

HOW TO GET INVOLVED WITH AND BENEFIT FROM THE UN OCEAN DECADE EARLY CAREER OCEAN PROFESSIONALS (ECOP) PROGRAMME

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THE OCEAN DECADE AND THE EARLY CAREER OCEAN PROFESSIONALS (ECOP) PROGRAMME

The [United Nations Decade of Ocean Science for Sustainable Development](#) (2021–2030) was launched in January 2021 to help society transition from “the ocean we have” to “the ocean we want.” As the largest coordinated ocean science movement worldwide, it leverages connections among global stakeholders, promotes the collection of data, information, and knowledge, and drives policy changes at multiple levels to achieve “the science we need” for this transition (UNESCO-IOC 2021). To guide this work, it identified 10 Challenges for collective impact, including “skills, knowledge, technology and participation for all” (Challenge #9). The Early Career Ocean Professionals (ECOP) Programme tackles this Challenge by providing capacity development and networking opportunities to 8200+ ECOPs in 168 countries (as of April 2026), by elevating and strengthening their diverse perspectives through a collective voice, and by empowering the next generation of ocean leaders to participate in and influence major Decade processes and decisions (Arbic et al. 2024). For the purpose of the ECOP Programme, an ECOP is a person that self-identifies as being early in their career, within 10 years or less of professional experience in any field related to the ocean. This definition includes not only paid positions but also post-secondary students and volunteer roles. The term “professional” is used in order to be inclusive of professionals from various sectors of society. As individuals managing various aspects of the Programme, we invite ECOPs from all disciplines and regions to join the network. We outline below how ECOPs can get involved with and benefit from the Programme.

ENGAGING WITH AND BENEFITING FROM THE ECOP PROGRAMME

At a basic level of involvement, ECOP members benefit from participating in our activities, but they can benefit even further by immersing themselves in the Programme; advancing between steps (participating, engaging, organizing, and leading; Fig. 1) should happen at an individual's own pace. We suggest that you start by [signing up](#) to our global registry, subscribing to our Newsletter, and joining specific [national and regional Nodes](#) or [Task Teams](#) for localized content and initiatives. Concrete actions within and across each of the four steps that you can take after joining the ECOP Programme include (Fig. 1):

Learn about opportunities

We aggregate and disseminate information from numerous worldwide sources about various types of professional development opportunities for ECOPs (e.g., jobs, funding calls, summer schools, training, volunteering, seminars, mentoring programs, etc.). We promote (and archive) them via our monthly Newsletter, [Database of Opportunities](#), directories of international and regional networks and organizations ([Ocean Networks directory](#) and [Asian Ocean Stakeholders map](#)), social media channels ([LinkedIn](#), [X](#), [Facebook](#), and [Instagram](#)), and [YouTube channel](#). You can share an opportunity by submitting it to the database or sending it to us for promotion!

Take part in professional development activities

We have hosted a [webinar series](#) since 2022, reaching an ever-increasing audience (4600+ registrants so far), and showcasing a wide variety of topics across many disciplines, such as the blue economy, ocean literacy, marine technologies, science writing and communication, and science-policy interface—recordings are archived on our YouTube [playlist](#). We also collaborate with other organizations (EUMETSAT, EMODnet, the Decade Coordination Office for Ocean Data Sharing, Sustainable Ocean Alliance, a.o.) to develop external webinars and with the [OceanTeacher Global Academy](#) to provide free in-person and online training courses on topics such as oceanographic survey techniques and data analysis and management. Our Asia and Africa ocean literacy hubs help bridge the gap between global resources and regional needs. They convene young ocean literacy enthusiasts and experts, review the regional ocean literacy landscape, and identify gaps and priorities (e.g., developing guidebooks and blue curricula). Overall, these hubs aim to curate learning resources and school networks and translate professional development into community-level action that nurtures a more informed and engaged blue society.

Network

The ECOP Programme can be your professional home! We provide the space where you can



FIG. 1. A (non-exhaustive) list of ways in which Early Career Ocean Professionals (ECOPs) can engage with and benefit from the ECOP Programme depending on how long they have been members (the timeline is a suggestion only, and members may choose to take up activities at any time they choose).



FIG. 2. Past and current members of the ECOP Programme coordination teams at the 2026 Ocean Sciences Meeting in Glasgow, Scotland. From left to right: Ronnie Noonan-Birch (ECOP Canada), Shenghui Li (ECOP China), Gabriella Yeboah (ECOP Ghana), Evgeniia Kostiania (ECOP Programme Global Coordinator), Anabel von Jackowski (ECOP DACH—Germany, Austria, and Switzerland), Naomi Krauzig (Training and Mentoring Task Team and ECOP Greece), Rita Franco-Santos (ECOP Australia & New Zealand), Charles Addey (ECOP Africa), Joelle Habib (ECOP Communications Team). Credit: Shenghui Li.

connect with like-minded ECOPs, whether locally (for an amazing support network) or further afield (use work travel to forge new relations). Take advantage of conferences to network; as an example, we delivered an informational townhall about the Programme during the 2026 Ocean Sciences Meeting in Glasgow this past February (Fig. 2), and organized an ECOP social gathering later that evening (Fig. 3) to promote more in-depth connections between ECOPs attending the meeting. The Programme also fosters connections between ECOPs and mid-to-late career professionals, promoting two-way learning opportunities and collaboration avenues and ensuring knowledge transfer and legacy work. Networking can take place virtually, but attending conferences of relevance is an extremely effective way to approach this! Upcoming regional events include annual/biennial conferences in Australia (AMSA), Latin America (COLACMAR), North America (ASLO meetings), Asia (XMAS, Blue Wave Conference), Africa (WIOMSA Symposium), and Europe (EGU meetings). Upcoming high-level events include annual Conferences of the Parties (COPs) and the Our Ocean Conferences, 2027 Ocean Decade Conference (Brazil), and 2028 UN Ocean Conference (Republic of Korea). Reach out to Node coordinators to be connected with other ECOPs attending regional events and to ECOP

Global for large conferences (e.g., Ocean Sciences Meetings) or high-level events.

Increase your career prospects

The ECOP Programme has a globally recognized brand. If you are actively volunteering, interning, or coordinating with us, you are enhancing your CV by gaining experience in leadership, time and project management, capacity building, and other soft skills. By getting involved with a working group, you could demonstrate scientific expertise and the global reach and impact of your research. The connections you make with ECOPs and other more senior professionals can also be useful—they might take an interest in your career and potentially employ you in the future. To volunteer with or coordinate a Node, email the current coordination team (contact info on their [respective pages](#)). You can also [actively support](#) any of the Task Teams or the Communications Team. If your country/region or target activity are not represented by an existing Node or Task Team (respectively), you can volunteer to establish a new one. This task involves building a core group with clear roles to coordinate activities, followed by co-designing a strategy to engage existing ECOP members, national stakeholders, partners, and Ocean Decade structures

(e.g., National Decade Committees) while ensuring effective communication channels and member tracking systems. Securing funding or in-kind support further strengthens Node/Team sustainability. Adherence to the practices laid out in the [ECOP Programme Onboarding Handbook](#) is essential, and prospective coordinators are encouraged to first connect with EK (Global Coordinator) or [regional coordinators](#) for initial guidance and integration into the global network. Please note that the ECOP Programme has no budget itself to finance coordinating roles, but some Nodes have secured funding for activities and positions (e.g., Canada, Australia & New Zealand, Africa). The vast majority of coordinators do so voluntarily (~250–300 individuals), and likely <10 are paid (part or full time).

Access Ocean Decade-relevant content and include your work in the collection

We encourage ECOPs to actively disseminate their knowledge and experiences with the community and provide a platform for that purpose. On our webpage you can find [articles](#), [reports/resources](#), and [scientific papers](#) produced by our members and [share your own publications](#). Consider taking advantage of an additional amazing opportunity—a [call for papers](#) whose work addresses the Ocean Decade and its Challenges. If you want to publish this work in Open Access (OA) format to benefit from greater reach and visibility, Franco-Santos (2024) provides OA payment information applicable to some of the participating journals; you can also contact the societies' lead organizers listed in the call about paying for OA.

Be highlighted among and beyond the community

We promote the work and activities of our members to give them international visibility and a platform where they can discuss their research, career pathways, and passion for the ocean. We highlight ECOPs' projects and stories through three ongoing communications campaigns: [ECOP Stories](#), [ECOP Conversations](#), and [My Coastline](#). Check the pages to find out how you can be featured!

PARTNERING WITH THE ECOP PROGRAMME

Support the growth of a worldwide network by partnering with us to help ECOPs make a lasting impact on the future of ocean science.



FIG. 3. Early Career Ocean Professionals gather for a social dinner after the ECOP Programme townhall at the 2026 Ocean Sciences Meeting in Glasgow, Scotland, on February 23rd, 2026. Credit: Shenghui Li.

Financial contributions help us cover operational costs (coordinator positions) as well as support initiatives (e.g., [BlueCaD project](#), [webinars](#)) and conference travel for ECOPs. In-kind contributions are also welcome; examples include organizational mentorship, provision of equipment and space for our in-person trainings, co-chairing of conference side events, and speaking during our webinars. In return, you get a unique opportunity to showcase your commitment to ocean sustainability and global development, to attract fresh and innovative ideas to advance your work and increase its relevance and impact, and to strengthen your brand's visibility and influence within the global community. To explore partnerships with us, contact EK (ECOP Programme Global Coordinator).

FINAL REMARKS

The ECOP Programme is an impactful initiative within the Ocean Decade given its power of networking, international visibility, and our

contribution to addressing Challenge #9 “*Skills, knowledge, technology and participation for all.*” We are providing real benefits to ECOPs now, and our legacy will live beyond 2030. Reach out if you want to join us or collaborate: we welcome all, individuals (at any career stage) and organizations.

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CONFLICT OF INTEREST

RMF-S is a Member-at-Large on the ASLO Board of Directors.

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