

Eco-Trails in Palestine

While hiking and walking on nature trails is popular in Palestine, no clear guidelines on selecting and rehabilitating eco-trails is available. Under the EU-funded SwitchMed programme Palestine's Environment Quality Authority in collaboration with United Nations Environment Programme (UNEP) launched a project to develop, test, and disseminate national guidelines and selection criteria for eco-trails. This process involved a diverse group of stakeholders (government and municipalities, civil society organizations and local partners) and considered local contexts and needs.



A Sustainable Consumption and Production National Action Plan (SDG12.1) was developed in Palestine through nationally owned multi-stakeholder processes. The implementation of the plan's priorities - tourism, housing and construction, agriculture, and food - is on-going through selected projects and initiatives.

Eco-Trail Guidelines and Methodology

A set of specific criteria to identify and select eco-tourism sites/ trails in Palestine was developed. Eco-trails and sites will not only promote eco-tourism but can also contribute in achieving eco-system sustainability, raising environmental awareness, as well as developing the economic status of local residents and communities.

Referring to international norms and practices, adopted by several countries, particularly the United Kingdom, Canada, Egypt and Iraq, a set of criteria have been proposed as to identify the sites/trails for eco-tourism in Palestine. These selection criteria have been divided into two categories:

- basic criteria specifying whether to allow tourism in a particular area;
- sub-criteria aiming to promote and prioritize the development of eco-tourism sites/trails.

Four determinants fall under the basic criteria:

- risk of environmental degradation;
- risk of increased pollution by tourism;
- risk of environmental resources destruction;
- risk of inability to control the number of visitors;



While the sub-criteria are divided into three main groups:

- natural standards including environmental criterion, accessibility, innate nature (natural balance), as well as the suitability for the establishment of a touristic area;
- economic and social standards linked to the availability of income sources or economic resources and investment opportunities;
- regional and national standards reflected in the contribution of the area in providing opportunities and training programs for local authorities, knowledge development and assessment of the local environment.

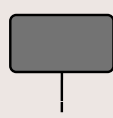


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Key features



7
Trails



140
Signs



80
Officials Consulted



100
Trainees

Selection and Rehabilitation of showcase eco trails:

Subject to the guidelines and methodology, potential trails and sites were screened, and a short list was prepared out of which 7 eco-trails were selected for rehabilitation to become showcase examples of sustainable eco-trails /sites. During the rehabilitation process each eco-trail went through several stages:

- undertake a trail survey to have a map for each of the selected trails from its starting point to the arrival;
- fix information signs at the beginning and end of the trails and to give directions to the visitors for walking the trail;
- mark the selected trail with the national marks along the whole path;
- define at least one relaxation point at mid-trail with information signs about flora and fauna in the area;
- fix an average of 10 signs along each trail path showing pictures and text about either birds, animals or plants in the area;
- prepare and disseminate a brochure for each trail with indications on the path and information on the trail such as most common and famous flora and fauna in the area and safety measures that the visitor should take into consideration.

During project implementation, testing and consultation workshops were organized and involved more than 80 participants from national and local authorities and civil society. Three on-site training workshops were organized in Janata Natural reserve in Ramallah governorate in April 2018, the natural reserve of Al Uja in Jericho governorate and the natural reserve of Wadi El Quf in Hebron governorate in May 2018 to train about 100 participants on how to use and apply the guidelines and methodology. The rehabilitated eco-trails/sites were presented to the public through communication and media activities during 2019.



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UN Environment Programme

UNEP is the leading global environmental authority that sets the global environmental agenda, promotes the coherent implementation of the environmental dimension of sustainable development within the United Nations system, and serves as an authoritative advocate for the global environment.



The EU-funded SwitchMed programme assists eight countries in the southern Mediterranean to switch to sustainable patterns of consumption and production and supports national and regional stakeholders in achieving productive, circular, and sharing economies in the Mediterranean. www.switchmed.eu