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European  
Commission

Towards an **initiative** for the  
**sustainable development**  
of the **blue economy** in the  
western Mediterranean

## GOALS and PRIORITIES





# Why this Initiative?

“ Millions of holiday makers have a happy association with the Western Mediterranean. Like the millions more who live across the region, they understand the fragile link between conserving national habitats and traditions and ensuring economic viability. Blue economy is important for each of the countries involved and they have recognised the strength of working together ”

Karmenu Vella, Commissioner for Environment, Maritime Affairs and Fisheries

## Major assets

The maritime economy of the Western Mediterranean region has huge potential for development in all related sectors. The region has 200 ports and terminals and nearly 40% of all goods (by value) pass through the Mediterranean.

The western Mediterranean region attracts the largest number of tourists in the Mediterranean basin, in part because of its art and cultural wealth. It is a biodiversity hotspot, with 481 marine protected areas, including Natura 2000 sites.

The region is a rich fishing ground, accounting for over 30% of the total value of landings at first sale in the Mediterranean and providing more than 36 000 direct jobs on fishing vessels.

## Major challenges

Despite these major assets, the region faces a number of challenges which add to its general geopolitical instability: a prolonged economic and financial crisis with high youth unemployment in several countries, growing coastal urbanisation, the over-exploitation of fish stocks, marine pollution

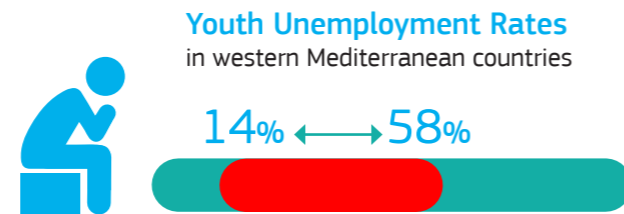
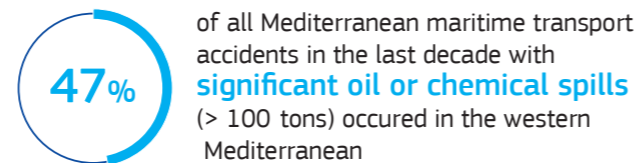
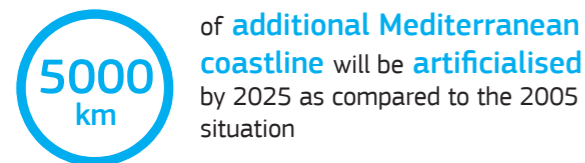
and last but not least the refugee crisis. Climate change greatly affects the region, and the rise in sea level is a major threat to coastal ecosystems and economies.

Other factors such as population growth and ageing, migration and deepening globalisation will also magnify these pressures.

There is therefore, a clear need for a joint initiative to enable the EU and neighbouring countries to work across borders to:

- increase safety and security;
- promote sustainable blue growth and jobs;
- preserve ecosystems and biodiversity in the western Mediterranean.

On the issue of maritime governance, joining forces will also allow countries to coordinate action, use tools more effectively and maximise the use of funding and financial instruments, with the possibility of leveraging more private investment than on their own, including by tapping into the recently launched EU Neighbourhood



# How was this Initiative formed?

## Political involvement

In 2015 the Union for the Mediterranean Ministerial Declaration on the Blue Economy invited the participating countries to explore the added value and feasibility of appropriate maritime strategies at sub-regional level, and build on the experience of the 5+5 Dialogue.

In October 2016, the Foreign Affairs Ministers of Algeria, France, Italy, Libya, Malta, Mauritania, Morocco, Portugal, Spain and Tunisia encouraged further work on an initiative for the sustainable development of the blue economy, together with the Union for the Mediterranean Secretariat.

The Initiative is based on the Commission's long-standing experience with sea basin and macro-regional strategies (such as the Atlantic Strategy, the EU Strategy for the Baltic Sea Region and the EU Strategy for the Adriatic and Ionian Region).

It also builds on other EU policies linked to the region, such as the European Neighbourhood Policy Review priorities and the recent Communication on International Ocean Governance.

## Stakeholder involvement

In drafting this Initiative, the European Commission made a point to strongly involve all relevant actors and stakeholders so to ensure that all their interests and concerns were duly taken into account and provide every possible opportunity for coordination and cooperation.

Actors and stakeholders were involved through a series of communication initiatives ranging from organising stakeholder meetings on both sides of the western Mediterranean to newsletters, social media, a dedicated website and a large scale conference.

“ This new regional initiative recognises and taps into the economic potential of the Mediterranean Sea and its coast lines to further enhance economic growth, contribute to job creation and eventually the stabilisation of the region. It is an important step towards closer coordination and cooperation among participating countries ”

Johannes Hahn, Commissioner for European Neighbourhood Policy and Enlargement Negotiations

## Geographical scope

Although the Initiative focuses on the western Mediterranean region and the 10 countries of the 5+5 Dialogue, its scope of action, and potential benefits, could easily extend beyond this sub-basin.

Therefore, depending on the needs to be addressed, actions may involve partners in the central Mediterranean and north-east Atlantic and will remain open to other partners.



Stakeholder conference 'Towards an initiative for the sustainable development of the blue economy in the western Mediterranean' Barcelona | 2 February 2017



# Goal 1 A safer and more secure maritime space

Ensuring the safety and security of activities at sea is essential for the sustainable development of the maritime economy, maintaining and creating jobs and for the proper governance of the sea and coasts.

## Challenges

### Increased risk of accidents and spills

On average, there are about 60 maritime transport accidents per year in the western Mediterranean, 15 of which involve tankers transporting oil or chemicals. Nearly half the accidents leading to significant spills (of more than 100 tons) over the last decade occurred in the western Mediterranean Sea.

The region still fares rather well compared to other sub-basins, but new economic developments may expose it to more risks, especially in areas where maritime traffic is congested (such as the Strait of Gibraltar, the Bonifacio Strait nor the Sicily Channel), and within harbours and terminals.

The doubling of the Suez Canal will exacerbate the threats. The concentration of ships increases the risk of collisions, environmental and noise pollution as well as accidents.

### High exposure to migration

The region has been highly exposed to migration. In 2013-2015, for example, an average of 11.000 illegal migrants per month crossed the region through the western and central Mediterranean routes.

The central route in particular has seen a dramatic increase in violence, exploitation and abuse perpetrated by smugglers against migrants, and in the number of casualties.

Managing mixed migration flows towards Europe has become an increasingly complex issue and one of the main priorities of the EU Neighborhood policy.

Moreover, the current demographic and climate change trends risks exacerbating the existing competition to control resources and could fuel the geopolitical instability of the region.

# Goal 2 A smart and resilient blue economy

Innovation and knowledge sharing are key to addressing the generational change in the labour market and making the region more sustainable, competitive and resilient to cyclical crisis and shocks. This goal largely builds on existing initiatives such as BLUEMED and its Strategic Research and Innovation Agenda, and encourages partner countries to be better involved.

## Challenges

### Employment paradox

Employment demand in ocean-based industries as a whole is set to more than double by 2030, with especially rapid growth occurring for example in marine aquaculture, fish processing, offshore wind and port activities.

But the maritime workforce on the northern shore is ageing, and young people are no longer attracted to maritime careers. Whether in traditional or emerging maritime sectors, businesses cannot find the desired skills and profiles.

This mismatch between demand and supply is mainly due to a lack of dialogue and cooperation between industry and the different providers of education.

### Dual R&D challenge

On the one hand, activities such as tourism, transport and fisheries that are traditionally at the forefront of the blue economy, require greater innovation and diversification to remain sustainable, competitive and profitable over time and to provide quality employment.

On the other hand, several emerging activities and value chains (such as blue biotechnology, marine renewable energies, living and mineral resources) require dedicated support, achieve sufficient critical mass and attract tailored R&D and investment in order to reach their full potential.

In this regard, the European regions also need to better align the use of their European Structural and Investment Funds with other funds on the basis of complementary Blue Growth priorities in their Smart

Specialisation Strategies for Research and Innovation.

Moreover, a lack of comparable and aggregated socio-economic data is preventing knowledge-sharing and cooperation among businesses, researchers and policy makers across the region.

Research cooperation and investments remain quite limited for a number of maritime innovative technologies, such as marine aquaculture, blue-biotech and sustainable marine energy.

Although some clustering initiatives have emerged across the sub-basin showing great potential compared to the overall performance of the Mediterranean basin, the lack of synergy between maritime sectors (whether traditional or emerging) remains a major hurdle to knowledge sharing and innovation.

## Initiative's Resolve

### Cooperation between coastguards

At present there are several initiatives developing maritime security and safety, but assets are deployed at different levels or by different partners in the western Mediterranean region.

Progress has been made to facilitate voluntary data exchange, but cooperation between coastguards across the two shores remains limited and the real-time response to emergency situations at sea still needs to be improved.

Actions include for instance networking among training centers, common exercises, and joint Search and Rescue operations.

### Maritime safety and response to marine pollution

Maritime data sharing needs to be optimized across the two shores of the western Mediterranean region in order to improve situational awareness, ensure national funding is used effectively and improve cooperation on cross-border operations planning.

Some partner countries have access to some EMSA/SAFEMED, while bottlenecks prevent their access to SafeSeaNet.

Actions include for instance coordination of Vessel Traffic Services and traffic data sharing and developing a new generation of Decision Support System tools for emergency response.

## Initiative's Resolve

### Strategic research and innovation

Partners and stakeholders from the southern shore of the western Mediterranean will be invited to join the BLUEMED Initiative to create economies of scale and foster partnerships between research and industry across the two shores.

Actions include for instance promoting marine bio-based innovative industries (from food and pharmaceuticals to energy) and services developing new concepts and solutions.

### Maritime clusters development

Maritime clusters clearly contribute to creating innovation, jobs and growth. They play a key role in generating the critical mass for economic activities that do not currently appeal to private investors.

Actions include for instance fostering an effective network of maritime clusters across the region.

### Skills development and circulation

Maritime training and education institutions have identified a number of possible ways to address the current mismatch between supply and demand of maritime skills and to increase cooperation.

Actions include for instance raising awareness of maritime professions and matching supply and demand for jobs in the different Blue Economy sectors.

### Sustainable consumption and production (maritime transport, ports, maritime and coastal tourism, marine aqua-culture)

Maritime and land-based activities, along with the progressive urbanisation of the coastline, exert pressure on the marine and coastal ecosystems of the sub-basin and can affect the longterm sustainability of sectors such as marine aquaculture and maritime and coastal tourism. This priority will encourage the implementation of the Action Plan for Sustainable Consumption and Production in the region and a shift towards smarter and greener mobility, sustainable tourism and sustainable aquaculture practices.

Actions include implementing sustainable consumption and production models and practices, supporting the use of clean energy sources for seawater desalination; promoting energy efficiency and adaptation to climate change in coastal cities.



# Goal 3 Better governance of the sea

Achieving healthy marine and coastal ecosystems while promoting socioeconomic development requires a solid institutional, legal and technical framework that can balance competing demands for limited natural resources and space.

## Challenges

### Anthropic pressures

The western Mediterranean region is a hot-spot of anthropic pressure (economic, demographic and environmental). As many as 7 of the 13 areas of the Mediterranean where dense economic activity strongly interacts with conservation, issues are found there.

Potentially competing maritime economic activities in the same waters may deter or prevent investments, while their cumulated pressures can increase waste generation and energy and water consumption, exacerbate the exploitation of mineral and biological resources and ultimately lead to more pollution and the serious deterioration of marine and coastal ecosystems.

### Fish stocks overexploitation

The region has the greatest biodiversity in the Mediterranean and is one of its most productive areas. However, similarly to the rest of the sea basin, several of the region's fish stocks have been subject to long-term overexploitation.

Nationally designated marine protected areas, including Natura 2000 sites under EU Birds and Habitats Directives, and SPAMI sites, cover together about 3.5% of the western Mediterranean waters, which is still quite far from the target of having 10% of the coastal and marine areas conserved through effectively managed and well-connected system of protected areas and other effective area-based conservation measures.

### Marine litter

It also is worth mentioning that marine litter has been found at all surveyed locations in the western Mediterranean sub-basin, including off the Catalan coasts and canyons, the Gulf of Lions, and the Algero-Balearic basin, with high densities found at its north-western part and on the continental slope.

A recent large-scale study targeting floating debris reported densities of up to 195 items per km<sup>2</sup> (96% of which were polymers), with one of the peaks located in the Algerian Basin.

## Initiative's Resolve

### Spatial planning and coastal management

Consistency will be sought in the implementation of the Maritime Spatial Planning (MSP) and Marine Strategy Framework Directives and the Integrated Coastal Zone Management (ICZM) protocol.

Actions include for instance promoting coordinated MSP and ICZM.

### Marine and maritime knowledge

Evidence-based policy making requires harmonised and up-to-date marine and maritime data on areas such as investments, gross value added, employment, waste production and disposal, bathymetry, water quality and environmental monitoring. Necessary data are often either unavailable or available only to some countries.

Actions include for instance extending the geographical and thematic scope of existing databases.

### Biodiversity and marine habitat conservation

The region's biodiversity is threatened by pollution, eutrophication, the destruction of marine and coastal habitats, disruption of wildlife migratory routes, changes in coastal dynamics, marine litter and noise. Countries will be supported in their efforts to meet agreed international commitments such as the Barcelona Convention, including its Marine Litter Regional Plan in the Mediterranean and the Convention on Biodiversity.

Actions include for instance improving ballast water management and fighting marine litter.

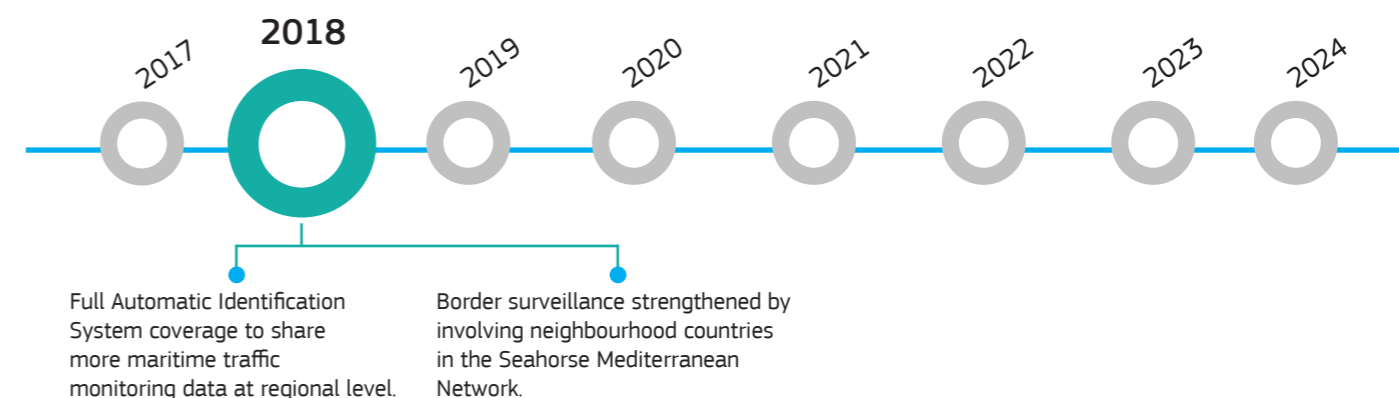
### Sustainable fisheries and coastal community development

Actions are currently fragmented across the two shores, so greater regional coordination and cooperation will be pursued through the implementation of the General Fisheries Commission for the Mediterranean mid-term strategy (2017-2020) towards the sustainability of Mediterranean and Black Sea fisheries. This will also ensure that the common fisheries policy is implemented more consistently at sub-basin level.

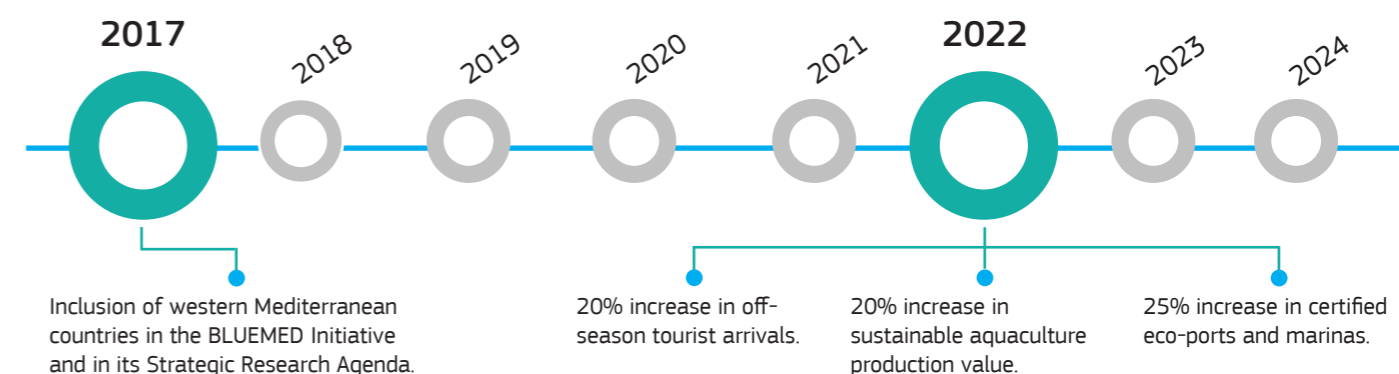
Actions include for instance improving cooperation among fishermen and sustainable fisheries management.

## Initiative's targets (tentative and non-exhaustive)

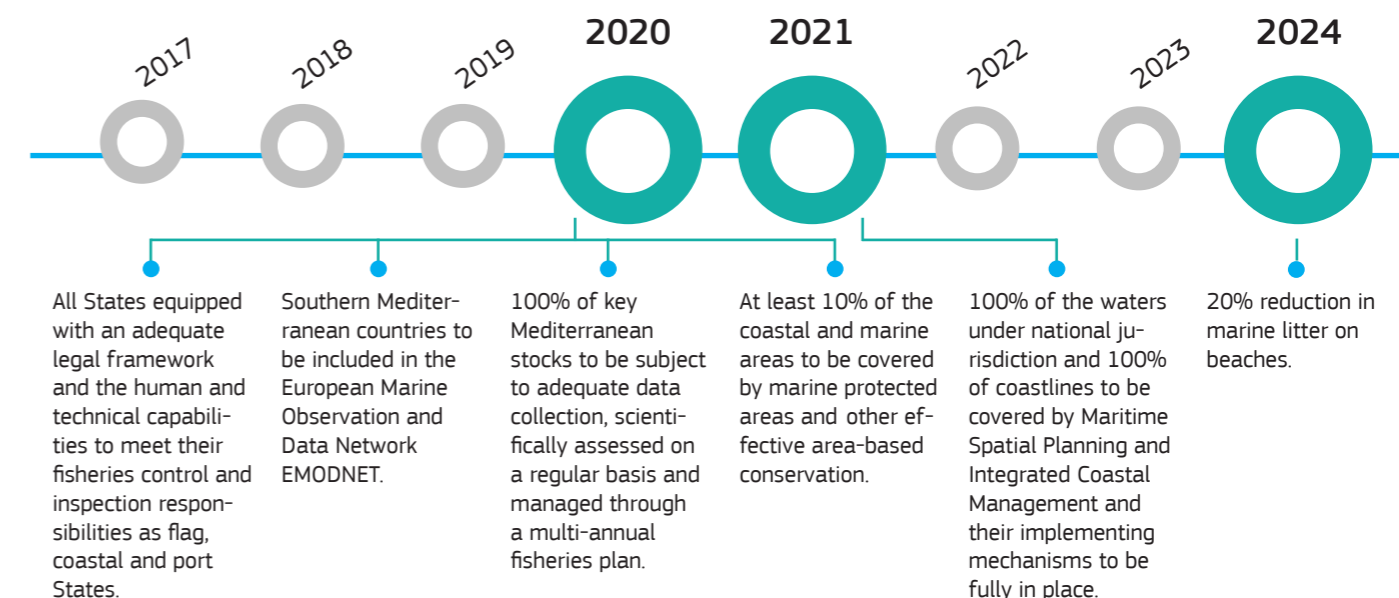
### Goal 1 A safer and more secure maritime space



### Goal 2 A smart and resilient blue economy



### Goal 3 Better governance of the sea



# What's next?

## Political endorsement

Under the Maltese Presidency of the European Council, the European Commission adopted the Communication on this Initiative for the sustainable development of the blue economy in the western Mediterranean on 19 April 2017.

Subsequently, on 26 June 2017, the Council Conclusions on Blue Growth endorsed the contents of the Communication, welcomed its accompanying rolling Framework for Action, and invited the countries involved, the European Commission, and the UfM Secretariat to take forward the implementation of the Initiative in coherence, complementarity and coordination with all the other existing initiatives which are taking place in the region.

## Coordination

Political coordination will be provided through the existing mechanisms and processes of the Union for the Mediterranean, including senior officers' and ministerial meetings.

Operational coordination will be ensured through a WestMED Task Force linked to the Union for the Mediterranean Working Group on the Blue Economy and will include national focal points from the relevant ministries, the European Commission and the Union for the Mediterranean Secretariat.

## Links with EU policies and Funding

Instead of creating new legislation, this Initiative aims to achieve the Union's core priorities: 'Jobs, growth and Investment', 'Energy Union and climate change', 'Migration' and 'A stronger global actor' by strengthening the policies relevant to the region and fostering compliance with EU law.

The emphasis is therefore on a better coordination between the funding instruments and on a truly integrated approach that ties together different policy strands and strongly interconnects EU policies and initiatives such as:

the maritime policy, the common fisheries policy, the cohesion policy, environment and marine and coastal policies, the global strategy for EU's foreign and security policy, the border and coastguard package, the strategies on Blue Growth, Maritime Security, MEDFISH 4EVER, biodiversity, adaptation to climate change, the 7th Environment Action Programme, the R&D framework programmes and the Communications on 'A Partnership for Democracy and Shared Prosperity with the Southern Mediterranean' and on 'International Ocean Governance'.

## Further information

Project website:  
<http://westmed-initiative.eu>

Communication on the Initiative for the sustainable development of the blue economy in the western Mediterranean:  
[https://ec.europa.eu/maritimeaffairs/sites/maritimeaffairs/files/com-2017-183\\_en.pdf](https://ec.europa.eu/maritimeaffairs/sites/maritimeaffairs/files/com-2017-183_en.pdf)

'Framework for Action' document presenting the identified priorities, actions and projects:  
[https://ec.europa.eu/maritimeaffairs/sites/maritimeaffairs/files/swd-2017-130\\_en.pdf](https://ec.europa.eu/maritimeaffairs/sites/maritimeaffairs/files/swd-2017-130_en.pdf)

European Council endorsement (Council Conclusions on Blue Growth):  
<http://data.consilium.europa.eu/doc/document/ST-10662-2017-INIT/en/pdf>

UfM secretariat:  
<http://ufmsecretariat.org>

EC Maritime forum:  
<https://webgate.ec.europa.eu/maritimeforum/en/frontpage/101>



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