

Implementation Report 2023-2024

WestMED Initiative
WestMED Assistance Mechanism



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1 Introduction

1.1 Overview of WestMED Initiative Progress

The **WestMED Initiative** for the sustainable development of the blue economy in the western Mediterranean region was adopted by the European Commission on 19 April 2017 and endorsed by the [Council of the EU on 26 June 2017](#). On December 4, 2018, in Algiers, the 10 Ministers of the Western Mediterranean countries (Algeria, France, Italy, Libya, Malta, Mauritania, Morocco, Portugal, Spain and Tunisia), together with the European Commission and the Union for the Mediterranean, adopted a declaration to strengthen regional cooperation on the WestMED initiative. Although the Initiative focuses on the western Mediterranean region and the 10 countries, its scope of action and benefits extend beyond this sub-basin.

3 GOALS

1. a safer and more secure maritime space
2. a smart and resilient blue economy
3. improved maritime governance

10 PRIORITIES

1. Coastguard functions cooperation (training, capacity building, search and rescue)
2. Maritime safety and response to marine pollution rescue
3. Strategic research and innovation
4. Maritime clusters development
5. Skills development and circulation
6. Sustainable consumption and production (maritime transport, ports, maritime and coastal tourism, marine aquaculture)
7. Spatial Planning and coastal management
8. Marine and maritime knowledge
9. Biodiversity and marine habitat conservation
10. Sustainable fisheries and coastal community development

Since 2018, the WestMED Initiative has been supported by a dedicated **Assistance Mechanism (AM)** to provide support upfront to countries and to the initiative itself, support stakeholders and collect relevant data needed to establish baselines, monitor and report on progress. The AM is formed by the Central Team and the National Hubs. The Central Team acts as an executive Management Team; coordinating all practical activities of the Initiative. The central team also serves as a linking pin between all (political) partners involved: DG MARE, CINEA and the National Coordinators for an efficient information flow and accountability regarding progress of the Initiative. National Hubs are teams of national experts with an extensive network and solid knowledge of funding opportunities, who can identify areas of high potential and help develop project ideas. National Hubs offer confidential and tailored guidance on project development, funding opportunities and partner matchmaking and are able to address local priorities.



The European Commission has been supporting the establishment and implementation of three sea basin strategies in the Atlantic, the Black Sea and the Western Mediterranean.

In May 2021, the European Commission adopted a [new approach](#) for a sustainable blue economy in the EU that sets out a detailed agenda for the blue economy to play a major role in achieving the European Green Deal [objectives](#).

The European Commission recognises the benefit of sea-basins strategies and indicates that the EU will continue supporting cooperation and developing tailored strategies for each European sea basin.

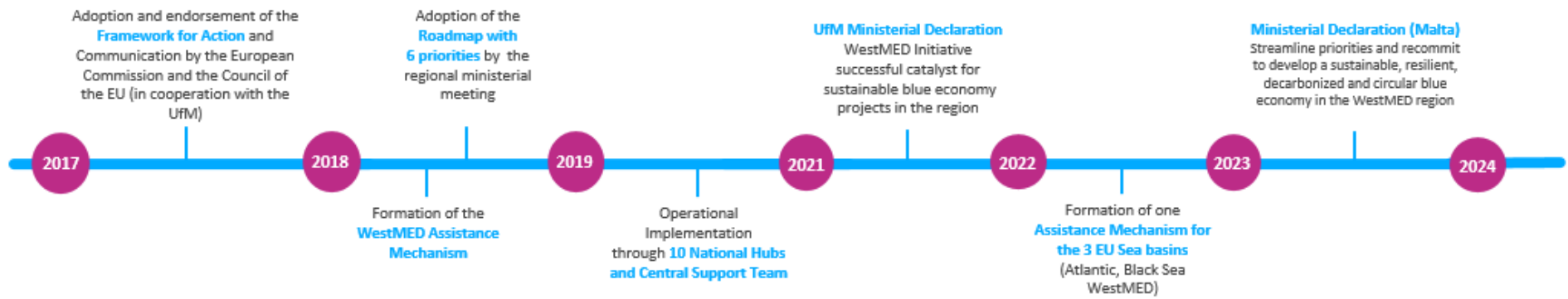
A unique Assistance Mechanism was formed in October 2022 to help support the implementation of the three EU Sea Basin Strategies, namely Atlantic Strategy, the WestMED Initiative and the Common Maritime Agenda for the Black Sea.

It means that the WestMED Assistance Mechanism has now become part of a larger consortium to better identify and build on the synergies between all three sea basins. It will do so by exchanging best practices and organizing national and regional events with themes that have a clear cross sea basin relevance such as blue skills, blue investments, green shipping, and sustainable aquaculture. This new approach will ensure the specific needs of each sea basin while facilitating synergies and increasing outreach and visibility. As has been done in the previous years, this new joint Assistance Mechanism will continue its networking expertise to initiate project partnerships and help gain access to funding with proposal development support. However, this time drawing from a much larger database of stakeholders and pool of experts.

ASSISTANCE MECHANISM



TIMELINE



1.2 Evolution of the WestMED Co-Presidencies

Co-Presidency in 2023: Mauritania and Malta

In 2023, the WestMED Initiative was co-presided by **Mauritania** and **Malta**, following the model that reinforces North-South cooperation across the Mediterranean. The joint leadership focused on inclusiveness, ensuring that both EU and non-EU nations were equally represented in the discussions shaping the future of the Mediterranean's blue economy.

Mauritania brought to the table its deep interest in marine resources, sustainable fisheries, and climate adaptation. Malta, with its established role as a maritime hub within the EU, contributed to valuable expertise in maritime governance, innovation, and environmental sustainability. Together, they prioritized key areas such as:

- The development of sustainable maritime industries in relation to marine renewable energy and blue biotechnology.
- Advancing maritime safety and pollution control, which remain concerns in the Mediterranean in the context of climate change.
- Strengthening economic resilience across the Mediterranean region, with an emphasis on creating green jobs and fostering innovative solutions that benefit both coastal communities and marine ecosystems.

The 2023 co-presidency helped solidify the foundation for future cooperation, setting the stage for the 2023 Ministerial Declaration, which reiterated the region's commitment to a decarbonized, circular blue economy.

Co-Presidency in 2024: Mauritania and Portugal

In 2024, the WestMED Initiative is being led by a joint co-presidency between **Mauritania** and **Portugal**. The co-presidency in 2024 is focused on building on the momentum of previous years while steering the WestMED Initiative toward new challenges and opportunities.

In this way, Mauritania and Portugal collaborate with the partners of the WestMED Initiative to implement the terms of the Malta Ministerial Declaration, adopted in 2023. This will include adopting the recommendations outlined in the Commission's Report to the Council and the European Parliament regarding the implementation of the WestMED Initiative. Furthermore, Portugal will focus on fostering synergies between the Atlantic Basin and the Western Mediterranean Sub-basin to promote a sustainable blue economy that supports the development of both regions, with particular emphasis on their coastal areas and communities. Together, Mauritania and Portugal are working to develop cooperative strategies and policies in favour of a sustainable blue economy that will boost the development of the Western Mediterranean region.

1.3 The new WestMED Ministerial Declaration

On 23 June 2023, ministers and high-level representatives from the 10 WestMED countries (Algeria, France, Italy, Libya, Malta, Mauritania, Morocco, Portugal, Spain and Tunisia) met in Malta together with representatives of the European Commission and the Union for the Mediterranean in order to reassess and update the priorities stated in the [WestMed Framework for Action](#) as supported by the WestMED Initiative. As a result of this Ministerial meeting, a [new WestMED Ministerial Declaration](#) was signed jointly committing to:

- Sustainable production and consumption, and through the support of the transition of Maritime Transport, Green shipping, and Ports towards carbon-neutrality and zero emission and ports as hubs for energy; Innovative and restorative aquaculture and fisheries and Coastal and maritime eco-Tourism.
- Maritime Clusters
- Blue skills and jobs
- Ocean literacy and youth
- Promoting Maritime Spatial Planning (MSP)
- Decarbonisation of the blue economy and, importantly, boosting the Marine Renewable Energy sectors
- Stepping up the efforts to tackle air and marine pollution
- Increasing ambition for preserving marine and coastal biodiversity in the Mediterranean
- Promoting training and technology transfer
- Developing coastal resilience solutions and early warning systems
- Maritime security and surveillance as a pre-condition for a prosperous and sustainable blue economy in the Mediterranean.

The declaration provides a renewed political commitment towards the sustainable management of the Mediterranean together with their efforts to recover from the Covid-19 crisis and tackle the serious impacts of climate change and environmental degradation while reinforcing the regional cooperation in the UFM region on Sustainable Blue Economy.

Through the Declaration, the countries also acknowledge the work done so far under the WestMED Initiative and highlight the need for synergies with other Sea Basin Strategies (the Atlantic Strategy and the Common Maritime Agenda for the Black Sea).



2 Progress of the WestMED Technical Groups (2023-2024)


The WestMED Assistance Mechanism (AM) has initiated several thematic discussion platforms. Current and future maritime developments are being discussed with lead stakeholders from the participating countries under the guidance of AM facilitators, with a focus on concrete actions.



AquaWest – Sustainable Aquaculture					
Context	Aim	Key activities	Key milestones 2023-2024	Synergies	Latest news
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Aquaculture has grown steadily since 2011, despite a decline during 2019-2021 due to COVID-19 impacts. ● It plays a crucial role in food security, employment, and economic development. ● In the Mediterranean, aquaculture produces over 675,000 tonnes annually, generating revenues of approximately EUR 10.5 billion and supporting over 250,000 jobs across the value chain. ● In 2021, AquaWest was launched to promote: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Innovative, eco-compatible, and restorative aquaculture practices. - Addressing needs and opportunities in Southern Mediterranean countries by leveraging existing innovative practices. ● AquaWest includes high-level policymakers and stakeholders from the Western Mediterranean aquaculture sector. 	<p>The general objective of the AquaWest is to encourage and promote the development of sustainable, eco-compatible aquaculture that meets the needs of food security and adaptation to climate change in the countries of the southern western Mediterranean.</p> <p>Specific objectives:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Identify and share relevant knowledge on innovation and the development of sustainable aquaculture - To facilitate contact and exchanges between national and regional institutions responsible for aquaculture development - To facilitate contact between the economic players in the aquaculture sector, by identifying, sharing and promoting the best sustainable aquaculture practices and promoting the establishment of scientific partnerships between aquaculture research centres and companies in the South; - Identify the funding available at national level (particularly in southern countries) and how to support cooperation between southern countries and innovative practices the West Med basin - Create an exchange and sharing platform on aquaculture (ideally co-financed by southern countries and existing regional funding - e.g. INTERREG MED). 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Support projects' ideas development, establishment of consortia and search of funding opportunities as well as support funded projects and awarded projects by WestMED. ● Support projects' ideas development, establishment of consortia and search of funding opportunities as well as support funded projects and awarded projects by WestMED. ● Establishing synergies with the aquaculture private sector 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Establishment of a regular collaboration with the EU Aquaculture Assistance Mechanism ● Organisation of joint events with FAO/GFCM ● Synergies across sea basins: establishment of synergies with the Black Sea Technical Group ● Preparation of a COST proposal for sustainable aquaculture involving more than 30 stakeholders. 	<p>This WG has established collaboration with key stakeholders such as The European Fisheries Control Agency (EFCA), FAMENET, FAO/GFCM, EU Aquaculture Assistance Mechanism, Federation of European Aquaculture Producers (FEAP) and, AquaBioTech Group, among others.</p>	<p>9 October 2024. WestMED Hackathon 2024: Crafting Sustainable Blue Economy Projects</p> <p>July 2024. WestMED Success Story. Sustainable aquaculture. Meet NewTechAqua – the European aquaculture innovators</p> <p>29 April 2024. WestMED's Aquaculture Technical Group AquaWest intensifies cooperation with the EU Aquaculture Assistance Mechanism and FAO/ GFCM</p> <p>23 February 2024. Joint FAO/GFCM-WestMED event during SIPA2024 on Climate Change Resilient Aquaculture</p> <p>9 October 2023. Samir Bachouche (WestMED National Hub) presenting 'the development of aquaculture in Algeria' at the University of Chlef</p>

Maritime Clusters Alliance



Context	Aim	Key activities	Key milestones 2023-2024	Synergies	Latest news
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Maritime clusters play an essential role as brokers between EU regions and neighbouring countries in the Mediterranean. They are essential actors in aggregating local SMEs and large companies across a range of sectors in the blue economy, including through synergies with enterprises involved in in-land activities across complex value chains. The western Mediterranean has a wide number of maritime clusters active in coastal areas, with strong emerging practices across the southern shore. A clear opportunity exists for the WestMED Initiative to support a stronger alliance across the most active Maritime Clusters in the western Mediterranean, and beyond. 	<p>The key objectives of the Alliance are:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Cluster dialogue: Support exchange of knowledge and practices across maritime and non-maritime clusters South-South cooperation: Boost the development of southern maritime clusters North-South capacity building: Upgrade cluster management skills Provide a platform for private investments in innovative SMEs 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Support project ideas, development of consortia and search of funding opportunities Support project ideas development and collaboration with funded projects Support to the creation of new Maritime Clusters within the WestMED seabasin (new Mauritanian Maritime Cluster in June 2022 and Libyan Maritime Cluster in September 2024). Strengthen collaboration and synergies among maritime clusters 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Close collaboration and organisation of joint events with the EMFAF funded project CALLMEBLUE Active support to the establishment of new collaboration agreements among clusters from both shores. For example, Algerian Incubator and Tunisian Maritime Cluster. Support to the creation of new maritime clusters (Libyan Maritime Cluster). 	<p>This WG has established collaboration with key stakeholders such as European Cluster Collaboration Platform (ECCP), European Clusters Alliance (ECA), Blue Invest, ANIMA, Union Africaine (UA) and ENMC.</p>	<p>20 October 2024. Memorandum of understanding between the Algerian incubator 'Leancubator' and the Tunisian Maritime Cluster</p> <p>15 October 2024. WestMED Tunisia presents maritime cluster actions during CallmeBlue event</p> <p>9 October 2024. WestMED Hackathon 2024: Crafting Sustainable Blue Economy Projects</p> <p>8 October 2024. Le cluster maritime libyen créé avec le soutien du cluster maritime tunisien</p> <p>29 September 2024. WestMED Libya announces the country's first Maritime Cluster at the Omar Al-Mukhtar University, during 'Blue Economy Research & Innovation' workshop</p> <p>22 February 2024. Tunisia and Greece join forces on the Sustainable Blue Economy in the Mediterranean</p> <p>1 July 2023. WestMED Maritime Clusters Alliance presenting major achievements and developments at SeaFuture 2023</p> <p>2 October 2022. Maritime Clusters take center stage at WestMED's National Event in Lisbon</p>

<u>Green Shipping and Ports</u>					
					
Context	Aim	Key activities	Key milestones 2023-2024	Synergies	Latest news
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The Global Sulphur Cap 2020, adopted by the International Maritime Organization in 2016, limits sulphur oxide emissions to 0.5% by 2020, down from 3.5%. • Achieving this requires transitioning the global fleet to less polluting propulsion energies. • The Western Mediterranean faces challenges in sustainable maritime transport that could become opportunities with proper action. These efforts align with: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Priority 2.4 of the WestMED Framework for Action (2017). - Priority 3 of the WestMED Roadmap (2018). • Discussions on sustainable maritime transport began at the WestMED Stakeholders' Conference in Algiers (Dec 2018) and were further developed during the WestMED Hackathon Event in Palermo (May 2019). • The TG on Sustainable Transport/Green Shipping aims to foster cooperation in research and deployment of innovative solutions for clean maritime transport. 	<p>General objectives of the group are two-folded:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Support effective international partnerships and better quality of project ideas to be supported by the WMAM (to be possibly funded by EU programmes, but also and importantly other IFIs). In this respect, different “geographical scopes” can be allowed depending on the specificities of each identified programme and specific call for projects. These would result in a series of coordinated project activities that could maximise the synergies amongst different financial streams, including a focus on southern/northern countries and a possible extension to the eastern Mediterranean. • Identify specific topics where further policy and political action is envisaged and provide inputs for strategic decisions to be discussed and agreed at the Steering Committee level. This way, the WestMED Initiative could be instrumental in fueling existing policy dialogue with innovative ideas and solutions towards more sustainable maritime transport solutions. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Support project ideas development, establishment of consortia and search of funding opportunities. • Support project ideas development and collaboration with funded projects • Submission of proposal and coordination of S3 Thematic partnership “Shipbuilding Propulsion Systems Alliance” with 30 partners from 3 EU sea basins • Approaching the new MED SOx-ECA SOx from 2025 on: persisting gaps and technical assistance needs at Mediterranean level and by each country. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Launch of a new launched S3 Thematic partnership “Shipbuilding Propulsion Systems Alliance” with 30 partners from 3 EU sea basins (November, 2024) • Direct support to proposals for EU funding. Several of these have been approved and funded such as GREEN MARINE MED, GreenMed and POWER4MED. • Strengthening synergies across sea basins with the Atlantic Action Plan, in particular, with the Pillar 1 Ports. 	<p>This WG has established collaboration with key stakeholders such as the UfM, Transport platform, ASCAME, Atlantic Action Plan – Pillar 1 Ports, Centre for Transport Studies for the Western Mediterranean (CETMO), Mediterranean Regional Centre for Emergency Response against Accidental Marine Pollution (REMPEC), European Maritime Safety Agency (EMSA), MedPorts, ZEWT Waterbone Partnership, MedCities.</p>	<p>30 November 2024. Launch of S3 Thematic partnership “Shipbuilding Propulsion Systems Alliance” with 30 partners from 3 EU sea basins</p> <p>9 October 2024. WestMED Hackathon 2024: Crafting Sustainable Blue Economy Projects</p> <p>17 July 2024. WestMED Malta discusses current and future challenges of the Mediterranean Logistics sector at MedaLogistics Week Barcelona 2024</p> <p>15 May 2024. The Atlantic Action Plan, WestMED Initiative, Port of Vigo, DG MARE, MAPA and the Energy Transition Partnership streamline port and vessel decarbonization actions</p> <p>25 February 2024. WestMED national event on Green Shipping in Algeria</p>

Community of Practice on Maritime Spatial Planning					
			 		
Context	Aim	Key activities	Key milestones 2023-2024	Synergies	Latest news
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> In the Mediterranean, there are many policy drivers for the implementation of Maritime Spatial Planning at regional, sub-regional and national levels. These include the MSP Directive implementation for the European Union Member States, the Ministerial declaration on Blue Economy of the Union for the Mediterranean, the Mediterranean ICZM protocol, the Conceptual Framework for MSP developed by UNEP/MAP and the MSPglobal pilot project in the Western Mediterranean Sea. During the WestMED '22 Hackathon in Malta and a couple of meetings under the MSPMED project, relevant stakeholders discussed the benefits of creating an open MSP Community of Practice within the framework of the WestMED Initiative and supported by CINEA and DG MARE. This, to facilitate easier and more coordinated exchanges between MSP experts/practitioners from both the northern and southern Western Mediterranean countries and beyond. 	<p>The main objective of the MED-MSP-CoP is to establish a permanent communication and dialogue across borders between experts on MSP (i.e. planners, technical experts, researchers), to exchange knowledge and relevant experiences in the region, to reach a shared perspective on topics of common MSP interests and enhance the cooperation between the northern and southern countries of the Mediterranean.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Gathering key experts on Maritime Spatial Planning (MSP) in the Mediterranean Organisation of events and webinars Advisory role on regional studies and publications 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Organisation of several webinars on relevant topics Gather of more than 90 experts on MSP 	<p>This WG has established collaboration with key stakeholders such as:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> EU funded projects (MEDIGREEN, MSP Green, REGINA, REMAP, MSP4BIO, MARINE Plan, etc) Key initiatives (Union for the Mediterranean, Offshore Coalition for Energy and Nature – Mediterranean Sea (Med OCEaN), UNEP Working Group on MSP) Cross sea basin collaborations (EMSP, Atlantic MSP CoP, North and Baltic CoPs). 	<p>19 December 2023. MED MSP Community of Practice: experts from across the Mediterranean unite to share experiences and align perspectives 27 January 2023. The Community of Practice on Maritime Spatial Planning (MSP) for the Mediterranean has been launched! Events and meetings. https://maritime-spatial-planning.ec.europa.eu/msp-resources/med-msp-cop</p>

Sustainable tourism					
Context	Aim	Key activities	Key milestones 2023-2024	Synergies	Latest news
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Traditional tourism (sun, sea, and sand) contributes significantly to local livelihoods, accounting for 11.5% of total employment in Mediterranean countries, making it a key economic sector. • Mass tourism drives: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Increased pollution. - Uncontrolled coastal development. - Growing demand for water, food, and energy. • Severe resource strain due to rising sea and land temperatures. • These factors make mass tourism unsustainable in the long term. • The Western Mediterranean must transition to eco-tourism to balance tourism's economic benefits with sustainability. • Recommended actions include: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Enhancing EU and external territorial cooperation, involving non-EU WestMED countries (Algeria, Libya, Mauritania, Morocco, Tunisia). - Promoting knowledge sharing among stakeholders from both northern and southern shores to amplify results. 	<p>The overall objective of the Sustainable Tourism TG within the WestMED Initiative is to serve as a technical forum to discuss trends and opportunities towards sustainable tourism within the region and to provide support to participants to develop project ideas around the topics already set at EU level with regards to the tourism-related topics of green transition, digitalization, promotion of social inclusion, governance, and skills.</p> <p>Counting with non-EU members under the WestMED Initiative, this TG will also focus on addressing other policy and regulation topics that can also help non-EU countries adapt and develop these sustainable tourism practices.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Gathering key stakeholders and organising info sessions on sustainable tourism • Support project ideas development, establishment of consortia and search of funding opportunities • Attend 3rd party events to present the TG work and establish synergies with other Tourism Initiatives. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Approval of the TG in June 2024 • Official launch of the TG in November 2024 • Gathering more than 80 stakeholders in the group of experts • Award from Sun&Blue Congress 2023 to WestMED Initiative for its important role in internationalizing the event 	<p>This WG has established collaboration with key stakeholders such as UfM, ASCAME, WOC, CPRM.</p>	<p>2 December 2024. WestMED makes its mark at the International Sun&Blue Congress 2024 in Almería, Spain</p> <p>9 October 2024. WestMED Hackathon 2024: Crafting Sustainable Blue Economy Projects</p> <p>24 July 2024. CALL for Experts: WestMED Technical Group on Sustainable Tourism Deadline 15 September 2024 (EOB)</p> <p>18 July 2024. A new WestMED Technical group on Sustainable Tourism.</p>

3 Strengthening cooperation with key partners

World Ocean Council (WOC)

On March 28, 2023, the Union for the Mediterranean (UfM)/ the WestMED Initiative and the **World Ocean Council (WOC)** signed a Memorandum of Understanding (MOU) at the UfM Headquarters in Barcelona. This, within the framework of the 2021 UfM Ministerial Declaration on Sustainable Blue Economy and Roadmap for its implementation, and the WestMED Initiative, supported by the UfM and by the European Commission.

The MoU details key avenues of collaboration to promote cooperation, strong engagement, stewardship, and corporate responsibility from the business and investment communities in the maritime sectors at Mediterranean level. Cooperation is mainly focused on blue business development and entrepreneurship (incl. blue skills, careers, jobs and employability) and blue investments such as the blue finance process in the Mediterranean.

ASCAME

Following a Memorandum of Understanding signed in 2021, the WestMED Initiative has continued its collaboration with **ASCAME** during 2023 and 2024.

The MedaLogistics Week 2024, that took place in Barcelona on 5-6 June 2024, showcased significant collaboration between ASCAME (Association of Mediterranean Chambers of Commerce and Industry) and the WestMED Initiative. The event focused on challenges and advancements in Mediterranean logistics and sustainable maritime practices, with some highlights such as:

1. **Workshop Contributions:** WestMED's Technical Group on Green Shipping participated in discussions addressing sustainability, geopolitical impacts, and innovation in the logistics sector. Projects like GREEN MED and BLUE PORTS, funded under the EU's EMFAF 2023 call, exemplify joint progress.
2. **Strategic Synergies:** Since signing an MoU in 2021, ASCAME and WestMED have fostered cooperation to promote the blue economy, maritime safety, and governance improvements. This partnership leverages the Mediterranean's unique strategic position and emphasizes unified stakeholder collaboration.
3. **Future Outlook:** ASCAME and WestMED continue to build an integrated Mediterranean network to enhance sustainable transport, drive green innovation, and establish platforms for shared solutions, reflecting their commitment to regional unity and development.



INTERREG

Back-to-back to the WestMED Steering Committee meeting in Brussels, in June 26th 2024, the **MedLab** annual meeting took place on 25 – 26 June. The MedLab is a platform which aims to share and transfer Mediterranean-based knowledge and to improve synergies and complementarities between Interreg programmes and other EU funds active in the area to increase their impact in the region. The network is particularly focused on developing these implementation synergies, considering the two geographical frameworks currently in the area. These are, the WestMED Sea Basin Initiative and the EUSAIR.

On this occasion, the meeting had a strong focus on the Post-2027 debate and discussions on maritime cooperation for Post-27 in the Mediterranean. Interact and TESIM presented the advancements on synergies from different angles, including synergies in the project assessment phase of several Interreg Programmes as well as complementary synergies between cross-border and transnational programmes and synergies with other EU funds and Initiatives. Another important point discussed was how Interreg Programmes engage stakeholders and citizen through consultations. Lastly, the Sustainable Tourism Multi-programme Coordination

Mechanism was presented as successful programme of cooperation in the region. The WestMED Initiative was invited as Observers to contribute to strengthening synergies with EU funding instruments and to align priorities with the Sea Basins strategies.



A full list of ongoing synergies and networking with relevant Blue Economy stakeholders is provided in **Annex 1: Synergies and networking activities (2023-2024)**.

4 Synergies across Sea Basins

During 2023 and 2024, the Sea Basin Assistance Mechanism has identified concrete and relevant opportunities for stronger cross-sea basin coordination and synergies, both at the policy as well as technical levels, with the ultimate objective of further streamlining overall cross-sea basins cooperation across the EU towards common challenges such as decarbonisation, environmental degradation or coastal tourism.

The European Maritime Days (EMD) is an annual event organized by the European Commission to celebrate and promote sustainable growth in the maritime economy and raise awareness of the seas and oceans' importance. The WestMED, as part of the Sea Basin Assistance Mechanism, has been represented in the last two editions:

European Maritime Days 2023: The European Maritime Days 2023 in Brest, France, was defined as an important moment for fostering regional cooperation towards the decarbonization of the blue economy, focusing on synergies across the Atlantic, WestMED, and Black Sea basins. The workshop, "Paths to Decarbonisation: Cross-Sea Basin Synergies," emphasized collaboration as a cornerstone for achieving a sustainable and decarbonized blue economy across Europe and its neighbouring countries.

During this day, WestMED prioritized Green Shipping and Sustainable Aquaculture with active projects under its Technical Groups and platforms like AquaWest. Besides, the discussions unveiled structured opportunities for cross-sea basin policy dialogues, such as joint Steering Committee meetings and the establishment of a common platform for ongoing collaboration. Eventually, the proposed actions for synergies included: the creation of cross-basin consortia to leverage EU funding opportunities, the increase of exchanges between technical groups and sharing best practices, and the Planning of a cross-sea basin fertilization event in 2024 to align efforts and strategies.



European Maritime Days 2024: The European Maritime Days 2024 in Svendborg, Denmark, highlighted the progress made since the adoption of the EU Sustainable Blue Economy Communication, emphasizing Sea Basin Strategies as enablers of sustainable growth. Key discussions at the High-Level Panel focused on cross-sea basin synergies, challenges, and future collaboration, with leaders from Atlantic, WestMED, and Black Sea initiatives outlining shared priorities.

The Sea Basins Assistance Mechanism workshop explored areas such as ocean literacy, green energy transition, and blue skills. Concrete outcomes included the formation of a cross-basin working group on blue skills and ocean literacy, a roadmap for cooperation in these areas, and initiatives like “Fishers of the Future” and “Blue Generation” to address workforce challenges and engage youth in blue economy careers. The discussions also called for strengthening political and stakeholder cooperation through upcoming events at that time like the WestMED Hackathon.

Based on the discussions on the future of WestMED and the conclusions of the European Maritime Day (30 May 2024) jointly called for:

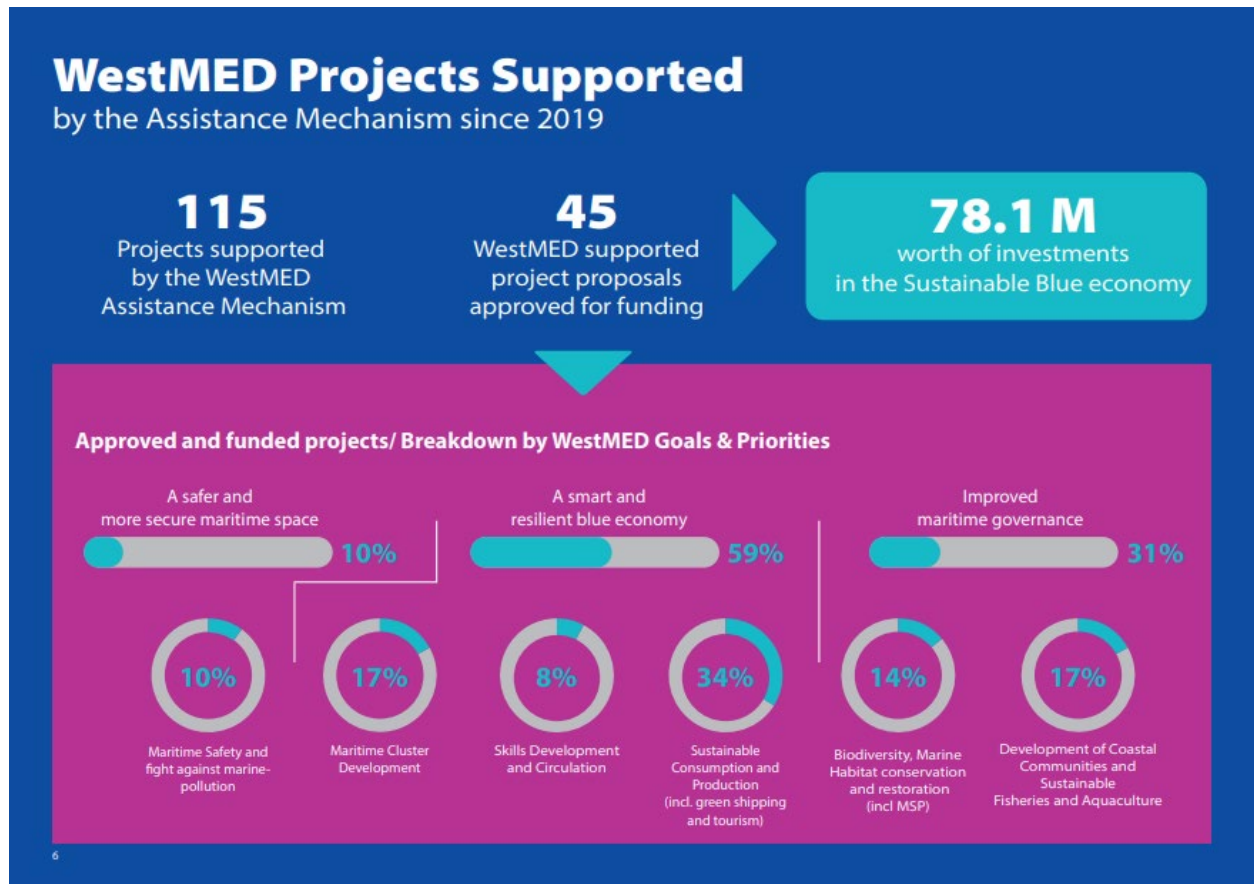
1. Cross-sea basin thematic cooperation across key topics, particularly around the area of blue skills and ocean literacy, which is a priority for all the sea basins involved. Cooperation among existing “technical groups” will continue to be strengthened, focusing on Aquaculture in the WestMED & Black Sea; and on Green Ports/Shipping in WestMED and Atlantic.
2. Strengthening political cooperation among National Coordinators of the initiatives, inter alia by promoting the participation of representatives of sea basin strategies member countries in each other’s Steering Committee/Group meetings.
3. Promoting stakeholder cooperation across sea basins in upcoming regional conferences and events, such as the “Assises de l’économie de la mer” held on 19-20 November 2024 in Bordeaux (France), or the WestMED “Hackathon” that took place in Algarve in October.



5 Projects supported by WestMED

With 10 Western Mediterranean countries, based on the 5+5 dialogue, the initiative supports project development by providing technical advice related to funding opportunities and connecting potential project partners across the sea basin. These countries include Algeria, France, Italy, Libya, Malta, Mauritania, Morocco, Spain, Portugal and Tunisia.

In the last 6 years, 115 blue project ideas have been actively supported by the WestMED Assistance Mechanism and submitted under different funding calls. 45 of these have been approved for funding, resulting in a total of €78.1M invested in the region to strengthen the sustainable blue economy with innovative initiatives. Simultaneously, cooperation within and between the countries have been strengthened by actively promoting the sustainable blue economy across the board - from science to governance.



A list of projects supported by WestMED and still active during 2023-2024 is provided in the table below.

Project	Description	Topic	Countries	Funding Source	Total (€) Budget
REBOOT MED	Recovering, Experiencing and Boosting eco-tourism in the WestMED area	Tourism	FR IT TU ES MA MR MT	EMFAF	1.249.225
TOUMALI	TouMaLi stands for preventing Tourism Marine Litter. It aims to develop and establish sustainable solutions for waste management in the tourism sector in North Africa to protect marine ecosystems, leading to economic, but also fundamental health, environmental and social improvements.	Marine Litter	MA TU EG DE	Germany Federal Ministry for the Environment, Nature Conservation and Nuclear Safety	4.232.000
MARMED	MARitime Cluster Manager Education Development. To promote competitive profiles for Marine and Maritime Clusters across Europe and, specifically in the Mediterranean Area, through the development and implementation of Cluster Management Educational Programs and training	Cluster	IT MT GR PT TN	Erasmus+	400.000
LEVIATAD	The LEVIATAD Project aims at creating the 1st Eurocluster of Excellence on Naval Defense	Defence	IT FR HR BE	COSME	1.391.000
LIFE4MEDECA	Reduction of emissions within the ECA MED area.	Green Shipping	IT ES DK IL DE FR NL	LIFE 2021	1.636.582
MedBAN	The main MedBAN objective is to work as a one-stop-shop that will mobilize blue economy SMEs to adopt processes and technologies to reinforce their «twin transition transformation» into a more resilient, greener and digitalized economy in the Blue Economy (open strand), with the aim of reinforcing EU's strategic autonomy and resilience in several blue sectors. MedBAN will also establish a network (beyond the Eurocluster) between Mediterranean clusters and other stakeholders that could contribute to a more sustainable Mediterranean (and EU) blue economy.	Clusters	FR ES IT PT EL DZ TN	COSME	1.399.384
NewTech-Aqua	Expanding and diversifying European and Mediterranean aquaculture production of finfish, molluscs and micro-algae by developing and validating technologically advanced, resilient and sustainable applications. A substantial involvement of the industry is essential for the project.	Aquaculture	IT ES GR NO HR UK FR H2020 BE CY		6.724.000
WIN-BIG	WIN-BIG develops female- and basin-tailored capacity-building to increase the participation and representation of women across EU geographies and BE sectors and work towards a gender balanced Blue Economy.	Fisheries	IT IE NL BE NO DE ES	EMFAF	1.467.788
2B-BLUE	2B-BLUE aims to capitalize on B-Blue positive results to: 1) Exemplify evidence-based best practices identified to help communities turn BBT research into practice, 2) Build national demonstration sites (DS) to experiment emerging technologies in local field conditions and bridge the gap among BBT research and industry for new technologies adaptation, 3) Establish strategic alliances of 5-helix stakeholders for the uptake of advanced blue biotechnologies by Med industries and 4) improve regional policies for enhancing sustainability, research and innovation capacities in Euro-Med area.	Blue Biotechnology	FR ES IT GR SL	INTERREG EURO MED	2.411.643
AZA4ICE	The aim of the project is to promote the transition to a circular and efficient economy in the aquaculture sector.	Aquaculture	GR IT ES FR HR PT BG ME	INTERREG EURO MED	2.962.186
BLUE ECO-SYSTEM	BLUE ECOSYSTEM will test innovative methodologies focused on supporting territory-making processes through knowledge production in the blue sustainable economy,	Research and Innovation	IT FR GR PT HR ES AL CY	INTERREG EURO MED	2.978.115

building on existing experiences achieved thanks to previous MED projects (MISTRAL, Blue Blo MED and B-BLUE).

TREASURE	TREASURE's overall objective is to improve environmental quality in and around Mediterranean port areas, by mitigating and reducing sediment and water pollution.	Marine transport	IT ME ES AL FR MT GR	INTERREG EURO MED	2.501.581
ECO-CRUIISING FU TOUR	The ECO-CRUIISING_FUTOUR project aims to boost managerial, innovative, blue, green and digital skills of tourism WestMed SMEs in charge of the promotion of EU and West European coastal and maritime destinations through specialised capacity building programme, knowledge and tech transfer, preparing the transfer of good practices and multiplying the results. The goal is to exploit the green potential of WestMed tourism SMEs and cross-border cooperation to unlock new business opportunities around the new eco-cruise tourism sector. To this specific objective, the project will design Eco smart cruise packages targeting Millennials and Gen Z	Tourism	IT ES MT GR	EMFAF	990.222
CALLMEBLUE	Creating a structured cooperation model between maritime clusters on Northern and Southern shore of the Mediterranean, followed by a capacity building phase and an increasing strengthening of policy support and interregional cooperation. Dissemination and follow up would be important actions to guarantee sustainability of the project results in the long-term.	Clusters	IT PT ES FR GR DZ TN	EMFAF	976.235
POWER4MED	local emPOWERment of fuel transition FOR a green MEDiterranean. Transition toward carbon neutrality in maritime transport requires short & medium-term solutions, the former based on transition fuels (LNG), the latter on not yet fully available alternative fuels (green hydrogen, methanol, electricity and wind). Dealing with such complexity is difficult for the operators of smaller ships and POWER4MED has the ambition to support them by developing the POWER4MED Supporting Structure, a "Supporting Team" of multidisciplinary experts and a set of toolkits facilitating the path toward carbon neutrality of the 3 sectors targeted by the project: fishing boats, commercial vessels and marinas.	Green Shipping	IT MT DZ ES EG TR LY	EMFAF	798.043
GreenMED	Observatory on technology for green shipping, Monitoring and Technology Foresight on Green Shipping in the Mediterranean.	Green Shipping	IT ES MT GR	EMFAF	926.085
Green Marine Med	GREEN MARINE MED will bring together, engage and mobilise the comprehensive Mediterranean Green Shipping stakeholder community, representing the full value chain including actors from the full vessel community, ports and marinas, fuel and energy, as well as finance, investment, innovation and other stakeholders. The comprehensive Network will create the foundation to enable the most broadly supported and useful Monitoring and Technology Foresight on Mediterranean Green Shipping. Through the project's unique inclusion of accelerators and other business support programmes in the Network, GREEN MARINE will strengthen the position of Green Shipping entrepreneurs and start-ups in the region.	Green Shipping	ES EG FR IT NL TN IL TR	EMFAF	1.165.587
Smart Twin Transition	Smart Twin Transition will create innovative tools (based on AI and other digital technologies) to support companies in the tourism chain in their digital and green transition.	Tourism	IT FR	INTERREG MARITIME IT-FR	1.140.922

6 WestMED Annual Events

6.1 WestMED Annual stakeholders 2023

Conference overview: After the successful 2021 WestMED Stakeholder Conference in Rome and the 2022 Hackathons on project development in Malta, the 2023 edition of the WestMED Stakeholder Conference took place in Malta on 22 June 2023.

The objective of this event was to provide a forum for stakeholders of the WestMED sea basin strategy to meet, exchange good practices, share information and identify funding and projects opportunities. The aim was to inspire stakeholders and encourage them to share experiences to succeed with their project ideas.

This Stakeholder Conference was followed by a WestMED Ministerial Conference. A new Ministerial Declaration was signed to express an enduring commitment to the Initiative and streamline the priorities for action.

Awards: This 2023 Conference included the 2nd edition of the WestMED Project Awards, with the objective to identify, showcase and honour exceptional projects in different areas that provide innovative and replicable solutions embodying the WestMED initiative's vision for the Western Mediterranean.

Sixty-one highly interesting and valuable projects from both shores (North and South) entered the competition. There were four categories:

- Biodiversity, marine habitat conservation and response to marine pollution. (Winner: [Bleu Adapt](#) and [Marine Hound](#)).
- Sustainable consumption and production (winner: [GALATEA](#))
- Sustainable fisheries, aquaculture and coastal community development (Winner: [NewTechAqua](#))
- Skill development and circulation (Winner: [We are blue schools](#))

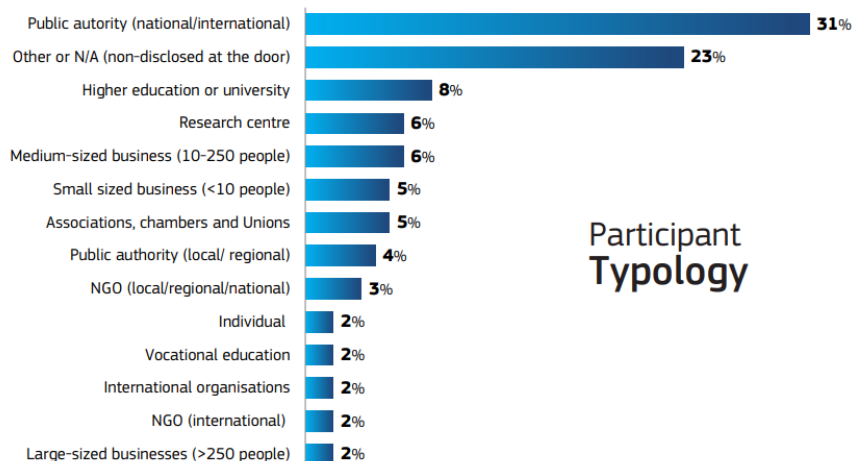
PARTICIPANTS

In-person participants

117

Represented Countries

13



Participant Typology

6.2 3rd WestMED Hackathon 2024

Conference Overview: On 3 October 2024, 87 practitioners and policymakers from 15 countries gathered in Vilamoura, Portugal, for the WestMED Hackathon 2024. This was the third Hackathon following successful events in Palermo (2019) and Malta (2022). The theme of this year's event was "Crafting Sustainable Blue Economy Projects," and it was co-organized by Portugal, Mauritania, and DG MARE.

The event began with opening remarks by the Sea Basins Assistance Mechanism Team Leader, Javier Fernández, the Portuguese and Mauritanian co-presidencies, Lídia Bulcão and Demba Diawara, and a welcome speech by Christos Economou from the European Commission. The project coordinator, Celia Murcia, introduced the agenda and highlighted available EU financial instruments such as Interreg NEXT MED, EMFAF, BlueInvest, and Erasmus+.

Project Showcases: Six blue economy projects presented their achievements, with five of them funded by EMFAF:

- [CALLMEBLUE](#): Cluster Alliance Med Blue is a project that aims to strengthen existing cluster alliances in the Mediterranean area and to accelerate north-south regional cooperation towards the emerging of strategic maritime clusters in North Africa. Among its objectives we can find: improve availability of relevant data to identify barriers and gaps at sea basin level in the Southern Area; promote empowerment of embryonic and emerging maritime clusters ecosystems; foster regional dialogue processes; and promoting sustainable follow-up of Maritime Clusters in the Mediterranean.
- [WeMED NA TOUR](#): This project intends to focus on West Mediterranean natural marine sites and maritime/coastal destinations to develop responsible and sustainable

transnational eco-smart tourism packages according to the blue economy strategy. The designed tourism packages will increase the attractiveness of coastal and marine destinations in the participant countries, highlighting their unique value to a broader audience of visitors, with a specific focus on the "new generations"

- [WINBIG](#): it is focused on empowering women in the blue economy by mapping the gender status and capacity gaps across sea basins and blue sectors and developing tailored capacity-building tools to make the European blue industry more gender-balanced and sustainable. The Project focus on three emerging blue sectors: Blue Sports and Sustainable Tourism, Blue Bioeconomy and Marine Energy and Robotics.
- [GREEN MARINE MED](#): the GREEN MARINE MED project unites the Mediterranean Green Shipping Network, representing the full value chain, including vessel communities, ports, marinas, fuel and energy sectors, finance, investment, innovation, and other stakeholders. This Network forms the foundation for a comprehensive Monitoring and Technology Foresight on Mediterranean Green Shipping. Through the project's unique accelerators and business support programs, we'll empower Green Shipping entrepreneurs and start-ups in the region.
- [BlueAquaEdu](#): this project enhances digital, green, soft, transversal, inter-/multi-disciplinary, managerial, entrepreneurial and project management skills of the next generation Aquaculture graduates. It will fill in the gaps of lack of structured, continued collaboration between industry and educational/ VET institutions and lack of "skills ecosystems" at sea basin level bringing together education, industry and public authorities. The Project attracts skilled mentors with practical experience in selected sectors in order to guide, support and inspire students towards careers in the Blue Economy by relying on the skills and capabilities of mentors.
- [Blue Skills Initiative](#): as lead partner and coordinator of the Blue Skills initiative, the Italian National Institute of Oceanography and Applied Geophysics - OGS proposes a multidisciplinary training offer on sustainable blue economy to suit the long-term education and short-term upskilling experience, circular mobility and knowledge transfer. Specifically, the Blue Skills initiative promotes opportunities for marine and maritime careers through capacity building, skills development, knowledge exchange, and talent circulation across the Mediterranean. The activities include: an Advanced Master, a Summer School, opportunities for research mobility and a traineeship programme.

The event concluded with reflections from Marisa Lameiras da Silva, Director General for Maritime Policy in Portugal, who commended the participants' engagement. Manuel Pleguezuelo Alonso from DG MARE highlighted how some of the ideas from the hackathon 2 years ago have now come to fruition, emphasising the importance of "policies through projects".



7 WestMED Success stories

During 2023-2024, the WestMED has supported initiatives and projects that they contribute significantly to a sustainable blue economy in the region.

- [Tackling invasive species: a successful Italian-Tunisian approach with Bleu Adapt and ARIBiotech](#): Tackling invasive species is one of the main lines of action by the European Commission (EC) on protection of marine ecosystems and its biodiversity, and it is especially applicable to the Mediterranean Basin. The introduction of these organisms into ports, coastal areas, and watersheds is damaging aquatic ecosystems worldwide. Species move without any geographical limitation and thus, a national or local approach is often insufficient to counter these threats across the Mediterranean. An example of such a transnational cooperation is the [Interreg NEXT Italy-Tunisia funding programme](#). This €36 Million programme has enabled multiple blue projects. Two notable projects that address invasive species are Bleu Adapt (Fighting the “blue crab” invasion in the Mediterranean) and Aribiotech (Alliance for Research and Innovation in Blue Biotechnology that focuses on the valorisation of marine waste).
- [The power of Accelerators – GALATEA, the Blue Growth Accelerator](#): Accelerator programs are emerging in recent years as a new model of startup assistance. A startup accelerator is a mentor-based program that provides guidance, support and limited funding in exchange for equity. The role of incubator/accelerator programmes is key to reinforce the entrepreneurial capacity-building by offering skills, knowledge, experience and investment, helping to increase the number of startups and the creation of jobs. Galatea is an excellent example of a sustainable blue economy accelerator, [funded under the EU HORIZON 2020 INNOSUP-programme](#). It has been awarded with the WestMED Best Category award 2023 for its efforts in the category ‘Skill development and circulation’.

During its 36-month existence (2020-2023) Galatea helped accelerate innovative projects and develop new cross-sectoral and cross-border industrial value-chains along 4 high potential Blue Growth domains: Smart Ship, Smart Port, Smart Shipyard and Maritime Surveillance.

- [The drive for green shipping with MARINEHOUND as a leading project example](#): The European Commission launched a regional flagship call in 2023 to promote sustainable transport and ports in the Mediterranean with a total funding of EUR 2.4 million. This call was part of the [European Maritime, Fisheries and Aquaculture Fund \(EMFAF\)](#). As a result of this call, four Mediterranean pilot projects were funded and launched in October 2023: [GREEN MARINE MED, GreenMED, POWER4MED and CALLMEBLUE](#). There are many initiatives doing groundbreaking work to promote green shipping. One of these initiatives especially worthy of attention is Marinehound. It is a Maltese company that developed an innovative approach to tackle the problem of lax emissions compliance in the maritime industry. Marinehound is a unique Continuous Emission Monitoring System (CEMS) to continuously monitor, analyse, and record emissions from ships.
- [Ocean Literacy and Blue Skills. “We are Blue Schools” making waves from the classrooms up!](#): ‘We are Blue Schools’ is an Erasmus+ pilot project that brings environmental awareness and sustainability skills to young people in schools by teaching them the value of the ocean and the influence they have on the ocean. It is based on the insights of a wide range of international Ocean Literacy experts. Mallorca was chosen for this project as it is a confined area with shared values, culture, and language. This, to test the effects of an intensified approach in a regional setting to create a higher impact on both the schools and their surrounding communities.
- [EMFAF Flagship Projects Accelerating Tourism Sustainability](#): Traditional ‘sun, sea and sand’ tourism has resulted in improved livelihoods for many local communities, [averaging 11.5% of total employment in Mediterranean countries](#). It is therefore, one of the leading sectors of the economy in the region. At the same time, it also puts tremendous pressure on the environment. In 2021 the [European Maritime, Fisheries and Aquaculture Fund \(EMFAF\)](#) decided to fund so-called flagship projects (pilot strategic initiatives) for each of the sea basin strategies with 5.5 million euro to accelerate achievement of their respective goals. For the Western Mediterranean the main objective of [this EMFAF flagship funding](#) was to ‘strengthen the competitiveness and sustainability of the coastal and maritime tourism sector, as part of a smart and resilient blue economy – one of the key goals of the WestMED Initiative.
- [Sustainable aquaculture. Meet NewTechAqua – the European aquaculture innovators](#): NewTechAqua is a pioneering research project funded by the European Union’s Horizon 2020 program that embarked on a mission to revolutionize aquaculture. During this 4-year initiative, the NewTechAqua partners identified, tested, and evaluated the effectiveness of new tools that improve the production and, at the same time, sustainability of the sector. The NewTechAqua consortium was made up of 26 partners from 9 countries. 11 partners are universities and R&D institutions, 12 are private companies, and three are international organisations specialised in industrial governance, innovation, and knowledge transfer.

Annex 1: Synergies and networking activities (2023-2024)

Nr	Name	Rationale (Progress achieved so far)	Type of initiative	Sector
1	JPI Ocean	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Possible ways of collaboration and how to better promote and utilize the upcoming funding opportunities. - Invitation of each other to their boards/committees or relevant events (Observer role) - Support visibility and awareness on upcoming JPI calls and (cross-) seabasin partnerships - JPI to be invited to thematic webinars/events and/or regional (cross) seabasins events - Assistance Mechanism to participate in the event of Sustainable Blue economy partnership (last week of September in Brussels) <p>Long term achievements</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Expand awareness/reach/eligibility beyond EU (neighbouring countries) - Discuss means for the AM to support JPI when establishing regional sea basin agenda 	Fund – Policy and governance	Research, Innovation
2	Interact, Interreg (Sea Basin and bilateral) and Regional authorities	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Synergies through the NHs and through the participation in Interact events. - Discussions are still ongoing and will continue on different levels (communication, promotion, governance). 	Initiative – Policy and governance	All
3	CPMR	Collaboration especially on how to utilize relevant events (i.e. SEARICA)	Organisation - Project and technical cooperation	All

4	Blue Invest	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Synergies with BlueInvest through Forum Oceano. - Participation of BlueInvest in the WestMED Hackathon presenting the investing opportunities. 	TA Project - Project and technical cooperation	All
5	S3/I3/EISMEA	Identify complementarities and possible synergies	Program - Project and technical cooperation	Innovation in value chains
6	Synergies EMFAF	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Identify complementarities and possible recommendations coming out of analysis of EMFAF projects. - Disseminate good examples, pick stakeholders to promote their projects and benefit from bilateral workshops (ex. Investors) 	TA Project - Project and technical cooperation	All
7	Missions Ocean	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Link with BlueMed Mission on how to link their Actions with the objectives of the SeaBasin strategies and invite them in the Stakeholder Conferences. - Allow the engagement of WestMed NH as part of EU Mission Hub in the Med. - Organisation of joint events WestMED and BlueMissionMed. 	Program - Project and technical cooperation	Marine protection, Biodiversity
8	Sustainable fisheries partnership agreements (SFPAs) / Blue Belt Initiative	Salon Alieutis participation of Morocco and Mauritanian NHs to discuss with their NC possible collaboration and stakeholder engagement.	Event - Project and technical cooperation	Fisheries
9	UfM/WOC	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Signed an MoU to enhance collaboration either through common events, participation in the TGs and maybe as observers in our SC. WOC could provide a wide range of private stakeholders. 	Initiative - Project and technical cooperation	All

		- Partners of the advisory role of the new technical group on sustainable tourism.		
10	ASCAME	- Continuing synergies as per the MoU signed. - Partners of the advisory role of the new technical group on sustainable tourism.		
11	REMPEC	Involvement and participation of REMPEC in the Green Shipping TGs meetings.		
12	Sustainable Blue Economy Partnership	- Disseminating further the partnership to find way for National Authorities to identify national funds (maybe linking with EIF and Blue Invest) but also on the way that non-EU countries could get involved - SBEP to be open to include non-EU countries to be communicated soon - Include SBEP in TGs	Organisation – Policy and Governance	
13	GFCM	Engage with them for the BSAM and have an observer role for the Aquaculture TG	Organisation – Policy and Governance	Fisheries
14	IUCN	Involvement in the new technical group on sustainable tourism.	Organisation – Policy and Governance	Marine protection, biodiversity

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