

New jobs in coastal communities: What are the new services and skills required in light of a changing blue economy? Is the educational landscape appropriate to cater for these new needs?

Date: Thursday, 25 April 2024

Theme: Business Support

Workshop Summary

The "New Jobs in Coastal Communities" workshop at the 2nd Mission Arena by Blue Mission BANOS explored the evolving landscape of employment in the blue economy. This session highlighted the interplay between new job opportunities across various sectors, such as blue biotechnology, low-trophic aquaculture, shipping, and offshore renewable energy. It assessed the readiness of the educational system to support these emerging fields.

Identifying Gaps and Opportunities

Participants noted a significant gap in the skills needed for the burgeoning blue bioeconomy to become sustainable. The discussion centred around the need for transversal skills for the future workforce to be able to apply across different sectors. In addition, upskilling and reskilling are needed, for example, specific hard skills requirements in the renewable energy sector.

Educational and Vocational Training Needs

- 1. Knowledge Gaps:** Students and newcomers to the field often find the terminology and specialised knowledge in the blue bioeconomy challenging, indicating a gap in foundational education that needs to be bridged.
- 2. Practical Engagement:** Educational programs that impart knowledge and provide hands-on experience with the ocean and its industries are urgently needed. This approach helps foster a personal connection with the ocean, which is vital for engaging and retaining talent in these fields.
- 3. Policy and Community Engagement:** Workshop participants identified the difficulty of connecting citizens with the blue economy, suggesting that policymakers need to better communicate the impacts (both positive and negative) to communities to avoid greenwashing and foster a more inclusive understanding of blue economy projects.

Strategic Recommendations for Education and Policy

- 1. Updating Educational Content:** There is a call to modernise fisheries schools and other vocational training programs to include relevant skills for the blue economy, emphasising hands-on and practical teaching methods.
- 2. Integrated Job and Learning Fairs:** Combining political events with job fairs could enhance public engagement and attract more people to blue economy careers.
- 3. Regional Academies and Tailored Programs:** Establishing academies that focus on the blue bioeconomy at a regional level could make these jobs more attractive and accessible. Identifying local potential and developing customised educational programs are crucial steps towards this goal.
- 4. Enhancing Job Value and Awareness:** Increasing awareness of these jobs' critical role in society and improving compensation could help elevate the status of blue economy professions and attract more skilled workers.
- 5. Blue Careers Support:** Introducing roles such as Blue Careers Ambassadors, counsellors, and mentors is key to bridging the gap between potential job opportunities and job seekers, ensuring a smoother transition into new roles. In addition, it supports the targeted allocation of labour in the blue bioeconomy.

This workshop not only illuminated the current challenges faced by the blue economy regarding employment and education but also offered concrete steps to enhance the alignment between these areas. By updating educational programs, improving policy communication, and creating supportive roles, coastal communities can better prepare for the evolving demands of a sustainable blue economy.