



UNITED  
NATIONS

EP

UNEP/MED WG.608/Inf.12



UNITED NATIONS  
ENVIRONMENT PROGRAMME  
MEDITERRANEAN ACTION PLAN

24 April 2025  
Original: English

Seventeenth Meeting of SPA/BD Focal Points

Istanbul, Türkiye, 20-22 May 2025

**Agenda Item 4: Progress report on the implementation of SPA/RAC activities under the UNEP/MAP Programme of Work for the biennium 2024-2025**

**Progress Report on the MCPAs component of the EU-funded SEMPA Project**

Note:

The designations employed and the presentation of the material in this document do not imply the expression of any opinion whatsoever on the part of Specially Protected Areas Regional Activity Centre (SPA/RAC) and United Nations Environment Programme concerning the legal status of any State, Territory, city or area, or of its authorities, or concerning the delimitation of their frontiers or boundaries.

© 2025 United Nations Environment Programme / Mediterranean Action Plan (UNEP/MAP)  
Specially Protected Areas Regional Activity Centre (SPA/RAC)  
Boulevard du Leader Yasser Arafat  
B.P. 337 - 1080 Tunis Cedex - Tunisia  
E-mail : [car-asp@spa-rac.org](mailto:car-asp@spa-rac.org)

## I. Introduction

1. The Project “Bolstering Mediterranean biodiversity and MCPAs for nature” (hereafter referred to as SEMPA project), is funded by European Union (EU) – the Directorate-General for Neighbourhood and Enlargement Negotiations (DG NEAR) through the Neighbourhood Development and International Cooperation Instruments (NDICI): Regional South Neighbourhood for 2021-2023 financial instrument.
2. The project is coordinated by UNEP/MAP Secretariat and co-implemented by UNEP/MAP Secretariat and its Regional Activity Centre for Specially Protected Areas (SPA/RAC). It covers a period of 48 months starting from August 2023, with an overall budget of EUR 4,000,000 (USD 4,390,779).
3. The beneficiary countries for the specific national activities (both MCPAs and IMAP components) are Algeria, Egypt, Israel, Lebanon, Libya, Morocco, and Tunisia.

## II. Objective of the MCPA Component of the Project

4. The overall objective of the MCPA component of the SEMPA Project is to protect the biodiversity of the Mediterranean Sea and support the achievement of its Good Environmental Status. This will be achieved through the support to the implementation of the Post-2020 Strategic Action Programme for the Conservation of Biodiversity and Sustainable Management of Natural Resources in the Mediterranean Region.
5. The MCPA component aims to enhance MCPA management through coordinated implementation of the MAP Roadmap for a Comprehensive Coherent Network of Well-Managed MPAs to achieve SDG 14 and SDG 15 in the Mediterranean, while integrating targets related to SDG 5 and SDG 13 in its transversal approach.
6. Furthermore, the project focuses on the sustainability of the actions and policies, ensuring that actions become progressively self-sustained, facilitating awareness raising, working to promote long-term behavioral changes in local populations toward biodiversity conservation, and finally integrating gender mainstreaming in all processes, activities and reporting. It will especially support the promotion of gender equality and gender related aspects in the designation and management processes of Marine and Coastal Protected Areas (MCPAs).

## III. MCPA Component Structure

7. The MCPA Component is structured into 2 outcomes and 3 outputs, which are hereunder described:

**MCPA Component:** Improvement and support to the development of a comprehensive and coherent Mediterranean network of well-managed and monitored MCPAs

Outcome 1: Improved on-site MCPA management and mechanisms that ensure MCPA sustainability.

- Output 1.1: Identification and designation of new MCPA and elaboration of MCPA management and business plans supported through participatory process with stakeholders.
- Output 1.2: Stakeholders trained on MCPA management and technical and financial support provided for management plan implementation

**Outcome 2:** Enhanced collaboration at regional scale between local, national and regional stakeholders involved in the management and communication on Marine and Coastal Protected Areas.

- **Output 2.1:** Forum of Marine Protected Areas in the Mediterranean organised (fourth edition)

#### **IV. Progress made for the implementation of the MCPA component**

8. Progress for the period extending from 15 February 2024 to 18 April 2025 is reported below for the MCPA component executed by SPA/RAC, namely the “Improvement and support to the development of a comprehensive and coherent Mediterranean network of well-managed and monitored MCPAs”.

#### **Outcome 1: Improved on-site MCPA management and mechanisms that ensure MCPA sustainability**

*Output 1.1: Identification and designation of new MCPA and elaboration of MCPA management and business plans supported through participatory process with stakeholders.*

9. The existence of a management plan is one of the major criteria for qualifying as an MCPA. This means that under this activity, and for each of the four MCPAs, namely Ashtoum El Gamil MCPA (Egypt), Bsis Island coast future MCPA (Libya), Cap des Trois Fourches future MCPA (Morocco); and Kneiss islands future MCPA (Tunisia), a thorough reflection should take place, including the definition of strategic and operational objectives, setting of an action plan and a calendar of implementation, allocation of resources, and definition of indicators to assess the management effectiveness.

10. Under this activity and based on complementary ecological and socio-economic studies, management plans will be drafted jointly with the national authorities responsible for marine and coastal protected areas and in consultation with other relevant governmental bodies and other stakeholders for the four potential MCPAs. The whole process of those management plans elaboration, based on ecological and socio-economic assessments followed by a collaborative and consultative approach, will extend over one year and half to two years, depending on the specific situation at the level of the four concerned countries.

11. For that purpose, the following actions have been executed:

- i. A series of coordination and planning meetings were held with the national authorities in Libya, Morocco and Tunisia to agree on the process and the approach to be followed for the implementation of the various SEMPA Project activities.
- ii. The first meeting took place in Libya on 26 and 27 March 2024, where the project's methodology, workplan, and future steps were established.
- iii. Subsequently, a similar meeting was held in Tunisia on 28 May 2024, with a focus on finalizing the approach and planning specific to Tunisia.
- iv. Lastly, during the week of 24 June 2024, a meeting was convened in Morocco to discuss and agree on the methodology, workplan, and future actions for the Moroccan activities.
- v. Following the first coordination and planning meeting on the project activities in Libya, two separate calls for consultancies have been launched, in June 2024 to hire, respectively, national consultants for elaboration of ecological and socio-economic study of the coastal and marine area of Bsis Island in Libya.
- vi. Following the publication of the two calls, national consultants were selected, and their contracts signed by September 2024 and the field work has already started since October 2024.
- vii. In Morocco, two separate calls for consultancies have been launched at the end of September to hire national consultants to elaborate, respectively i) a synthetic diagnostic assessment of the ecological status of the coastal and marine area of the Cap des Trois Fourches, and ii) a socio-economic characterization of the coastal and marine area of the Cap des Trois Fourches.

- viii. The national consultants have been selected by October 2024 and their contracts signed. The field work to undertake both ecological and socio-economic assessments has started since November 2024.
- ix. Concerning Egypt, while awaiting for the permission from the competent authorities to start the project activities in Egypt, we have been informed by the SPA/BD focal point, in December 2024, that the planned activities could start since they are considered as a continued implementation of the national strategy for MCPA/OECMS on the Mediterranean coast of Egypt.
- x. A call for consultancy, prepared and published in January 2025, has led to the hiring of two national experts who will elaborate the ecological and socio-economic assessments of the marine and coastal environment of Ashtoum El Gamil Protected Area in Egypt.
- xi. Finally, for Tunisia two separate calls for consultancies to hire the national experts to elaborate the ecological and socio-economic assessments of the coastal and marine area of Kneiss Island (Tunisia) have been prepared and discussed with the Tunisian representatives of the Agence de Protection et d'Aménagement de Littoral (APAL) in order to be launched early March 2025.

12. The following steps must be followed to ensure the best implementation of the above- mentioned activities:

- i. Perform a rigorous follow up regarding the running of the ecological and socio- economic assessments of the coastal and marine areas:
  - o Bsis Island, Libya
  - o Cap des Trois Fourches, Morocco.
  - o Ashtoum El Gamil Protected Area, Egypt.
- ii. Launch the calls for consultancies to hire the national experts to elaborate the ecological and socio-economic assessments of the coastal and marine area of Kneiss Island in Tunisia and ensure starting the field work.

*Output 1.2: Stakeholders trained on MCPA management and technical and financial support provided for management plan implementation*

13. Among the main issues seen in ineffective protected areas management is the lack or inexistence of enough quantitative tools to provide an in-depth analysis of protected area management. In addition, key indicators that have been proposed for greater integration into protected areas management effectiveness tools, such as climate change or ecosystem services, are still missing from current methodologies. In addition, many approaches focus only on the interior of a protected area, neglecting both influences outside its boundaries and the broader context in which protected areas operate and evolve.

14. Hence, the Integrated Management Effectiveness Tool (IMET) has changed the current paradigm of management effectiveness assessment, where often only the voice of the protected areas (PAs) management is heard. Managers are also often unchallenged in their opinions. Field staff members and managers are closely involved with day-to-day activities but have obvious difficulties in providing objective, fair and balanced assessments. Furthermore, IMET, which will be used to assess the effectiveness of some concerned sites under the SEMPA project, includes diverse perspectives which are extremely valuable for valid management effectiveness evaluation.

15. For that purpose, the following actions have been executed:

- i. Following the launch of the call of consultancy, the international consultants (trainers) who will organise the “Regional training session on enhancing effective management of Mediterranean MCPAs/SPAMIs using IMET tool” have been selected by October 2024 and their contracts signed.
- ii. The trainers have finalized since December 2024 the necessary material for the training and the training was held in Tunis, Tunisia from 13 to 20 February 2025.

- iii. The following managers of the Mediterranean MCPAs/SPAMIs benefitted from the regional training session: Banc des Kabyles Marine Reserve and Habibas Island in Algeria; Ashtoum El Gamil Protected Area in Egypt; Tyre Coast Nature Reserve and Palm Islands Nature Reserve in Lebanon; Farwa Lagoon and Ain El Ghezala Marine Protected Areas in Libya; Al Hoceima National Park and the future MCPA of Jbel Moussa in Morocco; and Galite National Park, Zembra and Zembretta National Park, Kneiss Islands and Kerkennah Islands in Tunisia.
- iv. The regional training course strengthened the MCPA managers capacities in evaluating and improving conservation effectiveness. The training course was structured into four modules over seven days, in a dynamic program combining plenary sessions, practical exercises, group work, and field visits, as follows:
  - Introduction and IMET Setup Module: Participants were introduced to the IMET framework, its installation, and customization for Mediterranean MCPAs/SPAMIs. This ensured that all attendees were familiar with the tool's structure and functionalities before engaging in advanced applications.
  - Practical Application Module: Through hands-on exercises and practical group work, participants analysed real-world conservation challenges using case studies from the two SPAMIs: Tyre Coast Nature Reserve (Lebanon) and Al Hoceima National Park (Morocco). They conducted governance assessments, integrated climate change considerations into MCPAs/SPAMIs management, and engaged in key activities such as stakeholder mapping, gender equity integration, funding mechanisms and scenario-based evaluations.
  - In-depth IMET Analysis Module: Participants analyzed IMET-generated data to develop conservation strategies, assess management effectiveness, and address site-specific challenges. The session also explored methods for scaling up IMET for governance at regional and national level.
  - Train-the-Trainer Module: The final module prepared participants to train others in IMET application by providing coaching techniques and action-planning strategies. This ensured long-term knowledge transfer and sustainability of IMET use within their respective institutions.
- v. Throughout the training, participants engaged in group discussions, interactive case studies, and structured reporting exercises to enhance their decision-making capacities. As a result, they developed improved governance frameworks, strengthened conservation planning, and identified practical solutions for MCPAs/SPAMIs management in the Mediterranean region.
- vi. It is worth noting that 'train the trainer' module intended to improve leadership, communication, training and coaching skills of the beneficiary MCPAs/SPAMIs managers who will act as mentors to organise, in collaboration with SPA/RAC, national and post-national training sessions on the management effectiveness of MCPAs/SPAMIs using IMET tool in the SEMPA Project pilot sites in Algeria, Lebanon, Morocco and Tunisia.
- vii. Within the same purpose and perspective of strengthening the conservation efforts of marina and coastal biodiversity along with the promotion MCPAs in the southern basin of the Mediterranean, SPA/RAC has financially supported the participation of official representatives to both the "9th Our Ocean Conference" held in Greece on the 16th and 17th of April 2024 and to the forum dedicated to "Marine environmental governance: towards a sustainable and resilient sea" held in Tunis on June 21, 2024.
- viii. The two events constituted unique opportunities to Tunisian representatives to reaffirm the commitment to transition to a "Blue economy" to harness the advantages of a new balance between economic development, social cohesion, and sustainability as well as addressing some key challenges such as biodiversity loss, climate change, unsustainable fishing, marine pollution especially from plastics, and unsustainable maritime transport.

- ix. The SEMPA project supported the organization of the third edition of the Specially Protected Areas of Mediterranean Importance Day (SPAMI Day) established under the Barcelona Convention by covering the participation of representatives of Mediterranean countries, particularly those from Algeria, Lebanon, Morocco and Tunisia, featuring a regional face-to-face meeting on May 15, 2024. SPAMI Day presents a unique opportunity to bring together stakeholders involved in the management and conservation of SPAMIs to exchange ideas, share best practices, and strengthen regional cooperation. This year, our focus has been on the effective management of SPAMIs and the achievements of managers and stakeholders towards the CBD and Barcelona Convention 30x30 Target.

16. The following steps must be followed to ensure the best implementation of the IMET post-training activities:

- i. Start preparing the processes to organise national training sessions on the management effectiveness of MCPAs/SPAMIs using IMET tool in Algeria, Lebanon, Morocco and Tunisia.
- ii. Organise the national training courses during the fourth quarter of 2025 and the first quarter of 2026.

**Outcome 2: Enhanced collaboration at regional scale between local national and regional stakeholders involved in the management and communication on Marine and Coastal Protected Areas**

*Output 2.1: Forum of Marine Protected Areas in the Mediterranean organised (fourth edition)*

17. The Forum of Marine Protected Areas in the Mediterranean became an inevitable four- yearly event for a unique participatory and inclusive process which place a necessary emphasis on the challenges that MPAs face in the region.

18. The 4<sup>th</sup> edition of the Mediterranean MPA Forum, to be organized in 2025/2026 in continuity with the 2012, 2016 and 2020/2021 editions, will be a touchstone for the global MPA targets and will provide a unique opportunity to showcase how MPAs underpin economic, social and cultural development. The forum will provide a platform to share success stories on MPAs, to highlight the challenges on Mediterranean MPAs through the 2025/2026 Status of Mediterranean MPAs publication, to evaluate the voluntary commitments made in the framework of the 3<sup>rd</sup> edition of the Forum, and to engage all stakeholders (MPA managers, civil society, scientists and private sector) to make new voluntary commitments for MPAs.

19. For that purpose, the following actions have been taken:

- i. Discussions with MedPAN on the preparation and organisation of the 2025/2026 MPA Forum have been initiated.
- ii. A joint agreement has been reached to organise a meeting of the MPA Forum Steering Committee to agree on the thematic, steps and actions to be put in place by end of March/beginning of April 2025.

20. The following steps must be followed to ensure the appropriate organisation of the 2025/2026 Mediterranean MPA Forum:

- i. Identify the host country, specific venue and potential co-organisers,
- ii. Identify the dates and launch a save the date for the MPA Forum and engage with the MPA community through mailing and questionnaire on the implementation of the forum related MPA roadmap, in line with the needs and priorities identified by the Post-2020 Regional Strategy on MCPAs and OECMs.

- iii. Agree on the launching of a call for registration & contribution to collect proposals for events to be organised during the Forum.

## V. Communication

21. The following communication and visibility activities and products have been undertaken and produced:

- UNEP/MAP has developed a dedicated SEMPA Project webpage in English and French on the UNEP/MAP website: [www.unep.org/unepmap/what-we-do/projects/SEMPA-Project](http://www.unep.org/unepmap/what-we-do/projects/SEMPA-Project)
- With the Project's support the SEMPA Project Manager and the SPA/RAC MPAs Projects Officer attended the Regional Workshop on the BBNJ Agreement for States of the Atlantic and Mediterranean Coasts of Africa (16–19 December 2024, Rabat, Morocco) as part of the UNEP/MAP–Barcelona Convention delegation. At the workshop they contributed to discussions on the BBNJ Agreement, a critical treaty for the conservation of marine biodiversity beyond national jurisdiction and achieving Kunming-Montreal Global Biodiversity Framework Target 3. Furthermore, they took the opportunity to meet with SEMPA Project Beneficiary Country representatives in attendance.
- SPA/RAC has developed a dedicated SEMPA Project webpage in English and French on the SPA/RAC website: [www.spa-rac.org/en/article/227/sempa-project](http://www.spa-rac.org/en/article/227/sempa-project)
- Major events and workshops organized in the framework of the project have been advertised on SPA/RAC's social media accounts.
- The SEMPA Project supported the organisation of the Specially Protected Areas of Mediterranean Importance (SPAMI) Day 2024 which focused on sustainable and efficient management of SPAMIs and MCPAs. The in-person celebration took place in Tunis, Tunisia on 15 May 2024 under the theme of sustainable management. The event was held under the high patronage of Mrs. Leïla Chikhaoui Mahdaoui, Minister of the Environment of Tunisia. SPAMI managers from 11 Mediterranean countries and key regional and national partners shared best practices and experiences through panel discussions and working groups.
- The project is involved in preparing SPAMI Day 2025. The event objective is to celebrate and promote biodiversity conservation through a flagship presential event in Lebanon, in collaboration of Tyre Coast Nature Reserve (SPAMI) and Palm Islands Nature Reserve (SPAMI). This regional hybrid event will be an opportunity to raise awareness among local communities and decision makers on the value of MCPAs and SPAMIs as well as the project's added value, and to foster collaboration and the sharing of best practices between managers of MCPAs/SPAMIs and partners.
- SPA/RAC welcomed Dr. Susan Gardner, Director of the Ecosystems Division at the UN Environment Programme, to Tunis in September 2024. During the visit, SPA/RAC presented its efforts for marine biodiversity conservation in the Mediterranean. A comprehensive presentation on MCPA projects, including the EU-funded SEMPA project, was delivered by SPA/RAC's project manager with the aim of fostering synergies and cooperation in the fields of MCPAs, OECMs, and gender mainstreaming with UNEP (Facebook post, LinkedIn post).
- SPA/RAC collaborated with an illustrator to create a visual representation of the project's activities, reflecting the marine and coastal environment, as well as management and monitoring efforts. This adaptable illustration can be used across various communication materials, both print and digital. SPA/RAC used this illustration to communicate about the regional training on enhancing effective MCPA/SPAMI management using the IMET tool (13–20 February 2025) and, more broadly, about the key issues addressed by the SEMPA project. Awareness-raising efforts included informative cards and video testimonies shared on social media (Facebook and LinkedIn) to engage stakeholders. The campaign achieved:
  - o Estimated reach: 19,528 people
  - o Total views: 31,922
  - o Total engagement: 6,017 interactions (likes, comments, shares)



- With the Project's support, SPA/RAC participated in key regional and international events to advance marine conservation efforts and promote initiatives such as the SEMPA Project:
  - o SOI CBD Capacity-Building Workshop (February 2025, Dakar, Senegal): SPA/RAC participated in the Sustainable Ocean Initiative (SOI) regional workshop for West and North Africa, contributing expertise, especially gained through the EU-funded projects such as SEMPA project, on area-based conservation. Discussions focused on capacity needs in the context of the Kunming-Montreal Global Biodiversity Framework and strategies to enhance MCPA and OECM coverage, effectiveness, and representativity.
  - o IMPAC6 International Steering Committee Meeting (February 2025, Dakar, Senegal): As a Steering Committee member, SPA/RAC contributed to preparations for the 6th International Marine Protected Areas Congress (IMPAC6), set to take place in Africa for the first time in 2027. The meeting focused on shaping IMPAC6 into a platform for knowledge exchange and advancing global ocean sustainability.