

Interreg NEXT MED Programme 2021-2027

**Strategic Environmental Assessment Screening Report  
and  
“Do no significant harm (DNSH)” Principle Assessment**

(March 2022)



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*The information and views set out in this report are those of the author and do not necessarily reflect the official opinion of the Managing Authority.*

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## **1. INTRODUCTION**

### **1.1. Background**

The requirement to carry out a Strategic Environmental Assessment (SEA) is based on the Directive 2001/42/EC on the assessment of the effects of certain plans and programmes on the environment adopted by the Council of the European Union on 27 June 2001 (hereafter referred to as SEA Directive).

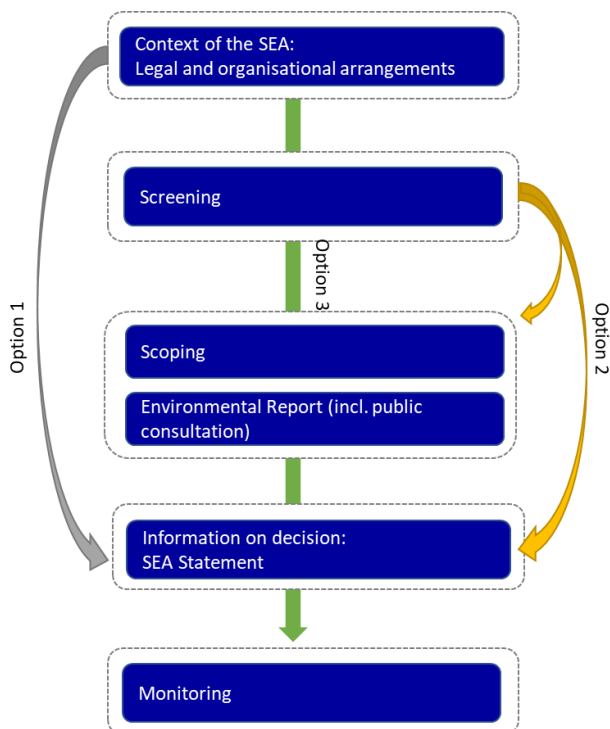
The SEA Directive aims to provide for a high level of protection of the environment and to contribute to the integration of environmental considerations into the preparation and adoption of plans and programmes with a view to promoting sustainable development. This Directive also regulates in which cases and how an environmental assessment shall be carried out for programmes co-financed by the European Union (including Interreg Programmes such as the NEXT MED Programme).

The SEA Directive is transposed into national law by the EU Member States while non-EU Member States may follow this or might have signed or comply with the international protocol on strategic environmental assessment (SEA Protocol, Kiev 2003). This SEA Protocol augments the Convention on environmental impact assessment in a transboundary context (known as Espoo Convention, 1991) by ensuring that individual parties integrate environmental assessment into their plans and programmes at the earliest stages, and thus helping in laying down the groundwork for sustainable development. The SEA Protocol entered into force on 11 July 2010.

### **1.2. SEA process**

The SEA process is carried out following these key steps:

**Figure 1 : SEA process**



Source: Sanopoulos 2022 based on TESIM 2020

Depending on the programme or plan, a full SEA process might not be compulsory. In this context, there are three options to be considered:

- **Option 1:** Some programmes or plans might not fall under the scope of the SEA Directive and no further assessment is needed.
- **Option 2:** A screening might be necessary to assess the need for an environmental assessment and depending on the screening results a full SEA might be needed or not.
- **Option 3:** A full SEA assessment of the programme or plan is automatically needed (with or without carrying out a screening assessment).

### 1.3. Aim of Screening

This screening report is part of the Strategic Environmental Assessment (SEA) for the Interreg NEXT MED Programme 2021-2027 (Interreg NEXT MED Programme). It describes the screening process and assessment as an important early step in the SEA which helps to analyse the need for carrying out a full Strategic Environmental Assessment (Option 2 above).

The screening assessment is based on the draft programme document and the relevant criteria set out in Annex II and Article 3 (5) of the European Union Directive 2001/42/EC on the assessment of the effects of certain plans and programmes on the environment (SEA Directive). Based on the screening assessment, a decision is to be taken including the following alternatives:

- **A full SEA is not required.** A statement confirming that the SEA is not applicable and a note on the screening conclusions explaining the reasons for not requiring a full SEA need to be published. All the relevant documents established during the screening stage should be made available to the European Commission in order to demonstrate that the applicable provisions of the SEA Directive have been complied with.
- **A full SEA assessment is required.** A scoping report and an environmental report should be prepared. During the full SEA process the environmental authorities and the public should be consulted.

To reach a final conclusion on the screening assessment, the Managing Authority of the Interreg NEXT MED Programme **will be consulting the environmental authorities of the countries participating in the programme** which should review and respond to the Managing Authority Assessment whether the programme is likely to have significant effects on the environment.

A list of the SEA competent environmental authorities of all participating countries designated by the members of the Interreg Next MED task force are presented in Annex II.

### 1.4. “Do no significant harm (DNSH)” principle assessment

In addition to the SEA screening, the Interreg NEXT MED Programme uses the opportunity of the SEA screening to conduct the “do no significant harm (DNSH)” principle assessment during the programming phase and before the programme adoption by the Commission in order to prevent the inclusion of activities or types of actions in the programmes that could do significant harm (in accordance with the EU Taxonomy Regulation (EU) 2020/852). Details are provided in Chapter 6.

## **2. PROGRAMME OVERVIEW**

The subject of this screening assessment is the Interreg NEXT MED Programme 2021-2027, which is being prepared for the funding period 2021-2027. The EU's earmarked contribution for this programme is approximately **EUR 244** million and the total programme budget (including national contributions) is around **EUR 270 million**. At this point in time (February 2022) the final draft of the territorial analysis and the draft programme strategy are available.

The programme will support the Euro-Mediterranean cooperation in a transnational dimension both as a tool of the EU regional development policy and as part of European Neighbourhood Policy aiming to establish an area of prosperity and good neighbourliness. The vision of the programme is to contribute to the achievement of smart, sustainable, fair development for all across the Mediterranean basin by supporting balanced, long-lasting, far-reaching cooperation and multilevel governance. The proposed actions are of a “soft” nature and no large infrastructure investment projects are planned to be supported.

### **2.1. Programme area**

The 15 participating countries are:

- 7 EU Member States: Cyprus, France, Greece, Italy, Malta, Portugal, Spain
- 7 ENP partners: Algeria, Egypt, Israel, Jordan, Lebanon, Palestine, Tunisia
- 1 negotiating candidate country – Turkey

The list of eligible regions is presented below:

<b>COUNTRIES</b>	<b>ELIGIBLE REGIONS</b>
<b>Algeria</b>	Tlemcen; Ain Temouchent; Oran; Mostaganem; Chlef; Tipaza; Alger; Boumerdes; Tizi Ouzou; Bejaia; Jijel; Skikda; Annaba; El Tarf
<b>Cyprus</b>	Whole country
<b>Egypt</b>	Matruh; Al Iskandariyah (alex.); Al Buhayrah (behera); Kafr -el-sheikh; Ash Sharqiyah (sharkia); Al Daqahliyah (dakahlia); Dumyat (damietta); As Ismailiyah (ismailia); Bur Said (port Said); Governorate of Cairo
<b>France</b>	Languedoc-Roussillon; Midi-Pyrénées; Provence-Alpes-Côte d’Azur; Corse
<b>Greece</b>	Αττική/Attiki; Βόρειο Αιγαίο/Voreio Aigaio; Νότιο Αιγαίο/Notio Aigaio; Κρήτη/Kriti; Ανατολική Μακεδονία, Θράκη/Anatoliki Makedonia, Thraki; Κεντρική Μακεδονία/Kentriki Makedonia; Δυτική Μακεδονία/Dytiki Makedonia; Ήπειρος/Ipeiros; Θεσσαλία/Thessalia; Ιόνια Νησιά/Ionia Nisia; Δυτική

	Ελλάδα/Dytiki Elláda; Στερεά Ελλάδα/Sterea Elláda; Πελοπόννησος/Peloponnisos
<b>Israel<sup>1</sup></b>	Whole country
<b>Italy</b>	Liguria; Campania; Puglia; Basilicata; Calabria; Sicilia; Sardegna; Toscana; Lazio
<b>Jordan</b>	Whole country
<b>Lebanon</b>	Whole country
<b>Malta</b>	Whole country
<b>Palestine<sup>2</sup></b>	Whole country
<b>Portugal</b>	Algarve
<b>Spain</b>	Cataluña; Comunitat Valenciana; Illes Balears; Andalucía; Región de Murcia; Ciudad de Ceuta; Ciudad de Melilla
<b>Tunisia</b>	Zaghouan; Kairouan; Sidi Bouz; Manouba; Siliana; Le Kef; Gafsa; Kebili; Tataouine; Jendouba; Beja; Bizerte; Ariana; Tunis; Ben Arous; Nabeul; Sousse; Monastir; Mahdia; Sfax; Gabes; Medenine
<b>Turkey</b>	Tekirdağ, Edirne, Kırklareli; Balıkesir, Çanakkale; İzmir; Aydın, Denizli, Muğla; Manisa, Afyonkarahisar, Kütahya, Uşak; Antalya, Isparta, Burdur; Adana, Mersin; Hatay, Kahramanmaraş, Osmaniye

## 2.2. Programme strategy

The selected policy and specific objectives of the Interreg Next MED 2021-2027 programme for the funding period 2021-2027 are:

- **PO1: “A more competitive and smarter Mediterranean”** by promoting innovative and smart economic transformation:
  - SO 1.1 Developing and enhancing research and innovation capacities and the uptake of advanced technologies
  - SO 1.3 Enhancing sustainable growth and competitiveness of SMEs and job creation in SMEs, including by productive investments

<sup>1</sup> In accordance with the EU policy, the programme does not apply to the territories occupied by Israel since June 1967. Thus, in accordance with the Guidelines on the eligibility of Israeli entities and their activities in the territories occupied by Israel since June 1967 for grants, prizes and financial instruments funded by the EU from 2014 onwards (OJ C 205/9 of 19.7.2013) only Israeli entities having their place of establishment within Israel's pre-1967 borders are considered eligible for EU funding. In addition, activities of Israeli entities funded by the EU must not be carried out in the territories occupied by Israel since June 1967.

<sup>2</sup> This designation shall not be construed as a recognition of a State of Palestine and is without prejudice to the individual positions of the MS on this issue.

- **PO2: “A greener, low-carbon Mediterranean”** supporting the transition towards a net zero carbon economy and resilient by promoting clean and fair energy transition, green and blue investment, the circular economy, climate change mitigation and adaptation:
  - SO 2.1 Promoting energy efficiency and reducing greenhouse gas emissions
  - SO 2.4 Promoting climate change adaptation and disaster risk prevention, resilience, taking into account eco-system-based approaches
  - SO 2.5 Promoting access to water and sustainable water management
  - SO 2.6 promoting the transition to a circular and resource efficient economy
  
- **PO4: “A more social and inclusive Mediterranean”** providing learning opportunities, ensuring equal opportunities and socio-economic integration and improving access to health care through the use of digitalization and technological innovation:
  - SO 4.2 Improving equal access to inclusive and quality services in education, training and lifelong learning through developing accessible infrastructure, including by fostering resilience for distance and on-line education and training
  - SO 4.5 Ensure equal access to health care and fostering resilience of health systems, including primary care, and promoting the transition from institutional to family and community-based care
  
- **ISO1: “A better cooperation governance for the Mediterranean”** by promoting joint activities for knowledge sharing, enhancing cooperation with partners and the institutional capacity of public authorities and stakeholders:
  - SO (ISO1.6) other actions to support better cooperation governance (all strands).

An overview of the selected objectives and the indicative types of actions is presented in the table below.

**Table 1: Objectives and planned actions under Interreg Next MED Programme 2021-2027 (programme version from 17 December 2021)**

Policy Objective/ Priorities	Specific objectives	Potential actions (summarized) <sup>3</sup>
<b>PO 1</b> : A more competitive and smarter Europe (and its Neighbourhood) by promoting innovative and smart economic transformation and regional ICT connectivity  <b>Priority 1</b> : A more competitive and smarter Mediterranean	SO 1.1 Developing and enhancing research and innovation capacities and the uptake of advanced technologies	A.1.1.1 Support for transnational testing and development of technologies, processes and services, and for the uptake of technology, technology transfer and commercialization of research outcomes and IP.
		A.1.1.2 Support for transnational RD&I business-academia networking, partnerships, and platforms sharing know-how and results, improving transnational access, collaboration, mobility and synergies.
		A.1.1.3 Support for business research and innovation activity, including investment in transnational research infrastructure, equipment, incubators, networking and transnational schemes for infrastructure sharing.
	SO 1.3 Enhancing sustainable growth and competitiveness of SMEs and job creation in SMEs,	A.1.3.1 Transnational support for the co-creation and follow up of start-ups and spin-offs, encouraging their entrepreneurship, innovation, diversification and growth  A.1.3.2. Development and promotion of transnational clusters, networks, value chains, living labs, incubators and

<sup>3</sup> Source: draft Interreg NEXT MED Programme document of October 2021



Policy Objective/ Priorities	Specific objectives	Potential actions (summarized) <sup>3</sup>
	including by productive investments	<p>accelerators, and their networking and exchange of good practice.</p> <p>A.1.3.3. Transnational skills development and measures to anticipate skills needs, increase entrepreneurship and improve the adaptability of enterprises, workers and entrepreneurs to change.</p> <p>A.1.3.4. Transnational business support services, platforms and networks to support business internationalization, the uptake and use of eco-innovations and clean technologies, and business environment improvements</p> <p>A.1.3.5. Initiatives for the digital transformation of SMEs and transnational e-business/e-commerce skills and capacity development, innovation and application.</p>
<p><b>PO2:</b> A greener, low-carbon transitioning towards a net zero carbon economy and resilient Europe (and its Neighbourhood) by promoting clean and fair energy transition, green and blue investment, the circular economy, climate change mitigation and adaptation, risk prevention and management, and sustainable urban mobility</p>	<p>SO 2.1 Promoting energy efficiency and reducing greenhouse gas emissions</p>	<p>A.2.1.1a Implementation of pilot actions to demonstrate technical, financial, and environmental benefits of measures related to energy efficiency, renewable energy sources and smart energy management.</p> <p>A.2.1.1b Transnational initiatives related to the technology transfer, utilization of research outcomes and adaptation to local needs and capacities related to energy efficiency, renewable energy sources and smart energy management.</p> <p>A.2.1.2 Transnational initiatives to increase awareness, capacities and encourage active participation and inclusion of citizens, civil society organisations and private sector and cooperation with public authorities regarding climate change impact, energy efficiency, renewable energy sources and smart energy management.</p> <p>A.2.1.3 Integration and adaptation in regulatory frameworks, policy formulation and decision-making of regional and local authorities of provisions and performance standards promoting energy efficiency, renewable energy sources, energy performance monitoring and smart metering.</p>
<p><b>Priority 2:</b> A greener, low-carbon and resilient Mediterranean</p>	<p>SO 2.4 Promoting climate change adaptation and disaster risk prevention and resilience, taking into account eco-system based approaches</p>	<p>A.2.4.1 Implementation of pilots and demonstration procedures to increase capacity and capability for joint deployment, provide "proof of concept" and enhance innovation in the fields of climate change adaptation, risk prevention and disaster resilience.</p> <p>A.2.4.2 Transnational initiatives to increase awareness, capacities and encourage active participation and inclusion of citizens, civil society organisations, and private sector and cooperation with public authorities regarding climate change adaptation, risk prevention and disaster resilience.</p> <p>A.2.4.3 Integration and adaptation in regulatory frameworks, policy formulation and decision-making of regional and local authorities of provisions and performance standards promoting climate change</p>

Policy Objective/ Priorities	Specific objectives	Potential actions (summarized) <sup>3</sup>
	SO 2.5 Promoting access to water and sustainable water management	<p>adaptation and risk prevention including contingency and resilience planning.</p> <p>A.2.5.1a Implementation of pilots to demonstrate technical, financial and environmental benefits of measures related to water cycle management, water efficiency for industries and households and rehabilitation of water bodies engaging local authorities, public utility providers, professional associations and environmental agencies.</p> <p>A.2.5.1b Transnational initiatives related to the technology transfer, utilisation of research outcomes and adaptation to local needs and capacities of local and regional authorities, public utility providers, professional associations practitioners, companies and supply chains related to water cycle management, water efficiency for industries and households and rehabilitation of water bodies.</p> <p>A.2.5.2 Transnational initiatives to increase awareness, capacities and encourage active participation of citizens, civil society organizations and private sector and cooperation with public authorities on activities regarding climate change impact, water consumption trends, water resources ecological and quantitative status, water cycle management, water efficiency and rehabilitation of water bodies.</p> <p>A.2.5.3 Integration and adaptation in regulatory frameworks, policy formulation and decision-making and policy formulation of provisions and performance standards promoting water efficiency, water-related climate change adaptation water saving incentives, water cycle management and water bodies rehabilitation (including water use monitoring, smart metering and water pricing).</p>
	SO 2.6 Promoting the transition to a circular and resource efficient economy	<p>A.2.6.1a Implementation of pilots to demonstrate technical, financial and environmental benefits of measures related to life-cycle management, product design, waste management, resource efficiency for industries and households and recycling engaging local authorities, public utility providers, professional associations, consumers, and NGOs, local companies/service providers and environmental agencies.</p> <p>A.2.6.1b Transnational initiatives related to the technology transfer, utilisation of research outcomes and adaptation to local needs and capacities of local and regional authorities, public utility providers, professional associations practitioners, companies and supply chains related to product design, waste management, resource</p>

Policy Objective/ Priorities	Specific objectives	Potential actions (summarized) <sup>3</sup>
		<p>efficiency and recycling.</p> <p>A.2.6.2 Transnational initiatives to increase awareness and encourage active participation of citizens, civil society organizations and private sector and cooperation with public authorities regarding resource efficiency, impacts of resource use and consumption patterns.</p> <p>A.2.6.3 Integration and adaptation in regulatory frameworks, policy formulation and decision-making and policy formulation of regional and local authorities of provisions and performance standards promoting resource efficiency, life cycle management, recycling provisions and circular economy mainstreaming.</p>
<p><b>PO 4:</b> A more social and inclusive Europe (and its Neighbourhood) implementing the European Pillar of Social Rights <b>Priority 4:</b> A more social and inclusive Mediterranean</p>	<p>SO 4.2 Improving equal access to inclusive and quality services in education, training and lifelong learning through developing accessible infrastructure, including by fostering resilience for distance and on-line education and training</p>	<p>A.4.2.1 Transnational educational /training measures and partnerships to anticipate skills needs, including through on the job training and work experience.</p> <p>A.4.2.2 Development of transnational platforms and digital infrastructures for e-learning and e-education.</p> <p>A.4.2.3 Digital literacy programmes and initiatives especially among migrants, NEETs, youth, women, the under-privileged, long-term unemployed and rural populations.</p> <p>A.4.2.4 Development of transnational/international partnerships, schemes, initiatives and innovations to improve education opportunities, quality, access and mobility for groups with specific barriers to participation (youth, women, migrants, asylum seekers, long-term unemployed and persons with special needs).</p> <p>A.4.2.5. Transnational actions and services that promote gender equality, equal opportunities, social inclusion and socio-economic integration and empowerment.</p>
	<p>SO 4.5 Ensuring equal access to health care and fostering resilience of health systems, including primary care, and promoting the transition from institutional to family- and community-based care</p>	<p>A.4.5.1 Development and pilot of transnational digital tools innovations, applications and services to improve health care provision and enhance equal and timely access to quality services</p> <p>.</p> <p>A.4.5.3. Measures to improve the resilience of the health care systems and capacity of civil society organisations and communities in healthcare, including transnational networking, capacity-building and training in healthcare improving preparedness and adaptation to pandemics and other health crises.</p>
<p><b>ISO 1:</b> Interreg-specific objective of a better cooperation governance</p>	<p>ISO 1.6 Other actions to support better cooperation governance</p>	<p>ISO.1.6.1 Promote and implement measures and joint actions to improve the institutional capacity, ownership and knowledge sharing across stakeholders, local actors and public administrations.</p> <p>ISO.1.6.2 Develop and implement common tools that can</p>



Policy Objective/ Priorities	Specific objectives	Potential actions (summarized) <sup>3</sup>
<p><b>Priority ISO:</b> A better cooperation governance for the Mediterranean</p>		<p>contribute to the design of socio-economic and environmental initiatives as well as to the delivery of innovative public services that fall within the scope of intervention of Interreg Next Med Programme</p>

### **3. ENVIRONMENTAL CONTEXT**

#### **3.1 Environmental status quo**

The description of environmental status quo and characteristics of the area is based on the territorial analysis for the programming period 2021-2027 and on other relevant documents and databases. A summary for the current state and expected trend is given for the environmental issues listed in Annex I of the SEA Directive, with special emphasis on those issues that are likely to be significantly affected.

##### **a) Biodiversity and ecosystems**

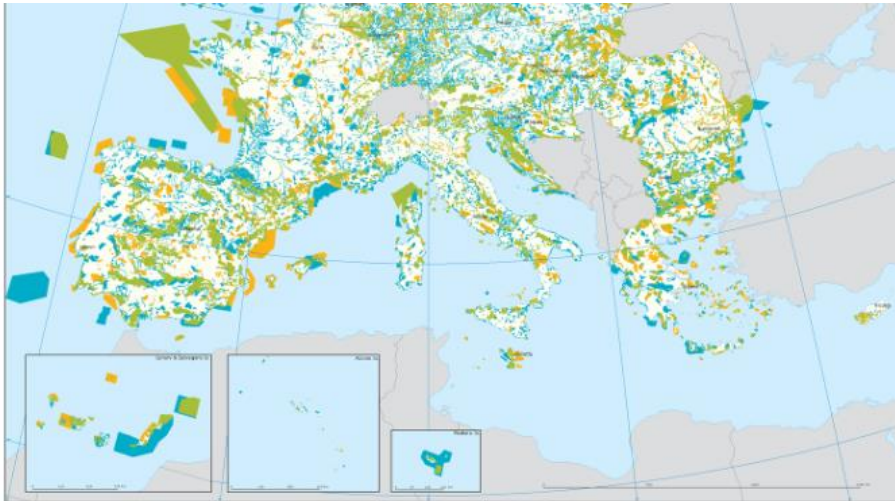
The programme area has a high diversity of ecosystems, terrestrial and marine and a very high rate of endemic species. This biodiversity is however under pressure both from internal factors (such as human activity) but also from external drivers (such as climate change and invasive species).

Forest coverage and biomass: On the terrestrial side, the forest coverage and biomass show a significant difference between north and south. While in the north forests cover a large part of the country (and are growing, mainly due to land abandonment and urbanisation), their share in the south is very small with rising numbers in a few countries. Climate change is expected to have a heavy impact on the quality of the forests in the next decades, while forest fires will become more frequent.

Fisheries' catches: A specific issue in the Mediterranean Sea is fisheries impact on the environment; the fish stocks in the region are not in a good condition, while fisheries become more efficient. Fisheries' catches increased in a number of countries in the region in 2012-2019. Aquaculture is only partially compensating overexploitation.

Protected areas: Regarding biodiversity protection, at EU level, the Birds the Habitats Directive require EUMCs to protect important habitats and species by establishing protected areas known as Natura 2000 sites but national protection regimes also apply. Natura 2000 has led to an important increase of protected areas in the EUMCs. The protected areas in the MPCs are also growing.

***Figure 2: NATURA 2000 protected areas, EUMC***



NATURA 2000 - EUROPEAN UNION

- Birds Directive sites (SPA)
- Habitats Directive sites (pSCI, SCI, SAC)
- Sites - or parts of sites - belonging to both Directives

European Environment Agency



Source: NATURA 2000 - 03/10/2010, coordinated from: BirdLife from the Member States, National Geographic Institute of Luxembourg, the Department of Environment and Heritage, Ministry of Natural Resources for a Europe, Luxembourg 2010. Project of a Common Information System.

Source: European Environment Agency, 2019

At the terrestrial side, where protected areas were established earlier, the EUMCs have a stable and developed network of areas but the south is rapidly catching up.

At the marine side, things are more dynamic since many marine protected areas were established only recently. The areas are rapidly increasing in the EUMCs while they are still relatively low in the MPCs. However, while establishment is advancing, control and enforcement overall lag behind.

Comparing the share of protected areas to the country area and territorial waters, the larger share of protected areas in the EUMCs compared to the MPCs is evident. However, their management remains problematic. Only a few areas have a fully-fledged management plan and even less effectively implement it.

**Table 2 : Protected areas**

Type of protected area	Share
Terrestrial protected areas EU MC (% of land area), 2018	26%
Terrestrial protected areas MPC <sup>4</sup> (% of land area)	9%
Marine protected areas EU MC (% of territorial waters) 2018	13%
Marine protected areas MPC <sup>51</sup> (% of territorial waters) 2018	5%

Source: World Bank development indicators database, own compilation, 2021

**b) Soil and circular economy**

While EUMCs show some tendencies of decoupling economic growth and resources use, many MPCs are still highly material resources dependent. In many cases waste production and hazardous activities moved from the intensively regulated north to the south.

<sup>4</sup>By excluding Morocco and Lybia the terrestrial protected areas as share of land area for MPC would decrease to 8%, while the share of marine protected areas would increase to 6%.

Waste production: Average waste production per person and year was 4,9 tonnes in the EU in 2014. The majority comes from activities such as construction and demolition, mining, quarrying and manufacturing. Household and municipal waste is an average of 411 kg per person and year.

Waste generation per capita and year in the MPCs remains low compared to the EUMCs (though recent statistics are lacking for some MPCs). However, it is rapidly increasing. This fact, paired with population trends, puts a serious burden on future waste management and environment (e.g. on soil).

Waste management: Even where waste management is implemented, rebound effects still apply. Landfill disposal remains a mainstay in the region. (Household) waste separation and handling, if implemented, is usually at the gathering points with implications on costs and the quality of the separated fractions (apart from metal). Organic waste remains a large fraction in Mediterranean countries (especially in urban areas in poorer countries, in rural areas it is recycled on the spot); and due to its high water share it is heavy and cumbersome to transport. Landfill disposal is a waste of its energy potential and creates various nuisances (attraction of rodents, odour, run-offs etc. that can be extremely disturbing in the Mediterranean climate).

Overall, resource consumption and disposal undergo certain stages, is (i) consumption, (ii) disposal, (iii) collection and treatment, (iv) recycling and re-use, (v) final disposal.

Consumption patterns have two features: (i) considerably higher per capita values in the north and relative stable trends. In the north many countries show reduction mainly due to the effects of the economic crisis and not due to a transformation of their production. In the south the highest values are observed in Israel and Turkey due to their “western” life style and their industrial output.

Linked to consumption is the generation of waste; overall the trend is rising. In the EUMCs, Malta shows an extreme increase, followed by Cyprus, Portugal and Spain. However, the change might also be due to the reorganisation of waste collection systems rather than an increase in waste generation per se (e.g., in case of small countries like Malta and Cyprus). Organic matter also becomes a smaller share while the waste mix slowly resembles “north European patterns” (more packaging materials and more electronics).

In the MPCs (though data are mostly not available), as a general trend, the waste production is increasing (rising per capita values and growing population).

Recycling rate: While waste production is increasing, treatment facilities also grow. Treatment is usually limited to collection, compression and eventually water removal. Advanced treatment, like recycling and composting, remains low.

Final disposal is far from satisfying. Landfills (often uncontrolled) are still the mainstay of waste disposal. While no figures could be found the situation is expected to be worse in the MPCs.

### **Box 1: Tourism and circular economy**

An aspect relevant to the circular economy in the Mediterranean is tourism. The area includes a combination of attracting features (climate, coastlines and water swimming quality, landscapes and cultural heritage, etc.) making it the most popular tourist region in Europe and one of the largest tourist areas in the world.

In 2017 more than 230 million people, mainly from western and northern Europe visited the area, 90% staying in the EUMCs. The destinations of the tourists are unevenly scattered with areas like Cataluña, the Balearic Island, Provence-Alpes-Côte d’Azur, Veneto and the Dalmatian coast being prominent hot spots.

Tourism sustainability was not the prime aim in the past; everything was about quantitative expansion coupled with high-density facilities and energy intensive activities. This has negative consequences on the sustainable management of coasts, biodiversity and water resources, among others. While not fully exploited, soft tourism and seasonal and location variation (coastal and hinterland) are becoming more important. Tourists, usually from affluent northern countries, show increased consumption patterns and



seasonal peaks. These two phenomena can create permanent damage in the infrastructure and ecosystems.

Related to the economy and tourism is the issue of marine litter, i.e. persistent, manufactured or processed solid material discarded, disposed of or abandoned in the marine and coastal environment. Main sources of marine litter are land-based sources and vessel-based. The majority of marine litter is plastic waste with variable floatability and hence variable dispersion<sup>5</sup>. 200.000 tonnes of plastic are discarded in the area<sup>6</sup>.

### **c) Water management**

The programme area is heavily affected by unevenly distributed water resources (nearly two thirds are in the north), increasingly polluted water bodies, aquifers threatened with depletion, and inefficient distribution systems. Trends indicate that demand will grow due to population growth while climate change will have a negative impact on water availability.

The main issues in water management relate to the water cycle (i) extraction, (ii) transport, (iii) treatment, (iv) supply, (v) sewage, (vi) treatment and disposal.

Water extraction: On the extraction side and taking into account that resources are scarce in some regions, the EUMCs have relatively stable demand (or decline) while in the MPCs demand grows or is stable. Looking at the fresh water abstraction per capita Greece, Turkey and Spain have the highest per capita abstraction due to the water intensive crops cultivated. The quality of the water transportation infrastructure also plays a role, since it defines demand at the extraction end by constant consumption.

Population using safely managed drinking water services and safely managed sanitation services: The share of the population using safely managed drinking water services and the share of the population using safely managed sanitation services are relatively high in most countries. Countries lagging behind constantly improve. Water supply is usually higher to sanitation as it is faster to implement and is considered more crucial.

Waste water collection and treatment show a similar picture. Most countries have a high level and the rest is catching up rapidly. It should be noted that lower shares in some countries do not indicate the lack of a system but might be due to decentralised water treatment structures. However, the gap to a satisfying level is still significant and should also be seen in connection to the population dynamics and the metropolisation of some urban areas in the south.

Better and more sustainable water management, uncontrolled discharges, groundwater and coastal areas overload with nutrients and hazardous spills are and will remain issues to be addressed.

### **d) Climate**

The Mediterranean climate is characterised by a strong summer-winter rainfall contrast, which increases when going from the north to the south and from the west to the east. Precipitation occurs mainly during winter and autumn while summer is very dry and prolonged.

Temperatures: According to the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change (IPCC), a temperature increase of 2-3°C paired with summer rainfall decrease up to 35%<sup>7</sup> can be expected by 2050. Sea warming is identified by the European Environment Agency as a key climate-change related pressure on the Mediterranean Sea. A water temperature average increase of 0.74°C is expected during 2030-2040 which could reach 1.5°C in some areas.

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<sup>5</sup> UNEP (2015), marine litter assessment in the Mediterranean

<sup>6</sup> IFREMER (2019), Monitoring and assessment guideline for marine litter in Mediterranean MPAS, AMARE Interreg project

<sup>7</sup> Plan Bleu (2015) <http://planbleu.org/en/activites/changement-climatique>

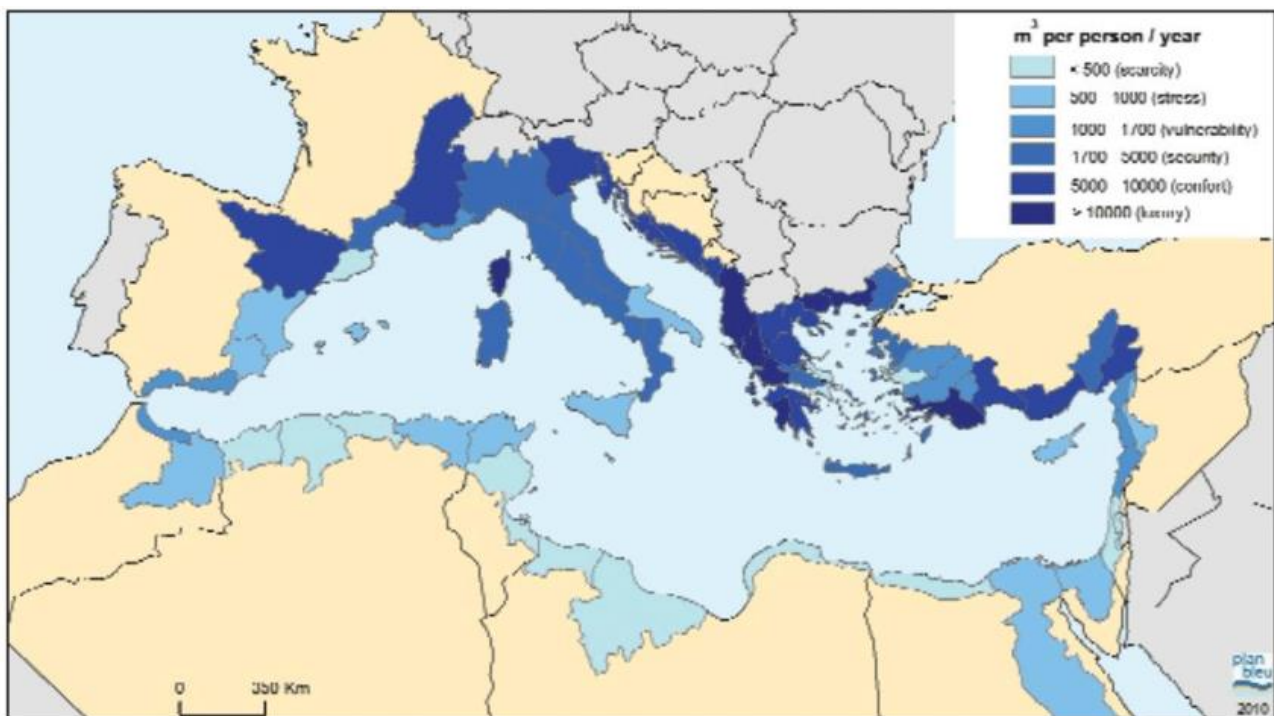


Marine ecosystems are already affected; increases in water temperature cause changes in salinity and circulation, the spread of non-native species, irregular migration and reproduction patterns, mass species mortalities, more frequent weather events and increases in sea levels. These developments have an impact on wildlife but also on several commercial species. Related ocean acidification will lead to changes in the number and abundance of marine organisms. Ocean acidification thus represents another stress on marine environments<sup>8</sup>.

While climate change mitigation aspects are usually well documented (e.g., in relation to energy issues), information on climate change adaptation is poor. The analysis of the preparedness of each country in relation to climate change adaptation is a difficult task, since adaptation measures (in contrast to concentrated mitigation measures) spread over policy domains like architecture, spatial planning, business support, water management etc. An effective climate change adaptation strategy requires performing multilevel, multisector governance; in most Mediterranean countries' governance indices do not fare very well, while the Mediterranean is one of the regions to be affected severely. Moreover, joint actions are needed to foster the climate change resilience and adaptation capacity in the EUMCs and MPCs.

Water stress: A useful, albeit proxy, indicator related to climate change adaptation is the level of water stress, i.e. freshwater withdrawal as a proportion of available freshwater resources (%). The higher the index the harder the hit the country will take if water becomes scarcer due to climate change as resources will be depleted rapidly in a “business as usual” scenario.

**Figure 3: Natural-annual-renewable-freshwater-resources-per-capita-in-the-Mediterranean-watersheds**



Source: Plan Bleu via Cramer, W. et al. (2018)

The situation in the EUMCs is overall good, with the exception of Malta, but exploitation is on the rise in some countries. In the south the situation is more precarious; many MPCs are exploiting resources at a rate

<sup>8</sup> WWF (2015), Blue Growth in the Mediterranean Sea: The challenge of Good Environmental Status

it cannot be replenished and are quite vulnerable. Even in countries where the share is low, the trend is upwards. This development is a combination of poor resources, negative hydrological balances, reliance on water demanding agriculture for exports, growing population and obsolete infrastructure.

Flood risks: Floods are weather-related hazards and their patterns are likely to be significantly affected by climate change. They are already the most frequent and among the costliest and deadliest natural disasters worldwide, including in the Mediterranean area. A number of events in the last years (e.g. in Western Attica in Greece in 2017; in southern France in 2018, etc.) show that flood-related risks and mortality remains a major concern in the Mediterranean countries. Tourism and natural and cultural heritage are also expected to become vulnerable to these climate effects and particular attention should be paid.

Greenhouse gas emissions: These are estimated as final GHG emissions per capita (tonnes of CO<sub>2</sub> equivalent per capita). Although data for most of the MPCs are missing, some differences can be seen between countries, especially between the EUMCs and MPCs. While some countries showed decreasing trends of GHG emissions per capita in 2012-2018 (e.g., Malta, Italy, Greece, France, Spain, Israel), other EUMCs and MPCs reported increasing levels.

Energy consumption: The 2016 UfM Ministerial Declaration on energy underlines the need for the use of renewable energy and energy efficiency. Clean energy and the transition to a low carbon economy is also one of the Green Deal thematic fields.

While there have been many efforts for lower carbon economy in the EU, the Mediterranean remains an area that is highly dependent on fossil fuels. The MPCs have a dependency of more than 90% while most EUMCs are also highly dependent.

Energy demand is rising in the area due to the population growth, lifestyles (e.g. vacation homes), urban sprawl and climate change (building cooling becomes more important, while the building stock is old and has poor passive and active energy efficiency characteristics). Although energy supply is less of an issue in recent years, energy efficiency remains a challenge that needs to be addressed.

Energy consumption in the vast majority of EUMCs is decreasing [Final energy consumption in households per capita (Kilogram of oil equivalent)]. This is partly due to efficiency improvements but also due to economy contraction and migration of industrial activities to the periphery. In the MPCs the overall energy consumption is rising. This is a logical trend considering the development stage of the MPCs but it also offers a great opportunity for energy efficiency investments.

Renewable energy: Overall, the share of renewable energy in gross final energy consumption is rising in the area, indicating that the investments in the field are paying out. There are however considerable differences in the renewable shares and trends. While in the EUMCs the share spans between 8% and 31% with most values being in the 10-20% range, the MPCs show significant differences with four countries having levels comparable to the EUMCs and the rest having a low or practically non-existent share.

The reasons are numerous with the availability of cheap fossil fuels and the institutional framework on renewable energies being the most decisive. In this context, more efforts are needed to promote renewable energy, especially in the MPCs.

#### **e) Air**

Greenhouse gas emissions: As above-mentioned, differences are seen between countries in the greenhouse gas emissions per capita, especially between the EUMCs and MPC. While some countries showed decreasing trends of GHG emissions per capita in 2012-2018 (e.g., Malta, Italy, Greece, France, Spain, Israel), other EUMCs and MPCs reported increasing levels.

Air pollutants: Air quality is improved in the EUMCs, with the majority of countries meeting the emissions ceilings for some air pollutants such as NH<sub>3</sub>, NMVOC, NO<sub>x</sub> and SO (European Environmental Agency<sup>9</sup>). However, additional improvements are needed, especially in Spain (e.g., with NH<sub>3</sub>). The situation on the exposure of urban population to concentrations above EU standards for PM<sub>10</sub>, PM<sub>2.5</sub>, O<sub>3</sub> and NO<sub>2</sub> also reflects the need for further efforts in reducing air pollutants (e.g. in Malta, Greece, Italy, Cyprus).

In the MPCs, sufficient statistics on air pollutions are lacking. However, for some air pollutants such as PM<sub>2.5</sub> the annual mean concentration is above the World Health Organisation (WHO) annual air quality guideline value for almost all countries<sup>10</sup>, including some EUMCs.

### f) Human health


People living in the programme area are exposed to various risks such as those related to climate change (e.g., flood risks) as well as those related to air pollution.

Flood risks: Floods are already the most frequent and among the costliest and deadliest natural disasters in the world, including in the Mediterranean area. The density of a fatal event is correlated to the population density and the rainfall frequency. The average number of deaths also depends on other factors such as prevention or crisis management which are crucial for the programme area.

Air pollution: The WHO statistics show that in the WHO European Region exposure to particulate matter (PM) decreases the life expectancy of every person by an average of 1 year, mostly due to increased risk of cardiovascular and respiratory diseases, and lung cancer. On the other hand, another study using data from 25 EU cities has estimated that life expectancy could be increased by up to approximately 22 months in the most polluted cities if the long-term PM<sub>2.5</sub> concentrations was reduced to the WHO guideline annual level<sup>11</sup>. However, meeting the WHO guideline annual level for PM<sub>2.5</sub> remains a challenge in the area.

A summary of potential trends of these environmental issues and indicators in the region for the new programming period is presented below.

**Table 3 : Environmental status quo trends for the NEXT MED Programme 2021-2027**

Indicators	Trends	Description	Source (s)
<b>Biodiversity and ecosystems</b>			
Forest coverage and biomass		The forest coverage and biomass show a significant difference between north and south. While in the north forests cover a large part of the country (and are growing), their share in the south is very small with rising numbers only in a few countries. However, climate change is expected to have a heavy impact on the quality of the forests and biomass which makes the trend assessment rather difficult.	Eurostat UN database

<sup>9</sup> <https://www.eea.europa.eu/data-and-maps/dashboards/air-quality-statistics>

<sup>10</sup> <https://www.euro.who.int/en/health-topics/environment-and-health/air-quality/data-and-statistics>  
<https://www.iamat.org/country/morocco/risk/air-pollution#:~:text=In%20accordance%20with%20the%20World,maximum%20of%2010%20C2%B5g%2Fm3.>

<sup>11</sup>

Indicators	Trends	Description	Source (s)
Fisheries' catches	↑	The fish stocks in the region are not in a good condition, while fisheries become more efficient. Fisheries' catches increased in 2012-2019 in some countries. Aquaculture is only partially compensating overexploitation.	Eurostat Work Bank
Protected areas	→↑	At the terrestrial side, the EUMCs have a stable and developed network of areas but the south is rapidly catching up. At the marine side, things are more dynamic since many marine protected areas were established only recently. The areas are rapidly increasing in the EUMCs while they are still relatively low in the MPCs. Therefore, an increasing trend should be expected. On the other hand, their management should also be improved.	Eurostat European Environment Agency World Bank UN database
<b>Soil and circular economy</b>			
Waste production	↑	<p>Waste generation is increasing. In the EU, the majority comes from construction and demolition, mining, quarrying and manufacturing. In the MPCs waste generation per capita and year remains low compared to the EUMCs (though recent statistics are lacking for some MPCs). However, it is rapidly increasing.</p> <p>This fact, paired with population trends, puts a serious burden on future waste management and environment.</p>	UN database Eurostat
Waste management	↓	<p>Landfill disposal remains a mainstay in the region. (Household) waste separation and handling, if implemented, is usually at the gathering points with implications on costs and the quality of the separated fractions (apart from metal). Organic waste remains a large fraction in Mediterranean countries (especially in urban areas in poorer countries); and due to its high water share it is heavy and cumbersome to transport.</p> <p>Final disposal is far from satisfying. Landfills (often uncontrolled) are still the mainstay of waste disposal. While no figures could be found, the situation is expected to be worse in the MPCs.</p>	UN database Eurostat
Recycling rate	→↑	Treatment is usually limited to collection, compression and eventually water removal.	Eurostat

Indicators	Trends	Description	Source (s)
		Advanced treatment, like recycling and composting, remains low, especially for the MPCs. The rate should be expected to increase, especially in the EUMCs, considering the increasing trend in 2012-2019.	UN database Union for Mediterranean (2019). Final Report. Regional Analysis of (I)NDCs in the SEMed Region
<b>Water</b>			
Water extraction	=	The EUMCs have relatively stable demand (or decline) while in the MPCs demand grows in some countries. However, a proper trend assessment can not be made since data are missing for many countries.	Eurostat
Population using safely managed drinking water services	↑	The share of the population using safely managed drinking water services is relatively high in most countries. Countries lagging behind constantly improve.	UN database Union for Mediterranean (2019). Final Report. Regional Analysis of (I)NDCs in the SEMed Region
Population using safely managed sanitation services	↑	The share of the population using safely managed sanitation services is relatively high in most countries, but lower than the population using safely managed drinking water services. However, increasing trends are reflected for the majority of countries. Water supply is usually higher to sanitation as it is faster to implement and considered more crucial.	UN database Eurostat National statistics
Waste water collection and treatment	→ ↑	Most countries have a high level and the rest is catching up. However, the gap to a satisfying level is still significant and should be seen also in connection to the population dynamics and the metropolisation of some urban areas in the south.  Better and more sustainable water management, uncontrolled discharges, groundwater and coastal areas overload with nutrients and hazardous spills	UN database Eurostat National statistics

Indicators	Trends	Description	Source (s)
		are and will remain issues to be addressed.	
<b>Climate</b>			
Temperatures	↑	Sea warming is identified by the European Environment Agency as a key climate-change related pressure on the Mediterranean Sea. A water temperature average increase of 0.74°C is expected in 2030-2040 which could reach 1.5°C in some areas.	European Environment Agency Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change (IPCC)
Water stress	↑	The situation in the EUMCs is overall good. However, the exploitation is on the rise in some countries. Many MPCs are exploiting resources at a rate it cannot be replenished and are quite vulnerable. Even in countries where the share is low, the trend is upwards. This development is a combination of poor resources, negative hydrological balances, reliance on water demanding agriculture for exports, growing population and obsolete infrastructure.	UN database Plan Bleu via Cramer, W. et al. (2018)
Flood risks	↑	Flood-related risks and mortality remains a major concern in the Mediterranean countries, which are expected to increase due to climate change. Tourism and natural and cultural heritage are also expected to become vulnerable to these climate effects and particular attention is needed.	Vinet F. et al (2019). Mapping Flood-Related Mortality in the Mediterranean Basin. Results from the MEFF v2.0 DB <sup>12</sup>
Greenhouse gas emissions	=	There are some differences between countries, especially between the EUMCs and MPCs. While some countries showed decreasing trends of GHG emissions per capita in 2012-2018 (e.g. Malta, Italy, Greece, France, Spain, Israel), other EUMCs and MPCs reported increasing levels. The lack of data for most MPCs makes the assessment difficult.	Eurostat
Energy consumption	=	Energy consumption in the majority of EUMCs is decreasing, which is partly due to efficiency improvements but also due to economy contraction and migration of industrial activities to the periphery. In the MPCs the overall energy consumption is rising. This is a logical trend taking into account the development stage of the MPCs. Energy efficiency remains a challenge that needs to	Eurostat International Energy Agency

<sup>12</sup> [https://www.researchgate.net/publication/336760378\\_Mapping\\_Flood-Related\\_Mortality\\_in\\_the\\_Mediterranean\\_Basin\\_Results\\_from\\_the\\_MEFF\\_v20\\_DB](https://www.researchgate.net/publication/336760378_Mapping_Flood-Related_Mortality_in_the_Mediterranean_Basin_Results_from_the_MEFF_v20_DB)



Indicators	Trends	Description	Source (s)
		be addressed.	
Renewable energy	↑	The share of renewable energy in gross final energy consumption is rising. There are however considerable differences in the renewable shares and trends. More efforts should be expected to promote renewable energy, especially in the MPCs.	Eurostat UN database
<b>Air</b>			
Greenhouse gas emissions	=	There are some differences between countries, especially between the EUMCs and MPCs. While some countries showed decreasing trends of GHG emissions per capita in 2012-2018 (e.g. Malta, Italy, Greece, France, Spain, Israel), other EUMCs and MPCs reported increasing levels. The lack of data for most MPCs makes the assessment difficult.	Eurostat
Air pollutants	→ ↑	While some improvements have been made, levels of emissions for some air pollutants (e.g. PM10, PM2.5, O3 and NO2) are relatively high for many countries in the region including some EUMCs).	European Environmental Agency WHO
<b>Human health</b>			
Flood risks	↑	Flood-related risks and mortality remains a major concern in the Mediterranean countries, which are expected to increase due to climate change.	Vinet F. et al (2019) Mapping Flood-Related Mortality in the Mediterranean Basin. Results from the MEFF v2.0 DB
Air pollution	↑	While some improvements have been made, levels of emissions for some air pollutants (e.g. PM10, PM2.5, O3 and NO2) and GHG emissions are relatively high for many countries in the region, especially if compared with the WHO annual air quality guideline values.	European Environmental Agency WHO

Source: Own elaboration

Legend

↑	Increasing
→	No change
↓	Decreasing
=	No assessment possible mainly due to lack of data for all countries



## **4. SCREENING OF THE INTERREG NEXT MED PROGRAMME**

### **4.1 Screening process**

This chapter describes the screening process carried out for the Interreg NEXT MED Programme. It summarises the relevant regulatory background taking into consideration the SEA Directive and other relevant legislation (e.g. EIA legislation). This helps to better understand the relevance of the programme in relation to the scope of SEA, as well as its potential effects on the environment.

The SEA Directive regulates in which cases and how an environmental assessment shall be carried out for programmes co-financed by the EU. Since the SEA Directive does not specifically address the cooperation programmes with third countries, it is the responsibility of the Member State hosting the Managing Authority (Italy in this case) to define, according to its national legislation, how to conduct a SEA for the programme.

In accordance with **Article 3.2 of the Directive**, the programme was analysed whether:

- It is prepared for agriculture, forestry, fisheries, energy, industry, transport, waste/water management, telecommunications, tourism, town and country planning or land use and which set the framework for future development consent of projects listed in the EIA Directive (85/337/EEC), **or**
- It might have likely effect on sites as defined in Article 6 or 7 of Directive 92/43/EEC (Habitats Directive). According to Article 6.3 of the Habitat Directive, any plan or project not directly connected with or necessary to the management of the site but likely to have a significant effect thereon, either individually or in combination with other plans or projects, shall be subject to appropriate assessment of its implications for the site in view of the site's conservation objectives. The terminology of "site" refers to sites of Community importance, which in the biogeographical region(s) contribute significantly to the maintenance or restoration at a favourable conservation status of a natural habitat type (Annex I of Habitat Directive) or of a species (Annex II) and may also contribute significantly to the coherence of Natura 2000, and/or to the maintenance of biological diversity within the biogeographic region(s).

In addition, based on **Article 3.4 of the SEA Directive**, Member States shall determine whether plans and programmes, other than those referred to in Article 3.2 of the Directive, which set the framework for future development consent of projects, are likely to have significant environmental effects.

The terminology "set the framework for future development consent of projects" of the SEA Directive means if the programme contains criteria or conditions which would guide the way the consenting authority decides an application for development consent on projects.

The terminology "project" in the SEA Directive is used according to the definition of the EIA Directive (2011/92/EU):

- the execution of construction works or of other installations or schemes,
- other interventions in the natural surroundings and landscape including those involving the extraction of mineral resources.

Based on this, it was analysed how much the programme takes into consideration environmental and sustainability aspects in general, as well as the potential effects on the environment of the different specific objectives and types of action.

The legal requirements for environmental assessments stemming from the SEA, Habitats and Water Framework Directives fully apply to the EU co-financed programmes to be drawn up for the 2021-2027 period under the proposed Common Provisions Regulation. The programmes developed in other sectors than the ones listed in Article 3.2(a) of the SEA Directive (e.g. territorial cooperation, social action, etc.) in principle do not require such assessment. Experience from the previous programmes has shown that the interventions supported by these programmes in most cases do not involve works or infrastructure laid down in the annexes of the EIA Directive. However, if such programmes set the framework for the development of such projects (e.g. construction of schools, transnational or cross-border infrastructure), it is necessary to determine if they are likely to have significant environmental effects.

The screening of the programme has been then carried out along the criteria set out in Annex II of the SEA Directive in order to determine whether the programme is likely to have significant environmental effects.

The overall screening assessment will be consulted with the national authorities in order to ask for their feedback and opinion on this screening assessment.

If the screening assessment concludes that no full SEA is needed (pursuant to art. 3(6)), the results of the determination of the likely significance of effects based on the criteria listed in Annex II of the SEA Directive and according to the assessment made by the national environmental authorities will be sent to the Commission. A statement confirming that the full SEA is not applicable and a note on the screening conclusions also need to be published.

#### 4.2 Screening assessment

The potential effects of the NEXT MED Programme on environment were analysed based on the programme characteristics and the SEA Directive provisions. In addition, a coherence analysis was carried out taking into consideration relevant EU and transnational directives, strategies and other key references.

##### a) External coherence analysis

The NEXT MED Programme represents a tool for the implementation of some of the objectives set in strategy and plans at European or transnational level. To analyse the relevance and the coherence of the programme with the main environmental policies at European and transnational level, a coherence analysis is presented here.

Coherence has been analysed crossing the specific objectives (SO) of the NEXT MED Programme and the key references at European and transnational level within a specific assessment matrix. These references include relevant documents (such as directives, strategies, plans) on topics considered relevant for the programme such as those on biodiversity, water, climate, air, soil, circular economy and human health.

**Table 4 : Coherence between the NEXT MED Specific objectives and key EU and transnational references**

References	SO 1.1	SO 1.3	SO 2.1	SO 2.4	SO 2.5	SO 2.6	SO 4.2	SO 4.5	ISO 1.6
Ramsar Convention				✓	✓				
Barcelona Convention				✓	✓				
Convention on Biological Diversity				✓	✓	✓			

References	SO 1.1	SO 1.3	SO 2.1	SO 2.4	SO 2.5	SO 2.6	SO 4.2	SO 4.5	ISO 1.6
UN Convention on Climate Change; Paris Agreement	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓			
Water Convention				✓	✓				
Convention on Long-range Trans-boundary Air Pollution and the long-term strategy for the Convention on Long-range Transboundary Air Pollution for 2020–2030 and beyond			✓	✓		✓			
UNESCO World Heritage Convention	✓	✓		✓					
European Landscape Convention			✓	✓	✓	✓			
Habitats Directive (92/43/EEC)				✓	✓	✓			
Birds Directive (2009/147/EC)				✓		✓			
Marine Strategy Framework Directive MSFD (2008/56/EC)	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓			
MRO Directive on establishing a framework for maritime spatial planning (2014/89/EU)	✓		✓	✓	✓	✓			
Water Framework Directive WFD (2000/60/EC)			✓	✓	✓	✓			
Flood Risk Management Directive (2007/60/EC)				✓	✓				
Groundwater Directive				✓	✓	✓			

References	SO 1.1	SO 1.3	SO 2.1	SO 2.4	SO 2.5	SO 2.6	SO 4.2	SO 4.5	ISO 1.6
(2006/118 /EC)									
Nitrates Directive (91/676/EEC)					✓	✓			
Directive 2010/75/EU on industrial emissions (integrated pollution prevention and control)	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓			
Thematic Strategy on Air Pollution COM (2005) 446 final	✓	✓	✓			✓			
Renewable Energy Directive(2018/2001/EC)			✓						
Waste Framework Directive (2008/98/EC)	✓	✓				✓			
Wastewater Directive (91/271/ EEC)					✓	✓			
Landfill Directive (1999/31/EC)						✓			
EU Soil Thematic Strategy 2030 COM (2021) 699 final	✓	✓		✓	✓	✓			
The 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
European Green Deal COM (2019) 640 final)	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓		
The EU Biodiversity Strategy for 2030 (COM (2020) 380)	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓			
New Approach for a Sustainable Blue Economy in the EU COM (2021) 240 final	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓		
EU 2030 Climate- and Energy Framework	✓	✓	✓	✓					

References	SO 1.1	SO 1.3	SO 2.1	SO 2.4	SO 2.5	SO 2.6	SO 4.2	SO 4.5	ISO 1.6
The EU Strategy on Adaptation to Climate Change (2021/82/EC)	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓		
The 8th Environment Action Programme	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓			
Circular Economy Action Plan COM/2020/98 final	✓	✓				✓			
The 2030 Climate target plan	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓		

Source: own elaboration based on international and EU conventions, directives, regulations, etc.

#### **b) Assessment of potential environmental impacts of the NEXT MED Programme 2021-2027**

The Interreg NEXT MED Programme has been prepared taking into consideration the main territorial needs and challenges of the Mediterranean area that can be effectively addressed by transnational projects such as those related to climate change, water, pollution, resources and energy efficiency, etc.

All thematic areas selected by the programme are expected to have neutral to (indirect) positive impacts on the environment which help to promote sustainable development and environmental protection and preservation in the Mediterranean area. The relation and potential effects on environment of the specific objectives and actions selected for the Interreg NEXT MED Programme are analysed below.

#### **Priority 1 – A more competitive and smarter Mediterranean**

- **SO 1.1 Developing and enhancing research and innovation capacities and the uptake of advanced technologies**

In this SO the programme will support transnational cooperation to develop and enhance research and innovation capacity, especially in shared areas of specialisation, the uptake of advanced technologies and the creation of innovative products and services.

The aim is to promote economic growth through boosting innovation and R&D, strengthening R&D and entrepreneurial capacities of research organisations, business and other innovation stakeholders and their collaboration in the development, testing, uptake, diffusion, transfer and commercialization of research outputs and technological innovations. Actions should also seek to reinforce sustainability and resilience and adaptation to climate change through supporting R&I in the circular economy and low carbon economy for the green transition and encouraging the uptake of new sustainable technologies.

This objective supports mainly soft projects aimed at knowledge and technology sharing as well as capacity building and does not intent to carry out any type of large non-environmentally friendly infrastructure. In

fact, it is expected that by encouraging and pushing regional research and innovation framework towards sustainable technologies and green transition it can have potentially positive impacts on the environment.

- **SO 1.3 Enhancing sustainable growth and competitiveness of SMEs and job creation in SMEs, including by productive investments**

In this SO the programme will support transnational cooperation to increase SME creation, innovation, internationalization, competitiveness, productivity and entrepreneurship, to facilitate the incorporation of unemployed people and new entrants into the labour force and improve job creation.

Actions will focus on improving skills and entrepreneurship, and hence the adaptability and resilience of the labour force, promoting self-employment, encouraging networking and clustering amongst innovation actors and stakeholders to encourage policy learning and exchange of experience, and internationalization and sustainability. Regional resilience will be reinforced through a digital transformation of SMEs, including their improved digital access and ability in all aspects of commerce and employment. Transnational business support services and platforms will also be supported, including those related to the uptake and use of eco-innovations and clean technologies, and to business environment improvements.

This objective supports mainly soft projects aimed at improving skills and entrepreneurship and encouraging networking and clustering amongst different innovation actors and stakeholders which are neutral to environment. Therefore, it does not intent to carry out any type of large infrastructure project which can do significant harm to the environment. On the contrary, it is expected that by supporting transnational business support services and platforms that are related to the uptake and use of eco-innovations and clean technologies it can have positive impacts on the environment.

## **Priority 2 – A greener, low-carbon and resilient Mediterranean**

- **SO 2.1 Promoting energy efficiency and reducing greenhouse gas emissions**

In this SO the programme will support transnational cooperation to increase awareness and cooperation, technology transfer, utilisation of research outcomes and adaptation to local needs and capacities to prepare the ground for the energy transition. It also aims to increase the uptake of relevant technologies through pilots and proof-of-concept approaches, by supporting an enabling environment of administration and decision-making bodies with capacity and provisions in the fields of energy efficiency, renewable energy sources and smart energy management.

This objective supports soft projects and it does not intent to carry out any type of large infrastructure project which can do significant harm to the environment. On the contrary, it is expected to have positive environmental impacts by supporting transnational actions that promote energy efficiency, renewable energy and smart energy management.

- **SO 2.4 Promoting climate change adaptation and disaster risk prevention and resilience, taking into account eco-system based approaches**

In this SO the programme will support transnational cooperation to increase awareness on the climate

change impact on environment, economy and society, beyond the mitigation context, climate change adaptation, risk prevention and disaster resilience. It will support cooperation and capacity for joint response and communication mechanisms and procedures as well as pilots and demonstration procedures to enhance cooperation. In line with this, it will also help to promote an enabling environment of administration and decision-making bodies with capacity and provisions in the fields climate change adaptation, risk prevention and disaster resilience in a multi-level, multi-sector governance set-up.

This objective supports soft projects and it does not intent to carry out any type of large infrastructure project which can do significant harm to the environment. On the contrary, it is expected to have positive environmental impacts by supporting transnational actions that promote climate change adaptation, risk prevention and disaster resilience.

- **SO 2.5 Promoting access to water and sustainable water management**

In this SO the programme will support transnational cooperation to increase awareness and cooperation, technology transfer, utilisation of research outcomes and adaptation to local needs and capacities in the fields of water efficiency, water-related climate change adaptation, water saving incentives, water cycle management and water bodies rehabilitation.

This objective can also help increase the uptake of relevant technologies through pilots and proof-of-concept approaches by supporting actions that promote an enabling environment of administration and decision-making bodies with capacity and provisions in the aforementioned fields including water use monitoring, smart metering and water pricing.

This objective supports soft projects and it does not intent to carry out any type of large infrastructure project which can do significant harm to the environment. On the contrary, it is expected to have positive environmental impacts by supporting transnational actions that promote sustainable water management.

- **SO 2.6 Promoting the transition to a circular and resource efficient economy**

In this SO the programme will support transnational cooperation to increase awareness and cooperation, technology transfer, utilisation of research outcomes and adaptation to local needs and capacities in the fields of life-cycle management, product design, waste management, resource efficiency and recycling. This objective also helps to increase the uptake of relevant technologies through pilots and proof-of-concept approaches by also promoting an enabling environment of administration and decision-making bodies with capacity and provisions in the above-mentioned fields.

This objective supports soft projects and it does not intent to carry out any type of large infrastructure project which can do significant harm to the environment. On the contrary, it is expected to have positive environmental impacts by supporting transnational actions that promote the transition to a circular and resource efficient economy in the Mediterranean area.

**Priority 4: A more social and inclusive Mediterranean**

- **SO 4.2 Improving equal access to inclusive and quality services in education, training and lifelong learning through developing accessible infrastructure, including by fostering resilience for distance and on-line education and training**

Under this SO the programme will support transnational actions that aim at improving equal access to

education and learning opportunities, especially in the context of the economic recovery and digital and green transitions. It aims to ensure that skills needs match labour market demand and include practical experiences that adequately prepare disadvantaged groups to enter the labour force.

Transnational educational and training opportunities including e-learning and platforms for e-education will be promoted, as well as activities specifically focused upon the access and mobility of those groups that suffer particular barriers to participation.

Actions will also include digital literacy programmes and initiatives particularly aimed at the under-privileged and under-represented sections of the population, and wider transnational educational programmes and actions that promote equality, inclusion and empowerment.

- **SO 4.5 Ensuring equal access to health care and fostering resilience of health systems, including primary care, and promoting the transition from institutional to family- and community-based care**

Under this SO the focus will be on capacity-building within the health and social care sectors through increased cooperation, knowledge exchange and training and mobility, incorporating the third sector and wider communities in order to improve efficiency, resilience and preparedness; improvements to actual provision of public services that could result from critical mass or digital solutions, as well as the development and piloting of new technological tools, solutions and processes.

Both specific objectives of priority 4 (SO 4.2 and SO 4.5) will support mainly soft projects and they do not intend to carry out any type of large infrastructure project which negatively affect the environment.

**Priority ISO: A better cooperation governance for the Mediterranean**

- **ISO 1.6 - Other actions to support better cooperation governance**

ISO 1.6 will focus on improving and strengthening capacity at all territorial levels and amongst stakeholders and cooperation actors to participate in joint initiatives in the Mediterranean area. It will also aim to identify and build on the synergies, improve coordination and complementarity between cooperation initiatives developed and implemented in and across the Mediterranean and amongst different actors.

This SO will support and enhance the broader implementation of territorial strategies and approaches by fostering cooperation across programmes and funding initiatives in the Mediterranean area. Moreover, it will seek to develop a strategic approach to the capitalization of programme and projects results and good practices through the development of tools and collaborative approaches and networks with other capitalization activities under other programme initiatives.

This objective will support soft projects which aim to improve administrative and organizational capacity and coordination as well as to enhance capitalization and exploitation of best practices and pilot experiences. Therefore, its actions are expected to be mainly neutral to the environment. However, they could support the effective implementation and communication of activities which promote environmental protection and the overall sustainable development in other priorities during the programme implementation.

An overview of the potential impact of the NEXT MED programme on the environment is presented below.

**Table 5: Potential environmental impacts of the NEXT MED Programme 2021-2027**



Specific objectives	Biodiversity & ecosystems	Soil & circular economy	Water	Climate	Air	Human health
SO 1.1	n.r.	+	n.r.	+	+	+
SO 1.3	n.r.	+	n.r.	+	+	+
SO 2.1	+	=	+	+	+	+
SO 2.4	+	+	+	+	+	+
SO 2.5	+	0	+	+	n.r.	+
SO 2.6	+	+	+	+	+	+
SO 4.2	0/+	0/+	n.r.	0/+	0/+	0/+
SO 4.5	n.r.	n.r.	n.r.	n.r.	n.r.	n.r.
ISO 1.6	0/+	0/+	0/+	0/+	0/+	0/+

Legend	
+	Positive impact
0/+	No change or positive impact
0	No change
-	Negative impact
=	No assessment possible
n.r.	Not relevant

### 4.3 Screening assessment along the criteria defined in Annex II of the SEA Directive

Table 6 presents the assessment made taking into consideration the Interreg NEXT MED Programme, its objectives, the types of action and the criteria defined in Annex II of the SEA Directive.

**Table 6 : Screening assessment along the criteria defined in Annex II of the SEA Directive**

Criteria for determining the likely significance of effects		
I. The characteristics of plans and programmes	Is there a significant effect? (Yes/No)	Assessment and justification
a) the degree to which the plan or programme sets a framework for the later implementation options of projects and other activities, either with regard to location, nature, size and operating conditions or by allocating resources	No	<p>The Interreg NEXT MED Programme defines potential activities in a broad manner. Environmental impacts will depend on the precise nature and scope of projects to be funded, as well as on external factors. In addition, the types of action do not set framework for future development consent of projects that require an EIA:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• does not set obligatory terms, conditions, or aspects for evaluation - especially regarding the location, type, size, function, operational criteria, direct resource consumption, load, or other use of natural resources,</li> <li>• does not prescribe the implementation of the above activities,</li> <li>• does not influence (facilitates, contributes to, or hinders) the implementation possibilities of the above activities especially regarding their location, type, size, function, operational criteria, consumption, or other use of natural resources.</li> </ul> <p>However, it should be noted that the programme has a limited budget and does not aim to support heavy investments (including such that are listed in the annexes to the EIA Directive). Instead, it focuses on small-scale investments and/or 'soft' actions such as cooperation and harmonisation measures in order to increase the capacities of institutions, knowledge sharing, initiatives related to the technology transfer, utilisation of research outcomes and adaptation to local needs and capacities of local and regional authorities, etc (see Annex 1).</p>
b) the degree to which the plan or programme influences other plans and programmes including those in a hierarchy	No (only indirectly)	<p>The type of activities that may be implemented within the programme are mainly process related and they are not expected to directly influence other plans or programmes.</p> <p>While some of these (e.g., those under ISO1) can have influence on other plans and initiatives - which however are to be further adapted on national, regional level - the impact chains from the</p>

Criteria for determining the likely significance of effects		
		<p>programme’s interventions to direct effects on specific sectors or the environment are rather long. For example, under ISO1 the programme will seek to develop a strategic approach to capitalization of programme and projects results and good practices through the development of tools and collaborative approaches and networks with other capitalization activities under other programme initiatives. This should ensure the further exploitation and scale-up of good practice across any Mediterranean initiative and the improved design and implementation of services, systems, policies and processes in the Mediterranean space.</p> <p>Specifically, the policy makers of the participating countries can be supported in their work through the cooperation projects focusing on the integration and adaptation in regulatory frameworks, policy formulation and decision-making of regional and local authorities of provisions and performance standards to harmonise efforts to tackle challenges relevant for areas, broader than their region, or the country. Harmonising measures in relation to climate change adaptation and risk prevention, energy efficiency, resource efficiency transferring knowledge in relation to research and innovation are some examples.</p> <p>Overall, the programme is expected to have indirect positive environmental impact in the region.</p>
<p>c) the relevance of the plan or programme from the point of view of incorporating environmental considerations, especially promoting sustainable development</p>	<p>To some extent (neutral or positive contribution)</p>	<p>The Interreg NEXT MED Programme can contribute to the integration of environmental considerations and sustainable development by the relevant actors in the plans and measures developed for the targeted territories within the programme area. Within its priorities, the programme is going to support cooperation projects that are directly and indirectly addressing key transboundary environmental issues of the Mediterranean region in relation to the green transition and promotion of a low carbon economy, renewable energy and energy efficiency, climate change adaptation, water management, circular economy aiming at eliminating waste and promoting the continuous use of resources, continuous adaptation of the workforce to prevent unemployment in a context of green transition, improve the resilience of the region to prepare and adapt to COVID and post-COVID challenges. Contributions to these issues can be made by</p>

Criteria for determining the likely significance of effects		
		supporting transnational cooperation actions of key stakeholders, through which they will gain improved capacities and skills, cooperation networks will be established and harmonised, joint initiatives will be developed in relation to the thematic fields, which are not expected to have negative, but mainly positive effects on the environment.
d) applies to areas or topics, where there are environmental problems	To some extent (mainly through soft and/or small-scale infrastructure projects)	<p>The Interreg NEXT MED Programme area faces complex transboundary environmental and ecological challenges, such as:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Underdeveloped adaptation capacities to climate change and insufficient institutional capacity;</li> <li>• Many sectors which are dominant in the area like agriculture, fisheries and tourism are marginally resilient and are expected to be severely affected by climate change.</li> <li>• More frequent and heavier environmental risks, due to climate change and extreme weather-events like floods, droughts, fires, invasive species etc;</li> <li>• Unevenly distributed water resources, increased pollution, inefficient distribution and poor waste water management;</li> <li>• Incomplete and not overall effective wastewater treatment;</li> <li>• The cycle of recycling and re-use not being fully in place;</li> <li>• High dependence on fossil fuels, poor energy efficiency and a growing population;</li> <li>• Underutilized renewable energy sources;</li> <li>• Need for increased capacity of local stakeholders, public bodies and policy making to integrate legal provisions, standards and performance monitoring in administration and decision making (e.g., related to energy efficiency and renewable energy, water management, climate change adaptation measures, resource efficiency, etc.)</li> </ul>
e) the relevance of the programme from the point of view of implementing EU legislation on the environment (e.g., plans and programmes)	No direct relevance and impact	The Interreg NEXT MED Programme and especially the specific objectives of Priority 2 (PO2) have good potential to contribute to the implementation of relevant EU policy in the field of the environment, like the European Green Deal, the EU strategy on adaptation to climate change, the Environment action programme to 2030, the Biodiversity Strategy for 2030 or such regulations like the Water

Criteria for determining the likely significance of effects		
linked to waste management, water protection)		<p>Framework Directive, the Flood Directive and the Habitat Directive.</p> <p>The Interreg NEXT MED Programme is expected to contribute to various international goals for example EU macro-regional strategies (EUSAIR) and initiatives (e.g. Westmed), UN Sustainable Development Goals, Convention for the Protection of the Marine Environment and the Coastal Region of the Mediterranean (Barcelona Convention), UfM initiatives (e.g. the 2016 UfM Ministerial Declaration on energy or the Union for the Mediterranean Ministerial Meeting on Environment and Climate Change), proclamation of EEZs and especially the Mediterranean Strategy for Sustainable Development etc.</p>
<b>II. Characteristics of the effects and of the area likely to be affected</b>	<b>Yes/No</b>	<b>Assessment and justification</b>
<i>The expected environmental effects:</i>		
a) may be of a duration, frequency, have a likelihood of occurrence and reversibility that qualifies them as significant	No	<p>The types of actions are broadly defined. Therefore, at this stage only a rough and qualitative estimation of the characteristics of the environmental effects is possible, since they will depend on the concrete projects and their location.</p> <p>However, as mentioned in section 4.2 above significant negative impacts are not expected, since the programme focuses mainly on ‘soft’ actions. The supported actions are considered to be largely neutral or positive to the environment (mostly indirect positive impacts).</p> <p>Large-scale investments are not supported by the programme and the limited number of small-scale infrastructures might include pilots and investment in research and knowledge sharing with no significant negative impacts. Environmental impact assessments and the project selection criteria during the programme implementation are expected to serve as gatekeepers in the event of unforeseen negative impacts.</p>
b) may be cumulative and enhance each other	No	<p>Based on the thematic scope and the characteristics of the types of action, many topics are either neutral to the environment, or, in case of those thematic issues which are related to the environment, it can be expected to have positive effects.</p> <p>In the fields of climate change adaptation, energy</p>

Criteria for determining the likely significance of effects		
		efficiency, water management or circular economy the transnational cooperation projects of the programme can have cumulative effects on the environment, which intend to bring positive changes, contributing to the improvement of the environmental status and sustainable development (e.g. support energy transition, protect biodiversity and water bodies, promote sustainable practices for example in tourism, etc.)
c) may be of transboundary nature (spread across borders)	No	<p>Considering the characteristics of the Interreg NEXT MED Programme, which is supporting cooperation of relevant actors to address key transnational challenges, in general, the impacts of such projects are expected to be transboundary.</p> <p>Regarding the possible environmental effects, most actions are expected to be neutral, or to have direct or indirect effects, while in case of future projects addressing the topics like water management, climate change, etc., which all are expected to focus on transnationally relevant issues, the effects are actually expected to be indirect or even direct and positive, improving the environmental conditions of the target areas.</p> <p>Similar positive transboundary effects can be expected from future projects that are related to transnational joint research and innovation initiatives (in PO1), education, training and access to health care (in PO4) as well as those supporting better cooperation governance (in ISO1).</p>
d) may trigger changes in the environment that may be a risk to human health or the environment (e.g., due to accidents)	No	<p>Considering the characteristics of the Interreg NEXT MED Programme, the types of action and the transnational thematic issues to be addressed, mainly neutral or positive effects can be expected. Specifically, initiatives to promote energy efficiency and renewable energy, better waste and water management, or activities to improve the adaptation capacity to climate change impacts as well as to increase the capacities of stakeholders within the health and social care sectors to improve efficiency, resilience and preparedness are expected to bring positive changes in combating the risks to human health and the environment.</p>
e) may be of a magnitude and territorial scope	No (Can not be defined at this stage. However, the effects	The Interreg NEXT MED Programme focuses on thematic fields where transnational cooperation is expected to bring positive change to the Mediterranean region, including its environment.

Criteria for determining the likely significance of effects		
(geographically or in terms of the size of population likely to be affected) that qualifies them as significant	are expected to be positive or neutral to the environment.)	Overall, the programme is expected to have impact on the whole region, but the actual impact is depending on the concrete projects, which will be supported and cannot be properly predicted at this stage. In case of specific projects, the environmental impacts are expected to be positive. Accordingly, the concrete effects on the environment regarding magnitude and spatial extent cannot properly be estimated at this stage, but overall, they are expected to be positive or neutral.
f) affect areas or landscapes which have a recognised national, EU or international protection status	No (mainly positive effects)	Most of the actions are neither related to, nor expected to have significant environmental effects on areas or landscapes which have a recognised national, EU or international protection status. Certain type of actions of related to ensuring resilience and adaptation to climate change, and other interventions aiming to fight pollution can have potential effects relevant for some protected areas, if targeted by a certain project, which are also expected to be positive.
<i>The area expected to be affected is valuable and/or vulnerable due to:</i>		
g) special natural characteristics or cultural heritage	No	The Interreg NEXT MED Programme and its planned types of actions are not expected to have any negative effect on special natural characteristics or cultural heritage. On the other hand, some of its activities may have indirect positives impact in nature and cultural heritage such as promoting sustainable practices in SO 1.1 Developing and enhancing research and innovation capacities and the uptake of advanced technologies, or other projects that support climate change measures and water management.
h) exceeded environmental quality standards or limit values	No	Taking into consideration the thematic fields to be addressed and the types of actions planned to be implemented, it is not expected that the supported projects would have such effects on their targeted areas to exceed environmental quality standards, or limit values (of air, biological, chemical, noise, etc.). In fact, e.g. projects to be supported in relation to water, energy efficiency and renewable energy are expected to make steps towards improvement in this field, and even if indirectly, contributing to the reduction of the pollution of water and air.
i) intensive land use (e.g. intensive agricultural	No	None of the specific objectives of the Interreg NEXT MED Programme is focusing on supporting activities

Criteria for determining the likely significance of effects		
production, etc.)		in relation to intensive land use. Therefore, in connection to the programme, no such negative effects can be expected in the region and the specific target areas of the projects to be supported.
Conclusion	The Interreg NEXT MED Programme 2021-2027 is not likely to have a significant negative effect on the environment; indirect long term positive effects are possible.	



## **5. SCREENING DECISION**

Based on the analysis and screening of the draft Interreg NEXT MED Programme, its characteristics and the scope of its priorities, specific objectives and types of action in connection to the requirements and criteria of the SEA Directive (2001/42/EC) **it could be concluded that a Strategic Environmental Assessment is NOT required for the Interreg NEXT MED Programme 2021-2027.**

The reasons are the following:

- The Interreg NEXT MED Programme 2021-2027 is focusing on territorial cooperation and is not prepared specifically for any of the sectors listed in Article 3.2(a) of the SEA Directive such as agriculture, forestry, fisheries, energy, industry, transport, waste management, water management, telecommunications, tourism, town and country planning or land use.

Instead, it focuses on territorial cooperation, addressing challenges relevant on a broader territorial scale within the Mediterranean region, supporting territorially integrated approaches, building regional capacities and institutionalising cooperation, which can partly be related to the sectors mentioned, but not dedicated to direct, specific sectorial development, but focusing on transnational cooperation within.

- The programme does neither set framework for future development consent of projects listed in Annexes I and II to Directive 85/337/EEC, nor having likely significant effects on sites in connection to Article 6 or 7 of Directive 92/43/EEC since:
  - The priorities and specific objectives of the Interreg NEXT MED Programme and indicative type of action are broadly defined which do not set framework for future development consent of projects that require an EIA.
  - The Interreg NEXT MED Programme is not funding large infrastructure investments listed in the annexes of the EIA Directive. It will finance projects of “soft” nature, mainly aiming at the integration and adaptation in regulatory frameworks, policy formulation and decision-making of regional and local authorities of provisions and performance standards, implementation of pilots and demonstration procedures, knowledge sharing and initiatives related to technology transfer, development of transnational/international partnerships, and awareness raising activities, among other. Some small-scale investments may be related to the pilot actions aiming to address environmental challenges or investment in transnational research infrastructure, equipment, incubators, networking and infrastructure sharing which have a rather limited focus. Environmental impact assessments and the project selection criteria during the programme implementation are expected to serve as gatekeepers to mitigate any unforeseen and reversible negative impact.
- Based on the assessment along the criteria listed in Annex II of the SEA Directive and the characteristics of the actions that can be supported and its potential impacts, it can be concluded that the Interreg NEXT MED Programme does not have significant direct effects on the environment. Most of its proposed actions are expected to have neutral or (indirect) positive impacts on the environment.

Considering the thematic scope of the selected specific objectives (SOs), some of the specific objectives (e.g., SO 1.1 - Developing and enhancing research and innovation capacities and the uptake of advanced technologies; SO 1.3 Enhancing sustainable growth and competitiveness of SMEs and job creation in SMEs, including by productive investments) can have neutral or (indirect) positive impacts on the environment.

Certain specific objectives are directly addressing environmental issues and challenges of the Mediterranean region and are expected to have mainly positive impacts on the environment, with the overall aim to bring positive change and impact to the programme area (e.g. SO 2.1 Promoting energy efficiency and reducing greenhouse gas emissions; SO 2.4 Promoting climate change adaptation and disaster risk prevention and resilience, taking into account eco-system based approaches; SO 2.5 Promoting access to water and sustainable water management, and SO 2.6 Promoting the transition to a circular and resource efficient economy).

## **6. DO NO SIGNIFICANT HARM ASSESSMENT**

In accordance with the EU Taxonomy Regulation (EU) 2020/852 and the “do no significant harm (DNSH)” principle, a dedicated assessment shall be carried out during the programming phase and before the programme adoption by the Commission in order to prevent the inclusion of activities or types of actions in the programmes that could do significant harm.

This chapter focuses specifically on the assessment of the environmental impact of the Interreg NEXT MED Programme considering the six environmental objectives covered by the Taxonomy Regulation.

1. An activity is considered to do significant harm to **climate change mitigation** if it leads to significant greenhouse gas (GHG) emissions;
2. An activity is considered to do significant harm to **climate change adaptation** if it leads to an increased adverse impact of the current climate and the expected future climate, on the activity itself or on people, nature or assets;
3. An activity is considered to do significant harm to the **sustainable use and protection of water and marine resources** if it is detrimental to the good status or the good ecological potential of bodies of water, including surface water and groundwater, or to the good environmental status of marine waters;
4. An activity is considered to do significant harm to the **circular economy**, including waste prevention and recycling, if it leads to significant inefficiencies in the use of materials or in the direct or indirect use of natural resources, or if it significantly increases the generation, incineration or disposal of waste, or if the long-term disposal of waste may cause significant and long-term environmental harm;
5. An activity is considered to do significant harm to **pollution prevention and control** if it leads to a significant increase in emissions of pollutants into air, water or land;
6. An activity is considered to do significant harm to the **protection and restoration of biodiversity and ecosystems** if it is significantly detrimental to the good condition and resilience of ecosystems, or detrimental to the conservation status of habitats and species, including those of Union interest.

A detailed assessment of the draft programme is provided in the table below.

**Table 7 : “Do no significant harm” (DNSH) principle assessment**

POs/SOs	Assessment
<b>Priority 1: “A more competitive and smarter Mediterranean”</b>	
SO 1.1. Developing and enhancing research and innovation capacities and the uptake of advanced	This specific objective includes various types of actions such as: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• A.1.1.1 Support for transnational testing and development of technologies, processes and services, and for the uptake of technology, technology transfer and commercialization of research outcomes and IP.</li> <li>• A.1.1.2 Support for transnational RD&amp;I business-academia networking, partnerships, and platforms sharing know-how and results, improving transnational access, collaboration, mobility and synergies.</li> <li>• A.1.1.3 Support for business research and innovation activity, including investment in transnational research infrastructure, equipment, incubators, networking and transnational schemes for infrastructure sharing.</li> </ul>

POs/SOs		Assessment		
technologies	<b>Please indicate which of the environmental objectives below require a substantive DNSH assessment</b>	YES	NO	<b>Justification if « NO » has been selected</b>
	Climate change mitigation		✓	<p>The Interreg NEXT MED Programme has limited financial resources and does not support large infrastructure projects. Instead, it will support ‘soft’ actions and small-scale investments which promote transnational cooperation.</p> <p>Considering the characteristics of the programme, the proposed types of actions, the transnational thematic issues to be addressed and the SEA Screening findings, it has been assessed that mainly neutral or positive effects can be expected.</p> <p>Therefore, it can be concluded that the types of actions to be supported by the programme are also compatible with the DNSH principle, because they are not expected to have significant negative impacts on any of the six environmental objectives covered by the EU Taxonomy Regulation (Article 9).</p> <p>Specifically, the proposed actions under this SO are considered to be positive for the environment. In particular, they are expected to have positive impacts on <b>circular economy</b> and <b>climate change</b> adaption and mitigation.</p>
	Climate change adaptation		✓	
	The sustainable use and protection of water and marine resources		✓	
	The circular economy, including waste prevention and recycling		✓	
	Pollution prevention and control to air, water and land		✓	
	The protection and restoration of biodiversity and ecosystems		✓	
SO 1.3 Enhancing sustainable growth and competitiveness of SMEs and job creation in SMEs, including by productive investments	<p>This specific objective includes various types of actions such as:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• A.1.3.1 Transnational support for the co-creation and follow up of start-ups and spin-offs, encouraging their entrepreneurship, innovation, diversification and growth</li> <li>• A.1.3.2. Development and promotion of transnational clusters, networks, value chains, living labs, incubators and accelerators, and their networking and exchange of good practice.</li> <li>• A.1.3.3. Transnational skills development and measures to anticipate skills needs, increase entrepreneurship and improve the adaptability of enterprises, workers and entrepreneurs to change.</li> <li>• A.1.3.4. Transnational business support services, platforms and networks to support business internationalization, the uptake and use of eco-innovations and clean technologies, and business environment improvements</li> <li>• A.1.3.5. Initiatives for the digital transformation of SMEs and transnational e-business/e-commerce skills and capacity development, innovation and application.</li> </ul>			
	<b>Please indicate which of the environmental objectives below require a substantive DNSH assessment</b>	YES	NO	<b>Justification if « NO » has been selected</b>
	Climate change mitigation		✓	<p>The Interreg NEXT MED Programme has limited financial resources and does not</p>
	Climate change adaptation		✓	

POs/SOs	Assessment			
	The sustainable use and protection of water and marine resources		✓	<p>support large infrastructure projects. Instead, it will support 'soft' actions and small-scale investments which promote transnational cooperation.</p> <p>Considering the characteristics of the programme, the proposed types of actions, the transnational thematic issues to be addressed and the SEA Screening findings, it has been assessed that mainly neutral or positive effects can be expected.</p> <p>Therefore, it can be concluded that the types of actions to be supported by the programme are also compatible with the DNSH principle, because they are not expected to have significant negative impacts on any of the six environmental objectives covered by the EU Taxonomy Regulation (Article 9).</p> <p>Specifically, the proposed actions under this SO are expected to have some positive impacts, especially related to <b>climate change</b> and <b>circular economy</b> (e.g. Type of action A.1.3.4 which aims to promote the uptake and use of eco-innovations and clean technologies)</p>
	The circular economy, including waste prevention and recycling		✓	
	Pollution prevention and control to air, water and land		✓	
	The protection and restoration of biodiversity and ecosystems		✓	

**Priority 2: A greener, low-carbon and resilient Mediterranean**

<p>SO 2.1 Promoting energy efficiency and reducing greenhouse gas emissions</p>	<p>This specific objective includes various types of actions such as:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• A.2.1.1a Implementation of pilot actions to demonstrate technical, financial, and environmental benefits of measures related to energy efficiency, renewable energy sources and smart energy management.</li> <li>• A.2.1.1b Transnational initiatives related to the technology transfer, utilization of research outcomes and adaptation to local needs and capacities related to energy efficiency, renewable energy sources and smart energy management.</li> <li>• A2.1.2 Transnational initiatives to increase awareness, capacities and encourage active participation and inclusion of citizens, civil society organisations and private sector and cooperation with public authorities regarding climate change impact, energy efficiency, renewable energy sources and smart energy management.</li> <li>• A.2.1.3 Integration and adaptation in regulatory frameworks, policy formulation and decision-making of regional and local authorities of provisions and performance standards promoting energy efficiency, renewable energy sources, energy performance monitoring and smart metering.</li> </ul>			
	<p><b>Please indicate which of the environmental objectives below require a substantive DNSH assessment</b></p>	<p><b>YES</b></p>	<p><b>NO</b></p>	<p><b>Justification if « NO » has been selected</b></p>
	Climate change mitigation		✓	<p>The Interreg NEXT MED Programme has limited financial resources and does not support large infrastructure projects. Instead, it will support 'soft' actions and small-scale investments which promote transnational</p>
	Climate change adaptation		✓	
	The sustainable use and protection of water and marine resources		✓	

POs/SOs	Assessment			
	The circular economy, including waste prevention and recycling		✓	cooperation. Considering the characteristics of the programme, the proposed types of actions, the transnational thematic issues to be addressed and the SEA Screening findings, it has been assessed that mainly neutral or positive effects can be expected. Therefore, it can be concluded that the types of actions to be supported by the programme are also compatible with the DNSH principle, because they are not expected to have significant negative impacts on any of the six environmental objectives covered by the EU Taxonomy Regulation (Article 9). Specifically, all the proposed actions under this SO are expected to have positive impacts on the environment, in particular related to <b>climate change</b> and reduction of <b>pollution</b> (e.g. energy efficiency, renewable energy sources and smart energy management).
	Pollution prevention and control to air, water and land		✓	
	The protection and restoration of biodiversity and ecosystems		✓	
SO 2.4 Promoting climate change adaptation and disaster risk prevention and resilience, taking into account ecosystem based approaches	This specific objective includes various types of actions such as: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• A.2.4.1 Implementation of pilots and demonstration procedures to increase capacity and capability for joint deployment, provide "proof of concept" and enhance innovation in the fields of climate change adaptation, risk prevention and disaster resilience.</li> <li>• A.2.4.2 Transnational initiatives to increase awareness, capacities and encourage active participation and inclusion of citizens, civil society organisations, and private sector and cooperation with public authorities regarding climate change adaptation, risk prevention and disaster resilience.</li> <li>• A.2.4.3 Integration and adaptation in regulatory frameworks, policy formulation and decision-making of regional and local authorities of provisions and performance standards promoting climate change adaptation and risk prevention including contingency and resilience planning.</li> </ul>			
	<b>Please indicate which of the environmental objectives below require a substantive DNSH assessment</b>	<b>YES</b>	<b>NO</b>	<b>Justification if « NO » has been selected</b>
	Climate change mitigation		✓	The Interreg NEXT MED Programme has limited financial resources and does not support large infrastructure projects. Instead, it will support 'soft' actions and small-scale investments which promote transnational cooperation.  Considering the characteristics of the programme, the proposed types of actions, the transnational thematic issues to be addressed and the SEA Screening findings, it has been assessed that mainly neutral or positive effects can be expected.
	Climate change adaptation		✓	
	The sustainable use and protection of water and marine resources		✓	
	The circular economy, including waste prevention and recycling		✓	
	Pollution prevention and control to air, water and land		✓	
	The protection and restoration of biodiversity and ecosystems		✓	

POs/SOs	Assessment																									
			<p>Therefore, it can be concluded that the types of actions to be supported by the programme are also compatible with the DNSH principle, because they are not expected to have significant negative impacts on any of the six environmental objectives covered by the EU Taxonomy Regulation (Article 9). Specifically, all the proposed actions under this SO are expected to mainly have positive impact on the environment, in particular related to <b>climate change adaptation, risk prevention and disaster resilience</b>.</p>																							
<p>SO 2.5 Promoting access to water and sustainable water management</p>	<p>This specific objective includes various types of actions such as:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• A.2.5.1a Implementation of pilots to demonstrate technical, financial and environmental benefits of measures related to water cycle management, water efficiency for industries and households and rehabilitation of water bodies engaging local authorities, public utility providers, professional associations and environmental agencies.</li> <li>• A.2.5.1b Transnational initiatives related to the technology transfer, utilisation of research outcomes and adaptation to local needs and capacities of local and regional authorities, public utility providers, professional associations practitioners, companies and supply chains related to water cycle management, water efficiency for industries and households and rehabilitation of water bodies.</li> <li>• A.2.5.2 Transnational initiatives to increase awareness, capacities and encourage active participation of citizens, civil society organizations and private sector and cooperation with public authorities on activities regarding climate change impact, water consumption trends, water resources ecological and quantitative status, water cycle management, water efficiency and rehabilitation of water bodies.</li> <li>• A.2.5.3 Integration and adaptation in regulatory frameworks, policy formulation and decision-making and policy formulation of provisions and performance standards promoting water efficiency, water-related climate change adaptation water saving incentives, water cycle management and water bodies rehabilitation (including water use monitoring, smart metering and water pricing).</li> </ul>																									
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<p>SO 2.6 Promoting the transition to a circular and resource efficient economy</p>	<p>This specific objective includes various types of actions such as:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• A.2.6.1a Implementation of pilots to demonstrate technical, financial and environmental benefits of measures related to life-cycle management, product design, waste management, resource efficiency for industries and households and recycling engaging local authorities, public utility providers, professional associations, consumers, and NGOs, local companies/service providers and environmental agencies.</li> <li>• A.2.6.1b Transnational initiatives related to the technology transfer, utilisation of research outcomes and adaptation to local needs and capacities of local and regional authorities, public utility providers, professional associations practitioners, companies and supply chains related to product design, waste management, resource efficiency and recycling.</li> <li>• A.2.6.2 Transnational initiatives to increase awareness and encourage active participation of citizens, civil society organizations and private sector and cooperation with public authorities regarding resource efficiency, impacts of resource use and consumption patterns.</li> <li>• A.2.6.3 Integration and adaptation in regulatory frameworks, policy formulation and decision-making and policy formulation of regional and local authorities of provisions and performance standards promoting resource efficiency, life cycle management, recycling provisions and circular economy mainstreaming.</li> </ul>																									
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<p>SO 4.2 Improving equal access to inclusive and quality services in education, training and lifelong learning through developing accessible infrastructure, including by fostering resilience for distance and on-line education and training</p>	<p>This specific objective includes various types of actions such as:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• A.4.2.1 Transnational educational /training measures and partnerships to anticipate skills needs, including through on the job training and work experience.</li> <li>• A.4.2.2 Development of transnational platforms and digital infrastructures for e-learning and e-education.</li> <li>• A.4.2.3 Digital literacy programmes and initiatives especially among migrants, NEETs, youth, women, the under-privileged, long-term unemployed and rural populations.</li> <li>• A.4.2.4 Development of transnational/international partnerships, schemes, initiatives and innovations to improve education opportunities, quality, access and mobility for groups with specific barriers to participation (youth, women, migrants, asylum seekers, long-term unemployed and persons with special needs).</li> <li>• A.4.2.5. Transnational actions and services that promote gender equality, equal opportunities, social inclusion and socio-economic integration and empowerment.</li> </ul>																								
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POs/SOs	Assessment			
				Taxonomy Regulation (Article 9). Specifically, the proposed actions under this SO are expected to have some positive impact on the environment (e.g. Type of Action A.4.2.1 which includes training measures related to <b>recycling and circular economy</b> )
SO 4.5 Ensuring equal access to health care and fostering resilience of health systems, including primary care, and promoting the transition from institutional to family- and community-based care	<p>This specific objective includes various types of actions such as:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>A.4.5.1 Development and pilot of transnational digital tools innovations, applications and services to improve health care provision and enhance equal and timely access to quality services</li> <li>A.4.5.3. Measures to improve the resilience of the healthcare systems and capacity of civil society organisations and communities in healthcare, including transnational networking, capacity-building and training in healthcare improving preparedness and adaptation to pandemics and other health crises.</li> </ul>			
	<p><b>Please indicate which of the environmental objectives below require a substantive DNSH assessment</b></p>	YES	NO	Justification if « NO » has been selected
	Climate change mitigation		✓	<p>The Interreg NEXT MED Programme has limited financial resources and does not support large infrastructure projects. Instead, it will support ‘soft’ actions and small-scale investments which promote transnational cooperation.</p> <p>Considering the characteristics of the programme, the proposed types of actions, the transnational thematic issues to be addressed and the SEA Screening findings, it has been assessed that mainly neutral or positive effects can be expected.</p> <p>Therefore, it can be concluded that the types of actions to be supported by the programme are also compatible with the DNSH principle, because they are not expected to have significant negative impacts on any of the six environmental objectives covered by the EU Taxonomy Regulation (Article 9).</p> <p>The proposed actions under this SO are expected to be largely neutral to the environment.</p>
	Climate change adaptation		✓	
	The sustainable use and protection of water and marine resources		✓	
	The circular economy, including waste prevention and recycling		✓	
	Pollution prevention and control to air, water and land		✓	
	The protection and restoration of biodiversity and ecosystems		✓	
<b>Priority ISO: A better cooperation governance for the Mediterranean</b>				
ISO 1.6 - Other actions to support better cooperation governance	<p>This specific objective includes various types of actions such as:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>ISO.1.6.1 Promote and implement measures and joint actions to improve the institutional capacity, ownership and knowledge sharing across stakeholders, local actors and public administrations.</li> <li>ISO.1.6.2 Develop and implement common tools that can contribute to the design of socio-economic and environmental initiatives as well as to the delivery of innovative public services that fall within the scope of intervention of Interreg</li> </ul>			

POs/SOs	Assessment			
	NEXT MED Programme			
	Please indicate which of the environmental objectives below require a substantive DNSH assessment	YES	NO	Justification if « NO » has been selected
	Climate change mitigation		✓	<p>The Interreg NEXT MED Programme has limited financial resources and does not support large infrastructure projects. Instead, it will support ‘soft’ actions and small-scale investments which promote transnational cooperation.</p> <p>Considering the characteristics of the programme, the proposed types of actions, the transnational thematic issues to be addressed and the Screening findings, it has been assessed that mainly neutral or positive effects can be expected.</p> <p>Therefore, it can be concluded that the types of actions to be supported by the programme are also compatible with the DNSH principle, because they are not expected to have significant negative impacts on any of the six environmental objectives covered by the EU Taxonomy Regulation (Article 9).</p> <p>The proposed actions under this SO are expected to be largely neutral to the environment. However, they should aim to further enhance the positive environmental effects of the programme (covering all environmental objectives) through capacity building and more effective and sustainable transnational cooperation.</p>
	Climate change adaptation		✓	
	The sustainable use and protection of water and marine resources		✓	
	The circular economy, including waste prevention and recycling		✓	
	Pollution prevention and control to air, water and land		✓	
	The protection and restoration of biodiversity and ecosystems		✓	
<b>Conclusion</b>	<p><b>Compliance with the “do no significant harm” principle</b></p> <p>In line with Article 9 (4) and Recital 10 of CPR, in order to comply with the “do no significant harm” (DNSH) principle a dedicated assessment of the Interreg NEXT MED Programme has been carried out with respect to their potential to do significant harm to the environmental objectives in the meaning of Article 17 of Regulation (EU) 2020/852 (Taxonomy Regulation).</p> <p>All types of actions proposed by the programme have been assessed as compatible with the DNSH principle, since they have been assessed as compatible under the RRF DNSH technical guidance.</p> <p>Since the programme template in the CPR does not provide for the possibility to include a detailed DNSH assessment in the programme, a specific statement based on this conducted assessment should be included in the draft programme document (see the Commission explanatory note on the application of this principle under Cohesion Policy EGESIF_21-0025-00 of 27 September 2021).</p>			

**Interreg**



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## **7. MONITORING PROVISIONS**

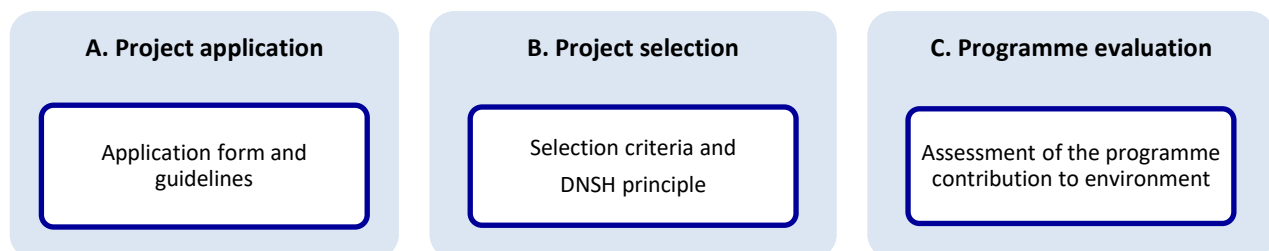
The SEA Directive (Art.10) specifies that monitoring provisions shall be prescribed in the context of a Strategic Environmental Assessment to monitor the significant environmental effects of the implementation of plans and programmes in order, inter alia, to identify at an early-stage unforeseen adverse effects and to be able to undertake appropriate remedial actions.

As regards the Interreg NEXT MED programme 2021–2027, no significant impacts can be expected that could negatively affect the environment. The programme has a limited budget and does not aim to support heavy investments. Instead, it focuses on intangible or ‘soft’ actions and small-scale investments. Any potential minor and reversible impact (e.g. related to small-scale infrastructure projects) cannot be predicted by the screening process at this stage, and will widely depend on the type of project and location. In some cases, the project may also be subject to a mandatory environmental assessment process according to EU and national legislation.

Nevertheless, some monitoring provisions and arrangements can be proposed to support the programme in preventing and minimizing any potential negative impacts on the environment and emphasizing on the positive ones.

Within the SEA context, monitoring provisions and arrangements are suggested to be considered during the following phases:

**Figure 4: Relevant phases for monitoring provisions**



Source: Sanopoulos 2022

**A. During the project application process and specifically in the course of preparing the calls for proposals and their application form and guidelines the following aspects should be taken into consideration:**

- I. Ensuring that a section is included in the application form which specifically allows the applicants to explain and self-assess the potential environmental effects (based potential on guiding questions).**

The project application form proposed by INTERACT<sup>13</sup> (September 2021) includes a specific section where project applicants should describe their contribution to the horizontal principles, including in particular to the sustainable development with a view to promoting environmental protection. This is based on a self-assessment of the project proposal (done by the project beneficiary and verified by the JS/MA and the

<sup>13</sup> <https://www.interact-eu.net/>

Monitoring Committee as the selection body) (see table below). This approach could be considered as a good practice to be followed by the Interreg NEXT MED Programme 2021-2027.

**Table 8: Horizontal principles**

<i>Please indicate which type of contribution to horizontal principles applies to the project and justify your choice.</i>		
<b>Horizontal principle</b>	<b>Type of contribution</b>	<b>Description of the contribution</b>
<i>Sustainable development</i>	<i>Neutral, positive effects, negative effects</i>	
<i>Equal opportunities and non-discrimination</i>	<i>Neutral, positive effects, negative effects</i>	
<i>Equality between men and women</i>	<i>Neutral, positive effects, negative effects</i>	

Source: INTERACT (Interreg Harmonised implementation tools" Application form", September 2021)

**II. Including the following aspects related to environmental protection in the application guidelines as recommendations for applicants:**

Project content and synergies:

- Coherence and synergies with existing/new strategies and plans should be ensured, especially those addressing environmental issues.
- Emphasis should be put on knowledge management to ensure that the knowledge and skills gained on environmental topics are used on a continuous basis (e.g. by public authorities).
- Sustainable collaboration between public institutions, research organisations and relevant stakeholders addressing environmental issues should be ensured.

Stakeholder and public involvement:

- Involvement of relevant stakeholders addressing environmental issues, especially those that are or who will likely be affected by them.
- Involvement of communities and civil society that are active in promoting sustainable development in various means in the context of environmental protection should be promoted.

Implementing provisions:

- Application of Green Public Procurement (GPP) practices should be envisaged and promoted by project applicants, when feasible.
- Minimize the project's carbon footprint, such as:
  - use and sharing of digital documents to the largest extent possible,
  - use of online events where possible and without compromising the quality and effectiveness of the planned events and actions,
  - avoiding the distribution of unnecessary and unsustainable materials during project implementation (e.g. unnecessary and unsustainable promotional materials and giveaways), and
  - implementation of activities with limited use of energy and natural resources.

Guidance documents and/or recommendation chapters specifically designed on environmental protection and sustainable development can be developed by the MA. Trainings and workshops could serve as important tools to highlight these aspects to the applicants.

**B. Monitoring provisions in the project selection process which should help to guide the application process and rank projects.**

During process selection, the Interreg NEXT MED Programme 2021-2027 could consider potential environmental effects as a horizontal issue during the assessment and selection of projects by specifically addressing environmental protection in its selection criteria.

Furthermore, in line with the “do no significant harm (DNSH)” principle, during project assessment and selection the six environmental objectives covered by the EU Taxonomy Regulation should be considered as follows:

- The project is considered to do significant harm to **climate change mitigation** if it leads to significant greenhouse gas (GHG) emissions;
- The project is considered to do significant harm to **climate change adaptation** if it leads to an increased adverse impact of the current climate and the expected future climate, on the activity itself or on people, nature or assets;
- The project is considered to do significant harm to the **sustainable use and protection of water and marine resources** if it is detrimental to the good status or the good ecological potential of bodies of water, including surface water and groundwater, or to the good environmental status of marine waters;
- The project is considered to do significant harm to the **circular economy**, including waste prevention and recycling, if it leads to significant inefficiencies in the use of materials or in the direct or indirect use of natural resources, or if it significantly increases the generation, incineration or disposal of waste, or if the long-term disposal of waste may cause significant and long-term environmental harm;
- The project is considered to do significant harm to **pollution prevention and control** if it leads to a significant increase in emissions of pollutants into air, water or land;
- The project is considered to do significant harm to the **protection and restoration of biodiversity and ecosystems** if it is significantly detrimental to the good condition and resilience of ecosystems, or detrimental to the conservation status of habitats and species, including those of Union interest

If the project application is expected to have negative environmental impacts based on the selection criteria and the six environmental objectives covered by the Taxonomy Regulation, the application should be sent to the applicants for clarification and possible revision and resubmission. This ensures that projects with potential negative environmental impacts would not be selected and funded. This aspect should be explained in the application guidelines.

The planned application of Green Public Procurement (GPP) practices by the project applicants can be one of the aspects that can be considered by the MA and the MC during the assessment of the sustainable development criterion.

In addition, the MA should mark the project proposals where the project applicants mention in the application that they are subject to a mandatory environmental assessment process according to EU and national legislation (e.g. Environmental Impact Assessment).

During project implementation, the project progress and implementation at different stages of the project life cycle should be also monitored, including on-the-spot checks (if required) to ensure that the environmental aspects are taken into consideration.

**C. Within the SEA context, the programme evaluation should answer one key evaluation question which is also linked to the selection process criteria:**

**“EQ 1. Did the programme activities make a positive contribution to the environment?”**

To answer this question, the programme evaluator could consider the contribution to the environmental issues listed in Annex I of the SEA Directive, such as:

- Biodiversity
- Soil
- Water
- Climate
- Air
- Landscape
- Human health/population
- Cultural heritage and material assets

The programme evaluation should help to assess whether the likely positive environmental impacts envisaged in the selection process have occurred or not, and that the environmental dimension has been taken into account.



**ANNEX 1 – ENVIRONMENTAL AUTHORITIES**

**Table 9: List of competent environmental authorities for the SEA**

No	Country <sup>14</sup>	Environmental authority
1	Cyprus	Department of Environment, Ministry of Agriculture, Rural Development and the Environment
2	France	Ministère de la transition écologique Conseil général de l'environnement et du développement durable (CGEDD)
3	Greece	Ministry of Environment & Energy <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ Directorate General for Environmental Policy</li> <li>▪ Environmental Licensing Directorate</li> </ul>
4	Italy	Italian Ministry of the Environment, Land and Sea (IMELS) Directorate General for Sustainable Growth and Quality of Development
5	Malta	Ministry for the Environment, Climate Change and Planning
6	Portugal	Agência Portuguesa do Ambiente
		Agência para o Desenvolvimento Regional I.P.
7	Spain	Ministerio para la Transición Ecológica y el Reto Demográfico (eng. Ministry for the Ecological Transition and the Demographic Challenge)
		Ministerio para la Transición Ecológica y el Reto Demográfico, Dirección General de Calidad y Evaluación Ambiental/Subdirección general de Evaluación Ambiental
8	Algeria	Ministry of Environment
9	Egypt	Egyptian Environmental Affairs Agency
10	Israel	Ministry of Environmental Protection International Relations Division
11	Jordan	Ministry of Environment
12	Lebanon	Ministry of Environment
13	Palestine	Environment Quality Authority (EQA)
14	Tunisia	Ministry of Local Affairs and Environment
15	Turkey	Ministry of Environment and Urbanization General Directorate of EIA Permit and Inspection/ Department of Infrastructure Investments EIA and Strategic Environmental Assessment
		Directorate for European Union Affairs, DG Financial Cooperation and Project Implementation, Unit for CBC and Union Programmes

Source: Sanopoulos supported by the MA

<sup>14</sup>Libya and Morocco are not participating in the Interreg NEXT MED programme 2021–2027. Therefore, competent environmental authorities of these countries are not included in the table.