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Agenda Item 3: Progress on Marine Litter MED II Project Implementation:

Progress Report on the Implementation of Marine Litter MED II Project

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1. Introduction

1. The EU-funded Marine Litter MED II Project implemented and coordinated by UN Environment Programme/Mediterranean Action Plan (UNEP/MAP) aims to support the Contracting Parties to the Barcelona Convention from the southern Mediterranean region to further expand and support the implementation of the Regional Plan on Marine Litter Management in the Mediterranean. The project's activities are coordinated by UNEP/MAP Secretariat with the support of UNEP/MAP Components (i.e. MED POL, SCP/RAC, SPA/RAC and REMPEC), in close cooperation with the beneficiary Contracting Parties (i.e. Algeria, Egypt, Israel, Lebanon, Libya, Morocco and Tunisia) and the Commission on the Protection of the Black Sea Against Pollution (hereunder referred to as BSC). The Marine Litter MED II project presents a special focus on Decision IG.24/4 on the "Roadmap and Needs Assessment for the 2023 Mediterranean Quality Status Report"; Decision IG.24/10 on the "Main Elements of the Six Regional Plans to Reduce/Prevent Marine Pollution from Land-Based Sources; Updating the Annexes to the LBS and Dumping Protocols of the Barcelona Convention"; Decision IG.24/11 on the "Regional Marine Litter Guidelines", as well as the COP21 Naples Ministerial Declaration.

2. The project was launched in September 2020 and aims to achieve three principal outputs:

- Output A: Enhance national capacities on monitoring and assessing marine litter addressing pressures/sources and impacts to contribute to 2023 MED QSR with quality assured data addressing pressures and effectiveness of measures in line with COP 20 Decision on 2017 MED QSR.
- Output B: Scale up and expand the implementation of pilot implementation of selected marine litter reduction and prevention measures at national and local level.
- Output C: Maximize synergies on marine litter actions in the Region with a focus on the collaboration with the Black Sea Commission and GFCM, and other regional partners.

3. Since its launch, the project is progressing towards achieving the implementation of all three project outputs. The present progress report highlights the main activities carried out up to August 2021. It is prepared by UNEP/MAP for the kind consideration and review of the First Steering Committee Meeting of the Marine Litter MED II Project with the aim to review the progress achieved; provide comments and advice; and set the next steps and the way forward for the execution of the on-the-ground activities towards the timely and effective implementation of the Project.

4. The present progress report provides an overview of accomplishments made for each activity (as outlined in the project work plan). This is presented in Chapter 2 titled "Progress Table: Marine Litter MED II Project" providing detailed information for each activity and describing remaining work and arising issues preventing the timely completion of these activities. It also includes response measures taken to address the arising issues.

2. Progress Table: Marine Litter MED Project

Table 1: Achievement of results

Outcome 1	Indicator(s)	Target vs. Actual result	Description of the results achieved
<p>Enhance national capacities on monitoring and assessing marine litter addressing pressures/sources and impacts to contribute to 2023 MED QSR with quality assured data addressing pressures and effectiveness of measures in line with COP 20 Decision on 2017 MED QSR:</p>	National Monitoring Programmes and Strategies Prepared for IMAP Candidate Indicator 24	<p>As planned and in line with the Project's Workplan (Preparatory Phase)</p>	<p>A Small-Scale Funding Agreement (SSFA) is countersigned with SPA/RAC since April 2021 and its first installment was released in June 2021. Bilateral discussions with the beneficiary countries have been initiated towards coordinating the execution of the national activities.</p>
	Level of collection of monitoring data for IMAP Candidate Indicator 24		<p>During this reporting period, focus was mainly on establishing the project structure (financial and administrative) and undertaking necessary preparatory actions for the preparation of the legal and financial arrangements in order to initiate the implementation of specific output activities. Consequently, tangible results cannot be reported for this reporting period. During Summer 2021 (i.e., July-August 2021) an extra effort is being made in order to finalize the SSFAs with the UNEP/MAP Components, Implementing Partners and the beneficiary Countries. Drafts of 7 SSFAs have been sent to countries for their review and feedback. SSFAs are expected to be countersigned in September-October 2021.</p>
	Level of agreement on updated baselines values, threshold values for IMAP Candidate Indicator 24		
	Number of Monitoring Protocols and methodologies prepared and implemented for riverine marine litter and microplastics coming from WWTP		
	Level of achievement of the approved marine litter environmental targets		
	Number of assessment reports delivered including measures' identification		
<p>Output 1-A Support countries to further advance and operationalize monitoring of IMAP Candidate Indicator 24, with a focus on the ground implementation of the operation</p>	Level of preparation of national Monitoring programmes and strategies for IMAP Candidate Indicator 24		<p>SSFA is countersigned with SPA/RAC since April 2021 and its first installment has been released.</p>
	Number of national teams and institutions involved in the process		<p>In-depth discussions have been carried out bilaterally (i.e., between UNEP/MAP MED POL and SPA/RAC)</p>

<p>strategy as developed during the previous ML MED Project</p>	<p>Number of national experts trained</p>		<p>and at regional level (i.e. during the Integrated CorMon Meeting (Dec. 2020)) regarding the execution of this set of activities. Moreover, the Regional Operational Strategy for monitoring IMAP Candidate Indicator 24 was reviewed and validated by the Contracting Parties during the CorMon Marine Litter Meeting (March. 2021) based on which the national monitoring programmes and strategies will be based. The Regional Operational Strategy provides the Contracting Parties with practical guidelines in designing and developing monitoring programmes to collect standardized data on marine litter ingested by sea turtles, with the aim of achieving GES and contribute to the 10th Ecological Objective (E010) of IMAP on Marine Litter.</p> <p>SPA/RAC has already informed the two beneficiary countries (i.e., Tunisia and Lebanon) about the activities concerning the IMAP CI 24 in the Marine Litter MED II Project. Moreover, SPA/RAC conceived 3 meetings with Tunisia to coordinate the execution of different EU funded projects (i.e., Marine Litter MED II, INDICIT II, COMMON, Life Marine turtles). The data on “impact of marine litter on sea turtles” is collected only within the EU INDICIT II (along the central and south of Tunisian coastline) and COMMON (along the northern coastline of Tunisia) projects by the INSTM, which hosts the sea turtles rescue center in Tunisia.</p> <p>To avoid overlap of the same activity within two EU funded projects (INDICIT II and Med Marine Litter II) It was agreed with INSTM to launch the collection of the mentioned data by September 2021 under the Marine Litter MED II project, since the INDICIT II project has been closed in July 2021.</p> <p>SPA/RAC developed a ToR for Lebanon and is waiting the designation of a national consultant to undertake the work at national level. Apart from the</p>
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			<p>initial selection of the beneficiary countries, Israel and Morocco have also expressed their interest in contributing to the work pertinent to IMAP Candidate Indicator 24. However, further discussions need to take place in order to evaluate the availability and budgetary implications. The SC's guidance is much needed in this regard.</p>
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Output 1-B Develop reporting templates, data standards and data dictionaries based on the agreed standardized monitoring protocols, including data quality assurance and quality control tools, to enable the reporting to the Secretariat of national data with regards to IMAP Candidate Indicator 24, through the IMAP (Pilots) Info System	Level of preparation of Data Standards and Data Dictionaries.		Small-Scale Funding Agreement (SSFA) is countersigned with SPA/RAC since April 2021 and its first installment was released in June 2021. Regarding development of reporting templates, data standards and data dictionaries during the reporting period (1/9/2020 to 31/8/2021), no tangible progress was made. It is planned to present the draft DS-DD in the upcoming CORMON Meetings in 2022.
	Level of preparation of quality assured reporting procedure of monitoring data sets		
	Level of inclusion of DS and DD in the IMAP Infosystem and operationality		
Output 1-C Update Baseline Values and establish threshold values for IMAP Candidate Indicator 24	Level of further development and update of baseline values and environmental targets		Small-Scale Funding Agreement (SSFA) is countersigned with SPA/RAC since April 2021 and its first installment was released in June 2021. Regarding the update of BV and establishing TV for CI24 during the reporting period (1/9/2020 to 31/8/2021), no tangible work was undertaken. It is planned to present this work outputs during in 2022 and 2023.
	Level of preparation of assessment threshold values		
Output 1-D Assess and further specify the environmental reduction targets as agreed by COP 19 in 2016 and reconfirmed in Naples Ministerial Declaration of COP 21 in December 2019, including to prevent and significantly reduce plastic leakage in the Mediterranean Sea and to progressively achieve 100% plastic waste collection and recycling by 2025.	Level of progress achieved in reaching the environmental targets approved by COP 19 in 2016.	As planned and in line with the Project's Workplan (Preparatory Phase)	The Baseline and Threshold Values for the IMAP CI 22 (beach macro-litter) were updated and approved by the MED POL Focal Points Meeting (July 2021) and are further submitted to the 8 th EcAp Coordination Group Meeting (September 2021). The data was collected from 822 surveys; 14 Contracting Parties to the Barcelona Convention between 2016 and 2018 deriving from monitoring programmes; projects and initiatives. The corresponding updated Baseline and Threshold Values for CI23 (seafloor macro-litter and floating microplastics) are under development and waiting for the contribution and submission of dataset by the countries. This work will be presented during the CORMON Meetings in 2022.
	Proposal on environmental targets or their update for IMAP Common and Candidate Indicators for Marine Litter		
	Number of indicators proposed to assess the reduction of plastic leakage in the Mediterranean towards the commitments in the Naples Ministerial Declaration of COP 21 with a particular on the result of the pilot projects under outcome 2 of this project		

<p>Output 1-E Assess knowledge and data gaps for the riverine inputs of marine litter in the Mediterranean; propose relevant monitoring methodologies based on existing experience and adjust them into the Mediterranean needs; ensure synergies with the EU MSFD TGML work. This would prepare the ground for expanding the marine litter common indicators of IMAP to include an indicator on riverine inputs.</p>	Level of preparation of Methodologies developed for monitoring and assessing riverine inputs.		Draft Small Scale Funding Agreements were prepared by UNEP/MAP and shared with seven beneficiary countries for comments before finalization. The SSFAs are expected to be signed in September-October 2021.
	Level of Data collected to feed 2023 MED QSR preparations with regards to marine litter riverine inputs		
	Number of national experts trained		
<p>Output 1-F Assess the main uses and sources of microplastics in the Mediterranean, as well as microplastic leakages into the marine and coastal environment of the Mediterranean, focusing on existing studies with the aim to fill the gap for the Mediterranean and subsequently will result in proposing accordingly necessary measures as well as a protocol for microplastic monitoring coming from WWTP.</p>	Number of Regional/sub-regional reports on the sources, uses and leakages of microplastics in the Mediterranean	As planned and in line with the Project's Workplan (Preparatory Phase)	Draft Small Scale Funding Agreements were prepared by UNEP/MAP and shared with seven beneficiary countries for comments before finalization. The SSFAs are expected to be signed in September-October 2021. Additionally, a ToR is under development and an external national consultant will be hired to collect available information related to microplastic in WWTP and to further develop a microplastic monitoring program in WWT.
	Number of key management and prevention measures proposed		
	Number of Protocols developed to monitor microplastics		
<p>Output 1-G Support national Governments and competent entities in building capacity through technical assistance, training and collaboration for monitoring IMAP Candidate Indicator 24, riverine inputs, and microplastic deriving from WWTP.</p>	Number of national experts trained		The capacity building component of the project will be executed after all activities are initiated and executed in all beneficiary Countries.
	Number of teams involved in the pilot projects at country level		

Outcome 2	Indicator(s)	Target vs. Actual result	Description of the results achieved
Scale up and expand the implementation of pilot implementation of selected marine litter reduction and prevention measures at national and local level:	Number of national reports submitted showcasing and presenting results from the implementation of Adopt-a-beach pilots	As planned and in line with the Project's Workplan (Preparatory Phase)	In-depth discussions have been carried out on the regional level during the presentation of the project at the Integrated CorMon Meeting (Dec. 2020)). Moreover, a letter from UNEP/MAP Coordinator was sent in April 2021 explaining the scope of work related to pilot projects.
	Number of national reports submitted showcasing and presenting results from the implementation of Fishing-for-Litter pilots		The Legal Instruments related to the pilot projects Adopt-a-beach and Fishing-for Litter were discussed and agreed within UNEP/MAP and drafts of the Small-Scale Fund Agreement were prepared and shared with the IPs for comments in August 2021. The SSFAs are expected to be signed in September-October 2021 in order to start the on-the-ground pilot actions implementation.
	Number of national reports submitted showcasing and presenting results from the implementation of measures related to the reduction of single-use plastic bags, and promote alternatives to SUPB, including preparation of adaptation programmes for concerned national industry		Regarding the reduction of SUPB, an SSFA is under preparation with SCP/RAC which has continued to work with Tunisia in order to conceive the communication tools on the ban decree on single-use plastic bags. The tools are expected to be completed by September 2021. It was agreed with the Ministry that ML MED II would contribute by implementing a campaign in different locations and the organization of a press conference.
	Number of EPR schemes prepared and developed with a particular focus on plastic packaging and beverage containers		In Lebanon, consultations took place with the Ministry of Environment to define the scope of action of ML MED II, and to maximize the synergies with WES project. It was decided to work on single-use plastic bags as a first priority, and work is expected to start in the 4 th semester of 2021. For the work related to EPR, SCP/RAC is implementing a WES national activity in Morocco in relation to EPR on plastic (PET) bottles. The outcome will be a roadmap to implement EPR and will serve to detail the scope of the contribution of ML MED II in 2022.
	Number of pilots related to the enhanced management of marine litter from sea-based sources in ports and marinas		The Legal Instruments related to the enhanced management of marine litter from sea-based sources are being developed and shared with the beneficiary countries in August 2021 and a

			<p>ToR is under finalization by UNEP/MAP with the support from REMPEC. The SSFAs are expected to be finalized in September-October 2021. The regional expert is expected to be on-board in October 2021.</p>
<p>Output 2-A Implement Adopt-a-Beach measures, with the scope to expand their geographical scope (at least 1 additional pilot per country) and related impact on further enhancing awareness raising of national/local communities.</p>	Number of countries implementing Adopt-a-beach pilots		<p>In-depth discussions have been carried out at regional level during the presentation of the project at the Integrated CorMon Meeting (Dec. 2020)). Moreover, a letter from UNEP/MAP Coordinator was sent in April 2021 in that regard.</p> <p>The Legal Instruments for the project operation were discussed and agreed within UNEP/MAP and a draft of the Small-Scale Funding Agreement has been prepared by UNEP/MAP and shared with the Countries for comments in August 2021. The SSFAs are expected to be signed in September-October 2021.</p>
	Number of sites selected per country to implement adopt of beach measures.		
	Number of data collected in line with IMAP guidance factsheets and Adopt a Beach Guidelines		
	Number of local actors involved in the process		
	Level of marine litter reduction in pilot areas		
<p>Output 2-B Implement Fishing-for-Litter measures (i.e. passive scheme), in at least one additional fishing port with the scope to remove existing marine litter from the marine environment; Efforts will be made to test to the extent possible the FAO voluntary guidelines on marking of fishing gear and to cooperation with GFCM towards addressing the contribution of aquaculture in marine litter and microplastic generation</p>	Number of countries implementing FfL pilots	<p>As planned and in line with the Project's Workplan (Preparatory Phase)</p>	<p>Draft Small Scale Funding Agreements were prepared by UNEP/MAP and shared with the beneficiary countries for comments in August 2021. The SSFAs are expected to be signed in September-October 2021.</p> <p>Preliminary discussions have been carried out with a new EU-funded project (LIFEDREAM) for the organization of a tangible synergy pertinent to the demonstration/piloting of a pyrolytic device in the selected ports of the ML MED II project (i.e. production of energy from the collected marine litter, low carbon emission footprint; portable device).</p>
	Number of sites selected per country to implement FfL measures		
	Number of data collected in line with IMAP guidance factsheets and FfL Guidelines.		
	Number of local actors involved in the process.		
	Level of marine litter item reduction in pilot areas.		

<p>Output 2-C Further sensitize and engage fishermen to the purpose of minimizing sea-based sources; and contribute to extent possible with data on seafloor marine litter.</p>	<p>Number of fishermen engaged in the implementation of the pilots.</p>	<p>As planned and in line with the Project's Workplan (Preparatory Phase)</p>	<p>The capacity building component of the project will be executed after the FfL projects are initiated by all beneficiary Countries and national teams are in place.</p>
<p>Output 2-D Phase out priority single-use marine litter items from the Mediterranean marine and coastal environment, with a focus on advancing the existing work on single-use plastic bags promoting proper and sustainable alternatives, including on single-use plastic items intensively used, or produced during the COVID-19 Pandemic; and to further support the improvement of the legislator framework for other single-use items ending up as marine litter , in line with the new EU Single-Use Plastics Directive and possibly the updated Regional Plan on Marine Litter Management in the Mediterranean</p>	<p>Number of national workshops.</p>		<p>A draft SSFA and budget with SCP/RAC has been prepared by UNEP/MAP and is under finalization, expected to be signed until September 2021. The SSFA includes the packages of activities under Output 2-D (i.e. focusing on the reduction of single-use plastics and the implementation of national EPR schemes). Minor adjustments may be considered with the scope to tailor the provided financial support per country.</p> <p>SCP/RAC continues to work with Tunisia in order to conceive the communication tools on the ban decree on single-use plastic bags. The tools are expected to be finished by September 2021. It was agreed with the Ministry that ML MED II would contribute by implementing a campaign in different locations and the organization of a press conference.</p> <p>In Lebanon, consultations took place with the Ministry of Environment to define the scope of action of ML MED II, and to maximize the synergies with WES project. It is decided to work on single-use plastic bags as a first priority. Work is expected to start in the 4th quarter of 2021.</p> <p>SCP/RAC is also implementing a WES national activity in Morocco in relation to EPR on plastic (PET) bottles. The outcome will be a roadmap to implement EPR and will serve to detail the scope of the contribution of ML MED II in 2022.</p>
	<p>Number of countries to review and draft up to date regulations and law on reduction of single use plastics</p>		
	<p>Number of laws/regulations developed on reduction of single use plastics.</p>		
	<p>Number of counties and sectors implementing EPR schemes for plastic packaging and beverage containers</p>		

<p>Output 2-E Expand the implementation of pilots (at least one additional port and one marina for the countries participated to the first phase of the project and, where possible, one port and one marina for those countries that did not participate in the first phase of the project) related to the enhanced management of marine litter from sea-based sources in ports and marinas in the Mediterranean, with a focus on advancing the existing work on the application of charges at reasonable costs for the use of port reception facilities or, when applicable, application of the No-Special-Fee system as well to the provision of reception facilities in ports and the delivery of ship-generated wastes, and to explore and establish synergies between the Marine Litter Regional Plan and the IMO Action Plan to address marine plastic litter from ships, as well as other relevant plans or initiatives</p>	<p>Number of pilots related to the enhanced management of marine litter from sea-based sources in ports and marinas implemented</p>	<p>As planned and in line with the Project's Workplan (Preparatory Phase)</p>	<p>Draft SSFAs and budgets have been prepared by UNEP/MAP and has shared with the beneficiary countries in August 2021, whereas it is expected to be signed until September-October 2021. The proposed SSFAs include all package of activities under Output 2-E.</p> <p>Additionally, a ToR is under development and an external regional consultant will support the Project Management Team with the scope to facilitate the implementation of the pilot projects building on the outcome of the first phase of the project (i.e. selecting the major port(s) determining the application of charges, applying the provision of PRF and exploring and establishing synergies with other relevant initiatives).</p>
	<p>Number of targeted diagnosis prepared for the selected ports and marinas</p>		
	<p>Number of Waste Reception and Handling Plans (WRHP) prepared or revised</p>		

Outcome 3	Indicator(s)	Target vs. Actual result	Description of the results achieved
Maximize synergies on marine litter actions in the Region with a focus on the collaboration with the Black Sea Commission and GFCM, and other regional partners:	Level of marine litter reduction observed in pilot areas in two eligible BS countries addressing beach marine litter (Adopt-a-beach) and prevention measures (phasing out single-use plastic bags)	As planned and in line with the Project's Workplan (Preparatory Phase)	A draft SSFA and budget with BSC has been prepared by UNEP/MAP since January 2021 but it has not yet been finalized as BSC has gone through several review cycles and recently (Summer 2021), BSC has informed UNEP/MAP that the SSFA has been shared with the BSC Commissioners for comments and approval. The main issue addressed by the BSC is mainly linked with the fact that not all BS countries are eligible for the project. This process has delayed the process of signature of the SSFA and certainly the commencement of the project activities. UNEP/MAP Secretariat has been following up with numerous reminders to BSC, making amongst others, special reference to the pertinent delays and the need to expedite the process. An official letter from UNEP/MAP Coordinator was sent in January 2021 informing the BSC for the commencement of the project, detailing the project activities and support, and reminding the need for BSC to organize a Regional Seas Coordination Meeting during the first half of 2021.
	Number of national marine litter monitoring programmes prepared		
	Number of marine litter assessment reports for the Black Sea region updated/prepared		
	Number of joint workplans prepared and established with GFCM and BSC on marine litter issues and cooperation with regional partners enhanced, including with G7 and G20 as appropriate		No tangible progress is reported as this set of activities will be initiated in late 2021 (i.e. Regional Cooperation Platform) and in 2022.
	Number of additional memberships from organizations/institutions from the project eligible countries join the Regional Cooperation Platform on Marine litter in the Mediterranean.		
	Number of project reports prepared and submitted, and steering committee meetings successfully organized.		

Output 3-A	Number of national monitoring programmes	As planned and in line with the Project's Workplan (Preparatory Phase)	A draft SSFA and budget with BSC has been prepared by UNEP/MAP since January 2021 but it has not yet been finalized as BSC has gone through several review cycles and recently (Summer 2021), BSC has informed UNEP/MAP that the SSFA has been shared with the BSC Commissioners for comments and approval. The main issue addressed by the BSC is mainly linked with the fact that not all BS countries are eligible for the project. This process has delayed the process of signature of the SSFA and certainly the commencement of the project activities. UNEP/MAP Secretariat has been following up with numerous reminders to BSC, making amongst others, special reference to the pertinent delays and the need to expedite the process. An official letter from UNEP/MAP Coordinator was sent in January 2021 informing the BSC for the commencement of the project, detailing the project activities and support, and reminding the need for BSC to organize a Regional Seas Coordination Meeting during the first half of 2021.
	Number of regional assessment reports		
	Number of baseline values formulated		
Output 3-B	Adopt-a-beach pilots are implemented in at least, two Black Sea countries		
	National regulatory framework for phasing out single-use plastic bags is reviewed, and technical assistance is provided in two countries		
Output 3-C	Joint workplan between UNEP/MAP and GFCM is prepared and agreed.		No work activities have been undertaken during this reporting period.
Output 3-D	Participation and membership of key Mediterranean actors and stakeholders into the Regional Cooperation Platform on Marine Litter in the Mediterranean expanded; and synergies maximized.	As planned and in line with the Project's Workplan (Preparatory Phase)	UNEP/MAP is organizing a meeting for the Regional Cooperation Platform on Marine Litter in the Mediterranean in November 2021. The goal is maximized synergies between projects and develop common actions/targets for all members of the Platform. Additional members from organization/institutions will be invited for the meeting and contribution/ nomination from the steering Committee members is much needed in this regard
	Additional memberships from organizations/institutions from the project eligible countries join the Regional Cooperation Platform on Marine litter in the Mediterranean		

3. Progress Report on Project Management

5. Progress in the first year of implementation has been mainly focused on the operationalization of the Project in all beneficiary countries and undertaking all necessary administrative and regulatory steps required to launch the on the ground implementation of the activities. In this respect, the budget of the Project was prepared and released in the UN financial system (UMOJA) in early December 2020. According to the General Conditions and SOP No. 5 of the ENRTP/GPGC Framework, unspent funds from 2020 were rolled over to 2021 and the respectively revised budget will be shared with the EC Task Manager for information purposes.

6. In terms of reporting, the UNEP PMU has successfully submitted the first Annual Project Progress Report of the Project, covering the period September to December 2020, including the relevant periodic ENRTP/GPGC traffic light reports.

7. The process for the recruitment of a P2 Project Manager Marine Litter MED II has progressed significantly, a candidate is selected, and the final recruitment steps are expected to be finalized by September/October 2021.

8. The preparation of the Legal Instruments for the activities to be executed by the UNEP/MAP Components that are implementing partners as per the Project Document, namely the SPA/RAC, SCP/RAC, as well as for the BSC, is close to finalization. Due to the COVID-19 situation, full/partial telecommuting arrangements of the UNEP (including UNEP/MAP) staff are currently in place. These have negatively affected the operationalization of the budget in the Umoja system in coordination with UNEP HQs. This in turn has delayed the start of elaboration of the Legal Instruments with the MAP Components. These Legal Instruments will be uploaded in the UNEP Partners Portal and are expected to be signed by both parties by September-October 2021.

9. In the absence of the Project Manager, the Secretariat has recruited a UNV expert since October 2020. The Umoja does not allow adequate access to non-UNEP staff members and this was another difficulty faced during this period. Despite the delays related to the referred Components partners, the Legal Instrument concerning the SPA/RAC is already in place and its first installment was release in June 2021.

10. The Legal Instruments with the national Implementing Partners in the seven beneficiary countries are expected to be operational by September-October 2021 when implementation of national activities can start. To this regard, due to the COVID-19 pandemic, all national administrations of the Marine Litter MED II beneficiary countries have been mostly under full/partial telecommuting arrangements. This reflected on the timetable for development of the Legal Instruments and the implementation of the national activities under the project, as well as the first phase of negotiations of the legal agreements with the beneficiary countries.

4. Interlinkages and Synergies with Other Projects

11. The project ensures complementarities with UNEP/MAP Mid-Term Strategies (MTS) 2016-2021 and 2022-2027, the 2020-2021 and 2022-2023 Programme of Work (PoW). The project will also ensure that synergy and coherence are enhanced as much as possible with other relevant projects and initiatives, and in particular with other EU- and GEF-funded projects (i.e. GEF Adriatic; GEF Med Programme Child 1.1; EcAp MED III; Cooperation Agreement with IMELS; ENI SEIS-MED II; IMAP-MPA; MED PlasticBusters MPAs; INDICIT II; Water and Environment Support (WES); MED REGION; GloLitter; etc.) The reporting period (01/08/2021-15/08/2021) covers the last eight months of project implementation. Due to the delays, tangible synergies with the said projects were not achieved. More concrete input and feedback will be provided during the next reporting cycles. The Marine Litter MED II Project Steering Committee will be encouraged to review the list of relevant projects during each of its meeting.

12. Regarding the Fishing-for-Litter (FfL) pilots, preliminary discussions have been carried out with a new EU-funded project (LIFE DREAM) for the organization of a tangible synergy pertinent to the demonstration/piloting of a pyrolytic device in the selected ports of the ML MED II project (i.e. production of energy from the collected marine litter, low carbon emission footprint; portable device). The cooperation is mainly planned through the dissemination of the results deriving from the Action E3.1 of the LIFE DREAM Project pertinent to the preparation of a Technical Protocol (LDTP) for marine litter removal and deep reefs restoration (hands-on manual), including a set of guidelines for fishermen and other stakeholders. The plan under this synergy is for the gained experience and lessons learnt from the FfL pilots and the previous and this version of the project, including the 2016 UNEP/MAP FfL Guidelines, to be integrated into the LDTP. The LDTP will: (i) represent a tool helping the decision makers in choosing the most appropriate option for managing the technical aspects connected to marine litter in the deep sea; and (ii) present an innovative and up-to-date approach that relies on an integrated evaluation of the costs/benefits associated with the removal operations. UNEP/MAP will also support LIFE DREAM project to maximize the impact of the transferability actions including those linked to the use of the prototype to selected marine parks and/or fishermen ports to demonstrate and transfer protocols and approaches developed by the LIFE DREAM Project.

5. Gender aspects

13. Gender balance and equity are among the ML MED II Project's core values, and pertinent provisions are taken into account in Project's activities. Gender equality and women's empowerment are also recognized as a cross-cutting priority across all aspects of UNEP's work, including for UNEP/MAP. The Secretariat, through its core work but also through projects' implementation, promotes women and men's participation in all environmental protection and sustainable development activities.

14. Provisions for gender balanced participation is also included in correspondence between UNEP/MAP and the beneficiary Countries for the nomination of Project Focal Points, as well as in the future calls for the recruitment of experts/consultants.

15. The Secretariat is exploring ways and means to streamline gender parity and gender dimension in the Project activities from the substantive point of view based on best practices from other projects and at UNEP level.

16. For the selection of experts and executing partners at national level under the Project activities of the Marine Litter MED II Project it is also required to take into consideration the gender equality.

6. Communication

17. Since the launch of Marine Litter MED II, the approved Communication and Visibility Plan is taken into consideration and the following communication, visibility and outreach activities have been undertaken.

18. An official letter was sent by the UNEP/MAP Secretariat on 8 April 2021 to the MAP Focal Points, informing them about the launch of EcAp MED III and of the other ENRTP-GPGC-funded Project Marine Litter MED II.

19. The preparation of a brochure of the Project has started in cooperation with Communication Officer at UNEP/MAP; contents are currently under internal development, and its finalization has been included in the Secretariat's procurement planning.

20. A dedicated URL link has been created under UNEP/MAP Website where dedicated information and documents are included.¹

¹ <https://www.unep.org/unepmap/what-we-do/projects/MarineLitterMED-II>