publication: **30.1.2026.**

Application deadline: **20.2.2026.**

Evaluation and selection: **28.02.2026.**

Programme start: **10.3.2026.**

Programme end: **10.5.2026.**

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8. Expected Results and Benefits

By participating, SMEs and start-ups will:

- Turn their business idea or existing operations into a clear, future-proof growth plan.
- Gain financial confidence with simple tools to control costs, set smart prices, and plan for investment.
- Strengthen their brand and stand out with sharper storytelling, better visibility, and practical marketing tactics.
- Learn how to run their business with less stress and more efficiency using easy-to-apply management tools.
- Discover new opportunities for sustainable, higher-quality products and services that attract modern customers.
- Receive personalised expert guidance to overcome their biggest challenges and accelerate next steps.

9. How to Apply

Submit your application electronically via Application form (see page 4, section 6. *Application and Selection Procedure*)

All questions can be sent to: preduzetnicko.gnijezdo@udg.edu.me;

Incomplete or late applications will not be considered.

10. Contact

For additional information about the A4SUSTINNO Acceleration Programme:

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Disclaimer

This Call for Applications is implemented under the A4SUSTINNO - Acceleration for Sustainable Innovation project, co-funded by the European Union through the Interreg IPA ADRION Programme 2021-2027. The content of this document is the sole responsibility of University of Donja Gorica UDG and does not necessarily reflect the views of the European Union or the Managing Authority of the Programme.