From policy to practice: **Building skills for a sustainable blue economy**

Black Sea Beywatch | 20 October 2026

Emerging skills for students and young professionals interested in blue economy sectors in the port cities of the wider Black Sea region

Andreea Strachinescu
Head of Unit Maritime innovation, marine knowledge and investments
Directorate-General for Maritime Affairs and Fisheries

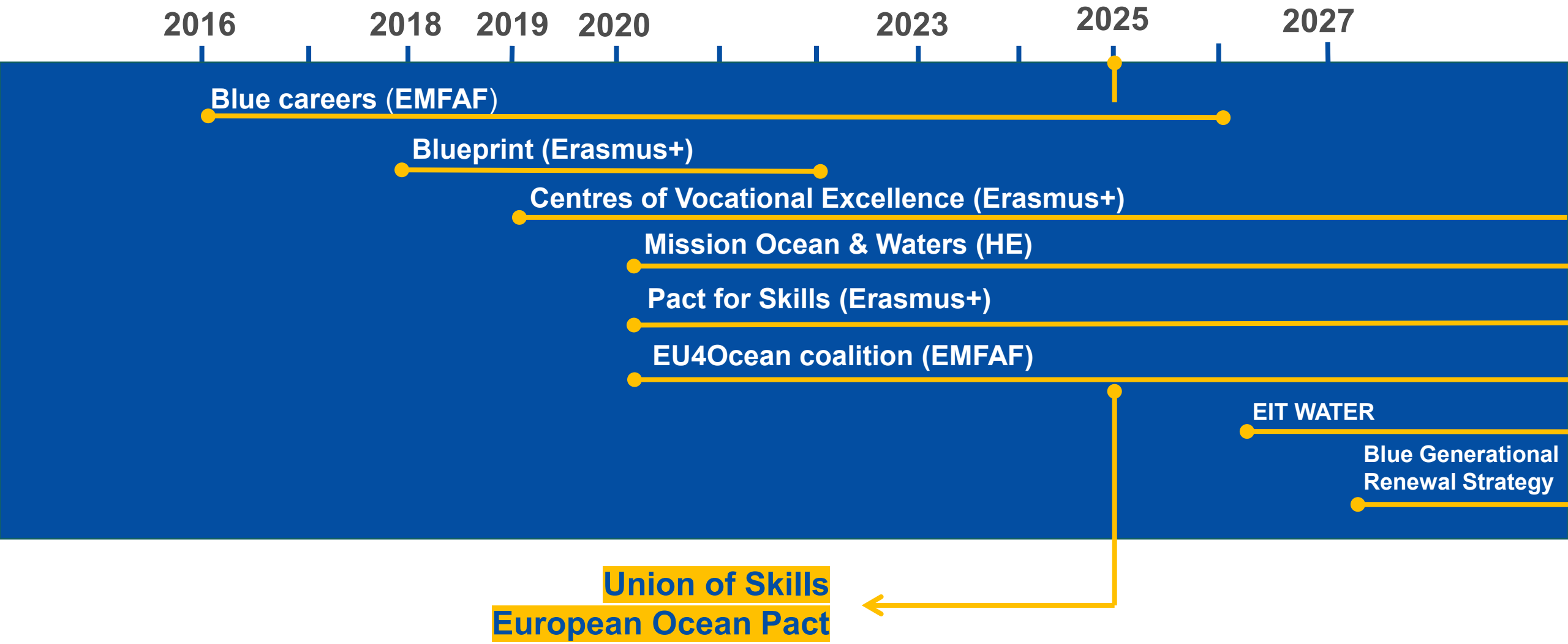
Current skills related challenges that blue economy is facing

- Attracting and retaining talent,
- addressing skills shortages,
- transferring knowledge between generations,
- the green and digital transitions are reshaping workforce needs.

What is the EU doing for blue skills?

European Commission

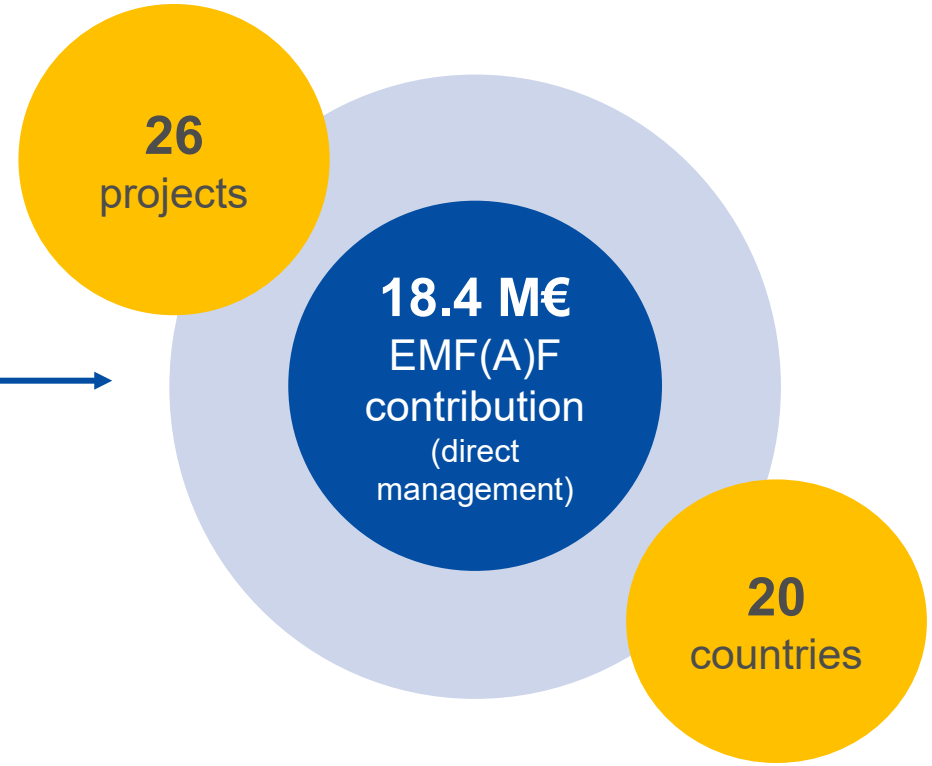
What is the EU doing for blue skills?



Projects on the ground

European Maritime, Fisheries and Aquaculture Fund (EMFAF/old EMFF)

Blue careers
2016, 2017, 2018, 2023



European Commission

EMFAF Projects in the Black Sea region

EU contribution

543.9k

Number of projects

6

MENTOR	Blue Career Centre of Eastern Mediterranean and Black Sea
T4BS	Tourism 4.0 for the Black Sea
ScienceDIVER	Cross-sectoral skills for the Blue Economy labor market
Turning Blue	Integrating young offenders through the blue economy
uBlueTec	Training framework on Underwater Tecs as key enabler for blue careers development
BLUE PORTS	Blue careers in Net Zero Energy Ports

European Commission

MENTOR - Blue Career Centre of Eastern Mediterranean and Black Sea (2017-2019)

MENTOR set up a Career Centre for the Eastern Mediterranean Sea and Black Sea, to attract young people and experienced workers and fill existing skill gaps in maritime transport, cruise and nautical tourism, aquaculture and offshore oil and gas.

8
Blue careers fairs

202
schools received guidance and mentoring to young students (15-18 yo)

9
e-learning courses

65
beneficiaries from the e-mobility scheme and visited other education institutions

European Commission

Turning Blue - Integrating young offenders through the blue economy (2023-2026)

This project aimed at facilitating the integration of disadvantaged young individuals into the workforce within the blue economy sectors.

80+
young people in prison trained

80+
professionals upskilled across PT, NL, RO, CY & IT

Mentorship programme
available in 6 languages

Job Matching Platform
with career pathways & training opportunities

500+
people reached through trainings & seminars

European Commission

uBlueTec - Training framework on Underwater Tecs as key enabler for blue careers development (2023-2026)

A training framework on underwater technologies as key enabler for blue careers development.

30+

courses on underwater techs, digital & green skills

37

pilots tested and validated

uBlueTec Hub

digital gateway to promote training opportunities in underwater techs

MOOC

on green skills for underwater techs

Bluetec.jobs

online recruitment platform with job matching & skill gaps analysis

European Commission

Blue Ports (2023-2026)

Aimed at tackling the challenges faced by European ports to reduce their environmental impact while remaining competitive, by offering upskilling and reskilling opportunities to ports' human capital.

200+

certified staff (port operators' personnel & management

300+

young talents beneficiated from courses & events

Certification Scheme ISO/IEC 17024,

with reskilling and upskilling opportunities

Roadmap

for the BLUE PORTS scheme's uptake across Europe, the Mediterranean and Black Sea

European Commission

2018-2022

Erasmus+ Projects on the ground

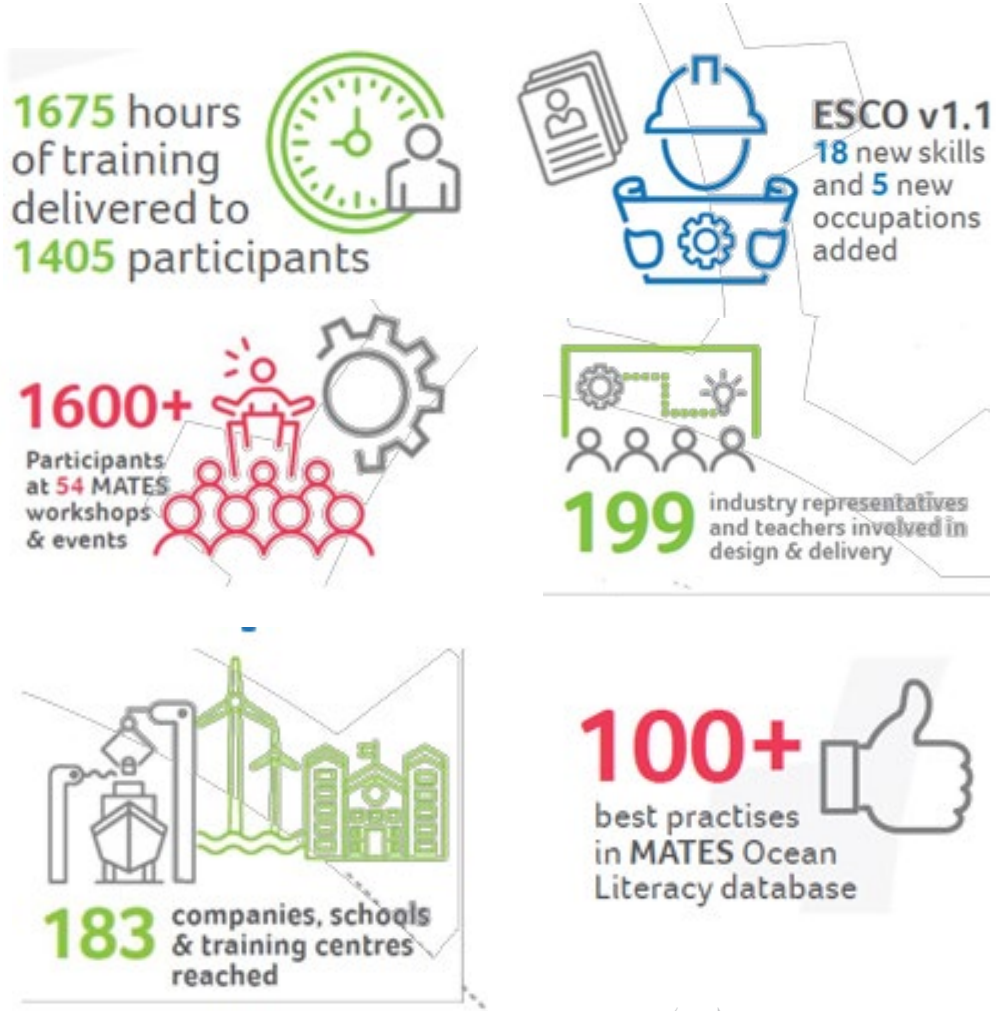
Blueprint alliances for sectoral cooperation on skills

One on maritime technology:

MATES project

EUR 4.9 million

11 pilot case studies on shipbuilding and offshore renewable energy



European Commission

Since 2019

Erasmus+ Centres of Vocational Excellence

Transnational collaborative networks that:

- Bring together VET providers, employers, research institutes and public authorities
- Provide high-quality skills training accessible to lifelong learners, youth, and workers transitioning careers.

Thematic CoVE's for:

Aquaculture (**BRIDGES**, 2020-2024)

Offshore renewable energy (**T-shore**, 2022-2026 & **SHOREWINNER**, 2024-2028)

Water sector (**PoVEWater Scale-up**, 2022-2026)

European Commission

Since 2021

EU Mission “Restore our Ocean and Waters by 2030”

10
projects on blue education, ocean literacy, skills, citizen science & youth engagement

22.6 M€
EU contribution

Horizon Europe

BlueLightS	EnLIGHTening future Schools to deliver BLUE Sustainability in Europe
CO-WATERS	Coalition of Waterfront Cities, Regions and Islands
FLOW	Future Lives with Oceans and Waters
INSPIRI	Imaginative Narratives and Scenarios for Inspiring Restoration and Innovation for European Seas and Water Systems
OTTERS	Social Transformation for Water Stewardship through Scaling Up Citizen Science
PartArt4OW	Participatory Art for Society Engagement with Ocean and Water
PlasticPiratesEU	Upscaling the plastic pirates citizen science initiative
ProBleu	Promoting ocean and water literacy in school communities
SHORE	Promoting ocean and water literacy in school communities
TIDAL ArtS	TransformIng anD inspiring Aquatic Landscapes through Art and Sciences

Mission-funded project
SHORE: EmpOweR Students as the agents of cHangE (2023-2026)

This project aimed at engaging students, teachers and schools in the Baltic, Black and Mediterranean seas, and Danube and Rhine River areas.

SHORE increased awareness through community activities, workshops and exhibitions.



European Commission

Since 2020

Pact for Skills

A flagship action of the European Skills Agenda to upskill and reskill workers.

Fostering collaboration between academia, industries, local communities and public authorities through large-scale partnerships:



Offshore Renewable Energy → Reskill & upskill ~20K-54K new workers by 2030



Shipbuilding and Maritime Technology → Reskill & upskill 200K workers by 2030

European Commission

Since 2020

EU4Ocean Coalition

EMFAF



Partners4Ocean

bringing together organisations, blue economy actors and civil society to promote ocean literacy across the EU.

268 partner organisations

7

1



Youth4Ocean Forum

For young people and early-career professionals aged 16-30

218 Young Ocean Advocates

5

1



Network of European Blue Schools

For teachers in schools and training institutions

1655 blue schools

63

13

3

Number of BLUE SCHOOLS per EU Member State



European Commission

2026

EIT WATER



A knowledge and innovation community connecting industry, innovators, researchers, educators and policymakers to tackle the most urgent water challenges.

Integrated pan-European innovation ecosystem

Connects education, research and business (knowledge triangle) across freshwater, marine and maritime domains – from source to sea – overcoming fragmentation.

Entrepreneurial education & skills development

Builds interdisciplinary, entrepreneurial and technical skills needed for the sustainable blue economy and future-proof workforce.

Regional Hub: EIT Water Black Sea

Integrates ports, logistics, blue biotech and maritime services to strengthen regional competitiveness.

European Commission

2027

EIT WATER Regional Hub – Black Sea

Hosted by Marine Cluster Bulgaria | Varna, Bulgaria

Focus areas

- Water scarcity, droughts and floods
- Pollution of marine and freshwater ecosystems
- Transition to a circular and sustainable blue economy

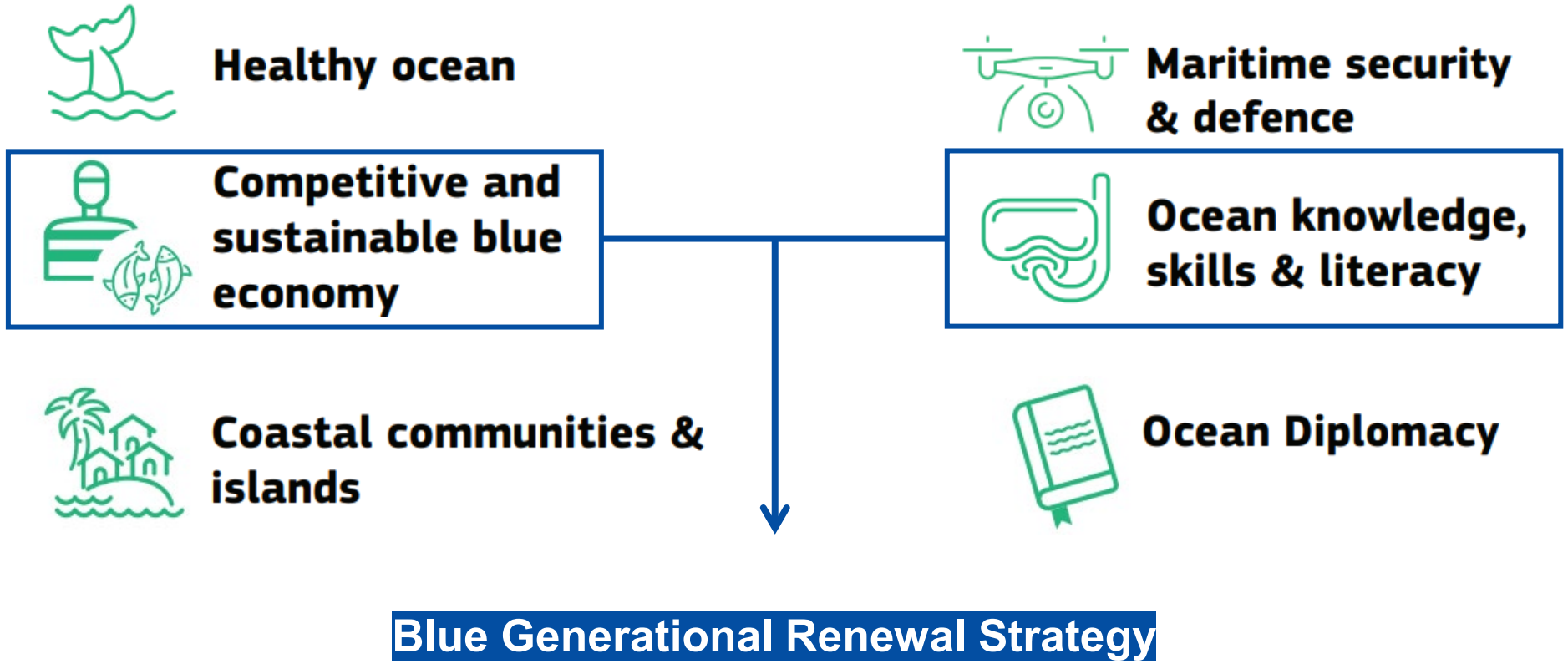
Role of the Black Sea Hub

- Capacity building and skills development
- Support for innovation projects and start-ups
- Integrated approach linking freshwater and marine systems
- Direct access to EIT Water resources, expertise, programmes and investment opportunities

European Commission

2025

What the European Ocean Pact foresees in terms of blue skills?



Blue Generational Renewal Strategy

European Commission

2024-2025

Blue Generational Renewal Strategy

What skills are needed to work in the blue economy?

A study funded by the EC aimed at mapping and identifying skills needs and emerging roles in the blue economy

Key skill needs	**Digital skills**, **business skills, green skills**, and **regulatory knowledge**.
Emerging roles	**AI specialists, blue carbon advisors, marine spatial planners** and **energy transition managers.**
Training recommendations	**Industry-academia collaboration**, **mentoring and internships**, **early outreach**, and **virtual tools.**

These results will feed the forthcoming **Blue Generational Renewal Strategy** as announced by the Ocean Pact

European Commission

2027

Blue Generational Renewal Strategy

This strategy aim to strengthen the **attractiveness**, **resilience** and **sustainability** of **blue careers** in Europe by focusing on:

- modernising ocean education and training,
- improving working conditions,
- and facilitating intergenerational knowledge transfer.

The Commission will launch a broad consultation process in Q1 2027 with the adoption foreseen for Q4 2027.

European Commission

How to engage?

- Join the EU4Ocean Coalition communities.

- Have your say at the stakeholders' consultations on theforthcoming **Blue Generational Renewal Strategy** (Join us at EOD in March 2027!).

- Create partnerships with training institutions, research centers and the industry.

- Analyse the projects already financed and their results for future intiatives

European Commission

2027

Save the date



European Commission

Thank you

© European Union 2026

Reuse is authorised provided the source is acknowledged and the original meaning or message of the document are not distorted. The European Commission shall not be liable for any consequence stemming from the reuse. The reuse policy of the European Commission documents is implemented by Commission Decision 2011/833/EU of 12 December 2011 on the reuse of Commission documents (OJ L 330, 14.12.2011, p.39).

All images © European Union, unless otherwise stated. All rights reserved.

European Commission