

# POLICY BRIEF 8

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**EXTRA-SMEs**  
Interreg Europe



## EXTRA-SMEs PROJECT

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# AIMS AND OBJECTIVES OF THE PROJECT

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EXTRA-SMEs is an Interreg Europe project that aims to foster the competitiveness, extraversion, and internationalisation of rural and coastal SMEs participating in aquaculture value chains.

To that end, the project brings together 8 regions from 7 countries to join forces and exchange experiences on:

- Simplification of administrative procedures.
- Expansion and access to new markets.
- Innovative value-added product solutions.
- Personnel up-skilling.
- Resolution of stakeholders' conflicts of interests.

The partners participating in the project are:

- The Region of Peloponnese in Greece
- The Region of Liguria in Italy
- The Northern Chamber of Commerce in Szczecin (NCC) in Poland
- The Bucharest-Ilfov Regional Development Agency (ADR-BI) in Romania
- The Lapland University of Applied Sciences (LUAS) in Finland
- The University of Patras (UPAT) in Greece
- The Western Development Commission (WDC) in Ireland
- The Public Institution National Regions Development Agency (NRDA) in Lithuania
- The Liguria Cluster for Marine Technologies (DLTM)

# POLICY BRIEF OVERVIEW

This policy brief reports on the best practices identified and promoted by the partnership. The project has promoted 13 good practices in total so far, 3 of which have been validated by Thematic Experts of INTERREG Europe and can be found in the Policy Learning Platform of INTERREG Europe (<https://www.interregeurope.eu/policylearning/good-practices/>).

The aim of this policy brief is to present these three best practices and highlight the lessons learnt from each case examined.

# CATEGORIES OF INTERVENTIONS TO RAISE THE SECTOR'S POTENTIAL: CAPACITY BUILDING AND AWARENESS

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According to activity A1.3: “Methodology to collect best practices on raising the perceived economic potential of the EXTRA-SMEs sector”, good practices belong to one of the following categories:

- Business innovation strategies
- Technological innovations
- Research & Development
- Strategic alliances and synergies
- Capacity building and awareness

In this policy brief we encounter three different cases of “Capacity building & Awareness raising activities” good practices.

The development of fully functioning knowledge networks through capacity building and awareness raising activities can have significant impacts on innovation efficiency and effectiveness, in reducing the transaction costs of knowledge diffusion and by encouraging green innovation in areas where market signals are not fully effective.

## **Capacity building**

Capacity building is a cross cutting theme, considered to be a key driver for sustainable aquaculture development and innovation adoption. The FAO Fisheries and Aquaculture Department encourages both competent public authorities and aquaculture SMEs to undertake capacity building activities, to strengthen the capacity of the sector to support sustainable, cost efficient and safe fishing operations and methods, get involved in fisheries management, and integrate innovative technologies and processes. Relevant activities may include the delivery of training courses on specific topics and technologies, preparation of training materials (e.g., simple methods in aquaculture series, disease diagnostic guides, surveillance methods, extension manuals, technical manuals, etc.), awareness raising through training/workshops, financial and technical support for staff participation in training programmes carried out by partner institutions.

## **Awareness raising activities**

There is wide consensus on the importance of aquaculture both as a traditional food production and supply sector that can address the world's growing demand for seafood, and as a key driver for sustainable Blue Growth with multiple benefits for coastal communities and significant contribution to environmental protection. On the other hand, even in leading producing areas, there is a distinct lack of general awareness on the importance and large economic potential of the sector.

Campaigns on aquaculture fall mainly within two broad categories: a) public campaigns to promote the aquaculture sector as a necessary and environmentally friendly food production industry, and b) campaigns launched by businesses for marketing aquaculture products and promoting healthy diets and responsible consumption.

At present, there is an emerging parallel call from consumers, scientists, private industries and some public entities to create and promote public standards for certification, beyond basic legislation, to competitively distinguish those methods and products of larger objective sustainability as a more transparent, accessible and reliable playing field for producers and consumers alike.

**Awareness raising activities** need also to target at the resolution of conflicting (socio-economic) interests and creating a positive public opinion of the sector as heavily undermined by false perceptions on its economic potential, environmental sustainability and contribution to local communities' development. For instance:

- Citizens associations and local communities are worried about the nutritional value of aquaculture products, the use of chemicals in feeding and production processes, and the risk of disease transmission.
- Small scale fishermen and local people are frequently against large aquaculture units deployed in their area, as they see them as competitors.
- Local communities also expect a greater contribution from fish farms to local population development since the amount paid to the local administration is low and the export-orientated sector is not beneficial for local people (example Oinousses Island, Greece; the same in Norway: NGOs and researchers were opposed for the unjust distribution of benefits - very small tax from fish farms).
- Environmental organisations protest for environmental damages associated with aquaculture activity, requesting large compensations (examples: South Evoikos Gulf in Greece, Charentais Sounds in France, Ireland, Scotland and Norway).
- Conflicts between different levels of public administration/governance (ex. In Greece the municipality of Lagadas conflict with the higher municipality of Chios, same example in Galway Bay in Ireland, Norway).

The **subcategories** of capacity building and awareness are:

- Training courses on specific topics and technologies
- Educational materials
- Workshops
- Delivery of financial and technical support

# EXAMPLE OF GOOD PRACTICES ON DELIVERING OF FINANCIAL AND TECHNICAL SUPPORT

**Partner's country:** Romania

**Name of the practice:** Centre for Aquaculture Consultancy Services to assist fish farmers on legal and technical matters

## Practice description

The Fish Culture Research and Development Station Nucet is a research institute that supports the Romanian aquaculture industry and fish farmers.

The launch of a Centre for advice and consultancy for aquaculturists was based on the need to create a formal mechanism that would allow the transfer of technology to fish farmers and to assist them in ensuring that their projects conformed to all the relevant legislation both national and European.

## Functions

Nucet carries out all the necessary physical, chemical and biological analyses for environment impact assessments including for the water going into and coming from a fish farm.

The Centre advises fish farmers on legal and technical matters, assisting the investors in fish farming in getting all the permits, environmental authorisations and creating the necessary documentation.

It provides services in four areas: environment, welfare, health and marketing and promotion. For investors what is perhaps interesting is that European Maritime and Fisheries Fund (EMFF) offers support to the farmers if they use this kind of service.

## Results

With the establishment of the Consultancy Centre the number of requests from fish farmers for advice reached 150 a year. Moreover, the types of advice increased; it is not only for water sampling, but also for advice on environmental legislation and authorisation procedures.

Other results achieved by the Centre are: increased competitiveness of the aquaculture related SMEs, strengthened technological development, innovation and knowledge transfer, promotion of sustainable aquaculture.

**Further information:** <https://www.statiuneapiscicolanucet.ro/>

# EXAMPLE OF GOOD PRACTICES ON EDUCATIONAL MATERIALS

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**Partner's country:** Italy

**Name of the practice:** Aquaculture: insights for a correct integrated management approach of the sector at a region level

## **Practice description**

Despite the rapid growth of recent years, aquaculture encounters many difficulties due to an increasingly competitive food market, technical problems and high production risk, bureaucratic delays to obtain the planned permits and a defective communication with consumers and the public sector. In order to clarify some of these aspects, Liguria Region issued a specific Regional Law which regulates the activity of mariculture.

## **Functions**

The Regional Law performs multiple functions:

- represents a useful reference tool for Municipalities and Port Authorities in the context of reorganization, rationalization and restructuring of ports and Liguria landings
- constitutes a reference document for potential subjects interested in realizing new aquaculture production realities in Liguria
- represents a useful cognitive tool for the public sector to learn about currently existing activities in Liguria, information on the health issues regarding aquaculture products, the protection of the environment and the welfare of farmed animals and, more generally, the initiatives of the Liguria Region aimed at the discipline and control of this specific productive sector.

## **Results**

This is the first regional law in Italy, related to this issue, that has been approved. It is a useful reference tool for Municipalities and Port Authorities and can be used as a reference document for subjects interested in realizing new aquaculture production realities in Liguria; as well as a useful cognitive tool for the public sector to learn about currently existing activities in Liguria.

**Further information:** <http://www.agriligurianet.it/it/impresa/2013-04-04-08-54-42/approfondimenti/item/1058-acquacoltura.html>

# EXAMPLE OF GOOD PRACTICES ON TRAINING COURSES ON SPECIFIC TOPICS AND TECHNOLOGIES

**Partner's country:** Romania

**Name of the practice:** Blue Career Centre Romania – training opportunities for marine fisheries and aquaculture sectors

## **Practice description**

The Blue Career Centre Romania was established within the MENTOR project – a partnership comprised of 7 partners from 4 countries, that aimed to support businesses in finding the right staff with proper qualifications and to provide prospects for young jobseekers in key Blue sectors: maritime transport (shipping, ports, ship-repairs and shipbuilding), cruise and nautical tourism, aquaculture and offshore oil and gas.

The project was developed in the context in which there was a frequent mismatch between training/academic qualifications and practical experience needed by the fisheries and aquaculture industries. Therefore, it can be considered a common effort to close the skills gap, tackle unemployment and make “blue careers” more attractive to the young people of Europe.

## **Functions**

The Blue Career Centre seeks to provide prospects for young jobseekers in the above sectors to support businesses in finding the right staff with proper qualifications. To do so, the BCC:

- Attracts higher education graduates or persons with a vocational/technical qualification to maritime professions through targeted and innovative education and/or training initiatives (including career guidance)
- Retrains and up-skills workers employed in other sectors and/or people currently unemployed for a job in the blue economy
- Diversifies and expands the skills of people currently employed in the blue economy to progress in their career and/or to facilitate their mobility to other maritime jobs.

## **Results**

### **Results**

The main outputs of the MENTOR project are:

- 1 Blue Career Centre Secretariat in Cyprus and 3 Centres in Greece, Bulgaria and Romania
- 4 re-training seminars
- 5 e-learning courses
- Visits in 200 schools
- 8 Blue Career Fairs
- 1 Matching database for maritime and aquaculture professionals

These results sought to impact national policies regarding life-long training of the professionals, young job seekers in the fisheries and aquaculture sectors, improving public perception and appeal of maritime carriers.

**Further information:** <http://www.bluecareers.org/>



# LESSONS LEARNT AND FUTURE IMPACT

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The cases presented can act as future examples for SMEs' initiatives regarding:

## **Financial and technical support**

The provision of non-financial business support such as knowledge-based services is key to well-balanced business support ecosystems and the development of traditional industries. The example of the Nucet Centre for Aquaculture Consultancy Services demonstrates the leveraging potential of such services for the aquaculture sector. It ensures the diffusion of knowledge and fosters the development of the sector by reducing the administrative barriers coming with the procedures regulating aquaculture.

## **Educational materials**

In the case of Liguria, to raise the level of dialogue between public and private worlds in the aquaculture sector has been the main challenge successfully encountered during the realization of the guideline.

The approach described in this practice goes beyond the creation of a practical guideline for setting up an aquaculture business. It consists in a practical and useful approach to bring together the relevant regional stakeholders for the aquaculture sector, thus fostering the emergence and development of a sense of belonging to an identified sector, while in parallel contributing also to raising public awareness.

The approach can be transferred to other region in the same sector but could also serve as a blueprint for other sectors.

## **Training courses on specific topics and technologies**

The successful operation of the Blue Career Centres for the Eastern Mediterranean and the Black Sea will set an example and model for all other sub-sea basins so that in the near future we can have policies towards an European Network of Blue Career Centres that will bring together all the stakeholders of the European Marine, Fisheries and Aquaculture sectors and Maritime Clusters in the common effort to close the skills gap, tackle unemployment and make "blue careers" more attractive to the young people of Europe.

Moreover, the MENTOR project shows how the improvement of knowledge and capacity of professionals, young job seekers in the fisheries and aquaculture sectors can have a real impact and increase the competitiveness of the domain.

According to Eurostat, 41% of the EU population lives in coastal regions where blue sector jobs could be developed. Thus, the potential for this good practice as a relevant and applicable learning opportunity for other regions is high.

The project also lays out a clear logic for bringing blue sector jobs to the mainstream through outreach activities to students, e-courses, and a matching database for maritime and aquaculture professionals. As 90% of businesses operating in this sector are SMEs, these activities help fill an important gap between finding qualified employees and SMEs in coastal areas and/or SMEs connected with the "blue sector" industry.

# PROJECT PARTNERS



Region of Peloponnese (EL)



Liguria Region (IT)



Northern Chamber of Commerce in Szczecin (PL)



Bucharest-Ilfov Regional Development Agency (RO)



Lapland University of Applied Sciences (FI)



University of Patras (EL)



Western Development Commission (IE)



Liguria Cluster for Marine Technologies (IT)



Public institution National Regions Development Agency (LT)

## About Us

EXTRA-SMEs is co-funded by INTERREG Europe / European Regional Development Fund (ERDF)

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