

Strategic Environmental Assessment of the EURO- MED Programme 2021- 2027

Non-technical summary of the Environmental report

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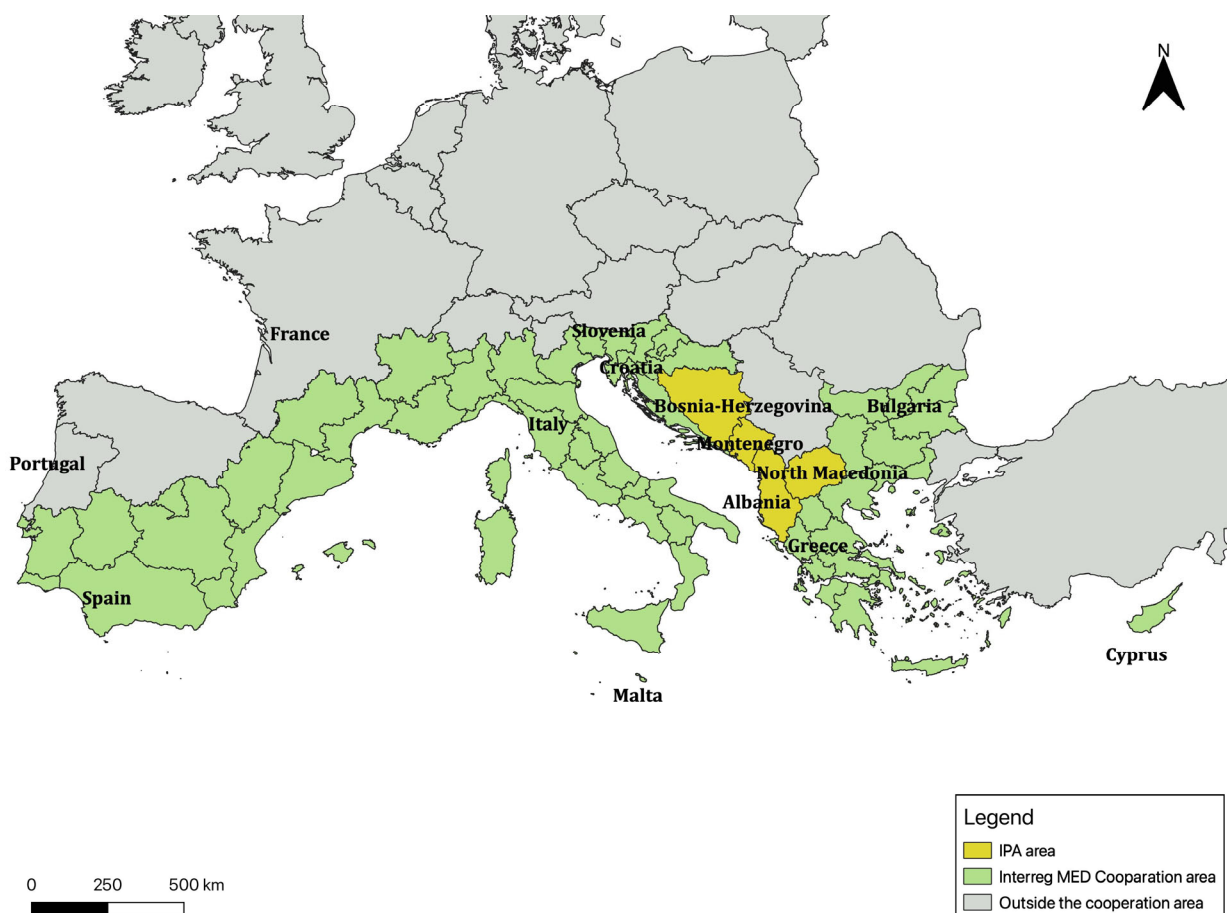
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The Strategic Environmental Assessment (SEA) aims at promoting sustainable development through evaluation as soon as possible to ensure that environmental issues are included in plans or programmes.

This is a non-technical summary of the Environmental Report on the Euro-MED 2021-2027 Programme (CP). It is designed to present the SEA findings in a clear and simple format that can be seen and understood by the widest possible audience.

Presentation of Euro-MED 2021-2027

Interreg MED is a transnational cooperation Programme which covers socio-economic, environmental, territorial and governance issues. In the new programming period 2021-27, the Programme area included 67 Nuts 2 regions, mainly coastal regions and islands in ten Member States, plus four pre-accession countries in the Mediterranean (IPA countries). Some of the countries are entirely included in the Programme area, such as Bulgaria, Croatia, Cyprus, Greece, Malta, Slovenia, Albania, Bosnia-Herzegovina, Montenegro and North Macedonia. The Programme expands geographically in this new programming period, including Bulgaria, North Macedonia and other three Spanish regions (Extremadura, Castilla La Mancha, Comunidad de Madrid); while Gibraltar, as UK territory, is withdrawing. The regions are very diverse geographically and socio-economically though they share some common environmental, coastal and maritime issues. These include marine pollution, litter management, biodiversity loss, alien species invasion, water shortages, maritime security, natural risks and extreme events.



The MED strategy for the coming programming period, in line with the EC orientation paper, focus on three policy objectives (referring to ‘operational missions’). The general goal as defined above will be achieved through three policy objectives and priorities:

- SMARTER MED: Priority 1 aims to reinforce societal commitment and increase innovation capacity of public authorities and private entities to implement solutions for a sustainable and greener economy in the Mediterranean by consolidating a competitive innovation ecosystem;
- GREENER MED: Priority 2 aims to provide a greener environment for the MED area, supporting a transition to a circular economy and an energy transition, promoting greener living areas, improving the management of natural resources and preventing and mitigating risks;
- MED GOVERNANCE: Better governance processes provide the backbone for the capitalisation of the INTERREG MED results into policy actions, in cooperation and coordination with all other programmes and strategies intervening in the area. A Mediterranean vision and shared solutions need a strong governance to be built.

The priorities are structured in five specific objectives and a number of actions contributing to the achievement of expected results. In addition, the Programme identified the “tourism” sector as a cross-cutting priority for the programming period; considering both the economic relevance of this sector for the regions in the cooperation area and the consequences of the socio-economic crisis due to the COVID-19 which hit particularly the sector in 2020 and 2021.

The total forecast budget for the period 2021-2027 is 230 million euros. The breakdown per priority is as follows:

SMARTER MED	GREENER MED	MED GOVERNANCE
20%	70%	10%

So, more than 70% the budget is dedicated to environmental goals.

Methodology of the assessment

The assessment follows the SEA Directive methodological prescriptions. It is first referred to the Euro-MED Programme area. Then, the relevant environmental objectives and related form the basis for the state of the environment's description and its development trends in the Programme's area in a scenario without Programme, as well as for the assessment of likely significant effects of the Programme on the environment.

The CP's potential effect on the environment was assessed in a qualitative manner. Significant issues relate to climate change, energy, biodiversity water, soil, landscape, air, health, and natural/cultural heritage.

Eventually, cumulative effects between the environmental issues and transnational effects are detailed, highlighting interdependencies and effect-chains.

Key environmental issues in the cooperation area

The cooperation area has diverse marine, coastal and inland ecosystems, mainly located in the Mediterranean biogeographical region. These provide a number of ecological benefits to local communities including fish resources, water quality and quantity, diverse plants and animals, as well as air quality. They also represent significant environmental amenities for tourism. However, human impact on the environment is high and ecosystems remain under pressure. Transnational environmental issues include water pollution and marine ecosystem health, climate change and natural risks management i.e. coastal erosion, floods and extreme events, biodiversity loss, air pollution, soil erosion and a variety of threats to the landscape and to natural and cultural heritage.

Risks and challenges linked to **climate change** in the cooperation area are quite homogeneous. Almost all the countries and regions succeeded in cutting their greenhouse gas (GHG) emissions in the last decade. However, GHG emissions of the cooperation area remain high and mainly above the EU-27 average. Almost all regions are on the coast of the Mediterranean Sea. Additionally, some of them have major rivers. Therefore, the area is particularly exposed to flood risk and coastal erosion, which may be caused by a rise in sea level.

Although energy consumption decreased in recent decade in most countries, economies in the area are still very dependent on fossil energy and derivatives. **Renewable energy** production and consumption are regularly increasing over the period, particularly for solar energy.

There are ‘hotspots’ in **water quality and water supply** in all regions interested in the Programme. There is a lot of human pressure on water through demographic trends, infrastructure and urban settlements, industrial investment and intensive farming. Many areas have climate change risk, such as water shortages, floods and drought. There are also risks of uncontrolled **marine pollution** affecting coasts and harbours, which could also be caused by accidents.

Air quality in the cooperation area tended to improve in all countries in recent years. PMx emissions have decreased. However, some areas are still struggling to master traffic and industrial emissions.

Over recent years **waste collection and processing** has generally improved for both the amount of waste collected by local public services and the share of waste recovery compared to landfill. However, there is still room for improvement, in landfill disposal which remains high in some countries. In this issue the cooperation area is not homogeneous.

The Mediterranean area has **highly diverse landscapes and ecosystems** including marine and coastal ecosystems, wetlands, traditional agricultural lands and large areas dedicated to intensive agriculture and urban areas. The area includes 20% of the EU Natura 2000 sites, but habitats are threatened by fragmentation and climate change and endangered species represent a critical aspect.

Soil and landscape quality in the cooperation area is clearly endangered and threatened by soil sealing. Soil contamination from waste management and industry is also an issue for human health. The situation is not homogeneous in the cooperation area.

Main environmental effects and mitigation measures

Analysis of the environmental effects has three main steps. Firstly, environmental objectives in the area were matched with the proposed Specific Objectives (SOs) and actions planned by the Cooperation Programme (CP). SOs with potential positive or negative effects on an environmental objective were then identified. Secondly, SEA experts estimated the effect’s intensity according to a scale of significance. Thirdly, the information was reorganised to assess the cumulative and transnational effects of each action planned by the CP. The impacts of SOs are ordered by environmental theme in the table below.

Many expected environmental effects of the Programme should be intangible and indirect with no relevant negative effects identified at this stage. Positive impacts, equally distributed across the area of cooperation, should be seen over the programming period and beyond. Positive impact can be reinforced providing synergies with other policy instruments in the area such as the maritime strategy WEST MED, external cross-border cooperation programme CBC ENI MED or the Adriatic and Ionian macro-strategy EUSAIR.

Priority Axis 1 – The SO (i) is devoted to enhance research and innovation capacities and the uptake of advanced technologies in the cooperation area. The interventions planned range from strategic design to development of

Mitigation and orientation measures for priority 1: integration of project selection criteria focusing on eco-innovation and resource efficiency; promote low carbon interventions and the introduction of carbon compensation eligible criteria.

innovative solutions and networking between public and private institutions. Sectoral coverage is large and includes blue and green economy, manufacturing, transport, tourism, cultural and creative industry, and others. Nevertheless, some types of action can have localised environmental effects, such as support to applied research or pilot lines. Positive effects are expected, especially regarding GHG emissions, however, effects are largely unknown at this stage and will depend on the projects supported.

Priority Axis 2 - The three specific objectives under priority 2 contribute directly to the environmental objectives of the cooperation area. The objectives are clearly consistent with the targets set by the EU strategy 'Green deal', with a specific focus on circular economy (SO vi), climate change issues (SO iv) and biodiversity management (SO vii). Financial allocation to priority 2 accounts for 70% of the overall budget. The specific objective (vi) promotes the circular economy in the cooperation area. Actions are devoted to improving waste management and resource efficiency, including waste reduction (e.g. plastic), eco-innovative approach and efficiency in water consumption. Sectors covered are mainly agriculture, food and fisheries, manufacturing, and tourism. Potential positive direct impacts are expected in terms of reduction of waste production, increase of recycling, reduction of chemical pollutions (through reuse and recovery), decrease of pressures on fresh water and on natural resources in general, as well as in terms of GHG emissions.

The specific objective (iv) promotes climate change adaptation, risk prevention and disaster resilience. Potential direct impacts are expected on risk management capacity development, as well as an improvement of water quality and in energy efficiency and promotion of renewable energy systems. Some effects are also expected, though of lesser extent, in terms of soil and land management (forest protection and soil restoration in rural areas).

Interventions under specific objective (vii) are dedicated to the conservation and preservation of biodiversity, consolidating the connection of ecosystems and improving the management of natural resources. Expected direct positive effects are mostly on inland and maritime ecosystems, as well as on air quality, through investment in urban green infrastructures, and the preservation and valorisation of landscape and cultural heritage.

Mitigation and orientation measures for priority 2: integration of project selection criteria focusing on eco-innovation and resource efficiency; promote low carbon interventions and the introduction of carbon compensation eligible criteria; Promote integrated project achieving several sustainable goal (SDGs).

Priority Axis 3 is devoted to governance actions. Interventions planned under the specific objective ISO1 should support in general the decision-making process, promote networking and capitalization, and enhance the capacity building of public and private organisations in the cooperation area. Even if supporting capacity building of public institutions is a precondition for the implementation of sustainable policies in the long term, actions under priority 3 have no clear environmental impacts which can be identified at this stage of the analysis.

Mitigation and orientation measures for priority 3: promote integrate policy approaches in the cooperation area based on sustainable development goals.

Impacts and transnational effects on the environment.

	Climate change	Marine ecosystem	Bio-diversity	Soil and cultural heritage	Waste	Water	Air	Energy	Health and population
Priority axis 1: SMARTER MED									
SO (i) Enhancing research and innovation capacities and the uptake of advance technologies	+	?	?	?	?	?	?	?	?
Priority axis 2: GREENER MED									
SO (vi) Promoting the transition to a circular economy	+	+	n.e	+	+	+	n.s.	+	+
SO (iv) Promoting climate change adaptation, risk prevention and disaster prevention	++	+	n.e.	n.s	n.e	+	n.e.	+	n.e.
SO (vii) Enhancing biodiversity, green infrastructure in the urban environment, and reducing pollution	n.s	+	++	+	n.s	n.s	n.e.	n.e.	n.e.
Priority axis 3: MED GOVERNANCE									
ISO (vi) Other actions to support better cooperation governance	n.e.	n.e.	n.e.	n.e.	n.e.	n.e.	n.e.	n.e.	n.e.

Positive effects	Scale to measure the intensity of the effects
++	Very significant effects
+	Significant effects
n.s.	No significant effects
?/n.e.	Unknown effect/No effects

Monitoring measures

A monitoring system is integral to the SEA procedure. The proposed monitoring system takes into account the environmental context as well as output and performance indicators. These are all able to monitor unexpected environmental effects from the Programme intervention during its implementation phase. Most of these indicators will be based on information already available in the Programme monitoring system; while a few will be quantified based on information collected from beneficiaries.

All the information collected at different levels, from the monitoring system and other relevant databases, will be included and analysed in an environmental report, periodically drafted and made available to the JS and Managing Authority for decision making. This report should be discussed in monitoring committees, especially during the Programme review, to prompt decisions regarding re-programming or adjustment of the Strategy to obtain more sustainable development of the area under the cooperation objective.

Conclusion

The environmental assessment revealed that the Euro-MED Programme has overall positive effects on environmental issues.

Analysis shows that, compared to a scenario business as usual, the current strategy proposed for public consultation must be considered as a good alternative, from an environmental point of view, compared to the alternative “zero-programme” as described in the context analysis.