

Not only EMFAF: what the EU Commission is doing for the sustainable blue economy

[Angela Lamboglia](#), [Novità](#)

24 November 2022



In the second edition of SEALOGY, the European Commission presented funding opportunities to support the strategy for a sustainable blue economy. In this interview, Andy Kontoudaki from DG Mare tells us why the new EMFAF calls, and synergies with other European funds, represent a great opportunity for Italian stakeholders.

[SEALOGY 2022: Blue economy at the Ferrara fair](#)

In early November, the European Commission approved [Italy's 2021-27 national EMFAF operational programme](#). Pending the first calls for tenders, operators in the fisheries and aquaculture sector, as well as in the other sectors falling under the umbrella of the blue economy, may participate in calls from European funds under direct management.

Two EMFAF calls, issued by the CINEA Agency on behalf of the Commission, are currently ongoing with a total budget of EUR 15,1 million: Blue careers for a sustainable blue economy, for the development of careers in the blue economy, and Regional flagships projects supporting sustainable blue economy in EU sea basins, to implement regional flagship projects in EU sea basins.

In conjunction with the Infoday on the two calls, we interviewed **Andy Kontoudaki**, policy officer at the Unit dedicated to Maritime Innovation, Marine Knowledge and Investment of the European Commission's DG MARE, who explained in detail the opportunities linked to the two new calls due on 31 January 2023 and what synergies are possible with other **EU funding programmes that can support the growth of the Blue Economy** and in particular the development of skills for a sustainable blue economy.

[More details: European blue economy funds: new EMFAF calls are underway](#)

There are currently two EMFAF calls under direct management under the 2021-27 EMFAF: Blue careers for a sustainable blue economy and Regional flagships projects supporting sustainable blue economy in EU sea basins. What are the objectives that the Commission intends to pursue through these two initiatives and why should Italian players in the blue economy take advantage of these opportunities?

We see these two new calls as important tools for our blue economy policies and as an additional means of meeting the main ambitions of the **European Green Deal** and their application to the blue economy. And I explain why.

First of all, skills policies can help deliver on the European Commission's ambition to achieve a green and digital, more efficient and more resilient economy. The designation of **2023 as the European Year of Skills**, just one month ago, demonstrates the importance of skills at the economic level. And our Blue Careers call helps to move in this direction.

At the same time, the importance we attach to the development of the sustainable blue economy is demonstrated by our continued support to the Union's coastal and maritime regions on the ground. The new call for regional flagship initiatives seeks to do this.

When it comes to skills, we need to address certain objectives: especially at this moment, and with regard to most sectors of the blue economy – as we see that they are progressively but firmly becoming highly technological and are constantly driven by innovation and digital transformation – we need to address the specific gaps we see created and provide concrete and effective solutions, also taking into account labour market and technological trends and prospects. **So we are focusing on promoting green and digital skills, professions and careers for the blue economy**, creating reskilling and upskilling programmes and cooperation between education and industry, **to increase awareness and attractiveness of blue careers for students and young professionals.**

As regards regional flagship projects, however, we have the option of piloting strategic initiatives, with these calls for regional flagships, **to achieve the objectives of the strategy for a sustainable blue economy in each EU sea basin**, giving priority to support for the line of activity identified by each sea basin as being of major importance.

What we have designed is a model for sea basin cooperation with reference to specific areas of economic activity. In this sense, our targeted support is geographically richer, offers wider coverage, reaches all European sea basins and allows to address even six different topics. In the Mediterranean in particular, we are promoting sustainable transport and ports, in line with our attempt to reduce emissions from ports and ships and promote the transition to carbon neutrality of maritime transport, but we are also seeking to foster an effective network of maritime clusters across the Mediterranean, in order to support SMEs, as enablers of innovation for a sustainable blue economy.

Together, the two EMFAF 2021-2027 calls we launched offer a total of EUR 15,1 million to support blue careers and regional flagship projects in sea basins. In this regard, **they represent a great opportunity for Italian stakeholders, authorities, training providers and SMEs in the blue economy** to deepen and implement actions that they consider appropriate to the specific needs of local authorities. Actions needed by the blue economy

sector in which they operate and for which they are seeking to obtain the initial funding that would promote the solutions they have designed in response to the problems they face.

The Blue Careers call reflects the importance of skills as a key to achieving the objectives of the European Green Deal. What other funding instruments are available at European level to accompany the ecological transition?

The green transition is today the key policy for the European Union. The European Commission therefore has substantial amounts of funding, through the various programmes, instruments and funds at its disposal, to support the necessary innovation and to implement actions that will facilitate the twin green and digital transitions, increase the resilience and recovery of our economy and make Europe more autonomous and stronger in the future.

Funding is available for all sectors and types of activities. In the context of climate or environmental policies, energy or the digital economy, including in the area of the sustainable blue economy. As the blue economy is a large area of the economy, including many sectors within it, it has served by many instruments. First of all, of course, the **European Maritime, Fisheries and Aquaculture Fund (EMFAF)**, this newly updated fund that we have at our disposal to address and finance the transition of the blue economy towards greater sustainability. Or, the important research and innovation programme we manage, **Horizon Europe**, which provides funding for innovative actions in a wide variety of sectors, including blue economy and ocean-related sectors.

Other instruments, such as the Recovery and Resilience Facility (RRF), the European Regional Development Fund (ERDF), the Just Transition Fund (JTF), the InvestEU programme, the Digital Europe Programme, Erasmus +, the Programme for Environment and Climate Action (LIFE), the Modernisation Fund, the Neighbourhood, Development and International Cooperation Instrument (NDICI), all directly support one or more policy areas and provide funding for effective solutions in different sectors.

As an example, REACT-EU was the first NextGenerationEU instrument to make Member States' recovery payments, helped create jobs and invest in skills in the regions most in need. Workers who lose their jobs as a result of large-scale restructuring events can also benefit from support from the European Globalisation Adjustment Fund for redundant workers (EGF) to find new jobs more easily, for example by undertaking new education and training, tailored career guidance and counselling services.

In early November, the Commission approved the national EMFAF programme of Italy. What synergies are possible between shared management funds and other EU funding programmes supporting the development of the blue economy?

We have long tried to provide a wide range of support tools and funding to meet the needs of the whole European economy, and the blue economy is the same. The resources we have at our disposal for any action in the field of the blue economy are almost all the funds and financing instruments that also serve all other EU economic activities.

EMFAF funding can also be combined with other funding from the general budget of the EU: cohesion policy funds, in particular the European Social Fund Plus (ESF +) when it comes to skills and human capital; with Erasmus + when it comes to education and training. Horizon Europe, including its new instrument – Mission Ocean – also offers opportunities for

synergies, while the LIFE (aquatic) environmental protection programme can be used and InvestEU provides support for financial products that can be used in the blue economy. Finally, the Recovery and Resilience Facility targets all sectors of economic activity, including those within the blue economy.

In short, there are many combinations and synergies between all available funding possibilities at EU level to help the blue economy grow sustainably and to provide opportunities for innovative solutions and business models.

[More details: EU and EIB launch InvestEU Blue Economy: EUR 500 million for the economy of the sea](#)

- [EU funding](#)
- [European Funds 2021-2027](#)