



Policy recommendations at the WestMed level

Deliverable D4.2 : Towards Recovering, Experiencing and Boosting Ecotourism in the WestMed Area

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POLICY RECOMMENDATIONS AT THE WESTMED LEVEL

Towards Recovering, Experiencing, and Boosting Ecotourism in the WestMed Area

I. Introduction and main aims

The [EMFAF REBOOT MED project, titled “Recovering, Experiencing and Boosting ecoTourism in the WestMed area”](#), aims **to foster public-private partnerships to co-develop Blue Economy Action Plans that drive tourism recovery**. It also seeks to incubate and test new eco/blue tourism products/packages in ten pilot areas across six WestMed countries: France, Italy, Spain, Tunisia, Morocco, and Mauritania.

A **policy brief** at the project's outset identified the severe impact of COVID-19 on the Western Mediterranean area's tourism and ecotourism as a key segment of the industry, particularly in Mauritania, Morocco, Tunisia, Spain (Balearic Islands), France (Corsica), and Italy (Tuscany and Sicily), where the sector is vital to local economies. This crisis underscored the urgent need for innovative business models to support recovery and sustainability. As a key sector of the Blue Economy, the tourism sector must move away from mass tourism toward responsible, sustainable practices, using the COVID-19 recovery period as a chance to build resilience.

To tackle these challenges, the REBOOT MED project focuses on pilot areas, including Diawling National Park (Mauritania), Al Hoceima National Park and Coastal area of Tétouan (Morocco), the Coastal areas of Tabarka and Gear el Melh (Tunisia), the Coastal areas of Bonifacio and Valinco Valley (Corsica, France), the Coastal area of Siccacà (Sicily, Italy), the Coastal area of Grosseto (Tuscany, Italy) and the Balearic Islands (Spain), to develop innovative eco/blue tourism products/packages. By promoting stakeholder collaboration and sustainable tourism practices, the project not only revitalizes the sector but also strengthens community resilience and environmental protection. With support from the supranational, national, and regional levels, REBOOT MED seeks to unlock the full potential of ecotourism in the Western Mediterranean region. The active involvement of key stakeholders, including local communities, is fundamental to creating sustainable tourism models that benefit both the environment and local economies. Drawing on lessons from past initiatives, the project aims to deliver actionable policy recommendations to guide the future of eco-tourism in the region.

At this pivotal moment, the Western Mediterranean region faces crucial questions about developing sustainable tourism models that deliver economic benefits to local communities. Community-led initiatives aligned with Blue Economy strategies, alongside public-private partnerships, will be critical to reshaping the tourism landscape. Additionally, the resilience of micro, small, and medium enterprises (MSMEs) is crucial for the overall resilience and sustainability of the sector.

This **policy paper** produced by the CPMR - Intermediterranean Commission in cooperation with the partnership of REBOOT MED (Petra Patrimonia Corsica, PRISM, ASCAME, FAR MAREMMA, WWF North Africa, AETIB, CCIS Tanger-Tetouan-Al Hoceima, le Parc National du Diawling) and key external stakeholders and initiatives (MEET Network, WestMED initiative, etc.) **addresses the necessary policy shifts and improvements to diversify maritime and coastal tourism products through a green, digital and circular economy approach in the Western Mediterranean.**

II. Policy framework

This policy paper, elaborated by the REBOOT MED partners :

1. Acknowledges the outcomes and good practices from previous projects that the REBOOT MED project has drawn inspiration from to build its methodology, such as the Interreg MED [DestiMED PLUS project](#), focusing on the development of eco-tourism packages in Mediterranean protected areas through coordination between the conservation and tourism departments, and the Interreg MED [TOURISMED PLUS project](#) which aimed to develop a tourism offer based on fishing tourism, highly compatible with the type of marine ecosystem in the Mediterranean.
2. Acknowledges and supports the [Mediterranean Ecotourism Consortium \(MEC\)](#), developed by the CPMR-Intermediterranean Commission (CPMR-IMC) in collaboration with the International Union for the Conservation of Nature (IUCN) and the World Wildlife Fund Mediterranean (WWF MED), and hosted by the CPMR-IMC Task Force on Sustainable Cultural & Maritime Tourism since 2019. This consortium supports the policy and governance conditions needed to scale the sustainable ecotourism model developed in the DestiMED PLUS project and managed by the [MEET Network](#). It serves as a platform for policy exchange and collaboration between conservation and tourism to promote the adoption of the MEET model and enhance ecotourism in the Mediterranean. Strategic priorities of the MEC are being defined in the [Mediterranean Ecotourism Policy Roadmap](#).
3. Welcomes the designation by the new European Commission of a Commissioner dedicated to Transport and Tourism¹. This pivotal appointment underscores the European Union's recognition of the critical role that tourism plays in driving economic growth and fostering cultural exchange across member states. By prioritizing this sector, the Commission is not only addressing the challenges posed by the COVID-19 pandemic but also laying the groundwork for a more sustainable and resilient tourism industry. This focus is essential for supporting jobs, promoting regional development, and ensuring that tourism remains a key pillar of the European economy. Moreover, this focus aligns with and enhances the co-implementation process of the [Tourism Transition Pathway](#) driven by DG GROW, which is essential for steering the sector towards sustainable practices and innovation, ultimately reinforcing the EU's commitment to a greener and more inclusive tourism landscape.
4. Also welcomes, the new Commissioner for the Mediterranean², whose role in enhancing cooperation and joint governance across Mediterranean territories is crucial. By fostering inclusive cross-border partnerships, addressing regional challenges such as climate change, migration, and economic disparities, and promoting sustainable

¹ Subject to confirmation by the European Parliament.

² Subject to confirmation by the European Parliament.

development, the Commissioner is set to play a key role in streamlining governance frameworks. Her emphasis on involving local stakeholders and improving decision-making processes reinforces the region's capacity for coordinated action and stronger ties between EU and non-EU Mediterranean countries.

5. Particularly supports the [Nature Restoration Law](#), which builds on Target 2 of the Kunming- Montreal Global Biodiversity Framework and was approved by the European Parliament on February 27, 2024. This regulation plays a vital role in fostering ecotourism development across Europe. By mandating Member States to submit National Restoration Plans, the regulation aims to restore degraded ecosystems, therefore enhancing biodiversity and creating healthier natural environments that attract tourists. Protected Areas are crucial in this context, as they serve as sanctuaries for diverse species and habitats, ensuring the preservation of natural landscapes that are fundamental to ecotourism. Restored ecosystems can provide unique experiences for visitors while supporting local economies through sustainable tourism practices. The regulation's emphasis on public authorities' roles in ecosystem mapping and restoration planning ensures that ecotourism initiatives align with broader environmental goals. By promoting biodiversity and healthy ecosystems, the Nature Restoration Law not only contributes to climate change mitigation and adaptation but also enhances the attractiveness of destinations for ecotourism, ultimately driving sustainable economic growth in the tourism sector.
6. Supports the [WestMED Malta Ministerial Declaration \(2023\)](#), which main objective was to 'strengthen the competitiveness and sustainability of the coastal and maritime tourism sector, as part of a smart and resilient blue economy'. This, by preserving the marine and coastal environment as well as marine cultural heritage, and contributing to the attractiveness of coastal areas by means of ecotourism, digitalization and mobilizing private-public investments.
7. Acknowledges and supports the [new Technical Group on Sustainable Tourism of the WestMED Initiative](#), which is key for the development of ecotourism in the Western Mediterranean. This group will serve as a collaborative forum for addressing the unique needs and challenges associated with advancing sustainable tourism in the region, where tourism significantly impacts the blue economy. By fostering EU and external territorial cooperation with non-EU WestMED countries, including Algeria, Libya, Mauritania, Morocco, and Tunisia, the Technical Group aims to promote knowledge sharing among stakeholders from both shores, enhancing eco-tourism initiatives. This represents a unique opportunity for capitalizing on the results of REBOOT MED.
8. Welcomes and aligns with the Policy Pathway included in the recent report, [Towards Sustainable Blue Tourism: Trends, Challenges and Policy Pathway](#), developed by the [Blue Tourism Initiative](#) which is instrumental in supporting blue/eco tourism development in the Mediterranean as it provides a comprehensive analysis of the current state of coastal and maritime tourism, identifying both challenges and opportunities specific to the region. It emphasizes the economic significance of tourism, which accounts for a

substantial portion of GDP and employment, and highlights the urgent need for sustainable practices in light of the sector's vulnerability to crises like the COVID-19 pandemic. By advocating for stronger governance, a robust legal framework, and collaborative stakeholder engagement, the report offers practical policy pathways to promote sustainable tourism. Additionally, it underscores the potential of the blue economy as a catalyst for preserving marine ecosystems while fostering economic growth, thereby aligning with the objectives of ecotourism to protect natural resources and promote environmentally responsible tourism practices in the Mediterranean.

9. Takes into consideration all the other relevant initiatives and frameworks of cooperation aiming to promote diversification of maritime and coastal tourism products with a green, digital and circular economy approach in the Western Mediterranean, such as the [European Union Strategy for the Adriatic and Ionian Region](#), the [MED Cooperation Alliance](#), the work of the [Union for the Mediterranean on blue economy](#), particularly the [UfM Ministerial Declaration on Sustainable Blue Economy – 2021](#) which is being implemented through its [Roadmap for the implementation](#) and which inspired the [European Commission Communication on Sustainable Blue Economy](#). Recognizes also the [Handbook on “Social and economic regeneration of the Mediterranean after the crisis: shared methods and tools for relaunching a sustainable post COVID-19 tourism model”](#) co-developed by the UfM and the CPMR-IMC, the work of DG MARE linked to the [Smart Specialization for Sustainable Blue Economy](#), the [Glasgow Declaration on Climate Action in Tourism](#), the recent CPMR-IMC [Mediterranean Charter for Climate Adaptation](#), the CPMR-IC [Policy Position A New Vision for Sustainable Tourism in Islands](#) and the [Interreg Euro MED Sustainable Tourism Mission](#) along with its recently shared [Blueprint for Tourism Climate Action Plans; A Guide for Regional Authorities and Destination Management Organizations \(DMOs\)](#), the [UNEP/MAP Mediterranean Strategy for Sustainable Development \(MSSD\)](#) and the [European Tourism Manifesto](#) led by Network of European Regions for Sustainable and Competitive Tourism (NECSTouR). Additionally, it welcomes the recent adoption of a [UN statistical framework for measuring the sustainability of tourism](#), which will establish standardized metrics to guide policy decisions and enhance accountability across these initiatives.
10. Builds upon the Local Policy Recommendations developed by the REBOOT MED partners, incorporating insights from diverse Mediterranean contexts. These recommendations reflect the main common challenges and opportunities identified by the project's territories, particularly in relation to ecotourism, sustainable tourism practices, and the involvement of local communities and MSMEs. The REBOOT MED partners have laid a foundation for actionable, context-specific policies that address issues such as seasonality, the promotion of eco/blue tourism products/packages, and the development of capacity-building initiatives for local actors. The WestMED recommendations build on this groundwork, ensuring that the local perspectives are aligned with broader Mediterranean and European sustainability goals. This will enable the region to leverage existing local success stories while creating a more resilient and collaborative framework for sustainable tourism across the WestMED area.

III. Key policy messages

We, members of the EMFAF project REBOOT MED, hereby:

1. Ask the European Commission (EC) to:

- **Prioritize the establishment of a dedicated budget line for sustainable tourism:** The designation of a Commissioner for transport and tourism is a clear statement that the European Commission wishes to focus on these sectors. Aligning more funding towards sustainable tourism is essential to foster eco-friendly practices within the sector. Securing funding can also enhance industry resilience, support regional development, and align tourism with the EU's environmental and economic
- **Promote tourism diversification and workforce upskilling:** Develop guidelines that address local/regional/national needs, including promoting handicrafts as part of tangible and intangible cultural heritage and sustainable economic development. Support local and regional initiatives that encourage innovation and community-led, sustainable tourism products and services
- **Provide further guidance and funding for the tourism sector at the local level:** Provide guidance and funding to Mediterranean countries to transition to green practices. The [Guide on EU Funding for Tourism](#) should be used to unlock opportunities for sustainable tourism initiatives across both shores of the Mediterranean
- **Address sustainable tourism as a key topic under the new Commissioner for the Mediterranean portfolio.** Indeed, sustainable tourism is a critical driver of the blue economy in Mediterranean countries, directly supporting millions of jobs and contributing to regional GDP. By integrating sustainable tourism into the Commissioner's mandate, the EC can enhance cross-border cooperation on eco-tourism, protect coastal ecosystems, promote cultural heritage, and support local economies. Moreover, addressing climate action is essential for the sector's resilience, as rising temperatures and environmental degradation threaten coastal areas and the very resources that underpin tourism socio-economic sustainability.

2. **Encourage the EMFAF, NEXT MED programme, DG GROW and DG MARE of the European Commission, as well as all ongoing and emerging initiatives, such as the WestMED Technical Group on Sustainable Tourism, to:**

- **Foster cross-border collaboration in sustainable tourism:** Support partnerships between public and private stakeholders, local communities, tourism businesses, and Destination Management Organizations (DMOs). Promote shared best practices across Mediterranean countries and regions to develop sustainable tourism models that tackle region-wide challenges, such as seasonality and over-tourism
- **Increase visibility and access to funding for sustainable tourism:** Streamline application processes and offer targeted support for projects aligned with Mediterranean and European sustainability goals. Focus on projects that integrate eco/blue tourism, community involvement, and the protection of natural and cultural heritage, and climate resilience. Emphasize projects that promote adaptation to climate change impacts and biodiversity loss, enhancing long-term sustainability
- **Enhance the coordination of programmes and funds:** Continue strengthening the efforts made under the multi-programme mechanism to ensure improved alignment and synergies between the various financial instruments and initiatives, which could also be supported by the creation of a macro-regional strategy at the global basin level. This would allow for more effective resource allocation, enabling projects to access diverse funding streams, thereby maximizing impacts across the Mediterranean region.

3. Call on States to

- **Promote the diversification and de-seasonalization of tourism offerings to ensure a balanced, year-round flow of visitors and sustainable incomes for the sector:** This can be achieved by embracing nature-based solutions regenerative practices, such as nature trails, wildlife observation, agro-tourism, and marine tourism. These niche tourism activities, grounded in local natural assets, can help reduce over-tourism when grouped as a segment, provide steady income for communities, and enhance ecosystem resilience, while encouraging sustainable, low-impact travel habits.
- **Develop and implement a comprehensive legal framework for sustainable tourism and fishery diversification through tourism (pescatourism), addressing local needs while aligning with broader EU sustainability goals:** This framework should promote the integration of primary activities, such as professional fishing and agriculture, into experiential tourism offerings. Pescatourism can diversify local economies and provide sustainable income while preserving cultural heritage and promoting environmental protection. Furthermore, a legal framework is necessary to enable the exercise of fishing activities under a multifunctionality principle. This would engage professionals in the management of fishery resources and coastal preservation. Measures must ensure sustainable fishing and agricultural practices, protecting biodiversity, thereby ensuring the long-term sustainability of primary sectors through the tourism vector, integrated into sustainable practices. Other legal barriers, such as permits for the establishment of rural lodgings, permits for temporary occupations, and concessions for ecotourism projects in Tunisia, as well as the legal framework regarding invasive species in Tuscany, must also be overcome to promote the development of ecotourism in these areas.
- **Strengthen support for MSMEs in the tourism sector, offering financial incentives, guidance, and technical assistance to help businesses transition to greener practices and enhance their competitiveness:** MSMEs are essential to the tourism sector but often lack the resources to adopt sustainable practices. Providing financial incentives, such as grants or low-interest loans, alongside technical support and training, will help them invest in green technologies and sustainable operations. This support will enable MSMEs to stay competitive while promoting sustainable tourism.
- **Strengthen support for local populations and artisanal activities:** Specifically in countries like Mauritania, Tunisia, and Morocco, support the promotion of local craftsmanship and artisanal products as part of the tourism offer. This can enhance

cultural heritage tourism, create sustainable income sources for the local communities, and preserve traditional skills.

- **Enhance stakeholder engagement and collaboration, ensuring that tourism strategies are inclusive and take into account the needs of local communities, businesses, and other relevant stakeholders:** Effective tourism strategies must include input from local communities, businesses, and other stakeholders. Establishing consultation processes and fostering dialogue will ensure that tourism policies reflect local needs, promote shared goals, and address challenges like seasonality and over-tourism. Engaging stakeholders can enhance sustainability and ensure equitable benefits from tourism.

4. Support the role of Regions in:

- **Taking a leading role in the definition and implementation of sustainable tourism strategies:** Ensure that local and regional contexts and needs are taken into consideration in policy-making processes
- **Facilitating the creation of sustainable tourism clusters:** Promote collaboration between public and private stakeholders and other actors of the quadruple/quintuple helix to create clusters that address common challenges like seasonality and over-tourism. These clusters should focus on shared resources, knowledge exchange, and sustainable practices
- **Strengthening regional efforts in developing sustainable ecotourism:** This can be done by joining the Mediterranean Ecotourism Consortium (MEC). The MEC provides a platform for collaboration between tourism and conservation stakeholders, promoting the adoption of the MEET model and enhancing sustainable ecotourism in the Mediterranean.

5. Stress the need for businesses and destinations to benefit from the funding available to:

- **Plan necessary investments:** Support tourism businesses in upgrading infrastructure, improving energy efficiency, and training staff. Investments should focus on green technologies and sustainable practices to foster long-term growth.
- **Diversify their offerings:** Encourage businesses to use funding to create niche products like blue/eco-tourism and cultural experiences. This will reduce seasonality and attract visitors throughout the year.
- **Transition to sustainable, innovative, and resilient models:** Promote the adoption of green technologies, circular economy practices, and low-impact travel solutions to enhance the sector's resilience against climate change and over-tourism.

6. Encourage public administrations at all levels to continue:

- **Integrating sustainability in tourism practices:** Promote ecotourism that prioritizes environmental conservation and local community involvement. Administrations should also support the development of eco-certification systems and sustainability standards that guide businesses in adopting best practices.
- **Supporting MSMEs and local communities:** Provide financial and technical assistance to help local enterprises develop sustainable, ecotourism-friendly offerings, promoting inclusivity and resilience in the sector.
- **Encouraging the adoption of environmentally friendly policies and practices:** Encourage businesses to adopt green practices such as waste reduction, energy conservation, and low-impact transportation. Promoting cross-sector cooperation, such as partnerships between tourism, agriculture, and environmental sectors, can also help to foster a more holistic approach to sustainable development.

7. Encourage necessary improvements for the sector in terms of:

- **Promotion and marketing:** Tourism marketing should focus on sustainable, eco- friendly products and services that appeal to conscious travelers. Destination Marketing/Management Organizations (DMOs) play a pivotal role in designing and executing campaigns that promote destinations. Campaigns should highlight ecotourism experiences, such as nature tours and cultural immersions, and promote off-the-beaten-path destinations to reduce over-tourism. Paths leading to these destinations should also be sustainable, to make these destinations transversally sustainable. Governments and tourism boards can support these efforts by aligning messages with sustainability goals and using eco-certifications to build credibility and attract responsible travelers.
- **Highlighting local, sustainable offerings:** Marketing should showcase locally- sourced products, eco-friendly accommodations, and community-based experiences that benefit both travelers and local businesses. Partnerships between tourism operators, artisans, and ecotourism organizations can enhance the promotion of sustainable tourism. Additionally, implementing subsidies for local producers can help ensure that prices remain affordable for customers, encouraging broader participation in sustainable tourism initiatives.
- **Monitoring the impacts and conducting carrying capacity assessments:** Monitoring impacts and carrying capacity assessments are essential for sustainable tourism development. These evaluations will provide critical insights into how tourism activities affect local environments, communities, and economies. By understanding the limits of a destination, stakeholders can make informed decisions that enhance visitor experiences while protecting natural and cultural resources. Regular assessments will also help identify potential issues early, ensuring that tourism growth remains sustainable and beneficial for both visitors and local populations.

8. Stress the need for specific attention to Western Mediterranean destinations, including:

- **Addressing seasonality by promoting off-season activities and sustainable tourism offers:** Encourage tourism initiatives that diversify activities throughout the year, reducing pressure on popular destinations during peak seasons. Promote off-season activities such as wildlife observation, nature walks, and cultural events that highlight the region's ecological and cultural assets. By focusing on sustainable offers, destinations can attract travelers year-round while minimizing the environmental and social impact of high-season tourism.

- **Digitalizing tourism services to improve accessibility, visitor experience, and operational efficiency:** Invest in digital tools and platforms that enhance visitor engagement, streamline operations, and provide more accessible information on sustainable tourism options. Digital solutions such as mobile apps, online booking systems for eco-friendly accommodations, and virtual guides can enhance the visitor experience while promoting eco-conscious travel choices. Incorporating features that guide users along marked trails and highlight local attractions can reinforce the experience for both visitors and local communities, fostering a deeper connection with the destination. This technology should also include educational elements, raising awareness about the natural and cultural heritage of the region.

- **Adopting a community-driven approach to tourism development:** Ensure that local communities are at the heart of decision-making processes regarding tourism development. Community involvement in shaping tourism strategies leads to more sustainable and culturally-sensitive outcomes. Local input should be solicited to ensure that tourism contributes to preserving tangible and intangible heritage and promoting social inclusion, while also providing economic benefits. The use of participatory governance models can help empower communities to take ownership of their sustainable tourism efforts.

- **Addressing the social and cultural impacts of tourism:** Recognize the importance of tourism in enhancing local economies but also in protecting and promoting cultural and natural heritage. Develop strategies that balance tourism growth with the preservation of local traditions and landscapes. Encourage tourism that fosters social inclusion by supporting local artisans, promoting cultural events, and creating spaces where visitors and locals can interact. This approach ensures that tourism contributes positively to the community without diminishing the region's social fabric.

- **Promoting scientific, educational, cultural, and environmental awareness activities:** Use education and awareness campaigns as powerful tools to foster responsible tourism. Engage visitors in activities that highlight the importance of protecting natural reserves and cultural heritage sites, such as guided tours, environmental workshops, or citizen science initiatives. These activities can stimulate virtuous behavior by increasing visitors' sensitivity to the region's environmental challenges, encouraging them to adopt eco-friendly practices, and supporting conservation efforts.
- **Identifying and addressing training needs for tourism professionals:** Equip tourism professionals with the skills and knowledge necessary to promote sustainable practices. Training programs should focus on sustainability certifications, eco-friendly hospitality, responsible tourism communication, and the use of technology to support green tourism initiatives. This investment in professional development will help create a workforce that is equipped to lead the transition towards a more sustainable and resilient tourism industry.

- 9. Stress the importance of local communities in shaping and benefiting from sustainable tourism by leading the design of tourism strategies that ensure equitable distribution of benefits.** This approach strengthens local economies, preserves cultural heritage, and fosters social inclusion. Sustainable tourism should also contribute to long-term economic growth by promoting local businesses, eco-friendly services, and entrepreneurship, which helps communities become more resilient. For island communities, in particular, sustainable tourism is essential for preserving unique ecosystems and cultural heritage. By encouraging eco-friendly practices and raising awareness about conservation, negative impacts from over-tourism can be mitigated. Additionally, building local capacity through training and skills development empowers communities, especially in remote or island regions, to manage tourism responsibly and sustainably.

10. Encourage the public-private partnerships as demonstrated by the local multi-stakeholders clusters in REBOOT MED: Collaboration between public authorities and private stakeholders can lead to the creation of innovative, eco-friendly tourism products that support both environmental sustainability and local economies. By working together, these partnerships can create sustainable economic opportunities, especially for local communities and MSMEs in the ecotourism sector, through financial incentives and capacity-building efforts. This joint approach also enhances tourism resilience, addressing issues like seasonality and over-tourism, while ensuring destinations adapt to climate change and future challenges. Public-private partnerships further promote knowledge-sharing and capacity-building, equipping tourism professionals with the expertise needed to adopt sustainable practices and raise awareness among both businesses and tourists.

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