



Policy recommendations for Sgiacca (Italy)

Deliverable D4.1 : Towards Recovering, Experiencing and Boosting Ecotourism in the WestMed Area

I. Introduction and main objectives

This document outlines the policy recommendations developed within the REBOOT MED project to support the sustainable development of maritime and coastal tourism in Sciacca. Located on the southwestern coast of Sicily, Sciacca is a town rich in cultural heritage, artisanal craftsmanship, and natural beauty. However, it faces significant challenges in maintaining a balance between tourism growth and the preservation of its cultural and environmental assets. The primary objective of this document is to provide a strategic framework for diversifying Sciacca's tourism offerings by promoting year-round, sustainable tourism models. These recommendations aim to foster an approach that is aligned with green, digital, and circular economy principles. They also emphasize the importance of preserving Sciacca's unique traditions—such as its famous ceramic and coral craftsmanship—while reducing the environmental impact of tourism activities and supporting local economic resilience. The REBOOT MED project has already achieved notable results in Sciacca, demonstrating the effectiveness of a community-driven approach:

- **Community-Driven development:** The success of "Sciacca: A Sensory Immersive Journey from Land to Sea" highlights the importance of involving the community at every stage of product development. This approach has strengthened local bonds and fostered pride in Sciacca's cultural heritage.
- **Addressing seasonality:** The project addressed the challenge of tourism seasonality. There is a clear need to create year-round tourism experiences that attract visitors beyond the peak summer months, thereby stabilizing the local economy.
- **Social and cultural impact:** While the economic impact is expected to grow over time, the immediate social and cultural benefits are significant. The project has revitalized interest in local traditions and fostered a stronger community identity, laying the groundwork for future economic gains.
- **Scalability:** The development model used in Sciacca has the potential to be replicated in other regions, with careful adaptation to local contexts to ensure authenticity and sustainability.

This document has been elaborated in cooperation with the local multi-stakeholder group, composed of representatives from the Municipality of Sciacca, local businesses, cultural associations, environmental organizations and the tourism sector. These stakeholders include:

- Municipality of Sciacca
- Fish products company "Curreri"
- Not-for-profit environmental organization "Marevivo"
- Non-profit social enterprise
- Sciacca's Community Cooperative 'Identità e Bellezza'
- Cultural Association "FARO Sicilia"
- Nautical Club

- Fossil coral craftswoman (eco-sustainable)
- The Merchants Union of the province of Agrigento (Sicily)
- Network of seaside accommodation facilities

II. Policy framework

These recommendations align with various national and regional policies, reinforcing the importance of sustainable and resilient tourism development for Sciacca. Below is an overview of the key policies framing the development of ecotourism in Italy and in Sciacca, and how the REBOOT MED project supports their goals.

EU Policy Level

Programmes of various areas of the cohesion policies; Blue Economy Action Plans for the Recovery of the tourism sector: The REBOOT MED project contributes directly to these EU strategies by fostering a sustainable and circular economy in the maritime and coastal tourism sectors. By promoting eco-friendly and low-impact tourism activities, the project aligns with the EU's Blue Economy objectives, ensuring long-term resilience for Sciacca's local economy.

National Policies

The REBOOT MED project plays a vital role in supporting Italy's national strategies for tourism, the blue economy, and maritime management. By promoting year-round tourism, circular economy principles, and the responsible use of maritime spaces, the project helps to achieve key objectives outlined in the Italian Strategic Tourism Development Plan, the Blue Economy measures, and the Sea Plan. Its focus on sustainability, community engagement, and environmental protection ensures that the tourism sector contributes to the long-term resilience of both local economies and natural ecosystems in Italy.

- Italian Strategic Tourism Development Plan 2023-2027. The Italian Strategic Tourism Development Plan (Piano Strategico di Sviluppo del Turismo 2023-2027) is a national roadmap aimed at enhancing Italy's tourism sector by promoting sustainability, innovation, and inclusiveness. The REBOOT MED project contributes to this plan in the following ways:
 - Year-round tourism: Italy's strategy emphasizes the need to expand tourism beyond the high season to reduce the environmental and social pressures on popular destinations. By developing tourism products that showcase Sciacca's cultural heritage and natural beauty throughout the year, REBOOT MED helps to diversify tourism offerings. This shift is crucial for balancing economic growth with the conservation of local ecosystems, particularly in coastal areas.
 - Cultural heritage integration: Italy's plan promotes integrating local traditions and heritage into tourism products to offer unique experiences. The REBOOT MED project supports this by incorporating traditional activities, such as fishing, artisanal crafts, and local gastronomy, into its eco-tourism products. By doing so, the project not only supports the national tourism strategy but also strengthens the identity and cultural preservation of local communities.
 - Sustainability focus: The Italian Strategic Tourism Plan places strong emphasis on sustainable practices in tourism. REBOOT MED, through its low-impact tourism models, aligns perfectly with this objective by encouraging eco-friendly

tourism activities, such as cycling tours, birdwatching, and guided hikes. These activities not only attract eco-conscious tourists but also protect natural resources.

- Blue Economy Measures – Ministry of Enterprises and Made in Italy. The Blue Economy plays a significant role in Italy’s economic strategy, especially in coastal and maritime regions. The Economic Manoeuvre (Manovra Economica) introduced by the Ministry of Enterprises and Made in Italy includes several measures to strengthen the maritime economy by fostering innovation, sustainability, and circular economy principles. REBOOT MED’s contribution to these goals includes:
 - Circular economy: The project promotes resource efficiency and waste reduction in tourism by encouraging the use of local products, eco-friendly practices, and sustainable waste management in the tourism supply chain. For instance, Sciaccà’s tourism packages focus on local sourcing and low-environmental-impact activities, which align with the Blue Economy’s focus on sustainability and innovation.
 - Strengthening coastal economies: The project aims to create sustainable jobs in Sciaccà and other coastal areas, helping to reduce dependency on seasonal tourism. By encouraging local businesses to participate in the eco-tourism sector and promoting year-round activities, REBOOT MED fosters the resilience of the coastal economy, which is a central goal of Italy’s Blue Economy policies.
 - Ecotourism as a Blue economy driver: The project highlights how sustainable tourism can serve as a catalyst for blue growth. By promoting eco-friendly maritime activities, such as responsible fishing and coastal exploration, REBOOT MED aligns with national efforts to expand the Blue Economy while ensuring environmental protection.
- Sea Plan – Interministerial Committee for Maritime Policy. The Sea Plan (Piano del Mare) is a strategic initiative aimed at governing Italy’s maritime spaces more effectively, promoting sustainable use of marine resources, and protecting the maritime environment. It is coordinated by the Interministerial Committee for Maritime Policy and aligns with EU maritime directives. REBOOT MED’s contribution to the Sea Plan is significant:
 - Sustainable maritime tourism: The project’s emphasis on low-impact maritime activities, such as eco-fishing, guided sea tours, and marine conservation education, supports the Sea Plan’s goal of protecting marine ecosystems while fostering economic growth in coastal regions. By offering tourism packages that prioritize marine protection, the project aligns with the Sea Plan’s strategic priorities.
 - Strategic management of maritime spaces: One of the Sea Plan’s objectives is to ensure the strategic management of maritime zones, including balancing tourism with conservation efforts. REBOOT MED directly contributes to this by ensuring that its tourism activities respect marine protected areas and engage tourists in conservation efforts. For example, the project’s tours promote

awareness of biodiversity and the importance of protecting fragile marine habitats in areas like Sciacca's coastal waters.

- Promoting blue growth: The Sea Plan emphasizes blue growth through sustainable practices in sectors like tourism and fisheries. REBOOT MED's integration of sustainable fishing practices into its tourism offer contributes to both the economic vitality of coastal regions and the protection of fish stocks, which is central to the Sea Plan's goals.

Regional Policies

Sicily's regional strategies focus on preserving cultural heritage while promoting sustainable tourism: The project is fully in line with Sicily's regional focus on sustainability and cultural preservation. By developing tourism products that highlight Sciacca's rich cultural assets—such as traditional ceramics and artisanal crafts—the project helps to protect and promote the local heritage, while advancing environmentally conscious tourism practices.

Local Practices

Initiatives like the Museo Diffuso dei 5 Sensi are key to integrating local cultural and natural assets into the tourism offerings: The REBOOT MED project strongly supports local practices like the Museo Diffuso dei 5 Sensi, which demonstrate the value of community-driven, bottom-up approaches to tourism development. By engaging local stakeholders and fostering pride in Sciacca's unique heritage, the project amplifies the success of such initiatives, making Sciacca a model for sustainable and inclusive tourism in the region.

III. Key policy messages

Based on the lessons learned from the product development process in Sciacca and other Euro-Med projects, the following policy recommendations are proposed. To enhance their impact and avoid generalization, the recommendations are specifically directed at relevant actors and linked to specific policies or strategic frameworks.

Improving the sustainability of designed products

- Invite the Regional Government, tourism operators, and certification bodies to support the integration of sustainability criteria into product design: The inclusion of sustainability criteria in tourism product development could involve creating regional guidelines for eco-friendly practices, covering aspects such as renewable resource use, waste minimization, and environmentally conscious design, in alignment with Sicily's regional sustainability policies.

Target Audience: Regional government of Sicily, local tourism operators, and certification bodies.

Promote low-impact tourism

- Encourage the adoption of the MEET methodology, which emphasizes ecotourism products that benefit conservation and local communities. This approach supports sustainable tourism models such as walking tours and cycling routes, benefiting both the environment and the local economy.

Target Audience: Destination Management Organizations (DMOs), regional authorities, and tourism operators.

Public-Private collaboration and networking

- Establish Public-Private Partnerships (PPPs) for Sustainable Tourism Initiatives: Facilitate PPPs to develop sustainable tourism infrastructure, such as eco-friendly accommodations, that align with national Blue Economy Action Plans and REBOOT MED strategies, supporting economic recovery and sustainability goals.

Target Audience: National and regional governments, private sector investors, local authorities.

Create local tourism networks

- Strengthen local networks to balance tourism growth with cultural preservation, modeled on the multi-stakeholder cluster from REBOOT MED and inspired by the Museo Diffuso dei 5 Sensi initiative.

Target Audience: Local administrations, tourism stakeholders, community groups, and businesses.

Training needs

- Implement training programs for sustainable tourism practices: Develop training programs covering sustainable tourism practices like waste management, funded through EU Cohesion Policy Programs and integrated with regional economic and environmental strategies.

Target Audience: Regional and local authorities, EU Cohesion Policy stakeholders, tourism operators, and community groups.

Foster digital skills for tourism stakeholders

- Provide digital skills training to local businesses for improved online marketing and service offerings, aligning with EU and national digital transformation strategies.

Target Audience: Tourism businesses, local operators, regional and national digital transformation initiatives.

Policy and legal issues

- Develop a legal framework for sustainable tourism: Advocate for frameworks that enforce sustainable practices, provide environmental protections, and create incentives for eco-friendly projects, aligned with the Italian Strategic Tourism Development Plan.

Target Audience: National and EU policymakers, environmental and tourism regulatory bodies.

Support for Small and Medium Enterprises (SMEs)

- Introduce policies providing financial and technical support to SMEs to help them adopt sustainable practices, in alignment with EU SME programs and national economic recovery strategies.

Target Audience: National and regional governments, SME support programs, financial institutions.

Seasonal diversification

- Promote off-season tourism: Develop initiatives to attract off-season tourists, such as festivals and culinary events, to reduce peak season pressure and distribute economic benefits more evenly year-round.

Target Audience: Regional and local tourism boards, cultural organizations, local businesses.

Product governance

- Establish Product Governance Committees: Create committees to oversee tourism product governance, ensuring alignment with regional sustainability goals and community values.

Target Audience: Local authorities, regional tourism boards, community leaders, and business representatives.