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الاتحاد من أجل المتوسط

# ORIENTATION PAPER

# MED CLUSTER

## Nature and Biodiversity



by Community4Tourism



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## 1. Introduction and explanation of the topic covered by the MED Cluster Nature and Biodiversity

This document has been developed in the framework of the Thematic Community Project of the Sustainable Tourism Mission of the Interreg Euro-MED Programme 21-27 (Community4Tourism project) and its activity of the Mediterranean Clusters.

The Mediterranean Clusters are the main project's proposal for the support of the transferring of practices and results to other actors and territories, and their integration into local, regional, national and European policies and strategies, covering the 4 main topics that the Sustainable Tourism Mission integrates: innovation, circular economy, climate change and nature & biodiversity.

This document is the Orientation Paper for the MED Cluster Nature and Biodiversity and aims to serve as a basis to launch the discussion and set the main priorities for the activities of the cluster in the coming years. It also integrates the main discussions and key challenges identified by the members of the cluster during the 1st and 2nd Annual Meetings of the Clusters (Rome, April 2024 and Tirana, October 2025).

The cluster focuses on the Specific Objective 2.7:

S.O 2.7: "**Enhancing protection and conservation of nature, biodiversity and green infrastructure including in urban areas and reducing all forms of pollution**" addresses the following ([Interreg Euro-MED Cooperation Programme](#)):

- Consolidate the connection of natural ecosystems with high touristic assets at transnational level.
- Ensure ecological corridors to boost and preserve biodiversity.
- Reinforce sustainable, efficient management and strong protection of protected areas.
- Work beyond protected areas to address pollution, overfishing and climate change.
- Improve restoration of ecosystems at land and sea degraded by tourism activities.
- Promote adequate conservation of coastal and marine biodiversity in touristic areas.
- Support the vision of biodiversity conservation as an economic and social value.





## 2. State of the art from the International, European, and Mediterranean perspective

### 2.1 Background

Home to over half a billion people, the Mediterranean is the world's main tourist destination, with more than 400 million international arrivals in 2019. Some of Europe's key destinations are found here, with coastal and maritime tourism constituting a major source of income for many Mediterranean countries. The region is both a biodiversity and a climate change hotspot—home to one of the highest rates of species endemism in the world, yet warming 20% faster than the global average. Its unique ecosystems are under mounting pressure: long-running droughts, intensifying wildfires, rivers drying even as floods worsen and a projected sea level rise of more than one meter by 2100. These climate stressors, compounded by habitat loss, fragmentation and pollution, are driving species toward extinction and disrupting ecological processes. Without effective action, the region's biodiversity—already among the most distinctive and irreplaceable globally—remains acutely vulnerable to further decline. This includes not only wild species and natural ecosystems but also the Mediterranean's rich agricultural biodiversity—such as local crop varieties, autochthonous livestock breeds and traditional agrarian systems—which constitutes a critical component of the region's ecological and cultural heritage.

By 2050, water demand is expected to rise to two or three times current levels, placing immense stress on ecosystems already under climate pressure. Unsustainable coastal development threatens biodiversity and weakens natural resilience, while farms and vineyards struggle to irrigate, jeopardizing food security and rural livelihoods. Tourism is also at risk, particularly in coastal zones vulnerable to marine submersion and erosion. At the same time, tourism itself drives environmental impacts. It accounts for an estimated 8–11% of global emissions and places heavy burdens on coastal socio-ecosystems through urban expansion, seasonal population surges and resource consumption. Air travel, maritime traffic, road transport, accommodations and infrastructure further accelerate greenhouse gas emissions, habitat degradation and pollution, compounding threats to biodiversity in the region.

The transition to a sustainable and regenerative model is essential for the Mediterranean tourism sector, whose vitality depends directly on healthy ecosystems and resilient coastlines. Integrated Coastal Zone Management (ICZM) and Marine Spatial Planning (MSP) are key tools for achieving this balance, as they bring together environmental, social and economic considerations to guide coastal and marine development. By coordinating diverse stakeholders and reconciling competing uses of land and sea, these approaches support the mitigation of tourism's negative impacts while enhancing biodiversity, ecosystem health and climate resilience. Effective ICZM and MSP rely on strong governance, inclusive stakeholder





engagement and sufficient resources to ensure long-term success. As urbanization and development pressures intensify in the Mediterranean basin, adopting integrated approaches that place biodiversity and sustainability at the core is vital for securing the future of both tourism and local communities.

## 2.2 Status Quo: International, European and Mediterranean perspective

Biodiversity action is shaped by a wide range of interlinked frameworks and commitments, spanning from global agreements to regional, national and sector-specific strategies. These frameworks provide the vision, targets and mechanisms for conserving ecosystems, protecting species and ensuring the sustainable use of natural resources. At the global level, agreements such as the Convention on Biological Diversity (CBD) and the Kunming-Montreal Global Biodiversity Framework set overarching goals. Regional and national strategies translate these into more context-specific actions, while sectoral initiatives—such as those in tourism, agriculture or fisheries—integrate biodiversity considerations into economic and social development. In line with the global agreements, these frameworks also explicitly encompass agricultural biodiversity, including traditional varieties and breeds. Together, these interconnected layers of governance guide action on biodiversity across scales and ensure alignment between international commitments and local implementation.

### 2.2.1 International Context

#### The Sustainable Development Goals

The 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development and its 17 Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) provide a global framework for addressing interconnected social, economic and environmental challenges by 2030. Tourism is explicitly recognized within this agenda as both a driver of sustainable development and a sector requiring responsible management. Several SDGs link directly to biodiversity. SDG 14 (Life Below Water) highlights marine conservation, where tourism has significant impacts on coastal development, marine ecosystems and fisheries. SDG 15 (Life on Land) emphasizes the protection and restoration of terrestrial ecosystems, areas often affected by expanding tourism infrastructure and land-use pressures. Beyond these, other goals reinforce the need for sustainable tourism models that safeguard biodiversity. SDG 8 (Decent Work and Economic Growth) calls for tourism that supports local livelihoods and culture without degrading natural assets. SDG 12 (Responsible Consumption and Production) promotes sustainable tourism practices that reduce pressure on ecosystems. SDG 11 (Sustainable Cities and Communities) and SDG 13 (Climate Action) further connect tourism with biodiversity, as resilient urban planning and climate adaptation are essential to protecting the ecosystems on which the sector depends. Together, the SDGs position biodiversity as both a foundation for sustainable tourism and a priority for ensuring the sector's long-term viability.





## **Convention on Biological Diversity (CBD)**

The Convention on Biological Diversity is a global treaty adopted in 1992 in Rio de Janeiro. It was the first international agreement to address all aspects of biodiversity with three goals:

- Conservation of biological diversity
- Sustainable use of its components
- Fair and equitable sharing of benefits from genetic resources

The CBD emphasizes the role of traditional knowledge, gender equality and the sustainable use of biodiversity. In the area of marine and coastal biodiversity CBD's focus is to identify Ecologically or Biologically Significant Marine Areas in specific ocean locations based on scientific criteria. It provides the global framework for conserving biodiversity, ensuring its sustainable use and equitably sharing the benefits from genetic resources.

To this end, the [National Biodiversity Strategy and Action Plan \(NBSAP\)](#) is a strategic policy framework that sets out how a country will conserve and sustainably use its biodiversity. Required under the UN Convention on Biological Diversity (CBD), it is the primary instrument for implementing the Convention at the national level. NBSAPs address critical challenges such as habitat loss, ecosystem degradation and species decline, while providing a roadmap for sustainable management of natural resources. They also aim to integrate biodiversity considerations into key sectors - including agriculture, fisheries, forestry and tourism - so that economic and development activities support ecological resilience rather than undermine it. To remain effective and relevant, NBSAPs are regularly monitored, evaluated and revised in response to evolving environmental and social conditions.

These frameworks also explicitly acknowledge agricultural biodiversity, including local crop varieties, traditional breeds and agrarian systems, recognizing their role in ecological resilience, cultural heritage and sustainable food systems.

## **The Kunming-Montreal Global Biodiversity Framework**

The Kunming-Montreal Global Biodiversity Framework (GBF) is an international agreement adopted at the UN Convention on Biological Diversity's COP15 in December 2022. It succeeds the Aichi Biodiversity Targets and sets ambitious, measurable goals for biodiversity conservation through 2030. The framework addresses the root causes of biodiversity loss, promotes sustainable development and ensures the fair and equitable sharing of benefits. Serving as a roadmap for global and national action, the GBF integrates biodiversity conservation with broader sustainable development agendas, emphasizing tangible outcomes, clear targets and mechanisms for monitoring and implementation. Most recently, countries have been updating their NBSAPs to align with the Kunming-Montreal Global Biodiversity Framework (2022), which sets new global targets for halting and reversing biodiversity loss by 2030.



## 2.2.2 European Context

The European Union has established a robust legal framework to safeguard biodiversity, with several key directives forming its foundation. Central to this are the [\*\*Habitats Directive \(92/43/EEC\)\*\*](#), which underpins the Natura 2000 network of protected areas, the [\*\*Water Framework Directive \(2000/60/EC\)\*\*](#), which seeks to achieve good ecological status for Europe's waters and the [\*\*Marine Strategy Framework Directive \(2008/56/EC\)\*\*](#), aimed at securing good environmental status in marine environments. Complementing these is the [\*\*Maritime Spatial Planning Directive \(2014/89/EU\)\*\*](#), which promotes sustainable use of marine resources while balancing ecological, economic and social objectives. Together, these instruments—among others—form a comprehensive approach to conserving Europe's biodiversity and ensuring the sustainable management of its natural resources. A range of frameworks and strategies support and complement the above directives at the European level.

### **The European Green Deal**

The European Green Deal is the European Commission's flagship policy initiative to transform the EU into a climate-neutral and sustainable economy by 2050. It sets out a broad package of measures to reduce greenhouse gas emissions, increase energy efficiency, accelerate the shift to renewable energy and foster sustainable economic growth through innovation and clean technologies. Notably, the Green Deal also recognizes the interdependence between climate and nature, embedding biodiversity protection as a core element alongside sustainable agriculture, circular economy practices and pollution reduction. It explicitly acknowledges agricultural biodiversity, including local crop varieties, traditional breeds and agroecosystems, as essential for ecological resilience, food-system sustainability and the preservation of cultural heritage. By promoting ecosystem restoration, sustainable land and sea use, and nature-based solutions, the Green Deal supports biodiversity conservation as both an environmental goal and a foundation for climate resilience and long-term prosperity.

### **EU Biodiversity Strategy for 2030**

The EU Biodiversity Strategy for 2030 is a cornerstone of the European Green Deal and a comprehensive framework designed to halt and reverse biodiversity loss within the European Union. It sets ambitious targets, including increasing the coverage of protected areas, restoring degraded ecosystems and reducing the use and risk of pesticides. It emphasizes the mainstreaming of biodiversity across various sectors—such as agriculture, fisheries and urban development—ensuring that policies contributing to economic growth do not undermine ecological resilience. The strategy also highlights agricultural biodiversity, supporting the conservation of traditional crop varieties, local breeds and sustainable farming systems. For tourism, this integration is particularly relevant: sustainable land and sea use, healthy ecosystems and resilient urban and rural landscapes





are essential to maintaining the natural and cultural assets on which the sector depends. By safeguarding biodiversity, the strategy supports not only nature conservation but also the long-term sustainability and competitiveness of European tourism.

### **Territorial Agenda 2030**

The Territorial Agenda 2030 is a strategic policy framework endorsed by the European governments to support territorial cohesion and ensure a sustainable future across all regions of Europe. It is centered around two main goals – a Just Europe and a Green Europe – and defines six priority areas to steer the development of the European territory. The Agenda identifies six priorities for guiding territorial development, ranging from balanced spatial planning to climate resilience and the circular economy. While its primary focus is on cohesion and land use, it highlights opportunities to restore biodiversity and enhance green infrastructure, particularly through the sustainable management of land, the reduction of land take and the revitalization of abandoned or underused areas. In this way, it complements broader EU biodiversity and climate objectives by linking spatial development with ecosystem health.

### **European Tourism Agenda 2030 and Transition Pathway for Tourism**

The [Transition Pathway for Tourism](#), introduced by the European Commission in March 2020 as part of its new industrial strategy, outlines measures to accelerate the green and digital transitions of the tourism sector and strengthen its resilience and competitiveness. While its focus is on industrial transformation, innovation and sustainability, it can generate indirect benefits for biodiversity - for example, by encouraging more resource-efficient infrastructure, promoting circular economy practices and supporting nature-based solutions that enhance destination resilience. In addition, the [European Tourism Agenda 2030](#)—adopted by EU countries in December 2022—is based on the Transition Pathway and sets out a more structured approach with enhanced ambitions. It defines concrete actions under five priority areas - green transition, digital transition, resilience and inclusion, skills and support, and the enabling policy framework and governance. Specific actions include reducing the environmental footprint of tourism, diversifying services across seasons and locations to ease pressure on nature-sensitive areas and improving accessibility.

### **EU Strategy for the Adriatic and Ionian Region (EUSAIR)**

The European Union Strategy for the Adriatic and Ionian Region (EUSAIR) is a macro-regional initiative endorsed by the European Council in 2014. Its goal is to enhance social, economic and territorial cohesion across the Adriatic-Ionian area by encouraging collaboration among ten countries. The strategy is built around four key pillars: Blue Growth, Regional Connectivity, Environmental Quality and Sustainable Tourism. Pillar 3 of the strategy – Environmental Quality – is dedicated to safeguarding biodiversity, protecting marine and coastal ecosystems and promoting blue and green infrastructure. These priorities are central to addressing environmental degradation, improving ecosystem resilience and mitigating pollution and climate-related impacts across the region.





## 2.2.3 Mediterranean Context

### The Mediterranean Action Plan

The Mediterranean Action Plan (MAP) - the regional framework of the Barcelona Convention System under the United Nations Environment Programme (UNEP) - works with national Contracting Parties and seven Regional Activity Centres (RACs) to achieve a shared vision of a healthy Mediterranean Sea and coast that supports sustainable development. It promotes the conservation of species and habitats, the creation and management of marine protected areas and the restoration of degraded ecosystems, while also addressing land and sea-based pollution, coastal development pressures and the impacts of climate change. MAP also recognizes the importance of agricultural biodiversity, including traditional crop varieties, local breeds and sustainable farming practices, as an integral component of Mediterranean ecosystems and cultural heritage. By linking biodiversity protection with sustainable resource use and regional cooperation, MAP serves as a key driver of resilience and ecological health in the Mediterranean.

### Mediterranean Strategy for Sustainable Development

The Mediterranean Strategy for Sustainable Development (MSSD), adopted in 2016 during the 19th Ordinary Meeting of the Contracting Parties to the Barcelona Convention, provides a regional framework for advancing sustainability in the Mediterranean. It sets out a common vision, objectives and 28 specific indicators with related flagship initiatives to guide governments, stakeholders and international organizations in addressing environmental, social and economic challenges. Biodiversity protection is a central pillar of the strategy. The MSSD promotes the conservation of marine and coastal ecosystems, the sustainable use of natural resources and the integration of ecosystem-based approaches into development planning. The MSSD also acknowledges agricultural biodiversity, emphasizing the conservation of local varieties, traditional breeds and sustainable farming systems as part of resilient socio-ecological landscapes. By linking biodiversity conservation with climate action, pollution reduction and socio-economic development, the MSSD helps strengthen the resilience of Mediterranean ecosystems and the communities that depend on them.





### 3. The projects' approach

The following projects were approved under the 2<sup>nd</sup> and 4<sup>th</sup> calls of the Interreg Euro-MED 21-27 programme in the framework of the Sustainable Tourism Mission and more specifically, tackling the Specific Objective 2.7 *Enhancing protection and conservation of nature, biodiversity and green infrastructure including in urban areas and reducing all forms of pollution*. For this reason, they have been allocated in the Nature and Biodiversity Cluster.

#### 3.1 MED-GIAHS

MED-GIAHS seeks to establish an innovative tourism-based network that strengthens the sustainability of existing, candidate and future Globally Important Agricultural Heritage Systems (GIAHS) in the Mediterranean. Tourism in these sites demands particularly careful management: while local communities may depend on foreign visitors to diversify their economic activities, it can also place significant pressure on these fragile systems. The project's main challenge is to enhance the role of sustainable tourism in protecting these unique agricultural landscapes, which face multiple threats. MED-GIAHS emphasizes the value of biocultural heritage, recognizing traditional agricultural landscapes, productive systems and their associated local knowledge as essential for both destination differentiation and biodiversity conservation. At the same time, the project addresses a set of common territorial challenges, including biodiversity loss, declining profitability for small farmers, abandonment of agriculture and rural depopulation, loss of ancestral knowledge about traditional practices and the underappreciation of ecosystem services. Additional pressures emanate from climate change, competition over natural resources with nearby tourism destinations, and loss of cultural identity, which is essential for sustainable tourism and rural resilience.

#### 3.2 INSPIRE

INSPIRE seeks to integrate biodiversity preservation and valorisation into the management of tourism destinations across the Euro-MED region. Its overarching aim is to develop practical solutions that balance the interdependence between destination management and ecosystem conservation, while at the same time improving the socio-economic conditions of rural communities affected by biodiversity loss. The project's innovative character lies in its application of a permaculture approach to agrobiodiversity, demonstrating how the value of agrobiodiversity can be integrated into tourism development policies both as a tool for environmental protection and as a driver of socio-economic growth. The project aims to design and test new tourism products and services but





also to initiate a process of social innovation, paving the way for a model of synergistic and sustainable management of tourism and biodiversity heritage in the territory. In doing so, INSPIRE also tackles shared territorial challenges such as the limited awareness of local agrobiodiversity as a tourism asset, the weak connection between tourism experiences and traditional agricultural and food heritage and the low community involvement in tourism planning, management and thus benefits sharing. It further addresses the lack of cooperation between formal and informal tourism sectors and the broader issues of depopulation and economic stagnation in rural areas.

### 3.3 ECO-SEAROUTES

ECO-SEAROUTES focuses on the Mediterranean as the largest global tourism destination and the main challenges arising from its intense maritime tourism industry. The main issues addressed are the high touristic pressure in MED ports and environmental damage in relation to seasonal trends of tourism flows, the vulnerability of natural protected sites located near touristic ports, and the poor touristic appeal of hinterland regions compared to overcrowded seashores. The project's core objective is to decrease environmental pollution and environmental pressure on natural coastal areas by advancing a new tourism model. This model aims to improve the management and interconnections of MED touristic ports and their neighbouring coastal destinations to counteract the impacts of mass tourism, while also connecting over-exploited nautical and seaside destinations with inland territories to redistribute flows and reduce human pressure. In doing so, the project responds to further common territorial challenges such as the strong seasonality of tourism, the inefficient use of local resources in overcrowded destinations and the limited involvement of local communities in tourism planning and management.

### 3.4 TO CARE MED

TO CARE MED project focuses on advancing sustainable ecotourism in Mediterranean destinations through the transfer and optimization of the Tourism Carrying Capacity Limit (TCCL) tool, originally developed under the ALTERECO project and integrated into the Euro-MED Toolkit for sustainable tourism. By addressing the risks of over-tourism, the project promotes environmentally healthier and economically viable tourism models. Its overall objective is the transfer and uptake of the tool in partner destinations, leading to improved tourism management, enhanced policy making and sustainable ecotourism development. The innovation of the project lies in its transferring process, which relies on both the optimization of the tool and cascade learning. Through this approach, TO CARE MED strengthens collaboration among stakeholders and reinforces their commitment to caring for MED resources, while fostering a balanced and sustainable tourism model that safeguards both natural and cultural heritage. At the same time, the project addresses common territorial challenges such as over-tourism and environmental degradation,





the loss of biodiversity in coastal areas and the unequal distribution of socio-economic benefits for local communities. It also responds to the effects of seasonality, the fragmented management of tourism and conservation efforts, and the lack of awareness and capacity to develop genuinely sustainable tourism models. By tackling these issues, TO CARE MED contributes to more resilient destinations that combine nature conservation with inclusive community well-being.

### 3.5 MedSkyTour

MedSkyTour project aims to develop and mainstream Dark Sky tourism in eight Euro-MED regions while reducing light pollution and safeguarding nocturnal biodiversity. As the first initiative in the Euro-MED area dedicated to this theme, it introduces a new sustainable tourism model that strengthens rural economies and promotes biodiversity conservation. Its overall objective is to enhance ecotourism opportunities, diversify the tourism offer and motivate regional authorities to adopt measures that limit light pollution and protect vulnerable nocturnal species. The project also seeks to offset the negative effects of coastal mass tourism by creating alternative experiences that increase employment and stimulate rural development. Dark Sky tourism has strong potential to attract eco-tourists year-round to sparsely populated areas and can be combined with hiking, culinary or romantic experiences, further enriching the tourism offer. At the same time, the project addresses common territorial challenges such as loss of biodiversity and environmental degradation, the seasonality of tourism flows and the economic vulnerability of rural and sparsely populated areas.

### 3.6 PortCrew

PortCrew focuses on improving the sustainability of cruise tourism in small and medium-sized Mediterranean cities. Its strategic objectives are to tackle overtourism and seasonal peaks, valorise inland natural and cultural assets as a strategy to decongest cruise ports and increase the social acceptability of the cruise sector through more balanced management of tourist flows at the territorial level. The project also aims to strengthen the integration of sustainable cruise tourism measures into local and regional urban, tourism and transport planning, while creating a new transnational tool for dynamic and interoperable touristic information in MED cruise terminals to support the design of new sustainable ecotourism packages to be offered to cruise passengers. At the same time, the project addresses common territorial challenges such as overtourism and environmental impacts linked to mass cruise tourism and the under-valorisation of inland natural and cultural assets. It also responds to the need to attract younger and more sustainability-oriented travellers and the lack of coordinated tools and strategies to manage cruise tourism in a smart and collaborative way.





## 4. Main challenges

All projects identify a range of challenges linked to the relationship between tourism and biodiversity. These are organised into four thematic topics. For each topic, the analysis presents: (a) the challenges identified by the projects, (b) the most relevant aspects of SO 2.7 in terms of the needs they seek to address, and (c) solutions and ideas emerging from both the projects' representatives and wider expert contributions. This structure is intended to foster constructive dialogue, while acknowledging that tourism and biodiversity are deeply interconnected. Many of the issues identified cut across themes and could have been grouped differently. The framework should therefore be viewed as a guide for collective exploration.

### 4.1 External challenges that influence and define the work on tourism and biodiversity action

#### Challenges from the projects

- Over-tourism and seasonal peaks place unsustainable pressure on port cities, coastal ecosystems and nearby protected areas (PortCREW, ECO-SEAROUTES)
- Agricultural biodiversity and heritage systems face growing pressures from urban development and industrial food production (food value chain), putting ecosystem services and rural livelihoods at risk (INSPIRE, MED-GIAHS)
- Light pollution disrupts nocturnal fauna and human health, requiring coordinated regulation beyond tourism (MedSkyTour)
- Climate change, water scarcity and waste generation amplify risks of exceeding destinations' carrying capacities (TO CARE MED)
- Depopulation and abandonment of rural areas (INSPIRE, MED-GIAHS)

#### Addressing Specific Objective 2.7 in the framework of:

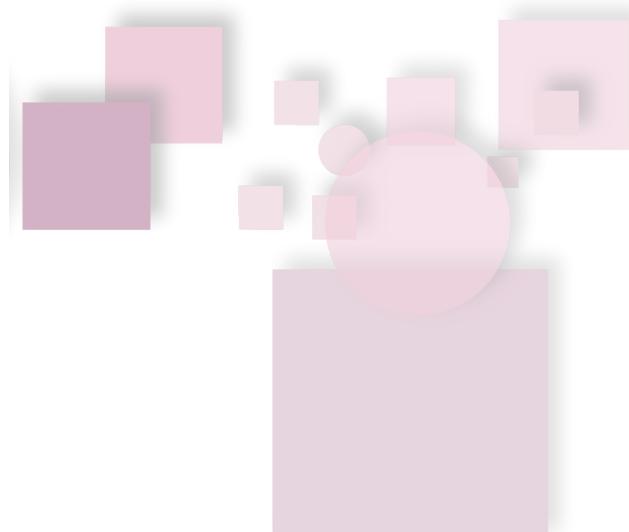
- working beyond protected areas to address pollution, overfishing and climate change





## Solutions from the projects and ideas for further exploration

- Use adaptive management systems to respond to seasonal peaks, visitor flows and environmental conditions (PortCREW)
- Establish regulatory and planning frameworks to address pollution that crosses borders, such as light pollution (MedSkyTour)
- Apply carrying capacity assessments to anticipate impacts of climate change, water scarcity and waste generation (TO CARE MED)
- Promote alternative tourism models that spread demand away from over-visited coasts to reduce environmental vulnerability (ECO-SEAROUTES)
- Integrate biodiversity and ecosystem services into tourism strategies to counter agricultural and genetic erosion (INSPIRE)
- Create networks and collective responses for fragile heritage systems facing global pressures that link resilient agriculture with regenerative tourism and can serve as replicable models (MED-GIAHS)
- Engage tourism actors in designing sustainable offers to promote tourism as a solution to climate change; foster collaboration among producers, farmers and SMEs to leverage traditional agricultural landscapes in supporting biodiversity-friendly tourism (MED-GIAHS)
- Protect and support local farmers and raise awareness of agricultural products
- Involve the private sector in addressing challenges; ensure companies feel engaged in the process (ETOA)
- Address gaps in awareness, particularly regarding Integrated Coastal Zone Management (DIBA)
- Facilitate knowledge exchange among departments and stakeholders to effectively target issues related to nature conservation (IUCN)
- Recognize the importance of balancing mitigation and adaptation efforts in tourism; consider the scale of impact on biodiversity and climate change at destination level (Global Footprint Network)
- Highlight the significance of biodiversity for tourism destinations (IUCN)





## 4.2 Challenges in rethinking and redesigning tourism in light of biodiversity emergencies

### Challenges from the Projects

- Mass tourism and “sea and sun” models continue to concentrate visitors in fragile hotspots, while hinterlands remain underutilized and undervalued (PortCREW, ECO-SEAROUTES)
- Lack of awareness, infrastructure, and policy integration limits the uptake of sustainable alternatives such as astrotourism and agrobiodiversity-based tourism (MedSkyTour, INSPIRE)
- Tourism planning often ignores ecological thresholds, risking long-term biodiversity damage (TO CARE MED)
- Engage tourists with land and increase flows to rural areas, highlighting traditional agricultural landscapes, productive systems, and associated local knowledge as key assets for destination differentiation and biodiversity conservation (MED-GIAHS)

### Addressing Specific Objective 2.7 in the framework of:

- ensuring ecological corridors to boost and preserve biodiversity
- reinforcing sustainable, efficient management and strong protection of protected areas
- improving restoration of ecosystems at land and sea degraded by tourism activities
- promoting adequate conservation of coastal and marine biodiversity
- encouraging sustainable tourism

### Solutions from the projects and ideas for further exploration

- Diversify tourism by redirecting flows to underutilized areas and reducing pressure on hotspots (PortCREW)
- Link tourism innovation with conservation, e.g. tourism based on natural assets such as dark skies (MedSkyTour)
- Ground tourism development in environmental and social thresholds rather than growth targets (TO CARE MED)
- Reconnect coasts with hinterlands through integrated tourism routes and shared cultural assets (ECO-SEAROUTES)
- Position agrobiodiversity as a resource for creating resilient, biodiversity-friendly tourism (INSPIRE)
- Develop sustainable tourism networks that preserve landscapes while sustaining rural livelihoods showing how resilient agriculture can support both biodiversity and regenerative tourism (MED-GIAHS)





- Advocate for integration and cross-cutting approaches in tourism planning (IUCN)
- Strengthen relationships with various departments beyond natural parks and mobility to build livable destinations (DIBA)
- Involve decision-makers from cities and DMOs in project dialogue to adapt to changing market dynamics (IUCN)
- Address the challenge of international mobility in tourism redesign efforts; promote dialogue between Destination Management Organizations (DMOs) and other departments (Global Footprint Network)
- De-politicizing tourism strategies to improve relations between DMOs and governments; advocate for long-term planning based on market realities and honest acknowledgment of obstacles (ETOA)
- Redesign tourism governance by involving all relevant departments; prioritize strategies to convince people and measure tourism flows; initiate projects integrating conservation and sustainability (Andalusia)
- Utilize tourism as a tool to raise awareness on biodiversity in less-known destinations; engage local communities in biodiversity preservation efforts through tourism development (CISP)
- Emphasize integration across spatial, temporal and sectoral dimensions in tourism planning; foster cooperation from local to national levels (UTH)

#### 4.3 Challenges in engaging with key stakeholders to support action on tourism and biodiversity

##### Challenges from the Projects

- Diverging interests among port operators, municipalities and communities hinder collective solutions (PortCREW)
- Local communities (including farmers and rural actors) often lack a voice in designing tourism products, managing impacts and tourism governance (MedSkyTour)
- Policymakers, businesses and residents often face capacity gaps that limit their ability to apply sustainability measures effectively (TO CARE MED)
- Stakeholders in coastal and inland areas, as well as across heritage sites, remain fragmented and disconnected, making integrated planning and coordinated approaches difficult, underscoring the importance of multi-actor governance frameworks that foster collaboration and shared responsibility (ECO-SEAROUTES, MED-GIAHS)



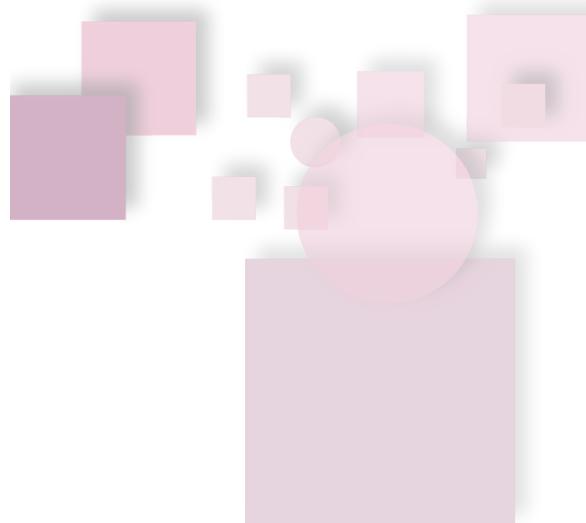


## Addressing Specific Objective 2.7 in the framework of:

- consolidating the connection of natural ecosystems with high touristic assets at transnational level
- supporting the vision of biodiversity conservation as an economic and social value
- encouraging sustainable tourism

## Solutions from the projects and ideas for further exploration

- Build cross-sectoral collaborations (public authorities, operators, communities) to manage tourism flows (PortCREW)
- Use participatory labs and co-creation spaces to empower communities and providers (MedSkyTour)
- Provide capacity building and training to embed sustainability in tourism governance (TO CARE MED)
- Apply bottom-up co-design approaches to connect diverse actors across territories (ECO-SEAROUTES)
- Foster collaborative innovation where farmers, residents and businesses shape tourism offers (INSPIRE)
- Strengthen knowledge-sharing networks linking heritage managers, researchers and tourism operators drawing on GIAHS systems as mature examples of multi-actor governance and community participation (MED-GIAHS)
- Replicate co-design approach from previous projects to develop tourism strategies related to agricultural systems and experiences leveraging the experience of GIAHS sites in community-based governance to inform participatory tourism planning (MED-GIAHS)
- Create forums for tourism sustainability professionals to foster open dialogue and collaboration across departments (Andalusia)
- Engage stakeholders through experiential learning; organize design-thinking workshops to raise awareness and generate feasible ideas; prioritize initiatives based on available budget (IUCN)
- Encourage DMOs to prioritize solutions over new additions; evaluate the added value of new initiatives compared to existing successful strategies (University of Toulon).





## 4.4 Challenges in delivering meaningful impact

### Challenges from the Projects

- Project results often remain at pilot stage and risk not being scaled up or institutionalized without strong adoption and policy support (PortCREW, TO CARE MED)
- Innovative approaches may see limited uptake unless supported by shared standards, clear frameworks and effective transfer mechanisms (MedSkyTour, ECO-SEAROUTES)
- Efforts to connect biodiversity preservation with socio-economic development can be hindered if they are not aligned with policies and governance structures (INSPIRE)
- Project impacts may be short-lived if they are not embedded in sustainable networks and long-term partnerships (MED-GIAHS)

### Addressing Specific Objective 2.7 in the framework of:

- reinforcing sustainable, efficient management and strong protection of protected areas
- supporting the vision of biodiversity conservation as an economic and social value

### Solutions from the projects and ideas for further exploration

- Develop scalable digital and management solutions that can be adapted across destinations (PortCREW)
- Create shared standards and transferable methodologies to mainstream sustainable practices (MedSkyTour)
- Embed tools and evidence into policies and long-term strategies for tourism planning (TO CARE MED)
- Design replicable models (routes, hubs, frameworks) that others can adopt and adapt (ECO-SEAROUTES)
- Produce policy frameworks that connect biodiversity preservation with socio-economic resilience (INSPIRE)
- Anchor impact in transnational networks that ensure continuity, exchange and scaling leveraging the MED GIAHS network to transfer and upscale solutions across Mediterranean territories and reinforce long-term cluster impact (MED-GIAHS)
- Identify methodologies based on best practices for adaptation at various destinations; provide training targeting informed policy-makers (Andalusia)
- Establish support desk to assist with training and capacity-building efforts; involve stakeholders in the process to ensure implementation (CISP)
- Integrate transversal topics into discussions and initiatives to ensure comprehensive planning and action (IUCN)





- Facilitate sustainable tourism panel discussions and knowledge transfer on governance and project implementation; leverage previous project experiences and develop sustainable tourism leadership summits (Lazio Region - D4T)
- Utilize the Mediterranean platform to access tools and connect with other implementers; integrate relevant tools into the platform for broader accessibility (UTH)

## 5. The Cluster's Priorities

During the 2nd Annual Cluster Meeting held in Tirana, the projects had the opportunity to identify the most pressing challenges concerning the relationship between tourism, nature and biodiversity. In collaboration with the MED Cluster coordinators, project representatives engaged in in-depth discussions and jointly identified the key issues. These discussions led to the definition of the following priority challenges to be addressed through the cluster's activities in the upcoming period:

- Over-tourism and seasonal peaks place unsustainable pressure on port cities, coastal ecosystems and nearby protected areas
- Agricultural biodiversity and heritage systems face growing pressures from urban development and industrial food production (food value chain), putting ecosystem services and rural livelihoods at risk and highlighting the need to conserve agroecological systems that can support regenerative tourism
- Depopulation and abandonment of rural areas
- Engage tourists with land and increase flows to the rural areas by leveraging traditional agricultural landscapes and productive systems as assets for biodiversity-friendly and regenerative tourism
- Diverging interests among port operators, municipalities and communities hinder collective solutions
- Local communities (including farmers and rural actors) often lack a voice in designing tourism products, managing impacts and tourism governance
- Project results often remain at pilot stage and risk not being scaled up or institutionalized without strong adoption and policy support

These challenges are systematically addressed by the projects through the development of tools and strategies such as action plans for sustainable agricultural tourism, the consolidation of supporting networks, community-based models for sustainable tourist destinations grounded in local agrobiodiversity, local itineraries connecting coastal destinations with their hinterlands, an online platform to help diffuse tourist flows from cruise ports, an optimized tool for assessing tourism carrying capacity and dedicated itineraries and action plans for astrotourism.





## 6. Key documents

### [Unpacking the Potential of ICZM & MSP processes for Sustainable Tourism in the Mediterranean](#) (2024)

Handbook compiling practices from a range of destinations across both shores of the Mediterranean to support destinations in defining integrated action plans, strategies and regulations for sustainable tourism.

### [Climate And Environmental Change In The Mediterranean Basin – Current Situation And Risks For The Future](#) (2020)

The report assesses the best available scientific knowledge on climate and environmental change and associated risks in the Mediterranean Basin in order to render it accessible to policymakers, stakeholders and citizens.

### [Risks associated to climate and environmental changes in the Mediterranean region](#) (2019)

A preliminary assessment of risk associated to climate and environmental changes in the Mediterranean region by the network of Mediterranean Experts on Climate and Environmental Change (MedECC)

### [Sustainable Tourism In The Mediterranean: State Of Play And Strategic Directions](#) (2020)

Strategic Directions for Sustainable Tourism in the Mediterranean to be implemented by regional, national and local policymakers and stakeholders under the following shared vision.

### [Tourism As A Strategic Driver For Inclusive, Responsible And Sustainable Growth In The Mediterranean Region](#) (2019)

Report for policymakers and decision-makers to understand not only the benefits brought by tourism but also the threats and risks that come with it if it is not environmentally and socially sustainable over the long term.

### [Global Biodiversity Outlook 5](#) (2020)

Report assessing global progress on the Aichi Biodiversity Targets and highlighting urgent actions needed to halt biodiversity loss and achieve sustainability by 2030.

### [Global assessment report on biodiversity and ecosystem services](#) (IPBES, 2019)

A scientific review showing that nature is declining at unprecedented rates, identifying key drivers of biodiversity loss, and outlining pathways for transformative change.





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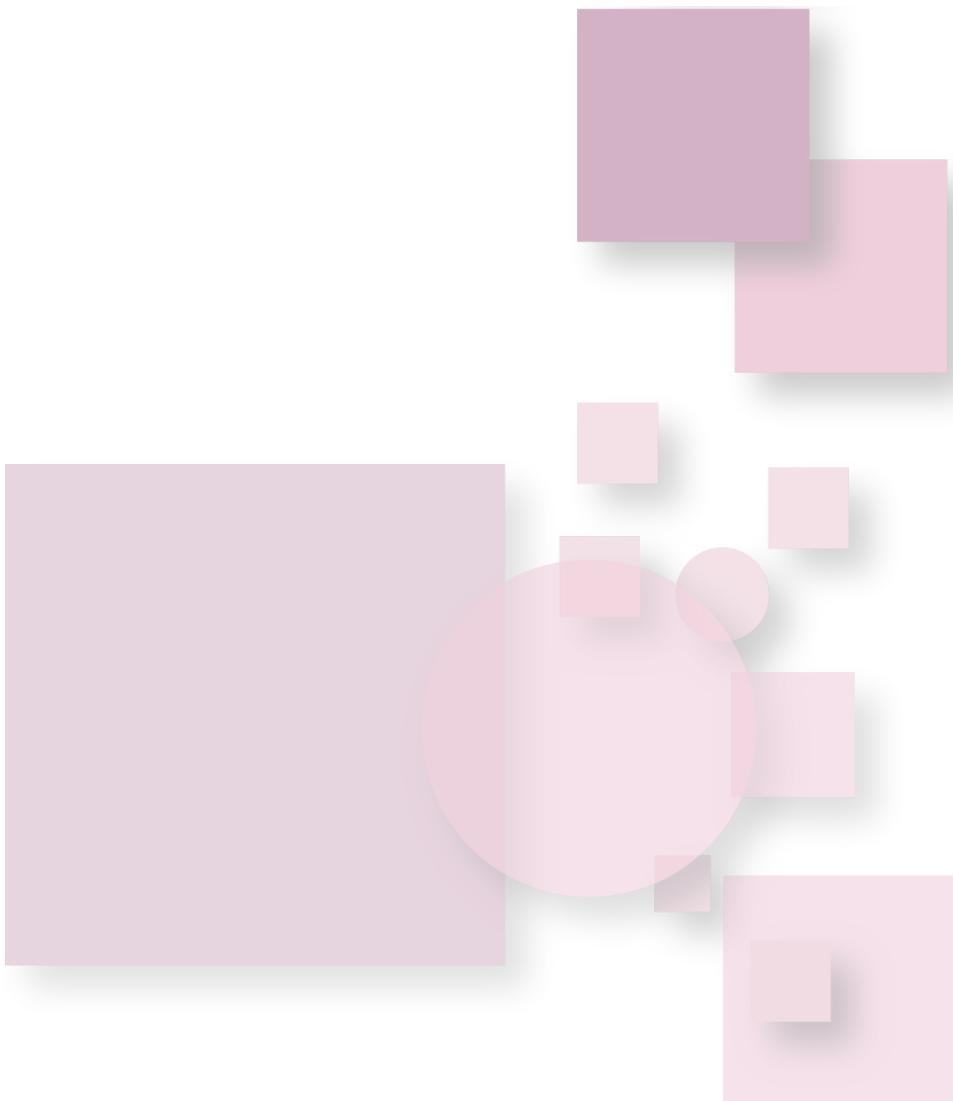
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## [MSPglobal: international guide on marine/maritime spatial planning, volume 2: Biodiversity Inclusive Principle](#)

The report expands the 2021 MSP Global International Guide on Marine/Maritime Spatial Planning by focusing on biodiversity-inclusive planning, highlighting the essential role of biodiversity in ocean health, ecosystem services and sustainable livelihoods and providing guidance on integrating biodiversity conservation and resilience across all maritime activities.

## [Globally Important Agricultural Heritage Systems \(GIAHS\)](#)

Framework to assist policymakers and communities recognize traditional agricultural systems that sustain biodiversity, culture and local livelihoods, while highlighting the risks they face without long-term, sustainable management.





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This document has been developed in the framework of the Thematic Community Project of the Sustainable Tourism Mission of the Interreg Euro-MED Programme 21-27 (Community4Tourism project) and its activity of the Mediterranean Clusters.

The Mediterranean Clusters are the main project's proposal for the support of the transferring of practices and results to other actors and territories, and their integration into local, regional, national and European policies and strategies, covering the 4 main topics that the Sustainable Tourism Mission integrates: innovation, circular economy, climate change and nature & biodiversity.

This document is the Orientation Paper for the MED Cluster Climate Change Adaptation and aims to serve as a basis to launch the discussion and set the main priorities for the activities of each cluster in the coming years. It also integrates the main discussions and key challenges identified by the members of the cluster during the 1st and 2nd Annual Meetings of the Clusters (Rome, April 2024 and Tirana, October 2025).

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