



Union for the Mediterranean  
Union pour la Méditerranée  
الاتحاد من أجل المتوسط

**External Mid-term Evaluation of the 2021 UfM  
Ministerial SB - 35 - PRO547WEB-2024**

# FINAL REPORT

30 June 2025



**SED Consultants PC**

***Disclaimer***

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## List of acronyms

Acronym	Explanation
BMP	Blue Mediterranean Partnership
COP	Community of Practice
CINEA	European Climate, Infrastructure and Environment Executive Agency
CPRM	Conference of Peripheral Maritime Regions
EFCA	European Fisheries Control Agency
EIB	European Investment Bank
EMFAF	European Maritime Fisheries and Aquaculture Fund - EMFAF funding is managed by DG MARE
EPR	Extended Producer Responsibility
ESIF	European Structural and Investment Funds
EU	European Union
EUSAIR	European Union Strategy for the Adriatic and Ionian Region
FAO	Food and Agriculture Organisation
FG	Focus Group
GES	Good Environmental Status
GFCM	General Fisheries Commission for the Mediterranean
GIZ	German International Cooperation Society Deutsche Gesellschaft für Internationale Zusammenarbeit (GIZ) GmbH
ICZM	Integrated Coastal Zone Management
IMO	International Maritime Organisation
IPA	Instrument for Pre-Accession
IUU	Illegal, Unreported, and Unregulated (in the context of fishing)
KII	Key Informant interviews
MA	Managing Authority
MDBs	Multilateral Development Banks
MED OCEaN	Offshore Coalition for Energy and Nature in the Mediterranean
MedBESP	Mediterranean Blue Economy Stakeholder Platform
MedCGFF	Mediterranean Coast Guard Functions Forum
MedPan	Mediterranean Protected Areas Network
MRE	Marine Renewable Energy
MSFD	Marine Strategy Framework Directive
MSP	Maritime Spatial Planning

Acronym	Explanation
MSPD	Maritime Spatial Planning Directive
MSSD	Mediterranean Strategy for Sustainable Development
MTE	Mid-Term Evaluation
QSR	Quality Status Report
R&I	Research and Innovation
SBE	Sustainable Blue Economy
SBEP	Sustainable Blue Economy Partnership
SDGs	Sustainable Development Goals
SEMED	Startup Europe Mediterranean
SIDA	Swedish International Development Cooperation Agency
SME	Small and Medium Sized Enterprise
SSF	Small-Scale Fisheries
SVC4MED	Sustainable Fisheries and Aquaculture Value Chains for the Mediterranean
TSBEM	<i>Towards a Sustainable Blue Economy in the Mediterranean</i>
ToR	Terms of Reference
UfM	Union for the Mediterranean
UfMS	Secretariat for the Union for the Mediterranean
UnepMap	United Nations Environment Programme – Mediterranean Action Plan
UNCLOS	United Nations Convention on the Law of the Sea
UNESCO	United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organisation
UNOC 3	The 3rd United Nations Ocean Conference which was held in Nice, from June 9 to 13, 2025 with many pre- and post-conference fora and events.
WOC	World Ocean Council
WRI	World Resources Institute
WWF	World Wildlife Fund

# 1. Introduction

## 1.1. Short overview of the UfM Ministerial Declaration on SBE

### Background to the 2021 UfM Ministerial Declaration on SBE

The Union for the Mediterranean (UfM) has been at the forefront of promoting a Sustainable Blue Economy (SBE) in the Mediterranean region. The first Ministerial Declaration on the Blue Economy was adopted by the UfM in 2015, setting the initial political mandate and framework for cooperation among its member countries. Six years later, in 2021, this was followed up by an ambitious new Declaration, reflecting the growing understanding of the SBE as a driving force for the region. The 2021 Ministerial Declaration, which aligns with the Renewed partnership with the Southern neighborhood, the Green Deal, the EC Communication on a new approach for a sustainable blue economy in the EU and the WestMED priorities of 2018<sup>1</sup>, aims to reinforce the existing Euro- Mediterranean process on SBE, expand shared areas of cooperation, and call for new joint actions to accelerate post-Covid recovery while ensuring the long-term sustainability of the Mediterranean SBE. The 2015 UfM MD on the sustainable blue economy was itself a spin-off from the 1<sup>st</sup> UfM Ministerial on the Environment and Climate Change of 2014.

### Rationale

The signatories of the 2021 Ministerial Declaration on Sustainable Blue Economy undertook to continue the political mandate and recommendations of the 2015 UfM Ministerial Declaration on Blue Economy, taking into account the successful completion of a series of deliverables, as well as the ongoing environmental- and climate-related, social and economic challenges facing the region, exacerbated by increasing human pressures on ecosystem. The 2021 MD cites the need to address these challenges, as well as their cumulative impacts, to ensure the well-being of current and future generations in the region.

The potential of the sustainable blue economy, encompassing all maritime and coastal activities, to promote the sustainable blue economy, increase employment, and to reduce poverty, is confirmed as is the need for all Mediterranean countries to benefit from a sustainable blue economy, and the need for all citizens and stakeholders to engage in supporting the development of a sustainable blue economy.

The 2021 MD reaffirmed the importance of regional and sub-regional cooperation and coordinated policy responses in the promotion of sustainable blue economy in the region – emphasizing the pivotal role of the UfMS in supporting such inter- and trans-national collaboration for a common purpose, such as WestMED and EUSAIR.

Framed by the urgent need to align environmental integrity with socioeconomic development, the UfM Ministerial Declaration offers a critical entry point for embedding sustainability into the core of regional marine and coastal governance.

## 1.2. The main theme and actions of the UfM 2021 MD on Sustainable Blue Economy

The UfM 2021 MD takes into account the integrated nature of the sustainable blue economy, and the need for comprehensive and coordinated actions across the Mediterranean basin in this sector. Thus, the 2021 Ministerial Declaration on SBE sets out a range of **ten priority areas for cooperation**:

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<sup>1</sup> These in turn were influenced by the 2015 SBE MD.

- Governance and sea basin strategies (Cross-Cutting Priority, Enabler)
- Marine research and innovation, skills, and employment (Cross-Cutting Priority, Tool)
- Sustainable food from the sea: fisheries and aquaculture (Sectoral Priority)
- Sustainable, climate-neutral, and zero-polluting maritime transport and ports (Sectoral Priority)
- Interactions between marine litter and the blue economy (Sectoral Priority)
- Coastal and maritime tourism (Sectoral Priority)
- Maritime Spatial Planning & Integrated Coastal Zone Management (Cross-Cutting Priority, Tool)
- Marine renewable energies (Sectoral Priority)
- Maritime safety and security (Sectoral Priority)
- Sustainable investment in the blue economy (Cross-Cutting Priority, Enabler)

The cross-cutting priorities are defined as “*transversal, horizontal (sets of) methodologies and actions which are considered instrumental for the development of the sustainable blue economy sectors*”<sup>2</sup>. The cross-cutting enablers are instruments which constitute a pre-requisite for the development of sectoral priorities providing resources and organisational structures essential for their operation.

There are a plethora of regional frameworks, subregional processes, and transnational projects per Sectoral Priority and per Cross-Cutting Tool, each at various stages of development.

To facilitate the effective implementation of this ambitious declaration, in 2022 a **Roadmap was developed, outlining concrete actions and timelines for achieving the stated goals**<sup>3</sup>. Recognizing the importance of a multi-stakeholder approach, the Roadmap emphasises stakeholder engagement and collaboration. It prioritizes the optimisation of existing resources and collaboration in order to achieve effective action. It identifies specific actions to be undertaken within regional projects and recognizes key elements of good practice that can be replicated at regional level. The Roadmap provides an overview of current initiatives, common needs, opportunities for future funding, and avenues for short-, medium- and long-term cooperation. It also puts in place a simple results-based monitoring, reporting and evaluation system, agreed by the 43 member countries of the UfM

The latest edition of the Roadmap (2024) was formulated through the examination of a large database of regional, subregional and international/transnational initiatives related to each of the MD priority areas, and a qualitative review of each initiative in relation to the relevant calls for action included in the MD. An assessment was carried out of the implementation status of each of the ten MD priority areas, identifying those where additional efforts were needed, and those where good progress was being made. In this way, the main areas for successful continued cooperation in the implementation of the MD were identified, providing a basis for future discussion and eventual endorsement by the UfMS, leading to specific actionable initiatives.

The Roadmap also generated a reporting system with which to monitor its implementation and the progress of the UfM Ministerial Declaration. Briefly, the results-based monitoring system includes:

- monitoring the process of implementation of the activities outlined in the Roadmap;
- monitoring the tangible outputs directly resulting from the implementation of the activities outlined in the Roadmap;

<sup>2</sup> Roadmap, (Version 3 June 2024), p. 106

<sup>3</sup> Roadmap to set the path towards the implementation of the 2021 UfM Ministerial Declaration on Sustainable Blue Economy, June 2024 (Version 3)

- assessing the progress of achievement of its objectives, and whether the result indicators evolve in the expected/desired direction;
- using the resulting information to review the overall strategy and to keep decision makers, donors, and stakeholders informed of developments.

The **UfM Regional Platform on Sustainable Blue Economy** (former UfM Working Group on Blue Economy, established following the 2015 UfM Ministerial Declaration on Blue Economy) meets on a regular basis, to steer and support the implementation of the relevant UfM Ministerial Declarations on the Sustainable Blue Economy of 2015 and 2021.

The Regional Platform is Co-Chaired by the Jordan and EU UfM Co-Presidencies, with the support of the UfM Secretariat, and it brings together national representatives designated by the 43 UfM member countries (**UfM Focal Points on Sustainable Blue Economy**) and Permanent Observers namely to:

- Steer and implement the regional SBE agenda and portfolio in line with the relevant Ministerial recommendations/priorities;
- Create synergies among existing and emerging joint initiatives/projects/programmes and promote the convergence and coordination of efforts (technical and financial) at regional level;
- Exchange information, views, best practices, and know-how among countries, experts, and stakeholders.<sup>4</sup>

The scope of the UFM action is regional, across the Mediterranean Sea basin and serves as a “glue”, encompassing the upscaling of best practices, networking and partnership opportunities. However, countries are also reporting, on a voluntary basis, about their national developments.

### 1.3. Outline of the operating environment of the UfM 2021 MD on Sustainable Blue Economy

There is a complex framework of policies and strategies impacting the blue economy in the Mediterranean, within which the Ministerial Declaration on SBE is called upon to operate. The most important of these are:

Policies and Strategies	Description
European Green Deal	The European Green Deal, approved in 2020, is a set of policy initiatives by the EC with the overarching aim of making the European Union climate neutral by 2050.
EU Integrated Maritime Policy	The IMP provides a more coherent approach to maritime issues, with increased coordination between different policy areas. It has 5 cross-cutting policies where R&I play a large part: blue growth, marine data and knowledge, maritime spatial planning, integrated maritime surveillance, and sea basin strategies.
UN Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs)	The SDGs are a universal call to action to end poverty, protect the planet, and ensure that by 2030 all people enjoy peace and prosperity. The 17 SDGs are integrated—recognizing that action in one area will affect outcomes in others, and that development must balance social, economic and environmental sustainability.
UN Paris Agreement on Climate Change (COP21)	The Paris Agreement is a legally binding international treaty on climate change, adopted in 2015, with the aims of substantially reducing GHG emissions, assessing progress of this goal, and providing financial aid to developing countries to mitigate climate change, strengthen resilience and enhance abilities to adapt to climate impacts.

<sup>4</sup> <https://medblueeconomyplatform.org/working-group-on-blue-economy/>



<b>BBNJ Agreement</b>	The BBNJ Agreement, formally titled the "Agreement under the United Nations Convention on the Law of the Sea on the Conservation and Sustainable Use of Marine Biological Diversity of Areas Beyond National Jurisdiction," is a legally binding international treaty adopted on 19 June 2023. It addresses four main issues: marine genetic resources, area-based management tools, environmental impact assessments, and capacity-building and the transfer of marine technology. It specifically addresses marine biodiversity in areas beyond national jurisdiction, complementing the framework of the Convention on Biological Diversity (CBD) adopted at the Earth Summit in Rio de Janeiro in 1992.
<b>EU Blue Growth Strategy</b>	Blue Growth is the long term strategy to support sustainable growth in the marine and maritime sectors. It is the maritime contribution to achieving the goals of the Europe 2020 strategy for smart, sustainable and inclusive growth.
<b>EUSAIR 2023 Sarajevo Declaration (EUSAIR)</b>	The EU Strategy for the Adriatic and Ionian Region (EUSAIR) is a macro-regional strategy aiming to promote economic and social prosperity and growth in the region by improving its attractiveness, competitiveness and connectivity. The Sarajevo Declaration, inter alia, welcomes and underlines the importance of the EU sustainable blue economy initiatives.
<b>EU Clean Industrial Deal</b>	The Clean Industrial Deal (2025) outlines concrete actions to turn decarbonisation into a driver of growth for European industries.
<b>UfM Regional Transport Action Plan (RTAP 2021-2027)</b>	The new Regional Transport Action Plan aims to reinvigorate multilateral cooperation in this sector until 2027 and unlock an important potential in the economic and social development in the region in the years ahead.
<b>WestMED Initiative</b>	The WEStMed initiative was created to help public institutions, academia, local communities, SMEs and entrepreneurs from both sides of the W. Mediterranean to develop local and regional maritime projects designed to strengthen the sustainable blue economy. The UfM plays a strategic coordination and legitimising role, ensuring that WestMED remains embedded in the broader Mediterranean vision for a sustainable blue economy.
<b>EU Mediterranean Strategy for Sustainable Development (MSSD) 2016-2025</b>	The MSSD provides an integrative policy framework for all stakeholders to translate the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development and the SDGs at the regional, sub-regional, national and local levels in the Mediterranean region. It adapts international commitments to regional conditions and guides national strategies and stimulates regional cooperation in the achievement of sustainable development objectives.
<b>EU BlueMed initiative</b>	The BLUEMED Initiative advanced a shared vision for a more healthy, productive, resilient, better known and valued Mediterranean Sea, promoting the citizens' social well-being and prosperity, now and for future generations, and boosting economic growth and jobs.
<b>EU Pact for Blue Skills (part of EU Pact for Skills)</b>	A regional scale partnership on blue skills for a sustainable blue economy in the Ionian and Adriatic Region, emphasizing blue skills as a key driver for the sustainable economic growth of the blue economy sector in the region.
<b>UNEP-Mediterranean Action Plan</b>	A multilateral environmental agreement aiming to protect the environment and to foster sustainable development in the Mediterranean basin.
<b>UN Regional Plan on Marine Litter Management in the Mediterranean</b>	The Regional Plan addresses the complex challenges posed in the region by marine litter, a global issue dramatically affecting marine and coastal environment. With this Plan, the Mediterranean region is pioneering the adoption of legally binding measures on marine litter.
<b>European Oceans Pact (<i>new</i>)</b>	It aims to bring coherence across all EU policy areas linked to oceans and will also focus on supporting resilient and healthy oceans and coastal areas, promoting the blue economy.
<b>New Pact for the Mediterranean</b>	The new Pact for the Mediterranean is intended to be the main political instrument that the European Commission aims to establish in order to deepen strategic cooperation with its southern and eastern Mediterranean neighbours. It is still in preparation at time of writing but

	will be based on two pillars, based strategic partnership agreements with countries in North Africa and all over the Mediterranean, and regional cooperation.
<b>EIB Blue Mediterranean Partnership</b>	Partnership aims to address the threats faced by the Mediterranean Sea through the coordination of the financing of blue economy projects in the Mediterranean and Red Sea regions, supporting transition to a sustainable blue economy in the region.
<b>EC Sustainable Blue Economy Finance Principles</b>	The sustainable blue economy finance principles provide a framework for financing a sustainable ocean economy, to guide banks, insurers and investors in this crucial role.
<b>EMFAF BlueInvest (EMFAF)</b>	EMFAF is the fund supporting the EU common fisheries policy (CFP), the EU maritime policy and the EU agenda for international ocean governance, providing support for developing innovative projects ensuring that aquatic and maritime resources are used sustainably.  BlueInvest aims to accelerate new ocean-based technologies and solutions to unlock innovation and investment opportunities in the sustainable blue economy.
<b>EU LIFE Programme</b>	The LIFE Programme is the EU's funding instrument for the environment and climate action.
<b>EU Sustainable Blue Economy Partnership (SBEP)</b>	The SBEP boosts the transformation towards a climate-neutral, sustainable, productive and competitive blue economy. It aims to restore the ocean's health, resilience and services to people by enabling economic activity that is climate-neutral, sustainable and productive.
<b>UNEP Sustainable Blue Economy Finance Principles</b>	The Sustainable Blue Economy Finance Principles are the foundational keystone to invest in the ocean economy. Launched in 2018, they are the world's first global guiding framework for banks, insurers and investors to finance a sustainable blue economy.
<b>UfM Ministerial Declaration on Environment and Climate Action (2021)</b>	The declaration recognises the Mediterranean as a climate change hotspot and commits to urgent, science-based action to address environmental degradation, biodiversity loss, pollution, and climate risks. Ministers pledged to accelerate the transition to sustainable, climate-neutral, circular and resilient economies through comprehensive adaptation measures, pollution reduction, nature-based solutions, and mainstreaming climate action across all sectors. The declaration also emphasises regional cooperation, stakeholder engagement, inclusive policies for youth and women, and scaling up resources for climate governance, research, and innovation.
<b>UfM Ministerial Declaration on Research and Innovation (2022)</b>	This declaration strengthens Euro-Mediterranean cooperation in research and innovation as a driver of sustainable development. Ministers highlighted the twin green and digital transitions and linked R&I to job creation, particularly under the EU Green Deal and sustainable blue economy. Priority areas include climate change, renewable energy, marine activities, pollution reduction, and initiatives such as BLUEMED and the "Restore our Ocean and Waters by 2030" mission.
<b>UfM Ministerial Declaration on Employment and Labour (2022)</b>	The declaration addresses employment challenges in the region, particularly those affecting youth and women, which have worsened due to the COVID-19 pandemic. Ministers underlined the importance of job creation, decent work, and inclusive growth, especially in relation to green and digital transitions. They committed to promoting gender- and youth-responsive policies, modernising vocational education and training, and supporting a just transition to a green economy.
<b>UfM Transport Ministerial Declaration (2023)</b>	The declaration reaffirms support for a safe, sustainable, efficient, and connected transport system, including the development of a Trans-Mediterranean network linked to the TEN-T. Ministers endorsed climate-neutral, zero-pollution maritime ports and set the goal of full decarbonisation of the maritime sector by 2050. They also supported the establishment of a Sulphur Oxide Emission Control Area (SOx ECA) in the Mediterranean, with preparation for its entry into force by 2025.

The UfMS plays a critical role in guiding the SBE-related initiatives of its members, ensuring that they further the aims of the MD in harmony with this complex environment.

## 2. The evaluation methodology

### 2.1. Summary of the scope, objectives and methodology of the evaluation

According to the Terms of Reference for the evaluation, the main objective of the assignment is to carry out an external mid-term evaluation of the 2021 UfM Ministerial Declaration on Sustainable Blue Economy. This is executed through:

- Assessing the implementation and latest update of the Roadmap for the implementation of the 2021 UfM Ministerial Declaration on Sustainable Blue Economy;
- Reviewing the Results-Based Monitoring, Reporting and Evaluation Mechanism and of the information provided by countries and collected so far in this framework;
- Carrying out a review of the participatory and knowledge sharing mechanisms in place, namely the UfM Stakeholders Conference/s and the Med Blue Economy Platform, with an emphasis on dissemination, capacity building, partnerships and networking;
- Assessing the technical and financial convergence of partners/stakeholders around the set joint priorities promoted by the UfM at Mediterranean level, keeping the focus on the regional and national dimension, with further example at local level;
- Analysing the main issues emerged through the above and of interest for any future political deliberations.

As a mid-term evaluation, carried out approximately three years after the signing of the 2021 MD, this assignment is a **Formative Evaluation**: it examines what has been done so far, comparing this to the original 2021 Ministerial Declaration and Roadmap; it examines the extent to which the aims and objectives of the Ministerial Declaration remain feasible, appropriate and acceptable. Early impact(s) are recorded, as well as added value which the 2021 Ministerial Declaration has already been found to produce.

The mid-way mark is a good point at which to re-assess the implementation of the decisions taken in the 2021 Ministerial Declaration, since enough time has passed to provide data on the progress of these decisions. Possible modifications, if deemed necessary, may still be carried out, and will feed into the planning of the future political/policy/strategic deliberations, to ensure that its aims are achieved

The mid-term evaluation focuses on the following areas of assessment as per the **OECD/DAC evaluation criteria**<sup>5</sup>:

1. **Relevance**: is the policy doing the right things? Is the policy evaluated addressing ongoing needs?
2. **Coherence**: how well does the policy fit? Is it aligned with other strategies and goals of the UfM? Is it aligned with strategies and goals of the environment external to the UfM?
3. **Effectiveness**: is the policy achieving its objectives? Are results being created?
4. **Efficiency**: how well are resources being used? What are the main challenges in achieving goals so far?
5. **Impact**: what difference does the policy make? What are the long-term, positive or negative, intended or unintended results of the policy?
6. **Sustainability**: will the benefits last? How viable are the outputs and outcomes of the Declaration?

The evaluation team also focused on the assessment of the **Added Value** which the policy brings to the region, in enabling the impact of policies and initiatives in the fields of SBE.

The above form the **key evaluation criteria**, and along with the **evaluation questions**, constitute the **evaluation framework**.

<sup>5</sup> <https://www.oecd.org/en/topics/sub-issues/development-co-operation-evaluation-and-effectiveness/evaluation-criteria.html>

The **evaluation matrix** (please refer to Annex II) organises the evaluation questions per evaluation criteria and includes the judgement criteria and sources of information.

The evaluation gathered and assessed qualitative and quantitative **sources of data**<sup>6</sup>:

Type of Data	Sources of Data	Task
<b>Qualitative Data</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Key stakeholder assessment, ie Key Informant Interviews (KII)</li> <li>- Review of related documents, progress reports, workplans, etc.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Desk Review</li> <li>- Field Evaluation (online and in-person interviews)</li> </ul>
<b>Quantitative Data</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Reports, workplans, financial data, timetables, deliverables, etc.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Desk Review</li> </ul>

Originally, focus group discussions (FGDs) were envisaged, as a means to engage with a greater number of stakeholders. However, the evaluator was given the opportunity to attend, in person, the 17<sup>th</sup> Regional Platform held over two days in Barcelona (19-20 Feb 2025). During this event, KIIs were arranged with almost all the participants: either on the spot in person, or scheduled for a subsequent date, online. In this way, the evaluator was able to conduct all the discussions originally foreseen, and therefore, in agreement with the UfMS, focus group discussions were not deemed necessary anymore.

## 2.2. The evaluated time period

The Mid-Term Evaluation was foreseen in the Roadmap in the context of the preparation of a new Ministerial Declaration, expected possibly after 2026<sup>7</sup>: thus, the MTE will provide information in support of the preparation and identification of the priorities of a subsequent Ministerial Declaration, and its recommendations may serve as a basis for future political deliberations on the sustainable blue economy in the Mediterranean region.

The Ministerial Declaration is a political document, blending policy and technical issues in its subsequent implementation. As such, the formative nature of the mid-term evaluation feeds into the policy cycle, providing inputs (lessons learnt, recommendations) based on current experience, for the design or adjustment of future policy measures.

The evaluation team examined the information available utilising the documentation provided by the UfMS and other stakeholders up to **early 2025**, as well as the information gathered through the meetings with stakeholders carried out between **February-April 2025**.

## 2.3. Geographical coverage

The 2021 Ministerial Declaration was signed by all 27 countries of the European Union and the 16 countries<sup>8</sup> of the Southern and the Eastern Mediterranean shores and reflects the shared political commitment of the 43 UfM Member States to strengthen regional cooperation, dialogue and integration in the Mediterranean area.

## 2.4. Target groups/intended users of the evaluation

The main recipient of the final Evaluation Report is the **UfM Secretariat**, as contracting authority for this evaluation: the Secretary General and the UfM Co-Chairs.

<sup>6</sup> For more information about the data gathering tools, please refer to Annex I.

<sup>7</sup> Roadmap, (Version 3 June 2024), p. 166

<sup>8</sup> Syria suspended its membership on December 1, 2011. Libya has observer status at the UfM.

**Key EU partners** of the UfM are also main target groups for the Evaluation findings and recommendations, namely the European Commission and DG MARE.

In line with the UfMS' operating principles of transparency and accountability, the findings and recommendations of the evaluation are expected to be shared with the **member countries** of the UfM.

The results of the evaluation will also be shared with **other stakeholders and partners** of the 2021 UfM MD for sustainable blue economy insofar as they will participate in any future political deliberations on the sustainable blue economy.

The findings and resulting recommendations included in the final mid-term Evaluation Report will be presented in a way best suited for the needs of these target groups, as requested by the managing authority

### 3. Findings

#### 3.1. Overall assessment of the UfM MD

The UfM Ministerial Declaration on Sustainable Blue Economy (SBE) **offers a vital framework for Mediterranean countries to collaborate on marine and maritime sustainability**. Uniting 43 member states, it fosters political cooperation, trust, and mutual accountability, enabling collective responses to challenges like marine pollution and coastal degradation. Bringing a wide range of environmental, economic, and social benefits to the region over the years, the cross-sectoral and multi-stakeholder cooperation on SBE under the UfM is facilitating the convergence of technical and financial efforts to drive the ‘blue and green’ transition forward; to decarbonize and circularize sea-based economies; to protect and restore marine and coastal ecosystems; and to level the playing field, delivering on fairer, more resilient, and healthier livelihoods across the region.

**It aligns regional action with global frameworks** such as the UN SDGs, the Paris Agreement, the BBNJ Agreement, the UN Ocean Decade, the UN Decade for Ecosystem restoration, as well as EU-wide frameworks such as the EU Green Deal, and regional frameworks, promoting policy coherence and harmonisation with international legal standards. This supports the creation of shared environmental policies and coordinated action regionally and across national contexts.

**The UfM itself plays a key role in coordinating and monitoring progress.** The Declaration has strengthened institutional networks, enhanced knowledge sharing, and built capacity in marine governance and science. It also encourages economic diversification through support for sectors like green shipping, eco-tourism, and marine renewable energy.

**Organisational collaboration** is advanced via joint initiatives, capacity-building events, and technical assistance, ensuring broad participation and investment. Knowledge transfer, particularly from developed to less-resourced countries, supports regional equity and boosts participation in the blue economy.

**Technology development**, such as sustainable aquaculture and marine data tools, is promoted through **cooperation, accelerating innovation and sustainability**. **Environmental protection remains central**, with tools like marine spatial planning and coordinated conservation efforts enhancing ecosystem resilience but also bringing economic and social benefits to the region.

However, **persistent challenges** include political instability, uneven implementation, and varying national capacities. Institutional weaknesses and funding gaps can hinder effective cooperation, especially in technology uptake and capacity-building efforts.

Despite these hurdles, **the Declaration offers significant opportunities**. It enables political convergence transnationally, fosters alignment with international standards, and encourages private-sector engagement. Through shared responsibility and common goals, it supports a transition toward a sustainable, inclusive, and resilient blue economy, positioning the region for long-term environmental and economic well-being.

**The evaluation which follows focuses on the findings of desk research and fieldwork conducted to assess the relevance, coherence, effectiveness, efficiency, impact, sustainability and added value of the Ministerial Declaration as it has been implemented.** The findings are predominantly positive in all evaluation criteria, but some points for improvement have been identified and are presented in a later chapter. As already mentioned, this is a formative evaluation, which seeks to guide the completion of the MD’s current implementation and possibly to inform a prospective new declaration.

## 3.2. Presentation and analysis of findings per evaluation criterion

### 3.2.1 Relevance

*(Is the MD doing the right thing(s)? Are the MD priorities still valid and relevant in addressing ongoing needs?)*

#### **MD on sustainable blue economy is a well-acknowledged framework**

The 2021 UfM MD on Sustainable Blue Economy continues to serve as a timely and pertinent framework for addressing the Mediterranean region's environmental, economic and social challenges. Despite the evolving policy landscape and the emergence of new frameworks since its adoption, the MD's priorities remain highly relevant at both regional and national levels. This enduring relevance is reflected in the alignment of subsequent planning documents (Roadmap, national strategies and action plans), and the shared priorities among Mediterranean stakeholders.

Recent regional strategies and high-level policy statements have reaffirmed the core themes of the MD. For instance, the 2023 Sarajevo Declaration, developed within the framework of the EU Strategy for the Adriatic and Ionian Region (EUSAIR), echoes the call for **improved sea basin governance and multi-level coordination** originally emphasised in the 2021 Declaration. It explicitly welcomes the EU Sustainable Blue Economy approach and calls for its implementation in all participating countries. Similarly, the emerging European Oceans Pact supports collaborative efforts directly tied to the implementation of the UfM Declaration, reinforcing the need for continued dialogue, integration, and regional cooperation—one of the key pillars of the Declaration.

SBE is one of the top priorities in the Mediterranean Region. This was recently highlighted by the Commissioner on Oceans at the 2024 UfM SBE Stakeholder Conference held in Athens. Through the work of the UfM, cross-sectorial and cross-border collaboration on SBE become a reality. The solid political and technical cooperation that this collaboration brings act as a 'glue' to tie the region together by highlighting the shared challenges and shared solutions to these challenges.

#### **MD priorities still remain valid**

In the area of **marine research and innovation, skills and employment**, the 2023 UNEP Mediterranean Quality Status Report (QSR) highlights persistent knowledge gaps and emphasizes the need for improved data, monitoring capacity, and scientific infrastructure across the region. These findings are echoed by the European Institute of the Mediterranean's policy report on the Blue Economy for the Mediterranean, also published in 2023 (Fosse, Monill, Lozano, & Milo, 2023) which highlights the mismatch between qualifications and job offers, lack of awareness of blue jobs, and "brain drain" as challenges. Gaps in funding for research and innovation are identified in the 2024 edition of the UfM publication "Towards a Sustainable Blue Economy in the Mediterranean region", which underscores the importance of boosting knowledge transfer between EU and non-EU countries, as well as addressing the skills mismatch in the Mediterranean region. These concerns mirror the MD's original identification of disparities in research capacity and the need for science-based policy decisions. The emphasis on skill development, employment, and innovation in the Declaration remains particularly relevant as countries seek to contribute to shared regional goals, while enhancing national capabilities. The findings from the MTE field research also support this perspective, as stakeholders across the Mediterranean emphasise the need for enhanced research capacity and the exchange of specialised knowhow between experts in SBE sectors.

Sustainable food systems, particularly **fisheries and aquaculture**, continue to be a major concern for Mediterranean countries, as they are the backbone of the region's blue economy. The UNEP QSR's comprehensive assessment of fish stocks and marine biodiversity calls for sustainable management practices and an ecosystem-based approach—both central principles of the UfM Declaration. Plan Bleu's Scoping Study to Develop a Mediterranean Pilot on Measuring the Sustainability of the Mediterranean Blue Economy recognizes sustainable fisheries management as a crucial priority domain for indicator development, to allow tracking of the percentage of sustainably managed fish stocks and juvenile replenishment rates. It recognizes that challenges like increasing fishing mortality persist (Plan Bleu, 2023 (Nov), p. 5) (Plan Bleu, 2023 (Dec), p. 41). The potential of aquaculture and the blue bioeconomy, highlighted in the Declaration, remains critical to



meeting the region's food security and economic diversification needs, especially for coastal communities. Field research findings indicate that many countries are actively developing and implementing policies to address these challenges, though further coordination and knowledge-sharing remain necessary. The relevance of this priority remains high due to its economic and social importance and the ongoing need to ensure ecological sustainability of stocks and farming practices.

The relevance of the Declaration's priorities is also clear in areas such as **maritime transport and marine renewable energy**. The maritime transport and ports sector handles 80% of global trade and is a hub for international shipping routes: it is expected to require investment in new equipment and infrastructure, as indicated in the 2024 edition of the UfM publication "Towards a Sustainable Blue Economy in the Mediterranean region". Independent reports such as the European Institute of the Mediterranean's policy report on the Blue Economy for the Mediterranean confirm the importance of the green transition of maritime transport (Fosse, Monill, Lozano, & Milo, 2023, p. 61). The Declaration's endorsement of the IMO sulphur cap and the ratification of MARPOL Annex VI remains aligned with broader EU strategies, including the Clean Industrial Strategy and the Industrial Decarbonisation Accelerator. These initiatives reflect an ongoing commitment to reducing emissions from maritime activities and increasing the uptake of sustainable technologies. Similarly, the promotion of marine renewable energy (MRE) in the Declaration remains crucial in the context of climate change mitigation and energy transition across the Mediterranean. MRE holds immense potential to drive the future of the Mediterranean blue economy. The ongoing implementation of these initiatives at both the EU and regional levels further supports the Declaration's long-term objectives.

The issue of **marine litter and pollution**, which features prominently in the Declaration, continues to be of immediate concern. The 2023 UNEP QSR dedicates a major section to the sources and impacts of marine litter, calling for the implementation of updated regional plans and waste reduction measures, while the importance of reducing marine pollution is emphasized in the Mediterranean Strategy for Sustainable Development. These actions directly support the Declaration's emphasis on addressing plastic pollution as a cross-sectoral threat to the marine environment and the sustainable development of the blue economy.

The priority of **Coastal and Maritime Tourism** is a crucial sector for the Mediterranean Blue Economy, heavily reliant on healthy coastal ecosystems. Sustainable change is needed to address environmental impacts and ensure long-term viability. In Plan Bleu's recent foresight report, over-tourism is mentioned as a potential negative future impact, highlighting the need for sustainable development and diversification (Plan Bleu, 2025, pp. 194, *passim*).

Further, the relevance of **integrated coastal zone management (ICZM)** and **maritime spatial planning (MSP)**—both strongly endorsed in the Declaration—is reinforced by recent regional and EU policy communications, as well as the 2024 edition of the UfM publication "Towards a Sustainable Blue Economy in the Mediterranean region". The EC's 2021 Communication on Transforming the EU's Blue Economy reaffirms the MSP's role in balancing nature protection with economic use of marine resources. The UNEP QSR similarly notes the continued importance of ICZM and MSP for achieving Good Environmental Status (GES), reinforcing the need for integrated and spatially aware governance mechanisms as proposed in the 2021 Declaration. These findings align with the MTE field research which suggests that while progress is being made in the implementation of these approaches, greater integration and coordination are still required to address local and regional challenges effectively.

**Climate change adaptation** remains another critical area of continued relevance. The Declaration calls for adaptation as a core component of sustainable marine management. The 2023 QSR emphasizes the Mediterranean's vulnerability to climate change and the importance of integrating climate indicators into regional and national monitoring frameworks. The EU's Joint Staff Working Document on Renewed Partnership with the Southern Neighbourhood (2021) further identifies green growth and climate action as priorities, aligning closely with the Declaration's strategic direction. The MTE field research confirms that climate adaptation remains a priority for Mediterranean countries, with a growing recognition of the need for coordinated efforts to address both mitigation and adaptation in the region.



The findings of the field research conducted for the mid-term evaluation support the ongoing relevance of the Declaration's priorities. Stakeholders across the region widely acknowledge that challenges such as marine pollution, overfishing, biodiversity loss, and climate change continue to demand coordinated and sustained responses. The flexible nature of the Declaration's accompanying Roadmap has proven crucial in maintaining relevance across a region marked by diverse economic, environmental, and institutional contexts. It allows countries to engage in sectors where their interests, capacities, or pressing needs are greatest, ensuring that the MD remains adaptable and relevant. This flexibility has been particularly important in enabling differentiated implementation across various countries, as it accommodates differing levels of capacity and urgency.

It should be noted that the Mediterranean was presented as a replicable model for blue economy governance and finance during the Mediterranean Day (10 June 2025) held as part of the UNOC 3 conference, indicating that the approach employed by the UfM, based on the Ministerial Declaration may be considered a good practice to be exported and to act as a model for scaling, replication and capitalisation across the region and beyond.

### Conclusion

The 2021 UfM MD on SBE remains a highly relevant and effective framework for guiding regional and national action. It continues to reflect the shared challenges, aspirations, and priorities of Mediterranean countries. Its strategic directions are reaffirmed by recent international and EU policy developments, as well as by empirical findings from the region. As Mediterranean states move forward in implementing sustainable blue economy strategies, the MD provides a common reference point that supports cooperation, fosters inclusive development, and ensures that progress toward a healthy, productive, and resilient marine environment remains on track. By continuing to reflect Mediterranean realities while supporting the global sustainability agenda, the MD ensures that environmental, social, and economic priorities are advanced in mutually reinforcing ways, which can also act as a model for other sea basins.

### 3.2.2 Coherence

*(How well does the policy align with global and regional frameworks, with other strategies and goals of the UfM, with national strategies and policies? To what degree do the MDs drive a common agenda for cooperation in the Mediterranean region?)*

The MD and Roadmap operate within a rich policy context shaped by both EU and broader international frameworks. Their strategic alignment with these initiatives reflects a coherent, integrated approach to the sustainable use of ocean and marine resources. The Declaration not only echoes long-standing international goals such as the UN Sustainable Development Goal 14 (SDG14), but also aligns closely with evolving EU priorities, especially the shift from "blue growth" to a "sustainable blue economy" as articulated in the EC's Communication *"Transforming the EU's Blue Economy for a Sustainable Future"* (COM(2021) 240 final).

#### Political and Strategic Alignment

Both the UfM MD and the EU underline the critical importance of healthy marine ecosystems in responding to global challenges, including climate change, energy transition, food security, and employment. The MD embraces the objective of promoting a "competitive, resilient, and sustainable EU blue economy," reinforcing the shared ambition expressed in the forthcoming European Oceans Pact. This common vision is firmly grounded in SDG14, making the Declaration a politically and strategically relevant document at the regional and international levels. The MTE field research confirms that there is a broad consensus among Mediterranean stakeholders about the importance of these challenges, which remain of critical significance. Sustainable Blue Economy issues are recognised as pressing and in need of a concerted, collaborative effort from all Mediterranean countries to be effectively addressed. The high political commitment to the MD was evident in the high-level of participation in the relevant sessions at UNOC 3 by the political leadership of the countries of the UfM.

## Cross-Sectoral and Integrated Policy Approach

The MTE field research highlights that the SBE sector in the Mediterranean is highly fragmented, involving various thematic areas, multiple regional and global engagement levels, and numerous stakeholders. While simplification of this landscape would be desirable, stakeholders acknowledge that such a goal is somewhat unrealistic. However, the UfM Secretariat has succeeded in fostering a degree of coordination among these diverse elements, which underscores the importance of the MD's integrated approach. According to the MTE field research, there is room for even further improvement in terms of synergy enhancement and minimizing duplication of efforts

The Declaration mirrors the EU's integrated approach to the blue economy, which has evolved through instruments such as the Integrated Maritime Policy and the Blue Growth Strategy. The UfM MD takes a similarly holistic view by addressing a wide range of interlinked sectors—fisheries, aquaculture, maritime transport, tourism, marine litter, and marine renewable energy.

## Coherence between the UfM Sustainable Blue Economy Declaration and other Regional Platforms

The UfM seeks to enhance regional cooperation, dialogue and the implementation of concrete projects and initiatives with tangible impact in the region. Its action-driven methodology is composed of three components: policy frameworks, dialogue platforms and regional projects. The **dialogue platforms** in particular, centralise and analyse the feedback and recommendations gathered on the ground through the **cooperation projects**. On this basis, dialogue platforms issue policy recommendations intended for the **policy frameworks**<sup>9</sup>.

Sector	UfM Regional Platforms	Coherence with SBE (scale 1-3)
<b>Economic Development and Employment</b>	Trade, Investment and Industry	<b>1</b>
	Employment and Labour	<b>2</b>
	Digital Economy and Internet Access	<b>3</b>
	Industrial cooperation	<b>1</b>
<b>Higher Education &amp; Research</b>	Research and Innovation	<b>2</b>
<b>Social &amp; Civil Affairs</b>	Women Empowerment	<b>1</b>
	Civil Protection	
<b>Water Environment &amp; Blue Economy</b>	Water	<b>3</b>
	Environment and Climate Action	<b>3</b>
	Sustainable Blue Economy	-
<b>Transport &amp; Urban Development</b>	Sustainable Urban Development	<b>2</b>
	Transport Connectivity	
<b>Energy &amp; Climate Action</b>	Energy	<b>2</b>

The priorities of the UfM Declaration on Sustainable Blue Economy (SBE)—ranging from marine spatial planning and sustainable fisheries to green maritime transport and coastal resilience—are designed to align with and complement the work of other UfM regional platforms, ensuring a coherent and integrated approach to regional development.

The SBE agenda is deeply interconnected with the UfM Environment and Climate Action Platform, particularly through joint efforts on climate change adaptation, marine biodiversity protection, pollution reduction, and nature-based solutions for coastal resilience. Similarly, it complements the UfM Water Agenda by addressing water quality, integrated coastal zone management, and land-sea interactions that are critical for both ecosystems and coastal communities.

Coherence is also evident with the UfM Transport and Urban Development Platform, especially in the promotion of sustainable maritime transport and port infrastructure, which support the decarbonisation of shipping and

<sup>9</sup> <https://ufmsecretariat.org/what-we-do/platforms/>

improved regional connectivity. Socially, the SBE Declaration reinforces the goals of the UfM Social and Civil Affairs, Employment and Labour, and Higher Education and Research Platforms by fostering blue skills development, decent job creation, gender equality, and youth engagement across maritime sectors.

Importantly, the Ministerial Declaration on SBE aligns with the UfM Energy Platform, particularly through its support for clean offshore energy, including wind and wave power. This contributes to the region's energy transition goals and climate commitments. Moreover, the development of low-carbon port infrastructure and the electrification of maritime activities reflect shared priorities on sustainable energy use.

Also, the Ministerial Declaration on SBE is increasingly synergistic with the UfM Digital Economy Platform. The digitalisation of blue economy sectors—through smart ports, marine observation systems, digital innovation in fisheries, and enhanced data-sharing—underscores the role of technology in boosting sustainability, competitiveness, and regional cooperation.

In addition to the SBE MD, there are Ministerial Declarations on Transport (February 2023), Environment and Climate Change (October 2021), Research and Innovation (June 2022), and Employment and Labour (May 2022), all of which have some interconnectivity with the priorities of the UfM's SBE MD.

The **UfM Transport Ministerial Declaration (2023)** demonstrates a strong and direct alignment with the SBE Ministerial Declaration, particularly in advancing sustainable maritime transport. Both declarations emphasise the transition to climate-neutral, zero-pollution ports and maritime systems, and jointly support the establishment of a Sulphur Oxide Emission Control Area (SOx ECA) in the Mediterranean by 2025. The Transport MD reinforces these goals with its focus on full decarbonisation of the maritime sector by 2050, building resilience to climate change, and enhancing regional connectivity through integrated transport networks such as the Trans-Mediterranean and Trans-European corridors, critical infrastructure for blue economy sectors.

The **UfM Ministerial Declaration on Environment and Climate Action (2021)** provides the broader environmental and climate framework that underpins the SBE agenda. It highlights the interconnected challenges facing the Mediterranean, including sea-level rise, marine pollution, biodiversity loss, and climate impacts, all of which directly affect the viability of blue economy sectors. The declaration calls for reducing pollution, protecting ecosystems, and transitioning to a circular, green, and inclusive economy, objectives that closely mirror the SBE's focus on marine litter, sustainable resource use, and ecosystem-based approaches. It also reaffirms commitment to regional cooperation and supports initiatives such as the SOx ECA, PRIMA, and BLUEMED, which are integral to both environmental and blue economy strategies.

The **UfM Ministerial Declaration on Research and Innovation (2022)** aligns with the SBE Declaration by positioning research and innovation as key enablers of sustainable development, particularly in support of the twin green and digital transitions. It prioritises scientific collaboration and technological advancement in areas such as climate resilience, renewable energy, marine ecosystem protection, and pollution reduction, all essential to a sustainable blue economy. The declaration promotes synergies with EU missions and partnerships, including “Restore our Ocean and Waters by 2030” and the BLUEMED Initiative, while encouraging R&I investments that foster sustainable growth, employment, and competitiveness in blue economy sectors like clean maritime transport and marine renewable energy.

The **UfM Ministerial Declaration on Employment and Labour (2022)** complements the SBE Declaration by addressing the social and human capital dimension of sustainability. It focuses on promoting decent work, reducing inequalities, and supporting inclusive economic growth across the Mediterranean, objectives that echo the SBE's emphasis on job creation and poverty reduction through blue economy development. The declaration highlights the need to tackle youth unemployment, improve labour market participation, and modernise vocational education and training systems to better match the evolving demands of green and blue sectors. By endorsing a just transition and the upskilling of the workforce, it provides a vital foundation for ensuring that the benefits of a sustainable blue economy are equitably shared.

The UfM MD on Sustainable Blue Economy is therefore fully coherent with the UfM's cross-sectoral framework. It actively reinforces efforts across environmental, economic, energy, digital, and social domains, contributing to a resilient and integrated Mediterranean region.

## Internal Cohesion of the 2021 UfM Declaration priorities

As regards the **internal coherence** of the 2021 UfM MD on SBE, the findings indicate a high degree of coherence between the ten priority sectors:

INTERNAL COHERENCE MATRIX (2021 UfM Ministerial Declaration on SBE)	1 Governance and sea basin strategies (Cross-Cutting Priority, Enabler)	2 Marine research and innovation, skills, and employment (Cross-Cutting Priority, Tool)	3 Sustainable food from the sea: fisheries and aquaculture (Sectoral Priority)	4 Sustainable, climate-neutral, and zero-pollution maritime transport and ports (Sectoral Priority)	5 Interactions between marine litter and the blue economy (Sectoral Priority)	6 Coastal and maritime tourism (Sectoral Priority)	7 Maritime Spatial Planning & Integrated Coastal Zone Management (Cross-Cutting Priority, Tool)	8 Marine renewable energies (Sectoral Priority)	9 Maritime safety and security (Sectoral Priority)	10 Sustainable investment in the blue economy (Cross-Cutting Priority, Enabler)
1 Governance and sea basin strategies (Cross-Cutting Priority, Enabler)										
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5 Interactions between marine litter and the blue economy (Sectoral Priority)										
6 Coastal and maritime tourism (Sectoral Priority)										
7 Maritime Spatial Planning & Integrated Coastal Zone Management (Cross-Cutting Priority, Tool)										
8 Marine renewable energies (Sectoral Priority)										
9 Maritime safety and security (Sectoral Priority)										
10 Sustainable investment in the blue economy (Cross-Cutting Priority, Enabler)										

The ten priorities of the MD are generally mutually reinforced. For example:

- Marine research and innovation underpin advances in most other areas, from fisheries to marine renewable energy and maritime safety.
- Maritime spatial planning (MSP) and integrated coastal zone management (ICZM) provide a spatial and policy coordination framework that benefits tourism, aquaculture, and marine energy development.
- Sustainable investment and governance and strategies are cross-cutting enablers, critical for scaling all sectoral priorities.

This shows good conceptual coherence, with interconnected pillars that support an ecosystem-based, integrated vision of the blue economy. The UfM Secretariat and Regional Platform play an essential role in maintaining internal coherence by convening cross-sectoral dialogues, facilitating knowledge exchange, tracking progress across all ten priorities via the Roadmap, and ensuring that investments and initiatives reflect a shared strategic direction.

However, coherence in practice faces challenges, such as the fragmented governance structures at national level which make it difficult to align all sectors under a single strategic vision; the varying capacities and sectoral maturity which leads to uneven implementation (e.g. as per responses to the fieldwork conducted, in some countries work resulting from the MD SBE on tourism is advancing faster than work on MSP). This may be creating tensions in prioritisation and resource allocation; and gaps in policy coordination between EU and non-EU UfM members, which may lead to misalignment in regulation and ambition levels, especially in areas like marine litter and sustainable transport.

In sum, the UfM SBE MD's priorities are therefore conceptually coherent and strategically aligned, with built-in synergies and cross-cutting enablers. However, practical coherence depends on national coordination, equitable capacities, and continued regional facilitation—areas where progress is evident but further effort would be beneficial.

## Financial and Institutional Coherence

In the financial domain, the MD supports the Sustainable Blue Economy Finance Principles, an initiative led by the European Commission, WWF, WRI, and EIB. It encourages regional and international financial institutions to align investments with sustainability goals. Additionally, the MD acknowledges the central role of existing sea basin strategies, such as WestMed and EUSAIR, in promoting coordinated governance in the Mediterranean. These strategies are fully in line with the EU's vision of developing customised approaches for each sea basin while extending cooperation to non-EU partners.

The MTE field research affirms that the MD and Roadmap have proven especially valuable in countries that lack dedicated national SBE strategies. By offering a comprehensive framework, these instruments guide countries in aligning their policies with regional and international sustainability objectives. The research also suggests that national strategies facilitate easier access to financial resources and improve capacity building in countries with less-developed blue economy sectors.

The MD also identifies marine litter as a pressing cross-sectoral issue, recognizing its impact not only on the marine environment but also on blue economy activities. It supports the implementation of the Regional Action Plan on Marine Litter Management and echoes priorities outlined in both the EU Communication on the Blue Economy and UNEP's 2023 Mediterranean Quality Status Report (QSR).

## Regional Specificities and Expanded Scope

While the UfM MD is broadly coherent with EU frameworks, it is distinct in its regional focus. Designed for the Mediterranean basin, the MD addresses challenges in the sector SBE unique to the region, such as rapid urbanisation and population growth along coastal areas. Attention is also given to the needs of Southern Mediterranean countries, by emphasizing the importance of equitable access to funding, capacity-building and knowledge transfer. This inclusive approach is supported by the EU's Joint Staff Working Document on the renewed partnership with the Southern Neighbourhood, which highlights blue economy support for countries like Algeria, Tunisia, and Morocco.

These challenges are critical to the region, as results from the MTE field research, with the sustainable development of the blue economy seen as closely tied to addressing the specific needs of Mediterranean countries. This regional focus makes the UfM MD particularly important for fostering cooperation between the northern and southern shores of the Mediterranean, ensuring that all countries can participate in the sustainable blue economy, regardless of their developmental starting point.

Institutionally, the UfM MD reinforces the role of the UfM Secretariat as a key actor in regional cooperation, by strengthening the Secretariat's coordination mandate and providing the necessary resources to maintain and expand its integrative role. Specific Mediterranean initiatives, such as WestMED, feature prominently in the Declaration, underscoring the tailored nature of its regional implementation.

This initiative closely correlates with the European Union's broader sea basin strategies, including those for the Atlantic, Baltic, and Black Seas which operate under the umbrella of the EU Integrated Maritime Policy, as presented in the table which follows:

Sea Basin	Key Strategy/Declaration	Year	Main Focus
Atlantic	Atlantic Action Plan 2.0	2020	Innovation, skills, coastal resilience
Black Sea	Common Maritime Agenda	2019	Blue entrepreneurship, governance, R&I
Baltic	EUSBSR	2009	Clean environment, shipping, planning

The UfM Declaration reflects the strategic orientations of the EU Maritime Strategy for the Atlantic Ocean (European Commission, 2020<sup>10</sup>), the EU Strategy for the Baltic Sea Region (EUSBSR) (EUSBSR, 2023<sup>11</sup>), and the Common Maritime Agenda for the Black Sea (European Commission, 2019<sup>12</sup>). Key areas of alignment include marine biodiversity protection, sustainable fisheries and aquaculture, marine litter reduction, climate change adaptation and resilience and marine renewable energy development.

These strategies emphasise the need to integrate environmental sustainability with economic development and the thematic areas held in common with the UfM's ministerial declaration are reflected in other regional frameworks such as the Atlantic Action Plan 2.0 (EC, 2020<sup>13</sup>) which highlights green ports and ocean literacy, and the Black Sea SRIA (Strategic Research and Innovation Agenda) (Black Sea CONNECT, 2020<sup>14</sup>) prioritizes pollution reduction and sustainable aquaculture.

While sharing a common framework, each sea basin strategy and the UfM Declaration itself address unique environmental and geopolitical challenges. The Mediterranean region, for instance, faces high levels of biodiversity pressure, transboundary pollution from land-based sources, intense maritime traffic and climate-accelerated phenomena such as sea level rise and coastal erosion. Nevertheless, despite the specific challenges of the Mediterranean as a sea basin, the UfM Sustainable Blue Economy Ministerial Declaration is strategically coherent and complementary with other EU sea basin strategies. It shares thematic priorities, governance models, and policy tools, contributing to a harmonised approach to maritime governance across Europe and its neighborhood.

### Field Research Insights

The findings from the MTE field research further validate the ongoing relevance of the MD and its Roadmap. The research confirms that the MD's strategic framework offers a coherent and structured approach to addressing SBE-related challenges. Its internal coherence, aligning political commitments with actionable objectives across multiple sectors such as fisheries, tourism, maritime transport, and inclusion, ensures that efforts across different domains complement rather than contradict one another. Externally, the MD and Roadmap align closely with global frameworks like the SDGs, the EU Green Deal, and regional sea basin strategies, creating synergy between national aspirations and international goals. In this context, the SBE increasingly acts as a form of 'regional glue', helping to bind together diverse priorities and actors under a shared vision for sustainable development.

The field research also highlights that while the UfM Secretariat has made notable progress in coordinating SBE efforts in the Mediterranean, there is still significant room for improving synergy among initiatives to reduce fragmentation and avoid duplication. Strengthening the Secretariat's role in these areas is seen as essential for enhancing the MD's effectiveness and ensuring that all stakeholders are working towards common objectives.

### Conclusion

The MD emerges as a highly coherent and strategically aligned instrument within the broader policy landscape. Its alignment with global sustainability frameworks, such as the SDGs and the EU Green Deal, confirms its role as a coherent driver of regional integration and long-term environmental stewardship. It reinforces shared commitments to sustainability, regional integration, and inclusive growth. While echoing the core tenets of EU and international frameworks, the Declaration expands upon them by tailoring priorities to Mediterranean realities and engaging a diverse set of countries. Its integrated structure and flexible implementation make it a

<sup>10</sup> [https://oceans-and-fisheries.ec.europa.eu/ocean/blue-economy/atlantic-strategy\\_en](https://oceans-and-fisheries.ec.europa.eu/ocean/blue-economy/atlantic-strategy_en)

<sup>11</sup> <https://eusbsr.eu/>

<sup>12</sup> <https://black-sea-maritime-agenda.ec.europa.eu/>

<sup>13</sup> [https://research-and-innovation.ec.europa.eu/news/all-research-and-innovation-news/atlantic-action-plan-20-2020-07-27\\_en](https://research-and-innovation.ec.europa.eu/news/all-research-and-innovation-news/atlantic-action-plan-20-2020-07-27_en)

<sup>14</sup> <http://connect2blacksea.org/the-sria/>



valuable reference for guiding sustainable development across the region's marine and coastal sectors. The findings from the field research further demonstrate that the MD and Roadmap offer a critical framework for navigating the challenges of the sustainable blue economy, ensuring that all Mediterranean countries can contribute to and benefit from a shared regional vision. Positioning SBE as a 'regional glue' can support more integrated and cohesive action across countries and sectors.

### 3.2.3 Effectiveness

*(Is the MD achieving its objectives? Are results being created? How effective is the MD in achieving measurable progress on key priorities, and cross-border collaboration?)*

The desk research analysed the effectiveness of the 2021 UfM Ministerial Declaration on Sustainable Blue Economy by comparing it with the 2024 UfM Roadmap and the latest UfM report Towards a Sustainable Blue Economy in the Mediterranean (TSBEM), and taking into account the Monitoring, Reporting, and Evaluation System – Country reports analysis of October 2024 and the Monitoring, Reporting, and Evaluation System – UfM Roadmap on SBE First Yearly Summary Report of January 2025. This features the combined results of thirteen completed country reports – those of approximately half of the mediterranean countries. The sample is therefore not ideal and the lack of responsiveness should be kept in mind when reading the results of the evaluation.

The research seeks to assess how far the Declaration has translated into tangible progress across key thematic areas and governance levels. The findings indicate that the Declaration has catalysed a series of coordinated policy responses, regional strategies, and national actions that demonstrate meaningful progress in several sectors.

Significant achievements include the establishment of sectoral frameworks and action plans in areas such as fisheries and aquaculture, maritime transport, and marine litter, often supported by regional platforms like the GFCM, UNEP MAP, and formerly BLUEMED. Four countries, Algeria, Lebanon, Egypt, and Portugal reported having a national Blue Economy strategy already in place. Meanwhile, the Roadmap and the TSBEM report identify continued challenges, notably uneven development, capacity gaps, and fragmented governance.

The implementation of the Declaration is supported politically by the UfM Co-Presidencies and technically by the UfM Secretariat and the Regional Platform on Sustainable Blue Economy, which jointly ensure coordination, stakeholder engagement, and progress monitoring. Overall, the research finds that while policy frameworks and cooperation mechanisms are increasingly in place, further effort is needed to translate these into systemic, equitable, and region-wide transformation.

The adoption of the Ministerial Declaration set a basis for coordinated support by the UfM and other relevant regional stakeholders to address joint challenges for the future of the Mediterranean Sea and its region. While progress is noted across different sectors, the degree of achievement varies. For instance, in fisheries and aquaculture, there is good coverage of regional frameworks thanks to the FAO and GFCM. While the latter works towards sustainable food systems, these are also the focus of work by the SFS-MED Platform and the Regional Action Plan for Sustainable Consumption and Production (SCP). In sustainable transport and ports, the Regional Transport Action Plan (2021-2027) is aligned with the Blue Economy Declaration. In marine litter, the amended Regional Plan on Marine Litter Management in the Mediterranean is presented as a very advanced instrument. From an analysis of the fieldwork conducted (KIs), it emerges that countries are advancing in the implementation of SBE sectors and topics at varying paces, depending on their national priorities, as well as their technical and financial capacities. Similarly, different sectors within the SBE are progressing at different rates; for example, tourism is developing more rapidly than maritime spatial planning (MSP). As of late 2024, over 657 regional actions aligned with the Ministerial Declaration have been identified, of which 56% are transnational projects, 23% sub-regional initiatives, and 21% Mediterranean-wide frameworks. In total, these actions have mobilised close to €1.4 billion in funding, demonstrating significant funding and engagement across all priority areas.

## Adoption of national strategies

The adoption of the Declaration has fostered the adoption of relevant national strategies amongst the participating countries. Several UfM countries have adopted blue economy strategies following a cross-sectorial approach which have been developed in close association with stakeholders. Within the Roadmap, it is noted that countries have reported coverage in terms of governance frameworks, often complemented by national strategies and initiatives. For example, Greece, Egypt, and Israel have reported national maritime policies. This suggests that the Declaration has effectively encouraged the development and reporting of national strategies related to the SBE, even if these are not exclusively focused on SBE. The MTE field research reveals fragmentation within the national SBE landscape: numerous countries are participating in the process, and within each, several ministries are involved in SBE-related issues which are not necessarily internationally aligned. This internal fragmentation presents challenges both in the formulation of national strategies and in international collaboration. The UfMS is recognised for managing these complexities effectively. It is noted that although four countries have reported the existence of a national SBE strategy, one more is known to have prepared one (Tunisia). Based on the incomplete data available to the evaluator, that the great majority of countries reporting the creation of a national SBE strategy are southern member states, while the northern member states are more likely to already have overlapping strategies covering aspects of the SBE, but not to have a specific strategic document for the SBE itself. That the southern countries have prepared national strategies or are working on them may be indicative of a strategic planning gap that is filled by the SBE strategy, whereas the northern countries cover the needs of SBE strategic planning with existing strategic plans which have already been prepared and are being implemented.

## Results per priority

In terms of results being recorded by priority, the level of implementation seems to be influenced by the existence of established regional bodies, pre-existing policy frameworks, and dedicated action plans in those sectors. It should be noted that the great majority of the priorities of the ministerial declaration focus on the environment and sustainability.

Nevertheless, implementation is reported to have been positive in the field of **Governance** and the future of sea basin strategies in the Mediterranean region, with all countries reporting relevant frameworks. The existence of common frameworks like MedWet, UNEP MAP, along with sub-regional initiatives like WestMED and EUSAIR, contributes to this. The TSBEM identifies "Governance of the Sustainable Blue Economy" as a key enabler for blue economy policies. The WestMED priorities and the latest Ministerial (2023 Ministerial adopted in Malta) are fully aligned with the 2021 UfM Ministerial on SBE and its related process. The Mediterranean Strategy for Sustainable Development (MSSD) 2016-2025 is highlighted as an integrative policy framework. Within the 13 country reports received by January 2025, more than half of the countries declared that an overarching Blue Economy strategy was partly or fully in place at national level with four of the 13 reports indicating a National Blue Economy strategy already in place: Algeria, Lebanon, Egypt, and Portugal.

Other sectors show varied progress. **Food from the sea:** fisheries, aquaculture benefits from established regional frameworks like the GFCM. The 2021 UfM Ministerial Declaration stresses the vital importance of Mediterranean fisheries for food security and socio-economic value, particularly for small-scale fisheries. It also acknowledges the growing potential of sustainable aquaculture. The Roadmap outlines various ongoing initiatives and projects which include efforts to reduce bycatch, integrate circular economy principles, prioritise research and innovation in aquaculture, address illegal fishing and support small-scale fisheries. Several EU-funded projects (SVC4MED, FishEUTrust, BlueAquaEdu, WINBLUE, EUFish Sustainable Growth) are aimed at enhancing sustainability, creating jobs, empowering women, and promoting innovative seafood products. Several Member States have adopted national strategic plans for fisheries and aquaculture. The TSBEM report echoes the Roadmap, and provides examples of projects and highlights future challenges towards 2030, including addressing overexploitation, enhancing data collection, and supporting the sector's energy transition. While overexploitation has decreased, most commercial species are still overfished. 87 actions are reported as being implemented regionally, demonstrating the dedication of the countries to sustainable food from the sea, including a cross-cutting women in aquaculture project which was set up as a GFCM initiative. Of the projects, the greatest majority are in the areas of research and innovation and capacity building. The policy framework



driven by the 2021 UfM Ministerial Declaration is actively promoting and supporting efforts towards sustainable food systems in the Mediterranean. Significant regional and national actions are being implemented, frameworks like the GFCM 2030 Strategy and the SFS-MED Platform are in place or under development, and progress is reported in areas like compliance, policy alignment, and combating illegal, unreported and unregulated (IUU) fishing. While substantial challenges remain, the policy is demonstrably working towards its objectives and generating activities and reported progress towards more sustainable food systems from the sea.

**Sustainable transport and ports** have seen the endorsement of a new Ministerial Declaration on Transport and a Regional Transport Action Plan (2021-2027) that aligns with the SBE Declaration. While the Ministerial Declaration recognizes the vital and strategic role of maritime transport in Mediterranean connectivity and its potential to reduce greenhouse gas emissions, it emphasizes the need to address environmental, climate change, and social challenges in this sector. Ministers call for promoting the transition of fleets and ports towards carbon neutrality and zero pollution through strengthened expertise and investments. They also advocate for the Mediterranean Sea as a Sulphur Oxide Emission Control Area (SOx ECA). The Roadmap notes that the EU Communication on Sustainable Blue Economy (2021) focuses on greening and decarbonizing maritime transport and port infrastructure and highlights initiatives for renewing ships with low-emission technologies and developing ports as energy hubs and circular economy centers. The Roadmap further mentions a European Maritime Fisheries and Aquaculture Fund (EMFAF) call supporting sustainable ports and transport in the Mediterranean. However, it also points to the urgent need for research into cleaner alternative fuels and economically viable models for shipowners. Many Member States have implemented national projects related to sustainable maritime transport and ports. The TSBEM report mentions the IMO's CII regulation for vessel energy efficiency. The report also points to the potential of ship repair yards in developing circular economy models. The Loop-Ports project is identified as an initiative to make ports and maritime transport more circular. Projects like Blue Ports and LIFE4MEDECA aim to enhance skills in ports and build support for a Mediterranean Emission Control Area. The sector is a major contributor to the Mediterranean Blue Economy but is exposed to market fluctuations. A clear trend towards decarbonisation, digitalisation, and smart port initiatives is observed, but significant investment is needed. The sector demonstrates significant activity with 87 actions being implemented with Research and Innovation (30%) and Capacity building (41%) being the primary project types, with organisations and platforms leading some 54% of initiatives. It has attracted the highest level of financial support, amassing €252.6M for the sector, possibly reflecting established funding mechanisms and the economic significance of these sectors.

As regards **interactions between marine litter and the blue economy**, the Ministerial Declaration expresses concern about the negative impact of plastic and micro-plastic pollution on the marine environment and blue economy activities like tourism, fisheries, and aquaculture. The Roadmap highlights the European Green Deal and related EU directives as the governing framework for reducing marine litter in the EU. The EU Mission 'Restore our oceans and waters by 2030' also aims to tackle marine pollution in the Mediterranean. Several projects (BlueMissionMED Plastic Busters CAP COMMON, SeaClear2.0) are listed as illustrative examples. The TSBEM report highlights the need for harmonised monitoring methodologies. Regional initiatives like The Switchers Support Programme are mentioned for promoting circular economy models. Some Mediterranean countries are reported to be progressively adopting Extended Producer Responsibility (EPR) schemes. 71 actions are being implemented regionally to address interactions between Marine Litter and the Blue Economy, with €64.4M being secured from sources such as the Horizon and Interreg programmes.

In terms of **Coastal and maritime tourism**, the Ministerial Declaration recognizes the major importance of coastal and maritime tourism for the Mediterranean economy. It calls for promoting sustainable tourism, including nautical, cruise, culinary, and sport tourism, and for fiscal and investment policies to support sustainable coastal and marine tourism. The Roadmap notes a strong emphasis on sustainable tourism activities across the Mediterranean, with projects underway to define sound sustainable blue tourism projects. The TSBEM report mentions trends, challenges, and policy pathways towards sustainable blue tourism. 129 actions were implemented regionally in the sector with primary project types being capitalisation of good practices and establishment of collaboration frameworks and platforms. €241M have been mobilised (the second-best funded sector) from diverse sources, primarily driven by the Interreg and Horizon programmes, again possibly reflecting established funding mechanisms and the economic significance of the sector.

The Ministerial Declaration calls for offshore operations for renewable energy production to be carried out with safety precautions and consideration of environmental impacts in the field of **Marine renewable energies (MRE)**. The Roadmap notes the considerable development potential in the Mediterranean Sea and the EU Communication on Sustainable Blue Economy (2021) has a specific focus on marine renewable energy within the European Green Deal. The Roadmap highlights the Offshore Coalition for Energy and Nature in the Mediterranean (MED OCEaN) and national strategies developed by countries like France and Spain. It also points to potential synergies with maritime transport and ports, envisioning ports as clean energy hubs. The Interreg MED project "Blue Growth Community" has developed a study on the status and potential of MRE in the Mediterranean. The TSBEM report discusses factors hindering adoption, including conflicts with other sea users and slow implementation of Maritime Spatial Planning. Examples of national strategies and initiatives in countries like Israel, Italy, Malta, Portugal, and Spain are provided. The report also touches upon the compatibility of MRE with other blue economy activities like aquaculture and desalination. 59 regional actions underscore strong engagement in the sector, with research and innovation projects making up 54% of the initiatives. €169.8M have been mobilised, primarily driven by the Horizon programme.

The Ministerial Declaration recognizes the importance of ensuring a high level of **maritime safety and security of blue economy activities** for the Mediterranean Sea. The Roadmap notes the role of the Mediterranean Coast Guard Functions Forum (MedCGFF) in enhancing regional cooperation. Multi-stakeholder workshops have emphasised that maritime safety and security are essential preconditions for the sustainable development of the blue economy. They also identified various challenges and threats. In the TSBEM report, opportunities for innovation in training, capacity building, and knowledge sharing are highlighted. The report lists skills and job ranges within the maritime safety and security sector. There are 83 regional actions recorded, with research and innovation and establishment of collaboration frameworks and platforms both accounting for 36% of the total number. €215.5M have been mobilised from diverse sources, primarily driven by the Horizon and Interreg programmes.

In terms of **Marine research and innovation, skills, careers, and employment**, the Ministerial Declaration reaffirms the need to invest in socioeconomic observatories and provide scientific evidence to support integrated approaches. The Roadmap notes the ongoing implementation of the BLUEMED Initiative and welcomes the continuation of the Copernicus programme. It highlights initiatives like the Mediterranean Blue Economy Stakeholder Platform (MED BESP) and points to several EU-funded projects aimed at fostering innovation and skills. A study on blue skills in the Mediterranean is also planned. Country reports show a greater level of coverage for this priority. The TSBEM report notes concerns about disparities in R&I and the lack of data on climate change impacts on oceans. 79 actions are implemented regionally in the sector, mainly in the field of capacity building, which represents the majority of projects (45%). €102.3M have been mobilised from diverse sources, led by the Horizon programme and the European Maritime and Fisheries Fund. The major projects being implemented are BlueAquaEdu, WINBLUE, NextBlueGeneration and CALLMEBLUE. The projects in this sector are led mainly by Italy, Greece, Spain, with 84% of project leadership between them. DG MARE, in close collaboration with DG REGIO, inaugurated a Smart Specialisation Strategy (S3) Thematic Platform for Sustainable Blue Economy in 2022, providing support for establishing interregional networks and partnerships in this field<sup>15</sup>.

Under **Maritime Spatial Planning (MSP) and Integrated Coastal Zone Management (ICZM)**, the Ministerial Declaration highlights the increasing competition for marine and coastal space and the need for increased effort to control impacts and expand Marine Protected Areas. The Roadmap outlines the state of activities and progress, including the EU Directive establishing a framework for MSP and various projects promoting MSP in different Mediterranean sub-regions. The TSBEM report notes the recognition of MSP as a relevant policy instrument in the Southern/Eastern Mediterranean. It underscores the role of ICZM and MSP in planning decisions, considering interactions and preserving biodiversity. Cross-country collaboration in the Western Mediterranean has been supported by initiatives like UNEP/MAP<sup>16</sup>. The sector shows a high degree of implementation with 97 regional actions. This could be attributed to the existing EU policy framework (MSP

<sup>15</sup> (Union for the Mediterranean, 2024, p. 144)

<sup>16</sup> (Sensi & Salazar, 2024, p. 144)

Directive) and a broader political will at the UfM level to work on the area, as highlighted by its central role at the 2nd UfM Stakeholder Conference. The Med Community of Practice on MSP, supported by the UfM, as well as the European Blue Forum that has been set up by DG MARE and CINEA (European Climate, Infrastructure and Environment Executive Agency) assist in this field<sup>17</sup>. The two also published guidelines for Guidelines for implementing an Ecosystem-based Approach in Maritime Spatial Planning in 2021<sup>18</sup>. The total funding secured for MSP stands at €235.2M, coming primarily from the Horizon and Interreg programmes.

In terms of **Sustainable investment in the blue economy**, the Ministerial Declaration expresses concern about uneven economic development and access to finance in the Mediterranean region. The Roadmap highlights the EU Communication on a new approach for a sustainable blue economy, emphasizing a transition towards clean and climate-proof activities. The European Maritime, Fisheries and Aquaculture Fund (EMFAF) and the BlueInvest platform are identified as supporting the transition. The mapping of investment sources reveals numerous funding opportunities for the current EU programming period. The Roadmap tracks the level of financial support committed to the Sustainable Food from the Sea priority. The TSBEM report dedicates a section to "Sustainable Blue Economy as an opportunity: Financing sustainable returns". It notes the increasing attention to sustainable blue finance in which international organisations and Multilateral Development Banks (MDBs) play a crucial role. The report provides an overview of different capital types and their risk-to-return ratio. It details various EU funding opportunities like EMFAF and LIFE, as well as international initiatives and banks investing in the blue economy. Blue loans and blue bonds are highlighted as innovative financial instruments. The report also discusses the role of venture capitalists and incubators in supporting blue economy start-ups. The Sustainable Blue Economy Partnership (SBEP) is mentioned as a significant effort to pool research and innovation investments, but the lack of understanding and awareness is identified as a barrier to increasing investments.

In addition, a major initiative contributing to the financing of the sustainable blue economy in the Mediterranean is the EBRD's Blue Mediterranean Partnership (BMP). Launched as a flagship initiative in the context of the UfM Ministerial Declaration, specifically following the 2022 UfM Conference on "Investing in a Sustainable Blue Economy" and also presented at COP27, the BMP aims to scale up investment in sustainable blue economy projects across the region. It supports project design and implementation, capacity building, and the creation of enabling policy and regulatory environments. The BMP provides grant co-financing for investments implemented by approved Multilateral Development Banks (MDBs) and Financial Institutions (FIs), including the EIB, EBRD, CDP, and KfW. To date, donor pledges from Sweden (SIDA), Germany (GIZ and KfW), France (via AfD), Spain (AECID), and the EU amount to EUR 22 million. While the BMP pipeline includes projects such as the New East Alexandria wastewater treatment plant the focus is equally on tackling diverse SBE sectors rather than a narrow focus on improved environmental infrastructure. The first investment projects are expected to be launched in mid-2025 and include the Ayla Oasis Regeneration in Aqaba (enhancement of marine biodiversity and coral ecosystem restoration); the Sokhna Container Terminal (development of a new "green", electrified, container terminal in Sokhna; and the Masen Offshore Wind (development of the first offshore wind farm in Morocco located on the Atlantic coast). The initiative stands out as a concrete mechanism for advancing the sustainable investment priorities of the Ministerial Declaration.

It should be noted that a Blue Economy and Finance Forum was held on 7-8 June 2025 during the UNOC 3 high-level event focused on finance solutions for many of the priority areas covered by the SBE MD. These include: an exploration of innovative financial tools and models, featuring real-world local projects, to mobilise capital for marine ecosystem conservation, focusing on scalability and overcoming barriers to access and effectiveness; an examination of financing strategies for cross-jurisdictional ocean protection and research, highlighting collaboration between private, philanthropic, and public actors to bridge the funding gap; presentation of how blended finance, biodiversity credits, and de-risking mechanisms can attract private capital to blue projects, offering strategic, scalable investment pathways for ocean-positive economic growth; an examination of the role of private capital and how venture capital and private equity can drive innovation in sustainable ocean industries, positioning blue investments as essential to long-term economic resilience. The mechanisms and frameworks

<sup>17</sup> (Union for the Mediterranean, 2024, p. 164)

<sup>18</sup> (Sensi & Salazar, 2024, p. 148)

necessary to align finance with sustainable development goals and ocean health were also discussed as were governance mechanisms necessary for the attraction of investment in the blue economy.

Innovative financing mechanisms for the sustainable blue economy also formed part of the programme of the UfM-led segment on Sustainable Blue Economy, titled “Charting the path towards SBE: the Mediterranean leading the way”, which was held during UNOC 3’s Mediterranean Day (10 June 2025).

### Challenges

The TSBEM document and the MTE field research identify a number of barriers which hinder the convergence with the provisions of the 2021 Ministerial Declaration. These include the uneven levels of economic development and access to finance between countries across the Mediterranean region; the lack of capacity in the developing UfM countries; the threat that might be an inertia of political will being translated into action, and different national interests, to drive collaborative and cooperative approaches across the region; the fragmentation of governance structures across different countries and sectors; the gaps in policy coherence, especially between the North and South Mediterranean states. Furthermore, while national funding schemes exist, the financial resources available are often insufficient to support all necessary projects simultaneously. Funding can also be disproportionately focused on the northern shore of the Mediterranean. In addition, unlike the Western Mediterranean (WestMED) and the Adriatic-Ionian region (EUSAIR), the eastern part of the Mediterranean lacks a robust governance structure to facilitate cooperation among stakeholders, which may be having an impact on the declaration’s effectiveness in this part of the Mediterranean.

From the MTE field research it further emerges that there are challenges in having an impact at the regional level, as the primary counterparts to the UfMS SBE team are national-level contact points: (a) a lack of coherent and coordinated governance across intra-national and sectoral boundaries contributes to policy fragmentation, also visible between the northern and southern Mediterranean shores, (b) the Regions, which have access to Interreg funding, have shown limited interest in becoming involved in the UfM’s SBE efforts. Additionally, limited progress has been made at the subnational level, as effective engagement at this level requires a strong and coordinated foundation at the national level.

### Role of the UfM

The UfMS, the UfM EU and Jordan Co-Presidencies, and the relevant Regional Platform on SBE provide political guidance, coordination, technical support, and a platform for dialogue and monitoring, all of which are crucial for facilitating the effective implementation of the policy activities outlined in the Declaration and the Roadmap. As per the documentation, the **UfM Secretariat** is tasked with reinforcing dialogue between UfM member countries and regional stakeholders, reporting progress to the UfM Senior Officials’ Meeting, and providing a technical assistance facility; the **UfM Co-Presidency** (EU and Jordan) provides the political leadership for the Ministerial Declaration and are involved in guiding the overall process; and the **UfM Regional Platform** on Sustainable Blue Economy (formerly the *Blue Economy Working Group*) convenes regularly to guide and support the implementation of the UfM Ministerial Declarations, oversees the Roadmap, monitors progress, approves and updates indicators, and ensures the preparation of yearly summary reports. The platform also facilitates the exchange of information, perspectives, best practices, and expertise. This collaborative approach enhances the multiplier effect of successful initiatives, supports their replication potential in diverse national and local contexts, and contributes to the capitalization of outcomes at regional level, reinforcing shared ownership and long-term impact.

### Conclusion

The review of implementation across the UfM region reveals a pattern of both positive momentum and persistent disparities. The UfM Ministerial Declaration has triggered meaningful developments in governance, strategy alignment, and pilot initiatives across sectors. Frameworks have matured in areas such as fisheries, sustainable transport, and governance, with promising signs of cross-sectoral synergies and stakeholder involvement. However, progress is uneven, with varying levels of uptake depending on pre-existing structures, institutional

capacity, and access to finance. The measurable progress achieved in key sectors affirms the MD's effectiveness in translating sustainability goals into concrete action, despite uneven implementation across countries.

Key enablers such as marine research, maritime safety, and sustainable investment are gaining ground, yet challenges remain in ensuring coherence between Northern and Southern Mediterranean countries. Structural barriers—including financial inequality, fragmented policy landscapes, and differing political priorities—continue to hinder convergence. The TSBEM report underlines these issues while pointing to innovation, financing instruments like blue bonds, and partnerships as potential solutions.

The role of the UfM institutional ecosystem, including its Secretariat, Co-Presidencies, and Regional Platform, emerges as vital in steering this complex, multi-stakeholder process. Their contributions in political guidance, technical assistance, and dialogue facilitation are critical for scaling efforts and aligning national and regional actions with the Declaration's vision, as is their role in coordinating efforts by gathering and processing regular information about the state of play in each member country. Just as importantly, this ecosystem fosters the alignment and amplification of successful practices across borders, enabling mutual learning, reinforcing regional synergies, and building a shared foundation for future initiatives.

### 3.2.4 Efficiency

*(How well are resources being used? What are the main challenges in achieving goals so far? To what extent does the MD lead to identified results at Mediterranean/ regional level? To what extent has the MD resulted in the mobilisation of additional funding for the priority areas?)*

Efficiency is a measure of how well resources are being used and the criterion also seeks to identify what factors make the achievement of goals difficult. This chapter explores the efficiency of implementing the 2021 UfM Ministerial Declaration on Sustainable Blue Economy, focusing on how well resources have been mobilised and coordinated, and what factors support or hinder achievement of goals. Drawing on desk research and the MTE field research (key informant interviews KIIs), the analysis identifies both structural strengths and ongoing challenges in the governance and delivery of SBE-related initiatives across the Mediterranean.

The UfMS, Regional Platform, and sub-regional initiatives such as WestMED and EUSAIR have established a participatory governance structure that enables dialogue, coordination, and monitoring. The Roadmap provides a comprehensive mechanism for tracking progress, while stakeholder platforms foster synergies and cross-sectoral collaboration. Fieldwork confirms the critical role of the UfMS in supporting member states—especially in the Southern Mediterranean—through capacity building, project development, and funding access.

Nonetheless, efficiency is affected by uneven implementation across countries and sectors, fragmented governance at national level, and limited engagement at subnational level. The complexity of coordinating diverse actors and priorities is compounded by pre-existing inequalities, environmental and economic pressures, and policy incoherence, particularly between EU and non-EU states. Efforts are being made to enhance coordination and policy alignment across the region, notably through initiatives and funding instruments like Interreg programmes, which aim to reinforce synergies with the UfM's priorities and facilitate dialogue reaching both shores of the Mediterranean while also supporting better cooperation governance. There is broad recognition of progress made from the first to the second Ministerial Declaration, with increasing specialisation of priorities. Continued EU support for the Regional Platform and further strengthening of national coordination mechanisms are recommended, with enhanced synergy with EU funding instruments like Interreg being a key avenue for cooperation.

Funding has come predominantly from the Horizon Programme, which accounts for approximately 54% of the total financial support at regional level. It is by far the largest source of funding for all priorities apart from the priority for coastal and maritime tourism, where it provides only 24% of the funding, whereas for Maritime Renewable Energy, it accounts for more than 80% of the funding. Interreg and ENI CBC MED which together account for 53% of the funding in maritime tourism, account for 25% of funding across all priorities.

In addition to Horizon and Interreg, DG MARE's European Maritime, Fisheries and Aquaculture Fund (EMFAF) has made targeted contributions to the implementation of the Ministerial Declaration across numerous priority areas. EMFAF funding has supported flagship calls and projects in areas such as climate-neutral transport and ports, blue skills and employment, marine litter, marine spatial planning, and sustainable food systems. Specific EMFAF-supported initiatives such as POWER4MED, Blue Ports, and Blue Careers demonstrate how financial resources have been directed towards accelerating innovation, improving human capital, and enabling energy transitions in alignment with the Declaration's priorities. The contribution of the EMFAF to the MD's implementation is detailed in Appendix 1.

Resource allocation is detailed in the Roadmap and a monitoring system to track the use of resources is described. This is to operate under the UfM Regional Platform on Sustainable Blue Economy with the UfMS steering the process. A number of challenges are identified in the available documentation which would potentially the achievement of goals, such as: Environmental and climate-related challenges, exacerbated by population growth, coastal urbanisation, and unsustainable use of marine resources, pose significant threats; the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic on economic activity and employment in the Mediterranean region; differing national contexts and challenges mean that not all Mediterranean countries are at the same stage, making harmonisation difficult and requiring strong political will; conflicts among sea users may hinder the integration of marine renewable energies; lack of centralised governance for MRE and uncertainties in the consenting processes (delays, multiple applications, unclear procedures) impede progress in this sector; the implementation of Maritime Spatial Planning (MSP) is uneven, particularly in the southern Mediterranean, and is often hampered by a lack of integrated data and cross-border cooperation; fragmentation of governance structures across different countries and sectors, as well as gaps in policy coherence, especially between EU and non-EU Mediterranean states also creates challenges to implementation.

When investigating efficiency through the prism of each of the ten priorities of the Ministerial Declaration, the findings below have been observed:

The current **governance structure**, centered around the UfM Secretariat, the Blue Economy Regional Platform, and the Mediterranean Blue Economy Stakeholder Platform, provides a framework for dialogue, coordination, and monitoring. The involvement of stakeholders from various sectors works towards ensuring a comprehensive approach. The recognition of sub-regional initiatives like WestMED and EUSAIR as successful examples of cooperation and the role of the GFCM in fisheries governance indicate that existing structures support the implementation of the UfM's SBE MD. The TSBEM report, however, points to the fragmentation of governance structures across different countries and sectors as a major barrier to better efficiency. The lack of a dedicated governance structure in the eastern Mediterranean, unlike the WestMED and EUSAIR, also suggests uneven coverage for the MD's implementation.

The Ministerial Declaration explicitly aimed at maximizing **regional coordination, partnerships, and opportunities for cooperation**. The establishment of the 'Mediterranean Blue Economy Stakeholder Platform' and the call for reinforced dialogue between member countries and stakeholders work as direct mechanisms to foster synergies and collaborations. The UfM's role in fostering regional cooperation through a participatory mechanism and the Regional Platform, which facilitates the exchange of information and best practices are key aspects which foster the creation of regional synergy. The Mediterranean Blue Economy Stakeholder Platform (MedBESP) is the regional networking platform for sharing knowledge and supporting the development of the blue economy in the Mediterranean. It is funded by the EU and overall managed by the Union for the Mediterranean (UfM). The MedBESP is an interactive, user friendly, and community-based stakeholder platform. One of its key goals is to contribute to the development of the Mediterranean Blue Economy Community and to this end the platform enables registered users to keep track of the latest news and events in the region; share their work and initiatives in order to disseminate and widen the reach of their activities; extend their network; and build new operational partnerships.

Initiatives like the AquaWest Technical Group under the WestMED framework, promoting cooperation in aquaculture, and the Sustainable Blue Economy Partnership (SBEP), pooling research and innovation investments, are concrete examples of synergies and collaborations that align with the Declaration's objectives. The UfM Regional Platform itself serves as a venue for bringing together diverse actors.

Whether or not the current modalities of management are "optimal" cannot be judged by desk research alone. However, the detailed monitoring, reporting, and evaluation system outlined in the Roadmap suggests a structured approach to track progress and inform decision-making. The fact that the Roadmap is updated periodically to reflect progress indicates an adaptive management approach which certainly facilitates the progress of the MD's implementation. The TSBEM report acknowledges the complexity of governance due to the diversity of countries and the range of sectors involved, implying that the **coordination of numerous stakeholders** is difficult, especially when the need for more inclusive decision-making processes, involving civil society, industry stakeholders, and local communities is taken into consideration. The UfM's participatory mechanism aims to address this and has been praised by interviewees as being effective in fostering cooperation at the regional level. There is a broad appreciation amongst the interviewees for the progress made from the first Ministerial Declaration to the second and the accompanying Roadmap. This evolution has been marked by an increasing degree of specialisation within the identified priorities, which themselves have remained largely consistent.

There are several **mechanisms which have facilitated positive outcomes** which are currently working together to produce results in line with the UfM's SBE MD, including: Sub-regional initiatives like WestMED and EUSAIR, with their clear goals, priorities, and measurable targets, and which act as catalysts for sustainable blue economy projects; the establishment of platforms for dialogue and collaboration, such as the Mediterranean Blue Economy Stakeholder Platform and the UfM Regional Platform on SBE, which facilitates the exchange of information, best practices, and the development of joint initiatives; and the development of strategic action plans, such as the UfM Strategic Action Plan for Transport Connectivity, and regional action plans, like the Regional Action Plan on marine litter management, which provide frameworks for coordinated action.

The UfM Secretariat plays a crucial role in supporting the efficiency of the Declaration's implementation by reinforcing dialogue between UfM member countries and stakeholders; maximizing regional coordination, partnerships, and cooperation; facilitating the pooling of resources; establishing and managing platforms like the Mediterranean Blue Economy Stakeholder Platform; providing a technical assistance facility to support regional policy dialogue and capacity building; steering the monitoring process of the Roadmap's implementation; reporting on progress made at regional and national levels; facilitating institutional dialogue among all actors; supporting the capitalisation of valuable projects across the Mediterranean; and acting as a dialogue forum for its 43 Member States. As reported by the interviewees, the UfM's SBE team also plays a crucial role in supporting member states in accessing available funding for SBE-related initiatives. It is considered essential that this support continues in the future, particularly through activities such as capacity building, project development, and the provision of technical assistance, especially for Southern Mediterranean countries.

The role of the Regional Platform is highly important for the efficient management and implementation of the policy, as it serves as a central body for guiding and supporting the implementation of the UfM Ministerial Declarations on Blue Economy; overseeing the Roadmap; convening at least twice a year to monitor progress and discuss advancements; and facilitating the exchange of information, perspectives, best practices, and expertise among countries, experts, and stakeholders. Interviewees mentioned that it is also important that the Regional Platform receives continued support from the European Union to ensure its effective functioning. It is recommended that this support be maintained in its current form, given the Platform's value in fostering regional cooperation. As per the interviewees, the Platform serves as a vital instrument of soft diplomacy, fostering collaboration and trust among participating states. While its impact may not be immediately measurable and requires time to mature, its significance is widely acknowledged. It ensures equal treatment of all member states during meetings, characterised by transparency, mutual respect, and inclusiveness. This approach is universally appreciated. By concentrating on technical rather than political matters, the UfM is able to make tangible progress in its work.

The Platform convenes regularly and has held a significant number of meetings (15 reported in the TSBEM report) and 13 countries were recorded as having provided presentations, as part of the Monitoring and Reporting exercise for 2023. Of these, four covered all 10 priorities in their presentations<sup>1</sup>, something which could suggest

either varying levels of engagement or capacity to report across all areas or more positively being engaged in all 10 priorities.

To date, over €1.4 billion has been mobilised across the Mediterranean region through transnational projects supporting the priorities of the Ministerial Declaration. Of these, 56% are transnational projects, 23% sub-regional, and 21% Mediterranean-wide initiatives. All reporting countries indicated they have national funding schemes to support blue economy sectors. Examples include Portugal's Fundo Azul, Algeria's Startup Fund, Malta's Maritime Proof of Concept Fund, and Greece's Decarbonisation Fund for Islands. These national efforts complement EU programmes like EMFAF, HORIZON, Interreg Euro-MED and NEXT-MED too.

In terms of efficiency of the implementation of the UfM SBE MD as broken down by priority, the findings which follow have been recorded. The spending by priority is outlined below. It is significant to note how much of the spending is directed at platforms and collaboration:

- **Sustainable food from the sea: Fisheries and Aquaculture:** This sector accounts for 10% of overall spending, with almost half going to Research & Innovation (R&I) (45%).
- **Sustainable, climate-neutral and zero-pollution maritime transport and ports:** This sector has the highest expenditure at 27%, with a significant portion allocated to platforms (47%).
- **Coastal and maritime tourism:** This sector accounts for 16% of overall spending, with the largest share going to R&I (44%).
- **Marine renewable energies:** This sector has a lower expenditure at 6%, with the largest share going to capitalisation projects (34%).
- **Interactions between marine litter and the blue economy:** This sector accounts for 6% of expenditure, with a focus on collaboration and building platforms (40%).
- **Maritime safety and security:** This sector accounts for 8% of expenditure, with R&I (43%) and capacity building (34%) being the largest shares.
- **Maritime Spatial Planning and Integrated Coastal Zone Management:** This area accounts for 17% of expenditure, focusing on platforms (36%) and capacity building (35%).

Pre-existing inequalities among countries can affect the implementation of any regional initiatives. These differing national contexts and the fragmentation of governance structures pose challenges. Other challenges identified by priority include compliance with the GFCM management recommendations for sustainable food from the sea, as well as attention regarding climate and environmental impacts and decent work for small scale fisheries; the need to diversify small ports and marinas for sustainable, climate-neutral and zero-pollution maritime transport and ports; stakeholder collaboration to strengthen resilience is needed for coastal and maritime tourism, as is the development of comprehensive monitoring, evaluation, and statistics; the lack of centralised MRE governance which leads to divided responsibilities and complex authorisation procedures is a major challenge for this priority, as are uncertainties (delays, multiple applications) in the process of consent and access to finance.

For the marine litter priority, the weak enforcement, lack of policy and legislative frameworks, poor solid waste management, and fragmented understanding due to lack of data are key challenges, as are the uneven emphasis on assessments between coastlines and seabeds, and the use of generalised data categories. For maritime safety and security, the absence of a single security system covering the entire Mediterranean region creates imbalances and various threats need addressing. The lack of a governance structure to facilitate cooperation in the eastern part of the Mediterranean as a counterpoint to WestMED and EUSAIR creates challenges, as does the current focus on regional and national levels, without the engagement of the subnational levels of government. There is an East-West divide in marine research and innovation, and for MSP the need to further explore multi-use approaches within Plans and the coherence of MSP and territorial matters is also a challenge.



## Conclusion

The implementation of the 2021 UfM Ministerial Declaration on Sustainable Blue Economy has demonstrated notable efficiency in mobilising financial and institutional resources across the Mediterranean region. The establishment of the Regional Platform, the support role of the UfM Secretariat has created a governance structure that enables dialogue, technical assistance, and capacity building—particularly benefiting Southern Mediterranean countries.

However, this efficiency is not uniform. Fragmented governance, especially at the national and subnational levels, uneven engagement across countries and sectors, persistent gaps between EU and non-EU members and a continuing imbalance between the eastern and western Mediterranean continue to pose challenges. While the Horizon programme and Interreg funds have been instrumental in financing numerous initiatives, certain sectors, such as marine renewable energy and marine litter, remain underfunded relative to their strategic importance. Variability in the uptake of the Declaration's priorities is evident, with tourism and sustainable transport attracting more investment and progress than others like MSP or MRE, reflecting asymmetries in institutional readiness and funding access.

The UfM's participatory and adaptive management approach, through structured monitoring and evolving Roadmap updates, has helped maintain momentum, but greater coherence, inclusiveness, and resource alignment are still needed to ensure sustainable, equitable outcomes. Continued EU support for coordination mechanisms and increased stakeholder engagement, especially at the subnational level, will be critical to enhancing implementation efficiency in the years ahead.

The mobilisation of EU programmes and participatory governance mechanisms illustrates growing efficiency in leveraging resources for sustainable outcomes, though efforts must continue to ensure that underfunded priorities do not jeopardise long-term sustainability.

### 3.2.5 Impact

*(What difference does the policy make? What are the long-term, positive or negative, results of the policy?)*

The 2021 UfM Ministerial Declaration called for a number of relevant actions to be implemented across the Mediterranean Sea basin, addressing sectoral priorities such as fisheries and aquaculture, maritime transport and ports, coastal and maritime tourism, marine litter, and maritime safety and security, as well as cross-cutting priorities like governance, research and innovation, skills, sustainable investments, and maritime spatial planning. The intended long-term positive results are a more sustainable, resilient, and prosperous blue economy in the Mediterranean, contributing to environmental protection, climate change mitigation and adaptation, and socio-economic development.

The findings highlight a variety of frameworks, initiatives, and projects that have taken shape in response to the Declaration. Notable environmental developments include the designation of the Mediterranean as a potential Sulphur Oxide Emission Control Area, progress on regional marine litter action plans, and strengthened cooperation under platforms such as the former BLUEMED and ongoing WestMED. National-level actions, from Egypt's Integrated Maritime Policy to the creation of innovation centres and protected areas, underscore how regional commitments are being translated into domestic policies.

Interviewees consistently acknowledge the strategic value of the Declaration and the UfM SBE Platform in fostering cooperation and establishing a shared agenda across the Mediterranean. However, they also highlight persistent coordination challenges, differences in national capacity and policy frameworks, and the urgent need for sustained funding. While the Roadmap tracks implementation, a stronger, more targeted strategic action plan could enhance efficiency and impact.

The Roadmap and Country reports analysis presented at the 16th UfM Regional Platform on Sustainable Blue Economy meeting highlight progress made in various priority areas through an analysis of initiatives, frameworks, and projects. These include the following:

- **Fisheries and Aquaculture:** The existence of the GFCM at the regional level is a key pillar for governance in this sector. Projects like LabMAF and FISH MED NET explored labeling schemes and data collection methodologies. The MedFish4Ever Ministerial Declaration is noted as a strong political commitment towards sustainability. Greece and Algeria are both committed to sustainable fisheries, while Marine Protected Areas (MPAs) are important for Morocco and Spain. Countries are also setting up specialised networks or hubs to support fisheries and the blue economy, such as Portugal's Blue Hub Network Algeria's Fishermen's Cooperatives.
- **Sustainable, Climate-Neutral and Zero-Pollution Transport and Ports:** The entry into force of the IMO's 0.50% sulphur limit in marine fuels is a significant step. The decision to work towards designating the Mediterranean Sea as a Sulphur Oxide Emission Control Area (SOx ECA) is also a key development with Greece, Spain, Morocco, and Italy actively pursuing this. A new Ministerial Declaration on Transport and a Regional Transport Action Plan (2021-2027) were endorsed in 2023, aligning with the SBE Ministerial Declaration. Turkey and Morocco are working towards green shipping initiatives and Greece, Malta, Jordan, Morocco and Portugal are all pursuing green shipping initiatives and electrification to reduce emissions. Egypt, Portugal and Spain are all embracing Green hydrogen. Finally Italy and Algeria are both involved in international collaborations, relevant to this priority.
- **Coastal and Maritime Tourism:** Several regional and sub-regional declarations and initiatives exist, but a comprehensive regional framework addressing all challenges outlined in the UfM Ministerial Declaration is still missing. The Interreg NEXT MED programme includes projects aiming to enhance sustainable tourism. Many of the countries have prioritised eco-tourism in their development strategies, including Egypt, Spain, Jordan and Turkey, while Greece, Algeria and Gozo are working towards digitalisation of tourism service provision. Greece and Morocco are also investing in infrastructure, while other countries are applying national funds to tourism development such as through Portugal's nautical stations, Italy's focus on sustainable coastal tourism, and Egypt's green yacht marina project.
- **Marine Renewable Energies:** The UfM held its first Mediterranean Ministerial Conference on Research and Innovation in 2022, emphasizing the importance of MRE. Projects like MERMAID and TROPOS are relevant in this area. Greece and Italy already have strategies in place, while Algeria and Morocco are currently developing theirs. Green Hydrogen is being actively developed in Egypt, Jordan, Morocco and Turkey, while Greece, Portugal, Spain, and Turkey all have specific initiatives aimed at expanding their offshore wind capacities. Other countries such as Malta and Portugal are looking into other renewables, too.
- **Interactions between Marine Litter and the Blue Economy:** Progress in the implementation of the Regional Action Plan on Marine Litter Management in the Mediterranean is noted. The amended Regional Plan on Marine Litter Management adopted at COP 22 includes new measures. National strategies have been introduced by Egypt, Portugal, Jordan and Algeria for the reduction of plastics, while Turkey and Jordan are working on a circular economy approach to waste. Projects like Plastic Busters CAP and Marine Litter Med II are also actively working on this issue. There are two sub-regional agreements for marine waste, one between Greece, Cyprus and Israel, the other between Spain and Malta.
- **Maritime Safety and Security:** The 2021 UfM Ministerial Declaration recognised the importance of this area for cooperation. Opportunities for innovation and progress in training, capacity building, and information sharing are highlighted. Egypt, Lebanon, Italy and Spain are all collaborating with international organisations in these fields, while Morocco and Malta are both seen to be investing in infrastructure for maritime traffic monitoring and search and rescue operations. A number of National Strategies are being prepared in this field, even in landlocked North Macedonia, as a compliance issue.
- **Marine Research and Innovation, Skills, Careers and Employment:** The first UfM Ministerial Conference on Research and Innovation was held in 2022. Initiatives like BLUEMED aimed to foster

research and innovation. Some countries have developed long-term strategic plans, such as Türkiye, Jordan and Morocco (Blue Plan 2053, the Morocco-Med Blue Innovation Corridor and the Jordan's strategic plan Aqaba Special Economic Zone Authority), while others have enlisted their national research institutions to play a role in driving blue economy initiatives. These include Italy's National Research Council (CNR) and Marine Sciences Institute (ISMAR). Turkey's TÜBİTAK Marmara Research Center, and Egypt's National Blue Economy Research and Innovation Center. Spain and Portugal are running programs like the National Basic Data Programme and MARineSIM training programmes. In this priority, there are also regional and transnational initiatives, such as the PRIMA (Partnership for Research and Innovation in the Mediterranean Area) between Egypt and Greece, and the JPI Oceans which are jointly operated by Malta and Spain.

- **Maritime Spatial Planning and Integrated Coastal Zone Management:** The importance of MSP and ICZM is emphasised. The establishment of the Mediterranean MSP Community of Practice (MED-MSP-CoP) is a significant development. Algeria, Italy and Spain all have ICZM strategies (and Lebanon and Egypt are developing theirs) and Greece, Spain, and Italy have all developed or are in the process of finalizing MSP plans. In Jordan the Aqaba Special Economic Zone relies on MSP to promote ecosystem-based management of marine resources.
- **Governance and Sea Basin Strategies:** The UfM continues to provide structural support through the Regional Platform on Sustainable Blue Economy. The WestMED and EUSAIR initiatives are recognised as successful examples of sub-regional cooperation.
- **Sustainable Investments:** The vital role of blue finance is acknowledged. The UfM held a conference on "Investing in a Sustainable Blue Economy" in 2022.

The Ministerial Declaration and its Roadmap are intended to guide and encourage actions at the national level, also. The Roadmap includes updates on progress in the implementation of the Ministerial Declaration by UfM member countries, based on information reported by the members of the UfM Regional Platform on Sustainable Blue Economy.

The interviews conducted confirmed that the UfM SBE MD and the Platform for Sustainable Blue Economy are seen as important and valuable for fostering cooperation and establishing a common agenda in the Mediterranean region. The MD is accepted as a regional common agenda across the North and South Mediterranean because the countries essentially share common challenges. The interviewees agree that it provides a compact and inclusive framework for Mediterranean countries to achieve related goals, while the platform helps bring countries together, raise awareness of SBE actions, and ensure every voice is heard. The UfM MD has strategic value for the interviewees, as it facilitates information sharing and cooperation under a governance framework with agreed goals and opens channels of cooperation which foster the development of technical dialogue. Even countries such as N. Macedonia which is landlocked agrees that the MD has value and is relevant for the management of their lakeshores.

Despite the importance of the initiative and the great potential for impact inherent in the text of the Ministerial Decision, there are challenges and problems to be overcome to fulfil its full potential. The number of priorities and the multiple sectors that they cover create a need for prioritisation to avoid thinly spreading resources. The interviewees consider the policy coordination to be difficult as is the integration which needs to be done between differently focused Ministries, however necessary it is. Furthermore, the cross-cutting nature of the blue economy leads to fragmentation, which is considered to be a general challenge. Differences in development speed among member states also cause imbalances and collaboration difficulties. Some member states have specific maritime strategies and ministries, while others follow general guidelines and the streamlining of cooperation becomes a coordination challenge. Geopolitical factors can also affect progress and therefore impact, as can competing political priorities and a lack of resources (both financial and human) hindering national progress in SBE.

The importance of funding and financing was frequently mentioned by the interviewees, because without funding to achieve results, there can be no impact from only programming documents, strategies and roadmaps. While the UfMS had a budget to support efforts, and budgeting/finance remains on the UfM's agenda, funding in

general of the SBE activities is a significant prerequisite for implementation of the UfM's SBE MD. In this respect, DG MARE's financing of the UfM has been crucial, and discussions have taken place about creating a dedicated fund, particularly for the SBE sector.

### Conclusion

the 2021 UfM Ministerial Declaration has served as a catalyst for numerous regional and sub-regional initiatives and projects aimed at fostering a sustainable blue economy in the Mediterranean. While comprehensive long-term results are still unfolding, progress is being made across various sectors and cross-cutting themes, with efforts to translate regional commitments and best practices into concrete actions and policy developments at the national level. The ongoing monitoring and reporting mechanisms are crucial for tracking the extent to which the Declaration leads to identified impacts throughout the Mediterranean region. Even without the transnational and sub-regional projects outlined above, as more and more countries formulate strategies and implement them for each of the priorities, the large number of complex national projects can be considered to be indicative of the impact at regional level that may be evident in future. While a comprehensive assessment of the long-term impact requires time, the desk and field research conducted indicate that significant steps have been taken through the establishment of governance structures, monitoring mechanisms, strategic roadmaps, and the promotion of regional and national actions to help ensure that the 2021 UfM Ministerial Declaration on Sustainable Blue Economy has a lasting positive impact in the Mediterranean region. Initial outcomes suggest that the MD is laying the groundwork for a sustainable transformation of the blue economy, with enduring environmental benefits connected to systemic shifts in environmental management and planning likely to emerge as national and regional efforts mature. Social benefits are also likely to follow as social cohesion and inclusion are incorporated as horizontal goals in projects.

### 3.2.6 Sustainability

*(Will the benefits last? How viable are the outputs and outcomes of the MD? What mechanisms are in place to ensure the long-term sustainability of Mediterranean/ regional cooperation on these matters?)*

The Ministerial Declaration is widely considered by the interviewees to constitute a vital instrument for addressing the common challenges associated with the SBE across the Mediterranean region. It offers a structured framework that enables national initiatives to align with broader regional objectives, thereby fostering coherence and cooperation. The desk research and field research both indicate that several steps are being taken to help ensure the lasting positive impact of the Declaration. The establishment of a monitoring system which involves yearly country updates on implementation and a mid-term evaluation is a key element. This allows for the tracking of progress and can inform adjustments to strategies over time. The Declaration itself also calls for the UfM Blue Regional Platform to regularly share progress.

The Roadmap aims to provide a clear pathway towards the full implementation of the Declaration. By offering an analysis of needs, gaps, and opportunities, it seeks to guide future support and strengthen ongoing work. The identification and prioritisation of actions are intended to create concrete initiatives with short, medium, and long-term impacts.

The alignment of the Declaration with existing international frameworks such as the UN 2030 Agenda and its Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), the Paris Agreement, the BBNJ Agreement, the UN Ocean Decade, the UN Decade for Ecosystem restoration, and the Barcelona Convention suggests that its principles are embedded within broader global sustainability efforts, which could contribute to the sustainability of its results and longevity of its impact. The emphasis on capacity building, knowledge sharing, and regional collaboration are also factors that contribute to sustainable progress. The research has also highlighted numerous examples of ongoing initiatives and projects that are direct outputs of or aligned with the Declaration's objectives, indicating its influence and the viability of its intentions.

The insights which have been gathered during the preparation of the present report into areas where progress has been made and which challenges remain can inform continuous improvement and act as lessons learned:

- **Regional Cooperation:** The recognition of WestMED and EUSAIR as successful examples of cooperation and the need for ongoing opportunities for exchange and cooperation indicates the perceived value of the sub-regional approach. The uneven geographical coverage of initiatives suggests a need to strengthen engagement in the eastern Mediterranean. Regional cooperation was recognised by a number of interviewees as one of the key factors ensuring the sustainability of the initiative's outcomes, as it fosters collaboration and networking.
- **Governance:** The UfM Regional Platform on Sustainable Blue Economy serves as a vital platform for guiding and supporting implementation. The participatory mechanism integrated into the UfM's governance framework promotes collaboration among diverse stakeholders, while the involvement of DG MARE as co-presidency ensures support of the initiative.
- **Data and Monitoring:** The emphasis on data collection and the development of information-sharing systems in fisheries<sup>19</sup> and the development of joint indicators for sustainable tourism<sup>20</sup> point to the importance of robust data for effective management and monitoring. In this respect, the EU Blue Economy Observatory, established in May 2022 by the JRC as the EU's central socio-economic monitoring hub for all ocean- and coast-based sectors may help in providing data and analysis to support the decision making process for the SBE.
- **Stakeholder Engagement:** The online consultation organised by the UfM secretariat and the outcomes of the 2nd UfM Stakeholders Conference on Sustainable Blue Economy underscore the value of engaging a broad range of stakeholders in the implementation process. This could benefit from being expanded to an even broader range of stakeholders.
- **Financial Support:** The recognition of uneven levels of economic development and access to finance and the focus on sustainable investments highlight the need to mobilise financial resources and create conducive environments for investment across the region.

Several key factors are recognised, which play a role to ensure the lasting positive impact of the 2021 Ministerial Declaration:

- **Establishment of a Monitoring and Evaluation System:** As mentioned earlier, the monitoring system with yearly updates and a mid-term evaluation is crucial for tracking progress and making necessary adjustments.
- **Development of a Roadmap for Implementation:** The Roadmap provides a structured approach to translating the Declaration's calls for action into concrete activities and projects.
- **Active Engagement of the UfM Regional Platform on Sustainable Blue Economy:** This group is responsible for monitoring progress and facilitating the implementation of the Declaration.
- **Alignment with Existing Policy Frameworks:** The Declaration builds upon previous UfM declarations and aligns with international agreements and strategies related to sustainable development and environmental protection.
- **Emphasis on Cross-Cutting Priorities:** Addressing governance, sustainable investments, research and innovation, skills, and maritime spatial planning as enablers for the blue economy aims for systemic and long-term change.
- **Monitoring Progress at National Level:** The yearly country updates through the Regional Platform allow tracking of how the Declaration's priorities are being addressed in national policies and initiatives.

Finally, the interviewees identified certain aspects of the Ministerial Declaration's implementation as important for the sustainability of the results:

<sup>19</sup> As recorded in the Roadmap document, concerning fish stock management (Union for the Mediterranean, 2024, p. 19)

<sup>20</sup> As mentioned in the Roadmap document, Plan Bleu is working to this end with other stakeholders (Union for the Mediterranean, 2024, p. 57)

- The **capacity building and technical assistance** which is facilitated by the Ministerial Declaration is considered especially effective in ensuring the sustainability of the declaration's impact, especially for the less advanced member states who learn from the more advanced ones
- The **funding received from DG MARE** is also considered particularly significant for the achievement of impacts and the sustainability of these impacts.
- The continuation of **dedicated TA from DG MARE** is considered very important.
- Finally, the importance of **social cohesion and inclusion** to establishing and maintaining the legitimacy and sustainability of the declaration's actions has been noted and should be kept in mind.

**In conclusion**, the desk and field research conducted indicate that significant steps have been taken through the establishment of governance structures, monitoring mechanisms, strategic roadmaps, and the promotion of regional and national actions to help ensure that the 2021 UfM Ministerial Declaration on Sustainable Blue Economy has a lasting positive impact in the Mediterranean region. The Declaration's embedded alignment with international frameworks, supported by robust monitoring, participatory governance, and regional cooperation, provides a strong foundation for the durability of its sustainability impacts, across the Mediterranean.

### 3.2.7 Added Value

*(What is the additional value which the MD brings? What is the additional value resulting from collective action, compared to individual initiatives in this field? What are the lessons learnt at Mediterranean, regional and national levels, which could support the continuous improvement of the Agenda?)*

The 2021 UfM Ministerial Declaration on Sustainable Blue Economy (SBE) provides significant additional value to the region by establishing a shared strategic agenda and enhancing regional cooperation compared to individual initiatives. The Declaration sets a basis for coordinated future support by the UfM and other relevant regional stakeholders, aiming to address the joint challenges for the future of the Mediterranean Sea and its region. It was commonly welcomed as an ambitious declaration on shared goals with an expanded scope in terms of areas of cooperation, principles, and common actions.

The Declaration aims to align the policies of UfM member states towards a collective vision of a sustainable and prosperous Mediterranean region. This overarching framework helps individual initiatives to be more coherent and impactful by contributing to a larger, agreed-upon strategy. The Declaration tasks the UfM Secretariat to continue reinforcing the existing dialogue among stakeholders in the blue economy to maximise regional coordination, partnerships, opportunities for cooperation, and pooling of resources. The UfM Regional Platform on Sustainable Blue Economy (SBE), formerly the UfM Blue Economy Working Group, convenes regularly to guide and support the implementation of the Declaration.

Regarding the mobilisation of additional funding, the 2021 Ministerial Declaration has aimed to prioritise investment in the sustainable blue economy and encourage UfM members to create a conducive environment for financial investments. It recognised the uneven levels of economic development and access to finance across the Mediterranean.

The Declaration's emphasis on sustainable investments and creating an enabling environment is likely to influence funding priorities and facilitate access to existing and new financial mechanisms. The declaration presents a call for prioritisation of investment, as it calls on financial institutions, development partners, and public and private actors to prioritise investment in the sustainable blue economy. It also encourages UfM members to continue making necessary domestic reforms to create a conducive environment for financial investments. At the same time, the declaration included short term priorities such as financing blue economy innovation ecosystems, recognizing them as essential drivers for transformative change.








For certain countries, participation in the MD is primarily knowledge-driven. While these countries may already possess the necessary material resources, their engagement is motivated by the opportunity to access technical dialogue and specialised knowledge in various SBE sectors. For EU candidate countries, their involvement in the

MD represents a milestone in their accession process as it provides them with valuable experience in working collaboratively with EU institutions and other member states on issues which may not necessarily be priorities for them, but the modalities of participation in such international fora help build capacity at national level. The presence of a non-EU co-chair in the UfMS is considered essential, as it promotes a greater sense of ownership and inclusiveness among non-EU participating countries, reinforcing the collaborative and balanced nature of the initiative.

**In conclusion,** the 2021 UfM Ministerial Declaration offers significant added value through enhanced coordination, policy alignment, and strategic direction, which can indirectly lead to a more effective utilisation of existing funds and potentially attract new investments by highlighting the regional commitment and shared priorities in the sustainable blue economy. The MD's added value lies in its capacity to generate collective momentum for sustainability, turning shared challenges into opportunities for inclusive, long-term regional transformation.

### 3.3. Summary of findings

Participation in the MD holds significant value for all countries, as it enables them to engage in the broader Mediterranean community on Sustainable Blue Economy issues and to establish cooperative relationships with neighbouring states. Despite existing geopolitical challenges, there is a shared interest in regional cooperation, particularly in such issues. The importance of fostering dialogue and partnership in addressing SBE challenges is universally recognised. In this context, the UfM plays a key role in promoting horizontal synergies and enhancing regional cohesion. By criterion, the mid-term evaluation's findings for the UfM's 2021 MD on the SBE may be summarised as follows:

<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>It remains a relevant and effective framework for regional and national action, reflecting shared Mediterranean challenges and priorities. Its strategic directions are reaffirmed by recent EU and international developments.</li> <li>It is a coherent and strategically aligned instrument that supports shared sustainability goals while adapting to Mediterranean realities. However, practical implementation depends on national coordination, balanced capacities, and ongoing regional support.</li> <li>It has prompted coordinated policies, regional strategies, and national actions with progress in several sectors, though achievement varies. More work is needed to turn frameworks into broad, equitable transformation.</li> <li>It benefits from participatory governance and the Roadmap, but efficiency is hindered by uneven implementation, fragmented systems, and uneven local engagement which can hinder the regional benefits from accruing. Funding from EU Programmes such as Horizon, Interreg Next MED and Euro MED as well as the EMFAF has helped, but coordination challenges persist.</li> <li>It has sparked multiple regional and sub-regional projects to support a sustainable blue economy. While long-term results are still developing, it fosters cooperation and a shared agenda, though coordination and funding remain issues.</li> <li>It is a key tool for addressing shared SBE challenges, aligning national efforts with regional goals. Mechanisms like the monitoring system, roadmap, and international alignment support sustained impact.</li> <li>It adds value by setting a common strategic agenda and boosting regional cooperation beyond individual efforts. It encourages engagement across the Mediterranean and strengthens synergies, with the UfM promoting cohesion.</li> </ul>	Relevance	
	Coherence	
	Effectiveness	
	Efficiency	
	Impact	
	Sustainability	
	Added Value	



## 4. Conclusions & Recommendations

### 4.1. Conclusions

The 2021 UfM MD remains a key framework for regional cooperation, driving Mediterranean countries toward a sustainable and inclusive blue economy. By addressing pressing challenges such as marine pollution, overfishing, and climate change, the Declaration emphasizes the need for countries to work together to manage marine resources in a way that balances economic, social, and environmental priorities. This collaborative approach is vital, as no single nation can solve these issues in isolation. The involvement of DG MARE is instrumental in ensuring that the MD remains high on the political agenda and that initiatives under the MD have access to funding.

One of the Declaration's central elements is its focus on **capacity building**. The Mediterranean region is diverse in terms of resources and expertise, so fostering collaboration and knowledge-sharing is essential for ensuring that all countries can participate in sustainable marine management. The **Roadmap for implementation** helps turn political commitments into action by offering clear guidelines and allowing countries to engage based on their own capacities and priorities.

The uneven pace of development amongst the MD priorities is noted. Some sectors (such as coastal and maritime tourism, fisheries and aquaculture) are well-established and continue to develop strongly, whereas others face challenges, such as marine spatial planning, which despite being a priority in terms of recognition, strategic focus, and framework establishment, suffers from uneven implementation. This uneven pace of implementation can be attributed to differing national priorities, difficulties in identifying and accessing funding, the complexity of the sector itself, the rapid speed of changes in emerging sectors in particular, which require greater levels of investment, support for regulatory reforms, and technological advancements, in order to realise their full potential.

While there has been progress in key areas such as **maritime safety** and **sustainable fisheries**, several challenges persist. **Funding constraints**, especially in Southern Mediterranean countries, remain a major obstacle to large-scale sustainable projects. These financial limitations hinder progress in vital areas like infrastructure, research, and innovation.

Another challenge is the **variation in national policies**, which complicates the implementation of regional initiatives. The diversity in policies makes it difficult to harmonise actions and develop coordinated strategies across borders. Addressing these discrepancies is crucial for ensuring that all Mediterranean countries can contribute to and benefit from the regional blue economy agenda.

The issue of **coordination** among diverse stakeholders, governments, private sector entities, and international organisations, continues to be a complex task. While regional cooperation is essential, aligning the interests and strategies of such varied stakeholders requires robust coordination mechanisms. Strengthening these mechanisms will be vital to achieving the goals of the SBE.

**DG MARE** has played a pivotal role in implementing the MD through strategic leadership, funding, and technical support. As EU Co-Presidency of the UfM, it has guided regional governance and facilitated cooperation via initiatives like the WestMED and MED-MSP-CoP. It manages EMFAF funding for Blue Careers and Maritime Spatial Planning, co-launched the S3 Thematic Platform, and supports marine data initiatives such as EMODNet and the EU Observatory for the Blue Economy. The DG's contributions span governance, research, skills, spatial planning, fisheries, and maritime security, reinforcing the Declaration's objectives through political support and funding alike.

The **Union for the Mediterranean** plays a critical role in addressing these challenges. It facilitates collaboration, provides technical expertise, and facilitates the access of Mediterranean countries to financial resources necessary for blue economy development. The operation of the MD facilitates osmosis between participating countries, acting as a particularly valuable and sound basis for exchange and access to technical assistance, thus improving the capacity of its member states to implement sustainable practices.



The **disparity** between western and eastern Mediterranean areas remains a significant issue, particularly as the success of the **WestMed initiative** demonstrates the benefits of targeted regional cooperation. The lack of a similar initiative for the Eastern Mediterranean creates an imbalance, requiring the development of initiatives that will provide countries in the eastern Mediterranean with access to resources, technical expertise, and collaborative opportunities on par with the West.

The growing significance of the **Mediterranean Ocean Pact** and the **New Mediterranean Pact**, as well as the appointment of a new EU Commissioner for Fisheries and Oceans, mark a new chapter in the region's approach to marine conservation and sustainable development. From 2015, when the integrated maritime policy was set out, to 2021 when the sustainable blue maritime policy was formalised, the EC's engagement in SBE is clear. As a precursor to current developments, the UfM Declaration further prepared the groundwork at regional level, in demonstrating the continuing importance of the blue economy sector: the new Pacts and the new Commissioner demonstrate the ongoing commitment of the EC, and creates opportunities to further improve the alignment of the efforts of both EU and non-EU countries, promoting greater coordination in addressing the Mediterranean's marine challenges.

In conclusion, the 2021 UfM MD on Sustainable Blue Economy continues to be a guiding framework for regional cooperation. While progress has been made in critical sectors, challenges related to **funding, regulatory differences, and stakeholder coordination** must be addressed. **The role of UfM and initiatives to balance capacities and interests in the Mediterranean are the key to unlocking the full potential** of the blue economy. Additionally, the emergence of the **Mediterranean Ocean Pact** provides a unique opportunity to advance regional sustainability efforts. Moving forward, **it is imperative that Mediterranean countries continue to strengthen cooperation, share resources**, and ensure that the blue economy remains a driver for environmental, economic, and social transformation across the region.

**The current dynamic momentum of the Ministerial Declaration is an indication that funding for the UfMS SBE platform should not only continue but should be further enhanced.** The participants of the MTE field research in particular were clear in their confirmation of the importance of securing funding in the future, (i) as a means of continuing and reinforcing the provision of technical assistance by the UfMS, and (ii) as a means of securing funding for SBE transnational projects per se and thus supporting capacity building and exchange between participating states.

## 4.2. Recommendations

### 1. Move from Strategic Intent to Operational Impact

The 2021 Ministerial Declaration provided a valuable strategic and political foundation for advancing the Sustainable Blue Economy across the Mediterranean. A potential future MD should consolidate political will into concrete, accountable implementation tools:

- Transition from high-level thematic priorities to a results-based implementation plan per MD priority, by upgrading the Roadmap and outlining clear objectives, tools, milestones, responsibilities, timelines, indicators and deliverables.
- The next Ministerial Declaration could further advance the increasing specialisation within the identified priorities by incorporating even more specialised and focused objectives, in order to better facilitate coordinated and measurable implementation.
- Integrate a flexible performance tracking system that uses both qualitative and quantitative benchmarks, allowing for national diversity while maintaining regional comparability. Define clear deliverables and measurable indicators for each of the ten existing priority areas of the MD, ensuring accountability and visibility of progress.
- Launch flagship regional initiatives under each priority, serving as best practice models, replicable pilots, and attracting funding. Prioritise emerging and high-potential sectors such as marine renewable

energy, climate resilience, AI/digitalisation, and data infrastructure, while consolidating gains in more established areas like blue tourism.

- Ensure cross-cutting issues such as circular economy, biodiversity, green transition, and ocean literacy are systematically embedded and operationalised at national levels, without losing sight of the social dimension of the SBE.
- Promote the preparation of national strategic plans for the SBE with tangible goals which will support and promote the regional goals and establish specific mutually agreed objectives per country or sector, to monitor progress, identify underperformance, and ensure targeted technical or financial support where needed.
- Couple these benchmarks with increased, tailored assistance, particularly for less-developed countries, through technical support, funding, and institutional strengthening in order to avoid exacerbating disparities.
- While a global vision for the entire ecosystem should be maintained, differentiated approaches could be adopted for groups of countries and sectors. This includes providing increased financial support to less developed countries and sectors, to ensure more balanced progress.

## **2. Acknowledge the Evolution of the MD from 2015 to 2021 and beyond**

As evidenced by the current state of play in the individual priorities covered by the MD and the maturing of the processes addressing the issues prioritised by the MD, the need for updating the MD is considered pressing. The support for addressing the priorities in the MD is moving fast so time should not be lost in preparing the next iteration of the MD. Nevertheless, the new MD should still position itself as the latest step in an evolving, maturing regional framework. It should:

- Reflect the progression from the early focus on blue growth and cooperation (2015), to the emphasis on sustainability, resilience, and inclusiveness (2021), and now on towards a climate-smart, innovation-driven, and just development of sustainable blue economy.
- Identify implementation gaps from the 2021 MD, for example in marine renewables, pollution mitigation, digitalisation, and inclusive regional collaboration, and propose mitigating measures for the specific gaps and a mechanism for addressing future gaps at as early a stage as possible.
- Build on the momentum of recent policy and financing initiatives such as the Blue Mediterranean Partnership to mainstream SBE in the policy making and support framework of the region, while benefitting from the synergies currently being developed or envisaged for the future.
- Embrace future-oriented priorities like ocean digital governance, pre-covery planning, resilience and biodiversity financing, and circular blue economy models.

## **3. Enhance tailored Capacity Building actions**

Recognizing the diverse priorities, capacities and starting points of UfM member countries, a tiered, context-sensitive model continues to be essential. Capacity gaps between partner countries should be proactively addressed to ensure coherent implementation across all UfM members:

- Scale up technical assistance, with a focus on policy alignment, project design, access to financing and institutional strengthening—particularly for Southern Mediterranean countries.
- Promote peer-learning, including twinning and mentoring programmes, to support institutional learning and the replication of success stories.
- Build on the existing commitment of partner countries to capacity building activities, and incorporate the social innovation approach to the solution of problems identified.
- Focus more on blue skills in mediterranean countries undergoing skills transitions, whether focused on energy transitions or transitions to digital, and strengthen the development of the youth for blue approach – whereby youth-led and youth-focused initiatives tackle societal or environmental issues.

#### 4. Strengthen Coordination Mechanisms

To manage growing complexity and overlapping initiatives, governance mechanisms should be strengthened and broadened:

- Institutionalise permanent technical working groups or thematic task forces within the Regional Platform, focused on priority areas like marine spatial planning, blue energy, and pollution.
- Further strengthen role of the UfM Secretariat as the umbrella coordinator of all Mediterranean-related strategies and initiatives in the sector of sustainable blue economy.
- Promote coherence between UfM sectoral platforms (climate, transport, employment, research) to reduce fragmentation and maximise synergies.
- Consider supporting the establishment of a Mediterranean Sustainable Blue Economy Observatory on the basis of the EU or Black sea SBE observatories, to provide more geographically tailored data for monitoring and decision-making processes.

#### 5. Develop mechanisms for enhanced Stakeholder Engagement and Regional public discourse

Broad stakeholder involvement remains critical for legitimacy, innovation, and ownership:

- Institutionalise mechanisms for sustained engagement with the private sector, academia, NGOs, and coastal communities, for example through dedicated forums and consultative platforms.

#### 6. Address Regional Imbalances and promote Equitable Development

To continue to foster inclusive growth and regional cohesion:

- Balance the gap in the funding and implementation of transnational projects in the eastern Mediterranean, drawing from WestMed's success and ensuring balanced engagement across the basin. The constant and regular strategic coordination between the UfM and WestMED would serve as good experience for establishing a similar initiative in the East.
- Prioritise cross-basin collaboration projects to generate shared benefits, improve integration, and reduce disparities.
- Promote inclusive coordination frameworks that amplify the voices of less developed regions and avoid duplication of effort.
- Ensure that future efforts place greater emphasis on the social dimension of the Sustainable Blue Economy, including inclusive growth, decent job creation, gender-responsive policies, and youth empowerment, so as to ensure that all communities, particularly in Southern and Eastern Mediterranean countries, benefit equitably from Blue Economy initiatives.

#### 7. Maintain and strengthen the environmental ambition of the MD

Building on progress in marine litter reduction, spatial planning, biodiversity protection, and clean maritime transport, the UfM should further support coordinated, ecosystem-based approaches to:

- Expanding Marine Protected Areas, enhance regional pollution control measures, and ensure that blue economy investments do not compromise long-term environmental sustainability.
- Incorporate Blue aspects into the environmental and social impact studies conducted for the Mega projects currently in planning or under review to ensure that in addition to Green, any Blue issues are taken into account and mitigated for any large projects in countries of the Mediterranean.

#### 8. Streamline and expand access to financing/funding information

Access to finance remains a persistent constraint, especially for less developed countries:

- Build on a Blue Mediterranean Partnership initiative where the UfM is a member of the Steering Committee and its role is to facilitate political and regulatory dialogue.

- Develop a UfM-managed platform or “one-stop shop” to consolidate and communicate all available funding sources to member states.
- Explore the establishment of a dedicated Blue Economy Fund under the EU/DG MARE umbrella, to co-finance regional and joint initiatives. Examine the integration of innovative financing models—such as blue/climate bonds, biodiversity offsets, and blended finance—into the blue economy project pipeline.
- Coordinate with international financial institutions and the EU to align financing instruments (e.g., Interreg, CINEA, NextMed) with UfM priorities.

## 9. Strengthen the UfM's Role as a Strategic Macro-Regional Facilitator

The UfM's convening power is vital to drive shared progress in the SBE sector in the Mediterranean:

- Uphold the co-chairing structure (EU and non-EU) to maintain balance, inclusiveness, and political ownership.
- Strengthen UfM's role as a macro-regional strategy coordinator that links international frameworks (SDG14, EU Green Deal, UN Decade of Ocean Science) to national and regional implementation.
- Align more closely with other UfM thematic platforms to promote coherence and synergies.
- Continue fostering soft diplomacy, technical exchange, and collaborative project development across the Mediterranean.

### 4.3. Key Takeaways of the MTE

The next phase of the UfM Ministerial Declaration on the Sustainable Blue Economy should move beyond strategic vision and focus on **results-oriented implementation**. This includes a robust Implementation Plan per priority, with clear goals, timelines, milestones, indicators, and accountability mechanisms. Building on progress since 2015, the Declaration should embrace **forward-looking themes** like marine renewable energy, ocean digital governance, circular economy, and resilience financing.

To ensure effectiveness, it should **refine priority areas**, introduce flagship initiatives, and prioritize high-impact sectors. **Capacity-building efforts** should be scaled up, particularly for Southern and Eastern Mediterranean countries, with technical support, blue skills development, and peer-learning mechanisms. Strengthening **governance and coordination** across regional initiatives is essential, as is broadening stakeholder engagement to include local authorities, the private sector, academia, and civil society.

The Declaration should explicitly address regional disparities by promoting equitable development mechanisms and fostering enhanced cross-basin collaboration. It must also reinforce its function as **a catalyst for national reforms** by encouraging the development and implementation of concrete national action plans and roadmaps—essential tools for improving regional coordination and streamlining collaborative efforts across the Mediterranean basin.

Access to finance should be significantly expanded and simplified, including the establishment of a central point of reference about funding opportunities. Additionally, the exploration of a dedicated Blue Economy Fund would provide targeted support for scaling sustainable initiatives across the region.

Finally, the UfM's strategic role as a regional convener and macro-regional facilitator should be further strengthened, ensuring alignment of Mediterranean efforts with global frameworks such as Sustainable Development Goal 14 and the European Green Deal.

## Appendix 1 – the Ministerial Declaration after UNOC 3

The 2025 United Nations Ocean Conference (UNOC 3), held in Nice from 9–13 June, culminated in the adoption of the declaration “*Our ocean, our future: united for urgent action*”, which articulates a renewed global commitment to accelerate progress on Sustainable Development Goal 14 (SDG 14) through just, inclusive, and transformative action. The declaration underscores key priorities including climate-resilient marine ecosystems, pollution control, sustainable fisheries, ocean-based economies, and enhanced ocean literacy and governance.

The UfM Ministerial Declaration on Sustainable Blue Economy (2021) continues to be relevant, aligning strongly with the UNOC 3 declaration, both in vision and substance. As a regionally coordinated framework endorsed by 42 countries, the UfM Declaration has already operationalised many of the principles now reaffirmed at the global level.

Key areas of alignment include:

- **Marine governance:** The UfM’s emphasis on ecosystem-based management, marine spatial planning, and integrated coastal zone management anticipates UNOC 3’s calls for holistic, science-based planning and legal alignment with the United Nations Convention on the Law of the Sea (UNCLOS).
- **Sustainable fisheries and aquaculture:** The UfM SBE MD supports regional cooperation to combat illegal, unreported and unregulated (IUU) fishing and promote sustainable aquaculture, fully echoing UNOC 3’s urgency to reform fisheries and empower small-scale fishers.
- **Pollution reduction:** Although not explicitly referenced in the SBE MD, UfM Member States and partners have undertaken important complementary actions to address marine litter and plastic pollution under other regional frameworks, such as the UNEP/MAP Barcelona Convention’s amended Regional Plan on Marine Litter.
- **Blue economy finance and innovation:** The SBE Ministerial Declaration calls for the development of innovative, sustainable financing mechanisms to support the transition to an inclusive and resilient blue economy. It explicitly highlights the need to facilitate access to finance, promote public-private partnerships, and mobilise investment in blue economy sectors, all of which directly echo UNOC 3’s emphasis on diversifying and scaling up ocean finance through instruments such as blue bonds, blended finance, and ecosystem services payments.
- **Social inclusion:** Both documents highlight the need for inclusive governance, capacity-building, and the empowerment of women, youth, Indigenous Peoples, and coastal communities.
- **Climate resilience and nature-based solutions:** The UfM’s workstream on climate-smart blue economy solutions complements UNOC 3’s emphasis on mitigation, adaptation, and ecosystem restoration.

In summary, the UfM Sustainable Blue Economy framework stands as a tangible, regionally integrated contribution to global ocean action. It offers an implementation-ready platform through which UNOC 3’s aspirations can be delivered at scale across the Mediterranean.

### Mediterranean day

During UNOC 3, the Interministerial Delegation for the Mediterranean coordinated the **Mediterranean Day**, held on 10 June 2025 at the Centre Universitaire Méditerranéen. The event gathered regional governments, financial institutions, civil society, and local authorities to spotlight Mediterranean-specific challenges and solutions for an inclusive, sustainable Blue Economy.

Highlights and Thematic Outcomes included outcomes in fields connected to a number of the MD priorities which confirmed its continuing relevance, but also its foresight in setting objectives at an earlier date which continue to be relevant today. As part of the Mediterranean day, regional actors, including Provence-Alpes-Côte d’Azur and local authorities, shared practical initiatives on **biodiversity conservation and reducing coastal pollution**. The UfM unveiled support for the **Blue Mediterranean Partnership**, aiming to mobilise **€1 billion** by 2030 (with backing from EBRD and EIB), explicitly linking innovation, finance, and regional integration. The commitment of Spain to financing the Blue Med partnership shows the increasing support that is being expressed for the solution of issues identified in the MD. The session of the Mediterranean Experts on Climate and environmental Change (MedECC) underlined the role of the **science-policy interface** on pollution, restoration, and circularity, while **civil society** played a prominent role in the day’s proceedings, including support for the Pelagos Sanctuary and enhanced visibility of NGO contributions. Finally, Ministers from Mediterranean states marked the 50th anniversary of the Barcelona Convention and announced their ministerial conclusions on addressing plastic pollution, emphasizing the continuing **high level of commitment at political level** for individual priorities of the UfM MD.

## Appendix 2 – the Contributions of EMFAF funding to the implementation of the Ministerial Decision

DG MARE's EMFAF funding has been instrumental or has played a significant role in supporting various aspects of the Ministerial Declaration on Sustainable Blue Economy in the Mediterranean.

Some areas where EMFAF funding has been noted for its contribution include the following:

- **Overall Sustainable Blue Economy Development:** The European Maritime, Fisheries and Aquaculture Fund (EMFAF), which succeeded the European Maritime and Fisheries Fund (EMFF), supports the EU Green Deal and a sustainable blue economy by implementing actions within EU Maritime Policy, the Common Fisheries Policy, and the overall EU international governance agenda. The Ministerial Declaration itself takes note of programmes co-funded by various European Union instruments, including EMFF. EMFAF supports the InvestEU dedicated blended finance instrument for the blue economy. Along with the EIB, it supports EU BlueInvest, aiming to boost innovation and investment in sustainable blue economy technologies by supporting access to finance for early-stage businesses, SMEs, and scale-ups.
- **Sustainable Climate-Neutral and Zero-Pollution Transport and Ports:** A 'flagship' call of the European Fisheries and Aquaculture Fund (EMFAF) received 26 proposals, including support for "sustainable ports and transport" in the Mediterranean. Topic 3 of this call specifically aimed to support energy communities in ports, anticipating or supporting the transition to alternative fuels, including LNG, green hydrogen, and electrification. Regionally, €252.6M has been mobilised for this priority, primarily driven by Horizon programmes and ENI CBC MED, with EMFAF also being a source. Specific EMFAF-funded projects in this area (2023-2025 period) include:
  - **POWER4MED:** Aims to drive the transition toward carbon neutrality in shipping in southern Mediterranean countries (Algeria, Egypt, Türkiye, Libya) by developing a support structure and toolkit.
  - **Blue Ports:** Focuses on enhancing the skills and capacity of human capital in ports through training and certification, aiming to minimize environmental footprint and drive green transition.
  - **LIFE4MEDECA:** Aims to build consensus and awareness for creating an Emission Control Area (ECA) in the Mediterranean and supporting the process for a Low Sulphur Emission Area.
  - **GREEN MARINE MED:** Has played a role in driving sustainable fuel adoption across the Mediterranean.
- **Marine Research and Innovation, Skills, Careers and Employment:** An EMFAF call for proposals titled "Blue careers for a sustainable blue economy" was launched with a budget of EUR 7.5 million, aiming to contribute to developing the next generation of blue skills and providing opportunities for sustainable jobs in the blue economy. Since 2014, €18.5 million have been mobilised under the EMFAF call for Blue Careers. At the regional level, EMFAF has funded projects supporting business opportunities in collaboration with the private sector, such as NextBlueGeneration, Blue Ports, WINBLUE, and WIN-BIG. It has also provided funding for ocean literacy projects like BlueAquaEdu (engaging youth in aquaculture) and BOUTCAR (educational program for skills development for sustainable jobs). For this priority, EMFAF contributed to the total regional funding of €102.3M, accounting for 4%.
- **Coastal and Maritime Tourism (WestMED):** The REBOOT MED project (€1.2 million), which encourages public-private partnerships and tests eco/blue economy tourism products in WestMED countries (Mauritania, Tunisia, Morocco, Spain, Italy, France), is funded by EMFAF.
- **Sustainable Food from the Sea:** Fisheries and Aquaculture: EMFAF is listed as a funding source for projects in this sector, contributing 8% of the €128.6M total funding.



- **Interactions between Marine Litter and the Blue Economy:** EMFAF is listed as a funding source for projects in this sector, contributing 3% of the €64.4M total funding.
- **Marine Renewable Energies:** EMFAF is listed as a funding source for projects in this sector, contributing €9.6M to the €40.7M total expenditure.
- **Maritime Spatial Planning and Integrated Coastal Zone Management:** EMFAF is listed as a funding source for projects in this sector, contributing 6% of the €235.2M total funding.
- **Maritime Safety and Security:** EMFAF is listed as a funding source for projects in this sector, contributing 4% of the €215.5M total funding.

Alongside other EU programs like Horizon and Interreg, EMFAF is consistently listed as a significant funding source contributing to the implementation of actions and projects across various priority areas outlined in the Ministerial Declaration. The Regional Flagships Call under EMFAF in 2023 was explicitly designed to support EU sea basin cooperation, targeting Mediterranean actors across 6 sectors.

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