

United Nations University Ocean & Coasts Institute

External Briefing Document for Strategic Partners



UNU
Paris

Introduction to the UNU system

Foundation and vision

UNU was established as a global think tank for the United Nations System as a higher education entity dedicated to promoting peace and progress through the production and exchange of knowledge.

Bridge between academia and politics

UNU uniquely links academic research with UN policymaking to address pressing global challenges and to provide decision-makers with evidence-based solutions.

An immersive academic institution

UNU is developing the next generation of leaders by offering a variety of courses around the world.

An inclusive approach between the South and the North

Strong priority is given to the needs of developing countries, both in terms of capacity-building and equitable access to knowledge.

History and context

UNGA Approval

In **1972**, the United Nations University (UNU) was established through a decision by the United Nations General Assembly.

UNU in Japan

In **1975**, UNU inaugurated its **headquarters in Tokyo**, provided by the Japanese government.

UNU Degree Programmes

Following the decision of the UNGA that UNU could also confer master's and doctoral degrees, UNU-IAS launched **the first UNU university course** in 2010.

Today, UNU counts six master's and doctoral programmes.

50 years of UNU

In September **2025**, UNU **celebrated its 50th anniversary** with a commemorative ceremony at its headquarters in Tokyo, paying tribute to five decades dedicated to promoting knowledge, education and evidence-based solutions for a more sustainable and peaceful world.

Presentation of the UNU Institutes

Global research and training network: UNU's current global network includes **13 institutes** located in **12 countries** around the world, which contribute to research and training within the framework of the 17 Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs).

Characteristics and functioning: The Institutes are the largest research structures of UNU, developed with a long-term perspective. The establishment of an institute requires an initial investment in the UNU endowment fund, the interest of which ensures the sustainability of academic activities and administrative operations. Institutes further develop by raising additional resources on a project basis.



UNU Headquarters in Tokyo, Japan

UNU Paris Office

The UNU Paris Office is a central node in Europe to strengthen UNU's global presence and engage with international organisations based in France, diplomatic missions and public authorities.

Acting as a connector and co-creator, the Paris Office brings together governments, academia, the private sector and civil society to address global challenges.

Two main functions

- A **liaison office** serving the entire UNU system in the heart of Europe.
- A **visible thematic platform**, focused on a few priority themes with a cross-cutting focus on science-policy interfaces and multilateralism.

Identified thematic priorities

- **Ocean and climate diplomacy**, with a focus on translating scientific knowledge into policy actions, in line with the ocean-climate-biodiversity-societies nexus and global sustainability frameworks. This priority area forms part of the broader strategic efforts undertaken for the future UNU Ocean and Coasts Institute, whose prefiguration phase is being led by the UNU Paris Office.
- **Learning systems**, with a particular focus on how AI and digital transformations affect the integrity of knowledge, academic freedom, public trust and the conditions under which societies learn and generate evidence.

The UNU Ocean & Coasts Institute at a glance

Introduction: International ocean governance is at a pivotal moment. The United Nations Ocean Conference (UNOC3), held in Nice in 2025, marked a turning point in the global mobilisation for the protection of maritime spaces. The UNOC Declaration, as well as the work of the UN Decade of Ocean Science for Sustainable Development, notes the urgent need to develop ocean research, policy science interfaces and SDG14 financing. Therefore, UNU has made it a priority to establish an **Institute dedicated to the Ocean and Coasts**.

France: The country offers exceptional assets for hosting a UNU Ocean & Coasts Institute with its leading scientific networks, multilateral influence, and territories stretching across the Atlantic, Mediterranean, the Pacific and the Indian Ocean.

Structuring: Historically led by the University of Western Brittany (UBO), the future Institute is a project open to financial, technical and academic partnerships with research actors, public authorities and private entities.

Background and current situation: The initiative to create a UNU Ocean & Coasts Institute originated from discussions in the late 2010s between UNU and UBO. The idea of establishing an institute in France was supported by a feasibility study approved by the UNU Council in 2019.

Progress in 2025: In 2025, the project gained new momentum. On the one hand, UNOC3, held in Nice in June 2025, helped generate diplomatic momentum on the issue. On the other hand, on **April 2, 2025**, the French Assembly adopted a draft resolution in favour of the creation of the Institute. A “flash” mission by the Foreign Affairs Committee subsequently proposed concrete steps for its implementation in a report published on January 21, 2026.

Architecture

Towards a multi-site model

The proposed model aims to address several challenges:

- **Strengthen national coherence** by rallying main ocean-focused research centers around a common project.
- **Broaden the political consensus** by covering all French maritime areas (Atlantic, Mediterranean, Pacific).
- **Expand the project’s international scope** to cover the Global North and South, aligned with UNU’s mandate.
- **Mobilise networks** of the Francophonie within the United Nations system on a pressing global issue.

Operational unit in French Polynesia

At the request of the Polynesian government, the establishment of an Operating Unit in Tahiti—an extension of the Institute in the Pacific—will enable the Institute to address the scientific challenges facing the subregion.

Advantages of the model

- **Political**, by expanding the scope of parliamentary and territorial support.
- **Scientific**, by integrating the various ocean basins.
- **Financial**, by mobilising public and private resources across distinct yet complementary areas.
- **Diplomatic**, by giving France the opportunity to connect science, society and international cooperation on the ocean.

Funding

A capital investment and operating contributions

The creation of a new UNU Institute requires the deposit of a **capital investment** of \$40-60 million to the University’s endowment fund. The interest generated ensures the financing of operations and programmes and guarantees the Institute long-term sustainability. In addition to this amount, operating contributions are provided until the capital is invested.

Diversification of funding sources

The long-term success of the project depends on the development of a blended finance model that combines public, private and targeted multilateral, bilateral, or philanthropic funding.



Prefiguration phase (2026-2028): UNU Ocean & Coasts Programme

Background

In view of the formal creation of the Institute, the Paris Office of the United Nations University (UNU Paris) is coordinating the prefiguration phase (2026–2028) through **the UNU Ocean & Coasts Programme**.

This programme provides a flexible institutional and operational framework for mobilising partners. It explores urgent scientific and strategic directions and produces concrete results in support of the Institute's creation. This dynamic builds on the growing interest of the scientific, diplomatic, and economic communities in ocean governance and in a sustainable and regenerative science-based blue economy.

Objective

The **UNU Ocean & Coasts Programme** launches a phase of action and cooperation towards the creation of the future Institute. It provides a framework for partners to co-develop research and training initiatives, strengthen multilateral engagement and contribute to the mobilisation of resources for the Institute creation. All activities will be coordinated by UNU, ensuring scientific excellence, international visibility and compliance with United Nations standards.

A territorial cluster approach

The preliminary phase is based on a structure of **regional clusters**, reflecting the diversity of France's maritime areas and promoting the mobilisation of regional ecosystems.

Three initial clusters are under consideration:

- A **Brittany cluster**, centered around Brest and the University of Western Brittany (UBO), based on internationally recognized scientific expertise.
- A **Mediterranean cluster**, structured around Marseille and the Aix-Marseille University ecosystem, with a particular focus on blue economy transitions, coastal adaptation and regional cooperation.
- A **French Polynesia cluster**, intended to support the establishment of a future operational unit in Tahiti and to strengthen ties with the Pacific states and territories.

Each cluster will bring together universities, research centers, local authorities, companies and international organisations.

Partners will be invited to formalise their commitment through a **joint letter of intent**, expressing their willingness to contribute to the collective dynamic and the construction of the future Institute.

A flexible governance will be established for each cluster to facilitate co-construction of priorities, coordination of initiatives and cooperation on opportunities facilitated by UNU Paris.

Scientific and strategic positioning

The **UNU Ocean & Coasts Programme** operates at the intersection of science, governance, and public policy with a strong focus on international cooperation. This approach complements the mandates of other UNU institutes and strengthens synergies within the system. To rapidly build the project's scientific credibility and international visibility, the pilot phase will focus on a limited number of thematic priorities within the *"ocean, coasts, biodiversity, climate, and societies"* nexus.

1/ Marine biodiversity, conservation and implementation of international frameworks

This theme covers the governance of marine protected areas, ecosystem restoration, ecological connectivity, benefit-sharing and the implementation of major international agreements including the Kunming-Montreal Global Framework, the Regional Seas Conventions and the BBNJ Agreement. It opens up prospects for cooperation with international organisations and scientific networks.

2/ Blue economy and blue justice

This theme will support transitions toward sustainable and regenerative maritime economic models, including transport and ports, fisheries and aquaculture, marine renewable energy and emerging industries. Particular attention will be paid to issues of equity, sustainability and governance.

3/ Cross-cutting work will focus on the coherence of public policies, legal and institutional frameworks and international governance.

Activities and expected results

Between 2026 and 2028, the UNU Ocean & Coasts Programme will coordinate a portfolio of joint activities, including:

- Multidisciplinary workshops and science-policy dialogues.
- Policy briefs and methodological frameworks.
- Foresight and international cooperation initiatives.
- Training and capacity-building actions.
- Contributions to major international conferences.

The Programme's activities will quickly demonstrate their added value, consolidate partnerships and support the progressive mobilisation of the resources necessary for the establishment of the Institute.

Funding

The operation of **the UNU Ocean & Coasts Programme** will rely on the UNU Paris office staff and a combination of targeted financial contributions and substantial in-kind commitments from partners, including research time, access to infrastructure, and joint organisation of activities.

The mobilisation of long-term funding for the UNU Ocean & Coasts Institute will be subject to a separate financial architecture to ensure the Institute's sustainability and autonomy.