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Second Steering Committee Meeting of the EU-funded EcAp MED III Project

Videoconference, 15 June 2022

Agenda item 2: Progress on EcAp MED III Project Implementation

Progress Report on Project Implementation

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1. Introduction

1. EcAp MED III - funded by the EU/DG ENV - is coordinated and implemented by the UNEP/MAP Secretariat with MAP Regional Activity Centres. It has a budget of USD 2,494,790, for 36 months (end date 31/08/23) covering seven beneficiary countries (Algeria, Egypt, Israel, Lebanon, Libya, Morocco, and Tunisia). The overall aims of EcAp MED III are: to further assist these Southern Mediterranean Contracting Parties to implement the Integrated Monitoring and Assessment Programme (IMAP); and to contribute to the preparation and delivery of the 2023 Mediterranean Quality Status Report (2023 MED QSR).

2. A first Project Steering Committee meeting took place via videoconference on 28 April 2021. Attended by all its Members, the discussions were based on the working documents prepared by the UNEP/MAP Secretariat (UNEP/MED WG.506). The Steering Committee welcomed the good progress in the implementation of Project activities - in spite of some constraints and concerns - and approved the revised work plan and communication plan.

3. This Progress Report summarises the progress of EcAp MED III since its first Steering Committee meeting (April 2021). Together with the EcAp MED III annual report submitted to the donor during the first quarter of 2022 (section 3. below), it covers the period from 01 January 2021 to 15 April 2022. The objective of this Report is to inform the donor about the status of the Project and to support the oversight of the Project execution and the related strategic guidance of its Second Steering Committee meeting.

2. Progress during the period January 2022 - April 2022

The Project falls under the UNEP/MAP Mid-Term Strategies (MTS) 2016-2021 and the Programme of Work (PoW) 2020-2021, as well as the newly adopted MTS 2022-2027 and PoW 2022-2023. Its pace of progress continued in 2022. The activities which took place between 01 January 2022 and 15 April 2022 are presented below (I.) together with an update on the Project management (II.).

I. Activity Progress

In this section, the two Outcomes of the Project are presented, together with progress towards their respective Outputs.

Outcome 1: Effective ‘on-the-ground’ national IMAP implementation by the beneficiary countries providing quality-assured data that will enable the development of the quality-assured, region-wide and data-based 2023 MED QSR

Indicator(s)	Target	Description of 2021 activities	Description of 2022 activities
Output 1.1: National and Joint Monitoring carried out of selected Common Indicator(s) (CIs) in beneficiary countries based on national IMAP			
1.1.1 Number of monitored and assessed IMAP CIs per beneficiary country	12 per each project beneficiary country	By 31/12/21, the number of CIs selected for implementation per BC based on national monitoring plans is as follows: -Algeria: 3 (CIs 13, 14, 17) -Egypt: 3 (CIs 13, 14, 17) -Israel: 5 (CIs 13, 14, 17, 22, 23) -Lebanon: 1 (CI 17) -Morocco: 4 (CIs 13, 14, 16, 17, 22, 23) -Tunisia: 3 (CIs 13, 14, 17) 2 additional CIs (22 and 23 on marine litter) are expected to commence in Algeria, Egypt, Lebanon and Tunisia in 2022 pending the finalization of the relevant legal agreements. Quality assurance and quality control are then carried out under the supervision of the RACs.	Ongoing. Progress should be noted in 2022, especially on the biodiversity cluster. The number of CIs selected for implementation per beneficiary country (BC) based on national monitoring plans is as follows: -Algeria: 6 (CIs 3, 4, 5 related to marine mammals, 13, 14, 17) -Egypt: 7 (CIs 3, 4, 5 related to marine mammals, 6, 13, 14, 17) -Israel: 9 (CIs 3, 4, 5 related to marine mammals, 6, 13, 14, 17, 22, 23) -Lebanon: 5 (CIs 3, 4, 5 related to marine mammals, 6, 17) -Libya: 3 (CIs 3, 4, 5 related to marine mammals) -Morocco: 9 (CIs 3, 4, 5 related to marine mammals, 13, 14, 16, 17, 22, 23)

1.1.2 Number of national quality assurance and quality control programmes prepared	Minimum one per CI per country		-Tunisia: 6 (CIs 3, 4, 5 related to marine mammals, 13, 14, 17) Quality assurance and quality control are continuously carried out as per regular practice.
1.1.3 Number of sets of data reported to IMAP Info System per country	Minimum 3 for EO5, EO9, EO10; minimum 1 for EO1	<p>BCs have started the submission of available monitoring data generated prior to 2020 (i.e. from 2017 to 2020) as well as new monitoring data (i.e. 2021, 2022). At least one set of data was submitted for all CIs by the majority of Contracting Parties (CPs), apart from CI 2 (Biodiversity) and CI 16 (physical disturbance to coastline). The number of available datasets per Ecological Objective in the beneficiary countries is the following:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> -EO 5: 4 Algeria, 10 Egypt, 34 Israel, 4 Morocco, 26 Tunisia -EO 8: 1 Morocco -EO 9: 2 Algeria, 3 Egypt, 19 Israel, 1 Lebanon, 18 Morocco, 14 Tunisia -EO 10: 6 Israel <p>Additional datasets pertinent to IMAP EO 10 marine litter (CIs 22 and 23) will be submitted to IMAP Info System in 2022 pending the finalization of the relevant legal agreements.</p> <p>The last set is scheduled for September 2022 as planned in the 2023 QSR Roadmap.</p>	<p>Ongoing. BCs gave a strong impulse to reporting in 2022, in particular on marine litter under the supervision of INFO/RAC and MED POL. Data dictionaries (DDs) and data standards (DSs) on CIs 3, 4 and 5 related to species were discussed during the related CORMON biodiversity meeting (28-29 March 2022).</p> <p>New available datasets per Ecological Objective (EO) have been uploaded in IMAP Info System:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> -EO 5: 3 Israel -EO 8: 1 Morocco -EO 9: 1 Israel, 1 Lebanon, 2 Morocco -EO 10: 4 Israel, 1 Lebanon, 2 Morocco <p>Additional datasets - including on marine litter (EO 10) and biodiversity (EO 1) - will be uploaded in the second semester of 2022.</p>

<p>1.1.4 Number of national institutions involved in the process</p>	<p>Minimum 2 per cluster per country</p>	<p>With the SSFAs signed with national IPs in each country, the Project involved up to two key national institutions, as listed below. -Algeria: the Ministry of Environment and Renewable Energy (for Biodiversity and NIS) and the National Observatory of the Environment and Sustainable Development (for Pollution and Marine Litter as well as Coast and Hydrography) -Egypt: the Environmental Affairs Agency (for all clusters) -Israel: the Nature and Parks Authority (for Biodiversity and NIS) and the Oceanographic and Limnological Institute (for Pollution and Marine Litter as well as Coast and Hydrography) -Lebanon: the Ministry of Environment (Biodiversity and NIS) and the National Council for Scientific Research (for Pollution and Marine Litter as well as Coast and Hydrography) -Libya: the Environment General Authority (for all clusters) -Morocco: the Ministry of Energy, Mines, Water and Environment (for all clusters) and the National Laboratory for Pollution Research and Monitoring (for Pollution and Marine Litter) -Tunisia: the Agency for Coastal Protection and Management Agency (for all clusters) and the National Institute of Marine Sciences and Technology</p>	<p>Achieved. With the SSFAs in each country, the Project involved up to two key national institutions (<i>cf</i> Description of 2021 activities, left column), and all BCs appointed the national institutions that are in charge of IMAP implementation.</p>
<p>1.1.5 Number of assessment factsheets at national and sub-regional and/or regional level</p>	<p>Minimum 6 national and 6 sub-regional/regional assessment factsheets</p>	<p>As planned, national (and regional) assessment factsheets will be prepared in 2022 by the national IMAP teams based on data delivered under Output 1.1 and other sources.</p>	<p>National assessment factsheets will be prepared by the national IMAP institutions/experts based on data delivered under Output 1.1 and other sources. Regional factsheets will be prepared subsequently.</p>
<p>Output 1.2: Joint monitoring pilots designed and implemented</p>			
<p>1.2.1 Number of joint (sub-regional) monitoring pilots designed and implemented</p>	<p>1 pilot implemented in East Mediterranean sub-region</p>	<p>One pilot designed. The work is ongoing to implement the joint monitoring and assessment programme on NIS related to fisheries, as explained under 1.2.2, 1.2.3, and 1.2.4.</p>	<p>Ongoing. Monitoring activities are progressing for the agreed seven NIS related to fisheries in the East Mediterranean sub-region. It is developed in synergy with the General Fisheries Commission for the Mediterranean (GFCM). Data will be uploaded to the related information sharing systems, such as MAMIAS and the Data Collection Reference Framework (DCRF) database.</p>

1.2.2 Number of countries participating in joint sub-regional monitoring programmes	3 countries	In addition to EcAp MED III beneficiary countries in the Eastern Mediterranean (i.e. Egypt, Israel, and Lebanon), Output 1.2 also involves non-BCs, namely Cyprus, Greece, and Turkey. Discussions with JRC are being held to ensure synergy with MSFD, to follow a common approach and avoid duplication of reporting for Greece and Cyprus.	Achieved. NIS baselines were endorsed during the 2022 CORMON meeting. In addition to the BCs (Egypt, Israel, and Lebanon), Cyprus, Greece and Turkey are involved in this activity.
1.2.3 Number of species monitored under sub-regional monitoring programmes on NIS	7 agreed species	The list of NIS was prepared as a first step for the elaboration of a baseline assessment, in collaboration with GFCM and in synergy, as appropriate, with the work performed at EU level by JRC. This list, based on the criteria of commercial importance, existing and potential impacts and data sources, consists of <i>Saurida lessepsianus</i> , <i>Lagocephalus sceleratus</i> , <i>Pterois miles</i> , <i>Siganus rivulatus</i> , <i>Siganus luridus</i> , <i>Fistularia commersonii</i> , <i>Plotosus lineatus</i> . The sub-regional and regional analysis are ongoing and will be reviewed by the CORMON meeting (28-29 March 2022).	Ongoing. The 2022 CORMON biodiversity meeting endorsed the document UNEP/MED WG.520/5 and UNEP/MED baseline for the IMAP Common Indicator 6 related to Non-Indigenous Species. The document is going through the regional and subregional analysis of NIS listings.
1.2.4 Number of baseline sub-regional assessment for NIS	1 Baseline assessment for the 7 agreed NIS for the East Mediterranean sub-region, and 1 regional baseline for the entire list of NIS	Updated national lists were received and discussed with corresponding countries. The draft NIS baseline was at the agenda of the informal Online Working Group (20/04/21). Progress and main findings were presented at the CORMON meeting on Biodiversity and Fisheries (10-11/06/21) and the 15th SPA/BD Focal Point meeting (23-25/06/21). The regional baseline is now at the agenda of the next CORMON meeting on Biodiversity and Fisheries for endorsement and its use for the 2023 MED QSR.	Achieved. The 2022 CORMON biodiversity meeting endorsed the document UNEP/MED WG.520/5 and UNEP/MED baseline for the IMAP Common Indicator 6 related to Non-Indigenous Species for its use for the purpose of the 2023 MED QSR preparation.
1.2.5 Number of sets of data on NIS reported to IMAP Info System	Minimum 1 set of data on 7 agreed NIS reported to IMAP Info System per participating country	The guidance factsheet on CI 6 was revised and discussed during the integrated CORMON session (12/20), CORMON on Biodiversity, the 14th REMPEC Focal Point meeting (May-June 2021) and the 15th SPA/BD Focal Point meeting. Its use for the 2023 MED QSR was agreed at the 8th EcAp CG meeting (September 2021). The development of national and sub-regional assessment factsheet will start in May 2022.	Ongoing (<i>cf</i> 1.2.1 and 1.2.2).

Output 1.3: Undertake baseline sub-regional assessments for CI 15 and support implementation of monitoring of CI 16 in at least one area per beneficiary country			
1.3.1 Number of baseline sub-regional assessments for CI 15	At least 1 per sub-region for CI 15	In coordination with IMAP-MPA, the jointly prepared questionnaire has been adjusted to initiate the preparation of the baseline assessment for CI 15. The preparation of country reports has been completed in Lebanon and Egypt. In Morocco, Tunisia, Libya and Israel drafts have been submitted by national consultants and the reports are about to be finalised. In Algeria the procurement procedure to nominate the national consultant is in progress and the contract will soon be signed. The results on CI 15 will be included in the first draft of the 2023 MED QSR (EO 7).	Ongoing. All national reports have been completed except Israel expected for mid-May. The lessons learnt (<i>cf</i> 1.3.3) will contribute to the achievement of this activity.
1.3.2 Number of sets of data reported for CI 16	At least one for each of the 6 beneficiary countries	The assessment criteria and the Guiding document for application of assessment criteria for CI 16 have been developed and discussed at the CORMON Coast and Hydrography meeting (25/11/21). The first set of monitoring data for CI 16 was completed and reported in Lebanon, Libya and Morocco. The results were validated by responsible contacts and the files uploaded to the IMAP Info system. The drafts were submitted by Tunisia and Algeria and comments provided to finalise the reports. Progress in Egypt is pending the nomination of the national consultant. The data collected for CI 16 will be included in the second draft of the 2023 MED QSR (EO 8).	Achieved. All national reports have been completed including in Egypt.
1.3.3 Number of reports presenting lessons learned	1 report	Lessons learnt will be drawn at a later stage once activities 1.3.1 and 1.3.2 are completed. A report will then be drafted and presented at the related CORMON meeting in 2023 as planned.	Ongoing. The procurement procedure has been completed and the consultant nominated. The work will be completed by mid-June 2022.
Output 1.4: IMAP Info System expanded to include all mandatory CI of IMAP, fully operational enabling the Contracting Parties to report their monitoring data in 2020, 2021 and 2022			
1.4.1 Percentage of mandatory CIs of IMAP included in IMAP Info System	100% (all mandatory CIs included – EO3 not included)	The implementation of Data Standards (DSs) and Data Dictionaries (DDs) is ongoing. In 2021 a light revision and adaptation of the DSs and DDs related to the 11 CIs selected for the pilot phase of the IMAP Info System was performed, and drafts developed for 5 new Common Indicators. Draft DSs and DDs for CIs 18 and 20 were reviewed by the	Ongoing. DSs and DDs for IMAP Common Indicators 3, 4, 5, 18, 20 were developed and completed. By June 2022, the final documents (including last national comments) will be available to implement the correspondent data flows in the IMAP Info System.

		<p>Online Working Group (OWG) on Pollution and submitted for information to the 8th EcAp CG meeting (September 2021). Revised versions for CIs 3 and 4 for marine mammals and marine turtles have been further elaborated in 2021 based on a meeting with ACCOBAMS and SPA/RAC in April 2021. These DSs and DDs and a first version for CIs 3, 4 and 5 on sea birds and monk seals were reviewed by the CORMON Biodiversity Meeting (June 2021) and will be submitted for adoption at the next CORMON Meeting on Biodiversity and Fisheries (March 2022). The objective is to have the IMAP infosystem with DS and DD in place and operational for all mandatory CI of IMAP by June 2022.</p>	<p>The first three have been revised with support of ACCOBAMS and the online working group (OWG) on marine mammals, marine reptiles and marine birds. The final version integrating inputs by BCs was adopted by the 2022 CORMON biodiversity meeting (UNEP/MED WG.520/6, UNEP/MED WG.500/7, UNEP/MED WG.500/8). OWG meetings will be organised ahead of the next CORMON meeting (October 2022, tbc). DSs and DDs for CIs 18 and 20 have been submitted to CORMON pollution (27-31 May 2022). In 2022, INFO/RAC started the development of CI 19 together with REMPEC.</p>
1.4.2 Number of countries supported to facilitate quality assured reporting of monitoring data	5 additional countries	<p>An IMAP Info System User Guide was updated to provide general assistance to users and a dedicated e-mail account (imap@info-rac.org) made available to support CPs to upload data.</p> <p>INFO/RAC delivered bilateral training and continuous assistance during the reporting period. National online workshops – with simultaneous translation in English and French – were organised and dedicated support provided to Tunisia and Morocco. It included a general overview of the IMAP Info System and its functionalities, as well as specific explanations and support on Data Standards and Data Dictionaries. Particular attention was paid to support the processing and loading of monitoring data by the CPs.</p> <p>The IMAP Data Policy was developed in close cooperation with the MAP components and the involvement of the Contracting Parties. It was reviewed by CORMONs, adopted by the EcAp CG meeting in September and endorsed by COP 22 in December 2021.</p>	<p>Ongoing. During the reporting period, INFO/RAC ensured continuous assistance to all relevant stakeholders, including the following BCs: Algeria, Egypt, Israel, Lebanon, Morocco, Tunisia. Assistance to the latter comprised constant contacts with IMAP User network, support in accessing the Info System, comprehension of data reporting, capacity to fill in DSs and perform the quality check, complete validation process, and replace corrected files.</p> <p>The next bilateral trainings are planned with Israel on 16 May 2022 and tentatively with Algeria in June 2022.</p>
1.4.3 IMAP Data policy availability	IMAP Data policy available and reviewed by CORMONs	<p>The IMAP Data Policy was developed in close cooperation with the MAP components and the involvement of the Contracting Parties. It was reviewed by CORMONs, adopted by the EcAp CG meeting in September and endorsed by COP 22 in December 2021.</p>	<p>Achieved (<i>cf</i> Description of 2021 activities, left column). In addition, INFO/RAC has started to develop an Annex to the IMAP Data Policy to facilitate its implementation by Contracting Parties.</p>

<p>1.4.4 Number of Data flows implemented</p>	<p>Data flows for all the IMAP CIs (EO3 not included) implemented and IMAP Info System completed and fully operational</p>	<p>The IMAP Info System is fully operational for the initial set of 11 CIs (12 modules) and updated in view of the implementation of the new data flows.</p> <p>The migration of data from the MED POL Info System database by INFO/RAC into the IMAP Info System started in 2020 and continued in 2021. The migration process involved information standards for CIs 13, 14 and 17 and MED POL monitoring data for nutrients and contaminants. The entire dataset is now available on the IMAP Info System in a standardized format and stored on an infrastructure able to guarantee its integrity and preservation over time. A further update is ongoing in order to include previous decade data recently made available by some countries.</p> <p>The GIS standards for the CIs related to hydrographic alterations induced by coastal and offshore infrastructures and to the level of coastal artificialization have also been updated.</p>	<p>Ongoing. Fine-tuning of the Info System is taking place in view of the implementation of the new data flows for CIs 3, 4, 5, 18, 19, 20. The migration of data from MED POL database into the IMAP Info System will be fully completed by June 2022.</p>
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Outcome 2: Regional scale progress and consensus for the monitoring and assessment as well as the reporting processes at national, sub-regional and regional levels

Indicator(s)	Target	Description of 2021 activities	Description of 2022 activities
Output 2.1.1: Analysis for each IMAP cluster on knowledge gaps, with a focus on the scales of assessment/reporting prepared/agreed and scales of monitoring for all IMAP CIs agreed/progressed			
2.1.1.1 Number of CI analysed with regards to knowledge gaps with focus on assessment scales	At least 5 CI	All the technical documents covering the scales of assessment were presented at the CORMON meetings. Assessment elements related to marine mammals were endorsed by the 8 th EcAp CG meeting for their use under the 2023 MED QSR. Synergy with the results at sub-regional/regional scales is ongoing to fill existing gaps and ensure quality assured data.	Ongoing. SPA/RAC is conducting a desk review of available data sources, best practices and methodologies in the Mediterranean for the monitoring and assessment of seafloor damage. This inventory covers gaps of knowledge about EO 6 and hence will form the basis for development of the EO under the EU funded project ABBIOMED. It will be reviewed by the next CORMON meeting (October 2022, tbc).
2.1.1.2 Number of CI covered by monitoring and assessment scales	At least 5 CI	An inventory of the damage on seafloor integrity (EO 6) is ongoing. It will be reviewed in autumn 2022. The Guiding document for CI 16 was presented at the CORMON meeting (25/11/21) by PAP/RAC and will be tested in some of the eligible countries in 2022. The document is crucial for the preparation of the country-specific GES, operational objectives and targets, as well as for the assessment of trends.	The Guiding document for CI 16 was finalised early 2022. The procurement procedure to test the document in Morocco was completed and work will start by June 2022. MED POL will present its progress on CI 17 and 22 at the upcoming CORMON meetings on pollution and marine litter. Similar work is undergoing for CI 13 and CI 14 and will be finalized during Q3 2022. This should ensure its application at national level from the beneficiary countries.
2.1.1.3 Availability of proposal on integrated scales of assessment	Proposal on integrated scales of assessment submitted to CORMON	The proposals for pollution and marine litter clusters were elaborated under MAP PoW. Further work is required and for other clusters too, it will take place in 2022-2023 as planned.	Ongoing. Further work will take place in the second semester of 2022 and first semester of 2023 as planned.
Output 2.1.2: Assessment criteria/thresholds/ baseline values proposed/updated for the 10 IMAP CIs included in the current IMAP Pilot Info System as well as one candidate indicator (Noise)			

2.1.2.1 Number of CIs with updated/new assessment criteria, thresholds and baseline values	10 IMAP CIs and one candidate indicator (Noise)	<p>On marine litter, the updated Baseline Values (BV) and new Threshold Values (TV) for IMAP EO 10 CI22, were approved during COP22 and were annexed to the updated Regional Plan on Marine Litter Management in the Mediterranean. Relevant work has been also initiated in 2021 for IMAP EO 10 CI 23 (seafloor macro-litter and floating microplastics), which is expected to be concluded in 2022.</p> <p>On pollution, the CORMON meeting (April 2021) discussed the documents prepared by MEDPOL on Adjusted Background (Assessment) Concentrations for CI 17 and Upgraded Approach for Environmental Assessment Criteria for CIs 17, 18 and 20, along with Application of the Assessment Criteria Methodology for IMAP CI 13 (UNEP/MED 492/11, UNEP/MED 492/12). This work supports the aggregated application of the assessment criteria within GES assessment for 2023 MED QSR.</p> <p>On biodiversity, documents on thresholds and baseline values of CIs 3,4 and 5 related to marine turtles and marine mammals were validated by the CORMON meeting (10-11/06/21) and the 15th SPA/BD Focal point meeting (23-25/06/21) and endorsed by the EcAp CG (09/09/21). A draft document on thresholds for CI 6 on NIS was validated by the CORMON and 15th SPA/BD Focal Point meetings. The work on the benthic habitats and sea birds is ongoing. The final versions will be presented to the CORMON meeting on biodiversity (28-29/03/22).</p> <p>Please refer to 2.1.1 above for CI 16.</p>	<p>During the 2022 CORMON on biodiversity, the document on Monitoring and Assessment Elements for the IMAP Common Indicators 3, 4 and 5 related to sea birds (UNEP/MED WG.520/4) was validated, and assessment criteria were endorsed for the 2023 MED QSR.</p> <p>Regarding IMAP EO 10 on marine litter, the upcoming CORMON (May 2022) will present and review the guidelines for monitoring riverine inputs of marine litter, the Data Standards (DS) and Data Dictionaries (DD) for IMAP candidate indicator 24. The work for elaborating updated BV and to propose TV for IMAP CI 23 (seafloor macro- and floating micro-litter) is ongoing and will be presented during a subsequent CORMON marine litter meeting that will be organised in the second semester of 2022.</p>
Output 2.1.3: Regular regional/sub-regional expert group meetings, i.e., expert group per sub-region per topic established and operational to address monitoring and assessment scales, monitoring protocols and assessment criteria			
2.1.3.1 Number of regional and sub-regional expert group meetings	At least one regional expert group meeting per cluster, and one per sub-region per cluster, per year back-to-back with CORMON	<p>The plan is to hold them in 2022 back-to-back with CORMONs inviting experts from national IMAP country teams and organising subregional discussions.</p> <p>Other regional and sub regional meetings will be held in 2022. They will connect experts at national level in the seven beneficiary countries, to allow for an exchange of lessons learnt, and support the process of development of monitoring and assessment scales, monitoring protocols</p>	The regional expert group meetings will take place ahead of the next CORMON meetings (with a first one on biodiversity before October 2022).

		and assessment criteria, upon which the 2023 MED QSR will be prepared.	
Output 2.1.4: Support to CORMON meetings per cluster ensuring strong participation and inputs to its work from expert networks established at sub regional level for the beneficiary countries			
2.1.4.1 Number of CORMON meetings organized and supported	At least one per cluster per year and two integrated	<p>All planned CORMON meetings took place in 2021 via videoconference. The BCs actively participated in all the meetings.</p> <p>The CORMON meeting on Marine Litter (30/03/21) approved the baseline and threshold values for beach macro-litter and the updated guidelines for monitoring floating microplastics.</p> <p>The CORMON meeting on Pollution (26-28/04/21) pored over the monitoring guidelines, integration and aggregation rules, and assessment criteria for the IMAP Common Indicators related to contaminants.</p> <p>The CORMON meeting on Biodiversity and Fisheries (10-11/06/21), addressed monitoring protocols and scales, assessment criteria, and threshold and baseline values of IMAP Common Indicators related to biodiversity.</p> <p>The CORMON meeting on Coast and Hydrography (25/11/21) addressed the Assessment criteria and the Guiding document for the application of the assessment criteria for CI 16, and the methodology for baseline sub-regional assessment of CI 15.</p> <p>The second batch of thematic CORMON meetings is scheduled for spring 2022 onwards.</p> <p>After a first integrated CORMON meeting held on 1-3/12/20, a second one could be envisaged in March 2023.</p> <p>CORMON meetings' outcome is strongly related and provide guidance to project activities implementation.</p>	<p>Ongoing. Three CORMON meetings were planned for the first semester of 2022.</p> <p>The meeting on biodiversity and fisheries took place on 28-29 March via videoconference. Among EcAp MED III BCs, it was attended by Algeria, Israel, Lebanon, Libya (chair), Morocco. Participants supported the MED QSR structure and outline content template, and status of Common Indicators and Ecological Objectives (UNEP/MED WG.520/3). In addition, the CORMON approved:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> -UNEP/MED WG.520/4, Monitoring and Assessment Elements for the IMAP Common Indicators related to sea bird. -UNEP/MED WG.520/5, Baseline for the IMAP Common Indicator 6 related to Non-Indigenous Species; and UNEP/MED WG.520/Inf.3, Monitoring and Assessment Scales, Assessment Criteria, Thresholds and Baseline Values for the IMAP Common Indicator 6 related to Non-Indigenous Species. <p>Two CORMON meetings on pollution and marine litter focussing on monitoring are scheduled for 27-30 May 2022 and 31 May 2022 respectively.</p>
Output 2.2.1: Establish and implement a communication and visibility strategy for the MED 2023 QSR; Outreach to key partners			
2.2.1.1 Availability of communication and visibility strategy for 2023 MED QSR	Communication and visibility strategy available	The 2023 MED QSR Communication and Visibility Strategy was drafted and approved by the 8th EcAp CG (meeting on 09/09/21). Its objective is to ensure that the 2023 MED QSR publication has a wide dissemination and	Achieved (cf Description of 2021 activities, left column).

		receives a high level of visibility; to promote its findings and related recommendations.	
2.2.1.2 Availability of a collaboration mechanism and Partnership Plan for the 2023 MED QSR	Collaboration mechanism and Partnership Plan available	Mechanism established and operational. It was initiated at a first regional meeting on 2 September 2021 with almost 40 participants. Scientific partner organisations and projects were identified, and potential contributions were defined per EO and/or CI. This was followed by bilateral talks between MAP Components and partner organisations to discuss whether and how their data and information could be used and these bilateral partnerships will continue in 2022. Meeting will be held on regular basis at regional level between UNEP/MAP and partners.	Ongoing. Mechanism established and operational (<i>cf</i> Description of 2021 activities, left column). Bilateral collaboration with key partners (e.g. ACCOBAMS) continued in 2022.
Output 2.2.2: Strengthen SPI networks of scientists and policy makers for the IMAP and its implementation; Design and implement 1-2 pilots at country level			
2.2.2.1 Number of national SPI pilot networks established	2 pilot national SPI networks established	National actions related to SPI were delayed by the consequences of the Covid-19. Plan Bleu also pinned down the scientific partners and institutions relevant to support SPI activity at national level.	Ongoing. One consortium was selected by Plan Bleu to work on the SPI component from spring 2022 to spring 2023. It takes place in Morocco in close collaboration with the IMAP-MPA project. Work started to identify existing relevant national mechanisms and processes as well as SPI frameworks in place involving scientific centres/laboratories and institutions that follow the implementation of environmental policies (coastal and marine particularly).
2.2.2.2 Number of SPI workshops organized	2 national SPI workshops and 1 regional SPI workshop	For a pilot, Plan Bleu, in collaboration with other IPs, has identified Morocco with a focus on the coast and hydrography cluster. The pilot will analyse the baseline and definition of requirements and approach for the monitoring of CI 15. The ToR for the expert supporting Plan Bleu will be finalised and the consultant selected by March 2022. The national workshop in Morocco should subsequently take place before the autumn. Other workshops could be organised in 2023 as planned.	The national workshop in Morocco should subsequently be organised back-to-back with a CORMON on coast and hydrography. Since the next CORMON meeting is planned later than initially envisaged, the SPI session is de facto rescheduled in spring 2023.
Output 2.2.3: Develop and implement a timeline for regional data sharing between partners			
2.2.3.1 Availability of agreement and timeline with regional partners for data sharing	Agreement and timeline for data sharing available	A collaboration mapping exercise took place to map where filling the science or data gaps is possible with comparable data of other regional organisations, scientific projects, pilot outcomes, or scientific literature. As indicated above under 2.2.1.2, the partners consultation meeting held on 02/09/21 was followed by bilateral talks to discuss whether and how	<i>Cf</i> 2.2.1.2 above.

		their individual data and information could be used. Follow up meetings will take place in 2022 between UNEP/MAP and relevant partners.	
Output 2.2.4: Develop and Publish 2023 MED QSR in 2 languages; make it available online and present at COP 23			
2.2.4 Availability of 2023 MED QSR	2023 MED QSR published	The methodology, outline, structure and contents of the 2023 MED QSR was adopted by the EcAp CG meeting in September 2021 (UNEP/MED WG.514/05). Two documents will be developed for the CORMON and EcAp CG meetings of 2022: an update of the QSR Roadmap and EO-CI template. It will provide detailed information on the structure and contents of the 2023 MED QSR by explaining the expected content of the different sections whenever feasible at this stage, with the methodological context for all EOs/CIs and some practical examples.	Ongoing. Participants to the 2022 CORMON on biodiversity supported the more elaborated 2023 MED QSR structure and outline content template for CIs and EOs provided by the Secretariat that built on the previously endorsed methodology, structure, and content of the QSR. This will be presented to the 9 th EcAp Coordination Group (5 July 2022). The CORMON meeting also reviewed an update of progress in the QSR Roadmap. A detailed report per CI and EO on the current state of progress and the anticipated content of the QSR 2023 – assessment criteria, baselines, threshold values, assessment methods & scales, data availability, and integration possibilities – is being prepared for consideration by the 9 th EcAp Coordination Group.

II. Project management

Human resources and budget

At the Secretariat, the contracts of the two UNV specialists involved in the project - EcAp MED III Officer and Finance Assistant - were extended. The former will be replaced by the P3 Officer in quarter 3 2022 while the G5 position for the latter will be published in quarter 2 2022.

The Project budget was released for 2022 in accordance with yearly allocations, as per the Project document.

SSFAs

In 2022, the Secretariat finalised another legal agreement with Israel and the National Park Authority (INPA) on the biodiversity cluster; and arrangements with Algeria and Lebanon are in place, pending resolution of technical hurdles.

SPA/RAC reached a preliminary agreement with Algeria, Lebanon, Libya and Egypt, thanks in particular to the resumption of missions and face-to-face meetings (Libya 12-14/02/22, Algeria 7-10/03/22, Egypt 30/03-02/04/22, Lebanon upcoming).

Challenges

Covid-19 and its consequences continued in 2022. Considering the late conclusion of legal agreements with the national authorities and the seasonal dimension of the monitoring activities on the ground, the Secretariat suggests the Steering Committee explore the possibility of a six-month no-cost extension, which would not modify the nature of the Project.

Communication

The brochure presenting the three EU-funded projects is available on the website of [UNEP/MAP](#). A complementary video is being produced.

The UNEP/MAP Coordinator reflected her views on 'gender equality today for a sustainable tomorrow' in an article '[Gender equality for people and nature in the Mediterranean](#)' published on 04/03/22. She noted how EcAp MED III and other EU-funded projects are poring over gender dynamics by analysing gender differences, moving beyond the vulnerability narrative and recognising women as capable stewards of ecosystems.

The Steering Committee meeting could be the occasion to shed lights on the progress made in the past months through an article to be published on the website of UNEP/MAP during the summer.

UNEP/MAP always ensured appropriate EU visibility and the acknowledgement of its financial contribution in the abovementioned actions. All the RACs will pay particular attention to the promotion of EcAp MED III in the framework of the numerous international and regional meetings planned in the second semester of 2022.

Synergies with other EU-funded projects

Coherence with IMAP-MPA and ML MED II continued to be ensured in 2022 in order to leverage their effects and avoid overlaps. Analysis for each IMAP cluster on knowledge gaps (with a focus on the scales of assessment, reporting and scales of monitoring for all CIs) is ongoing within the IMAP-MPA project. The results will be applied to EcAp MED III.

INFO/RAC ensures the harmonisation of data between the EU-funded projects through the IMAP Data Standards and its intermediary role among official IMAP Users, MAP Components and other Mediterranean experts. Plan Bleu and PAP/RAC contribute to bridge IMAP-MPA and EcAp MED III on SPI and CI 15 related to hydrography through a common questionnaire, the dissemination of reports and organisation of several coordination meetings. The development of EO 6 on seafloor integrity is ongoing under the EU-funded ABIOMMED project. The desk review conducted under EcAp MED III will serve as a basis for the development of EO 6 and the work conducted by ABIOMMED under the supervision of SPA/RAC.

3. Progress during the period January 2021 - December 2021

The Project implementation in 2021 was formerly presented to the donor through the EcAp MED III 2021 annual report. This section stems from this previous reporting exercise, with relevant extracts underneath for ease of reference.

I. Summary of overall project performance in 2021

The EU-funded EcAp MED III Project started in September 2020, with an official launch in December 2020 during the integrated [CORMON meeting](#). Actions during the first months of implementation have been mainly focused on its operationalisation and the undertaking of administrative and regulatory steps required to launch the implementation of most activities on the ground. The pace of progress has accelerated in 2021 despite recurrent challenges due to the Covid-19 pandemic. The Project implementation progress was reviewed by the first [Project Steering Committee](#) (PSC) on 28/04/21.

The Secretariat of UNEP/MAP has created an IMAP Task Force of project officers and representatives of MAP Components as a communication and coordination channel with the aim to enhance the implementation of the IMAP in the work of the UNEP/MAP system at regional and national levels. The Task Force supported and provided substantive guidance to the implementation of EcAp MED III throughout the year via regular monthly and ad hoc meetings during which specific recommendations were made to ensure full technical relevance and quality of Project products, compliance with the Programme of Work (PoW) 2020-2021 and synergies with other projects. As developed in Section V of this report, complementarity between IMAP-MPA, Marine Litter MED II (ML MED II) and EcAp MED III was ensured during the year.

In terms of Project staffing, mitigation measures were taken such as the recruitment of an Individual Contractor for 10 months, followed by a UN Volunteer and the involvement of other in-house human resources, to avoid any gaps until the onboarding of the P3 EcAp MED III Project Officer foreseen in spring 2022. Although not optimal, it allowed the Project team to run efficiently in 2021.

Regarding the Project implementation, a first important milestone was reached with the conclusion of legal agreements with the MAP Components acting as implementing partners (IPs) in April 2021. Project Cooperation Agreements (PCAs) were signed with INFO/RAC, SPA/RAC and PAP/RAC, and a Small-Scale Funding Agreement (SSFA) with Plan Bleu.

Following the formal start of implementation by the MAP components, work focused on the preparation of the SSFAs with all beneficiary countries (BCs). This exercise has been delayed to an extent which was not fully anticipated. The impacts of the Covid-19 in the BCs led to non-optimal working arrangements in spite of intense outreach by the Secretariat and MAP components. By 31/12/21, the Secretariat signed SSFAs with Israel and Morocco; and SPA/RAC with Tunisia, Morocco and Libya.

Overall, SPA/RAC and PAP/RAC made good progress on the monitoring of selected Common Indicators (CIs), the scales of assessments and monitoring and the baseline values of the CIs as indicated in the Project document. The work on the Non-Indigenous Species (NIS) and to undertake baseline sub-regional assessments for CI 15 and support implementation of monitoring for CI 16 is well-advanced. The activities on the Science-Policy Interface (SPI) could not take place on the ground, but at regional level dialogue between scientists and policy makers were undertaken with full participation and contribution by Plan Bleu. The actions carried out by INFO/RAC to update and upgrade the IMAP Info System continued at pace in 2021, as illustrated by the implementation of Data Standards and Data Dictionaries, the strengthened support to BCs and the approved MAP Data Policy.

National and joint monitoring plans are underway, for example on biodiversity for Tunisia and Libya. Preliminary meetings were organised with national institutions to discuss the first drafts and elements

developed within EcAp MED III in synergy with the IMAP-MPA Project to ensure successful coordination and implementation of the respective national IMAPs.

Gender equality and women's empowerment are recognised as priorities across all aspects of UNEP/MAP's work and are among the Project's core values. Pertinent actions are therefore taken throughout the Project. A gender-balanced participation was achieved in the relevant meetings which took place in 2021 as well as for the recruitment of regional experts and consultants.

The CORMON meetings in 2020 and 2021 contributed to several Project activities, as did the 8th [EcAp Coordination Group](#) (EcAp CG) and [MAP Focal Points](#) meetings in September 2021. This sequenced set of meetings paved the way to the 22nd Meeting of the Contracting Parties to the Barcelona Convention and its Protocols ([COP 22](#)), held on 7-10 December 2021 in Antalya, Turkey. The "COP for the Mediterranean" successfully concluded this reporting period with a package of [action-oriented decisions](#) including on ecosystem approach implementation and specifically on IMAP addressing related governance aspects which are also very important and related to the success of the Project implementation.

II. Output performance in 2021

The progress made and results achieved in 2021 for each output listed in the Project Document are described in the tables under **Section 2.** above.

Project management and coordination

The start of most national activities on the ground depends on the signing of legal agreements between UNEP/MAP and its Components with the relevant national authorities. These agreements (or SSFAs) establish the financial support and modalities of cooperation to carry out actions related to effective implementation of IMAP process at national level.

The consequences of the pandemic led to some delays in the conclusion of the SSFAs with BCs. Nevertheless, thanks to intense discussions and constant follow up at technical and political level, two SSFA were signed with Israel and Morocco by the Secretariat in the second semester of 2021. The agreements focus on pollution and marine litter. During the same period, SPA/RAC signed SSFAs with Tunisia, Morocco and Libya. Except Libya, all countries received the first instalment of the budget and all the remaining SSFAs were at an advanced stage of negotiation on 31/12/21.

Regarding human resources, the Secretariat had recruited an Individual Contractor from October 2020 to July 2021, until the start of the QSR Programme Officer in July 2021. After a long re-classification process, the recruitment of the EcAp MED III Project Manager is in the final phase. and is expected to start in late spring 2022. In parallel and as agreed at the PSC, a UNV was recruited in June 2021 to support the management of the ECAP MED III Project until mid-March 2022, with the intention for prolongation until end of May 2022 to avoid any gap until the Project manager is on board.

The enrolment of a G5 Administrative Assistant jointly with ML MED II was initiated, with an estimated start quarter 2-2022. A UNV Finance Assistant post is currently allocated to the project and the contract has been extended to avoid disruptions and ensure an effective transition.

There is a good gender balance in the Secretariat team in charge of Project implementation and its supervision. The local staff allocated to the Project at the RACs level (experts on biodiversity, coast, science-policy interface, IT and related administrative support) is on board. Gender considerations were also taken into account locally. For example, SPA/RAC ensured a balanced participation through a recruitment which included the relevant provisions.

Despite the consequences of the Covid-19, all the meetings planned in 2021 took place and substantially contributed to the implementation of the Project from the technical and policy guidance perspective. Besides the CORMON meetings (see output 2.1.4 in the table above) the 8th EcAp CG meeting and the MAP Focal Points meeting in September reviewed and/or approved important documents which provide guidance to a number or of project activities such as implementation of the 2023 MED QSR Roadmap (UNEP/MED WG.514/4); 2023 MED QSR methodology, outline, structure and contents (UNEP/MED WG.514/5); 2023

MED QSR Communication and Visibility Strategy (UNEP/MED WG.514/6); Updated Baseline Values and Proposal for Threshold Values for IMAP Common Indicator 22 (UNEP/MED WG.514/7); Background (Assessment) Concentrations (BC/BAC) for Common Indicator 17 and Upgraded Approach for Environmental Assessment Criteria (EAC) for IMAP Common Indicators 17, 18 and 20 (UNEP/MED WG.514/8); Assessment Criteria Methodology for IMAP Common Indicator 13: Pilot Application in Adriatic Sub-region (UNEP/MED WG.514/9); Revised guidance factsheet for the IMAP Common Indicator 6 related to Non-Indigenous Species.

III. Challenges, management actions, and risk mitigation in 2021

Risks were well identified in the Project Document, which allowed the Secretariat to react efficiently to the issues faced in 2021. The first Steering Committee meeting reviewed progress made and difficulties encountered since the start of the Project in late 2020. It allowed to slightly adapt the Project through corrective actions and revised schedule.

As projected, the Covid-19 and its consequences (lockdowns, border closures, travel restrictions, etc.) continued to be the main impediment to EcAp MED III and other programmes. It impacted HR aspects (recruitments particularly), the conclusion of legal agreements (and the transfer of funds to implement corresponding activities) and the organisation of meetings. Due to the pandemic, all national administrations of the BCs have been mostly under full/partial telecommuting arrangements. Together with turnover of national staff, it made the negotiation phase of the SSFAs more complicated. The absence of physical meetings at country level also impacted the establishment of National IMAP Committees.

The pandemic comes on top of administrative and other difficulties faced by some beneficiary countries. The Secretariat is closely monitoring the respective situations and reacting accordingly.

The involvement of the BC remains key to the successful implementation of EcAp MED III. As implementing partners, all the RACs faced the same situation. If need be, the importance of face-to-face meetings was demonstrated by the successful outcome of SPA/RAC's mission to Libya where a bilateral meeting with the Minister of Environment in Tripoli (14-15/21) led to the signature of the SSFA by the Minister. For Plan Bleu and the SPI component, it was so far not possible to organise activities on the ground. A first workshop should take place before the autumn. In order to mitigate risks, the preparation of the workshop and terms of reference for the consultant are already well advanced.

PAP/RAC made a lot of efforts to establish and strengthen contacts with national responsible institutions which resulted in positive outcomes in all countries except Egypt. For the latter, the work carried out is likely to pay off and the nomination of a consultant is expected promptly.

Thanks to the mitigation and safeguard measures undertaken, the implementation of the Project was never jeopardised as such. Lessons learnt will be incorporated into the Project management in 2022. However, considering the considerable time needed for implementing monitoring activities on the ground and in particular its seasonal dimension, the need for a project duration extension may be considered for further discussion with the PSC and the EC Task Manager.

IV. Outcome performance in 2021

The performance at the level of outcomes is summarised in the table below.

Outcome	Indicator(s)	Target	Description of the results achieved
Outcome 1: Effective 'On the ground' national IMAP implementation with beneficiary countries providing quality assured data for the development of a quality-assured, region-wide and data-based (Evidence-based) 2023 MED QSR	1.1 Number of countries with operational national IMAPs	Target: additional 7	SSFAs were signed between the Secretariat and Israel and Morocco; between SPA/RAC and Tunisia, Morocco and Libya; national IMAPs are being established; and monitoring plans designed and implemented for pollution, marine litter and biodiversity clusters.
	1.2 Number of IMAP Common Indicators (CIs) monitored and quality assured reported per beneficiary country	Target: 12	The finalisation of monitoring plans and the implementation of field survey programmes will enable the collection of data sets as required for the QSR. Up to two key national institutions (agencies and ministries) are engaged in the Project, as listed in Section II. Exchanges with national stakeholders take place with both the Secretariat and the RACs.
	1.3 Number of stakeholders/institutions or coordinating bodies involved in national IMAP implementation per beneficiary country	Target: at least 3	The biodiversity monitoring focuses on CIs 3, 4 and 5 on marine mammals and CI 6 on NIS in East Mediterranean sub-region. The implementation of the joint monitoring and assessment programme on NIS related to fisheries in the Eastern Mediterranean is underway. National lists were received and revised. A regional analysis is being undertaken and final output will be presented to the CORMON meeting in quarter 1 2022. A scientific coordinator per country will lead the monitoring process and will support the work of the national teams in the field, to validate the collected data, to prepare the relevant reports and contribute to the preparation of the national assessment of GES.
	1.4 Number of CIs covered by a quality assured reporting system in place through IMAP Info System	Target: at least 17	Countries have started the process of data elaboration for the other EOs. The second set of data on IMAP CIs monitored and reported by Contracting Parties is scheduled for the quarter 3 2022 as planned.
	1.5 Number of sets of data on IMAP CIs reported to IMAP Info System by the end of the Project	Target: minimum 3 new datasets for EO5, EO9 and EO10 CI, minimum 1 new dataset for EO1, EO2, EO7, EO8	In coordination with IMAP-MPA, the jointly prepared questionnaire was adjusted to initiate the preparation of the baseline assessment for the CI 15. It is expected that the relevant work will be conducted in all countries early 2022.
	1.6 Number of baseline sub-regional and regional assessment	Target: 1 for NIS and 1 for CI15	National CI assessment factsheets will be validated by national workshops and baseline assessment validated by national/sub-regional workshops shared with the Secretariat in spring 2023 as planned.
	1.7 Number of CI national assessment factsheets per beneficiary country	Target: at least 8, baseline: existing guidance factsheets and information in 2017 MED QSR	These new sets of data are being used to prepare the very first draft of the 2023 MED QSR. The IMAP Info System contained data flows for the initial set of 11 CIs and the work in 2021 focused on the upgrade and delivery of a fully operational IMAP Info System. 5 new CIs are now covered by the reporting system, bringing the total to 16

	1.8 IMAP Info System operational with a functional data policy in place	Target: Info System fully operational for at least 17 CI	<p>CIs. With the finalisation of the Data Standards and Data Dictionaries, it will allow the hosting of the new data submitted in 2021 for the CIs already included in the System and for all other CIs by summer 2022. By quarter 4 2022 all new datasets should be available in the System to support the elaboration of the draft 2023 MED QSR.</p> <p>The number of available datasets per Ecological Objective in the beneficiary countries is the following:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> -EO 5: 4 Algeria, 10 Egypt, 34 Israel, 4 Morocco, 26 Tunisia -EO 8: 1 Morocco -EO 9: 2 Algeria, 3 Egypt, 19 Israel, 1 Lebanon, 18 Morocco, 14 Tunisia -EO 10: 6 Israel <p>The IMAP Info System was established in line with FAIR (Findable, Accessible, Interoperable and Re-usable) principles and best practices. The MAP Data Policy was approved at COP 22. Together with the “Element for IMAP Data Policy” elaborated by INFO/RAC, this will pave the way for implementation of the IMAP Data Policy.</p>
Outcome 2: Regional scale progress and consensus for the monitoring and assessment as well as the reporting processes at national, sub-regional and regional levels	2.1 Availability of analysis and proposal of updated scales of monitoring and assessment	Target: analysis available, baseline: information provided in CI guidance factsheets	<p>The project supported the 2021 CORMON meetings in 2021: on Marine Litter (30/03/21), on Pollution (26-28/04/21), on Biodiversity and Fisheries (10-11/06/21), and on Coast and Hydrography (25/11/21). An analysis of knowledge gaps and the definition of the scales of monitoring and assessment for all IMAP CIs were presented. The conclusions and actions agreed by the CORMONs will be addressed to prepare the first draft of the 2023 MED QSR.</p> <p>The establishment of assessment criteria, thresholds and baseline values for IMAP CIs laid solid foundations for their development in 2022. This will be instrumental to prepare the first draft of the QSR using a threshold- approach to the extent possible for a number of CIs. To this aim, the 2021 CORMONs played an important role in reaching consensus on the Secretariat’s respective proposals.</p> <p>The second set of thematic CORMON meetings will start in the first quarter of 2022. The number of stakeholders involved is high at both country and regional level. It is expected that the target of 130 experts will be exceeded by 2023, including a significant number of women.</p> <p>The adoption in September 2021 of the 2023 MED QSR Communication and Visibility Strategy is a fundamental means to ensure visibility and outreach of the whole process of preparation and delivery of the QSR.</p>
	2.2 Number of CIs with updated/new assessment criteria, thresholds and baseline values	Target: at least 10, baseline: existing Pollution/Marine litter assessment criteria	
	2.3 Number of regional expert meetings and CORMONS	Target: at least one sub-regional meeting, one CORMON per cluster per year and 2 integrated CORMONS	
	2.4 Number of local, national and regional experts/actors mobilized/involved	Target: at least 130	

	2.5 Availability of communication and visibility strategy for 2023 MED QSR	Target: 1 strategy	<p>The work on SPI during the reporting period prepared the ground for a strong interface at regional and national level. In the long-term the intention is to promote sustainable collaborating networks of stakeholders from scientific community and policy makers for IMAP implementation, which is indispensable for its effective implementation beyond the Project.</p> <p>Overall, the activities implemented in 2021 to identify data gaps, sources, and partners, are key to engaging partner organisations and projects and to ensure the timely provision of additional data to support the preparation of the 2023 MED QSR in the next reporting period.</p>
	2.6 Number of national SPI pilot networks established	Target: 2	
	2.7 Number of SPI workshops organized	Target: 1 regional back-to-back with CORMON and 2 national	
	2.8 Availability of 2023 MED QSR	Target: 2023 MED QSR published	

V. Inter-linkages and synergies with other EU-funded projects from UNEP in 2021

The Project falls under the UNEP/MAP Mid-Term Strategies (MTS) 2016-2021 and 2022-2027, as well as the PoW 2020-2021 and 2022-2023. In line with the Project Document, synergies and coherence are being ensured with several projects and initiatives in order to strengthen their impacts and avoid duplication and fragmentation.

EcAp MED III was launched in parallel with the EU-funded project [ML MED II](#). Together, they are contributing to enhance national capacities on monitoring and assessing Candidate Indicator (CCI) 24 (litter ingested by or entangling marine organisms) in a way to supplement the support for Ecological Objective (EO) 10; to address pressures/sources and impacts; and to assess knowledge and data gaps for the riverine inputs of marine litter in the Mediterranean and the main uses and sources of microplastics in the region. The current work of ML MED II contributes to the development of the assessment of marine litter-related Common Indicators, which will be part of the 2023 MED QSR.

At the thematic CORMON meeting held on 30/03/21, the Regional Operational Strategy for Monitoring IMAP CCI 24 was presented for review and endorsement. Its aim is to provide practical guidelines in designing and developing monitoring programmes to collect standardised data on marine litter ingested by sea turtles.

The aim of the EU-funded project [IMAP-MPA](#) is to strengthen the ecosystem approach for Marine Protected Area (MPA) in the Mediterranean. IMAP-MPA is focusing on testing the implementation of integrated monitoring in monitoring sites/stations/areas already identified under the EcAp MED II and III projects. The two ongoing projects are both supporting countries in developing and enhancing capacities pertinent to monitoring of IMAP EOs on biodiversity and NIS (EO 1, EO 2), pollution and marine litter (EO 5, EO 9, EO 10), and coast and hydrography (EO 7, EO 8).

As an example of cooperation, the questionnaire for the analysis of hydrographic status in pilot areas of IMAP-MPA project was prepared jointly. For the purpose of EcAp MED III, this document has been adjusted to respond to the country-scale needs. This questionnaire has been used to report on CI 15 to provide national baseline status.

The monitoring sites in BCs are selected together in a cost-effective way, with IMAP-MPA focusing on specific pilot areas. The results will be taken into account by EcAp MED III in the planned development of monitoring of other representative areas.

Regular exchanges are taking place with the RACs. For instance on the SPI, where Plan Bleu is consulting IMAP-MAP on a regular basis.

Despite not being officially a partner of ML MED II and IMAP-MPA, INFO/RAC has established relationships with both on the monitoring data collection and future data upload in the IMAP Info System. INFO/RAC is ensuring the compatibility of data with the agreed templates and could participate in upcoming training sessions for the BCs.

EcAp MED III is strongly linked with ABIOMMED, another EU-funded project in which SPA/RAC is leading the integration of the GES biodiversity assessment in a pan-Mediterranean scale. This activity will provide guidance towards a regional harmonized assessment of EO 1 focusing on benthic habitats. It will be based on a regional analysis of available data, lessons learnt and efforts elaborated within previous and current project implemented in the Mediterranean.

Finally, exchanges took place with the EU-funded project [MED REGION](#), which aimed at addressing critical aspects of IMAP implementation. The following activities are directly related to EcAp MED III: the completion of gaps in monitoring data in the Mediterranean; the support to the development and operational implementation of (sub)regional indicators, lists of elements, threshold values; and towards the support to the development of effective regional measures, with a special focus on biodiversity. To this end, a continuous dialogue is taking place, projects' deliverables and relevant information are shared on a regular basis between the two projects.

VI. Resources and budget

The official release of the Project budget occurred in December 2020. Its allocation for 2021 was USD 857,375, with more than 60 percent assigned to Outcome 1 (Outputs 1.1 and 1.4 mainly). The expenditure incurred as of 31/12/2021 amounts to USD 258,345. The difference can be explained by the implementation delays related to the IPs since the budget is largely allocated to operational activities.

The Project is co-funded by the [Mediterranean Trust Fund](#) (MTF). Its in-kind contribution amounts to USD 294,790, including USD 94,930 in 2021.

The complementarity with the two EU-funded projects (IMAP-MAP and ML MED II) allows - when relevant and duly justified - financial resources to be pulled together in order to increase their leverage. This is the case at national level through the SSFAs with BCs or by the joint communication at COP 22 and the production of common visibility material (see Section VII).

USD 910,750 were budgeted for 2022, together with a contribution from MTF worth USD 94,930. According to the General Conditions of the ENRTP-GPGC Framework, unspent funds from 2021 would be rolled over to 2022. The reallocation of potential savings (e.g. absence of travel and in person meetings) will be reviewed at a later stage.

Besides reallocations, the possibility to secure additional resources from the MTF 2022-2023 biennium will be explored. It could *inter alia* finance activities such as a second SPI pilot, the preparation of national sets of monitoring data on CI 16 or on the baseline status for CI 15.

More information and detailed financial figures can be found in the 2021 Annual EcAp MED III Financial Report.

VII. Visibility in 2021

The planned communication actions and deliverables are stemming from the initial Project Communication and Visibility Plan, the revised Workplan for 2021-2022 presented at the Steering Committee in April 2021 (UNEP/MED WG.506/4) and the 2023 MED QSR Communication and Visibility Strategy (adopted by the meeting of the Ecosystem Approach Coordination Group on 09/09/21, UNEP/MED WG.514/6). The objective of the latter is to ensure that the 2023 MED QSR publication has a wide dissemination and receives a high level of visibility; and to promote its findings and related recommendations. Most of the activities are therefore geared towards 2023.

The activities already undertaken are described underneath, following the structure of the abovementioned Workplan. In all of them, particular attention was paid to EU visibility and the acknowledgement of its financial contribution.

A brochure (*A push for the achievement of Good Environmental Status in the Mediterranean*) was prepared in 2021 and is under procurement. It describes the three EU-funded projects (EcAp MED III, IMAP MPA and ML MED II) contributing to the Ecosystem Approach and the 2023 QSR. Drafted in English, it will be available in Arabic, French and Spanish in the first quarter of 2022 and distributed through all UNEP/MAP and IPs' usual channels (websites, social networks and relevant events).

In addition, a 2-minute video will be produced and disseminated in 2022 alike the brochure.

A [webpage](#) dedicated to the Project was created at the end of 2020 within the UNEP/MAP website. The page – in both English and French – is regularly updated (last time on 20/12/21 following COP 22) to take new developments into account. In a year time, the page has been viewed 244 times by a core group of stakeholders.

Achievements under EcAp MED III were illustrated by regular publication of news features on the Project webpage and press briefs in newsletters and social media. The progress acknowledged by the Steering Committee meeting of [IMAP-MAP](#) (20/04/21), of [EcAp MED III](#) (19/05/21 and viewed 347

times until 19/12/21) and by the [EcAp Coordination Group](#) (11/11/21) were showcased by UNEP/MAP on its website and twitter via @UNEPMAPNews.

As IPs, the RACs contributed to the visibility of the Project by presenting its activities at their respective Focal Points and CORMON meetings. They channeled the communication of Secretariat through their networks, social media and websites, including on their dedicated EcAp MED III webpages (example from [SPA/RAC](#)).

Due to late or delayed legal agreements with BCs, communication at national level was kept to a minimum. The implementing partners will communicate on tangible results through local media to a greater extent in 2022 and 2023 in particular.

COP meetings occur every two years and are the most important event of the Barcelona Convention and the principal gathering on environment and sustainable development in the region. COP 22 (7-10/12/2021 in Antalya, Turkey) offered an inclusive platform for renewed commitment in the Mediterranean and sent a clear signal that the UNEP/MAP system was ready to act effectively and in a timely manner to support the region in building back greener with strong environmental objectives.

It was a great opportunity to communicate widely on the Ecosystem Approach and EcAp MED III. A [slideshow](#) was used for that purpose. It was displayed in four languages (Arabic, English, French and Spanish) in the main hall and in the background of multiple events. A [virtual exhibition](#) was developed by INFO/RAC to showcase the videos, panels and documents displayed physically at the venue.

The actions there had a large policy impact since it reached all the key players identified in the Project Document and its stakeholders analysis. This greater awareness and engagement should lead to an improved implementation of the Project and increased sustainability beyond its lifespan.

VIII. Final remarks on reporting period 2021

This Annual Progress Report provided a comprehensive account of all aspects of the implementation of the Project for the period covered. Overall, EcAp MED III made good progress in 2021. The initial delays and challenges do not affect the relevance of the Project which will continue at full speed in 2022. As planned, it will support the Beneficiary Countries in the implementation of IMAP and the 2023 QSR. The issues faced were mitigated by the long-standing experience within the Secretariat and the Components. It allowed the Secretariat to draw several lessons from this first implementation phase (developed under Section III). Coordination among EU-funded projects allowed for constant exchanges of experience, knowledge and best practices.

The successful implementation of EcAp MED III requires strong and solid engagement by the beneficiary countries, and, in this context, there is room for improvement to shorten the time needed for bilateral consultations and related actions.” The donor will be kept informed of the Project performance and fully updated ahead of the next Steering Committee meeting in spring 2022 through a dedicated Project report and workplan for the upcoming period.

4. Annex

The document annexed to this report is ‘UNEP/MAP Brochure on EU-funded projects’, which can be found in a separate *.pdf* document.