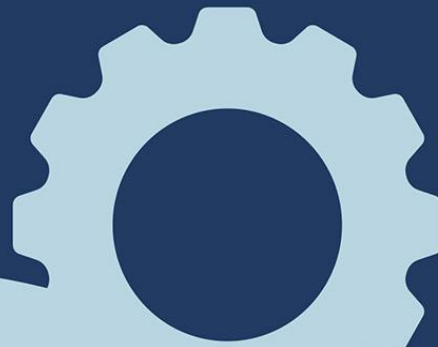




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# MARMED

MARitime cluster Management Education Development

## RECOMMENDATION AND GUIDELINE FOR BLUE CLUSTER MANAGER

*WP5 - Stakeholders Mobilization and set of recommendation for  
blue Cluster Manager*

ERASMUS+

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## INTRODUCTION

The Maritime cluster Management Education Development (MARMED) project aims at bridging the gap between the existing needs and the current skillset of Maritime Clusters Managers, ensuring upskilling, aiming at outlining an innovative professional profile for an increased competitiveness of Maritime Clusters in the Mediterranean area and, overall, boosting innovation and sustainable growth in the Blue Economy sector.

Maritime Clusters have been growingly acknowledged as essential boosters for innovation and diversification of the Blue Economy. And yet, the very concept of “cluster” and the practical examples of related organisations have evolved through time. As a result, a range of practices and approaches has *de facto* emerged (industrial complex, agglomeration of interlinked industries, community-based network, etc.), depending on specific local needs and experiences, as well as on the different development patterns and challenges faced across the maritime sectors.

Cluster management is a multi-faceted and rather demanding activity, which requires a large set of different skills. However, at present there are very few training opportunities available for the present and future Maritime cluster managers.

Based on innovation strategies within Baltic Sea Region and a large preparatory work to investigate the needs for cluster managers, the MARMED project aims at developing and providing Maritime Cluster Managers with a set of specific skills and competences allowing this professional profile to represent a key driver of change at EU and international level, helping Clusters to become open, collaborative, interconnected, mission-oriented, innovation-driven and, overall, SDG-driven ecosystems.

The project, through the collaboration between Maritime Clusters, Research Centers and Vocational Training Providers, designed, pilot, evaluated a transversal training programme targeted at employees of Maritime Clusters and potential ones.



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## EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

WP5 activities and deliverable have been central to MARMED Project, implemented throughout its 24-month duration. The main objective of WP5 was to strengthen relationships and synergies between maritime cluster ecosystems, enhancing their competitiveness and cooperation in line with the project's goals.

Key activities included fostering the exchange of information and best practices to create a cooperative environment among maritime clusters and key actors.

The specific objectives of WP5 were:

- 01.** Promotion of exchange of information and best practices to enhance cooperation among maritime clusters and other key actors.
- 02.** Creation of a reference ecosystem to strengthen multi-level dialogue between maritime clusters, educational providers, and institutions.
- 03.** Facilitation of interaction and networking among Mediterranean maritime clusters and relevant actors through events.
- 04.** Improvement of cluster managers' competitiveness and innovation within Mediterranean maritime clusters.

The primary aim is to compile a comprehensive document that consolidates the findings, research activities, and feedback gathered throughout WP5 and the entire project. This final document aims at providing a set of Recommendations and Guidelines to support maritime clusters and boost innovation and sustainable growth in the Blue Economy sector.

To achieve this objective, a series of activities were implemented across various Work Packages, contributing significantly to the design and definition of the WP5 final report.

These include:



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- **WP2 – Skill Gaps Analysis.** This WP mapped skills gaps in the sector and created a list of competences that should be fostered to highlight this gap. In particular, the field research and interviews conducted in the frame of this Work Package were instrumental to highlight areas of potential improvement and provide valuable data and information that support the definition of recommendation and guidelines.
- **WP3 - Methodology and design of training activities.** This WP focuses on the development and implementation of an innovative Maritime Cluster Management Curriculum, transforming the identified skills gaps into structured learning outcomes. It included the design of a specific curriculum, the creation of a sustainable e-learning training platform that supports both self-paced learning and interactive digital classes, and the development of a Quality Training Evaluation methodology to assess effectiveness and ensure continuous improvement.
- **WP4 – Piloting and Practical Training.** In the frame of WP4, the Consortium elaborated and delivered a practical training dedicated to Cluster Managers. In particular:
  - **Blue Cluster Manager Training:** a training course dedicated to Blue Cluster Managers aimed at providing insights, skills, and strategies essential for driving innovation and collaboration in the Blue Economy. The course was divided in three main sections:
    - **Section A - E-Learning Course:** a 40h e-learning course aimed at providing experienced and aspiring maritime clusters with a valuable set of skills.
    - **Section B - Study Visit:** a two-day face-to-face experience that took place in Trieste (13-14 June 2024) and which aimed at strengthening the skills of the selected Maritime Cluster Managers in the Mediterranean region. During this experience, participants had the opportunity to learn more about the best



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practices from actors operating in the marine and maritime sectors, as well as create and strengthen synergies and acquire more knowledge in the different sectors of the Blue Economy.

- **Section C - Online Live Discussions:** These dynamic and interactive discussions sessions represented an important moment of knowledge exchange between participants, trainers and partners, and were instrumental to apply theoretical knowledge to real-world scenarios, encouraging critical thinking and promoting cross-national collaboration.
- **Train-the-trainer Program:** a training program dedicated to the trainers and aimed at providing them with all necessary tools to duly address the Online Live Discussions and create a dynamic and interactive environment for the discussions.

These activities provided essential inputs, fostering collaboration and aligning efforts to address the project's overarching goals. This document highlights the objectives achieved and the key activities carried out during the implementation of the project, with a particular focus on Result 5: Recommendations and Guidelines for Blue Cluster Managers. This report aims to promote a mechanism of cooperation among maritime clusters in the Mediterranean, emphasizing the strategic role of Cluster Managers in fostering collaboration and innovation.

Additionally, this deliverable contains the *Final Set of Recommendations and Guidelines*, offering actionable insights to stakeholders and key actors to support the role of Maritime Clusters in the Blue Economy ecosystem.



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## OVERVIEW OF EXISTING FRAMEWORK

Maritime Clusters represent important policy tools to support sustainable growth and jobs across the Mediterranean. They promote the uptake of innovation, knowledge, skills as well as access to finance – ensuring that the support provided is effective and locally grounded. This is possible through joint actions promoted by socio-economic and institutional actors at the local, national, EU and sub-regional levels. Hence, commitment to the enhancement of maritime clusters competitiveness is crucial to ensure the sustainable growth of Blue Economy sectors. In this frame, the **WestMED Clusters Maritime Alliance** aimed at fostering maritime cluster cooperation across the western Mediterranean, supporting exchange of knowledge and practices across maritime and non-maritime clusters, boosting the development of southern maritime clusters, upgrading cluster management skills. Clusters are essential contributors to European sustainability and digital policies, supporting small and medium enterprises (SMEs) and addressing societal challenges through community-level initiatives. The 2021 European Expert Group on Clusters recommended to center Cluster activities on leading the green transition, accelerating the digital transition and building resilience. According to the Group, policies should support clusters use the collective intelligence of their members to face challenges and adapt to change, working together as networks to prepare for shifts and find new supply and market options (European Commission, 2021). With specific reference to maritime clusters, the United Nations (UN) underscores the importance of the Blue Economy in fostering sustainable growth through ocean-related activities while ensuring environmental preservation and social equity (UN, n.a.). Furthermore, Blue Growth has been recognized as a key EU priority within the context of smart specialization strategy (de Vet et al., 2016). The principles of Smart Specialization are highly relevant for



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implementing Blue Growth, which is an integrated approach to enhancing the maritime economy, emphasizing innovation, creation of new businesses, bottom-up strategies, and the development of value chains. Indeed, in the Mediterranean region, maritime clusters are vital tools for promoting sustainable growth, innovation, skills development, and access to finance. They bring together socio-economic and institutional actors across local, national, and EU levels to implement joint actions that are both effective and locally relevant. Over time, the concept of “clusters” has evolved, adapting to different regional needs and challenges, resulting in a variety of practices such as industrial complexes, networks of interlinked industries, and community-based models. Effective cluster management, supported by skilled personnel and dedicated resources, is essential to achieving these synergies and driving the development of maritime clusters in the Mediterranean.

In this frame, maritime cluster alliances and collaboration platforms play a crucial role in fostering cooperation, innovation, and sustainable growth within the maritime sector. These collaborative networks allow stakeholders to combine resources, share knowledge, and develop joint strategies to address common challenges. The significance of such platforms lies in their ability to enhance synergies across regions and countries, promote cross-border collaboration, and create a unified approach to tackling key issues such as maritime innovation, sustainability, and economic development. There have been several key initiatives in this context, all of which serve as vital tools for strengthening partnerships and advancing the Blue Economy across Europe. For instance, the **European Cluster Collaboration Platform** serves as the central online hub for industry clusters across Europe, designed to strengthen the European economy through enhanced collaboration. It offers a range of services to support EU clusters, including fostering partnerships with regions, organizing weekly talks to facilitate knowledge exchange, and hosting discussions



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on relevant topics. Additionally, the platform organizes matchmaking events and interactive workshops tailored to cluster organizations. It also features the *Cluster Booster Academy*, which leverages the expertise of experienced cluster managers to guide the development of emerging clusters. Moreover, the platform provides *Green Transition Support*, enabling businesses to connect and collaborate in advancing sustainable and environmentally friendly practices. On the other side, another example is the **European Network of Maritime Clusters (ENMC)**, a non-profit organization founded with the goal of fostering effective cooperation within the maritime sector. Its core mission is to advocate for a unified maritime voice to European policymakers, promoting the creation of a level playing field for the maritime industry across Europe - a vision centered on the establishment of a single European Maritime Cluster. The ENMC focuses on sharing information and best practices among its members while actively promoting and safeguarding their interests, particularly those engaged in the Blue Economy. The organization participates in and hosts various meetings, events, and trade fairs across Europe. Through its networks and collaborations, the ENMC highlights the strengths and opportunities of maritime clusters, keeping European policymakers informed and engaged.

These are just few of the initiatives aimed at supporting maritime clusters in their operations and collaboration mechanisms.



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## PREPARATORY ACTIVITIES TO CO-SHAPE THE SET OF RECOMMENDATIONS

By involving maritime clusters and various actors operating within the Blue Economy, the project fostered collaboration, enabling cross-sector dialogue and innovative approaches to capacity building and skills development. A key achievement was the establishment of a dynamic network comprising maritime clusters, VET providers and research entities, which fosters value creation through European, national, and regional dimensions, emphasizing intercultural and interdisciplinary collaboration to address emerging needs within the Blue Economy sector.

This paragraph aims at illustrating some key elements that emerged during the activities conducted under the different Work Packages and that supported the development of the final set of Recommendations.

### Field research and interviews

Field research was conducted during the early stages of project activities as part of WP2 (Skill Gaps Analysis). The focus was mainly but not exclusively on managerial employees within maritime clusters. Target countries were selected from both the northern and southern Mediterranean to enrich the analysis and promote long-term cooperation between these regions, given the steady growth of clusters across the Mediterranean. In each selected country, in-depth interviews were carried out with maritime cluster managers to identify their skill gaps, clarify the expected outcomes for these roles, and gather insights on training expectations. A large sample of respondents was engaged to ensure comprehensive results.

Drawing on the fruitful contribution of the participants in the field research, it was possible to identify some key major trends in terms of skills needed for Maritime Cluster Managers, paving the way for drafting the key recommendations and guidelines to enhance Maritime



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Clusters competitiveness. The discussion conducted, in particular, with existing cluster managers and employees with managerial roles within Maritime Clusters and organizations operating within Blue Economy, led indeed to the identification of a number of crucial cross-cutting trends and views on requested skill to manage Maritime Clusters. Such trends and opinions were isolated and read from a strategic perspective and used to draw some relevant conclusions.

A key observation that has emerged from the in-depth interviews, and which should guide recommendations, is the critical importance of equipping maritime cluster managers with a thorough understanding of European, national, and regional policies, regulations, and priorities that directly impact the blue economy. This is particularly essential given the strong connection between clusters and policy frameworks, as well as their frequent interactions with ministries, policymakers, and regional strategies like S3.

Moreover, maritime law and regulations have been identified as crucial aspects of the cluster manager's expertise. The ability to navigate and balance diverse economic and strategic interests within the different blue economy sectors, is of paramount importance. To address these needs, a focused approach to training should be considered, including short courses on EU Blue Economy strategies and introductions to relevant Regional Innovation Strategies within the Mediterranean basin. Therefore, a key recommendation must emphasize the integration of specialized training on policy and legal frameworks into capacity-building programs for maritime cluster managers. This should not only enhance their ability to facilitate investments and coordinate diverse stakeholders effectively but also support the overall alignment of cluster activities with regional and national priorities. Such training initiatives should be continuous and adaptable to reflect the evolving nature of policies and industry needs.



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Another essential observation that emerged from the interviews highlights the importance of fostering cooperation mechanisms between maritime clusters at both European and Mediterranean levels. Interviewees unanimously agreed that such mechanisms create a dynamic and supportive environment for cluster managers to enhance their skills, share knowledge, and improve their overall performance. Moreover, these mechanisms contribute significantly to the growth and sustainability of the maritime industry as a whole. To this end, a key Recommendation should focus on promoting the establishment and strengthening of formal cooperation frameworks within maritime cluster networks. Initiatives such as the European Network of Maritime Clusters (ENMC), the WestMED Cluster Alliance, and Euroclusters - European Cluster Collaboration Platform provide valuable platforms for bringing clusters together and collectively developing better management capabilities. This is particularly critical in emerging sectors and markets, where knowledge transfer and collaboration are essential for driving innovation and competitiveness. Establishing and maintaining these mechanisms should be prioritized to ensure the continuous development of cluster managers and the industry at large.

### **Key Findings from project activities and attended events**

The key findings from the project activities reveal valuable insights into the effectiveness and impact of the different initiatives that took place during the implementation of the project. Feedback collected through surveys administered during the course of the project highlighted a set of key outcomes that supported the design of the final set of recommendations. The following chapters described the main findings of the *Blue Cluster Training Program*, the *Train-the-Trainer* sessions, and the events organized in the frame of WP5.



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### ***Train-the-Trainer***

The Train-the-Trainer program proved highly effective in preparing trainers for their case study sessions, exceeding expectations by equipping them with the tools and support needed to deliver high-quality training. A key takeaway was the added value of directly involving expert cluster managers in the program. Their participation allowed trainers to gain deeper insights into the functioning of Maritime Clusters and to better understand the strategic role these clusters play in driving innovation and sustainable growth in the Blue Economy.

This approach not only enhanced the trainers' knowledge but also enriched their capacity to convey complex concepts to participants effectively. This experience proved to be highly recommended, as it fosters a more comprehensive understanding of Maritime Cluster dynamics and strengthens the overall impact of the training program.

### ***Blue Cluster Training Program***

The key findings from the Blue Cluster Training Program offered essential insights that served as the foundation for developing the final set of recommendations. A detailed analysis of the feedback from each section of the program is provided below.

### ***Section A – E-Learning Course***

The feedback gathered from the e-learning course highlights several key elements that contribute to define the basis for the final set of recommendation. A recurring theme is the richness and high performance of the content, with participants expressing appreciation for the variety of topics covered, which provided valuable insights into multiple sectors, especially the blue economy. For instance, one comment emphasized the importance of cross-sectoral engagement through intergenerational dialogue as a means to achieve sustainable oceans, aligning with the growing recognition of the need for more inclusive, collaborative approaches within the sector.



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Another important aspect was the practicality of the course materials. Many learners noted that the content was both information-rich and practical. Additionally, the course was praised for its relevance to participants' professional roles, with feedback indicating that it provided useful tools for those working in the blue economy sector. Overall, these insights suggest that future courses should maintain a balance of rich, relevant content with practical applications, while also emphasizing the importance of open access education resources and e-learning contents that allow professionals to follow the course at their own pace.

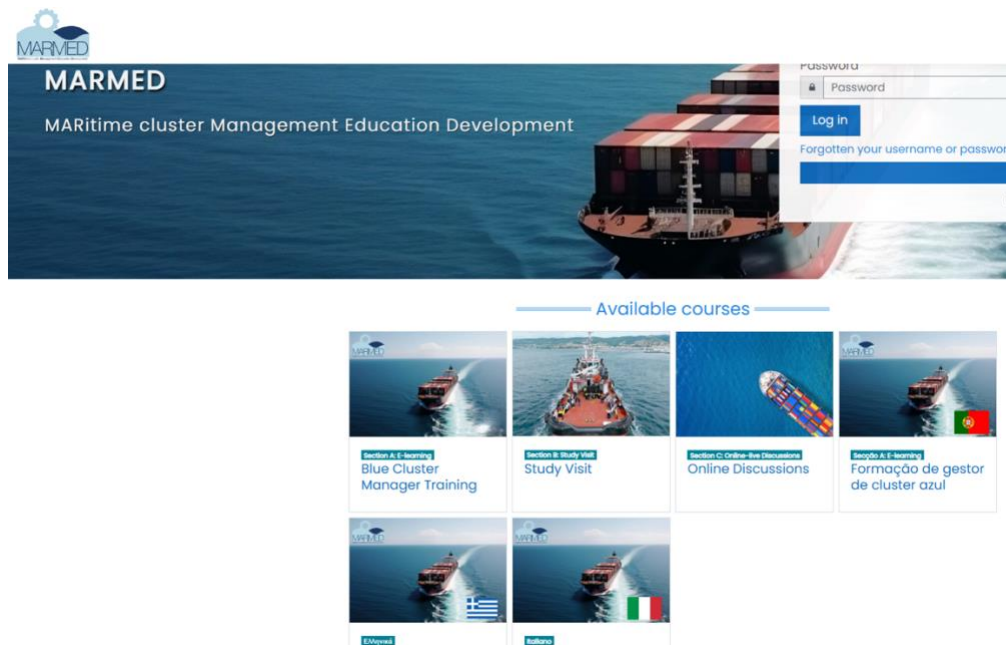


Figure 1. E-Learning Platform

### Section B – Study Visit in Trieste

The feedback from the Study Visit highlights key strengths and areas for improvement, forming a solid foundation for the final recommendations. The program was highly valued, particularly for facilitating fruitful discussions with experts and experienced cluster



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managers. Participants praised the networking opportunities, the quality of the conferences, and the presentations, which enriched their learning experience and fostered meaningful connections. The Study Visit successfully created a dynamic environment for knowledge exchange by bringing together experts and participants. This feedback underscores the importance of maintaining and enhancing opportunities for interaction and well-structured content in future activities involving Maritime Cluster Managers.



Figure 2. Study Visit in Trieste

### Section C - Online Live Discussions

The feedback from the Online Live Discussions highlights several strengths and areas for improvement, which were instrumental in shaping the final set of recommendations. Overall satisfaction rates were exceptionally high, with participants commending the clarity



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and structure of the presentations. The content was widely appreciated as relevant to their professional development, and the sessions stood out for their interactivity and the practical application of case studies.

These discussions provided not only valuable learning opportunities but also a platform for participants from across the EU to engage in meaningful exchanges, fostering a collaborative learning environment. The case-study methodology was considered a significant added value, as it facilitated knowledge sharing and networking among stakeholders. Additionally, participants praised the carefully chosen topics for their relevance to current trends in the Blue Economy.

A key factor contributing to the success of the sessions was the involvement of both sector experts and experienced cluster managers, who collaborated in each session bringing deep insights and credibility to the discussions. Their guidance, along with the moderation of VET providers, ensured that the sessions addressed specific needs within the maritime sector. Overall, the feedback indicates that the course effectively met its objectives, with well-structured content, engaging materials, a seamless digital experience, and interactive elements that fostered productive networking and discussions among participants.



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Figure 3. Online Live Discussions

### Participation to relevant event at EU, national and regional levels

During MARMED project's lifetime, the Consortium actively participated in numerous events, conferences, and initiatives aimed at building momentum and engaging the identified target groups, including current and future managers of maritime clusters, employees in the blue economy sector, trainers, Maritime Clusters in general and their associates, but also Research entities and VET Providers offering Blue Economy and Management courses. The coordination and synergy among the partners proved to be a significant asset in promoting project results across various networks. The partners



leveraged their networking and consensus-building capabilities to explore and promote strategies for addressing the skills needs of maritime cluster managers.

The partners attended different event at national and European levels, fostering awareness about the project's relevance, showcased its outcomes, and stimulated multi-level dialogue among key actors in the Blue Economy. These interactions facilitated discussions, knowledge transfer, and concrete actions to engage experts and stakeholders through conferences, thematic meetings, and research workshops.

### ***European Maritime Day 2023 – 24<sup>th</sup> – 25<sup>th</sup> May 2023***

MarMED Project was presented during the European Maritime Day (EMD) 2023 that took place in Brest (France) on the 24<sup>th</sup> – 25<sup>th</sup> May 2023. The EMD is the annual two-day event during which Europe's maritime community meets to network, discuss and outline joint actions on maritime affairs and sustainable blue economy. The event was attended by more than 1600 participants, and the main topics of discussions were the use of marine space, the energy transition and blue skills. During the event, ForMare presented MARMED project in the context of the joint workshop «Future Skills for Sustainable Blue Economy: What challenges and opportunities?». The presentation focused on the structure and key objectives of the project, illustrating the development and state of the art of the work packages. Indeed, the Joint Workshop represented a great opportunity to promote MARMED Project and to facilitate the dialogue between key stakeholders of the Blue Economy Sector raising awareness on the crucial role of Maritime Clusters as essential boosters for innovation and diversification of the Blue Economy. It is also worth to mention that the workshop was selected by the European Commission as an associated event of the **European Vocational Skills Week 2023**, a week held by the Commission to celebrate all the very best practices in Vocational Education and



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Training (VET), which represented a great opportunity to raise awareness on the MARMED project importance at Institutional level.

The workshop was also selected by the European Commission as associated event of the **European Year of Skills 2023**, an initiative promoted by the European Commission to promote skills development and to address skills gaps in the European Union and boost the EU skills strategy.

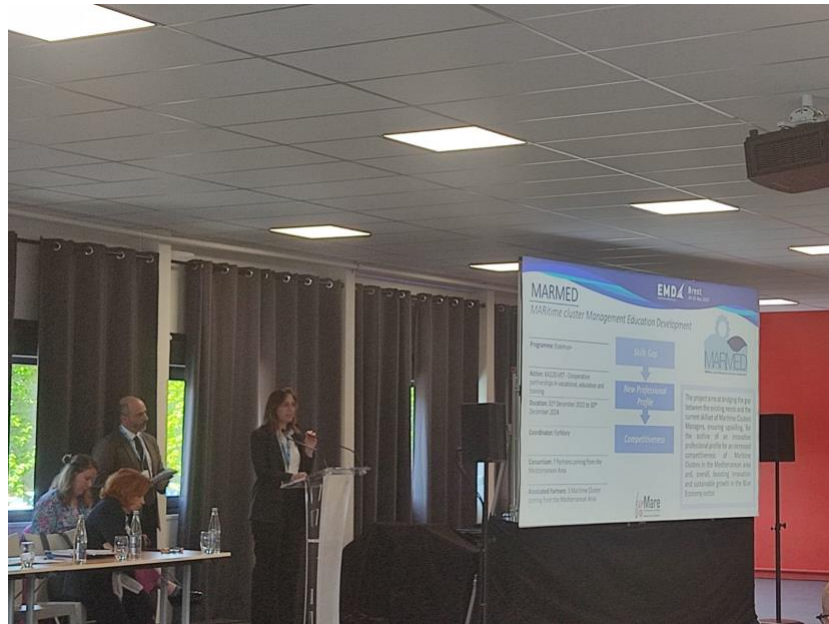


Figure 4. Presentation of MARMED Project at EMD 2023, Brest (France)

### **8<sup>th</sup> Edition of SEAFUTURE Convention – 5<sup>th</sup> – 8<sup>th</sup> June 2023**

The 8<sup>th</sup> June 2023, MARMED project was presented in the frame of the 8<sup>th</sup> edition of SEAFUTURE Convention, the hub on the Mediterranean Sea for the Blue Economy. SEAFUTURE is the annual business convention of maritime and dual use technologies and it took place in La Spezia (Italy) on the 5<sup>th</sup> – 8<sup>th</sup> June 2023 and it was attended by 20.000 participants.



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MARMED Project was presented by ForMare in the frame of the panel organized by the WestMED “Main Achievements of the WestMED Maritime Clusters Alliance and its members”. The panel represented a good opportunity to present the result of the fruitful collaboration established with Maritime Clusters operating in the Mediterranean Area under the edge of the WestMED Alliance and to create synergies with similar projects. The panel was attended by representatives of major Institutions at national level – as the Italian Ministry of Foreign Affairs, Presidency of the Council of Ministers – Department for Cohesion Policies – and at EU level – as DG Mare and Union for the Mediterranean. The panel was attended also by the representatives of the main European and Mediterranean Maritime Clusters, the European Clusters Alliance and the European Network of Maritime Clusters, providing a good opportunity for the partners to raise awareness on the importance of MARMED Project at institutional level.



Figure 5. Presentation of MARMED Project at SEAFUTURE - La Spezia (Italy)



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### ***3<sup>rd</sup> edition of the Blue Planet Economy Expoforum – 11<sup>th</sup> October 2023***

The MARMED Project was presented by Cluster BIG – Blue Italian Growth at the Blue Planet Economy Expoforum during the panel discussion “Skills to Feed Jobs,” organized by OGS.

The Blue Planet Economy Expoforum is an annual event dedicated to sustainability, innovation, and development within the blue economy. It emphasizes the crucial role of local communities and small and medium-sized enterprises in fostering sustainable and innovative practices. The 2023 edition focused on the challenges of ecological transition in the Mediterranean Region, with themes including sustainable development, environmental regeneration, and youth engagement for a "Blue Future."

The event serves as a meeting point for companies, experts, researchers, institutions, and industry associations to tackle pressing challenges, explore innovative solutions, and unlock new opportunities for a sustainable future. Among its key areas of focus is Blue Future and Youth Experience, which highlights the importance of preparing young generations for emerging careers and skills in the blue economy.

The panel “Skills to Feed Jobs” brought together key stakeholders from private and public institutions to discuss strategies for promoting the next generation of blue careers in the Mediterranean. In this context, Cluster BIG presented the results of the WP2 Skill Gaps Analysis, offering valuable insights into the skill needs and gaps identified in the maritime sector.

The Blue Planet Economy Expoforum provided an essential platform to raise awareness about the MARMED Project and its findings. By engaging a wide audience of stakeholders, the event amplified the project’s results, encouraging dialogue, collaboration, and



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actionable steps to address the skill needs for the Education sustainable development of the blue economy.



Figure 6. MARMED Project presented at the Blue Economy ExpoForum - Rome (Italy)

### World Ocean Summit – 11<sup>th</sup> – 13<sup>th</sup> March 2024

The MARMED Project was showcased at the World Ocean Summit in Lisbon on March 11-13, 2024, a premier event for the global blue economy. Integrated into the Forum Oceano stand, MARMED highlighted its commitment to addressing skill gaps and promoting sustainable growth in Mediterranean Maritime Clusters.

The event was attended by over 1,200 delegates, 220 speakers, and featured 80 sessions, covering critical topics such as ocean climate solutions, plastics, and the sustainable ocean economy. This provided MARMED with a unique platform to connect with



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stakeholders, decision-makers, and industry leaders from all over the world. MARMED presence at this influential summit underlined the project's commitment to align with global efforts to foster a sustainable ocean economy.

By participating, MARMED gained visibility and opportunities for collaboration, strengthening its role as a driver of innovation and transformative change in the maritime sector. The event also reinforced MARMED's mission to build partnerships and shape the future of the ocean economy through upskilling, innovation, and cooperation.

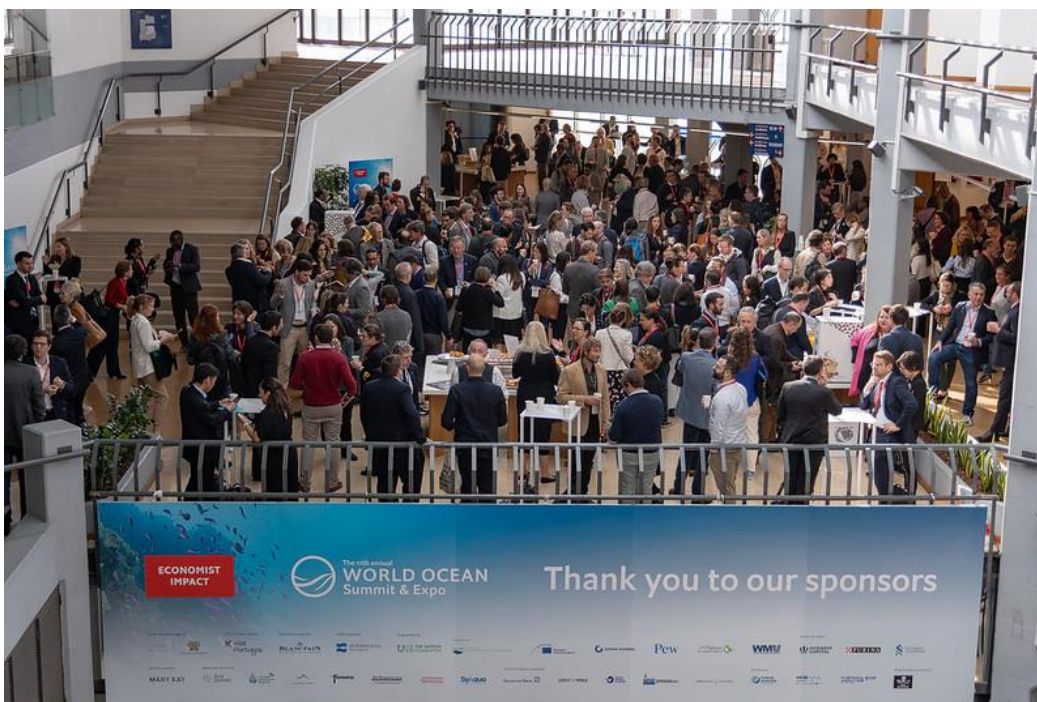


Figure 7. MARMED Presence at World Ocean Summit 2024 – Lisbon (Portugal)

### **Naples Shipping Week – 4<sup>th</sup> October 2024**

On 4 October 2024, Formare presented MARMED Project at the Naples Shipping Week, a biennial event for the port and shipping industries in Naples, Italy, attended by over 4,000 participants and featuring 350 speakers.



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The project was highlighted during a panel on Maritime Professions, which engaged students and professors from Nautical Institutes, ITS (Higher Technical Institutes), Universities, and various industry stakeholders. This provided an opportunity to introduce the Blue Cluster Manager Training pilot course, designed to equip current and future maritime cluster managers with the skills needed to foster innovation and competitiveness in the Blue Economy, and the results of Study Visit in Trieste (13-14 July 2024), showcasing practical steps taken to address these gaps and fostering collaboration to ensure the development of a skilled workforce.

MARMED's presence at Naples Shipping Week was particularly significant as the event is a central platform for dialogue between the academic community, maritime professionals, and industry stakeholders. It allowed MARMED to gain visibility and share its objectives of addressing the critical skill gaps in maritime cluster management.

By participating, the project strengthened its connections with key educational institutions and industry actors and reinforced its role in shaping the future of maritime professions and its commitment to sustainable growth within the Blue Economy.



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Figure 8. MARMED Project presented at the Naples Shipping Week 2024 – Naples (Italy)

#### **4<sup>th</sup> Edition of Blue Economy Expoforum – 17<sup>th</sup> October 2024**

The Blue Planet Economy Expoforum 2024 in Rome featured a dedicated panel to present the MARMED Project, which gathered over 50 participants, both in-person and online. The panel focused on the role of Maritime Cluster Managers as drivers of innovation and competitiveness in the Mediterranean’s Blue Economy.

As in the previous year, the event involved companies and experts from the Blue Economy sector, fostering discussions on best practices, capacity building, and the professional development of Cluster Managers. Key speakers included WestMED Maritime Clusters Alliances, along with partners ForMare, OGS and Cluster BIG, who provided valuable insights into the strategic importance of maritime clusters.



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The dedicated MARMED panel underscored the project's objectives in addressing skill gaps and enhancing the professional profile of Maritime Cluster Managers. It highlighted the importance of targeted training and capacity-building initiatives to ensure clusters' competitiveness and sustainability. This engagement reaffirmed MARMED's role as a catalyst for innovation and collaboration in the Mediterranean maritime sector.



Figure 9. MARMED Project presented at Blue Planet Economy Expoforum 2024 – Rome (Italy)

### ***Um Mar de Oportunidades – 19<sup>th</sup> November 2024***

The MARMED Project was presented at the conference "Um Mar de Oportunidades" (A Sea of Opportunities), held at the Gare Marítima in the Port of Funchal, Madeira, as part of National Maritime Day. Organized by WISTA in partnership with the Regional Secretariat



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for Education of the Regional Government of Madeira, the event gathered over 100 participants, including students, maritime professionals, and leaders in the Blue Economy. The presentation, led by Fórum Oceano, highlighted MARMED’s mission to address skill gaps among Maritime Cluster Managers and to define an innovative professional profile capable of boosting competitiveness, fostering innovation, and promoting sustainable growth in Mediterranean Maritime Clusters.

MARMED’s presence at this conference was particularly important as it provided an opportunity to engage with a wide range of stakeholders and emphasize the critical role of Maritime Clusters in driving innovation, enhancing skills, and improving access to funding through collaborative actions at local, national, and EU levels. This event reinforced the importance of MARMED’s contributions to building a more resilient and sustainable maritime sector, showcasing its transformative potential for the Mediterranean and beyond.



Figure 10. MARMED Project presented at Um Mar de Oportunidades 2024 – Madeira (Portugal)



### **Organization of dedicated clustering events: Multiplier Events, Workshops**

The organization of dedicated clustering events, including Multiplier Events and online workshops, was a collaborative effort led by the MARMED Project partners. Each partner played a crucial role in planning, promoting, and executing these events to maximize their impact at both national and European levels. Partners leveraged their networks to ensure the participation of relevant stakeholders, including industry experts, policymakers, Maritime Clusters and educational institutions, creating an inclusive and dynamic environment for dialogue. The partners were instrumental in curating the thematic content, sharing project outcomes, and facilitating discussions that addressed skill gaps and promoted the professional development of Maritime Cluster Managers. Their efforts ensured that these events served as effective platforms for knowledge transfer, best practice exchange, and the identification of concrete actions to enhance the competitiveness of Mediterranean maritime clusters. Through these clustering activities, the partners successfully fostered collaboration and reinforced the project's commitment to driving innovation and sustainable growth in the Blue Economy.

### **2023 Online Workshops and Webinars**

In 2023, the partners of the MARMED Project organized a series of free online national workshops aimed at empowering Maritime Cluster Managers in the Mediterranean region. These workshops served as key platforms to present and promote the project's progress and outputs while fostering discussions on the critical role of Maritime Cluster Managers in driving sustainable growth and innovation in the Blue Economy sector. Each workshop was tailored to address the specific needs and challenges faced by clusters in their respective countries, ensuring relevance and engagement at the national level.



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### *Italian Workshop: Tools for Cluster Management*

The Italian online workshop, organized by the Italian partners, took place on 13 December 2023. It focused on providing an overview of key management tools tailored to clusters operating within the Mediterranean Blue Economy ecosystem. With over 40 participants, including experts from regional and national clusters, the workshop facilitated a lively and productive debate.

Participants expressed significant interest in the MARMED initiative and its training program, designed to address emerging capacity-building needs at the European and international levels. The discussions underscored the importance of adapting the skill sets of Maritime Cluster Managers to foster innovation, enhance job opportunities, and contribute to career development in the Blue Economy sector.

### *Greek Workshop: Clusters in Action – The Role of Maritime Clusters*

The Greek partners hosted their workshop on 14 December 2023, presenting the MARMED project alongside a practical case study based on the Greek Maritime Cluster's experience. The session delved into the philosophy behind establishing clusters and their strategic importance in Greece, a country where the Blue Economy is a cornerstone of the national economy.

The workshop also emphasized the critical skills Maritime Cluster Managers need to perform effectively in their roles. The event achieved significant national-level success, sparking interest and raising awareness about the value of clusters as catalysts for innovation and collaboration within the Blue Economy.

### *Portuguese Workshop: Skills Development in the Blue Economy*

On 19 December 2023, the Portuguese partner held a workshop addressing the importance of equipping Maritime Cluster Managers and Blue Economy stakeholders with the necessary skills and tools for effective management. The event, attended by over 40



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sector experts, featured a dynamic roundtable discussion highlighting the growing relevance of the Blue Economy for achieving sustainability goals and its substantial contribution to the European economy.

Discussions underscored the role of Maritime Clusters as active facilitators of matchmaking and synergy creation among stakeholders at both national and international levels, further emphasizing the importance of their strategic function within the broader Blue Economy framework.

#### *Maltese Workshop: Investing in Human Capital*

The Maltese partner, Maritime MT, conducted their workshop on 10 January 2024, with 30 experts participating. The session highlighted the responsiveness and willingness of the Maltese maritime community to engage in initiatives that strengthen the sector.

The discussions revealed a growing national awareness of the need for investment in the maritime sector, not only in financial terms but also in human resources and intellectual capital. The workshop reinforced the importance of aligning training and capacity-building initiatives with the sector's needs to support sustainable growth and innovation.

#### *2024 Online Workshops and Webinars*

In 2024, the MARMED Project hosted a series of impactful workshops, reinforcing its commitment to advancing Maritime Clusters and supporting the sustainable growth of the Blue Economy. These events served as critical platforms for knowledge exchange, exploration of innovation, and discussions on best practices in the maritime sector. Each workshop, tailored to national and Mediterranean contexts, fostered collaboration among stakeholders, partners, and experts.

#### *Greek Workshops: Innovation and Technology in Maritime Clusters*

Greek Partners organized two online workshops in 2024. The first focused on cross cutting technologies as platforms for cooperation among clusters of innovation, and it was held



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the 25 September 2024. The online workshop focused on innovative technologies such as 5G and advancements by the Hellenic Navy, while also exploring the role of European projects in supporting maritime clusters. With over 30 participants, the session underscored the importance of cross-sector collaboration and the integration of cutting-edge technologies in cluster management. Participants discussed the potential of technology to enhance the competitiveness of maritime clusters and highlighted the significance of ongoing European projects in fostering innovation and sustainability within the Blue Economy.

The second online workshop took place the 28<sup>th</sup> November 2024 and it focused on the role of clusters in promoting skills development and innovation in the Blue Economy. Discussions included the cruise industry's challenges and opportunities for sustainable development, emphasizing decarbonization and skills alignment, and the importance of freshwater resource management within the Mediterranean. Key examples of cross-border water policies and clusters' roles in fostering sustainability and climate resilience further enriched the dialogue.

#### *Italian Workshops: Cluster Managers and Capacity Building*

Italy hosted two significant workshops in 2024. On 19 June 2024, Italian partners in collaboration with the WestMED Maritime Clusters Alliance and the Erasmus+ Project Up-Sailing, organized the first online workshop, during which the results achieved by the MARMED project were presented, with contributions from key organizations. ForMare shared updates on project milestones, while OGS highlighted the positive outcomes of the Study Visit in Trieste, attended by 20 aspiring Cluster Managers. Testimonies from participants reinforced the value of hands-on experiences in capacity building. The event also featured insights into the Erasmus+ Up-Sailing project which focuses on developing green skills in the maritime sector, and a roundtable discussion involving Cluster BIG and



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ForMare on best practices, funding opportunities, and the strategic role of Cluster Managers in Italy’s industrial ecosystem. This workshop was highly successful, engaging professionals from the Blue Economy and demonstrating the importance of synergies between related projects to enhance competitiveness and innovation. The workshop was also selected as part of the European Maritime Day in My Country 2024.

	Event date	Country	Event location	Event title	Type/nature of the event	Organiser
424	19-06-2024	Italy	Association premises in Rome, Italy. _x000D_	Blue Skills for future career path	Hybrid event	Formare – Polo Nazionale per lo Shipping s.r.l.

Complete list available at: [European Maritime Day in My Country – Past Events.](#)

The second online workshop was part of the hybrid panel dedicated to MARMED project at the Blue Planet Economy Expoforum 2024 in Rome. A dedicated panel gathered over 50 participants in-person and online, focusing on the pivotal role of Maritime Cluster Managers in the Blue Economy. The event included presentations by leading organizations and a roundtable discussion, emphasizing MARMED’s achievements in capacity building and fostering cluster competitiveness at both national and Mediterranean levels.

#### *Portuguese Workshop: Blue Finance and Strategic Leadership*

On 6<sup>th</sup> December 2024, the Portuguese partner hosted an online workshop that addressed two key themes: Blue Finance and the importance of leadership and strategy for effective maritime cluster management. This event, attended by more than 30 participants, provided insights into emerging trends and funding opportunities in the Blue Economy sector. It also facilitated networking opportunities with industry experts and key stakeholders, fostering discussions on how strategic leadership can optimize cluster management to meet sustainability objectives.



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The workshop reinforced the role of Blue Finance as a driver for innovation and growth, underlining the necessity of strong leadership in maritime clusters navigating the complexities of the Mediterranean's Blue Economy landscape.

#### *Maltese Workshops: Policy and Innovation in the Blue Economy*

The Maltese partner organized two webinars addressing key topics in the Blue Economy. The first session explored effective policy consultations, emphasizing the role of Maritime Clusters in influencing policy decisions at both national and regional levels. The second session focused on opportunities through research and innovation, highlighting how Maritime Clusters can act as facilitators for matchmaking, collaboration, and knowledge transfer among stakeholders.

Both webinars engaged a wide audience of experts and stakeholders, reinforcing the importance of coordinated efforts to drive sustainable development in the sector.

#### *Key Outcomes and Impact*

The workshops demonstrated the MARMED Project's commitment to advancing the Blue Economy through capacity building, strategic leadership, and cross-sector collaboration. By fostering knowledge exchange, enhancing networking opportunities, and promoting best practices, the workshops emphasized the strategic role of Maritime Clusters in driving innovation, sustainability, and competitiveness at both national and Mediterranean levels. By addressing specific national challenges while aligning with broader Mediterranean and European objectives, the workshops emphasized the importance of Maritime Clusters in fostering innovation, enhancing professional profiles, and promoting sustainable development within the Blue Economy sector.



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### ***Multiplier Events***

The Multiplier Events were a key manifestation of MARMED's mission, bringing together Maritime Clusters' managers, Blue Economy experts, industry leaders, VET Providers and stakeholders from various Mediterranean countries to create a dynamic platform for dialogue, capacity-building, and the exchange of best practices. These events underscored the necessity of strengthening regional cooperation and highlighted the central role that clusters play in promoting sustainable growth within the maritime sector. Each participating country organized its own Multiplier Event following a set of guidelines provided by the WP Leader.

### ***Italian Multiplier Event: Innovation and Capacity Building***

Held the 17<sup>th</sup> October 2024 in Rome at the Blue Planet Economy Expoforum 2024, the Italian Multiplier Event gathered over 50 participants, both in-person and online. This event provided a significant opportunity to delve into the critical role of Maritime Cluster Managers as key drivers of innovation and competitiveness in the Mediterranean's Blue Economy. Prominent speakers included WestMED Maritime Clusters Alliance, who shared valuable insights on maritime cluster development, and project partners ForMare, OGS and Cluster BIG who presented their contributions to the project. A major highlight of the event was the roundtable discussion that brought together diverse voices from the maritime sector to discuss best practices and the role of Cluster Managers as territorial innovation leaders. This discussion reinforced the importance of targeted professional development programs to enhance the competitiveness of maritime clusters, which are increasingly seen as crucial entities for the growth of the Blue Economy.



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Figure 11. Italian Multiplier Event

### *Women's Participation in the Blue Economy: Maltese Multiplier Event*

In Malta, the Multiplier Event took the form of a workshop dedicated to the participation of women in the Blue Economy. With 63 participants in attendance, the event was a remarkable opportunity to explore the increasing role of women in maritime industries and highlight successful case studies from accomplished women professionals. Hosted by MaritimeMT, the event emphasized EU efforts to advance gender diversity in the maritime sector, which has historically seen low representation of women in leadership positions. A panel discussion further explored future opportunities in the sector for women, showing strong support for gender equality and inclusion. Participants rated the event highly, with a satisfaction score of 4.76 and 94% of attendees acknowledging the value of the MARMED Project. This positive feedback signals a clear demand for continued



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engagement on these critical topics, reinforcing the importance of addressing gender diversity within the Blue Economy.



Figure 12. Maltese Multiplier Event

### *Portuguese Multiplier Event: A Sea of Opportunities*

The Portuguese Multiplier Event, held in Madeira on National Maritime Day, was another landmark moment for the MARMED Project. Organized by WISTA and the Regional Secretariat for Education of the Regional Government of Madeira, the “Um Mar de Oportunidades” (A Sea of Opportunities) conference took place at the picturesque Port of



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Funchal, drawing over 100 participants. This event was an excellent platform for showcasing the overarching goals of MARMED Project, particularly its focus on fostering sustainable development through maritime clusters. As a key part of the National Maritime Day celebrations, the conference highlighted the interconnectedness of maritime activities and the potential for further developing the Blue Economy in Portugal and beyond. The event featured presentations on the project’s objectives, with an emphasis on the importance of regional cooperation and innovation in driving the maritime sector’s growth.

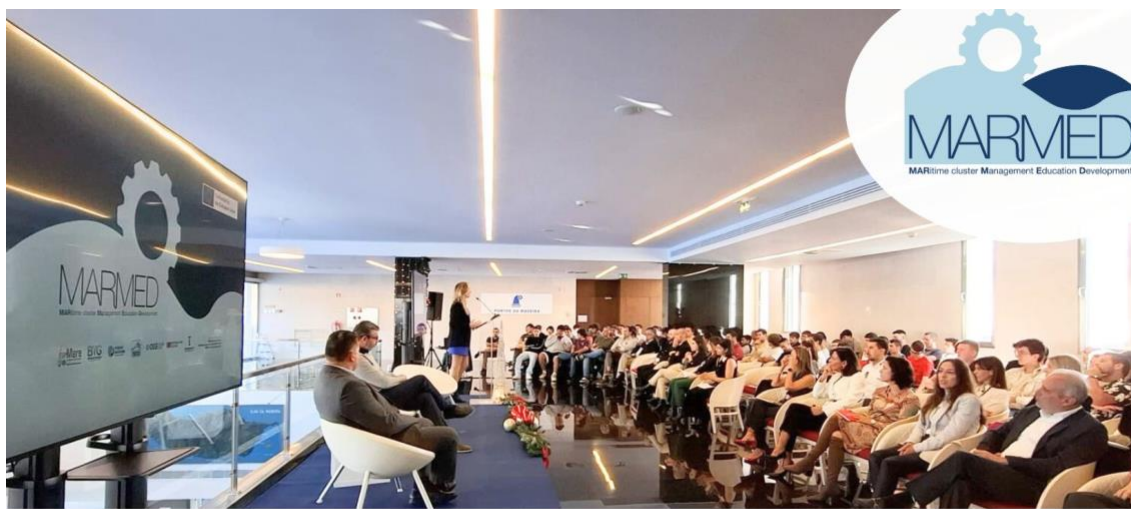


Figure 13. Portuguese Multiplier Event

**Greek Multiplier Event: Innovation and Skills Development**

On November 28, 2024, Greek Partners, Strategis and AMC, hosted the Multiplier Event at the Piraeus Business Centre Conference Hall in Greece, which attracted over 60 participants, both in-person and online. This event focused on the critical role of clusters in driving innovation, skills development, and sustainable practices within the Blue



Economy. The MARMED Project's achievements were highlighted, particularly the successful implementation of online courses and the enriching study visit to Trieste. Discussions also centred on sustainability in the cruise industry and freshwater resource management, two areas where maritime clusters are playing an increasingly significant role. The roundtable discussion with MARMED participants emphasized the program's value in preparing future Cluster Managers to lead regional competitiveness and innovation efforts. The Greek event reaffirmed the importance of clusters as hubs for knowledge exchange and catalysts for long-term sustainable development.



Figure 14. Greek Multiplier Event

### **Key findings from Events**

The feedback collected from the different events attended and organized by MARMED partners highlights the appreciation for the innovative and practical nature of MARMED project, emphasizing its potential in strengthening the role of maritime cluster managers—



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an increasingly important professional profile. Many respondents noted that the project offers valuable opportunity for networking and collaboration among stakeholders in the quadruple helix model, which is crucial for maximizing the impact on the maritime economy. Several participants describe MARMED project as highly relevant to the current economic context and affirm that it offered a significant opportunity for synergy and professional training in the blue economy sector.

These insights underscore the need to focus on the holistic development of professionals in the blue economy, especially for cluster managers, with an emphasis on cross-sectoral collaboration, innovation, and leadership development, which is central to the recommendations for future iterations of the MARMED project.

### **Synergies with other EU Projects to ensure the sustainability of MARMED Project**

Throughout the duration of the MARMED project, significant efforts were made to promote synergies with other EU projects, fostering collaboration and enhancing the collective impact on the maritime sector. By actively engaging with other initiatives, MARMED not only contributed to the advancement of common goals but also benefited from shared knowledge, resources, and networks. This collaborative approach stimulated mutual learning and encouraged the exchange of best practices, ultimately strengthening the overall outcomes of the project and promoting a more integrated approach that also enhanced the sustainability of the project results.

### ***UpSailing – Cultivating Green Skills in the Maritime Sector***

On the occasion of European Maritime Day “In my country,” a Joint Hybrid Conference was organized in Italy at the premises of ForMare, in collaboration with the ERASMUS+ project UpSailing. This event provided a valuable platform to explore the importance of networking and cross-project interactions, particularly with UpSailing, which focuses on



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introducing innovative training strategies for the development of green skills in maritime studies. The conference underscored the alignment of UpSailing with cutting-edge environmental policies at the EU level, promoting sustainable practices across the maritime sector. This opportunity of collaboration between MARMED and UpSailing highlighted the critical role of green skills development in driving the transition towards a more sustainable and inclusive Blue Economy. By sharing knowledge, resources, and best practices, this collaboration fostered a deeper understanding of how the maritime sector can contribute to environmental sustainability, while also ensuring that future professionals operating in the Blue Economy sectors are equipped with the necessary expertise to support green policies and initiatives. Furthermore, this collaborative approach ensures the long-term sustainability of the project by building a strong foundation of shared commitment and continued engagement among stakeholders.



Figure 15. Joint Conference with UpSailing Project



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### **CALLMEBLUE - Cluster Alliance Med Blue**

During the final meeting of the MARMED project, a dedicated slot was included in the agenda for a presentation by a representative of the EMFAF project CallmeBLUE – Cluster Alliance Med Blue. This provided an opportunity to explore potential synergies between the two initiatives. By facilitating this exchange, the collaboration not only strengthened ties between the projects but also ensured their long-term sustainability by fostering shared goals, knowledge exchange, and mutual support within the maritime sector. The meeting featured engaging presentations and discussions on the project's key outcomes, with a particular focus on opportunity for cross-project collaboration. In particular, CallmeBLUE Project aims to enhance existing cluster alliances across the Mediterranean, focusing particularly on accelerating North-South regional cooperation to establish strategic maritime clusters in North Africa. By bringing together stakeholders from various sectors, CallmeBLUE seeks to drive forward the growth and resilience of maritime clusters, fostering innovation and sustainability. The discussions at the final MARMED meeting underscored the mutual benefits of collaboration, laying the groundwork for future joint initiatives and ensuring the long-term impact and sustainability of MARMED results in the Mediterranean Blue Economy landscape.



Figure 16. CALLMEBLUE Project Logo



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## SET OF RECOMMENDATIONS and GUIDELINES

The opinions collected through the interviews, the conduction of workshops and multiplier events, the administration of questionnaires and the participation to events, have constituted the ground to define a set of key recommendations and guidelines to enhance the competitiveness of Maritime Clusters and to promote their role as key drivers of innovation within the Mediterranean Blue Economy ecosystem.

Indeed, these measures and tools are designed to support the development and integration of maritime clusters, strengthening their contributions to the blue economy and fostering collaboration among stakeholders in the region. Through this, the project seeks to improve the sustainability and growth potential of Mediterranean maritime clusters.

The final set of Recommendations reflect the current status in terms of required skills for Maritime Clusters, as resulted from the project activities conducted under all WPs. The Recommendations focus on EU level and aim also at supporting the long-term visibility and sustainability strategy of the project.

### Why the need for Recommendations and Guidelines?

The recommendations and guidelines developed within the MARMED project aim to serve as foundation for the project's sustainability strategy, and to maximize the potential of MARMED outputs by engaging key stakeholders identified and operating in the Blue Economy Mediterranean framework with the methodologies developed throughout the project, alongside other EU initiatives on Maritime Clusters and skills for the Blue Economy sector.

The goal is to raise awareness among Maritime Clusters, organizations and companies operating in the Blue Economy sector, as well as policymakers, about the project's results and the ways the sector can benefit from them.



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The recommendations will support policymakers in adopting strategies to enhance the role of maritime clusters within the Mediterranean ecosystem. This will increase the competitiveness of the Maritime Clusters and provide Maritime Cluster Managers with a set of specific skills and competences allowing this professional profile to represent a key driver of change at EU and international level.

Additionally, the recommendations will stimulate public debate and foster dialogue on the Blue Economy in the Mediterranean Region, in line with the latest EU policies, while addressing key challenges and offering viable solutions for the benefit of the entire Mediterranean ecosystem. By utilizing inputs from Maritime Clusters, VET providers, and other maritime stakeholders, the project results should produce an impact on the blue economy and drive meaningful change within the Blue Economy ecosystem.



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### **Recommendation n.1**

*Strengthen Policy and Institutional Support to advocate for national and regional policies that recognize the strategic importance of maritime clusters as drivers of the Blue Economy.*



The first key recommendation is to strengthen the policy and institutional dialogue at the European and regional levels to enhance the role of maritime clusters as drivers of the Blue Economy. This involves advocating for national and regional policies that recognize the strategic importance of maritime clusters in fostering innovation, sustainability, and competitiveness in the Mediterranean. By strengthening specific dialogue framework and specialized forum that gather key actors operating in the Blue Economy, it will be possible to promote a supportive policy environment and provide institutional backing to maritime clusters, enabling them to thrive and effectively contribute to the region's economic and environmental goals and enhance their competitiveness. By investing in initiatives that foster opportunity for collaboration and create dynamic environment for knowledge exchange among clusters, policymakers, industry stakeholders, and educational institutions, the Mediterranean maritime ecosystem can become more integrated, resilient, and innovative.

To achieve this, it is essential to involve key stakeholders, including EU institutions, national and regional authorities, Maritime Clusters, private sector representatives, and VET providers. This collaborative approach will ensure that policies and support mechanisms are aligned with the evolving needs of the sector, fostering the development



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of innovative solutions, increasing job opportunities, and enhancing the competitiveness of Maritime Clusters.

### **Guidelines to support Recommendation 1:**

- **Foster capacity-building and collaboration:** Encourage the establishment of synergies among similar projects to create networking opportunities, facilitate the exchange of best practices, and support sustainability efforts. Enhance the role of maritime clusters as catalysts for modernization and drivers of competitiveness.

This guideline offers actionable steps to strengthen the dialogue of maritime clusters with institutions and different stakeholders operating in the Blue Economy sector, ensuring a leading role in shaping a sustainable and prosperous Mediterranean Blue Economy.



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## Recommendation n. 2

*EU funding and programs that invest in enhancing competitiveness of Maritime Clusters, ensuring the development of key professional roles within Clusters (e.g. Maritime Cluster Managers).*



The European Union holds a pivotal role in driving progress and ensuring sustainable development across Blue Economy sectors. In this context, it is essential to advocate for dedicated funding streams within EU programs that position maritime clusters as catalysts for innovation and sustainable growth. These funds should prioritize investments for research, innovation, and skills development to strengthen Maritime Clusters' long-term resilience.

Raising awareness about EU funding opportunities among Maritime Clusters at both EU and Mediterranean levels is equally vital. This approach will enable Maritime Clusters to enhance their role within the Blue Economy ecosystem, maintain a high level of competitiveness, and contribute to sustainable development both regionally and across the European Union.

For the aforementioned reasons, a non-exhaustive list of main EU funds which can be beneficial for Maritime Clusters is provided below.

**ERASMUS+<sup>1</sup>**. The European Union's program dedicated to supporting education, training, youth, and sports across Europe. It emphasizes social inclusion, fosters green and digital

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<sup>1</sup> More information available at the following link: <https://erasmus-plus.ec.europa.eu>.



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transitions, and encourages young people's active participation in democratic life. The programme also promotes vocational education and training (VET), with a particular focus on developing skills relevant to the Blue Economy. Additionally, Erasmus+ supports the advancement of digital and green skills in the higher education sector and through capacity-building projects.

**Horizon Europe**<sup>2</sup>. The EU's key funding program for research and innovation with a budget of around €93.4 billion\* for 2021-2027. It includes funding for the blue economy, particularly in areas like marine and maritime research, innovation in the blue economy sectors, and sustainable ocean management. Indeed, around €33.4 billion are earmarked for emission mitigation of maritime industries and related climate action in the period 2021-2027.

**LIFE Programme**<sup>3</sup>. The EU's funding instrument for the environment and climate action, which includes projects related to the marine environment and the blue economy. A budget of €5.4 billion has been allocated to this programme for the 2021-2027 funding period.

**European Maritime, Fisheries and Aquaculture Fund (EMFAF)**<sup>4</sup>: Supports the sustainable and innovative development of the fisheries and aquaculture sectors as well as coastal communities through funding opportunities managed by Member States. The fund also covers sectoral skill development, worker conditions and maritime security. €6.11 billion have been allocated to this fund for the period 2021-2027.

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<sup>2</sup> More information available at the following link: [https://research-and-innovation.ec.europa.eu/funding/funding-opportunities/funding-programmes-and-open-calls/horizon-europe\\_en](https://research-and-innovation.ec.europa.eu/funding/funding-opportunities/funding-programmes-and-open-calls/horizon-europe_en).

<sup>3</sup> More information available at the following link: [https://cinea.ec.europa.eu/programmes/life\\_en](https://cinea.ec.europa.eu/programmes/life_en).

<sup>4</sup> More information available at the following link: [https://oceans-and-fisheries.ec.europa.eu/funding/emfaf\\_en](https://oceans-and-fisheries.ec.europa.eu/funding/emfaf_en).



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**Interreg NEXT MED<sup>5</sup>**. Focusing on **cross-border and transnational co-operation between EU Member States and neighbouring countries**, this programme aims to exploit shared opportunities related to environmental sustainability, climate adaptation, biodiversity, innovation and digital transformation as well as enhance institutional capacity. **€1.1 billion** from the ERDF, the Neighbourhood, Development and International Cooperation Instrument (NDICI) and the Instrument for the Pre-Accession (IPA) have been allocated for the period 2021-2027.

Also, regional and national funding programs are essential for supporting maritime clusters, as they align with Smart Specialisation Strategies (S3) to target key areas for innovation and development. These programs help drive growth, attract investments, and ensure the sustainability of the sector, strengthening maritime clusters at both the regional and national levels.

#### **Guidelines to support Recommendation n.2:**

- **Foster EU Funding Streams for Maritime Clusters.** Advocate for the enhancement of funding lines within EU programmes, such as Horizon Europe or Erasmus+, to address the needs of Maritime Clusters.
- **Develop and Disseminate Targeted Awareness Campaigns.** Launch information campaigns to raise awareness about available EU grants and programmes among Maritime Clusters.
- **Enhance Partnerships Between Maritime Clusters, VET Providers and Research Centers.** Encourage collaboration between clusters and educational providers to align training and research activities with industry needs.

<sup>5</sup> More information available at the following link: <https://www.interregnextmed.eu>.



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### Recommendation 3

*Enhance and support the creation of practical and cross-sector training programs for Maritime Clusters' key professional figures.*



Enhance and support the creation of practical training programs for Maritime Clusters' key professional figures is crucial to strengthen their role as drivers of the Blue Economy. This involves designing cross-sectoral training initiatives that provide hands-on experience and insights into various Blue Economy sectors, e.g. renewable energy, sustainable shipping, marine biodiversity, and circular economy practices. These programs should combine technical skills development with interdisciplinary knowledge to prepare professionals for the evolving challenges and opportunities in the sector.

By investing in practical and innovative training, Maritime Clusters can foster a highly skilled workforce capable of driving sustainability, innovation, and competitiveness. Such training programs should also create a platform for knowledge exchange, enabling participants to learn from best practices across sectors and regions, while promoting collaboration among clusters, industry stakeholders, and educational institutions. This will ensure that maritime clusters' professionals are equipped with the tools needed to develop innovative solutions, address sectoral gaps, and enhance the integration and resilience of the Mediterranean Blue Economy ecosystem.

To achieve this, it is essential to involve a wide range of stakeholders, including EU institutions, national and regional authorities, Maritime Clusters, private sector representatives, and VET providers. This collaborative approach will help align training



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initiatives with the sector's evolving needs, ensuring they are relevant, accessible, and impactful. By supporting practical and cross-sectoral training, Maritime Clusters can position themselves as central actors in fostering sustainable development and strengthening their competitiveness at both the Mediterranean and European levels.

**Guidelines to support Recommendation n.3:**

- **Develop Cross-Sectoral Training Curricula.** Create training programs that integrate insights from various Blue Economy sectors, such as renewable energy, sustainable shipping, marine biodiversity, and coastal tourism.
- **Implement blended methodologies for Training Curricula.** Blended methodologies provide a dynamic and inclusive approach to upskilling Maritime Clusters' professionals, providing a flexible, comprehensive, and effective learning experience.
- **Organization of Study Visits as part of Trainings.** Study Visits can represent a crucial opportunity for offering hands-on learning experiences and fostering knowledge exchange. The study visits can make the learning experience more dynamic, interactive, and directly applicable to the challenges faced by Maritime Clusters. Moreover, it can foster networking opportunities, creating synergies among existing and emerging Maritime Clusters' professionals.
- **Implement national and regional Centers of Vocational Excellence for knowledge sharing.** Establish national and regional centers of vocational excellence or training hubs dedicated to the Blue Economy.



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### **Recommendation n. 4**

*Fostering alliances among clusters and organizing seminars, workshops, and conferences to share and promote innovative upskilling and reskilling methodologies developed within EU projects.*



The fourth key Recommendation is to foster alliances among maritime clusters and organize seminars, workshops, and conferences to share and promote innovative upskilling and reskilling methodologies developed within EU projects. By strengthening cross-sectoral alliances, maritime clusters can expand their stakeholder networks and collaboratively address skills gaps in the Blue Economy. These alliances serve as a foundation for developing and implementing strategies that align with the sector's evolving needs and EU priorities.

The purpose of this Recommendation is to create opportunities for engagement and mutual consultation among clusters, industry stakeholders, policymakers, and educational institutions. By facilitating regular exchanges of expertise and best practices, these initiatives can drive innovation in training methodologies and ensure that the workforce is equipped to meet emerging challenges in the maritime sector.

### **Guidelines to support Recommendation 4:**

- **Foster Cross-Sectoral Alliances.** Build partnerships between maritime clusters, industry, academia, and policymakers to address skills gaps in green technologies, digitalization, and sustainability.



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- **Organize Engagement Opportunities.** Host seminars, workshops, and conferences to share innovative upskilling methods and actionable insights from EU projects.
- **Promote Discussion Forums.** Establish regular consultations and networking events to exchange expertise, solve challenges, and strengthen Blue Economy networks.

By fostering alliances and organizing targeted engagement opportunities, these guidelines aim to enhance the capacity of maritime clusters to drive workforce development, innovation, and sustainability within the Mediterranean maritime ecosystem.



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## CONCLUSION

The MARMED Project has highlighted the importance of positioning maritime clusters as central players in the Blue Economy. By advocating for dedicated EU funding and fostering cross-sectoral alliances, clusters can drive innovation and sustainable growth. This will enhance their competitiveness and ensure their role in shaping the future of the maritime sector. On the other hand, the experience of MARMED reinforces the necessity of creating practical, hands-on training programs tailored to the evolving demands of the maritime industry. These programs must provide professionals with interdisciplinary skills, offering insights into emerging sectors such as renewable energy, sustainable shipping, and marine biodiversity, thus boosting clusters' resilience and adaptability.

Indeed, MARMED has underscored the value of collaboration between maritime clusters, educational institutions, and industry leaders. The implementation of blended learning methodologies and the organization of study visits are key strategies to bridge the gap between theoretical knowledge and practical applications, fostering an integrated and innovative Blue Economy ecosystem. These conclusions affirm the need for a comprehensive, multi-stakeholder approach to strengthening maritime clusters, ensuring they are well-equipped to drive innovation, sustainability, and growth in the Blue Economy. The recommendations from MARMED serve as a valuable roadmap for future initiatives aimed at enhancing the resilience and competitiveness of the maritime sector.

In this frame, European cooperation can play a crucial role in enhancing the competitiveness of maritime clusters. By fostering collaborative efforts between clusters, EU institutions, and industry stakeholders, shared knowledge and best practices can be leveraged to address skills gaps, drive innovation, and ensure that maritime clusters remain competitive in the evolving Blue Economy landscape.



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