

Mid-term evaluation of ENI CBC Med programme 2014-2020



ENI
CBCMED
Cooperating across borders
in the Mediterranean

**Report on programme efficiency,
effectiveness, relevance, coherence and
impact**

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Acronyms

AA: Audit Authority

ASEZA: Aqaba Special Economic Zone Authority

BO: Branch Offices

CBC: Cross-Border Cooperation

CCP: Control Contact Point

EQ: Evaluation questions

ENI CBC IR: ENI CBC Commission Implementation Regulation 897/2014

ENI CBC Med: ENI CBC Mediterranean Sea Basin programme

FTE: Full Time Equivalent

JMC: Joint Monitoring Committee

JOP: Joint Operational Programme

JTS: Joint Technical Secretariat

MA: Managing Authority

MIS: Management and Information System

MS: European Member States

NA: National Authorities

NCP: National Contact Point

PSC: Project Selection Committee

SCO: Simplified Cost Options

TESIM: Technical Support to the Implementation and Management of ENI CBC programmes

Introduction

After the submission of the preliminary report and of the three additional products on SCO, Territorial Analysis and Indicators, this report is the fifth product of the Mid-term evaluation of the ENI CBC Med programme 2014-2020.

The report provides the analysis of the programme efficiency, effectiveness, relevance, coherence and impact (with a focus on five priorities out of 11).

The report is structured as follows:

- ✓ Chapter 1 summarises the key evaluation findings
- ✓ Chapter 2 presents the methodological approach
- ✓ Chapter 3 illustrates in details the key evaluation findings, more precisely:
 - ✓ 3.1 analyses the governance of the programme;
 - ✓ 3.2 focuses on the selection of operations;
 - ✓ 3.3 investigates the implementation mechanisms;
 - ✓ 3.4 analyses the information system;
 - ✓ 3.5 analyses the monitoring system;
 - ✓ 3.6 provides an overview of the ability of the programme to achieve its objectives;
 - ✓ 3.7 focuses on the communication strategy;
 - ✓ 3.8 investigates the ability of the programme to respond to the changes in the area.
 - ✓ 3.9 analyses the internal and external coherence of the programme;
 - ✓ 3.10 investigates the impact achieved by the programme focusing on Priority A.1.1;
 - ✓ 3.11 investigates the impact achieved by the programme focusing on Priority A.2.1;
 - ✓ 3.12 investigates the impact achieved by the programme focusing on Priority A.3.1;
 - ✓ 3.13 investigates the impact achieved by the programme focusing on Priority B.4.1;
 - ✓ 3.14 investigates the impact achieved by the programme focusing on Priority B.4.3;
 - ✓ 3.15 provides elements on the impact achieved in relation to the horizontal principles.

Case studies are provided in Annex I.

To make the link with the methodology proposed in the technical offer and validated in the work plan more evident, each section of the report lists the relevant evaluation questions.

It is important to underline that:

- ✓ the analysis concerning the effectiveness is preliminary, not only because of the early stage of project implementation (especially strategic projects and capitalisation projects which had only recently started when this report was prepared), but also because the evaluator needs to collect further information from additional case studies on the way in which information to populate the indicator values is produced, and also needs to gain a higher overall understanding of the monitoring system;
- ✓ the analysis concerning impact, coherence and horizontal principles shall be completed by surveying the projects of the remaining priorities and by preparing another series of case studies.

What explained above indicated the necessity to continue the evaluation work based on the already set up and consolidated methodology.

I Executive summary

GOVERNANCE

EQ 1: Are decision making processes clear and transparent?

EQ 3. Are the structures of the JTS / MA / BO / NCP adequate (for example in terms of FTE) to ensure effective and efficient implementation mechanisms?

Key findings

Overall, the analysis of the programme documents and the opinions of the key stakeholders collected through the interviews highlight the presence of governance mechanisms in line with regulatory requirements and, albeit complex, capable of ensuring the programme the capacity of reacting with sufficient timing and flexibility to the emerging needs and challenges. In this regard, it is worth mentioning the capacity of the programme to maintain a sound decision-making process even when working from remote, when travel restrictions due to the pandemic imposed the online modality, and even when delicate issues were discussed (e.g., the candidature of an alternative MA).

At governance level, the only negative aspect to underline concerns the very late activation of the JTS, which was established only in 2019 and started operations in spring 2020. The gap created by the JTS absence had to be filled by the MA, on one side, and by the two BOs on the other. Concerning BOs, it is worth noting that, even if small in size, they proved to be resilient bodies able to absorb possible programme deficiencies in the area of support to the projects. From the interviews a very good interaction between the NAs/NCPs and the programme bodies emerged.

For what concerns the adequacy of the human resources, the benchmark with the administrative costs for ETC programmes shows that the number of human resources dedicated to the programme management (i.e., MA, JTS and BO) are in line with the average costs identified for Interreg programmes. Considering that the management of ENI CBC programmes is generally more complex than the management of ETC programmes, and that ENI CBC Med presents highly complex specificities, this analysis reveals that the ENI CBC Med programme is characterised by efficient implementation mechanisms.

Recommendation for ENI CBC MED 2014-2020

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Recommendation NEXT MED 2021-2027

Experience from 2014-2020 shows that the timely start of JTS operations is key to ensure a sound balance between the programme bodies commitments and efforts. It is therefore of fundamental importance that any procedures for the selection of the new JTS are anticipated in order to avoid what happened in the previous programming period.

APPLICATION PHASE AND SELECTION OF OPERATIONS

EQ 4. How effective and efficient is the project selection process and their contractualisation?

Quality/usefulness of external assessors; Quality/usefulness of committee for the selection of operations (PSC)

EQ 5. How do applicants assess the support provided by the programme in the drafting phase of the project proposal? Are there any differences in the quality of support provided in different countries?

Key findings

Overall, data gathered through the evaluation prove that the selection process is sound and transparent. This is confirmed by the opinion of beneficiaries (76% consider the selection criteria clear, 84% the results of the selection procedure clearly published and communicated) and by the opinion of the interviewed NAs.

As concerns the quality/usefulness of the PSC in light of the 2014-2020 programme experience, this body can appear redundant due to the spirit of trust that seems to pervade the governance of the programme. However, from the evaluator's perspective, the PSC ensures the possibility to mitigate potential disputes and disagreements before they get to the JMC. Therefore, the added value of this body should not be assessed by only considering its actual effectiveness, but also by taking into account its role as a "clearing house" for potential future disagreement during the selection phase.

Regarding the quality/usefulness of the external assessors, overall the information gathered from interviews suggest that external assessors carry out a competent and balanced assessment work. However, the need to review the criteria for selecting them was highlighted, in particular by reducing the weight attributed to the linguistic criteria. Moreover, some of the stakeholders interviewed suggest the idea of enhancing the JTS role in project selection. However, the strict necessity of guaranteeing JTS continuity and, above all, the high workload that it would face indicate that this idea is hardly feasible.

As concerns the application and selection phase, the only critical element identified is the long time needed to contract and make the standard projects start after the closure of the relevant call (beneficiaries had to wait for 18-23 months before their project could start). The time needed for the projects to start was reduced in case of strategic and capitalisation calls but it is still relevant (e.g., in the call for capitalisation projects, the projects started 13-17 months after the closure of the call).

Concerning the quality of the support provided by the programme during the application phase, data from the survey indicate that applicants and beneficiaries are mostly satisfied about the completeness, clarity and timeliness of the support received. A correlation between the number of proposals submitted per country and the national approval rate was observed.

Recommendation for ENI CBC MED 2014-2020

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Recommendation for NEXT MED 2021-2027

We recommend reconsidering the involvement modalities of the external assessors. As they should continue playing a key role in the project selection process, it appears necessary to further

increase the quality of their contribution. In their recruitment process, technical criteria should be carefully applied so that assessors with a profound knowledge and a forward-looking approach are selected. Moreover, good knowledge of the programme features should be transferred to them following a structured learning process. Finally, a higher effort to include them in all phases of the programme life should be made, so as to increase their will to collaborate also to the programme evaluation process in the future.

IMPLEMENTATION MECHANISMS

EQ 6. How effective are the project implementation rules set out in the programme documents (JOP, Call Guidelines, Grant Contracts and Project Implementation Manual)?

EQ 8. How do the beneficiaries and stakeholders evaluate the support provided by the programme in the different phases of project implementation?

EQ 7. What are the main difficulties encountered by the beneficiaries?

EQ 2. Is the management and control system effective? What can be improved?

Key findings

The project implementation is supported by a long list of documents and tools elaborated by the programme bodies. The number of documents can appear excessive in quantity and length to actors already used to participating in Interreg programmes. However, in the evaluators' view such an approach is correct as it creates the conditions for sound participation by the "newcomers", especially if belonging to countries where administrative practices differ from what is expected in EU programmes. Data from the survey prove that the beneficiaries strongly appreciate both the support directly provided by the programme bodies and the tools elaborated to support the project implementation.

The main difficulties encountered by the beneficiaries refer to the financial management of the projects. In particular, in some Mediterranean Partner Countries there are significant difficulties to open a bank account in Euros. Additionally, problems with VAT exemption were noted, given that some beneficiaries were not informed on the relevant procedure.

The management and control system are based on the activation of professional independent auditors at Lead Beneficiary and partner level, combined with the role played by CCPs in all countries. This approach was expected to avoid the necessity of doing massive quality controls and create the conditions for smoother administrative verifications. However, the implementation of the programme was characterised by frequent errors in the verification of the expenditures from the auditors' side. The immediate consequence of poor auditors' quality was additional control activities by the central bodies. In the context of the delayed start of the JTS activities, the MA had to perform all controls without the possibility to delegate any task to the JTS. This generated an obvious overload to the MA. Serious misalignment between national auditors and programme bodies occurs in a limited number of countries, mainly belonging to the group of Mediterranean Partner Countries. Secondly, even when the JTS started operations, time was needed to align with the technical level achieved by the MA in the field of quality control of reported expenditures. Furthermore, the composition of the JTS in terms of expertise corresponds to the expectation

that projects had to be followed more on the thematic/technical side than for administrative and financial issues. Consequently, only after one year of collaborative work, the MA and the JTS started to share tasks in this area.

Recommendation for ENI CBC MED 2014-2020

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Recommendation NEXT MED 2021-2027

Considering the problems faced during 2014-2020 by the decentralised bodies in ensuring adequate verifications and controls, we strongly recommend that, also during the 2021-2027 programming period, the system maintains a (second) level of centralised control under the responsibility of the MA/JTS. From the evaluator's point of view, at the current state maintaining this centralised level of control is the only solution to ensure compliance with EU requirements in terms of controls and verification.

Without prejudice to the importance of the centralised level of control, we formulate further recommendations:

- Define a minimum price for auditors' fees: price as only award criteria, when adopted by the Lead Beneficiaries and partners in the auditors' selection, seem to have reduced the room for a good work by the auditors. If poorly paid, professionals are less incentivised to provide good quality services. Furthermore, some good professionals can decide not to bid in such unfavourable tender procedures.
- Enhance trainings of auditors: during 2014-2020, the programme has organised numerous trainings for the auditors. Nevertheless, the low level of quality in the controls carried out at national level suggests the need to reinforce training practices, e.g., more meeting can be organised at central level (by the MA/JTS) to allow the exchange of ideas and best practices among auditors. Training should be primarily targeted to the countries where major misalignments between the national auditors and the MA occurred.
- Make more extensive use of SCOs. SCOs are considered by the EC the most effective solution to reduce the administrative costs (both for the MA and the beneficiaries) and to reduce errors. Increasing the use of SCOs can free up time and resources from the verification of expenditures allowing MA/JTS to devote more time to supporting beneficiaries, selecting good projects proposals, and controlling the quality of outputs and results. As regards the types of costs and SCO most suitable for the programme, refer to our "Scoping study on the possible use of SCO".

INFORMATION SYSTEM

Does the eForm meet expectations?

EQ 9. Does the programme Management Information System (MIS) meet expectations?

EQ 10. What is the opinion of the beneficiaries on the efficiency of the MIS?

EQ 11. What is the opinion of the programme bodies and other stakeholders involved in the control and management mechanisms about the efficiency of the MIS?

Key findings

Most beneficiaries and applicants are satisfied with the two information systems (i.e., eForm and MIS) and by the related manuals. No significant problems were reported by the stakeholders involved in the control and management mechanism. The only weakness identified by the evaluators refers to the possibility to quickly extract aggregated data from MIS on the progress of output indicators at priority and programme levels (see sub-chapter 3.6 for more details). This data is organised by the MA on Excel files but is not necessarily regularly available to the JTS.

Recommendation for ENI CBC MED 2014-2020

We recommend the programme to verify with the IT expert the possibility to elaborate a solution for allowing to easily monitor MIS the data on the achieved values declared by the projects in the progress reports. In our view, the availability of such a system could enhance the JTS capacity to anticipate and reduce possible risks without the necessity to require ad hoc monitoring data from the MA.

Recommendation NEXT MED 2021-2027

The future monitoring system shall allow constant monitoring on the state of progress of the indicators (i.e., shall allow to quickly aggregate data declared by the projects in the progress reports and validated by the auditors and the programme bodies).

QUALITY OF THE MONITORING SYSTEM

EQ 12. Are the proposed indicators capable of capturing the most important outputs and results achieved by the projects?

EQ 13. Do beneficiaries encounter any problems in monitoring the indicators (e.g., inconsistencies in the interpretation of the definitions of the indicators)?

EQ 14. Have there been any problems at programme authority level in meeting regulatory monitoring requirements?

Key findings

The desk analysis confirms the compliance of the indicator system with the EU requirements. The system is potentially capable of collecting detailed information at the level of individual projects. This is also confirmed by the opinions of most beneficiaries who consider that the indicators are capable to capture the key outputs and results. However, the consultation of projects indicates cases of misalignment between programme and project level in the calculation of certain output indicators and in the interpretation of certain result indicators. The overall number of indicators is very high and so is the number of indicators selected by some of the projects. Combined with the frequency of reporting, the high number of indicators to be reported creates significant workload for some projects.

In a programme perspective, the monitoring system is characterised by a certain degree of complexity (both in terms of the number of indicators and the heterogeneity of the information collected) with potential risks of high administrative costs for ensuring their consistent monitoring.

Recommendation for ENI CBC MED 2014-2020

The calculation of the value achieved in relation to some of the output indicators should be verified. The repetition of some output indicators in more than one work package could lead to double or triple counting of the same value. It is therefore recommended to verify how projects collect information relevant to indicators such as I.I.I.I.b, which, for instance, is used by MEDST@rts to collect information relevant to six different outputs in two different Work Packages.

Common understanding of the definition of some of the result indicators between the programme (ref. Indicative Monitoring and Evaluation Plan) and project level should be verified. For instance, the interpretation of the result indicator 3.I.I.A used under Priority A.3.1 appears to depend on different concepts of employment.

Recommendation NEXT MED 2021-2027

From the evaluator's perspective, the development of the 2014-2020 monitoring system was exclusively guided by the preference for a system able to capture the key outputs and results. In view of the next programming period, we recommend considering two principles: on the one hand, the ability to capture key outputs and results, on the other hand, the "manageability" of the system. With this term we mean to focus on the need to have indicators that are easily usable by the beneficiaries and which can be easily and constantly monitored at programme level.

Conversely, the use of a much lower number of indicators in the 2021-2027 programming period presents other problems that should be considered.

First of all, indicators will not guide anymore the proposal preparation as it has happened in 2014-2020. It is therefore recommended to ensure similar information on how to make the proposals relevant to the programme, even in absence of detailed output and result indicators.

Secondly, it appears that dealing with less indicators and less project content-related ones, makes the consequences of possible inconsistencies between the programme and the project level more important. If the use of these indicators will be confirmed, it is recommended to revise the definition of indicators RCO 84, RCO 116, RCR 03 and RCR 104. To make some examples, it will be necessary to (1) show the demarcation between "joint development" and mere cooperation where activities are just mirrored, (2) describe the nature of the "pilot actions" in terms of innovativeness and capacity to generate further outputs (i.e. solutions), (3) identify what a "solution" is expected to be, if necessary, based on S.O. specificities.

Thirdly, specific reference to the type of evidence that projects need to elaborate as a proof of fulfilments for each indicator (output and results) should be made. The evidence demanded should be coherent with the definition of the indicators, the regulation and the guidelines of the EU, and the good practices developed in European Territorial Cooperation programmes.

Finally, the process of collecting and reporting the above-mentioned evidence should be standardised. The projects should be provided with specific guidelines on how to gather and report data for each definite indicator and methods to provide the demanded evidence, including technical solutions facilitating this exercise.

More detailed suggestions regarding the system of indicators are provided in our "Note on the system of indicators – Focus on quantification and risks of inconsistencies".

ABILITY OF THE PROGRAMME TO ACHIEVE THE OBJECTIVES SET, IN TERMS OF OUTPUTS AND RESULTS

EQ 15. Did the monitoring system make it possible to anticipate and reduce possible risks (e.g. anticipate risks of failure to achieve specific targets)?

EQ 16. What is the state of implementation of the programme with respect to the achievement of the objectives and results identified?

EQ 17. What is the state of implementation of the programme with respect to the achievement of the identified outputs?

EQ 18. Is the degree of achievement of the identified objectives and results influenced by the resources and means made available?

EQ 19. What other external and internal factors affect the achievement of the identified targets?

EQ 20. Are there any risks / problems hindering the smooth implementation of the programme?

EQ 21. Are the target groups of the programme involved successfully?

EQ 22. Have the Call Standards, Strategic and Capitalization, through which the programme is implemented, been modelled in a manner consistent with its objectives, as presented in the JOP?

EQ 23. Is the implementation of the programme consistent with the EU 2020 strategy and with the relevant macro-regional strategies?

Key findings

At the current state, the main weakness is the limited level of progress in terms of financial absorption: according to data as of April 2022, only 11% of the budget allocated has been certified (in total approximately MEUR 22). It is important also to underline that to this date only standard and strategic projects (at a very limited extent) have certified expenditure.

Concerning the state of implementation with respect to the achievement of the targets for the outputs and results, it is first important to highlight that the monitoring system does not allow to easily anticipate and reduce possible risks of not meeting the targets. The MIS does not allow the automatic aggregation of the achieved values declared by the projects in the progress reports and the JTS does not currently have a scoreboard that offers a synthetic picture of the level of progress of projects with respect to the output targets. Such a function is available only for the result indicators, which are not usable to monitor the actual progress of projects.

The analysis of the targets set by the projects for the end of 2023 shows limited risks of not meeting the programme targets. The review of the targets made in 2020 reduced the risks of not meeting the targets under TO B.I. This is also confirmed by the data collected through the survey, with over 90% of the beneficiaries who are positive about the possibility to reach the initial targets. Consulted Lead Beneficiaries confirmed such a confident approach.

Furthermore, the analysis also shows possible problems in misinterpreting the definition of the indicators, with some indicators for which the targets set at project level exceed the targets initially established at programme level. This could depend on misinterpretation of the definition of the indicators or of the way to aggregate its values.

The achievement of the identified targets was significantly hindered by the pandemic, especially when standard projects are concerned. Therefore, significant time extensions were required that appear of fundamental importance for sound output achievement. Furthermore, political instability

in Lebanon and other countries has significantly hampered the activities of some of the project partners.

Risks of instability remain important and could affect the smooth implementation of the programme. The economic consequences of the current Russia-Ukraine war could be severe for some of the Southern Mediterranean Countries and this could directly impact the conduction of some activities and involvement of definite segments of target groups.

Based on the information collected, the involvement of target groups appears good. This aspect is analysed in relation to five priorities in sub-chapters 3.10-3.14. Aspects such as the use of the Arabic language by the projects are highlighted. More in general, the excellent communication work, which is analysed in sub-chapter 3.7, shall be mentioned when engagement of the target groups is concerned. A well-structured cooperation between the programme and the project level was built to exploit the opportunities offered by the web. With the pandemic being an accelerator of the digital shift, this approach turned to be even more important than expected for the target groups involvement.

The information gathered by the evaluator does not allow to clearly depict the differences between the standard and the strategic projects. As underlined in sub-chapter 3.3 dedicated to the implementation mechanisms, a full awareness of the difference between standard and strategic projects did not emerge from the analysis of the relevant programme documents, nor from the interviews to the key stakeholders, nor from the interviews to the Lead Beneficiaries consulted for the focus groups. The specificities of capitalisation projects, which have not been analysed by the evaluator yet, appear much clearer.

The programme implementation appears fully in line with the initially set strategy addressing the key topics of business and SME development (TO A.1), support to education, research, technological development and innovation (TO A.2), promotion of social inclusion and fight against poverty (TO A.3), environmental protection, climate change adaptation and mitigation (TO B.1). The relevance of the projects is high. The programme implementation shall be considered as consistent with the EU 2020 strategy.

Recommendation for ENI CBC MED 2014-2020

The evaluator suggests firstly conducting a thorough check of declared output data in order to assess and avoid overestimations or misinterpretations of output indicators by applicants/beneficiaries. Additionally, we recommend the programme to verify with the IT expert the possibility to elaborate a solution for allowing to easily monitor the data on the output achieved values declared by the projects in the progress reports on MIS. In the evaluator's view, the availability of such a system is of key importance for ensuring the capacity to anticipate and reduce possible risks.

Intensive interaction with the projects to reach a common understanding of the result indicators definitions is also recommended to assess the actual level of achievement in 2022 and 2023 in a sound manner.

Recommendation for NEXT MED 2021-2027

Future monitoring system shall allow constant monitoring on the state of progress of the output indicators (i.e., shall allow to quickly aggregate data declared by the projects in the progress reports and validated by the auditors and the programme bodies).

In view of the next programming period, ensure a robust methodology for the choice and calculation of output and results indicator targets, considering the weaknesses identified in the current programme.

To keep attractiveness compared to other donors, the programme is recommended to reduce administrative burden for the beneficiaries. Reluctance of project partners from the southern shore could reduce the capacity of NEXT MED to achieve its objectives.

At a more strategic level, the programme should consider that socio-political instability is expected to affect more than one participating country in each programming period. The capacity to adjust the project management plans (in terms of activities, outputs, results and duration) flexibly and quickly to possible new situations would be highly beneficial to the capacity of the programme to achieve its objectives. Such a flexibility would be particularly important in case of involvement of NGOs representing youth, as they could be particularly impacted by a new unfavourable context due to their higher vulnerability.

EFFECTIVENESS OF THE COMMUNICATION ACTIONS OF THE PROGRAMME

EQ 24. *Do the communication activities carried out by the Managing Authority and the antennas lead to the achievement of the general and specific objectives established in the communication strategy?*

EQ 25. *If not, what changes are needed?*

EQ 26. *Which communication tools have been most effective in raising awareness of the programme?*

Key findings

In relation to the objectives set in section 4.7 of the JOP, the analyses show that the first objective of the communication strategy (i.e., *To raise awareness of potential beneficiaries and the public on both shores of the Mediterranean about the aims and opportunities of the programme and to involve all of them in its promotion*) is achieved.

As concerns the second objective (i.e., *ensure adequate visibility of the programme and of the cooperation between the European Union and Partner Countries in the Mediterranean area*) this is divided into two specific objectives. Considering the quality and the number of contents produced through the website and the media channels, the first one (i.e., *SO 2.1 Ensure Programme visibility in the cooperation area*) can be considered achieved. Also the second one (*SO 2.2 Enhance relations with institutions and the media*) is considered achieved, especially considering the press coverage ensured by the projects.

Objective 3 refers to the final phase of the programme lifecycle focusing on the achieved programme results and good practices to be disseminated with all the stakeholders interested within and outside the cooperation area. As the programme has not reached the needed maturity

to implement the communication strategy related to the dissemination of good practices, the third general objective is not considered in this analysis.

Recommendation for ENI CBC MED 2014-2020

From the evaluator's perspective, information on the extraordinary press coverage gained by the projects could be aggregated and shown in the Press review area of the website. The visualisation per project, indeed, does not provide an overlook on the overall press coverage gained by the programme through the project activities.

Recommendation for NEXT MED 2021-2027

We recommend highlighting that the programme is generating contents in Arabic also covering technical fields that were not covered in this language before the projects. This is an added value generated by the programme that could be shared by the MA with the MPC to explore how to further increase the impact of the projects on the countries of the southern shore.

ABILITY OF THE PROGRAMME STRATEGY TO RESPOND TO ANY CHANGES IN THE SOCIO-ECONOMIC CONTEXT AND THE POLITICAL-REGULATORY FRAMEWORK

EQ 27. Are the objectives of the programme still relevant, coherent and complementary in the political context? Do the funded projects highlight the presence of needs and challenges that are not among the problems identified by the programme strategy?

EQ 28. Have the needs of the Program area changed since the strategy was formulated in the JOP?

EQ 29. If so, is the programme adequately responding to the new needs of the area?

EQ 30. Are there any unmet needs that could be addressed in the future programme?

Key findings

80% of web survey respondents consider that the programme strategy is still relevant as the area is not characterised by the presence of new needs and challenges with respect to those identified in the 2014-2020 Joint Operational Programme. The 20% who consider that the programme strategy is no longer relevant to the emerging needs mainly refer to: social and economic impacts due to the health crisis related to COVID 19 and to social and political instability (particularly in Lebanon).

As the funded projects address key challenges for the Mediterranean area, some of them have shown the capacity to prepare the ground for higher resilience to unexpected crises.

Recommendation for ENI CBC MED 2014-2020

Solutions elaborated by the funded projects to better react to the possible crisis of the food supply chain deriving from the Russia-Ukraine war could be identified and disseminated to fertilise other project and facilitate quick capitalisation at policy level.

Recommendation NEXT MED 2021-2027

The programme should continue addressing key challenges for the Mediterranean area, knowing that this approach increases resilience to unexpected crises.

INTERNAL AND EXTERNAL COHERENCE OF THE PROGRAMME

EQ 31. To what extent do the projects respond to the problems and needs identified by the programme in the context analysis phase?

EQ 32. At the level of management bodies (MA, JMC), have coordination mechanisms been put in place with other programmes or policies in the cooperation area?

EQ 33. At project level, are there good practices in terms of synergies / integrations between funded projects and other policies or strategies?

Key findings

The internal coherence of the ENI CBC Med programme is reflected in a well-structured intervention logic, meaning that the answers given to the problems and needs identified in the context analysis are detailed in the expected results identified at priority level. Thanks to the strict guidance given to the projects in the application phase, their relevance to the challenges identified by the programme is very high. Such relevance is confirmed by the observation of the outputs actually produced by the projects. Considering only the surveyed priorities A.1.1, A.2.1, A.3.1, B.4.1, B.4.3, it appears that those belonging to Overarching Objective A have a stronger tendency to fertilise the others. Among the surveyed ones, the priority A.2.1 shows the highest capacity to fertilise other priorities and this suggests that “technological transfer and commercialisation of research results” is highly transversal to various topics addressed by the programme.

Capitalisation projects are based not only on the results generated by ENPI CBC Med 2007-2013 and ENI CBC Med 2014-2020 projects, but also on the results achieved by projects promoted or funded by other initiatives/ programmes (Union for the Mediterranean and Interreg MED). Such a mechanism of coordination with external initiatives shows full awareness by the programme that synergies in the Mediterranean area can be beneficial especially when they allow to share contents and solutions.

Projects belonging to Overarching Objective A show higher capacity to establish synergies with other projects/initiatives compared to Overarching Objective B projects. Furthermore, it appears that the policy fields of technological transfer, and especially of enterprise support are featured by an extraordinary networking capacity that goes beyond the ENI CBC Med Programme. Long and fruitful project chains were observed across EU programmes and programming periods.

Recommendation for ENI CBC MED 2014-2020

We recommend verifying if projects dealing with environmental protection, climate change adaptation and mitigation, i.e. projects belonging to Overarching Objective B, can be encouraged to develop more synergies with other projects within and outside the ENI CBC Med programme, given that environmental topics could have a not fully explored fertilisation potential.

Recommendation for NEXT MED 2021-2027

In the evaluator’s perspective, the much lower number of indicators foreseen for NEXT MED (compared to the extraordinarily high number of indicators of ENI CBC Med 2014-2020) represents a good progress towards easier programme management. However, it clearly appears

that the use of specific output and result indicators at the priority level served as an effective guidance in the proposal preparation phase and contributed to the good relevance of the projects to the programme. As already mentioned in chapter 3.5, it is recommended to ensure similar information on how to make the proposals relevant to the programme, even in absence of detailed output and result indicators.

IMPACT ACHIEVED BY THE PROGRAMME UNDER PRIORITY A.1.1

EQ 34. Has the programme achieved what was expected in terms of: training activities (output 1.1.1.1), the creation of investment schemes (output 1.1.1.2), and hubs and accelerators (output 1.1.1.3)? Are there significant differences between countries?

EQ 35. Have the outputs achieved made it possible to create companies with a cross-border dimension? Is it possible to identify good practices or particularly critical cases?

EQ 36. Have the outputs achieved made it possible to increase the employment of young people and women? Is it possible to identify good practices or particularly critical cases?

EQ 37. What is the impact of the COVID 19 crisis on achieving the expected results at the level of priority A.1.1?

EQ 38. Have the other priorities of the programme contributed in any way to supporting innovative start-ups and newly established businesses?

Key findings

The main strategy adopted to support innovative start-ups and newly established companies consists of capacity building and training activities, a trait common to all projects analysed under this priority. The analysis of the feedback surveys from target groups confirm that skills and competences of the participants in the projects' activities increased as a result of the project activities. A second significant strategy adopted by the funded projects to support innovative start-ups and newly established companies was the provision of legal and/or financial support. Another significant topic for this priority is the Intellectual Property Right, as this aspect if not managed risks to become a weak point for the Mediterranean innovative start-ups and newly established companies. There is little evidence of the creation of hubs and accelerators and the creation of investment schemes did not feature the priority. When developed, investment schemes had to reduce their ambitions and opt for traditional approaches.

Companies with a cross-border dimension were not established nor attempts to start them were made. It is true that due to the pandemic some cross-border activities (i.e. organisation of cross-border forum) were postponed, however it seems that the aim to create companies with a cross-border dimension was too ambitious for ENI CBC Med 2014-2020.

At the present stage, conclusions on the capacity to increase the employment of young people and women cannot be drawn, yet. What emerges is that the indicator measuring creation of jobs was too narrowly defined in the view of some of the projects, and this could create inconsistencies in the assessment of the jobs created.

The COVID 19 crisis is largely responsible for delays in project activities. Many activities were either adapted to an online format when possible or simply postponed, leading to the revision of the implementation plan and the request for time extensions. It is worth noting that beyond the pandemic, implementation was hampered also by political, social and economic crisis occurred in some of the partner countries, especially Lebanon.

Priority A.1.1 appears to have received a contribution from the projects funded under the other analysed priorities (i.e. A.2.1, A.3.1, B.4.1, B.4.3) that is above the average (29% compared to 26%). 85% of projects having contributed to Priority A.1.1 belong to Priority A.2.1. This suggests that technology transfer and commercialisation of research results are highly beneficial to the support of innovative start-up and recently established enterprises, with the other topics addressed by the programme not offering significant contribution.

Recommendation for ENI CBC MED 2014-2020

Ensure that capitalisation plans of standard and strategic projects are actually implemented so that outputs are transferred to national/regional/local stakeholders preparing the ground for their use at the policy level. This should occur even in case follow-up is not ensured by a relevant capitalisation project. At the same time, the evaluator also recommends to verify that the ReSt@rts capitalisation project actually contributes to transferability of outputs and durability of results produced under this priority.

Recommendation NEXT MED 2021-2027

- On project design:
 - Focus on homogenous target groups or adapt approaches to the needs of the various target groups.
 - Improve risk analysis and include mitigation measures, in particular to adapt project activities to changes in the country context.
- On programme indicators
 - Reconsider having binding criteria to measure indicators to avoid a mismatch between the expectations of the programme and what the beneficiaries are realistically able to achieve given the resources available and the external environment.
- On reporting
 - To make the programme more competitive with the opportunities offered by other international donors, reduce the burden at the project level by making a more extensive use of Simplified Cost Options.
- On sustainability, capitalisation and impact
 - Even in the absence of a dedicated capitalisation project, always ensure that outputs are transferred to national/regional/local stakeholders able to support them, thus guaranteeing the continuity of project results (in the case of MEDSt@rts, potentially transferable outputs include the database of microfinance schemes available in the Mediterranean area, the network of 60 organisations integrating a Mediterranean network on microfinance and microcredit for business development, the 15 microfinance packages mixing direct support (sub-grant) and access to finance).

IMPACT ACHIEVED BY THE PROGRAMME UNDER PRIORITY A.2.1

EQ 39. *Has the programme achieved what was expected in terms of: creation of new living labs (output 2.1.1.1); greater institutional capacity (output 2.1.1.2 and 2.1.1.4), increased skills in the business environment (output 2.1.1.3), increase the availability of services for technology transfer activities (output 2.1.1.5, 2.1.1.6, 2.1.1.7, 2.1.1.8)? Are there significant differences between countries?*

EQ 40. *Have the outputs achieved made it possible to improve the processes of technology transfer and marketing? Is it possible to identify good practices or particularly critical cases?*

EQ 41. *What is the impact of the COVID 19 crisis on the achievement of the expected results at the level of priority A.2.1?*

EQ 42. *Have the other priorities of the program contributed in any way to supporting technology transfer and commercialization of research results?*

Key findings

Feedback from the survey and evidence from the case studies show that Living labs were a type of output largely produced by the projects, thus showing the capacity to make the different components of the innovation process actively interact. The projects also showed the capacity to increase the skills in the business environment by conducting training activities even in a period when restrictions due to pandemic could have hampered them. Lower evidence of a contribution to institutional capacity enhancement was collected. None of the surveyed projects indicated promotion of a better governance as the most significant added value. Nevertheless, the high number of strategic projects is promising under this aspect, even if it appears that they are still elaborating plans to capitalise their results at the policy-making level. However, the level of maturity of the strategic projects is not sufficient to draw conclusions. Such an early stage of the projects represents a difficulty also to evaluate the capacity of the projects to generate services, which is the most tangible form of impact under this priority. It is true that almost one third of the projects declared to have created new spin-offs, registered co-patents or facilitated the establishment of new agreements between companies and R&D bodies. However, the actual capacity of these outputs to enhance the availability of services for technology transfer activities does not appear measurable, yet.

The Living labs seem a good solution to experiment the process of technology transfer as they make the scientific, industry, society and business communities actively interact. However, their continuity after the conclusion of the projects is unclear if further funding will not be provided through follow-up projects. Technology transfer is easier to be seen when projects have a technical and productive focus.

The COVID crisis impacted the projects, especially when the learning activities and the cross-border dimension are concerned. Starting at the same time as the pandemic, all face-to-face activities were shifted to an online format. However, it is worth noting that preparation of the training, quality of the learning materials, and distribution of the learning materials seem to have benefitted from such an exceptional situation. The impossibility to exploit fully the 'human factor' has pushed the projects to dedicate special attention to the quality management of the learning process. Additionally, projects took the opportunity to strengthen local engagement with newly developed digital tools, increasing projects' visibility and reaching more participants.

Priority A.2.I appears to have received a contribution from the projects funded under the other analysed priorities (i.e. A.1.1, A.3.1, B.4.1, B.4.3) that is well above the average (40% compared to 26%). All other analysed priorities appear to have contributed to A.2.I either with half or one third of their projects. This suggests that the topics of technology transfer and commercialisation of research results is somehow horizontal to the programme.

Recommendation for ENI CBC MED 2014-2020

Ensure that capitalisation plans of standard and strategic projects are actually implemented so that outputs are transferred to national/regional/local stakeholders preparing the ground for their use at the policy level. This should occur even in case follow-up is not ensured by a relevant capitalisation project. At the same time, the evaluator recommends to verify that the WEF - CAP capitalisation project actually contributes to transferability of outputs and durability of results produced under this priority.

Recommendation NEXT MED 2021-2027

- On project design:
 - Ensure that projects have a clear focus with well-defined outputs and results and that proposals are written in plain language.
 - Strengthen monitoring practices at project level so that clear and concise information is collected on project activities and achievements.
 - Encourage projects, especially those focused on specific sectors and niches, to develop models and technologies that could be replicated in other contexts.
- On programme indicators:
 - Consider simplifying the programme performance framework to facilitate reporting and monitoring by project partners.
 - Consider additional capacity building actions to promote a common understanding of the indicators and improve the link between project's outputs and results and the programme's performance framework.
- On reporting
 - To make the programme more competitive with the opportunities offered by other international donors, reduce the burden at the project level by making a more extensive use of Simplified Cost Options.
- On sustainability, capitalisation and impact
 - Consider replicating the model of cooperation between research and business promoted by BESTMEDGRAPE in other cases of circular economy.
 - Ensure that strategic projects develop a robust and clear capitalisation strategy.

IMPACT ACHIEVED BY THE PROGRAMME UNDER PRIORITY A.3.1

EQ 43. *Has the programme achieved what was expected in terms of: implementation of marketing actions (output 3.1.1.1); training services (output 3.1.1.2) ; new tools and methods (output 3.1.1.3); tutoring and liaison initiatives between the world of training and businesses (output 3.1.1.4, 3.1.1.5, 3.1.1.6)? Are there significant differences between countries?*

EQ 44. *Have the outputs achieved made it possible to improve the "employability" of NEETs and women? Is it possible to identify good practices or particularly critical cases?*

EQ 45. *What is the impact of the COVID 19 crisis on the achievement of the expected results at the level of priority A.3.1?*

EQ 46. *Have the other priorities of the programme contributed in any way to improving the "employability" of NEETs and women?*

Key findings

Projects made a significant effort for the implementation of marketing actions to enhance services that foster youth employment through the collaboration with sector professional representatives involved in social inclusion actions and networks. The projects also managed to realise targeted training courses oriented to the labour market involving young NEETs and women. In many cases the trainings were focused on curricula and skills transfer related to sustainable and green economy. In other cases, the training activities targeted specific high-potential growing sectors offering higher chances of employability for the beneficiaries involved. At the time of the evaluation, many training activities were still in progress. However, it was possible to assess that many youths, NEETs and women already benefitted from the project activities. Concerning the tutoring and liaison activities between the world of training and business, the projects enhanced the hands-on approach of the trainings offered to the beneficiaries, by focusing on specific sectors to enhance the likelihood to find a job at the end of these. Concerning the expected outcome of these activities, it is too early to assess them in terms of civic associations launched by the project beneficiaries, or the public institutions engaged. No specific differences between countries were identified.

The trainings and initiatives realised are providing the NEETs involved with skills and competences adapted to the actual demand of the labour market. In some cases, the trainings focus was decided following an initial phase of research to analyse which sector in each target territory could offer the higher chances of employability to the beneficiaries involved, in collaboration with the local stakeholders. This practice significantly increases the reliability and resilience of the project initiatives, having a strong connection to the real needs of the local labour market. However, it is worth noting that there could be misalignments between the programme and the project level in the interpretation of the indicator concerning employment. Such misalignments could hamper a sound measurement of the jobs actually found.

The COVID 19 crisis impacted the projects', especially when the learning activities and the cross-border dimension are concerned. As the beginning of many projects coincided with the outbreak of the pandemic, many activities, when possible, were adapted to an online format or postponed. The restrictions resulted in a significant loss for the beneficiaries in terms of value added as they could not travel to participate in the project activities hosted in a different country or meet in the same physical space to network. However, the projects were resilient and exploited tools and

devices to connect digitally with the beneficiaries, even those located in rural areas who could not participate to the project without a digital support.

Priority A.3.I appears to have received a contribution from the projects funded under the other analysed priorities (i.e. A.1.I, A.2.I, B.4.I, B.4.3) that is below the average (20% compared to 26%). The highest contribution was from Priority A.1.I concerning support to innovative start-up and recently established enterprises, i.e. a topic relevant to employability.

Recommendation for ENI CBC MED 2014-2020

Ensure that capitalisation plans of standard and strategic projects are actually implemented so that outputs are transferred to national/regional/local stakeholders preparing the ground for their use at the policy level. This should occur even in case follow-up is not ensured by a relevant capitalisation project. At the same time, the evaluator recommends to verify that the CLUSTER capitalisation project actually contributes to transferability of outputs and durability of results produced under this priority.

Recommendation NEXT MED 2021-2027

- On project design:
 - Projects should focus on homogeneous target groups to maximise impact. Beneficiaries should be encouraged to address the needs of the most disadvantaged (e.g. women with weak higher education) and develop actions that are well linked to the potential of the respective project territories (e.g. a learning course related to an emerging cluster).
- On programme indicators:
 - Consideration should be given to capacity building actions to promote a common understanding of the indicators at project and programme level. As regards indicator definitions, there should not be discrepancies between the two levels.
 - Indicator definitions and targets (especially when results are concerned) should better reflect the reality of implementation and the project context to make programme indicators more relevant and less ambiguous.
 - Given the workload involved, consideration should be given to reduce the number of mandatory programme indicators, while also giving the possibility to beneficiary to monitor project-specific indicators.
- On sustainability, capitalisation and impact:
 - To allow projects bringing valuable contents to further engage in capitalisation projects, it is necessary to ensure that the call for capitalisation projects does not occur when standard projects are not yet mature.
 - Strategies to ensure the durability of outputs/results beyond the project duration should be encouraged regardless of capitalisation projects. In this respect, each partnership should include organisations that are able either to invest their own resources in follow-up activities, or to secure national or regional support.

IMPACT ACHIEVED BY THE PROGRAMME UNDER PRIORITY B.4.1

EQ 47. Has the programme achieved what was expected in terms of: creation of cross-border networks (output 4.1.1.1, 4.1.1.2, 4.1.2.7); realization of training events (output 4.1.1.3, 4.1.2.6); pilot initiatives (output 4.1.1.4, 4.1.2.8); new management plans (output 4.1.1.5)? Are there significant differences between countries?

EQ 48. Have the outputs achieved made it possible to increase the use of innovative solutions that ensure a more efficient use of water resources in agriculture and the home? Is it possible to identify good practices or particularly critical cases?

EQ 49. What is the impact of the COVID 19 crisis on the achievement of the expected results at the level of priority B.4.1?

EQ 50. Have the other priorities of the programme contributed in any way to the development of innovative solutions for improving the efficiency of the use of water resources?

Key findings

The outputs produced relate to the strategic side (plans, tools, legal frameworks) as well as to the demonstrative side. Pilot actions for improving water management are an output to be largely produced by the projects, however important delays in the application of the demonstrative technologies required significant extensions. Capacity building and training schemes are another type of output strongly present in the projects. Combined with the good involvement of key stakeholders, this is a good condition to increase awareness of this topic. Among the most important changes being expected on the southern shore of the Mediterranean, the capacity of the projects to focus on rural territories appears particularly relevant.

Overall, the projects concern all key topics that should be addressed under the priority with a particular focus on the use of non-conventional water resources. 80% of web survey respondents have also indicated that their project aims to “face climate change related issues”. However, the most tangible effects of the projects have not been produced, yet. Compared to other priorities where durability seems to depend strongly on follow-up projects, Priority B.4.1 shows that in some territories the involved stakeholders, including investors, could take over the project outputs.

The COVID 19 pandemic has slowed down activities for partners, delaying tendering procedures and making face to face events impossible in definite periods. However, the impact of the pandemic on the projects funded under this priority appears lower than in others featured by intensive people-to-people activities. The slow pace of the projects, which made the require of extensions necessary, can therefore be attributed only partly to the pandemic.

Priority B.4.1 appears to have received a contribution from the projects funded under the other analysed priorities (i.e. A.1.1, A.2.1, A.3.1, B.4.3) that is well below the average (17% compared to 26%). The highest contribution was from Priority A.2.1 concerning technology transfer, whereas no contribution was given by the projects belonging to Priority B.4.3 under the same Thematic Objective.

Recommendation for ENI CBC MED 2014-2020

Ensure that capitalisation plans of standard and strategic projects are actually implemented so that outputs are transferred to national/regional/local stakeholders preparing the ground for their use at the policy level. This should occur even in case follow-up is not ensured by a relevant

capitalisation project. At the same time, the evaluator recommends to verify that the MEDWAYCAP capitalisation project actually contributes to transferability of outputs and durability of results produced under this priority.

It is also recommended to speed up the approval of an addendum to extend the project time-frame and reorganise activities to deal with delays and partnership issues.

Recommendation NEXT MED 2021-2027

- On future project design:
 - Consider that the issue of water scarcity is of high priority and will be even more relevant in the future for southern Mediterranean countries.
 - Consider additional capacity building for project partners to improve management capacity and enhance ownership and accountability.
 - Consider reviewing national regulatory frameworks to identify obstacles to the proper implementation of projects and suggest remedial actions, including recommendations addressed to the national authorities.
 - Consider introducing contingencies in the budget to mitigate the effects of inflation on project activities.
- On programme indicators:
 - Some of the programme indicators will not be fulfilled, as the aggregated projects targets are below the programme target. This could mean that the programme overestimated the targets (even though a revision towards lower targets was already approved in November 2020), or that the indicators should be better balanced.
 - Indicators on organisational and preparatory activities as well as stakeholder mobilisation and information would allow to assess better the progress of projects.
 - Consider a simplified performance framework, with stronger links between project activities/outputs and programme indicators and better explanations of relationship between the two in the Application Form, especially concerning project results.
- On sustainability, capitalisation and impact:
 - Ensure that capitalisation plans developed by the project are well-articulated with capitalisation projects.
 - Ensure that sustainability and impact depend not only on capitalisation projects, but also on the integration of project results into national and local strategies.

IMPACT ACHIEVED BY THE PROGRAMME UNDER PRIORITY B.4.3

Additional EQ: Has the programme achieved what was expected in terms of: provisions for sustainable urban design (output 4.3.1.1), energy mix efficiency plans/strategies (output 4.3.1.2), cross-border case studies (output 4.3.1.3), twinning and knowledge sharing (output 4.3.1.4), implementation of pilot technologies, delivery of energy performance certificates and application of renewable energy systems to public buildings (outputs 4.3.2.5, 4.3.2.6, 4.3.2.7)? Are there significant differences between countries?

Additional EQ: Have the outputs achieved made it possible to increase the use of innovative solutions that support cost-effective and innovative energy rehabilitations relevant to building types and climatic zones, with a focus on public buildings? Is it possible to identify good practices or particularly critical cases?

Additional EQ: What is the impact of the COVID 19 crisis on the achievement of the expected results at the level of priority B.4.3?

Additional EQ: Have the other priorities of the programme contributed in any way to the development of cost-effective and innovative energy rehabilitations relevant to building types and climatic zones, with a focus on public building?

Key findings

All projects under this priority developed cost-effective and innovative energy renovations relevant to building types and climatic zones by implementing pilot actions for improving energy efficiency. In particular, the Living labs appear to be a good activity that enhances the implementation of innovative energy efficiency renovation solutions, as they promote an interactive approach allowing all the relevant stakeholders to brainstorm and understand the related implications. The educational sector appears particularly targeted by innovative energy renovations, and this could have a good multiplier effect. The development of energy mix efficiency plans and strategies appears to be less present among the projects, while the development of the cross-border case studies was still ongoing when this evaluation report was being drafted. Overall, Southern Mediterranean countries can potentially benefit the most from the projects. At the same time, the absence of infrastructure made the implementation of innovative solutions more difficult compared to the countries located on the northern shore.

The projects are making efforts to involve the key decision makers implied in the public building renovations to raise their awareness of the benefits and the relevant aspects to consider concerning the energy efficiency solutions.

However, besides the application of the technologies foreseen in the implementation of pilot projects, it is too early to assess whether the project impact will increase the use of energy efficiency solutions in public buildings located in the Mediterranean area. A strong point to keep in mind is that the integration of such innovations on a policy level is essential to amplify the impact of the projects, which, according to the analysis so far, is not always obvious.

The COVID 19 crisis impacted the project activities which were either postponed or shifted to an online format, when possible. The imposed restrictions prevented the relevant stakeholders to meet physically and to initiate the construction works of pilot projects because of the slowdown of tenders or delays in the shipping of materials.

Priority B.4.3 appears to have received a contribution from the projects funded under the other analysed priorities (i.e. A.1.1, A.1.2, A.3.1, B.4.1) that is below the average (19% compared to 26%). The highest contributions were from Priority B.4.1 under the same Thematic Objective and from Priority A.2.1 concerning technology transfer and commercialisation of research results.

Recommendation for ENI CBC MED 2014-2020

Ensure that capitalisation plans of standard and strategic projects are actually implemented so that outputs are transferred to national/regional/local stakeholders preparing the ground for their use at the policy level. This should occur even in case follow-up is not ensured by a relevant capitalisation project. At the same time, the evaluator recommends to verify that the SEACAP 4 SDG, Sustainable MED Cities capitalisation projects actually contribute to transferability of outputs and durability of results produced under this priority.

Recommendation for NEXT MED 2021-2027

- On programme indicators:
 - Given the rapid evolution of technology, the programme indicators must be formulated in such a way that they remain relevant to technological developments.
- On sustainability, capitalisation and impact:
 - Since not all standard projects are expected to be followed by a capitalisation project, a capitalisation plan outlining the modalities of engagement of the policy level should be included in the project proposal or prepared in the very first phase of the project.
 - Sustainability and impact will depend not only on capitalisation efforts but even more so on national policies in place to promote energy renovation of public buildings, including access to funding to roll out the technologies and pilots developed by the project.
 - Synergies with other projects and initiatives during the project lifetime could be facilitated and enhanced through national coordination in the ENI CBC Med countries, starting from those featured by a good number of projects funded by ENI CBC Med.
 - Synergies with other sectors should be explored as they could provide significant added value, especially on horizontal issues such as environmental and economic sustainability.
 - Particular attention should be paid to the partnership composition of capitalisation projects to ensure that all key stakeholders, including economic actors, are represented.

IMPACT ACHIEVED IN RELATION TO THE HORIZONTAL PRINCIPLES

EQ 5 I. What are the most significant results and impacts achieved by the programme in terms of horizontal principles?

Key findings

The horizontal principle on sustainable development is strongly and homogeneously promoted by the programme, whereas the principles concerning equal opportunities and non-discrimination such as equality between men and women depend more on the challenges addressed by the single priorities. The communication developed by the programme is extraordinarily effective in promoting the idea that women play an active role in the Mediterranean societies.

Recommendation for ENI CBC MED 2014-2020

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Recommendation NEXT MED 2021-2027

Horizontal principles concerning equal opportunities and non-discrimination such as equality between men and women could be more streamlined across the projects funded under all priorities.

2 Methodological approach

This report is based on four key evaluation sources:

Desk analysis The analysis of programme documents, administrative data retrieved from MIS or directly sent by the MA (see e.g., excel file on the cuts decided by the MA) as well as the analysis of the programme website represented the key starting point for a thorough understanding of the programme's structures and functioning and lay the foundation for a targeted collection of primary data through interviews to programme bodies and web surveys.



Interviews to programme bodies



Between September and December 2021, a total of 36 semi-structured interviews have been conducted with the MA, JTS, BO, JMC members, NCP, CCP and PSC covering all Member States and partner Countries. See the table below for the list of the interviews carried out.

Table 1 List of interviews to the programme bodies

Name of the interviewee	Role	Date
Fabrizio Paloni	JTS Coordinator	18 and 27 October
Dua'a Qurie	JTS – Social inclusion and fight against poverty	19 October
Khaled ElSaadany	JTS – Education, research and innovation	19 October
Simona Cannistraci	JTS – Financial coordinator	20 October
Valeria Cibrario	JTS – SMEs and business development	25 October
Vincent Ernoux	BO Valencia	25 October
Esmat AlKaradsheh	BO Aqaba	25 October
Elisabetta Neroni	MA – Operational Authorising	26 October
Antonella Giglio	MA Director	27 October
Mohamad Itani	NCP Lebanon	27 October
Laila Awartani	JMC/NCP Palestine	28 October
Raquel Rocha & Oliveira Graça	JMC NCP Portugal	2 November
Emad Ahmad Shana'ah	JMC/NCP Jordan	2 November
Patricia di Biase	JMC/NCP France	4 November
George Simos	JMC/NCP Greece	8 November
Celine Jorio	CCP France	10 November
Samira Rafrafi	JMC/NCP Tunisia	11 November
Costantia Costantinou	JMC/NCP Cyprus	11 November
Astrid Fenech	CCP Malta	16 November
Claudio Polignano	NCP Italy	16 November
Rogério Martins	CCP Portugal	17 November
Fadi Karam	JTS – Environment and climate change	17 November

Name of the interviewee	Role	Date
Mouna Mekki	CCP Tunisia	18 November
Elisabetta Perrone	CCP Italy	18 November
Maria Papiri	CCP Cyprus	19 November
Daniel Kigel	CCP Israel	23 November
Ambra Franceschetti	JMC Italy	23 November
Antonella Garippa	Audit Authority	25 November
Carmen Munoz	PSC Portugal	25 November
Christos Tsikmanlis	CCP Greece	26 November
Carmen Hernandez, Jesus Fernandez, David Callejo Gomez	JMC/NCP and CCP Spain	29 November
Chistina Besez	PSC France	3 December
Maria Catania	JMC/NCP Malta	3 December
Dalia Sadek	NCP Egypt	13 December
Carmel Vella	PSC Malta	17 December

Web-survey



Between 11 October and 2 December 2021, a web survey addressed to all project applicants and beneficiaries was launched. A total of 240 applicants and beneficiaries took part in the survey. As illustrated by the table below, the response rate is 7% in the case of applicants of non-approved projects, while it is significantly higher for Lead beneficiaries and project partners. If compared with similar surveys carried out in the context of other mid-term evaluations, this is a high response rate that ensures a good representativeness of the sample.

Questions concerning impact, coherence and horizontal principles were asked only to Lead Beneficiaries and project partners involved in projects funded under priorities A.1.1, A.2.1, A.3.1, B.4.1, B.4.3.

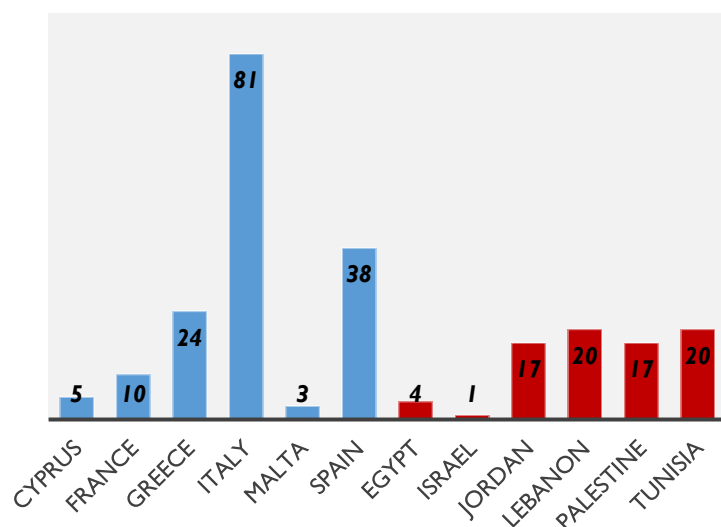
Table 2 Survey response rate

Type of respondent	n. questionnaires	response rate
Lead applicant of a not funded project proposal	39	7%
Project Lead Beneficiary	62	83%
Project partner	139	28%

Looking at the geographical coverage, 67% of respondents come from EU MS, in particular from Italy, while for Partner Countries most replies come from Lebanon, Tunisia, Jordan and Palestine (see the figure below).

Most of respondents (i.e., 67%) were not beneficiaries from ENPI MED 2007-2013, but 71% of participants declare to have experience with other EU funds, in particular with Horizon 2020.

Figure 1 Number of responses per country



10 case studies were identified among the standard and strategic projects belonging to the five priorities mentioned above (A.1.1, A.2.1, A.3.1, B.4.1, B.4.3), consistently with the web survey. It was not possible to include capitalisation projects due to their recent start. The early stage of implementation of the strategic projects made their analysis more difficult compared to standard projects. Two out of 10 projects are led by organisations from the southern shore, namely from Tunisia. The other eight projects have Lead Beneficiaries from Italy, Spain, Cyprus, France, Greece.

Between February and March, 20 interviews were conducted to the Lead Beneficiary and one project partner per project. Interviews covered all countries having projects approved to ensure the highest possible territorial balance in data collection. Information gathered from each project was triangulated with the elements emerged from desk analysis (application form, project reports, promotional information published on the programme website) and from the web survey. Case studies were key to conduct the partial assessment of the impact of the programme.

Table 3 List of the interviews to Lead Beneficiaries and Project Partners

Priority	Project	Project	Role	Country	Month
A.1.1	MEDSt@rts	Standard	LB	Italy	February
			PP	Palestine	February
	INVESTMED	Strategic	LB	Tunisia	February
			PP	Lebanon	February
A.2.1	BESTMEDGRAPE	Standard	LB	Italy	February
			PP	Lebanon	March
	NEX-LABS	Strategic	LB	Spain	February
			PP	Egypt	March
A.3.1	InnovAgroWoMed	Standard	LB	Italy	February
			PP	Tunisia	March
	RESMYLE	Standard	LB	France	February
			PP	Jordan	March
B.4.1	ACQUACYCLE	Standard	LB	Greece	February
			PP	Malta	March

Priority	Project	Project	Role	Country	Month
	PROSIM	Standard	LB	Italy	February
			PP	Jordan	March
B.4.3	BERLIN	Standard	LB	Cyprus	February
			PP	Israel	March
	Med-EcoSuRe	Standard	LB	Tunisia	February
			PP	Spain	February

As already mentioned in the introduction, to complete the assessment of impact, coherence and contribution to horizontal principles, it will be necessary to expand the survey and conduct further case studies for the remaining priorities not covered in this evaluation.

3 Evaluation of efficiency, effectiveness, relevance, coherence and impact

3.1 GOVERNANCE

EQ 1: Are decision making processes clear and transparent?

EQ 3. Are the structures of the JTS / MA / BO / NCP adequate (for example in terms of FTE) to ensure effective and efficient implementation mechanisms?

Key findings

Overall, the analysis of the programme documents and the opinions of the key stakeholders collected through the interviews highlight the presence of governance mechanisms in line with regulatory requirements and, albeit complex, capable of ensuring the programme the capacity of reacting with sufficient timing and flexibility to the emerging needs and challenges. In this regard, it is worth mentioning the capacity of the programme to maintain a sound decision-making process even when working from remote, when travel restrictions due to the pandemic imposed the online modality, and even when delicate issues were discussed (e.g., the candidature of an alternative MA).

At governance level, the only negative aspect to underline concerns the very late activation of the JTS, which was established only in 2019 and started operations in spring 2020. The gap created by the JTS absence had to be filled by the MA, on one side, and by the two BOs on the other. Concerning BOs, it is worth noting that, even if small in size, they proved to be resilient bodies able to absorb possible programme deficiencies in the area of support to the projects. From the interviews a very good interaction between the NAs/NCPs and the programme bodies emerged.

For what concerns the adequacy of the human resources, the benchmark with the administrative costs for ETC programmes shows that the number of human resources dedicated to the programme management (i.e., MA, JTS and BO) are in line with the average costs identified for Interreg programmes. Considering that the management of ENI CBC programmes is generally more complex than the management of ETC programmes, and that ENI CBC Med presents highly complex specificities, this analysis reveals that the ENI CBC Med programme is characterised by efficient implementation mechanisms.

Recommendation for ENI CBC MED 2014-2020

-

Recommendation for NEXT MED 2021-2027

Experience from 2014-2020 shows that the timely start of JTS operations is key to ensure a sound balance between the programme bodies commitments and efforts. It is therefore of fundamental importance that any procedures for the selection of the new JTS are anticipated in order to avoid what happened in the previous programming period.

This chapter aims to assess the effectiveness of the programme management by investigating the division of responsibilities and tasks among the different programme bodies.

3.1.1 Programme management set-up



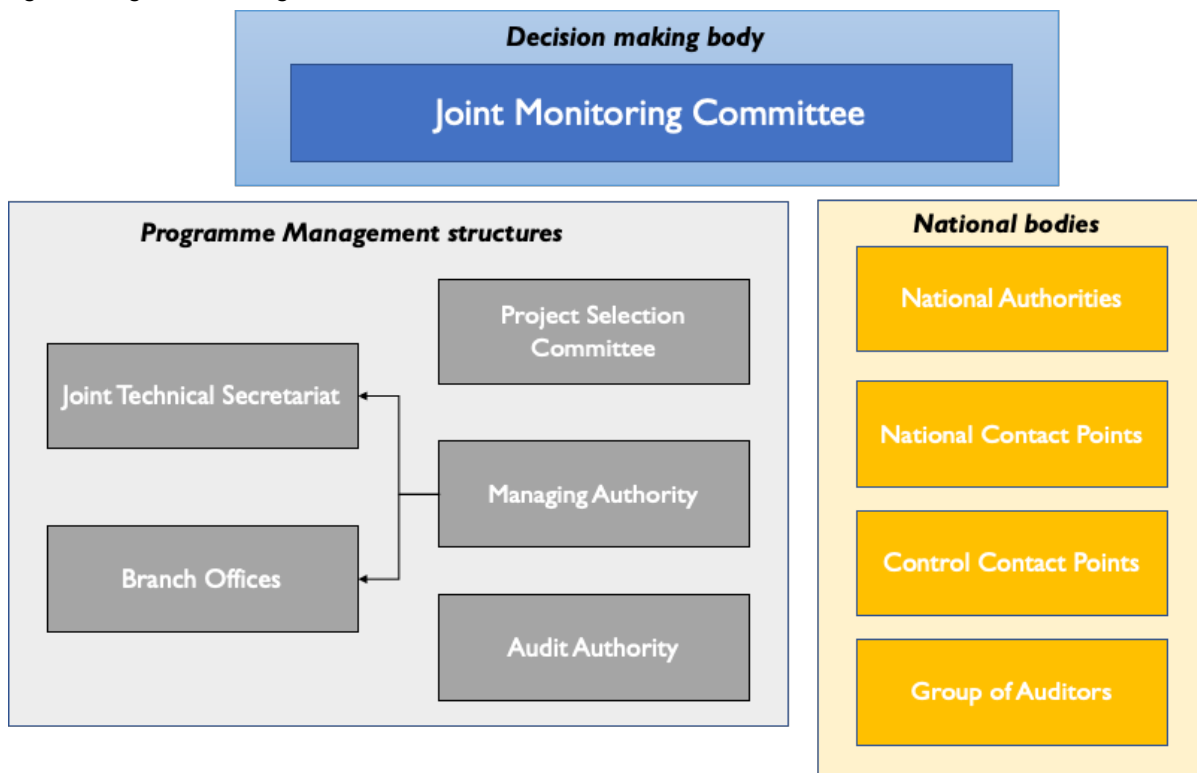
In compliance with EU regulatory requirements and the national institutional, legal and financial framework of all partner countries, ENI CBC Med has set up a programme management system that establishes functions, responsibilities and tasks of the different bodies involved in the management of the programme. As foreseen by the Commission Implementation Regulation 897/2014 (from now on mentioned as ENI CBC IR), the ENI CBC Mediterranean Sea Basin programme is managed through a separation of functions among the following compulsory bodies:

- Joint Monitoring Committee (JMC);
- Managing Authority (MA);
- National Authorities (NAs);
- Audit Authority (AA);
- Group of Auditors (GoA);
- Control Contact Points (CCPs).

Besides the compulsory bodies, the countries involved decided to include the following additional 'optional' programme bodies, to support the mandatory ones in some of their specific functions:

- Joint Technical Secretariat (JTS);
- Branch Offices (BO);
- National Contact Points (NCPs);
- Project Selection Committee (PSC).

Figure 2 Programme management structure



Joint Monitoring Committee

The Joint Monitoring Committee (JMC) is responsible for the general programme execution and the strategy implementation. The JMC is therefore accountable for the decision-making of the programme.

According to the ENI CBC IR, all countries involved in the programme are required to set up the JMC within three months the programme adoption by the EC.

The main duty of the JMC is monitoring and approving the Managing Authority work schedule and financial planning, as well as defining the criteria for project selection and ensuring that those are respected. The JMC is also responsible for the election of the Project Selection Committee members, acting under its responsibility.

The functioning of the JMC is described in the Rules of Procedures together with the decision-making procedures.

Managing Authority

The Managing Authority (MA) is the Autonomous Region of Sardinia (Regione Autonoma di Sardegna), located in Cagliari (Italy) at the Sardinia Region Presidency.

The MA has three units:

- the Director's Office;
- the Operational and Authorising Unit; and
- the Payment Unit.

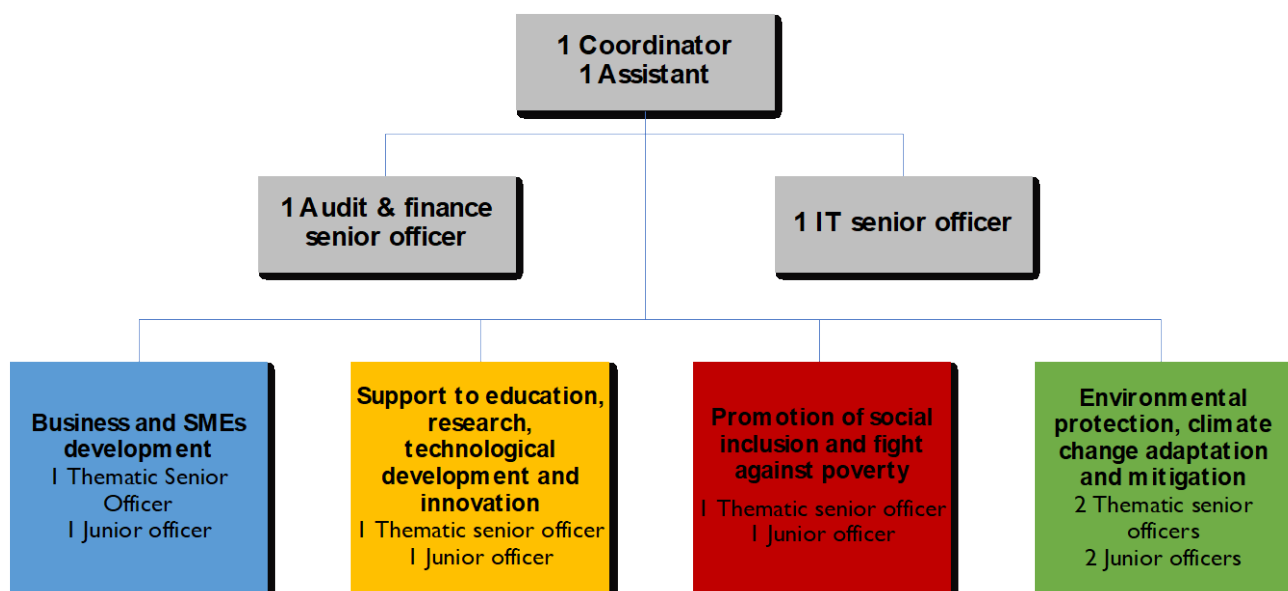
As defined in article 26 of ENI CBC IR, the MA is responsible for the programme management and verifies that the decisions taken by the JMC are compliant with laws, regulations and provisions. The MA is in charge of designating the JTS.

The Director's Office is mainly responsible for ensuring that the ENI CBC IR is respected during the programme implementation and ensures that the JMC carries out its tasks smoothly. The Operational and Authorising Unit oversees the selection and contracting of projects. In particular, the Unit is in charge of launching calls for proposals and defining their content. This Unit is also accountable for managing the Technical Assistance funds and ensuring the financial management control. In particular, the MA officers analyse the conclusions brought by the JTS on the interim and final financial reports delivered by the beneficiaries, to ensure that the expenditures reported are eligible and beneficiaries are effectively those who paid. Finally, the Operational and Authorising Unit is in charge of making sure that administrative verifications on projects are carried out.

Joint Technical Secretariat

The JTS includes 14 staff members, structured as illustrated in the organisational chart below.

Figure 3 Joint Technical Secretary organisation



The JTS coordinator is responsible for the comprehensive coordination of the body and accountable for the communication with other programme bodies.

The JTS thematic officers are in charge of the interactions with project beneficiaries, including the monitoring of the financial consisting of the examination of the interim and final reports. The JTS thematic officers assist beneficiaries during project implementation and examine modifications requests. They supervise the methodology used by the external assessors during the evaluation of proposals and provide assistance to the MA and BOs during the events organised at programme and national level. All senior thematic officers are supported by a junior officer in the day-to-day work.

In addition to these resources, the JTS organisation includes one IT senior officer to support the programme bodies in the monitoring and reporting of their activities and one Audit and Finance senior officer responsible for the drafting financial parts of the programme official documents and systems to support beneficiaries.

Branch Offices

Two Branch Offices (BO) are established to support the Managing Authority:

- The Branch office of Aqaba, hosted by the Aqaba Special Economic Zone Authority (ASEZA), consisting of a coordinator and an accountant officer.
- The Branch office of Valencia, hosted by the Autonomous Region of Valencia (Generalitat Valenciana), with a coordinator and a junior officer.

The location of the two BOs is strategic: they are located at the opposite sides of the Mediterranean basin so as to facilitate the support provided to stakeholders located in those areas.

The BOs are in charge of organising events in their respective geographical areas to promote the programme launch, the launch of calls for proposals and to support project development and implementation.

In particular, the BOs support the MA and the JTS with capacity building and communication activities, as well as during the selection of project proposals and the preparation and translation of programme documents. For this reason, the BOs have to ensure full use of the Arabic language.

National Authorities

The National Authorities (NA) are national institutions accountable for programme implementation in each participating country. Each NA is responsible for the correct functioning of the management and control system in the respective country. They shall also ensure a smooth communication and information exchange between all the institutions involved and the setting of the appropriate procedures in each participating country to prevent irregularities.

National Contact Points

The NCPs are officers appointed for each participating country to support the NA. Their main task consists of supporting applicants during project preparation and the MA in spreading information at the national level.

Control Contact Points

One CCP is appointed for each participating country to support the Managing Authority in the tasks related to the project expenditures verification. The CCP is independent from the other bodies involved in the programme management and control.

The CCPs are in charge of verifying that the expenditures declared by the beneficiaries have effectively been paid by them. The MA may require the CCP to carry out additional administrative verifications of payments requests and on-the-spot-checks verifications of projects.

The CCP guarantees that each request for payment submitted by beneficiaries has been examined by an auditor meeting the criteria set in the implementing rules.

Audit Authority and Group of Auditors

The AA is the Autonomous Region of Sardinia (Italy), composed by a dedicated staff of five officers, independent from the programme managing structures.

The Audit Authority is responsible for updating the audit strategy, the audit methodology and for performing audit activities on the management and control system, on project samples and on annual accounts. The AA is also in charge of the MA designation procedure and is assisted by the GoA, composed by a representative of each country involved in the programme.

Project Selection Committee

The JMC establishes a PSC according to the criteria set in the Joint Operational Programme. The PSC is responsible for providing an additional assessment on project proposals in case of discrepancies.

A case of discrepancy occurs when the judgments of external assessors on a project proposal are extremely discordant.

The PSC is composed by:

- A non-voting chairperson;
- A non-voting secretary;
- Voting members appointed by the NA of each country involved in the programme.



Several members of the JMC, all NAs and the AA were interviewed, among other programme bodies and stakeholders. A wide consensus was registered on the **profound MA awareness of the complexity of the programme, especially in terms of partnership** (EU MS and Partner Countries belonging to three different continents). This is of great importance for the coordination of a sound decision-making process. Intercultural aspects are understood by the MA and this is reflected in the regular interplay with NAs. When necessary and useful for the success of the programme, documents are translated into Arabic. The MA approach also includes some flexibility in supporting the decision-making process by the JMC, i.e. the timeliness in suggesting to postpone decisions that could not be unanimously taken and could risk stopping the process.

In this regard, it was noted that the **JMC demonstrated the capacity to maintain a sound decision-making process even when working remotely**, when travel restrictions due to the pandemic imposed the online modality. In 2021, the candidature of an alternative MA (Greece) showed that the JMC is a body where different options are actually considered and discussed. Such a candidature also indicated the interest in the programme by the participating countries. The sound modality of voting and the proper conclusion of the MA selection process showed the capacity of the JMC to conduct sound decision-making even in a phase that could have culminated in a conflict. However, to keep and increase the mutual trust within the JMC, which also depends on the quality of the relationships among JMC members, restarting face-to-face meetings is considered as a precious opportunity.

The programme was featured by a **very late activation of the JTS**, given that it was established only in 2019 and started operations in spring 2020. This fact had consequences which will be analysed under various respects. At this stage, it is worth noting that the gap created by the JTS absence had to be filled by the MA on one side, and by the two BOs on the other side. The MA was obliged to do an extraordinary administrative work and it was not easy for the JTS to align with the practices

established by the MA, as it will be analysed more in detail in the chapter dedicated to implementation. On the other side, the BOs were required to offer assistance under all aspects to the standard projects that started between July and December 2019. It is clear that **a timely start of JTS operations is key to ensure a sound balance of commitments and efforts among all programme bodies.**

Concerning **BOs** it is worth noting that, **even if small in size, they showed to be resilient bodies able to absorb possible deficiencies** by the programme in the area of project support. As a specific BO commitment, the translation of some of the programme documents into Arabic should be emphasised. The BO of Aqaba is responsible for the translation work, with the BO in Valencia giving support. At this regard, language competences appear to be a key element in the composition of the BO staff.

From the interviews, a **very good interaction between the NAs and the central programme bodies** (namely MA and BO) emerged. Looking at the NAs playing the role of NCPs, commitment can vary significantly depending on the projects developed at the national level (from the 73 projects with Italian partners to the 3 projects involving Portuguese actors). Overall, two different organisational models for NCPs were observed. The first model envisages that one single ministerial officer is appointed, with apparent limited support by other colleagues. Normally, the appointed officer is largely dedicated to ENI CBC Med and ensures full commitment and continuity to the programme processes. On the other side, this model offers fewer opportunities of interaction with other cooperation programmes. According to the second model, the role of NA is played by the team of a whole office covering more than one cooperation programme. This model is frequent among the EU member states, which benefit from several Interreg cross-border and transnational programmes. In this case, one officer is appointed and acts as a representative of the office director. When necessary, other colleagues can step in. It was observed that due to the number of programmes to be covered, this model can entail lower commitment in ENI CBC Med. On the other side, synergies with other cooperation programmes at the national level are facilitated which can be beneficial.

3.1.2 Human resources



The analysis of the adequacy of human resources working at central level (i.e. MA/JTS/BO) was carried out adopting the same approach used by the EC when assessing the baselines on administrative costs for 2014-2020 (EC 2018 “New assessment of ESIF administrative costs and burden”), i.e. by comparing the total number of full-time equivalent (FTE) working for the programme management with the overall programme budget.

As illustrated in the table below, according to the data gathered from the interviews with the MA/JTS/BO, the management of the 2014-2020 ENI CBC Med programme involves 139,6 FTE (over the 2014-2023 period). Compared to the overall programme budget **this corresponds to 0,60 FTE per Million EUR, which is slightly above with the average administrative costs of 0,56 calculated for ETC programmes.**

Table 4 FTE dedicated to programme management – benchmark with ETC programmes

Body	2014	2015	2016	2017	2018	2019	2020	2021	2022	2023
MA/CA	9	9	9	9	9	9	9	9	9	9
JTS 2007-2013	8	8	4	-	-	-	-	-	-	-
JTS 2014-2020	-	-	-	-	-	14	15	15	15	15
BO Valencia	2	2	2	2	2	2	4	3	3	3
BO Aqaba	2	2	2	2	2	2	2	2	2	2
% of workload dedicated to the 2014-2020 Programme (estimated by the evaluators)	20%	30%	80%	100%	100%	100%	90%	80%	70%	20%
tot	3,8	5,7	12	11	11	25	25,2	21,6	18,9	5,4
	139,6									
FTE/MEUR	0,60									

Source: own calculation based on interviews

The benchmark with the average administrative costs of ETC programmes at EU level suggests the adequacy of the number of human resources dedicated to programme management. Moreover, from the evaluator's perspective, the management of ENI CBC Med is more complex than the management of ETC programmes due to the number of countries involved and the intercultural issues featuring the relationships among authorities belonging to three different continents. Based on this, one could expect higher administrative costs for ENI CBC Med than for Interreg ETC. In this sense, the benchmark analysis reveals the efficiency of the ENI CBC Med programme, which maintains management costs in line with those of ETC programmes despite dealing with activities that are generally more complex than in the ETC context.

3.2 APPLICATION PHASE AND SELECTION OF OPERATIONS

EQ 4. How effective and efficient is the project selection process and their contractualisation?

Quality/usefulness of external assessors; Quality/usefulness of committee for the selection of operations (PSC)

EQ 5. How do applicants assess the support provided by the programme in the drafting phase of the project proposal? Are there any differences in the quality of support provided in different countries?

Key findings

Overall, data gathered through the evaluation prove that the selection process is sound and transparent. This is confirmed by the opinion of beneficiaries (76% consider the selection criteria clear, 84% the results of the selection procedure clearly published and communicated) and by the opinion of the interviewed NAs.

As concerns the quality/usefulness of the PSC in light of the 2014-2020 programme experience, this body can appear redundant due to the spirit of trust that seems to pervade the governance of the programme. However, from the evaluator's perspective, the PSC ensures the possibility to mitigate potential disputes and disagreements before they get to the JMC. Therefore, the added value of this body should not be assessed by only considering its actual effectiveness, but also by taking into account its role as a 'clearing house' for potential future disagreement during the selection phase.

Regarding the quality/usefulness of the external assessors, overall the information gathered from interviews suggest that external assessors carry out a competent and balanced assessment work. However, the need to review the criteria for selecting them was highlighted, in particular by reducing the weight attributed to the linguistic criteria. Moreover, some of the stakeholders interviewed suggest the idea of enhancing the JTS role in project selection. However, the strict necessity of guaranteeing JTS continuity and, above all, the high workload that it would face indicate that this idea is hardly feasible.

As concerns the application and selection phase, the only critical element identified is the long time needed to contract and make the standard projects start after the closure of the relevant call (beneficiaries had to wait for 18-23 months before their project could start). The time needed for the projects to start was reduced in case of strategic and capitalisation calls but it is still relevant (e.g., in the call for capitalisation projects, the projects started 13-17 months after the closure of the call).

Concerning the quality of the support provided by the programme during the application phase, data from the survey indicate that applicants and beneficiaries are mostly satisfied about the completeness, clarity and timeliness of the support received. A correlation between the number of proposals submitted per country and the national approval rate was observed.

Recommendation for ENI CBC MED 2014-2020

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Recommendation for NEXT MED 2021-2027

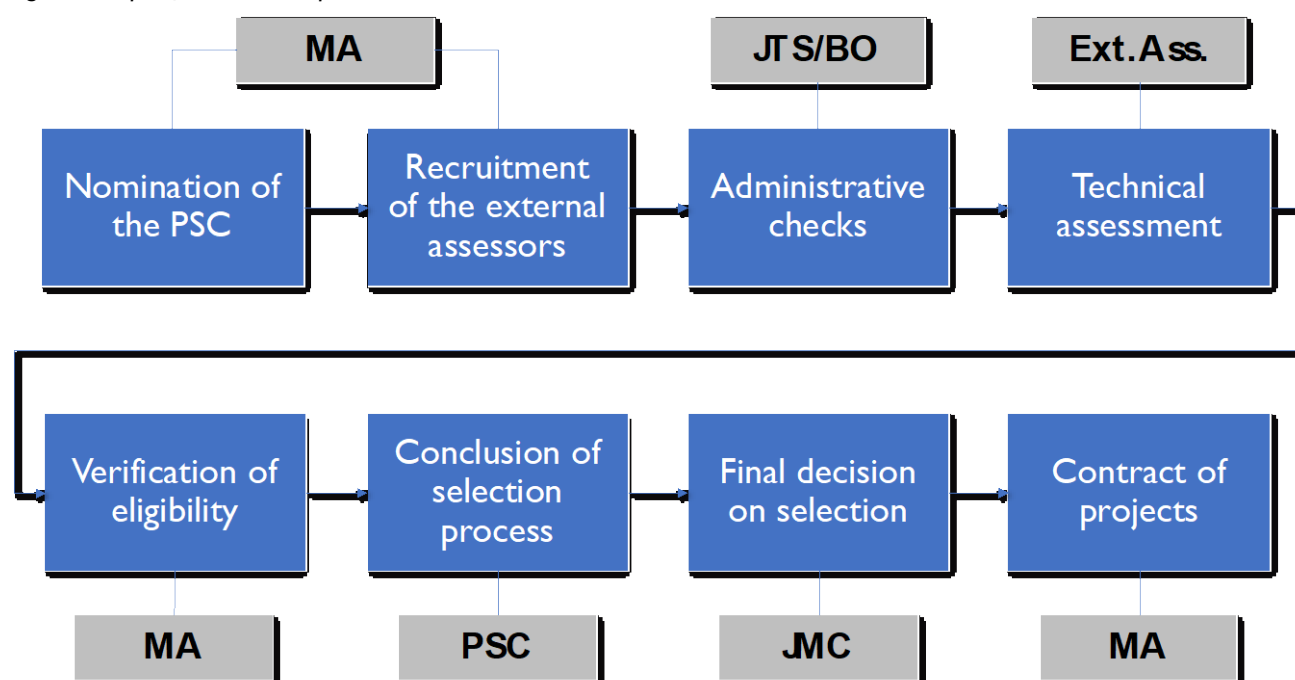
We recommend reconsidering the involvement modalities of the external assessors. As they should continue playing a key role in the project selection process, it appears necessary to further increase the quality of their contribution. In their recruitment process, technical criteria should be carefully applied so that assessors with a profound knowledge and a forward-looking approach are selected. Moreover, good knowledge of the programme features should be transferred to them following a structured learning process. Finally, a higher effort to include them in all phases of the programme life should be made, so as to increase their will to collaborate also to the programme evaluation process in the future.

3.2.1 Rules and decision-making in the selection process

The selection of the ENI CBC Med projects is a rather structured process foreseeing several steps and involving a series of bodies plus external experts.

A diagram is provided to indicate the single steps and the responsible bodies.

Figure 4 Steps of the selection process and bodies involved



The details on the selection process provided below are largely based on the programme documents and have been verified by interviewing representatives of all involved bodies. Specific points made by the interviewees follow the general illustration of the process. Some of the feedbacks and proposals received by beneficiaries and applicants concerning the selection process have been also reported.



Nomination of the Project Selection Committee

A PSC is nominated by the JMC comprising:

- a non-voting Chairperson appointed by the Managing Authority;
- a non-voting Secretary, also appointed by the Managing Authority;
- voting members and their substitutes appointed by the participating countries. Each country appoints one voting member.

The JMC approves the rules of procedure of the PSC and the selection criteria for both proposals and external assessors.

Creation of the two teams of assessors

The PSC works with the support of a team of assessors for the evaluation of project proposals. There are two types of assessors:

- internal assessors: JTS and BO staff supporting the administrative and eligibility checks of proposals;
- external assessors: recruited through an international call for expression of interest to gather a pool of experts. These assessors are selected by the MA following the criteria defined by the JMC.

Application procedure

In principle, the programme envisaged a two-phase application procedure. It was supposed to let any eligible bodies participate in the first phase by submitting a concept note. As a second phase, it was foreseen to invite only shortlisted applicants to submit full applications.

The JOP, however, let the door open to a one phase procedure clarifying that the decision had to be taken by JMC. In the implementation phase, it was decided to adopt a one-phase procedure.

Table 5 Evaluation of standard and strategic projects

	What	How	Who
STEP I	A. Administrative check	<p>The following requirements are verified:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Eligible territories - Financial dimension - Specific requirements (among which: at least 50% of the total direct costs shall be dedicated to activities to be implemented in the Mediterranean Partner Countries territories) - Eligibility of Applicant and Partner organisations - Eligibility of budget costs <p>Only the proposals passing the administrative check are considered in the following evaluation steps.</p>	Internal assessors
	B. Strategic evaluation: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Relevance - Quality of Design 	Each of the two award criteria is defined through a series of questions that are related to specific sections of the application form.	External assessors

	What	How	Who
		Award criteria have different scores, depending on the associated number of questions: Relevance 30 points, Quality of Design 20 points.	
STEP 2	C. Operational evaluation: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Operational and financial capacity - Effectiveness - Sustainability - Cost effectiveness 	Each of the four award criteria is defined through a series of questions that are related to specific sections of the application form. Award criteria have different scores, depending on the associated number of questions: Operational and financial capacity 20 points, Effectiveness 20 points, Sustainability 15 points, Cost effectiveness 15 points.	External assessors
	D. Verification of the eligibility of applicants' and partners' organisations	The MA checks if Applicants' and Partners' organisations fulfil the necessary criteria by requiring the following documents: legal entity sheet (for standard projects), declaration by the applicant - partner statements - international organisations declarations (for strategic projects), statutes or articles of association (of applicant and partners), composition of the management board, financial identification form of the applicant, partnership agreement, external audit reports.	MA

Table 6 Evaluation of capitalisation projects

	What	How	Who
	A. Administrative check	The following requirements are verified: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Eligible territories - Financial dimension - Specific requirements (among which: at least 50% of the total direct costs shall be dedicated to activities to be implemented in the Mediterranean Partner Countries territories) - Eligibility of Applicant and Partner organisations - Eligibility of budget costs Only the proposals that passed the administrative check are considered in the following evaluation steps.	Internal assessors
	B. Quality evaluation: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Relevance - Quality of design - Operational and financial capacity - Effectiveness - Sustainability - Cost effectiveness 	Each of the six award criteria is defined through a series of questions that are related to specific sections of the application form. Award criteria have different scores, depending on the associated number of questions: Relevance 20 points, Quality of Design 20 points, Operational and financial capacity 20 points, Effectiveness 20 points, Sustainability 15 points, Cost effectiveness 15 points.	External assessors

What	How	Who
C. Verification of the eligibility of Applicants' and partners' organisations.	The MA checks if Applicants' and Partners' organisations fulfil the necessary criteria by requiring the following documents: declaration by the applicant - partner statements - international organisations declarations, statutes or articles of association (of applicant and partners), composition of the management board, financial identification form of the applicant, partnership agreement, external audit reports.	MA

Conclusions by the PSC

The PSC drafts its recommendations after the internal assessors have examined the eligibility of the pre-selected proposals. It shall not change the assessors' scores or recommendations and shall not alter the evaluation grids completed by the assessors. The PSC must ultimately draw up a list of proposals to be selected for financing, indicating the score obtained by each proposal, the requested amount of the grant and the percentage of eligible costs proposed to be financed. Subject to the following considerations, this list is made up of the proposals that obtained the best scores, ranked by order, within the limits of the funds available under the call for proposals.

The same Committee may also draw up, under the same conditions, a ranked reserve list comprising a limited number of proposals that obtained the best scores after those selected for financing. This reserve list is valid for the period stated in the Guidelines for Applicants. The proposals included in that list are likely to receive a grant if funds become available under the call for proposals (if the eligible costs of the selected proposals fall, or it is impossible to sign a contract with the selected applicants, etc). The final Evaluation Report, covering the eligibility checks, is drawn up and signed by all members following the final meeting of the PSC.

Decision by JMC, communication to applicants

The MA sends the list of projects recommended by the PSC to the JMC at least 14 calendar days before its meeting. Moreover, the MA sends the list of selected projects to the EC to consult different DGs and EU Delegations in order to avoid any double funding of projects and to identify possible synergies. Following this consultation, the JMC may decide to reject initially recommended proposals. This consultation should take a maximum of 14 calendar days in order to allow the JMC to have the result of this consultation before its meeting.

Once the approval has been given by the JMC, the MA begins negotiating and signing the grant contracts.



The interviews to the NAs showed that **the selection process appears sound and reasonable** to the countries participating in the programme. This is a remarkable point in a programme featured by the participation of several countries belonging to different geographical areas and continents. The information collected from the programme bodies and stakeholders showed that cultural and linguistic diversity did not bring any concern on the balance in the selection process.

In some stakeholders' view, there is one aspect that risks not to be fully taken into account given the present selection procedures, i.e. the **management capacity of the Lead Beneficiary**. It appears that project success largely depends on the experience and competence of the management structure of the organisation leading the project. In some cases, it can happen that proposals are prepared by experts who will not be involved in the implementation phase of the project. In other cases, simple turnover in the organisations implies that a new team, not necessarily aware of the project's complexity, starts leading the financed project. More effective ways to verify the quality of the project management were therefore indicated by some stakeholders. The inclusion of management team members' CVs in the application form was mentioned. Even interviews with the management team were proposed, knowing that this would risk delaying the procedure and would turn to be a rather delicate step.

Three NAs (all belonging to EU MS), plus one member of the PSC (same country as one of the NA), put into question **the added value of the PSC** as a body with the mission to ensure projects selection. On the one hand, it was observed that the mobilisation of further human resources would be an excessive cost, considering that the JTS and external assessors are already involved in the selection process. Conversely, it was argued that the PSC involvement is time-consuming and can end up creating delays in the selection procedure. The programme bodies tend not to emphasise the *strategic* aspect of PSC composition, i.e. the fact that it includes representatives from all programme countries, which could appear as an important guarantee of neutrality. The significant trust built in the programme lifecycle mitigates the importance of this aspect, perceived as not highly sensitive by the programme bodies. Furthermore, it could be argued that the rule prescribing that at least 50% of the total eligible costs of the project shall be dedicated to activities implemented in Mediterranean Partner Countries is a strong guarantee itself, when equitable distribution of resources is concerned. On the other side, some interviewees observed that from an *operational* point of view the PSC is committed to intervene only in case of unsolved discrepancies between the scores attributed by the two assessors. The impossibility to have the technical competences to cover 11 priorities was raised. Additionally, it was noticed that as the BO managed to reduce discrepancies from 13 to 3, the PSC had to intervene in an extremely limited number of cases.

Overall, it appears that **the external assessors carry out a competent and balanced assessment work**. However, two aspects were underlined by the MA and some NAs both of EU Mediterranean Countries and Mediterranean Partner Countries. First of all, **higher care in the external assessors' selection** is expected. In fact, the MA underlined that in 2014-2020 an excessively high weight was attributed to the linguistic criteria, and this did not allow to contract some potential assessors with high thematic competences. Secondly, it appears necessary to some NAs to **intensify the training of the external assessors**. In case these experts do not have sufficient knowledge of the programme features, it is easier that their project assessments diverge, and this hampers the smooth running of the selection process. For the evaluators it was impossible to interview any of the external assessors, and this seems to suggest that retention to the programme could be increased.

To conclude, *the idea of enhancing the JTS role in the project selection circulates among programme bodies*. The availability of thematic competences and the experience gained by the JTS suggest to some NAs that this body could have a higher responsibility in the selection process in NEXT MED, with external assessors activated only in relation to technical aspects that are not covered by the knowledge of JTS officers. In this regard, it could be noted that the JTS is featured by a relatively good country coverage.

This aspect should be further enhanced in NEXT MED in case of higher responsibility by the JTS in the selection process. However, this hypothesis shows two weak points. The first one is the necessity of a strong continuity of the JTS, given that such a possible new role is absolutely not compatible with the delayed start of JTS operations, which featured the 2014-2020 period. The second weakness appears even more significant. The first NEXT MED call is expected to see an allocation of 45% of the total EU funds, i.e. to finance about sixty projects. This corresponds to an enormous commitment to select the projects, which does not appear compatible with the operations of the JTS. Even in case of strong continuity of the JTS, a problem could be the time overlap between the operations necessary to conclude the 2014-2020 projects and the activities of 2021-2027 projects selection.

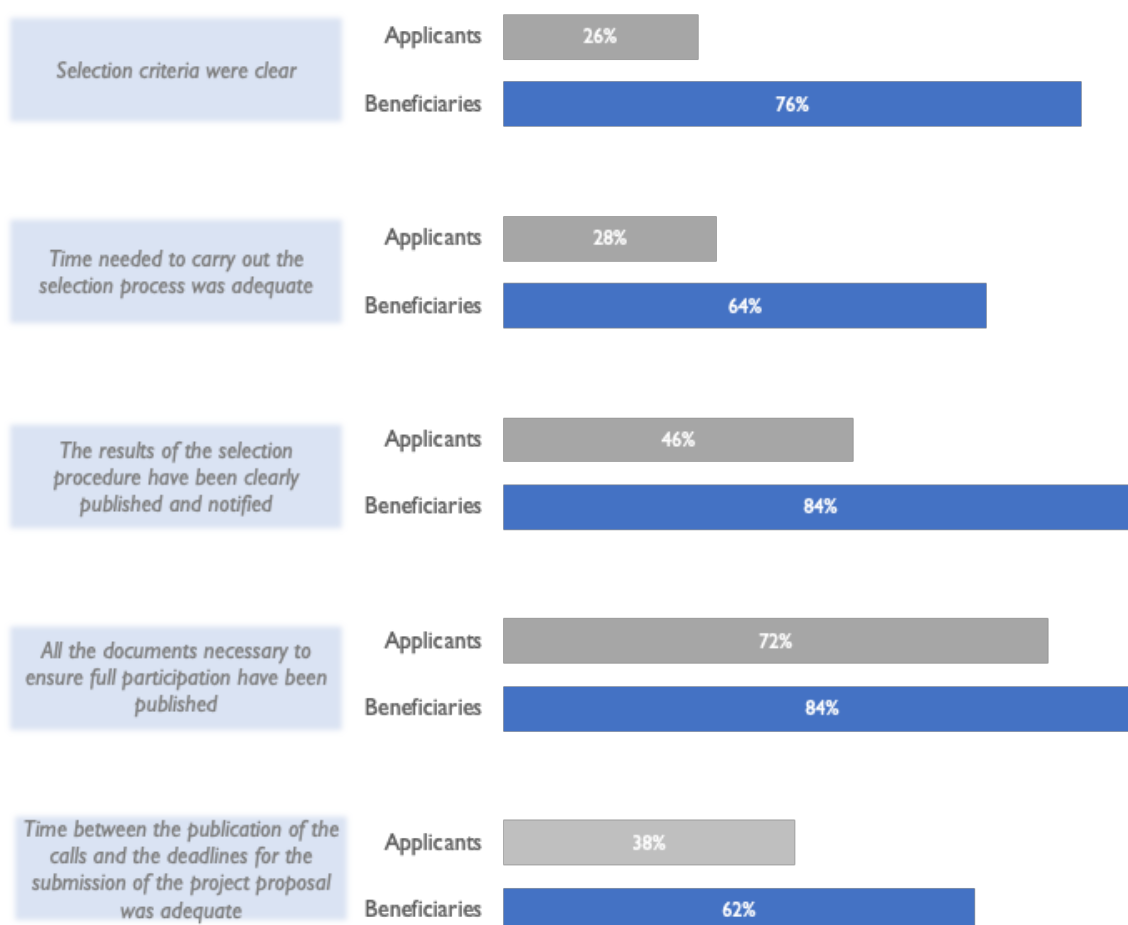


The beneficiaries' opinions confirm the NAs point of view about the soundness and clarity of the selection process. **84% of beneficiaries agree that the selection procedure was clearly published and notified.** A similar result appears concerning the documents necessary to ensure a full participation, with 84% of beneficiaries estimating that they have been published.

Concerning the time to carry out the selection process, 64% of beneficiaries agree with its adequacy. Similarly, concerning the adequacy of time between the publication of calls and the deadlines of the project proposal submission, 62% of beneficiaries estimate it was adequate, and **61% of them agree with the fact that the time needed to complete the contracting phase was adequate.** This element shows that the different performances registered among the three calls did not generate an overall dissatisfaction regarding the contracting phase.

As one could expect, **the responses concerning the quality of the selection process provided by the applicants are less positive** than those provided by the beneficiaries. It is true that the correctness of the programme is not put into question, given that 72% of the applicants recognise that all documents necessary to ensure a full participation were published. However, only 26% of applicants agree that the selection criteria were clear and only 28% of them estimate that the time needed to carry out the selection procedure was adequate. Concerning the results of the selection procedure, 46% of applicants consider that they were clearly published and notified, while the time between the publication of calls and the deadline for submission is considered adequate by 38% of respondents.

Figure 5 Beneficiaries and applicants' perception of the selection process and contracting phase



Source: web survey

3.2.2 Performance of calls



Three calls were launched and the respective selection procedures were conducted and concluded by the programme bodies:

- Call for standard projects;
- Call for strategic projects;
- Call for capitalisation projects.

The standard projects have a demonstration character, providing pilot examples in a specific field of expertise, while ensuring networking among relevant stakeholders. The **call for standard projects** covered the II programme priorities with a financial allocation of EUR 84.668.414.

Partnerships had to include a minimum of three countries with at least one EU Mediterranean Country and one Mediterranean Partner Country. Limitations of participation were not applied for the participation at partner level, whereas one organisation could apply only once under the same priority, and an applicant could not be awarded more than two grants as Lead Beneficiary.

The programme contribution to the projects covered up to 90% of the total eligible costs of the project, with the remaining percentage to be provided by the project partners' own resources, or by public and private sources other than European Community Budget or the European Development Fund, as co-financing rate.

The project total contribution from the programme should be within a minimum of EUR 1.000.000 and a maximum of EUR 3.000.000. The total cost of the project and related budget could not exceed EUR 3.500.000 including co-financing.

A specific rule of ENI CBC Med is the distribution of budget between EU Mediterranean Countries and Mediterranean Partner Countries. At least 50% of the total eligible costs of the project had to be dedicated to activities implemented in Mediterranean Partner Countries. As far as duration is concerned, projects had to last between 24 and 36 months.

The call for standard projects was launched on the former web platform of the programme (www.enpicbcmmed.eu) since the new platform was under development (www.enicbcmmed.eu) at the time, i.e. 2017. A series of tools and documents to facilitate participation in the call were published on the ENI CBC Med website ("Calls for proposals" section). These are the e-application form user guide as well as the presentations used in the two workshops for potential applicants and the list of participants, followed by five sections of documents: Key documents, Mandatory documents, Documents to support the preparation of project proposals, Documents published for information, National information. The list of documents published under each of these five categories is provided in the table below. Furthermore, "FAQs" and "Project ideas and partner search" tool were available for applicants.

Table 7 Documents for Applicants – Call for standard projects

Key documents	Mandatory documents	Documents to support the preparation of project proposals	Documents published for information	National information
Text of the call for proposals: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ English version ○ Arabic version Guidelines for Applicants: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ English version ○ Arabic version 	Declaration by the Applicant Partner Statement Declaration for International Organisations Associated partner declaration Evaluation of the financial capacity State aid self-assessment grid Calculation of the administrative costs	ENI CBC Med Joint Operational Programme Indicative evaluation and monitoring plan Strategic Environmental Assessment Courtesy application form Note on the evaluation of the financial capacity of Applicants and partners Note on State Aid Note on eligible costs Glossary TESIM fact sheets on State Aid (only for organisations from Egypt, Jordan and Tunisia)	Model of Grant Contract Model of Partnership Agreement	National co-financing for Greek Applicants and partners

The strategic projects guarantee a deeper focus on emerging needs identified by the terms of references approved by the JMC. They support an extended impact on the selected priorities and a clear contribution to EU and national policies in the region. With an allocation of EUR 68.518.886, the **call for strategic projects** covered seven priorities:

- A.1.1: Support innovative start-up and recently established enterprises;
- A.1.2: Strengthen and support euro-Mediterranean networks, clusters, consortia and value chains in traditional sectors and non-traditional sectors;
- A.2.1: Support technological transfer and commercialisation of research results;
- A.3.1: Provide young people, especially those belonging to the NEETS, and women, with marketable skills;
- B.4.1: Water management - Support sustainable initiatives targeting innovative and technological solutions to increase water efficiency;
- B.4.2: Waste treatment and recycling - Reduce municipal waste generation, promote source-separated collection and its optimal exploitation;
- B.4.3: Renewable energy and energy efficiency - Support cost effective and innovative energy rehabilitations relevant to building types and climatic zones, with a focus on public buildings.

Partnerships had to include a minimum of four countries with at least two EU Mediterranean Countries and two Mediterranean Partner Countries represented. Limitations of participation were not applied for the participation at partner level, whereas one organisation could apply only once under the same priority, and an applicant could not be awarded more than three grants as Lead Beneficiary.

The programme contribution to the projects covered up to 90% of the total eligible costs of the project, with the remaining percentage to be provided by the project partners' own resources, or by public and private sources other than EU Funds, as co-financing rate.

The project total contribution from the programme should be within a minimum of EUR 2.500.000 and a maximum of EUR 3.500.000. The total cost of the project and related budget could not exceed EUR 4.000.000 including co-financing.

A specific rule of ENI CBC Med is the distribution of budget between EU Mediterranean Countries and Mediterranean Partner Countries. At least 50% of the total eligible costs of the project had to be dedicated to activities implemented in Mediterranean Partner Countries. As far as duration is concerned, projects had to last between 24 and 30 months.

A series of tools and documents to facilitate participation in the call were published on the ENI CBC Med website ("Calls for proposals" section). The tool "Project ideas and partner search" was included, together with a section dedicated to the frequently asked questions. In the area 'Submit a project proposal' the E-application form user guide was made available together with five sections of documents: Key documents, Mandatory documents, Documents to support the preparation of project proposals, Documents published for information, National information. The list of the documents published under each of these five categories is provided in the table below. Compared to the call for standard projects, the terms of reference were added among the Key documents. Also, a Synthesis of the 41 projects funded under the first call for proposals was included among the

documents to support preparation, given that strategic projects are expected to consider previous project results.

Table 8 Documents for Applicants – Call for strategic projects

Key documents	Mandatory documents	Documents to support the preparation of project proposals	Documents published for information	National information
Text of the call for proposals: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ English version ○ Arabic version Guidelines for Applicants: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ English version ○ Arabic version Terms of Reference: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ English version ○ Arabic version 	Declaration by the Applicant Partner Statement Declaration for International Organisations Associated partner declaration State aid self-assessment grid Calculation of the administrative costs	Joint Operational Programme Indicative evaluation and monitoring plan Strategic Environmental Assessment Courtesy application form Note on State Aid TESIM factsheets on State Aid (only for Egyptians, Jordanian and Tunisian organisations) Note on eligible costs Glossary Synthesis of the 41 projects funded under the first call for proposals Note on the financial capacity	Model of Grant Contract Model of Partnership Agreement	National co-financing for Greek Applicants and partners

The capitalisation projects promote the exploitation and/ or widest dissemination of the successful practices and results of previously financed projects. The **call for capitalisation projects** was open to any applicant, whether or not they had been a beneficiary of the previous calls of ENI CBC Med 2014-2020 and addressed the 11 priorities of the programme with a financial allocation of EUR 11.000.000.

Partnerships had to include a minimum of five countries with at least one EU Mediterranean Country and one Mediterranean Partner Country. Limitations of participation were not applied for the participation at partner level, whereas one organisation could apply only once under the same Thematic Objective, and an applicant could not be awarded more than two grants as Lead Beneficiary. The programme contribution to the projects covered up to 90% of the total eligible costs of the project, with the remaining percentage to be provided by the project partners' own resources, or by public and private sources other than EU Funds, as co-financing rate.

The project total contribution from the programme should be within a minimum of € 500.000 and a maximum of EUR 1.000.000. The total cost of the project and related budget could not exceed EUR 1.111.111 including co-financing.

A specific rule of ENI CBC Med is the distribution of budget between EU Mediterranean Countries and Mediterranean Partner Countries. At least 50% of the total eligible costs of the project had to

be dedicated to activities implemented in Mediterranean Partner Countries. As far as duration is concerned, projects had to last between 12 and 24 months.

A series of tools and documents to facilitate participation in the call were published on the ENI CBC Med website (area 'Calls for proposals'). The information provided is the same as for the strategic projects. Only presentations of the call were added. The list of the documents published under each of these five categories (Key documents, Mandatory documents, Documents to support the preparation of project proposals, Documents published for information, National information) is provided in the table below.

Table 9 Documents for Applicants – Call for capitalisation projects

Key documents	Mandatory documents	Documents to support the preparation of project proposals	Documents published for information	National information
Text of the call for proposals: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ English version ○ Arabic version Guidelines for Applicants: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ English version ○ Arabic version Terms of Reference: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ English version ○ Arabic version 	Declaration by the Applicant Partner Statement Declaration for International Organisations Associated partner declaration State aid self-assessment grid Calculation of the administrative costs	Joint Operational Programme Indicative evaluation and monitoring plan Strategic Environmental Assessment Courtesy application form Note on State Aid TESIM factsheets on State Aid (only for Egyptians, Jordanian and Tunisian organisations) Note on eligible costs Glossary Note on the financial capacity	Model of Grant Contract Note on personal data processing Model of Partnership Agreement	National co-financing for Greek Applicants and partners

The table below shows the project approval rate across priorities and types of calls (standard vs. strategic/capitalisation) and includes information on the time needed from the closing of each call to the contractualisation of the projects.

Table 10 Participation and success rate across programme priorities, time from closure of the calls and projects' start

Call	Indicator	A.1.1	A.1.2	A.1.3	A.2.1	A.2.2	A.3.1	A.3.2	B.4.1	B.4.2	B.4.3	B.4.4	TOT.
Standard	n. applications	28	59	67	54	25	49	22	45	19	35	36	439
	approved	3	6	4	2	3	3	3	5	4	5	3	41
	approval rate	11%	10%	6%	4%	12%	6%	14%	11%	21%	14%	8%	9%
	time from closure of the call to projects' start	Standard projects: 18-23 months											
Strategic and Capitalisation	n. applications	32	58	9	38	5	47	4	28	17	22	7	267
	approved	5	5	1	10	2	7	1	1	2	3	2	39
	approval rate	16%	9%	11%	29%	20%	2%	25%	25%	12%	14%	29%	15%
	time from closure of the call to projects' start	Strategic projects: 12-16 months (with 2 outlier projects having started respectively 19 and 24 months after the closure of the call) Capitalisation projects: 13-17 months											
All calls	n. applications	60	117	76	92	30	96	26	73	36	57	43	706

Call	Indicator	A.1.1	A.1.2	A.1.3	A.2.1	A.2.2	A.3.1	A.3.2	B.4.1	B.4.2	B.4.3	B.4.4	TOT.
	approved	8	11	5	12	5	10	4	6	6	8	5	80
	approval rate	13%	9%	7%	13%	17%	10%	15%	8%	17%	14%	12%	11%
	time from closure of the call to projects' start	All projects: 12-24 months											

Source: own elaboration of data collected from MIS

In the evaluators' perspective, the main element emerging from the table is **the long time needed to contract and have the standard projects actually start** after the closure of the relevant call. The call for standard projects, whose initial deadline was 9 November 2017, was closed on 24 January 2018. The standard projects were contracted between July and December 2019, with most of the projects starting in September. In the beneficiaries' perspective, this means that after the deadline of the call they had to wait for 18-23 months before their projects could start. **Looking at the strategic and capitalisation calls, a clear improvement is observed.** The call for strategic projects was closed on 3 July 2019 and the projects started in the second half of 2020, with only two projects contracted respectively in February and July 2021. Apart from these two outlier projects, time needed for the project's start was 12-16 months. For the call for capitalisation projects, which was closed on 28 July 2020, a similar timeframe was needed (13-17 months).

As a result, the three calls for projects culminated with the selection of respectively **41 standard projects, 23 strategic projects, 16 capitalisation projects**. Overall, the financed projects are therefore **80**.

The **approval rate** at programme level is **only 11%**. This rate is even lower for the standard projects (9%), whereas it is significantly higher for the strategic/ capitalisation projects (15%).

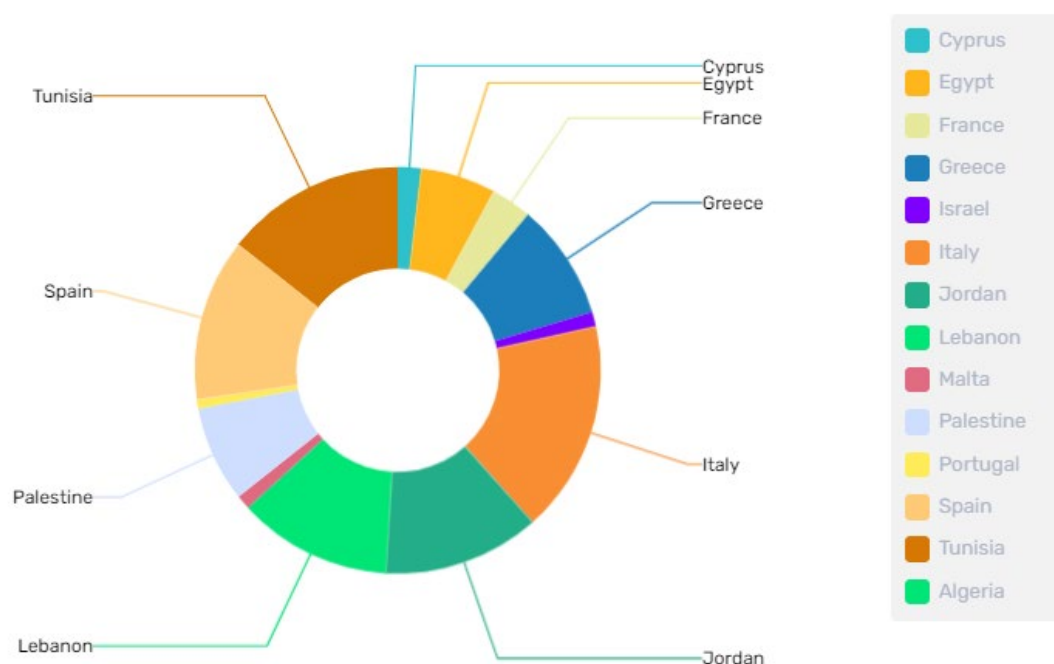
At programme level, two priorities (A.2.2, B.4.2) have a significantly higher approval rate amounting to 17%. The priority with the lowest approval rate (7%) at programme level is "A.1.3: Encourage sustainable tourism initiatives and actions aimed at diversifying into new segments and niches". This is also the priority with the second lowest approval rate under the call for standard projects, with only priority "A.2.1 "Support technological transfer and commercialisation of research results, strengthening the linkages between research, industry and other private sector actors" performing worse with an extremely modest approval rate of 4%.

Higher differences can be observed if the three calls are concerned. Standard projects see an approval rate of 9%, whereas 12% of the strategic projects are approved. **In the call for capitalisation projects, almost one proposal out of four is approved (23%)**. Surprisingly, the approval rate rises in Priority A.2.1 (67%) that is the most competitive when the standard projects are concerned (4%).

Looking at the **distribution of approved projects per country**, a varied situation emerges. Five countries, both EU Mediterranean Countries and Partner Mediterranean Countries, see participation in more than 50 projects. They are Italy, Tunisia, Spain, Jordan and Lebanon. Three countries, i.e., Greece, Palestine and Egypt, have a number of financed projects between 20 and 49. Finally, the remaining six countries see lower participation, i.e., less than 20 financed projects.

The figure below shows the different weight of the programme countries in terms of approved projects.

Figure 6 Projects approved per country (all calls)

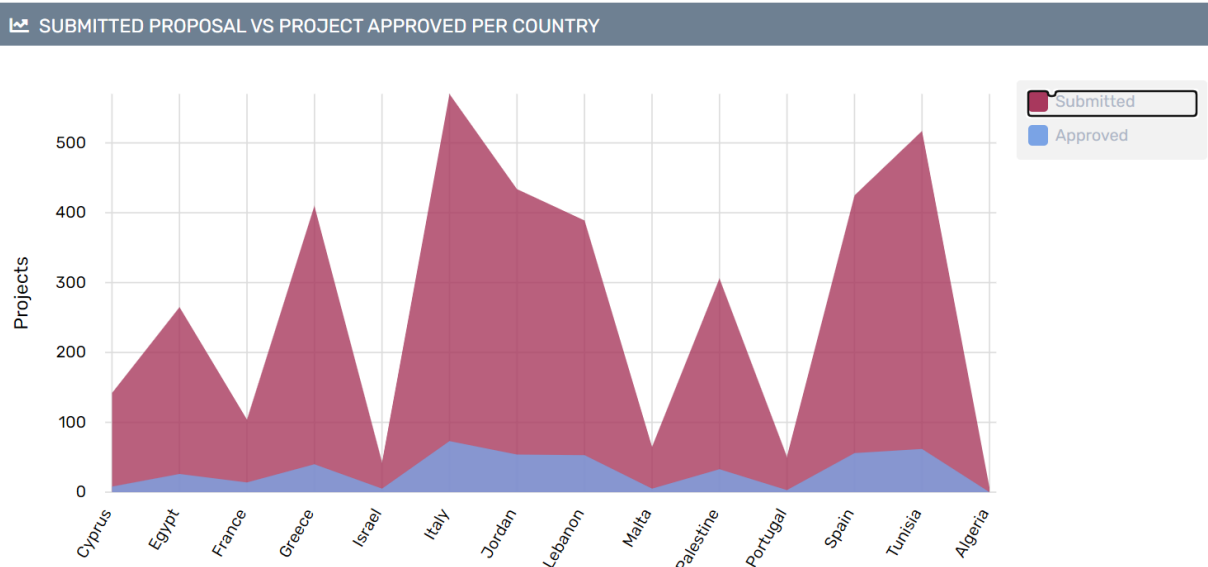


Source: MIS

The analysis of the approval rate per country shows a correlation between intensity of participation and success rate. Considering a first group of countries from where more than 350 proposals were submitted (Italy, Tunisia, Jordan, Spain, Greece, Lebanon), an average success rate of 12% is noted. The second group, composed by countries from where a number between 100 and 350 proposals were submitted (Palestine, Egypt, Cyprus, France) presents a lower success rate amounting to 10%. Finally, when the countries from where less than 100 proposals are submitted (Malta, Portugal, Israel) are concerned, the success rate falls to 8%. Algeria is excluded as an outlier. The country with the highest success rate is Lebanon (14%), whereas the lowest performances are observed in Cyprus and Portugal (6%). **Such a correlation could suggest that a critical mass of stakeholders interested in the programme at the national level is beneficial to successful participation.**

The figure below shows the relationship between submitted proposals and approved projects per country.

Figure 7 Submitted proposals vs projects approved per country (all calls)



Source: MIS



During the interviews to the programme bodies and stakeholders, interviewees stressed how **the programme is very competitive**, with a high number of applicants seeing their project not financed. However, the stakeholders are aware that any programme has financial constraints and recognise that the preparation of a reserve list enables the

JMC to finance a limited number of initially not selected projects.

Overall, the interviewees agree with the articulation of the programme in three calls. Some stakeholders expressed a particular appreciation of the capitalisation call, underlining its innovative approach. A full awareness of the difference between standard and strategic projects did not emerge from the interviews.

3.2.3 Support provided during the application phase

Chapter 3.7 provides a detailed description on the events organised to promote the calls (see, in particular, Table 20). This section is aimed at providing an overview of the opinions of the applicants and beneficiaries about the support provided by the programme during the application phase.

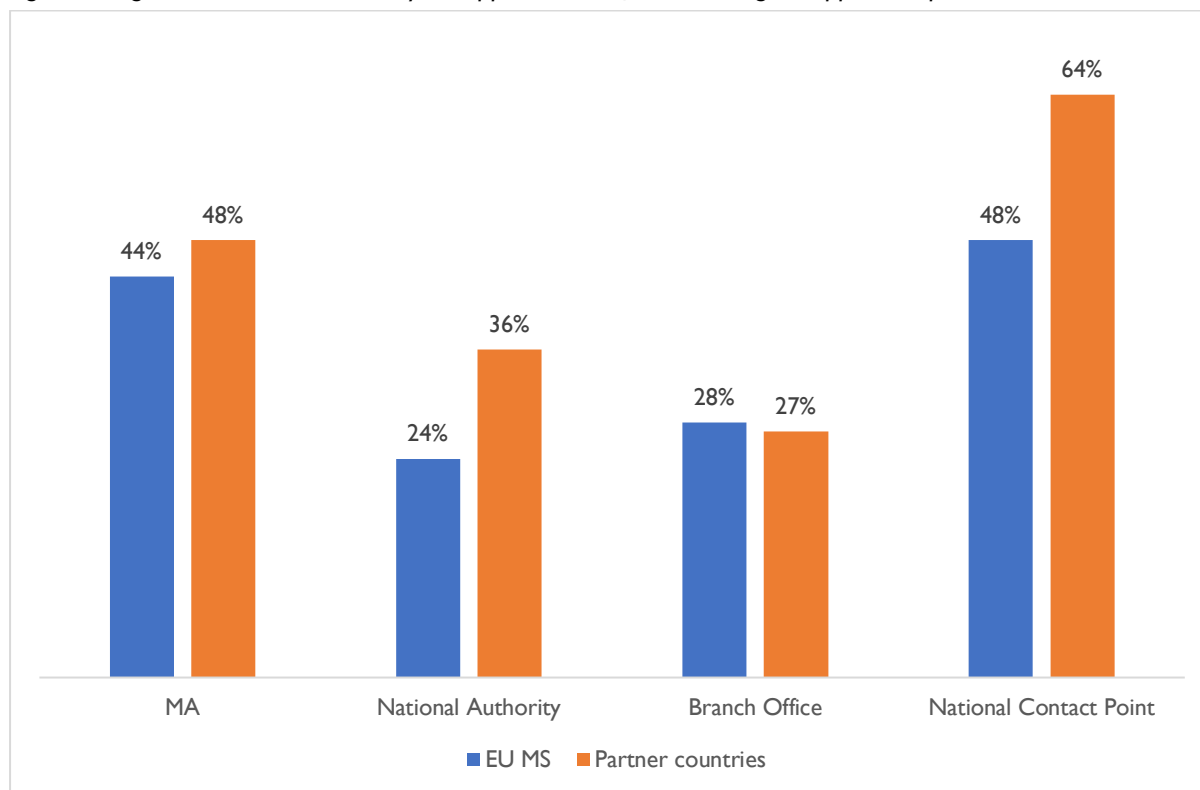


50% of respondents declared to have received support during the development of their proposal. This percentage is slightly higher for lead beneficiaries (61%) and for respondents from EU MS (55%).

Looking to the bodies to whom applicants and beneficiaries refer to, as illustrated by the figure below, NCPs and MA are their main points of reference during the application phase. It is interesting to notice that almost two thirds of respondents from Partner Countries having asked support to the programme bodies during the application phase and interacted with the NCP. It is also interesting to underline that a large part of those who declare to have requested support from programme bodies (a) contacted more than one programme body (which explains why the sum of the percentages in

the figure below is more than 100%) and (b) affirm it was clear for them to whom to refer to get the relevant information.

Figure 8 Programme bodies contacted by the applicants/beneficiaries during the application phase



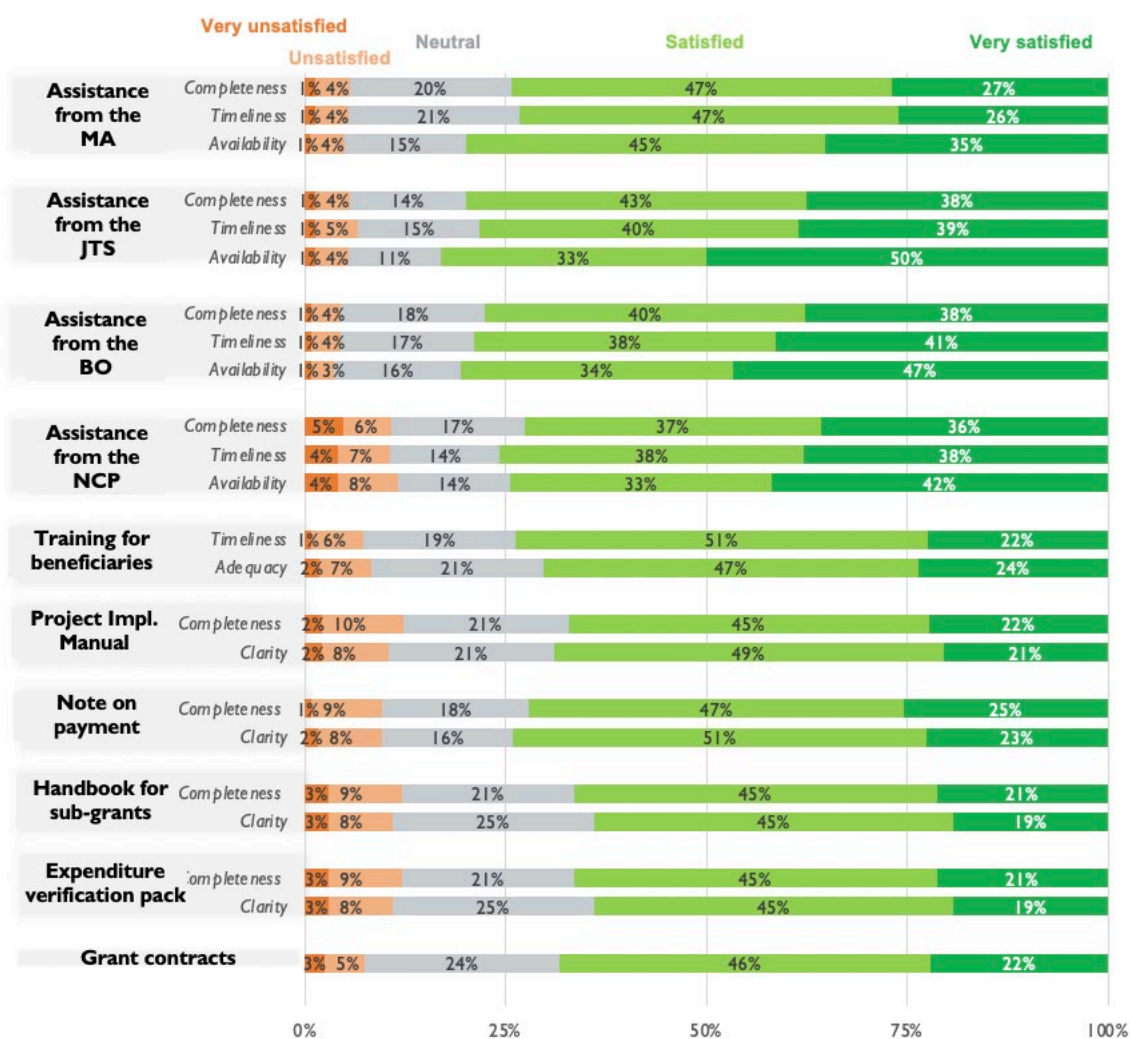
Source: web survey

Moving to the perception of applicants and beneficiaries about the quality of the support provided, most of respondents are largely satisfied both by the assistance received by the programme bodies and by different tools made available during the application phase, as illustrated by the figure below. As concerns the assistance from programme bodies, 73% of respondents are satisfied or very satisfied about the completeness of the support received. The percentage of respondents satisfied is slightly lower but still over 65% for what concerns the timeliness of the responses provided and the availability in providing the responses.

Extremely positive is also the opinion about the quality of the JOP, the Project Implementation Manual and the Call Guidelines both in terms of completeness and clarity of the information provided.

Wishing to identify possible areas for improvement, the information collected through the survey shows a more limited (but still positive) appreciation as regards to the section on project ideas on the website and to videos and tutorials.

Figure 9 Opinion of the applicants/beneficiaries about the tools and support received during the application phase



Source: web survey

3.3 IMPLEMENTATION MECHANISMS

EQ 6. How effective are the project implementation rules set out in the programme documents (JOP, Call Guidelines, Grant Contracts and Project Implementation Manual)?

EQ 8. How do the beneficiaries and stakeholders evaluate the support provided by the programme in the different phases of project implementation?

EQ 7. What are the main difficulties encountered by the beneficiaries?

EQ 2. Is the management and control system effective? What can be improved?

Key findings

The project implementation is supported by a long list of documents and tools elaborated by the programme bodies. The number of documents can appear excessive in quantity and length to actors already used to participating in Interreg programmes. However, in the evaluators' view such an approach is correct as it creates the conditions for sound participation by the "newcomers", especially if belonging to countries where administrative practices differ from what is expected in EU programmes. Data from the survey prove that the beneficiaries strongly appreciate both the support directly provided by the programme bodies and the tools elaborated to support the project implementation.

The main difficulties encountered by the beneficiaries refer to the financial management of the projects. In particular, in some Mediterranean Partner Countries there are significant difficulties to open a bank account in Euros. Additionally, problems with VAT exemption were noted, given that some beneficiaries were not informed on the relevant procedure.

The management and control system are based on the activation of professional independent auditors at Lead Beneficiary and partner level, combined with the role played by CCPs in all countries. This approach was expected to avoid the necessity of doing massive quality controls and create the conditions for smoother administrative verifications. However, the implementation of the programme was characterised by frequent errors in the verification of the expenditures from the auditors' side. The immediate consequence of poor auditors' quality was additional control activities by the central bodies. In the context of the delayed start of the JTS activities, the MA had to perform all controls without the possibility to delegate any task to the JTS. This generated an obvious overload to the MA. Serious misalignment between national auditors and programme bodies occurs in a limited number of countries, mainly belonging to the group of Mediterranean Partner Countries. Secondly, even when the JTS started operations, time was needed to align with the technical level achieved by the MA in the field of quality control of reported expenditures. Furthermore, the composition of the JTS in terms of expertise corresponds to the expectation that projects had to be followed more on the thematic/technical side than for administrative and financial issues. Consequently, only after one year of collaborative work, the MA and the JTS started to share tasks in this area.

Recommendation for ENI CBC MED 2014-2020

-

Recommendation NEXT MED 2021-2027

Considering the problems faced during 2014-2020 by the decentralised bodies in ensuring adequate verifications and controls, we strongly recommend that, also during the 2021-2027 programming period, the system maintains a (second) level of centralised control under the responsibility of the MA/JTS. From the evaluator's point of view, at the current state maintaining this centralised level of control is the only solution to ensure compliance with EU requirements in terms of controls and verification.

Without prejudice to the importance of the centralised level of control, we formulate further recommendations:

- Define a minimum price for auditors' fees: price as only award criteria, when adopted by the Lead Beneficiaries and partners in the auditors' selection, seem to have reduced the room for a good work by the auditors. If poorly paid, professionals are less incentivised to provide good quality services. Furthermore, some good professionals can decide not to bid in such unfavourable tender procedures.
- Enhance trainings of auditors: during 2014-2020, the programme has organised numerous trainings for the auditors. Nevertheless, the low level of quality in the controls carried out at national level suggests the need to reinforce training practices, e.g., more meeting can be organised at central level (by the MA/JTS) to allow the exchange of ideas and best practices among auditors. Training should be primarily targeted to the countries where major misalignments between the national auditors and the MA occurred.
- Make more extensive use of SCOs. SCOs are considered by the EC the most effective solution to reduce the administrative costs (both for the MA and the beneficiaries) and to reduce errors. Increasing the use of SCOs can free up time and resources from the verification of expenditures allowing MA/JTS to devote more time to supporting beneficiaries, selecting good projects proposals, and controlling the quality of outputs and results. As regards the types of costs and SCO most suitable for the programme, refer to our "Scoping study on the possible use of SCO".

3.3.1 Support to project implementation

The solutions/tools in support of implementation are mentioned and briefly described as they are made available on the programme website. The description of the provision of assistance to the projects depends on the triangulation between the series of interviews conducted with the programme bodies and stakeholders. Finally, the level of beneficiaries' satisfaction on the assistance received is indicated by the results of the online survey.



The programme is characterised by a comprehensive provision of documents and tools aimed at supporting the implementation and the reporting process by the projects. Documents and tools are published on the project website under the "Projects" area. Such an effort appears to be regularly developed over time. To make some examples concerning the Project Implementation Manual, some sections were updated (until October 2021), new sections were recently published (Note on documents keeping, published in November 2021), other sections are announced to be published in the future (Project closure, which is not necessary,

yet). Materials used in the training sessions organised at central level (for Lead Beneficiaries) and national level (for auditors and partners) are also published. The use of both English and French emerges from the publication of the training materials used at the national level.

A first series of documents and tools are made available to support **project implementation**. The main one is the previously mentioned Project Implementation Manual, which contains 10 sections covering the whole project life cycle. Furthermore, technical documents are made available, such as the notes on document keeping. This effort reflects the full awareness of the programme complexity, involving 14 countries from three different continents. The administrative practices vary from country to country and imply the need of an explanatory and even pedagogic approach. This is necessary to minimise possible misunderstandings on the obligations deriving from the development of a project funded by ENI CBC Med. The programme appears not to assume that usual practices in the EU programmes have to be *already* known by all actors developing cooperation projects. On the contrary, **the programme makes an effort to share and explain how to participate in a sound manner**. This is reflected in the distribution of a significant series of documents that can appear excessive in quantity and length to actors already used to participate in Interreg programmes. However, in the evaluator's view such an approach is correct as it creates the conditions for a sound participation of the "newcomers", especially if they belong to countries where the administrative practices differ from what is expected in EU programmes. The following table list all the documents and tools provided to support projects implementation.

Table 11 Documents and tools published on the programme website in support of project implementation

Item	Description
Project Implementation Manual	The Project Implementation Manual is a comprehensive document supporting the main phases of the project life cycle in different areas, i.e. technical management and financial issues. It includes 10 sections: (1) Key documents; (2) Actors involved; (3) Project start; (4) Reporting + annexes; (5) Project amendments + annexes; (6) Monitoring; (7) Financial management + annexes; (8) Risk management; (9) Project closure (to be published, yet); (10) Communication and visibility. To make an example, the Communication and visibility section includes specific indications on traditional aspects such as placement/ size of logo and media relations, such as on more recent topics such as use of social media and smartphone applications.
Notes on documents keeping	These notes indicate the documents to be kept with reference to all processes: Selection, Negotiation, Contracting, Reporting, Financial flows, Communication, Management verifications and other controls. Specific indications are provided to: (A) Lead Beneficiaries, (B) Partners.
Note on payment methods	This document provides indications on the supporting documents to be checked in relation to payments made by the projects.
COVID-19: information to funded projects	This document informed the Lead Beneficiaries and partners on how a series of aspects were managed by the programme due to the COVID 19 emergency: Changes in the project activities, work plan and budget; Eligibility of costs; Suspension; Contribution to the mitigation measures.
Handbook for sub-grants management	This document provides support to project Lead beneficiaries and partners in developing their own subgrant schemes, so they can be implemented in compliance with the applicable rules.

Item	Description
Expenditure verification pack	This package of documents contains seven documents/ templates to be considered/ used in the expenditure verification process: Expenditure verification procedure; Check-list auditor; Individual report; Consolidated report; List of findings; Suspected fraud; Template contract auditor; List of contracts.
National information	This section contains information on the specific procedures to be ensured at national level. Document related to the national frameworks of Egypt, Jordan, Lebanon, Tunisia, Palestine, Greece, Italy are provided. In particular, issues such as procurement and selection of auditors are concerned.
Training of Lead Beneficiaries of standard projects	This section contains the training materials used to train the Lead Beneficiaries of standard projects in occasion of the training session held in Rome on 1, 2, 3 October 2019. 19 presentations are made available. They concern a series of topics relevant to project management such as Financial management, Expenditure verification, Management of sub-grants, Procurement, State aid management, Communication and visibility (logo, website, videos, press etc.).
Training of Lead Beneficiaries of strategic projects	Similarly to the previous one, training materials are contained in this section. They are the materials used in occasion of the training of the Lead Beneficiaries of strategic projects held on 23 and 24 February 2021. 18 presentations are made available. The topics raised are the same as for the standard projects. In addition, information on the use of MIS were provided.
Training of Lead Beneficiaries of capitalisation projects	Similarly to the previous one, training materials are contained in this section. They are the materials used in occasion of the training of the Lead Beneficiaries of strategic projects held in Barcelona on 23 and 24 November 2021. The topics raised are the same as for the standard and strategic projects with additional information on the dimension of capitalisation and an emphasis on communication.

A second series of documents and tools are made available to support **project reporting**. As already mentioned, the publication of the training materials adapted to the single countries shows a full awareness of the necessity to consider national specificities including the linguistic aspects, when possible. The information is organised following two different and complementary approaches. On the one side, presentations on the reporting work and process are published. On the other side, the same topic is articulated in questions and answers, therefore reflecting the point of view of beneficiaries that could need to be facilitated in focusing on specific topics that risk hampering their progress in the reporting work. In the table below all documents and tools provided to support project reporting are listed.

Table 12 Documents and tools published on the programme website in support of reporting

Item	Description
Presentations	This section includes information and tools related to the reporting process. An introductory document illustrates the key steps (Start of project activities; Communication on project starting; Progress Report I; Interim Report I; Progress

Item	Description
	<p>Report 2; Interim Report 2; Progress Report 3; End of project activities; Final Report) and applies their timing to different possible project durations, i.e. 36 and 30 months.</p> <p>Furthermore, specific documents are provided: Drafting the interim report; Reporting in the MIS for Lead Beneficiaries and partners; Adjustments in the MIS; Reporting in the MIS for auditors.</p> <p>Finally, the training materials used in the national seminars on reporting of standard projects for auditors and partners are published. As far as standard projects are concerned, the specific materials used in 12 countries (materials used in France and Tunisia are in French, whereas materials used in the remaining 10 countries are in English). Standard presentations used in the national seminars on reporting of strategic projects for auditors and partners are also published.</p>
FAQ on the interim report	<p>A series of Frequently Asked Questions are answered in this section.</p> <p>Six questions and answers are published in relation to the narrative report preparation; 12 questions and answers are published in relation to the financial report preparation; finally, six questions and answers are published in relation to the expenditure verification reports.</p>



Several interviewed NAs underlined the **quality and comprehensiveness of the ENI CBC Med programme documents** of compared to other extra EU cooperation programmes they participate to. Overall, NAs expressed **appreciation for the assistance offered by the programme** to the projects developed in their own country, with **special emphasis on** support offered by the geographically relevant **BO** (Aqaba for the eastern countries, Valencia for the western countries). Even if the need for more assistance and training to beneficiaries was occasionally expressed, the quality of the support offered by the MA, JTS and BOs to the projects appears to be good to NAs. However, **some perplexity on the demarcation between JTS and BOs** was expressed by some NAs, when assistance to projects is concerned. It was observed that in some cases beneficiaries are not aware of the respective functions of JTS and BO. This could depend on the fact that until spring 2020, the (recently) started standard projects were assisted only by the geographically competent BO, given that the JTS had not started operations yet. BOs recognised that substitution of JTS in providing assistance to the projects would have been impossible with the increasing number of projects from spring 2020 onwards. From the interviews, a good cooperation and reciprocal appreciation between JTS and BOs emerged. Furthermore, it was clarified that JTS is dedicated to ‘day by day’ assistance to all the projects, whereas BOs are involved in case of problems implying the necessity to activate the national level in the projects’ countries. Additionally, it was explained that when the JTS started to play its role, the BOs continued participating in the projects’ kick-off meetings and ensured training to the projects. It is worth noting that **JTS started operations under unfavourable conditions**. The very delayed start required the JTS to progressively perform its tasks in place of other bodies that had already gained knowledge and established their own practices. **Such a delicate phasing-in turned to be smooth** thanks to the JTS commitment and the cooperative and supportive approach by the other bodies, especially MA and BOs. JTS members were trained both by the MA and TESIM. However, the transfer of knowledge and competences between the MA and the JTS was hampered

by the restrictions due to the pandemic, which started exactly when the JTS international team was supposed to be fully operational in the premises of the Sardinia Region in Cagliari. Even if from remote, the members of the JTS team started working together and, in few months, the body became fully operational. At this regard, it shall be reminded that in the initial period of the pandemic, the risk to see the projects stop their activities existed. The programme as a whole managed to encourage the Lead Beneficiaries to adapt their action plans to the new conditions. Some projects reacted better than others and served as inspiration.

Apart from these extraordinary factors, the interviews revealed **that specific problems affecting the financial management of the projects exist** and cannot be solved through the assistance offered at central level. In some Mediterranean Partner Countries, there are significant difficulties to open a bank account in Euro. A procedure lasting 4-6 months, mentioned with reference to some of the countries belonging to the programme, is not compatible with sound project management and requires that solutions at national institutional level are identified and put in place. Additionally, problems with VAT exemption were noted, given that some beneficiaries were not informed on the relevant procedure. In general, local authorities seem to have more problems in managing the projects given their limited administrative capacity. Once again, the importance of the management team dedicated to the project emerged as a key element from the interviews.

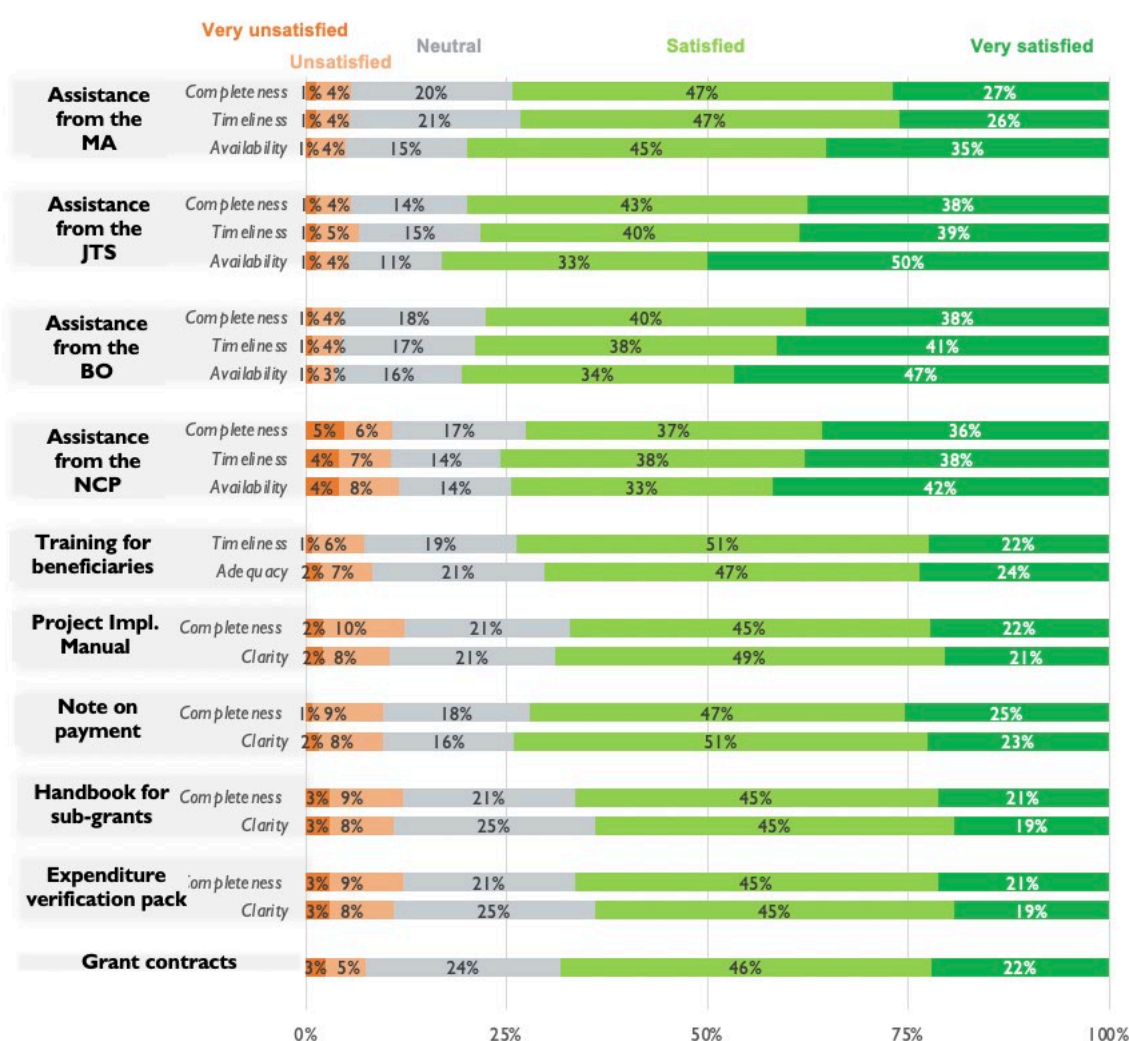


The good opinion of the NAs about the quality of the support provided during the implementation of the projects is confirmed by beneficiaries. As

illustrated by the figure below, the assistance received by the programme bodies is generally appreciated by 75% of respondents. Particularly high (over 80% of respondents) is the satisfaction about the availability of the JTS, the BO and the MA. If we compare the appreciation of the four programme bodies, satisfaction is generally higher in case of JTS and BO, a bit lower, but still extremely high, in case of MA and NCP. This general finding is also confirmed when analysing the answers provided by beneficiaries from EU MS or from Mediterranean Partner Countries.

Looking to the opinions about the tools and initiatives set in place to support beneficiaries, also in this case what emerges from the survey is the overall appreciation by the stakeholders (in general at least 60% of respondents are satisfied). Wishing to identify possible areas for improvement, the information collected through the survey shows a more limited (but still positive) appreciation of the Handbook for subgrants and the Expenditure verification pack.

Figure 10 Opinion of the beneficiaries about the tools and support received during the implementation phase



Source: web survey

3.3.2 Verification of the expenditures

The most delicate aspect concerning project implementation appears to be the **verification of expenditures**. This is the reason why the evaluator decided to focus on this topic by summarising what is prescribed by the programme documents and reporting the most relevant aspects emerged from the interviews to MA, JTS, NCP, CCP and AA on this topic.



Detailed information on the verification of expenditure is provided in chapter 7 “Financial management” of the Project Implementation Manual (updated on 1/1/2021). The elements concerning this process that emerged from the interviews to the programme stakeholders, will be also presented.

Ensuring that the auditors selected by LB or PP meet the requirements

The appointed auditor shall meet the requirements set by the ENI CBC Implementing Rules and shall be independent from the LB and PPs' organisations as well as the programme bodies (MA/JTS/AA). Specific procedures have been set up in each participating country to ensure that the auditor selected by the LB or PP meets these requirements. Such verifications are carried out at national level by the CCP which endorse the choice by validating the selected auditor. Before signing the contract with the selected auditor, the LB and the PPs organisations have to send the documents required in order to allow the CCP of their respective country to verify the auditor's requirements.

Training of the auditors

The participation of the person in charge of the expenditure verification in the training courses organised by the MA is mandatory.

Expenditure declaration by the beneficiaries

The expenditure declared by the beneficiary in support of a payment request shall be examined by an auditor or by a competent public officer being independent from the beneficiary. The auditor or the competent public officer shall examine whether the costs declared by the beneficiary and the revenue of the project are real, accurately recorded and eligible in accordance with the contract.

Quality controls

The MA, the JTS or the CCPs may carry out quality controls on the work carried out by the auditor at any moment during the execution period of the Grant Contract. The MA can ask to the LB and partners to replace the project auditor in case of doubts on his/her independence, professional standards, professional reliability or of substantial errors detected in the reports. In such a case, the CCP of the concerned country will be immediately informed and take any appropriate action as the case may be.

The tasks of the auditors appointed by the project Lead Beneficiaries and partners are, *inter alia*:

- a) to verify that goods and services have been delivered and the works have been performed;
- b) to verify that the expenditure declared by the beneficiaries relates to the eligible period or previous ones and it has been paid;
- c) to verify the compliance with applicable rules (including eligibility rules), also including procurement and visibility requirements;
- d) to verify the compliance of the expenditures with the approved project and the signed Grant Contract;
- e) to check the related documents and accounting on avoidance of possible double funding;
- f) to verify the adequacy of supporting documents;
- g) to check the registration of the expenditure in the accounting records of the beneficiary and that the expenditure is determined according to the accounting standards and the usual cost accounting practices applicable to the beneficiary;
- h) to check the record-keeping and archiving rules for the documentary evidence related to the implementation of the project;
- i) to notify irregularities and suspicion of fraud or corruption, as the case may be.

Administrative verifications and on-the-spot checks by the MA with support of the JTS

The MA, with the support of the JTS, shall perform:

- (a) administrative verifications on the Interim and Final reports (including the auditor reports) for each payment request by LB;
- (b) on-the-spot project verifications carried out on a sample basis.

The checks on the reports are carried out in order to verify that services, supplies or works have been performed, delivered and/or installed and whether expenditure declared by the LB and PPs has been paid, and that the expenditure complies with the applicable law and the programme rules.

The on-the-spot checks are performed on the basis of a risk analysis considering risk factors such as:

- type of project (standard, strategic, capitalisation);
- ENI contribution;
- presence of Sub-grants;
- size and geographical representation of the partnership;
- categories of beneficiaries and partners (public/private profit/non-profit);
- number of projects implemented by the LB;
- state of play;
- specific costs categories having a high fraud or corruption risk level, such as staff and/or services;
- findings of the project external auditors;
- results of the annual audits on projects carried out by the AA;
- any critical points or problems arisen in the project implementation.

An analysis was made by the evaluator on the **cuts of the expenditures declared by the standard projects**. The control ensured by the MA on the cuts made by the National Auditors (and already revised by the JTS) was analysed.

On a global amount of EUR 33.274.264 (expenditures declared by standard projects), the National Auditors made cuts amounting to EUR 345.834, which correspond to 1,04%. At the end of the process, i.e. after conclusion of the MA control, cuts amount to EUR 1.751.771, which correspond to 5,26% of all declared expenditures. Discrepancy between the cuts operated by the National Auditors and the cuts decided by the MA amounts to EUR 1.405.937. This means that **the overall discrepancy between the National Auditors' cuts and the MA's cuts is of 4,23% of the expenditures declared by standard projects**. Such data indicates **a significant misalignment between the two levels**. If the intermediate intervention of the JTS is also considered, what emerges is that **the process of expenditure control is highly burdensome for the programme bodies**.

The necessity to improve the alignment of the National Auditors to the programme requirements, and more in general to the sound principles of expenditure audit, emerges even more clearly when data at the national level are analysed. The overall discrepancy mentioned above is in a range between 0,64% and 11,13%. Five countries, i.e. Portugal, Spain, Cyprus, Malta and Italy show a discrepancy below 2%. Greece, Palestine and Egypt are in a range between 2% and 5%. More significant problems occur in the Israeli, Lebanese and Jordanian projects whose national auditors see a discrepancy with the MA final decision ranging from 5% to 10%. Finally, Tunisia and France are above 10%, showing very significant problems of misalignment between the levels of expenditure control. It is worth noting that, **apart from France, all EU Countries have a discrepancy below 3%**, indicating that

presumable familiarity with the expenditure rules of the EU programmes by the national auditors is a good precondition for a better alignment. This also shows that **ensuring appropriate training to national auditors could bring significant improvement**, with the case of France needing further analysis.

Table 13 Discrepancy between MA cuts and National Auditors' cuts

Country	Discrepancy
Portugal	0,64%
Spain	0,77%
Cyprus	0,77%
Malta	0,87%
Italy	1,96%
Greece	2,51%
Palestine	2,97%
Egypt	3,37%
Israel	5,80%
Lebanon	6,03%
Jordan	8,75%
Tunisia	10,20%
France	11,13%
Total	4,23%

Source: Excel file sent by the MA

74% of all cuts finally decided by the MA corresponds to amounts below EUR 1.000. However, if value is considered, these cuts represent only 28% of all cuts. If cuts finally decided by the MA below EUR 100 are considered, it emerges that they correspond to 32% in number and 2% in value. Overall, **a huge work dedicated by the MA to the control of little expenditures emerges.**

Secondly, it appears that the types of expenditures that are more exposed to cuts are 'Other costs' (23% of the 'Other costs' expenditure was cut), 'Travel and subsistence' (9%), and 'Human resources' (6%). The case of human resources is particularly important because of their weight in the project budget. Overall, cuts made on 'Human resources' correspond in value to 78% of all cuts and this percentage is slightly increased when cuts below EUR 1.000 are considered.

These elements suggest the opportunity to adopt Simplified Cost Options, especially if focused on human resources that are the most important type of expenditure and generate the main part of the expenditure control work, especially when little amounts are concerned.

Audit on projects by AA

The AA, with the support of the members of the Group of Auditors, performs an annual audit on projects. The European Commission, the European Anti-Fraud Office, the European Court of Auditors and any authorised institution may perform additional checks. As far as the annual audits on projects are concerned, they are performed during the programme lifetime on a sample basis. When the AA selects a project for an audit, the Lead Beneficiary as well as one or more Project partners may be audited. The audit may be carried out on the basis of supporting documents for the accounts,

accounting documents and any other document relevant to the financing of the activities. Moreover, auditors analyse a number of processes related to the implementation of the project, including:

- the compliance with the obligations set in the Grant contract and Partnership Agreement;
- the confirmation of the expenditure verification performed by the project auditors.



The MA and JTS emphasised that the weak point in the verification of expenditures is the **quality of the auditors' work**. The frequency of errors in reporting the projects' costs is significant in some of the ENI CBC Med countries. Furthermore, it appears that some auditors lack the basic knowledge of projects' financial reporting rules. In some countries, this element appears to be combined with the presence of a lighter accounting regulative framework. This determines, in some cases, the difficulty by the auditor to fully understand the programme requirements.

Interviews to CCPs revealed that the **auditors' requirements** are met in all countries, as there are clear criteria to create the list of the potential project auditors. At programme level, a tendency by some of the projects to activate their internal auditors was detected. This could create room for potential conflicts of interest. On the other side, the interviewed CCPs declared that procedures for auditors' selection are put in place by the projects in their respective countries. However, **price-only award criteria**, when adopted by the Lead Beneficiaries and partners in the auditor's selection, seem to have reduced the room for good quality work by the auditors. If poorly paid, professionals are less incentivised to provide a good quality service. Furthermore, some good professionals can decide not to bid in such an unfavourable tender procedures. Beside these aspects, the **training of auditors** appears as a practice that could be adopted more intensively and more regularly. It is true that, as shown in the previous paragraph, seminars on reporting were held in 12 countries for auditors and partners involved in standard projects. This happened when the JTS was not operational yet and required efforts by MA and BOs. However, these training sessions appear not to have been sufficient to ensure a homogeneous level in financial reporting by the projects. The evaluators have not found evidence that a sufficient level of training is ensured to all auditors in all countries. Furthermore, specific training actions in the countries affected by major issues did not emerge. When targeted initiatives were taken by the JTS to enhance the competences of the auditors, they were declared to be effective. This should encourage to make further and more regular efforts in this direction.

The commitment of the CCPs seems to be limited to ensuring a proper selection of auditors. When necessary, CCPs have required to cancel the procedure of auditors' appointment. One case occurred in Lebanon where it resulted that one auditor, even if well known for its competence, had not been regularly selected. The selection procedure was therefore cancelled. Beyond this commitment, none of the CCPs declared to have been required to do further quality controls. Therefore, it appears that the **quality control of the work carried out by the auditors** was centralised and carried out by the MA and the JTS. The delayed start of the JTS activities caused two different consequences on the distribution of tasks between MA and JTS in the area of control of expenditure reporting. First, it is clear that when the JTS was not present yet, the MA had to perform all controls without the possibility to delegate any task to the JTS. This generated an obvious work overload to the MA. Secondly, even when the JTS started to engage in operations, some time was needed to align with the technical level achieved by the MA in the field of quality control of reported expenditure. Furthermore, a third aspect has to be noticed. The composition of the JTS in

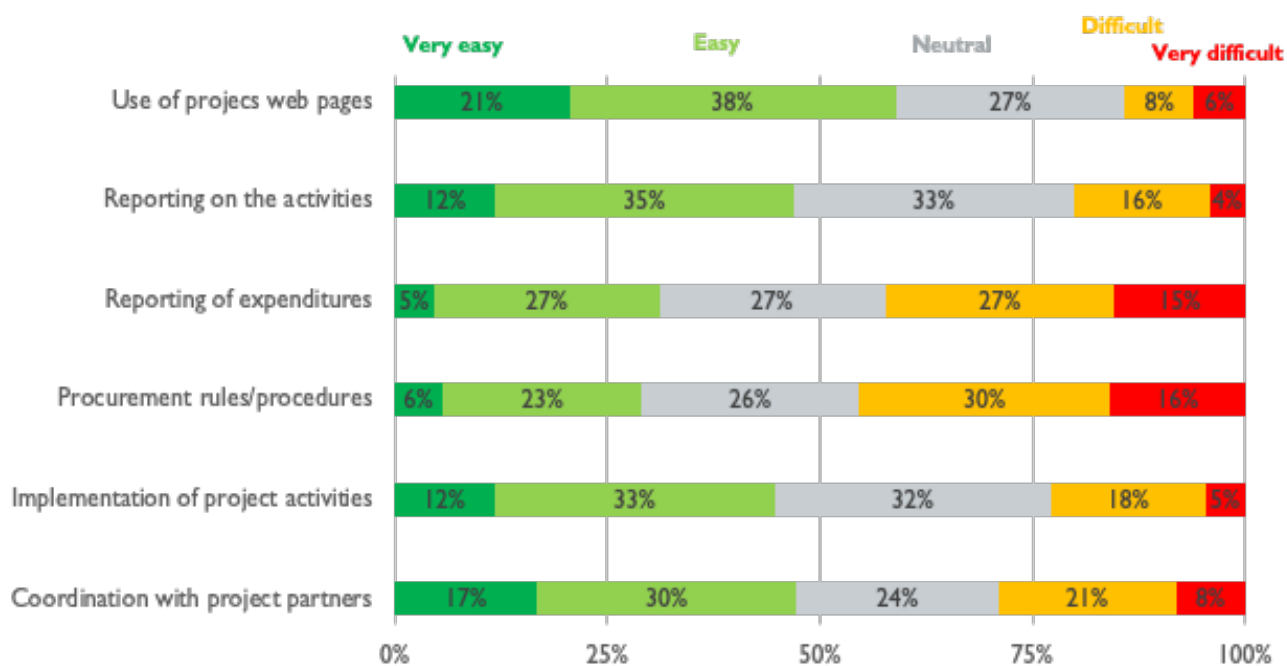
terms of expertise corresponds to the expectation that projects had to be followed more on the thematic/technical side rather than for administrative and financial issues. Looking at the JTS team, indeed, one observes that the four thematic units are composed of five senior experts plus five junior experts, whereas only one expert is dedicated to financial issues and audit. It seems that the activation of professional independent auditors at Lead Beneficiary and partner level, combined with the role played by CCPs in all countries, was expected to avoid the necessity of doing massive quality controls and create the conditions for smoother administrative verifications. On the contrary, the poor quality of financial reports submitted imposed significant financial and administrative control by the programme. After one year of collaborative work, the MA and the JTS started to share tasks in this area. However, the necessity to control 100% of expenditures still represents a significant burden for the MA. It is clear that in NEXT MED a timely activation of the JTS will be necessary to allow a sound distribution of tasks between the MA and the JTS in the area of control of financial reporting, accompanied by a harmonised gain of knowledge even in the early stage of the programme.

Finally, concerning the AA activities, it is worth noting that due to the timing of the projects' reporting, only in 2022 it will be possible to start carrying out sample checks of project expenditures.



The online survey conducted among Lead Beneficiaries and partners confirmed that the reporting of expenditures is one of the activities that appear more difficult to the organisations involved at project level. Only procurement rules/procedures represent a higher difficulty for the organisations managing ENI CBC Med projects. Considering that procurement sees the combination between programme and national rules, one can observe that reporting of expenditure is perceived as the most difficult activity fully related to the programme rules. The figure below shows the comparison between the perception of several project activities.

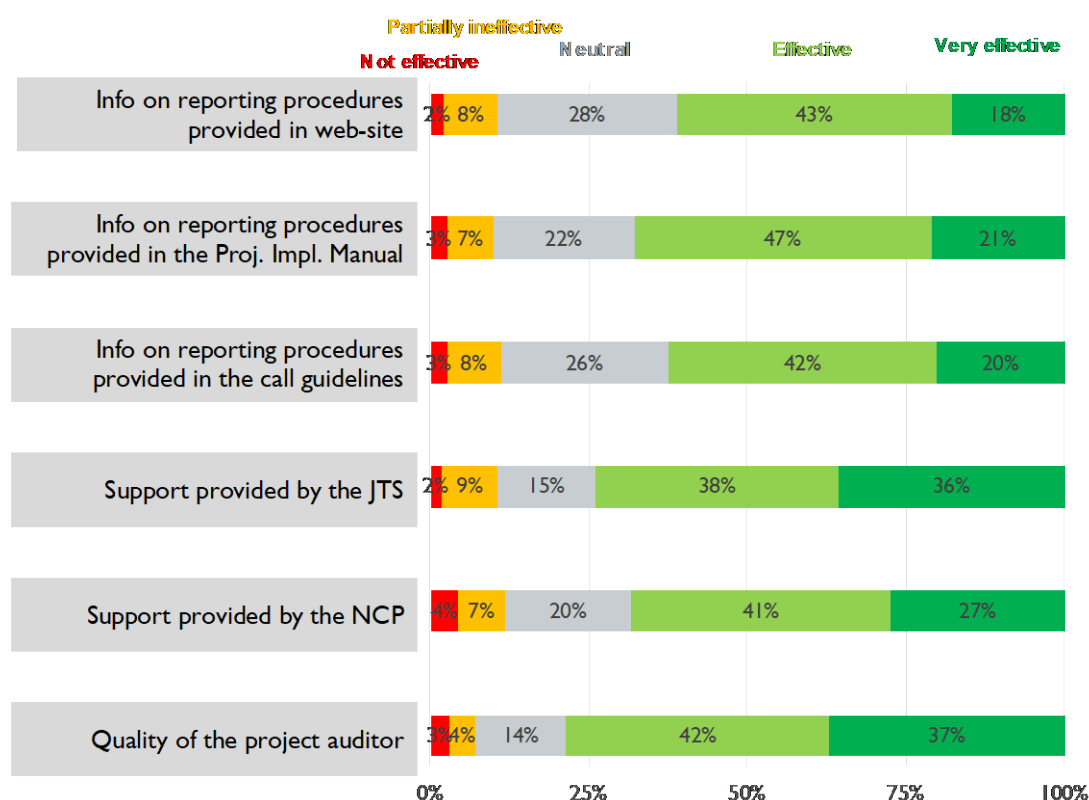
Figure 11 Opinions of beneficiaries about the most difficult tasks/activities



Source: web survey

The online survey, however, indicates a significant misalignment between project actors and programme level, when the quality of the work carried out by the auditors is concerned. **79% of Lead Beneficiaries and partners declared that the quality achieved by their project auditor is effective or very effective** (see figure below). The work performed by the project auditors is perceived as the most effective element within the process of reporting and certification of the expenditure. On the one side, this could be explained by considering that the auditor was selected by the project itself and collaborated with the respondent. On the other side, it is clear that **the actors working at project level did not gain a sufficient awareness of the problems created to the programme by insufficient auditor contribution**. If the practice to select auditors based on only-price criteria has to be changed and quality criteria have to be adopted by Lead Beneficiaries and partners in auditors selection design, a common understanding of the actual professional contribution offered by the auditors should be gained.

Figure 12 Opinions of beneficiaries on the reporting and certification of the expenditure



Source: web survey

3.4 INFORMATION SYSTEM

Additional EQ. Does the eForm meet the expectations?

EQ 9. Does the programme Management Information System (MIS) meet expectations?

EQ 10. What is the opinion of the beneficiaries on the efficiency of the MIS?

EQ 11. What is the opinion of the programme bodies and other stakeholders involved in the control and management mechanisms about the efficiency of the MIS?

Key findings

Most beneficiaries and applicants are satisfied with the two information systems (i.e., eForm and MIS) and by the related manuals. No significant problems were reported by the stakeholders involved in the control and management mechanism. The only weakness identified by the evaluators refers to the possibility to quickly extract aggregated data from MIS on the progress of output indicators at priority and programme levels (see chapter 3.6 for more details). This data is organised by the MA on Excel files but is not necessarily regularly available to the JTS.

Recommendation for ENI CBC MED 2014-2020

We recommend the programme to verify with the IT expert the possibility to elaborate a solution for allowing to easily monitor MIS the data on the achieved values declared by the projects in the progress reports. In our view, the availability of such a system could enhance the JTS capacity to anticipate and reduce possible risks without the necessity to require ad hoc monitoring data from the MA.

Recommendation NEXT MED 2021-2027

The future monitoring system shall allow constant monitoring on the state of progress of the indicators (i.e., shall allow to quickly aggregate data declared by the projects in the progress reports and validated by the auditors and the programme bodies).



The programme has two different online information systems, one dedicated to the application phase (i.e., eForm) and a second one dedicated to the management of the approved projects (MIS). Both systems make the exchange of information substantially paperless both between the programme authorities and beneficiaries/applicants.

MIS includes the following areas:

- **Projects**, which includes the list of 80 projects with relevant documents (Application Form, Progress Reports).
- **Actors**, which includes the list of 616 organisations involved as beneficiaries in the programme (repetitive number, meaning that organisations are repeated if belonging to several project partnerships) with information on their allocations under each project, general information on their profile (such as annual total staff), specific information on their experience and expertise, plus names and contact information of the key members/employees.
- **Contacts**, which lists the 2.450 key members/employees of the organisations involved as beneficiaries of the programme.

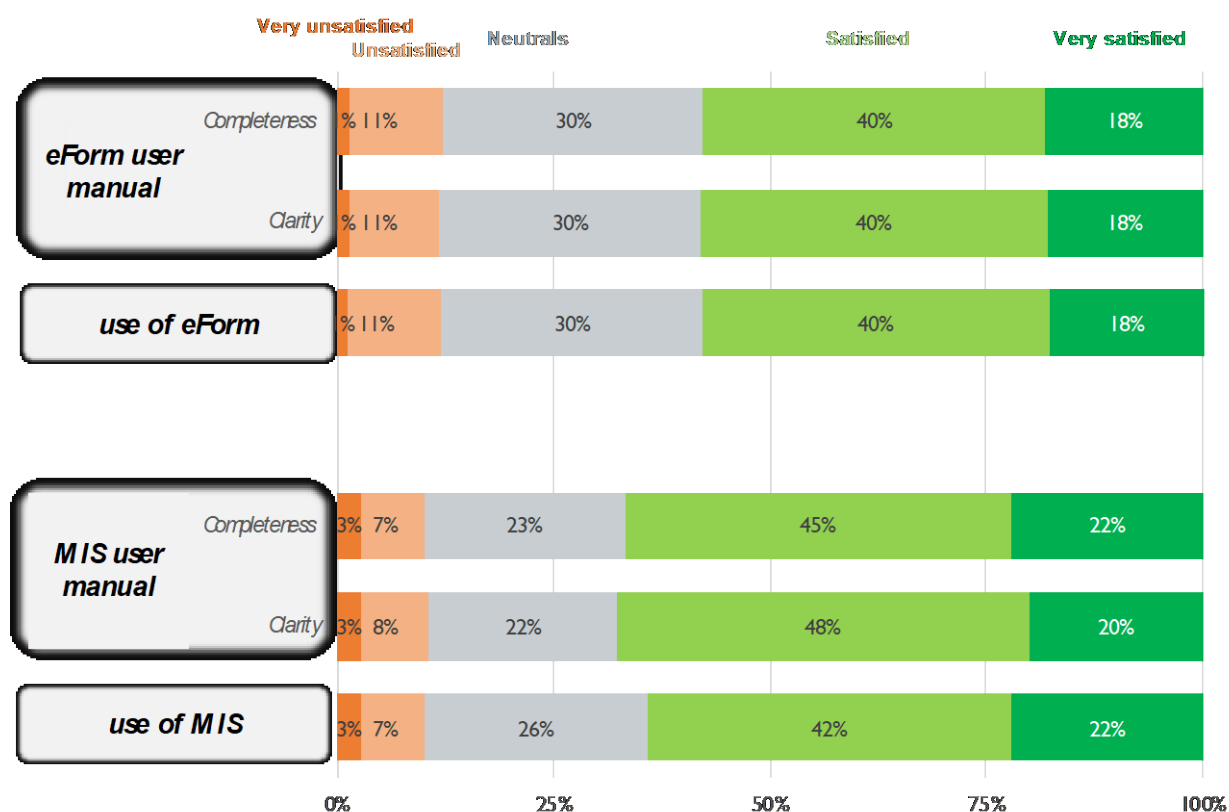
- **Statistics**, which provides information aggregated at country level on number of projects, ENI contribution, number of actors), concerning actors' involvement, achievement of indicators.
- **Debt Recovery**, which does not appear to be populated with data.

Data published on MIS are comprehensive. The consultation of the project documentation could be easier, as the downloading of the files is not fully user-friendly, meaning that the function to export files is not easy to find. However, given that this system is addressed to professional and regular users, these obstacles can be overcome. More importantly, the JTS noticed that MIS does not provide easily accessible (i.e. visual) information on output achievement. Physical progress is fully and regularly monitored by the MA using Excel files. Result achievement can be visualised on MIS but data do not correspond to the monitoring system set by the MA using Excel. The possible shift to a fully web-based monitoring system (already in the current programme or in NEXT MED) could make the same information available both to MA and JTS so facilitating the work of the latter and further enhancing the alignment between the MA and the JTS.



The figure below summarises the opinions of applicants and beneficiaries about their experience in the use of eForm and MIS. Most respondents are satisfied both by the two monitoring systems and the related manuals. If we compare the perception about the two instruments, as illustrated by the figure below, the percentage of respondents satisfied or very satisfied is slightly higher for MIS than for eForm.

Figure 13 Opinions of applicants and beneficiaries on eForm and MIS



Source: web survey

3.5 QUALITY OF THE MONITORING SYSTEM

EQ 12. Are the proposed indicators capable of capturing the most important outputs and results achieved by the projects?

EQ 13. Do beneficiaries encounter any problems in monitoring the indicators (e.g., inconsistencies in the interpretation of the definitions of the indicators)

EQ 14. Have there been any problems at programme authority level in meeting regulatory monitoring requirements?

Key findings

The desk analysis confirms the compliance of the indicator system with the EU requirements. The system is potentially capable of collecting detailed information at the level of individual projects. This is also confirmed by the opinions of most beneficiaries who consider that the indicators are capable to capture the key outputs and results. However, the consultation of projects indicates cases of misalignment between programme and project level in the calculation of certain output indicators and in the interpretation of certain result indicators. The overall number of indicators is very high and so is the number of indicators selected by some of the projects. Combined with the frequency of reporting, the high number of indicators to be reported creates significant workload for some projects.

In a programme perspective, the monitoring system is characterised by a certain degree of complexity (both in terms of the number of indicators and the heterogeneity of the information collected) with potential risks of high administrative costs for ensuring their consistent monitoring.

Recommendation for ENI CBC MED 2014-2020

The calculation of the value achieved in relation to some of the output indicators should be verified. The repetition of some output indicators in more than one work package could lead to double or triple counting of the same value. It is therefore recommended to verify how projects collect information relevant to indicators such as I.I.I.I.b, which, for instance, is used by MEDSt@rts to collect information relevant to six different outputs in two different Work Packages.

Common understanding of the definition of some of the result indicators between the programme (ref. Indicative Monitoring and Evaluation Plan) and project level should be verified. For instance, the interpretation of the result indicator 3.1.1.A used under Priority A.3.1 appears to depend on different concepts of employment.

Recommendation NEXT MED 2021-2027

From the evaluator's perspective, the development of the 2014-2020 monitoring system was exclusively guided by the preference for a system able to capture the key outputs and results. In view of the next programming period, we recommend considering two principles: on the one hand, the ability to capture key outputs and results, on the other hand, the "manageability" of the system. With this term we mean to focus on the need to have indicators that are easily usable by the beneficiaries and which can be easily and constantly monitored at programme level.

Conversely, the use of a much lower number of indicators in the 2021-2027 programming period presents other problems that should be considered.

First of all, indicators will not guide anymore the proposal preparation as it has happened in 2014-2020. It is therefore recommended to ensure similar information on how to make the proposals relevant to the programme, even in absence of detailed output and result indicators.

Secondly, it appears that dealing with less indicators and less project content-related ones, makes the consequences of possible inconsistencies between the programme and the project level more important. If the use of these indicators will be confirmed, it is recommended to revise the definition of indicators RCO 84, RCO 116, RCR 03 and RCR 104. To make some examples, it will be necessary to (1) show the demarcation between “joint development” and mere cooperation where activities are just mirrored, (2) describe the nature of the “pilot actions” in terms of innovativeness and capacity to generate further outputs (i.e. solutions), (3) identify what a “solution” is expected to be, if necessary, based on S.O. specificities.

Thirdly, specific reference to the type of evidence that projects need to elaborate as a proof of fulfilments for each indicator (output and results) should be made. The evidence demanded should be coherent with the definition of the indicators, the regulation and the guidelines of the EU, and the good practices developed in European Territorial Cooperation programmes.

Finally, the process of collecting and reporting the above-mentioned evidence should be standardised. The projects should be provided with specific guidelines on how to gather and report data for each definite indicator and methods to provide the demanded evidence, including technical solutions facilitating this exercise.

More detailed suggestions regarding the system of indicators are provided in our “Note on the system of indicators – Focus on quantification and risks of inconsistencies”.



As illustrated by the table below, the programme has selected a significant number of indicators: in total, there are 123 indicators (i.e., 40 result indicators and 83 output indicators) and on average each priority is monitored through 11 indicators (4 result indicators and 7 output indicators).

Table 14 Number and types of indicators selected by the programme

TO	Priority	N. of result indicators	N. of output indicators	Total
A.1 Business and SME development	A.1.1	7	10 (1 ENI)	17 (1 ENI)
	A.1.2	4	6 (2 ENI)	10 (2 ENI)
	A.1.3	3	8 (3 ENI)	11 (3 ENI)
A.2 Support to education, research, technological development and innovation	A.2.1	4	10 (2 ENI)	14 (2 ENI)
	A.2.2	3	4 (2 ENI)	7 (2 ENI)
	A.3.1	1	8	9

TO	Priority	N. of result indicators	N. of output indicators	Total
A.3 Promotion of social inclusion and fight against poverty	A.3.2	2 (1 ENI)	6 (2 ENI)	8 (3 ENI)
B.4 Environmental protection, climate change adaptation and mitigation	B.4.1	6	9	15
	B.4.2	3	7 (1 ENI)	10 (1 ENI)
	B.4.3	5 (1 ENI)	8 (1 ENI)	13 (2 ENI)
	B.4.4	2	7 (2 ENI)	9 (2 ENI)
Total		40	83	123 (18 ENI)

* (ENI) = common ENI indicators

Source: excel DB sent by the MA

Without prejudice to the differences in the rules underlying the ENI CBC Med and Interreg monitoring systems, the comparison with the indicators generally used in the Interreg context can help to grasp the features of the ENI CBC Med monitoring system.

For instance, the table below compares the indicators used for monitoring two similar priorities (both focused on innovation networks and clusters) under ENI CBC Med and Interreg MED. Not only the number of indicators used under ENI CBC Med is greater, but the indicators are more specific (i.e., more relevant to the types of actions) meaning that their definitions often incorporate the types of activities, outputs and expected results. Indeed, in general the indicator system appears more specific, while indicators used under Interreg MED are more general and consequently easier to be applied under different themes/priorities.

All in all, the desk analysis shows the presence of an indicator system potentially capable of collecting detailed information at the level of individual projects, but at the same time characterised by a certain degree of complexity (both in terms of the number of indicators and heterogeneity of the information collected) with potential risks of high administrative costs for ensuring the constant monitoring.

What emerges from the desk analysis (i.e., specificity of the indicators system but also potential complexity in managing it) can explain the opinion of some of the interviewed representatives of programme bodies, according to whom this long list of (very specific) indicators was particularly useful for guiding applicants (i.e., for making them understand what the programme was targeting) but then the attention paid to indicators by programme authorities and beneficiaries during the implementation phase was more limited.

Table 15 Approach to monitoring: comparison between ENI CBC MED and Interreg MED

	ENI CBC MED	Interreg MED
SO/Priority	A.1.2 - Strengthen and support euro-Mediterranean networks, clusters, consortia and value-chains in	SO 1.1 To increase transnational activity of innovative clusters and networks of key sectors of the MED area

	ENI CBC MED	Interreg MED
	traditional sectors and non-traditional sectors	
Result indicator	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ 1.2.1.A Number of newly established business alliances in traditional and non-traditional sectors (at local and international level) ▪ 1.2.1.B Number of new products and services sold on domestic and foreign markets ▪ 1.2.2.C Number of created public-private partnerships promoting demand-driven innovation in the public and private sector and implementing new medium-long term investments ▪ 1.2.2.D Additional public and private resources invested by created PPPs as co-financing of project activities (in euro) 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Share of innovative clusters offering their members a consolidated mix of transnational activities in key sectors of the MED area
Output indicators	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ 1.2.1.1.a Number of enterprises substantially and actively involved in CBC-MED projects satisfied with consultancy services and making requests for follow-up (ENI CBC 2) ▪ 1.2.1.2.b Number of enterprises participating in cross-border business events (ENI CBC 3) ▪ 1.2.1.3.c Number of enterprises involved in CBC-MED projects that share common knowledge on specific items (i.e. food security, sustainable tourism, eco-innovation, green and sustainable water technologies, internationalisation processes etc.) ▪ 1.2.2.4.d Number of public tenders awarded as results of joint collaborations and additional resources allocated ▪ 1.2.2.5.e Number of public and private stakeholders involved in 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ 1.1.a Number of operation instruments to favour innovation of SMEs ▪ 1.1.b Number of enterprises receiving grants ▪ 1.1.c Number of enterprises receiving non-financial support ▪ 1.1.d Number of transnational innovation clusters supported

	ENI CBC MED	Interreg MED
	training events and joint pilots that have made written commitments to engage in PPP undertakings <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ 1.2.2.6.f Number of campaigns (e.g. global forums, seminars, platforms etc.) where public sector and PPP practitioners exchange knowledge to support value chains and their economic activity 	

Source: excel DB sent by the MA



Information collected from the web survey indicate the quality of the monitoring system in terms of capacity of capturing the most important outputs and results achieved by the projects. As the table below shows, 90% of respondents consider that the programme indicators allow to capture the key projects outputs and results.

Table 16 Beneficiaries' perception of the quality of the monitoring system

	Do the programme indicators allow to capture the key projects outputs and results?	
Type of indicator	Yes	No
Output	90%	10%
Results	90%	10%

Source: web survey

Looking to differences at priority level (see table below), we observe that across all priorities most beneficiaries consider the programmes indicators capable to grasp key information about the projects. If we focus on possible weaknesses, the survey data suggest the possibility that under priorities A.2.2 and B.4.4 some key outputs and results are not captured through the information collected by the indicators.

Table 17 Beneficiaries' perception of the quality of the monitoring system – differences at priority level

	Do the programme indicators allow to capture the key projects			
	Outputs		Results	
Priority	Yes	No	Yes	No
A.1.1	90%	10%	89%	11%
A.1.2	86%	14%	82%	18%
A.1.3	93%	7%	94%	6%

Priority	Do the programme indicators allow to capture the key projects			
	Outputs		Results	
	Yes	No	Yes	No
A.2.1	89%	11%	86%	14%
A.2.2	75%	25%	83%	17%
A.3.1	97%	3%	95%	5%
A.3.2	88%	13%	88%	13%
B.4.1	91%	9%	91%	9%
B.4.2	91%	9%	100%	0%
B.4.3	92%	8%	92%	8%
B.4.4	75%	25%	75%	25%

Source: web survey



Information gathered from the case studies complement the picture on the beneficiaries' perception of the indicator system, and in some cases, they provide different views from the ones emerged from the survey. **Overall, interviewed beneficiaries showed not to consider the project indicators system as a useful dashboard to follow the progress of their project.** In few cases they showed to be familiar with the indicators system. This is particularly unlikely in case of projects with several output indicators such as BESTMEDGRAPE (looking standard and strategic projects, the average number of output indicators chosen amounts to six, a number of 10 indicators being chosen by six projects, i.e. BESTMEDGRAPE, INVESTMED, LIVINGAGRO, MED-QUAD, NEX-LABS, TRANSDAIRY). Some of the interviewed Lead Beneficiaries expressed criticism of the indicator system. **In some cases, they shared doubts on how to report indicators values** with consequent significant risks of double counting. **In other cases, it emerged that their understanding of a given indicator is not fully aligned with the definition provided by the programme.** In several cases **the workload generated by the necessity to manage the indicators system was indicated as excessive if compared to the energies required to carry out the project's activities.** Compared to other programmes managed by other donors on the southern shore of Mediterranean, this aspect emerged as a weak point of ENI CBC Med. It was also noticed that administrative requirements imposed by ENI CBC Med are higher than those featuring sectoral EU programmes (i.e. Horizon) especially in the reporting of indicators and justification of expenditures.

Criticism was particularly harsh in case of Priority A.2.1. It is worth noting that such criticism was expressed by two projects, BESTMEDGRAPE and NEX-LABS, having selected 10 output indicators. Conversely, it appeared that **when indicators to be considered are fewer, it is more likely that Lead Beneficiaries express appreciation.** This was the case of the interviewed Lead Beneficiaries of Priority A.3.1 who considered the result indicator prescribed by the programme (measuring new jobs) as appropriate.

Detailed arguments are developed in the sub-chapters 3.10-3.14 and especially in the case studies. The main risks emerged from the interviewed projects are the following:

- Inconsistencies in the calculation of output indicators' values deriving from the collection of the same output indicator value in association with different work packages:
 - Example: Output indicator I.1.1.b “Number of entrepreneurial ideas identified in the scouting stage and supported” is used by the standard project MEDSt@rts to measure an output under WP 4 and to measure another output under WP 6.
- Inconsistencies in the understanding of result indicators between the programme and the project level:
 - Example: Result indicator I.3.1.A “Number of women (all ages) and youths up to 30 years old, especially those belonging to the NEETs, supported by the programme who have found a job” is interpreted by the partners of RESMYLE and InnovAgroWoMed as including self-employment, meaning that a person having established a company is considered as employed. However, the measurement unit indicated in the programme manual on monitoring is “Job contracts for young people (18–24 years old), NEETS and women.

3.6 ABILITY OF THE PROGRAMME TO ACHIEVE THE OBJECTIVES SET, IN TERMS OF OUTPUTS AND RESULTS

EQ 15. Did the monitoring system make it possible to anticipate and reduce possible risks (e.g. anticipate risks of failure to achieve specific targets)?

EQ 16. What is the state of implementation of the programme with respect to the achievement of the objectives and results identified?

EQ 17. What is the state of implementation of the programme with respect to the achievement of the identified outputs?

EQ 18. Is the degree of achievement of the identified objectives and results influenced by the resources and means made available?

EQ 19. What other external and internal factors affect the achievement of the identified targets?

EQ 20. Are there any risks / problems hindering the smooth implementation of the programme?

EQ 21. Are the target groups of the programme involved successfully?

EQ 22. Have the Call Standards, Strategic and Capitalization, through which the programme is implemented, been modelled in a manner consistent with its objectives, as presented in the JOP?

EQ 23. Is the implementation of the programme consistent with the EU 2020 strategy and with the relevant macro-regional strategies?

Key findings

At the current state, the main weakness is the limited level of progress in terms of financial absorption: according to data as of April 2022, only 11% of the budget allocated has been certified (in total approximately MEUR 22). It is important also to underline that to this date only standard and strategic projects (at a very limited extent) have certified expenditure.

Concerning the state of implementation with respect to the achievement of the targets for the outputs and results, it is first important to highlight that the monitoring system does not allow to easily anticipate and reduce possible risks of not meeting the targets. The MIS does not allow the automatic aggregation of the achieved values declared by the projects in the progress reports and the JTS does not currently have a scoreboard that offers a synthetic picture of the level of progress of projects with respect to the output targets. Such a function is available only for the result indicators, which are not usable to monitor the actual progress of projects.

The analysis of the targets set by the projects for the end of 2023 shows limited risks of not meeting the programme targets. The review of the targets made in 2020 reduced the risks of not meeting the targets under TO B.I. This is also confirmed by the data collected through the survey, with over 90% of the beneficiaries who are positive about the possibility to reach the initial targets. Consulted Lead Beneficiaries confirmed such a confident approach.

Furthermore, the analysis also shows possible problems in misinterpreting the definition of the indicators, with some indicators for which the targets set at project level exceed the targets initially established at programme level. This could depend on misinterpretation of the definition of the indicators or of the way to aggregate its values.

The achievement of the identified targets was significantly hindered by the pandemic, especially when standard projects are concerned. Therefore, significant time extensions were required that

appear of fundamental importance for sound output achievement. Furthermore, political instability in Lebanon and other countries has significantly hampered the activities of some of the project partners.

Risks of instability remain important and could affect the smooth implementation of the programme. The economic consequences of the current Russia-Ukraine war could be severe for some of the Southern Mediterranean Countries and this could directly impact the conduction of some activities and involvement of definite segments of target groups.

Based on the information collected, the involvement of target groups appears good. This aspect is analysed in relation to five priorities in sub-chapters 3.10-3.14. Aspects such as the use of the Arabic language by the projects are highlighted. More in general, the excellent communication work, which is analysed in sub-chapter 3.7, shall be mentioned when engagement of the target groups is concerned. A well-structured cooperation between the programme and the project level was built to exploit the opportunities offered by the web. With the pandemic being an accelerator of the digital shift, this approach turned to be even more important than expected for the target groups involvement.

The information gathered by the evaluator does not allow to clearly depict the differences between the standard and the strategic projects. As underlined in sub-chapter 3.3 dedicated to the implementation mechanisms, a full awareness of the difference between standard and strategic projects did not emerge from the analysis of the relevant programme documents, nor from the interviews to the key stakeholders, nor from the interviews to the Lead Beneficiaries consulted for the focus groups. The specificities of capitalisation projects, which have not been analysed by the evaluator yet, appear much clearer.

The programme implementation appears fully in line with the initially set strategy addressing the key topics of business and SME development (TO A.1), support to education, research, technological development and innovation (TO A.2), promotion of social inclusion and fight against poverty (TO A.3), environmental protection, climate change adaptation and mitigation (TO B.1). The relevance of the projects is high. The programme implementation shall be considered as consistent with the EU 2020 strategy.

Recommendation for ENI CBC MED 2014-2020

The evaluator suggests firstly conducting a thorough check of declared output data in order to assess and avoid overestimations or misinterpretations of output indicators by applicants/beneficiaries. Additionally, we recommend the programme to verify with the IT expert the possibility to elaborate a solution for allowing to easily monitor the data on the output achieved values declared by the projects in the progress reports on MIS. In the evaluator's view, the availability of such a system is of key importance for ensuring the capacity to anticipate and reduce possible risks.

Intensive interaction with the projects to reach a common understanding of the result indicators definitions is also recommended to assess the actual level of achievement in 2022 and 2023 in a sound manner.

Recommendation for NEXT MED 2021-2027

Future monitoring system shall allow constant monitoring on the state of progress of the output indicators (i.e., shall allow to quickly aggregate data declared by the projects in the progress reports and validated by the auditors and the programme bodies).

In view of the next programming period, ensure a robust methodology for the choice and calculation of output and results indicator targets, considering the weaknesses identified in the current programme.

To keep attractiveness compared to other donors, the programme is recommended to reduce administrative burden for the beneficiaries. Reluctance of project partners from the southern shore could reduce the capacity of NEXT MED to achieve its objectives.

At a more strategic level, the programme should consider that socio-political instability is expected to affect more than one participating country in each programming period. The capacity to adjust the project management plans (in terms of activities, outputs, results and duration) flexibly and quickly to possible new situations would be highly beneficial to the capacity of the programme to achieve its objectives. Such a flexibility would be particularly important in case of involvement of NGOs representing youth, as they could be particularly impacted by a new unfavourable context due to their higher vulnerability.



This section provides a preliminary overview of the capacity of the programme to reach its objectives. As illustrated in the table below, according to data downloaded from MIS in April 2022, the programme has allocated 208,3 MEUR corresponding to 80 projects approved.

This is respectively 11% and 14% more than the targets of performance set in the monitoring and evaluation plan (i.e., 188,1 MEUR of funds committed to approved projects and 70 projects approved).

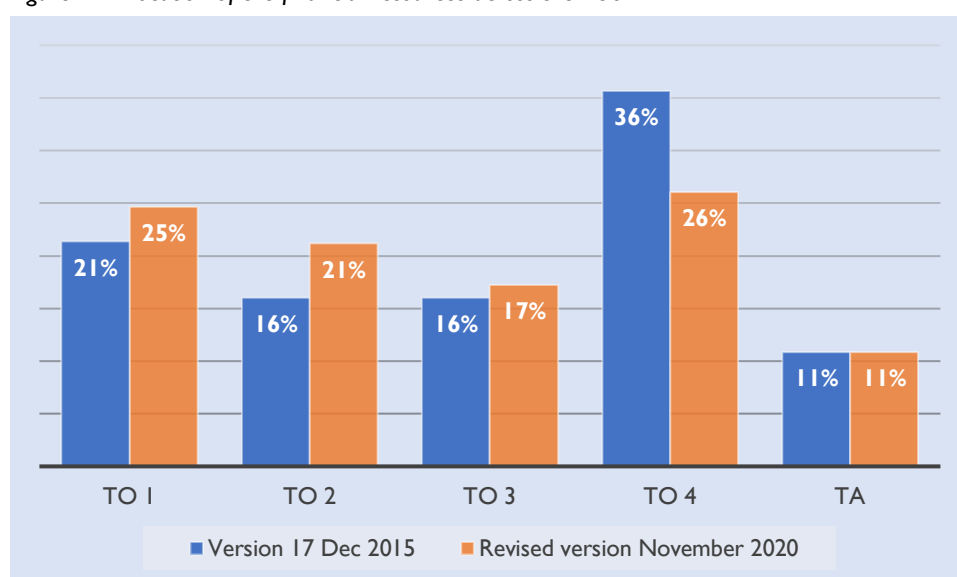
Table 18 n. of projects approved and budget allocated at priority level

TO	Priority	Standard		Strategic		Capitalization		Total	
		n. proj.	MEUR	n. proj.	MEUR	n. proj.	MEUR	n. proj.	MEUR
1	A.1.1	3	6,7	3	11,1	2	2,2	8	19,9
	A.1.2	6	15,3	3	9,0	2	2	11	26,3
	A.1.3	4	11,2			1	1,1	5	12,3
2	A.2.1	2	6,7	9	32,1	1	1,1	12	39,9
	A.2.2	3	7,9			2	1,9	5	9,9
3	A.3.1	3	7,8	6	21,2	1	1,1	10	15,9
	A.3.2	3	8,8			1	1,1	4	9,9
4	B.4.1	5	14,8			1	1,1	6	15,9
	B.4.2	4	10,1	1	3,3	1	1,1	6	14,5
	B.4.3	5	13,3	1	3,7	2	1,8	8	18,8
	B.4.4	3	8,5			2	2,2	5	10,7
Total		41	111,2	23	80,3	16	16,8	80	208,3

Source: MIS

Most of funds are concentrated under the priorities related to TO 1 and TO 4. It is important to underline that the distribution of resources across the TOs does not correspond to the initial budget allocation. As showed by the figure below, the initial allocation foresaw a stronger concentration of financial resources on TO 4 (i.e., 36% of the total resources corresponding to more than 83 MEUR). This initial allocation was modified in 2020. According to the information collected from interviews the number of good project proposals received under TO 4 was not sufficient to cover the initial budget allocation which led to redistributing part of the budget to TO 1 and TO 2, in particular.

Figure 14 Allocation of the financial resources across the TOs



Source: Joint Operation Programme, versions 17 December 2015 and revised version November 2020

Concerning the state of implementation of the programme from the perspective of financial absorption, data as available on April 2022 shows a limited level of progress: **only 11% of the budget allocated was certified** (in total approximately MEUR 22). The level of absorption varies across priorities (see table below) with priorities B.4.1, A.2.2, A.3.2 and B.4.3 showing the highest level of financial absorption and priorities A.1.1 and A.2.1 the lowest. It is important to underline that the consulted data do not show any certificated expenditure for capitalisation projects and indicate a very low rate of expenditure certification for strategic projects (3%).

Table 19 Financial absorption at priority level

Priority	Tot budget	% of certified expenditure
A.1.1	19,9	7%
A.1.2	26,3	11%
A.1.3	12,3	12%
A.2.1	39,9	5%
A.2.2	9,9	16%
A.3.1	30,1	9%
A.3.2	9,9	15%
B.4.1	15,9	18%

Priority	Tot budget	% of certified expenditure
B.4.2	14,5	12%
B.4.3	18,8	15%
B.4.4	10,7	12%
Total	208,3	11%

Source: MIS

Concerning the physical progress, the analysis of the targets set by the projects for the end of 2023 shows limited risks of not meeting the programme targets. Furthermore, it can be observed that some indicators significantly exceed the targets initially established at programme level. This could depend on misinterpretation of the definition of the indicators or of the way to aggregate its values.

Output and result indicator targets have been updated and modified by the Managing Authority during 2020. Indeed, due to the COVID 19 pandemic, on 23 June 2020 the European Commission adopted the Implementing Regulation (UE) 879/2020, which modified the previous (UE) 897/2014. In line with the new regulation, the programme has modified its Evaluation Plan (a new version has been adopted in November 2020) and set new targets for six priorities.

More in details, target values of output indicators have been modified as follows:

- in Priority A.2.1 10 targets were changed with an overall increase of 26% of their value;
- in Priority A.2.2 four targets were changed with an overall increase of 20% of their value;
- in Priority B.4.1 nine targets values were changed with an overall decrease of 31% of their value; in Priority B.4.2 seven targets were changed with an overall decrease of 33% of their value;
- in Priority B.4.3 eight targets were changed with an overall decrease of 33% of their value;
- in Priority B.4.4 seven targets were changed with an overall decrease of 33% of their value, and a new indicator was added.

It is worth noting that the decrease of target values under TO B.1 is consistent with the reduction of allocations mentioned above.

The table below shows the changes in detail.

Table 20 Output indicators new targets

Priority	Output indicator	Old target	Consolidated target	Difference	Number of changes	Increase/ decrease in %
A.1.1	I.1.1.1.a	100	100	0	0	0%
	I.1.1.1.b	200	200	0		
	I.1.1.2.c	500.000	500.000	0		
	I.1.1.3.d	80	80	0		
	I.1.1.4.e	900	900	0		
	I.1.2.5.f	10	10	0		
	I.1.2.6.g	30	30	0		
	I.1.3.7.h	720	720	0		
	I.1.3.7.i	720	720	0		
	I.1.3.9.j	3.000	3.000	0		

Priority	Output indicator	Old target	Consolidated target	Difference	Number of changes	Increase/ decrease in %
A.1.2	1.2.1.1.a	120	120	0	0	0%
	1.2.1.2.b	120	120	0		
	1.2.1.3.c	120	120	0		
	1.2.2.4.d	18	18	0		
	1.2.2.5.e	300	300	0		
	1.2.2.6.f	750	750	0		
A.1.3	1.3.1.1.a	80	80	0	0	0%
	1.3.1.1.b	40	40	0		
	1.3.1.2.c	200	200	0		
	1.3.2.3.d	100	100	0		
	1.3.2.4.e	50	50	0		
	1.3.2.5.f	15	15	0		
	1.3.2.6.g	150	150	0		
	1.3.2.6.h	300	300	0		
A.2.1	2.1.1.1.a	50	90	40	10	26%
	2.1.1.1.b	40	48	8		
	2.1.1.2.c	20	24	4		
	2.1.1.3.d	135	162	27		
	2.1.1.4.e	100	120	20		
	2.1.1.5.f	30	36	6		
	2.1.2.6.g	50	60	10		
	2.1.2.7.h	10	12	2		
	2.1.2.8.i	150	180	30		
	2.1.2.8.j	100	120	20		
	A.2.2	2.2.1.1.a	50	60		
2.2.1.1.b		40	48	8		
2.2.1.2.c		50	60	10		
2.2.1.3.d		50	60	10		
A.3.1	3.1.1.1.a	20	20	0	0	0%
	3.1.1.2.b	45	45	0		
	3.1.1.2.c	450	450	0		
	3.1.1.2.d	14.400	14.400	0		
	3.1.1.3.e	150	150	0		
	3.1.1.4.f	30	30	0		
	3.1.1.5.g	20	20	0		
	3.1.1.6.h	20	20	0		
A.3.2	3.2.1.1.a	450	450	0	0	-5%

Priority	Output indicator	Old target	Consolidated target	Difference	Number of changes	Increase/decrease in %
	3.2.1.2.b	15	15	0		
	3.2.1.3.c	12	12	0		
	3.2.2.4.d	30	30	0		
	3.2.2.5.e	30	30	0		
	3.2.2.6.f	150	150	0		
B.4.1	4.1.1.1.a	6	4	-2	9	-31%
	4.1.1.2.b	6	4	-2		
	4.1.1.2.c	18	12	-6		
	4.1.1.3.d	480	320	-160		
	4.1.1.4.e	9	8	-1		
	4.1.1.5.f	30	20	-10		
	4.1.2.6.g	480	320	-160		
	4.1.2.7.h	18	12	-6		
	4.1.2.8.i	9	6	-3		
B.4.2	4.2.1.1.a	540	360	-180	7	-33%
	4.2.1.2.b	36	24	-12		
	4.2.1.2.c	9.000	6.000	-3.000		
	4.2.1.2.d	9.000	6.000	-3.000		
	4.2.1.2.e	225.000	150.000	-75.000		
	4.2.1.3.f	36	24	-12		
	4.2.1.4.g	90	60	-30		
B.4.3	4.3.1.1.a	18	12	-6	8	-33%
	4.3.1.2.b	27	18	-9		
	4.3.1.3.c	36	24	-12		
	4.3.1.4.d	12	8	-4		
	4.3.2.5.e	12	8	-4		
	4.3.2.5.f	9.000	6.000	-3.000		
	4.3.2.6.g	36	24	-12		
	4.3.2.7.h	54	36	-18		
B.4.4	4.4.1.1.a	54	36	-18	8	-33% (plus indicator 4.4.1.2.d which was added)
	4.4.1.1.b	18	12	-6		
	4.4.1.1.c	900	600	-300		
	4.4.1.2.e	6	4	-2		
	4.4.1.3.f	9.000	6.000	-3.000		
	4.4.1.4.g	180	120	-60		
	4.4.1.5.h	36	24	-12		
	4.4.1.2.d	0	12	12		

Source: Excel file provided by the MA in January 2022 corrected based on revised Evaluation Plan

An assessment of the level of achievement of output indicators is not provided by the evaluator. The reason lies in the difficulties emerged in the previous chapter concerning the inconsistencies in the calculation of output indicator values deriving from the collection of the same output indicator value in association with different work packages (*double counting*).

Furthermore, projects are at a too early stage to assess the result indicators achievement. At this regard, it shall be reminded that differently from the outputs achievement, MIS provides information on result indicators progress.

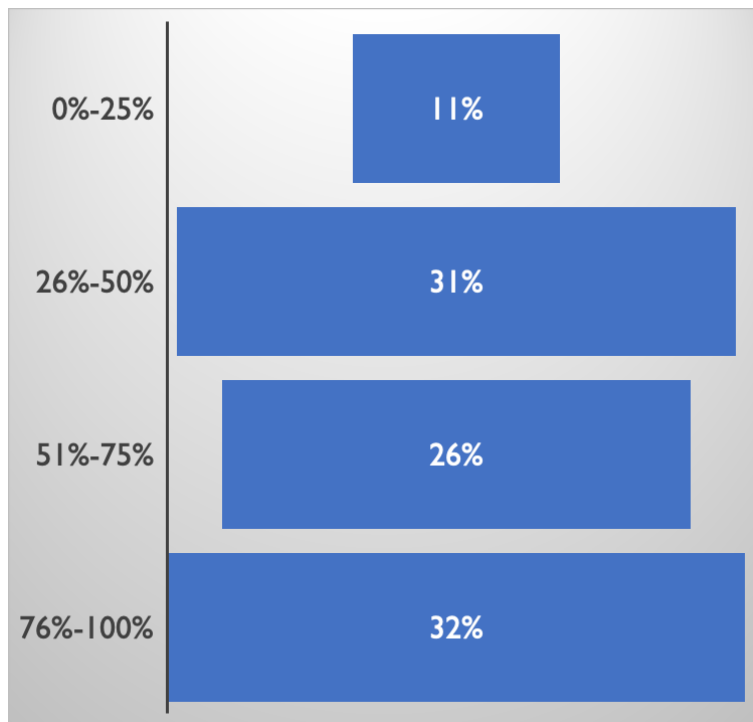
The level of progress of the achievements by the projects is analysed below based on the case studies, which allowed in-depth investigations.



As concerns the ability of the projects to reach what was initially set in terms of outputs and results, the web survey collected some data on the perception of the beneficiaries about their capacity to reach the initial targets.

The figure below shows what is the level of progress of project activities compared to the initial workplan. All in all, 58% of respondents have already completed more than half of the project’s activities, with 32% having already completed more than 75% of the project’s activities. It is important to remind that this data was collected at the end of 2021, while data on certified expenditures presented in Table 17 refer to the end of July 2021. In this sense, by comparing the two data (i.e., Table 17 and Figure 15) one must expect that expenditures certified during the second half of 2021 will significantly improve the financial absorption rate of the programme.

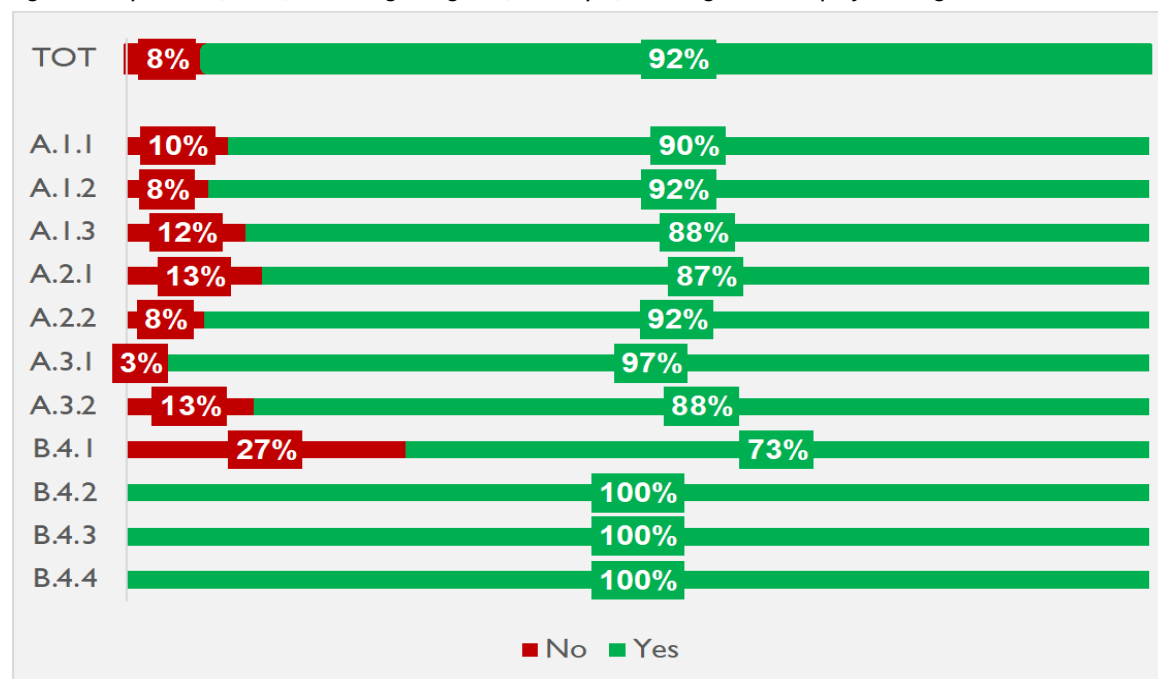
Figure 15 Percentage of progress of the achieved activities compared to the initial workplan



Source: web survey

Respondents were also asked to estimate whether the initial targets in terms of outputs and results were still reachable. As illustrated by the figure below the feedback from the web survey is extremely reassuring with 92% of respondents that are positive about the possibility to reach the initial targets. The situation is rather consistent across the different priorities, with the only exception of B.4.1 where the percentage of the respondents who declare themselves skeptical about the achievement of the targets raise to 27%.

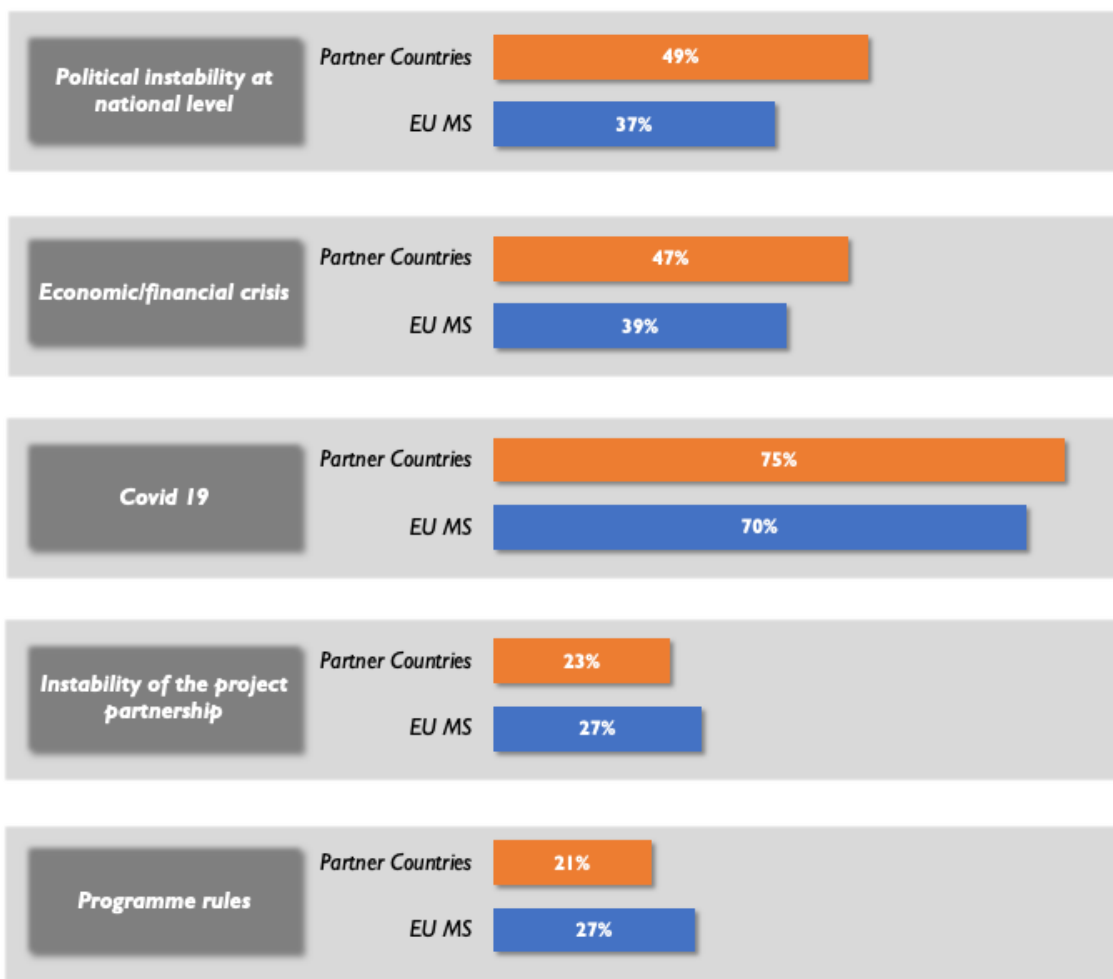
Figure 16 Opinions of beneficiaries regarding the feasibility of reaching the initial projects targets



Source: Web survey

Finally, looking at the factors which have more negatively affected project implementation, i.e., limiting the capacity to achieve what was initially planned, the web survey confirms what was reasonable to expect (see figure below), namely the impact of COVID 19, considered a key negative factor by 75% of respondents from Partner Countries and by 70% of respondents from EU MS. Also important are the impacts of the political instability and of the financial crisis, which were considered as a negative factor by almost half of respondents from Partner Countries. On the contrary, it is interesting to notice that factors that we can consider as “internal” to the programme (meaning the programme has the capacity to influence them) such as the programme rules and the instability of the projects’ partnership were considered as a negative factor only by one fourth of respondents. From the evaluator’s point of view, this is a further confirmation of the capacity of the programme to respond to the needs of the beneficiaries (as already demonstrated by the feedback on the support provided during the implementation of the projects, see Figure 10).

Figure 17 Factors that have negatively affected the achievement of the projects' objectives



Source: Web survey



Case studies indicate that, in spite of the still limited progress of the projects, **Lead Beneficiaries are still confident to achieve both the target values for the output and result indicators.** This confirms what has emerged from the web survey.

As the observed level of project management is high, it appears that thanks to the extensions required almost by all observed projects, **a good level of achievement of outputs should be reached.** At this regard, it is recommended to verify possible inconsistencies in output indicator calculations.

Regarding result indicators achievement, the situation appears uncertain. Very little progress was observed and there are misalignments in the understanding of some indicators that do not reflect the situation on the ground, i.e. the type of jobs that projects try to create. This aspects have been analysed in the previous section. **Interaction with the projects to reach a common understanding of the result indicators definitions appears necessary to assess the actual level of achievement in 2022 and 2023 in a sound manner.**

Case studies allowed to investigate how COVID 19 impacted on the course of the projects. First of all, it is important to underline that already started projects did not stop and managed to continue their activities even though with new modalities. This shall be considered as a success for the whole programme. Even if in spring 2020 the JTS had just started operations, the officers managed to support

the projects in their efforts to continue activities. A process of mutual learning between the projects was observed when new modalities of work were concerned. Web communication received an input from the overall digital acceleration. The timing of the different types of projects was relevant to the impact of the pandemic. Whereas standard projects having started in the second half of 2019 had to reorganise their activities taking into account new restrictions, strategic projects started mainly in the second half of 2020 and therefore were facilitated in adapting to the new situation. Even in absence of case studies dedicated to capitalisation projects, one can expect that adaptation to the “new normal” was even easier for them due to their start concentrated mainly in the second half of 2021.

Beyond the extraordinary situation created by COVID 19, it is worth noting that in the Mediterranean area **political instability** is a recurring phenomenon affecting more than one country in each programming period. In the period when the 2014-2020 ENI CBC Med projects were developed, the most dramatic crisis affected **Lebanon**. Projects involving partners from this country were severely impacted as it is reported by more than one case studies. Other cases of political instability were reported by the projects as important external factors, for instance in Tunisia. Palestine remains a country featured by delicate political conditions. Furthermore, as briefly illustrated in sub-chapter 3.8, the Russia-Ukraine war could cause further instability in some of the countries of the southern shore. The standard project AQUACYCLE, which focused on water management, is an interesting case to be mentioned with regard to the difficulties due to external factors.

Evidence from the AQUACYCLE standard project

The project faced several difficulties due to external factors. Owing to COVID 19, most events had to be held online, which had an impact on their effectiveness, as the lack of face-to-face contact did not suit some of the target groups, such as farmers.

In Lebanon, the multiple crises that the country has faced since 2020 combined with administrative red tape have affected the implementation of activities. For example, not being allowed to open a Euro bank account according to national regulations, the Lebanese University was unable to pay its staff, which led to reporting problems and delays in tenders. In autumn 2021, the new Rector of the university managed to solve the problem by establishing direct contacts with the Central Bank of Lebanon. According to another project partner¹, the Lebanese partner has displayed a high level of responsiveness and should be commended for keeping the project on track and achieving the expected results² under extremely unfavourable conditions.

The political instability which Tunisia has been experiencing since the parliamentary and presidential elections of 2019 has been another destabilising factor for the project, delaying the launch of tenders for the demonstration unit until March 2021. The evaluation process was slowed down by bureaucratic constraints as the procedure foresees that the results are sent to a Ministerial Committee which gathered only in November 2021. The validity period of offers being only 4 months, they all expired and were rejected in December 2021, resulting in a loss of time of 9 months. Another source of delay was the change of government in 2021, which prevented any high-level decision-making. The tender was finally relaunched in February 2022.

Finally, several projects reported that **the opportunities offered by other international donors could discourage participation in ENI CBC Med from the southern shore**, considering that

¹ Integrated Resources Management (IRM)

² Except for the launch of the tender which is foreseen to be launched by the first semester of 2022

the latter is featured by remarkably higher administrative burden. Such an aspect is not relevant to the 2014-2020 period but represents a risk that the programme should consider for the 2021-2027 period. At this regard, administrative simplification is key to increase the “competitiveness” of the programme compared to other funding sources.

3.7 EFFECTIVENESS OF THE PROGRAMME COMMUNICATION ACTIONS

EQ 24. Do the communication activities carried out by the Managing Authority and the antennas lead to the achievement of the general and specific objectives established in the communication strategy?

EQ 25. If not, what changes are needed?

EQ 26. Which communication tools have been most effective in raising awareness of the programme?

Key findings

In relation to the objectives set in section 4.7 of the JOP, the analyses show that the first objective of the communication strategy (i.e., *To raise awareness of potential beneficiaries and the public on both shores of the Mediterranean about the aims and opportunities of the programme and to involve all of them in its promotion*) is achieved.

As concerns the second objective (i.e., *ensure adequate visibility of the programme and of the cooperation between the European Union and Partner Countries in the Mediterranean area*) this is divided into two specific objectives. Considering the quality and the number of contents produced through the website and the media channels, the first one (i.e., *SO 2.1 Ensure Programme visibility in the cooperation area*) can be considered achieved. Also the second one (*SO 2.2 Enhance relations with institutions and the media*) is considered achieved, especially considering the press coverage ensured by the projects.

Objective 3 refers to the final phase of the programme lifecycle focusing on the achieved programme results and good practices to be disseminated with all the stakeholders interested within and outside the cooperation area. As the programme has not reached the needed maturity to implement the communication strategy related to the dissemination of good practices, the third general objective is not considered in this analysis.

Recommendation for ENI CBC MED 2014-2020

From the evaluator's perspective, information on the extraordinary press coverage gained by the projects could be aggregated and shown in the Press review area of the website. The visualisation per project, indeed, does not provide an overlook on the overall press coverage gained by the programme through the project activities.

Recommendation for NEXT MED 2021-2027

We recommend highlighting that the programme is generating contents in Arabic also covering technical fields that were not covered in this language before the projects. This is an added value generated by the programme that could be shared by the MA with the MPC to explore how to further increase the impact of the projects on the countries of the southern shore.



This part of the evaluation aims to verify whether the communication activities carried out in the first part of the programme implementation were effective in achieving the objectives established in the strategy. Moreover, the analysis also verifies the communication tools that contributed the most in raising the awareness of the opportunities to the potential beneficiaries and provided visibility of the programme achievements.

The communication strategy described in section 4.7 of the JOP, drafted in accordance with article 79 of Commission Implementing Regulations (EU) No 897/2014, reports three main objectives that the strategy shall pursue to promote the magnitude of mutual interests and long-term objectives of cooperation between the EU and Partner Countries in the Mediterranean area. Those objectives are:

1. To raise awareness of potential beneficiaries and the public on both shores of the Mediterranean about the aims and opportunities of the programme and to involve all of them in its promotion.
2. To ensure adequate visibility of the programme and of the cooperation between the European Union and Partner Countries in the Mediterranean area.
3. To promote the diffusion of the results achieved under the programme, in order to foster the exploitation and capitalisation of good practices and valuable experiences.

Objective 1 takes into consideration the initial phase of the programme launch, during which the communication strategy focuses on spreading the awareness among the stakeholders about the programme initiatives to promote the cooperation in the Mediterranean area through the opportunities included in the calls for proposals.

Objective 2 refers to the implementation phase and the communication strategy focuses on providing visibility to the activities undertaken by projects and their impact on the cooperation area together with the results achieved.

Objective 3 refers to the final phase of the programme life focusing on the programme achieved results and good practices to be diffused with all the stakeholders interested within and outside the cooperation area.

The following table proposes an analysis of the tools and initiatives that were implemented by the programme to realise the proposed actions to achieve the specific objectives described in the JOP. Each specific objective is assessed according to the level of the realisation of the activities planned. As the programme has not reached the needed maturity to implement the communication strategy related to the diffusion of good practices, the third general objective is not considered in this analysis.

Table 21 Progress in the achievement of the key objectives set in the communication strategy

SO	Action	Tool – Initiative	Assessment
I.1 Launch the new Programme	I.1.1 Organisation of a launching conference	- - International conference with 350 participants	Achieved
I.2 Promote the first call for proposals	I.2.1 Organisation of informative events	- Info days for standard calls - National info days for calls for Info strategic projects - Technical workshops for potential applicants - Online webinars to promote calls for proposals for capitalization projects	Achieved
	I.2.2 Production of dissemination material	- Calls for proposals texts and PPT presentation in English and Arabic - Guidelines for applicants in English and Arabic - Terms of reference in English and Arabic	Achieved

SO	Action	Tool – Initiative	Assessment
		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Documents to support the preparation of project proposals - e-form user guide - Frequently Asked Questions - Project ideas database 	
	1.2.3 Promotion of the call for proposals in media	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Local and national newspapers - Social media 	Achieved
	1.2.4 Design of a dedicated section on the programme website	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - https://www.enicbcmec.eu/calls-for-proposals 	Achieved
2.1 Ensure Programme visibility in the cooperation area	2.1.1 Development and management of the programme website	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Programme website 	Achieved
	2.1.2 Management and updating of social media	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Facebook - Twitter - LinkedIn - YouTube - Instagram - Interreg podcast 	Achieved
	2.1.3 Production and dissemination of a communication kit	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Section 10 of the Project Implementation Manual: Communication and visibility - Standardized projects websites - Tenders and vacancies publishing examples 	Achieved
	2.1.4 Drafting and diffusion of newsletters	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Programme newsletter 	Achieved
2.2 Enhance relations with institutions and the media	2.2.1 Participation in external events	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Participation to the COP 26 as a side event - ENI CBC Med Programme participation in the high-level side event on “Biological Diversity, Ecosystem Restoration and Food System” organised by the European Union - Participation to Tandem media awards - Participation to EU4Youth in Egypt and Tunis 	Achieved
	2.2.2 Creation/reinforcement of links with EU delegations	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Open day in Jordan organised by JEDCO - Participation to EU-funded ERASMUS+ EGREEN project - Launch of the EU-funded project titled “Intellectual Properties Capacities for Smart, Sustainable and Inclusive Growth in the Mediterranean Region” (IPMED) 	Achieved
	2.2.3 Organisation of a media campaign	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Very Active on social media - Online and printed press 	Achieved

Source: JOP and information available on the website

The analysis of the available data shows that several initiatives were undertaken to promote the calls for proposals (i.e., SO I.2). The table below summarises the key events organised to promote the different calls.

Table 22 Information days organized in participating countries

Partner State	Standard			Strategic			Capitalisation		
	Date	Participants	Modality	Date	Participants	Modality	Date	Modality	
Cyprus	06/06/2017	14	Physical event	04/06/2019	74	Physical event			
Greece	08/06/2017	129		06/06/2019	106				
Spain	15/06/2017	139		07/05/2019	157				
Malta	22/06/2017	52		23/05/2019	74				
Portugal	27/06/2017	37		09/05/2019	49				
France	04/06/2017	85		29/05/2019	84				
Jordan	11/06/2017	164		13/06/2019	128				
Lebanon	13/07/2017	186		11/06/2019	106				
Italy	14/07/2017	307		14/05/2019	253			18/06/2020	Online webinar
								12/06/2020	
Egypt	18/07/2017	137		22/04/2019	90				
				23/05/2019	79				
Tunisia	20/07/2017	169		16/05/2019	488				
Israel	25/07/2017	89		16/04/2019	42				
Palestine	27/07/2017	89	17/04/2019	126					
Total participants		1597			1856				

Source: website



According to the interviewed representatives of the programme bodies, **the communication strategy is developed at two complementary levels: centralised and national.** The communication centralised at the programme level is mainly aimed at informing the interested audience about the projects' achievements and initiatives. At this regard, all the interviewees appreciate the social media management strategy implemented by the programme staff. As concerns the promotion of the calls of proposals, interviewees underline that the communication on national level is generally more effective. The NCPs are providing information concerning the calls for proposals in the local languages that can reach out to a greater number of potential applicants. The Italian NCP is a relevant example of this successful communication strategy, as can be seen in the section dedicated to the events organised to promote EU policies and cooperation programmes of the Regione Puglia Eventi (europuglia.it). Furthermore, Regione Puglia has been organising several webinars in Italian to share information about the opportunities provided by ENI CBC Med and potential synergies with other Interreg programmes.



For the calls for standard projects and strategic projects, an information day was organized in each participating country. Overall, the info days organised to promote the strategic calls registered a higher number of participants.

Beside the info days, the launch of the calls was promoted through the programme website. As illustrated in sub-chapter 3.2 for each call a wide range of supporting material was made available to potential applicants on the programme website in English and in some cases in Arabic. Moreover, a specific Frequently Asked Questions section and a section to support the development of project ideas were created (see section 3.2.3 for the analysis of the effectiveness of these different tools).

The news on the calls for proposals were published in local newspapers of the countries involved as part of the communication action to spread the awareness of the opportunities. The calls were also promoted through the programme social media, i.e. Twitter, LinkedIn, Facebook.

In the light of the various activities carried out to promote the calls, the **first objective of the communication strategy** (i.e., *To raise awareness of potential beneficiaries and the public on both shores of the Mediterranean about the aims and opportunities of the Programme and to involve all of them in its promotion*) **can be considered achieved.**

For what concerns the second objective (i.e., *ensure adequate visibility of the Programme and of the cooperation between the European Union and Partner Countries in the Mediterranean area*) as illustrated by Table 21 above, this is divided into two specific objectives.

The first one (i.e., *SO 2.1 Ensure Programme visibility in the cooperation area*) was mainly pursued through the creation and management of the programme website and of different social media channels.

Overall, the programme website is well structured and highlights sections concerning projects achievements and opportunities related, such as vacancies and workshops. The first page of the website shows the most relevant news about projects and includes an interactive calendar with the events involving projects initiatives. Alongside the website, several social media channels are used to enhance the programme visibility.

As illustrated by the table below the programme is very active on a wide range of platforms publishing different forms of content. The social media are used to publish contents related to project activities and initiatives for the public. Besides these channels, ENI CBC Med has taken part to “This Is Europe”, the Interreg podcast channel to broadcast stories on EU funded projects. A newsletter of the latest updates has been created and the registration can be made on the website home page.

Table 23 Social media managed by the programme

Social Medium	LinkedIn	Facebook	Twitter	YouTube	Instagram
Followers	>500	13.167	6.621	382	1.577
N. of posts	N/A	N/A	9.507	130	573
Frequency of posting	Weekly	Daily	Daily	Monthly	Daily

Source: analysis of the social networks

Considering the quality and the number of contents produced through the web site and the media channels, from the evaluator’s perspective the programme has achieved what was planned in the communication strategy in terms of actions to pursue SO 2.1.

As concerns the SO 2.2 *Enhance relations with institutions and the media*, one of the actions planned by the communication strategy was to participate in external events. ENI CBC Med participated in the UN Climate Change Conference (COP26) that took place in Glasgow in November 2021. In particular, the programme took part in a side event organised by the EU on “Biological Diversity, Ecosystem Restoration and Food System” and to the TANDEM, a regional competition involving several countries from the southern shore of the Mediterranean. The programme also took part to the to EU4Youth concerning EU support to youth in the Eastern Partnership.

The programme communication strategy highlights the importance of reinforcing links with the EU delegations in Partner Countries.

A selection of activities involving EU delegations in the period 2019-2021 follows:

- Mr. Luis Miguel Bueno, EU Arabic Spokesperson for the Middle East and North Africa, took part in the online dialogue between young people from the Mediterranean area organised by the Managing Authority on 10 May 2021 to celebrate the Europe Day.
- A representative of the Managing Authority took part in the event “EU-funded CSO projects in Israel in the environmental sector” organised by the EU Delegation to Israel together with the international department of the Israeli Ministry of Environmental Protection. During this event, which took place on 31 May 2021, the BERLIN and DECOST projects were also presented.
- H.E. Mr Christian Berger, Ambassador of the European Union to Egypt, took part in the conference “Blending Business Support Organisations (BSOs) & Incubators Support” organised on 6th of May 2021 to officially launch the CRE@CTIVE, and INTECMED projects.
- Former EU ambassador to Israel, Mr. Emanuele Giaufret, visited the Yeelim school in Eilat on 17 June 2021, selected as a pilot site by BERLIN to improve energy performance and become an energy independent building through integrated photovoltaics, building – applied photovoltaics and energy storage interventions.
- Mr. Omar Abu Eid, environmental officer at the EU Delegation to Jordan, took part in the launching event of the ORGANIC ECOSYSTEM project which took place online on 3 June 2020. Find more information here (event not mentioned in previous report).
- H.E. Ms. Maria Hadjitheodosiou, Ambassador of the European Union to Jordan, opened the sixth meeting of the Joint Monitoring Committee which took place in Amman on 4-5 December 2019.
- Ambassador Hadjitheodosiou also took part to the launching events of IPMED and HELIOS projects and she visited National Agricultural Research Center (<http://www.enicbcmed.eu/presentation-livingagro-project-eu-delegation-and-ambassador-jordan>) which participated in the LIVINGAGRO, MENAWARA, HELIOS and PROSIM projects.
- A technical meeting between the partners of the [SME4SMARTCITIES project](#) and the representatives of the EU Delegation in Israel and the EU office for the West Bank and Gaza Strip.

- A representative of the EU Delegation to Israel took part to the kick-off meeting of the GreenInMed project as well as to the project webinar for hotel managers and owners (<http://www.enicbcmcd.eu/israeli-partners-greeninmed-will-host-zoom-conference-hotel-owners-and-managers-discuss-current>).

From the evaluator's perspective, the programme fully achieved what was planned for specific actions aimed at strengthening the link with the EU.

The last action planned under SO 2.2 was to organise a media campaign. The programme set up a detailed communication strategy to guide the projects and support them in the implementation of the communication activities, e.g. section 10. "Communication and visibility" of the Project Implementation Manual (PIM). According to the PIM, all projects are required to share information and communication activities designed to raise awareness of their results to specific and general audiences in the countries and regions concerned, as well as the impact of their activities.

It must be noted that the ENI CBC Med Programme distinguishes itself for the effectiveness of its communication strategy. The projects designed a mix of actions to ensure the visibility of their activities and to ensure an appropriate level of communication with the target groups and the general audience. The mix includes several online tools, such as the programme website or social media and offline channels (e.g. press, radio, television).

The most effective tool to communicate with **internal and external stakeholders is the programme website and especially the project web pages**. The commitment shown by the programme and the projects in maintaining an active and receptive communication stream for the ENI CBC Med Programme is remarkable. In fact, **the projects are required to update their webpages at least four times a month** during their implementation phase. The content published by the projects is reviewed by the programme authorities before being published, which can result in delays because of the high traffic of information. From the data gathered through the consultation with the project partners, the communication strategy required by the programme is highly appreciated, despite being quite demanding in terms of workload.

Considering the communication work directly carried out by the programme and also the communication activities that the projects were encouraged to develop (see below), SO 2.2. of the communication strategy can be considered totally achieved.

Beside the official website, the programme has highly encouraged projects to be present and active on social media (e.g. Facebook, Twitter, LinkedIn and Instagram). **Social media** have proven to be very **effective channels which allow projects to reach out to a wide array of audience, especially young people.**

Evidence from the RESMYLE standard project

According to the data collected from the consultation with the project's lead beneficiary, the communication strategy of RESMYLE is very effective. During the COVID 19 crisis outbreak, the communication stream was not flowing because the activities had to be postponed. However, once the restrictions started to ease, the project website started to flourish with insightful content. RESMYLE publishes stories of the beneficiaries' experiences to give a concrete visibility of the results achieved. Moreover, the project has opened its own social media accounts, where it automatically publishes all the content that is available on their website. Their accounts are updated

day-by-day and the partners ask the beneficiaries to mention the project in their posts. At the moment, Facebook is the most active channel.

As highlighted in the programme communication strategy, the media are essential to enhance interactions with the target groups, and projects were expected to maintain continuous relations with them. The evaluators conducted an analysis of the “Press Review” section available on the programme website. It should be noted this analysis does not take into account the capitalisation projects, as it would have been too premature considering their recent start.

From the analysis it appears that **the projects published 681 items in total on a variety of channels**. Moreover, it is remarkable that **almost the half of the projects considered have published content in Arabic** (31 out of 64). From the analysis of case studies, it emerged that publishing content in the national language of the target groups is **essential to increase the effectiveness and the reach of the message communicated**. This aspect could appear as particularly relevant in the MPC countries, where the Arabic speaking population might be left out if the content shared of the project is not translated. However, from the analysis of the case studies, the translation into Arabic appears to be a controversial topic: some project partners have been making significant efforts to reach out the potential beneficiaries and translate the material in Arabic to make it accessible to anyone. On the other hand, other projects consider fluency in English as a requirement to get involved in the project activities, therefore did not feel the necessity to translate any content into Arabic.

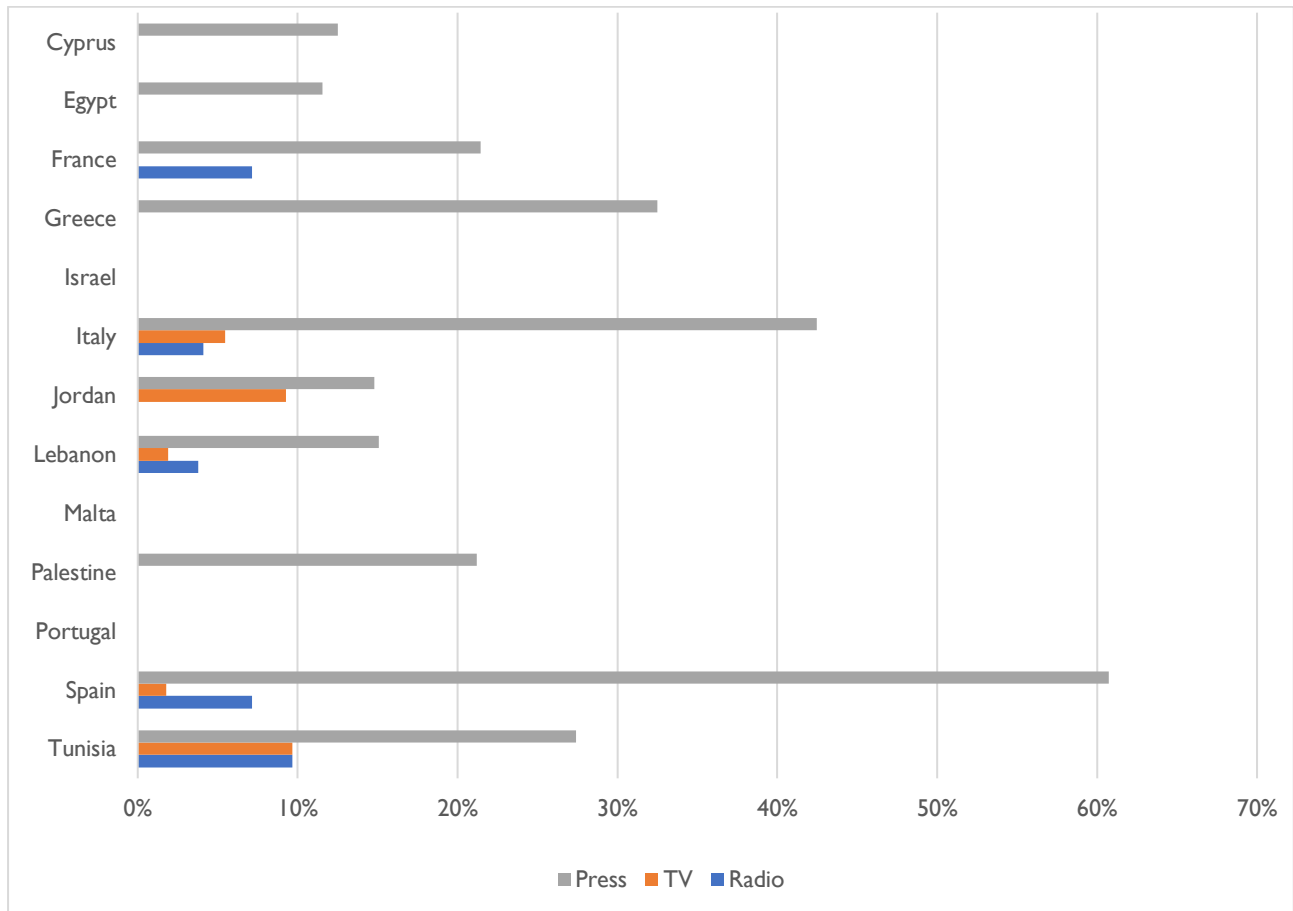
Evidence from the BESTMEDGRAPE standard project

BESTMEDGRAPE created a MOODLE platform to share the learning material for its activities. As the COVID 19 crisis has significantly increased the use of this platform, the project partners decided to translate the material in all the languages of the projects, including Arabic. It should be noted that scientific content is usually only published in English, which in some countries can represent an entry barrier for beneficiaries who are not fluent in this language. As the translated material is going to be made public, this translation represents a significant value added brought by the project and a legacy to raise awareness about the programme after its conclusion.

As illustrated by the example above, besides the communication channels illustrated by the programme in the Implementation Manual, some projects developed other effective tools to communicate with the target groups and support the sharing of learning materials with the project beneficiaries or any other party that might be interested. From the project partners consultation, it emerged that often these tools acquired a more prominent role than what was initially foreseen because of the social distance imposed by COVID 19 crisis.

From the analysis of the “Press review” section, it emerges that the online press was the most used channel. For instance, in Italy, 42% of the approved projects who are active in the country disseminated content via online press release, 5% of them published content through television broadcast and only 4% through the radio. In Tunisia and Jordan, television was used to a greater extent compared to other countries. No data were registered in Israel, Malta and Portugal.

Figure 18 Percentage of projects having been covered by press, TV, radio (per country)



Source: own elaboration of data published on the website

3.8 ABILITY OF THE PROGRAMME STRATEGY TO RESPOND TO ANY CHANGES IN THE SOCIO-ECONOMIC CONTEXT AND THE POLITICAL-REGULATORY FRAMEWORK

EQ 27. Are the objectives of the programme still relevant, coherent and complementary in the political context? Do the funded projects highlight the presence of needs and challenges that are not among the problems identified by the programme strategy?

EQ 28. Have the needs of the programme area changed since the strategy was formulated in the JOP?

EQ 29. If so, is the programme adequately responding to the new needs of the area?

EQ 30. Are there any unmet needs that could be addressed in the future programme?

Key findings

80% of web survey respondents consider that the programme strategy is still relevant as the area is not characterised by the presence of new needs and challenges with respect to those identified in the 2014-2020 Joint Operational Programme. The 20% who consider that the programme strategy is no longer relevant to the emerging needs mainly refer to: social and economic impacts due to the health crisis related to COVID 19 and to social and political instability (particularly in Lebanon).

As the funded projects address key challenges for the Mediterranean area, some of them have shown the capacity to prepare the ground for higher resilience to unexpected crises.

Recommendation for ENI CBC MED 2014-2020

Solutions elaborated by the funded projects to better react to the possible crisis of the food supply chain deriving from the Russia-Ukraine war could be identified and disseminated to fertilise other project and facilitate quick capitalisation at policy level.

Recommendation NEXT MED 2021-2027

The programme should continue addressing key challenges for the Mediterranean area, knowing that this approach increases resilience to unexpected crises.



80% of web survey respondents consider that the programme strategy is still relevant as the area is not characterised by the presence of new needs and challenges with respect to those identified in the 2014-2020 Joint Operational Programme. The 20% who consider that the programme strategy is no longer relevant to the emerging needs mainly refer to: social and economic impacts due to the health crisis related to COVID 19 and to social and political instability (particularly in Lebanon).

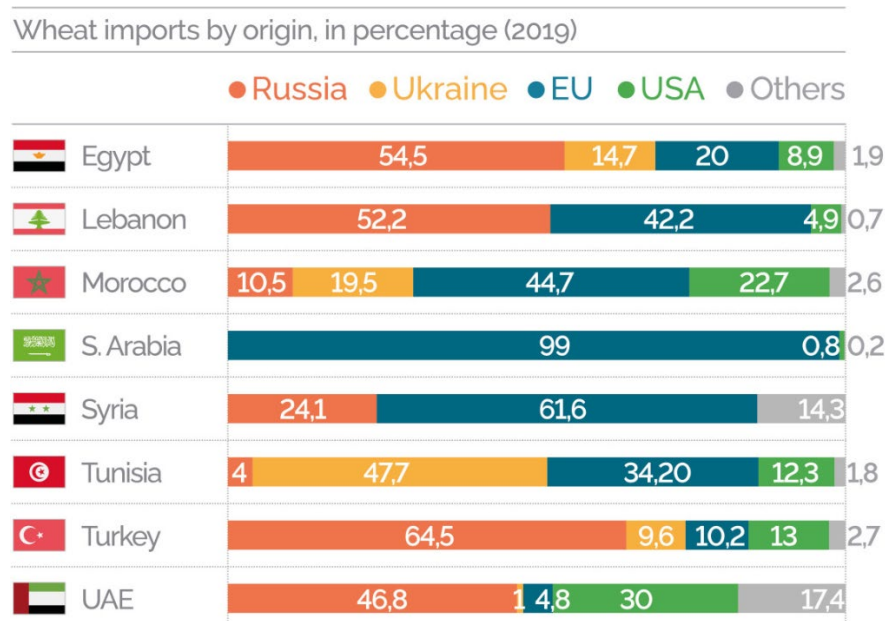


The relevance of projects to the key challenges of the Mediterranean area is a strong point for the programme. At this regard, it shall be mentioned that some of the projects answered challenges of very fundamental importance for the population such as **food provision** or **water availability**. Among the projects analysed as case studies, two examples can be mentioned. The strategic project NEX-LABS, under Priority A.2.1, aims to support

the implementation of clean technologies for sustainable and resilient increase of agri-food sector production based on a more efficient use of energy (renewable/solar solutions) and water (wastewater treatment, water harvesting or reuse solutions). The standard project PROSIM, under Priority B.4.I, brings innovative solutions to tackle the issue of the intensive use of water for irrigation, by combining water use efficiency and non-conventional waters (NC) and build local capacities to adopt/upscale the solutions.

These topics appear even more relevant in light of the recent Russia-Ukraine war, which could have significant consequences for the Mediterranean partner countries. There is indeed a risk for the Middle East and North African countries to suffer a serious food crisis due to their high dependence on Ukrainian and Russian wheat and other grains. It is worth noting that Russian and Ukrainian imports are much higher than in the EU. Some countries have already announced that the war could cause a wheat shortage. The figure below shows wheat imports for three of the ENI CBC Med countries, i.e. Egypt, Lebanon and Tunisia.

Figure 19 Wheat imports by origin, in percentage



Source:
Observatory of Economic Complexity

ISPI

Source: ISPI <https://www.ispionline.it/en/pubblicazione/war-ukraine-food-crisis-mena-region-34063>

This exposes some of the Southern Mediterranean countries to risks of inflation that could directly impact the implementation of some activities and the involvement of specific segments of target groups. Such economic consequences could also play a role, as external factors, in the achievement of socio-economic result indicators such as job creation. At the same time, it is clear **that some of the projects funded by ENI CBC Med have prepared the ground for higher resilience in case of crises of the food supply chain.** This is also the case of RESMYLE (under Priority A.3.I) where the Jordanian partner identified the food supply chain as one of the key topics for the development of the project at national scale.

Such examples show that the programme was built to answer fundamental challenges for the Mediterranean area and, therefore, the funded projects turn to provide solutions that are also useful to face unforeseen crises.

The programme could increase the capacity to identify the link between the solutions elaborated by single funded projects and newly emerged problems or even crises, as such projects could fertilise others and see their results more quickly capitalised at the policy level.



During the interviews to the programme bodies, the difficulty of the programme to deal with the key challenge of population flows between participating countries, i.e. migration, was mentioned. It was commented that such a challenge is sensitive for the national political level and could be hardly addressed through cross-border cooperation projects that are mainly promoted by regional development agencies, academic bodies, associations and national sectoral agencies.

3.9 INTERNAL AND EXTERNAL COHERENCE OF THE PROGRAMME

EQ 31. To what extent do the projects respond to the problems and needs identified by the programme in the context analysis phase?

EQ 32. At the level of management bodies (MA, JMC), have coordination mechanisms been put in place with other programmes or policies in the cooperation area?

EQ 33. At project level, are there good practices in terms of synergies / integrations between funded projects and other policies or strategies?

Key findings

The internal coherence of the ENI CBC Med programme is reflected in a well-structured intervention logic, meaning that the answers given to the problems and needs identified in the context analysis are detailed in the expected results identified at priority level. Thanks to the strict guidance given to the projects in the application phase, their relevance to the challenges identified by the programme is very high. Such relevance is confirmed by the observation of the outputs actually produced by the projects. Considering only the surveyed priorities A.1.1, A.2.1, A.3.1, B.4.1, B.4.3, it appears that those belonging to Overarching Objective A have a stronger tendency to fertilise the others. Among the surveyed ones, the priority A.2.1 shows the highest capacity to fertilise other priorities and this suggests that “technological transfer and commercialisation of research results” is highly transversal to various topics addressed by the programme.

Capitalisation projects are based not only on the results generated by ENPI CBC Med 2007-2013 and ENI CBC Med 2014-2020 projects, but also on the results achieved by projects promoted or funded by other initiatives/ programmes (Union for the Mediterranean and Interreg MED). Such a mechanism of coordination with external initiatives shows full awareness by the programme that synergies in the Mediterranean area can be beneficial especially when they allow to share contents and solutions.

Projects belonging to Overarching Objective A show higher capacity to establish synergies with other projects/initiatives compared to Overarching Objective B projects. Furthermore, it appears that the policy fields of technological transfer, and especially of enterprise support are featured by an extraordinary networking capacity that goes beyond the ENI CBC Med Programme. Long and fruitful project chains were observed across EU programmes and programming periods.

Recommendation for ENI CBC MED 2014-2020

We recommend verifying if projects dealing with environmental protection, climate change adaptation and mitigation, i.e. projects belonging to Overarching Objective B, can be encouraged to develop more synergies with other projects within and outside the ENI CBC Med programme, given that environmental topics could have a not fully explored fertilisation potential.

Recommendation for NEXT MED 2021-2027

In the evaluator’s perspective, the much lower number of indicators foreseen for NEXT MED (compared to the extraordinarily high number of indicators of ENI CBC Med 2014-2020) represents a good progress towards easier programme management. However, it clearly appears that the use of specific output and result indicators at the priority level served as an effective guidance in the proposal preparation phase and contributed to the good relevance of the projects

to the programme. As already mentioned in chapter 3.5, it is recommended to ensure similar information on how to make the proposals relevant to the programme, even in absence of detailed output and result indicators.



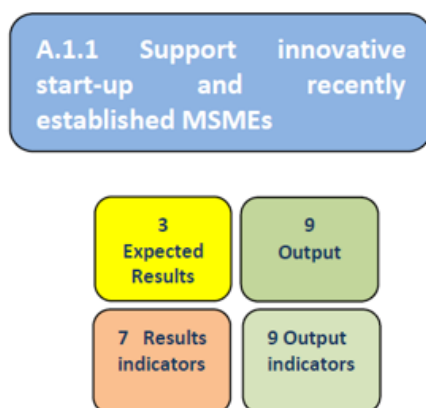
The internal coherence of the ENI CBC Med programme is reflected in a well-structured logic of intervention, meaning that the answers given to the problems and needs identified in the context analysis are detailed in the expected results identified at priority level.

To make an example, the context analysis shows high unemployment in the area, especially affecting youth and women. The potential of MSMEs as drivers of changes is shown, together with the necessity to foster innovation. Now, Priority A.1.1 is expected to produce results that clearly answer these needs:

- Expected Result 1.1.1: Innovative start up enterprises having a cross-border dimension, managed by youths (graduates or equivalent between 24 and 35 years old) and/or women (all ages) sustainably grow their share in traditional and non-traditional sectors.
- Expected Result 1.1.2: Increased share of youth/women staff in managerial positions in companies recently established (since 2011) that access and develop innovative markets domestically and/or in other MED countries.
- Expected Result 1.1.3: Increased capacity of public authorities to facilitate access to and protect Intellectual Property Rights and commercial contracts of youths and women entrepreneurs.

Furthermore, the programme includes a series of specific and detailed result indicators that are intended to measure the achievement of the expected results. The figure below shows how the priority is structured including the foreseen outputs and the relevant indicators.

Figure 20 Logic of monitoring for Priority A.1.1



Source: Monitoring and Evaluation Plan

Both the analysis of the application forms and the case studies showed that **the project relevance to the challenges identified by the programme is very good.**

In particular, the necessity for the projects to use the result indicators foreseen for their priority, helped to answer the challenges identified by ENI CBC Med, so enhancing the coherence between the project and the programme level.

The problems experienced by the projects (that could be reflected in the use of the programme monitoring system) due to such narrowly defined indicators have been analysed in chapter 3.5. However, when internal coherence is concerned, it shall be noted that **the specific logic of intervention defined at priority level** and including expected results, result indicators, indicative list of outputs and output indicators, **has made the relevance of the projects to the 2014-2020 programme robust and highly recognisable**. This matter of fact emerges from the analysis conducted in the next five chapters on priorities A.1.1, A.2.1, A.3.1, B.4.1, B.4.3.

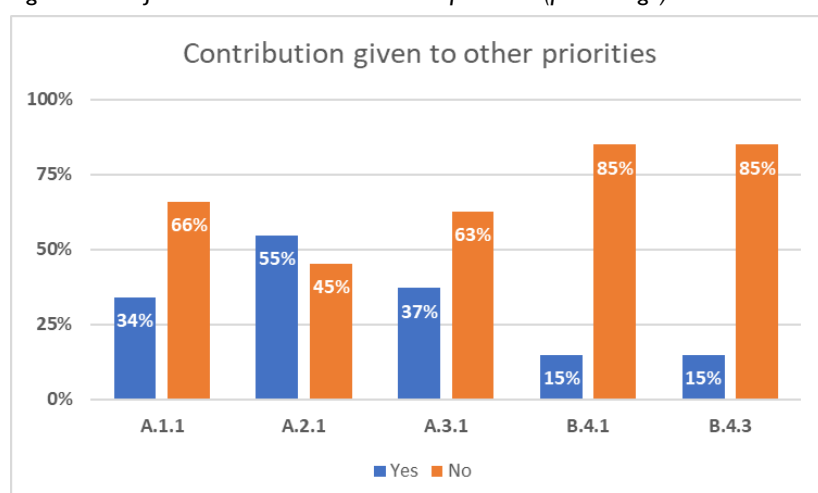
As this approach will not be continued in NEXT MED and much fewer output and result indicators will be chosen, an alternative strategy to ensure the projects' relevance will have to be put in place in the 2021-2027 period.



To further investigate the internal coherence of the programme, the evaluator assessed the contribution given by each of the five analysed priorities (A.1.1, A.2.1, A.3.1, B.4.1, B.4.3) to the other priorities. Overall, what emerged is that the **priorities belonging to Overarching Objective A have a stronger tendency to fertilise the others**, whereas the priorities belonging to the Overarching Objective B offer a much more limited cross-priority contribution. This can be explained by the fact that projects under Overarching Objective B address very technical problems such as reuse of water or technologies to increase building energy efficiency, and therefore could be less open to connect with projects dealing with other topics. However, higher contribution to other areas of the programme by projects funded under Overarching Objective B could be stimulated. For instance, projects dealing with energy efficiency (Priority B.4.3) could contribute to the policy area of support to innovative start-up and recently established enterprises (Priority A.1.1).

The priority showing the highest capacity to fertilise other priorities is A.2.1. Not surprisingly, 'technological transfer and commercialisation of research results' appears highly transversal to various topics addressed by the programme. Such an evidence could suggest capitalisation paths to be pursued in NEXT MED.

Figure 21 Projects that contributed to other priorities (percentage)

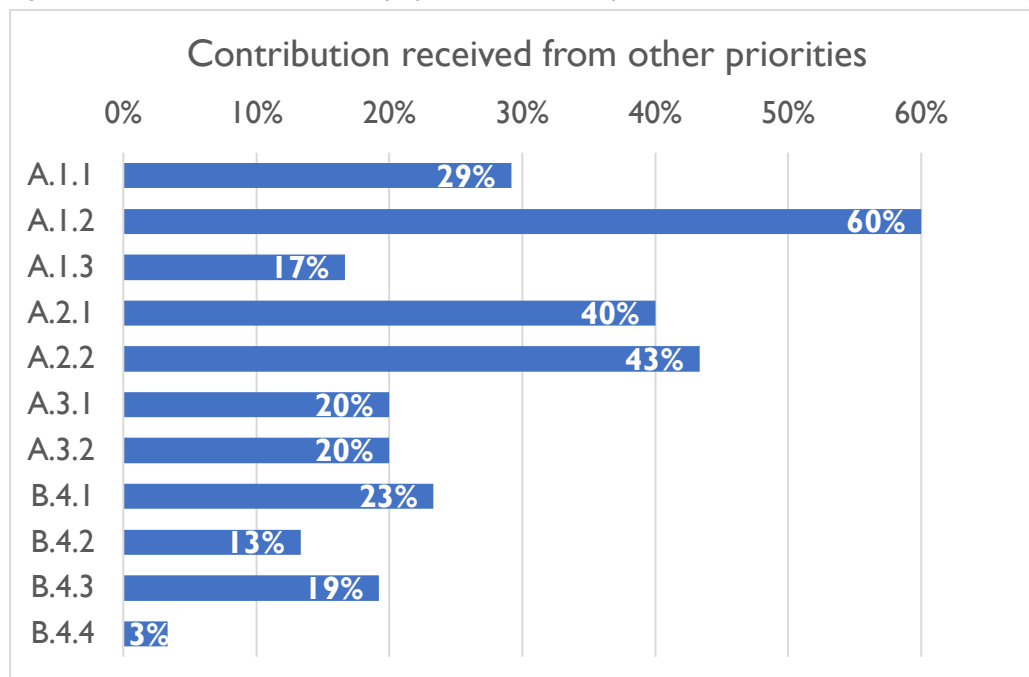


Source: Web survey

The analysis of the level of contribution received by the programme priorities is indicative, given that only projects funded under five priorities were surveyed. The elements emerged from the survey are therefore partial. However, what can be already observed is that the very horizontal priority A.1.2

“Strengthen and support networks, clusters, consortia and value-chains” is by far the most influenced by the projects funded under the other priorities. The two priorities belonging to the TO “Support to education, research, technological development and innovation” follow. Once all II priorities will have been surveyed, a complete picture will appear.

Figure 22 Contribution received from projects funded under priorities A.1.1, A.2.1, A.3.1, B.4.1, B.4.3, per priority (percentage)



Source: Web survey



As illustrated in chapter 3, the programme launched a call for capitalisation projects with a financial allocation of EUR 11 millions. The call closed in July 2020 and saw the approval of 16 projects that started between August and December 2021. Projects aim at transferring and exploiting results, reinforcing networks, and increase awareness of public authorities and policy-makers. As capitalisation projects are at a very early stage, they were not analysed in this phase of the evaluation. However, what emerges from desk analysis is that they represent a form of coordination with other programmes that shows a strong effort of external coherence. **Capitalisation projects are based** in fact not only on the results generated by ENPI CBC Med 2007-2013 and ENI CBC Med 2014-2020 projects, by **also on the results achieved by projects promoted or funded by other initiatives/ programmes**. They are:

- Projects labelled by the **Union for the Mediterranean**;
- Projects funded under the 2014-2020 **Interreg Med** programme.

The Union for the Mediterranean is an intergovernmental institution bringing together the European Union Member States and 15 countries from the Southern and Eastern shores of the Mediterranean to promote dialogue and cooperation. The Union for the Mediterranean attributes its ‘Label’ to a number of regional cooperation projects. This label allows project promoters to mobilise governments and stakeholders, raise awareness and visibility and gain access to a strong network of donors and financial institutions. In the ENI CBC Med call, 13 labelled projects were proposed for capitalisation in relation to six priorities, as shown in the table below.

Table 24 Union for the Mediterranean Labelled project suitable for ENI CBC Med capitalisation

ENI CBC Med Priority	Union for the Mediterranean Labelled Project
Priority A.1.1 – Start-ups and recently established enterprises	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Generation Entrepreneur • Promoting women empowerment for inclusive and sustainable industrial development in the MENA region
Priority A.1.2 - Euro-Mediterranean economic clusters	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Euro-Mediterranean Smart City Innovation Centres
Priority A.3.1 – Professionalization of young people (NEETs) and women	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Developing Youth Employability & Entrepreneurial Skills – Maharat MED • YouMatch II • BlueSkills: Blue Jobs and Responsible Growth in the Mediterranean • MedNC - Mediterranean New Chance
Priority B.4.1 – Water management	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Capacity Building Programme on Water Integrity in the Middle East and North Africa • Overcoming Governance Challenges for the Mobilization of Financing in the Water Sector – Phase II
Priority B.4.3 – Energy efficiency and renewable energy	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Clima-Med: Acting for Climate in South Mediterranean • SEmed Private Renewable Energy Framework “SPREF”
Priority B.4.4 – Integrated Coastal Zone Management	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • PLASTIC-BUSTERS for a Mediterranean free from litter • The MedFund: Environmental Fund for Mediterranean Marine Protected Areas (MPAs)

Source: Capitalisation call

According to the same logic, in the ENI CBC Med call twelve projects funded by Interreg MED were proposed for capitalisation in relation to four priorities, as shown in the table below.

Table 25 Interreg MED projects suitable for ENI CBC Med capitalisation

ENI CBC Med Priority	Union for the Mediterranean Labelled Project
Priority A.1.2 - Euro-Mediterranean economic clusters	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • PELAGOS - Promoting innovative nEtworks and cLusters for mARine renewable energy synerGies in mediterranean cOasts and iSlands • ARISTOIL - Reinforcement of Mediterranean olive oil sector competitiveness through development and application of innovative production and quality control methodologies related to olive oil health protecting properties • CreativeWear - Creative Clothing for the Mediterranean Space
Priority A.1.3 – Sustainable tourism	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • MEDFEST - MED Culinary heritage experiences: how to create sustainable tourist destinations • DESTIMED - Mediterranean Ecotourism Destination: main components (joint planning, monitoring, management and promotion) for a governance system in Mediterranean protected areas • EMbleMatlC - Emblematic Mediterranean Mountains as Coastal destinations of excellence

ENI CBC Med Priority	Union for the Mediterranean Labelled Project
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> TOURISMED - Fishing Tourism for a Sustainable tourism development in the Mediterranean area
Priority B.4.3 – Energy efficiency and renewable energy	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> CESBAMED - Sustainable MED Cities STEPPING - Supporting The Energy Performance Contract Public Procurement IN Going-beyond SISMA - Supporting Innovative Schemes in the MED Area
Priority B.4.4 – Integrated Coastal Zone Management	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> COASTING - Coastal INtegrated Governance for Sustainable Tourism MPA-ADAPT - Guiding Mediterranean MPAs through the climate change era: Building resilience and adaptation

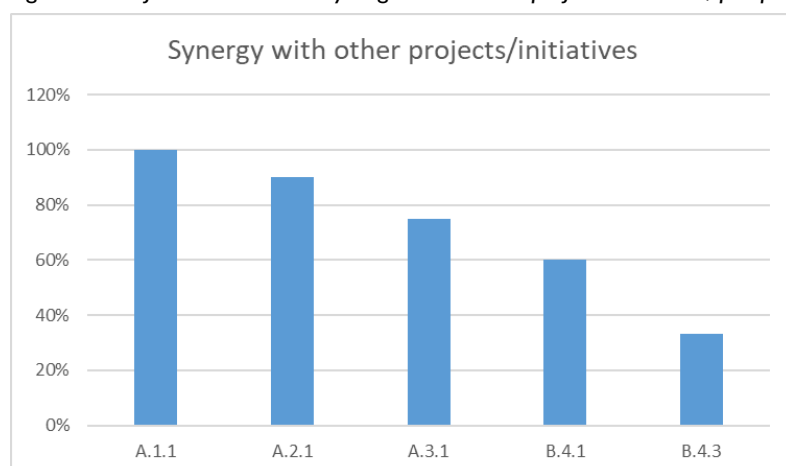
Source: Capitalisation call

Such a mechanism of coordination with external initiatives shows full awareness by the programme that synergies in the Mediterranean area can be beneficial, especially when they allow to share contents and solutions.



The capacity of the standard and strategic projects to connect with other projects and initiatives was investigated through the web survey. Only projects belonging to priorities A.1.1, A.2.1, A.3.1, B.4.1, B.4.3 were surveyed. What emerges from this still limited investigation, is that **projects belonging to Overarching Objective A are more capable of establishing synergies with other projects/initiatives compared to Overarching Objective B projects.** Furthermore, it appears that **the policy fields of technological transfer and especially of enterprise support are featured by an extraordinary networking capacity that goes beyond the ENI CBC Med programme.**

Figure 23 Projects that created synergies with other projects/initiatives, per priority (percentage)



Source: Web survey



The case studies showed an overall good capacity by the projects to capitalise results of previous projects. Such projects do not necessarily belong to ENPI CBC Med 2007-2013 but are also funded by other EU programmes, including sectoral ones directly managed by

the European Commission e.g. Horizon. Furthermore, projects showed the tendency to develop follow-up projects more than capitalising their results at the national and regional policy level. **Long and fruitful project chains were observed across EU programmes and programming periods.**

Evidence from strategic project NEX-LABS

The search for synergies with other research and innovation initiatives is part of a long-term strategy pursued by the Lead Beneficiary to address sustainability and resilience issues in the Mediterranean region through a web of partnerships bringing together universities and their technology transfer offices, research institutions, SMEs, and business support organisations.

3.10 IMPACT ACHIEVED BY THE PROGRAMME UNDER PRIORITY A.1.1 SUPPORT INNOVATIVE START-UPS AND RECENTLY ESTABLISHED ENTERPRISES

EQ 34. Has the programme achieved what was expected in terms of: training activities (output 1.1.1.1), the creation of investment schemes (output 1.1.1.2), and hubs and accelerators (output 1.1.1.3)? Are there significant differences between countries?

EQ 35. Have the outputs achieved made it possible to create companies with a cross-border dimension? Is it possible to identify good practices or particularly critical cases?

EQ 36. Have the outputs achieved made it possible to increase the employment of young people and women? Is it possible to identify good practices or particularly critical cases?

EQ 37. What is the impact of the COVID 19 crisis on achieving the expected results at the level of priority A.1.1?

EQ 38. Have the other priorities of the programme contributed in any way to supporting innovative start-ups and newly established businesses?

Key findings

The main strategy adopted to support innovative start-ups and newly established companies consists of capacity building and training activities, a trait common to all projects analysed under this priority. The analysis of the feedback surveys from target groups confirm that skills and competences of the participants in the projects' activities increased as a result of the project activities. A second significant strategy adopted by the funded projects to support innovative start-ups and newly established companies was the provision of legal and/or financial support. Another significant topic for this priority is the Intellectual Property Right, as this aspect if not managed risks to become a weak point for the Mediterranean innovative start-ups and newly established companies. There is little evidence of the creation of hubs and accelerators and the creation of investment schemes did not feature the priority. When developed, investment schemes had to reduce their ambitions and opt for traditional approaches.

Companies with a cross-border dimension were not established nor attempts to start them were made. It is true that due to the pandemic some cross-border activities (i.e. organisation of cross-border forum) were postponed, however it seems that the aim to create companies with a cross-border dimension was too ambitious for ENI CBC Med 2014-2020.

At the present stage, conclusions on the capacity to increase the employment of young people and women cannot be drawn, yet. What emerges is that the indicator measuring creation of jobs was too narrowly defined in the view of some of the projects, and this could create inconsistencies in the assessment of the jobs created.

The COVID 19 crisis is largely responsible for delays in project activities. Many activities were either adapted to an online format when possible or simply postponed, leading to the revision of the implementation plan and the request for time extensions. It is worth noting that beyond the pandemic, implementation was hampered also by political, social and economic crisis occurred in some of the partner countries, especially Lebanon.

Priority A.1.I appears to have received a contribution from the projects funded under the other analysed priorities (i.e. A.2.I, A.3.I, B.4.I, B.4.3) that is above the average (29% compared to 26%). 85% of projects having contributed to Priority A.1.I belong to Priority A.2.I. This suggests that technology transfer and commercialisation of research results are highly beneficial to the support of innovative start-up and recently established enterprises, with the other topics addressed by the programme not offering significant contribution.

Recommendation for ENI CBC MED 2014-2020

Ensure that capitalisation plans of standard and strategic projects are actually implemented so that outputs are transferred to national/regional/local stakeholders preparing the ground for their use at the policy level. This should occur even in case follow-up is not ensured by a relevant capitalisation project. At the same time, the evaluator also recommends to verify that the ReSt@rts capitalisation project actually contributes to transferability of outputs and durability of results produced under this priority.

Recommendation NEXT MED 2021-2027

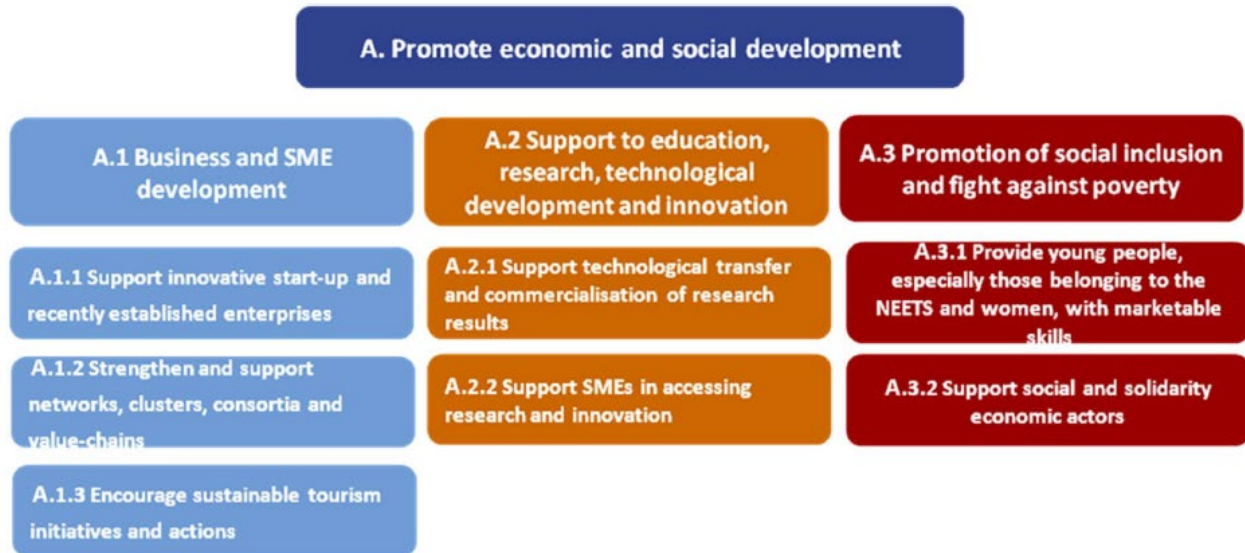
- On project design:
 - Focus on homogenous target groups or adapt approaches to the needs of the various target groups.
 - Improve risk analysis and include mitigation measures, in particular to adapt project activities to changes in the country context.
- On programme indicators
 - Reconsider having binding criteria to measure indicators to avoid a mismatch between the expectations of the programme and what the beneficiaries are realistically able to achieve given the resources available and the external environment.
- On reporting
 - To make the programme more competitive with the opportunities offered by other international donors, reduce the burden at the project level by making a more extensive use of Simplified Cost Options.
- On sustainability, capitalisation and impact
 - Even in the absence of a dedicated capitalisation project, always ensure that outputs are transferred to national/regional/local stakeholders able to support them, thus guaranteeing the continuity of project results (in the case of MEDSt@rts, potentially transferable outputs include the database of microfinance schemes available in the Mediterranean area, the network of 60 organisations integrating a Mediterranean network on microfinance and microcredit for business development, the 15 microfinance packages mixing direct support (sub-grant) and access to finance).



Priority A.1.I “Support innovative start-ups and recently established enterprises, with a particular focus on young and women entrepreneurs, and facilitate the protection of their intellectual property rights and commercialisation where applicable” is the first one belonging to the Thematic Objective A.I “Business and SME development”, under overarching Objective A “Promote economic and social development”.

A complete picture of Objective A is useful to understand the overall approach adopted by the programme to promote economic and social development. This is relevant also to the sub-chapters dedicated to Priorities A.2.1 and A.3.1.

Figure 24 Overview Overarching Objective A, Thematic Objectives and Priorities



Source: Joint Operational Programme

At Thematic Objective level, the programme tackles the challenge to create economic opportunities and jobs to reduce the high rates of unemployment, especially among youth, with a special attention to the high number of new entrants into the Mediterranean Partner Countries' work force.

Priority A.1.1 focuses on innovative start-ups and recently established enterprises for their potentially strong contribution to MSMEs' competitiveness and for their capability to innovate and create new knowledge that is transmitted to other firms. Compared to other priorities, a higher articulation of the expected results can be noticed. Firstly, the programme envisages that innovative start-ups having a cross-border dimension managed by youth sustainably grow their share in traditional and non-traditional sectors. Secondly, it is expected an increase of the share of youths/ women staff in managerial positions in companies recently established (since 2011) that access and develop innovative markets domestically and/ or in other MED countries. Finally, the programme foresees to increase the capacity of public authorities to facilitate access to and protect Intellectual Property Rights (IPR) and commercial contracts of youths and women entrepreneurs. Related result indicators are seven. They capture information on a series of aspects such as new jobs and value of sales generated under specific conditions, new contracts and products/ services, public authorities staff involved in IPR and commercial cross-border projects, products registered and protected under IPR laws and regulations, IPR laws and regulations reviewed.

The richness of this priority is shown in the table below, which also includes information on the output level.

Table 26 Expected results and outputs under Priority A.1.1 with relevant indicators

Indicative list of Outputs	Output indicators	Expected results	Results Indicators
<p>Training, mentorship, tutorship provided to young entrepreneurs (24-35 years old) and women (all ages) through youth-to-youth and women-to-women support and mentor networks.</p> <p>Investment schemes with risk capital dedicated and accessible to the start-ups.</p> <p>Local hubs and accelerators created to train/coach and host talents in the creative sectors.</p>	<p>Number of trainings provided to youths (graduates 24-35 years old) and/or women (all ages).</p> <p>Number of entrepreneurial ideas identified in the scouting stage and supported.</p> <p>Volume of risk capital (in euro) raised by hubs and start-ups accelerators.</p> <p>Number of entrepreneurs that successfully launched new ventures/projects in a creative sector.</p>	<p>Innovative start-up enterprises having a cross border dimension managed by youths (graduates or equivalent between 24 and 35 years old) and/or women (all ages) sustainably grow their share in traditional and non-traditional sectors.</p>	<p>Number of new jobs (contracts) created in knowledge intensive MSMEs for youths and women in the traditional and non-traditional economic sectors where innovative start-ups have entered.</p> <p>Value of sales in existing and new markets of new youth/women-led innovative start-up enterprises that are legally established, and continuously involving at least two Mediterranean countries that have a cross-border dimension.</p>
<p>Specialized supporting services provided, such as in R&D services, sector specific product development services, scientific partner search etc that address especially needs of young/women staff in recently established enterprises.</p> <p>New products/ services/ tools for enterprises to foster distribution, retail and access of products to new customers.</p> <p>Open Data initiatives / websites or learning platforms launched/ developed.</p>	<p>Number of youths and women participating in training activities and business meetings.</p> <p>Number of business development organisations receiving support (ENI CBCI) for coaching and acceleration programmes.</p> <p>Number of launched/ developed and operational websites and/ or operational online platforms.</p>	<p>Increased share of youths/women staff in managerial positions in companies recently established (since 2011) that access and develop innovative markets domestically and/or in other MED countries.</p>	<p>Enterprises, with youths/women staff in managerial positions, which have signed commercial contracts (domestic and for export) for the first time (Percentage out of the total number of the enterprises supported).</p> <p>Number of new products and services sold on domestic and foreign markets.</p>
<p>Bilingual (Arabic/English) and (Arabic/French) simple guidebook for business development.</p> <p>IPR awareness campaigns designed and implemented.</p>	<p>Number of bilingual (Arabic/English) and (Arabic/French) guidebooks acquired by public authority staff and entrepreneurs.</p> <p>Number of trainings for public authorities and</p>	<p>Increased capacity of public authorities to facilitate access to and protect Intellectual Property Rights (IPR) and commercial contracts of youths and women entrepreneurs.</p>	<p>Number of public authority staff actively and directly involved in IPR and commercial cross-border projects.</p>

Indicative list of Outputs	Output indicators	Expected results	Results Indicators
Existing “one-stop-shop” service providers specialized in support services for start-ups and recently established firms (e.g. for technology transfer and proof of concept projects) reinforced or newly established.	brokers (e.g. Technology transfer offices located at Universities) that are aimed at the development of new services (e.g. Support for Proof-of-concept projects).		Number of products registered and protected under IPR Laws and regulations.
			IPR Laws and regulation reviewed and developed to reflect international best practice.

Source: Own elaboration on JOP

Seven projects were funded under Priority A.1.1. Three of them are **standard projects**, i.e. GIMED, IPMED and MEDSt@rts. Three more projects, i.e. INVESTMED, Stand Up! and U-SOLVE are **strategic projects**. Finally, ReSt@rts is a **capitalisation project** aiming to achieve synergies with other programmes and projects to integrate the results into EU policies and replicate them through a Policy Knowledge Package to be shared with the relevant public authorities.

Due to the recent start of the capitalisation projects, **only standard and strategic projects are analysed under this sub-chapter**. They are six projects sustaining innovative start-ups and recently established enterprises with various sectoral approaches. Overall, a thematic attention to the green economy can be observed. GIMED is focused on eco-innovative entrepreneurship, Stand Up! wants to explore the potential of the textile sector in terms of reusing and recycling, U-SOLVE targets young entrepreneurs dealing with environmental solutions for sustainable urban development. The strategic project INVESTMED wants to create a supportive environment for sustainable businesses. IPMED is a project thematically dedicated to Intellectual Property Right, whereas MEDSt@rts wants to create business opportunities for non-bankable would-be and early-stage entrepreneurs.



All these projects answered the online survey launched by the evaluator, and two of them (the standard project MEDSt@rts and the strategic project INVESTMED) have been analysed as case studies so providing from the field information that will be used in this sub-chapter, the full case studies being

included in the Annex.

All projects involved young people and women in the project activities, meaning that they were involved in activities such as training, mentorship, tutorship. Data from the case studies confirm a balanced involvement of women and men, with a focus on young people. The definition of youth does not appear obvious. During the course of MEDSt@rts, the age limit was extended from 35 to 40 years considering the difficulties created by the pandemic. This was in line with Italian programmes supporting the youth. However, this choice could appear as more coherent with the demographic structure of the EU Member States than with that featuring the Mediterranean Partner Countries.

The main strategy adopted to support innovative start-ups and newly established companies consists of **capacity building and training activities**, a trait common to all projects analysed under this priority. Both the consultation of the project partners and the analysis of the feedback surveys from

target groups confirm that **skills and competences of the participants in the projects' activities increased as a result of the project activities**, with special focus on the capacity to innovate and the capacity to set-up and manage a company. It appears that the projects focused more on managerial skills than on sectoral or technical competences. This appears coherent with the composition of the groups participating in the projects, which tended not to be fully homogeneous. However, the advantages to have a clear focus on a well-identified target group should be considered. Even if the exchanges between people from different backgrounds and in different situations can enrich a learning path, and even create the conditions for future more productive collaborations, it seems that supporting people with different expectations and potentials can reduce the impact of the project. If belonging to different target sub-groups, participants can appreciate the project's benefits at different degrees. At the same time, they can show a different potential in relation to the generation of project's results.

Evidence from the MEDSt@rts standard project

The heterogeneity of the target groups, composed of aspiring and newly established entrepreneurs, seems to be a weak point for the project. Having different knowledge, backgrounds and needs, the two groups do not share the same expectations about the project added value. For aspiring entrepreneurs, the knowledge delivered and the size of the subgrant are satisfactory to realise the initial operations involved in starting a business; however, often due to external circumstances, the aspiring entrepreneurs do not achieve their objective, resulting in a lower success rate for the project. Concerning early-stage entrepreneurs, the subgrant does not have a significant impact on the growth of the business, resulting in a lower satisfaction rate but a higher success rate as the objectives set are more easily achievable by the participants, especially when creation of new jobs is concerned.

A second significant strategy adopted by the funded projects to support innovative start-ups and newly established companies was the provision of **legal and/or financial support**. A significant topic for this priority is the Intellectual Property Right, as this aspect if not managed risks to become a weak point for the Mediterranean innovative start-ups and newly established companies. The projects managed to tailor IPR guidebooks to the needs of the target groups by involving legal experts with regional experience. To ensure impact at the territorial level, an appropriate linguistic coverage was ensured. Furthermore, guidebooks were made accessible to public authorities, so as they can facilitate access to and protect intellectual property rights and business contracts for youth and women entrepreneurs.

Evidence from the INVESTMED strategic project

The production of technical materials in Arabic represents a significant added value, as Arabic literature on entrepreneurship is scarce and generally of poor quality, which the project partners are planning to expand and publish on the platform.

Only one project declared to have created **hubs and accelerators**, so showing that this approach did not feature the priority. Finally, one project (MEDSt@rts) focused on **investment schemes** but due to the actual potential of the involved businesses had to abandon the ambition to launch crowdfunding campaigns and opt for a more traditional fundraising approach.

Even if projects (especially the strategic ones) are not sufficiently mature to allow for a results assessment, it clearly appears that **companies with a cross-border dimension were not**

established nor attempts to start them were made. It is true that, due to the pandemic, some cross-border activities (i.e. organisation of cross-border forum) were postponed, however it seems that the aim to create companies with a cross-border dimension was too ambitious for ENI CBC Med 2014-2020.

Furthermore, a point on the measurement of the result indicator “Number of new jobs (contracts) created in knowledge intensive MSMEs for young people and women in the traditional and non-traditional economic sectors where innovative start-ups have entered” can be made based on the consultation of the projects. It appears that the **definition of knowledge-intensive MSMEs formulated by the programme is too ambitious and sophisticated** compared to the entrepreneurial context where the projects are developed, and this could result in difficulties to measure the results achieved by the projects having selected the indicator “Number of new jobs (contracts) created in knowledge intensive MSMEs for youths and women in the traditional and non-traditional economic sectors where innovative start-ups have entered”. More in general, our analysis reveals that **indicators are often too narrowly defined**, which prevents a full appreciation of project activities. Moreover, some indicators lack sensitivity to socio-economic contexts, especially in Mediterranean Partner Countries, which create difficulties for the beneficiaries, who struggle to meet the criteria linked to the indicators as defined in the programme due to the context in which they operate.

Evidence from the MEDSt@rts standard project

According to the programme Indicative Monitoring and Evaluation Plan, knowledge-intensive MSMEs must respect the following criteria: % of R&D costs out of total costs (>15%) EITHER/OR % of employees holding a PhD degree and involved in R&D activities out of the total (> 30%). The case study shows that the project did not manage to involve this kind of enterprises. Only 2 out of the 9 early-stage enterprises responding to the feedback survey declared a percentage of R&D costs higher than 15%. Furthermore, 8 out of 9 enterprises declared that there are no PhD holders among their employees. According to the Lead beneficiary, these criteria appear to be particularly difficult to meet in the territorial context of the project, especially in the Southern Mediterranean countries. Furthermore, it does not seem easy for the project partners to measure the evolution of these elements during the project.

Looking at external factors, from the case studies it emerged **that COVID affected the projects' course significantly**. Many activities were either adapted to an online format when possible or simply postponed, leading to the revision of the implementation plan and the request for a time extension. On the one side, the restrictions gave an enormous input to the experimentation of digital modalities to conduct training, mentorship and tutorship activities and this opened the door to solutions that can be favourable for participants who have limited time due to their business activities or should cover important distances from their place to the venue where the project's activities are organised. On the other side, it appeared in some cases that the human dimension of the project had been weakened. The lack of direct contacts during training and visibility events has certainly reduced interaction and communication between stakeholders, which is a considerable loss in people-to-people projects. To remedy this situation, as the pandemic restrictions are easing in the first months

of 2022, the project partners are currently trying to organise in-person events to gather all beneficiaries and promote exchanges and networking.

Evidence from the MEDSt@rts standard project

First of all, the pandemic prompted an extension of the sectors covered. Originally targeting four sectors with high potential in local sustainable development, i.e. Eco-design, Food, Digitalisation, Handicraft., it was decided to include other sectors as a result of the pandemic because of their strategic value, i.e. Services for people, or because they were particularly impacted by Covid public health restrictions, i.e. Tourism and Culture. The COVID crisis deteriorated the working conditions and compressed the basin of job opportunities for unemployed people. For these reasons the project decided also to widen the age range of the target groups up to 40 years, in line with Italian national programmes to support the youth.

Secondly, the project activities foreseen were either adapted, when possible, to an online format or postponed. The majority of partners were able to respond to the crisis by implementing online activities, although in some cases it was possible to maintain face-to-face events.

COVID 19 is not the only external factor having influenced the course of the projects and their capacity to generate an impact. A general perception that economy has deteriorated so making the projects' objectives even more relevant was registered. Regardless from the COVID crisis, precariousness, unemployment and exclusion of young people and women are seen as rising phenomenon by some project actors. The case of **Lebanon** is of different scale as the country **sank into a severe systemic crisis**. The partnerships including Lebanese members experiment therefore the difficulty to involve the target groups and especially to generate entrepreneurial and economic results. ENI CBC Med appears to be a programme featured by recurrent political instability phenomenon. Therefore, increasing attention to the capacity to adjust project activities to the evolving country situations should be paid programming period after programming period.

Evidence from the INVESTMED strategic project

In Lebanon, the country's economic system, which was mainly based on imports of goods and services, with limited local production, has been transformed by the crisis: national banks have less liquidity and, as buying goods and services abroad is becoming more difficult, local production and subsistence economy have gained in importance. The interest of target groups in project activities is decreasing as their priorities change. Although training is fundamental to acquire the necessary skills to develop a business, participation in training has declined as target groups seek other opportunities involving immediate income. To maintain interest, the Lebanese project partner is doing its best to adapt the contents of training courses to the needs of its target groups, by providing trainings specifically focused on the needs of the local entrepreneurial context.

Strategies to ensure sustainability appear to depend on follow-up projects. The capacity of the funded projects to base their activities on previous experiences, connect with parallel projects (as it is the case of MEDSt@rts with GIMED such as the case of INVESTMED with CREAT4MED) and transfer outputs to other projects appears as a strong point. The ENI CBC Med capitalisation project named ReSt@rts will help maintain and strengthen the results achieved under MEDSt@rts by replicating schemes already developed in other locations and promoting the establishment of a sustainable institutional framework. However, there is little evidence of the capacity to integrate

project's achievements into national/ regional policies and this is true also for the analysed strategic project. As strategic projects are not mature yet, more time is needed to reach more robust conclusions concerning such a key aspect.

What clearly appears, already, is that the projects of priority A.1.1 clearly reflect the **international dimension of ENI CBC Med**. The added value most indicated by the respondents to the survey is the contribution to the achievement of the common United Nations objectives, i.e. the Sustainable Development Goals. Furthermore, during the interviews it emerged that business actors in the Middle East do not necessarily consider the Mediterranean as the most promising economic space. Gulf countries are seen with high interest both because of the possibility to attract significant investments and the cultural proximity. Finally, when complementarity with other funding sources is concerned, it is worth noting that projects refer to other international programmes (and not to other EU funds). At this regard, the interviews to the project actors belonging to Mediterranean Partner Countries revealed that ENI CBC Med programme should consider the “competition” with other international donors and take into account that simplification is key to making EU funds attractive.

Evidence from the INVESTMED strategic project

The complexity of ENI CBC Med programme procedures may have dissuaded some target groups from participating in project activities. Likewise, some potential project partners seem to find other donor programmes more attractive, as they offer greater financial opportunities and involve fewer bureaucratic procedures (e.g. GIZ/ USAID programmes).

Interestingly, 100% of the projects funded under this priority have declared to have established synergies with other projects/ initiatives. Such a value is well above the average of 72% detected in the five analysed priorities and shows the fertility of the projects supporting start-up and recently established enterprises. One project of this priority out of three declared to have contributed to other priorities. Furthermore, Priority A.1.1 appears to have received a contribution from the projects funded under the other analysed priorities (i.e. A.2.1, A.3.1, B.4.1, B.4.3) that is above the average (29% compared to 26%). 85% of projects having contributed to Priority A.1.1 belong to Priority A.2.1. This suggests that technology transfer and commercialisation of research results are highly beneficial to the support of innovative start-up and recently established enterprises, with the other topics addressed by the programme not offering significant contribution.

To conclude, the additionality of ENI CBC Med shall be underlined. **Half of the survey respondents consider ENI CBC Med as essential for the sake of the mission pursued by their own organisation.** Such a percentage is higher than the average at programme level (37%) and shows that in the policy field of enterprise support, the value of ENI CBC Med is highly recognised.

3.1 | IMPACT ACHIEVED BY THE PROGRAMME UNDER PRIORITY A.2.1 SUPPORT TECHNOLOGICAL TRANSFER AND COMMERCIALISATION OF RESEARCH RESULTS

EQ 39. Has the programme achieved what was expected in terms of: creation of new living labs (output 2.1.1.1); greater institutional capacity (output 2.1.1.2 and 2.1.1.4), increased skills in the business environment (output 2.1.1.3), increase the availability of services for technology transfer activities (output 2.1.1.5, 2.1.1.6, 2.1.1.7, 2.1.1.8)? Are there significant differences between countries?

EQ 40. Have the outputs achieved made it possible to improve the processes of technology transfer and marketing? Is it possible to identify good practices or particularly critical cases?

EQ 41. What is the impact of the COVID 19 crisis on the achievement of the expected results at the level of priority A.2.1?

EQ 42. Have the other priorities of the programme contributed in any way to supporting technology transfer and commercialization of research results?

Key findings

Feedback from the survey and evidence from the case studies show that Living labs were a type of output largely produced by the projects, thus showing the capacity to make the different components of the innovation process actively interact. The projects also showed the capacity to increase the skills in the business environment by conducting training activities even in a period when restrictions due to pandemic could have hampered them. Lower evidence of a contribution to institutional capacity enhancement was collected. None of the surveyed projects indicated promotion of a better governance as the most significant added value. Nevertheless, the high number of strategic projects is promising under this aspect, even if it appears that they are still elaborating plans to capitalise their results at the policy-making level. However, the level of maturity of the strategic projects is not sufficient to draw conclusions. Such an early stage of the projects represents a difficulty also to evaluate the capacity of the projects to generate services, which is the most tangible form of impact under this priority. It is true that almost one third of the projects declared to have created new spin-offs, registered co-patents or facilitated the establishment of new agreements between companies and R&D bodies. However, the actual capacity of these outputs to enhance the availability of services for technology transfer activities does not appear measurable, yet.

The Living labs seem a good solution to experiment the process of technology transfer as they make the scientific, industry, society and business communities actively interact. However, their continuity after the conclusion of the projects is unclear if further funding will not be provided through follow-up projects. Technology transfer is easier to be seen when projects have a technical and productive focus.

The COVID crisis impacted the projects, especially when the learning activities and the cross-border dimension are concerned. Starting at the same time as the pandemic, all face-to-face activities were shifted to an online format. However, it is worth noting that preparation of the training, quality of the learning materials, and distribution of the learning materials seem to have benefitted from such an exceptional situation. The impossibility to exploit fully the 'human factor'

has pushed the projects to dedicate special attention to the quality management of the learning process. Additionally, projects took the opportunity to strengthen local engagement with newly developed digital tools, increasing projects' visibility and reaching more participants.

Priority A.2.1 appears to have received a contribution from the projects funded under the other analysed priorities (i.e. A.1.1, A.3.1, B.4.1, B.4.3) that is well above the average (40% compared to 26%). All other analysed priorities appear to have contributed to A.2.1 either with half or one third of their projects. This suggests that the topics of technology transfer and commercialisation of research results is somehow horizontal to the programme.

Recommendation for ENI CBC MED 2014-2020

Ensure that capitalisation plans of standard and strategic projects are actually implemented so that outputs are transferred to national/regional/local stakeholders preparing the ground for their use at the policy level. This should occur even in case follow-up is not ensured by a relevant capitalisation project. At the same time, the evaluator also recommends to verify that the WEF – CAP capitalisation project actually contributes to transferability of outputs and durability of results produced under this priority.

Recommendation NEXT MED 2021-2027

- On project design:
 - Ensure that projects have a clear focus with well-defined outputs and results and that proposals are written in plain language.
 - Strengthen monitoring practices at project level so that clear and concise information is collected on project activities and achievements.
 - Encourage projects, especially those focused on specific sectors and niches, to develop models and technologies that could be replicated in other contexts.
- On programme indicators:
 - Consider simplifying the programme performance framework to facilitate reporting and monitoring by project partners.
 - Consider additional capacity building actions to promote a common understanding of the indicators and improve the link between project's outputs and results and the programme's performance framework.
- On reporting
 - To make the programme more competitive with the opportunities offered by other international donors, reduce the burden at the project level by making a more extensive use of Simplified Cost Options.
- On sustainability, capitalisation and impact
 - Consider replicating the model of cooperation between research and business promoted by BESTMEDGRAPE in other cases of circular economy.
 - Ensure that strategic projects develop a robust and clear capitalisation strategy.



Priority A.2.1 “Support technological transfer and commercialisation of research results, strengthening the linkages between research, industry and other private sector actors” is the first one belonging to the Thematic Objective A.2 “Support to education, research, technological development and innovation”, under overarching Objective A “Promote economic and social development”.

The complete picture of Objective A is shown in the sub-chapter 3.10.

At Thematic Objective level, the programme tackles the challenge to improve the linkages between the various innovation players, notably the science system and higher education, the government, the private sector, and also the not-for-profit sector. This appears necessary given that the Mediterranean countries are quite heterogeneous in terms of innovation policies and spending and therefore risk not to exploit the potential of innovation to drive competitiveness and growth.

Priority A.2.1 seeks to create and strengthen a framework conducive to innovation and technological development. The priority aims therefore at facilitating knowledge sharing and joint initiatives between research institutions and private sector actors focusing on fields that have a potential in the Mediterranean space such as clean/ environmental technologies, new cultural heritage technologies and Key Enabling Technologies (KETs). The result under this priority is twofold. On the one side it is expected to see the enhancement of the demand-driven technological transfer among research, industry and SMEs in the above-mentioned fields. On the other side, the priority should increase the commercialisation opportunities of research products in the same fields.

The related result indicators are four. The first one counts the number of Living labs created to transfer technology among research, industry and SMEs. This solution appears as very relevant to this priority. The second indicator counts the number of spin-offs created and operating across the borders. The third indicator measures the forecasted value of sales of newly identified innovative products/services. Finally, the fourth indicator reflects the most genuine priority ambition in terms of technological innovation in the cross-border dimension by counting the number of co-patents registered.

The articulation of this priority is shown in the table below, which also includes information on the output level.

Table 27 Expected results and outputs under Priority A.2.1 with relevant indicators

Indicative list of Outputs	Output indicators	Expected results	Result Indicators
Living labs established where the scientific, industry and business communities can work and innovate together by matching the demands of innovation (SMEs) and offer of technological solutions (research actors/Universities).	Number of institutions using programme support for cooperation in education, R&D and innovation (ENI CBC 4).	Enhanced demand-driven Technological transfer among research, industry and SMEs in the fields of clean/environmental technologies, new cultural heritage technologies and Key Enabling Technologies (KETs).	Number of demand driven Cross Border Living labs created for R&D and technological transfer among research, industry and SMEs.
Enhanced institutional capacity to manage cross sector projects involving both science and industry.	Number of Enterprises cooperating with research institutions (ENI CBC 5). Number and type (bilateral, consortium, etc.) of industry academia research agreements		Number of spin-offs established as new enterprises and operating across borders, able to sell their products or services.

Indicative list of Outputs	Output indicators	Expected results	Result Indicators
<p>Increased specialised staff engaged in industries and SMEs in the targeted fields.</p> <p>Enhanced capacity of public authorities and specialized intermediaries (e.g. Technology transfer offices located at Universities) that are aimed at the development of new services (e.g. Support for Proof-of-concept projects).</p> <p>Co-publications (in specific technological fields).</p>	<p>before, during and after intervention.</p> <p>Number of industries and SME researchers trained to initiate / create enterprises.</p> <p>Number of researchers and specialised staff in public authorities involved/ contracted in joint activities with industries and SMEs.</p> <p>Number and field of co-publications.</p>		
<p>New products/services developed for commercialisation in the earmarked technological fields.</p> <p>Effective platforms allowing a precompetitive analysis of promising products and services.</p> <p>Science to business brokerage events/fairs organised (e.g. on market opportunities for researchers and business actors).</p>	<p>Number of new products/services developed.</p> <p>Number of platforms allowing a pre-competitive analysis of promising products and services put in place and effective.</p> <p>Number of brokerage scientist /researchers and Entrepreneur organisations.</p> <p>Number of Technology transfer support and new intellectual property brokering services delivered.</p>	<p>Increased commercialisation opportunities of research products in the fields of clean/ environmental technologies, new cultural heritage technologies and Key Enabling Technologies (KETS).</p>	<p>Forecasted value of sales of newly identified innovative products/ services.</p> <p>Number of co-patents registered.</p>

Source: Own elaboration on JOP

Twelve projects were funded under Priority A.2.1. Two of them are **standard projects**, i.e. BESTMEDGRAPE and LIVINGAGRO. This priority includes a high number of **strategic projects**, i.e. nine corresponding to 75% of funded projects. Strategic projects are FruitFlyNet-ii, iHERITAGE, INTECMED, MED-QUAD, NEX-LABS, PPI4MED, RE-MED, TECHLOG, TRANSDAIRY. Finally, the priority funded the **capitalisation project** WEF – CAP aiming to create a multi stakeholder meta-cluster fostering innovation and enabling policies.

Due to the recent start of the capitalisation projects, **only standard and strategic projects are analysed under this sub-chapter.** They are 11 projects sustaining solutions to foster innovation by enhancing the links between research, technology and industry with a special focus on SMEs operating in fields that are significant in the Mediterranean space and show good potential of

development. Overall, a thematic attention to the green economy and sustainable agriculture can be observed.



Ten of these projects answered the online survey launched by the evaluator, and two of them (the standard project BESTMEDGRAPE and the strategic project NEX-LABS) have been analysed as case studies so providing information from the field that will be used in this sub-chapter.

Feedback from the survey and evidence from the case studies show that **Living labs were a type of output largely produced by the projects**, so showing the capacity to make the different components of the innovation process actively interact meaning that scientific, industry, society and business communities can work and innovate together by matching demands of innovation and offer technological solutions. Such an approach supports co-creation by moving from ideation of new solutions to their implementation. Even if in the evaluator's view the creation of a Living lab corresponds more to the output level, it is worth noting that in Priority A.2.1, "Number of demand driven Cross Border Living labs created for R&D and technological transfer among research, industry and SMEs" is a result indicator. This confirms the importance of such a solution to measure the projects' success.

Evidence from the NEX-LABS strategic project

The project has developed a comprehensive territorial strategy for the ecosystem competitiveness based on Open Innovation models. The physical and virtual environments to match innovation demand and offer have been analysed to define new and/or adapted business support services and increase regional competitiveness based on Open Innovation Penta Helix models for greater innovation. These activities were essential pre-requisites to the implementation of the two cross-border so called "WEF Nexus Driven Open Living Labs", one in Jordan (focused on water/energy) and one in Lebanon (focused on optimization of water/energy virtual trade in food value chain).

The projects also showed the capacity to increase the skills in the business environment by conducting highly qualified **training activities**. BESTMEDGRAPE, which promotes methods and techniques for grape by-product extraction, identification and characterisation as well as the development and testing of new nanotechnological products from the extracted bioactive compounds, helps through training and coaching would-be entrepreneurs turning these products into innovative business ideas for health promotion. Even in a period when restrictions due to pandemic could have hampered this kind of activities, training was developed by all projects as it was confirmed by the survey. Furthermore, case studies show that the training activities were prepared by the academic bodies involved in the projects with care and learning materials were delivered in several languages (in BESTMEDGRAPE English, Arabic, Italian and French). Finally, in the follow up phase the further distribution of learning materials was enhanced by a stronger use of digital platforms. A stronger impact after the end of the projects could be favoured by the expected open licencing policies.

Evidence from the NEX-LABS strategic project

The project has designed the guidelines and launched the call for the training and coaching. The original approach to training has been revised to transform the entire programme into a virtual one. The project

has defined new methodologies, materials, agenda and identified external trainers. The call for applications for the tailored training for public authorities has been launched on 1 October 2021, while those related to SMEs, has been launched in November 2021. The training activities have been finalized and were to be further complemented with the Entrepreneurs summer school, an intensive 7-day school event bringing together entrepreneurs from several countries and cultural backgrounds to explore the core themes of entrepreneurship addressing future NEXUS challenges in the MED countries and suitable cross-border clusters.

It is clear that the **COVID 19 crisis impacted the project learning activities**. Starting at the same time as the pandemic, all face-to-face activities were shifted to an online format. However, it is worth noting that the elements mentioned above, i.e. **preparation of the training, quality of the learning materials, and distribution of the learning materials seem to have benefitted from such an exceptional situation**. Higher attention was dedicated to the overall quality management of the training process, knowing that if distance reduces the teachers' capacity to transfer contents, all other factors have to be brought to excellence. Furthermore, some projects managed to make the researchers circulate so ensuring the empowerment of the teachers in each country. This was the case of BESTMEDGRAPE, where a special attention was also dedicated to the PhD students geographical mobility between the partnering academic organisations. NEX-LABS took the opportunity to strengthen local engagement with more targeted events, such as focus groups and workshops, and newly developed digital tools to facilitate remote work, increase the project's visibility and reach more participants. It is clear that the online modality had advantages when involvement of participants from marginal and even remote areas is concerned. It appears that in the academic, technological and business environment the obstacles to digital access were lower than in other cases, and this allowed the projects of Priority A.2.1 to take advantage of the online modality without experiencing significant damage.

Evidence from the BESTMEDGRAPE standard project

The Lead Beneficiary, in its quality of scientific partner, has made considerable effort in preparing educational materials suitable for the online format. The fact that most project partners were already experienced in implementing online events facilitated the process. By organizing online events, they were able to attract even more participants, also from rural areas. To reach a wider audience, sessions were moved from weekends to weekdays and split into two sessions.

The acceleration of the digital shift could also have driven the project partners to see cooperation in a well-defined perspective. 30% of the surveyed projects consider that their added value consists in promoting and transferring good practices with another 30% mentioning the promotion of international networks. Only 10% thinks that the added value resides in the movement of people and goods. What emerges is that **transfer of innovation in an international context is clearly considered the focus by the funded projects**. At the same time, there is no doubt that digitalisation provides powerful solutions under this priority.

Three fourth of the projects funded under Priority A.2.1 are strategic. In spring 2022 **strategic projects are not sufficiently mature to allow for an evaluation of their capacity to generate services**, which is the most tangible form of impact under this priority. It is true that

almost one third of the projects declared to have created new spin-offs, registered co-patents or facilitated the establishment of new agreements between companies and R&D bodies. However, the actual capacity of these outputs to enhance the availability of services for technology transfer activities does not appear measurable, yet. Even in case of a very well-structured project such as BESTMEDGRAPE, it is difficult to assess whether the Living labs will continue to operate after project closure and in which format.

When measurability is concerned, **case studies showed a strong criticism by the projects of the indicators' system**. Both BESTMEDGRAPE and NEX-LABS Lead Beneficiaries consider the output indicators as unfit to capture significant information on their respective projects. In their view, they focus on details that do not reflect the dynamic of their respective projects. At this regard, the high number of indicators selected by these two projects must be mentioned. Both projects have indeed 10 output and four result indicators and reveal difficulties both in interpreting and managing them. In their view, the link between project and programme outputs is unclear. With the same activities/outputs being used several times in connection to different programme indicators, the performance framework is unwieldy for monitoring progress and assessing the project's contribution to the programme.

More in general, **the interviewed lead beneficiaries consider the process of financial and narrative reporting as excessively burdensome** both in terms of quantity of information required and frequency of reporting required. The amount of time dedicated to the reporting process is in their experience out of balance with the time devoted to the project's contents. The need to prepare a six-monthly report with the same level of details as the annual report is considered as not reasonable. BESTMEDGRAPE reported the necessity to translate into English long tendering procedure documentation. Such a long operation created frustration because, in the understanding of the well-structured management team, the translated tendering procedure documentation was not assessed by JTS/ MA (also able to access the original language) but had to be available in English for possible further verifications. NEX-LABS observed that compared to sectoral programmes such as Horizon 2020, ENI CBC Med is less demanding in the preparation phase but significantly more burdensome in the implementation phase due to the reporting procedures. Significant administrative expertise is therefore required to lead an ENI CBC Med project and this would make it extremely difficult for a "newcomer" to play the role of Lead Beneficiary under this programme. ENI CBC Med procedures appear therefore **too cumbersome compared to other donor programmes (GIZ / USAID)** and might deter potential beneficiaries to join project partnerships.

Evidence from the BESTMEDGRAPE standard project

The Lead Beneficiary considers the programme output indicators to be too strict and too narrowly defined and therefore inadequate for capturing the full range of project outputs. The difficulty of interpreting indicators and relating to project outputs is said to add complexity to the reporting process and create confusion within the partnership.

The AF indicators table is complex and does not provide an easy guide to the assessment of the project performance and its contribution to the programme.

According to the beneficiary, this complexity combined with the rigidity of the programme's administrative procedures is a major challenge, which could discourage future participation of southern partners.

Scarcer evidence of a contribution to institutional capacity enhancement was collected. The survey shows that none of the projects considers promotion of better governance as the most significant added value. Nevertheless, the high number of strategic projects appears still promising under this aspect, even if they are still elaborating plans to capitalise their results at the policy-making level. However, the level of maturity of the strategic projects is not sufficient to draw conclusions yet.

NEX-LABS reported that interaction with the political level even if well planned can turn to be unsuccessful as external factors are major in each of the partner countries. However, the presence of partners of institutional level represents an obvious facilitator when impact on the policy level is concerned. The Egyptian partner of NEX-LABS, the Academy of Scientific Research and Technology, is planning to share project results and replicate them on a national level. As a scientific network supporting the vital role of science in seeking evidence-based solutions to the world's most challenging problems, the Academy will integrate NEX-LABS results at the national policy level in Egypt, with government funding available for implementing some of the innovations and technologies developed and experimented under NEX-LABS.

In such a still unclear framework, what appears already is the **capacity of the projects to create synergies with previous and parallel projects**. According to the survey, 90% of the projects managed to develop synergies with other projects/ initiatives. NEX-LABS is an extraordinary example of capacity to finance a definite approach towards innovation exploiting programmes of different nature, starting from Horizon 2020. On the one side, this shows a long-term strategy allowing to consolidate the network and optimising the solutions adopted. On the other side, the technicality elaborated and especially the vocabulary invented by the project make it more difficult to understand the activities and could not facilitate the understanding of the solutions outside of the project's circle.

At priority level, according to the web survey 55% of the projects contributed to other priorities, which is significantly above the average of 31%. Conversely, Priority A.2.1 appears to have received a contribution from the projects funded under the other analysed priorities (i.e. A.1.1, A.3.1, B.4.1, B.4.3) that is well above the average (40% compared to 26%). All other analysed priorities appear to have contributed to A.2.1 either with half or one third of their projects. This suggests that the topics of technology transfer and commercialisation of research results is somehow horizontal to the programme.

In terms of sustainability, **the possibility to start a follow-up project still appears as the most obvious solution**. This is the reason why high attention is devoted to the capitalisation projects. The Lead Beneficiary of NEX-LABS is partner of the capitalisation project WEF-CAP and intends to further enhance the systematic approach experimented along the series of projects funded over a decade.

Evidence from the NEX-LABS strategic project

The whole WP6 is dedicated to promoting capitalisation through synergies and replication of the project's approach, including by setting up a platform to help NEXUS stakeholders promote and commercialise their innovative technologies and business models and by cooperating with the PHEMAC project, which runs an interactive platform to promote innovation project results. However, no capitalisation strategy has been developed yet, although the project is a strategic one.

The Universidad Autónoma de Barcelona is partner of the WEF-CAP project, a capitalisation project funded under programme Priority A.2.1, that will create a multi stakeholder meta cluster to foster innovation and enabling policies. Even if the Universidad Autónoma de Barcelona is not project coordinator, it is trying to involve NEX-LABS stakeholders in WEF-CAP activities to boost capitalisation and sustainability of the NEX-LABS results.

The BESTMEDGRAPE Lead Beneficiary did not manage to enter in a capitalisation project. However, the technical specificity of the project makes its capitalisation potential more understandable if compared to horizontal sectoral projects. BESTMEDGRAPE started a public-private cooperation to further develop the grape value chain in the future, with additional capacity building and exchanges between stakeholders and further support for start-up companies. The project has established synergies with the associate partner ICNODERM, an innovative start-up operating in the dermo-cosmetic sector. Thanks to the project, the University of Cagliari (Lead Beneficiary), together with the Saint Joseph University of Beirut, is developing a patent for the creation of cosmetic products made from winemaking waste. Furthermore, thanks to the Lebanese partner Berytech Foundation another aspect of the project's sustainability emerged. BESTMEDGRAPE explored the application of the "circular economy" principles in a well-defined niche, i.e. the use of local grape cultivars. This made the generally abstract paradigm of "circularity" much clearer to the Foundation, so creating the preconditions for further application in other fields. This suggests that **projects with a well-defined technical focus, if clearly developed, can show a surprisingly higher potential of capitalisation, also fertilising other sectors.**

Evidence from the BESTMEDGRAPE standard project

Beyond the project, the model promoted by BESTMEDGRAPE to build bridges between researchers and entrepreneurs can be applied to other fields of the circular economy. The Living labs and the technological platform allow scientists to explain the practical relevance of their research on local grape cultivars to a non-scientific audience, integrating the commercial perspective in their work through cooperation with the business community to develop solutions and methods that can be used for developing innovative commercial health products. The project could serve as a model for initiatives supporting partnerships between scientists and stakeholders of other fields of the circular economy, with the aim of developing value chains and generating profitable commercial applications.

To conclude, **the survey shows that for 30% of the projects the ENI CBC Med programme has been essential** for the sake of the mission pursued by the organisation. Such a percentage is in line with the programme level.

3.12 IMPACT ACHIEVED BY THE PROGRAMME UNDER PRIORITY A.3.1 PROVIDE YOUNG PEOPLE, ESPECIALLY THOSE BELONGING TO THE NEETS AND WOMEN, WITH MARKETABLE SKILLS

EQ 43. Has the programme achieved what was expected in terms of: implementation of marketing actions (output 3.1.1.1); training services (output 3.1.1.2) ; new tools and methods (output 3.1.1.3); tutoring and liaison initiatives between the world of training and businesses (output 3.1.1.4, 3.1.1.5, 3.1.1.6)? Are there significant differences between countries?

EQ 44. Have the outputs achieved made it possible to improve the "employability" of NEETs and women? Is it possible to identify good practices or particularly critical cases?

EQ 45. What is the impact of the COVID 19 crisis on the achievement of the expected results at the level of priority A.3.1?

EQ 46. Have the other priorities of the programme contributed in any way to improving the "employability" of NEETs and women?

Key findings

Projects made a significant effort for the implementation of marketing actions to enhance services that foster youth employment through the collaboration with sector professional representatives involved in social inclusion actions and networks. The projects also managed to realise targeted training courses oriented to the labour market involving young NEETs and women. In many cases the trainings were focused on curricula and skills transfer related to sustainable and green economy. In other cases, the training activities targeted specific high-potential growing sectors offering higher chances of employability for the beneficiaries involved. At the time of the evaluation, many training activities were still in progress. However, it was possible to assess that many youths, NEETs and women already benefitted from the project activities. Concerning the tutoring and liaison activities between the world of training and business, the projects enhanced the hands-on approach of the trainings offered to the beneficiaries, by focusing on specific sectors to enhance the likelihood to find a job at the end of these. Concerning the expected outcome of these activities, it is too early to assess them in terms of civic associations launched by the project beneficiaries, or the public institutions engaged. No specific differences between countries were identified.

The trainings and initiatives realised are providing the NEETs involved with skills and competences adapted to the actual demand of the labour market. In some cases, the trainings focus was decided following an initial phase of research to analyse which sector in each target territory could offer the higher chances of employability to the beneficiaries involved, in collaboration with the local stakeholders. This practice significantly increases the reliability and resilience of the project initiatives, having a strong connection to the real needs of the local labour market. However, it is worth noting that there could be misalignments between the programme and the project level in the interpretation of the indicator concerning employment. Such misalignments could hamper a sound measurement of the jobs actually found.

The COVID 19 crisis impacted the projects', especially when the learning activities and the cross-border dimension are concerned. As the beginning of many projects coincided with the outbreak

of the pandemic, many activities, when possible, were adapted to an online format or postponed. The restrictions resulted in a significant loss for the beneficiaries in terms of value added as they could not travel to participate in the project activities hosted in a different country or meet in the same physical space to network. However, the projects were resilient and exploited tools and devices to connect digitally with the beneficiaries, even those located in rural areas who could not participate to the project without a digital support.

Priority A.3.1 appears to have received a contribution from the projects funded under the other analysed priorities (i.e. A.1.1, A.2.1, B.4.1, B.4.3) that is below the average (20% compared to 26%). The highest contribution was from Priority A.1.1 concerning support to innovative start-up and recently established enterprises, i.e. a topic relevant to employability.

Recommendation for ENI CBC MED 2014-2020

Ensure that capitalisation plans of standard and strategic projects are actually implemented so that outputs are transferred to national/regional/local stakeholders preparing the ground for their use at the policy level. This should occur even in case follow-up is not ensured by a relevant capitalisation project. At the same time, the evaluator also recommends to verify that the CLUSTER capitalisation project actually contributes to transferability of outputs and durability of results produced under this priority.

Recommendation NEXT MED 2021-2027

- On project design:
 - Projects should focus on homogeneous target groups to maximise impact. Beneficiaries should be encouraged to address the needs of the most disadvantaged (e.g. women with weak higher education) and develop actions that are well linked to the potential of the respective project territories (e.g. a learning course related to an emerging cluster).
- On programme indicators:
 - Consideration should be given to capacity building actions to promote a common understanding of the indicators at project and programme level. As regards indicator definitions, there should not be discrepancies between the two levels.
 - Indicator definitions and targets (especially when results are concerned) should better reflect the reality of implementation and the project context to make programme indicators more relevant and less ambiguous.
 - Given the workload involved, consideration should be given to reduce the number of mandatory programme indicators, while also giving the possibility to beneficiary to monitor project-specific indicators.
- On sustainability, capitalisation and impact:
 - To allow projects bringing valuable contents to further engage in capitalisation projects, it is necessary to ensure that the call for capitalisation projects does not occur when standard projects are not yet mature.
 - Strategies to ensure the durability of outputs/results beyond the project duration should be encouraged regardless of capitalisation projects. In this respect, each partnership should include organisations that are able either to invest their own resources in follow-up activities, or to secure national or regional support.



Priority A.3.1 “Provide young people, especially those belonging to the NEETS, and women, with marketable skills’ is the first one belonging to the Thematic Objective A.3 ‘Promotion of social inclusion and fight against poverty”, under overarching Objective A “Promote economic and social development”. The complete picture of Objective A is shown in sub-chapter 3.10.

Thematic objective A.3 focuses on two complex issues affecting the area: social exclusion and poverty. Women and youths, especially those belonging to the category of NEETS (young people Not in Employment, Education and Training) are among the most disadvantaged categories, and their condition was worsened by the economic crisis.

Priority A.3.1 targets women of all age groups and youths (in the 18-24 years old age group) belonging to the NEETS category, by enhancing their opportunities of economic integration in the labour market.

A major issue affecting the area is the mismatch between the job market requirements and candidates. Therefore, this priority seeks to tackle the employability issues of the above-mentioned categories through a variety of interventions, including targeted trainings, workshops, coaching and tutoring sessions to acquire entrepreneurial skills on different sectors. Compared to other priorities, A.3.1 focuses on a single expected result: to increase the employability of women of any age and of youths up to 30 years old. The related result indicator is measured through the number of women and youths supported by the programme who found a job. The following table reports the information on the results and outputs related to this priority.

Table 28 Expected results and outputs under Priority A.3.1 with relevant indicators

Indicative list of Outputs	Output indicators	Expected results	Result Indicators
Branding’ and marketing campaigns to enhance services that foster youth employment.	Number of socio- or sector-professional representatives involved in social inclusion actions and networks.	Increased employability of women (all ages) and youths up to 30 years old, especially those belonging to the NEETS.	Number of women (all ages) and youths up to 30 years old, especially those belonging to the NEETS, supported by the programme who have found a job.
Targeted training courses oriented to the labour market addressing youths (18-24 years old) and women (all ages) especially those belonging to vulnerable groups.	Number of new curricula proposing skills required by the labour market (new professions).		
Innovative learning tools and methodologies supported by new technologies (social media; mobiles).	Number of training courses designed and targeted to youths (18-24 years old) (especially those belonging to the NEETS) and women.		
Coaching and tutoring actions with leading	Number of youths, NEETS and women trained.		

Indicative list of Outputs	Output indicators	Expected results	Result Indicators
<p>mentors, especially women, from successful businesses and civil society groups.</p> <p>Initiatives to better connect Technical Vocational Education and Training (TVET) with market needs and socio-professional sectors.</p> <p>Social employment initiatives jointly implemented by public institutions and civil society organisations.</p>	<p>Number of social media specifically targeting learning for unemployed youth and women.</p> <p>Number of associations (civic, sports, performing arts) launched by young people, NEETS and women.</p> <p>Number of agreements between TVET institutions and the business sector.</p> <p>Number of public institutions engaged (i.e. through charters, protocols, Memoranda of Understanding) in employment schemes to foster employability of young people and women.</p>		

Source: Own elaboration on JOP

Ten projects were funded under priority A.3.1. three of them are **standard projects** (RESMYLE, InnovAgroWoMed, HELIOS) six are **strategic projects** (YEP MED, Skills4Sports, SIRCLES, MYSEA, INTERNISA, GREENLAND) and one is a **capitalisation project** (CLUSTER). Due to the recent start of the capitalisation projects, **only standard and strategic projects are analysed under this sub-chapter.**

The projects contribute to supporting young people in the development of skills useful for their participation in the labour market through different initiatives. For the standard projects, RESMYLE aims to find jobs for young people thanks to their participation in workshops and projects focused on sustainable and circular economy, InnovAgroWoMed designs tailored trainings for women specific to the territories where the project operates to enhance the chances of employment insertion of the beneficiaries and HELIOS aims to develop specific curricula of skills based on the actual needs of the job market. Concerning the strategic projects, YEP MED focuses on increasing the matching of NEETs skills with the requirements of employers in the port logistic sector, which has a high growth potential in the Mediterranean area and similarly, Skills4Sport shares the same goal in the sport sector. Both SIRCLES and GREENLAND aim to provide marketable skills and job opportunities in the green and circular economy and the biowaste sector, with the final purpose to boost the economy with a sustainable approach. MYSEA proposes tailored trainings oriented to the labour market offering on-the-job experience to unemployed youths and women to acquire the needed skills in the growing agri-food sector. INTERISA's mission is to develop a platform to connect the labour supply and demand and reduce the digital gender gap.



Five out of the nine standard and strategic projects answered the online web survey, and two standard projects, RESMYLE and InnovAgroWoMed have been analysed as case studies so providing from the field information that will be used in this sub-chapter, the full case studies being included in the Annex.

The majority of projects made relevant efforts in the **implementation of new marketing actions to enhance services that foster youth employment**. These actions consist of partnerships with social and economic sector professionals involved in social inclusion of fragile categories. From the data gathered from the web-survey and the consultation of project partners, it emerges that the collaboration with external actors has been fundamental to reach out and involve target groups in the project activities and set the basis for their social and economic integration. Overall, **all the projects focused on supporting NEETs in their development of useful skills to enter the labour market through capacity building and training schemes**, including workshops, training courses, tutoring and mentorship programmes. Many of these activities were still ongoing at the time of the consultation.

InnovAgroWoMed designed two trainings models: one oriented toward the employment of beneficiaries, and the other specific to deliver the necessary skills and knowledge to start a business in a specific high-potential growth sector of the target territory. In this case, the subgrants represent an essential tool to support the beneficiaries in their entrepreneurial ambitions. However, after the project had already started, the regulation concerning the supply of the subgrants changed. It emerged that the calls for proposals to receive the subgrants must be open to any woman willing to participate, excluding the requirement of having participated to the project activities. This aspect is a threat to the achievement of the project expected results.

Evidence from the RESMYLE standard project

This project proposes different activities oriented to increase the employability of NEETs and women by providing them with new skills. The project has foreseen the realisation of several workshops dedicated to the adaptation of the sustainable economy sector to the Mediterranean area. These workshops are realised in each partner country in collaboration with local associations and organisation to exploit their network of potential beneficiaries. The aim is to build new curricula in the sustainable economy and transfer the related skills to the beneficiaries, leading to finding job opportunities in the field. Besides the workshops, RESMYLE is also supporting the beneficiaries with eco-incubators for start-ups to initiate their own project. The project has not created any new incubator but is exploiting already existing ones, such as the one present at the Jordan University of Science and Technology. The eco-incubators represent a legacy to be exploited after the project reaches its conclusion. Even though there are no doubts concerning the value added brought by already existing incubators, this aspect might correspond to an entry barrier for unexperienced partners to join the project.

From the data gathered through the web survey, new tools were created to support the **delivery of training materials and courses** that were useful to enable beneficiaries located in more rural areas to take part in the project activities. Another relevant aspect is the effort that the projects

made to link their training activities to business sectors. The liaison between the business sector and the training activities enhances the chances to find a job thanks to the services offered by the projects. This aspect is very relevant considering that the expected result for this priority is measured through the number of individuals that found employment. The linking with the existing business in the relevant sectors targeted by the project enabled the partners to better define the curricula of required skills for the beneficiaries to be employed, or to start their own entrepreneurial project.

Evidence from the InnovAgroWoMed standard project

This project has developed the trainings based on a three phases approach: research, local adaptation and implementation. During the first phase, the lead partners focused on research and developed a training course model that could be adapted to all the territories targeted. During the second phase, the partners conducted a territorial analysis of the local business sectors and value chain that could bring the training model the higher value and offer to the beneficiaries the higher chances to find an employment. The partners collaborated directly with local association and enterprises to define this model. Finally, the trainings were delivered by the partners in each country according to the best modalities to better engage with the beneficiaries. This approach gives the project partners autonomy while remaining under the guide on the lead beneficiary, by shaping the trainings according to the real business opportunities and needs of the territories involved.

Evidence from the RESMYLE standard project

This project developed a web-portal of educational resources for trainers and educators involved in the professional insertion of NEETs in the Mediterranean region. At the moment of the project partner consultation, the platform was not finalised yet, although the resources are already accessible to the relevant stakeholders. The organisations that made use of these educational resources were later selected to implement pilot project focused on environmental issues and trained 240 NEETs in total.

At the moment of drafting the evaluation, it was too early to assess whether the outputs achieved by the project made it possible to improve the 'employability' of NEETs and women. From the data gathered through the web survey, **all respondents think that at the project increased the skills and competences of the NEETs and women involved in the project activities.** In particular, the project activities have enhanced the beneficiaries' capacity to set up and manage a company and their capacity to network.

The wide definition of NEETs conceived by the programme leads to questions concerning the profiles of the target groups to involve in the projects. The category of NEETs includes people in very different situations. In some cases, the project involved students having recently graduated with a higher education degree. In other cases, people with significant previous professional experience were involved. This is absolutely coherent with the definition of NEETs but raises a question concerning the additionality of the programme. This heterogeneity might lead to inconsistencies among the project results and the actual value added for the beneficiaries. In this context, a good practice worth mentioning is the territorial focus implemented by the project InnovAgroWoMed. By delivering

trainings tailored to specific value chains of the territories involved, even though the beneficiaries did not share a common background they could acquire skills and competences adapted to the sector chosen to increase their chances of being employed or starting a business in that sector.

Evidence from the InnovAgroWoMed standard project

Even though the progress made by the projects toward the expected results is still at an initial phase, the hands-on approach implemented by InnovAgroWoMed makes it easier for the evaluators to assess the potential outcomes of the project activities and the explanations behind an eventual failure in meeting the targets. An example of this approach is the focus on the “blue crab” value chain in the region of Medenine, located in the southern area of Tunisia. The blue crab is a growing sector in the area implicating the creation of new jobs, a great opportunity for the beneficiaries of InnovAgroWoMed. However, due to the introduction of seasonal hunting restrictions that could potentially hamper the professional insertion of the beneficiaries, the local project partner, in collaboration with the local stakeholders, decided to refocus the trainings on the flourishing sector of tuna and anchovies, eventually to increase their chances to meet the targets. This change is a great example of the hands-on mentality and resilience of the training model developed in this project.

The expression “finding a job” used in the definition of the result indicator can be equivocal. RESMYLE has adopted a broad interpretation of the term ‘employment’, which covers both short-term and part-time jobs. As explained during the interview, this is because the project prioritises access to the labour market over employment duration. It also assumes that the start-up initiatives, which the project supports, fall within the definition of employment. While this approach is consistent with a dynamic concept of employability that includes entrepreneurial self-employment, the extent to which these initiatives can be considered as employment contracts, as understood by the programme, is debatable.

The COVID 19 crisis affected the implementation of many project activities, which, when possible, were either postponed or moved to an online format. **The beneficiaries’ mobility foreseen by the projects was the aspect most impacted** by the crisis. The restrictions on traveling narrowed the cross-border dimension of the training activities and also limited the networking opportunities of beneficiaries. At the same time, the COVID 19 crisis brought about a wave of digitalisation that enabled the participation of beneficiaries located in remote rural areas who would have been impossible to involve without the support of digital tools. In many cases, the e-learning platforms developed by the projects acquired a more prominent role than it was initially foreseen.

Evidence from the RESMYLE standard project

This project had initially foreseen to implement the workshops on an international scale, involving beneficiaries coming from all the partner countries. However, because of the COVID 19 crisis, this could not be realised, and the workshops could only involve beneficiaries that were already physically present in the country where they took place.

From the data gathered through the web-survey, it emerged that **the majority of projects were able to establish synergies with other projects or related initiatives**. In fact, 60% of the projects established synergies with other ENI CBC Med projects, other EU programmes, or other initiatives sharing similar goals in the same area (i.e. business creation in the green sustainable economy in the Mediterranean region). From the case studies analysis, it also emerged that the projects established synergies with other projects that already reached their conclusion, by exploiting the material developed or the network of stakeholders established. In most cases, this form of cooperation was possible because a partner of the project was involved in the concluded initiative.

One third of the projects funded under Priority A.3.1 declared to have contributed to other priorities of the programme. Conversely, Priority A.3.1 appears to have received a contribution from the projects funded under the other analysed priorities (i.e. A.1.1, A.2.1, B.4.1, B.4.3) that is below the average (20% compared to 26%). The highest contribution was from Priority A.1.1 concerning support to innovative start-up and recently established enterprises, i.e. a topic relevant to employability.

To conclude, the survey shows that **the ENI CBC Med programme has been essential for the sake of the mission pursued by the organisation only for 20% of the respondents**. Such a percentage is below the average value of 37% and suggests that the programme has a relatively lower importance for the stakeholders dealing with employment of young people and women.

3.13 IMPACT ACHIEVED BY THE PROGRAMME UNDER PRIORITY B.4.1 SUPPORT INNOVATIVE AND TECHNOLOGICAL SOLUTIONS TO INCREASE WATER EFFICIENCY AND ENCOURAGE USE OF NON-CONVENTIONAL WATER SUPPLY

EQ 47. Has the programme achieved what was expected in terms of: creation of cross-border networks (output 4.1.1.1, 4.1.1.2, 4.1.2.7); realization of training events (output 4.1.1.3, 4.1.2.6); pilot initiatives (output 4.1.1.4, 4.1.2.8); new management plans (output 4.1.1.5)? Are there significant differences between countries?

EQ 48. Have the outputs achieved made it possible to increase the use of innovative solutions that ensure a more efficient use of water resources in agriculture and the home? Is it possible to identify good practices or particularly critical cases?

EQ 49. What is the impact of the COVID 19 crisis on the achievement of the expected results at the level of priority B.4.1?

EQ 50. Have the other priorities of the programme contributed in any way to the development of innovative solutions for improving the efficiency of the use of water resources?

Key findings

The outputs produced relate to the strategic side (plans, tools, legal frameworks) as well as to the demonstrative side. Pilot actions for improving water management are an output to be largely produced by the projects, however important delays in the application of the demonstrative technologies required significant extensions. Capacity building and training schemes are another type of output strongly present in the projects. Combined with the good involvement of key stakeholders, this is a good condition to increase awareness of this topic. Among the most important changes being expected on the southern shore of the Mediterranean, the capacity of the projects to focus on rural territories appears particularly relevant.

Overall, the projects concern all key topics that should be addressed under the priority with a particular focus on the use of non-conventional water resources. 80% of web survey respondents have also indicated that their project aims to “face climate change related issues”. However, the most tangible effects of the projects have not been produced, yet. Compared to other priorities where durability seems to depend strongly on follow-up projects, Priority B.4.1 shows that in some territories the involved stakeholders, including investors, could take over the project outputs.

The COVID 19 pandemic has slowed down activities for partners, delaying tendering procedures and making face to face events impossible in definite periods. However, the impact of the pandemic on the projects funded under this priority appears lower than in others featured by intensive people-to-people activities. The slow pace of the projects, which made the require of extensions necessary, can therefore be attributed only partly to the pandemic.

Priority B.4.1 appears to have received a contribution from the projects funded under the other analysed priorities (i.e. A.1.1, A.2.1, A.3.1, B.4.3) that is well below the average (17% compared to 26%). The highest contribution was from Priority A.2.1 concerning technology transfer, whereas no contribution was given by the projects belonging to Priority B.4.3 under the same Thematic Objective.

Recommendation for ENI CBC MED 2014-2020

Ensure that capitalisation plans of standard and strategic projects are actually implemented so that outputs are transferred to national/regional/local stakeholders preparing the ground for their use at the policy level. This should occur even in case follow-up is not ensured by a relevant capitalisation project. At the same time, the evaluator recommends to verify that the MEDWAYCAP capitalisation project actually contributes to transferability of outputs and durability of results produced under this priority.

It is also recommended to speed up the approval of an addendum to extend the project time-frame and reorganise activities to deal with delays and partnership issues.

Recommendation NEXT MED 2021-2027

- On future project design:
 - Consider that the issue of water scarcity is of high priority and will be even more relevant in the future for southern Mediterranean countries.
 - Consider additional capacity building for project partners to improve management capacity and enhance ownership and accountability.
 - Consider reviewing national regulatory frameworks to identify obstacles to the proper implementation of projects and suggest remedial actions, including recommendations addressed to the national authorities.
 - Consider introducing contingencies in the budget to mitigate the effects of inflation on project activities.
- On programme indicators:
 - Some of the programme indicators will not be fulfilled, as the aggregated projects targets are below the programme target. This could mean that the programme overestimated the targets (even though a revision towards lower targets was already approved in November 2020), or that the indicators should be better balanced.
 - Indicators on organisational and preparatory activities as well as stakeholder mobilisation and information would allow to assess better the progress of projects.
 - Consider a simplified performance framework, with stronger links between project activities/outputs and programme indicators and better explanations of relationship between the two in the Application Form, especially concerning project results.
- On sustainability, capitalisation and impact:
 - Ensure that capitalisation plans developed by the project are well-articulated with capitalisation projects.
 - Ensure that sustainability and impact depend not only on capitalisation projects, but also on the integration of project results into national and local strategies.



The Priority B.4.1 “Support innovative and technological solutions to increase water efficiency and encourage use of non-conventional water supply” is one of the four well focused priorities under the thematic objective B.4: “Environmental protection, climate change adaptation and mitigation”, which refers to the overarching Objective B “Address common challenges in environment”. The complete picture of Objective B is shown in the figure below.

Figure 25 Overview Overarching Objective B, Thematic Objectives and Priorities



Source: Joint Operational Programme

The Thematic Objective B.4 wants to answer the environmental challenges emerged in the context analysis. Water, waste management, renewable energies/ energy efficiency, and integrated coastal zone management, are topic that are crucial for the sustainable development of the area and can be addressed jointly on a Mediterranean scale.

Priority B.4.1 is based on an approach recognising the importance of the integrated water management system that takes into account both demand and supply of water. Water use efficiency is key to improve the management of water demand. Savings concern both the agricultural sector and the domestic use mainly concentrated in the urban areas. On the supply side, the first point to be mentioned is the availability of safe water to everybody, given that according to the Joint Operational Programme 20 million of Mediterranean people still have no direct access to drinkable water, especially in the rural areas of the southern shore. On the technical point of view, it appears crucial to increase the use of non-conventional sources of water. Various technologies can be used, such as using return water from agricultural drainage, reuse of treated wastewater for irrigation purposes, desalination of plants. The priority also includes the enhancement of the cooperation between institutions and specialised agencies.

As shown in the table below, two results are expected. The first one is related to the agricultural sector and focuses on the adoption of water efficiency technologies. The second result is related to the domestic use and focuses on non-conventional water resources.

Table 29 Expected results and outputs under Priority B.4.1 with relevant indicators

Indicative list of Outputs	Output indicators	Expected results	Result Indicators
Functional cross-border research networks on efficient water use and use of nonconventional water supply for irrigation purposes	Number of new or enhanced ICT solutions for water resources management in agriculture	Increased adoption of innovative sustainable water-efficiency technologies and systems in agriculture by public authorities, specialized	Surface in ha. of land irrigated with treated wastewater and non-conventional water or equipped with modern and efficient irrigation systems

Indicative list of Outputs	Output indicators	Expected results	Result Indicators
		agencies and other relevant stakeholders	<p>Number of measures and initiatives to showcase, exchange, test and transfer water management solutions to end-users in the agricultural sector in view of improving water use efficiency and quality and use of non-conventional water resources (NCWR) in agricultural practices</p> <p>Investments in up-scaling of appropriate technologies to increase water efficiency and use of non-conventional water supply systems for irrigation purposes</p>
New / enhanced cross-border thematic practitioner networks on water in agriculture with broad involvement of different relevant stakeholders to compile, disseminate and further develop technological solutions (Horizon) and stakeholder dialogue and water governance approaches	<p>Number of public / private actor alliances engaged in non-conventional and efficient water management plans</p> <p>Number of local authorities applying integrated approaches for water cycle management in agriculture</p>	Support research and development for locally applicable and low-cost technologies for the use of non-conventional water resources for domestic purposes	<p>Number of technologies applied for the use of non-conventional water resources for domestic purposes</p> <p>Number of measures and initiatives to showcase, exchange, test and transfer water supply and demand solutions to end-users in view of improving water use efficiency and quality and use of non-conventional water resources for domestic purposes</p>
Tailored training events on water use efficiency and non-conventional water addressed to farmers, practitioners and other relevant stakeholders	Number of staff of different stakeholders trained that are involved in CBC-MED projects		<p>Volume (m³) of non-conventional water supply used for domestic purposes</p>
Initiatives/pilot projects to showcase, exchange, test and transfer water management solutions (water-efficient irrigation, drip-irrigation, grey water/ wastewater treatment plants,)	Number of replicable technologies for water efficient use and use of non-conventional water resources		

Indicative list of Outputs	Output indicators	Expected results	Result Indicators
Water management and local governance plans in participating countries that integrate non-conventional water resources and water efficiency concerns	Number of organizations involved in WRM applying sustainable innovative water efficiency and non-conventional water technologies within local water governance frameworks		
Tailored training and events to raise awareness on the use of non-conventional water resources for drinking water	Number of staff of different stakeholders trained that are involved in CBC-MED projects		
New / enhanced cross-border thematic practitioner networks on domestic water supply with broad involvement of relevant stakeholders to compile, disseminate and further develop technological solutions and stakeholder dialogue and water governance approaches	Number of local authorities applying integrated approaches for water cycle management in domestic water supply		
Initiatives/pilot projects to showcase, exchange, test and transfer water management solutions (rooftop water harvesting, grey water/ wastewater treatment plants, desalination plants)	Number of new or enhanced ICT solutions for water supply and demand management in urban areas		

Source: Own elaboration on JOP

Six projects were funded under Priority B.4.1. Five of them are **standard projects**, i.e. AQUACYCLE, MEDISS, MENAWARA, NAWAMED and PROSIM. The priority also includes one **capitalisation project** named MEDWAYCAP that focuses on non-conventional water resources and aims at transferring and upgrading knowledge, reinforcing networks, raising awareness among public authorities, policy makers and stakeholders.

The standard projects appear to have identified approaches that are highly coherent with the challenges identified in the priority. AQUACYCLE is set to bring an eco-innovative wastewater treatment technology that consists of anaerobic digestion, constructed wetlands and solar treatment for the cost-effective treatment of urban wastewater with minimal costs of operation

and maximum environmental benefits. MEDISS tests innovative solutions in the use of treated wastewater and desalination of brackish water. On the longer term, the project will contribute to reducing stress on freshwater, as well as costs for water supply. The joint challenges of MENAWARA project consist in providing additional resources by recycling drainage and wastewater, tapping water losses, rationalizing water use practices and setting operational governance models in line with national and international plans. NAWAMED aims at changing the urban water management practice by mean of innovative, sustainable, and low-cost treatment technologies, applicable in a decentralised way, to replace the use of potable water with good quality of non-conventional water. Greywater (and rainwater when available) can be reused for WC flushing and irrigation but requires the implementation of decentralised treatment systems, serving one or a few buildings. PROSIM faces the challenges of water losses due to non-efficient irrigation systems, limited reliance on non-conventional water (NCW), scarce capacities of institutions in this policy field by focusing on both water demand and supply for irrigation. The project wants to bring innovative solutions combining water use efficiency and NCW and build local capacities to adopt/upscale them.



All five standard projects answered the web survey, while two standard projects, AQUACYCLE and PROSIM, have been analysed as case studies, providing the field information that will be used in this sub-chapter, the full case studies being included in the Annex.

The first element emerged from the web survey is **the importance of the strategic and regulative side under this priority**. 80% of respondents declared to have managed plans/tools and legal frameworks to contribute to the development of solutions for improving the efficiency of water use. This capacity is **linked to the involvement of the appropriate stakeholders**. 80% of the projects saw the involvement of environmental national and regional authorities such as of water providers. Interestingly, local communities were also involved by 60% of the respondents.

Evidence from the PROSIM standard project

According to the Lead Beneficiary, by bringing together local actors involved in the sector (farmers, national and local authorities, water providers, extension services, etc.), building capacity and promoting cooperation, the project will enable new water management and irrigation practices to take root, ensuring ownership and sustainability. For instance, the project has established the so-called groups of agricultural development (GDA) in Tunisia. The impact is not only in terms of water savings, but also in terms of human resources, as the responsible ministry can rely on the project-trained staff, the extension agents (EA), to transfer experience and knowledge to farmers at the local level and to monitor the use of irrigation equipment provided by the project.

Pilot actions for improving water management are an output to be largely produced by the projects (80%). However, both analysed projects (AQUACYCLE and PROSIM) show **important delays** in the application of the demonstrative technologies. Long extensions were therefore required. They appear essential for the success of both projects. Concrete results in terms of more efficient use of water resources were declared only by 40% of the surveyed projects.

The web survey also shows that **the most important field of application of innovative technologies is the reduction of consumption and waste of water**. At a more general level, 80% of projects declare that their approach allows to face climate change related issues.

Capacity building and training schemes are another type of output strongly present in the projects (80%). This aspect is very important. If combined with the intensive stakeholders' involvement mentioned above, it shows that even if focused on highly technical contents, these projects are also committed to share knowledge knowing that the change depends on the mobilisation of various actors in a given territory.

Concerning the **territorial dimension**, it is worth noting that **half of the projects target rural areas**, with the remaining half targeting both rural and urban areas. It appears that the topic of water allowed the programme directly to address the challenged posed to the rural areas, whose involvement in relation to other topics is less easily recognisable.

Such a remarkable territorial focus is not always accompanied by a clearly recognisable cross-border dimension. **The main added value declared by 80% of projects is the promotion and transfer of good practices**, but this seems to be intended as the first level of cooperation intensity. In the two analysed projects, technologies already adopted in the EU were transferred to the countries of the southern shore and they were applied following a participatory approach.

Difficulties in developing the cross-border dimension become stronger in projects that encountered major difficulties such as PROSIM. The project saw the withdrawal of a partner due to bureaucratic problems and a long period of inactivity experienced by another partner. Furthermore, PROSIM project was hampered not only by the pandemic but also by the instability in Lebanon and in Tunisia. However, the problems of project ownership highlighted by the Lead Beneficiary go beyond such difficulties and reveal the importance of a well harmonised partnership. Compared to other programmes, ENI CBC Med entails a higher level of complexity in terms of management because of the interactions in the partnership and the articulated procedures. If these aspects are not understood by all partners as part of the project cross-border dimension, they risk to affect its smooth running.

Evidence from the PROSIM standard project

According to the Lead Beneficiary, not all partners show the same interest in participating in cross-border activities, as some partners tend to focus on achieving national objectives without much regard for the cross-border dimension of the project, thus reducing its expected added value.

The project also revealed problems of ownership and accountability within the partnership, as some partners, usually passive recipients of technical assistance and with limited project management skills, are reluctant to shoulder the responsibilities of managing a budget and take an active part in implementing activities, expecting the Lead Beneficiary to step in whenever a problem arises. This lack of ownership creates an additional workload for the Lead Beneficiary and carries a risk of mismanagement.

The COVID 19 pandemic has slowed down activities for partners, delaying tendering procedures and making face to face events impossible in definite periods. However, the impact of the pandemic on the projects funded under this priority appears lower than in others featured by intensive people to people activities.

The slow pace of the projects, which made the require of extensions necessary, can therefore be attributed only partly to the pandemic. However, as a result of the delay in the outputs production, the achievement of results cannot be measured yet. In the beneficiaries' perspective, the most reached achievement so far is the increase of the **stakeholders' awareness on environmentally**

friendly practices. More in general, the web survey indicates that such awareness is considered as the main goal of the projects themselves.

Evidence from the AQUACYCLE standard project

AQUACYCLE is very important for the achievement of the three programme result indicators, contributing to 50% of the programme targets. The most ambitious result is the volume of non-conventional water supply used for domestic purposes (4.1.2.F), which will require local action plans to be adopted and implemented by local authorities, using the technology tested with the demonstration units. This will require political commitment and extra resources to implement local action plans, a process which the project will help set in motion through its governance activities but is likely to take time. However, the interviewed beneficiaries stressed that the project main goal is to raise awareness about the technology through its demonstration units and convince stakeholders of the potential of wastewater reuse for addressing water needs of local communities across the Mediterranean.

It should be noted that the programme target of 1.800.000 m³ for indicator 4.1.2.F will be difficult to reach, as the other project, NAWAMED, only contributes with 9.000 m³.

It is clear that **the opportunity to continue the projects' action within a capitalisation project is considered as highly valuable.** To make an example, AQUACYCLE is followed by the ENI CBC MED capitalisation project MEDWAYSAP which was launched in January 2022 and which also includes the Tunisian Centre for Water Research and Technologies (AQUACYCLE PP4) in its partnership. There are high expectations that this new project will disseminate the results of AQUACYCLE, including in urban areas, and to improve the technology both quantitatively and qualitatively.

However, the analysed projects show that project results do not necessarily need to be capitalised by follow-up projects. **Given the territorial nature of these projects, there are possibilities to see their results integrated in the local and regional policies also through private investors mobilisation.** This is particularly encouraging in the Southern Mediterranean countries, especially when featured by socio-political instability. However, it is clear that the capacity of Priority B.4.1 projects to continue delivering their effects strongly depends on external factors, including inflation that can be a significant element when small scale investments are concerned. The case of AQUACYCLE illustrates a possible strategy to overcome the challenges.

Evidence from the AQUACYCLE standard project

Both partners interviewed declared that AQUACYCLE has very promising prospects in Lebanon, with the signing of an agreement between the public company SANABEL and private investors to pursue the project results. SANABEL has asked the Lebanese university team to adapt the technology to one of its housing estates to test its effectiveness, before applying it to other buildings.

Furthermore, one of project legacies is the e-training platform on APOC technology (<https://etraining-aquacycle.eu/>) which explains how to design and maintain each of the system components and was designed not only for experts, but also for students and stakeholders in the water sector.

In general, partners are aware that the uptake of the technology on a large scale depends on external factors and faces issues of corruption, conflicts of interest, and lack of interest.

The participatory approach adopted by the project is fundamental to overcoming these types of challenges and ensuring the long-term success of the endeavour, the key being to remove the stigma attached to the

use of treated wastewater among stakeholders (farmers, local entrepreneurs, etc.) in order to ensure their active participation once APOC systems are installed.

In a priority featured by a **low capacity to fertilise other priorities** (15% compared to an average of 31% for the five priorities analysed), AQUACYCLE appears as a well-integrated project capable to connect not only with four sister projects (MEDISS, MENAWARA, NAWAMED and PROSIM) but also with a project belonging to Priority A.3.2 (MEDTOWN) and a project belonging to Priority A.2.1 (NEX-LABS). Furthermore, the Lead Beneficiary reported that most of the know-how on which AQUACYCLE is based was developed under previous H2020 projects. This shows that **high project technicality does not prevent from establishing synergies at a wider scope, if a sufficient managerial capacity is in place.**

Conversely, Priority B.4.1 appears to have received a contribution from the projects funded under the other analysed priorities (i.e. A.1.1, A.1.2, A.3.1, B.4.3) that is well below the average (17% compared to 26%). The highest contribution was from Priority A.2.1 concerning technology transfer, whereas no contribution was given by the projects belonging to Priority B.4.3 under the same Thematic Objective.

Finally, it must be noted that **40% of the surveyed beneficiaries declared that participation in the programme was essential for the sake of the missions they pursue.** Such a percentage is higher than the average at programme level (37%) and shows that even in a policy field where significant investments are necessary, the value of ENI CBC Med is highly recognised.

3.14 IMPACT ACHIEVED BY THE PROGRAMME UNDER PRIORITY B.4.3 SUPPORT COST-EFFECTIVE AND INNOVATIVE ENERGY REHABILITATIONS RELEVANT TO BUILDING TYPES AND CLIMATIC ZONES, WITH A FOCUS ON PUBLIC BUILDINGS

Additional EQ: Has the programme achieved what was expected in terms of: provisions for sustainable urban design (output 4.3.1.1), energy mix efficiency plans/strategies (output 4.3.1.2), cross-border case studies (output 4.3.1.3), twinning and knowledge sharing (output 4.3.1.4), implementation of pilot technologies, delivery of energy performance certificates and application of renewable energy systems to public buildings (outputs 4.3.2.5, 4.3.2.6, 4.3.2.7)? Are there significant differences between countries?

Additional EQ: Have the outputs achieved made it possible to increase the use of innovative solutions that support cost-effective and innovative energy rehabilitations relevant to building types and climatic zones, with a focus on public buildings? Is it possible to identify good practices or particularly critical cases?

Additional EQ: What is the impact of the COVID 19 crisis on the achievement of the expected results at the level of priority B.4.3?

Additional EQ: Have the other priorities of the programme contributed in any way to the development of cost-effective and innovative energy rehabilitations relevant to building types and climatic zones, with a focus on public building?

Key findings

All projects under this priority developed cost-effective and innovative energy renovations relevant to building types and climatic zones by implementing pilot actions for improving energy efficiency. In particular, the Living labs appear to be a good activity that enhances the implementation of innovative energy efficiency renovation solutions, as they promote an interactive approach allowing all the relevant stakeholders to brainstorm and understand the related implications. The educational sector appears particularly targeted by innovative energy renovations, and this could have a good multiplier effect. The development of energy mix efficiency plans and strategies appears to be less present among the projects, while the development of the cross-border case studies was still ongoing when this evaluation report was being drafted. Overall, Southern Mediterranean countries can potentially benefit the most from the projects. At the same time, the absence of infrastructure made the implementation of innovative solutions more difficult compared to the countries located on the northern shore.

The projects are making efforts to involve the key decision makers implied in the public building renovations to raise their awareness of the benefits and the relevant aspects to consider concerning the energy efficiency solutions.

However, besides the application of the technologies foreseen in the implementation of pilot projects, it is too early to assess whether the project impact will increase the use of energy efficiency solutions in public buildings located in the Mediterranean area. A strong point to keep in mind is that the integration of such innovations on a policy level is essential to amplify the impact of the projects, which, according to the analysis so far, is not always obvious.

The COVID 19 crisis impacted the project activities which were either postponed or shifted to an online format, when possible. The imposed restrictions prevented the relevant stakeholders to

meet physically and to initiate the construction works of pilot projects because of the slowdown of tenders or delays in the shipping of materials.

Priority B.4.3 appears to have received a contribution from the projects funded under the other analysed priorities (i.e. A.1.1, A.1.2, A.3.1, B.4.1) that is below the average (19% compared to 26%). The highest contributions were from Priority B.4.1 under the same Thematic Objective and from Priority A.2.1 concerning technology transfer and commercialisation of research results.

Recommendation for ENI CBC MED 2014-2020

Ensure that capitalisation plans of standard and strategic projects are actually implemented so that outputs are transferred to national/regional/local stakeholders preparing the ground for their use at the policy level. This should occur even in case follow-up is not ensured by a relevant capitalisation project. At the same time, the evaluator recommends to verify that the SEACAP 4 SDG, Sustainable MED Cities capitalisation projects actually contribute to transferability of outputs and durability of results produced under this priority.

Recommendation for NEXT MED 2021-2027

- On programme indicators:
 - Given the rapid evolution of technology, the programme indicators must be formulated in such a way that they remain relevant to technological developments.
- On sustainability, capitalisation and impact:
 - Since not all standard projects are expected to be followed by a capitalisation project, a capitalisation plan outlining the modalities of engagement of the policy level should be included in the project proposal or prepared in the very first phase of the project.
 - Sustainability and impact will depend not only on capitalisation efforts but even more so on national policies in place to promote energy renovation of public buildings, including access to funding to roll out the technologies and pilots developed by the project.
 - Synergies with other projects and initiatives during the project lifetime could be facilitated and enhanced through national coordination in the ENI CBC Med countries, starting from those featured by a good number of projects funded by ENI CBC Med.
 - Synergies with other sectors should be explored as they could provide significant added value, especially on horizontal issues such as environmental and economic sustainability.
 - Particular attention should be paid to the partnership composition of capitalisation projects to ensure that all key stakeholders, including economic actors, are represented.



Priority B.4.3 “Support cost-effective and innovative energy rehabilitations relevant to building types and climatic zones, with a focus on public buildings” focuses on energy efficiency and rehabilitations, particularly for public buildings, under the thematic objective B.4: “Environmental protection, climate change adaptation and mitigation”, under overarching objective B “Address common challenges in environment” the complete picture of objective B is shown in sub-chapter 3.13.

The priority focuses on the building sector, which according to the Joint Operational Programme represents one third of the total energy consumption in the Mediterranean Partner Countries, and 40% of the European Union’s total energy consumption. The energy administration and the transfer

of innovative energy saving solutions is a common and relevant topic for cooperation in the Mediterranean area because of the natural characteristics shared by the territories (climate, geography, etc). In this context, supporting the relevant decision makers in identifying cost-effective solutions for energy renovations is a key aspect of the interventions. Similarly to other priorities, involving all the relevant stakeholders, including public institutions, is essential to enhance the implementation of sustainable energy policies and measures. Priority B.4.3 focuses on energy efficiency and energy consumption from renewable sources in public buildings. It addresses two expected results i.e. enhancing the capacity of public institutions to implement sustainable energy policies and reducing the emissions of energy consumption by introducing sustainable solutions.

Table 30 Expected results and outputs under Priority B.4.3 with relevant indicators

Indicative list of Outputs	Output indicators	Expected results	Result Indicators
<p>Administrative and legal provisions for sustainable urban design through innovative approaches regarding sustainable building and energy efficiency.</p> <p>Energy mix efficiency plans/strategies developed to stimulate cost-effective deep renovations of buildings.</p> <p>Cross-border case studies that demonstrate potential replication of proposed measures and solutions (including technologies, methodologies, systems or tools).</p> <p>Twinning and knowledge sharing activities involving public authorities.</p>	<p>Number of new or revised procedures (legal, regulatory, economical, etc.) initiated as a result of a transfer of good practices.</p> <p>Number of energy mix efficiency plans/strategies approved.</p> <p>Number of innovative and affordable renovation solutions and technologies for public buildings that can deliver significant improvements in energy performance while ensuring indoor comfort requirements, and being non-invasive, and reversible.</p> <p>Number of tools for planning and implementing the renovation of public buildings.</p> <p>Number of cost-effective technologies for energy efficiency and renewable energy solutions</p>	<p>Enhanced capacity of public institutions to plan and implement sustainable energy policies and measures with regard to public buildings.</p>	<p>Number of public institutions that adopted energy mix efficiency plans/strategies.</p> <p>Number of public institutions cooperating towards strengthened multi-level governance (linking up local, regional and national levels) for delivering integrated sustainable energy action planning and measures.</p>

Indicative list of Outputs	Output indicators	Expected results	Result Indicators
Implementation of pilot cost-effective technologies for energy efficiency and renewable energy.	implemented on a pilot basis.	Reduced and cleaner energy consumption in public buildings through the use of renewable energy measures and energy saving interventions.	Estimated annual decrease of greenhouse gases as a result of renewable energy and energy efficiency measures implemented in public buildings (adapted ENI CBC nr.23).
Energy performance certificates.	Additional capacity of renewable energy production.		
Renewable energy systems (solar, etc.).	Number of energy audits carried out on public buildings.		
Applications to public buildings.	Number of public buildings and/or facilities benefiting from Renewable Energies & Energy Efficiency (REEE) measures.		Total kWh generated using renewable energy applied to public buildings.
			Total kWh saved (expressed in budget reductions) using renewable energy applied to public buildings.

Source: Own elaboration on JOP

Eight projects were financed under the Priority B.4.3, five of which are **standard projects** (BERLIN, BEEP, ESMES, GreenBuilding, Med-EcoSuRe). SOLE (ex-HELIOS) is the only **strategic project**, and two are **capitalisation projects** (SEACAP 4 SDG, Sustainable MED Cities). **Only standard and strategic projects are analysed under this sub-chapter.** The common goal of the projects is to renovate the energy consumption of public buildings by introducing innovative sustainable innovations. BERLIN aims to implement cost effective energy solutions based on the nano-grid technology to increase the sustainability and self-resilience of buildings. ESMES focuses on the optimization of energy consumption in public schools through innovative, monitoring-based renewable energy and efficiency (REEE) pilot actions, while Med-EcoSuRe is implementing similar solutions in higher education buildings. BEEP project is focused on strengthening the use of Building Information Modelling (BIM) to generate and manage the digital representations of physical and functional characteristics of places, while GreenBuilding focuses on three cost-effective public buildings energy refurbishment in Greece, Tunisia and Jordan. The strategic project SOLE supports cost-effective and innovative energy rehabilitations of public buildings through pilot actions to foster knowledge exchange. Finally, the capitalisation project SEACAP 4 SDG analyses the outcomes of other projects and adapt them to the local Mediterranean specificities to cope with specific issues related to climate change. Sustainable MED Cities tackles the challenges related to the increasing

urbanisation of the Mediterranean area by proposing a sustainable approach to spatial planning and management.

All the projects have foreseen to strengthen the capacities of public institutions to effectively plan and implement sustainable energy policies.



Four out of the six standard and strategic projects answered the web survey launched by the evaluator, while two standard projects, BERLIN and Med-EcoSuRe have been analysed as case studies, so providing from the field information that will be used in this sub-chapter, the full case studies being included in the Annex.

100% of the respondents declared to contribute to the development of cost-effective and innovative energy renovations relevant to building types and climatic zones by implementing **pilot actions for improving energy efficiency**. The analysis of the case studies also highlights that the partners progressed toward the realisation of pilot projects in buildings mainly belonging to the educational sector, which could have a higher potential to share the good practices developed by the projects and replicate their results. From the case study analysis of BERLIN, it emerges that the results achieved through the pilot projects, once they will be completed, are to be shared through the drafting of eight case studies, highlighting the achievements and lessons learned through the experience gained from the pilots. The case studies will serve as a legacy to foster the knowledge exchange and transfer of good practices.

Evidence from the BERLIN standard project

BERLIN has foreseen to implement eight pilot projects in public buildings located in four different countries. Each partner is responsible to gather the required data to run the analysis and comparisons. The methodology consists of the identification of the existing technical, regulatory and financial framework concerning the Renewable Energy (RE) & Energy Efficiency (EE) in buildings in each region. Then, the partners are expected to design a joint technical solution adapting the technology applied by the project to the regional specificities. At the moment of drafting the evaluation, not all the partners were able to complete the installations of the pilots. This delay was caused by the slowdown of administrative procedures due to the pandemic and the inexperience of the local authorities involved, besides the late shipping of the materials from abroad.

At the moment of the evaluation, the projects were still progressing toward the realisation of the pilot activities. Once they will be completed, the achievement and good practices are to be shared through the production of informative materials. BERLIN has foreseen to draft eight case studies highlighting the good practices and lessons learned from the experience gained through the pilot actions and the implementation of the joint technical solutions. Beside the case studies, the project is planning to deliver short trainings addressing the usage of the tools and the actual operation of the pilots.

Half of web survey respondents declared that their project develops **capacity building/training schemes**. Given that the topic addressed under this priority is highly technical, transfer of knowledge requires a workshop approach more than an academic one. Evidence from the case studies shows that **Living labs** were largely practiced. The Living labs enhance the interaction of the different stakeholders involved in the building renovation process in a proactive way. Specifically, the Living

labs foster exchanges between actors covering different roles in the innovation ecosystem, resulting in a knowledge exchange between academics, public policy actors and decision makers. The goal is a mutual empowerment to create a participated energy renovation approach.

Evidence from the Med-EcoSuRe standard project

The project set up several Living labs in each country and developed their governance structure, management and monitoring procedures and defined intellectual property rights and terms of exploitation. The partners selected the living labs' participants among the managers of higher education buildings, academics, students and public policy actors. The activities undertaken within the Living labs led to the development of best practices concerning Passive Solution Design to eventually increase energy efficiency in higher education buildings. These initiatives were very useful to expose the academics and students involved to the application of their work. Such an approach supports the co-creation of innovative solutions from the ideation to the physical application.

Half of the web survey respondents declared to have performed **energy audits** to assess the current building performances. The audits were carried out in selected pilot buildings in the cooperation area, with the purpose of creating specific recommendation tailored for the Mediterranean specificities to improve the energy consumption. In Med-EcoSure, the brainstorming carried out during the activities performed in the living labs led to the definition of a toolkit to identify the best paths to renovate the energy consumption model of the buildings audited.

Energy mix efficiency plans/strategies appear less present in the projects, given that only one project out of four declared to have contributed to the development of cost-effective and innovative energy renovations by managing a plan/strategy. The strategic side is therefore not the most evident in the projects, even if **all projects managed to involve both national and regional environmental authorities and public authorities owning public buildings**. Energy providers and distribution networks were involved, but to a lower extent (half of the projects).

There are differences concerning the output production among the countries involved depending on how severe the restriction due to the COVID 19 crisis were and their impact on the project activities. Besides the pandemic, the burden of administrative procedures related to the tendering processes, data gathering and opening of bank accounts in foreign currencies also had a significant impact on project activities. From the consultation with the project partners, it emerged that the technologies implemented were perceived as too advanced to be implemented because of the outdated infrastructure. For this reason, an accurate selection of the partners to implement such technology is essential to produce the expected outputs.

Concerning the results achieved, from the analysis of the web survey some progress was declared concerning improvement of skills and competences and also the improvement of the conditions for the governance. However, the result that all the respondents declared to have achieved is the **increase of awareness on environmentally friendly practices** between the authorities and stakeholders involved in the building renovation process. More tangible results could not be achieved, yet. It appears that projects recognise the scope of their activities so far. **Three out of four declared that their main added value is the transfer of good practices**, i.e. the first step for the cooperation projects.

In spring 2022, the projects **were not sufficiently mature to allow for an evaluation of their capacities to increase the use of innovative solutions that support cost-effective and innovative energy rehabilitations relevant to building types and climatic zones.** At this regard, Med-EcoSure represents an exception, as at the moment of the consultation with the project partners, the project outreached the target set for the expected results in terms of tons of CO² estimated annual decrease of greenhouse gases as a result of renewable energy and energy efficiency measures implemented in public buildings. Moreover, the project also made significant progress in reaching the expected results concerning public institutions that adopted mix efficiency plans and or strategies. Beside the encouraging results that the project has achieved, the project strategy to ensure the sustainability of the proposed solutions to other higher education buildings and, in the long run, to public buildings in general, remains uncertain. So far, efforts to raise awareness of public authorities about the project results and the potential for scaling them up have only started in Tunisia, each country taking a different approach to this issue.

It is clear that the **COVID 19 crisis impacted project activities.** Starting at the same time as the pandemic, all face-to-face activities were, when possible, shifted to an online format. However, because of the nature of the activities performed by the projects requiring physical presence of the involved stakeholders (the Living labs, the audit reports and the pilot implementation), the delivery of the expected outputs has been delayed. In fact, the pandemic created difficulties for partners in hiring human resources and shipping the necessary material from abroad. Also, the tendering processes were slowed down by the pandemic, creating important delays in the initiation of the activities. From a qualitative point of view, the imposed restrictions reduced the level of interaction between the stakeholders involved in the Living labs.

Other external factors appear very important for the success of the projects under this priority. First of all, the level of infrastructure in each country is key as it should sustain the type of advanced technology developed by the projects. Furthermore, factors such as the cost of the electricity and the cost of shipping can significantly affect the course of a project dedicated to energy performance. These elements should be taken into account when a project is started, especially considering that geopolitical events can change the picture dramatically.

Evidence from the BERLIN standard project

Spurred by the European Directive on Energy Performance of Buildings, public authorities in the EU are adopting long-term renovation strategies that will encourage investments in the renovation of building stocks in the coming years and stimulate the uptake of energy efficiency technologies and solutions with the participation of public and private partners, as tested under the BERLIN project. Therefore, in the case of EU countries the improvement of the energy performance is primarily promoted by the regulatory framework and the project achievements, with particular regards to the opening towards private investors, will be highly usable and transferable. Looking at the southern shore of the Mediterranean, where the regulatory framework depends on the single states and is overall not comparable with the EU one, the Lead Beneficiary expects that BERLIN will contribute to the promotion of better energy performance of buildings also through the engagement of the private sector.

However, the most important external factor is the regulatory framework in each country. At this regard, a differentiated situation can be seen on the two shores of the Mediterranean. In the countries

belonging to the EU, the European Directive on Energy Performance of Buildings determines a trend that cannot be assumed in the Southern Partner Countries. In all countries the engagement of the private sector appears of fundamental importance to ensure that these projects produce an impact.

The importance of the regulatory framework, including the fiscal and financial incentives, emerged also from Med-EcoSuRe.

Evidence from the Med-EcoSuRe standard project

The impact of Med-EcoSuRe will depend on external factors, such as supportive regulatory frameworks and fiscal and financial incentives to promote the uptake of the REEE developed by the project in the participating countries. At present, while there are encouraging signs, for example in Tunisia, with the launch of dedicated programmes for energy renovation of public buildings, it is not clear whether financial means will be available to implement the strategic plans, let alone roll them out across the participating countries.

Priority B.4.3 appears to have received a contribution from the projects funded under the other analysed priorities (i.e. A.1.1, A.1.2, A.3.1, B.4.1) that is below the average (19% compared to 26%). The highest contributions were from Priority B.4.1 under the same Thematic Objective and from Priority A.2.1 concerning technology transfer and commercialisation of research results.

To conclude, according to the web-survey **half of the projects find that the funding opportunities of the programme have been essential** (compared to an average of 37% in the five analysed priorities), indicating that the additionality of ENI CBC Med is considered as very high by the stakeholders dealing with energy.

3.15 IMPACT ACHIEVED IN RELATION TO THE HORIZONTAL PRINCIPLES

EQ 5 I. What are the most significant results and impacts achieved by the programme in terms of horizontal principles?

Key findings

The horizontal principle on sustainable development is strongly and homogeneously promoted by the programme, whereas the principles concerning equal opportunities and non-discrimination such as equality between men and women depend more on the challenges addressed by the single priorities. The communication developed by the programme is extraordinarily effective in promoting the idea that women play an active role in the Mediterranean societies.

Recommendation for ENI CBC MED 2014-2020

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Recommendation NEXT MED 2021-2027

Horizontal principles concerning equal opportunities and non-discrimination such as equality between men and women could be more streamlined across the projects funded under all priorities.

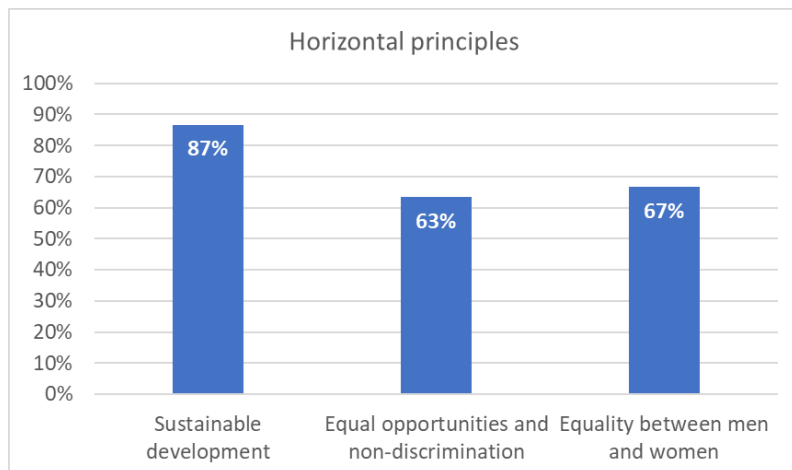
Three horizontal principles are considered in the analysis:

- Sustainable development;
- Equal opportunities and non-discrimination;
- Equality between men and women.

According to the survey distributed to the projects funded under priorities A.1.1, A.2.1, A.3.1, B.4.1 and B.4.3, the highest contribution is given to sustainable development. Almost nine projects out of ten declare to have produced such an impact, and this is not surprising given the orientation towards green and circular economy under overarching Objective A, both in terms of business development and creation of new employment, and in overarching Objective B, which is thematically dedicated to common challenges in environment.

The same survey indicates that contribution to equality between men and women is given by two thirds of projects, whereas equal opportunities and non-discrimination are promoted by 63% of the funded projects under the above-mentioned priorities.

Figure 26 Overall contribution to horizontal principles



Source: Web survey

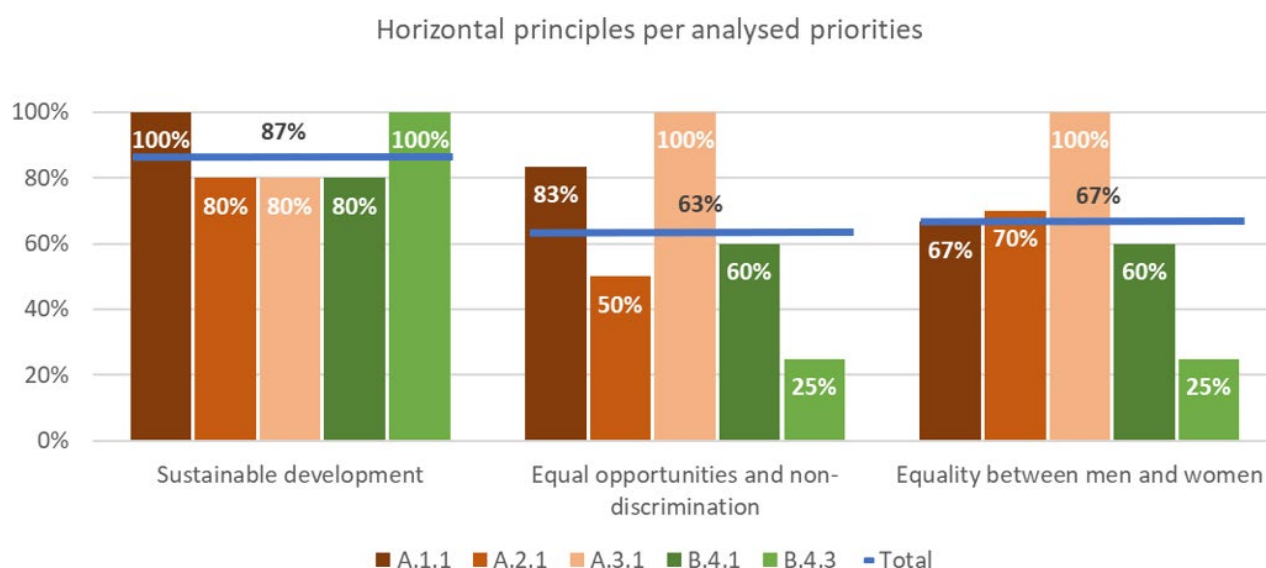
If the contribution to the horizontal principles is analysed across priorities, in the case of sustainable development the level of contribution is rather homogeneous, meaning that under some priorities 100% of the projects declare their contribution whereas in others 80% do.

For the other two horizontal principles, i.e. equal opportunities and non-discrimination and equality between men and women, stronger differences among priorities emerge. Overall, priorities belonging to overarching Objective A show a higher contribution than priorities belonging to overarching Objective B.

All projects of Priority A.3.I “Provide young people, especially those belonging to the NEETS and women, with marketable skills” contribute to both these horizontal principles, and this is coherent with the topic addressed. Priority A.1.I (innovation) appears to give a higher contribution to equal opportunities and non-discrimination, whereas Priority A.2.I (technological transfer and commercialisation) shows a stronger contribution to equality between men and women.

A significant differences between priorities emerges in overarching Objective B. Priority B.4.I, concerning water, appears to offer a much higher contribution to these horizontal principles than Priority B.4.3 concerning energy, where only one project out of four contributes.

Figure 27 Contribution to horizontal priorities per analysed priority



Source: Web survey

Finally, a point has to be made on the role played by web communication. The programme has shown high awareness of how visual messages combined with well-prepared contents can contribute to promoting the role of women in Mediterranean societies. The website and the social network communication is regularly populated with images and stories of active women. The video technique is systematically used. The international women day is used to launch promotional campaigns³ underlining the key roles that women already play in the countries belonging to the programme. The narrative behind these is that socially active and involved women are key for the Mediterranean development and that different ideas have to be demystified. The recent campaign #WOMED: stories of women who break stereotypes⁴ is a very clear example of such a communication strategy.

Table 31 Example of #WOMED campaign



Source: Website

³ <https://www.enicbmed.eu/international-women-day-2021>

⁴ <https://www.enicbmed.eu/womed-discover-stories-women-who-break-stereotypes-mediterranean>