



Regions to Boost
National Maritime
Spatial Planning



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REGINA-MSP

Communication brief

Policy brief on recommendations at EU level from
the workpackage 2 of REGINA-MSP



REGINA-MSP communication brief series

The REGINA-MSP project is a two-year project (2023-2024) that aims to greater integrate the regional and sub-regional needs, perspectives and stakeholders in the development and implementation of national Maritime Spatial Planning (MSP). The project highlights potential challenges to this integration and opportunities to reduce them, building on a general analysis at the European level and an in-depth analysis in eight case study regions in five European countries, i.e., France, Greece, Ireland, Italy and Spain.

Based on various activities carried out within REGINA-MSP and further described in this communication brief (e.g., workshops, bibliographical analyses, surveys), a set of policy needs and recommendations has been identified at different levels (European, national, regional). This communication brief summarizes the main policy recommendations for the European level. This brief is part of a series of communication briefs produced as part of REGINA-MSP, focusing on various topics related to MSP (such as ocean literacy or communities of practice) and on each case study region and country part of the project.

Introduction

The Maritime Spatial Planning Directive (MSPD), entered into force in 2014, aiming to balance economic, social, and environmental interests in managing the EU's overall marine waters by requiring Member States to deliver national Maritime Spatial Plans. Ten years later, evolving EU policy objectives, such as addressing environmental, climate, energy, and food security challenges, have increased the importance of MSP as a key tool for the development of a sustainable blue economy.

Within the REGINA MSP project, proposals were explored to enhance the MSPD's effectiveness and transform it into a comprehensive political instrument for the future of EU marine waters. The project outcomes emphasize the need for better integration of regional and local authorities to maximize the potential of the MSPD and contribute to sustainable ocean management.

The REGINA MSP project was launched to address the need for more effective Maritime Spatial Planning by enhancing the directive's capacity to respond to current and future maritime challenges. The project advocates for the inclusion of regional and local authorities in the planning process, ensuring that the unique needs of coastal areas are reflected in national policies. With its focus on building a sustainable blue economy, the project also encourages better integration of stakeholders at all levels of governance.

Activities conducted part of workpackage 2 of REGINA-MSP

This policy brief is built upon the overall work performed within the REGINA MSP work package 2 (WP2), with specific reference to:

- The “**Baseline assessment on national and regional implementation of MSP and gap analysis**” finalized to evaluate the status of Maritime Spatial Planning (MSP) implementation and to identify any existing gaps in the process. The report processed the results of a survey that involved 36 replies from 12 countries, where participants shared their vision of MSP, detailed their level of involvement and expressed their expectations and needs.
- The **REGINA-MSP Symposium**: “Shaping the future of Maritime Spatial Planning - Regional perspectives on challenges and opportunities of the development of a sustainable European Blue Economy”. The symposium was held on 30 April 2024 in Brussels at the European Committee of the Regions, and gathered high-level speakers from EU institutions, international organizations and regional authorities. It was focused on challenges and opportunities related to the EU Green Deal and to the need to move towards a more effective and innovative multi-level governance in the National Maritime Plans. The Symposium was also an opportunity to identify good practices and draw a wider perspective of the key role played by regional authorities MSP processes largely driven by national governments.



Symposium “ Shaping the future of Maritime Spatial Planning”, 30 March 2024, European Committee of the Regions, Brussels.

- The “**Compendium of regional experiences**”: A collection of various regional experiences in MSP, to capture snapshots from different countries and sea basins about specific topics emerged from the previous WP2 tasks. Benefits for regions and local authorities, gaps, barriers and needs and the transferability potential were underlined in a cross-cutting analysis, enabling a general overview of regional aspects into MSP implementation and its evolution at EU level to be provided.
- The “**REGINA MSP Policy Paper**”, a series of policy recommendations from CPMR targeting EU institutions, to enhance the EU Maritime Spatial Planning Directive with the perspective of regional authorities. The document analyses within a sequential order strategic articles of the MSP Directive and closes with a call for political debate on the relevance and future of the MSP Directive.

Proposals for policy recommendations

This policy paper provides insights from topics that repeatedly emerged as particularly relevant during the above mentioned WP2 activities and reflects major discussion points that are ongoing among MSP researchers and practitioners. It calls for a proactive, multi-level governance approach and underscores the importance of collaboration across governance levels to effectively manage marine resources and address challenges like climate change and biodiversity protection. The main goal is to stimulate further debate on MSP at various governance levels and boost new opportunities to keep regional authorities aware and deeply involved in all MSP processes.

A proactive multi-level governance approach is needed for MSP

Concept of multi-level governance

Multi-level governance refers to the distribution of decision-making across multiple levels of authority—local, regional, national, and supranational—where various actors (governments, private entities, and civil society) collaborate in policymaking and manage shared responsibilities. The concept of multilevel governance highlights the interconnectedness of different governance levels and sectors. It emphasizes the importance of coordination, cooperation, and flexibility. It seeks to address complex policy related issues by allowing a decentralized, participatory decision-making approach while ensuring cohesion across governing entities.

Why multi-level governance is crucial for MSP

Multi-level governance is a critical aspect in Maritime Spatial Planning as maritime sectoral activities and ecosystems involve multiple jurisdictions and require the coordination of various public and private stakeholders. MSP integrates economic, social, and environmental goals, making it essential for national, regional, and local level authorities, along with the private sector and civil society, to collaborate effectively. A well-structured multi-level marine governance framework ensures that decision-making reflects both local and regional specificities while aligning with broader policy goals. This approach allows for the equitable management of different maritime spaces and their uses, such as the development of renewable energy, fishing, and conservation/protection of biodiversity. Marine multi-level governance through a coordinated approach fosters sustainable blue economy development and more effective management and use of marine resources, while addressing cross-border and regional challenges like climate change adaptation and mitigation and biodiversity protection.

Elevate the role of regional authorities in MSP processes

Regional authorities can connect economic operators, civil society, and local coastal communities. Their active participation in MSP can strengthen synergies between EU, national, and regional strategies and enhance the social acceptance of national maritime spatial plans. The following recommendations emphasize the need to elevate the role of the Regions from consultation to active participation:

- **Integration in MSP:** Regional authorities should be integrated into MSP plans by design, with a formal role in planning and coordination.
- **Smart Specialisation Strategies (S3s):** Synergies between MSP and regional S3s, which prioritize the blue economy, should be coordinated to align with regional economic ambitions.
- **Marine Multi-level Governance:** The European Commission should report on regional participation and marine governance practices.
- **Capacity building:** Regional marine planners need training, and the EU should provide resources to develop blue skills and support regional development.
- **EU Blue Forum:** Encourage regional authorities' participation in the forum for improved marine multi-level governance.
- **Communities of Practice:** Regional communities of practice in MSP should be developed to foster knowledge sharing on marine governance, ecosystem-based approach, energy and climate-smart planning.

The way ahead

- Recommend Member States ensure active participation of regional authorities in MSP plan design, promoting bottom-up coordination through existing or new regional bodies.
- Advocate for the alignment of MSP plans with Blue Economy investment priorities outlined in Regional Smart Specialisation Strategies (S3s).
- Request the European Commission to document and share multi-level governance practices on the EU MSP Platform.
- Encourage the European Commission to support the establishment of a regional Community of Practice in MSP.
- Propose the EU Blue Forum initiate a discussion on MSP multi-level governance.

MSP is an opportunity for achieving the objectives of other policies in regions

At EU policy level, the Maritime Spatial Planning Directive (MSPD) and the Marine Strategy Framework Directive (MSFD) share common goals, such as promoting an ecosystem-based approach and addressing spatial distribution at sea. Enhancing the integration between these directives could significantly boost both Blue Economy development and the achievement of Good Environmental Status (GES). By aligning their processes, stronger environmental and economic outcomes can be achieved through coordinated spatial planning and marine strategy efforts. In this context, regions can play a key role in integrating the various issues related to sea uses and in promoting a more comprehensive and integrated vision.

Biodiversity

One of the key conclusions from the REGINA MSP Compendium of regional experiences is the emphasis on how regions effectively tackle environmental challenges by integrating ecosystem-based approaches into their planning processes.

Regional Experiences

The following examples from Sardinia, Murcia, Central Macedonia emphasize how regions address environmental challenges and integrate ecosystem considerations into their planning processes.

- **Sardinia (Italy):** Sardinia contributed to the MSP process by developing a regional zoning proposal prioritizing environmental protection. The marine waters around the island were divided into 40 planning units, 17 of which are dedicated to environmental protection and natural resources. These areas prioritize environmental use, either as the main focus or in conjunction with compatible activities.
- **Murcia (Spain):** In Murcia a thematic working group on marine protected areas was established, bringing together various institutions to support the national MSP plan. They developed a comprehensive management plan for the Mar Menor and the Mediterranean coastline, which requires collaboration with national authorities to manage protected coastal areas effectively.
- **Central Macedonia (Greece):** has integrated environmental protection into its draft MSP for the North Aegean Sea through an ecosystem-based approach, aligning with its Regional Spatial Framework. This approach emphasizes maintaining ecosystem services while indirectly benefiting marine environments.
- **Montenegro:** The country incorporated the ecosystem approach in MSP, by employing methodologies to assess the cumulative environmental impacts of maritime activities. This helps identify the areas most affected by human activities and informs strategies for managing coastal and marine resources more sustainably.

The experiences from Sardinia, Murcia, Central Macedonia, and Montenegro reveal the existence of diverse strategies and approaches for integrating environmental protection and conservation into MSP. While challenges such as knowledge gaps and stakeholder engagement persist, the benefits of regional involvement, data enhancement, and the application of ecosystem-based approaches contribute positively to marine and coastal resource management in the Mediterranean region.

Key recommendations include:

- Using MSFD data on the state of the sea to inform MSPD processes.
- Aligning MSFD descriptors with maritime spatial planning sectors.
- Including socio-economic descriptors in the MSFD for better integration.
- Leveraging regional authorities for inclusive co-management processes.
- Merging environmental and socio-economic perspectives to support compensation measures.
- Aligning the timing of both directives and promoting coordinated governance for their implementation.

Climate change mitigation and adaptation

Oceans, seas, and coastal areas are both affected by and crucial to mitigating climate change. MSP should consider how climate change alters maritime activities and how these activities impact marine ecosystems.

Regional Experiences

The following examples from Cork, Crete, and Pays de la Loire illustrate how regions and local authorities are leveraging MSP to address climate change, focusing on both mitigation efforts, such as renewable energy development, and adaptation strategies to protect coastal areas from climate impacts.

- **Cork (Ireland):** The county emphasizes MSP to enhance renewable energy for climate change mitigation. A draft South Coast Designated Maritime Area Plan (DMAP) for Offshore Renewable Energy was published in May 2024 and aims to become part of the National Marine Planning Framework (NMPF). The Cork County Development Plan and Climate Action Plan also link climate action, including adaptation strategies, to MSP, envisioning collaboration with designated Implementation Groups.
- **Crete (Greece):** Crete's Regional Spatial Planning Framework (RSPF) addresses both climate adaptation (coastal erosion) and mitigation (renewable energy projects). The Regional Plan for Climate Change Adaptation (PeSPKA) includes measures specifically for coastal and marine areas, reinforcing the relevance of climate considerations in MSP.
- **Pays de la Loire (France):** The region has developed a sustainable coastal management agreement in collaboration with the French government to protect the coast against flooding risks. This agreement aligns with the North Atlantic and West Channel façade strategic document, which guides the implementation of the MSP Directive.

The experiences above described illustrate the significant potential of MSP to facilitate climate change adaptation and the development of renewable energy. Nonetheless, challenges such as resource needs, misalignment of priorities, and the necessity for broader collaboration, underscore the complexities of integrating climate considerations into marine planning effectively. Strengthening MSP's climate resilience can support coastal adaptation and align with EU climate goals.

Key recommendations include:

- Involving regional authorities in Climate-Smart MSP for place-based adaptation strategies.
- Enhancing cooperation between national climate strategies and maritime plans.
- Developing knowledge on socio-economic impacts and adaptation costs.
- Integrating coastal adaptation into the EU Climate Adaptation Plan.
- Promoting nature-based solutions for climate adaptation in MSP planning.

Multi-use

The concept of "multi-use" in maritime spatial planning has gained increasing attention in recent EU policies, particularly with the aim to combine activities like offshore renewable energy and aquaculture. Multi-use has been highlighted in EU Communications on sustainable blue economy, offshore wind energy, and aquaculture development.

To further clarify and promote multi-use, key recommendations include:

- Defining the concept clearly and integrating it with sectoral policies
- Ensuring regional authorities' involvement and providing technical assistance.
- Diversifying funding mechanisms to support multi-use projects,
- Addressing challenges such as incompatibilities and economic feasibility,
- Acknowledging that while multi-use offers potential, it is not a universal solution.



Land-Sea Interactions

Article 7 of the Maritime Spatial Planning Directive (MSPD) addresses land-sea interactions, allowing flexibility for Member States in integrating these interactions into the planning process. Regional authorities, supported by the EU's Integrated Coastal Zone Management (ICZM) Recommendation (2002), have played a key role in managing the land-sea continuum.

Regional Experiences:

LSI and ICZM regional experiences are documented in the REGINA MSP Compendium from France (Brittany), the Netherlands (Zuid Holland), Belgium (West Flanders), and Italy (Calabria).

Brittany (France): The regional authority adopted a Regional Strategy of Sea and Coast, evolving from a governance framework that enhances coordination among regional actors. Brittany actively participates in national MSP processes while supporting local projects under the European Maritime Fisheries and Aquaculture Fund (EMFAF).

Zuid Holland (Netherlands): This province manages coastal spatial planning and protection, sharing responsibilities with national authorities. A comprehensive analysis of land-sea interdependencies informs regional MSP, though it remains somewhat disconnected from national MSP efforts.

West Flanders (Belgium): As Belgium's only coastal province, West Flanders ensures that land-sea interactions are prioritized during public consultations on MSP revisions. The upcoming Belgian national MSP includes a 'coastal ribbon' policy to protect coastal areas.

Calabria (Italy): Calabria's regional marine plan integrates LSI into its vision and objectives, linking maritime economic development with environmental and cultural heritage protection. This region emphasizes LSI across its coastal planning units.

While the experiences from these regions underscore the importance of integrating LSI into MSP, they also highlight challenges such as competency divisions and the need for better alignment with national planning processes. Improved connections between regional ICZM initiatives and national MSP can enhance the effectiveness of managing land-sea interactions, as mandated by the MSP Directive.

Key recommendations include:

- Strengthening the integration of land-sea interaction analysis into the MSP cycle.
- Updating the EU's 2007 ICZM assessment to reflect current policies and priorities.
- Involving the Committee of the Regions in evaluating ICZM and MSP alignment.
- Ensuring regional authorities actively contribute to Maritime Spatial Plans.
- Making climate change adaptation central to future ICZM strategies, coordinated with MSP and EU climate policies

The way ahead

Biodiversity:

- Call for integrated implementation of the Maritime Spatial Planning Directive (MSPD) and Marine Strategy Framework Directive (MSFD), supported by analysis and public consultation.
- Propose the alignment of descriptors between MSPD and MSFD, embedding socio-economic and environmental perspectives.
- Encourage the European Commission to take stock and analyze co-management processes at regional levels, focusing on participatory approaches for Marine Protected Areas.
- Recommend that Member States appoint joint competent authorities for MSPD and MSFD or facilitate cooperation until further EU-level integration.

Place-based Climate Actions:

- Call for a review of MSPD to include climate change as a minimum requirement.
- Propose including coastal adaptation in the future EU Climate Adaptation Plan, aligning it with the MSP cycle.
- Request the development of socio-economic impact models for coastal areas, integrated into the EU Digital Twin of the Ocean.
- Advocate for horizontal cooperation between maritime and climate-related plans, emphasizing regional initiatives.
- Encourage the European Environmental Agency to provide guidance on nature-based solutions in Maritime Spatial Planning.

Multi-use of the Seas:

- Request the European Commission to provide a clear definition of multi-use, emphasizing a higher level of integration beyond coexistence.
- Call for the development of technical and financial resources for national and regional authorities to capitalize on funding opportunities for multi-use projects.
- Encourage the European Commission to support public-private investment through platforms like BlueInvest, diversifying funding models.
- Facilitate knowledge-sharing on multi-use across sea basins to promote cross-border cooperation and innovation.

Land-Sea Interactions:

- Urge Member States to ensure active participation of regional authorities in MSP design, leveraging their expertise in Integrated Coastal Zone Management (ICZM).
- Call for an updated report from the European Commission on the implementation of the EU Recommendation on ICZM, focusing on governance, for the 2026 MSPD report.
- Advocate for better coordination between climate change impacts and land-sea interaction management, with climate adaptation central to future ICZM policies.
- Encourage the Committee of the Regions to provide input through the NAT Committee.

MSP decision-making needs to be scientifically based by data

MSP relies on diverse data types—geospatial, biophysical, socio-economic, meteorological, and legal—alongside tools like Geographic Information Systems (GIS) and Decision Support Systems (DSS) to manage resources and protect ecosystems. Platforms for data sharing, such as geoportals and stakeholder engagement tools, enhance collaboration and decision-making. A multidisciplinary approach, integrating these resources, helps planners address the complexities of marine resource management, as demonstrated by regional successes in facilitating sustainable planning and governance.

Regional Experiences:

The experiences from three regions (see “compendium of regional experiences”—Emilia-Romagna, Italy; Galicia, Spain; and Region Sud, France)—highlight the usefulness of the development of geoportals and platforms for Integrated Coastal Zone Management (ICZM) and Maritime Spatial Planning (MSP)

- **Emilia-Romagna** developed a regional marine and coastal information system to support ICZM and MSP and contributed to the Adriatic-Ionian Geoportal (GAIR).
- **Galicia** created geoportals like MARPLAN, which includes socio-economic and environmental data to support spatial planning for aquaculture and fisheries.
- **Region Sud** launched the “Mon Littoral Provence-Côte d’Azur” platform, connecting coastal stakeholders and sharing best practices. Challenges encountered include data harmonization, financial sustainability, and the need for continuous updates. Future improvements focus on enhancing data resolution, providing accessible tools, avoiding platform duplication, and securing funding. Benefits include well-organized knowledge repositories aiding decision-making, collaboration with scientific partners, and enhanced stakeholder engagement through public data access and co-creation processes.

The way ahead

- Support Regions in developing and maintaining interoperable and accessible geoportals and data platforms that consolidate environmental, economic, and social data, enhancing decision-making in Maritime Spatial Planning (MSP), and engaging a wide range of stakeholders in marine governance and planning.
- Integrate data platforms that provide a comprehensive view of the marine spatial environment, enabling planners to make informed decisions and balance the various uses of marine resources, for more sustainable outcomes.
- Create accessible platforms that encourage participation from all sectors, e.g. government agencies, local communities, private stakeholders, and researchers, by incorporating features such as forums, comment sections and collaborative workspaces. These tools facilitate discussion and provide feedback on data accuracy, relevance, and usability, ensuring the continuous improvement of the platform.
- Ensure that data shared across different platforms adheres to standardized formats (e.g., INSPIRE Directive standards in Europe) to facilitate integration and comparison.

Improving stakeholder engagement, awareness and training in MSP is essential

The REGINA-MSP Compendium of regional experiences highlighted how, at national level, countries like Finland, Greece, Ireland, Italy, and Spain approach stakeholder involvement in Maritime Spatial Planning with varying methods. Common challenges include centralized control, resource limitations, and governance complexity, all of which can hinder MSP effectiveness and slow implementation.

The analysis enabled the identification of how stakeholder participated, were engaged or informed at regional level, emphasizing key practices and solutions to further consider the needs and challenges facing regional and local levels in relation to MSP processes:

Regional Experiences:

Stakeholder Engagement & Collaboration:

- **West Flanders (Belgium)** and **Zuid Holland (Netherlands)** prioritize cooperation across government levels and sectors to balance national MSP goals with regional needs, focusing on sustainable marine resource use and long-term climate adaptation.
- **Sardinia (Italy)** engaged in public consultations, though local involvement was limited, while Montenegro involved a broad range of stakeholders despite pandemic challenges.
- **Brittany (France)** utilizes multi-stakeholder platforms to integrate local sea and coastal commissions, essential for conflict resolution in maritime sectors.

Public Awareness & Training:

- **Cork (Ireland)** emphasizes training in climate resilience and cross-sector cooperation, while **Region Sud (France)** focuses on data sharing and co-creation for coastal management strategies.
- **Crete (Greece)** and **Pays de la Loire (France)** focus on raising public awareness of coastal and marine risks, with a strong emphasis on stakeholder engagement for climate change adaptation.

Technical & Financial Challenges:

- Several regions, such as **Region Sud** and **Sardinia**, face data collection and financial constraints, hindering effective MSP implementation.
- **Emilia Romagna (Italy)** relies on scientific support for MSP but struggles with local stakeholder engagement.
- **Central Macedonia (Greece)** requires better environmental monitoring and data to balance economic development with protection efforts.

Coordination & Communication Issues:

- **Zuid Holland** and **Pays de la Loire** emphasize the need for improved communication and awareness among stakeholders, especially when balancing short-term political goals with long-term sustainability.
- **Brittany** faced difficulties in managing conflicts between sea users and ensuring full participation from smaller, resource-limited stakeholder groups.

Overall, the regions demonstrate strong commitment to inclusive MSP processes but face common challenges, such as limited stakeholder participation and training opportunities, awareness issues, and resource constraints. Addressing these challenges is crucial for more effective and inclusive MSP implementation.

The way ahead

Encourage an EU public debate on the role and relevance of the Maritime Spatial Planning Directive, securing inclusive, representative, and multi-level public participation in a reflecting process. Explore the potential for establishing at EU level joint coordination mechanisms or supranational bodies to improve coordination between Member States and stakeholders at regional and local levels.

- Foster replicability of local and regional stakeholders' engagement best practices such as co-management practices.
- Create a MSP community of practices involving regional authorities to encourage capacity building and training opportunities and new knowledge sharing among marine users and planners, policy decision-makers and other stakeholders.
- Develop adapted training materials for regional maritime planners and national, regional and local authorities (especially addressing the concept of multi-use).
- Support regional and local authorities to deliver and seize cooperation opportunities via EU calls.

Citation

Guennal, L., O'Hagan, A.M., Kyriazi, Z., Kaczorowski, D., Andreoli, E., Castellani, C. and Sciacca, G. (2024). Communication policy brief on recommendations at EU level from the workpackage 2 of REGINA-MSP. REGINA-MSP project, European Climate, Infrastructure and Environment Executive Agency.

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