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Mid-Term Evaluation of the Mediterranean Strategy for Sustainable Development (MSSD) 2016-2025 – Final Report

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Note by the Secretariat

As mandated by Decision IG.24/3, the Secretariat mobilized consultancy services to conduct the independent, indicator-based and participatory mid-term evaluation of the MSSD.

Based on a forward looking and inclusive methodological approach, and following a literature review, preliminary outputs of the MSSD mid-term evaluation were captured in a State of Play and Gap Analysis Report, which was discussed by the 22nd Meeting of the MCSD Steering Committee in December 2020.

A Note for the Stakeholder Consultation was prepared to facilitate the consultation of various decision-makers and stakeholders (MCSD Members, UNEP/MAP Partners, UNEP/MAP Components and key stakeholders), through bilateral interviews, focus groups (webinars / online workshops) and a wide online survey, which were held in the period November 2020 – March 2021.

The present report of the MSSD mid-term evaluation has been finalized after the discussions held at the 19th Meeting of the MCSD (videoconference, 7-9 June 2021) for consideration by the Meeting of MAP Focal Points (September 2021) and COP 22 (December 2021).

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Executive Summary

The [Mediterranean Strategy for Sustainable Development \(MSSD\) 2016-2025](#) remains a unique regional sustainability strategy aligned with major environmental commitments, providing an integrated roadmap to reach the 2030 Agenda in the Mediterranean.

The launch of Flagships Initiatives is a key driver of the MSSD implementation, involving UNEP/MAP partners and stakeholders on concrete field actions.

However, the path of implementation of the MSSD is too slow to match 2020 and 2025 targets; and none of the Mediterranean country is currently on track to achieve the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) by 2030.

The MSSD suffers from a lack of visibility, awareness, and engagement from non-UNEP/MAP related stakeholders.

The monitoring mechanisms of the MSSD are not providing a timely and comprehensive picture of the state of sustainability in the Mediterranean region.

The level of financial investment into the MSSD is insufficient to ensure its effective implementation and reach its objectives.

The COVID-19 crisis is hindering the implementation of the MSSD, having major health, economic and social impacts in all Mediterranean countries,

Recommendations to advance the MSSD implementation in its second phase (2021-2025)

A renewed political leadership is strongly needed

- High-level political commitment should be attracted to drive transformative policies and actions.
- The MSSD should be better monitored and implemented at national level through cross-ministerial coordination schemes.

Governance and coordination mechanisms must be reinforced

- The MCSDD should receive more dedication, resources, visibility, and capacity to support the MSSD implementation and monitoring.
- The private sector and citizens must become more involved in the implementation and follow-up of the MSSD.

The MSSD should be better funded, visible and attractive for stakeholders

- A roadmap for financing the MSSD, identifying public and private financial mechanisms and potential investments sources should be developed.
- A specific MSSD label could reward the most interesting sustainability initiatives promoted by regional and national stakeholders.

Flagship initiatives are key drivers to advance the MSSD

- Successful flagship initiatives should be disseminated, scaled-up through adequate funding, and replicated wherever possible.
- Flagship Initiatives should be captured in the UNEP/MAP monitoring/reporting system through an ad-hoc label.

Monitoring mechanisms should be improved

- All initiatives contributing to the MSSD should be correctly reported or identified, at regional, national and local level, through a continuous, transparent and public monitoring process.
- The MSSD monitoring should integrate external data sources related to citizen science, academia, big data, the private sector, civil society organizations and local authorities.

Mid-Term Evaluation of the Mediterranean Strategy for Sustainable Development (MSSD) – Final Report

Introduction

1. The [Mediterranean Strategy for Sustainable Development \(MSSD\) 2016-2025](#) was adopted through Decision IG.22/2 by the 19th Meeting of the Contracting Parties to the Barcelona Convention (COP 19) in February 2016, as a **non-legally binding** instrument to translate the global 2030 Agenda and Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) at the regional, national and local levels.
2. The MSSD is based on **six transversal Objectives** providing an integrated approach to address regional sustainability issues, while being aligned with SDGs. A set of **33 Strategic Directions (SD)** was formulated, complemented by **161 Regional and National Actions**, as well as **11 Flagship Initiatives and 7 Targets**. The MSSD looks also into the means for **financing the implementation and monitoring** its impacts, as well as the **institutional and governance prerequisites**. The high number of actions and related indicators, most of them not populated, represents a serious hurdle to carry an exhaustive and evidence-based assessment.
3. The Mid-Term Evaluation (MTE) of the MSSD, as requested by Decision IG.24/3 adopted at COP 21, aims to inform on (i) the **state of the sustainability** in the Mediterranean, considering both socio-economic and environmental components, (ii) the **progress and gaps** regarding the strategy's implementation, and (iii) **opportunities** on which to put the emphasis in the second phase of implementation (2021-2025).
4. This report is the result of a desktop analysis from a broad source of knowledge, **literature review** and evidence collected from recognized institutions and experts¹ (see [Document UNEP/MED WG.483/Inf.3](#)). It also integrates inputs from on-line **stakeholder consultations** (interviews, workshops, and a wide survey) with UNEP/MAP stakeholders to ensure an inclusive and participatory consultation process (see Document UNEP/MED WG.493/Inf.4). This evaluation includes quantitative and qualitative criteria, using the **Mediterranean Sustainability Dashboard** and recent **Assessment Studies**², and capitalizing on the implementation of MSSD Flagship Initiatives.

I. Analysis of the MSSD vision, structure and content

5. **The MSSD vision³ remains aligned with objectives of main global environmental and sustainability commitments** contracted by Mediterranean countries: the Barcelona Convention (*Protection of the marine environment and the natural resources of the Mediterranean Sea*); the Paris Agreement (*Response to the threat of climate change*); the Convention on Biological Diversity; and, the 2030 Agenda (*Protect the planet from degradation (...), sustainably managing its natural resources and taking urgent action on climate change*).
6. **The interlinkages between the MSSD and the 2030 Agenda/SDGs are clearly defined.** Synergies are identified between environmental, economic and social goals of the SDGs and the six MSSD Objectives (which cover 12 out of 17 SDGs). Only the social goals related to Poverty (SDG1), Health (SDG 3), Education (SDG 4), Gender (SDG 5) and Inequality (SDG 10) are not fully stated as such in the MSSD Objectives. Nevertheless, several MSSD Strategic Directions are targeting specifically Women (SD 2.4 and 5.1), Education (SD 2.2, 4.1, and 6.4), Health (SD 3.7 and 4.4) and Poverty (SD 2.4 and 5.1).

¹ Reliable information and data from the following sources: UNEP/MAP – Barcelona Convention System; UN-related, governmental and other Intergovernmental Organizations (IGO); Academic and grey literature.

² UNEP/MAP and Plan Bleu (2020), [State of the Environment and Development in the Mediterranean](#) (SoED); MedECC (2020), [First Assessment Report on the Current State and Risks of Climate and Environmental Changes in the Mediterranean](#) (MAR 1), etc.

³ “A prosperous and peaceful Mediterranean region in which people enjoy a high quality of life and where sustainable development takes place within the carrying capacity of healthy ecosystems. This is achieved through common objectives, strong involvement of all stakeholders, cooperation, solidarity, equity and participatory governance”.

Linking the MSSD objectives to the Sustainable Development Goals

MSSD Objectives	SDGs
1. Ensuring sustainable development in marine and coastal areas	
2. Promoting resource management, food production and food security through sustainable forms of rural development	  
3. Planning and managing sustainable Mediterranean cities	 
4. Addressing climate change as a priority issue for the Mediterranean	
5. Transition towards a green and blue economy	  
6. Improving governance in support of sustainable development	 

7. **Participatory approaches are at the core of the MSSD.** A text analysis of the MSSD (Annex II) highlighted the involvement of a large, balanced and diverse number of stakeholders representing the main categories of Mediterranean actors, in particular National governments (mentioned 122 times), Civil Society (97 times), Local authority (96 times), Private sector (65 times) and Regional institutions (34 times). Another major cross cutting issue of the MSSD is climate change (mentioned 121 times), detailed in a specific chapter (Objective 4).

8. **Stakeholders’ engagement is critical for the MSSD implementation.** The MSSD implementation has been defined as a collective process in which the involvement of (regional and national) stakeholders is essential: *Facilitated by the MAP system, the participation of all stakeholders will play a decisive role in the delivery of the Strategy, from national and local governments to civil society, academia, private sector, and the support of regional institutions* (MSSD Foreword).

9. **The MSSD is going beyond the environmental scope of the Barcelona Convention, covering economic, social, and even cultural aspects of sustainable development,** as highlighted in its subtitle: *“Investing in environmental sustainability to achieve socio-economic development in the Mediterranean”*. The MSSD is based on the principle that economic growth needs to be harmonized with the protection of natural resources, and to distribute the welfare dividend of the development process to all society.

10. **The role of the Mediterranean Commission on Sustainable Development (MCSD) is essential to advance the MSSD implementation and monitoring.** As per Article 4 of the Barcelona Convention⁴, the MCSD is the advisory body to assist the Contracting Parties in their efforts to integrate environmental issues in their socioeconomic programmes and to promote sustainable development policies. Gathering government representatives (22) and stakeholders (18) from various groups, the MCSD and its Steering Committee ensure the governance and monitoring of the MSSD.

II. General progress towards sustainability

11. **One third of the way into the SDG journey, the world is not on track to achieve the global Goals by 2030⁵.** Before the COVID-19 outbreak, progress had been uneven and more focused attention was needed in most areas. The pandemic abruptly disrupted implementation towards many of the SDGs and, in some cases, turned back decades of progress. Of the 93 global environment-related SDGs indicators⁶, only 22 (23%) are showing good progress over the last 15 years. For the other 77%

⁴ “The Contracting Parties shall take fully into account the recommendations of the Mediterranean Commission on Sustainable Development established within the framework of the Mediterranean Action Plan”.

⁵ <https://unstats.un.org/sdgs/report/2019/>

⁶ <https://wedocs.unep.org/bitstream/handle/20.500.11822/27627/MeaProg2019.pdf?sequence=1&isAllowed=y>

of the environment-related SDGs indicators, there is either not sufficient data to assess progress (68%) or it is unlikely that the target will be met without upscaling action (9%); there has been mixed progress in improving access to environmental resources and reducing the impacts of environmental degradation on human health and food security.

12. **Timely, quality, open and disaggregated data and statistics are becoming critical** to understand, manage and mitigate the human, social and economic effects of the COVID-19 pandemic. Data are also essential for designing short-term responses and ambitious actions to put countries back on track to achieve the SDGs⁷. Globally huge data gaps still exist in terms of geographic coverage, timeliness and the level of disaggregation required. Moreover, challenges remain in compiling and disseminating metadata to document the data quality of SDG indicators at local and national levels. Investments in data and statistics are needed to maintain adequate coverage of all population groups, as well as to guarantee the internal consistency, comparability and overall quality of data produced to advance implementation of the 2030 Agenda.

13. **The Mediterranean countries are far from achieving the SDGs**; no promising trends can be identified that suggests they will be achieved by 2030⁸. Nine of the Mediterranean countries had not reached any of the SDGs in 2019. For almost two thirds of the SDGs, significant or major challenges remain for their achievement. In most situations, efforts undertaken since 2015 have brought about positive developments, but changes have occurred at a level and/or pace that is insufficient for achievement of the SDGs by 2030. The situation is particularly critical for SDG 2 on hunger, nutrition and sustainable agriculture, SDG 5 on gender equality, SDG 11 on sustainable cities and communities, and SDG 14 on life below water – which is most relevant to the Barcelona Convention – for which none of the Mediterranean countries are considered to be on track to reach the SDG targets by 2030.

14. **The report on the State of the Environment and Development (SoED) in the Mediterranean⁹ recalls that over the last decades, human-induced pressures have increasingly affected the Mediterranean region.** Population growth and unsustainable production and consumption patterns have led to severe environmental degradation. Despite some progress, economic growth continues to increase resource consumption and carbon emissions. Exploitation of resources and organisms, pollution and climate change are projected to exacerbate pre-existing fragilities in the region, leading to multiple stresses and systemic failures, putting health and livelihoods at risk.

15. **Progress has been achieved in policy responses and actions to manage the Mediterranean more sustainably (source: SoED). However, these results have not been sufficient** to reduce the most significant pressures on the environment and to safeguard the Mediterranean for present and future generations while meeting human development needs. Current trends do not allow to achieve the Good Environmental Status (GES) of the Mediterranean Sea and coast by 2020 and beyond.

16. **The UNEP/MAP – Barcelona Convention system can play a major role in fostering sustainability transitions (source: SoED).** But this requires an urgent step up from planning, engagement and local innovation, to widespread implementation on the ground and effective enforcement, in collaboration with local authorities and stakeholders, including the private sector and funding agencies. Implementation and enforcement are lagging behind the ambition of commonly agreed objectives.

17. **The COVID-19 crisis is hindering the implementation of the MSSD**, having major health, economic and social impacts in all countries, through severe increase of mortality, lock-down of millions of citizens, and disruption of international freight and transport. In the Mediterranean region, the consequences of the crisis are particularly dramatic, being some of the countries more affected globally, both in number of cases per inhabitants¹⁰ and in GDP fall, due to their dependence from

⁷ <https://unstats.un.org/sdgs/report/2020/the-need-for-data-innovations-in-the-time-of-COVID-19/>

⁸ Sachs et al. (2019), Sustainable Development Report 2019, New York: Bertelsmann Stiftung and Sustainable Development Solutions Network (SDSN)

⁹ <https://planbleu.org/en/activites/report-state-environment-and-development-mediterranean>

¹⁰ <https://www.sciencedirect.com/science/article/pii/S0048969720323342>

international tourism revenue¹¹. In addition, the current crisis affects negatively the capacity of countries to collect, assess and interpret data related to the implementation of the MSSD and SDGs¹².

18. According to the stakeholder consultations carried out, **the main impacts of the COVID-19 on the MSSD and SDGs implementation were the change in political priorities, the disruption of decision-making mechanisms, the rise in (socio-economic) inequalities and the reduction of investment in the region.** The opportunities were related to the massive investment in green activities, sound public policies (Build Back Better), nature-based solutions, and digitalization.

19. **The response from international organizations to the challenges created by the pandemic have been rather quick.** The UN launched a platform to disseminate high level political messages to “turn the recovery into a real opportunity to do things right for the future.”¹³ UNEP published recommendations to integrate COVID-impact in the development of environmental policies¹⁴. UNEP/MAP has also promoted a regional response to better understanding zoonotic threats¹⁵. However, the impact of those initiatives at national or regional level remains unknown as the priorities of countries is currently to cope with the direct health, social and economic crisis.

20. **The COVID-19 crisis might require a reshaping of the Agenda 2030¹⁶,** as well as a need to have a more pragmatic strategy to cluster the 17 SDGs into a set of few pivotal axes. As such, the way the MSSD is structured around six objectives could be of inspiration for such work at Mediterranean scale. In addition, the proposal from SDSN to focus on “Six Transformations to achieve the Sustainable Development Goals” through an integrated framework is very synergic to the MSSD¹⁷.

III. Strategic evaluation of the MSSD

21. **The UNEP/MAP – Barcelona Convention system has well identified and mirrored the relevant political tools and technical processes to advance sustainable development** both at global and Mediterranean level, as described in the following equivalence table:

Global	Regional (Mediterranean)
2030 Agenda and Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs)	Mediterranean Strategy for Sustainable Development (MSSD)
High-Level Political Forum (HLPF)	Mediterranean Commission on Sustainable Development (MCSD)
Volunteer National Review (VNR)	Simplified Peer Review Mechanism (SIMPEER)
SDG Indicators; SDG Index and Dashboards	Mediterranean Sustainability Dashboard

22. **The Mediterranean Sustainability Dashboard is not fully operational.** Established by Plan Bleu Regional Activity Centre to ensure the monitoring of the MSSD implementation, this dashboard consists of 28 indicators, most of them corresponding to SDG indicators. Updated every two years, the last version was released in March 2021 with only 20 out of 28 indicators (71%) currently tracked and updated, as detailed in the following table. Additionally, the coverage of the 6 objectives is unbalanced: Objective 2 (rural development and resources) is monitored by 9 indicators while and Objective 1 (Sea and coast) has only one.

¹¹ <http://www.oecd.org/economic-outlook/june-2020/>

¹² <https://unstats.un.org/sdgs/report/2020/the-need-for-data-innovations-in-the-time-of-COVID-19/>

¹³ <https://www.un.org/sustainabledevelopment/sdgs-framework-for-covid-19-recovery/>

¹⁴ <https://www.unenvironment.org/news-and-stories/story/covid-19-updates-unep;>

¹⁵ <https://www.unenvironment.org/unepmap/covid-19/transformational-change-nature-and-people>

¹⁶ <https://www.nature.com/articles/d41586-020-02002-3>

¹⁷ Sachs, J.D., Schmidt-Traub, G., Mazzucato, M. et al. Six Transformations to achieve the Sustainable Development Goals. Nat Sustain 2, 805–814 (2019). <https://doi.org/10.1038/s41893-019-0352-9>

Level of population of the Mediterranean Sustainability Dashboard (March 2021)

Clusters of Indicators Per MSSD Objective	N° indicators / Objective	Indicators distribution / Objective	Indicator with data from at least one year	Indicator with data from at least two years
General indicators	5	18%	5	5
1 - Sea and coast	3	11%	3	0
2 - Rural & Resources	9	32%	9	8
3 - Cities	3	11%	3	2
4 - Climate change	2	7%	2	2
5 – Green/blue economy	1	4%	1	1
6 - Governance	5	18%	5	2
	28	100%	100%	71%

23. The **Simplified Peer Review Mechanism (SIMPEER) promoted by the MCSD** (Decision IG.22/17) **provides an innovative benchmarking tool** that supports volunteer Contracting Parties towards the transposition, implementation and monitoring of the MSSD and SDGs. SIMPEER brings valuable qualitative assessments of the National Strategies on Sustainable Development (NSSD) of targeted countries. Reports are currently available for France, Montenegro and Morocco (2016-2017); and Albania, Egypt and Tunisia (2018-2019). A synthesis report¹⁸ has been published with the aim to share key information, learnings, and best practices that can be replicated by other countries.

24. **Sustainable development requires transformative actions to be undertaken in a coordinated and coherent way by governments through adequate national strategies**¹⁹. But the quality, alignment and ambition of such plans differ from country to country. The capacity of the Barcelona Convention and the MSSD itself to induce an ecological transition is limited by its original environmental scope. This appears particularly accurate when compared on how the 2030 Agenda and SDGs are driven at national level, usually by the Heads of State, Prime Ministers, Vice-Presidencies or Inter-Ministerial Commissions or Agencies, providing a strong political leadership with high technical and financial means of implementation²⁰.

25. Echoing outcomes of SIMPEER and of the stakeholder consultation in the context of the present evaluation, **the Ministries of the Environment often lack technical and financial resources** to address such a broad and transversal number of issues. Governments may have internal coordination mechanisms to ensure proper consultation, validation and compliance between and within different ministries and agencies covering different sustainability topics, but in practice knowledge, implementation and reporting gaps usually appear when implementing sustainable development strategies and policies at national or local level²¹.

26. **All Contracting Parties to the Barcelona Convention went through the Voluntary National Reviews²² (VNRs) process at the UN High-Level Policy Forum (HLPF)**, facilitating the exchange of national experiences, successes, challenges and lessons learned, with a view to mobilizing multi-stakeholder support and partnerships for accelerating the 2030 Agenda and SDGs implementation. VNRs reports give valuable insights on the national priorities, strategy and implementation of the SDGs. The VNRs appear to be a necessary and positive exercise, although not sufficient by itself, to advance the implementation and monitoring of the SDGs and therefore the MSSD.

¹⁸ <https://planbleu.org/en/publications/report-simpeer-simplified-peer-review-mechanism-of-sustainable-development-strategies-in-mediterranean-countries/>

¹⁹ OCDE (2019). [Governance as an SDG Accelerator: Country Experiences and Tools](#).

²⁰ El Bilali, H., et al. (2019). Implementation of the Sustainable Development Goals in the Mediterranean: institutional and governance arrangements. [X AGROSYM 2019 conference](#).

²¹ OECD (2017). [Getting Governments Organised to Deliver on the Sustainable Development Goals](#).

²² <https://sustainabledevelopment.un.org/vnrs>

27. **VNRs can support the MSSD monitoring and implementation processes as a tool to share good practices and engage with Contracting Parties and stakeholders**, raising countries' political commitment on sustainability issues in front of the international community. The synthesis benchmark²³ on Mediterranean VNRs prepared by the Secretariat should therefore be replicated and shared systematically with all stakeholders within and outside the UNEP/MAP – Barcelona Convention system.
28. **The MSSD Implementation Reporting Table updated on a biannual basis to track the development of MSSD Flagships Initiatives and Targets** remains mainly descriptive and filled-in with partial information provided by implementing partners. A link with the Mediterranean Sustainability Dashboard would allow to better demonstrate the level of advancement and real contribution to the MSSD.
29. **The Shared Environmental Information System (SEIS) does not deliver yet a regular production of quality assessed environmental data, indicators and information.** Supervised by the Info/RAC Data Centre²⁴, and based on the common reporting format developed for the H2020 indicators²⁵, the last reporting exercise²⁶ shows that data availability at the proper geographical scale remains often an obstacle, limiting comparison among countries.
30. **The ownership of the MSSD has been supported by some communication actions²⁷ oriented within the UNEP/MAP or UN related system.** The process for external stakeholders (i.e. outside the UNEP/MAP institutional context) to engage with the MSSD should be strengthened as it seems rather difficult for third parties not connected to the UNEP/MAP – Barcelona Convention system to influence or make explicit contributions to the MSSD implementation. The lack of a user-friendly and centralized platform, for collecting and sharing all relevant data, reports and information related to the MSSD, and potentially accessible to any Mediterranean citizens and civil society organizations (CSOs), makes it complicated for third parties to be actively involved.

IV. State of Implementation of the MSSD

31. **A systemic review of the state of advancement of MSSD Objectives, Strategic Directions (SD), Targets, Regional Actions and Flagships Initiatives** has been undertaken, using the evaluation color coding described below. Full details of the assessment are available in Document UNEP/MED WG.483/Inf.3²⁸.

Evaluation color coding of the MSSD Mid Term Evaluation

BLUE: Objective achieved - Clear evidence of achievement has been found.

GREEN: In progress – Evidence of certain progress and advancement has been found that keeps the target achievable in due time.

ORANGE: Mixed achievement – Certain evidence of progress has been found but not enough to match the targeted timeline or reach the full objective.

RED: Objective not reached – Timeline has been passed without reaching the expected target.

GREY: Missing data – lack of reliable or consistent data to have a clear picture of the situation.

²³ Document UNEP/MED WG.493/7 “Peer Learning: Structures and Processes for Implementing the 2030 Agenda and SDGs in the Mediterranean Countries”

²⁴ <http://www.info-rac.org/en/infomap-system/data-centre>

²⁵ <https://eni-seis.eionet.europa.eu/south/areas-of-work/indicators-and-assessment;https://tableau.discomap.eea.europa.eu>

²⁶ EEA and UNEP/MAP report. 2020. [Towards a cleaner Mediterranean Sea: a decade of progress.](#)

²⁷ UNEP/MAP and Plan Bleu websites; Stakeholder News Briefs; articles in e-media; Case study for UNEP Blue Economy Report; Presentations at thematic conferences, etc.

²⁸

https://wedocs.unep.org/bitstream/handle/20.500.11822/34236/20wg483_inf4_engonly.pdf?sequence=1&isAlloWed=y

IV.1 Objective 1 on marine and coastal areas is partially advancing

32. MSSD Objective 1 includes two broad Strategic Directions related to the implementation and enforcement of the Barcelona Convention and its Protocols.

Objective 1: Ensuring sustainable development in marine and coastal areas

Strategic Directions	Targets	Regional Actions	Flagship Initiative
SD 1.1: Implementation and compliance with the Barcelona Convention and other regional policy instruments	By 2020, conserve at least 10% of coastal and marine areas	1.2.6: Prepare a regional programme on assessment and control regarding open ocean exploration and exploitation of non-living resources	Support the Trust Fund for Mediterranean marine protected areas (1.1.10)
SD 1.2: Regulatory Mechanisms related to open ocean resources (MSP)	By 2020, effectively regulate harvesting and end overfishing	1.2.7: Set up process to further the exchange of good practices on control approaches	

33. The high number of Regional and National Actions (17), clustered around 2 Strategic Directions, has been supported by many COP Decisions and UNEP/MAP activities, as well as a successfully launched Flagship Initiative (*The MedFund*). However, one target (overfishing) has not been met in due time (2020): 78% of Mediterranean and Black Sea fish stocks are fished at biologically unsustainable levels (FAO, 2018). The other target (10% of MPAs) is likely to be matched (from 6.81% in 2016 to 8.9% in 2018), although at a superficial level: only 1.27% of the Mediterranean is effectively protected. In general, significant efforts remain necessary to reach Objective 1 of the MSSD, which is at the center of the Barcelona Convention.

IV.2 Objective 2 on natural resources, food security and rural development is not on track

34. The increasing attractiveness of coastal regions and cities comes with a decline in rural economic and population dynamics. Socioeconomic disparities between rural and urban areas persist, with poorer households and more challenging access to basic services and infrastructure in rural areas compared to urban agglomerations and cities.

35. The MSSD Objective 2 indicators are showing divergent trends between countries with a regional degradation of the situation (for water stress, biodiversity losses and food security). Organic farming is booming (x 4 since 2000) but still only covers 3% of the agricultural land in 2018.

Objective 2: Resource management, food production and security through sustainable rural development

Strategic Directions	Targets	Regional Actions	Flagship Initiative
SD 2.1: Natural Resources and ecosystems conservation	Reduce the degradation and fragmentation of natural habitats, halt the loss of biodiversity and, by 2020, protect and prevent the extinction of threatened species	2.1.9: Cross border water cooperation programmes	Promote the IUCN “Green list” in riparian states (2.3.5).
SD 2.2: Traditional biodiversity, knowledge and practices		2.2.4: Regional collaboration between seed banks and knowledge repositories;	
SD 2.3: Protected Areas Networks and stakeholders awareness		2.3.4: Regional network of managers of ecologically protected areas	
SD 2.4: Inclusive and sustainable rural development		2.4.4: International partnerships and networks in the promotion of traditional knowledge	
SD 2.5: Access of local producers to distribution channels and markets			

36. Under MSSD Objective 2, Strategic Directions (5) and related Actions (25) are numerous and not always adequately described²⁹, with vague ownerships or timeline, which makes it difficult to monitor and implement efficiently. The Target and Flagship Initiative related to biodiversity are not performing well and biodiversity losses remains a major issue at global and regional level.

37. Regarding the (missed) target (*by 2020, protect and prevent the extinction of threatened species*), around 1,238 coastal terrestrial species have been identified by IUCN as threatened with extinction. The value of the Red List Index in the Mediterranean countries is above the world value.

IV.3 Objective 3 on cities lacks monitoring information

38. Although affected by the economic crisis, the urbanization of the Mediterranean population continues at a fast pace, in particular along its southern shores. Two in every three people are already living in the urban areas of Mediterranean countries, which is higher than the world average.

39. In most countries, the urban population living in slums (MSD Indicator 18) is increasing in absolute numbers even if its percentage is decreasing in relative terms. Regarding the UNESCO World heritage sites (MSD Indicator 19), out of 54 sites in danger globally, 28% are in Mediterranean countries. The waste production and recycling rate (MSD Indicator 20) is showing a mixed situation, with high waste generation in the North, high food waste in the South, and a still too low average recycling rate.

Objective 3: Planning and managing sustainable Mediterranean cities

Strategic Directions	Targets	Regional Actions	Flagship Initiatives
SD 3.1: Spatial planning towards sustainable territorial cohesion	By 2030, enhance inclusive and sustainable urbanization	3.1.5: Monitor coastal urbanization and encroachment	“Environment Friendly City” Award (3.1.9)
SD 3.2: Inclusive and participatory urbanization		3.1.6: Capacity building on spatial planning regulations	
SD 3.3: Protection and rehabilitation of historic urban areas		3.1.7: Guidelines for planning green and blue infrastructures	Sustainable urban toolbox for the Mediterranean (...) (3.2.5)
SD 3.4: Sustainable waste management and circular economy		3.1.8: Identify Mediterranean urban biodiversity hotspots	
SD 3.5: Efficient integrated public transport systems	By 2030, substantially reduce waste generation through prevention, reduction, recycling and reuse	3.2.4: Regional Cities networking and partnership	Undertake regional assessments and knowledge exchanges of high- and low-tech solutions to achieve waste reduction (3.4.5)
SD 3.6: Green buildings and built environment		3.3.5: Networks of historic cities	
SD 3.7: Urban resilience to reduce vulnerability to risks		3.4.4: Database of waste and material flows	
		3.5.4: Regional transport and mobility framework	
		3.6.2: Green Building Standards frameworks	
	3.7.5: Inventory of local natural risk responses		

40. Under MSSD Objective 3, Strategic Directions (7) and related Actions (35) are also numerous, vague and not adequately described, making them difficult to track and implement efficiently.

41. Out of the 10 Regional Actions, only one is showing clear proof of implementation (see table below), although innovative sub-regional projects financed by the European Commission are contributing to their implementation. Most of the actions are planned to be delivered by 2020, which is not achievable at the current path. In particular, the effective management of waste, including marine litter and used waters, remains a major problem in the Mediterranean region.

²⁹ Strategic directions can be very general (2.1.5. *Achieve a sustainable balance between production of food, use of water and use of energy*), too ambitious (2.1.6 *Develop socio-economic models for national strategic choices for water allocation*) or difficult to monitor and/or implement (2.1.8. *Develop action plans for the restoration of land from extractive activities*). In addition, the owners are often a long list of stakeholders and UNEP/MAP Partners, without defining clearly roles and contributions.

42. The [Med Urban Tools Platform](#) coordinated by MedCities, provides a valuable set of policies and practices to advance sustainable urban planning in Mediterranean cities. The [EU-funded regional project Water and Environment Support Mechanism \(WES\)](#), the [Regional Solid Waste Exchange of Information and Expertise Network in Mashreq Maghreb countries \(SWEEP-Net\)](#) and the [Euro-Mediterranean Strategic Platform for a suitable waste management \(MED-3R\)](#) are also supporting the achievement of this Objective, although the results are not yet fully visible.

IV.4 Objective 4 on climate change remains a major challenge

43. As highlighted in the Fifth Assessment Report of the IPCC and the recent report from the Mediterranean Experts on Climate and environmental Change (MedECC)³⁰, the Mediterranean region, considered as one of the world’s major climate change hotspots, is highly vulnerable to the negative impacts of global warming.

44. The high density of the coastal population and infrastructure on the shoreline, linked to a limited tidal range, make the Mediterranean coast particularly vulnerable to changes in climate and sea level. These risks are higher along the southern and eastern shores, where monitoring systems are limited, and the adaptive capacity is generally lower. Although Mediterranean countries are designing national frameworks to mitigate and adapt to climate change, much effort is needed to implement, enforce, and increase ambition in a multi-stakeholder context.

45. If the energy intensity and the share of renewable energy (MSD Indicator 22) are improving, CO2 emissions from fossil fuel (MSD Indicator 21) continue to rise.

Objective 4. Addressing climate change as a priority issue for the Mediterranean

Strategic Directions	Regional Actions	Flagship Initiative
SD 4.1: Climate change knowledge and decision-making processes	4.1.5 : Mediterranean climate research agenda	Establish a regional science-policy interface mechanism on Climate Change (4.1.9)
	4.1.6: Regional climate change monitoring and analysis	
	4.1.7: Indicators and tools for climate vulnerability and mitigation	
	4.1.8 : Regional courses on Mediterranean climate change	
SD 4.2: Climate-smart and resilient responses		
SD 4.3: Climate finance from public and private sectors	4.3.3: Capacities to access international climate finance	
SD 4.4: Reforms for climate change responses, including the energy sector	4.4.7: Climate change knowledge and innovation centre	
	4.4.8 : Trans-Mediterranean power grids	

46. Out of the seven Regional Actions, only one is showing clear proof of implementation (4.1.5. *Promote a Mediterranean research agenda*), through the PRIMA initiative³¹. For the others Actions, no clear evidence of development has been found although some sub-regional projects such as Clima Med or UfM climate related studies and Working Groups³² are contributing to the Objective.

47. The creation of the Mediterranean Experts on Climate and environmental Change (MedECC)³³ and the publication of the first Mediterranean Assessment Report (MAR 1) in 2020 have been major milestones to disseminate science-based evidence around the impact of climate change in the region. However the diverse climate and environmental frameworks such as the Paris Agreement on Climate Change (UNFCCC), the work of the IPCC and the IPBES results could be integrated more directly

³⁰ <https://www.medecc.org/>

³¹ PRIMA is an EU-funded initiative to finance R&D projects in Mediterranean countries related to sustainable agriculture, food and water. www.prima-med.org

³² <https://ufmsecretariat.org/fr/climate/>; <https://www.climamed.eu/>

³³ <https://www.medecc.org/>

and/or explicitly into the UNEP/MAP – Barcelona Convention system or the MSSD to overcome jointly climate, biodiversity, pollution, and development challenges in the region.

48. The launch in 2020 of the “*Mediterranean Sea Programme (MedProgramme): Enhancing Environmental Security*”, a 43 million USD endeavor funded by the Global Environment Facility (GEF) with the aim of reducing major environmental stresses, strengthening climate resilience and water security, and improving the health and livelihoods of coastal populations in the Mediterranean region, should contribute to progress significantly towards the delivery of the MSSD Objective 4 by 2025.

IV.5 Objective 5 on green and blue economy is advancing slowly

49. According to SoED, addressing socio-economic inequalities between and within countries, owing partly to the high unemployment rate, is a key concern for the Mediterranean region. Production and consumption patterns in the Mediterranean region have undergone profound changes in recent decades, which, in combination with demographic growth, urbanization, and rising living standards, have led to an increase in resource consumption and environmental degradation. This adds to inefficient industrial processes and unsustainable waste management, putting further pressure on the natural resources on which Mediterranean economies depend.

50. The transition of the Mediterranean region towards a Green and Blue Economy is showing an unbalanced and blurry picture. While most EU Mediterranean countries have a strong political and economic commitment towards green and inclusive socio-economic transformation (e.g. European Green Deal, the EU Blue Economy Strategy, Recovery funds), the Southern Mediterranean countries are in general not performing well³⁴. The lack of (political and social) leadership, the high level of harmful subsidies (such as for fossil fuels) and the low involvement of stakeholders hinder the development of more sustainable and responsible economies.

51. Recently the EU has approved a new Taxonomy³⁵ for investors, companies, issuers and promoters to identify low-carbon, resilient and resource-efficient projects. However, the taxonomy is not yet implemented at EU or national level and is not targeting non-EU countries.

52. The Domestic Material Consumption (MSD Indicator 23) is decreasing in relative terms but increasing in absolute volume.

Objective 5: Transition towards a green and blue economy

Strategic Directions	Target	Regional Actions	Flagship Initiatives
SD 5.1: Green and decent jobs for all	By 2025, the majority of Mediterranean countries are committed to green or sustainable public procurement programmes	5.1.4: Guidelines on green jobs and social entrepreneurship	Mediterranean business award for environmental innovation (5.4.5)
SD 5.2: Development, progress and well-being.		5.2.2: Open database on societal progress and wellbeing	
SD 5.3: Sustainable Consumption and Production		5.3.3: SCP Regional Action	
SD 5.4 : Environmental and social innovation		5.4.4: Regional network of green and social incubators	Sustainable Public Procurement (5.6.5)
SD 5.5: Sustainable Public and Private Investment		5.5.3: Sustainable investment and CSR	
SD 5.6: Greener and inclusive market		5.5.4: Environmental and social international investissements	
	5.6.3: Green fiscal and financial reform		
	5.6.4: Regional trade cooperation		

³⁴ <https://greeneconomytracker.org>

³⁵ https://ec.europa.eu/info/business-economy-euro/banking-and-finance/sustainable-finance/eu-taxonomy-sustainable-activities_en

53. Out of the eight Regional Actions planned (most of them to be achieved by 2020), four (50%) are currently supported by the [SwitchMed](#) initiative, Regional Business Associations and UfM Working Groups³⁶, among other regional platforms. No relevant information has been found related to the other regional actions, showing a lack of monitoring and implementation.

54. The 2025 target on *Green or Sustainable Public Procurement (SPP) programmes* is being advanced through the implementation of the [SCP Regional Action Plan](#). However, the number of SPP programmes in the Mediterranean countries is not well tracked; and it seems difficult to reach the mentioned target under those conditions.

IV.6 Objective 6 on governance is evolving positively

55. The advancement of the MSSD Objective 6 is rather difficult to determine due to lack of information from the Mediterranean Sustainability Dashboard and other monitoring mechanisms. The launch of regional initiatives described earlier are showing significant progress towards more inclusive and sustainable governance patterns. However, the lack of effective and robust regional mechanisms to discuss, regulate and enforce sustainable policies, related to non-environmental issues such as trade, energy, migrations or health, is a barrier to advance towards the MSSD implementation.

56. According to SoED, all Mediterranean countries are using Environmental Impact Assessment (EIA), and about 75% of the countries have regulated Strategic Environmental Assessment (SEA). However, the effective implementation, monitoring and enforcement of environmental obligations varies widely between countries and areas.

Objective 6: Improving governance in support of sustainable development

Strategic Directions	Targets	Regional Actions	Flagship initiatives
SD 6.1: Dialogue and cooperation on emergency-preparedness	By 2025, two-thirds of Mediterranean countries have acceded to the Aarhus Convention	6.1.2 : Cooperation on emergency-preparedness	Capacity building programmes related to environmental obligations (6.3.5)
SD 6.2: Engagement of stakeholders in the governance and decision-making processes		6.1.3 on Population flows	
SD 6.3: Implementation and compliance with environmental obligations			
SD 6.4: Education and research for sustainable development		6.4.5: Research and innovation	Publicly accessible integrated information system (6.5.5)
SD 6.5: Regional capabilities for information management		6.4.6 : Education for sustainable development	
	6.5.3: Data and information production and sharing		
		6.5.4 : Monitoring programmes	

57. Out of the six Regional Actions, five have been advanced, while one Regional Action has not been launched. The [Partnership for Research and Innovation in the Mediterranean Area \(PRIMA\)](#) has started in 2018, with around 500 million euros to support regional R&D projects with the aim to advance sustainable development in the Mediterranean. It provides an innovative experience that could be extended into other areas of research.

58. Regarding the [Mediterranean Strategy on Education for Sustainable Development \(MSESD\)](#), only 15 countries (69%) have currently a legal framework for ESD in place (MSD Indicator 28).

59. Regarding the Flagship Initiatives, the [Horizon 2020 initiative](#) to depollute the Mediterranean have reached some valuable achievements, in particular in the Southern shore, to develop adequate strategies, policies and facilities. However, a publicly accessible Mediterranean integrated information system is still lacking, although it is being (slowly) advanced through the [ENI SEIS II South Support Mechanism](#). The latter aims at developing a Shared Environmental Information System (SEIS) at

³⁶ <https://ufmsecretariat.org/what-we-do/platforms/>

Mediterranean level; however, country capacities are very heterogeneous and data availability remains an obstacle.

60. Regarding the target to provide legal instruments for civil society and citizens to access environmental information at national level, only 12 countries out of 21 (57%) have acceded to the [Aarhus Convention](#) so far. Therefore, two additional countries are necessary to reach the two-thirds target, which remains challenging as per today. In addition, the large majority of the countries have outdated or incomplete national green economy/sustainable development strategies (MSD Indicator 24).

IV.7 Status of means of implementation and monitoring of the MSSD

61. The chapter 3 of the MSSD addresses the implementation of the Strategy through institutional structures and processes, financing mechanisms, and monitoring system and regional dashboard. Political, technical and financial resources are not yet in place for the effective and timely monitoring of the MSSD. The Strategic Directions, Targets and Regional Actions of the MSSD are not adequately and systematically tracked, hindering its effective implementation.

Means of implementation and monitoring of the MSSD

Strategic Directions	Regional Actions
SD 7.1. Structures for implementation at national and regional scale, with adequate resourcing	7.1.2: Improve the impact of the MCSD
	7.1.3: Enlarge the MCSD
	7.1.4: Improve visibility of the MCSD
	7.1.5: Ensure that the MCSD promotes the exchange of good practices
SD 7.2: Establish regional processes for the implementation and monitoring of the MSSD	7.2.1: Ensure the necessary resources for the implementation and monitoring of the MSSD
	7.2.2: Prepare an implementation plan for the MSSD
	7.2.3: MCSD support to national sustainable development policies
	7.2.4: Participatory midterm evaluation of the MSSD
	7.2.5 : New MSSD for 2026-2035
SD 7.3 Strengthen capacity for financing the MSSD	7.3.1: Project portfolio supporting MSSD actions, and funding sources
	7.3.2: Provide capacity-building workshops in fundraising to national governments and stakeholders
	7.3.3: Create an investment facility for sustainable development implementation
	7.3.4: Encourage private sector to engage with civil society and foster greater corporate social responsibility
7.4: Ensure the regular monitoring of the MSSD	7.4.2: MCSD monitoring of the MSSD implementation
	7.4.3: Strategy monitoring systems based on existing and planned data-sharing and information systems of the MAP.
	7.4.4: Develop and populate a dashboard of sustainability indicators for the Mediterranean

62. **Despite substantial efforts, the implementation, financing and monitoring mechanisms of the MSSD need to be strengthened.** The MCSD Steering Committee has been successfully mobilized to actively follow-up the MSSD Flagships Initiatives, the work on the Mediterranean Sustainability Dashboard, and a set of Assessment Studies. However, the *processes for the implementation and monitoring of the MSSD* (SD 7.2), the *capacity reinforcement for financing the MSSD* (SD 7.3) and the *monitoring mechanisms of the MSSD* (SD 7.4) have not been fully designed nor effectively implemented. This lack of appropriate supporting instruments for the MSSD implementation is a major barrier to advance its Objectives. It requires the mobilization of significant human, technical and financial resources, beyond the actual capacity or budget of the UNEP/MAP Coordinating Unit or Components/RACs.

63. **The diversity, balance (governments vs. stakeholders) and inclusiveness of the MCSD and its Steering Committee could be still improved** to ensure a better representation and participation of the whole range of sustainable development actors in the region.

64. **The MSSD is lacking visibility and recognition by policymakers and stakeholders.** The level of acknowledgement and awareness of the MSSD in the policy arena is rather difficult to assess: no public reports have been published so far on those aspects. An on-line search (Annex III) shows that the term “Mediterranean Strategy for Sustainable Development” is quoted in a limited number of times during 2015-2020, compared to the references to the Barcelona Convention, the 2030 Agenda or SDGs. In the last communication from the European Commission on [A New Agenda for Mediterranean](#), the MSSD is not quoted at all and the Barcelona Convention is mentioned only once.

65. **The MSSD financing mechanisms are not properly developed to achieve a timely and effective implementation of the MSSD.** No monitoring of MSSD funding has been undertaken (no thematic report nor specific indicators). This remains a major obstacle in advancing towards the MSSD implementation, as adequate finance schemes have been identified as a key driver to reach SDGs³⁷.

66. **The MSSD is under-financed compared to its ambition.** The MSSD states that “*the Mediterranean Commission on Sustainable Development should have its proper funding and its human resources (...) with at least two employed officers (...)*”, but as of today only one officer from UNEP/MAP is dedicated to follow the MSSD and MCSD activities. Additionally, in the 2020-2021 UNEP/MAP Programme of Work and Budget, a limited amount (143,427 EUR) is covering the organization of meetings of the MCSD and its Steering Committee, and the mid-term evaluations of the MSSD and SCP Regional Action Plan. The budget for the MSSD monitoring (Mediterranean Sustainability Dashboard) coordinated by Plan Bleu seems rather insufficient to track adequately the complexity of the MSSD. No specific dedicated budget is targeting MSSD communication, outreach or dissemination activities. It represents rather limited resources compared to the scope and ambition of the MSSD and the total budget of the UNEP/MAP Secretariat and Components.

67. **The implementation and delivery of MSSD Flagship Initiatives are supported by UNEP/MAP Components, MCSD Members, MAP/NGO Partners and external stakeholders,** with external secured resources (e.g. projects-based grants) without direct funding from the Mediterranean Trust Fund (MTF). **No ad-hoc financial mechanisms** (with the exception of [The MedFund](#)) targeting Strategic Directions or Actions have been identified, beyond activities supported by external donors on a case-by-case basis, e.g. Horizon 2020 initiative, SwitchMed programme.

68. **Several UNEP/MAP initiatives are contributing to the MSSD implementation.** The MSSD clearly identifies synergies between a set of regional and national initiatives, assessment studies and projects coordinated or supported by UNEP/MAP and its partners. Others have been approved or launched at COP 20 and COP 21. Additionally, the Secretariat coordinates the [MedProgramme](#) funded by the Global Environment Facility (GEF) to deploy more than 100 coordinated actions at regional and national levels in 2020-2024 in ten beneficiary countries: Albania, Algeria, Bosnia and Herzegovina, Egypt, Libya, Lebanon, Morocco, Montenegro, Tunisia and Turkey.

69. **However, it is rather difficult to effectively coordinate, synergize and capitalize such a high number of initiatives without the appropriate means.** Those sustainability-driven projects, initiatives and institutional frameworks, supported and/or implemented by the UNEP/MAP – Barcelona Convention Secretariat, its components – without including other projects developed independently by the RACs through external funding –, and partners add complexity to the tracking, monitoring and follow-up of the MSSD, while all of them contribute, directly or indirectly, to the MSSD implementation.

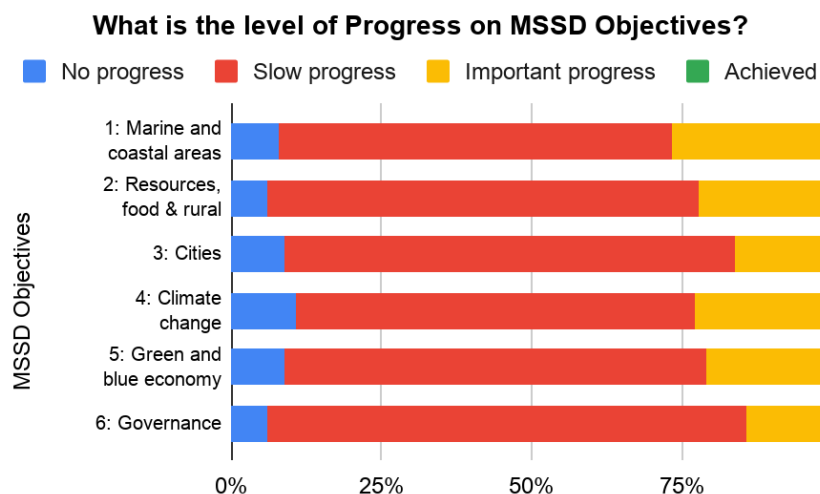
70. **The Mediterranean Sustainability Dashboard does not yet provide a complete, updated and effective information towards the MSSD implementation.** The number of indicators is not well distributed between the different objectives: from one single indicator for Objective 5 (Green and blue economy) up to nine indicators for Objective 2 (Rural areas and Natural resources). The level of population of indicators is good (100%), however only 71% are effectively providing trends over time by being populated with at least two different years between 2016 and 2020. It is rather low when

³⁷ [UN Secretary-General’s Strategy for Financing the 2030 Agenda](#)

compared with SDGs data monitoring platforms such (UN, SDSN)³⁸ that provide yearly data that can be easily visualized, downloaded and compared. In addition, **those indicators are also not directly related to the monitoring of MSSD Actions, Targets or Flagships Initiatives.**

V. Main learnings from the assessment and stakeholder consultations³⁹

71. When looking at the level of progress towards the MSSD Objectives, **the consulted stakeholders are highlighting the slow, partial and uncertain state of implementation of the strategy.**



V.1 Main achievements of the MSSD

72. **The MSSD remains a unique regional sustainability strategy** covering a wide and diverse number of countries, approved by all Contracting Parties to the Barcelona Convention, and providing an integrated and ambitious roadmap to improve the state of the region by 2025.

73. **The MSSD contributes to the (regional) sustainability agenda** and influences practices on the field, although the level of implementation should be accelerated. The MSSD is recognized by UNEP/MAP stakeholders as a driver to reach the 2030 Agenda in the Mediterranean.

74. **The MCSD is playing an essential role as a multi-stakeholder platform** to discuss, monitor and advance on the implementation of the MSSD. It accelerates knowledge sharing and dissemination of good practices among Contracting Parties and UNEP/MAP Partners.

75. **The development of the Flagships Initiatives is driving the MSSD implementation,** involving UNEP/MAP partners and stakeholders on concrete actions. They are increasing the visibility of the MSSD and supporting the concrete advancement of the SDGs in the Mediterranean.

76. **A wide number of innovative projects, initiatives and programmes** (SwitchMed, Horizon 2020, WES, PRIMA, WestMed, ClimaMed, etc.) are contributing to the MSSD implementation, although they are not always covering all the Mediterranean countries. Short- and long-term results are already visible through the advancement of the MSSD Objectives, Targets and Regional Actions.

V.2 Main gaps in the MSSD implementation

77. **The path of implementation of the MSSD and SDGs is too slow** to match 2020, 2025 and 2030 deadlines. Without transformative acceleration and leverage on synergies between those strategic frameworks, the targeted Objectives and Goals will not be reached in time.

78. **The MSSD suffers from a lack of visibility, awareness and engagement** from non-UNEP/MAP related stakeholders. Non-environmental policy and decision-makers in the

³⁸ <https://unstats.un.org/sdgs/indicators/database/>; <http://sdgstoday.org/>

³⁹ Details are available in Document UNEP/MED WG.493/Inf.3.

Mediterranean region and countries are not always knowledgeable of the MSSD, limiting its effectiveness and impact.

79. **The MSSD does not clearly identify the implementing partners** of Strategic Directions and Actions, which leads to a lack of empowerment and commitment. Many Strategic Directions and Actions are too vague and generic to be correctly implemented, and they are lacking SMART⁴⁰ indicators to monitor efficiently its state of progress.

80. **The monitoring mechanisms of the MSSD are not providing a timely and exhaustive picture of the state of sustainability in the Mediterranean region.** They do not cover adequately the level of implementation of the Strategic Directions, Actions, Flagship Activities and Targets. Large data gaps exist in terms of geographic coverage, accuracy, timeliness, and the level of disaggregation.

81. **The level of financial investment into the MSSD activities is insufficient to ensure its effective implementation and reach its objectives.** Financial resources are not tracked, which impedes the possibility to evaluate the quantity and quality of initiatives contributing to the MSSD. The MSSD is also lacking a strategy to attract relevant financial actors and increase available funds.

V.3 *Main opportunities for the MSSD*

82. **The MSSD remains a strategic instrument accelerating the SDGs implementation, by providing a mid-term milestone** by 2025, five years ahead of the 2030 Agenda target. The MSSD also guarantees a focus on sustainability issues most relevant to the Mediterranean region.

83. **The MSSD can leverage the active involvement of Contracting Parties and relevant stakeholders through the MCSD and MAP Partners** consultation mechanisms. The MCSD can be empowered, and enhanced technically and financially, to become the multi-stakeholder platform supporting the MSSD implementation in a timely and effective manner.

84. **The clustering of Flagship Initiatives with key Regional Actions** and other identified sustainability-driven initiatives contributing to the MSSD can simplify the monitoring and support the upscaling, dissemination and replication at regional, national and local level.

85. **The massive investment in post-COVID recovery plans** can be directed towards MSSD and SDGs transformative actions, providing a unique opportunity to accelerate the sustainability transformation and avoid harmful subsidies or initiatives.

86. **The diversity, complementary and inter-relations between the existing sustainability-related Mediterranean platforms,** institutions, initiatives and actors can create synergies and gains that can be harvested through innovative collaboration and multi-stakeholders' partnerships.

VI. **Recommendations to advance the MSSD implementation**

VI.1 *Renewed political leadership is strongly needed*

87. **Political commitment is crucial to drive ambitious and field actions.** Engagements related to the MSSD could become (softly) binding, using (for example) the *Complain or Explain* approach to increase the pressure on targeted actors. The organization of high-level political summits (with heads of states), mirroring the HLPF with the VNRs, would contribute to increase political visibility and empowerment. Annual or bi-annual stakeholder conferences could also better disseminate outcomes.

88. **The MSSD should be monitored and implemented at national level through a cross-ministerial level.** The MCSD Members representing the Contracting Parties should be empowered to interact with all relevant ministries. Such inter-ministerial engagement would improve the governance, coherence, consistency and coordination among processes at global, regional, and national scales.

VI.2 *Governance and coordination mechanisms must be reinforced*

89. **The MCSD represents a unique regional platform for multi-stakeholder dialogues** and collective actions around sustainable development. It is necessary to strengthen the MCSD role in the

⁴⁰ Specific, Measurable, Achievable, Relevant and Time-bound

MSSD implementation by reinforcing its dedication, resources, visibility, and capacity. Better inter-connections between the MSSD and other international environmental commitments and regional platforms for sustainable development is also needed. Regional actions or cross-sectorial initiatives contributing to several institutional engagements should be identified and strongly supported.

90. **Private sectors and citizens must become more involved.** The UNEP/MAP – Barcelona Convention Secretariat should engage more closely with the private sector, in particular in the field of green and blue economy. Regional business actors could become members or partners of the MCSDD. Specific communication campaigns should target the private sector, showing the benefits of the MSSD, and opportunities through the participation of citizens and socio-economic actors.

VI.3 The MSSD should be better funded, visible and attractive for stakeholders

91. It is recommended to **concentrate the limited available resources to develop the most promising Regional Actions and Flagships Initiatives.** Adequate investment and funding schemes are needed for an effective implementation of the MSSD. A roadmap for financing the MSSD, identifying public and private financial mechanisms and potential investments sources should be developed, as originally planned.

92. **A specific MSSD label could be designed and reward the most interesting sustainability initiatives promoted by regional and national stakeholders.** Stakeholders contributing to the MSSD implementation should be involved more closely and be better recognized, through an ad-hoc labelling process (*MSSD Partners*).

VI.4 Flagship initiatives are key drivers to advance the MSSD

93. **Successful flagship initiatives should be promoted as best practices, scaled-up through adequate funding,** and replicated. The use of a dedicated on-line platform (such as Plan Bleu Regional Observatory on the Environment and Development) with updated information would contribute to share valuable learnings at regional and national level.

94. **Flagship Initiatives can become inspiring practices to increase the visibility and achievement of the MSSD but need greater political leadership and remain too dependent on voluntary achievements from stakeholders.** Policymakers (Contracting Parties) should promote and/or endorse concrete Flagship Initiatives, putting them at the core center of sustainability policies.

95. **Flagship Initiatives should be officially captured in the UNEP/MAP monitoring/reporting system** with specific support to attract funders and donors. A process of **labelling MSSD initiatives** would increase MSSD visibility and attractiveness, following the experience of the UfM project labelling.

VI.5 Monitoring mechanisms should be improved

96. **All initiatives contributing to the MSSD should be correctly reported or identified, at national or local level, through a continuous, transparent and open monitoring process** engaging relevant stakeholders within the UNEP/MAP – Barcelona Convention system. A dedicated on-line platform could collect and disseminate inputs on a rolling basis. Outcomes from indicators should be better communicated to the public and policymakers to increase knowledge sharing and commitment. Annual MSSD reports can be published and disseminated like for the UN SDGs.

97. **MSSD indicators should be more integrated and aligned with SDGs indicators,** to facilitate data collection and avoid reporting fatigue. The Mediterranean Sustainability Dashboard should become an instrument strategically supportive of the MSSD core objectives. Data should be updated on an annual basis, and shared in an interactive, visual and open manner. New sources of data should be identified and collected, in particular related to citizen science, academia, big data, the private sector, civil society organizations or local/sub-national authorities.

Conclusion

98. The Mid-Term Evaluation of the MSSD brought concrete learnings and suggestions that could significantly benefit the implementation of the Strategy. Unfortunately, it should be recognized that, in

line with recent environmental assessments, **the advancement of the sustainability agenda is insufficient** to reach the targeted objectives in 2025 (MSSD) or 2030 (SDGs).

99. The desktop review and stakeholder consultations highlighted clear suggestions and practical recommendations to support the second phase (2020-2025) of the MSSD. First, **the renewed involvement, commitment and empowerment of policy and decision-makers is essential** to accelerate the MSSD implementation. High-level events and flagship reports would be useful.

100. Secondly, the **investment in monitoring, communication (labelling) and implementation activities is critical** to track and increase MSSD visibility and impact on the field. A MSSD labelling process as well as financial investment mechanisms would be very valuable.

101. Finally, the **national recovery plans** should promote a more sustainable economy and prosperous society in the Mediterranean region. This once-in-a-lifetime opportunity cannot be missed to deliver the MSSD and SDGs in due time.

List of Acronyms

CBD Convention on Biological Diversity

CSO Civil Society Organizations (CSOs)

ESD Education for Sustainable Development

IGO Inter-Governmental Organization

HLPF High-level Political Forum

MAP Mediterranean Action Plan

MCSDMediterranean Commission on Sustainable Development

MSD Mediterranean Sustainability Dashboard

MSSDMediterranean Strategy on Sustainable Development

MTE Mid Term Evaluation

NGO Non-Governmental Organization

RAC Regional Activity Centre

SDG Sustainable Development Goal

SIMPEER Simplified Peer Review Mechanism

SoED State of THE Environment and Development

UNEP UN Environment Programme

VNR Voluntary National Review

Annex I
Stakeholder Consultation: Online Survey, Workshops and Interviews

Annex I: Stakeholder Consultation: Online Survey, Workshops and Interviews

Calendar of Stakeholder Consultations

Date	Stakeholders	Type	No of Participants
November-December 2020	MCSD Members, UNEP/MAP Components and Partners, and other stakeholders	On-line Survey	69
16/12/2021	Specific session during the 22 nd Meeting of the MCSD Steering Committee	Online Workshop	7
14/01/2021	SPA/RAC and PAP/RAC	Online Interview	3
14/01/2021	Plan Bleu	Online Interview	2
09/02/2021	MCSD Members and UNEP/MAP Partners (1 st group)	Online Workshop	7
11/02/2021	MCSD Members and UNEP/MAP Partners (2 nd group)	Online Workshop	9
17/02/2021	SCP/RAC	Online Interview	3
25/02/2021	INFO/RAC and MEDPOL	Online Interview	2
25/02/21	REMPEC	Online Interview	1

Agenda of the online workshops and interviews

- **Introduction** (by the facilitators): Presentation of the mid-term evaluation process, description of the methodology and objectives of the session.
- **A- State of Progress and Implementation:** Discussion around state of progress and implementation of the MSSD and SCP Regional Action Plan at regional and national level, including financial mechanisms and policy instruments.
- **B- Monitoring and Evaluation:** Discussion around the relevance, accuracy and efficiency of mechanisms to supervise and monitor the implementation of the MSSD and SCP Regional Action Plan, including the tracking of policy initiatives and field projects – 20 minutes
- **C- COVID-19 and Sustainability Agenda:** Discussion around impacts of COVID-19 crisis for the implementation of the SCP Regional Action Plan, MSSD and SDGs in the Mediterranean region and countries.
- **Closing of the session** (by the facilitators): Summary of the main outcomes, next steps – 15 minutes

Annex II:
MSSD Text Analysis

Annex II: MSSD Text Analysis

Content Analysis and Keywords Mapping: A text mining software⁴¹ based on artificial intelligence has been used to extract and assess the frequency and relevance of meaningful contents of the MSSD by highlighting main ideas, key words and basic concepts. It brings background information to contextualize and prioritize the MSSD Objectives, Strategic Directions, Regional and National Actions, and Flagships Initiatives.

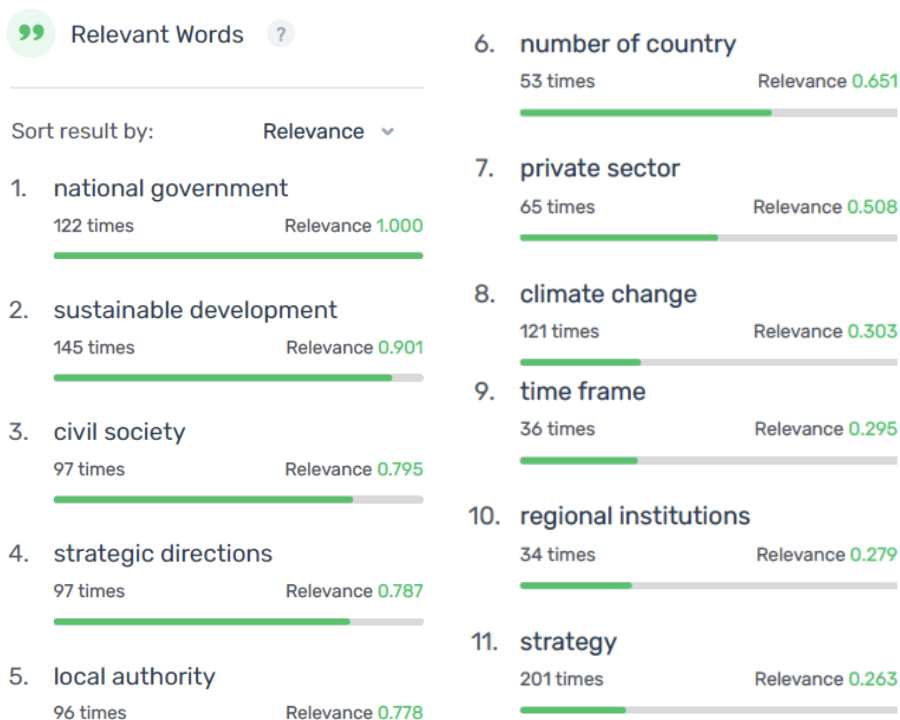
MSSD Keywords Cloud



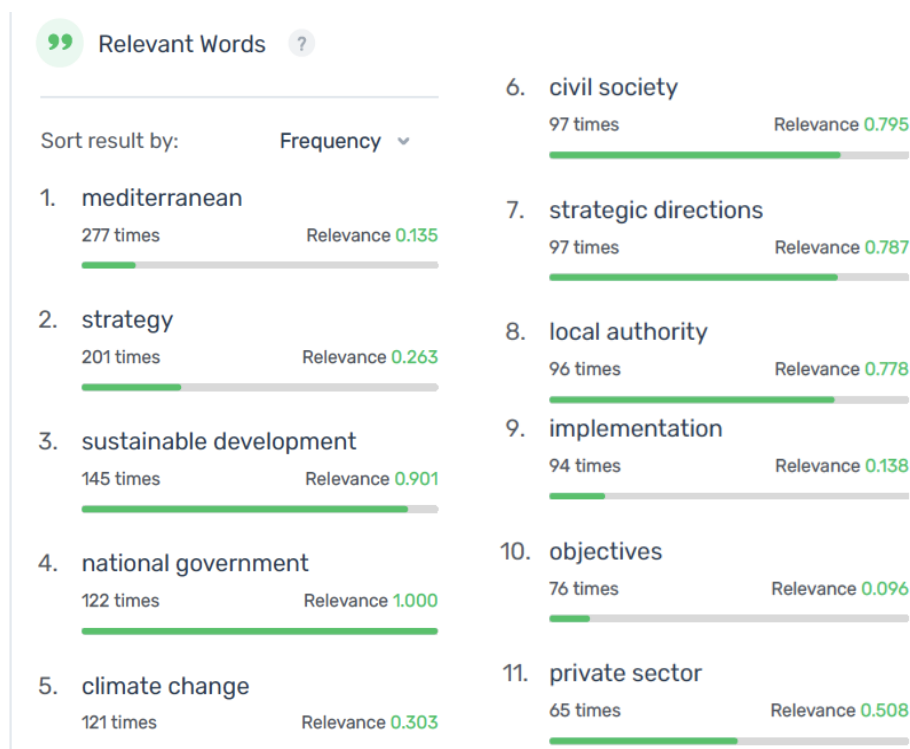
An analysis of the **frequency and relevance of keywords** within the MSSD are highlighting two main points. First, the participatory approach of the MSSD is based on the involvement of a large, balanced and diverse number of stakeholders representing the main categories of Mediterranean actors, in particular National governments (122 times), Civil Society (97 times), Local authority (96 times), Private sector (65 times) and Regional institutions (34 times). Secondly, a major cross cutting issue of the MSSD is Climate Change (mentioned 121 times), detailed in a specific chapter (Objective 4) and indeed very much related to the environmental perspective of the UNEP/MAP – Barcelona Convention system.

⁴¹ <https://monkeylearn.com/word-cloud/result>

Keywords by Relevance⁴²



Keywords by Frequency



⁴² Keywords are relevant terms within a text summarizing its contents. Keywords have a corresponding **relevance** measure that indicates how important the keyword is within that particular content. See full methodology here: <https://help.monkeylearn.com/en/articles/2174069-what-is-extraction>

Annex III:
MSSD Visibility

Annex III: MSSD Visibility

Google Scholar Search				
Year	Number of results per research terms			
	<i>"Mediterranean Strategy for Sustainable Development"</i>	<i>"Barcelona convention"</i>	<i>Mediterranean Agenda 2030</i>	<i>Mediterranean Sustainable Development Goals</i>
2014	36	437	1430	1400
2015	28	405	1960	15400
2016	35	563	2130	16900
2017	36	514	2750	18200
2018	35	502	3400	19200
2019	41	505	4360	21500
2020	30	472	4740	24100

Source: own assessment, 3 April 2021 (<https://scholar.google.com/>)
