



## Deliverable 5.4

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BlueBioClusters Startups/SME support package

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<b>Abstract</b>	The support package includes different types of activities designed to support startups and SMEs operating in the target value chains in the project regions to unlock their development.
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## Acronyms

AKR	ASSOCIATION KLAIPEDA REGION
BBA	BLUEBIO ALLIANCE
BBC	BlueBioClusters
BioPark	TARTU BIOPARK
D	Deliverable
DBC	DE BLAUWE CLUSTER
EU	European Union
GDPR	General Data Protection Regulation
INNO	INNOVATUM
IOC	ICELAND OCEAN CLUSTER
IP	Intellectual Property
KDMP	Knowledge and Data Management Plan
KU	KLAIPEDA UNIVERSITY
LEGASEA	BLUE LEGASEA
MVP	Minimum Viable Products
PMBA	POLE MER BRETAGNE ATLANTIQUE
PU	Public
R&D	Research & Development
SAMS	THE SCOTTISH ASSOCIATION FOR MARINE SCIENCE
SME	Small & Medium Enterprises
SUBNet	SUBMARINER Network for Blue Growth EEIG
T	Task
TRL	Technology Readiness Level
UTartu	UNIVERSITY OF TARTU
WP	Work package

## Executive Summary

The development and support of startups and SMEs operating in the blue bioeconomy sector require strategies that are both flexible and regionally sensitive. Within this context, WP5 of the BBC project established a consolidated strategy to foster innovation and growth among these businesses through tailored actions and initiatives. Building on the outcomes of previous tasks and deliverables, this report provides a comprehensive overview of the methodologies, processes, and achievements throughout WP5.

This report presents the results of a joint effort by all BBC partners, leveraging their experience, expertise, and network management to develop a common strategy across regions for supporting startups and SMEs operating in the blue bioeconomy. D5.4 is an output of T5.3 - *Create Regional BlueBioClusters Network of Mentors/Coaches/Support Actors*, T5.4 - *Blue Bio (Inter-) Regional Mentoring/Coaching* and T5.6 - *Capacity Building / co-creation workshops*. It presents the ways in which the BBC project supported the growth of blue bio startups and SMEs through capacity building, boot camps, matchmaking, and tailored mentorship.

Finally, D5.4 offers a reflective analysis of the overall impact of these activities, incorporating feedback gathered from participants and resulting impacts throughout the process.

## Introduction

The sustainable growth of startups and SMEs in the blue bioeconomy sector depends on customised support, which takes into account regional specificities and business challenges. In response to this need, WP5 designed a consolidated strategy to assist and support companies in all project regions through a series of coordinated and regionally adapted actions. This report presents an overview of the methodologies, processes, and achievements resulting from these activities. Tasks 5.1 to 5.6 form an integrated, step-by-step support package that ensures tailored, needs-based assistance, from initial mapping to long-term capacity building and investment readiness. The infographic below shows how tasks were interlinked in WP5 while contributing to a holistic approach.

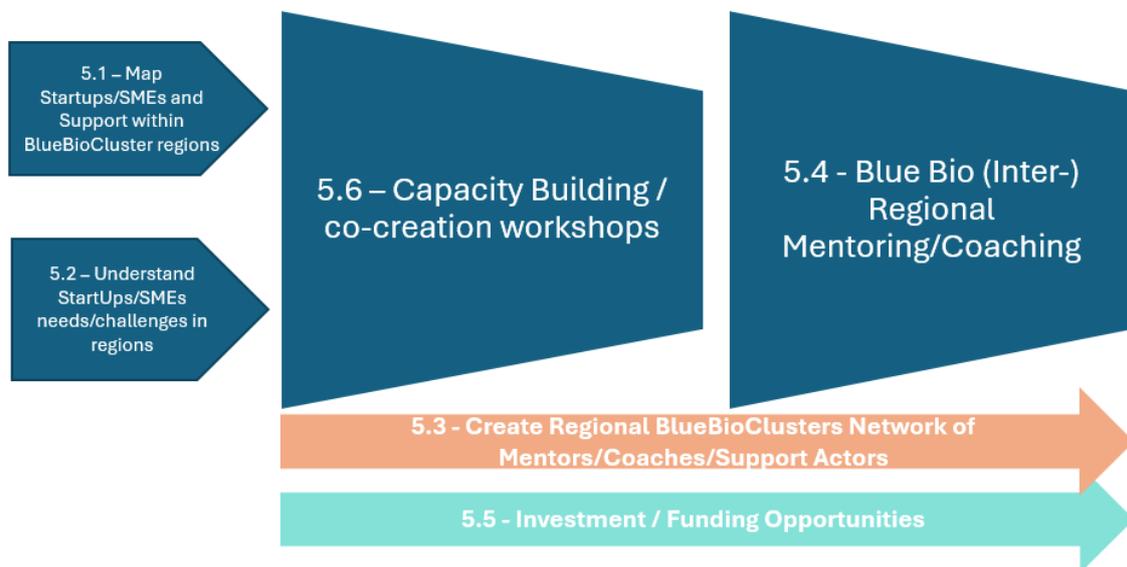


Figure 1: WP5 Task Flow.

Beginning by mapping the stakeholders operating in the blue bioeconomy across regions and gaining an understanding of common challenges faced in the regions allowed us to make qualitative and quantitative insights into the specific challenges and support needs for startups and SMEs. These findings ensured that the support package was demand-driven and regionally adapted rather than generic or top-down.

Grounded in a collaborative approach, this deliverable reflects all BBC partners' combined efforts and expertise. Together, they designed and implemented a cross-regional support strategy focused on four main pillars: **capacity building**, **bootcamps**, **matchmaking** and **tailored mentorship**. These initiatives were deployed to address the unique challenges faced by startups and SMEs across the 9 different regions of BBC<sup>1</sup>, ensuring a relevant and impactful engagement. Together, these initiatives strengthened the blue bioeconomy ecosystem and empowered startups and SMEs through targeted upskilling and collaborative engagement.

Building on the earlier work done during the BBC project, which aimed to provide insights into startups and SMEs in the blue bioeconomy sector and the challenges

<sup>1</sup> Belgium, Estonia, France (Brittany), Iceland, Lithuania, Norway, Portugal, Scotland, Sweden

they face across various regions, finding an effective communication channel was essential. This led to the creation of the **BlueBioMatch platform**, designed to connect different regions, startups, SMEs, mentors, and project partners. This digital platform, developed by a BBC project in collaboration with other like-minded projects and activities, plays a crucial role in connecting all stakeholders in real time, enabling interaction among them. It helps stimulate and accelerate transnational cooperation by engaging various stakeholders and gathering input from startups and SMEs within each value chain, regional cluster, and network.

The following section will provide a detailed exploration of the startup/SME support package and its outcomes.

## Methodology

The methodology used to create this report was based on internal reflections, data gathered, and brainstorming among partners to understand the type of activities that could bring more impact in each region based on partners' experience managing their networks and stakeholders operating in blue bioeconomy sectors. Idiosyncrasies were considered on a regional basis to establish a common strategy that could benefit all, taking into account specific regional adaptations. During the process of creating the support package, it was important to understand the following topics in the different regions:

- Challenges per region (D5.2).
- Level of engagement of stakeholders operating in target value chains.
- Willingness to participate in project activities.
- Dimension of the blue bioeconomy sector.
- Language preference for communication (between English and the language of the country of origin).
- Time zones and usual working hours.

All partners shared their experiences and contributed to establishing a baseline for the support strategy for startups and SMEs, making it more customised. To do so, some actions were taken into account, such as:

- Adapted agendas, topics and workshops per region based on identified challenges.
- Direct contact/invitations using emails/calls to specific startups/SMEs.
- Translation of the communication materials into the local language.
- Adjusting activity schedules to meet the needs of different time zones and ensure participation in transnational activities.

In terms of the support package's activities: **capacity building**, **boot camps**, **matchmaking**, and **tailored mentorship** —all planned activities under the BBC were developed and adapted accordingly.

### Capacity Building

Capacity building encompassed a broader set of activities, including workshops, training programmes, and co-creation sessions, aimed at strengthening both individual and organisational capabilities. In this context, it was targeted to:

- Enhancing entrepreneurial and innovation skills.
- Promoting knowledge sharing and best practices within and across regions.
- Fostering a culture of sustainability, circular economy, and responsible resource use.

Capacity building empowered startups and SMEs to operate more effectively and sustainably within the blue bioeconomy.

## **Bootcamps**

Bootcamps were intensive, time-bound training sessions designed to equip startups with the practical tools and knowledge necessary to refine their business models, validate their value propositions, build networks and pitch effectively to investors or other relevant stakeholders. In the context of the BBC project, the bootcamps:

- Focused on sustainability-driven business strategies.
- Helped teams align their innovation with environmental regulations and market needs.
- Provided hands-on mentoring and peer feedback in a collaborative setting.

They served as catalysts for rapid progress, allowing startups to make significant leaps quickly.

## **Matchmaking**

Matchmaking facilitates generated strategic connections between startups and SMEs and relevant stakeholders such as investors, mentors, researchers, industry partners, and public authorities. By creating opportunities for cross-sectoral and cross-regional collaboration, matchmaking helps companies gain access to:

- Specialized knowledge and complementary expertise.
- Funding opportunities and potential partnerships.
- Value chains and markets beyond their local context.
- Access to support network and clusters.

This exchange accelerated innovation, encouraged technology transfer, and increased the chances of successful market entry and scaling.

## **Tailored Mentorship**

Tailored mentorship provided individualized guidance based on the specific needs, stage of development, and regional context of each startup or SME. Through access to experienced mentors, companies receive:

- Strategic advice on product development, commercialization, and growth.

- Support in navigating technical, regulatory, and operational challenges.
- Support in designing a business strategy and funding.
- Ongoing feedback that enhances resilience and long-term viability.

This personalized approach ensured that support was relevant, actionable, and aligned with the startup and SMEs' sustainable development goals.

Together, these four activities created a comprehensive support package for the regional innovation ecosystems that stimulates innovation and accelerates the growth and impact of sustainable business ideas. By addressing different stages of the entrepreneurial journey, from ideation and validation to scaling and market integration, these initiatives can directly contribute to a more connected, resilient, and environmentally responsible blue bioeconomy growth across regions.



Figure 2 : Startups and SME support activities.

To drive this support package and support all partners, BBA (as WP leader), together with INNO (task leader) and SUB (leader of BBC), established some supporting actions along the project, such as:

- Exploring the potential of Microsoft Teams for communication and the archiving of supporting documents.
- Shared files (Excel) for tracking and task status.
- Creation of a dedicated group for matchmaking activities in BlueBioMatch.
- Bi-monthly meetings between partners to follow matchmaking needs and tailored mentorship processes.
- Creation of a guide and templates to support the tailored mentorship process (Annex 1).
- Communication material for bootcamps and capacity building activities.

## Support Package Activities

To stimulate and accelerate the development of a sustainable blue bioeconomy across the regions, it is essential to provide startups and SMEs with targeted support mechanisms that not only enhance their technical and business capacities but also connect them with key players across the ecosystem. The following activities, which are part of the designed support package: capacity building, bootcamps, matchmaking, and tailored mentorship, played a critical role in enabling these

companies to transform their sustainable and innovative business ideas into viable and impactful ventures.

## i) Capacity Building

Following what was planned under T5.6 – *Capacity Building / co-creation workshops*, all partners promoted co-creation workshops in their region to equip startups and SMEs with the practical tools and knowledge to promote their growth and development, overcoming their challenges. Based on the qualitative and quantitative information about the hurdles and support needs for startups and SMEs, the co-creation workshops were regionally adapted and designed to address these needs and facilitated and designed by project partners to include relevant actors from along subsector value chains to participate in co-designing solutions. The co-creation workshops were developed around multi-helix representatives: corporates, SMEs and startups, academia, investors, public organisations and community to foster collaborations and knowledge uptake by different perspectives and nourish entrepreneurial talent at the local level.

When defining the themes for the co-creation workshops, understanding regional challenges was crucial for attracting and engaging participants, as well as ensuring that the resulting solutions would be grounded in the local context. Additionally, BBC tools were incorporated to support the co-creation element and provide a guide for strategic discussions in determining regional Blue Visions, as well as blue bio value chain discussions using the Inter-active Value Chain Facilitation Tool (D2.2) and the Ecosystem Approach Wheel (D3.3 and D3.4). By giving the participants tools to support their pathways and training on how to make use of them for a sustainable transition within the blue bio value chains, the project was able to promote the growth of the blue bioeconomy sector in the regions. Thus, drivers for job creation were settled in terms of what is required in terms of skills and capabilities to promote innovative solutions, such as nature-inclusive or nature-based solutions. Promotion of entrepreneurial works as a catalyst to motivate more and better startups, creating more highly qualified jobs. Founders had the opportunity to develop new skills and establish competence frameworks that contributed to their qualifications. This not only strengthened their startups but also attracted investment, facilitating growth and job creation, ultimately leading to economic progress. The various themes addressed in this initiative contributed to the vision of a new workforce for the blue economy, supported by a diverse set of skills and competencies tailored to blue jobs. By incorporating a sustainability-oriented approach from the early stages of development through to growth, this capacity-building effort aimed to enhance the social aspect of sustainability, particularly by promoting job creation in regions.

Resulting solutions from co-creation workshops could be applied to be part of the Regional Bootcamps.

More detailed information and the report of the Transnational Bootcamps' activity can be consulted in D5.3 - *Results from Regional Co-Creation Workshops/Transnational Bootcamps*.

## ii) Bootcamps

Following what was planned under T5.6 – *Capacity Building / co-creation workshops*, a series of Transnational Bootcamps was designed with the goal of equipping startups with practical tools and knowledge to promote their growth and development, overcoming their challenges. Considering the qualitative and quantitative insights collected in terms of the challenges and support needs for startups and SMEs, bootcamps were designed by a multidisciplinary consortium of partners involving their networks: corporates, academia, investors, public organisations and other stakeholders to foster collaboration and knowledge uptake from different perspectives. Overall, the 3 Trans-Regional Blue Bio Bootcamps and the final Transnational Bootcamp included the use of co-creation workshops, pitching sessions and supporting materials according to the needs of the startups supported by invited experts who delivered content and facilitated workshops during the bootcamps.



Figure 3 Series of Transnational Bootcamps.

By participating in the BBC Blue Bio Bootcamps, startups and SMEs had the chance to connect with potential experts/mentors and be included in the BBC project and partner network. By inviting all participants to join the BlueBioMatch platform, they were exposed to further possibilities for partnerships and collaborations, showcase their products, and get access to more funding opportunities.

The final Transnational Bootcamp aimed to connect participants with investors by showcasing their businesses to a targeted audience of invited investors, including business angels, venture capitalists, incubators, and public grant consultants. This initiative aligns with strategy T5.5, which focuses on Investment and Funding Opportunities. The goal is to connect startups with potential investors and funding

mechanisms through investment-readiness initiatives, pitch sessions, and introductions to relevant financial instruments. This approach ensures that innovative business ideas receive the financial support needed to scale and successfully enter the market.

Full information and the report of the Transnational Bootcamps' activity can be consulted in D5.3 - *Results from Regional Co-Creation Workshops/Transnational Bootcamps*.

### iii) Matchmaking

The Matchmaking process was launched at the beginning of the project by mapping stakeholders under the work of T5.1—*Map Startups/SMEs and Support within BlueBioClusters regions*. The result is presented in D5.1—*Database of Startups/SME in the BlueBioClusters regions*. It served as a baseline for designing relevant interventions by locating the key actors, capabilities, and gaps in the current innovation and support landscape.

The matchmaking process gained significant momentum in 2023 and 2024 when BlueBioMatch was launched as an effective communication tool, enabling interactions to expand rapidly.

By creating a dedicated group on the platform to support matchmaking activities, BBM validated its role as a key enabler, confirming its effectiveness in accelerating connections and engaging more stakeholders.



Figure 4 Matchmaking working group in BlueBioMatch.

All partners contributed to matchmaking activities and all interactions were recorded in a Excel file to track all interactions and monitor their progress during the project.

Name	Request	Request Date	Channel	Contact person	Contact email	Country	City	Type	Link to	Link to date	Link to Channel	Follow up date	Follow up details	Status	Matchmaking final details

Figure 5 Matchmaking monitoring Excel.

By collecting details of interactions, including company name, contact, country, city, and request/need, each partner can follow up on progress and provide concluding remarks for each interaction.

As of May 5th, 2025, the progress of all interactions is summarised in the graphic below, showing over 160 entries resulting from facilitated one-to-one engagements.

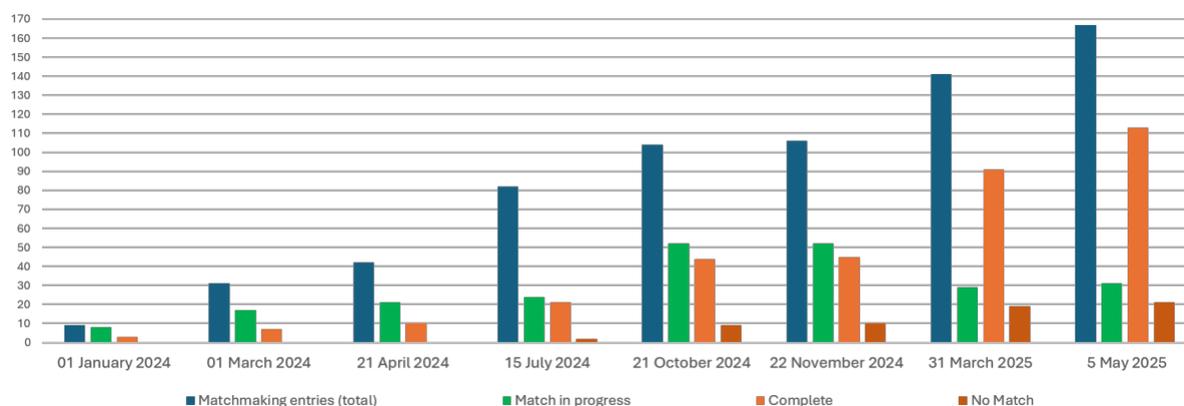


Figure 6 Evolution of matchmaking interactions 2023-2024.

Considering the graphic, more than 110 entries were completed, meaning that a contact was established between the two identified parties where there was a match between the interests of one party and the needs of another. A disclaimer that further interactions beyond the initial matchmaking on each connection are not within the scope or control of the consortium.

The requests were very diverse, depending on specific challenges each company was trying to tackle in its value chain. Analysis of the needs and matches made, we can see that in general, companies were looking for:

- Strategic Partnerships:

Companies were actively seeking strategic partnerships with organisations that could complement their core capabilities. This included collaborations from adjacent or complementary sectors (upstream and downstream), aiming to expand market reach, accelerate time-to-market for new products, and share the risks involved in innovative projects. These partnerships are seen as a key strategy for gaining a competitive edge in a more agile and sustainable manner.

- Technological Providers:

There was a strong demand for technological providers to scale and customize solutions. Companies aimed to have access to these technologies to test their operations, products, or services to create new products and blue bio-based applications, increase efficiency, reduce costs, and create new business models.

- Funding Opportunities:

Identifying funding opportunities, both public and private, was also a major priority to create direct contact with investors, joint ventures and consortium creation to access investment funds, innovation incentive programmes, venture capital, and government grants. Companies were looking for these financial resources to support R&D initiatives, prototype development, scale, and market expansion.

- Joint R&D Ventures:

There was significant interest in launching joint research and development projects, particularly focused on new applications, products, or technological solutions. These ventures typically involve collaborations with universities, research centres, startups, and other companies with complementary expertise. The goal was to accelerate blue bio-based innovation through the sharing of knowledge, infrastructure, and skilled human resources.

Detailed information on the needs and matches is available, and due to the details included, and according to GDPR, this information was considered sensitive and used only for internal purposes of the BBC project.

## iv) Tailored Mentorship

Included in T5.4 - *Blue Bio (Inter-)Regional Mentoring and Coaching*, with the aim to deliver direct support through cross-regional mentoring and coaching activities and supported by the work developed under T5.3 – *Create Regional BlueBioClusters Network of Mentors, Coaches, and Support Actors*, this task activates the mentoring process by offering tailored mentorship to startups/SMEs across and between regions. This mentoring network was further strengthened, and its success is largely attributed to the use of the BlueBioMatch platform. Mentors were selected by startups and SMEs through the BlueBioMatch platform, which features over 60 mentors with detailed profiles and descriptions of their areas of expertise.

Task 5.4 establishes targeted support for regional innovation ecosystems, connecting startups with experienced mentors, industry professionals, and innovation support actors. These networks are key enablers for delivering personalised guidance and fostering collaboration at the regional and transnational levels.

This activity was focused on tailored mentoring to a selection of startups and SMEs in the regions represented by the BBC, with specific expertise to address their unique challenges/needs and fill the knowledge gap, working towards growing/improving their blue bio business.

In total, 40 startups and SMEs had access to tailored mentorship across different regions. Various tailored mentorship methods were applied, including a few small collective sessions on common topics.

The tailored processes were slightly adapted per region, mainly using:

- One-to-one mentorship processes where a startup/SME had the possibility to choose one or two mentors to receive support during the period from September 2024 to March 2025.
- Collective mentorship sessions were used when common needs were detected, and one mentor could support a group of startups/SMEs during the same sessions, facing the same needs.

The mentoring processes had an average duration of three months, with around ten sessions per process in some cases. At the end of the process, all mentors submitted reports detailing the progress and outcomes, which are archived in the BBC records, a total of 27 reports on mentoring processes.

The assessment and selection of startups and SMEs eligible for mentorship were primarily based on participants identified during the Transnational Blue Bio Bootcamps. This group was further expanded to include other regional startups and SMEs that had demonstrated development needs hindering their growth in the regions. Mentors were selected by the companies themselves, with support from BBC partners. The selection process leveraged the BlueBioMatch platform and partner networks, focusing on aligning mentors with the companies' specific challenges and needs, while also considering availability and suitability. This approach contributed to building a strong regional network of experts and enablers. BBC partners' guidance was crucial to support the tailored mentorship processes by facilitating the contacts, interactions, kicking off the processes and keeping track of the sessions. BBC partners followed up on the mentoring process, supported the interaction with the mentors, and organised events and other meetings to ensure the development needs of the companies were met.

The mentorship process was grounded in expert knowledge exchange, skills development, and strategic business advice to address company-specific challenges. Upon analysis of the development needs and mentor matchmaking, two main areas of focus for mentorship were identified: 1) Business & Strategy, and 2) Technology.

The list of topics addressed by the mentors in the two main focus areas included:

#### A. Business & Strategy

- Business Planning and Strategy

Developing a clear and structured business plan that outlines the company's long-term goals, competitive positioning, value creation approach, and roadmap for growth. This includes market analysis, operational planning, and identifying key performance indicators to guide decision-making and measure success.

- Financial strategy

Designing a robust financial framework to ensure long-term sustainability and profitability. This involves managing cash flow, setting financial goals, optimizing capital structure, and aligning financial resources with strategic objectives to support growth and mitigate risk.

- Business model

Defining how the company creates, delivers, and captures value. This includes identifying revenue streams, cost structures, key partners, customer segments, and channels. A strong business model is essential for ensuring scalability and resilience in a competitive market.

- Cost-benefit analysis and Budgeting

Conducting thorough cost-benefit analyses to evaluate the economic viability of projects or strategic decisions. This process supports the development of realistic budgets and resource allocation plans that align with business priorities and maximize return on investment.

- Investment and Funding Support

Identifying and securing the necessary financial resources to support growth and innovation. This includes preparing for investment rounds, engaging with venture capitalists, applying for grants, and developing investor-ready documentation such as business plans, financial forecasts, and pitch decks.

- Market position and Branding

Establishing a strong market position through consistent branding, differentiation, and value-driven messaging. This involves defining the company's identity, reputation, and unique selling points to build customer loyalty and stand out in a crowded marketplace.

- Market entry for novel products

Developing go-to-market strategies for launching innovative products or services. This includes market research, regulatory considerations, pricing strategies, distribution channels, and customer acquisition plans to ensure a successful market entry.

- Define Value Proposition and target Markets

Clearly articulating the unique value the company offers to its customers and identifying the most relevant market segments. This helps in tailoring marketing efforts, product development, and sales strategies to meet the needs of high-potential customer groups.

- Scaleup strategy and market fit

Designing a growth strategy that allows the business to scale operations while maintaining product-market fit. This involves refining offerings based on customer feedback, expanding into new markets, optimizing processes, and ensuring operational readiness for scaling.

- Stakeholders mapping and management

Identifying all key stakeholders and understanding their influence, interests, and expectations. Effective stakeholder management includes engagement strategies, communication plans, and conflict resolution mechanisms to foster strong relationships and alignment.

- Marketing Strategy

Creating a comprehensive marketing strategy that drives brand awareness, customer engagement, and sales. This includes digital and traditional marketing tactics, content creation, customer journey mapping, and performance tracking to optimize campaigns.

- Public Relations plan

Developing a proactive Public Relations plan to manage the company's public image, media relations, and communication during critical events. This supports brand credibility, builds stakeholder trust, and enhances target market visibility.

- Pitch and Communication

Crafting compelling pitches and communication materials tailored to various audiences such as investors, partners, or clients. This includes refining key messages, storytelling, visual support (e.g., pitch decks), and public speaking skills to effectively convey value and vision.

- Sustainability in business

Integrating environmental, social, and governance (ESG) principles into the business model. This includes sustainable sourcing, energy efficiency, ethical practices, and

long-term impact strategies that align with global sustainability standards and enhance brand reputation.

## Technology

- R&D Planning and Support

Comprehensive guidance in planning and managing research and development activities. This includes defining R&D goals, aligning them with business strategy, identifying key innovation areas, coordinating R&D teams, and managing timelines, resources, and risks. The objective is to foster innovation while ensuring efficiency and alignment with market needs.

- Intellectual Property support

Providing expertise in protecting inventions through patents, trademarks, copyrights, and trade secrets. This includes IP strategy development, patent landscaping, freedom-to-operate analysis, support with applications and filings, and guidance on IP commercialisation to maximise the value of technological assets.

- Prototyping

Assisting in the design, development, and refinement of prototypes to test concepts and validate technical feasibility. This involves selecting appropriate materials, methods, and tools to develop MVPs or functional models for testing and demonstration purposes.

- Selection of microorganism strains and processes

Supporting the identification and selection of optimal microorganism strains (e.g., microalgae) for specific applications based on desired traits such as growth rate, metabolite production, or environmental resilience. This also includes choosing appropriate cultivation methods and bioprocesses to maximise efficiency and output.

- Culture and production optimisation

Improving the cultivation conditions and production protocols for microbial or blue biomass. This may involve optimization of parameters such as nutrient composition, light intensity, temperature, pH, and aeration to increase yield, productivity, and quality in a cost-effective manner.

- Optimisation of bio-filtration systems for aquaculture

Enhancing biofiltration technologies used in aquaculture systems to ensure effective removal of waste compounds (e.g., ammonia, nitrates, organic matter) while maintaining water quality and ecosystem balance. This can include microbial community management, system design improvements, and integration with other water treatment technologies.

- Testing protocols for microalgae

Developing standardised testing methods to evaluate the quality, purity, and performance of microalgae strains. This includes protocols for assessing growth rate, biomass composition (e.g., lipids, proteins, pigments), contamination levels, and bioactivity in various applications such as feed, biofuels, or cosmetics.

- Explore new applications for side streams

Investigating innovative uses for byproducts and side streams generated during production processes. This could include valorisation strategies such as extracting valuable compounds, developing circular economy solutions, or applying side streams

in agriculture, energy, or materials sectors to improve sustainability and resource efficiency.

In total, 40 Tailored Mentorship Processes were conducted, representing an expenditure of € 58,750.00 from the BBC budget. All project partners supported the mentorship processes by unlocking and facilitating interactions, proceeding with the payments and collecting mentorship reports and feedback surveys from mentors and mentees. At the end of the mentoring phase, all mentors and startups/SMEs were asked to report back with their learnings summarized below and fully reported in Annex 2.

### Feedback on Mentorship

Collecting feedback and reflecting on lessons learned was vital to the process to capitalise on these activities and ensure positive impact on the development and growth of the startups and SMEs. Also, the information from both mentors and mentees was important in understanding potential challenges in the mentorship process and the relevance of mentorship in overcoming challenges faced by startups. All mentors and mentees were invited to participate in the feedback survey, and full results can be consulted in Annex 2.



Figure 7 Relevance of Tailored Mentorship to overcome the challenges (1-low, 5-high).



Figure 8: Level of achievements.

The outcomes, in terms of both achievements and challenges encountered by participants during their Tailored Mentorship process, were influenced by a combination of internal and external factors, as well as by the dynamic and agile

nature inherent to such processes. Participants identified the following examples as key obstacles encountered throughout the mentorship.

- Limited Timeframe – Several participants noted that the short duration of the program limited their ability to gather feedback from experts or potential clients and complete technical or wet lab tasks.
- Funding Constraints – Many recommendations required financial investment, which could not be secured or implemented within the programme period. Some participants were in very early stages and focused mainly on fundraising.
- Capacity and Resource Limitations – Founders often had limited time and human resources, which made it difficult to implement new routines or fully engage in all mentorship activities.
- Early-Stage Startups – A number of participants were still defining their business or technical models and needed more time and support to reach investment readiness or return on investment goals.
- Mismatch in Expectations or Timing – Some startups experienced misalignments in how to present their cases or found that the timing of the mentorship didn't align well with their development phase or funding cycles.
- Complexity and External Dependencies – A few cases involved high complexity, multiple stakeholders, or long testing phases, which extended beyond the scope of the mentorship.

Despite the challenges encountered, many participants expressed strong appreciation for the mentorship. They indicated their intention to continue applying the tools, methodologies, and materials provided beyond the duration of the programme. Overall, the process was positively evaluated, receiving an average rating of 4.66 out of 5.



Figure 9: Evaluation of Tailored Mentorship process (1-low, 5-high).

Participants (mentors and mentees) were invited to share their mentorship journey during the final Transnational Bootcamp, held online on April 9, 2025. This provided an opportunity for participants to exchange experiences with their peers, including the

challenges faced and progress made, to support the dissemination and exploitation of the results of the BBC Tailored Mentorship activity.

## Achievements

All of the above activities were able to reach out to representatives from all of the blue bio value chains, but especially target the following: fish, microalgae, macroalgae, bivalves, crustaceans, and marine bacteria. According to the feedback received, these activities successfully helped startups and SMEs develop core capabilities to tackle identified challenges such as business modelling, technology gaps, regulatory compliance, and sustainability integration, as previously mentioned. The result is reinforced long-term resilience and strengthens the value of collaboration and sustainability in business strategy. The matchmaking activities ignited international partnerships, business cooperation and technological support. BlueBioMatch was validated as an effective platform for fostering multi-helix stakeholder engagement, supporting mentorship matchmaking, and promoting regional cooperation among public entities and other actors. It has helped spark more strategic and collaborative regional visions by creating new opportunities through access to international support networks and digital platforms that enable faster, more efficient interactions.

An overview of the tailored mentorships completed shows a direct impact on startups and SME's operating the following value chains:



**Fish Aquaculture RAS**

Figure 10 BBC Value Chain: fish.



**Cyanobacteria  
Microalgae research**

Figure 11 BBC Value Chain: microalgae.



**Seaweed aquaculture  
Monitoring and predictive  
software for biodiversity data**

Figure 12 BBC Value Chain: macroalgae.



### Shrimp aquaculture RAS

Figure 13 BBC Value Chain: crustaceans.



### Oyster aquaculture New application for Oyster side streams

Figure 14 BBC Value Chain: bivalves.



### Genetic Research on Blue Microorganism Bioinformatic Marine Biotechnology Marine Bacteria

Figure 15 BBC Value Chain: bacteria.

Throughout the process of supporting startups and SMEs, several interconnected phases were implemented, mobilizing a wide range of stakeholders, including mentors, startups, and SMEs, across the different stages of the support process. These phases included regional bootcamps and tailored mentorship activities, ensuring continuous engagement and capacity building.

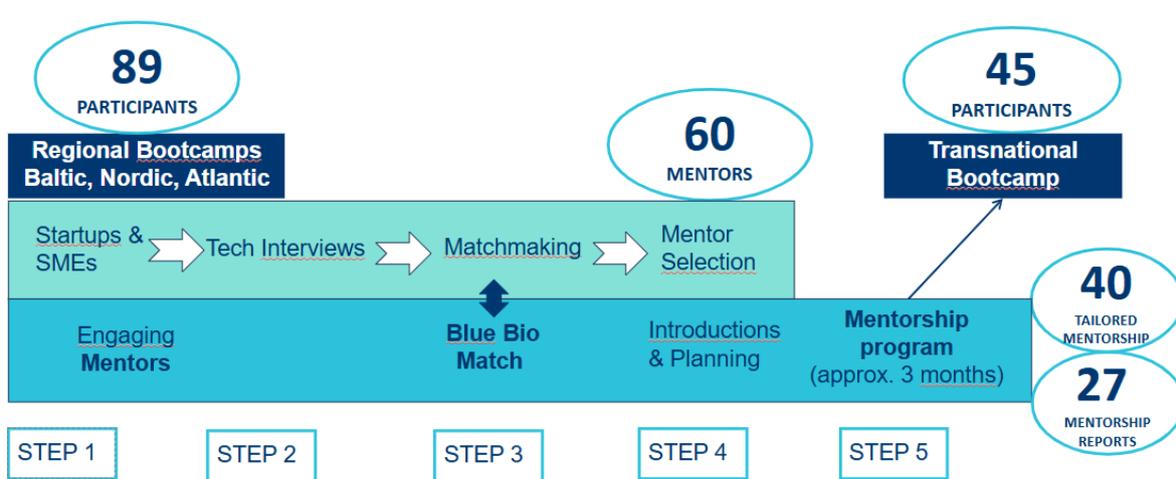


Figure 16 Support Package Process

In total, more than 150 participants, including startups, SMEs and mentors, took part in the various project activities. The process culminated in personalized mentorship programs for 40 startups and SMEs, which showcased their progress during the Transnational Bootcamp, an event that gathered participants with strong links to investment and business development. The final Transnational bootcamp marked the culmination of the dissemination and exploitation of the startups and SMEs support package results. As these outcomes are publicly available, they can now be leveraged by relevant target audiences interested in their adoption and further development.

Moreover, the pool of mentors that includes more than 60 mentors available through BlueBioMatch remains a highly valuable resource, ensuring the continuity and sustainability of the project's impact beyond its official timeline.

Overall, the designed support package and previously presented activities and methodology were core in the BBC project, contributing to increased knowledge, peer-to-peer interactions, transnational collaborations, investment readiness, new technological partnerships, and cooperation. Thus, they impacted and strengthened the innovation and entrepreneurial skills of Blue Bio startups and SME. Keeping in mind the connection to investment and funding opportunities, the involved stakeholders were presented with more options in terms of facilitating access to funding and investment channels.

## Conclusion

This report synthesises the outcomes of key tasks under WP5, demonstrating how these coordinated actions have contributed to fostering innovation, growth, and collaboration in the blue bioeconomy ecosystems across BBC regions. Reflections on the broader impact, informed by feedback, indicate that these actions have improved understanding of support package strategies for startups and SMEs, while also accelerating the transition to a more bio-based economy in coastal communities.

This structured yet flexible framework stimulates innovation, accelerates sustainable business development, and strengthens cross-regional collaboration as key pillars for a thriving and resilient blue bioeconomy. As an innovation-driven field, blue bioeconomy is evolving rapidly but still faces the challenge of securing a highly skilled and versatile workforce. To thrive, the sector requires professionals equipped with advanced, cross-disciplinary competencies capable of navigating and contributing across diverse fields. This evolution gives rise to entirely new job profiles, demanding updated and specialised qualifications. By fostering these skillsets, the sector not only boosts employment prospects at local and regional levels but also enhances its ability to attract and retain talent. Strengthening connections with global actors through a multi-helix approach will further elevate the visibility of the blue economy and reinforce the value of its potential.

Together, all activities presented and developed across regions form a modular yet interdependent support package tailored to the lifecycle of blue bioeconomy companies and their different development stages:

1. **Diagnose** the ecosystem and needs (T5.1, T5.2)

2. **Mobilize** support structures (T5.3)
3. **Deliver** personalized and collaborative support (T5.4, T5.6)
4. **Enable growth** through access to funding (T5.5)

The development and support of startups and SMEs operating in the blue bioeconomy sector require strategies that are both flexible and regionally sensitive. Within this context, WP5 of the BBC project established and successfully executed a consolidated strategy aimed at fostering innovation and growth among these businesses through tailored actions and initiatives.

This deliverable is the result of a collaborative effort among all BBC partners, who contributed their expertise, networks, and regional insights to design and implement a cross-regional support package, setting the stage for a critical reflection on the overall impact of these efforts.



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## Annex I



### **Blue Bio Bootcamps and access to Mentorship – from website:**

Participants at the Blue Bio Bootcamps have the chance of winning a paid mentorship to help support their company take the next step forward, thanks to expert guidance and support.

While startups and SMEs from any location can participate in the bootcamps, it's important to note that paid mentorship is exclusively available for companies situated within the project partner regions. However, we can still extend our support to those located outside the region by facilitating matchmaking with mentors through the BlueBioMatch platform.

### **Selection criteria for Bootcamp:**

*To apply for the Bootcamp, your business must be a Startup or an SME, and have a verified idea for a solution that addresses one of the challenges identified within our BlueBioClusters partner regions.*

## **BBC Mentor program**

At the end of a BBC Bootcamp, selected participants are offered the opportunity to receive mentorship support. The Mentorship period is June to December 2024.

Selection criteria to be eligible for Mentorship:

- An established company Startup or SME (not research or idea phase)
- A verified business idea that has market potential and is scalable.
- A specific challenge definition that mentorship can provide support to overcome.
- Team motivation – are they able to participate in a mentorship? Are they “coachable”?

### **For Mentees:**

Mentorship is based on identification of a specific challenge or need that expertise and support of a mentor can help to overcome within a 6-month timeframe. Examples could be specific technical development issues, preparing for investment, sales or marketing strategy work.

The mentor matchmaking process begins with a deeper interview to gain an understanding of the current challenges the startup is facing to develop their solution and



value proposition (see *Interview document: Guidelines for Mentor Matchmaking and Tech Interview* [LINK](#)). -> Please upload Tech Needs\_ Interview document per startup/SME.

Each region is responsible for assessing the challenges and needs of their regional startups/SMEs and formulating the challenges to be addressed by mentorship. Each partner must manage all mentorship process including preparation of required documents to support (mentioned below and templates available [HERE](#)).

### **For Mentors:**

#### *Selection:*

Selection and recruitment of mentors is based on the needs of the mentee. To find mentors Blue Bio Match as well as regional networks of mentors and experts will be used. Mentors must be registered in Blue Bio Match. Regions may need to interview more than one possible mentor to ensure that they meet their own organization's procurement requirements.

#### *Defining the deliverable:*

Once a suitable mentor is selected, the regional partner can offer a contract based on an agreed challenge to be overcome and the form of mentor support that will be provided (incl. the scope of number of hours or number of mentor sessions during the months June to December 2024) - [MENTORSHIP AGREEMENT](#) .

The region issuing the contract will be responsible for supporting mentor and mentee matching and following through with the mentorship to ensure the agreed upon deliverable is met. The process is concluded after sending the invoice and the [MENTORSHIP FINAL REPORT](#).

#### *Contracts/Price:*

Depending on the region, the selected mentor(s) will receive an offer based on the country rates and agreed upon cost. Each region has received a project budget for mentorship and will determine how to best dispose of these funds in terms of paid mentorship. The invoice must include the description "*BlueBioClusters - Tailored Mentorship for company YYYYY*". Payment should be processed after receiving the invoice and the Mentorship Final Report.

#### *Non-Disclosure Agreements (NDA):*



In the case that a startup or SME has a very specific trade secret or confidential information it wants to keep secret, mentors may be asked to sign an NDA. Nevertheless a confidentiality arrangement is included in the mentorship contract.

### **Mentors and Mentees**

#### *Reporting/Evaluation:*

All mentors and mentees will be asked to provide feedback in an evaluation following up after the mentoring period. Please use this <https://forms.office.com/e/QvYVAmHCxA>



**Deadline to close all Mentorship Processes (March 31, 2025).**

#### **Processual documents and templates:**

- [MENTORSHIP AGREEMENT](#)
- [MENTORSHIP FINAL REPORT](#)
- INVOICE
- PAYMENT (Paid by BBC Partner to Mentor)



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## Annex II

## Responses Overview

Active

Responses

**43**



Average Time

**47:20**



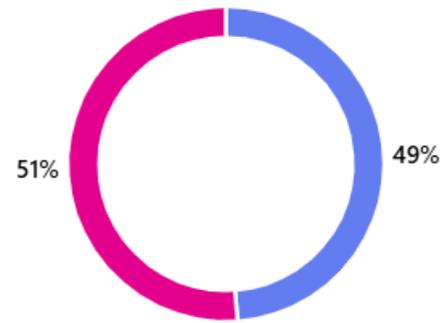
Duration

**188** Days



1. I participated as:

- Mentor 21
- SME/Startup 22



2. Mentor and/or organisation name:

42  
Responses

Latest Responses

- "Kelpture"
- "Nanna Lín"
- "Hringvarmi"
- ...

2 respondents (5%) answered Simona Paolacci for this question.

A word cloud containing the following names and organizations: Aquaponics Iberia, Jan Karlsen, Macedo, Igor Sigal, Susete Pinteus, Vytautas Kulvietis, Johan Hägerman, Anna Hölling, Planeet Ruhnu, Karl, Simona Paolacci, MAARI, Valor, Boris Teillant, Elisabete, Bala Kamallakharan, Nanna Lín, Egle Radzeviciene, Gunnar Jónsson, and Kimura-Gross.

3. Country/Region:

43  
Responses

Latest Responses

- "Iceland"
- "Iceland"
- "Iceland"
- ...

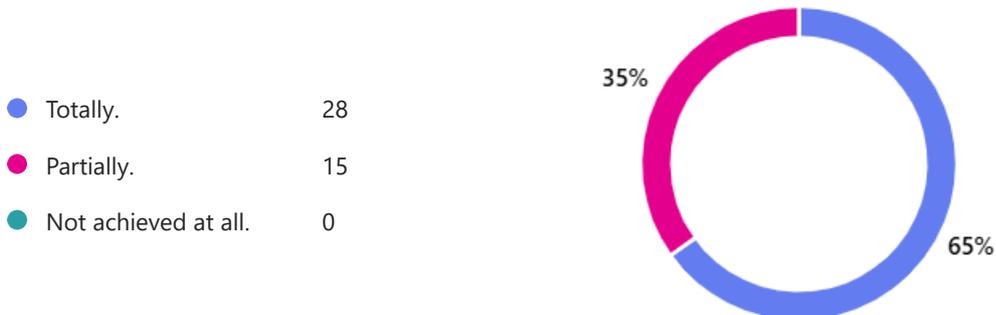
7 respondents (16%) answered Lithuania for this question.

A word cloud containing the following countries and regions: France/Brittany, Sweden/Gbg, Lithuania/Klaipeda, Klaipeda region, North, Estonia, Estonia / Saare, Västra Götaland, Iceland, Lithuania, Saare maakond, de loire, Klaipeda, Norway / Portugal, Sweden, loire/France, Canada, America, and Roscoff.

4. How relevant did you find the Tailored Mentorship to overcome the challenges/needs of the specific SME/Startup? (1-Low; 5-High).



5. Were the specific goals and outcomes achieved?



6. If the goals were not achieved please elaborate on the challenges faced during the process.

15  
Responses

Latest Responses



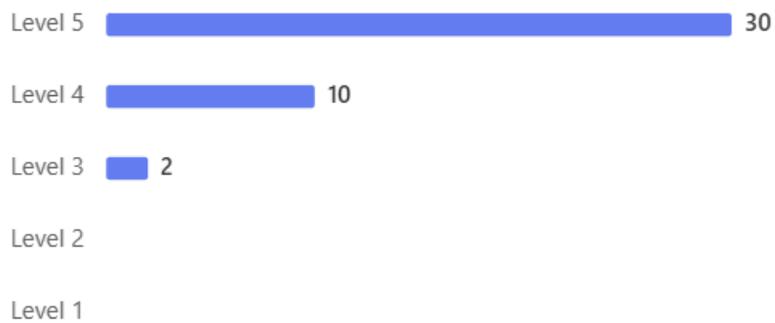
5 respondents (33%) answered times for this question.



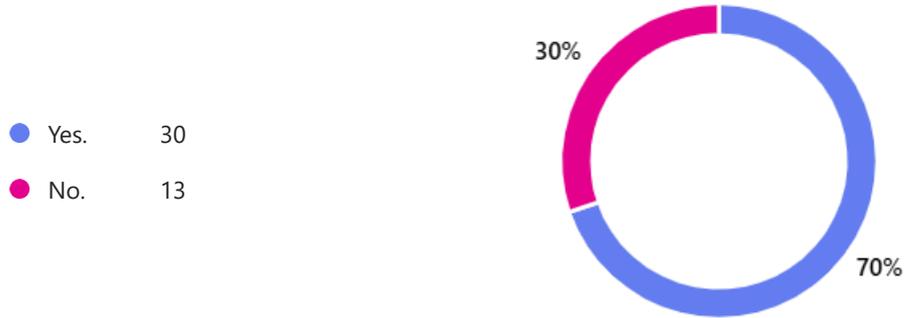
7. Overall, how do you rate the organisation and planning of the sessions? (1-Low; 5-High)

4.67

Average Rating



8. Have you already sent the Final Mentorship Report to the BlueBioCluster partner? If not please consider to do it at maximum by February 2025.



9. Are you register in Blue Bio Match as a Mentor? Blue Bio Match is a plataform developed under Blue Bio Cluster project to support business matchmaking oportunities and mentorship. If no, please consider your registration <https://bluebiomatch.hivebrite.com/>. If you are a mentor, please register also in the mentorship section to make yourself available for other upcoming mentorship needs.

