



Policy recommendations for Tusinia

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

I. Introduction and main objectives

The REBOOT MED project supports the implementation of a shared roadmap for a sustainable blue economy in the WestMed region, aiming to generate growth, jobs, and improved quality of life for local communities and tourism ecosystems. By fostering public-private partnerships and engaging local stakeholders, it co-develops action plans to revitalize the tourism sector through ecotourism. Pilot projects are being tested across 10 zones in France, Italy, Spain, Tunisia, Morocco, and Mauritania.

In Tunisia, the regions of Tabarka (Melloula) and Bizerte (Ghar El Melh) were chosen as REBOOT MED pilot sites to enhance the competitiveness and sustainability of the coastal and maritime tourism ecosystem under a blue economy strategy. This project has enabled significant progress in supporting ecotourism project leaders, with co-created and tested ecotourism circuits. In Ghar El Melh, a couple of fishers is transforming their landing site into a tourist spot, while in Melloula, a group of artisanal fishers is developing seasonal dining activities integrated into a visitor circuit.

This document has been prepared following the experience gained in creating ecotourism packages and after consultations with various local and national actors. It addresses the necessary policy reforms to diversify the coastal and maritime tourism offer, adopting a green, digital, and circular economy approach in the regions of Melloula and Ghar El Melh, Tunisia.

This document is designed to present strategic recommendations for policymakers to promote ecotourism in response to current environmental challenges and the need to diversify the tourism offer. It proposes a holistic approach that integrates sustainability principles, respect for ecosystems, and appreciation of local heritage. With contributions from stakeholders, the document highlights the importance of cross-sector collaboration to create synergies among economic, social, and environmental actors. Thus, this document aims to guide policy and strategic decisions towards a future where tourism aligns with environmental respect and shared benefits.

II. Current status and recommendations on the regulatory framework

This document, developed by WWF North Africa:

1. **Acknowledges** that ecotourism is a key economic sector, serving as an optimal balance between tourism development and profitability, and acting as a cornerstone for aligning Tunisia's economy with environmental protection. However, this sector remains insufficiently regulated from a legal perspective.
2. **Notes** that current legal references to ecotourism are fragmented and covered in a cross-cutting manner across several laws, including the Forest Code, the Code of Archaeological, Historical, and Traditional Arts Heritage, and Law No. 2009-49 of July 20, 2009, on protected marine and coastal areas, which address ecotourism only implicitly.

Additionally, the Investment Incentives Code has included ecotourism among the activities eligible for financial and fiscal incentives, while Article 3 of the decrees of April 13, 2009, allows private entities to participate in ecotourism projects within newly established nature reserves. However, these texts lack coherence and specificity to adequately address the current sustainability and conservation challenges

The absence of specific legislation dedicated to ecotourism indeed limits effective management of natural areas and ecotourism projects.

3. **Emphasizes** the importance of establishing a legal definition of ecotourism that distinguishes it from other related terms such as sustainable tourism, nature tourism, etc., as well as creating a regulatory framework governing this activity, including access to justice.
4. **Supports** the need to establish more precise and adapted regulations that ensure sustainable management of natural resources and identify suitable areas for ecotourism development. A solid legal framework is essential to support national strategies and enable genuine ecotourism development in Tunisia.

III. Strategic and institutional recommendations

Recognizing the negative impacts of conventional tourism, especially its environmental toll, ecotourism emerges as a driver for environmental preservation while supporting local economies.

In response, Tunisia has established legal, institutional, financial, and technical mechanisms to incorporate ecological considerations into its broader tourism policy. A range of strategies has been implemented to promote this form of tourism, integrating sustainability objectives and the protection of natural resources.

The National Strategy for Ecological Transition (SNTE) in Tunisia, adopted in 2023, aims to foster sustainable development by embedding ecological principles across various sectors, including tourism. Although ecotourism is not explicitly mentioned, the strategy emphasizes environmental sustainability and natural resource protection, which align with ecotourism practices. However, the success of SNTE also supports other strategies, such as the Tourism Strategy 2035, which includes essential measures like combating pollution, preserving beach assets, and protecting ecosystems—critical elements for sustainable ecotourism development.

Tunisia has also developed a 2035 Sustainable Tourism Strategy, envisioning an expanded entrepreneurial base and new travel experiences. Ecotourism is thus positioned as an innovative growth area, akin to a startup model. Strategic Goal 4 encourages promoting thematic tours that blend beach, cultural, historical, and nature-based experiences inland. While ecotourism is not directly named, there is a shift indicated toward wetlands and away from the high-impact coastal tourism model.

The success of ecotourism in Tunisia hinges on close collaboration between ministries, environmental agencies, and local stakeholders. It is recommended to create an intersectoral advisory committee to coordinate actions and integrate outcomes into public policies. A dedicated legal framework is needed to regulate ecotourism activities, align initiatives with natural resource preservation goals, and ensure their long-term sustainability. Finally, training local experts and decision-makers is essential for the effective, sustainable implementation of ecotourism strategies.

I. Other recommendations and key policy messages

Tourism in Tunisia, traditionally focused on coastal areas, threatens the country's natural assets due to land development and resource overconsumption. Ecotourism offers a sustainable alternative by balancing economic growth with environmental preservation. However, it remains underdeveloped and requires improvements, as outlined in the recommendations below.

● Environmental Recommendations

Strengthen ecological data infrastructure: Invest in robust ecological data collection and management systems, such as remote sensing and integrated databases, to optimize ecotourism planning and ensure that activities align with sustainable practices.

Implement waste management and renewable energy initiatives: To protect natural sites, introduce waste management, recycling, and clean energy use at ecotourism sites. These practices will support resource conservation and enhance the long-term sustainability of tourism destinations.

Promote the Tunisian Ecolabel (INNORPI): Encourage eco-labeling, issued by the National Institute of Standardization and Industrial Property (INNORPI), among tourism accommodation providers. Support ecotourism promoters in achieving certification and provide training to help small-scale farmers and fishers adhere to these standards, ensuring accessibility and applicability.

● Cultural and Socioeconomic Recommendations

Raise awareness among local communities and private actors: Highlight the value of tourism that engages local communities in environmentally and economically beneficial practices. Strengthen awareness campaigns to promote sustainable ecotourism benefits, emphasizing environmental preservation as a long-term economic growth driver. Establish guidance programs for ecotourism entrepreneurs. **Involve local communities in project management:** Involving local communities in ecotourism project management will help showcase their cultural heritage while creating economic opportunities. This participatory approach encourages community buy-in and fosters the long-term success of ecotourism initiatives.

Simplify the process for establishing rural lodging: Building on Decree No. 2007-457 of March 6, 2007, which regulates rural lodging facilities, we recommend streamlining the authorization process for creating rural lodges. This includes expanding permissible activities related to fishing and agriculture and creating specific guidelines tailored to local residents. Training local populations and ecotourism promoters will be essential to help them meet these guidelines. **Facilitate temporary permits and concessions:** To stimulate local economic growth through ecotourism, make it easier to obtain permits and concessions for temporary occupations. This approach ensures fair and inclusive development, involving local populations in economic initiatives while protecting indigenous rights.

Email contacts: mabaab@wwfna.org ; mazizi@wwfna.org

Website: www.wwf.tn