

WESTMED
blue economy initiative

 Direção-Geral de
Política do Mar



WESTMED Hackathon '24

3rd edition

Crafting sustainable
blue economy
projects

Vilamoura, Portugal | 3 October 2024

SUMMARY NOTE (with video-links)



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CONCEPT AND OBJECTIVES

This WestMED Hackathon took place on 4 October 2024 in Pestana Vila Sol Vilamoura, Algarve - Portugal.

The event was organised by the WestMED Assistance Mechanism team in cooperation with DGPM (Direção-Geral de Política do Mar - Portugal), CINEA and DG MARE.

Building on the previous experiences of Palermo (2019) and [Malta \(2022\)](#), this third edition of the WestMED Hackathons aimed to facilitate the **exchange of project ideas** and promote **concrete project development** ideas among stakeholders operating in the Blue Economy in the western Mediterranean.

KEY FACTS AND FIGURES

In-person participants

87

Generated project ideas

16

Typology of participants

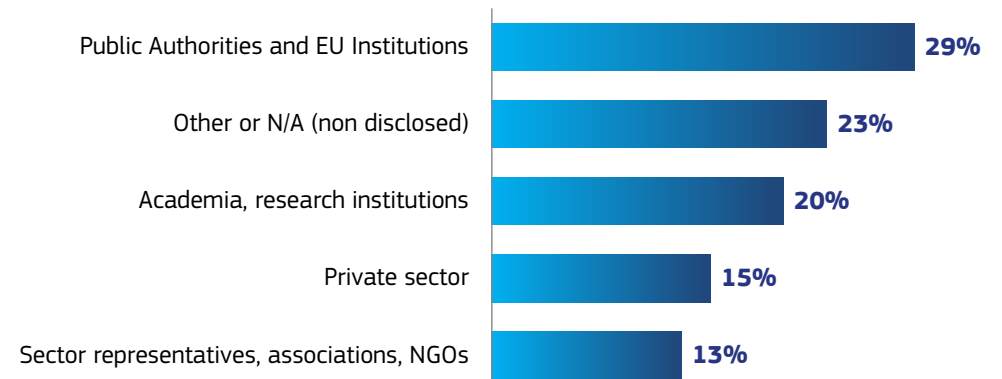
Sectors tackled

5

Blue skills and careers
Sustainable tourism
Green shipping and ports
Aquaculture
Maritime clusters

Countries

15



SETTING THE STAGE



Together with our team, we count 115 projects that we actively supported, taking your project ideas to the next level. Out of these 115 projects and project ideas, 45 have been approved to receive around 78 million euro of mostly EU funding. Hackathons like today have played a crucial role in achieving these numbers. And that is why we are here for its third edition and hope that in 2026 there will be a fourth.



Javier Fernández | Sea Basin Strategies Assistance Mechanism Team Leader (Ecorys)



This year's theme, 'crafting sustainable blue economy projects' reflects our shared commitment to developing solutions that ensure long term health and prosperity of our maritime resources. We are proud to co-chair the WestMED steering committee together with Mauritania. Last year's Ministerial meeting marked a key milestone. And our goal as co-presidents is the effective implementation of the Ministerial Declaration by fostering regional cooperation and collaboration. This hackathon represents a concrete step towards that goal that will drive the sustainable blue economy forward.



Lídia Bulcão | Secretary of State for Maritime Affairs - Portugal (WestMED co-presidency)



We welcome all partners and the good people here who honour the WestMED initiative with their remarkable presence at this event; who have agreed to make this day a real guided laboratory where all the main themes relating to the blue economy will be addressed. We are confident that our Initiative will be able to complete all of these activities and be able to plan and implement the projects that will be discussed during the day.



Demba Diawara | Transport manager, Mauritanian Agency for Maritime Affairs (WestMED co-presidency)

SETTING THE STAGE



Today we come to the cherry on the cake by bringing the stakeholders together from both sides of the Mediterranean working on the practical side of the policy - the projects is what we count at the end. WestMED has been a successful example of cooperation and we advertise it: at the UfM stakeholder conference in Athens, The Ocean days and the European Maritime Day. The Mediterranean is gaining importance at the European Commission with a dedicated Commissioner for the Mediterranean and a new commissioner for for the Fisheries and the oceans. So we will be working on new strategies on how to get the best out of the ocean and the environment.



Christos Economou | Deputy Director for Maritime Policy and Blue Economy from DG MARE

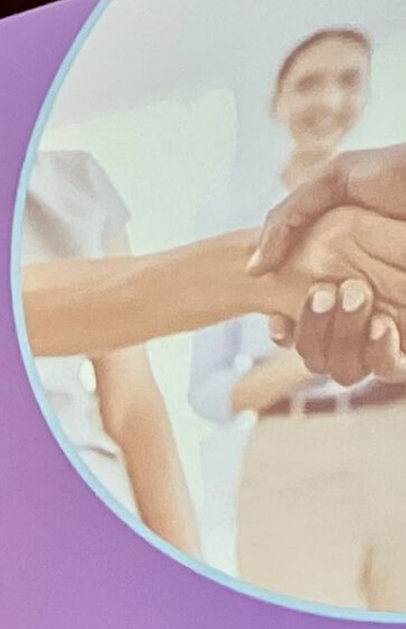


We will have a first session of funding opportunities, so you will learn about funding calls that you might be interested in. Then a 2nd session in the form of project pitching. We will hear from 6 projects that have been working on the topics, that have been selected for today. The idea of this session is to inspire you to learn how we can capitalise on these projects' outcomes and scale up the solutions. Then we will start with the core of our hackathon which we call project development labs. These are very practical sessions to identify 2-3 project ideas per lab that we will further develop in the following months.

Celia Murcia | Project coordinator of the WestMED Assistance Mechanism

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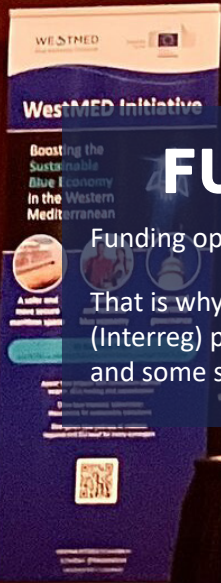
Insights in WestMED Project Support and Funding Opportunities



FUNDING OPPORTUNITIES

Funding opportunities are an essential part of making projects come to life.

That is why the first part of the project was dedicated to several relevant EU (Interreg) programmes, an actual open EMFAF call, an investment platform and some successful examples from Portugal.



FUNDING OPPORTUNITIES



All five thematics today are very important to us at Interreg NEXT MED. We co-finance 89% of the projects. To be eligible, it is absolutely key to have partners from both shores of the Mediterranean - you need a partner from the Northern shore and a partner from the Southern shore. You also need at least three countries, usually there are more, to have a Mediterranean (wide) impact with your proposed solution to a Mediterranean wide problem.



Vincent Ernoux | [Interreg NEXT MED](#)



BlueInvest is a EU funded initiative which aims to boost innovation in the sustainable blue economy. It is a platform that analyses the blue economy from the perspective of the investor. I recommend you all to read the [BlueInvest report](#) with very important insights. There is also the network of blue coaches for SMEs and startups to help refine their business models, and there is a pipeline of projects from early stage to mature- having the seal of BlueInvest. It makes these projects more monetizable.



Ruben Eiras | [BlueInvest](#) (Forum Oceano representing BlueInvest)



I will give you an insight into a [new EMFAF call](#) with a deadline of 18 February 2024. It is a 5.7 million call for proposals with two different topics: the first topic seeks to fund highly innovative regional flagships projects supporting sustainable blue economy in EU sea basins for Smart Specialisation. The second topic is related to demonstrating the feasibility and environmental benefits of regenerative ocean farming and boosting algae innovation. Non-EU countries involved in the WestMED are also eligible.



Anja Detant | [CINEA](#)

FUNDING OPPORTUNITIES



Erasmus+ is the EU program for education, training, youth and sports. It intends to promote and facilitate the circulation of ideas, best practices and knowledge between European citizens and in some specific actions between Europe and some other continents. It is for instance meant to develop new curricula, create new professional profiles and training skills to young people or training for researchers in general. New calls will be published in late October beginning of November with deadlines between early February and late April 2025.



Gustavo Alva-Rosa | [Portuguese Agency Erasmus+](#)



Since its launch the WestMED has been a key player promoting maritime cooperation across the western Mediterranean and Portugal has also greatly benefited from its technical advice and project development support. The WestMED Initiative has been pivotal in helping our stakeholders find funding and (project) partners across the Mediterranean. Portugal has participated in multiple projects that have brought impactful results.



Lorella Ciuti | [WestMED National Hub Portugal](#) (presenting succesful projects MedBAN, HUBAZUL)

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Project Pitches for inspiration



PROJECT PITCHES

Six successful projects have been asked to share their results in order to serve as inspiration and/ or to capitalise on during the subsequent development labs of this hackathon.

Most of these projects have actively been supported by the WestMED Assistance Mechanism in different forms - primarily focused on developing strong proposals and creating consortia with multiple partners from both shores of the Mediterranean in order to secure funding.



PROJECT PITCHES



CALLMEBLUE stands for Cluster Alliance in the Mediterranean Sea Basin and the main scope is to strengthen maritime alliances for north-south cooperation to create transferable models of interregional dialogue and collaboration between clusters at sea basin level. We have a large partnership with clusters from Italy, Spain, Portugal, Tunisia, an incubator from Algeria and an investment network at Mediterranean level. Next to improved dialogue, one of the objectives is also to promote empowerment of the embryonic & emerging maritime clusters ecosystem.



Lidia Rossi | [CALLMEBLUE](#) (ForMARE)



The core of our project EU WeMED_NaTour is the future generation - our children are super digitally connected but also addicted. In particular when they are on holidays, they can't enjoy what they have around them. We developed innovative eco-smart tourism packages for school trip tourism that we piloted in four different countries in four different schools; in Spain, Italy, Mauritania and Portugal. And we try to empower tourism SMEs in green and blue skills with an online free training programme.



Marika Mazzi Boem | [EU WeMED_NaTour](#) (X23)



The goal of WINBIG is to map the current status of gender imbalance, identify capacity gaps and empower women in the blue economy across all the six European sea basins with a focus on three emerging sectors: blue bioeconomy, blue sports & sustainable tourism, marine renewable energies & robotics. We launched a survey with already 800 respondents, did a peer review publication covering 650 reports, identified 75 women champions for testimonials and created a database of more than 700 mentors to help women in entrepreneurship, leadership and innovation. You can help increase these numbers as we still need many more respondents, women champions and mentors.



Mariana Almeida | [WINBIG](#) (University of Aveiro)

PROJECT PITCHES



GreenMarineMed is a Mediterranean shipping project with three core themes: create a strong and lasting network of key players in Mediterranean green shipping ecosystem, deliver a clear assessment of where are we now when it comes to Green shipping Technologies and to foster Innovation and facilitate access to finance. For this last point we will be launching a call for innovation open to entrepreneurs from Mediterranean countries. We also launched the center of excellence to build this core network of different actors uniting them across the Mediteranean, to catalyze Innovation drive collaborative solutions and attract strategic investments



Lisa Simone de Grunt | [GreenMarineMed](#) (World Ocean Council)



BlueAquaEdu is a 3 year educational program aimed at enhancing engagement and learning amongst teenagers and students with a focus on aquaculture, the post-harvesting value chain and valorisation of by-products. The plan of the project is to develop a gamification app, a virtual aquaculture Educational network, an E-platform with experienced mentors and events like workshops, summer schools and apprenticeships.



Patrícia Canhão | [BlueAquaEdu](#) (SEAentia)



In 2021 we started analysing what was missing and realised that our ocean was missing. From there we started to build this BlueSkills' Initiative. It now consists of an advanced Master course and a Summer school dealing with all aspects of the Blue Economy. In 2023 we were ranked first as top master with enrollments from 20 countries. We build bridges between the acadamia, the government and the industry in order to fill the job gaps.



Oriela Halilaj | [BlueSkills Initiative](#) (OGS)



PROJECT DEVELOPMENT LABS

Themes for the project development labs included five of the biggest topics currently being discussed within the WestMED Initiative: Green Shipping and Ports, Aquaculture, Maritime clusters, Tourism and Blue skills & Careers.

During each lab, a state of play was provided concerning the theme at hand as a basis for generating and discussing concrete project ideas - including the identification of possible funding opportunities and open/ future calls for proposals.

AQUACULTURE PROJECT DEVELOPMENT LAB



Context

The Aquaculture project development lab consisted of 11 stakeholders representing academia, NGOs, public authorities and the private sector.

It was organised in collaboration with the [Aquaculture Assistance Mechanism](#) that presented recent publications, trainings and other relevant case studies.

Participants shared their experiences regarding their involvement in other projects. Four specific project ideas were presented and discussed in light of the open Aquaculture EMFAF call and the upcoming Interreg NEXT MED call - participants expressed their interest in becoming part of a partnership that could be further supported by WestMED's Technical Group AquaWest to further elaborate on this.

Outcomes and emerged ideas

- MSP/AZAs could provide opportunities to remove barriers on licensing farms and access to space by using pilot test sites
- Multiuse approach in MPAs that could assess and test ecofriendly aquaculture
- Explore the development of sustainable feed based in local sources

Potential funding opportunities/ programmes targeted

- Current EMFAF call
- Upcoming Interreg NEXT MED call



GREEN SHIPPING & PORTS

PROJECT DEVELOPMENT LAB



Context

This lab was attended by approx. 20 participants including colleagues from beyond the WestMED region like Türkiye, Greece and Bosnia Herzegovina. After the Union for the Mediterranean (UfM) presented an [update on progress towards the implementation of the UfM Regional Action Plan on Transport 2021-2027](#), Interreg NEXT MED shared an update on the status of the 2nd green economy call. Before opening the floor and starting the exchange, the WestMED National Hub for Italy concluded the introduction by presenting the progress made under the WestMED Initiative and its [Technical Group on Green Shipping](#) with among others, a recently submitted proposal for a new S3 partnership with 30 partners from EU and non EU countries.

Outcomes and emerged ideas (first 3 most innovative)

- Scaling up of innovative approaches to bunkering, ship repair, etc as piloted by the Canary Islands
- Network of Excellence Centers
- Upgrade of energy grids to serve smaller ports
- Digital twin focusing on common ports & oceans -contributing to a unified approach to data collection and management
- Transitional fuels linking to the green hydrogen supply chain and the concept of energy communities

Potential funding opportunities/ programmes targeted

- IEMFAF, I3, LIFE CET, HORIZON Cluster 5; HORIZON SBEP; HORIZON MISSION Restore Our Ocean and Waters



MARITIME CLUSTERS

PROJECT DEVELOPMENT LAB



Context

The [WestMED Cluster Alliance](#) is a successful initiative supported by the WestMED Assistance Mechanism and led by Mediterranean Maritime Clusters from the two shores of the region. So far, this Alliance has already fostered valuable project ideas and partnership to scale-up emerging clusters (notably on the southern shore), as well as experimenting acceleration of innovative solutions through cascade funding (mainly for the northern shore).

This hackathon was the occasion to investigate future developments for the WestMED Cluster Alliance, also involving clusters from the Eastern Mediterranean (WestMED Alliance+) and further foster the pivotal role for maritime clusters on promoting a sustainable, green and innovative blue economy.

Outcomes and emerged ideas

- Clusters cooperation to foster uptake of digitalisation and data services across local value chains
- Cluster as a facilitator to incubate and accelerate/ scale-up local innovative solutions
- Possibly the two projects being merged into one, by building upon previous projects from the WestMED+ Cluster Alliance

Potential funding opportunities targeted

- INTERREG NEXT MED (preferred)
- ERASMUS+ Innovation Alliances (not discussed)



BLUE SKILLS & CAREERS

PROJECT DEVELOPMENT LAB



Context

After an introduction on the state of play of the Blue Skills developments across EU sectors and some of the latest EU calls, this lab consisting of approx. 15 stakeholders, exchanged thoughts related to 4 specific topics: (1) Upskill and reskill of the workforce to meet the demands of new jobs and technologies, (2) Facilitate the process of mutual recognition of qualifications, (3) Increase the cross-border mobility of workers in blue economy sectors and (4) Ensure the promotion of maritime professions.

Outcomes and emerged ideas

- Creation of a WestMED label for education and training certification via a MoU between WestMED initiative and education or training operators/ Setting a network of labelled education or training operators in WestMED+ (consistency with UfM)
- Baseline study on BE skills (definition and needs) in the WestMED+, building on the outcomes of the ongoing study at EC level with a seabasin focus (to be considered in cooperation with UfM)
- Capacity building for public servants on Maritime affairs and policies enforcement/ regulation via EU agencies (e.g EFCA, EMSA, Frontex)
 - virtual maritime policy academy building on EFCA experiences (FIUUFRA – e-FishMed)

Potential funding opportunities/ programmes targeted

- Interreg Med or ERASMUS+
- UfM/EMFAF direct management
- EMFAF or TAEIX



TOURISM

PROJECT DEVELOPMENT LAB



Context

As stated in the WestMED Malta Ministerial Declaration (2023), the main objective was to 'strengthen the competitiveness and sustainability of the coastal and maritime tourism sector,' as part of a smart and resilient blue economy – one of the key goals of the WestMED Initiative. This, by preserving the marine and coastal environment as well as marine cultural heritage and contributing to the attractiveness of coastal areas by means of ecotourism, digitalization and mobilizing private-public investments.

Outcomes and emerged ideas (most voted)

- Capitalizing the results of EU WEMED NA_TOUR project and pursuing its expansion to other geographical contexts and target groups.
- Development a SMART Sustainability Platform. This platform will pursue the democratization of the information and seek to advance on indicators and ways to measure the impact that the use of technologies could have on creating behavior changes, new tourism demands and the development of new sustainable business activities

Potential funding opportunities/ programmes targeted

- EMFAF
- INTERREG NEXT MED



CONCLUDING REMARKS



In the room we have about 85 participants which is remarkable and I thank you all for your attendance. The Blue economy is a matter for policy makers - but you, the stakeholders are very important to achieve the WestMED goals. The energy that you deliver in the five labs is remarkable. The ideas, the debate and most important your interest make me proud of our decision. As current co-chair I am confident about the future.



Marisa Lameiras da Silva | Director General for Maritime Policy in Portugal



The main role of this Assistance Mechanism is this matchmaking and find funding opportunities to turn these project ideas into realities. So I think that we have build on this cooperation and can affirm that we are a good example of soft diplomacy - and this is specifically special in this geopolitical context in the Mediterranean. So after this fruitful and motivating day we can also remind how useful the WestMED is for the whole sea basin.



Manuel Pleguezuelo Alonso | Policy officer, Sea-basin Strategies and Maritime Regional Cooperation Unit, DG MARE



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The WestMED hackathon '24 was organised by the WestMED Assistance Mechanism (Ecorys led consortium), together with the DGPM (Direção-Geral de Política do Mar - Portugal), CINEA and DG MARE. For more information mail: communications@westmed-initiative.eu or call: + 34 915 980 851