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**COMMUNICATION FROM THE COMMISSION TO THE EUROPEAN  
PARLIAMENT, THE COUNCIL, THE EUROPEAN ECONOMIC AND SOCIAL  
COMMITTEE AND THE COMMITTEE OF THE REGIONS**

**A new approach to the Atlantic maritime strategy – Atlantic action plan 2.0**

*An updated action plan for a sustainable, resilient and competitive blue economy in the  
European Union Atlantic area*

{SWD(2020) 140 final}

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## 1. INTRODUCTION

The Atlantic maritime strategy<sup>1</sup> was adopted in 2011 to support the sustainable development of blue economy in the EU Member States bordering the Atlantic. In 2013, the European Commission put forward an Atlantic action plan<sup>2</sup> to implement the strategy. To give a new boost to a sustainable maritime economy that can create jobs, it is time to update the priorities for regional cooperation, following stakeholders' consultation, and as a fresh contribution to Europe's recovery from the unprecedented socio-economic crisis triggered by the current COVID-19 pandemic.

The Blue Economy in the Atlantic Ocean generated EUR 73.4 billion of Gross Value Added (GVA) and employed 1.29 million people in 2017. It is the largest EU sea basin representing 36% of the EU Blue Economy GVA. Several Blue economy sectors in the Atlantic area are expected to suffer from the current crisis; notably coastal and maritime tourism which is the largest sector of the Atlantic Blue Economy generating EUR 27 bn in terms of GVA generated and employing 0.76 million people.

In response to the COVID-19 crisis, the European Commission has already adopted a series of measures. Most notably, to help repair the economic and social damage brought by the coronavirus pandemic, kick-start European recovery, and protect and create jobs, the European Commission has put forward its proposal for a major recovery plan on 27 May. To ensure the recovery is sustainable, even, inclusive and fair for all Member States, the European Commission has proposed to create a new recovery instrument called Next Generation EU<sup>3</sup>, of €750 billion embedded within a powerful, modern and revamped long-term EU budget.

The EU's recovery efforts are centred on the notion of sustainability, which underpins the European Green Deal<sup>4</sup> adopted by the European Commission in December 2019. This ambitious package of measures aims to make Europe the first climate-neutral continent by 2050 and boost the health of our planet, economy and people.

The European Green Deal stresses the central role of blue economy as a critical enabling vector to reach these objectives. The role of oceans in mitigating and adapting to climate change is increasingly recognised. The blue economy sector can contribute to the clean energy transition notably via tapping into the growing potential of offshore renewable energy and managing maritime space more sustainably.

In addition, this sector can contribute to alleviating climate change by promoting nature-based solutions and improving the use of aquatic and marine resources for example by promoting the production and use of new sources of protein that can relieve pressure on agricultural land. To that end, as a core part of the European Green Deal, the European Commission adopted on 20 May the new EU Biodiversity Strategy for 2030<sup>5</sup> with a view to protecting nature and reversing the degradation of ecosystems. In parallel, the European Commission has also adopted a Farm to Fork Strategy<sup>6</sup> for a fair, healthy and environmentally friendly food system.

Furthermore, as part of the recovery efforts, the EU has also adopted policy guidelines on tourism to enable all Europe to benefit from a restful and above all, safe tourism season. The

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<sup>1</sup> COM(2011) 782 final, <https://eur-lex.europa.eu/legal-content/EN/ALL/?uri=CELEX:52011DC0782>

<sup>2</sup> COM(2013) 279 final, <https://eur-lex.europa.eu/legal-content/EN/TXT/?qid=1395674057421&uri=CELEX:52013DC0279>

<sup>3</sup> COM(2020) 456 final

<sup>4</sup> COM(2019) 640 final

<sup>5</sup> COM(2020) 380 final

<sup>6</sup> COM(2020) 381 final

communication on Tourism and transport in 2020 and beyond also underscores the importance of protecting and restoring Europe’s land and marine natural capital, in line with the strategic approach for a sustainable blue and green economy.

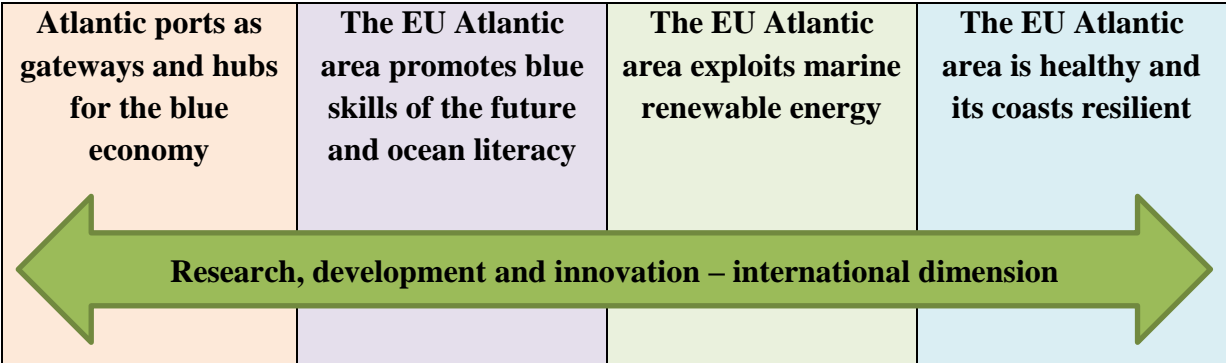
The revised action plan contributes to the recovery efforts in the blue economy focussing on key sectors that combine sustainable transformation with a high job creation potential in Atlantic coastal communities. For example, besides promoting sustainable coastal tourism, the transition to off-shore renewables offer significant employment opportunities in the Atlantic. Green shipping and innovative port activities as suggested by this action plan will contribute to reducing the EU’s carbon and environmental footprint.

This action plan is the result of a long process that started with a mid-term review<sup>7</sup> published in 2018 and continued with bottom up consultations<sup>8</sup> with stakeholders and the Atlantic Member States. The mid-term review demonstrated that the Atlantic action plan had led to over 1,200 new maritime projects and nearly 6 billion euro in investments, mostly from the EU budget. It also highlighted the need for improvements regarding the thematic focus of the plan, the governance structure and the introduction of a monitoring framework.

**2. A COMMON VISION FOR A SUSTAINABLE, RESILIENT AND COMPETITIVE BLUE ECONOMY IN THE EU ATLANTIC AREA**

The purpose of this revised Atlantic action plan 2.0 is to unlock the potential of blue economy in the Atlantic area while preserving marine ecosystems and contributing to climate change adaptation and mitigation. This is in line with the global commitments for sustainable development and fully integrated in the European Commission’s political priorities for 2019 - 2024, notably a European Green Deal, an Economy that works for people and a stronger Europe in the world.

The action plan has the ambition to achieve seven goals under four thematic pillars through concrete actions mobilising all relevant Atlantic stakeholders:



**3. PILLARS**

The new action plan includes four pillars, which represent a practical way to make the common vision a reality. They are integrally interconnected and trans-regional by nature. These four pillars address key challenges and aim to foster sustainable blue growth and

<sup>7</sup> SWD(2018) 49 final, [https://ec.europa.eu/maritimeaffairs/sites/maritimeaffairs/files/swd-2018-49\\_en.pdf](https://ec.europa.eu/maritimeaffairs/sites/maritimeaffairs/files/swd-2018-49_en.pdf)  
<sup>8</sup> Series of dedicated stakeholder workshops were organised by the European Commission in Gran Canaria (Spain), Viana do Castelo (Portugal), Dublin (Ireland), Liverpool (UK) and Bordeaux (France) between September and November 2018. The results of the workshops are available online: <https://webgate.ec.europa.eu/maritimeforum/en/node/4400>

contribute to greater territorial cooperation and cohesion in the EU Atlantic area. The research activities implemented as part of the Galway<sup>9</sup> and Belém<sup>10</sup> Statements and the All-Atlantic Ocean Research Alliance<sup>11</sup> cut across all pillars. They give an international dimension to the action plan and support its implementation by improving understanding of the changing Atlantic Ocean and its effects on coastal communities and by developing innovative solutions.

The pillars focus on issues that one coastal region and one single State cannot solve alone or where it is more efficient to act together and deliver on challenges that matter in the daily lives of people living in the coastal areas.

The feedback received from the consultation process and the discussions with the five EU Member States have helped to identify specific, yet interconnected and mutually reinforcing, **goals and actions**. The agreed goals and actions are not exhaustive.

The Staff Working Document accompanying this Communication spells out in detail the concrete actions and the corresponding avenues for implementation under each pillar.

## **PILLAR I: PORTS AS GATEWAYS AND HUBS FOR THE BLUE ECONOMY**

Coastal tourism, aquaculture, shipbuilding, as well as growing industries like marine renewables, are centred on or closely interlinked with the activity of ports. Ports can play a major role in the sustainable development of these sectors and for the transition to carbon-free economy. To seize this opportunity, the role and potential of Atlantic ports need to be re-considered. At the same time, the role of port operators as catalysts for blue businesses needs to be strengthened. On the other hand, ports must cooperate among themselves to mobilise financing for smart infrastructures and better plan the development of capacity to accommodate trade growth.

Maritime innovation can help with the decarbonisation of maritime sources. For instance, there are available technologies that reduce the carbon produced by vessels. They include liquefied natural gas, hydrogen production, air lubrication, wind propulsion and exhaust technologies. Installing recharging and refuelling infrastructure for alternative fuels in ports and cargo terminals, including for docked vessels would significantly improve the air quality in coastal communities.

To address the needs identified above, the pillar includes **two specific goals** and a set of concrete actions.

### **Goal 1: Ports as gateways for trade in the Atlantic**

#### **Actions**

- ▶ Develop the TEN-T Motorways of the Sea in the Atlantic
- ▶ Create a network of green ports by 2025
- ▶ Foster short-sea shipping links in the Atlantic area to better integrate Ireland

<sup>9</sup> On 24 May 2013, the European Union, Canada and the United States signed an agreement on Atlantic Ocean Cooperation. [http://ec.europa.eu/research/iscp/pdf/galway\\_statement\\_atlantic\\_ocean\\_cooperation.pdf#view=fit&pagemode=none](http://ec.europa.eu/research/iscp/pdf/galway_statement_atlantic_ocean_cooperation.pdf#view=fit&pagemode=none)

<sup>10</sup> On 13 of July 2017, the European Union, Brazil and South Africa signed the Belém Statement signed an agreement for research and innovation in the Atlantic Ocean. [http://ec.europa.eu/research/iscp/pdf/belem\\_statement\\_2017\\_en.pdf](http://ec.europa.eu/research/iscp/pdf/belem_statement_2017_en.pdf)

<sup>11</sup> AORA involves the EU, the United States and Canada. Thanks to AORA, today some 25 projects involving over 500 international research teams are already engaged in Atlantic Ocean research. <https://www.atlanticresource.org/aora>

- ▶ Launch an Atlantic strategy on liquefied natural gas
- ▶ Develop eco-incentive schemes to upgrade port infrastructure
- ▶ Jointly develop waste and handling plans for Atlantic ports

**Goal 2:        Ports as catalysts for business**

**Actions**

- ▶ Develop a blue accelerator scheme for Atlantic ports to help scale up innovative businesses
- ▶ Share best practices, exchange ideas and tackle problems jointly
- ▶ Expand data collection beyond traditional (logistics) data
- ▶ Increase communication and availability of data on the economic potential of ports

## PILLAR II: BLUE SKILLS OF THE FUTURE AND OCEAN LITERACY

Having the right set of skills is essential to take advantage of innovation and rapidly deploy blue technologies. A specialised blue education and training offer based on a business intelligence scheme can attract young talent to the blue economy, stimulate productivity and increase the competitiveness of the EU Atlantic area.

While specialised clusters already operate at local and regional level, efficient sea-basin cooperation can facilitate the cross-border circulation of qualified workers to match evolving labour market demand. Another focus area is ocean literacy. Ocean literate citizens can ‘adapt their everyday behaviour to make informed and responsible decisions that promote ocean stewardship in a co-creation approach’<sup>12</sup>.

To address the needs identified above, the pillar includes **two specific goals** and a set of concrete actions.

### Goal 3: Quality education, training and life-long learning

#### Actions

- ▶ Identify blue skill gaps in the EU Atlantic area
- ▶ Harmonise data collection in the area of blue careers
- ▶ Create a business intelligence scheme and promote liaison centres for improved cooperation between businesses and training providers
- ▶ Identify through peer learning best practices for matchmaking employers and jobseekers that serve as inspiration
- ▶ Take advantage of existing information platforms for job opportunities and harvest their potential for blue jobs

### Goal 4: Ocean literacy

#### Actions

- ▶ Launch an Atlantic Ocean literacy pilot curriculum
- ▶ Create 25 Atlantic blue schools by 2025
- ▶ Implement an ocean literacy component (dissemination) in relevant projects
- ▶ Making use of the All-Atlantic Ocean Youth Forum
- ▶ Engage citizens in ocean-related actions in the EU Atlantic area
- ▶ Engage citizens in activities organised for European Maritime Day, International Ocean Day and under the future EU4Ocean platform

<sup>12</sup> As stated in the [transatlantic implementation strategy](#) drafted by the Marine Working Group on Ocean Literacy of the Atlantic Ocean Research Alliance supported by Horizon 2020.

### **PILLAR III: MARINE RENEWABLE ENERGY**

The European Green Deal emphasises the essential role of offshore wind production for the transition to a climate-neutral economy. It stresses the need for a more sustainable management of maritime space to unlock the potential of offshore wind. This will require building on the success of regional cooperation, which the Atlantic maritime strategy and its action plan are actively promoting. In this perspective, the Commission will present a strategy for the development of offshore renewable energy in the EU in the fourth quarter of 2020. It should build upon inter alia the Atlantic action plan 2.0.

The EU Atlantic area is the leader in and testbed for the development of novel marine renewables<sup>13</sup>, especially ocean energy and floating offshore wind. To reach the next step of development, namely the commercial maturity of successful prototypes, is essential to maintain technological leadership, retain talent and provide affordable clean energy while taking into account potential impacts on the marine environment and the way to mitigate them.

The countries participating in the Atlantic maritime strategy have developed a strong cooperation on maritime spatial planning.

This pillar responds to several interconnected challenges, which are to increase access to finance, obtain the necessary political support and public acceptance, facilitate knowledge sharing and make use of best practices across the region.

To address the needs identified above, the pillar includes **one specific goal** and a set of concrete actions.

#### **Goal 5: The promotion of carbon neutrality through marine renewable energy**

##### **Actions**

- ▶ Set specific deployment objectives for marine renewable energy in the Atlantic regions taking into account their environmental impacts
- ▶ Define best sites for marine renewable energy farms (including offshore wind) and adjacent ports across the Atlantic, taking into account potential impacts on the marine environment
- ▶ Implement incentives for deployment of innovative renewable energy installations
- ▶ Pool together different marine renewable energy initiatives covering the EU Atlantic area, based on the philosophy and furthering the objectives of the Strategic Energy Technology plan (SET plan)
- ▶ Develop public awareness using appropriate communication tools on marine renewable energy in the Atlantic
- ▶ Strengthen cooperation in the European ocean energy community
- ▶ Develop a specific ocean energy framework for EU islands in the Atlantic

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<sup>13</sup> Marine renewable energy includes offshore wind (bottom fixed and floating) and ocean energy (waves and tidal energy).



## PILLAR IV: HEALTHY OCEAN AND RESILIENT COASTS

The EU Atlantic coast is vulnerable, considering the high number of human activities in this area. Large storms, floods and erosion also have a detrimental effect on large parts of the coast and will likely be exacerbated through climate change. Both the ocean and cryosphere in a changing climate report<sup>14</sup> from the UN's Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change<sup>15</sup> and the annual ocean state report<sup>16</sup> from the Copernicus Earth Observation programme<sup>17</sup> predict a continued rise of sea level at an accelerated pace and an increase in extreme weather events (marine heat waves, storm surges).

Climate risk management and adaptation measures are necessary to protect the coastal habitats and biodiversity, as well as vulnerable infrastructure and economic activities. Marine and coastal habitats should be preserved and valorised, notably with the view to develop new forms of maritime and coastal tourism. In this particular economic sector, circular economy, zero pollution, energy efficiency and biodiversity preservation should be the guiding principles to develop more sustainable practices that benefit local development and local employment all over the year.

Although shipping has become safer over the past decades, marine pollution resulting from deliberate and accidental spills of oil and other harmful substances remains a high risk. Effective risk management of spills and their impact requires cross-sectoral cooperation and work at regional level.

Marine pollution and notably plastics, is another major problem. Materials valuable for recycling are polluting Atlantic beaches and damaging the environment. They could be collected and pumped back into the economy, making it more circular. Coastal regions and citizens can develop an Atlantic response to marine litter through a system of coordinated actions, adding to the ongoing initiatives under the Convention for the Protection of the Marine Environment of the North-East Atlantic (OSPAR)<sup>18</sup> the EU Marine Strategy Framework Directive<sup>19</sup> (MSFD) and the EU Strategy for Plastics<sup>20</sup>. Research activities have also demonstrated that exposure to underwater noise can cause several types of adverse effects on marine animals, ranging from changes of behaviour to their death. The European Green Deal Mission “healthy oceans, seas, coastal and inland waters” will be of particular importance for conserving and restoring the health of the Atlantic Ocean and ensuring resilient coasts.

To address the needs identified above, the pillar includes **two specific goals** and a set of concrete actions.

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<sup>14</sup> <https://www.ipcc.ch/srocc/home/>

<sup>15</sup> The UN's Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change was tasked with assessing the scientific evidence on climate change.

<sup>16</sup> <http://marine.copernicus.eu/2nd-ocean-state-report-available/>, <http://marine.copernicus.eu/3rd-ocean-state-report-now-available/>

<sup>17</sup> [www.copernicus.eu](http://www.copernicus.eu)

<sup>18</sup> The Convention for the Protection of the Marine Environment of the North-East Atlantic (the 'OSPAR Convention') was open for signature at the Ministerial Meeting of the Oslo and Paris Commissions in Paris on 22 September 1992. It was adopted together with a final declaration and an action plan. All five EU Member States, participants in the Atlantic strategy, are members of OSPAR.

<sup>19</sup> <https://eur-lex.europa.eu/legal-content/EN/TXT/?uri=CELEX:32008L0056>

<sup>20</sup> [COM/2018/028](https://eur-lex.europa.eu/legal-content/EN/TXT/?uri=CELEX:32018028)

## Goal 6: Stronger coastal resilience

### Actions

- ▶ Demonstrate a comprehensive alert and observing system for increased storms and floods due to climate change
- ▶ Develop synergies between existing EU infrastructures for coastal observation and protection, as well as for alert and monitoring and increase the development of in-situ ocean observatories
- ▶ Develop test spaces, pilot areas to test methods of coastal protection and promote nature-based solutions
- ▶ Promote sustainable practices in coastal and maritime tourism
- ▶ Compile an inventory of national and regional climate change coastal adaptation strategies and measures, linked to the risk assessments and risk management plans, share best practices
- ▶ Create information campaigns for Atlantic coastal communities
- ▶ Educate young people and coastal communities on the evolution of the coastline and ways to adapt to sea level rise
- ▶ Share best practices on the application of maritime spatial planning to coastal adaptation, resilience, and applicable environmental assessments (EIA<sup>21</sup>, SEA<sup>22</sup>, AA<sup>23</sup>).
- ▶ Map coastal wetlands for preservation and to monitor their role as carbon sinks

## Goal 7: The fight against marine pollution

### Actions

- ▶ Develop a pilot project of 'litter-free' coastal communities
- ▶ Make use of available tools to identify major sources, pathways and hotspots of marine litter, as well as accidental or deliberate pollution
- ▶ Promote business actions based on the circular economy, develop incentives and environmental certification schemes
- ▶ Launch joint actions to promote a public perception of the problem, e.g. beach days

<sup>21</sup> Directive 2011/92/EU of the European Parliament and of the Council of 13 December 2011 on the assessment of the effects of certain public and private projects on the environment, OJ L 26, 28.1.2012, pp.1-21, as amended by Directive 2014/52/EU of the European Parliament and of the Council of 16 April 2014, OJ L 124, 25.4.2014, pp. 1-18.

<sup>22</sup> Directive 2001/42/EC of the European Parliament and the Council on the assessment of the effects of certain plans and programmes on the environment, OJ L 197, 21.7.2001, p. 30-37.

<sup>23</sup> Council Directive 92/43/EEC of 21 May 1992 on the conservation of natural habitats and of wild fauna and flora, OJ L 206, 22.07.1992, as amended by Council Directive 97/62/EC of 27 October 1997 OJ L 305, 8.11.1997, p. 42, Regulation (EC) No 1882/2003 of the European Parliament and of the Council of 29 September 2003, OJ L 284, 31.10.2003, p.1, Council Directive 2006/105/EC of 20 November 2006, OJ L 363, 20.12.2006, p. 368, Council Directive 2013/17/EU of 13 May 2013, OJ L 158, 10.6.2013, p.193.

where communities meet to clean the beach

- ▶ Promote fishing-for-litter actions to encourage all fishermen to bring ashore the waste caught in their nets during their normal fishing operations
- ▶ Engage under OSPAR to implement collective actions of the marine litter regional action plan
- ▶ Promote coordinated and effective implementation of actions against marine litter and underwater noise required under the MSFD for the EU MS
- ▶ Support the work under the Union Civil Protection Mechanism and of Bonn and Lisbon Agreements towards effective prevention, preparedness and response to deliberate and accidental pollution
- ▶ Promote cooperation among sectors for a coordinated at-sea and shoreline response

## 4. GOVERNANCE OF THE ACTION PLAN

### 4.1. COORDINATION

**Political coordination** is in the hands of the participating countries' designated ministers responsible for maritime affairs. The Member States define the broad political guidelines (including the geography of the Atlantic strategy), take stock of implementation and emphasise ownership of the initiative. The Member States may decide, in consultation with the European Commission, to expand membership of the Atlantic strategy to any interested State.

**Operational coordination** is ensured by the Atlantic Strategy Committee that acts, within its functions, as a decision-making (executive) body of the action plan and ensures proper involvement of representatives of the coastal regions (in line with the respective constitutional framework of the EU Member States). Representatives of the relevant funding and financing bodies, as well as other bodies, can be invited as observers on a case-by-case basis (e.g. based on the agenda of the meeting). The European Commission is a standing member in this Committee.

Dedicated working arrangements will define the exact modalities, roles and rules of procedure in the governance bodies.

### 4.2. IMPLEMENTATION AND REPORTING

This action plan is an invitation to the coastal regions, private sector, researchers, national public bodies and other actors to start designing projects that respond to the goals. Existing and new partnerships in the EU Atlantic area should use the umbrella of the action plan to exchange knowledge and innovate.

To enable effective implementation, a number of key conditions must be met, with clear decisions taken at an early stage. These conditions are the following:

- Member States must endorse the revised action plan before it can be implemented; the participating countries must acknowledge that the action plan priorities cut across policies, ministries and levels of government; they set priorities, take ownership and responsibility, align policies and funds at national and regional levels, and encourage the participation of regional authorities, private investors within existing mechanisms

and frameworks and provide the relevant means and resources, based on a country's capacity;

- the Atlantic Strategy Committee periodically reviews and updates (i.e. defines and updates the priority areas of) the action plan and proposes/approves flagship actions and may label projects;
- the European Commission promotes a strategic approach at EU level, including coordination and, to the extent possible, funding alignment with existing EU-related initiatives and instruments<sup>24</sup> relevant for the pillars and agreed actions;
- governments monitor and evaluate national progress at country level as appropriate, including with the support of the Atlantic assistance mechanism, and provide guidance for implementation;
- the key stakeholders should be involved, including national, regional and local authorities, economic and social actors, civil society, academia and non-governmental organisations; public events will also promote this involvement (for example, annual fora, business to business and investors pitch/speed-funding events);
- the Atlantic Strategy Committee will make use of periodic and progress tracking to report to the political level, and will be responsible for ensuring the action plan's implementation;
- a dedicated assistance mechanism will provide support upfront to EU Member States and help to implement the goals under each pillar; the support should also include involving stakeholders and helping them to partner and collecting any data needed to establish baselines, monitor and report on progress, and maintain the Atlantic maritime data hub<sup>25</sup>;
- communicating about the Atlantic action plan and the overarching Atlantic maritime strategy is a responsibility shared by the EU and its Member States at all levels – national, regional and local; the assistance mechanism will develop and coordinate a consistent communication approach in the EU Atlantic area.

A dedicated monitoring and evaluation framework will track the action plan's progress and help assess the extent to which the action plan is delivering on its goals. The results of this continuous review will inform potential amendments of the action plan in the future.

### **4.3. MOBILISING FUNDS AND FINANCING**

No funding has been earmarked in the EU budget for the Atlantic action plan. The plan will mainly rely on any EU and national funds and financing instruments relevant to the goals and actions that can be mobilised. The timing of the action plan is designed to inspire managing authorities from EU Member States and coastal regions when they are formulating their partnership agreements and programmes which are planned to be finalised before the end of 2020.

Looking to the next programming period (2021-2027), the Communication explores what finance is needed to ensure a successful implementation of the identified actions. This will

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<sup>24</sup> Subject and without prejudice to the assessment of the evaluation procedures and criteria for the concerned funds, programmes and projects.

<sup>25</sup> <https://maritime.easme-web.eu/>

involve a combination of public investment from national and EU budgets as well as private money.

The EU Member States and their coastal regions can draw on:

- European Structural and Investment Funds (ESIF) in particular:
  - the European Maritime and Fisheries Fund (EMFF) and
  - the European Regional Development Fund (ERDF), including the European Territorial Cooperation programmes
- the Horizon 2020 and Horizon Europe research programmes,
- the COSME programme for small and medium enterprises,
- the Connecting Europe Facility for infrastructure,
- the Erasmus+ programme for education, training, youth and sport,
- the LIFE programme for environment and climate,
- the Reform Support Programme, upon request for financial and technical support,
- the Union Civil Protection Mechanism for prevention and preparedness for cross-border risks, and for marine pollution at sea and on shore.

Territorial Cooperation programmes, especially the Interreg Atlantic Area programme, facilitates the transnational collaboration that this action plan aims to achieve.

The EU aims to deliver a high proportion of support through financial instruments. Between 2013 and 2017, the European Investment Bank provided almost €3 billion in loans for projects on connectivity and green technologies in the EU Atlantic area, becoming the second largest source of finance after the European Regional and Development Fund. The European Fund for Strategic Investment has also contributed by providing guarantees that lessen the risk for public and private investors. These loans and guarantees have been blended with grants from EU programmes. The BlueInvest platform, which started operations in September 2019, is helping small and medium enterprises to access finance. This will enable them to deliver new products or service to the market through coaching in business readiness and grants for activities such as further development or demonstrations. The Commission's proposal for a successor to the European Fund for Strategic Investment for 2021-2027, the InvestEU programme, will have greater emphasis on meeting EU goals such as decarbonisation or the circular economy.

## **5. WIDER LINKS AND BREXIT**

The implementation of the action plan does not require changes to EU legislation. The action plan aims to strengthen EU policies relevant to the EU Atlantic area and increase the synergies between them in order to support a sustainable, resilient and competitive blue economy in the EU Atlantic area. This includes, in particular, EU policies and programmes dealing with ports and connectivity<sup>26</sup>, energy from renewable sources<sup>27</sup>, education and

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<sup>26</sup> A framework for the provision of port services and common rules on the financial transparency of ports: <https://eur-lex.europa.eu/legal-content/EN/TXT/?uri=CELEX:32017R0352>

<sup>27</sup> Revised Renewables energy directive: [https://eur-lex.europa.eu/legal-content/EN/TXT/?uri=uriserv:OJ.L\\_.2018.328.01.0082.01.ENG&toc=OJ:L:2018:328:TOC](https://eur-lex.europa.eu/legal-content/EN/TXT/?uri=uriserv:OJ.L_.2018.328.01.0082.01.ENG&toc=OJ:L:2018:328:TOC)

skills<sup>28</sup>, mitigation and in particular, the actions of the Skills Agenda, adaptation to climate change<sup>29</sup>, environment<sup>30</sup>, and research and innovation<sup>31</sup>.

Widening the support base for the action plan suggests working with well-known networks in order to engage with specialised stakeholder groups, such as the European Enterprise Network<sup>32</sup>, FARNET<sup>33</sup>, regional and local clusters. Synergies will be sought with other intergovernmental bodies, such as the Convention for the Protection of the Marine Environment of the North-East Atlantic<sup>34</sup> and the Atlantic Ocean Research Alliance<sup>35</sup> whose geographic reach and scope are similar to the action plan's.

As of 1 February 2020, the UK is no longer a member of the European Union. This third country status will determine the scope and terms of the UK's participation in the Atlantic action plan.

## 6. CONCLUSION

The Commission invites the European Parliament and the Council to endorse the action plan and the orientation set out in this Communication. The Commission also invites the Committee of the Regions and the European Economic and Social Committee to provide opinions on this initiative.

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<sup>28</sup> A new skills agenda for Europe: <https://eur-lex.europa.eu/legal-content/EN/TXT/PDF/?uri=CELEX:52016DC0381&from=EN>

<sup>29</sup> The European green deal: <https://eur-lex.europa.eu/legal-content/EN/TXT/?qid=1576150542719&uri=COM%3A2019%3A640%3AFIN>

<sup>30</sup> MSFD, EIA, SEA and AA for offshore wind

<sup>31</sup> [https://ec.europa.eu/info/research-and-innovation/research-area/oceans-and-seas\\_en](https://ec.europa.eu/info/research-and-innovation/research-area/oceans-and-seas_en)

<sup>32</sup> <https://een.ec.europa.eu/>

<sup>33</sup> [https://webgate.ec.europa.eu/fpfis/cms/farnet2/node\\_en](https://webgate.ec.europa.eu/fpfis/cms/farnet2/node_en)

<sup>34</sup> <https://www.ospar.org/convention>

<sup>35</sup> <https://www.atlanticresource.org/aora/site-area/background/whoweare>