

Milestone 1 – Project Kick-off

The journey of **Inno2mare** officially began with its **Kick-off Meeting**, held on **17–18 January 2023** at the University of Ljubljana, Faculty of Mechanical Engineering. This milestone marked a crucial starting point for the consortium, bringing together partners from Slovenia, Croatia, Belgium, and other European countries to launch a joint mission: strengthening the capacity for excellence of regional innovation ecosystems to support the digital and green transitions of maritime regions.

The two-day meeting provided an opportunity for all partners to introduce their organizations, present their expertise, and clarify their roles within the project. It set the stage for collaborative work by aligning expectations, defining responsibilities, and building a shared vision of how Inno2mare will contribute to the competitiveness and sustainability of the maritime sector.

A series of presentations and discussions focused on the **core objectives of the project**, such as:

- Supporting the **digital transformation** of maritime industries through new technologies and data-driven solutions.
- Advancing the **green transition** by promoting sustainable practices, renewable energy integration, and improved energy efficiency.
- Strengthening cooperation between **research institutions, industry, policymakers, and society**.
- Building long-term cross-border innovation ecosystems in Slovenia and Croatia.

The Kick-off Meeting also introduced the **Excellence Hubs initiative** under Horizon Europe, framing Inno2mare in a broader European policy context. This connection highlights the project's role not only as a regional driver of innovation but also as part of Europe's collective effort to achieve climate neutrality and digital leadership.

In addition to strategic discussions, the consortium planned concrete first steps. Key deliverables for the first semester included:

- The **Data Management Plan (DMP)** to ensure transparent and FAIR use of research data.
- The **Quality Assurance Plan (QAP)**, incorporating monitoring of gender balance and equal opportunities.
- The **Dissemination, Exploitation, and Communication Plan (DECP)** to guide outreach activities.
- The initial **ecosystem mapping report**, documenting actors, roles, and collaborations in Slovenian and Croatian maritime innovation landscapes.

Work also began on designing the three **R&I Pilot Projects** that will serve as testbeds for innovation:

1. A **VR-based fire evacuation model** for ship engine rooms, supporting safety training.
2. A **digital twin of hybrid hydrogen systems**, enhanced by artificial intelligence, for sustainable energy conversion and management.
3. **Autonomous shipping technologies** to improve safety, efficiency, and competitiveness of maritime transport.

Equally important, the Kick-off marked the creation of governance structures, including the **Project Management Board, Quality Assurance Committee, Data Management Committee**, and the **Gender and Equal Opportunities Committee**. These bodies ensure that the project is implemented with high standards of scientific excellence, accountability, and inclusivity.

The meeting concluded with the adoption of an **Action Plan for the first six months**, defining deadlines, responsibilities, and next steps. Partners also agreed on regular online coordination meetings and the organization of annual physical gatherings to strengthen collaboration.

By the close of Milestone 1, Inno2mare had successfully laid its foundations: a committed consortium, a clear governance framework, a roadmap for research and innovation pilots, and a common strategy to mobilize knowledge, resources, and stakeholders. This starting point ensures that the project can progress with strong momentum towards its long-term goal—positioning Slovenia and Croatia as leaders in maritime innovation and contributing to Europe's digital and green transitions.