

EcoYOU – Clean and Green minds for environmentally friendly behaviour

A1.18 Developing a Joint Study that includes a BluE-Map used to raise awareness on environmental protection for youth in BSB regions

Observation collecting report

1. General information

The EcoYOU project, “*Clean and Green Minds for an Environmentally Friendly Behaviour*”, aimed to foster environmental responsibility across the Black Sea Basin through education, civic engagement, and cross-border collaboration. Partners ACTIE (Moldova), PRO NATURA GALATI (Romania), Mare Nostrum (Romania), and NALAG (Georgia) organized a wide range of activities designed to raise awareness, mobilize communities, and provide practical training on environmental protection. This report summarizes their contributions in a narrative form, drawing on both quantitative and qualitative insights.

The project engaged diverse stakeholders across Romania, Moldova, and Georgia to promote sustainable practices, raise awareness on environmental issues, and foster cross-border cooperation. Between 2024 and 2025, the four project partners – LP ACTIE (Moldova), PP2 Pro Natura Galati (Romania), PP3 Mare Nostrum (Romania), and PP4 NALAG (Georgia) – organized a wide range of activities including clean-up events, capacity-building sessions, awareness seminars, joint camps, round tables, interviews, and podcasts. These initiatives combined experiential learning, community engagement, and institutional dialogue to address pressing environmental challenges, particularly those related to waste management and microplastic pollution.

The data reflects inputs from various observers and project partners, documenting participant engagement, topics of interest, challenges, and environmental concerns.

2. Participant engagement and interaction

Across the four partners, engagement levels were consistently **high**, with participants actively collaborating, sharing knowledge, and taking initiative during hands-on activities such as clean-ups and joint camps.

Clean-up activities were among the most engaging events. Mare Nostrum mobilized over 240 participants across beaches in Constanța County, while ACTIE gathered around 100 participants in clean-ups near villages and lakes. NALAG involved more than 50 participants in joint and local clean-ups in Georgia, and Pro Natura brought together 50 people at Lake Brateș for an international clean-up action. Actions most frequently observed included **picking up litter, sorting recyclables, and sharing environmental knowledge**.

- **Clean-up campaigns** were among the most visible actions.
 - Mare Nostrum mobilized over **240 participants** across beaches such as Pescărie, Corbu, Vama Veche, and Modern Beach, collecting hundreds of kilograms of waste.
 - ACTIE engaged communities in Cahul, Manta, and Giurgiulesti, with over **100 participants** involved in removing waste from riverside and village areas.
 - NALAG organized both local and joint clean-ups in Georgia, bringing together more than **130 participants** in Gori, Tana, and Tedzami, reinforcing the symbolic dimension of regional cooperation.
 - Pro Natura held a **common clean-up at Brateș Lake**, engaging **50 participants**, including cross-border partners, transforming the event into a demonstration of regional solidarity.

Awareness seminars proved particularly effective in reaching young audiences. Mare Nostrum delivered **36 microplastic seminars** reaching over 700 youth and 40 teachers. Pro Natura hosted **seven awareness sessions** in schools and universities in Galați, each engaging around 30 participants. NALAG organized **five awareness seminars** in different municipalities of Georgia,

reaching more than 170 students, teachers, and local representatives. These seminars highlighted the impact of microplastics and generated lively discussions.

- **Educational and awareness events** were central.
 - Mare Nostrum delivered **36 microplastic seminars**, reaching more than **770 young people and teachers**.
 - ACTIE and Pro Natura organized multiple **awareness-raising seminars** in schools, universities, and community centers, each hosting around **30 participants** per session.
 - NALAG held seminars in five Georgian municipalities, with participant numbers ranging between **21 and 46**, focusing on the dangers of microplastics.

Round tables and joint events brought stakeholders together to exchange knowledge. Mare Nostrum's launching round table at Ovidius University engaged 56 participants, while NALAG's round table in Gori hosted 42 people, including cross-border partners. Pro Natura and ACTIE also organized joint events, each attracting around 30 participants from diverse institutions.

Capacity-building sessions engaged local administrations, NGOs, and teachers in discussions on sustainable waste management and environmental policies. Mare Nostrum (36 participants), ACTIE (15 participants), Pro Natura (18 participants), and NALAG (over 90 participants across four municipalities) emphasized collaboration between institutions and community representatives.

- **Capacity-building sessions and round tables** complemented the outreach activities.
 - Pro Natura convened **18 specialists** from public authorities in Galați to identify pollution-reduction strategies.
 - Mare Nostrum and ACTIE facilitated training sessions in Constanța and Cahul, while NALAG focused on municipal representatives in Georgia, discussing policy and infrastructure improvements.
 - Joint round tables and partner meetings gathered stakeholders from **all partner countries**, reinforcing knowledge transfer and good practice exchange.

Joint camps encouraged experiential and multicultural learning. Mare Nostrum gathered 42 participants at Corbu-Vadu Beach, ACTIE engaged 36 in Valeni village, and NALAG hosted 42 participants in Gori. These events fostered cooperation among youth, educators, and environmental experts from all three countries.

Interviews, focus groups, and 8-hour overtime sessions allowed for deeper reflection. All partners organized interviews with youth, teachers, parents, and stakeholders to explore perceptions of environmental education and behavioural barriers. Focus groups (10–44 participants each) facilitated open discussion, while hackathon-style overtime sessions (Mare Nostrum: 31 participants, ACTIE: 28 participants, NALAG: 41 participants) produced innovative environmental project ideas.

- **Youth-focused joint camps and 8-hour hackathon-style events** stimulated creativity and teamwork.
 - Mare Nostrum hosted a joint camp at Corbu-Vadu Beach with **42 participants**, while NALAG held a youth camp in Gori with the same number of participants, involving forest rangers, educators, and youth workers.
 - ACTIE and Pro Natura also organized multi-day youth activities combining dialogue, fieldwork, and cultural exchange.
- **Podcasts and interviews** added an innovative communication component.
 - Pro Natura produced multiple podcast episodes featuring institutions such as the Environmental Guard of Galați and the ECOSAL waste management service, exploring local and regional environmental reforms.
 - NALAG contributed with cross-border podcast episodes, extending project visibility to broader audiences.
 - Both Pro Natura and Mare Nostrum conducted structured interviews with youths, educators, parents, and community leaders, generating qualitative data on attitudes toward environmental protection.

Across all partners, participant engagement was consistently **high**, with individuals actively taking part in clean-up campaigns, awareness sessions, and collaborative discussions.

3. Learning methods and preferred engagement approaches

The events used a blend of **experiential learning (hands-on clean-ups, environmental patrols), community-based learning (round tables, focus groups), and digital tools (podcasts, IT app demonstrations)**. Among these, experiential and community-based approaches proved most effective, as participants were actively involved in discussions and hands-on tasks.

Topics that generated the greatest interest included **waste management & recycling, microplastic pollution, conservation and biodiversity, and climate change**. Students frequently asked questions about microplastic sources, while institutional stakeholders were more engaged in discussions on waste management infrastructure and cross-border cooperation.

Learning methods incorporated into these events were diverse:

- **Experiential learning** was dominant, particularly in clean-up campaigns and joint camps.
- **Community-based learning** characterized round tables and awareness seminars, encouraging dialogue between generations and sectors.
- **Digital resources and storytelling** were used effectively in podcasts and hackathons.

The most engaging topics across all partners were **waste management and recycling, biodiversity conservation**, and the **threat of microplastics**. These themes consistently provoked questions from young people, teachers, and local authorities, reflecting growing environmental consciousness in the Black Sea Basin.

4. Environmental topics of interest

- **Waste management and recycling** emerged as the most consistently discussed topic.
- Other recurring interests included **climate change, biodiversity conservation, sustainable agriculture, and renewable energy**.
- These topics align with pressing local and global environmental challenges.

5. Challenges and barriers to engagement

Some challenges were observed during implementation:

- **Weather conditions** occasionally limited participation in outdoor clean-ups. Participants showed resilience and adaptability.
- **Limited resources and equipment** were noted during patrols and waste collection in rural or protected areas. Limited resources in some localities constrained the scale of clean-up efforts, but this was mitigated by strong community volunteerism.
- **Knowledge gaps** among youth required facilitators to adapt content to different educational levels. Knowledge gaps among younger participants highlighted the need for sustained educational programs, which partners addressed by increasing

Despite these barriers, participants responded positively, showing flexibility, enthusiasm, and willingness to adapt. Collaborative spirit and local partnerships helped overcome most obstacles. Participants largely responded to these challenges with enthusiasm, often compensating for limitations through teamwork and improvisation.

6. Environmental mapping and findings

Events provided valuable mapping data for the BluE-Map platform. High-density waste hotspots were identified on **Romanian beaches**, around **Brateş Lake**, and in **Georgian protected areas** such as Tana and Tedzami. The most frequent waste categories included plastics, glass bottles, fishing

gear, and household waste. These observations underline the urgent need for **recycling programs and waste segregation infrastructure** across project regions.

Through clean-up events and patrols, several **waste hotspots** were identified: beaches along the Romanian coast (Pescărie, Corbu, Vama Veche), Lake Brateș in Galați, protected landscapes in Georgia (Tana and Tedzami), and rural lakesides in Moldova. Waste types most frequently collected included plastics, packaging materials, and household waste. Stakeholders highlighted concerns about **microplastic accumulation, insufficient recycling infrastructure, and illegal dumping sites**, which were recorded for BluE-Map monitoring.

7. Recommendations for targeted interventions

The activities implemented by ACTIE, Pro Natura, Mare Nostrum, and NALAG demonstrate the added value of cross-border cooperation in environmental protection. Together, the partners engaged **thousands of citizens**, mobilized **youth, educators, local authorities, and NGOs**, and tested a variety of learning and engagement methods.

Key recommendations include:

- **Strengthening waste segregation programs** at local and regional levels.
- **Expanding awareness campaigns** on microplastics and biodiversity, especially in schools.
- **Investing in infrastructure improvements** such as waste bins, recycling stations, and improved waste management services.
- **Enhancing cross-border exchanges** through digital tools (podcasts, webinars) and in-person youth camps.
- **Sustained monitoring and mapping** of environmental hotspots to support evidence-based policy making.

Ultimately, the EcoYOU project showed that only through **collaborative, participatory, and innovative approaches** can lasting ecological responsibility be cultivated across the Black Sea Basin.

Overall, the EcoYOU project demonstrated strong engagement across all partner countries, successfully combining awareness raising, institutional cooperation, and practical action. Mare Nostrum stood out for its extensive educational seminars, ACTIE for its consistent community-based clean-ups, Pro Natura for its diversified activities combining seminars, podcasts, and international cooperation, and NALAG for its wide municipal outreach and cross-border engagement.

Based on findings, recommended interventions include:

- Strengthening **waste collection and recycling infrastructure**, especially in rural and coastal areas.
- Expanding **policy advocacy and awareness campaigns** targeting youth and institutions.
- Enhancing **cross-border joint actions** to address shared environmental challenges.
- Continuing **research and monitoring** through tools like BluE-Map to track progress.

The collaborative nature of the EcoYOU project showed that environmental challenges transcend borders and that shared knowledge, engagement, and community action are vital to building a sustainable future for the Black Sea Basin region.

- **NGOs** were the most frequently involved, followed by **local authorities, schools, and community actors**. Their presence reflects strong institutional engagement in the program.

Engagement and behaviours

- Engagement levels were reported as **high**, with participants actively discussing, asking questions, and sharing experiences.
- Observable behaviours included **note-taking, guiding others, and contributing to discussions**.

Concerns raised

- Participants expressed concerns about **landfill management, water management, waste transportation, and sustainable agriculture practices**.
- In some sessions, no significant concerns were reported.

Challenges and responses

- Commonly identified challenges:
 - Lack of prior knowledge or training.
 - Limited resources to implement solutions.
 - Difficulty in applying knowledge to local contexts.
- Participants often responded by **adapting resource use and attempting to localize solutions**, showing resilience and commitment.

Environmental hotspots

- Some areas were identified as **waste hotspots**, linked to landfill and waste transportation issues.
- Other observations highlighted **water pollution and agricultural impacts**.

8. Additional observations & notes

Many responses left blank; when provided, they suggested:

- More **in-depth training sessions**.
- Greater emphasis on **practical application** at the local level.
- Ensuring **resources and support** are available for implementation.

Overall Observations

- **High participant engagement** was a defining feature of the sessions.
- **Waste management** is the central issue across all regions, supported by concerns about climate change and agriculture.
- **Local authorities play a crucial role** as hosts and stakeholders, ensuring institutional backing.
- While knowledge and resource gaps remain, participants are motivated and willing to adapt solutions.

Conclusion

The observations indicate that the organized events are achieving their intended purpose: raising awareness, fostering engagement, and aligning discussions with community needs. To build on this momentum, future activities should emphasize **practical implementation, targeted resources, and follow-up support** for participants.