UN 2023 WATER CONFERENCE

New York City Multi-stakeholder Pledge on Localising the Blue Economy

On the occasion of the **UN 2023 Water Conference** side event **Localising the Blue Economy: A City-Basin Approach** held on 24 March 2023 in New York City, the OECD and partners of the **Initiative "Cities and Regions for a Blue Economy"**[1], namely the *International Association of Cities and Ports (AIVP), Atlantic Cities, ICLEI – Local Governments for Sustainability, International Network of Basin Organisations (INBO), Ocean & Climate Platform, Resilient Cities Network and United Cities and Local Governments (UCLG) Africa*:

1. Acknowledge **the role of cities, regions and basins** in fostering RISC-proof blue economies that are: *Resilient* to economic and water-related shocks and risks exacerbated by climate change; *Inclusive* of local communities and stakeholders, especially the most vulnerable; *Sustainable* environmentally, to maximise economic benefits while limiting greenhouse gas emissions, pollution, ecosystem degradation and biodiversity loss; an*d Circular*, to limit resource extraction and tackle associated waste and pollution, including from plastics.

2. Promote a **"city-basin" approach** to water resources management beyond administrative boundaries, and across relevant institutions, from **source to sea**, to tackle water risks and pollution and unlock the potential of the blue economy through stakeholder engagement, planning, coordination, data collection and monitoring.

3. Encourage **greater coordination** across local and national government departments in charge of oceans, freshwater and aquifers for coherent responses to current and emerging environmental, economic and social challenges magnified by climate change, population and economic growth and unsustainable land use practices.

4. Nurture a **systems approach** to the blue economy, involving all blue economy sectors[2] and players, such as seafood, tourism, transport, port activities and water-based renewable energy, to make the most of synergies across water, climate mitigation, climate adaptation, waste, industrial policy and land use planning, among others.

5. Call on national and subnational governments to **set sound incentives and frameworks to catalyse investments** needed for sustainable blue economies at local level, to avoid and reduce waste generation, greenhouse gas emissions, water and land contamination, depletion of natural resources and biodiversity loss.

6. Encourage meaningful engagement of **local communities** in knowledge-sharing and bottom-up learning, striving to ensure equal access to marine resources and freshwater sources, acknowledging local specificities, histories and heritage, and fostering inclusiveness and **gender equality** of traditional and emerging blue economy sectors.

7. Explore the opportunities of a sustainable blue economy for job creation, innovation and environmental protection, particularly through **emerging sectors** (e.g. blue bioeconomy, biotechnology), while ensuring a **just transition**.

8. Support the collection, analysis and disclosure of **granular** socio-economic and environmental **data** that can be used to inform blue economy decision-making.

9. Promote **capacity development** and ocean literacy, and ensure that educational programmes, especially for **youth,** are tailored to local sustainable blue economy needs.

10. Will strive to **support governments at all levels** to foster RISC-proof blue economies, by providing guidance, sharing international best practices and providing new data and measurement tools.

---

[1] OECD (2016) defines the ocean economy as "the sum of the economic activities of ocean-based industries, together with the assets, goods and services provided by marine ecosystems". This pledge uses the term "blue economy" to refer to the "ocean economy" and other economic activities based on freshwater ecosystems.

[2] Seafood; water-related tourism; blue bioeconomy, biotechnology and research & education; water passenger transport and related services; port activities; shipbuilding and repair; shipping; and water-based renewable energy.

Background on Cities and Regions for a Blue Economy

The blue economy can be a powerful driver of sustainable economic growth in cities and regions, but it can generate environmental degradation

The ocean (blue) economy, conservatively valued by the OECD (2016) at around USD 1.5 trillion per year in 2010, takes place, creates value and provides employment at local level. The blue economy also includes non-market economic benefits provided by freshwater, coastal and marine ecosystems (e.g. natural river systems, wetlands, mangroves and coral reefs), such as carbon storage, coastal protection, cultural values and biodiversity.

Preliminary results from the OECD Global Survey on Localising the Blue Economy, which collected 56 responses from subnational governments and river basin organisations from 30 OECD and non-OECD countries to date (March 2023), highlighted that the two highest-ranking drivers for blue economy activities in cities and regions are economic, namely to boost GDP growth and create jobs. At the same time, the blue economy is not always green, with pollution from plastics and waste generation being the main impacts of the blue economy at local level according to respondents.

Cities and regions have a key role to play in the blue economy, but their potential is not fully exploited

Core competences of subnational governments such as land use, spatial planning and waste management greatly affect the level of water security and quality, which, in turn, affects the blue economy. Although many national governments have developed formal blue economy strategies, policies, programmes or legislation, very few of them define a clear role for subnational governments and mechanisms for local implementation.

A resilient, inclusive, sustainable and circular (RISC-proof) blue economy in cities and regions can help address climate mitigation and adaptation challenges simultaneously

Climate change threatens the blue economy by magnifying the risks of "too much", "too little" and "too polluted" water. At the same time, the blue economy can be a significant source of carbon emissions and pollution. Cities, regions and basins should therefore prepare to respond to these challenges by developing resilient, inclusive, sustainable and circular (RISC-proof) blue economies, which are:

- *Resilient* to economic and water-related shocks and risks exacerbated by climate change;
- *Inclusive* of local communities and stakeholders, especially the most vulnerable;
- *Sustainable* environmentally, to maximise economic benefits while limiting GHG emissions, pollution, ecosystem degradation and biodiversity loss;
- *Circular*, to limit resource extraction and tackle associated waste and pollution, including from plastics.

Getting the governance right can unlock the potential of a RISC-proof blue economy in cities and regions

To unleash the full range of benefits of a RISC-proof blue economy, governments can take action on three fronts. First, national governments could adopt a *localised* approach to the blue economy when developing and implementing national blue economy strategies and initiatives, co-ordinating actions with cities and regions. Second, governments could take a *systems* approach to the blue economy, to make the most of synergies with related policy areas including water, climate mitigation, climate adaptation, waste, industrial policy and land use planning among others. Finally, governments could apply a *functional* lens to the blue economy, developing city-basin links on the ground to address water risks.