



# **ZES unica**

**Special Economic Zone  
of Southern Italy**

**Guide for Investors**

# SOUTHERN ITALY'S "ZES UNICA" ("SINGLE SEZ"): EUROPE'S LARGEST SPECIAL ECONOMIC ZONE

## Competitive advantages of the "ZES unica"

- **Significant tax incentives:** access to tax credits and benefits for productive investments.
- **Simplified authorization processes:** faster procedures for starting and expanding economic activities.
- **Privileged access to European and Mediterranean markets:** a strategic position for international trade.
- **Rapidly developing infrastructure:** advanced port and logistics networks, efficient rail and airport connections.
- **A strong industrial ecosystem:** presence of key sectors such as manufacturing, energy, logistics, automotive, and digital industries.



## A strategic territory for investment and development

- **Total area:** 123,000 km<sup>2</sup>, larger than 19 European Union countries.
- **Regions involved:** Abruzzo, Basilicata, Calabria, Campania, Marche, Molise, Puglia, Sicily, Sardinia and Umbria.
- **Population:** 20 million inhabitants, accounting for one-third of Italy's total population.
- **Annual GDP:** €474 billion, representing 22.3% of the national total.
- **Employment:** 6.3 million workers, over a quarter of Italy's total workforce.
- **Active businesses:** 1.3 million, including major industrial groups.

## A driver for export and innovation

- **Export growth:** €49 billion as of Q3 2024.
  - Presence of mature, high-potential industrial supply chains.
- **Innovation and startups:**
  - Over 2,600 innovative SMEs, growing by **+25.8% annually** since 2020.
  - Around **300 innovative startups**, **+128** compared to 2020.

The Zona Economica Speciale ZES unica Mezzogiorno (Single Special Economic Zone SEZ of Southern Italy) is the largest in Europe, representing a strategic hub for investment, innovation and international logistics. Thanks to unique competitive advantages, the “ZES unica” offers a favorable environment for business growth and the attraction of new capital.

“ZES unica”: a bridge between Europe and the Mediterranean Sea  
Thanks to its strategic location and the synergy between industry, logistics, and innovation, the “ZES unica” serves as a privileged gateway to global markets. It offers a concrete opportunity for businesses seeking to grow within a dynamic, competitive, and rapidly expanding ecosystem.

## A concrete opportunity for businesses

The “ZES unica” of Southern Italy is more than just a development area: it is a growth accelerator for companies looking to expand in a highly competitive environment.

**A dynamic market** with growing demand and expanding sectors.

**A high-potential industrial ecosystem** offering incentives for innovation and productivity.

**A gateway to global markets** supported by an advanced logistics network and strategic connections.

### Why choose the “ZES unica”?

**Advantageous taxation:** incentives and benefits for new productive investments.

**Simplified procedures:** less bureaucracy and fast-track processes for permits and business setup.

**Easier access to EU and national funding** for innovative projects.

**Strategic infrastructure:** ports, airports, and logistics hubs to support borderless growth.

**Investing in the “ZES unica” means gaining a competitive edge in an area with privileged conditions for growth, competitiveness and international trade.**

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Investing in Southern Italy today means accessing a growing market, with concrete incentives and a highly favorable business environment.

The “ZES unica” represents an unprecedented opportunity, thanks to a strategic plan integrated with key development tools such as the NRPP (National Recovery and Resilience Plan) and cohesion funds, ensuring a coordinated central approach while respecting territorial specificities.

Both new and existing businesses that choose to invest in the single Special Economic Zone of Southern Italy can benefit from special tax incentives and streamlined administrative procedures, a competitive advantage that is already attracting new industrial players.

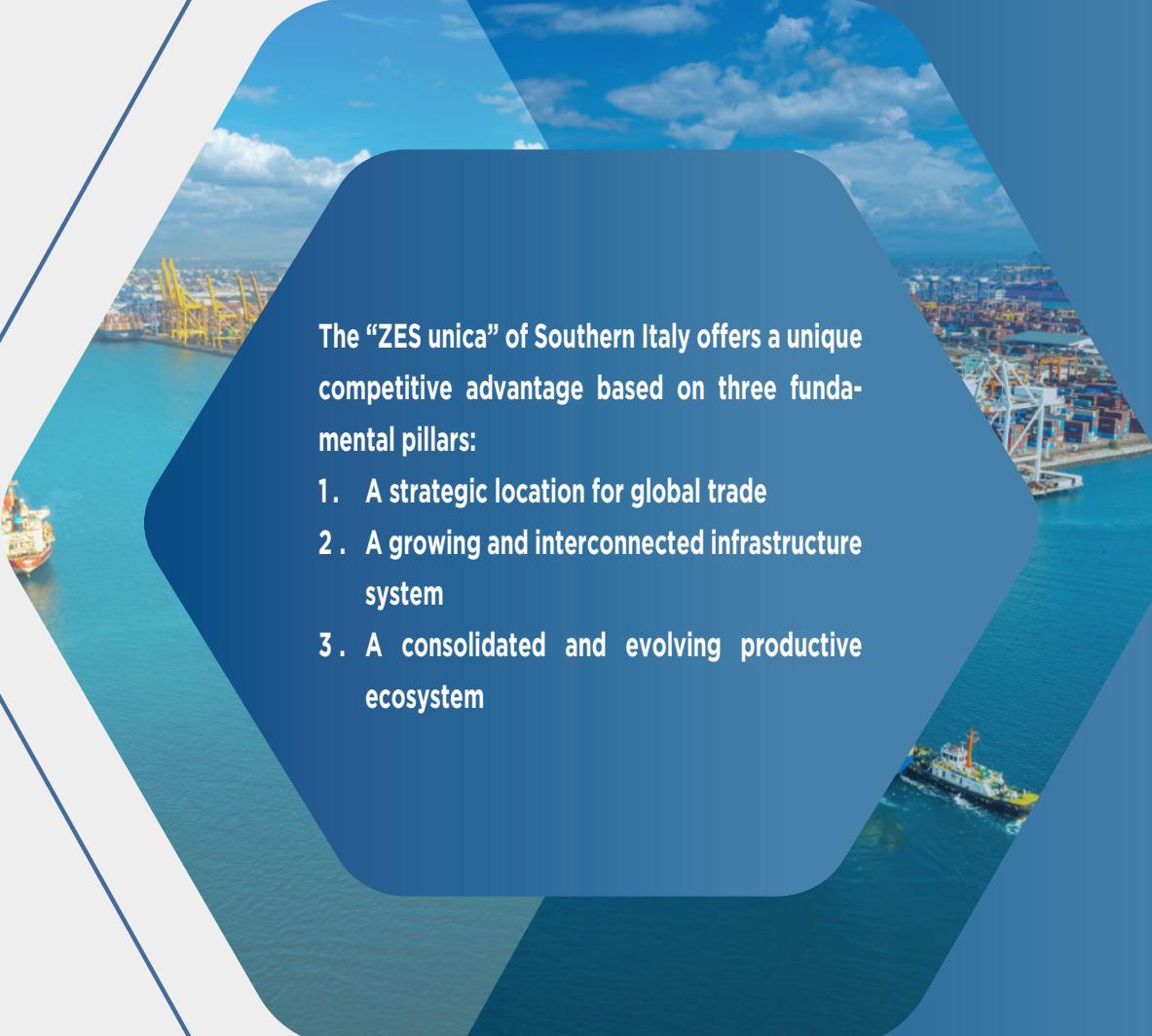
The “Struttura di missione ZES” (SEZ Dedicated Unit) established at the Presidency of the Council of Ministers, provides support and coordination to make investments faster, more efficient, and secure.

Today, Southern Italy is at the forefront of an unprecedented infrastructure transformation, driven by NRPP investments, which will elevate the logistics, digital, and industrial system to the standards of Europe's leading economies.

Now is the right time to invest in Italy: the “ZES unica” is the gateway to new growth opportunities in the Mediterranean and beyond. ”

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# Why invest in the “ZES unica”



The “ZES unica” of Southern Italy offers a unique competitive advantage based on three fundamental pillars:

1. A strategic location for global trade
2. A growing and interconnected infrastructure system
3. A consolidated and evolving productive ecosystem

## A strategic location for global trade

Located in the heart of the **Mediterranean**, the “ZES unica” is a **natural logistics hub** for trade routes between **Europe, Asia, Africa, and the Americas**.

- Strong integration with Northern Italy and Central-Western European markets
- Connection between the Atlantic, Mediterranean, and Indo-Pacific regions
- A key hub on major international maritime routes
- SCAN-MED Corridor (Scandinavian-Mediterranean Corridor)
- The southern terminal of the TEN-T (Trans-European Transport Network)
- Direct access to Northern European markets and stronger integration with continental supply chains

Thanks to its privileged location, the “ZES unica” ensures businesses fast access to global markets, reducing transit times and logistics costs.

## An advanced and interconnected infrastructure system



### Ports and integrated logistics areas

- **Internationally significant commercial and industrial ports**, equipped with modern infrastructure for cargo handling



- Direct connections to **rail and road hubs for efficient intermodal transport**



### Strategic rail and airport networks

- Access to an **intermodal transport system** designed for international logistics
- **Cargo and industrial airports** supporting key productive supply chains

Investing in the “ZES unica” means operating in an area with cutting-edge infrastructure capable of supporting international trade flows.



## A World-Class and rapidly expanding infrastructure network

To ensure efficient and fast connectivity with Europe and the rest of the world, the “ZES unica” offers an advanced infrastructure network, currently undergoing further expansion.

- **18 international and regional airports**, offering direct connections to major European capitals and intercontinental hubs.
- **7 highly efficient logistics hubs**, facilitating the distribution of goods on both a national and European scale.
- **42 commercial and industrial ports**, including Gioia Tauro, Naples, Taranto, Palermo, and Cagliari, already established as key hubs for freight and passenger traffic in the Mediterranean.

The “ZES unica” for Southern Italy includes 8 Port System Authorities (AdSP), managing a total of 42 ports:

**Central Tyrrhenian Sea:** Naples, Salerno, and Castellammare di Stabia

**Central Adriatic Sea:** Pescara and Ortona (in addition to the ports of the Marche region)

**Southern Adriatic Sea:** Bari, Brindisi, Manfredonia, Barletta, Monopoli, and Termoli

**Southern Tyrrhenian and Ionian Seas:** Gioia Tauro, Corigliano, Crotone, Vibo Valentia, Palmi, and Taranto

**Strait Area:** Messina, Tremestieri, Milazzo, Reggio Calabria, Villa San Giovanni, and Saline

**Western Sicily Sea:** Palermo, Termini Imerese, Porto Empedocle, Trapani, Sciacca, Licata, and Gela

**Eastern Sicily Sea:** Catania, Augusta, and Pozzallo

**Sardinian Sea:** Cagliari, Olbia, Golfo Aranci, Porto Torres, Oristano, Santa Teresa, Foxi - Sarroch, Portoscuso - Portovesme, and Arbatax

# A Strategic Plan for growth and innovation

The “ZES unica” is built on a Strategic Development Plan (Piano Strategico della ZES unica) aimed at strengthening existing assets and creating new opportunities for both businesses already operating in Southern Italy and those looking to invest in this high-potential area.

To enhance the productive system of the “ZES unica”, the Plan has identified:

## Five strategic sectors to strengthen

- Agri-Food & Agro-Industry
- Tourism
- Electronics & ICT
- Automotive
- High-Quality Made in Italy

## Four strategic sectors to reinforce

- Shipbuilding & Maritime Industry
- Aerospace
- Railway Industry
- Chemicals & Pharmaceuticals

## Three key technologies to promote

- Digital Technologies
- Cleantech (clean and resource-efficient technologies)
- Biotechnologies (Biotech)

The “ZES unica” is not just a logistics hub but a strategic industrial center, capable of attracting investments in the most advanced and innovative sectors

### Investing in the “ZES unica”: a gateway to growth

Investing in the “ZES unica” means becoming part of an integrated ecosystem, where logistics, infrastructure, and key industries converge into an unprecedented growth platform.

The “ZES unica” serves as the intersection of innovation, advanced logistics, and global trade: a fully equipped area designed to welcome new businesses and strategic investments.

## Education, Training and Research

Graduates in the “ZES unica” area account for 40.62% of the total in Italy, with **technical-professional specializations representing 43.2%** of them.

Among individuals aged 18 to 34, **those enrolled in tertiary education** represent 22.3% of the national total.

**32 universities**, including two specialized institutions: Politecnico di Bari and L'Orientale in Naples.

**105,000 university graduates, approximately 29% of the national total.**

**540 postgraduate specialization schools with nearly 16,000 students** enrolled.

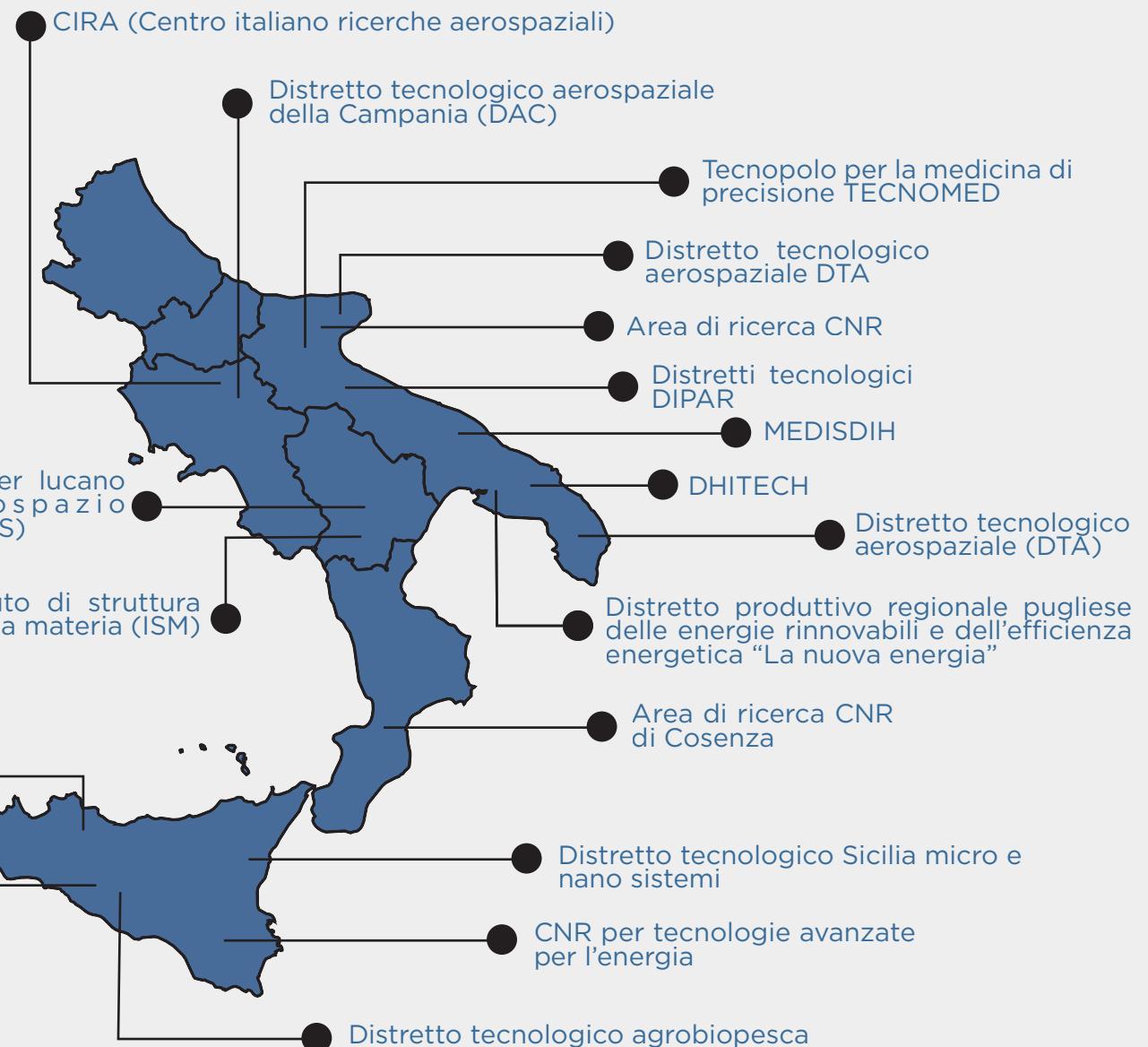
Almost 85% of doctoral programs have involved university-business collaboration, and nearly half of Italy's industrial doctorates are located in Southern universities (24 out of 49).

The “ZES unica” area hosts 18,740 university professors and researchers.



## Research hubs and technology districts

Southern Italy is home to numerous research hubs and technology districts, fostering strong collaboration with private sector stakeholders.



One-third of the €6 billion allocated by the European Union's STEP initiative (Strategic Technologies for Europe Platform) will be invested in five Southern Italian regions: Sicily: €615 million, Campania: €581 million, Puglia: €471 million, Calabria: €264 million, Sardinia: €166 million. **A bold investment in innovation and strategic technologies**

## Advantages of investing in the “ZES unica”

### Single Authorization (Autorizzazione Unica – AU): Administrative Simplification

#### A streamlined process for investments

Businesses planning to invest in economic, industrial, production, or logistics activities within the “ZES unica” can apply for the Single Authorization, which consolidates all necessary permits into one streamlined procedure.

The Single Authorization allows businesses to obtain all required permits in just a few days with a one-stop-shop application process.

It eliminates the need for multiple administrative procedures across different authorities, significantly reducing bureaucratic complexity.

## Eligible projects

The Single Authorization can be requested for:

- establishing and locating new economic activities;
- constructing, launching, and modifying production facilities;
- converting, restructuring, or expanding existing industrial plants;
- transferring, ceasing, or reactivating economic activities.

## A fast and simplified process

Within three working days of receiving the application, the SEZ Dedicated Unit initiates a Conference of Services.

At the end of the process, the Single Authorization is issued, consolidating all necessary permits.

If needed, it also serves as an urban planning amendment.

It includes the declaration of public utility, urgency and necessity of the project.

## How to apply

Applications must be submitted via the “ZES unica” Digital Desk (S.U.D. ZES), accessible through the official portal (<https://www.strutturazes.gov.it/en/>) of the SEZ Dedicated Unit (Struttura di missione ZES).

The application must include a detailed business plan, specifying project characteristics, investment amount, expected employment impact.



## Fast approval times

On average, the SEZ Dedicated Unit grants the Single Authorization in just over 30 days.

**This centralized and simplified procedure ensures businesses can launch their investments quickly, with clear timelines and no bureaucratic obstacles**

## Success stories



**Construction of a luxury resort with golf course** in the province of Taranto: it will be built on the Ionian coast, in an area of over 100 hectares, suitable to host international competitions. The total value of the project is estimated at over 200 million euros.

**Expansion of a pharmaceutical plant** in the province of Naples (80 million euros): the project involves the development of a new production unit and a new high-capacity warehouse, with the goal of increasing the production volumes of life-saving drugs and improving their packaging efficiency.

## **S.U.D. ZES: the Digital One-Stop Shop for productive activities in the “ZES unica”**

The “ZES unica” Digital Desk (S.U.D. ZES - Sportello unico digitale ZES), established within the SEZ Dedicated Unit, serves as the central point of contact for business companies looking to start, expand or modify productive activities within the “ZES unica”.

### **A unified strategy for economic growth**

The S.U.D. ZES was created to ensure a cohesive economic revitalization of Southern Italy.

This platform simplifies administrative processes for business companies operating in the “ZES unica”.

## Competences and areas of intervention

Within the “ZES unica”, the S.U.D. ZES is responsible for:

- Economic and productive activities: administrative procedures related to the localization, construction, expansion, cessation and reactivation of production plants.
- Building interventions and land transformation: authorizations for the construction and modification of buildings intended for economic and productive activities.
- Sports and cultural facilities of public interest.



Thanks to S.U.D. ZES, business companies can benefit from a single digital platform that centralizes and accelerates all the administrative procedures necessary to operate within the “ZES unica”.

## **A wide range of incentives for businesses**

The “ZES unica” area offers a rich menu of incentives designed to support business companies investing in Southern Italy.

The available measures are tailored to meet the specific needs of each company, taking into account the business development stage and the territory where the investment is planned.

For the benefit of both Italian and foreign companies choosing to operate within the “ZES unica”, a wide range of incentives is available, funded through regional, national, and European Union resources, including, for instance:

## Tax incentives and tax credits

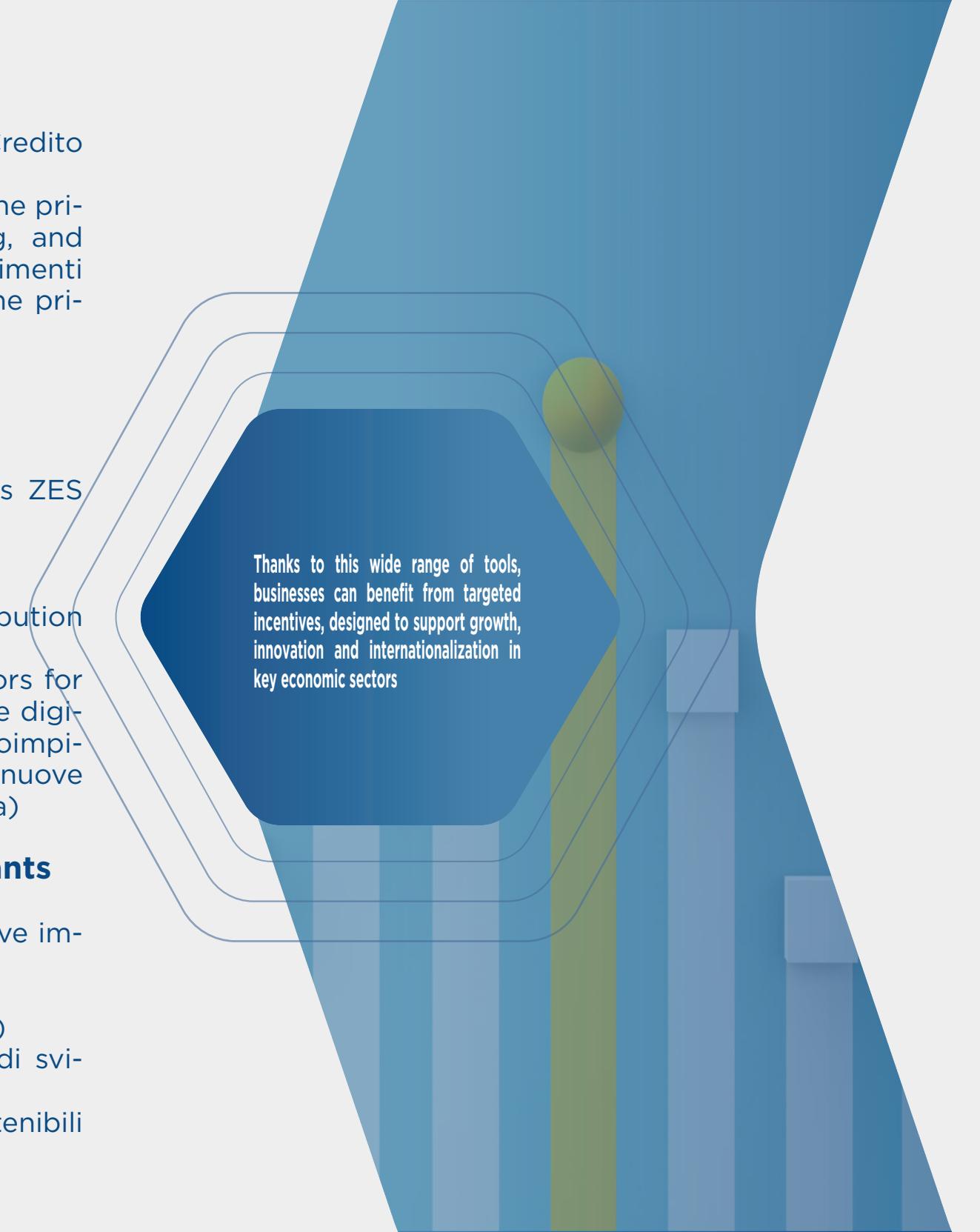
- Investment Tax Credit for the “ZES unica” (Credito d’imposta per investimenti nella ZES unica)
- Investment Tax Credit for the “ZES unica” in the primary production sector (agriculture, fishing, and aquaculture) (Credito d’imposta per investimenti nella ZES unica per il settore della produzione primaria, agricoltura, pesca e acquacoltura)
- “Transizione 5.0”

## Employment contribution reliefs

- “ZES unica” Bonus for Southern Italy (Bonus ZES unica per il Mezzogiorno)
- Youth Employment Bonus (Bonus giovani)
- Women’s Employment Bonus (Bonus donne)
- “Nuova decontribuzione Sud” (Social Contribution Relief for Southern Italy)
- Self-Employment Incentives in strategic sectors for the development of new technologies and the digital and ecological transition (Incentivo all’autoimpiego nei settori strategici per lo sviluppo di nuove tecnologie e la transizione digitale ed ecologica)

## Favorable financing and development grants

- Zero-Interest Loans for New Businesses (Nuove imprese a tasso zero- NITO-ON)
- Smart & Start Italia
- Development Contracts (Contratti di sviluppo)
- Mini Development Contracts (Mini contratti di sviluppo)
- Sustainable Investments 4.0 “Investimenti sostenibili 4.0” PN RIC 2021-2027



Thanks to this wide range of tools, businesses can benefit from targeted incentives, designed to support growth, innovation and internationalization in key economic sectors



## **Tax credit** **Credito d'imposta ZES**

The tax credit for investments in the “ZES unica” represents an important opportunity for business companies that intend to start or expand their activities in Southern Italy. The incentive allows for a reduction in the tax burden in exchange for investments in capital goods, real estate and equipment intended for production facilities.

### **Eligible beneficiaries**

All business companies, regardless of their legal form or accounting system, that make investments in the “ZES unica” can access the tax credit. Companies operating in specific sectors, including steel, transport, energy, banking and insurance, are excluded from the benefit.

### **Eligible investments**

Eligible investments include:

- Purchase of new machinery, plants and equipment intended for production facilities
- Purchase of land and industrial real estate for the establishment or expansion of production activities
- Investments in financial leasing, limited to the purchase costs of the assets

The incentive does not cover goods intended for resale, consumable materials and investments below a minimum threshold set by regulations (200,000 euros).

## Benefit amount

The amount of the tax credit varies by region and business size, from 70% to 15%.

## Application process

To benefit from the tax credit, business companies must:

- Notify the Italian Revenue Agency (Agenzia delle entrate) of the amount of eligible investments.
- Submit an additional communication confirming the actual implementation of the investments.
- Use the tax credit for tax compensation through the Italian Revenue Agency's telematic services.

The tax credit can be combined with other incentives, provided that the total aid does not exceed the maximum limits set by European regulations.





## The “ZES unica” Dedicated Unit

The “**ZES unica**” Dedicated Unit operates at the Presidency of the Council of Ministers and is responsible for:

- Coordinating and implementing the activities outlined in the “ZES unica” Strategic Plan;
- issuing Single Authorizations;
- managing the implementation of “last mile” connection interventions in the competence of the Dedicated Unit.

[\*\*https://www.strutturazes.gov.it/it/\*\*](https://www.strutturazes.gov.it/it/)