

ABBA Open call for blue economy innovators

This document is the open call (including application template, methodology & criteria) for the collection and assessment of the received applications by deeptech solution providers for ensuring a transparent, open and fair procedure for all beneficiaries.

Program priority: Supporting a smarter Adriatic - Ionian region

Specific objective: SO. 1.1: Strengthening innovation capacities in the Adriatic - Ionian region

Project acronym and title: **ABBA - Adriatic-Ionian SustainaBle Blue Economy Alliance for upscaling SMEs**

Project ID: IPA-ADRION00284

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1. ABBA Project Overview

The Adriatic-Ionian Sustainable Blue Economy Alliance (**ABBA**) is funded by the European Union under the Interreg **VI-B IPA ADRION programme**, and aims at boosting the **sustainable blue growth** across the Adriatic-Ionian region. Through six **Regional Blue Excellence Hubs** across **Greece, Italy, Croatia, Montenegro, Albania, and Bosnia and Herzegovina**, it will foster innovation by **supporting deep tech innovators** focused on advanced technologies like AI, robotics, and biotechnology. These innovations will benefit blue economy sub-sectors (*port activities, maritime transport, marine renewable energy, sustainable aquaculture & fisheries, shipping, shipbuilding & repair, and blue bioeconomy & biotechnology*). By facilitating collaboration and capacity building, the ABBA project will **address regional challenges** such as climate change adaptation, marine energy efficiency, circular economy, biodiversity protection, digitalization of ports and vessels, and sustainable shipbuilding, and contribute to economic development.

The ABBA Partnership:

- ❖ [University of the Aegean](#) (Lead Partner)– Greece
- ❖ [KiNNO Innovation Intermediaries](#) LTD – Greece
- ❖ [Chamber of Commerce Industry Craft and Agriculture of Venice Rovigo](#) – Italy
- ❖ [Intermodal Transport Cluster](#) – Croatia
- ❖ [Science and technology park Montenegro](#) – Montenegro
- ❖ [AULEDA](#) - Local Economic Development Agency, Vlora Region – Albania
- ❖ [Sarajevo Economic Region Development Agency SERDA](#) - Bosnia and Herzegovina

Together, the ABBA partners aim to build a collaborative and inclusive innovation environment that empowers deeptech entrepreneurs to scale their solutions and contribute to a resilient and sustainable blue economy across the region.

The project has a duration of 36 months. **Start:** 1/09/2024 - **End:** 31/08/2027. You can always get informed on the developments of ABBA by visiting the official **project webpage**: <https://abba.interreg-ipa-adrion.eu/>

2. Open call in one page

The ABBA Open Call is launched within the framework of the ABBA Project – Adriatic-Ionian Sustainable Blue Economy Alliance for upscaling SMEs (Project ID: IPA-ADRION00284), co-funded by the Interreg IPA ADRION Programme. The project supports the Specific Objective 1.1: Strengthening innovation capacities in the Adriatic-Ionian region, under the broader goal of fostering a smarter and more sustainable Adriatic-Ionian area.

Through this Open Call, ABBA will select 30 promising innovators who will benefit from tailored innovation services, capacity-building, and transnational open innovation activities.

The ABBA Open Call is launched on 20/06/2025 to identify and support 30 early-stage deeptech innovators from the Adriatic-Ionian region. Selected applicants will receive innovation support services, as part of the ABBA project, co-funded by the Interreg IPA ADRION Programme.

Eligible Applicants:

- ✓ SMEs
- ✓ Startups
- ✓ Spin-offs
- ✓ Research Teams
- ✓ Entrepreneurship Teams
- ✓ Individual Researchers
- ✓ Individual Entrepreneurs

What Will You Gain?

Selected innovators will benefit from a comprehensive support package designed to:

- Explore and enhance their innovation capacity through tailored mentoring and diagnostics
- Improve their business and technology readiness with expert guidance on product development, market fit, and commercialization
- Identify and connect with strategic partners across borders for co-development and scaling
- Participate in transnational Open Innovation activities, including matchmaking, networking, and collaborative R&D concept design
- Strengthen their technical, commercial, legal, and financial skills relevant to innovation and technology transfer
- Gain visibility and access to new markets through the ABBA ecosystem and its partners

What Do We Need From You?

Interreg



Co-funded by
the European Union

IPA ADRION

ABBA

- Willingness to Collaborate
- Time Commitment
- Openness to Innovation
- A Motivated Team

Key Dates for the open call:

- Call Launch: 20/06/2025
- Application Deadline: 21/07/2025
- Announcement of Selected Beneficiaries: 12/09/2025
- Service Delivery Period: 09/2025 – 05/2026

How to Apply

To apply, you must submit:

- ✓ Completed the Online Application Form (including an online Declaration of Honour)
- ✓ Optional Pitch Deck or Supporting Materials

Apply here: <https://bit.ly/4jLDOWk>

For any questions, contact us at: ABBA@aegean.gr

3. Supporting Services and Benefits for the SMEs

The ABBA project offers a two-stage support scheme designed to empower early-stage deeptech innovators in the blue economy. The first set of services, called **S1 - Scaling-up of deeptech innovators** aim at supporting the capacity building of 30 - selected through the open call - deeptech providers for the development of advanced technologies applicable to sustainable blue growth, through:

- **Innovation profiling:** Identifying the innovation potential of deeptech solutions, estimating the technology and market readiness level of the innovations. The service covers the exploration of Market & financial aspects such as Problem Definition, Value Proposition Definition and Business model development
- **Open Innovation Diagnostic Sessions:** Amplifying the innovation readiness assessment and understand the open innovation level taking into account both technology and business factors
- **Entrepreneurship coaching sessions:** Dedicated coaching sessions in Business Models, Go-to market & Marketing/Sales, Pitching, Financing and Open Innovation.
- **Funding opportunities scouting:** Customized lists of available grants, subsidies, venture capital, and other financial instruments to scale up deeptech solution in the blue economy.
- **Transnational Demo Day Event:** Participation in a transnational event for the presentation of deeptech solutions to a targeted audience comprising potential investors, industry experts, and stakeholders in the blue economy sector
- **Business-to-Business matching event** B2B networking activity to connect with participants with compatible interests, goals, or profiles.

Benefits for Beneficiaries

- ✓ Clear and accelerated path to improve the performance of innovation, technology, product, or service with customized expert support
- ✓ Comprehensive understanding of current capabilities, strengths, weaknesses, and growth opportunities.

- ✓ In-depth analysis of the company's open innovation needs and partnership opportunities.
- ✓ Support in decision-making and action planning regarding technology upscale strategies.
- ✓ Upgraded technical, commercial, financial, and legal skills.
- ✓ Elevated entrepreneurship & investment acquisition capacity
- ✓ Free travel to Montenegro to meet prospective partners in person and present technology to potential investors and collaborators

The second set of services, **S2 – Proof of Concepts Development**, aims at exploiting the full potential of 12 deeptech solutions, selected after S1 provision, through forming transnational collaborations and development PoCs, maximising positive impact for the blue economy:

- **Identification of transnational partners:** identification of suitable partners such as ports, shipbuilding, academic partners, TTOs, research partners, tech parks, etc for ERDF-IPA collaborations and the development of Proof of Concepts for deeptech solutions deployment.
- **Soft-landing services** identification of suitable partners such as ports, shipbuilding, academic partners, TTOs, research partners, tech parks, etc for ERDF-IPA collaborations and the development of Proof of Concepts for deeptech solutions deployment.
- **Coaching & mentoring sessions:** Dedicated training for the development of EU-IPA PoCs and improving collaboration capacity with transnational partners
- **Development of EU-IPA Proofs of Concept:** development of a ready-to-use PoC, exploring standards (e.g pilot site, laboratory, equipment, infrastructure, feasibility, functionality, impact, funding sources etc.) and showcasing their feasibility, functionality, and potential impact, as well as investment opportunities.

S2 - Proof of Concepts Development Benefits

- ✓ Clear understanding of what is open Innovation a and what an open innovation partnership requires.
- ✓ Identification of transnational partners for potential collaboration and joint projects.

- ✓ Reach out to potential external partners who can support the open innovation process and the technology
- ✓ Access to funding sources to support upscaling efforts
- ✓ Access to International markets
- ✓ Work in Pair with collaborators and co-develop ready-to-be exploited Transnational proof of concepts

4. The Blue Economy and Target Sectors

The **Blue Economy** refers to the sustainable use of ocean, sea, and coastal resources for economic growth, improved livelihoods, and jobs, while preserving the health of marine and coastal ecosystems. It encompasses a wide range of interlinked sectors that are vital to the economic and environmental resilience of the Adriatic-Ionian region. In the context of the ABBA project, the Blue Economy is approached through the lens of **deeptech innovation**, aiming to address pressing environmental, technological, and socio-economic challenges through advanced technologies such as artificial intelligence, robotics, biotechnology, nanotechnology, and advanced materials.

Target Sectors for Innovation

Applicants for the ABBA Open Call are expected to propose solutions that address **at least one (1)** or more of the following **Blue Economy sectors**:

1. **Port Activities:** Innovations that improve the efficiency, sustainability, and digitalization of port operations, logistics, and infrastructure.
2. **Maritime Transport:** Solutions that enhance the environmental performance, safety, and automation of maritime transport systems.
3. **Marine Renewable Energy:** Technologies that harness energy from marine sources such as offshore wind, wave, tidal, and ocean thermal energy.
4. **Sustainable Aquaculture and Fisheries:** Innovations that promote responsible aquaculture practices, biodiversity conservation, and sustainable fishery management.
5. **Shipping:** Solutions that reduce emissions, improve fuel efficiency, and support the transition to greener shipping practices.
6. **Shipbuilding and Repair:** Advanced materials, digital tools, and circular economy approaches that modernize shipbuilding and maintenance processes.
7. **Blue Bioeconomy and Biotechnology:** Applications of marine biotechnology for pharmaceuticals, cosmetics, food, and bio-based materials, contributing to a circular and sustainable economy.

ABBA Challenges to Be Addressed:

Solutions should target **one or (max two)** of the following **ABBA challenges**:

- Addressing rising sea levels, extreme weather events, and coastal erosion due to climate change

- Promoting marine energy efficiency through renewable energy or alternative fuels
- Advancing circular economy practices in marine and coastal industries
- Combating overfishing and ensuring sustainable management of marine biodiversity
- Supporting sustainable maritime spatial planning and environmental conservation
- Promoting port & vessels digitalization and automation solutions for emissions reduction
- Promoting grid integration to overcome infrastructure gaps
- Promoting green shipbuilding & repair process

5. Application Process Overview

The ABBA Open Call invites early-stage deeptech innovators to submit proposals for advanced technological solutions addressing key challenges in the blue economy. The application process is designed to be transparent, inclusive, and aligned with the strategic objectives of the ABBA project.

Applicants must complete and submit the official online **ABBA Application Form**, which includes:

- Applicant and contact details
- Description of the proposed solution
- Business and innovation overview
- Open innovation and collaboration needs
- Declaration of Honour

Optional supporting materials such as a **pitch deck** or visual documentation may also be submitted to strengthen the application. The pitch deck should follow the structure of Annex 3 – Pitch Deck.

All applications must be submitted by the specified deadline, in English, and be completed respecting the character limits. Late or incomplete submissions will not be considered.

The document Application form can be used only for drafting the Application before filling it out online.

6. Evaluation and Selection

The evaluation and selection process of the ABBA Open Call is designed to ensure transparency, fairness, and alignment with the project's strategic objectives, supported by a Monitoring and Evaluation Team across the six participating countries.

The evaluation will be conducted in two main stages:

Stage 1: Eligibility Check

All submitted applications will first undergo an eligibility screening to ensure compliance with the formal requirements of the call. Only applications that meet **all eligibility criteria** will proceed to the technical evaluation stage.

Eligibility Criteria:

1. The applicant must be legally established or reside in one of the following countries: Greece, Italy, Croatia, Montenegro, Albania, Bosnia & Herzegovina.
2. Eligible applicants include **SMEs, startups, spin-offs, research teams, entrepreneurship teams, individual researchers, and individual entrepreneurs.**
3. The application is complete, in English, and submitted before the deadline.
4. The proposed solution must address at least one blue economy sector and one (at most two) ABBA challenge.
5. A Declaration of Honour must be submitted through the online form.

Applications that do not meet all eligibility criteria will be excluded from further evaluation.

Stage 2: Technical Evaluation

Eligible applications will be evaluated by national evaluators based on five core criteria, each scored on a scale from 0 to 5 (no half points). The maximum total score is 25 points.

Evaluation Criteria:

1. **Customer Pain & Target Market**-Clarity and relevance of the problem addressed, understanding of the target market, and awareness of existing solutions or competition.

2. **Technology & Value Proposition**-Quality and originality of the solution, use of advanced technologies, and the value it brings to users and the blue economy.
3. **Resources & Revenue**-Feasibility of the solution in terms of resources, cost structure, and sustainability or revenue model.
4. **Team**-Skills, experience, and motivation of the team or individual applicant.
5. **Impact**-Expected environmental, economic, or social impact at local, national, or Adriatic-Ionian level.

All the criteria have the same weightening scoring a max of 5 points each. Each application can receive a maximum score of 25 points. The minimum score for an application to be considered acceptable is 15/25.

Each country will rank its eligible applications based on the total technical score. The top 5 applications per country will be selected as beneficiaries.

The results will be published in the ABBA website (<https://abba.interreg-ipa-adrion.eu/>) and all winning applicants will be informed via email.

7. Open Call timeplan

Following is an indicative timeplan for the completion of the process, including the open and closing of the ABBA Open Call, the application collection and distribution, the evaluation, the transnational peer review meeting, and the final selection of the beneficiaries.

- ❖ **Monday 20/06:** Open Call launch
- ❖ **Monday 21/07:** Open Call deadline
- ❖ **21/07 – 29/08:** Evaluation of applications
- ❖ **Friday 12/09:** Announcement of Selected Beneficiaries

8. Personal Data Processing and Intellectual Property Rights

The ABBA project partners and all applicants commit to handling any information exchanged during the application and evaluation process with strict confidentiality. No information or documentation submitted by applicants will be disclosed to third parties, except those directly involved in the evaluation and selection process. Only basic data from the submitted proposals—such as the project title, general description, image, and name of the applicant—may be used for communication and dissemination purposes.

This confidentiality obligation remains in effect even after the conclusion of the ABBA innovation support services.

All personal data collected through the ABBA Open Call will be processed in accordance with the **General Data Protection Regulation (EU) 2016/679 (GDPR)** and the applicable national data protection laws in each participating country

Applicants' data will be used solely for the purposes of managing the Open Call, evaluating applications, and delivering project services. All data will be stored securely and processed only by authorized personnel.

All intellectual property related to the ideas, solutions, or projects submitted under the ABBA Open Call remains the sole property of the applicant. Submission of an application does not imply any transfer of ownership or intellectual property rights to the ABBA project partners. Applicants retain full rights over their innovations, including any developments made during their participation in the ABBA support services.

Annex I: Application Template

Applicant Details	
Name of the Applicant (<i>Organization / Team / Individual</i>)	
Type of Applicant	<input type="checkbox"/> SME <input type="checkbox"/> Startup <input type="checkbox"/> Spin-off <input type="checkbox"/> Research Team <input type="checkbox"/> Entrepreneurship Team <input type="checkbox"/> Individual Researcher <input type="checkbox"/> Individual Entrepreneur
Legal Status (if applicable)	
VAT Number (<i>for companies</i>)/ ID (<i>for team representative / individual applicant</i>)	
Country	<input type="checkbox"/> Greece <input type="checkbox"/> Italy <input type="checkbox"/> Croatia <input type="checkbox"/> Montenegro <input type="checkbox"/> Albania <input type="checkbox"/> Bosnia & Herzegovina
Region	
City	
Phone number (<i>Include country code</i>)	
Website / social media (<i>if any</i>)	
Short Profile / Background	
<i>(Brief description of the applicant's background, expertise, or mission – max 1000 characters)</i>	
Contact Person Details	
First name	
Surname	
Position (<i>if applicable</i>)	
Phone number	
E-mail	
Solution Description	
Title of the Solution/Service/Product	<i>(Give your innovation a clear and concise name)</i>
Which blue economy sector(s) does your solution primarily address? <i>(Select one or more that apply)</i>	<input type="checkbox"/> Port activities <input type="checkbox"/> Maritime transport <input type="checkbox"/> Marine renewable energy <input type="checkbox"/> Sustainable aquaculture & fisheries <input type="checkbox"/> Shipping <input type="checkbox"/> Shipbuilding & repair <input type="checkbox"/> Blue bioeconomy and biotechnology
Which of the following key challenges does your solution aim to tackle? <i>(Select one or max two that apply)</i>	<input type="checkbox"/> Addressing rising sea levels, extreme weather events, and coastal erosion, occurring from climate change

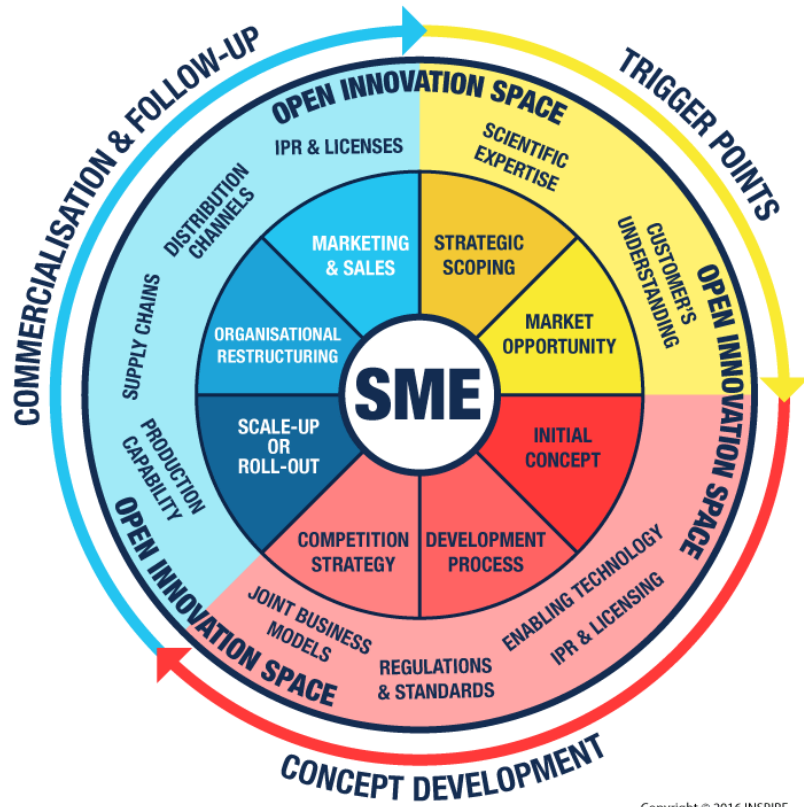
	<input type="checkbox"/> Promoting marine energy efficiency solutions through renewable energy or alternative fuels (biogas, wave, and tidal energy, offshore wind, etc.) <input type="checkbox"/> Promoting circular economy practices such as waste management, treatment & valorization, eco-design, recycling materials, etc. <input type="checkbox"/> Combatting overfishing, protecting ecosystems, and ensuring sustainable management of biodiversity <input type="checkbox"/> Supporting Sustainable Maritime Spatial Planning and environmental conservation <input type="checkbox"/> Promoting port & vessels digitalization and automation solutions for emissions reduction <input type="checkbox"/> Promoting grid integration to overcome infrastructure gaps <input type="checkbox"/> Promoting green shipbuilding & repair process
Briefly describe your solution	
(What is it? What problem does it solve? How does it work? - max 1000 characters)	
Technology readiness level (TRL) of the solution¹	<input type="checkbox"/> TRL 1 – basic principles observed <input type="checkbox"/> TRL 2 – technology concept formulated <input type="checkbox"/> TRL 3 – experimental proof of concept <input type="checkbox"/> TRL 4 – technology validated in lab <input type="checkbox"/> TRL 5 – technology validated in relevant environment (industrially relevant environment in the case of key enabling technologies) <input type="checkbox"/> TRL 6 – technology demonstrated in relevant environment (industrially relevant environment in the case of key enabling technologies) <input type="checkbox"/> TRL 7 – system prototype demonstration in operational environment <input type="checkbox"/> TRL 8 – system complete and qualified <input type="checkbox"/> TRL 9 – actual system proven in operational environment (competitive manufacturing in the case of key enabling technologies; or in space)
Business & Innovation Overview	

¹ https://ec.europa.eu/research/participants/data/ref/h2020/wp/2014_2015/annexes/h2020-wp1415-annex-g-trl_en.pdf

<p>Customer Pain & Target Market: What problem or need are you addressing? Who experiences this problem and why is it important to address it? Which is your target market? Include info on the competition if relevant</p> <p>(max 1000 characters)</p>
<p>Technology & Value Proposition: What is your solution and what value does it offer? Describe the core advanced technology or concept behind your solution. What makes it innovative? What value does it bring to users or the blue economy sector?</p> <p>(max 1000 characters)</p>
<p>Resources & Revenue: What resources do you need to develop or scale your solution? If applicable, mention your cost structure and how you plan to generate revenue or sustain your solution: What are the most important costs inherent in your business model?</p> <p><i>(Examples of Resources: Physical - Intellectual (brand patents, copyrights, data) – Human – Financial resources)</i></p> <p>(max 1000 characters)</p>
<p>Team: Introduce your team or yourself. Highlight relevant skills, experience, or motivation. If you're applying as an individual, you may include a short cover letter-style statement.</p> <p>(max 1000 characters)</p>
<p>Impact: What positive environmental, economic, or social impact do you expect your solution to have on the local/ national/ Adriatic-Ionian Region level?</p> <p>(max 1000 characters)</p>
<p>Pitch Deck or Supporting Materials (Optional): You may upload a pitch deck, presentation, or any other supporting material that helps explain your solution. This is optional but recommended if you have visuals, diagrams, or additional context that can strengthen your application.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Accepted formats: PDF, PPT, or link to an online presentation (e.g., Google Slides, Notion, etc.) Maximum file size: 10 MB If submitting a link, please ensure it is publicly accessible.
<p>Upload or paste link here:</p>
<p>Open Innovation (OI) Stages and Collaboration Needs</p>
<p>Are you looking for partners to help you develop or scale your solution? Please describe what kind of collaboration you are seeking. What type of partners would be most</p>

<p>helpful (e.g., research institutions, companies, public authorities, ports, etc.)? Have you already identified or started working with any partners?</p> <p>(max 1000 characters)</p>	
<p>Which stage best describes where you are in your innovation process?²</p>	<p><input type="checkbox"/> Trigger Point – You have identified a challenge or opportunity and are exploring ideas</p> <p><input type="checkbox"/> Consent Development – You are developing or testing a prototype or early-stage solution</p> <p><input type="checkbox"/> Commercialization & Follow-up – You are preparing to scale, pilot, or bring your solution to market</p>
<p>Select the areas where you would benefit from Open Innovation partnerships:</p>	<p><input type="checkbox"/> Scientific or technical expertise</p> <p><input type="checkbox"/> Understanding customer needs or user feedback</p> <p><input type="checkbox"/> Access to enabling technologies, IPR, or licensing</p> <p><input type="checkbox"/> Navigating regulations and standards</p> <p><input type="checkbox"/> Co-developing business models</p> <p><input type="checkbox"/> Access to production or testing facilities</p> <p><input type="checkbox"/> Supply chain or logistics support</p> <p><input type="checkbox"/> Distribution or market access</p>
<p>Choose all the types of OI partners you are seeking for</p>	<p><input type="checkbox"/> Research institutions or universities</p> <p><input type="checkbox"/> Complementary technology providers</p> <p><input type="checkbox"/> Customers or end users</p> <p><input type="checkbox"/> Suppliers or manufacturers</p> <p><input type="checkbox"/> Ports, shipping companies, or shipyards</p> <p><input type="checkbox"/> Public authorities or regulators</p> <p><input type="checkbox"/> Innovation hubs, accelerators, or clusters</p> <p><input type="checkbox"/> Other: _____</p>

² <https://www.inspire-smes.info/>



Annex II: Declaration of Honour

Adriatic-Ionian Sustainable Blue Economy Alliance for upscaling SMEs

Project Acronym: **ABBA**

Declaration of Honour

Each applicant understands and agrees the following conditions (please select all boxes)

ABBA Call Terms and Conditions

- ☐ I agree with the ABBA terms and conditions specified in the guide for applicants
- ☐ I confirm that the applicant is based in Greece, Italy, Croatia, Montenegro, Albania or Bosnia & Herzegovina
- ☐ I confirm that at least one member of the applicant entity, who is strongly related to the proposed solution, is English Fluent
- ☐ I confirm that the data and documents submitted, and all conditions and obligations stated in the Call are accurate and truthful
- ☐ I declare that there is not in a situation of conflict of interest with the ABBA Partners.
- ☐ I give the permission to the ABBA Project Partners to process the data given only for management and statistic purposes (including publishing of general information) even through digital devices with respect of the security and privacy within the law Data processing by ABBA Project Partners will be made in accordance with the provisions of Regulation (EU) 2016/679 and the subsequent transposing laws (jointly, the "GDPR").

Annex III: Pitch Deck

The structure that should be followed by each applicant for the development of the **pitch deck** is the following:

1. Title | Overview (*WHO ARE YOU?*)
2. Opportunity (*WHY THIS MARKET, WHY NOW?*)
3. Problem (*WHAT ARE YOU TRYING TO SOLVE?*)
4. Solution (*WHAT ARE YOU DOING ABOUT IT?*)
5. Traction (*YOUR EVIDENCE OF SUCCESS?*)
6. Customer or Market (*WHO ARE THEY AND HOW MANY ARE THEY?*)
7. Competition (*WHO IS SOLVING THE SAME PROBLEM AS YOU?*)
8. Business model (*HOW WILL YOU MAKE MONEY?*)
9. Team (*WHO IS GOING TO MAKE THIS HAPPEN?*)
10. Financials & Use of funds (*WHAT & WHY?, Forecasts & metrics, Clear milestones*)

The project is co-funded by the European Union through the Interreg IPA ADRION programme.