

RESPONSE

Building Response Frameworks under existing
& new Marine Pollution Challenges in the Black Sea



Milestone 9

Setting of regional strategic goals



Co-funded by
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Project background and context

The RESPONSE, supported by the European Union EMFAF, under Grant Agreement no 101124661 has duration of 36 months, starting from 01.10.2023. The project consortium involves six partners from five different countries: Greece, Bulgaria, Romania, Ukraine and Georgia. Five of the participants are based in countries bordering on the Black Sea, and the lead beneficiary, the Aristotle University of Thessaloniki (AUTH), has a long history of working with the region and with members of the consortium. The partnership includes one university, two research institutes and three environmental NGOs: the Black Sea NGO Network (BSNN) regional NGO network based in Varna, Bulgaria; the National Institute of Marine Research and Development (NIMRD), based in Constanta, Romania, leading research institute for the Black Sea; the Institute of Market and Economic & Ecological Researches of the National Academy of Sciences of Ukraine (IMEER - NASU), Odesa, a public institution, part of the National Academy of Sciences of Ukraine; the Black Sea Branch of Ukrainian Environmental Academy of Sciences (BSBUEAS) is Odesa-based NGO with a team of professional researchers; and the Greens Movement of Georgia / Friends of the Earth (GMG/FoE) – Georgia, an NGO, part of the international environmental network. All three beneficiaries from EU Member States have extensive experience in marine pollution projects under the Horizon 2020 and Horizon Europe programmes.

RESPONSE aims to identify and promote the development and establishment of new-generation advanced training schemes and curricula to support early warning, region-wide mechanisms for monitoring natural and man-made disasters. Various training programs, platforms and curriculum have been implemented to monitor marine pollution and ensure knowledge integration and dissemination. Still, training material, best practices, standards and protocols often differ among platforms and programs, hindering progress towards implementing an integrated, transdisciplinary and multidisciplinary marine pollution training system. Peculiar events, such as armed conflicts, create new environmental and societal challenges that call for international, coordinated responses.

RESPONSE acknowledges the importance of deeper understanding of marine ecosystems and river-delta-sea connections, the need for development of harmonized procedures, standards and methodologies in marine monitoring across the Black Sea countries to support healthy and resilient seas and foster integrated marine governance. The sustainable changes that are required for the establishment of efficient, advanced training schemes that would be integrated with the challenges, goals and specificities of the scientific and social context and make the most of the untapped capacity of stakeholders to promote regional awareness in the field.

In view of the background and context described above, the four overarching objectives of RESPONSE are: 1) IDENTIFY and UNDERSTAND the institutional and societal gaps and needs for effective, integrated, transdisciplinary and multidisciplinary marine pollution training systems; 2) DEVELOP effective training programs by assembling, integrating, and improving the most promising approaches and results into a comprehensive framework that consists of a set of methodological training tools, databases, policy recommendations, and background information; 3) SUPPORT the implementation of the EU and Regional Strategies, by developing operational guidelines for effective application, updating, monitoring and management of training programs on marine pollution; 4) EMPOWER marine pollution training, monitoring and mitigation by involving, inspiring and influencing stakeholders through a broader vision of co-design, co-creation, co-

establishment, co-implementation and co-assessment of the training programs.

Executive summary

This document describes the place and role of Milestone 9 "Setting of regional strategic goals" in the overall project structure of RESPONSE and the sharing and replicating of the project results. It is a consistent process that begins with producing guidelines for dissemination of information and project training outputs to key target audiences involving them in co-creation, continues with networking and synergies with other projects, and moves towards empowering stakeholders and joint strategic planning at the regional level.

The Communication Dissemination and Stakeholder Empowerment (CDSE) Plan elaborated in the early stages of the project has helped guide, streamline and harmonise outreach and dissemination activities throughout the implementation period. The principal target groups have been identified and their active participation ensured through different activities of co-designing, elaborating, testing, improving, and implementing the RESPONSE training outputs.

Outreach and networking have been supported primarily by digital products (webinars, videos, website, social media, press releases, and scientific dissemination activities etc.), but also through regional and national workshops, training curricula on national level, as well as through the use and testing of the RESPONSE digital toolkit and replication guide for sustainable institutional participation.

Outreach and active participation of stakeholders and policy makers will be ensured through different activities of co-designing, elaborating, testing, improving, and implementing the RESPONSE training outputs. An essential element of that set of activities is the joint planning process on regional level. The envisaged Regional Action Plan (RAP) of RESPONSE is intended to focus on achieving effective training for preparedness and emergency response, with the aim to mitigate the impacts of marine pollution incidents and consequently reduce marine pollution overall. The project partnership has discussed and approved of a set of general regional strategic goals for RAP ensuring the continuation of the process of knowledge and capacity building on training, contingency planning, coordination, and long-term institutional developments toward integration of a large number of pollution sources, including pollution from armed conflicts, in the monitoring and management activities for the Black Sea.

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Introduction

Milestone 9 is part of Work Package 4: Ensuring the sustainability of RESPONSE assets. The work package has four specific objectives that clearly relate to key stakeholders training and regional participation and planning:

- communicate and disseminate RESPONSE training outputs to key stakeholder groups and the wider public in the BS countries
- establish regional strategic action plans for driving institutional participation
- build networks and transferability potential
- streamline policy recommendations

Setting the regional strategic goals aligns with the preparation of national training operation plans and the establishment of a strategic Regional Action Plan (RAP) to address the needs of the marine protection policies for the Black Sea currently and in the future after the end of the project lifecycle.

1. Project RESPONSE communication and stakeholder empowerment process in view of the achievement of strategic planning in the Black Sea Region

The RESPONSE Communication Strategy, used as basis for the Dissemination and Stakeholder Empowerment (CDSE) Plan, identifies the project target groups and sets communication goals to ensure that the project information, messages and updates reach the relevant target audiences through the most appropriate channels. The Communication Strategy is set to support the stakeholder communication and empowerment process and the production of a strategic document, the Regional Action Plan for training and capacity building and policy recommendations for Black Sea region stakeholders.

The communication challenges of the RESPONSE project involve working with a wide range of regional stakeholders in two specific areas: identification of all types and impacts of marine pollution, that should be tackled, and prioritize the potential environmental risks (including hazardous substances, eutrophication, litter, noise, microplastics, armed conflicts pollution) and the threats to marine and coastal biodiversity of the Black Sea; and the co-design and co-creation of the framework for the establishment and operation of an advanced training system.

The RESPONSE project has been designed and implemented in difficult times for the Black Sea region with an ongoing war of Russia against Ukraine. Nevertheless, the project partners have been working together to address the strategic capacity building issues related to earlier and more recent regional and EU plans and strategies promoting environmental protection, climate change resilience and preparedness, and civil protection. The alignment of the strategic goals of the Regional Action Plan (RAP) for training and capacity building with regional policy documents will be addressed further in the document. The major issue addressed by the RESPONSE partnership in disseminating, sharing, and replicating of the project results has been the stakeholder mapping and stakeholder empowerment process.

The basic element addressed in the stakeholder mapping (D1.1) has been the identification of Key Stakeholders in terms of responsibilities for implementing the existing training programmes on marine pollution monitoring and emergency response and the need to update and develop them. Those stakeholders perform a coordinating role defined in a legal act or possess unique expertise in the marine environment, or have a specific function, and accumulated knowledge and skills in training at national and international level. The Key Stakeholders have been involved in the co-creation and training process as they are in the best position to view and support its regional perspectives.

Stakeholder empowerment envisages active participation of all relevant stakeholders, including policy makers, administrations, scientists, experts, NGOs, and the general public in outreach activities ensured through co-designing, elaborating, testing, improving, and implementing the RESPONSE training outputs. Policy-makers will be in the focus of specific attention and will be invited to give their input to the planned work during workshops, dedicated surveys, or one-on-one interactions.

2. The Communication, Dissemination and Stakeholder Empowerment (CDSE) Plan tasks and implementation

The CDSE Plan supports the implementation of RESPONSE and the achievement of its key objective: to develop and test new training schemes and curricula for the monitoring, reporting, management, and mitigation of marine pollution, with particular attention to pollution caused by armed conflicts. The project is to combine existing knowledge and expertise, and develop the next generation, fit-for-purpose, multidimensional training schemes on marine pollution preparedness and response.

The communication challenges of the project involve working with a wide range of regional stakeholders in two specific areas: identification of all types and impacts of marine pollution, that should be tackled, and prioritize the potential environmental risks (including hazardous substances, eutrophication, litter, noise, microplastics) and the threats to marine and coastal biodiversity of the Black Sea; and the co-design and co-creation of the framework for the establishment and operation of an advanced training system.

The use of communication messages and tools and specific stakeholder empowerment tools, including the national training curricula and the RAP, will provide decision-makers, scientists, managers, regulators, and the public the means to better understand marine pollution processes and the drivers of change, to assess the effectiveness of mitigation measures and the path to recovery, and through that help achieve the goals of the EU on marine pollution control and effective marine management.

The CDSE Plan will support the RESPONSE communication, dissemination and stakeholder involvement and empowerment activities continuously throughout the project implementation. The Plan's task is to maximize the number of the target groups informed about the activities and project objectives and results. In addition, it will support the monitoring and assessment of the co-designed and co-created advanced training schemes and will ensure further participation of stakeholders well beyond the project timeframe.

The tasks of the CDSE Plan within the RESPONSE project are integral to effectively disseminating training outputs to key stakeholder groups and the wider public in the Black Sea (BS) countries, as well as to establishing regional strategic action plans for driving institutional participation. Additionally, this plan aims to build networks, enhance transferability potential, and streamline policy recommendations. To successfully implement those tasks, the CDSE Plan includes the following aspects:

- Development of contacts with local beneficiaries and target groups, facilitating direct and extended access to local networks and national administrations for effective communication of project achievements and sustainability.
- Proper documentation of dissemination activities to ensure clear and concise communication of project goals and results.
- Adherence to principles for smooth and effective dissemination aligned with project objectives and outputs, considering the specific characteristics and nature of the targeted groups.

- Enhancement of project sustainability and stakeholder support through transparent co-creation and co-development processes in decision-making at national and regional levels.
- Increased efficiency of stakeholder engagement in co-development and co-creation of training schemes and curricula, facilitated by a larger volume of feedback.
- Improved accessibility of stakeholders to open-access early warning region-wide mechanisms for monitoring natural and man-made disasters.

The CDSE Plan serves as a comprehensive guide for effectively disseminating project outcomes, engaging stakeholders, and fostering collaboration towards achieving the overarching objectives of the RESPONSE project.

3. Key stakeholders' involvement in the scientific and technical developments of RESPONSE

The main actors in all Black Sea countries are government agencies with clearly defined responsibilities in existing legislation. An additional but important role is played by research institutes and universities involved in monitoring, curriculum development, and training. A lesser role is played by business associations and NGOs with specific expertise. Among them key stakeholders have been identified by their institutional names and functions and the partner teams continued to work closely with them.

The key stakeholders of RESPONSE, identified in the stakeholder mapping process, have been continuously engaged in dissemination and outreach activities to keep them informed about the progress of the project and to involve them in the co-creation process and its development at national and regional level. The key stakeholders have also been directly involved in the mapping of the legislative, institutional, and operational context in the participating Black Sea countries. Their organizational structures, needs and training capacity have been assessed. They have been key actors in the co-creation of the training curricula on national level, the monitoring and evaluation activities, the production of national training operation plans.

The scientific knowledge and information from the RESPONSE studies, identifying and evaluating the types and impacts of marine pollution, including those from armed conflicts, and recognizing tools that are being used to address these impacts helped to involve key players and focus on real-life issues related to marine pollution and response and the elaboration of tailored training operational plans.

The RESPONSE Regional Action Plan will assign strategic goals but also specific roles to stakeholders in developing Black Sea regional cooperation in the field of monitoring and management of marine pollution and will foresee ways to facilitate training, knowledge exchange, and cooperation actions among coastal countries.

4. Progress in building networks and achievements in transferability potential

The training process of RESPONSE has created favourable conditions for building networks and broadening the transferability of project outputs. The knowledge generated by the training process of RESPONSE will offer an extraordinary basis for developing sustainable (a) transferability networks (b) operational planning in strategic regional terms and (c) grounds for policy recommendations.

Therefore, as pointed out above, the RESPONSE training outcomes will be under a continuous dissemination process throughout the project implementation which is based on the well-targeted dissemination and communication strategy designed to reach the relevant audiences at the national, regional, and European level, while establishing a real Black Sea stakeholder community. The RESPONSE communication strategy and the project CDSE Plan rely on a digital and offline means and activities for community building, dissemination, awareness raising, and communication (e.g. dissemination material, social media, info-days etc.).

The consortium will draw on their existing networks and continuously work on expanding these networks to new stakeholders among Black Sea marine pollution response entities. The advisory board, a group of renowned external experts, will provide valuable feedback on the RESPONSE communicating outcomes and will also be encouraged to spread information through their international networks.

This networking task will enhance the role of RESPONSE as a vehicle of networking between Black Sea countries that are not yet part of the EU but are in the process of integration or possible future association (Ukraine, Georgia) and other countries that are already EU members (Greece, Bulgaria, Romania) with long-time functioning European platforms and initiatives.

Contacts and collaboration with regional European platforms and initiatives

For contacts and collaboration with regional long-time functioning European platforms and initiatives, the partnership relies primarily on professional contacts of experts and institutions. The project coordinator of NIMRD, Constanta, Romania, Razvan Mateescu is expert of the European Maritime Safety Agency (EMSA), a member in EMSA/IMS Correspondence Expert Group on "Drift Modelling". The partner BSNN is working to develop contacts with EMSA via partner maritime agencies in Bulgaria.

There is a significant partnership developing in Ukraine. The RESPONSE partner IMEER NASU (State Organization "Institute of Market and Economic & Ecological Research of the NAS of Ukraine") has established a strategic collaboration with EMSO ERIC — the European Multidisciplinary Seafloor and water column Observatory European Research Infrastructure Consortium — formalized through a Memorandum of Understanding, highlighting EMSO's recognition of the Institute's expertise in the blue economy. Together, the Institute and EMSO have developed a joint Horizon Europe grant proposal, with the Institute leading the creation of an innovative integrated Impact Assessment Framework. This Framework combines OECD and ESFRI approaches with blue economy indicators this provide a comprehensive assessment of socio-economic and environmental effects of marine activities. In direct synergy with the RESPONSE project, this collaboration focuses on strengthening capacities for monitoring, predicting, and mitigating marine pollution in the Black Sea, integrating real-time observational data from EMSO infrastructures with socio-economic impact analyses.

Additionally, the partnership includes initiatives to enhance knowledge exchange and policy support, enabling evidence-based decision-making for sustainable marine management. By aligning scientific expertise with practical frameworks for pollution response, the collaboration ensures that the Institute contributes to the European efforts in addressing both current and emerging challenges in the Black Sea region.

Links with other EU projects

The partnership has been networking with other recently completed or currently underway EU projects to enhance RESPONSE visibility. The following 18 projects have been used by the different partners for contacts with key representatives in view of future involvement in training, testing of digital tools and regional planning.

NEMO-Tools project - Next-generation monitoring and mapping tools to assess marine ecosystems and biodiversity – HFRI Grand

Life Mapper - Guidelines for MAPping, ProtEcting, and Restoring Marine Ecosystems – LIFE-2024 101213793

GuardIAS - Guarding European Waters from IAS - HORIZON-CL6-2024-BIODIV-01-1: Invasive alien species

GES4SEAS - Achieving Good Environmental Status for maintaining ecosystem SErvices, by ASsessing integrated impacts of cumulative pressures - HORIZON-CL6-2021-BIODIV-01-04

MarinePlan - Improved transdisciplinary science for effective ecosystem-based maritime spatial planning and conservation in European Seas - HORIZON-CL6-2021-BIODIV-01-12

THAL-HOR 3 - Monitoring and evaluation of Marine Spatial Planning (MSP) - Interreg VI-A Greece – Cyprus 2021–2027

LIFE MareNatura project – Conservation of priority species of marine megafauna in Greece and Italy - LIFE22-NAT-EL-LIFE-MareNatura/101113792

ILIAD Project - Integrated Digital Framework For Comprehensive Maritime Data And Information Services (2022 – 2025), H2020 Green Deal.

EfxINNOs Project - Establishing and Operating an Innovative Marine Technology Transfer Network for Enhancing the Transition to a Sustainable Blue Economy in the Black Sea Basin, - INTERREG Next BS (2024-2027).

DANSER / DANube SEdiment Restoration: towards the deployment and upscaling of sustainable management of the sediments across the Danube catchment basin - HORIZON-MISS-2023-OCEAN-01.

BRIDGE-BS Project – Advancing Black Sea Research and Innovation to Co-Develop Blue Growth with Resilient Ecosystems – EU Horizon 2020

MARMAPS - Open environmental eFolio for joint maritime spatial planning and conservation of the valuable Black Sea Basin marine ecosystems' BSB00113 Interreg NEXT Black Sea Basin Programme

SOS-ZEROPOL2030, Source to Seas — Zero Pollution 2030 — Horizon Europe

ANEMONE PLUS Project /Assessing the Vulnerability of the Black Sea Marine Ecosystem to Human Pressures – Promoting Collaboration with Business, Governance, and Citizens for a Sustainable Blue Region - Interreg NEXT Black Sea Basin Programme 2021–2027

Marine and River Litter Elimination New Approach – MARLENA eMS BSB – 139;

Sustainable Agricultural Trade Network in Black Sea Basin - AgriTradeNet EMS BSB – 383;

Zero Waste Strategy: Methods and Implementation in Black Sea Basin – ZeroWasteBSB eMS BSB 788;

Let's Cycle at the Black Sea – LetsCYCLE eMS BSB 998 MLPDA 88703;

SturNet BSB00172 (Network for the Preservation of Sturgeon and for the Sustainability of the Black Sea Basin Ecosystem), Interreg VI-B NEXT Black Sea Basin Programme 2021-2027.

NGO members of the consortium from Bulgaria and Ukraine have been promoting RESPONSE on national level through environmental and civic action networks – Bluelink, For Nature to Remain in Bulgaria Network, Network of UEAS contacts etc.

Links/contacts with organizations

RESPONSE Project visibility is one of the objectives of the communication of BSNN (observer at the BSC) and the other project partners with Iryna Makarenko, LL.M., Pollution Monitoring and Assessment Officer, Permanent Secretariat of the Commission on the Protection of the Black Sea against Pollution. Ms. Makarenko delivered a presentation at the RESPONSE regional co-creation workshop in Constanta, hosted by NIMRD. She will be involved in future activities, workshops, preparation of Regional Action Plan and promotion of project outputs.

The project partners from all Black Sea countries communicate regularly with the Secretariat of the Common Maritime Agenda for the Black Sea and coordinator Mihaela Candea Mirea, Romania. Coordination on national level with the respective contacts from national administrations are also maintained. Contacts will be further developed with DG Mare, DG Environment, SEARICA Intergroup at EU Parliament, etc.

Marine Litter Watch at the EEA, Programme and citizen science community of which BSNN is member, and its coordinator Eda Bayar Aydin will be involved in promotion of RESPONSE outputs, involvement in Digital Toolkit promotion, synergies with the Updated European Beach Litter Assessment on WISE Marine portal etc.

Applying project outputs outside the project area

The project outputs can be applied in Turkey and Moldova, as the Black Sea project partners have various contacts with different profiles familiar to them from completed and ongoing cross-border projects. Universities, scientific research institutes, administrations, and environmental NGOs match the profiles of the RESPONSE stakeholders. The digital content of the project and the specific outputs

can be communicated to interested partners and replicated in the two countries. RESPONSE can serve for upscaling and continuation of activities in the Black Sea basin.

Networking between partner teams and stakeholders

In practical terms regarding networking, the RESPONSE partners from the Black Sea countries have involved key stakeholders in the co-creation process and have prepared the outlines of their national operation plans on training curricula with defined objectives, activities and tools for the training courses, stakeholder groups, and process of addressing the specific needs on country level. They are taking steps toward planning and holding the physical training and identifying suitable trainers to involve in the training process, especially in view of their expertise, experience, and links with the stakeholder groups. The national operational plans also include the processes for recruiting new participants, key performance indicators, timeline of the actions and the roles of training, procedures, guidelines, and templates for interacting with stakeholders and reporting results along with any problems and/or issues encountered during the operation of the trainings. The networking with key stakeholders that represent the competent state authorities of the Black Sea countries will support the implementation of legislation on monitoring and management of marine pollution and will help assess, at various stages, the need for further initiatives such as developing policies on statutory, regulatory or technical issues which emanate from the applicable legislation

5. Setting regional strategic goals of the project exploitation strategy through a Regional Action Plan (RAP) of RESPONSE

5.1 Purpose for the establishment of RAP

The sharing and replicating of the project results is a consistent process that begins with producing guidelines for dissemination of information and project training outputs to key target audiences involving them in co-creation, continues with networking and synergies with other projects, and moves towards empowering stakeholders and joint strategic planning at the regional level.

The Communication Dissemination and Stakeholder Empowerment (CDSE) Plan elaborated in the early stages of the project has helped guide, streamline and harmonize outreach and dissemination activities throughout the implementation period. The principal target groups have been identified and their active participation ensured through different activities of co-designing, elaborating, testing, improving, and implementing the RESPONSE training outputs.

Outreach and active participation of stakeholders and policy makers will be ensured through different activities of co-designing, elaborating, testing, improving, and implementing the RESPONSE training outputs. An essential element of that set of activities is the joint planning process on regional level. The envisaged Regional Action Plan (RAP) of RESPONSE is intended to focus on achieving effective training for preparedness and emergency response, with the aim to mitigate the impacts of marine pollution incidents and consequently reduce marine pollution in the Black Sea basin.

The purpose of RAP is to create a common background- a conceptual and co-operational umbrella- for all BS coastal countries to:

- (a) ensure that they all have contingency planning and coordination / operation mechanisms,
- (b) support institutional developments for sustainable and long-term joint response training activities,
- (c) integrate a large number of marine pollution sources in the monitoring and management scene, supported under specialized advanced training courses.

5.2 Regional actors and their role in view of sustainable institutional participation in marine pollution preparedness and emergency response

Regional actors have been described by categories and roles in view of their sustainable institutional participation in marine pollution preparedness and emergency response in the early stages of the project, as part of the communication strategy and the CDSE plan.

In terms of networking and transferability the stakeholder categories described in the CSDE Plan can be successfully correlated to the key stakeholders identified in the mapping process and used to broaden outreach and transferability of outputs.

The CSDE Plan presents a description of a wider range of stakeholders, including the general public, without specifying the names of national institutions which is different from the stakeholder mapping in D1.1. The analysis, based on expert assessment, compares the categories in terms of influence and power on the one hand and interest in the adoption and development of RESPONSE topics on the other.

The RESPONSE application has identified the following four broad target groups which remain highly relevant in terms of targeted communication and networking and correspond to the target audiences described in other sections of the proposal: (i) policy makers, (ii) relevant stakeholders, (iii) the broad scientific community and iv) the general public.

Some of the groups are quite diverse and would require some differentiation in communication approaches. During project implementation there may be fine-tuning in the communication and manner of involvement of the relevant groups targeted by the project. Some additional relevant target groups and/or audiences may be identified during the project and communication pathways will be adapted to engage those as suitable.

RESPONSE aims to reach diverse target audiences involved in design and implementation of regional scale preparedness and response activities to fight marine pollution of various types, well-known and emerging, including pollution from armed conflicts. They differ in their interest and knowledge and attitudes to the focus of the project and especially in their influence on the process. The target audience is therefore split into primary and secondary audiences according to their interest and influence on the project. They can have different roles in networking and regional strategic planning for further exploitation of the new generation training tools.

Primary audience 1: Policy makers and decision-makers on local, national, Black Sea regional and EU level: local authorities, national authorities including ministries of environment, transport, interior, health, navy etc., regional bodies like the Black Sea Commission, EU agencies like EMSA, Common Maritime Agenda for the Black Sea

RESPONSE seeks to target and inform policy makers on all levels because of their high level of influence on the process of implementation and improvement of policies related to marine environmental protection and emergency response and protection mechanisms.

Primary audience 2: Relevant stakeholders including: marine and environmental protection departments and agencies, including public health agencies, all of them responsible for marine pollution monitoring and protection; maritime administrations, coast guards, port authorities, interior authorities, naval authorities and other responsible authorities for emergency response and preparedness in case of marine accidents and pollution, especially pollution by armed conflicts; businesses affected by marine pollution, coastal businesses concerned by the state of the marine environment and the coast etc.

RESPONSE seeks to target and inform the diverse group of relevant stakeholders because of their high potential to ensure impact and high level of influence on the project focus and outcome. Their level of influence however is lower than the policy makers and decision-makers.

Secondary audience 1: Broader scientific community including researchers and academic entities on marine pollution, environmental management, civil defense

This RESPONSE group includes the scientific institutes, networks, and communities of the partner institutions themselves as well as academic institutions training experts in civil defense, preparedness and response to marine pollution and accidents. It also includes other relevant regional and international research projects funded by the EU and others similar work in the field of marine pollution research, identification of pollution sources and impacts. The group is characterized with strong interest and low level of influence on the policy process.

Secondary audience 2: General public and environmental NGOs

RESPONSE seeks to target and inform the residents of the project areas and then generally of all the Black Sea region. It is essential that the general public be informed as a valuable dissemination output. Organized civil society is valuable supporter of the project teams to raise awareness on marine pollution, prevention, and emergency response to pollution. The group is characterized with considerable level of influence on the policy process, especially when actual pollution accidents take place, and somewhat low level of interest when pollution is not in the focus of public interest.

Those audiences will be assigned specific roles in the regional strategic planning process and the strategy for further exploitation of the RESPONSE new generation training tools.

5.3 Setting of regional strategic goals for the RAP - process of approval of the goals by the project partners

The RESPONSE teams in the process of preparation for the design of the project RAP reviewed and studies several strategic documents for the Black Sea. Among them are the Convention on the Protection of the Black Sea against Pollution (1994) and its relevant protocols, the Strategic Action Plan for the Protection and Rehabilitation of the Black Sea (2009), the Black Sea Synergy, the SRIA and the Common Maritime Agenda for the Black Sea and also the recent EU strategy for a stable and secure Black Sea region from May 2025, aiming to boost connections and growth, by linking Europe with the South Caucasus, Central Asia, and beyond. The focus of EU-Black Sea cooperation within this strategy and its pillars and flagship initiatives are highly relevant to the RESPONSE outputs and involve issues like promoting environmental protection, climate change resilience and preparedness, and civil protection, regional cooperation in addressing risks to the environment and maritime safety and tackling war-related environmental damage. In addition to the above documents, every partner reviewed plans and programmes for training and emergency response capacity building on national level.

The thematic area of RESPONSE has been considered as highly relevant to the current international strategic plans and legal documents related to the Black Sea. The partners have agreed that the project Regional Action Plan must focus on the project achievements in developing and testing new training schemes and curricula for the monitoring, reporting, management, and mitigation of marine pollution, with particular attention to pollution caused by armed conflicts. The partnership has also considered the resources and limitations of the project and focused on two very basic and generic strategic goals for the RAP.

The wealth of partner ideas for specific/engagement objectives and tasks and activities has been recorded for future analysis and review, as well as revision and incorporation in the RAP, along with timelines, responsibilities etc. technical details.

The Action Plan is expected to set strategic goals in developing BS regional cooperation in the field of monitoring and management of marine pollution and foreseeing to facilitate training, knowledge exchange, and cooperation actions among coastal countries.

The **two strategic goals** approved by the partnership are:

1) encourage the regional cooperation and advanced training in monitoring and management of familiar and emerging marine pollution sources, specifically pollution from armed conflicts

2) facilitate training, knowledge exchange, and cooperation actions among coastal countries with particular attention to marine pollution incidents resulting from armed conflicts.

The Action Plan will create the circumstances for the establishment of a regional platform and a framework for the exchange of information and expertise on operational, technical, scientific, legal, and financial matters and will promote spaces for dialogue in conducting coordinated action at the national, regional, and global levels for the implementation of the prevention and emergency responses, including those from armed-conflicts.

5.4 Design of the RAP and the regional co-creation process

The Action Plan will be designed to comprise strategic goals, and specific engagement/dissemination objectives, sets of actions, time-table, assigned responsibilities, along with quantitative targets, and will also outline training mechanisms and contingency planning, thus, allowing for ad-hoc and on-demand actions towards enhancing our capacity to monitor, manage and mitigate marine pollution in the region. The Action Plan will follow the general principles of planning and will provide short, medium, and long-term perspectives for implementation. The roles of the actors involved will be specified. The roles/positions and responsibilities of the people (or institutions) responsible for reaching the goals will be designed in the process of further work. Aligning roles with the strategic goals, specific objectives, tasks etc. would be of crucial significance for the clarity and focus, ensuring the participants know what they are responsible for and how their work contributes to a larger goal or objective.

Currently the partners have provided ideas that have been grouped thematically for further review and assessment. They are provided below and will be considered for refinement and integration in the planning process.

Specific objectives – policy and regulatory process, monitoring

- support the development / improvement of regional regulatory frameworks related to marine pollution monitoring and response and align them with international standards;
- reduce chronic pollution pressures from maritime transport, ports, and coastal activities, aiming at strengthening regional measures to reduce discharges, manage waste and wastewater, reduce underwater noise and cumulative risks in coastal areas;
- encourage the alignment of the monitoring and management of pollution sources, including pollution from armed conflicts, with the tasks and mechanisms of achievement of the Ecosystem Quality Objectives for the Black Sea (Strategic Action Plan BS 2009);
- increase the resilience of coastal communities in the Black Sea, by promoting public participation, educational campaigns and a common culture of prevention and rapid response in emergency cases of marine pollution; articulating a coherent cross-border message through the Black Sea Commission, on the protection of the marine environment.

Specific objectives – training process

- integrate regional training system aiming at optimizing surveillance and alerting, for preparing marine pollution countermeasure capacities, in particular rapid intervention capacities, in

emergency situations, for unifying in a common regional architecture the data support in decision-making;

- consolidate regional exercise and training programs (including BRAVO, table-top and full-scale exercises) aiming at: institutionalizing a multi-annual combined exercise and training program (technical, operational, decision-making) for all riparian states, correlated with the BSC and EMSA mechanisms
- encourage education, awareness, and stakeholder involvement in reducing the risk of pollution aiming to: develop a coordinated regional program of awareness campaigns for coastal communities, economic operators and the maritime sector;
- extend the transferability of the project outside the pilot area, by creating institutional bridges to Moldova and Turkey, and identify possibilities for replicating in the future, the RESPONSE tools, in the wider Black Sea basin;
- encourage the adoption of common standards/guidelines, and procedures for developing training programs that strengthen preparedness and response to marine pollution incidents. These programs should be tailored to the needs of each country and organization, while also maintaining common elements at the regional level, aligned with those of the other Black Sea countries. The goal is to enable coordinated and unified action in times of crisis.
- promote the creation of a regional repository/library that will serve as a common reference point for training materials at the regional level. The RESPONSE digital toolkit can act as the foundation for developing this shared "training material bank."
- encourage shaping the structures and foundations needed to strengthen the exchange of knowledge and experience in contingency planning and coordination/operational mechanisms at an international scale. This will support the adoption and integration of innovative and good practices, help avoid unsuccessful approaches, ensure the continuous updating of knowledge on cutting-edge technologies, and promote the creation of synergies and active networks at the international level.

Tasks – contingency planning and other issues

- carry out an action to harmonize and update the national contingency plans with the Black Sea Regional Contingency Plan, in order to align the national plans for response to accidental pollution with the Black Sea Regional Contingency Plan (BS RCP);
- create a single register with a classification of types and sources of pollution of the Black Sea ecosystems, with a special emphasis on the classification of military pollution, which is relatively new, unstudied and the most dangerous. The formation, discussion and improvement of such a register should take place with the involvement of relevant stakeholders, taking into account their authority, experience, and capabilities to respond to certain types of pollution;
- create an electronic platform for key players in the field of responding to pollution of the Black Sea. On such a platform, it would be advisable to place the above-mentioned register with the definition of potential capabilities, competencies and powers of stakeholders in responding to various types of pollution;

- the electronic register-classifier of pollution proposed by the Ukrainian partners will help to organize rapid, flexible (in the case of unforeseen pollution) coordination of the powers of various stakeholders regarding response, monitoring and source management pollution, including pollution from armed conflicts;
- to fix in the regional regulatory and legal bases/framework provisions on the functioning of the aforementioned electronic register, defining a clear division of functions and powers regarding the administration and use of such a register by stakeholders, taking into account the coordination with international and EU standards and policies.
- integrate numerical modelling and Copernicus services into the pollution response decision-making chain, aiming at: the systematic use of numerical drift/transport models (oil, hazardous substances, debris) and high-resolution meteo-oceanographic models in the risk and vulnerability assessment of sensitive areas, as operational support during probable incidents, post-event assessments and "what-if" scenarios;
- strengthen the regional data and reporting infrastructure for pollution (including marine litter and noise), aiming at: the development of a "Black Sea Pollution Data Hub" aligned with BSIMAP and MSFD (for EU countries).
- to use the project BRIDGE-BS Platform for modelling and calculation of "ecosystem service dynamics" with a RESPONSE E-Platform, essentially converting raw numbers into economic indicators to help the region plan for tourism, aquaculture, and transport sectors. The RESPONSE E-Platform will use historical and real-time data as case study material. It presents data to trainees to teach them how to interpret pollution signals and report them correctly.
- strengthen inter-institutional cooperation and multi-level governance, aiming to clarify and strengthen the roles and cooperation flows between national authorities (environment, transport, coast guard, ports), BSC structures (Advisory Group on the Environmental Safety Aspects of Shipping, LBS/ESAS etc.), EU agencies (EMSA, EEA) and regional initiatives (e.g., twin projects like Black Sea Sierra etc.).
- develop a regional roadmap for the adoption of innovative digital tools, by integrating EO, AI capabilities, numerical modelling, and associated early warning systems/tools into a "regional operational ecosystem", with clear protocols for interoperability/data and information exchange.
- create a regional network/core (of specialists) for joint exercises and pilot operations, including establishing a regional calendar of strategic, tactical, and operational exercises, using the tools, simulations, digital platform/toolkit developed in RESPONSE, for transboundary pollution situations.

5.5 Regional consultation workshop

A regional consultation workshop will be organized where a first structure of the Action Plan will be presented to key stakeholders to ensure their substantial operational impact. To this end, at the workshop, a brief presentation of all the results and lessons learnt from the training activities will be made. The workshop will assess the co-created training curricula and materials and the initial design of the Action Plan. The stakeholders taking part will be acquainted with the digital toolkit and replication guide of RESPONSE.

Their attention will be drawn to the need to conduct sustainable training activities on marine pollution monitoring and emergency response. There is an urgent need that preparedness and response mechanisms on marine pollution should align with conflict resilience frameworks e.g. strengthening of decision-making processes for taking mitigation actions after attacks similar to strengthening after accidental oil spills from shipping activity. Regional stakeholders at the workshop will be addressed with messages about the enormous significance of emergency response planning. Because the duration and severity of war pollution events marine pollution is even more unpredictable, and the role of advanced training and operational capacity is very challenging.

Effort will also be applied to engage regional stakeholders with the idea of integration of the Action Plan within any future update of the Strategic Action Plan for the Environmental Protection and Rehabilitation of the Black Sea or similar strategic documents.

Policy recommendations will be channelled to the competent state authorities of the Black Sea countries at the Regional Workshop that implement legislation on monitoring and management of marine pollution and the need for further initiatives such as developing policies on statutory, regulatory, or technical issues that emanate from the applicable legislation. During the implementation of the RESPONSE project, these needs will be brought to surface, as many opportunities for feedback mechanisms will arise.

The feedback from the workshop and the planning process will be communicated to the key stakeholders.

Conclusions

All EU legislation and their follow-up established mechanisms require that EU and neighbourhood countries should set up systems that are compatible with each other so that countries can share data and the Commission can monitor that the rules are respected. In terms of the project area, not all Black Sea countries share the same legal status (EU, non-EU), with Ukraine currently in the process of entering the EU, nor they endorse same institutional cultures or access and familiarity to technological advances.

In the field of preparedness and response to marine pollution this means that in some cases incompatible and incomparable data and methodologies are applied for monitoring, training, and assessment purposes. Lack of modern equipment and ICT tools to provide relevant platforms for data exchange is hindering harmonized operations.

RESPONSE is working to improve the situation and provide the regional Black Sea community and stakeholders with new training schemes and curricula for the monitoring, reporting, management and mitigation of marine pollution, with particular attention to pollution caused by armed conflicts. The stakeholders' societal needs and requirements will drive the co-creation of the framework for the establishment and operation of an advanced training system. Towards this direction the project has explored and addressed the challenges, resources, needs and structure of these authorities/organizations aiming to provide tailored training schemes which will be performed, but also updated, on a regular basis for a long period. To seal the sustainability of these processes, RESPONSE will develop specific Regional Action Plans to ensure a continuous interactive process with evaluation and fine-tuning well beyond the project, and the introduction of incentives for further participation and uptake. Setting the strategic goals is the start of the Regional Action Plan, for driving sustainable institutional participation, and an exploitation strategy for the project resources.