



2025 Macro-Regional and Sea Basin Strategies Days, 24-25 September 2025, Brussels

Executive summary

The 2025 Macro-Regional and Sea Basin Strategies Days convened stakeholders from across the eight EU's Macro-Regional and Sea Basin Strategies to identify shared priorities, foster cooperation, and explore how these strategies can effectively address the complex, interconnected challenges of our time, including geopolitical, environmental, and socio-economic pressures.

The event focused on key themes such as the energy transition, skills development, resilience, security, youth engagement, governance, and the importance of visibility and stakeholder engagement. By bringing together the four EU Macro-Regional Strategies (Alpine, Danube, Adriatic-Ionian, Baltic Sea) and the four EU Sea Basin Strategies (Atlantic, Western Mediterranean, Black Sea and Greater North Sea Basin), the event leveraged the unique strengths of these frameworks to drive concrete action, facilitate regional and sea basin cooperation, and promote the sharing of expertise and experience. As Europe navigates the rapidly evolving geopolitical, environmental, and socio-economic landscape, the Strategies are well-positioned to facilitate adaptation and change, unlocking opportunities for cooperation and collaboration across regions and sea basins.

The programme featured keynote addresses by two EU Commissioners: a video message from **Raffaele Fitto**, European Commission Executive Vice-President for Cohesion and Reforms and opening remarks by **Cósta Kadís**, the European Commissioner for Fisheries and Oceans. The event also included high-level panel discussions with representatives from the Strategies, a 'speed dating' session with the Commission services, and a Cross-Strategies Fertilisation Session that brought together stakeholders from all eight strategies to explore cooperation and synergies. Additionally, the event showcased the perspectives of young people through interventions by youth representatives, presentations of two youth contests (the Youth4Ocean Forum Video Contest and the 'Living without Leaving?' art competition), and a photo exhibition entitled 'Through the Youth Lens, Stories of Transnational Cooperation'. The event concluded with closing remarks from two Commission Directors-General: **Charlina Vitcheva**, Director-General for Maritime Affairs and Fisheries, and **Themis Christophidou**, Director-General for Regional and Urban Policy.

Priority areas for the Strategies:

- Cooperation with candidate countries in view of enlargement process.
- Defense and security (maritime and inland).
- Transformation to a greener and more circular economic system. This entails a holistic approach, connecting research, innovation, and economy, while also addressing labour market issues, as the emergence of new professions will require a skilled workforce. Supporting enterprises is crucial, but it is equally important to consider the broader societal implications of this transition.
- Access to (marine and land-based) data, which underpins various activities, such as spatial planning, nature restoration, and the establishment of protected areas. Especially for sea basins, effective maritime spatial planning, marine protection, and eco-based sea basin management are essential for striking a balance between ecosystem conservation and economic use.
- Facilitating and supporting the development of renewable energy (offshore and inland), promoting innovation in clean industry and energy security and resilience.
- Restoring natural ecosystems and promoting water resilience. Developing skills that enable a good quality of life and improving the well-being of people in regional and local communities.



- An area of particular emphasis is territorial cooperation, particularly in terms of enhancing collaboration between border regions outside the EU and those within it, to foster greater cohesion and cooperation.

Challenges

The future of the Macro-Regional and Sea Basin Strategies is marked by several broad challenges, including demographic changes, spatial planning, research and innovation, quality of life, governance, visibility, communication, and stakeholder inclusion. Ensuring that participating countries dedicate the necessary resources to these efforts, such as thematic steering groups, is a particular concern.

Remote areas face significant challenges due to demographic changes, depopulation, and the impacts of climate change. However, globalisation, which has previously posed a threat to small-scale industries, now presents an opportunity for these companies to regain competitiveness by adopting more sustainable and circular practices. Ongoing cooperation is focused on driving innovation and fostering new technologies to ensure the future competitiveness of these industries.

The implementation of the recent and future EU policy initiatives (e.g., Ocean Pact, mid-term review of cohesion policy) poses several challenges, including aligning priorities, actions, and work programs with the Strategies, translating policies into tangible cooperation and projects, and engaging stakeholders, particularly regional actors.

Finding a balance between the needs and interests of candidate countries and EU Member States is also a challenge. The Strategies have proven useful for non-EU countries, providing a framework for joint initiatives, partnerships, and expertise-sharing. However, the frequent updates to EU legislation and policies require the Strategies to be revised regularly, which can be a challenge. Additionally, revising a Strategy to respond to the diverse needs and interests of both landlocked and coastal countries can be difficult.

A recurring theme throughout the discussions was the importance of involving young people in decision-making processes to ensure the long-term viability of the Strategies. Young people are recognised as key agents of change and innovation, and their participation in the implementation of the Strategies should be a two-way exchange, with young people contributing their energy, creativity, and innovative perspectives. In return, the Strategies can provide young people with opportunities for learning and active participation.

Young people also play a crucial role in promoting the visibility of the Strategies, bringing them into schools, universities, and local communities, and communicating their importance to a wider audience.

Main takeaways and actionable steps

A key proposal emerging from the discussions was the creation of a shared agenda of events to facilitate collaboration and coordination among the Macro-Regional and Sea Basin Strategies.

Mutual learning between the Macro-Regions and Sea Basins

All the Sea Basin and Macro-Regional Strategies act as a bridge. They are not only technical frameworks but also political tools, building trust, strengthening proximity and paving the way for deeper cooperation. To enhance coordination, it is essential to support dialogue between the sea basins and the macro-regions, which share common policy priorities (e.g. sustainable tourism, spatial planning and research cooperation). Cooperation can take the form of joint events, collaborative work on overlapping themes, or participation in each other's initiatives.



A stronger network of stakeholders can bring numerous benefits. The approaches of the Macro-Regions and Sea Basins can gain from each other, leveraging each other's strengths and amplifying results. Sharing data and lessons learnt are among areas where further dialogue between Sea Basins and Micro Regions can be explored.

Recommendations and Next Steps

The discussions explored **governance, communication and visibility, and place-based approaches** in the context of strengthening synergies among macro-regional and sea basin strategies. Each discussion generated concrete ideas on how strategies can evolve to be more effective, inclusive, and impactful.

Governance

The governance-focused discussion highlighted the need to strengthen mechanisms for feeding messages from macro-regional and sea basin collaboration into EU institutions. Ensuring that the main ideas and outcomes of cooperation inform EU-level decision-making is crucial.

Participants emphasised the importance of forecasting challenges ahead to ensure strategies remain adaptable and relevant. They also called for creating conditions that encourage investor engagement, noting that financial backing is essential to bring collaborative projects to scale. Proposals included the establishment of a cross-strategy coordination portal to connect and streamline governance efforts across regions.

Youth involvement was highlighted as a priority, with recommendations to create dedicated platforms linking youth to scientific communities and strengthening science-policy interfaces.

Sector-specific meetings across strategies were suggested to make cooperation more actionable, rather than relying solely on general exchanges. Experts would be able to share their experience with piloting/uptake of place-based innovation within their respective fields of expertise. Innovation-focused events such as hackathons were also proposed to increase visibility, foster engagement, and stimulate collaborative problem-solving across regions.

Communication and Visibility

The discussion on communication and visibility emphasised the need to target messages to specific audiences, including policymakers, stakeholders, and communities, to maximise relevance and impact. Broad or unfocused communication was seen as less effective; strategies should clearly demonstrate how stakeholder inputs shape policy agendas.

Participants highlighted the importance of political engagement, with national and EU parliaments representing untapped channels to increase strategy influence. The concept of appointing "strategy ambassadors" was proposed to champion strategies within decision-making bodies. Youth engagement was identified as essential for both communication and visibility, with recommendations to create institutionalised pathways for participation and connections with youth groups.

Aligning programming timelines, optimising the use of existing funding, and leveraging support from national coordinators and secretariats were also cited as ways to strengthen visibility and ensure outputs are acted upon.

Place-Based Approaches

Discussions emphasised the value of grounding strategies in regional specificities and community needs.

Conclusion



Common priorities emerged across sessions, including strengthening governance through better coordination and EU-level connections, enhancing communication and visibility through targeted outreach, political engagement, and youth participation, and grounding strategies in regional realities through place-based approaches. These insights point to the need for strategies that are more targeted, inclusive, and politically visible, while remaining responsive to local contexts and challenges.

A more detailed report will be available soon upon request.

If you are interested, please request a copy from: regio-EU-STRATEGIES-DAYS@ec.europa.eu