

## How to increase citizen participation in marine and freshwater initiatives across Europe?

### WHAT IS THIS STUDY ABOUT?

From October 2022 – January 2023, the PREP4BLUE team undertook an analysis of citizen participation in marine and freshwater activities across Europe and its waters. The survey was translated into 11 languages and disseminated through research, advocacy, industry, and community networks around Europe.

The aims of the study were to examine the organisations and projects working on citizen engagement in the space, and to assess their needs in terms of resources and training. The results will be useful to those planning citizen-focused activities in marine and freshwater initiatives. The overall goal is to place citizen engagement at the core of marine and freshwater ecosystem restoration, pollution reduction, and making the blue economy carbon neutral and circular, in line with the EU Mission: Restore our Ocean and Waters by 2030.

### WHAT IS PREP4BLUE?

PREP4BLUE is a €4.9 million, three-year project that will set the foundations for co-creating and co-implementing the research and innovation required to achieve the EU Mission: Restore our Ocean and Waters by 2030.

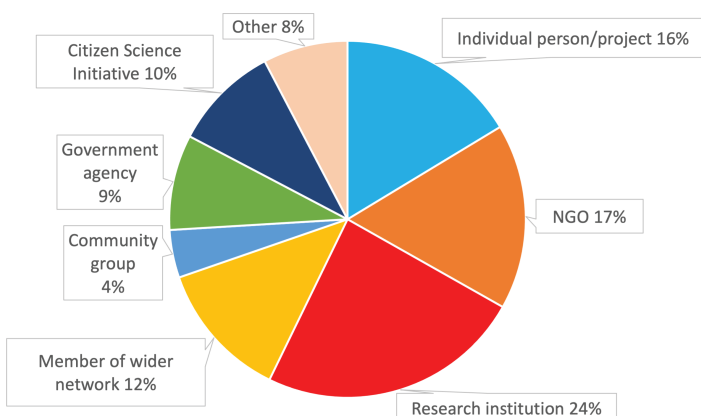
PREP4BLUE's overarching objective is to facilitate a successful first phase (2022-2025) of the Mission, preparing the ground for inspiring and engaging citizens and stakeholders.

### RESPONSES

#### RESPONSES RECEIVED:

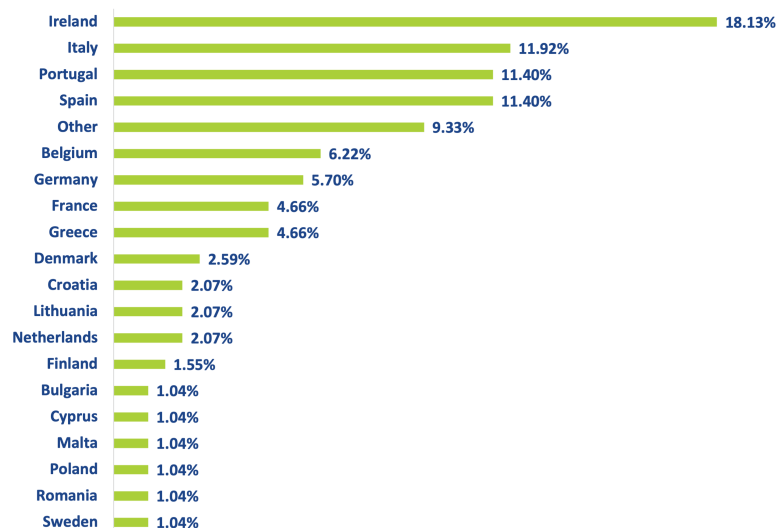
**137 valid responses received from 26+ different countries (some respondents are globally active).**

Respondents include individuals, ocean literacy and advocacy groups, NGOs, government policymakers, R&I, and more!



Wide range of stakeholders, from local citizen science initiatives to European policymakers!

#### WHERE RESPONDENTS WORK



Atlantic coastal countries best represented.

Responses from land-locked EU states relatively low or absent.

Presents a challenge: How to better integrate work on rivers & lakes with the ocean?



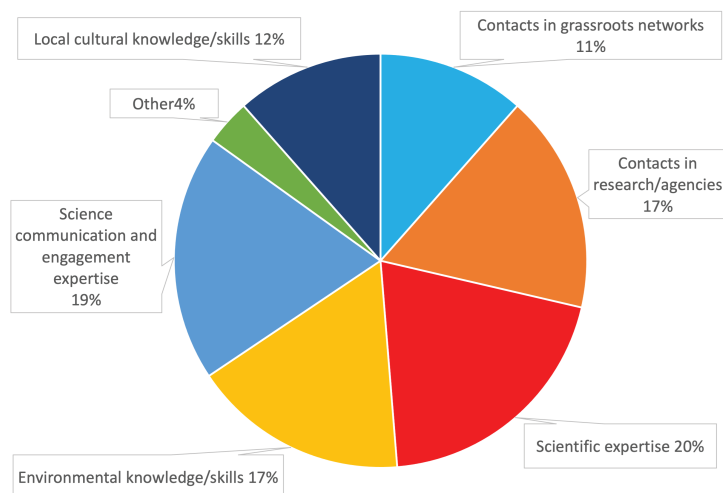
# RESULTS

## WHAT RESOURCES DO YOU HAVE THAT ARE VALUABLE FOR ENGAGING CITIZENS IN MARINE OR FRESHWATER ADVOCACY/LITERACY?

Resources widely available across the sector: scientific expertise, marine science communication or engagement expertise, and contacts in research or agency networks.

Less widely available: local cultural knowledge/skills, and contacts in grassroots or community networks.

This is a barrier: Essential to connect expertise and advocacy activity with the grassroots, especially in culturally sensitive ways.



## WHAT BARRIERS, IF ANY, PREVENT YOU FROM BETTER ENGAGING CITIZENS?

Lack of resources (particularly funding) and lack of time are major barriers.

Funding must better target activities that engage citizens in their design, practice, and evaluation.

Contacting citizens and maintaining a stable volunteer base are also significant barriers.

Barriers in order of percentage chosen: 1. Lack of resources (28.03%), 2. Lack of time (24.57%), 3. Lack of sufficient means of contacting citizens (18.34%), 4. Lack of stable volunteer base (14.19%), 5. Lack of skills or upskilling opportunities (8.65%), 6. Other (5.19%), 7. None of the above (1.04%).

## WHAT TRAINING WOULD YOU FIND BENEFICIAL TO HELP YOU ENGAGE CITIZENS?

- Fostering sustainable behaviour change (51.82% of respondents)
- Evaluating impact in citizen engagement projects (48% of respondents)
- Empowering citizens to participate in initiatives (45.26% of respondents)

## WHAT IS YOUR PRIMARY NEED IN TERMS OF ENGAGING CITIZENS?

- Funding
- Time
- Democratic structures that empower citizens and deliver results for participants!
- Means of reaching citizens
- Citizen participation training

# KEY RECOMMENDATIONS

## RESOURCES

- More funding targeted at citizen participation
- Project applications should include more time & budget for citizen engagement

## STRUCTURES

- Use participatory methods to build democratic structures (e.g. assemblies) for initiative design, monitoring, management. These must deliver tangible results for participants and affected communities

## PROJECTS & ACTIVITIES

- Include NGOs and community groups in project teams to reach citizens, gain grassroots contacts and local cultural knowledge
- Integrate social scientific knowledge and approaches to ecosystems and technology-based projects
- More effort needed to network marine-based projects with freshwater projects, and communicate the importance of ocean science to non-coastal regions

## TRAINING

- Provide training in behaviour change, impact monitoring, citizen engagement techniques, social inclusion in marine & freshwater advocacy activities, and how to integrate time/resources for citizen engagement into funding proposals